Towards a Listening Theatre: Metamodernism, Millennials and Contemporary Political Theatre

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based Ph.D. maps emerging trends in contemporary political theatre in order to apply them in the development of a new frame of performance practice: The Listening Theatre. It does this by defining an evolving structure of feeling in new political theatre created by millennial artists which reflects current sensibilities as part of the emerging metamodern paradigm. This study provides significant new insight into how the metamodern can be located in a theatrical frame and indicates possible future trajectories for metamodern performance practices; locating and developing an innovative form of theatrical metamodernism.

The written component of this thesis maps out the territories and previous performance practices that the Listening Theatre intersects. I focus on the development of my own performance practice, through which I locate my work within a wider framework of political theatre created by millennial artists that exhibits an oscillation between optimistic endeavours towards, and doubtful self-criticism of, authentic, efficacious theatrical engagement. This theatre of hope/lessness is inherently connected to the historical situatedness of the millennials as a generation. By offering a new definition of the millennial as a related structure of feeling, this thesis connects particular precarities and crises in my generation's formative adult years to specific anxieties observable in our art.

This study also details my uncovering of the practical modalities and aesthetic concerns shared by a number of millennial theatre makers and my application of these as theatrical tools to engage with the millennial generation itself. The written component of this thesis details the development of this engagement and how I utilised the outcomes of this

research to develop my own performance practice. This culminates in a new play, *Like Lions*, which forms the practical body of this study, through which I applied millennial-made performance modalities and metamodern aesthetics in order to intentionally develop innovative forms of metamodern, political performance.

I certify that this thesis and the research to which it refers is the product of my own work, and that any ideas or quotations from the work of other people, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices of the discipline.

Elements of Chapter One and Chapter Two have been previously published in a different form as 'The Listening Theatre: A Metamodern Politics of Performance' in the *Performance Philosophy Journal*, Vol.4 No.1 (Drayton, 2018c).

- *Tom Drayton, December 2019*

CONTENTS

vi

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter One

Chapter Three

<u>Chapter Four</u>

LIST OF ACCOMPANYING MATERIALS

Print copies of this thesis are accompanied with USB memory sticks containing the following material:

- Copies of video files as detailed in Appendix A.6.

- A video recording of *Like Lions* at The Bread and Roses Theatre, Clapham on the 14th October 2018.

- Copies of each track composed and performed by The Dagen Smiths for *Like Lions*, kindly reproduced with permission.

Please note that all video files can be accessed online via the links supplied throughout Chapters Three and Four of digital copies of this thesis, or by scanning the QR codes provided in Appendix A.6 of print copies.

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 *TWENTYSOMETHING*

The pub is full of audience members. They drink local cider and sit on benches talking. A guitarist plays in the corner of the room. An actor picks up a bottle and starts to tell the audience about an inspirational quote he remembers from a magnet on his mum's fridge. Another actor joins him and, together, as the audience settle down, they start to tell the story of a failed relationship to those in the room. They stop, start again - they might have missed something out.

The actors question the audience. They ask one in particular whether they've seen the film being referenced. They check that everyone's following the story okay. One actor begins to recount a local legend about the nearby town of Totnes being founded by ancient Greek settlers - becoming where "Britain began". An audience member chimes in; "It's where it ends, too!". The actors and audience laugh.

Parts of the story of this relationship are performed as short scenes, glimpses from different times, commented on by the actors. Some of these scenes are about being in love. Some are about the characters' time at university. Some are about being a recent graduate; the number of friends who have moved back in with their parents; the balancing of a minimum-wage, zero-hour contract against the cost of a rented room in shared accommodation; continually visiting the job centre and being told you'll have to train in a 'real' profession – 'plumbing or something' (Drayton, 2014, p.12) – if you haven't secured an interview before the next appointment; and, interspersed within all of this, the

overarching, inexplicable feeling of having lost something that the characters can't quite put into words.

These are the moments that best describe *Twentysomething: A Reading List*, which premiered at The Rusty Bike pub, Exeter, as part of the Exeter Ignite Festival in 2014. I wrote the piece to express my own experience as a recent graduate in the period of Conservative-enforced austerity in Britain, supported by similar anecdotal experiences from my peers at the time. I am a member of the generation directly affected by the New Labour government's doubling of the number of graduates in the working-age populous from that of two decades before (Wright, 2013), an effort essentially motivated by economics rather than the inherent positives in regards to social mobility (Ryan, 2005, p.89). Following graduation, my generation found ourselves in a period of economic precarity that our education had simply not prepared us for. We were 'raised during the boom times and relative peace of the 1990s' (Williams, 2015) and encouraged to follow our passion (Newport, 2012), a term now criticised as dangerous for its implication that 'you start by identifying a passion and then match this pre-existing calling to a job' (Newport, 2012). However, the economic reality we faced upon leaving university did not adhere to such an arrangement. Instead, we met precarity and uncertainty brought on by neoliberal austerity measures. By 2017, the UK Parliament had admitted that my generation had obtained 'long term 'scarring' in the labour market by having the misfortune to enter the workforce at the height of the financial crises' (Brown et al, 2017, p.5). Millennial graduates and non-graduates alike emerged into our formative adult years within a labour model that was unstable and uncertain, just when we were attempting to get on our feet.

Fig. 1. Actors Ali Sondreal and Patrick McHugh with musician Tim Clack perform *Twentysomething: A Reading List* at The Rusty Bike Pub, Exeter, June 2014. [Video still]

There is increasing evidence that the precarity of the neoliberal work models that help the government keep official unemployment figures down (Office for National Statistics, 2019) but force millennials to piece together 'survival wages through a patchwork of low-paid, part time work' (Cairns, 2017, p.97) is having a disastrous effect on the state of our mental health (cf. Curan & Hill, 2017, p.1). Despite this, the 'mythical millennial' (cf. Cairns, 2017) continually presented by parts of the media is inherently selfish and entitled. Whilst I and my fellow company members worked zero-hour contracts, attempting to plan, rehearse and produce our next production whenever we were able to meet in our ever-shifting post-university work schedules, Time Magazine famously labelled us as part of the 'Me, Me, Me Generation' (Stein, 2013). This implicated us in the stereotypical view of the millennial; a youngster who 'feels entitled to rapid career progression and frequent increases in salary [and] expect[s] to walk into a top job without working for it' (CBRE, 2017, p.22). In actuality, CBRE's recent research found that most millennials 'rather than feeling entitled, […] feel lucky to be employed' (CBRE, 2017, p.29). For a generation encouraged to '"take charge of their own lives", sell themselves [and] diversify their brand' (Cairns, 2017, p.69), the precarity of the work and accommodation structures available to millennials is antithetical to such an aspiration. Millennials are far from 'luxuriating in the intense anxiety of a precariousness said to be uniquely theirs' (n+1, 2015). Rather, as James Cairns states, 'millennials entered the workforce in the age of austerity and are now, quite reasonably, doing what they can to get by in it' (Cairns, 2017, p.69). The perpetuation of the myth of the 'selfish, entitled millennial' only highlights the mistreatment of my generation.

Twentysomething… was my attempt at capturing a collective sense of loss that I was observing in my generation at the time. In his review of the piece for Ignite Magazine,

Roger Jarman described the narrative as exemplifying the 'unexpected hollowness of life for two recent graduates who find themselves in a brave new world with no map, no compass and a diminishing desire to meet their earlier ambitions' (Jarman, 2014). The piece encapsulated what we felt were 'potentials that never materialize[d]' (Freinacht, 2017, p.6) in a post-financial-crash economy that we were un(der)prepared for; a pervading anxiety, or 'sense of sadness' as political philosopher Hanzi Freinacht terms it, that became 'central in [our] life goals, aspirations and choices' (2017, p.6). I admit that we are not the first generation to experience difficulties in orienting ourselves and starting careers in our formative adult years, particularly in the case of arts graduates. Yet there have been specific, measurable effects on my generation as a whole from 'enter[ing] adulthood during the first decade of the millennium' (Brown et al, 2017, p.5) amongst an 'increasing number of accelerating revolutions and crises, all cross-pollinating at an accelerating pace' (Freinacht, 2017, p.69).

Twentysomething… further advanced practical methodologies I had previously developed with Pregnant Fish Theatre. Since forming in 2010, we have aimed to create theatre that intentionally rejects trends of digitisation and forms of postmodernity within performance that were, at the time of our formation, being taught on our BA Drama course as currently pioneering practice and research. As some of the first digital natives, our own, lived experiences were already deeply ingrained in an increasingly digitised world. In addition, as children raised during what has now become clear was the denouement of postmodernity, we were acutely aware that the postmodern was becoming superseded by a new dominant cultural logic, what I now understand to be metamodernism. Whilst we aimed to create 'intimate, stripped back performances […] about the connection between people' (Pregnant Fish Theatre, 2018) we were being taught that progressive theatre

practice increasingly embraced digitisation and a growingly fragmented postmodern aesthetic. Instead, outside of the academy, we purposefully embraced an anti-digital aesthetic focused on a re-centring of the transferential act of storytelling between actor and audience so as to provide an intimate departure from the fragmentation of our own, lived experiences. As per the company statement, 'We believe that theatre is about the connection between people; between audience and actor, between characters, and between company members' (Pregnant Fish Theatre, 2018). I see this as reflecting Anne Bogart's understanding of her own creative shift beyond a previous 'resistance to the comfort and tyranny of stories' within postmodernity (Bogart, 2014, p.4) towards a new, communal sharing of stories in the theatre, through which performers build an 'empathetic bridge' (Bogart, 2015) between themselves and an audience.

Twentysomething… built upon this previous practice with Pregnant Fish Theatre in embracing the intimacy afforded by fringe and non-traditional venues to re-centre the act of storytelling and focus on an intimate connection with the audience. The actors affirmed that they were in the pub to tell the audience a story, without any pretence that what they were portraying was anything but a performed, fictional narrative. In *Twentysomething…*, this narrative was framed by the actors portraying their characters for the duration of the piece, whether in a scene or during the act of storytelling. Whilst the performers appeared genuine in their admission that they were performing a fiction, their continued characterisation also, paradoxically, asked the audience to empathise with their fictional characters, not the performers themselves. Whilst Jarman's review stated that the performers 'engage[d] the audience's sympathy [by] persuading us that they are sincere' (Jarman, 2014), I felt that such a paradoxical admission could have been developed further. Could the actors ask the audience to both consciously embrace the fact that they

are being told a fictional story by the performers themselves, but also sympathetically engage with the fictional characters; being at once removed from and imbricated within the fictional narrative?

In this respect, I felt that *Twentysomething…* had begun to touch on a methodological approach to storytelling in theatre that is at once self-referential and self-aware whilst also endeavouring towards some form of genuineness and sincerity in its method of portraying characters and story. As the beginnings of a methodological approach, I felt this could be advanced to intentionally develop a paradoxical positioning in regard to characterisation. This would reflect Jerry Saltz's observation regarding newly emerging, post-postmodern artistic patterns in 2010, in which he states that the contemporary artist is one who claims that 'I know that the art I'm creating may seem silly, even stupid, or that it might have been done before, but that doesn't mean this isn't serious' (Saltz, 2010). Such theatre would embrace the fictionality, or untruth, of the act of storytelling, whilst also simultaneously striving for the audience's authentic, empathetic engagement with fictionalised characters. This may seem like a given, in that audiences in general are used to empathising with fictional characters whilst being inherently aware, however (un)consciously, of the unreality of such. However, I was interested in how, with the fictionality and performativity of actors telling a story being brought to the forefront, such empathy and connectivity could still be achieved. If postmodern theatre practice can be considered as semiotics-based deconstruction (cf. Hurtsfield, 2019), by which postmodernism has pulled back the curtain to reveal the 'chaotic fertil[ity]' (Hurtsfield, 2019) and complexity behind the act of presenting a narrative, how could I, as a playwright and director, simultaneously embrace that chaotic fertility whilst also reapplying a mode of storytelling that could not be ascribed to the postmodern oeuvre?

My return to performative storytelling would not, in this respect, wholly reject previous postmodernist deconstruction of narratives or performance. Rather, it would attempt to move within and beyond such forms through a reappreciation of the act of unapologetically attempting to affect a form of authentic and empathetic connection between characters and audience, whilst simultaneously embracing the fictionality and plausible impossibility of achieving such a connection through the inherently inauthentic act of performing.

The above methodological approaches, which I locate as having stemmed from an intention to create work that breaks through and beyond postmodernist irony and cynicism, coalesce around the elusive concept of the authentic. In attempting to connect with the audience on an intimate scale and outwardly acknowledging that the act of performance is inherently inauthentic, I am endeavouring towards some form of authentic connection unburdened by pretence. This connection, however, also paradoxically acknowledges and utilises the inauthenticity of the performative form in a way that, ironically, also emphasises the authenticity of this acknowledgement. Such work admits to its own limits, but endeavours to move beyond them despite this. Through the methodologies developed in *Twentysomething…* and previous work with Pregnant Fish Theatre, I began to seek a way in which to tell stories that were embracing of the fact that they were just that – stories – whilst also advocating for their ability to be something deeper and more meaningful. At once recognising (or accepting) *and* rejecting (or testing) their own limitations.

Twentysomething… was a continued development of an experiment in theatrical form and performed political discourse that began with Pregnant Fish's earlier *A Few Dented*

Branches in 2013, which fused intimate storytelling and contemporary folk music to investigate the increasing complexity of pressures upon young people at the time. During the development of *Twentysomething…*, I began to identify companies that shared similar methodological approaches to ours and who's work overlapped aesthetically or thematically with my own. These emerging, millennial-led companies were creating theatre that had an intentionally palpable political voice and that also strove towards an authenticity in their intimate connection with audiences. Companies such as Plymouth-based New Model Theatre, who's *Static* (2013) encapsulated playwright Tom Nicholas' experience growing up during the advent of 24-hour news cycles in an increasingly precarious political situation, or Nottingham-based The Gramophones, who's *Playful Acts of Rebellion* (2014) was constructed around the companies' efforts to both playfully perform protest about issues they felt strongly about, and recount and re-stage stories of their real-life acts of protest, whilst also offering space within the performance for issues provided by the audience to be platformed.

Tom Nicholas speculated with me at the time that there appeared to be 'particular themes which run through work by practitioners under thirty' (Nicholas, 2014), coalescing into an intimate form of political theatre. These companies of 'twentysomethings' were using aesthetically or thematically similar approaches in creating a political theatre that, to me as both an artist and audience member, appeared to differ from more established political performance practice in its embracing of a particular focus on intimacy and authenticity. As Hannah Stone of the Gramophones explained to me, in their case, this stemmed from their desire to 'speak directly to our audience [which] compliments the idea of capturing the honesty of the work' (Stone, 2014). When observed concurrently, each of these interconnected works, of which I include my own, appeared to aim to voice political

concerns through telling personal stories. They were attempting to create some form of authentic intimacy with their audience, whilst also embracing the paradox of the inherently inauthentic nature of performance itself. 'I don't see it so much as acting,' Hannah Stone explained to me about her company's process, 'more as telling a kind of theatrical anecdote' (Stone, 2014).

Such a paradoxical positioning was also inherent in the works' political stances. The shows I was observing (and creating) urgently critiqued or platformed political issues ranging from zero-hour contracts, to student riots, to the aftermath of the financial crises. As Tom Nicholas told me, 'it felt as though there was something unique happening in the country and the world at the time in terms of differing responses to the recession [which] made me want to make theatre about the changes that were happening to […] the rest of my generation' (Nicholas, 2014). However, whilst each show was built around the creator's personal responses to these problems, none offered a solution or way forward. Whilst the companies I was observing displayed an urgency in addressing the issues that mattered to themselves, their peers and, in some cases, their audiences, they also acknowledged that they might not be the ones with the answers. Such theatre attempted a discursive politics expressed through storytelling, building on Grochala's observation of contemporary political theatre progressing from 'serious drama' (Grochala, 2017, p.13) towards more 'liquid dramaturgical structures' (17).

I posit that, in my initial observations, there were small indications of overlapping themes and aesthetics in the political theatre created by these millennial companies and my own practice. Following preliminary discussions with The Gramophones and New Model Theatre, I proposed that there were signs of a mutual methodological approach in the

work of these young political theatre makers that may have been affected by the specific societal, political and cultural constructs that have shaped the millennial generation.

Since we formed Pregnant Fish Theatre in 2010, I have continued to focus on narrative storytelling and an intimate connection with the audience in my practice. This focus originated from, in part, an intentional break from the prevalence of postdramatic theatre practice (see Chapter Two, section 2.1) that we were simultaneously seeing in venues and experiencing as the dominant focus of theatre studies at the time. Whereas postdramatic theatre rejected 'mimesis, narration and representation' (Lavender, 2016, p.87), as an undergraduate company we were actively seeking to reinvest in the power of communal storytelling. Whilst this was not a direct challenge to the work of established postdramatic companies such as Forced Entertainment, Stan's Café or The Wooster Group, I understand my practice with Pregnant Fish historiographically as responding to the disjointedness we, as artists and audiences, experienced through postdramatic practice by recentring the joyful act of communally sharing stories. In this respect, our work builds upon a strand of practice that can be traced back through 20th/21st century theatre that emphasises a communal event and direct audience address. This includes the work of Kneehigh (1980 – present), John McGrath's leadership of 7:84 (1971 – c.1987) and Joan Littlewood's direction of Theatre Workshop (1945 – c.1979), all of which were aesthetic and methodological inspirations in the foundations of our own, developing practice.

Four years later, *Twentysomething: A Reading List* was an experiment in how our storytelling-focused theatre could become a platform for political issues, focused on investigating the millennial situation at the time through gentle interaction with the audience. Following the show's initial performances, I felt that further work was needed

in order to investigate how this methodology could be developed to enhance and best utilise the paradoxical nature of aiming to be authentic within performance. How could this reappreciation of storytelling that allowed for an intimate, honest connection between actors and audiences be used as a political tool? How were other companies using similar methodological approaches? Could such approaches be utilised together in order to further develop this seemingly interconnected methodology? In addition, if other, similarly-aged companies shared related methodological approaches to creating political performance to my own, what is the reason for this similarity? Is it, as I originally speculated, affected by our positioning as young creatives engaged in producing work following, and responding to, the denouement of postmodernity? Is it in response to the particularities of the situation we, as members of the millennial generation, find ourselves in? In this respect, just what does 'millennial' define in the first place? Plus, if I am observing what appears to be a shared methodology between emerging theatre makers, what can I determine about possible future trajectories of this performance practice; if this is the beginnings of a new, millennial theatre, where will such practice lead?

0.2   RESEARCH AIMS

After locating my own practice within a potential wider methodological shift, I set out to explore the following research aims. I structured this investigation into three specific elements; what, why and how. This division allowed me to first investigate the validity of my initial speculation regarding an indicated shared methodology within the political theatre practice of millennial companies; asking *what* was going on. This then allowed me to locate such methodological shifts within wider cultural frameworks surrounding both the shifts within my own and related companies' practice, and our positioning as millennial artists; asking *why* this is occurring. Through this analysis, I could then utilise

this new insight to further develop my own practice and hence further interrogate the questions I still had after the initial methodological development within *Twentysomething*…; asking *how* this new knowledge could be applied. This would, therefore, develop new forms of practice built upon new insight into millennial artists and the frameworks we are imbricated within, thus providing insight into possible future trajectories for such interconnected, millennial theatrical forms. The following sections briefly detail these three research aims.

0.2.1   *What* methodological shifts are occurring within millennial-made political theatre in Britain right now?

Following my initial, tentative tracing of particular aesthetic and thematic modalities shared between my own work and parallel political performances, I began to sketch out an interconnectivity between work created by particular emerging companies within the millennial age bracket. By locating these companies and artists, it becomes possible to assess their performance aesthetics and structures in order to understand what specific modalities are shared between them.

It was my opinion, at the beginning of this research, that there were certain theatrical forms and performance modalities that were shared by, or reflected within, a number of pieces that I had experienced by current millennial theatre makers but this initial analysis, at that time, remained somewhat elusive and unsubstantiated. By focusing on four particular case studies, I have attempted to locate and put to words an emerging structure of feeling within contemporary British theatre made by millennial artists. I refer here to Raymond Williams' understanding of the term structure of feeling as 'embodied, related feelings' (Williams, 1969, p.17) that suggest a contemporary shift in artistic form that is

'as firm and definite as "structure" suggests, yet is based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience' (18). As James McDowell (2017, p.28) notes, the term does not suggest that this is necessarily a dominant form, but 'only one of many such localised "structures" at work in a particular time and place'. It is my understanding, however, that the performance modalities and methodologies I have located point towards a structure of feeling that is essentially linked to the specific age of these artists, in that they are members of the millennial, post-postmodern generation. As Williams analysed the shift from naturalistic to expressionistic structures of feeling within his own contemporary theatrical landscape, noting that the terms encompassed more than that of a convention or stylistic register (1969, p.17), I have attempted to open a discursive framework within which the contemporary structure of feeling located throughout the political theatre of British, millennial performance makers can be understood, located and, in turn, utilised.

0.2.2 *Why* are these shifts occurring and what are the larger cultural, political and philosophical constructs that have affected this?

In order to understand the reasons behind the aesthetic and methodological choices being made by millennial artists, it was necessary to investigate the larger cultural structures that have impacted my generation. Firstly, it is important to examine the notion of the millennial generation itself. Is the term simply a media-implemented diatribe that simplifies diversity between rough age groups to focus on surface level difference? Or, are there specific cultural, political and philosophical shifts that have collectively affected an age-group in varied and yet interconnected ways so far as to shape a shared structure of feeling within a particular generation? I also employ Williams' terminology here, as I posit that, although generational analysis is at best flawed and at worst exclusionary, the

use of such a framework means that I am able to analyse experiential modalities that are 'essentially related, although […] in detail, this is not always easy to see' (Williams, 1969, p.17).

It is my understanding that there are two specific elements that have largely affected the millennial generation. Firstly, we are the *children of postmodernism*. By this, I mean that we were born into postmodernity at its penultimate stage and have been at the forefront of what theorists who are mapping such shifts (Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2010; van den Akker, Gibbons & Vermeulen, 2017; Dember, 2018) contend will be seen as the formation of the post-postmodern zeitgeist from the mid-2000's. Secondly, as British-based millennials, our formative adult years have coincided with the convergence of a number of unique structural and societal shifts that have intrinsically transformed how we perceive our place within our various communities and society at large. Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen, in particular, point to the post-millennial zeitgeist as the point where 'the maturity and availability of digital technologies' reached a threshold, 'the so-called fourth wave of terrorism hit Western shores… immigration policies and multicultural ideals backlashed in the midst of a revival of nationalist populism… and the financial crises inaugurated yet another round of neoliberalism' (Van den Akker & Vermeulen, 2017, p.11-12), all of which have played a particular part in establishing our formative, early-adult experiences.

This analysis, however, is not merely hypothetical, but has bled into both economic and political strategies. Companies are currently scrabbling to solve the complications around advertising to a large economically maturing consumer base who are simultaneously financially unstable and distrustful of traditional marketing stratagem (Kay, 2019; Laurie

et al., 2018). The UK Parliament's 2017 report which attempted to summarise the unique factors (Brown et al., 2017, p.3) that have affected those aged roughly between 25 and 34 at the time of publication, cited the fact that millennials 'entered young adulthood in the midst of the 2008 financial crisis' (3) as a cornerstone in forming the political ideologies and economic status of the generation as a whole. As such, it is evident that the concept of the millennial can't only be recognised as media-based vilification as it has a tangible influence on 'real world' events. Importantly, however, it is the convergence of the particular crises being both part of, and concurrent to, a move through and beyond the postmodern that has affected what I see as the millennial *structure of feeling*.

Through an analysis of how millennials have been affected by this convergence, I began to see trends emerge within millennial culture, politics and art which reflected my own prior concerns regarding my generation and cemented our pop-culture status as a 'paradoxical generation' (Huntley, 2006, p.10) in that we occupy a contradictory position that oscillates between cynicism and optimism, that embraces hypocrisy, that strives for betterment, truth and authenticity – even forms of utopia – all whilst remaining suspicious and aware of the traps of such acts. This positioning is exemplary of the emerging post-postmodern paradigm, inherently connected with – but not exclusive to – the millennials, that is constantly 'oscillating between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010). Vermeulen and van den Akker label this emerging trend metamodernism. They apply Raymond Williams' structure of feeling as a framework to analyse the interconnected shifts within the present-moment, embodied nature (Williams, 1969, p.18) of this current paradigm which permeates a range of cultural, political, and philosophical structures, as we move through and beyond the postmodern. The theatrical trend I have observed, therefore, is affected by the millennial

artists' position in the congruent, and interconnected, structures of feeling of the millennial and the metamodern. It is through an understanding of these larger, emerging structures that I began to locate the theatrical trends I had determined within wider structural shifts in contemporary culture.

0.2.3   *How* can I use this new insight to develop my own practice as part of the emerging millennial theatre?

This research project stemmed from what I saw as unanswered questions surrounding particular developments in my practice through *Twentysomething…* and my consequent initial locating of particular modalities shared between this and the practice of other millennial artists. My initial understanding of a developmental shift, therefore, was driven by tacit knowledge deriving from my own practice. Within this research, I employ Robin Nelson's protocols in regard to practice as research (PaR) within the creative arts, in that my inquiry is, in the most part, developed through practical, tactile investigation. Nelson's (2013, p.37) multi-mode epistemological model locates a circular movement between the haptic, performative 'know-how', the conceptual framing of the 'know-what', and the tacit being made explicit through critical reflection within the 'know-what-works'. It is by oscillating between these three threads of knowing – the embodied, the conceptual and the critical – that praxis, or 'theory imbricated within practice' (5), can develop new insights that can then be extrapolated from the embodied to the conceptual, and vice versa. As such, my intention in extrapolating methodological tools from the case studies, as well as locating the shifts in theatrical intentions and aesthetics as part of wider cultural and political structures, is to reapply this to my own practice in order to investigate how such modalities can be utilised, developed and employed within future practice.

The particular practical modalities uncovered in my research into millennial political theatre will be detailed in Chapter One. However, it is important to note that the companies I located, although sharing certain aesthetics and intentions, varied between platforming, (re)presenting and staging the voices, concerns and stories of others, as per Lung's *E15* (2015) and Feat.Theatre's *The Welcome Revolution* (2018), and sharing their platform between the concerns of others and their own personal politics, as per The Gramophones' *Playful Acts of Rebellion* (2014), and Eager Spark's *Regeneration* (2015).

My intention, in practically investigating the limits of these companies' practical, methodological tools, is to turn such tools back in on themselves in order to interrogate, platform and examine the millennial generation itself. Through a series of workshops with millennial participants, I attempted to unpick and develop the modalities taken from the case studies, in conjunction with the insight gained from the conceptual framing. These workshops aimed to further investigate a number of questions I originally posed in 2014, as well as new questions unearthed in the research. Primarily, how can the millennial and metamodern shifts in theatrical form be utilised to investigate notions of the millennial and the metamodern themselves? If this is 'millennial theatre', what do millennials understand the 'millennial' to be? And, by focusing the millennial methodologies in on themselves, what new insight is unearthed in terms of future performance practice?

The findings and failures of these initial workshops were utilised in the development of a further series of workshops that led to me writing and staging a new play with Pregnant Fish Theatre in late 2018; *Like Lions*. This performance brought together an assortment of the methodological tools discovered and explored throughout the research and input

from a further range of millennial participants. It consciously utilised structural forms located as part of the metamodern within its construction in order to, as one reviewer articulates, 'pave the way for a new kind of storytelling [that is] incredibly tranquil yet provocative' (Minnitt, 2018).

In order to pave the way for a 'new kind of storytelling', *Like Lions* intentionally applies and interrogates the structures, concepts and modalities I locate as part of the millennial structure of feeling, after having derived such from input gained in workshops with other millennials. Through this, I have located my own practice as part of a wider cultural shift beyond the postmodern. My practice is reflective of the metamodern as defined by leading scholars in the field as a structure of feeling inherently interconnected with the millennial generation's coming of age. The following research investigates how modalities ascribed to the metamodern can be intentionally utilised within creative practice. In this respect, this research is among the first to locate the metamodern within contemporary British theatre practice, and the first to further develop *intentionally* metamodern theatre practice in order to both map future trajectories for such performance practice and to investigate the practical applications of such concepts through performance.

In this introduction, I have briefly outlined the questions surrounding the development of my own practice, and my locating of it in regard to the practice of other millennial artists and wider structural and cultural shifts. I was originally grappling with these questions during the development of *Twentysomething: A Reading List*, which attempted to encapsulate how I understood the millennial generation at the time through my own experience within it. The following chapters detail the development of my thought surrounding these questions throughout this research, opening up a discourse around how

the millennial and the metamodern both influence, and can be embodied within, contemporary political performance practices. Through this, I posit that the interrelated methodologies of specific millennial theatre companies, including my own, can be seen to point towards a new field of performance practice that lays the foundation for future developments within the metamodern paradigm; the Listening Theatre.

THE LISTENING THEATRE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1   A Tiny Thing

Three women jump on the stage. They wear brightly coloured balaclavas and shout through megaphones. In a moment, they will take off their disguises and talk to us. One of them will tell us the story of their first protest at a G8 gathering. Another will hold up a sign that simply proclaims, 'I feel ignorant'. The third will show us pictures of cats that they had fostered and then ask us what makes us, as an audience, angry; what makes us want to stand up and shout? We will write our statements down, and they will repeat them back to us, calmly, involving us in their conversation.

I saw the Gramophones' *Playful Acts of Rebellion* at the now sadly closed Bike Shed Theatre in Exeter in 2014. The piece is built around a dialogue between the three company members and the audience about issues that make them feel passionate and angry alongside an admittance that they're not quite sure what to do about any of it. As one reviewer described, the piece 'involved the audience in a lively conversation, providing a safe, friendly environment to unpack these ethically stimulating issues' (Hart, 2014). However, it is clear that the company felt that such a conversation, although earnestly and urgently needed, would probably offer no effectual, practical solutions. And yet, what else could they do but address such issues in the best way they knew how?

Fig. 2. The Gramophones company member Ria Ashcroft holds up a sign in *Playful Acts of Rebellion*, 2014. Photo by Julian Hughes. Reproduced with permission.

In 2016, I interviewed the group's Co-artistic Directors Hannah Stone and Ria Ashcroft. Stone explained that the piece itself evolved from a paradoxical feeling of being both angry at the current political situation and hopeful of change, whilst also being aware of her limited agency as a performer:

> I think that kind of feeling of "I can't do anything" is something that has lasted since doing the show. Even though I think doing the show is kind of doing something […] and that might feel like a tiny thing and it probably is a tiny thing in the grand scheme of things but that is my contribution (Appendix A.1).

It is my contention that this thinking oscillates between a sincere desire for, and belief in, political change through performance and a self-awareness of the limitations of the theatrical medium. The Gramophones set out to address certain political issues to be, 'in some way, part of the solution and not just sitting back and not saying anything' (Appendix A.1), whilst also offering a platform in the piece itself for the audience to do the same; 'creating conversation', according to Stone (Appendix A.1). However, they are also importantly critical of the efficacy of such a performative act. As Yasemin Craggs Mersinoglu's review for Impact magazine states, 'It may be easy to dismiss the trio as naive but they repeatedly made the point they understood how overwhelming each issue was and how it could be perceived badly that 'privileged' woman were calling on others to change' (Mersinoglu, 2014). The Gramophones are exemplary as a millennial company that are at once aiming for sincere, progressive and authentic connection with their audience in order to effect political change, whilst simultaneously embracing the frailties, falsities, and failings inherent within their work.

Hannah Stone regarding her work as simultaneously *important* and *tiny* is illustrative of a cornerstone in what I have come to see as an emerging sphere of practice within the work of a number of theatre companies led by millennials in Britain. The methodologies

of these companies are built around attempts at authentic engagement between actor and audience as a form of political intervention. Whilst these methods build upon aspects of previously established practice concerning intimacy, engagement and dialogue, I see such methodologies as indicative of new modes of practice that are inherently connected to the artists' experiences as part of the millennial generation during the transference through and beyond the postmodern paradigm. Such new practices suggest an underlying, millennial ideology that oscillates between hope and hopelessness.

1.1.2   The Listening Theatre

In the following analysis of the work of four millennial companies, I will argue that particular concerns that resonate across their methodologies point towards a new sphere of practice within the field of contemporary political theatre. This new practice builds upon aspects of Andy Lavender's theatres of engagement (Lavender, 2016, p.21) as an attempt to discern a post-postmodern paradigm within the 'negotiations, participations and interventions' (21) of contemporary performance. Specifically, I refer to his portrayal of a theatre of engagement that suggests a 'set of performances that are turned towards their society, deliberately invested in social process, political perspective, matters of import to gathered groups of people' (26) that also exemplify a 'new fascination with authenticity' (23). This practice is also reflective of Grant Kester's dialogical art, in its focus on 'collaborative, and potentially emancipatory, forms of dialogue and conversation' (Kester, 2005, p.154) as well as Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics in terms of art functioning as 'social interstice' (Bourriaud, 2002, p.45). Bruce Barber's definition of littoral art, too, speaks to earlier forms of practice now reflected in this new millennial practice, particularly in the latter's integral oscillation between disparate

polarities – hope and hopelessness, sincerity and irony – and on the metaxis created through such oscillatory movement.

My use of the term metaxis refers to Gavin Bolton's (1984, p.141) evaluation of Augusto Boal's use of the term as an 'interplay between the actual and the fictitious' and Tor-Helge Allern's later reappraisal of Plato's usage as an in-betweenness (cf. Allern, 2002, p.79) of extremities; fiction and non-fiction, mortality and immortality. Barber similarly defines the littoral as the 'intermediate and shifting zone between the sea and the land' (Barber, 1998), and littoral art projects being 'the result of the conjoining of theory and practice into a political praxis' that aims 'to stimulate dialogue and elevate the standards of conversation between different communities' (Barber, 1998). I understand Barber's littoral art as an expression of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics in its application of non-conventional performance space 'outside the conventional contexts of the institutionalized [sic.] artworld' (Barber, 1998) to instigate socially engaged performance.

Whilst Kester's critical framework for Barber's littoral art expounds a number of problematics emanating from such a classification (Kester, 2009), he also touches on the fact that critically examining littoral art leads to more concrete and inflexible categorisation, but that, conversely, 'one of the strengths of Littoral practice lies in its capacity to transgress existing categories of knowledge' (Kester, 2009). Littoral art, stresses Kester, is a dialogical process as well as a physical product. His dialogical art is an attempt to discern an aesthetic that is 'based on the possibility of a dialogical relationship that breaks down the conventional distinction between artist, art work and audience' (Kester, 2009), the boundaries and definitions of which might be 'relatively

intuitive or unconscious' (Kester, 2009). As such, the interconnected frameworks of Bourriaud, Barber, Kester, and Lavender are built around terminology that, in many ways, is intuitively understood through embodied experience. An analysis of these theatrical shifts aims to, as Kester suggests, 'subject [such definitions] to some conceptual elaboration' (2009) but is also consciously aware of the embodied nature of the theatrical modalities described. Consequently, the analyses that follow are built around a number of interviews conducted with each company in order to better conceptualise their own intentions for and understandings of the methodological tools applied within their own practice.

It is my opinion that the methodological shift that has emerged over the past few years is both affected by, and part of, the wider cultural shift through and beyond the postmodern as well as the millennial artists' particular generational experience. In 2010, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker popularised the term metamodernism to mark what they saw as an emergent, dominant cultural structure of feeling characterised by an 'oscillat[ion] between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010) that, building upon the earlier definition of metaxy, produces an 'in-betweenness or, rather, a dialectical movement that identifies with and negates – and hence, overcomes and undermines – conflicting positions, while never being congruent to these positions' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2017, p.10). In Chapter Two, I will examine both the concept of the metamodern and the elusive moniker 'millennial' in order to locate this particular theatrical practice within wider, contemporary cultural trends.

I apply Vermeulen and van den Akker's oscillation between disparate polarities here as the companies attempt political betterment through dialogical engagement with communities and audiences whilst simultaneously being inherently and perceptibly critical and questioning of their own approaches within their art. Within this analysis, I will propose that, through this metaxis, there is a liminal space created between these positions in which these new theatrical frameworks are occurring. Throughout the next two chapters, I will explore how the millennial theatre makers' oscillation between optimism and doubt in their art is indicative of a new sphere of practice; The Listening Theatre. Such practice exists in this state of metaxy between hope and hopelessness - it aims to improve the dialogue between communities, artists and audiences through listening to others whilst also critiquing, and listening to critiques of, its own listening.

I have adopted the term the Listening Theatre from Hanzi Freinacht's posited political metamodernism as detailed in 2017's *The Listening Society*, as will be detailed in Chapter Two, in which he proposes a socio-political upheaval built around his contention that we will come 'closer to the truth if we create better dialogues' (Freinacht, 2017, p.4), leading to what he terms a Listening Society. This proposed terminology does not discern a concrete theoretical framework or a distinct, practical methodology, but, as I will position it within this analysis, an attempt to speak to and acknowledge a range of interrelating methodological features that I have observed concurrently emerging in the work of millennial political theatre makers. As such, I position the Listening Theatre, alongside my understanding of the millennial and the metamodern, as a nascent theatrical *structure of feeling* that also reflects wider cultural and political shifts as detailed in Chapter Two. I appropriate Raymond Williams' structure of feeling in this respect as his term attempts to discern contemporary 'changes in experience – the responses and their

27

communications; the "subjects" and the "forms" – which make the drama in itself and as

a history important' (Williams, 1969, p.20). Williams' theoretical framework, developed

in *Drama from Ibsen To Brecht* (1969), is particularly useful in understanding how the

sociological concepts of the metamodern and the millennial interact with the theatrical.

Williams analysed the shift from naturalistic to expressionist structures of feeling within

his contemporary theatrical landscape, noting that the term encompasses more than that

of a convention or stylistic register (17). Similarly, I understand the Listening Theatre to

build upon certain contemporary theatrical frameworks' 'immediate and better

recognized predecessors' (19), that could mask the analysis of it as a separate structure

of feeling. However, this sphere of practice both builds upon and sits congruently to other

such localised frameworks within contemporary theatre and, coupled with its inherent

connection to both the millennial and the metamodern as structures of feeling, I argue that

this justifies new, separate terminology and analysis.

1.1.3   The Case Studies

The companies and particular performances chosen for this analysis exhibit various

modes of sincere engagement with communities before and after performances and / or

their audiences within performances in order to affect some form of political engagement

and / or change, and, importantly, include a critique of their own process within the

process itself. In order to select these case studies, I determined that, firstly, the company

members must fit within the millennial age bracket, which I determine as being born

between roughly 1985 and 1995 (see Chapter Two) and that, secondly, the specific

production should be overtly political in its message and / or aesthetics. The following

four companies were then selected as final cases as they represent a geographical spread

around the UK; Eager Spark in Exeter, Lung in Manchester, The Gramophones in Nottingham, and Feat.Theatre in London.

1.1.4   The Analysis

Through my initial analysis of these case studies, I noticed similar concerns and approaches within each company's methodologies. Primarily, each company attempted to involve the audience (and, in some cases, their participants) in a form of political discussion. Secondly, each company attempted to extend this dialogical engagement past the theatrical event itself in order to enable some form of sustained political exchange. Then, importantly, each company was inherently critical of their own process, engagement, and efficacy within the process or performance itself. Through isolating particular companies under the bracket of political theatre created by millennials, it became clear that a theatrical trend that focused on attempted genuine and authentic connection and change through political, performative dialogue that is also questioning of its own efficacy was emerging. This theatre is made by millennials that are wholly aware that they don't know the answers or have the efficacy to enable solutions, and therefore want to open up the discussion to others, whilst also being acutely aware that those others probably won't have the answers or ability either.

The analysis that follows is divided into four sections. First, I will discuss the varied methods of *social engagement* employed by the four case studies, and how such engagement is both built upon and moves beyond aspects of the dialogical and littoral. This will lead into a dissection of the *audience engagement* employed by the companies, and the integral link between this and their social engagement in their attempts at curating a political dialogue that extends past the event frame of the performance. Thirdly, an

analysis of the importance of **_authenticity_** within the millennial case studies' performance methodologies will draw upon Andy Lavender's assertion that the shift through and beyond postmodernism has reignited an obsession with the concept of the authentic in contemporary performance (Lavender, 2016, p.25). This focus on authenticity leads to an analysis of the companies' **_self-critique_** of their own methodologies, engagement, and efficacy that I find integral to the Listening Theatre and that firmly places such modalities within an oscillatory system that switches between hopelessness and hope.

1.2   SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Feat.Theatre's _The Welcome Revolution_ (2018) imagines 'a world where inviting strangers for cups of tea is no longer a radical act' (Theatre Royal Stratford East, 2018). The production was created as a response to the increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric the two-woman company experienced upon returning to Britain from a period in Germany, as well as being directly inspired by the _Welcome is a Radical Act_ conference at Goldsmiths University, London (2017), which engaged with the increase in nationalist discourse and rise in hostility towards refugees and migrants, particularly since the 2016 Referendum on Britain's exit from the European Union. The company's application of the act of 'welcoming' through facilitating a dialogical interchange between themselves and local community members addressing how 'welcome' they feel, and the further platforming of these issues, is exemplary of aspects of Hanzi Freinacht's suggestion of coming closer to the truth by creating better dialogues (Freinacht, 2017, p.4) as a utopic political act. Both Freinacht and Feat.Theatre suggest that the act of actively listening to your neighbour can lead to further eudemonic happiness within society. I invoke Freinacht's interpretation of eudemonic here to refer to 'meaning, purpose in life, and peace of mind' (Freinacht, 2017, p.73) rather than pleasure-focused _hedonic_ happiness.

My use of the term dialogical refers to Grant Kester's dialogical art which, in turn, references Mikhail Bahktin's (1982) theories surrounding dialogical interchange being an open system that is less combative and more open to facilitating cooperation than a more dominant dialectical (closed) exchange (Sennet, 2012). Kester's dialogical art aims to categorise what he observed as an 'emergence of a body of contemporary art practice concerned with collaborative, and potentially emancipatory, forms of dialogue and conversation' (Kester 2005, p.2). He describes the emergence of this shift as occurring within the mid-1990s, highlighting particular works that 'solicit participation and involvement so openly' (2). Marissia Fragkou's suggestion of such an ''affective turn' towards relations of intimacy and relationality' (Fragkou, 2019, p.184) in British theatre being inherently connected to the precarity of contemporary neoliberalist structures, of which I detail in regard to the millennials in Chapter Two, reflects such a chronology. The proliferation, she indicates, of 'notions of responsibility, solidarity and care for Others' (184) in such theatre is reactive to the 'neo-liberal narratives of 'responsibilization'' (184), indicating that such performance offers alternative narratives of responsibility and social solidarity in the public sphere. Grant Kester's use of Habermas' concept of the public sphere in his defining of dialogical art is reflective of such alternatives, in that he contends that such art works to curate a discursive space free of the 'coercion and inequality that constrain human communication in normal daily life' (Kester, 2006, p.4). In this way, Kester encapsulates Habermas' communicative action in which the 'very act of participating in these exchanges makes us better able to engage in discursive encounters and decision-making processes in the future' (Kester, 2006, p.4). As Fragkou surmises, theatres of 'intimacy and relationality' may offer methods of 'transforming the shape of contemporary subjectivities' (Fragkou, 2019, p.185).

The Welcome Revolution is divided into two halves: a participatory tea party, in which local members of the community are invited to engage in discussions and practical workshops, and an interactive performance formed around the responses collected within the previous section. This first section relies heavily upon the dialogical framework, as well as that of Bruce Barber's littoral art practice, which he saw as 'lifeworld affirming' projects that position themselves 'between the private realm and public sphere' (Barber, 1998). Within the first part of *The Welcome Revolution,* members of the local community are invited to a tea party at a theatre or arts centre, where they share tea, cake, and biscuits, participate in family-friendly arts and craft activities, and engage with discussions led by the company about how 'welcome' they feel and what community means to them (Theatre Royal Stratford East, 2018). The company both welcome the community into a public sphere in order to engage in a dialogue regarding their own thoughts on the issues surrounding the idea of 'being welcome' and through this gather material from the participants in order to craft their show; curating a space for listening to occur. The discussions in this section are led by questions the company have prepared but take free form between the participants involved.

This tea party formula evolved from the group's concern about problematics surrounding the collection of the local communities' input. As Josie Davies explained to me, in curating the workshops, the pair were trepidatious about there being 'such a fine line between platform and just appropriation […] what's the more equal exchange? Can we actually facilitate these […] workshops in a fair way and who is it for? Is it for us or is it for the participants?' (Appendix A.4). The pair decided that there would have to be some form of equal transaction between themselves and the participants; 'if we give them something like a cup of tea or a biscuit, then maybe a conversation for that is a more equal

Fig. 3.   Performer Stella Von Kuskell with Feat.Theatre's tea party participants at York Theatre Royal, 2018. Photo by Feat.Theatre. Reproduced with permission.

exchange and feels more fair [sic.] and feels less exploitative,' as Davies (Appendix A.4) explains, 'Okay, well let's do tea parties. That's quite fun because that also ties into the nationalism and using the British trope of tea parties. How can we turn that on its head and do it to something that's actually really pro-immigration or welcoming others?' In this respect, the tea party workshops were an exchange between the community and company; offering a welcome space and refreshments in exchange for a conversation.

This focus on the dialogical is reflective of Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, in which the artwork functions as 'social interstice' (Bourriaud, 2002, p.45). For Bourriaud, relational art 'constructs models of sociability suitable for producing human relations' (70); curating societal space that enables dialogical engagement. Stella Von Kuskell sees such an act as 'using small-scale kindness to promote much wider ideologies' (Appendix A.4) with questions such as '"Do you trust strangers?", "Would you welcome somebody to your house?", "Do you usually feel welcome?" […️ making up the] conversational tea party' (Appendix A.4). Feat.Theatre's tea parties generated dialogical space for new combinations of local demographics to come together, be welcomed, and to listen to each other. The input gathered by the company during this engagement was then woven into the performative half of the piece a number of days later.

In a similar process, the work of Manchester-based, verbatim company Lung is particularly exemplary of progressive dialogical engagement with community participants in order to later utilise their input in a theatrical performance. Their 2015 production, *E15*, illustrated the journey of the Focus E15 campaign in Stratford, London, in a way that aimed 'to provide a truthful re-telling of a national issue and how one group of women refused to be marginalised' (Lung, 2017). The company worked with members

of the Focus E15 campaign group in a series of interviews and workshops over a six-month period, as well as attending regular protest events. The campaign itself is built around a group of young mothers who had been forcibly evicted from their homes after Newham Council cut its funding for the Focus E15 Hostel, Brimstone House, in 2013 (Focus E15, 2014), with the council advising that the families 'would have to accept private rented accommodation as far away as Manchester, Hastings and Birmingham' (Monks & Woodhead, 2016, p.vii).

Lung's work with the group formed a verbatim performance that continued to rally support for their cause over the next three years, gaining signatures and donations for the campaign from audience members post-performance and offering a national platform of awareness for Focus E15. When the show transferred to London's Battersea Arts Centre in 2017, the company opened the run by marching into the theatre from the local train station with the campaign group. The performance then opened with banners, protestors, and even babies on the stage (Appendix A.2), emphasising the reality of the situation—that real families' homes and lives are still at stake. The company's work with the campaign group still continues, with the play's authors frequently travelling to Stratford to protest with the group on the high street.

Lung describe their work as 'platforming political issues' (KCOM, 2017), but their work extends further than this. Helen Monks explained their struggle with the responsibility towards communities and audiences post-performance to me: 'You can't just give someone a piece of theatre that's incredibly triggering for lots of issues they might have in their life and then just leave. There becomes a responsibility around that play and what that play is trying to do' (Appendix A.2). The dialogical processes employed by Lung are

Fig. 4. Lung's *E15* at the Edinburgh Fringe, 2016. Photo by Joe Twigg. Reproduced with permission.

exemplary in three different states of performance. Firstly, the dialogical engagement begins in the creation of the piece in their interaction with the protest movement. This then continues in the piece itself through both the act of verbatim platforming and their use of actual interviewees within the performance at Battersea Arts Centre. Lastly, it continues past the piece's immediate life in their continual involvement in the campaign. In this way, Lung's work can be viewed as an attempt at engaging audiences within a political dialogue, whilst also endeavouring to continue the performance's engagement after the theatrical event itself.

Their following piece, *Who Cares* (2016), which aimed to identify hidden young carers within schools and youth centres, provided post-show access to support for young carers at each performance with a number of young carers either identifying themselves or being identified by friends or teachers throughout the process (Appendix A.2). In this way, Lung are exemplary in their attempts at impassioned and empathetic understanding between community, artist, and audience through an amalgam of dialogical and littoral engagement that places emphasis on the act of listening. Their work differs aesthetically from Feat.Theatre's, in that Lung's actual engagement with the community isn't performed until it has been filtered through more traditional theatrical means whilst Feat.Theatre's tea parties are part of the performative event. However, as will become clear, both cases build upon the previous theatrical frameworks discussed in that they aim for developing engaged connectivity whilst also being self-reflexively aware of the problematics surrounding this.

Such self-critique will be discussed fully in section 1.5, however, it is pertinent to include Exeter-based Eager Spark, who rebranded themselves from Write by Numbers in 2018,

at this juncture as a millennial company continually struggling with the problematics involved in the responsibilities surrounding the creation of socially engaged theatre. Their 2015 production *Regeneration* was an attempt at teasing out the complications and, in some respects, the guilt of having been heavily involved in two urban regeneration projects in London in the years previous. As Write by Numbers, the company described their methodology as 'making work with / for audiences' (Write by Numbers, 2018) and as Eager Spark, they aim to 'start conversations' (Eager Spark, 2018). Both statements are reflective of the company's focus on dialogical, community-engaged performance that often occurs within a non-theatrical space, but, as will become clear, the company are also inherently aware of the complications and problematics that have emerged from this.

The group's first work together began as part of a regeneration project in Brixton Village Market, London, in 2010. Furness describes the space as a 'glorious 1920's arcade […] but at the time, most of the units weren't occupied. Initially, they had wanted to bulldoze it to build flats, obviously, but then the […] community managed to get it listed. They couldn't [demolish it], so they decided that they're going to have a regeneration project instead' (Appendix A.3). As part of this regeneration scheme, the developers let a portion of retail space for free to start-up businesses, 'but amongst that,' states Furness, 'they also wanted to have an arts element - principally for footfall rather than any big social purpose' (Appendix A.3). The company curated a pop-up theatre programme, *Ovid Reworked* (2010), in one of the retail units – 'taking over an empty shop and turning it into a theatre' (Appendix A.3). *Ovid Reworked* featured a series of short plays, playwriting workshops, free tea and cake - 'bribery for people to come and talk to us' states Furness (Appendix A.3) - and a 'Wall of Change'; a portion of the unit in which visitors could answer

questions such as '"How do you think Brixton has changed? How would you like it to change in the future?"' (Appendix A.3). Importantly, Furness described her experience of coming to understand the project's place within the community as it was being altered by the regeneration scheme as understanding that;

> By being in the market, you have to engage with the traders who were there […] I kept going to market meetings. You'd hear people talk about the fact that they'd been there for 20 years and all of that. Suddenly, I was really aware of this community of people I hadn't been before and actually how potentially our project was maybe helping them a bit, which hadn't been a dimension I directly thought about at all. It was when market traders came to see shows – that's probably the nicest thing in the entire project. It was one of those things that felt, at the time, like a really lovely experience (Appendix A.3).

However, when the company look back at the project in hindsight, the situation appears more complex. Furness explains that through its gentrification process, Brixton Village Market is now labelled a 'cultural hub' (Timeout, 2019), meaning that 'some of the traders who were there when we were there are no longer there' (Appendix A.3). In fact, the group's association with the regeneration scheme meant that they themselves became 'accused of having socially cleansed the market, with someone pointing out on Facebook that no black locals went anymore' (Wyver, 2016). As Furness explains, their relationship with the impact of the project is muddled; 'Certainly, at the time, it was a very positive thing, but retrospectively, I've been incredibly aware of [the fact that] we were part of the pilot fish for potential gentrification' (Appendix A.3).

Through the varied forms of engagement with particular communities pre- and post-performance employed by these companies, a trend towards extended dialogical engagement becomes clear. The modalities employed are reflective of previously ascribed dialogical, littoral and engaged performance practice; work that centres on

Fig. 5. Crowds outside Shop 82 as part of *Ovid Reworked: The Brixton Project* by Eager Spark, 2010. Available at: http://eagerspark.co.uk/back-catalogue/ovid-reworked-the-brixton-project/ (Accessed 6 December 2019)

participation, collaboration and engagement as a reflexive, communicative and progressive force that is, as Barber clarifies, 'essentially political' (Barber, 1998). When I addressed these shifts in a paper at New York University's *Performance as Activism* conference in early 2018, I was met with an interesting question regarding the politics of Arts funding in the UK, particularly regarding the role of Arts Council England (ACE), in the development of young companies' repertoires. Are these companies simply ticking 'community engagement' boxes to acquire funding? Is this increase in adapting dialogical and littoral processes actually affected by restricted financial structures? It is true that, to paraphrase Theatre Deli's co-artistic director Jessica Brewster (2018), the narrative of theatre and performance within the UK has been moulded by ACE's financial guidelines. As ACE is financed both through the UK government and the National Lottery, the outgoing funds have a responsibility to work for the public, with ACE commenting on the importance of funded companies becoming 'more focused on audiences [...] to give more people the chance to *take part* in the arts' (ACE, 2018, my emphasis). It is also true that certain companies, in particular Lung and The Gramophones, have been in receipt of ACE funding for specific projects. From talking to the companies directly, it is evident that the work is never set out with funding as precedence, however inadvertently such companies may be subscribing to such regulations and providing an unwitting panacea for ACE's objectives. As Lung's Helen Monks explained to me particularly,

> It's such a cliché, but [theatre] should be a mirror that reflects the world but also presents, maybe an alternative ideal world. And I think that what's cool about it being real people is that it offers to stage [...] a platform. [...] Part of the reason that we make our own work is so that we don't have to adhere to those people who are giving pots of money, or the people sat in buildings deciding what's going to offend their board members or their trustees (Appendix A.2).

This dialogical engagement, as Monks suggests, seeks to approach or negotiate both a reflection of the world and an 'alternative ideal' through legitimate, extended dialogue

with communities. Within the following analysis, I locate this notion of working towards an 'alternative ideal', or form of utopia, through constructive, dialogical engagement as central to the concept of the Listening Theatre whilst it is coupled with an inherent critique of this very undertaking. This will be fundamentally linked to structures of thought within the post-postmodern paradigm of metamodernism, described by artist Luke Turner as a 'climate in which a yearning for utopias, *despite their futile nature*, has come to the fore' (Turner, 2015; emphasis my own). However, this dialogical engagement is not limited to communities and participants outside of the actual performance event. The following section addresses aspects of dialogical engagement between audience and artist in the moment of performance.

1.3 AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Hannah Stone, co-artistic director of all-female company The Gramophones explains that their work is 'not really about us, but how can we still find ways to make [the audience] involved and make them part of the conversation?' (Appendix A.1). The Nottingham-based company's work is partly built upon input obtained from current and previous audiences. Reflective of Lung and Feat.Theatre's extended engagement with particular communities, The Gramophones aim to curate dialogical engagement with their audiences and then extend this past the performance event itself.

Their *Playful Acts of Rebellion* (2014) was based around the group attempting to find a form of protest that they felt had personal resonance to them as examples of a both/neither spectrum of marginalisation – as women, the cast felt they had a duty and responsibility to make their voices heard, but as cis, straight, white women, they also felt that other voices deserved precedence. It is also important to note the company's emphasis on

generating the performance subject from within, using their own experiences as an impetus and then joining these with input from the audience within the show itself. In some ways, this reflects aspects of Feat.Theatre's *The Welcome Revolution*, except that the merging of these two sources occurs during the Gramophone's performance itself, not in any intervening weeks as per Feat.Theatre's.

In the piece, the company recall their own stories of political engagement and protest, as well as stories of people met within the project. Throughout this, the audience is also invited to contribute their own objections on stage via paper aeroplanes thrown into the performance space. The actors then use these as issues within the performance as an impetus for protest. The performance aesthetics switch from the Pussy-Riot inspired balaclava-donned chants, to intimate, audience level discussion; 'involving the audience in a lively conversation, providing a safe, friendly environment to unpack these ethically stimulating issues' (Hart, 2014). Although, at surface level, this implies inclusivity towards the audience, it is also essential to note the audience limitations that this form of performance requires. Such audience participation suggests that audience members become what Jen Harvie describes as 'prosumers' (Harvie, 2013, p.50); consumers who are simultaneously charged with producing the artwork. It also assumes that such prosumers are comfortable with such theatrical forms and willing and able to take part in such participation. This dependence on the audience aiding in generating material is essentially dialogical in this respect but also threatens to restrict the variety of audience able to experience such a performance.

Such interdependence between artist and audience, though, is integral to the creation of The Gramophone's work. After I first saw *Playful Acts of Rebellion*, the audience were

given postcards addressed to the company, on which we were asked to write about a journey we had recently undertaken. The responses received from this went directly into the creation of *Wanderlust* (2015) which was also partly based on input collected from previous show *End to End* (2012), in which the company made a journey from Land's End to John O'Groats using only £1 per mile. Similarly, the *End to End* project itself culminated in a staged performance of the journey, mixed with re-tellings and stagings of stories collected from people met along the way. In essence, input garnered throughout the process or performance of each of the company's projects helps form the next, and so on. Alongside the concept of making an audience part of the conversation, Stone describes the company's desire to extend the audience-company dialogue so that it 'stretches further than the moment and further than that night' (Appendix A.1). Their focus on continual audience engagement, in some ways reflective of Lung's focus on sustained relationships, emphasises an attempt at a continual authentic connection that extends past the more familiar performative space. To further illustrate this, Stone and Ashcroft described the process of audience engagement within *Wanderlust* as beginning as soon as a ticket was purchased; 'we'd ask them [..] to bring something in a jar that represented some memory, or something that was important to them' (Appendix A.1). These jars then became part of the aesthetics of the performance, with the audience invited 'to come and open jars, read things, touch things, add their own jar' (Appendix A.1) in order to open up a dialogue with the audience. In particular, Stone and Ashcroft remember 'a huge amount of people who really did want to talk' (Appendix A.1), with many presenting very personal stories and objects as part of the performance (cf. Appendix A.1).

Fig. 6. The Gramophones' Hannah Stone opens *Playful Acts of Rebellion* in a Pussy Riot inspired costume, 2014. Photo by Julian Hughes. Reproduced with permission.

Fig. 7. Ria Ashcroft with audience members onstage at the end of The Gramophone's *Wanderlust*, 2015. The jars provided by the audience can be seen in the background to the right. Photo by Ralph Barklam. Reproduced with permission.

The Gramophones' work can be compared to Feat.Theatre and Eager Spark's attempts to open up a dialogical space with their audience to effect positive change through mutual listening, but it is also reflective of Lung's attempt to continue this engagement after the performance event itself. When I interviewed the company in 2016, they told me that they were still receiving postcards that they gave to their audiences of *End to End* in 2012. These postcards had been given to previous audience members with seeds attached, 'and a little instruction basically saying, "Go on an adventure. Plant a seed. Then write to us and tell us about your journey"' (Appendix A.1). Stone describes one that they had received as saying, '"Oh, I kept your seed for you, and I've just been to Norfolk and I planted it."' (Appendix A.1). Such lingering engagement suggests a form of continued dialogical interplay between company and audience that, as Stone herself describes 'stretches beyond that; before the show, leading up to it, and after. Even *years* after' (Appendix A.1).

Such attempts at lengthening the dialogical engagement with their audience are also present in Lung's identification of hidden young carers in the audiences of *Who Cares* and Feat.Theatre's attempt to re-engage the *Welcome Revolution* tea party participants within the performances that followed. All three demonstrate an attempt at extending a dialogue with their audiences past the performance event itself. Following her critique surrounding participatory theatre leading to audiences becoming prosumers, Jen Harvie is critical of participatory performance that appears to 'offer social bonds which are, in fact, thin' (2013, p.59). The work of The Gramophones, Lung, and Feat.Theatre appears to be, in part, an attempt at remedying such a case. From speaking with the three companies it is clear that there is an impassioned endeavour to curate a durational connection between artist and audience in order to further facilitate some form of

authentic dialogue; one that is not simply constrained to the time and spatial limitations of the performance, but extends past this in order to, as per Freinacht, create better dialogues to get closer to the *truth* (cf. Freinacht, 2017, p.4), a somewhat slippery concept that is also an integral component in these companies' methodologies.

1.4   AUTHENTICITY

In *Performance in the Twenty-first Century* (2016), Andy Lavender makes particular reference to the import placed upon authenticity within art in the current cultural state of post-postmodernism. 'After the clarion calls of modernism,' he states, 'and the absences and ironies of postmodernism, came the nuanced and differential negotiations, participations and interventions of an age of engagement' (Lavender, 2016, p.21). Although Lavender does not use the term, his analysis speaks to certain aspects of the metamodern, of which I will detail in the next chapter, that point towards a pragmatically idealistic re-appraisal of certain metanarratives as a break from and beyond postmodern deconstruction. He argues that our contemporary cultural space 'has the look and feel of one that is now definitely beyond the postmodern even while it continues to trade in certain postmodern strategies' (10). He also considers the application of performative modes that 'mark a break from the decenterings of postmodernism' (20) as exemplary of a cultural paradigm shift, as the 'tools [postmodernism] introduced proved limited in dealing with new scenarios that changed our relationship […] to realities and their expression' (19). In particular, his appraisal of Janelle Reinelt's poetics of 'caring, engagement, and commitment' within theatre (Reinelt, 2010, p.39-40), leads him to observe a 'notably different lexicon from that employed during the height of postmodernism […] "actuality", "authenticity", "encounter", "engagement"—a set [of terms] that would have seemed naïve or faintly ridiculous if wheeled out a generation or

so ago' (Lavender, 2016, p.25). In addition, Lavender points to Jeffrey Melnick's assertion that 'once we [as a culture] loved irony and took refuge in that distancing strategy: now we are earnest and authentic' (Melnick, 2009, p.20). In our current post-postmodern zeitgeist, Lavender argues that 'theatre has been exploded, and it has been regathered' (Lavender, 2016, p.9), that a new paradigm is being (re)built from the pieces created through postmodernist performance modes – something not wholly resembling the old, but not wholly new either. For Lavender, the 'real' has returned (19) and a 'new fascination with authenticity' (23) is integral to understanding this paradigm shift. In Daniel Shulze's *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance* (2017), he details how this shift is manifest within current performing arts practices, claiming that authenticity is a 'counter-movement to feelings of uncertainty and instability' (Shulze, 2017, p.23) and is utilised within sections of contemporary performance as 'an aesthetic tool [as] both a strategy of creation and reception […] which induce[s] a visceral understanding and experience of performance' (37).

Within Chapter Two, Section 2.3.6, I provide a detailed dissection of this re-emergence of authenticity in response to both Lavender's terminology and that laid down by Shulze and detail the inherent connection to the re-emergence of terminology surrounding the 'authentic', the 'true' and the 'real' within the emergent metamodern structure of feeling as determined by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010). The two latter theorists contend that sincerity and affect have become two dominant modalities within contemporary culture (*Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker: Notes on Metamodernism*, 2013) and that metamodern artists, intellectuals and particularly millennials, long 'for 'honest', 'true' and sincere personal experiences on the basis of empathy' (Bastiaanse, 2018). As critic Rueben Bastiaanse outlines, this is linked to 'socio-political engagement

and the return of grand narratives,' with artists 'looking for sincere and honest engagement in order to improve the world' (Bastiaanse, 2018). As will be detailed within the next chapter, this return to grand narratives does not herald a return to the trappings of modernist metanarratives; it is not naïve. Instead, it offers what has come to be termed 'informed naivety' or 'pragmatic idealism' (Turner, 2015) that engages with a resurgence of the strive for authenticity, romanticism and affect, whilst not 'forfeiting all that we've learnt from postmodernism' (Turner, 2015). As such, the contemporary (re)engagement with the concept of the authentic, oscillates 'between a modern enthusiasm for authenticity and a postmodern "sense" about authenticity's artificiality' (van Poecke, 2017, p.58). It is my contention that the aesthetic and performative modalities employed by these millennial companies clearly exhibit an endeavour towards forms of authentic connection and representation concerning social and political improvement whilst being simultaneously critical and quizzical of such an attempt. In order to expound this, I will first detail how these case studies exhibit both an ironic and sincere application of the authentic. For this, I employ Schulze's designation of 'mechanisms of authenticity' (2017, p.29) employed within theatre manifest as a 'longing for something that is not a simulacrum' (34), that can, however paradoxically, stake 'a claim to being unmediated, genuine or real' (39). This will then lead to the pragmatic idealism of these companies use of such authenticity for social betterment whilst being concurrently sincere about the problematics, limitations, and failings inherent in their own work.

Of course, this analysis of the authenticity of such performances inhabits a paradoxical terminological area, in that, in defining the authentic as a quality, it ceases to hold its 'claim to being unmediated, genuine or real' (Shulze, 2017, p.39). As Susanne Knaller explains, the authentic exists in a paradox 'between subjective legitimisation and

objective certification' (Knaller, 2012, p.70). As Timotheus Vermeulen expands, authenticity 'aspires to unformed immediacy and non-fictive truth but can only ever manifest in and as a fictive form' (Huber & Funk, 2017, p.155). Its autological nature means that when the authentic is verbalised, 'the concept collapses like a soap bubble' (Shulze, 2017, p.39). In ways reflexive of Robin Nelson's haptic knowledge in reference to performance praxis (2013, p.37), the notion of authenticity is a tacit understanding embodied within the audience and artists' individual experience of a performance. As with the modalities surrounding the littoral and the dialogical, the authentic is intuitively understood through embodied experience, yet this analysis aims to 'subject [such definitions] to some conceptual elaboration' (Kester, 2009) whilst remaining aware of the paradoxical, slippery nature of such an endeavour. In ways, however, this is reflexive of the particular methods in which these millennial companies are addressing their own attempts to curate authentic dialogical connection in that they are simultaneously sceptical, critical and questioning of their own endeavours.

Feat.Theatre's use of real participant's input from the previous tea parties and Lung's verbatim work both, in part, depend on the presupposed authenticity of their texts. Jürs-Munby et al, in their book *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political* (2013) describe documentary theatre's 'use of authentic texts and personages [as] self-validating, in the sense that its legitimacy is vouchsafed by direct link to external reality made by the use of authentic material' (26). Lung's focus on authentic platforming through verbatim techniques, and their continual interaction with particular communities, highlights an awareness and concern for authentic and efficacious platforming. In Feat.Theatre's *The Welcome Revolution,* such platforming is coupled with their audience engagement. The second part of the piece sees the audience sat on sofas, sharing more tea and biscuits, a

Fig. 8.   Stella Von Kuskell and an audience member during Feat.Theatre's *The Welcome Revolution*, 2018. Photo by Samantha Thompson. Reproduced with permission.

week or so after the tea party event. On a stage filled with bunting and origami sculptures created by the tea party participants, Von Kuskell takes us through her journey towards political engagement. Throughout this, we are invited to play particular characters, without having to leave the comfort of our sofa (or our cup of tea). One audience member becomes her parent and pushes her on a 'swing'; another acts as her school friend, reading pre-prepared lines into a microphone. It is a paradoxical mix of the authentic and the imaginary. We are at once given what appears to be a first-person retelling of a political awakening, alongside real responses to the tea party events from actual participants, but then we become part of a 'Welcome Revolution' in an imagined land, with many of us donning hats, wigs, or even fairy wings as various characters from children's literature. It is at once wholly real and wholly unreal, authentic and ironic. *The Welcome Revolution* fluctuates between the observably authentic in both its intentionally 'un-performed' readings of participants' responses collected at the earlier tea parties alongside its genuine attempt to involve participants within a dialogical event, and the performative deconstruction of such authenticity in their use of the audience as prosumers to 'perform' supplementary characters alongside the imagined nature of such a Welcome Revolution that fluctuates between an authentic desire for change whilst using an ironically imaginary and inauthentic narrative.

The Gramophone's *Playful Acts of Rebellion* utilises a clearer interconnectivity between the input of the performers and the audience in that the piece documents the company members' individual journeys towards political action alongside issues brought forward by the audience, whilst also being imbued with their contrasting sense of '"I can't do anything"' (Appendix A.1). In her review, Ellen Hart noted that the company had 'create[d] a space that effortlessly necessitates audience involvement; by the end, I was

so on board that I actually wanted to chat about my own thoughts and feelings' (Hart, 2014). In this respect, the piece appears to treat the audience's political views as equal and as necessary as the performers' own.

Whether or not such voices dissent or correspond is debatable and the problematics surrounding the construction of a performative, political dialogue will be addressed in Chapter Three. However, it is the emphasis placed on discussion, as per Hart's review, that is of interest to me here. Daniel Shulze touches on the inclusion of the audience within the work of Forced Entertainment that speaks to a similar state of audience engagement as employed by Feat.Theatre and The Gramophones in that the audience are made to be 'part of the spectacle, even if they remain quietly in their seats' (Shulze, 2017, p.69) and that, by including the audience in the performative event, this allows 'the "real world" to enter the theatre room' (69). Such pieces, argues Shulze, 'are curiously positioned between the real world and the theatrical world, set in an ontological limbo, neither here, nor there' (69). In ascribing to particular theatrical customs such as performing in a theatrical space, using proscenium style staging, and assigning a clear distinction between actor and audience, Feat.Theatre and The Gramophones set their performance firmly within the theatrical frame, but their 'conversational' (Hart, 2014) inclusion of their own 'real world' experience alongside input and action from the audience themselves allows the audience and artist to come together in a form of theatrical conversation that is 'not didactic' but provides a liminal 'environment to unpack these ethically stimulating issues' (Hart, 2014). Although, as both Harvie (2013, p.59) and Shulze (2017, p.74) ascertain, it is debatable whether there is any actual audience agency within such performances, 'it is absolutely clear that the audiences will at least *feel* more actively involved in the construction of the show' (74).

This sensation of 'real world' authenticity permeating the theatrical space is also evident in The Gramophones' staging choices reflecting both the audience's and the performer's lives outside of the theatrical event. In 2015's *Wanderlust*, the jars containing 'memories' (Appendix A.1) brought in by the audience members became an interactive part of the performance space. The previous year's *Playful Acts of Rebellion* saw the three performers onstage being joined for one section by projected footage of fourth company member, Rebecca D'Souza, who could not physically be part of the tour due to her pregnancy, discussing her own experience of political activism from the comfort of her own 'real world' home. This was coupled with further projections of a number of cats that had been fostered by artistic director Hannah Stone as part of a scheme that temporarily re-homes pets whose female owners have escaped abusive relationships and cannot take them to their temporary accommodation. Such moments are glimpses into the authentic 'real life' of the performers offstage that disrupt the theatrical, and supposed inauthentic, space. The authenticity of The Gramophones' performance, therefore, is derived not only from their inclusion of the audience in a conversation, but of their own 'real world' lives being integral to the content and aesthetics of the performance itself.

Similarly, Eager Spark's *Regeneration* is dependent upon the inclusion of the company members' own personal experiences as part of earlier regeneration projects. The production originally began as a 'big sprawling show about various strands of regeneration stories' (Appendix A.3) that aimed to interrogate the problematics surrounding urban regeneration and gentrification. However, during a Q&A session after a workshop performance during the development of the production, Corinne Furness discussed the company's previous engagement with such projects and how this led to the show's current form. Then, as Furness explains;

Fig. 9. The Gramophones' fourth company member, Rebecca D'Souza, offers input to *Playful Acts of Rebellion* from outside of the performance space whilst on maternity leave. Photo by Julian Hughes. Reproduced with permission.

> Someone was like, "That's really interesting, I'd really like to see that in the piece". It was one of those moments when I was like, of course, why on earth have we not mentioned it – like, it's really obvious? […] The reasons why we've made this and why we are the people to make this piece is important to an audience (Appendix A.3).

As such, *Regeneration* became a critique of both the process of gentrification and the company's own involvement in regeneration projects 'that, alongside other factors, helped gentrify the area[s]' (Wyver, 2016). The authenticity of the project comes from the continual framing of the piece as a reaction to the company's previous work and from its attempt to open up a sincere and critical dialogue with their audience in order to pose questions about their own involvement and own responsibilities in such gentrification. This critique of their own practice is not exclusive to Eager Spark's work however, but is, in many ways, integral to all four pieces within this analysis. Each production attempts to negotiate a discourse between the audience and the artist in order to work towards some form of political betterment, whilst also struggling with self-critique through an awareness of their work's failings, frailties, and falsehoods. In this way, they oscillate between genuine human connection and engagement (built upon performance modalities engaging with the concepts of the littoral, the dialogical and the authentic) and an ironic self-awareness of their own limitations. As will become clear within the next section, they strive 'for utopias despite their futile nature' (Turner, 2015).

1.5   HOPE/LESSNESS

In her 2017 analysis of 'what is and what is not a political play in the context of post-Thatcher Britain' (Grochala, 2017, p.1), *The Contemporary Political Play*, Sarah Grochalla draws on literary theorist Stefan Collini's definition of politics as a 'difficult attempt to determine relations of power in a given space' (Collini, 2004, p.67) and

Fig. 10. Eager Spark's *Regeneration* at the Plymouth Barbican, 2015. Available at: http://eagerspark.co.uk/back-catalogue/regeneration/ (Accessed 6 December 2019)

highlights that, if politics can be considered an 'attempt', the *intention* of the artist should be considered in a definition. As Grochala states, therefore, to 'intend to have a political impact is a political act, regardless of ultimate success or failure' (Grochala, 2017, p.7). Such highlighting of the attempt of such an act is reflected in these companies' awareness of inherent failings in their methodological approaches that strive towards utopia despite a possibly inevitable failure. As will become clear within this section, these case studies *attempt* change despite acknowledging the futility of this; they are at once optimistic and doubtful. Their political intentions, of attempting dialogical engagement and the platforming of certain ideologies, frame them as political theatre through Grochala's definition, despite their own awareness of the frailty of such.

This optimistic/doubtful or hope/less paradox is permanently entwined with the acceptance of inevitable, inherent failure. In Tony Fisher and Eve Katsouraki's *Beyond Failure* (2019), they tie the act of failure to the notion of the futurity – and I would also contend that Mark Fisher's concept of Lost Futures will play into this in the following chapter – in two distinctive respects. Firstly, they state that 'failure leads to an almost messianic faith in the power of futurity' (2), that present failures will be corrected in a future period. Secondly, however, they refer to the 'arrival of nihilism' (2) as affecting a 'drastic disavowal of futurity, where the knowledge of failure produces a bleak assessment of the impossibility of salvation or redemption' (2). Therefore, the act of accepting failure at once creates and negates notions of future development – it is a self-defeating paradigm. Fisher and Katsouraki expand on this paradoxical acceptance in that failure is at once aimed to be avoided *and* sought after; 'failure is both knowledge of one's passivity - to fail is to *experience* failure, not to will it […] and at the same time one experiences the radical acceptance of failure's lesson – thus one indeed *wills* failure,

embraces it' (2). While they maintain that every performer risks the *possibility* of failure, it is this paradoxical acceptance of *inevitable* failure whilst maintaining *resolved belief* in success that is apparent within the millennial case studies.

Feat.Theatre's *The Welcome Revolution* exhibits explicit moments of interrogation of their own process, akin to what will become clear within Chapter Two as the oscillatory nature of Vermeulen et al.'s ironic-sincere metamodernity, in its simultaneously genuine belief *and* disaffected critique of its own methods of engagement. The company extols the act of welcoming as an activist act, of sharing stories and listening to the local community as positive political protest, but are critical of the next steps of their engagement and of their position within the power dynamics created by facilitating the dialogical space, weaving such critique into the structure of the piece itself. I saw the production at Gerry's Café, run by Theatre Royal Stratford East, as part of the *Stronger Than Fear* Festival in 2018. Stratford's borough, Newham, is an area of extremely high deprivation (Newham Council, 2019), with the lowest level of adult arts engagement in London according to Arts Council England (ArtsProfessional, 2018). The company state that a range of participants attended the tea party in Stratford and contributed to the later performance, including European migrants, a member of Hackney Council, and a homeless participant, which the group describe as creating a juncture in their approach:

> Then we were like, "The tea party's irrelevant now. Let's just give this person a hot drink and food, if that will help." That was a turning point […] because for us we were talking about displacement and the refugee crisis in terms that were quite broad. Then, you just have a person, a rough sleeper, who's actually in your life. Okay, well, we're not going to ask him our questions, for example, because that feels inappropriate. Then you have this whole internal conflict of if it's not appropriate to ask them, who is it appropriate to ask? (Appendix A.4).

This is a moment returned to in the performance of *The Welcome Revolution*, when Von Kuskell addresses what they saw as shortcomings in their approach as she explains how

she reacted to the homeless participant's inclusion in the workshop – 'I offer him a plate of cake and biscuits. I teach him how to make an origami frog because that's all I can think of at the time' (The Welcome Revolution, 2018).

Additionally, the staging of the company's 'Welcome Revolution' is in an imagined land, with the audience dressed as characters from children's literature, and is the closest the company gets to an act of revolution within the piece. The remainder of the show edges slowly away from the idea of revolt and involves critique of the *Welcome Revolution* project itself. It is an affirmation of the oscillation between hope and hopelessness made evident within Feat.Theatre's production. The company strive to curate a public sphere as an effectual communicative forum between local communities, to perform the act of welcoming as a radical act of political defiance – and yet the only revolution the company creates occurs within a storybook-land amongst the joint imaginations of the audience and actor. It is at once both a call to arms and an admission of defeat. The curated feeling of comfort between actor and audience within the first half of *The Welcome Revolution* is deliberately challenged further when the company address the responses to their previous tea party.

As the production I experienced was performed in Stratford, where over 80% of the local area is classed as being in the 2nd and 3rd worst levels of the 10-level Index of Multiple Deprivation Scale (Newham Council, 2019), it was not surprising to hear stories of social isolation, inequality, poverty, and homelessness that felt antithetical to the collective and communal 'feel-good' experience curated for the audience through the first half of the production. Whilst some of these responses explicitly address the fact that the participants enjoyed their time at the tea party itself, others offer insights into issues that the company

Fig. 11. Stella Von Kuskell dances with the audience at the end of Feat.Theatre's *The Welcome Revolution*, 2018. Photo by Charlie Kirkpatrick. Reproduced with permission.

admit they cannot address. It is here that *The Welcome Revolution* shows a departure from both dialogical art and relational aesthetics. In projects under both former frameworks, the dialogical act may be the focal point of each artwork; the creation of participatory space being the performance itself. Some projects might go further and also offer a summation of the dialogical participation as a performance or artwork, as does *The Welcome Revolution*, too.

However, Feat.Theatre are attempting something else with their further exploration and critique of such an encounter in that they are not only listening to participants and offering a summation of this listening but are also listening to the critiques of their listening itself. They address the shortcomings experienced within the participatory act, of being unable to affect change, of appropriating participants' stories, of the failure to create an extended relational platform between the tea party and the performance. Yes, their tea party was a welcoming and hopeful event, but their onstage attentiveness to the limitations of their process conveys an awareness and acceptance of the critiques that could be levied at their work. Feat.Theatre aim to directly address issues of nationalism, anti-immigration, and community through long-form participatory engagement. However, as artists, they are also critical and questioning of this format, and of their place within such frameworks. In this way, *The Welcome Revolution* project strives for utopia, whether through participatory practice or through imagined literary amalgam, whilst overtly admitting that it *almost* expects to fail. As Davies explained to me, 'I think that's actually something that can be galvanizing even though it's hopeless' (Appendix A.4).

In Lung's *E15*, a similar form of critique comes from two jarring moments that disrupt both the performance and the audience's engagement. The first comes roughly three-

quarters of the way into the piece, when the production is interrupted by a member of the audience. A voice cuts in midway through a scene, disrupting the actors onstage, who eventually ask for the house lights to be brought up. The audience member who caused the interruption continues to speak. He claims to be homeless and criticises the company's singular focus on the Focus E15 campaign, stating that audience members would, most likely, have walked past homeless people on their way to the theatre without a second look (Monks & Woodhead, 2016, p.80). He holds up a bag that contains all he owns. 'That's my world', he states (80). In the particular performance I attended at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2016, the audience didn't know how to react. Some shifted awkwardly, others tutted, some even told him to be quiet. 'You'd be surprised how much he got told to be quiet […] that it's not about him,' Monks (Appendix A.2) told me. However, at the end of the speech that I observed; a number of audience members applauded his statement. The house lights came back on, the play awkwardly continued, and it wasn't until the actor joined the others onstage during the applause that many of the audience members realised it was staged. This momentary criticism, in fact, is still part of the verbatim approach of the performance, with the words taken from a chance encounter at a conference about the housing crisis attended by Monks (cf. Appendix A.2). Its insertion into the piece, and the intentionally disruptive staging, came from the group's own understanding that their focus on the Focus E15 campaign potentially neglected the wider issue of homelessness, alongside a desire to challenge an audience's complacency in watching the issue onstage, with some level of detachment, whilst they 'could be sat next to someone' in a similar situation (Appendix A.2).

The second moment comes at the play's finale. During the climax, the audience are roused into a chant with the campaign group, rallying behind the small group's success. 'The

future is ours', they are told, 'so make some noise!' (Monks & Woodhead, 2016, p.88). Cutting through the chant, one performer takes the microphone and offers a dramatically different update on the group's efforts. 'It's happening to me', she states. 'My tenancy's run out. My year's up. Right now it's like shit' (88). The chanting stops and the audience stills, forced to accept that a rallying cry for change isn't enough. The performer repeats the fact that the families in the piece are real and are going through the situations presented on stage as she speaks. 'This isn't someone standing on a stage thinking what they're going to do, remembering their lines', she states ironically, 'This is the reality […] Look what's happening' (88).

Despite the staging's sincere intentions at providing a platform for the campaign, Lung are aware of the complacency and disconnect afforded to an audience of a verbatim work. As a piece of theatre, *E15* is fundamentally and inescapably insincere in its staging; similarly to *The Welcome Revolution*, these are the voices of others, not the artists. As such, there is arguably an inherent falsity within its sincere efforts, with the theatrical devices utilised in its staging adding a layer of dramatics and possible distortion. However, it is their intentional disrupting of the piece, and of the performative space itself in the interruption from within the audience, that imbues the work with a dual nature; one that oscillates between an attempt at sincere and authentic verbatim platforming, and a jarringly disconnected critique of this focus and its effects. Evidently, Lung's aim is to platform the voices of the Focus E15 campaign, but they also embrace the complexities and ironies that arise from this platforming. It is at once uplifting and devitalising, sincere and disconnected; calling, even shouting, for change while also including an interrogation of the overall efficacy the performance project itself.

Fig. 12. Lung's *E15* at The Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 2016. Photo by Joe Twigg. Reproduced with permission.

It is this oscillation between sincere, heartfelt engagement and platforming, and legitimate critique that I see as integral to the Listening Theatre. *E15* at once believes in its own power of platforming the campaign and is simultaneously sceptical of its own potential. Whilst this differs from the critiques evident within *The Welcome Revolution*, in that Feat.Theatre determine their scepticism of the project within the piece themselves, Lung's *E15* asks its characters to provide an extant critique of the audience's reception of the performance. Yes, Lung want change, but they are also inherently mindful of the limitations of theatre, working their own uncertainty and doubt, distrust from the campaigners themselves, and a pre-conceived criticism of the reception of the work, into the play's text.

As Corrinne Furness explained within the previous section, Eager Spark's *Regeneration* came to be built upon such performative self-reflection. In a review of the piece at the Wardrobe Theatre in Bristol, Kate Wyver (2016) describes the company's involvement in previous gentrification projects through *Ovid Reworked* and *Theatre 41* as 'spill[ing] out of the play, historically, ethically and emotionally' and that 'the company are open to criticism'. In some respects, *Regeneration* could feel like an atonement for past sins, a way of retroactively avoiding 'real' political engagement in order to progress to their next work unscathed. The complex mix of feelings that Furness and the rest of the company share about their involvement in such projects keeps the show from being wholly derogatory of such schemes, or wholly flattering. As Wyver explains, the piece both 'evokes a feeling of upheaval, a desire to change' whilst also not 'feel[ing] like a call for revolution' (Wyver, 2016). Instead, the piece attempts to curate a dialogue about the complicated problematics surrounding regeneration that, inadvertently or not, includes the audience as a matter of course. As Wyver explained after seeing the piece in Bristol;

'The thing is, I'm surrounded by an entirely white audience in an area that has been gentrified over the past decade. Maybe they had a point. Maybe we are a product of gentrification, and we're continuing it. Maybe we are part of the problem' (Wyver, 2016).

Eager Spark's complicated history with socially engaged performance projects connected to urban regeneration schemes has instilled an inherent sense of hope/lessness within the group's work, but I do not see this as apologetic. They are at once wholly sincere about the positive affect of parts of their work within the local communities – believing that, similarly to Feat.Theatre, performative dialogical acts of listening can lead to communal eudemonic happiness - but they are also fundamentally aware of the failings and critiques that became apparent throughout the process. *Regeneration* is not an attempt at telling their side of the story, nor is it a call to arms, but, as Furness explained to me, the message of the show concerns the company's desire for the audience to engage in a conversation about such issues;

> Because there is no right answer. Thus far, everything that people are doing is failing. We desperately need to be talking about these issues now. How about let's have a conversation about it and can we think of new models? [The show] doesn't necessarily offer a way forward. It doesn't go, "[…] This is how we might do it better." […] The *conversation* is the important part of *Regeneration* (Appendix A.3).

In effect, Eager Spark's later work demonstrates a millennial company accepting inevitable failure whilst also being simultaneously hopeful of success through forms synonymous with the dialogical and the littoral. Through a mix of socially engaged projects and performances aiming to create dialogical exchange between audience and company, Eager Spark exemplify Hanzi Frienacht's posited act of politicised listening in order to evoke a form of positive, communal change. Freinacht's (2017, p.4) claim that we will 'come closer to the truth if we create better dialogues' is reflected in this hopeful

strive for change through dialogical engagement. Whilst Furness describes Eager Spark's methodology as '"Just chat to us and we'll see what we can do", she doubles down on the inherent ineffectuality of the situation when she continues with, 'and to be entirely honest […] I feel like there are no easy answers' (Appendix A.3).

1.6   THE WIDER FRAMEWORK

As I have illustrated through the four case studies, it is my contention that there is an emerging trend within the political performance of certain millennial theatre makers that engages with both notions of 'conventional' political performance, as laid down by Grochala (2017), and the postdramatic political, as per Jürs-Munby et al (2013). Through an application of particular practical methodologies that engage with the notions of the theatre of engagement, the dialogical, the littoral and the relational, these artists are fully aware of the very probable unobtainability of both any concrete political change outside of the performance, and the curation of an effective and measurable 'collective social bond' within the performance. And yet, I contend that this is exactly what they try to do. The Listening Theatre embraces a politics of paradoxes. It attempts the impossible despite knowing it will fail. It is sincere in its application of the methodological frameworks of social engagement as laid out within this section whilst fully embracing an ironic realisation that such engagement is destined, in all probability, not to succeed.

The paradoxical nature of the Listening Theatre is reflected in aspects of concurrent political theatre frameworks in regard to its intentions to disrupt certain structures and, as per Collini, 'determine relations of power' (Collini, 2004, p.67). As such, I locate the Listening Theatre as a structure of feeling, in that it 'may not yet be articulated in a fully worked-out form, but has rather to be inferred by reading between the lines' (Taylor,

2010, p.931), which sits congruent to and overlaps certain current practices within theatre of the postdramatic and the political. Jürs-Munby et al define conventional political theatre as 'mimetically referential […] whereby what is enacted and said on stage refers to – and *defers* to – social and political realities outside the theatre' (Jürs-Munby et al, 2013, p.16). They refer to critiques of the 'circular nature' (16) of such conventional political performance, in that such performance, 'it is suggested – reaches only a self-selecting minority and preaches to the converted in any case' (17). Political postdramatic theatre can be seen as a divergence from this in its critique of 'any seemingly assured portrayal of political realities' as depicted within more conventional political drama, as 'such an assured approach is seen to rest on an ideological basis of the coherence of which does not do justice to the complex nature of contemporary reality' (17). They refer explicitly to Lehman and Rancière in their classification of postdramatic theatre as 'collective and democratic' (23), but I would like to outline a further connection between postdramatic political performance as defined by Jürs-Munby et al and the previous charting of Lavender, Kester and Bourriaud's theoretical framings of similarly dialogically engaged performance. The authors suggest that postdramatic political performance opens 'up a space for alternative realities to come into view [… through] the way that norms of discourse and representation are disrupted' (23), reflecting Bourriaud's relational social interstice in order to critically and socially engage, as per Lavender, in a dialogical encounter as defined by Kester. The authors specifically refer to the platforming of 'political subject matter or voices that have no representation yet' (23) in their definition of such alternative realities, intentionally distancing such a definition from a utopian 'paradoxically unobtainable alternative reality, for instance the fleetingly 'collective' theatre situation' (23) and instead, focusing on the curation of a dialogical space for representation of narratives that might not have existed within more

conventional political theatre due to its focus on 'seemingly assured portrayal[s] of political realities' (17).

Jürs-Munby et al's reference to a seemingly unsustainable 'collective theatre situation' (23) is reflective of Jen Harvie's critique of immersive, participatory theatre; a modality that sits within the framework of the postdramatic. In *Fair Play* (2015) Harvie refers to a contemporary trend towards performance that seemingly engages with Bourriaud's relational art as 'active participation with an environment and/or process that compels those audiences to interact socially with each other' (Harvie, 2013, p.5). She concedes, however, that such 'participation is not intrinsically politically progressive' (10) and her contention is that a sustained, utopic, collective theatrical experience is unobtainable. Jürs-Munby et al, instead, offer that the curation of dialogical space, while not utopic in itself, opens up 'space for alternative realities *to come into view*' (Jürs-Munby et al, 2013, p.23, italics my own). Whilst Jürs-Munby et al are more critical towards more conventional forms of political performance, both they and Harvie concede that the curation of performative dialogical engagement does not necessarily *enact* utopic change in terms of a 'paradoxically unobtainable alternative reality' (23). The Listening Theatre, however, diverges from such a definition, in that it both sincerely and ironically works towards exactly that.

1.7 APPLICATIONS

If, as Grochala positions, the political character of a play is determined by the politics of its form alongside the politics of its content (Grochala, 2017, p.12), then there is a clear relation between the case studies' use of dialogical and littoral engagement within their performances and the politics of Hanzi Freinacht's proposed Listening Society (2017),

which will be detailed within Chapter Two. Such performance methodologies are inherently connected to Freinacht's political metamodernism as an attempt to enact progressive, utopic change through dialogical engagement as well as van den Akker and Vermeulen's metamodern structure of feeling as an oscillation between 'a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010). The next chapter will detail the metamodern as an attempt to speak to an emerging structure of feeling within contemporary culture that is inherently connected to the millennial generation that these theatre companies are part of. I will also offer a dissection of the 'millennial' as a concept in and of itself, detailing the specific structures that have come to influence such young companies to both sincerely work towards societal and political change despite a clear acknowledgement of the perceived impossibility of any performance having such agency.

In Chapter Three, I will detail a series of investigations into the practical application of the methodological concerns detailed throughout this chapter in a workshop format. The *Plan B* (2016) workshops attempted to unravel and apply facets of the littoral, the dialogical and the engaged *through* the methodological and aesthetic choices located within the case studies. By turning such tools used by artists of the millennial generation back *in* towards the millennial generation itself, such practice could; firstly, interrogate the concept of the millennial through engaged performance and, secondly, pave the way for such workshop-based practice to develop into a performative political discussion that advanced practical elements located in the case studies by further equalising the level of interaction between artists and audience. This analysis will detail the outcomes of such attempts and how, through embracing the failings of such practice, the intentions and purpose of such workshops shifted to produce what would become *Like Lions* (2018), as

detailed in Chapter Four, and developed my own understanding of the implications of possible future trajectories for the Listening Theatre.

THE MILLENNIAL & THE METAMODERN

2.1   INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I detail the theoretical foundations that underpin the development of my practice throughout this research project. I began the project with the intention of further investigating modes of performative political storytelling that fluctuated between the fictive and the 'real', locating similar oscillatory movements between the performed and the authentic, and the hopeful and the cynical, in the practice of parallel millennial artists. Such fluctuations are reflective of the metamodern as defined by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker (2010), as a conceptual understanding of contemporary post-postmodern aesthetic strategies and modes of making that are 'characterized by the oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.2).

Through outlining my own, somewhat unenthusiastic experience with postmodernist theory as a millennial theatre student in the late 2000s, I locate the shift beyond postmodernity within a wider cultural framework alongside my own, and my generation's, conscious or unconscious denunciation of postmodernity as being *the* defining structure of our lived and artistic experience. I then position metamodernism as the proposed structure of feeling that best speaks to the cultural and philosophical shifts beyond postmodernism that my generation have been, and are currently, experiencing.

I define postmodernism as per Frederic Jameson's use of the term as an 'historical rather than a merely stylistic' (Jameson, 1991, p.45) concept, alongside his earlier acknowledgement that the cultural constituents of postmodernity are 'empirical, chaotic, and heterogeneous' (Jameson, 1984). In the context of this thesis, postmodernity refers to the 'cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism' (Jameson, 1991, p.45), an 'attempt to make sense of the age […] that refuses the traditional forms of understanding [such as] narrative' (Felluga, 2011) and, instead, favours 'deconstruction, parataxis and pastiche' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.10). As the principal structure of feeling within Western capitalist culture throughout the latter half of the 20th century, I agree with Gorynski that postmodernism's 'ground tone [is of] irony and relativism' (Gorynski, 2018) and, as Dember argues, its 'eventual limitation is that it often nullifies a sense of meaningfulness or purpose and deflates the affective dimension and interior subjectivity' (Dember, 2018).

Following this logic, I define metamodernism as the structure of feeling that appears to have now superseded the previous postmodern paradigm. I detail my understanding of the metamodern in section 2.2 of this chapter, following van den Akker and Vermuelen's use of the term as a 'heuristic label [as] an attempt to chart – in much the same way that Jameson has done for postmodernism – […] today's condition as well as its culture, aesthetics and politics, by way of the arts' (van den Akker & Vermeulen, 2017, p.4). In the context of this study, metamodernism refers to a contemporary cultural logic that includes aesthetic shifts, artistic representations and cultural discourses that cannot be ascribed to the previous postmodern structure of feeling. In part, these shifts include a (re)emergence of cultural interest in how 'faith, trust, dialogue and sincerity can work to transcend postmodern irony and detachment' (Yousef, 2017, p.37), whilst *also* continuing

to appreciate, utilise - and exist within - such postmodern structures. In this respect, metamodernism indicates an oscillation between 'postmodern and pre-postmodern (and often modern) predilections: between irony and enthusiasm, between sarcasm and sincerity […] between deconstruction and construction' (van den Akker & Vermeulen, 2017, p.11).

Furthermore, I define my use of the term postdramatic within this thesis by aligning my application of the term with Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatische Theater* (1999). The term postdramatic was initially presented by Lehmann as an alternative to the term 'postmodern theatre' to describe contemporary performance that 'had departed not so much from the 'modern' as from 'drama'' (Jürs-Munby et al, 2013, p.1). Emerging from postmodern 'deconstruction, parataxis and pastiche' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.10), postdramatic theatre may require no 'plots, nor plastically shaped dramatis personae […] neither dramatical dialectical collision of values, nor even identifiable figures' (Lehmann, 2006, p.34). As Lavender expands, Lehmann's postdramatic theatre depicts a 'shift towards eventness and a simultaneous swing away from mimesis, narration and representation' (Lavender, 2016, p.87). In section 2.2.2 of this chapter, I briefly discuss my initial experience creating performance work that actively rejected these ubiquitous postdramatic forms by (re)applying particular aesthetic strategies that could not be ascribed to the postdramatic structure including 'seemingly 'old' traditions like mimesis, and the pristine urge to tell stories' (Schuhbeck, 2012). As van den Akker and Vermeulen define metamodernism as emerging from, and reacting to, the postmodern (2017, p.5), I position my own practice – and, within that, the development of the Listening Theatre – as emerging from, and reacting to, the postdramatic. In this sense, my understanding of post-postdramatic theatre reflects Schuhbeck's tracing of a 'new'

theatre– 'theatre [that] understands itself again as a critical force that reveals and deals with society's hidden power-structures, instead of simply giving up in face of an overcomplicated world' (Schuhbeck, 2012).

This chapter, then, defines the theoretical foundations of the development of my practice, locating specific modes of thought that I am able to use to examine my work in a wider cultural context. These tools allow me to define metamodern theatrical strategies and then, following this, apply and interrogate these in the development of my own practice. My investigation into these strategies culminated in *Like Lions* (2018), an experimental piece that both applies and interrogates metamodern aesthetics and modalities within a theatrical frame.

After defining the metamodern, I expand upon Vermeulen and van den Akker's use of Immanuel Kant's "negative" idealism (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.5) as an 'as-if' philosophy, by applying his transcendental aesthetics (1781) as a lens in which to understand a central component of the metamodern structure of feeling; a paradoxical 'yearning for utopias, despite their futile nature' (Turner, 2015). Through this, I draw a link between an endeavour towards impossible utopias and the rise in populist politics, evidencing a shift away from the centralist political framework of the postmodernist era. Kant's transcendental aesthetics, and the elusive concept of the utopic, are foundational components for my analysis of the millennial within the *Plan B* workshops, as detailed in Chapter Three, and this section provides the foundations for such use.

As the millennial is the key demographic of my research, the second half of this chapter investigates the vague term itself. Through this, I attempt to locate specific changes that

have affected the embodied and related feelings (cf. Williams, 1969) of my generation. I outline specific cultural, political and economic shifts that have affected the millennials in our formative adult years, shaping a possible collective, generational structure of feeling. This includes an examination of the particular anxieties produced by the prolonged periods of precarity in the millennials' work and living circumstances. I argue that such precarity in our early adult years, when considered in conjunction with the fact that millennials were predominantly raised 'during the boom times and relative peace of the 1990s' (Williams, 2015), reflects what Mark Fisher describes as Lost Futures (2014), in that millennials were raised to believe in a future that does not exist anymore. My generation has 'been forced to react to the shared trauma of economic instability' (Olvera, 2018) and such disjunct between expectations and reality, I argue, has led to a crisis of generational identity. Following this, Daniel Shulze's observance of the importance of authenticity within contemporary performance (Shulze, 2017), as reflected in the millennial case studies in Chapter One, emerges as a direct reaction to the period of precarity the millennials have experienced, with a strive towards authenticity, sincerity and veracity (Shulze, 2017, p.15) resurfacing as a counterpoint to crisis.

2.1.1   The Millennial as a Structure of Feeling

I propose that the concept of the millennial can be examined through Raymond Williams' structure of feeling (1969), following Vermeulen and van den Akker's application of such to define the metamodern, and my own utilisation of the concept in order to connect concerns and aesthetics in the case studies. Through my application, the 'structure' of the millennial refers to particular 'embodied, related feelings' (Williams, 1969, p.18) that a number of people born in the roughly defined age range experience, which, possibly in part due to the media fixation on the millennial generation and the following amplification of such narratives through social media and online meme culture, becomes a pervasive

appellation. The modality of a structure of feeling is useful in understanding this construct rather than delineating specific generational epochs through defined dates of birth. As James McDowell notes, such a term also takes into account that 'it is only one of many such localised "structures" at work in a particular time and place' (McDowell, 2017, p.28), and a multiplicity of structures are in place at any historical moment, including the present one. Importantly, McDowell also raises Williams' admission that (a structure of feeling) 'will not be "possessed in the same way by many members of the community"' (28; citing Williams 1965, p.65). Therefore, I would emphasise that the 'millennial' as a concept is not all-encompassing, nor relevant to every person born from the mid-1980s 'up to and (sometimes) after the millennium' (Brown et al, 2017, p.3) - and yet there is a certain 'experience of the present' (Williams, 1977, p.128) that can be expressed through Williams' term.

2.1.2   Theatrical Implications

The following analysis builds upon my foundational examination of the case studies in Chapter One, in which I posited that there were observable trends within strands of political theatre created by British millennials that point towards a paradoxical positioning of simultaneous optimism and cynicism. Such theatre attempts to negotiate a methodological framework built upon earlier structures of the dialogical, the littoral and the engaged in order to strive towards some form of societal betterment, even forms of utopia, through performance, whilst also expressing an awareness of the problematics and inherent failure of such attempts within the performances themselves. I argued that the varied methodologies and modes of making could be examined under the framework of a structure of feeling and intimated that the use of Williams' lens is in part a response to

Vermeulen and van den Akker's suggestion of a wider, cultural structure of feeling that currently supersedes the previous postmodern paradigm.

My enquiry into the metamodern and the millennial as interrelated structures of feeling provides the conceptual foundations for the practical enquiries that are to follow. In Chapter Three, I use the theoretical outlines of the millennial and the metamodern as the foundations of a series of workshops. In these, I attempt to utilise the practical tools extrapolated from the case studies, alongside the specific thematic points located within this analysis, to interrogate and platform the millennial generation's performance of itself, as well as to investigate whether the metamodern can be used as a theatrical modality.

2.2   THE METAMODERN

2.2.1   Metamodernism

In 2010, Jerry Saltz observed a new artistic attitude that proclaimed that 'I know that the art I'm creating may seem silly, even stupid, or that it might have been done before, but that doesn't mean this isn't serious' (Saltz, 2010). Robin Van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen's following seminal article, *Notes on Metamodernism* (2010) posited that this emerging attitude was reflective of 'new generations of artists increasingly abandon[ing] the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, para-taxis, and pastiche in favour of aesth-ethical notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.2), whilst simultaneously remaining aware of the problematics and critiques of such. Their concept of the metamodern is centred around a 'both-neither dynamic' (6) of attempts to discern a contemporary structure of feeling, as per Raymond Williams' terminology, that they see as having come into being during the 2000's; a cultural and historical period

beginning towards the end of the 1990's and ending in 2011 after the global financial crisis-point and amidst the Occupy protests (van den Akker, 2019).

It is in this period that particular 'trends and tendencies' within the contemporary artistic and cultural landscape emerged that could 'no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.1) and hinted at new structures of thought evolving through and beyond that episteme. These feelings were 'characterised by an oscillating in-betweenness or, rather, a dialectical movement that identifies with and negates – and hence, overcomes and undermines – conflicting positions, while never being congruent to these positions' (10), in which a new focus on an '(often guarded) hopefulness and (at times feigned) sincerity' (1) comes to the fore. As Vermeulen expands, 'There is the sense [now] that you say; "I cannot just be cynical – I'm so tired of being ironic all the time – I want to be sincere." You're not. We are all, from the start, ironic. That's how we were raised [within the postmodern paradigm], but we *want* to be sincere' (*What is Metamodern?*, 2014, italics my own).

In a way that reflects metamodernism's 'both, and' nature, Raymond Williams' structure of feeling being both 'as firm and definite as "structure" suggests, yet […] based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience' (1969, p.18) refers to almost intangible, and yet experiential, modalities apparent within a particular cultural timeframe that are 'essentially related, although in practice, and in detail, this is not always easy to see' (17). In Vermeulen and van den Akker's application of Williams' framework, metamodernism is an attempt to describe a structure of feeling 'that is a sensibility that is widespread enough to be called structural […] yet that cannot be reduced to one particular strategy' (Vermeulen & Van Den Akker, 2015). The multiple strategies that make up this

sensibility are located within; the aesthetics of the 'quirky' in cinema (MacDowell, 2011, 2017) and new narrative trends within contemporary blockbusters (*In Defence of The Force Awakens*, 2017; Warren, 2017); specific shifts in contemporary literature, including the emergence of the genres of Misery-Lit and Uplit (James, 2019); the rise in empathetic and sincere modes of lyricism within certain genres of music such as freak folk and rock (van Poeke, 2019; Dember, 2019); the 'new golden age' of American sitcoms that are 'as cynical and harsh [but have a] warmer, more humanist spirit' than their pre-2000's counterparts (Rustad, 2011); as well as the global rise in divisive populist politics (Krumsvik & Co, 2017; cf. van den Akker & Vermeulen, 2017, p.8).

The prefix 'meta' stems from Plato's metaxy, a term that Voegelin connects to the Greek *heros*, or demi-gods, highlighting an experience that contains a continual oscillation between god and man; 'order and disorder, truth and untruth, sense and senselessness of existence' (Voegelin, 1989, p.119-120). In the case of the metamodern, this embodies an oscillation between what Vermeulen and van den Akker 'may call – and of course cannot be reduced to – postmodern and pre-postmodern (and often modern) predilections' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2017, p.11) including sincerity and sarcasm, irony and enthusiasm (cf. 11), hope and hopelessness. Importantly, this oscillatory movement does not indicate a 'best of both worlds' (11) approach. Instead, 'it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles. Each time the metamodern enthusiasm swings toward fanaticism, gravity pulls it back toward irony; the moment its irony sways toward apathy, gravity pulls it back toward enthusiasm' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.6).

The cultural and political structures emerging in the 2000s can not only be ascribed to what had come to be known as the postmodern episteme. The emergence of strategies that appeared to reapply and / or return to certain tendencies that contradicted, or undermined, strategies and modalities that would be considered postmodern indicated a shift beyond the postmodern paradigm. These strategies included a reapplication and renewed interest in historicity, affect, and depth (cf. van den Akker et al, 2017) and an endeavour towards some form of authenticity within both artistic and personal spheres (cf. Shulze, 2018), as well as what could be described as a rise in a sense of both an (ironic) sincerity and (pragmatic) idealism (cf. Turner, 2015) through a continual oscillation between (sometimes disparate) polarities.

2.2.2. (Already) Beyond Postmodernity

It was around the time of the publication of Vermeulen and van den Akker's original article that I was coming up against a similar conundrum in my own education, in that the strategies of creation and reception that I was being taught in my university course made sense at a historical and theoretical level but did not relate to my own experience. The modalities of the postmodern era provided an impressive and exciting toolbox for a theatre maker; its liminality, as according to Victor Turner, implying 'chaotic, fertile nothingness, that is potentially full of possibilities, that strives after new forms and structure' (Turner, 1990). The collaborative authorship and multiplicity of readings that a postmodern theatre enabled, too, was essentially liberating in its catalysing of a myriad of aesthetic and practical methodologies. However, such strategies of deconstruction, irony and scepticism did not reflect how my peers and I lived our lives. Whilst we could not escape (and maybe even revelled in aspects of) the irony and cynicism that inevitably followed the deconstruction postmodernity facilitated, as 'that's how we were raised'

(*What is Metamodern?*, 2014), we still lived *as if* certain structures were true - otherwise why work *towards* anything in the first place? As Seth Abramson summarises, despite innately understanding the value and impact of postmodern deconstruction, having grown up at its height, 'we still have to make breakfast and go to work and have some sort of hope that things can work out and that there's some meaning' (Owls at Dawn, 2017).

In addition to this, I observed a waning interest from my peers and I in the digitisation of theatre through the (what was quickly becoming outmoded but still labelled as emerging) integration of online technologies such as live video streaming, hypertexts and online gaming platforms within performance, the focus on the blending of live and mediated action, and the shift between the 'real' and the digital space. At peak of the 2000s, my peers and I were already living within and through such technologies. During our formative years, our lives already blurred the boundaries between the real and the digital; our personal relationships being formed online as much as they were offline. Although we had not reached the current level of social media integration that Generation Z were born into (cf. Durfy, 2019), we were the first early-life adopters of online social medias in the latter parts of our childhood, the digital natives of the early 2000s (Bolton et al, 2013, p.6). The strategies surrounding the complexities of integrating such technologies into performance in the end of the 2000s seemed, to me, outdated; the 'originality' of a multi-authored text was lessened by our being used to multi-authored online engagement; the 'integration' of digital technologies into performance seemed arbitrary rather than ground-breaking as that is how we already communicated; and the implied meaningless or inherent incomprehensibility of the multiplicity of meanings imposed upon a text through what was being taught to us as the 'postmodern lens' already reflected our familiarity with the early web-based experience and humour that would eventually give

rise to what we now see in online meme culture. In essence, the postmodern within performance was not new, nor current, and did not reflect our own experiences. Notwithstanding our understanding of the value of postmodern deconstruction and the reasons it came to be, as well as its cultural, political and philosophical impact, it did not, and does not, reflect our current lived experience.

When I came together with a number of my peers to create our own theatre company outside of our university course in early 2010, we chose to create performances with a deliberately intimate and lo-fi aesthetic which also focused on (a return to) storytelling. Our instinctual artistic drive manifested as an attempt to move beyond what we saw as the limitations of the postmodern, returning to notions of the authentic within art. Not by returning to the trappings of modernist narratives or particular ascribed modalities of what could be termed pre-postdramatic theatre, but by (re)applying certain artistic and aesthetic strategies that could not be attributed to postmodern forms of practice. Whilst there is currently very little critical writing about the specifics of millennial theatre artists' shifts beyond the postmodern, a fact that is part of the driving force behind this research, May Olvera offers reflective insight in her analysis of the millennial's return to analogue aesthetics in the resurgence of the use of Polaroid cameras. She observes an 'intended rejection of postmodernity and capitalism […] seen in instant cameras' deviation from hyperreality' (Olvera, 2018). A decision to create art that rejects the digital and postmodern aesthetic, is, in effect, a political stance in that it is a 'resistance to commodification [and that] inversely, [an] attraction to analogue can be seen as a desire for a level of stability that most millennials were denied at the hands of digital revolution in late capitalism' (Olvera, 2018). In this respect, I now see our intention to move beyond

postmodernity as inherently linked to a political rejection of the attached neoliberal structures enforced upon our generation, of which I will detail in section 2.3.

2.2.3　Problems in the terminology

I am aware of the problems of generalising the discourse surrounding postmodernity. Specifically, there is a danger that, in mapping what succeeds the postmodern, the postmodern itself risks becoming moulded to retroactively fit the map. At the turn of the century, David Robinson claimed that it seemed that, as no singular understanding of postmodernity existed, and 'nobody really knows' what the label meant, it had become 'perhaps just a convenient label for a set of attitudes, values, beliefs and feelings about what it means to be living in the late 20th century' (Robinson, 1999, p.35). In ways, however, this is reflective of Vermeulen and van den Akker's understanding of what may come to be a new paradigm within our shared cultural history emerging from the postmodern, in that their attempt at discerning the metamodern is simply an attempt to put words to a rhizomatic, emerging structure that is manifest in 'a cultural logic, a certain dominant ideological patterning that leaves its traces across culture' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2015). When I discuss metamodernism as a structure of feeling, I am engaging with the postmodern in the same vein through Lyotard's 'simplifying to the extreme' of the postmodern as 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (1984). I refer to postmodernity within the context of this research as a historical structure of feeling defined through Vermeulen's 'ironic detachment' (Gorynski, 2018) and Lyotard's incredulity. This definition does not intend to ignore postmodernism as a critical methodology or an 'important emancipatory movement' (Gorynski, 2018), but to emphasise that postmodernity's 'ground tone [is of] irony and relativism' (Gorynski, 2018).

2.2.4 Other -isms

Metamodernism follows a number of varied attempts to define particular contemporary shifts through and beyond the postmodern. Giles Lipovetsky's hypermodernism (2005), Alan Kirby's digimodernism (2009) and Robert Samuels' automodernism (2010), for example, structure themselves largely around the impact of the millennium's technological advances. However, as Bunnel states, out of these 'proposed successors […] none of them adequately describe deviations from the postmodern condition, and none have been able to gain traction in the academic community, let alone become part of mainstream usage' (Bunnel, 2015, p.3). As Vermeulen and van den Akker explain, these particular conceptions appear to 'pick out and unpick what are effectively excesses of late capitalism, liberal democracy and information and communication technologies rather than deviations from the postmodern condition' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.3).

One proposed post-postmodern terminology that *has* garnered cultural attention is Nicholas Bourriaud's altermodernism (2005), which he describes as 'a synthesis between modernism and post-colonialism' (Bourriaud, 2009, p.12). In his manifesto accompanying the *Altermodernism* exhibition at the Tate Modern in 2009, Bourriaud claimed that 'our globalised perception calls for new types of representation' (Bourriaud, 2009b) and builds altermodernism around forms of creolisation, with the prefix *alter* 'referring to multiplicity and otherness' (Tate Modern, 2009). I agree with Vermeulen and van den Akker's claim that altermodernism is 'at once evocative and evasive' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.4). Such a globalised perspective 'implies a multiplicity and scope of (simulacral) vision neither phenomenologically nor physically possible' (4). Bourriaud's creolisation is problematic in terms of describing the actualities

86

of contemporary culture. If the 'alter-modernist (artist) is a *homo viator,* liberated from (an obsession with) his/her origins' (4), this does little to account for an overwhelming increase in public focus on individual identities of nationality, class, race, gender, sexuality and ability; whether manifest in the nationalist identity rhetoric of Brexit or in the efforts of decolonialisation in Higher Education. Rather than a global creolisation, I argue that there is currently an overarching sense of reclaiming the importance of certain narratives. Whilst postmodernism aided in decentralising the white male narrative (cf. Clarke, 2013), offering space for multiplicity, the concept of altermodernism appears to engender a conflicting erasure of individualistic narratives. What I observe, instead, across the polarities of the current political spectrum, is a return to a multiplicity of individualistic narratives of nationality, race, gender and sexuality. Whilst on the political right, one's claiming of their individual narrative may manifest as part of an attempt to erase or lessen the narrative of others, those engaged in decolonialisation, for example, appear to attempt to equalise such narratives. The current paradigm does not, as Bourriaud's altermodernism seems to suggest, claim that through 'increased communication, travel and migration […] multiculturalism and identity is being overtaken by creolisation' (Bourriaud, 2009b), but that issues of identity are of (increasing) importance, whilst also remaining open to enquiry. Altermodernism is not sufficient at describing the contemporary structure of feeling, therefore, as it only addresses aspects of unification in an increasingly interconnected, globalised culture, not the expanding and concurrent division that is also prevalent within it.

Perhaps the attempt at defining the post-postmodern paradigm that sits most closely to that of the metamodern is Raoul Eshelman's performatism (2008). In Chapter Four, I detail how I use performatism as a practical tool in which to examine the levels of acting

and non-acting that I originally problematised in *Twentysomething*. Through developing my practice from my initial concerns regarding the 'real' and the 'fictive' in intimate forms of storytelling, I investigate how performatism, as one of a number of metamodern strategies, can be consciously applied and interrogated through performance. Performatism takes the form of an act of wilful self-deceit; an artistic 'belief' in a truth that cannot be true. Such belief is enacted through Eshelman's concept of framing (Eshelman, 2008, p.3); art that must be read 'in such a way that the reader or viewer at first has no choice but to opt for a single, compulsory solution to the problems raised within the work at hand' (2). Eshelman observed an emerging artistic epoch, in his terms, that worked 'first and foremost on an aesthetic, identificatory level, to create an attitude of beautiful belief, and not a cognitive, critical one' (12). Such art causes its audience to 'identify with it more or less involuntarily – even if [they] still remain […] incredulous about its basic premises' (13). As an illustration, Eshelman draws on Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi* (2001), in which the sole survivor of an accident at sea recounts a 'brave, uplifting story [that] seems consistent and true' (53) until 'a host of clues make clear that parts of the tale are fantasy or a lie' (53). The survivor has two stories – 'one is beautiful [and possibly false] and one is ugly [and credibly true]' (53). However, instead of 'leaving us in an attitude of sceptical undecidability regarding the hero,' states Eshelman (53), 'as postmodernist texts tend to do, it encourages us to revise our skeptisim [sic.] and identify with his [first] story *even though we know it to be false*' (53, italics my own).

Greg Dember draws a number of similarities between Eshelman's performatism and metamodernism, locating them as part of the same 'general shift' (Dember, 2018). As he explains, Eshelman's performatism describes 'a sensibility that escaped from postmodern ennui by *performing* belief in ideas such as truth, beauty, innocence and moral certainty,

even while understanding the postmodern doubt about such notions' (Dember, 2018).

Eshelman understands such works as being able to do this through his 'performatist framing' (Eshelman, 2008, p.2) or 'double framing' (3) in which an outer frame surrounds the inner frame of the main narrative, the former consisting of a larger narrative or world-structure 'imbued with enough fantasy elements that the reader is forced to make a choice to buy into all of it, if they are going to commit to engaging [with] the work' (Dember, 2018). As Eshelman describes, the 'implausibility [of an outer frame] cuts us off – at least temporarily – from the endlessly open, uncontrollable text around it and forces us back *into* the work' in order to understand the narrative at play (Eshelman, 2008, p.3). Within a theatrical framework, this reflects the 'central principle of drama and theatre' (Grainger, 2010), that of suspension of disbelief, and, hence, an acceptance of a focus on the story being told. Eshelman's conceptual framework is particularly pertinent in this respect, as it purposely defines a specific artistic modality within the larger cultural shift beyond the postmodern.

2.2.5   Kant and the 'As If'

Eshelman's performatism is not a broad enough conceptual frame to encompass the multiplicity of wide-ranging shifts occurring in the post-postmodern paradigm, rather it is 'one among many possible metamodern methods' (Dember, 2018). Eshelman speaks to one integral modality of the metamodernist framework in his act of believing in something despite being aware of its unreality. As Luke Turner states, the metamodern structure of feeling describes a certain pragmatic idealism, or informed naivete (Turner, 2015), which Seth Abramson expresses as '*knowing* your optimism is naïve – but plowing [sic.] on anyway' (Abramson, 2018). Within the post-postmodern paradigm, Abramson contends, we understand that our metanarratives are 'insufficient, they're fragile, they're

false – but they help us' (Owls at Dawn, 2017) and that, now that we have moved beyond the deconstruction of metanarratives through postmodernism, the metamodern paradigm is 'very much about living *as if* something were true' (Owls at Dawn, 2017).

To expound on this, Vermeulen and van den Akker appropriate Kant's "negative" idealism (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.5) and summarise his philosophy of history as "as if" thinking, in that '[e]ach... people, as if following some guiding thread, go toward a natural but to each of them unknown goal' (Kant, 1963, p.11). For Kant, argue Vermeulen and van den Akker, 'there is no purpose in history or nature, but he imagines one nevertheless in order to progress' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.14) and society is 'not really going toward a natural but unknown goal, but they pretend they do so that they progress morally as well as politically' (5). Martin Paul Eve critiques this appropriation of Kantian philosophy, in that he sees Vermeulen & van den Akker's usage as overlooking the intricacies of Kant's original wording regarding a hypothetical 'guiding thread' - '*als an einem Leitfaden'* in the original German (Eve, 2018, italics my own). According to Eve, their usage is contradictory to Kant's original meaning, in that Kant describes a scenario in which 'for the individual, actions appear free, chaotic and unpredictable, whereas when considered en-masse, human behaviour conforms to overarching predictable laws' (Eve, 2018). Eve problematises the paradoxical nature of Vermeulen and van den Akker's usage of Kant's claim that '[e]ach... people [...] go toward a natural but to each of them unknown goal' (Kant, 1963, p.11) alongside their statement that people are 'not really' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.5) doing such a thing. Such usage misconstrues Kant's original text, according to Eve, as, in his reading of Kant, society would instead 'abandon the search, only to find the truth in which it disbelieved regardless' (Eve, 2018). However, I argue that, in the spirit of the foci of this

thesis, one need not be afraid of embracing the paradoxical nature of such appropriation; Kant's 'as-if' philosophy being ascribed to the metamodern structure of feeling (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, Gibbons et al, 2017; Turner, 2015; Abramson, 2018), reflecting Eshelman's performatism, effects a belief in structures that the believer knows to be not true, which is, in itself, inherently paradoxical.

I propose that further application of Kant, specifically his transcendental aesthetics (1781), allows for a further understanding of the levels of belief in unreality, or in structures that we know to be false (or at least frail) as an observable trend within post-postmodern culture. Such thinking is reflective of particular structures within contemporary political trends that Vermeulen (Krumsvick & Co., 2017) and Turner (2018), amongst others, have ascribed to metamodern modes of thought, in its application of the concept of a form of truth that is somehow, as yet, unobtainable. In this respect, I argue that Kantian aesthetics can be used as a lens to comprehend particular, metamodern shifts within contemporary politics; including the rise of agonistic, populist discourse.

In *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant posited that we can never understand or experience *true* reality due to the limitations of our biological senses;

> All our intuition is nothing but the representation of phenomena; the things that we see are not by themselves what we see…. It remains completely unknown to us what objects may be by themselves and apart from the receptivity of our senses. (Kant, 1934, p.151)

The structures we perceive to exist, therefore, are mediated through how our own understanding and senses have developed over time. 'When the mind looks at the world, it has no choice but to view it with ideas that are built into the mind' (Blumeau, 2001), such as spatial and temporal distance. Kant termed this act of perceiving *Anschauungen*, literally translated as 'views'. Whatever we are truly viewing, however, cannot be

experienced outside of the *Anschauungen*, or *tools of understanding*, as the act of viewing dictates that the 'view' is mediated through the 'tools'. The original, unmediated 'view', Kant termed the noumenal, or the *Ding an sich*; 'the thing in itself' (Blumenau, 2001). The noumenal world would be the world as it really is, outside of our experience of it, and the mediated version of the world we experience is therefore the phenomenal. Bertrand Russell (1998, p.624) uses an analogy that encapsulates Kant's *Ding an sich* by imagining a world in which everybody wore blue tinted glasses. In such a world, the layman would posit that the universe was blue, but the philosopher, upon realising that they wore blue glasses, would posit that they could not know whether or not the world *was* blue, as the experience was always mediated through the spectacles.

Such endeavouring towards a seemingly unreachable goal is inherently reflective of certain tendencies within the metamodern structure of feeling, and in Chapter Four, Section 4.4.3, I detail how this endeavour, and Russell's blue spectacles analogy, became a foundational narrative drive in *Like Lions*. If each of us proceed through life 'as if' there is a purpose despite knowing that 'there is no purpose in history or nature' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.14), we are, in essence, believing in structures that we know not to be true – a key component in the metamodern structure of feeling. Kant's concept of one unreachable truth, then, aids us in understanding specifically contemporary *political* endeavours occurring as part of a post-postmodern paradigm in their reapplication of specific metanarratives as part of what Luke Turner describes as a 'climate [of] yearning for utopias, despite their futile nature' (Turner, 2015).

2.2.6 Striving for Utopia

The unexpected 'figure of utopia' has reappeared 'across the arts in the past few years, often alongside a renewed sense of empathy, reinvigorated constructive engagement, a reappreciation of narrative and a return to craftswo/manship' (Vermuelen & van den Akker, 2015b, p.55). This (re)emergence of utopia and concerns surrounding the notions of authenticity and truth are inherently connected to the political mindset of the millennials;

> The millennials know too much of today's exploits, inequalities and injustices to take any meaningful decision, let alone position themselves on a convenient subject position, yet they appear – from the political left to the political right – to be united around the feeling that today's deal is not the deal they signed up for during the postmodern years (with its promise of the end of conjunctures, careless consumerism, and eternal growth […]) (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2015b, p.58).

This 'sense of […] hope' (van den Akker & Vermeulen, 2017, p.8) is present in a range of contexts and phenomena alongside the political, 'without being reducible to any of them in particular' (8). Such utopic rhetoric is seen within both ends of the political populist spectrum; in the US, Trump offers to 'make America great again', whilst, in the UK, Brexit is a similarly symbolic offer of a 'return' to a false-nostalgic (cf. Campanella & Dassù, 2019) narrative of Britain's own 'former glory'. I refer, here, to Cas Mudde's (2004) definition of populism that combines a 'host' ideology, on the 'left or the right', that is 'characterized fundamentally by anti-elitism' (Burtenshaw & Jäger, 2018). In brief, populism is defined as an ideological and political battle between the ordinary people and the 'nefarious' elite (Lewis, et al, 2018). *The Guardian*'s recent, if controversial (cf. Burtenshaw & Jäger, 2018), report on the rise of populism states that the ideology has 'been consistently on the rise since at least 1998' (Lewis, et al, 2018), reiterating the fact that (the return of) utopic politics is inherently connected to the period of the 2000s and the shifting from the post- to the metamodern. The same report emphasises the transferal

of populism from the fringes of the political debate to the mainstream (Lewis, et al, 2018). Brexit, Momentum, Occupy, Trump and Corbyn are all exemplary of this politics of it *can be different* (cf. Krumsvik & Co, 2017)*,* manifest in populist rhetoric focused on a strive for forms of utopia outside of the current construction. These politics are 'as diverse in their aims as they are similar in their libidinal investments, modes of organization and, indeed, utopian longings' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2015b, p.58) and reflect my earlier problematising of Bourriaud's concept of the altermodern's focus on creolisation. Politically, at least, the opposite appears to be true, in that the rise in populism is indicative of a return to divisive, if not individualistic, political narratives. The concept of the utopic, as reflected within populist political discourse, and the falsity and failings inherent within such a concept, is one of the integral concerns that I discern in the millennial structure of feeling through both the following analysis and the subsequent workshops.

2.2.7   The Listening Society

Although metamodernism does not describe a specific manifesto or movement, instead encompassing polarisations within contemporary politics, particular political ideologies have arisen through metamodern discourse. In *The Listening Society* (2017), Hanzi Freinacht - described elsewhere as a 'political philosopher, historian and sociologist' (Metamoderna, 2016) but actually a pen name for activists Emil Ejner Friis and Daniel Görtz – posits that metamodernism can be read as a 'developmental stage' that 'builds upon [the] understanding' of Vermeulen and van den Akker's concept of a 'cultural "phase"' (Freinacht, 2017, p.15), or structure of feeling. He claims that 'political metamodernism tries to bring about the society that comes after, that goes beyond' (2), championing a political ideology where the emotional needs and psychological growth

of all citizens is a priority; where cross-party exchanges strengthen political discourse and, in turn, improve the eudemonic, 'authentic' (72) happiness of all individuals. Developing the 'psycho-social environment' (73) would in theory 'benefit everyone immensely [as… h]appier people create more functioning societies, and more functioning societies are more efficient at combating inequality' (75). Freinacht's foundations for his Listening Society, essentially utopic in their intentions, are inherently connected to the structural shifts I detailed in the previous chapter and that, in the following section, I determine as integral to the millennial structure of feeling; belief in progression towards some form of *utopic* arrangement that addresses the *lost futures* of a post-millennium post-postmodern society through crafting *dialogical engagement* focused on *authentic* connection and eudemonic happiness.

Freinacht describes the impetus of his need for a Listening Society as a 'multi-dimensional crisis revolution' (69); an 'increasing number of accelerating revolutions and crises, all cross-pollinating at an accelerating pace' (69), reflective of the coalescence of crises located as foundational for the millennial as a structure of feeling. Similarly reflective of Mark Fisher's lost futures being born out of a 'deflation of expectations' (Fisher, 2014, p. 8), Freinacht points towards a collective sense of loss in contemporary culture, particularly that of the millennials, through a sense 'of potentials that never materialize' (Freinacht, 2017, p.6). Echoing Shulze's tracing an emergence of the longing for authenticity emerging out of times of crisis (Shulze, 2017, p.23), Freinacht locates this feeling of 'suffering and lost potential' (Freinacht, 2017, p.75) as an outcome of the 'great web of interacting, evolving nodes' (69) of the 'multidimensional crisis' (62) of postmodernity, and states that through enabling better dialogues, his Listening Society

will 'make everyone secure at the deepest psychological level, so that we can live *authentically*' (81, italics my own).

Whilst I appropriate Freinacht's terminology to label the modalities I locate within millennial political theatre, his Listening Society differs from the millennial, the metamodern, and the Listening Theatre as interconnected structures of feeling in that his propositioning of an optimistic strategy for change offers no cynicism in response. There is no inherent critique in its own form, no self-doubt and scepticism in its potential. As three intermeshed structures of feeling, the millennial, the metamodern and the Listening Theatre all exhibit an elemental oscillation between what could be essentialised as hope and hopelessness; they cannot be described as ascribing only to postmodern cynicism or modern optimism, but characteristically fluctuate between the two. I see artists operating within the Listening Theatre as essentially interrogating similar notions addressed in Freinacht's Listening Society, and attempting to curate better dialogues in order to 'come closer to the truth' (Freinacht, 2017, p.4) through a performative listening, but they also, as defined in Chapter One, listen to critiques of their own listening. They oscillate between the optimism of Freinacht's posited, utopic, eudemonic society, and an essential scepticism and uncertainty about such optimism. The Listening Theatre does not enact Freinacht's Listening Society through performance. Rather, it remains somewhat sceptical of its own process, despite *wanting* to be sincere in its endeavour towards some form of progress, platforming, or dialogical engagement.

2.2.8   Metamodernism and the Millennials

The metamodern terminology I have detailed in this section is reflective of what I determine as a structure of feeling – the Listening Theatre - within the contemporary

performance landscape that I previously located as interwoven throughout the range of political theatre created by the millennial case studies; that of an oscillatory movement between a 'modern desire for sense and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all' (Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2010, p.6), between 'irony and sincerity […] optimism and doubt' (Turner, 2015). In addition, Vermeulen and van den Akker's metamodern structure of feeling is inherently connected to a coalescence in the 2000s of particular economic, political and cultural conditions, all of which were set in place in the preceding decade (cf. Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2017, p.11) and came together whilst the millennial generation came of age – fundamentally linking, historically and culturally, the millennials and the metamodern. What are these conditions, however, and how have they affected the millennial generation? More pressingly, how can I define the millennial? If it is an integral component of the contemporary paradigm shift, what exactly does the term describe? Is it a media-based diatribe? A pop-culture appellation? Or does the concept of the millennial describe an experiential understanding of a cultural epoch?

In the next section, I detail the particular political and social structures that have come to affect my own generation within Britain when framed as a structure of feeling. I will build upon Vermeulen and van den Akker's claim that such structures are part of the larger cultural shift from the postmodern to the metamodern and illustrate how this has influenced the theatre of the case studies within Chapter One. The following topics that make up what I define as the millennial structure of feeling are then interrogated in the two series of workshops, as detailed in Chapter Three. Through these, I obtained reflective input from millennial participants regarding their own views on each concern. This input largely supports the following analysis in qualitative form.

2.3   THE MILLENNIALS

The following section provides a theoretical unpacking of the often-quoted and often-maligned term millennial generation. Through this, I locate myself, my own practice and that of the case studies within a wider cultural and historical framework by pinpointing specific political, economic and cultural occurrences in the last few decades. The cultural shift towards the metamodern is essentially connected to the millennial generation. Specifically, this shift has been affected by our coming of age alongside a number of societal and economic crises, as well as technological and cultural transformations, during the 2000s. As Tom Nicholas (Drayton, 2014, p.20) asserts, we have recently been witness to the arrival of artistic output from the first digital natives, bringing with it new aesthetic modalities that are inherently connected to the generation's formative experiences within the shift from the post- to the metamodern.

As a mid-level member of the millennial generation, I am specifically interested in how certain constructs have shaped my own experience and artistic output, as well as that of my peers. Through the following analysis, I posit that the shifts located within the case studies in Chapter One are, as well as being associated with the emergence of the metamodern, also inherently connected to particular moments, structures and problematics that have shaped the generational experience of the millennials. I am also locating these modalities within a particular historical and cultural framework; the period in which the children of postmodernism grew into the millennial generation.

In the following analysis, I explore how aspects of the millennials' formative experiences have led to particular 'embodied, related feelings' (Williams, 1969, p.18) within what I discern as the millennial as a structure of feeling. Whilst definitions of the millennial are

varied and often conflicting, such analysis allows me to generate my own definition through utilising a similar framework of analysis as used to define the metamodern as an 'experience of the present' (Williams, 1977, p.128), as expressed through Williams' terminology. In particular, I locate specific anxieties within the generational cohort induced through a prolonged period of precarity within our formative economic and occupational experiences. I argue that this precarity within our developmental adult years is contradictory to what we were raised to expect throughout the 'boom times and relative peace of the 1990s' (Williams, 2015) and, as such, are existing within a millennial manifestation of Mark Fisher's concept of lost futures (2006), in that millennials were raised to believe in a future that did not and cannot come to be.

2.3.1   Defining the Millennials

The idea of analysing generations as separate and often disparate entities can be traced back to Karl Mannheim's 1928 essay, *Das Problem der Generationen*, in which he analysed generational differences within a socio-historical context (Pilcher, 1993, p.482). More specifically, Mannheim located 'certain definite modes of behaviour, feeling and thought' (Mannheim, 1952, p.291) affected by such factors as geographical location, political and cultural participation, and the generation's 'differing responses to a particular situation' (Pilcher, 1993, p.483) that produced a form of 'distinctive consciousness' (483) within a specific cohort, dependent on 'the tempo of social change' (483). As Ng and Johnson summarise within their analysis of millennial-focused research, the generational theory built from Mannheim's work theorises that 'the environment in which Millennials grew up during their formation years [their teenage to young adult period] impacts their values, attitudes, and behaviors [sic.]' (Ng & Johnson, 2015, p.3). In regards to formation of the millennials, therefore, my generation's values, attitudes and

behaviours have been affected by, as according to Mannheim's theory, being 'raised during the boom times and relative peace of the 1990s' (Williams, 2015), only to emerge, as Rebecca Huntley proclaims, 'into an adult world where only one rule exists – the certainty of uncertainty' (Huntley, 2006, p.15).

What does the term millennial actually denote, however? When it comes to specifics in terms of age, the sheer range of definitions from a variety of sources seems to prohibit straightforward standardisation. The popular terminology, too, has blurred the boundaries between the specific traits of the millennials of the United States and those of the United Kingdom. In my effort to establish my own definition, I am intentionally utilising studies focused on both US and UK millennials, not through a conflation of the two, but in order to utilise the wealth of research and insight generated through US-based study as a theoretical model in order to better the specifics of the UK-based generation[1].

The term originates from American historians Neil Howe and William Strauss' 1991 study, *Generations*, to describe the group of children that would start to come of age at the turn of the millennium, determining the millennial age bracket as those 'born in or after 1982' (4). A recent UK House of Commons report specifies that millennials are those who were 'roughly aged between 25 and 34' (Brown et al, 2017, p.3), meaning that, according to the UK Parliament, millennials were born approximately between 1983 and 1992. Contrastingly, think tank The Resolution Foundation, whose two-year Intergenerational Commission published its final report in 2018, details millennials as being born between 1981 and 2000 (Shrimpton et al, 2017, p.7). In addition, the Pew

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[1] It is also important to note that a number of generation-shaping, historical reference points are shared across the two in regards to; their relative prosperity in the 90s-00s and the following global financial crash of 2007-8; the rise in divisive, nationalist and populist political discourse; the propagation of continuous online access and social media; and cross-cultural popular media consumption.

Research Centre, which has 'stud[ied] the Millennial generation for more than a decade' (Dimock, 2019) recently determined a 'cutoff point' (Dimock, 2019) between the millennials and the next generation, stating that millennials were strictly born between 1981 and 1996, whilst, rather paradoxically, simultaneously noting that such 'generational cutoff points aren't an exact science' (Dimock, 2019). Whilst age is an obvious determiner in locating the millennial generation, the boundaries of the specific age range remain debatable and, as agreed by the UK Parliament, 'not formally defined' (Brown, et al, 2017, p.5). I have generally located the millennials as having been born between roughly the mid-1980s through to the mid 1990s. Rather than focusing on age as the specific determiner, however, I have followed the judgement of the 2017 House of Commons report on the millennial generation in emphasising the importance of 'the unique experiences and challenges this generation has faced' (5) in shaping their shared generational experience.

In this respect, I argue that the term millennial can similarly be understood and examined as structure of feeling. As James McDowell notes, 'a structure of feeling will not be "possessed in the same way by many members of the community"' (28; citing Williams 1965, p.65). Rather, Williams' term attempts to put to words a 'practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity' (Williams, 1977, p.132): an embodied structure of 'specific, internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension' (132). My attempt to discern the millennial through Williams' framework is built upon my locating of these interlocking tensions, or 'unique experiences and challenges' (Brown, et al, 2017, p.5), of my generational cohort and an enquiry into how these have affected the embodied, related feelings of the millennials.

2.3.2 The Millennial Timeline

The most commonly accepted version (cf. Brown et al, 2017, p.5) of the contemporary generational timeline begins with the 'Greatest Generation', who would have fought, and died, in the Second World War. Their offspring then became the Silent Generation; those who were too young to join the forces but, in turn, were too old to participate in the upcoming Summer of Love. These were then followed by the Baby Boomers, born during the post-war economic upturn, who's formative years saw participation in the civil rights movement and rock 'n' roll. The Boomers then gave rise to Generation X, who grew up in one of the 'most passionate eras of social and cultural upheaval… with often painful consequences for political, economic, family and educational institutions' (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p.48). Generation X's formative early adult years saw the rise of a popular culture that was intrinsically self-aware and ironic. In 1999, Rob Owen's analysis of Generation X television culture cited a number of societal issues, ranging from crime rates, to the increasing availability of news footage, to their parents leaving 'them at home with TVs in order to pursue their own career goals or simply to work to make ends meet' (Owen, 1999, p.55) that led to a prevailing sense of anger in their humour and popular culture, stating that 'out of this anger, [came] cynicism, sarcasm and irony' (55). The millennials, who would have been children during the denouement of the postmodern era, grew up exposed to the cynicism and ironic detachment of Generation X, whilst also becoming instilled with the 'optimism and idealism of their Boomer parents' (Huntley, 2006, p.14) that had been prompted by the end of the Cold War and the 'turbo-charged economic upswing and fantastic social unravelling' (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p.99) of the 1990s.

This dichotomic fluctuation between cynicism and hope instilled in the millennials from an early age through such coalescence of previous generational influences is reflective of the oscillation between disparate polarities apparent within the metamodern. As such, a metamodern characterisation of the millennial 'psyche' would indicate an oscillation between the 'optimism and idealism of their Boomer parents' (Huntley 2006, p.14), and the cynicism and ironic detachment that has arisen from both childhood exposure to Generation X culture and the economic and political crises of our formative adult years. It is this oscillation between optimism and cynicism that defines the metamodern millennial.

Such fluctuation, however, is not only affected by the millennials' exposure to conflicting generational mentalities within our childhoods. It is compounded by the crises affecting our formative years as we emerged from the relative prosperity of the 1990s and early 2000s into a precarity 'inextricably connected to the conditions of cultural capitalism […] now felt by a wider network of people' (Fragkou, 2019, p.5) that permeates our politics, economics, career prospects and ecology. In the following sections, I will outline the 'unique experiences and challenges' (Brown et al, 2017, p.5) that have affected millennials at such critical moments, from 'enter[ing] adulthood during the first decade of the millennium' (5) to establishing careers following the global financial crash.

2.3.3   Follow Your Passion

I dispute media narratives portraying millennials as whingeing "snowflakes" who have "never had it so good" (cf. Hunter, 2016). As Howe and Strauss noted, it was true that, at the turn of the millennium, 'millennials have never, on the whole witnessed economic trouble' (2000, p.100), and in 2006, Rebecca Huntley further described millennials as

'hav[ing] only known a prosperous world, where […] people only get wealthier […] where consumerism and capitalism are natural conditions that largely go unchallenged' (2006, p.2). However, the 2017 UK Parliament report on the millennials' socio-political outlook details subsequent 'significant world events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 2008 financial crises' (Brown et al, 2017, p.5) as having had a major impact, specifying that millennials have obtained 'long term 'scarring' in the labour market by having the misfortune to enter the workforce at the height of the financial crises' (5). By 2018, the Resolution Foundation found that, in the UK, the 'generation-on-generation progress […] that was a feature of the 20th century […] has failed to materialize for younger generations so far in the 21st' (Rahman & Tomlinson, 2018, p.4) meaning that millennials could be the first British generation to be worse off than their parents (cf. UCL Institute for Education, 2018) and more likely to face poverty in working-age than any previous generation (Chapman, 2019).

However, back in 2000, Howe and Strauss stated that the word 'crisis' didn't even appear in the teenage lexicon at the time and that 'four in five teens… believe they will be financially more successful than their parents – a percentage that rose sharply during the 1990's' (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p.179). Famously labelled the 'Me, Me, Me Generation' (Stein, 2013), one of the most prevailing assumptions about millennials over the last decade has been our perceived sense of entitlement, built upon this supposed expected success. James Cairn's *The Myth of the Age of Entitlement* (2017) describes the perpetuation of this perception throughout popular discourse being due to the fact that, like all myths, the claim of millennials' 'expected' entitlement is 'malleable [and] able to fit the needs of the storyteller' (Cairns, 2017, p.2). Using strikingly similar discourse, CBRE Research conducted a 2016 report in collaboration with Ipsos that interviewed 13,000 20-29 year olds globally, 1,000 of which were in the UK, in order to analyse what

they termed the 'Mythical Millennial' (CBRE, 2017, p.2). This stereotypical millennial, built from an amalgam of media-based and popular discussion, 'feels entitled to rapid career progression and frequent increases in salary, they expect to walk into a top job without working for it' (22). However, the report's findings indicate that the reality is noticeably different from this stereotype, and that 'rather than feeling entitled, they feel lucky to be employed' (29). In fact, Carl Newport's *Solving Gen Y's Passion Problem* (2012), indicates an earlier picking apart of the stereotypical entitled millennial, stating that 'the problem is not that we're intrinsically selfish or entitled. It's that we've been misinformed.' Or, as millennial author Emma Gannon summarises; 'We were sold a career ladder that doesn't exist anymore' (Thompson, 2018).

Whilst millennials were 'raised when "follow your passion" became pervasive career advice' (Newport, 2012), such guidance throughout our educational experience was then incompatible with the economic situation we later found ourselves in. The New Labour Government's 2002 precedent that 'by the end of the decade half or more of young people would be entering higher education' (BBC, 2002), an 'arbitrary target [of] no ifs, no buts' (Independent Voices, 2015), doubled the number of graduates in the working-age populous from that of two decades before (Wright, 2013). Whilst this offers inherent positives in terms of social mobility through first generation graduates, the 'motivation for New Labour's wish for continued growth in HE [was] essentially economic' (Ryan, 2005, p.89). Due to this increase, by the end of the decade, the 'problem facing Britain's university leavers is simply stated: too many graduates, too few graduate jobs' (Independent Voices, 2015).

2.3.4 Precarity

Although the number of unemployed 25-34 year olds in Britain is now lower than it was before the 2008 financial crash (Office for National Statistics, 2019), the current epidemic of an atypical labour model plays an intrinsic role in this seemingly positive statistic, with many millennials 'piecing together survival wages through a patchwork of low-paid, part time work' (Cairns, 2017, p.97). Cairns pinpoints the rise of 'entrepreneurial education' (97) as another factor perpetuating the myth of millennial entitlement. He argues that the reorienting of post-secondary education in America has 'encourage[d] students to approach working life as an unstable, fierce competition in which success comes through the capacity to constantly sell oneself as being a flexible, self-motivated and resilient hustler in the face of continuous hardship' (97). Oli Mould's critique of the commodification of creativity within current neoliberal structures, *Against Creativity* (2018), reinforces the development of this trend within Britain's labour model. The 'notion of 'work'', states Mould (2018, p.30), 'is being replaced by a more nebulous notion of creativity; our entire productive selves and the relationships we keep are now geared towards producing things, ideas, experiences and services that capitalism can exploit'.

By invoking Mould's analysis of the creative labour force in Britain, I am not conflating it with the exact experience felt by the millennial generation as a group, but wish to draw distinct parallels between precarity in the majority of British millennials' work-lives, and the effect this has on British millennial theatre makers. As Mould stresses, there has been a 'fundamental shift in how labour is conceptualised in contemporary capitalism' (30) and the neoliberal system that 'tells us we must be 'creative' to progress' (3), that 'champions flexibility, agility and dynamism over institutions [and] social formations'

(31), actually inhibits creativity that does not support the capitalist narrative, and, consequently, leads to increasing precariousness.

I draw a distinction here, between the terms precarity and precariousness. In this context, precarity, as Judith Butler explains, is a 'politically induced condition' (2009, p.5) which, as Janell Watson expands, manifests as a 'particular vulnerability imposed on the poor [and] the disenfranchised' (Watson, 2012). Marissia Fragkou clarifies Butler's position by viewing precarity as a 'social ecology' (Fragkou, 2019, p.6); a model of 'material conditions that facilitate and maintain the uneven distribution of vulnerability and management of precarious life' (6). Precariousness, on the other hand, refers to a 'corporeal… shared vulnerability' (Watson, 2012); an existential anxiety that is 'intertwined' (Fragkou, 2019, p.6) with, or perhaps even caused by, models of precarity. In the following subsection (2.3.5), I expand upon this causality, mapping how strands of anxieties within the millennial structure of feeling, that coalesce into an overarching precariousness, have been shaped by the material conditions of precarity experienced by the generation.

Reflecting Mould's analysis of creative precarity, a perpetuating viewpoint from business analysts (cf. Thorley & Cook, 2017) is that millennials are uniquely entrepreneurial, a fact that Cairns sees as embedded in the millennial 'mythos'. As Cairns point out, however, 'Millennial attitudes and aptitudes didn't cause neoliberal work arrangements; rather, millennials entered the workforce in the age of austerity and are now, quite reasonably, doing what they can to get by in it' (Cairns, 2017, p.69). I refer here to the precarity within employment structures based around the 'gig economy' and 'zero-hour contract' models. According to the Office for National Statistics (2017), roughly 19% of

25-34 year olds were employed on a zero-hours contract basis in 2017 and over half of all gig economy workers in the UK were aged between 18 and 34 years old, a quarter of whom earned below the minimum wage (Booth, 2018). Although such workers are technically employed, work and wages are not guaranteed within such employment models. Alongside this, the rise in prevalence of the 'gig economy', which, as Prassl points out, 'evokes the artists life' (Prassl, 2018, p.2), offers work as a 'one-off task or transaction, without further commitments on either side' (2). This 'increasing casualisation of labour' (Mould, 2018, p.33) emphasises flexibility but causes precarity.

Between precarity in the labour market, which has seen a decline in real wages over the past decade, and increasingly high rental costs in larger cities where a majority of millennials are concentrated (Chapman, 2018), millennials have been forced to choose between an insecure labour model in order to cover city-based rent costs, or to stay in smaller towns and risk 'stunting' their pay and career prospects (Snaith, 2019). Together with a 'skewed' (Gardner, 2019) arts funding system that bears the risk on those at the beginning of their careers, the structural set up in which millennials can create theatre recently led Lyn Gardner, in her 2019 investigation into millennial-led Damsel Production's staging of a London Fringe performance, to proclaim that she was 'astonished that anything ever gets made at all – and it wouldn't if not for the […] self-exploitation of all those involved' (Gardner, 2019). Although forging a creative career has never been an easy endeavour, the specific precarity of the millennials' situation, to borrow from sociologists Shaun Wilson and Norbert Ebert, 'translates into social precarity' (2013, p.264). Whilst the emerging British theatre makers of previous decades may have been able to make use of funds such as the 1983 Enterprise Allowance Scheme in order to supplement their work, the precarity of the labour model available to

millennials alongside a skewed funding system, 'raises questions around who can afford to make theatre and who is excluded by the financial constraints' (Gardner, 2019).

2.3.5   Anxieties

For a generation encouraged by uncertain neoliberal structures to '"take charge of their own lives", sell themselves [and] diversify their brand' (Cairns, 2017, p.69), the precarity of labour structures available to millennials is antithetical to such an aspiration. In addition, the effects of such structures upon my generation are becoming increasingly measurable. In a 2017 report, Curan and Hill reiterate that the 'neoliberal governance in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom has emphasized competitive individualism' (2017, p.1) since the 1980s. They describe millennials as experiencing 'multidimensional perfectionism' (1); the pressure to achieve ever increasingly higher standards. This perfectionism is, in turn, exacerbated by the relative ease of online image crafting via social media and imposed by the neoliberal market that places, as Curan and Hill maintain, a 'heavier burden on recent generations of young people to strive against one another under the auspices of meritocracy' (1).

Following this, the integration of multiple social media networks into millennials' everyday lives has been intrinsically linked to a higher risk of depression and anxiety (Primack et al, 2017) through feelings of inadequacy and Fear Of Missing Out (MacMillan, 2016). An epidemic of loneliness within young adults, inherently linked to both the precarity of the employment system and social media constructed inadequacy, likewise leads to increased mental health issues (Matthews et al, 2018). This base level of inadequacy felt by millennials, implemented by a system that 'misinformed' (Newport, 2012) them, is multiplied through the act of comparing their own lives to that of their

cohorts' through continual updates on social media. The *Social Comparison, Social Media, and Self-Esteem* study in 2014 found a distinct pattern in participants feeling worse when looking at someone else's profile if it exhibited 'upward comparison information' and feeling better when they saw someone else's profile that showed 'downward comparison information' (Vogel et al, 2014). In short, seeing someone else you know doing expressly better than you on social media can categorically make you feel worse.

Tim Urban employs a metaphorical equation to tender a hypothesis regarding this millennial discontent; 'happiness = reality – expectations' (Urban, 2013). For Urban, social media creates a world for millennials in which 'A) what everyone else is doing is very out in the open, B) most people present an inflated version of their own existence, and C) the people who chime in the most about their careers are usually those whose careers (or relationships) are going the best' (Urban, 2013). Although millennials are highly aware of the unreality of their peers' posts on social media in that they only represent a 'snapshot of a second in time that doesn't share the pain, the compromise, the sacrifice, their hard work, their insecurities, their anything' (Raphael, 2019), reports confirm that there is still a seemingly inevitable social comparison that occurs between our own lives and the curated extracts when we view them online. This paradoxical reaction is reflective of the 'as if' modality of the metamodern in the fact that we are contradictorily believing in something that we understand to be untrue. It is also reflective of the stance of the millennial generation in general; we continue to use social media whilst also feeling 'that it is depriving [us] of deeper personal relationships' (Huntley 2006, 10); we decree that we are victims of the gig economy but are also the most 'enthusiastic users of gig-economy apps and services' (Parkinson, 2017). We occupy a

contradictory position, one that embraces hypocrisy. Through a conflicted movement between poles, we are a 'Paradoxical Generation' (Huntley, 2006, p.10).

When framed as a structure of feeling, the anxieties created by the particular experience of the millennials within a sustained period of neoliberal precarity, of which the generation were ill-prepared for, have led to a shared precariousness based on a deflation of expectations within the cohort, exacerbated, in part, by the permeating dominance of social media. Within the next subsection, I suggest that such anxieties build upon Mark Fisher's concept of lost futures (2014), in that the millennials were prepared for a future than can no longer exist. In turn, I locate this feeling of loss as a catalyst, as per Shulze (2017) and Funk (2015), in the millennials' strive towards the elusive concept of the authentic; an act that is not only an integral modality in the theatrical case studies, but a permeating modality within the structure of feeling of the millennial generation.

2.3.6   Lost Futures & Authenticity

A preoccupation with the authentic is prominent within the embodied modalities of the millennial and the Listening Theatre, but what has led to this prominence, and how is it manifest within the metamodern and millennial as interrelated structures of feeling? In Chapter One, I detailed Andy Lavender's observation that the 'real' has returned to theatre (Lavender, 2016, p.19) and his similar contention that considering a 'new fascination with authenticity' (23) is integral to understanding this paradigm shift. Daniel Shulze, whose *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance* (2017) provides a detailed analysis of the contemporary concern with authenticity, sees this resurgence as arising as a direct response to an existence within the postmodern condition. 'Assuming that for the layman in postmodern society, postmodern theory is perceived as scary rather

than liberating,' states Shulze (2017, p.25), 'it becomes evident that the search for authenticity – in other words, a flight from the unwelcome truth of fragmentation and uncertainty – is the only viable option'. This endeavour towards the authentic, however, is not a direct retraction from the postmodern, but situates itself both *through* and *beyond* it. As Shulze remarks, it is only once 'mankind comes to terms with the fact that the subject, the world, the languages we speak […] are constructed and in themselves meaningless' (25) that such a paradigm shift will occur.

Shulze draws a clear line between specific 'key' moments in history and the coinciding resurgence in the term (again) becoming prevalent (Shulze, 2017, p.14). He points to Wolfgang Funk's assertion that authenticity re-emerges during crucial moments in time (Funk, 2015, p.38), that, in periods of great disruption and change, a strive towards authenticity, sincerity and veracity (Shulze, 2017, p.15) resurfaces as a counterpoint. As Shulze summarises, 'It is no exaggeration to say that authenticity, or rather the longing for it, always goes hand in hand with a profound feeling of having lost something' (15). He states that the development of authenticity found its 'first pinnacle' at the start of the twentieth century: 'The scientific revolutions, the division of labour, the discoveries about mankind and its place in the world have all contributed to a profound feeling of loss and being lost' (23). The advent of the postmodern condition, then, drove humankind to feel 'far-removed and isolated from nature and its own origins, sentenced to live in a world which is perceived as fake and superficial' (26). Deconstruction, mediatisation, and poststructuralism led to an inevitable superficiality that 'creates a sense of loss in a complex world' (26). As Shulze summarises, throughout history, the rise of '[a]uthenticity is the counter movement to these profound feelings of uncertainty and instability' (23). Out of crisis comes a search for truth. My translating of Shulze's theory

onto the particular experience of the millennials means that concerns regarding the concept of the authentic can then be traced to the generation's own particular uncertainty and instability; our longing for the authentic developing from an inherent feeling of generational loss.

Congruent to this 'sense of loss' (26), Mark Fisher's conceptual lost futures (2014), developed from Derrida's notion of hauntology (1994), speaks to his interconnected observance of contemporary British culture being oppressed by an awareness of a loss of possible futures and futurity, through a 'slow cancellation of the future [that] has been accompanied by a deflation of expectations' (Fisher, 2014, p.8). Rather than such a cancellation slowly dripping in through inactivity, such lost futures are the outcome of what Fisher describes as a 'time of massive, traumatic change' (8), citing neoliberalism and increasing computerisation as catalysts for such, leading to a sense of culture that has 'lost its ability to grasp and articulate the present' (9). As observed in the previous sections, the millennial experience has been shaped by such a deflation of expectations. Add to that our current politics of uncertainty surrounding the aftermath of the 2016 Brexit Referendum, our economics of precarity within labour models, and our climate of severe weather conditions and a continual slide towards environmental disaster, and it becomes clear that never before have my generation been so intricately insecure in so many interconnected and yet somehow disparate ways. If there is a period for which a longing for authenticity is to make a comeback, it is surely this one.

I argue that such a longing for the authentic is observable in the millennial generation when framed as a structure of feeling. Primarily, corporations have certainly become aware of the tendency for millennials to gravitate towards 'authentic' brands (McDonnell,

2018); the increase in the craft beer market (Carneiro, 2018), the importation of the Nordic notion of *Hygge* (Olmstead, 2016), organic food (Walker, 2017), veganism (Pointing, 2018) and the experience economy (or spending 'less money on buying things, and more on doing things' (Usborne, 2018) are all exemplary of millennial consumer behaviour that shows a tendency of leaning towards the 'authentic'. Additionally, according to a Field Agent survey, 94% of millennials reported making 'personal improvement commitments' in 2015 (Field Agent, 2015), leading to a number of businesses attempting to market books, guides and apps towards such a self-help market that, interestingly enough, wasn't affected by the recession (Linder, 2009).

When coupled with the millennial-led support for Labour's Momentum campaign at the time of the 2017 UK General Election (Ipsos Mori, 2017), alongside the millennials' engagement with the development of contemporary protests, from the Occupy movement in 2011 to the Extinction Rebellion disruptions in 2019, there are particular, observable patterns within millennial behaviour that are reflexive of either an internal or external struggle to improve. However, as Vermeulen describes, 'everything's at stake, and you don't know how to change it; that's the kind of double bind of the Metamodern individual' (Gorynski, 2018). To return to Vermeulen and van den Akker's observance of the re-emergence of the figure of utopia 'as a trope, individual desire or collective fantasy' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2015, p.57) as part of the 'the passage from postmodernism [to] metamodernism' (57), there is a clear interconnectivity between the return of historicity, affect and depth (cf. Vermeulen, van den Akker & Gibbons, 2017) as part of the development of the metamodern paradigm and this emergence of a desire for change within the millennials, whilst simultaneously exhibiting a scepticism and 'sense of sadness' (Freinacht, 2017, p.6) due to being haunted by futures that failed to

happen (cf. Fisher, 2014). Luke Turner describes this confliction between cynicism and optimism, reflective of the modalities apparent within the Listening Theatre, as inherent within the metamodern paradigm and the mindset of the millennial generation when he reflects upon the pervasiveness of the pop culture of the millennials' childhood years;

> Ours is a generation raised in the '80s and '90s, on a diet of *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, for whom postmodern irony and cynicism is a default setting, something ingrained in us. However, despite, or rather because of this, a yearning for meaning - for sincere and constructive progression and expression - has come to shape today's dominant cultural mode (Turner, 2015).

Through an examination of critical discourse on the millennial generation alongside an evaluation of the qualitative responses obtained from millennial participants in the two series' of workshops as detailed in Chapter Three, this desire for 'sincere and constructive progression and expression' (Turner, 2015) becomes a panoptic sensibility within the millennial structure of feeling. This desire, however, is manifest in a 'pragmatic idealism' (Turner, 2015) that engages with a revival of the strive for authenticity and progression, whilst not 'forfeiting all that we've learnt from postmodernism' (Turner, 2015). As detailed within my examination of the performance methodologies of the millennial case studies in Chapter One, in which modalities that express an oscillation between a sense of optimism and cynicism became evident, this mode of informed naivete describes a suitably paradoxical 'climate in which a yearning for utopias, *despite their futile nature*, has come to the fore,' (Turner, 2015, italics my own). This yearning for forms of utopia, for 'sincere and constructive progression' (Turner, 2015) alongside a pervasive sense of loss for futures that could have been (cf. Fisher, 2014) will be revisited in the consideration of the responses of millennial participants collected through the workshops. This will, in turn, lead to an examination of how I then both utilised and interrogated this sentiment within the narrative structure of *Like Lions*, in Chapter Four.

2.4 THE METAMODERN, THE MILLENNIALS AND CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

If metamodernism is an attempt at discerning a 'discourse that gives meaning to our experience' (van den Akker & Vermeulen, 2017, p.11), the term endeavours to encapsulate a form and feeling that is becoming increasingly evident within a multitude of artforms and popular culture; the '*overall state of the organism* […] that relates to […] in particular the coming of age of […] the millennials' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2015). In this respect, a fluctuation between a 'modern desire for sense and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all' (6) manifests within the metamodern structure of feeling as forms of pragmatic idealism, informed naivety, sincere irony and a 'yearning for utopias despite their futile nature' (Turner, 2015).

In my analysis of developing modalities within the political theatre of British millennial companies in Chapter One, I located a trend of continual oscillation between optimistic attempts to enact social betterment through engaged performances and a scepticism of theatre's power, and the artists' own abilities, to enact such change, alongside a critical interrogation of the problematics inherent in such engagement within the artwork itself. This culminated in paradoxical performances that are at once altruistic and sceptical. What has become clear, through this analysis, is that this fluctuation is a part of a structural shift within wider contemporary cultural and societal configurations that moves beyond the postmodern, whilst also being fundamentally connected to, and affected by, the millennial generation's responses to specific societal and cultural transformations within our childhoods and formative adult years. The precarity and uncertainty of this period has instilled a collective sense of lost futurity within our generational cohort; a

crisis of identity built around intense feelings of instability and loss. As Shulze (2017, p.15) asserts, the direct response to such feelings is a longing for authenticity, truth and sincerity. Whilst, as millennials, we cannot escape the irony and scepticism of our postmodern foundations, we *strive* towards sincerity, despite remaining simultaneously sceptical.

As detailed in the previous chapter, the work of the case studies exhibits four specific modalities that I locate as essential principals in the Listening Theatre. These modalities are: a focus on ***social engagement*** and belief in betterment through a strive towards forms of utopia within and beyond the performance space; an attempt at direct and, often, sustained ***audience engagement*** in order to form better dialogues; a fascination with the concept of the ***authentic*** within performance, which I locate as inherently tied to the first two modalities; and the in-built ***self-critique*** such performances illustrate within their own structures. This endeavour towards betterment, particularly towards new political realities through performance, is reflective of Vermeulen, van den Akker (2015) and Turner's (2015) observance of the resurgence of utopic forms within the metamodern structure of feeling, emerging, as it does, from an inherent mourning for futures that will no longer happen, as per Fisher's (2014) hauntological lost futures. However, such endeavours also include an inherent scepticism of their own modalities within the artwork itself through an ironic self-reflexivity. Such work emphasises a metamodern 'pursuit… [for] strong, communal integrity, valuing others for their human dignity, [and] unabashedly enjoying the things you find to be awesome' (*David Foster Wallace – The Problem with Irony*, 2016) whilst also utilising an inbuilt and ingrained irony as 'a path to sincerity, rather than as an end in itself, born of a desire to do something heartfelt in a cynical world' (Muñoz-Alonso, 2016).

I posit that the case studies are not just examples of millennial-made theatre, but exemplary as theatre that exhibits distinctly metamodern tendencies *because* it has been made by millennials who are intrinsically linked to this paradigm shift. Such work strives towards new forms of sincerity and affect within performance whilst also remaining inherently aware of the frailty and falsity of such a position. Specifically, I see the work of these millennial companies as exemplifying a metamodern oscillation between the disparate polarities of optimism and cynicism, an interest in enacting utopic ideals through performance despite an acknowledgement of an inevitable failure. Through my analysis of the concept of the millennial, as both a pseudo-historical and pseudo-mythical construct, I have drawn connections between particular cultural and political shifts that have affected the millennials' specific generational experience and, therefore, led to such modalities being present in their performance work. This oscillatory nature is manifested through the seemingly contradictory optimism instilled in my generation via our Baby Boomer parents, alongside the relative prosperity of a pre-financial-crash Britain and a government-led drive towards higher education, set against the cynicism of the predominantly postmodern Generation X culture we were exposed to in childhood, and the effects that a precarious labour model and enforced austerity have had on our formative adult years. Accordingly, it is this continual fluctuation between optimism and cynicism within the shared millennial structure of feeling that is manifest within the Listening Theatre and therefore places the latter firmly within the emerging metamodern paradigm.

In the following chapters, I detail how this foundational understanding of the shared generational experience of British millennials underpinned the development of my practice through a series of workshops. I designed the sessions to investigate how the

methodological tools located within the work of these millennial companies, who largely create work that platforms the narratives of those who are not necessarily part of the millennial as defined within this research, can be turned back in on the millennial generation itself. This will lead into an account of how the qualitative input gathered from these workshops was developed into the narrative and theatrical structure of *Like Lions*, my development of which attempted to purposefully utilise metamodern sensibilities in its construction in order to investigate how such methodological tools could be used to create intentionally metamodern theatre that interrogated the notions of the 'mythical' millennial.

DEVELOPING THE LISTENING THEATRE

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers the key findings from two series' of workshops that I ran with millennial participants over the course of this research: *Plan B*, which comprised of six sessions throughout November 2016, and *What Now?*, which consisted of two identical workshops in London and Exeter during April 2018 developed from the *Plan B* exercises. These workshops responded to my third research aim: *how can I use this new insight to develop my own practice as part of the emerging millennial theatre?*

I designed these workshops to develop aspects of the Listening Theatre by applying facets of other millennial companies' practices to workshops with millennial participants. This investigated whether millennial performance praxis, predominantly utilised by the case studies to engage with communities not directly part of their generation, could be applied to engage the millennials themselves. This analysis offers new insight into how aspects of millennial companies' methodologies can be used to advance and interrogate the Listening Theatre as a speculative theatrical framework. The workshop findings also provide specific insight into how the millennial participants related to, and located themselves in/outside of, the concept of 'mythical millennial' (Cairns, 2017).

The workshops were described as 'therapeutic' by the participants, enabling forms of catharsis to occur. Whilst this was an unexpected consequence of my research, it allowed me to develop my intentions for the *Plan B* workshops towards providing this cathartic space through exercises focused on gentle, practical acts that also prompted gentle,

conversational interaction: formulated around an oscillation 'between thought and feeling', which Thomas Scheff (2001, p.142) sees as integral for allowing catharsis to occur. I had intended for the workshops to facilitate dialogical engagement that was varied and possibly conflicting in an attempt at enacting Freinacht's emphasis on facilitating better dialogues between different polarities (2017, p.4). However, the restricted pool of participants led to an echo-chamber occurring within the workshop space – a term I appropriate from social media analysis to describe how the similarity in the group's shared experience demonstrated a self-supporting, largely left-wing bias.

Whilst the *Plan B* workshops failed in creating the beginnings of a *disruptive* discourse which could be developed into a performance, the cathartic effect a number of workshops produced for some participants, alongside the exercises' ability to collect and collate new insight into the millennial generation, meant that I could reformat the workshop structure to focus on these two aspects. The subsequent *What Now?* workshops developed previous exercises focused on allowing millennial participants space to 'voice their issues, concerns and thoughts about the future' (Pregnant Fish Theatre, 2018b). This produced a form of catharsis within the workshop environment and enabled me to gather detailed, qualitative input from millennial participants about their understanding of their location in the generation and the issues that surround and impact this positioning. This refocus meant that I could concentrate on collecting input that would be used as material to generate a playscript as I focus my research back towards my original aims in developing my own practice as a playwright and director investigating new forms of intimate, storytelling focused performance. The input gathered in both workshops then formed the main thematic threads of *Like Lions*, the development of which will be detailed in Chapter Four.

3.1.1 Practice as Research (PaR)

I employ Robin Nelson's multi-mode epistemological model in terms of considering the particulars of PaR. Specifically, I am referring to an orbital movement between the haptic, performative 'know-how', the conceptual framing of the 'know-what', and the tacit being made explicit through critical reflection within the 'know-what-works' (Nelson, 2013, p.37). Nelson reasons that through this oscillation between the embodied, the conceptual and the critical, new modes of thought and making can be extrapolated, investigated and developed within the practice itself. Employing this model 'allows for the making visible of an intelligence that nevertheless remains fundamentally located in embodied knowing' (40). This analysis is a retrospective account of a process that included parallel interrogation and critique for real-time development. Therefore, what follows is a developed, retroactive, critical commentary but cannot fully substitute for the real-time development of haptic, embodied understanding during and alongside the practice itself. There is a tension between the tacit understanding within the praxis and this subsequent act of making the tacit explicit that, as a PaR researcher, I am attempting to navigate within this analysis by relaying my own developing thought process throughout the research. As Nelson identifies;

> Framing arts practices in a research context through the lens of hermeneutics […] affirms the necessity of the dialogic dynamic […] It constructs critical commentary as *one* mode of interpretation, a means of assisting in the articulation of what arts practices are and might signify (59, emphasis my own)

Through this, Nelson affirms Nicholas Davey's emphasis on the 'productive tension between art's intellectual and material character' (Macleod & Holdridge, 2006, p.26 in Nelson, 2013, p.58). In order to account for the discrepancy between the haptic embodied 'know-how' within the praxis and the following reflective reworking of such, I have linked this commentary to videos of the workshops themselves, which can be accessed

through the hyperlinks in digital copies of this thesis or by scanning the QR codes supplied in Appendix A.6. Copies of physical, archival evidence of workshop outcomes are provided in this document, alongside photographs and video-stills of moments of insight. My use of this evidence builds upon the importance placed on 'correspondence and corroboration' (Nelson, 2013, p.65) that I am employing from Nelson's PaR model in a 'convergence of evidence' (65) that attempts to map such data onto 'insider accounts and a conceptual analysis' (65) in order to triangulate between the know-how, know-what and know-what-works, through rigour within the multi-modal research.

I also invoke Nelson's use of Thomas Nagel's (1986, p.51) admission that there is no 'view from nowhere'. As an artist, I am fully imbricated in this research, as it is built around both the development of my own praxis and an attempt to discern the structure of feeling of the generation that I am a member of. This analysis attempts to clearly locate my own positioning within the practice, and its continual development. Through this, I am not only referring to my own function as a practitioner in the workshops, or as playwright and director in Chapter Four, but I also refer to an attempt to, as per Nelson's suggestion, articulate a ''liquid knowing'' (Nelson, 2013, p.60) that does not seek an 'unattainable objectivity but [strives] to nudge knowing at least into an intersubjectively apprehensible mode of doing-knowing' (60) in that I attempt to acknowledge my own position in the praxis alongside and in dialogue with a more conceptual critique. As Nelson emphasises, the purpose of a critical reflection formulated as such is to 'articulate […] what is at stake in the praxis in respect of substantial new insights' (60). The following attempts to articulate the development of these new insights, acknowledging my own place within this, whilst simultaneously assessing the failures apparent within this praxis.

3.2   PLAN B (2016)

3.2.1   Aims of the *Plan B* Workshops

The first series of workshops consisted of six sessions throughout November 2016 at The University of East London. These workshops were built on particular modalities (re)appropriated from the work of Eager Spark and The Gramophones as detailed in Chapter One. Additionally, they are retroactively reflective of Feat.Theatre's particular methods of community engagement in the tea party portion of *The Welcome Revolution* (2018). I applied Eager Spark's 'go in and […] have a cup of tea' (Appendix A.3) approach, which Corrine Furness describes as '"Just chat to us and we'll see what we can do"' (Appendix A.3) in an attempt to facilitate dialogical engagement between millennial participants through a deliberately relaxed, informal and welcoming space. Through this, I also attempted to develop The Gramophone's 'gentle ways of interacting' (Left Lion, 2014), informed by my experience as an audience member of *Playful Acts of Rebellion* in 2014. Although the level of platforming in *Playful Acts…* was skewed in favour of the performers' own political ideologies, I *felt* that my own protest-worthy-issues were of an equal importance, having been given the space for them to be raised onstage. Inspired by this, I facilitated a series of exercises in which this dialogue between participants might be *further* equalised through curating certain *gentle* ways of interacting within a dialogical frame.

I have located oscillations between the possibility and impossibility of cathartic, eudemonic improvement through the act of listening as an overarching, metamodern thematic in the works of the millennial case studies (1.5). In these workshops, I aimed to examine how these practical modalities could be utilised in an intentionally limited focus group – that of millennial participants engaging with other millennial participants. Could

W, Why lies at UCL

<u>MISSION STATEMENT</u>

- I want to attempt to open up a DISRUPTIVE DISCOURSE onstage
- I want to see if it <u>fails</u>
- I want to find an answer — <u>Do I?</u>
- I want us to argue
- I want us to discuss our failures
- I want to get over self-negation by self-negating
- I want to know WHY we fail
- I want to fail.

<u>Dates & times confirmed.</u>

Tues 1st   6.30-9.30   B (from 8), L, M, H, D + J
Tues 8th   "   B, L, M, H, D + J
Thurs 17th   "   B, L, M, H, D, T + J & Faye?
Tues 22nd   "   B, L, M, H, T, J
Thurs 24th   "   B, L, M, H, T, Ben?
Sat 26th 10-8pm — B, L, M H, T, Ben, Robbie, Faye
                    How many people do we need?

Fig. 13. Excerpt from notebook detailing plans for the *Plan B* workshops, including the 'mission statements'.

I curate a performative dialogue that equalised the discourse between participants – or even actors and audience – through furthering performative modes formulated around Freinacht's emphasis on 'creating better dialogues' (Freinacht, 2017, p.4)? Could I develop these into a dialogical, performative event that both strove towards 'figures of utopia' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2015b, p.58), despite an awareness of unavoidable failure, hence embracing, even welcoming, an inevitability of failure?

I selected the participants for these preliminary *Plan B* workshops from a group of millennial actors and non-actors that had previously worked or engaged with Pregnant Fish Theatre. This was largely due to the fact that I could depend on them to engage in the exercises with a level of professional trust that had been built between them through previous projects, and also that I could expect them to commit to the number of sessions planned. Although the participants were from a range of backgrounds, it is important to note that the group was majority-white, mostly London-dwelling creatives who classified themselves as at least politically aware, and that a majority had attended Higher Education. These similar backgrounds, combined with their history with Pregnant Fish Theatre, meant that the group shared a number of skills related to critical thinking, public speaking and improvisation, as well as being used to working on both practical and conceptual projects as part of a team. As such, my analysis of these experimental workshops takes into account how the shared knowledge and skill set of this particular group affected both the engagement within the sessions and the input gathered throughout.

The *Plan B* workshop responses are not intended to represent the entire millennial generation in Britain, but to offer a snapshot of a particular group of millennials that were

chosen as responsive and willing test subjects. In an attempt to remedy this, the coordination of the later *What Now?* workshops included a number of outreach efforts in order to engage a wider variety of participants, as detailed in 3.3.2.

3.2.2   The Politi-Web

The following analysis presents the key findings of the *Plan B* workshops by highlighting particular moments of insight throughout the program. These revolve around the participants' deconstruction of the 'mythical millennial' (Cairns, 2017) as a media-ascribed concept in order to reconstruct their own configuration and definition of the millennial. This was achieved practically in an exercise that resulted in what the participants termed the 'politi-web': a physicalised metaphor for the interconnectivity of the concerns they had located within the millennial construct. I see these particular moments as reflective of Jill Dolan's utopian performatives; 'small but profound moments [that] in their doings, make palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better' (Dolan, 2005, pp.5-6). These exercises enabled dialogic engagement to occur through simple practical tasks based around gentle forms of interaction. Coupled with the miniaturised echo-chamber that occurred within the workshops, these exercises provided a 'therapeutic', cathartic space for the millennial participants which prompted them to provide detailed, qualitative input. I focus on these specific moments rather than a chronological detailing of each workshop in order to concentrate on clarifying the foundational moments that were then developed into the *What Now?* workshops.

In advance of the *Plan B* workshops, I introduced the participants to discourse defining the 'mythical millennial' (Cairns, 2017) in current news media by providing a variety of recently published articles concerning the millennial generation. The topics of these

articles included, but were not limited to, defining a supposed 'suspended adulthood' (Quinn, 2016), the perceived 'degradation' of UK HE degrees (Independent Voices, 2015b), and the rise of veganism within the age group (Meager, 2016). Through the workshops, I attempted to discern how the group located themselves as part of this ascribed categorisation or whether the terminology as set out by the media did not apply to their individual, lived experience. In order to investigate this, I encouraged the participants to break down the complicated, interconnected and, at points, conflicting discourse surrounding the millennials into 'digestible' single words or phrases that could then be used to reconstruct the terminology in a way that made sense to them as a specific group. In this way, autonomy over the construction of the mythical millennial was given to the participants, rather than ascribed by an outside source. In applying my reading of Kant's transcendental aesthetics to my initial intentions, this workshop enabled the participants to deconstruct the millennial *phenomenon*, reorient both their own positionality and that of each constituent part, and then, effectively, reconstruct their own reality using such fragments.

Building on The Gramophone's gentle interaction and Freinacht's emphasis on the act of improved listening as essential to social progress, I asked the participants to get into small groups and reflect upon their reactions to these articles. The atmosphere within the space was intentionally relaxed and aimed to provide a friendly and comfortable space in which the participants could express their opinion, have it listened to and, in turn, listen to the opinion of others. As advised by Eager Spark, tea, coffee, beer and biscuits were also provided for participants. This preliminary discussion was an opportunity for the group to firstly reorient themselves with the material that they would be using in the workshop and, secondly, assess their own positioning within the media's framing of the millennials.

Fig. 14. Participants talk through the articles provided at the beginning of the first *Plan B* workshop at The University of East London, 1st November 2016. [Video still]

Could they locate themselves within the paradigm constructed by the media? Did their own experience validate or challenge the construct as prescribed by these articles?

Through this, the groups identified the issues that they agreed played a role in the creation of the millennial as per their own interpretation and condensed these to single words or phrases. The only caveat being that each 'main issue' had to originate from the sources provided (Appendix A.6.1). The issues that were listed in this exercise are provided below, in no specific order and excluding repetitions.

'Millennial Issues' located from news media sources
- Brexit
- Degree Degradation
- Suspended Adulthood
- Personal Debt
- Social Media (and Image Construction)
- Media 'Conglomerate'
- Political Electoral System
- Zero Hour Contracts
- Minimum Wage
- Parents
- Rent
- Anxiety
- Veganism

The participants then wrote each issue on large pieces of paper and taped them to the walls, floor and furniture of the studio. Following this, the participants and I could then clearly see the main components of the mythical millennial construct, as originally construed by the news media and then reduced to elemental issues by the group. In this respect, the participants had broken the construct down into its constituent points and, consequently, I would later task them to reconstruct the interconnected 'web' of issues. As Dempsey asserts, metamodernism is 'a project of *reconstruction'* (Dempsey, 2014) in which a revival of 'narrative, depth, meaning, and *reorientation* are once again being
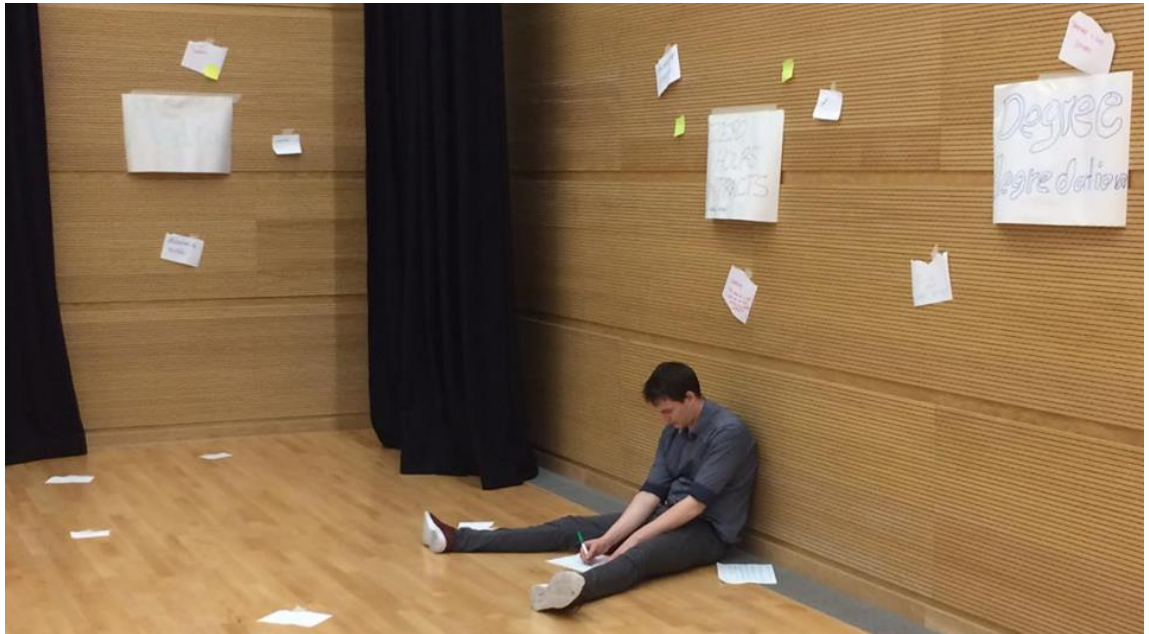
Fig. 15. A participant writing responses to the issues stuck around the studio space during the first *Plan B* workshop at The University of East London, 1st November 2016

sought out' (Dempsey, 2014, emphasis my own) following the deconstruction and discreditation of grand narratives through postmodernity. Through the practical act of deconstructing the 'mythical millennial' and then, through collective action, attempting to reconstruct a new form of this depiction whilst remaining aware of the problems revealed in the deconstruction, I was attempting to practically enact this aspect of the metamodern shift within dominant cultural discourse; applying the oscillation between de- and re-construction central to metamodernism in a contained, practical exercise. In addition, I was aiming to collect and collate qualitative responses to these constituent parts that would, in turn, aid in the reconstructive act. In order to achieve this, I tasked the participants to individually respond to each of the issues in three distinct ways.

Firstly, participants were asked to produce an *intuitive emotional response*. They were to capture their immediate reaction to the issue when they came to read each one, to consider how each issue made them feel *in the moment*. This attempted to record the baseline, emotional response to the topic at hand. Secondly, I asked them to reconsider each topic around the room in response to *their own personal experience*. These personal responses aimed to capture qualitative input regarding the participants' experiences of being part of the 'mythical millennial' model as ascribed by the particular issues. Following this, I tasked the participants to provide some form of *analysis* of the issue, intentionally keeping the instructions for this open, in terms of not constraining how the participants interpreted the act of analysis, in order to collect insight into the group's understanding of the topics on a more structural, less individualistic scale and also encourage thinking in relation to the interconnectivity between such issues. Participants were asked to consider how each issue came to be an 'issue' and locate it within wider political, cultural or economic structures (Appendix A.6.2).
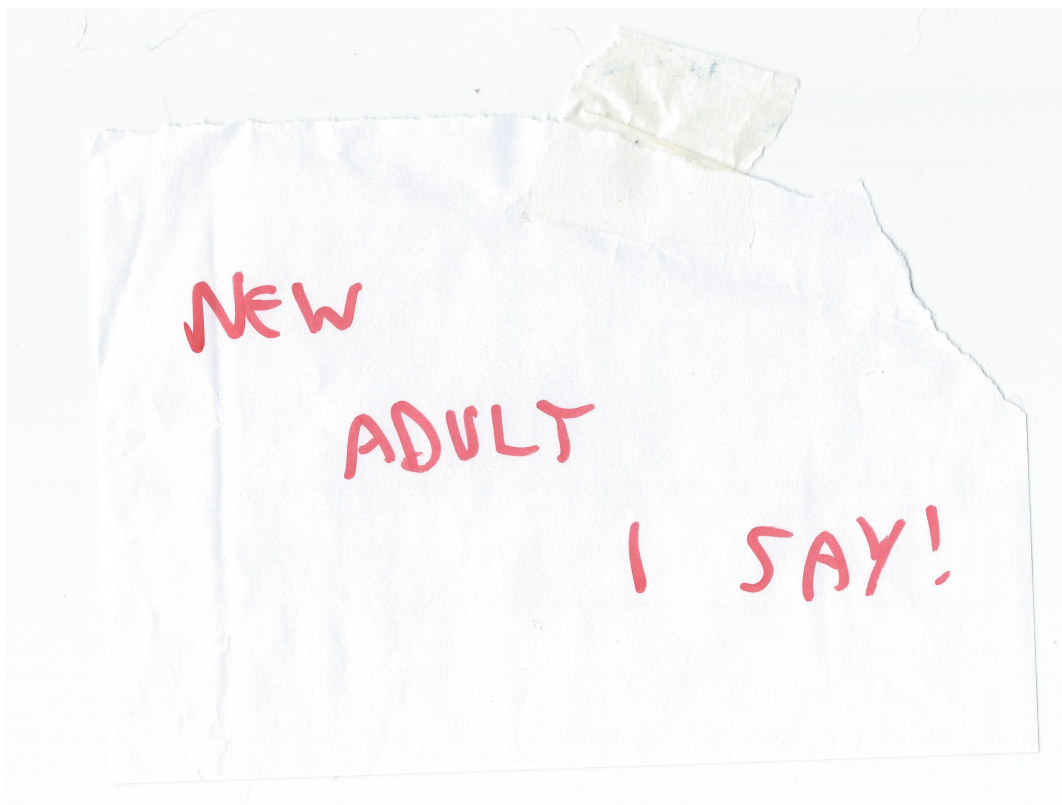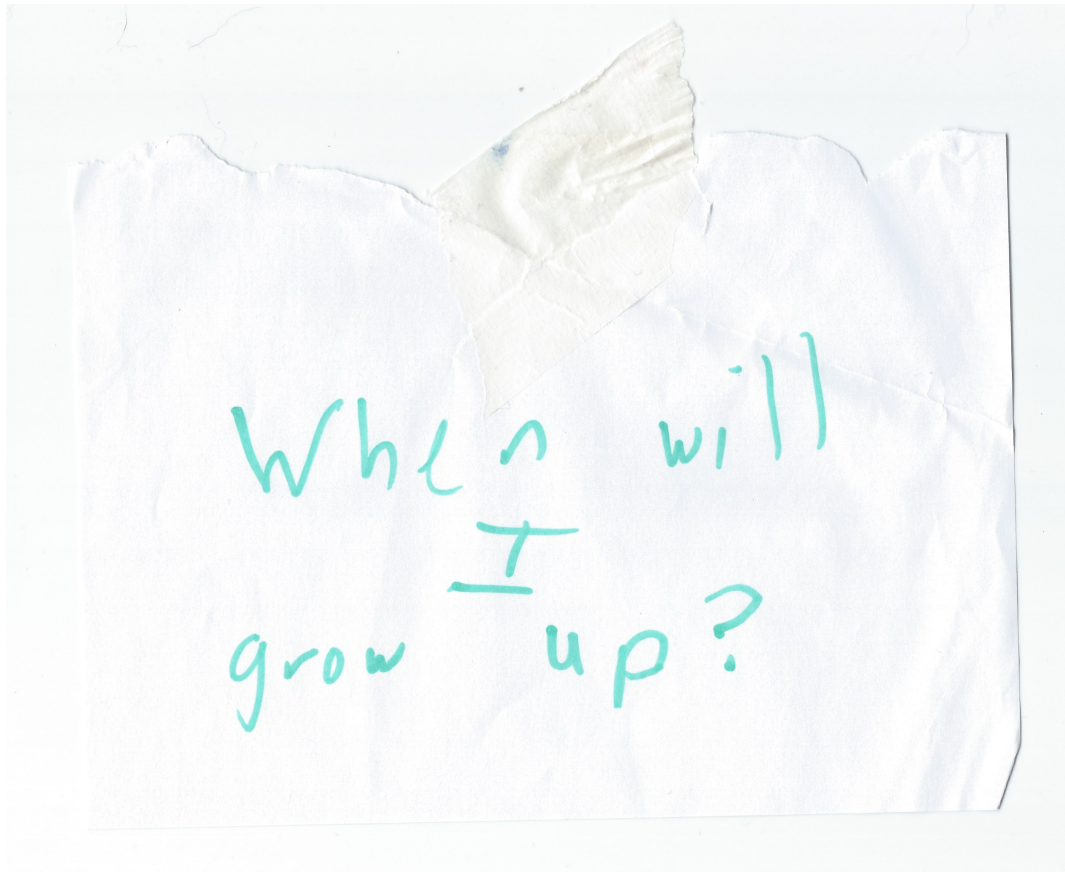
Fig. 16. Immediate, emotional responses to the theme of 'SUSPENDED ADULTHOOD' by participants in the Plan B workshops. 1st November 2016.

Fig. 17. Secondary, personal response to the theme of 'SUSPENDED ADULTHOOD' by participants in the Plan B workshops. 1st November 2016.

- Generation Why - some feel less mature as they still live at home, supported by parents so they continue to act in similar ways to when they were teenagers

- Lack of stability, good employment and good wages means people are not 'settling down'. Have more time for fun (as long as its cheap....)

- Escapism - trying to forget about debts. anxiety etc = reversion to teenage stuff (Pokemon, Star wars etc)

Fig. 18. Tertiary, analytical response to the theme of 'SUSPENDED ADULTHOOD' by participant in the Plan B workshops. 1st November 2016.

On the previous three pages, I have included the three levels of responses to the topic of 'Suspended Adulthood'. Each of these responses were taped next to the large issue around the workshop space. Clearly, not every participant responded to each topic at each level. Instead, they were gently encouraged to respond to those that they wished to. As such, there is a mix of participants' responses that do not correlate between the levels, but offer a variety of emotional, personal and analytical responses to the topics that were extrapolated from the articles by the participants.

Following this deconstruction, a subsequent exercise aimed to form a new construct from the issues located by the participants and their various responses. After this exercise, one participant used the term 'politi-web' to describe both the interconnectivity of the neoliberal system they saw as affecting a majority of the issues they had located as part of the 'mythical millennial', as well as the actual, *physical* web of connected issues and concerns that the participants created. I have appropriated this term within the following analysis as I feel it best describes both the conceptual and actual webs that became a repeated thematic and aesthetic in both series of workshops.

The politi-web, as pictured below, was created by the participants using strings to physically connect both the issues and corresponding responses to other issues and responses around the room. These connections could be as concrete or tenuous as the participants wanted, as long as they felt that the two issues or responses were associated by an affective thread that was now made manifest. Through the construction of this web of interconnected issues, emotions, personal stories and analytical responses, the workshop studio became a complex network of interrelated issues that had been reconstructed, from the ground up, by the participants (Appendix A.6.3). Although this

Fig. 19. Participants linking the themes and responses to create their 'politi-web' during a *Plan B* workshop at The University of East London, 1st November 2016.

was not a utopic construction – the participants had to include and contend with issues that they, sometimes, disagreed with – the act of de-constructing the web of issues as located within the media and reconstructing it as per their own interpretation, gave some form of agency to the participants within the context of the exercise itself.

This physical 'web' provided a practical metaphor as a way of accessing the complex totality of the socio-economic and political structures that are imposed upon the millennial generation. Whilst the participants and I were aware that such an exercise framed around reconstruction did not hold any actual reconstructive power in a wider political sense, it became clear to me that the action itself had become beneficial for a number of the participants themselves. The simplistic, conversational performative act of (re)building the politi-web within this workshop through an active and equal discourse between participants, in which all opinions and queries were valid and respected, created a cathartic, 'discursive exchange and negotiation' (Bishop, 2012, p.23). The act of reconstructing the political paradigm turned out to be a therapeutic act for the participants in that it mapped out a new *phenomenon* that was essentially their own. As two of the participants explained;

> PARTICIPANT A: So, when I was, like, reading through the articles you gave us yesterday I found it quite, like, depressing. Um, and, I was a bit, yeah, like _____, I was a bit worried about, like, what the workshop would, like, make me feel. But then I think, like, coming together and discussing it all together and then especially, like, matching all these things up together at the end was just, like, really nice to just be talking about it with likeminded people.

> PARTICIPANT B: It has been, like, *therapeutic*, so it's kind of like, you kind of feel a bit like – oh, that was okay.
> <div align="right">(<u>Appendix A.6.4</u>)</div>

Thomas Scheff's *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual, and Drama* (2001) traces the dramatic use of catharsis back to Aristotle's Poetics in which catharsis was achieved by 'purging the audience of pity and terror' (19). Scheff separates theatrical catharsis into three distinct groups; Apollonian dramas that are 'largely intellectual… [and] overdistanced from emotion' (141), Dionysian dramas on the opposite end of the scale that seek 'a sensationalism of emotional experience' (142), and the 'third type'; a drama which exhibits an 'orientation towards catharsis, which depends on the balance between thought and feeling' (142). This 'third type', which oscillates between intellect and emotion, reflects particular metamodern sensibilities in terms of metaxis, and Scheff argues that it is this middle ground that makes catharsis possible. He quotes Greenson's (1967, p.47) 'splitting of the ego' as being 'between the irrational, experiencing ego, and the rational cooperative ego,' and states that 'when the individual's attention is exactly divided… repression is lifted and catharsis can occur' (Scheff, 2001, p.57). By facilitating dialogical engagement through simple, practical exercises that attempted to balance critical analysis and personal emotional responses, I posit that a liminal space of metaxis between these polarities is the reason for the cathartic responses voiced by the participants.

Despite this cathartic effect being a surprising, yet welcome, outcome to the exercise, the political, social and individual efficacy of such an insular activity is debatable. Notwithstanding activist Owen Jones' claim that 'simply provoking a discussion […] is itself a key objective' (2014, p.xii) in restructuring the political norm, the *Plan B* workshops included a total of eight participants whose political views were not so much challenged or deconstructed as strengthened. Upon reflecting on this exercise whilst planning further workshops, I came to understand that it was the cathartic effect provided through practical actions that focused on *breaking down* and *re-building* that was the

strength of such exercises. These exercises focused on reconstruction allowed me to collect and collate the participants' responses to specific stimuli in a way that felt, as per the participant above, 'therapeutic'.

The outcomes being described as therapeutic by participants highlights the role of listening as an affective practice as defined by Wetherell as a 'lively, situated and communicative act' (Wetherell, 2012, p.102). Similar to Kester's dialogical art recognising the importance of listening (Shaughnessy, 2012, p.200), by enabling participants to actively listen to one another's concerns, the workshop provided opportunities for empathetic, affective engagement (cf. Shaughnessy, 2012, p.7). As per Scheff's understanding of catharsis being enabled through division between thought and action (Scheff, 2001, p.57), however, I began to understand the therapeutic reaction specified by the participants as a result of the act of listening being partnered with the simple, practical exercises undertaken in each workshop. In Simon Shepherd's study on the body in performance, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* (2006), he defines listening as 'happen[ing] in specific *physical* situations' and, as such, 'empathy is a response to the whole physical person' (Shepherd, 2006, p.8, italics my own). Highlighting the importance of presence and physicality in regard to listening as an affective practice enabled me to focus on creating exercises focused on de- and re-construction, as above, that produced active listening combined with simple practical tasks – developing modes of gentle interaction. By emphasising the fact that this cathartic affect was produced by the practice of listening, particularly when combined with gentle, practical participation, I intend to highlight the importance of listening as affective practice in my conceptualisation of the Listening Theatre. As such, the use of the term does not only refer to companies creating work from listening to communities and audiences, as well

as listening to critiques of this listening within the work itself; it also refers to listening as an affective, transformative practice for participants within the socially engaged practice undertaken as part of, or imbricated within / throughout, performances in the Listening Theatre framework, and my development of the participatory methodologies as detailed within this chapter.

Because of the echo-chamber created within the workshops, my intentions in facilitating a discourse that attempted to 'come closer to the truth [by] creat[ing] better dialogues' (Freinacht, 2017, p.4) between opposites shifted to focus on both the cathartic, therapeutic possibilities of the dialogical engagement for the participants, balanced with the opportunities this presented to collect qualitative input regarding millennials understanding of, and own location within, the mythical millennial construct. As Jill Dolan questions in *Utopia in Performance* (2005), perhaps artists burden utopian performatives by questioning what their effect can be post-performance (2005, p.170) rather than focusing on the effects *in the moment* for the assembly of performers, audience members or participants engaging within it. Whilst these workshops may, as per Dolan's utopian performatives, 'create the *condition* for action' (170) for the participative group, in the process of developing these experiments I began to agree with her contention that such analysis 'too often flounder[s] on the shoals of "what does this do," when how something *feels* in the moment might be powerful enough' (170). Such focus gave me the opportunity to embrace the questionable efficacy of such workshops and, consequently, allowed me to explore further exercises that welcomed an inevitable failure in achieving real world efficacy and focused, instead, on facilitating a liminal, dialogical interplay between participants.

3.2.3   (Im)Possible

In order to investigate how I could utilise the concept of an inherent impossibility within these workshops, I devised a series of 'impossible' challenges for the participants that focused on attempting to 'fix' the issues they had located in previous exercises. In the first instance, I tasked two groups to arrange the previous issues in order of importance, intentionally offering no specifics in terms of how they should interpret this ranking. One group envisioned an order of hierarchy in relation to 'millennial' issues – seeing the level of import from an informed but conceptualised and somewhat disconnected level. The other group discussed between themselves what issues mattered most to them individually and compromised on an order specifically tailored to them as individuals.

As before, the atmosphere was intentionally relaxed and informal, which led to conversations between the group members fluctuating between the political and the personal, with the personal disclosures appearing to influence their process of ordering the issues (Appendix A.6.5). The two groups then strung up the issues in their specific orders of importance (Appendix A.6.6), leading to a further discussion between the groups as to how they would uphold their own order in comparison to the others'. Throughout the discussion, each group attempted to support their own order, but also found themselves agreeing with the variations between the two. This highlighted the impossibility of achieving a definitive 'ranking' of the issues they had located.

Following this, I tasked the participants to take one of their top-rated issues and 'fix' it. Interestingly, both groups had the topic 'Degree Degradation' on the far-right of their scale, highlighting the importance of the issue to them as individuals in one respect, or their perceiving of it as important to the generation as a whole. Each group then provided

Fig. 20 Participants discussing how to order the issues during a *Plan B* workshop a**t** The University of East London, 8th November 2016. [Video still]
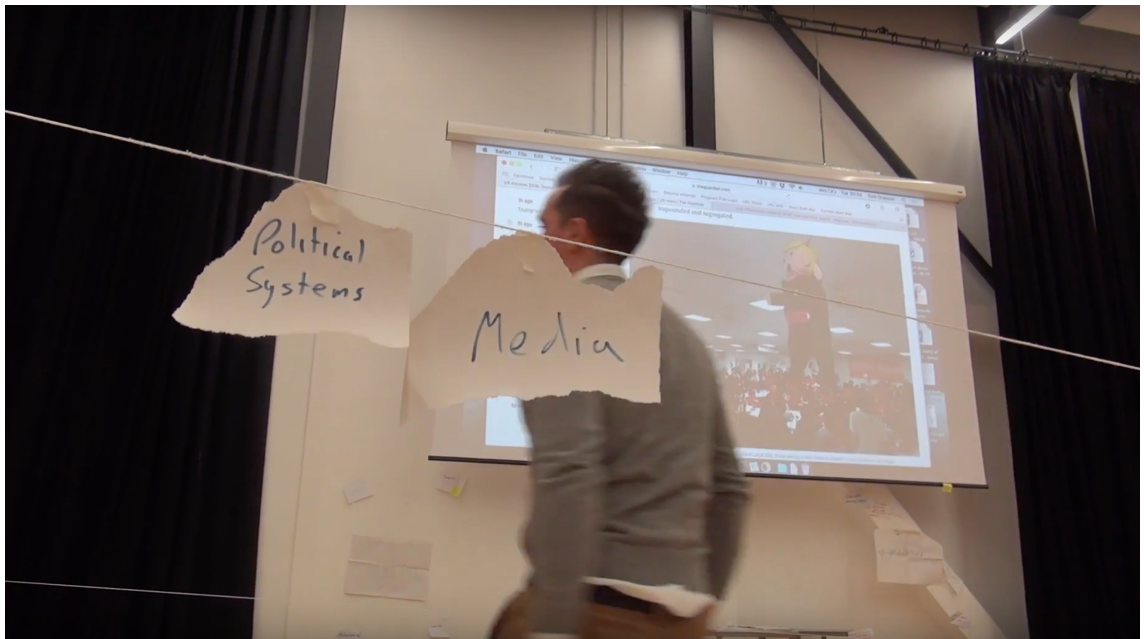
Fig. 21. A participant beginning to order the issues during a *Plan B* workshop at The University of East London, 8th November 2016. [Video still]

an 'impossible five-point plan' that would solve this issue in whatever way they saw fit. As Turner suggests, 'speculative modes of thought' (Turner, 2015) are an integral part of 'the climate in which a *yearning* for utopias, despite their futile nature, has come to the fore' (Turner, 2015). As such, the participants were encouraged to envision their five-point plan hypothetically, as, in the spirit of Turner's Metamodernist Manifesto, 'at once coherent and preposterous' (Turner, 2015).

I have included the plans provided by each group below. In each, there are demonstrable political ideologies tied to improving the flaws they believe they have experienced within the millennials' Higher Education, but they proffer their ideas conceptually, without constraint to political or economic reality. One proposes that tuition fees are scrapped, and the finances replaced by taxing 'big businesses like Amazon that avoid it'. The other centres on improving the focus on employability within the university structure itself (Appendix A.6.7). As before, this exercise did not offer concrete efficacy outside of the dialogical space. However, the feedback offered by the participants, again, stressed the positive, cathartic effect such exercises had in that they were able to isolate a particular issue and think through their problems with these, as well as being able to envisage an (im)possible, utopic alteration to the system they perceived as flawed. This reflects Dolan's utopic performatives as 'moments of liminal clarity and communion' (Dolan, 2005, p.168) in which participants' 'mutual confrontation with a historical present […] lets them imagine a different, putatively better future' (168).

3.2.4   In-between Thought and Action

My intention preceding the workshops was to curate a dialogical space in which participants could de- and then re-construct the somewhat elusive concept of the millennial

Fig. 22. The first of the 'Five-Point Plans' provided by the participants during the second *Plan B* workshop, 8th November 2016.

Fig. 23. The second of the 'Five-Point Plans' provided by the participants during the second Plan B workshop, 8th November 2016.

in a format that I could mould into a performative event, pulling methodological approaches from the certain case studies in my use of 'gentle interaction'. However, the echo-chamber that was created from the limited participants restricted the intended disruption and, instead, led to the participants undergoing some form of cathartic experience in which the act of reconstructing and re-thinking certain structures offered, according to a number of participants, a form of therapeutic release. Through this, I began to understand that it was the specific structure of the practical exercises that allowed such engagement to occur, reflecting Scheff's third type of cathartic drama dividing the audience's attention (Scheff, 2001, p.57) between emotion and thought in my dividing the participants' attention between thought and action. As Dolan proposes, such performatives fill the space 'between logos and the body […] the gap in which performance inevitably, spectrally swirls' (Dolan, 2005, p.168). The liminality created by this oscillation between thought and action offered space for ideas of utopia to begin to emerge – the in-between-ness allowing for the "no place" to exist – despite the inherent ineffectuality of such structures outside of the liminal moment.

Following this revelation regarding the split between structured practical action and analytical discussion creating a liminal space, I asked the participants within a later workshop to work with me in creating an environment that, through limiting what participants could do, still offered space for them to speak their mind about certain topics and undergo the cathartic effect that they had experienced within the first two workshops. What emerged from such discussions was a workshop performance based around an activity that has been said to be having a millennial 'revival' (cf, Luk, 2016; Boycott-Owen, 2018) – the boardgame. At this stage, my intentions for developing 'reconstructive' forms of dialogical engagement had shifted towards providing a platform

that enabled space for each participant to voice their concerns. As I was to come to see, however, this shift minimised the effects that the simple, performative exercises which focused on reconstruction had in enabling and encouraging gentle dialogical interaction between participants.

3.2.5 *Plan B: Fixit* **Performative Workshop**

As the participants had confirmed, simple, cooperative, practical exercises had enabled their previous discussions to occur freely, and the oscillation between thought and action in such exercises then allowed, as per Scheff, cathartic responses to occur and, as per Dolan, notions of utopia to emerge. When I asked the participants what form of participatory structure that would best, in their opinion, facilitate further dialogical interchange, the discussion eventually settled on a format based on a boardgame. This partly emerged from anecdotal input regarding their own use of boardgames as a form of entertainment. The popularity of boardgame use by the millennial generation as a whole has been widely reported (cf. Graham, 2016) and, as Boycott-Owen suggests, is 'part of a trend – from books to vinyl, there is evidence of growing interest in the "real thing"' (Boycott-Owen, 2018). This shift towards analogue entertainment reflecting my earlier analysis of the resurgence of the importance of authenticity within the millennial structure of feeling.

As I still aimed to curate a performative event out of the exercises themselves, the boardgame format was envisaged as the foundations of a final performative workshop. This *Plan B* workshop acted as an experimental performance of a board-game inspired piece, with an intention to develop the performance for future, public productions. This workshop performance included six participants as a small test audience who would act

as what Jen Harvie terms 'prosumers' (Harvie, 2013, p.50) in that they would consume as well as produce the artwork through their interaction. The piece would, in its developed form, feature two actors as the 'living pawns', who could be swapped out at any time by an audience member, alongside one facilitator. There were no 'actors' in the workshop performance, as the intention was to investigate whether the performance structures were successful in facilitating dialogical, cathartic exchange, and, therefore, the two teams were made up completely of the few audience-participants. I undertook the role of facilitator, a form of 'boardgame host', responsible for instructing and scoring the game. I have provided the instructions from the workshop performance below in order to expand upon the structure of the piece and an edited recording can be viewed in <u>Appendix A.6.8</u>. I developed the format from two of the exercises I have detailed above in that the teams had to offer three 'reactions' to specific issues in order to progress around the board and, at the end of the board's progression-stage, the teams then had to work together to 'fix' a particular issue through a 'fool-proof' manifesto for the political party each had created.

The boardgame aesthetics utilised facilitated the creation of a seemingly dialogical space in which the prosumers' input was integral to the piece moving forward. In this respect, it was successful in my intention of developing The Gramophones' inclusion of the audience's input, in that their input in the *Plan B* workshop performance was *more* fundamental to the performance structure than that of the artists'. In the intended development of the piece more audience members would lead to further input and inclusion on a larger scale. As one participant remarked at the end of the workshop, 'opening a dialogue between not only the teams but the audience would create far richer and more raw [sic.] information'.

'PLAN B: FIXIT'

Board Game Instructions

- The audience becomes two teams, forming their own political 'parties' in order to work their 'living-pawn' around the game board and become the first team to the middle.

- In order to do this, each team (including the audience) must provide some input on the topic they have landed on. Within this workshop, these will be from the list of issues provided by the participants in the first workshop. In a further performance, these could be suggested via Twitter beforehand.

- At each topic a team's pawn lands on they must provide:
  - 1) a *Rant* about the particular topic. What makes you angry about this? Or are you angry that people are angry about this? What do you *need* to get off your chest? Tell us – we won't judge!
  - 2) a *Personal Story* relating to that topic. Has this topic affected you in any way? Do you have any first-hand experience of this? Would you care to share this with us so we can learn from this experience together?
  - 3) a *Joke* to lighten the mood. Life's already too depressing.

- Any member of the team of actor/audience members can provide these via the microphones on stage (and in the audience in possible later performances).

- These responses are scored by the facilitator/game-master. The number of points awarded dictates the number of squares the teams can move forward for that turn.

- There are 3 points available per response, meaning that you can get **up to** 9 points per turn. Points are decided by the game-master and are non-negotiable.

- Upon reaching the middle star, the points for each team are totaled up and are transformed into seconds. Each team then has as many seconds as points they collected to work together to fix a remaining issue through a fool-proof 5-point plan. Try to collect the most points to have the most time!

- The winning team is the one who 'fixes' the issue successfully. The team with the least points can still win the game (a bit like Quidditch)!

Fig. 24. Instructions used in the final performative workshop in the *Plan B* series: *Fixit.*

However, the dialogical nature of this performance is debatable and, as such, the process came into question during my development of the workshops. The format I used enabled no actual dialogue between the prosumers. In offering only a singular platform at a time, there is no conversation. By investigating aspects of the Listening Theatre, I was not only investigating the act of listening as a performative device but, as per Freinacht's political metamodernism, aiming to investigate how, as artists, we can come 'closer to the truth if we create better dialogues' (Freinacht, 2017, p.4). As such, I felt that the original intention of facilitating performative dialogical engagement was not present in this experiment. There *was* a level of teamwork at play in the creation of the manifestos towards the end of the game, but the particular structure did not facilitate dialogical *exchange*. Instead, it fell short of delivering dialogical engagement by focusing too much on practical structure rather than emphasising dialogue between participants. Through this structure, I had also removed the opportunity for participants to practically de- and re-construct particular conceptual structures which, as emphasised in their feedback from the politi-web exercise, enabled a form of cathartic release. Furthermore, the integral modality of oscillation between hope and scepticism that I have located within the Listening Theatre is absent from such a performative exercise. Whilst the fluctuation between the apparent authenticity of the input provided by the participants and the intentional arbitrariness of the point-scoring exhibited an oscillation between sincerity and irony reflective of metamodern sensibilities, there is no essential critique of the piece's own structure within the piece itself. It was therefore not reflective of the model of hope/lessness that I have located as essential to my understanding of emerging metamodern and millennial modalities in the Listening Theatre.

Fig. 25. One participant delivers a reply to one of the topics (seen hung at the back of the studio space) whilst the two 'living pawns' are on the game board in the *Plan B: Fixit* performative workshop. [Video still]

3.2.6 Failures and Shifts in Praxis

In the introduction to this thesis I illustrated how, during the development of my play *Twentysomething…* (2014), I began to identify millennial theatre companies that shared similar aesthetic and thematic approaches to my own work. I also detailed my original intentions in not only investigating what these other overlapping companies' concerns were and how they are affected by wider cultural shifts and generational structures, but how I could use these companies' similar methodologies to improve and develop my own practice. At this later stage in the research, I realised I needed to reassess what was achievable within the workshops and reorient the focus of my research to centre, again, on my own praxis. Whilst the *Plan B* workshops had focused on attempting to mould experimental exercises into a performance, rather than focus on the performance as an end result, this did not build on the strengths of my own previous practice as a director and playwright. As such, my own practice had become lost within the investigation and my own positioning as an artist located within the emerging paradigm that I have been tracing within this research became unclear. Instead, I returned to what had led me to researching the contemporary shifts within millennial-made theatre in the first place; understanding and developing my own practice. Through this significant shift, I could refocus the research to return to my original questions posited in my analysis of my previous practice concerning championing storytelling as a sincere attempt at forms of authentic connection between actor and audience and questioning the interplay between fiction and reality that such intimate storytelling can examine.

The main strengths of the exercises developed within the *Plan B* workshops were their ability to extract information from the participants through *gentle interaction*. These exercises got people talking whilst simultaneously recording physical, written evidence

of their thought processes during this. What the *Plan B* workshops produced, therefore, were a number of exercises that were particularly effective at generating input from participants. In my research following this series of workshops, I came to use Feat.Theatre's *The Welcome Revolution* (2018) as a case study. As detailed in Chapter One section 1.2, the tea parties Feat.Theatre use as part of this are performative events but also work largely to collect material that is then utilised in a following performance. This collected material is filtered through the modalities of the *acted* performance; combined with a mix of fictionalised and autobiographical text, and, at times, working to critique the efficacy of such engagement. Their dialogical engagement with their chosen communities is performative in itself but principally works as the catalyst for the subsequent performance that is given more importance than the tea parties as the 'real', ticketed production. Feat.Theatre's use of forms of social engagement as a means to generate material for use in a later performance then became influential in my restructuring of my own forms of gentle interaction to focus on collecting recorded input.

As detailed in Chapter One, all four case studies utilise certain aesthetics and modalities that, as per Jürs-Munby et al's designation, fall within the framework of postdramatic political theatre through their ability to open 'up a space for alternative realities to come into view [… through] the way that norms of discourse […] are disrupted' (Jürs-Munby et al, 2014, p.23). However, as I expressed in the introduction to this thesis regarding the companies' overlap with my own theatrical concerns, each case study appears to fluctuate between postdramatic structures and a return to forms of storytelling. Lung's disruption of the narrative structure of *E15* through the inclusion of the homeless man's interruption, for instance, is only effective in creating a jarring disconnect because of the strength of the storytelling it is interrupting. Similarly, Feat.Theatre's use of the audience as proto-

performers in *The Welcome Revolution* emphasises the collaborative, inviting nature of the storytelling being undertaken. This is reflective of Birgit Schuhbeck's 2012 consideration, which may be the first examination of contemporary theatre through a metamodern lens, in which she states that 'The mosaic structure of postmodernism is not appropriate anymore to represent the current developments in culture, the 'new' theater [sic.] feels the need to turn to seemingly 'old' traditions like […] *the pristine urge to tell stories*' (Schuhbeck, 2012, emphasis my own). By shifting the focus of my use of forms of gentle interaction towards generating material to use within later storytelling, I would be able to re-centre my current praxis which had shifted, in part, from my original research aim in utilising the methodologies located to develop my own previous practice. The following workshops, therefore, focused on facilitating gentle interaction developed from the exercises detailed above that fostered some form of cathartic or therapeutic experience for participants whilst, in return, generating material for the play that would become *Like Lions* (2018).

3.3   WHAT NOW? (2018)

3.3.1   Aims of the *What Now?* Workshops

Through reflection on the unforeseen outcomes of the *Plan B* workshops, I moved my attention away from attempting to use the practical methodologies extrapolated from the case studies to form a performance based upon experimental, dialogical engagement with millennial participants. Instead, I began to focus on utilising such modalities within a series of workshops that would supply new insight through participant-created material to form the foundations of a narrative. This final product would combine this input with both aesthetic modalities and practical tools adopted from the case studies, and my own developing practice through intimate storytelling. The intention of the *What Now?* series

of workshops was to modify a number of exercises developed within the previous workshops to enable millennial participants to engage in possibly therapeutic discussions around the concept of the mythical millennial in such a way as to produce qualitative, recorded input that could then become a primary resource for me as playwright.

The *What Now?* workshops were based on particular exercises detailed in section 3.2. In each instance, the participants would be tasked with reviewing a number of current articles about issues affecting millennials and asked to locate particular single-word themes from these. These themes would then be used within a simplified version of the 'politi-web' exercise from the *Plan B* workshops, with the participants providing emotive, personal and analytical reflections on each topic, before physicalising the interconnected web of issues. This would then be followed by the participants locating a topic of high importance, as according to them as individuals or small groups, and being tasked with devising an 'at once coherent and preposterous' (Turner, 2015) plan to 'fix' this issue. These exercises were intentionally chosen to be developed for the *What Now?* series for two reasons. Firstly, in reaction to the positive feedback received from the participants who took part in the first instances, in regard to being given the space to interrogate such structures and the cathartic response this induced. Secondly, because of the amount of written responses that these exercises could generate.

Taking a cue from my conversations with The Gramophones, I intended to offer overall control of the collection of these responses to the participants themselves. Inspired by the company's process developing *Wanderlust* (2015), I provided each participant with a jar at the end of each workshop and asked them to collect any of the written responses they thought would be worth saving, and therefore part of the development of a future

performance. The input they stored in their jars at the end of each workshop could be their own or that of others that affected them in some way. Any paper that was not collected by the participants was then recycled and removed from the process. In this respect, the foundations for the development of what would become *Like Lions* were produced, filtered and archived by the participants themselves. I was aware that any filtering of such input through the process of developing a narrative and subsequent script would mean that I, as playwright, would have an overarching agency in terms of what could and would be platformed within a final performance. Giving the participants the option to decide what ingredients should be considered in the following development was an attempt at allowing them further agency in the process to come.

3.3.2   Engaging with Millennials

In order to gather input from a range of millennials, I intended to run the *What Now?* workshops in four locations around the UK, generally covering the South West, the South East, the Midlands and the North. Each workshop was intended to take place within a major city, due to the concentration of millennials within such (Chapman, 2019). However, after lengthy negotiations with various venues, this was then limited to the University of Exeter and the University of East London. The two locations, however, offered a number of interesting differences. Whilst the cost of living in London is roughly 54% higher than in Exeter as of March 2019 (Expatisan, 2019), the former has also notably been labelled the 'best' place for 'creative millennials' (Lewis, 2017) due to the size of its creative economy and amount of rental properties available. From the same data, Exeter 'repeatedly appeared in the bottom of the pack across many of [the] ranking factors' (Lewis, 2017) including available housing and employment opportunities. Importantly, too, there are roughly two and a half million millennials living in London

(Lewis, 2017), whilst, at the time of the study, Exeter had the 'lowest population of Millennials living in the area' (Lewis, 2017). As such, in deciding upon the two final workshop locations, the dichotomy between these two areas, and the millennials' experiences of each indicated that interesting comparisons may be available in the input collected.

In order to obtain participants for the workshops, I ran an advertising campaign that focused predominantly on targeted social media adverts on Instagram and Facebook. For each workshop, adverts were targeted towards app users who were between 25 and 34 years of age, lived within 10 miles of the workshop location, 'likely to engage in political content' - whether this be, as per Facebook's terminology, conservative, liberal or moderate - and may have also shown interest in theatrical events in the past. Each advert across the platforms linked directly to an Eventbrite page, which explained the workshops in detail, including an FAQ, and encouraged those interested to book their free places for each event. Alongside the targeted social media advertising, I also contacted University Drama Departments and Student Unions, as well as alumni mailing lists, youth-engagement charities, and young political groups for each major political party to ask them to promote their local workshop, leading to the event also being promoted in private Facebook groups and a number of mailing lists. Alongside this, a press release was issued to local newspapers that emphasised the fact that each workshop would offer space for local millennials to 'voice their issues, concerns and thoughts about the future' (Pregnant Fish Theatre, 2018c), in response to recent figures stating that over half of 25 – 35-year-olds feel 'overwhelmed' and are 'struggling to cope' (First Direct, 2018). Interestingly, however, no local newspapers or websites decided to publish this or catalogue them within in their upcoming event listings. It was, however, accepted on a number of local
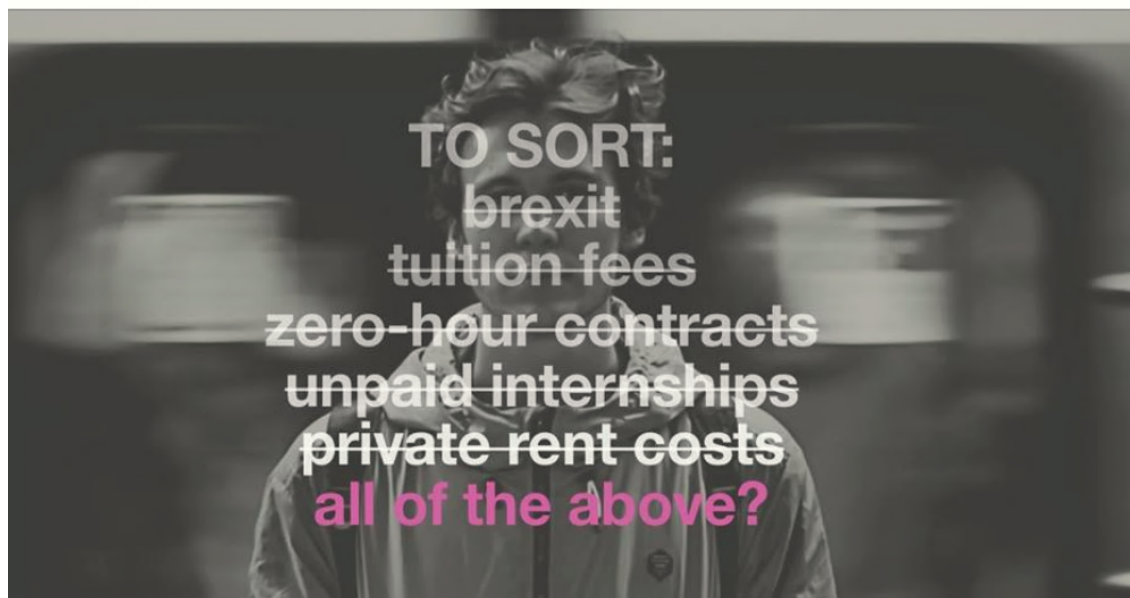
Fig. 26. Example of Facebook timeline advert targeted towards users based in London and aged between 25 – 34 who have previously engaged with political content.

event listing sites, including Visit Devon (2018) and The List (2018). I also produced printed leaflets, which were handed to local cafes, pubs, and businesses frequented by local millennials, as well as theatres and community art centres.

As can be seen on the below leaflet, I framed each event as a 'workshop of ideas' that would offer participants the opportunity to discuss their 'worries and thoughts about the world […] in a relaxed, fun and friendly atmosphere', alongside an intention of 'working out what to do about it'. It was made clear from the promotional media that the workshops would function as the beginnings of a new play to be performed later in the year, and that no previous experience would be necessary to take part in the workshops.

In total, the recorded number of people the targeted advertising on both Facebook and Instagram reached was 6,387, which does not account for people who were reached via other sources such as the private Facebook groups, mailing lists and leaflets. As such, I can assume that this number may have been significantly higher. From this, a total of 16 people showed interest in the Exeter workshop by either reserving a space on Eventbrite or by replying to the equivalent Facebook event page. The corresponding amount for the later London workshop was 33. Despite this level of online engagement, however, the actual number of attendees for the Exeter workshop was just two and, in London, three. The reasons for this are difficult to determine. Despite an urge to relate such a poor turnout to what we have ascribed as the 'millennial myth', in so far as the culturally ingrained conception of millennials as lazy, there is no actual evidence to support such a claim in regard to this specific occurrence. There may have been any number of reasons for the disparity between the intended and actual participant numbers, but without data from each respondent to the adverts, these cannot be determined. Suffice to say that, despite a high
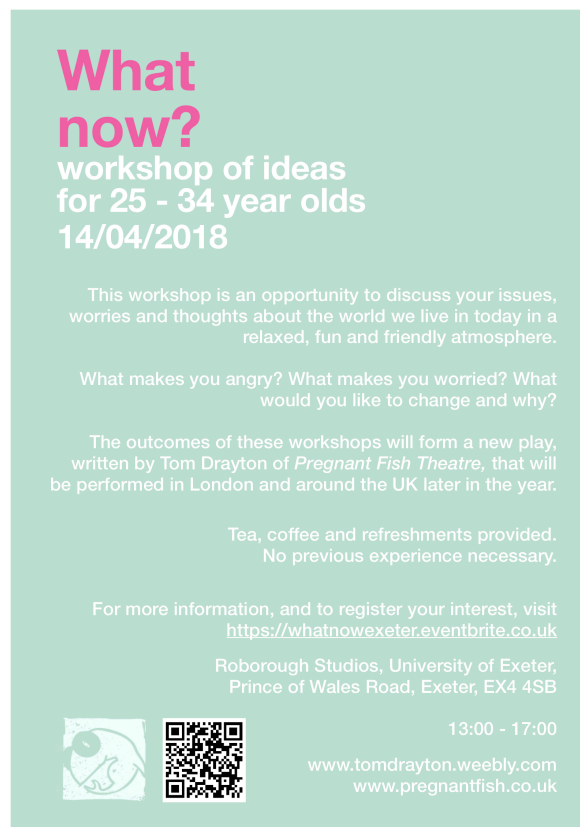
Fig. 27. Copy of the leaflets used to advertise the *What Now?* Exeter workshop, April 2018.

level of engagement from the advertising campaign, the pool of workshop participants was severely limited. As such, the amount of data retrieved from the workshops was minimal, however, the detail of the input received and the repetition of particular issues within the responses led to me deriving six particular themes which were then used in the foundations of the *Like Lions* project, as detailed in the next section.

3.4   RESPONSES TO THE *WHAT NOW?* WORKSHOPS

Reflective of the responses from the earlier *Plan B* workshops that stated that homeownership was a 'target' but 'not [possible] in England', in the material the participants collated in the *What Now?* sessions, there were a number of references to the concept of millennials being unable to get on the housing market, and failings in the employment options available to them. One jar of input archived by a participant contained a slip of paper on which I had written the statement of a participant in response to the rental system in London, simply stating that the 'System [is] set up for <u>profit</u> & not to live'. In addition, the manifesto created by the two Exeter participants was centred upon their own 'implement[ion of] a better social & council housing system'. There were also a number of points collected which reflect particular themes running throughout what I discerned as the millennial structure of feeling within Chapter Two, particularly that of anxiety built on feelings of failure through a comparison to both older generations and 'distorted' versions of others through social media, as well as an anxiety built on the precarity of their economic situations, the fear of missing out on life experiences others might be having, and a focus on experiential consumerism – or, as one participant describes it, 'as long as I have my travel distractions, I am happy'.

Fig. 28. Two participants and I take part in the 'Politi-web' exercise during the *What Now?* workshop at The University of Exeter, 14th April 2018. [Video still]

Fig. 29. Me discussing with the participants about how they found the process of the *What Now?* workshop at The University of East London, 28th April 2018. [Video still]
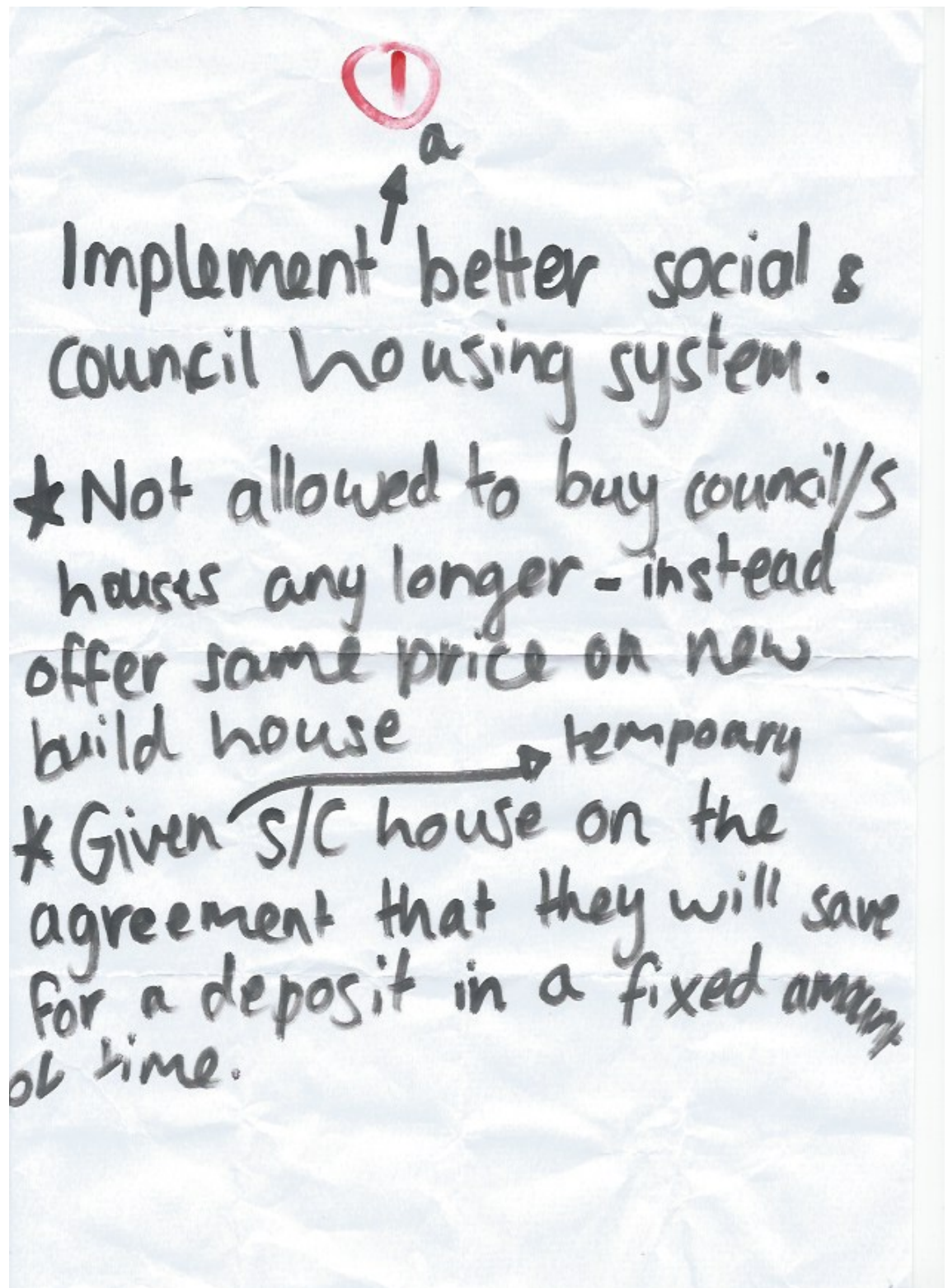
Fig. 30. 'Manifesto' to improve the millennial housing situation, as created by participants during the *What Now?* workshop at The University of Exeter, 14th April 2018.

Importantly, too, there were a number of responses collected by the participants that I see as reflective of the missing metamodern both/and dynamic between irony and sincerity. This included one participant's interpretation of some form of 'fate' - 'remind yourself […] what is meant to be will be' (Fig. 31), which indicates an acceptance of, or belief in, some form of overarching metanarrative. Whilst, in the same jar, the participant had also included another response about a seemingly blasé reaction to the inherent anxiety experienced by a number of participants – 'Anxiety but also "meh… I'll worry about it later"' (Fig. 31).

There was also a notable amount of archived material that related to the idea of the dichotomy between the 'real' and the 'constructed', which appeared to stem from the discourse in the workshop surrounding social media as well as the act of constructing the 'politi-web' within the session itself. Participant input such as 'False reality', 'Fake success', 'False illusion', and the repeated use of the word 'Freedom', indicates some form of thinking around the constructed nature of particular ('fake' or 'false') realities. When this is coupled with the input specifically concerning social media, the paradoxical positioning in terms of understanding that the lives of others on such platforms are false constructs, and yet comparing yourself to this 'false illusion of what you should be', comes to the forefront. I see such a positioning as indicative of an inherent, yet subconscious, metamodern understanding in terms of paradoxical belief in something you know not to be true. As such, when viewed as a whole, the input collated by the participants reveals threads of concerns that I see as reflective of those which I locate in the metamodern structure of feeling. These appear to support my earlier association between the millennial and metamodern as structures of feeling: a paradoxical belief in

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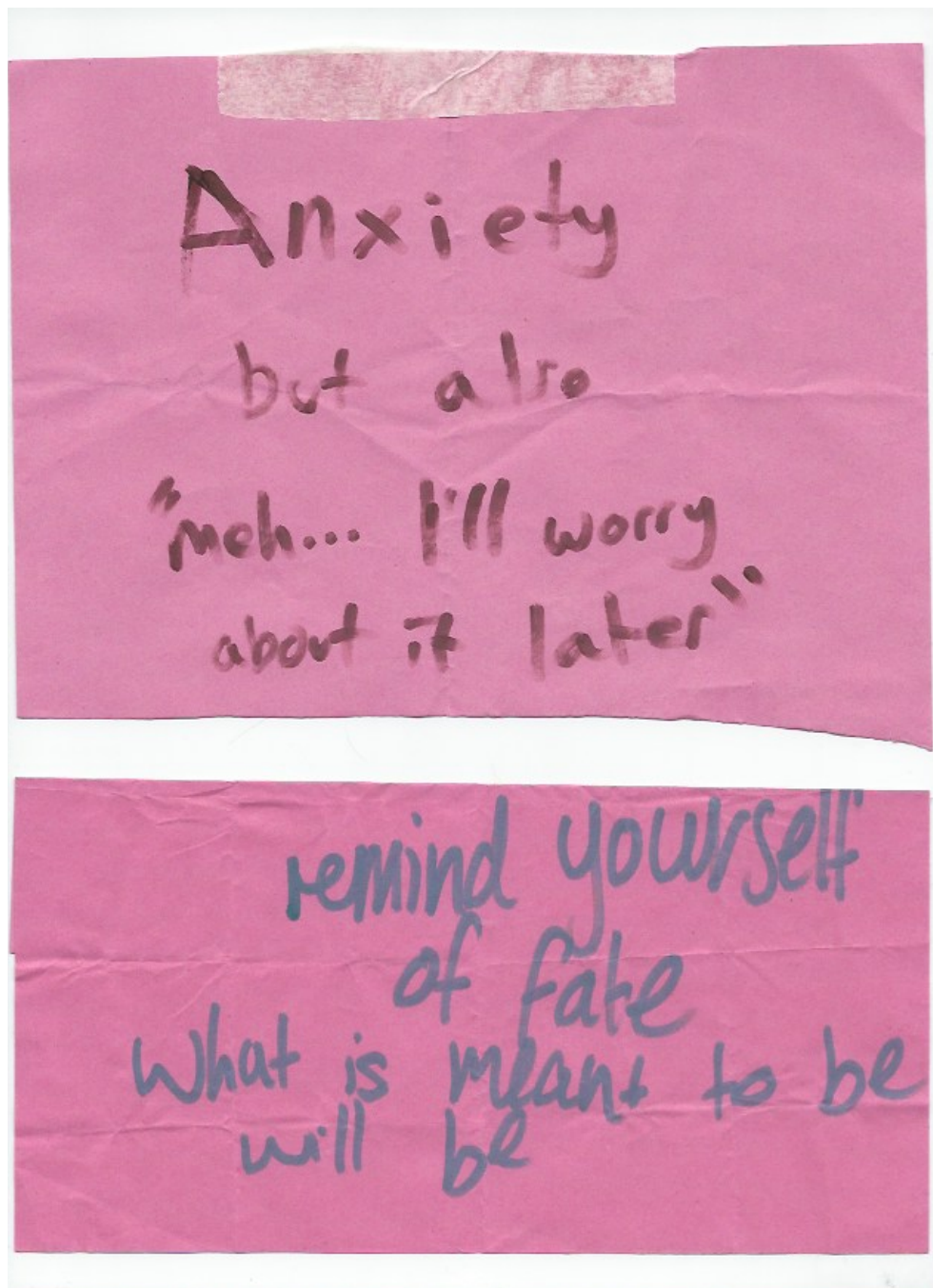
Fig. 31. Responses collected by a participant and 'archived' in a jar at the *What Now?* workshop at The University of Exeter, 14th April 2018.

particular narratives whilst being aware of their falsity, an interest in the concept of the authentic, and positions that oscillate between sincere hope and as-sincere cynicism.

3.5   OUTCOMES

Whilst the amount of input gained from the second series of workshops was limited due to the small number of participants, the material that was collected generated some interesting reflections on modes of thought that ran through my preceding research into the millennial generation as a structure of feeling, supporting my thinking about such a structure through more detailed, individualistic insight. In analysing this input against the initial research, I began to see how certain responses captured by the participants reflected particular issues I had located as either part of the metamodern or millennial structures of feeling. By organising the responses into loose groupings, I then located six particular threads that ran throughout the responses to both series of workshops. Through locating these overarching topics, I was able to distil the responses into workable themes that I could then use as the basis of the script that would become *Like Lions*, through further research into, and development of my thinking around, such thematics.

Firstly, this included a focus on the participants' inferring that they feel as though they have a ***lack of an authentic identity*** as, or maybe within, a generation, in that the 'millennial' has been constructed by those outside the millennial bracket, and is, as per analysis in Chapter Two, predominantly used within a negative, mythical frame. This is also related to the act of comparing themselves to, what they know to be, *false constructs* of others on social media, which, in turn, affects how they see themselves, despite the acknowledged untruth of such an act.

Fig. 32. Responses collected by participants during the *What Now?* workshop at The University of East London, 28th April 2018.

Alongside this, there was a repeated emphasis on what I have labelled *geographical issues,* including; an anxiety induced by the complications arising from the 2016 EU referendum result; the migration of millennials to larger cities, the inability for a significant portion of millennials to leave their parents' homes, the complications arising from renting shared accommodation and the effects that being constantly ready to move has on your living arrangements, and the perceived impossibility for some of the participants to ever become property owners.

Following this, the concept of *constructed realities* was also present throughout the responses. I use this term to refer to issues surrounding; the construction of the mythical millennial, and the participants' positioning within this, the strength of the physicalised metaphor of the de- and re-construction of the conceptual 'polti-web' within the workshops, and the paradoxical complications arising from understanding the constructed nature of online image crafting.

Further importance was placed on an underpinning theme of *anxiety induced by precarity*, specifically in relation to precarity in labour, wages, and therefore accommodation, but also, on a lesser scale in the responses collected, the precarity of the British political system in general and the ecological precarity concerning the climate crisis.

I also saw reflections of Mark Fisher's *lost futures* in responses concerning participants feeling like a 'failure' and wondering 'what the point' of having obtained a degree had been, echoing Emma Gannon's remarks that millennials 'were sold a career ladder that

doesn't exist anymore' (Thompson, 2018), alongside archived responses such as '(Lack of) hope for the future' and 'broken society'.

Connected to this, there were also repeated instances of issues that I saw as reflecting ideas of **utopia** as per Dolan's description of the utopic being 'always a metaphor, always a wish, a desire' (2005, p.170). Through this, I particularly refer to my locating of the metamodern in the current divisive political discourse of it *can be different* (cf. Krumsvik & Co, 2017) outside of the current construct. Such responses may have been born out of the focus on reconstruction within the politi-web exercise. Such thinking reflecting the theme of the utopic was particularly notable in the manifestos created as part of the two *What Now?* workshops, in the first group's focus on reworking the social housing system in such a way as to support the millennial generation, to the second's attempt to, in their words, (re)create a shared identity within a divided country.

I then applied these six main concerns as the central thematic strands in the writing of *Like Lions*, using them as both starting points for further research and narrative development as well as continual anchor points within the piece's progress to ensure it continued to explore and platform the central themes of the participants' collected input. In the next chapter, I detail my development of these potential themes into the play's narrative. I will then specify my application of further practical tools extrapolated from the case studies within the staging of the piece. Finally, I will offer an analysis of *Like Lions* as an innovative form of metamodern performance that develops practical methodologies located within the theatre of the millennials and proposes a 'new kind of storytelling' (Minnit, 2018) based on an inherent metamodern oscillation between sincerity and irony, hope and hopelessness.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIKE LIONS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter details how I combined the input gathered from both the *Plan B* and *What Now?* workshops with the interrelated concerns and practical methodologies I located in the original case studies. Through these works' central ***oscillation*** between optimism and doubtfulness and continued endeavours towards either staging the ***authentic*** or forms of authentic ***engagement***, I was able to develop the aspects of my practice I problematised at the start of my research regarding a fluctuation between the fictive and the 'true' within intimate forms of storytelling. In order to develop this, I applied particularly metamodern sensibilities concerning ***meta-reflexivity*** and ***oscillation*** onto a theatrical frame as practical methodological tools. Using these to aid the development of my own practice enabled me to create new theatrical forms of storytelling through the metamodern modalities of the Listening Theatre. This included structuring a piece in such a way as to highlight how it was created and platform the 'authentic' elements within its fiction, writing characters that exhibit a hope/less oscillation, and working with actors to develop a style of performance that allowed them to fluctuate between non/acting, the fictive and the real. This culminated in me writing and directing a new play, *Like Lions*, which was produced with Pregnant Fish Theatre at The Bread and Roses Theatre, London, in October 2018.

4.1.1 (A Return to) Storytelling (With Substance)

My 2014 play, *Twentysomething: A Reading List*, advanced the methodological approach I had developed with Pregnant Fish Theatre that aimed to move beyond the 'chaotic fertil[ity]' (Hurtsfield, 2019) of postmodern performance forms by re-centring the act of storytelling and emphasising an intimate connection with the audience. The piece required the audience to deliberately commit to the narrative at play, through empathetic engagement of, as per one review, 'the audience's sympathy [by the actors] persuading us that they are sincere [characters]' (Jarman, 2014), whilst also simultaneously forcing them to consciously acknowledge the performativity of the narrative at play through disjointed chronology and direct audience address. In developing my practice, I was interested in how this paradoxical positioning could be advanced further. Could I get an audience to both genuinely empathise with a fictional narrative whilst they were also forced by the actors' continual 'stepping' in and out of character to acknowledge the fictionality and construct of the piece? According to Eshelman, such performance would require the audience to 'identify with it more or less involuntarily – even if [they] still remain […] incredulous about its basic premises' (Eshelman, 2008, p.13). The act of re-centring storytelling within performance through Eshelman's 'performatist framing' (2) would allow me to create work that '*perform*[s] belief […], even while understanding the postmodern doubt about such notions' (Dember, 2018). Through this, I aimed to negotiate a performative mode that paradoxically oscillated between the fictional and the 'authentic' through intimate, storytelling-focused theatre.

During reflection on the difficulties of my performative workshops, I returned to my previous practice as a playwright and director in order to develop what would become *Like Lions*. Whilst I felt that my own practice had become lost in the research during the

Plan B (2016) workshops, my restructured engagement in the following *What Now?* (2018) workshops had provided valuable insight into other millennials' thoughts on the mythical millennial construct. By locating concerns that recurred throughout these responses, I had defined a number of themes that I decided could be used as narrative premises in a new *story*. Through fictionalising these themes within a scripted production, I could advance the aspects of my own practice I wished to develop through this research.

In discussing my return to the aspects of my practice focused on re-centring a transferential act of storytelling in theatre, I also want to highlight the communal aspects tied to the act of storytelling. Building upon Anne Bogart's concept of an 'empathetic bridge' (Bogart, 2015) being constructed between audience and actor through storytelling, I also want to draw upon Brian McConachie's use of Raymond Williams' structure of feeling to describe an 'aura of an inclusive community' (McConachie, 1998) generated through storytelling-centric performance. In the introduction to this thesis, I described the communal feel created between actors and audience that was created during performances of *Twentysomething: A Reading List* at The Rusty Bike pub in Exeter. Through sharing their character's story directly with the audience, the two actors were able to affect a 'cheerful [and] uplifting […] atmosphere at The Rusty Bike' (Jarman, 2014) in such a way as the audience felt able to comment on the unfolding action (see p.1). Through 'returning to' storytelling in the development of *Like Lions*, I also intended to develop the use of storytelling as 'one way to create and strengthen a sense of community' (Zipes, 2013, p.4) within the event frame of the performance.

Birgit Schuhbeck reflects my own concern with (a return to) storytelling as indicative of a theatrical shift beyond postmodernity when she observes a 'comeback' of performances

that 'put the focus on logic, psychological motivation and straight-forward narration' (Schuhbeck, 2012). Such re-centring of storytelling seemingly indicates a 'return to traditional elements, but is, in fact, a very contemporary tendency' (Schuhbeck, 2012). This new theatre can 'no longer be reduced to being taboo-breaking and 'risk-taking'' (Schuhbeck, 2012) but, instead, 'turns towards 'real' people with real problems' (Shubeck, 2012) and, as such, is 'regaining' its political agency, 'which was theatre's main task from the beginning' (Schuhbeck, 2012). Such reappraisal of the importance of traditional, narrative elements reflects the metamodern return to certain tendencies which cannot be ascribed to the postmodern, whilst Eshelman's performatist framing allows an audience within the metamodern paradigm to simultaneously remain sceptical and, paradoxically, embrace such modalities. A new piece that would develop my previous practice, intentionally utilises metamodern aesthetics, and applies the practical modalities and theatrical concerns of my millennial case studies would intentionally advance metamodern theatrical forms and pave the way for new modes of practice built upon the millennial and the metamodern.

4.2   TAMING THE LIONS

In this section, I offer a brief account of how I developed the narrative of *Like Lions*, from the *What Now?* workshops to the final performance, whilst the narrative itself and, subsequently, the structure and staging of the piece, will be analysed and critiqued in sections 4.3 and 4.4.

4.2.1   From Millennial Concerns to a Metamodern Narrative

In order to develop a performance narrative that interrogated millennial concerns, I began with the six recurring themes that I had located in the input collected in the *What Now?*

workshops. These included; ***Geographical / Locational issues***, by which I refer to issues such as the propensity for millennials to be trapped in the rental market / in shared housing / living with their parents / moving to major cities / being unable to move to major cities / concerned about the repercussions of the 2016 Referendum on the UK's exit from the European Union; an interest in working towards forms of ***utopia***, despite an inherent awareness of, and cynicism arising from, the problematics of this; ***constructed realities***, in regards to their awareness of Online Image Crafting and the concept of the 'politi-web'; curiosity towards the concept of the ***authentic***, perhaps in response to the previous concern; ***anxiety produced by precarity*** within labour models in particular; and an elaboration of Mark Fisher's ***lost futures,*** in that millennials appeared to believe they were sold a future that doesn't exist anymore.

Throughout my research into the case studies' interconnected modalities, the metamodern and the millennial, the concept of the authentic and attempts to reach such an elusive term were repeated motifs. As I had collected material input through the two series of workshops, I decided to use these as verbatim lines within the performance in order to explore authenticity within the staging. This was influenced by Lung, The Gramophones and Feat.Theatre's respective uses of authentic, verbatim material in their work. In my parallel analysis of their productions, I observed a repeated choice for each company to make clear to the audience as to where such 'real' input ended, and the fiction of the narrative began. Lung frame their verbatim work as documentary theatre, with each line clearly originating from their subjects. The Gramophone's *Playful Acts of Rebellion* (2014) mixed the company members' experiences with audiences' input, with the cast clearly explaining the truth in each. Feat.Theatre used the input gained through their tea
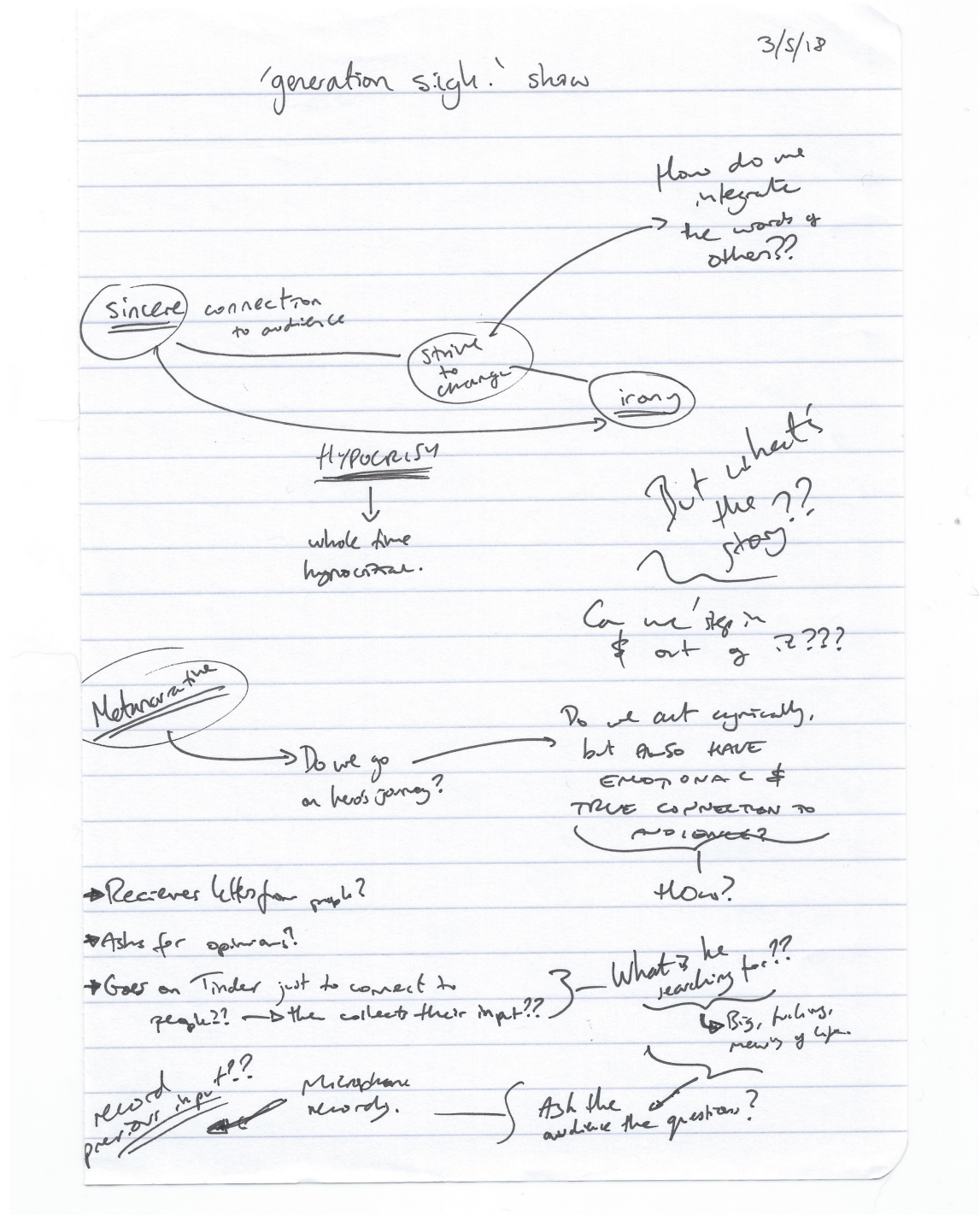
Fig. 33. Excerpt from notebook outlining preliminary ideas regarding how to tie together the themes taken from the *What Now?* workshops. Note the focus on an oscillation between sincerity/irony and acting/non-acting, alongside the attention to the idea of metanarrative as a 'hero's journey' as well as a search for meaning in the character's lives.

parties in such a way as to emphasise the authenticity of the responses whilst also fictionalising the tea parties themselves.

From these influences, I decided that, whilst the six main concerns above would form the basis of the fictional narrative, verbatim input from the workshops could be performed in such a way as to frame it authentically in that the actors would relay real responses to the workshops. From this, I was then able to pinpoint how I would be able to structure the fluctuation between the 'real' and the 'fictional' within the conversational form of storytelling I wished to explore. If the actors were going to reference the responses to the workshop, they would be consequently referencing the construction of the performance itself. Through this, they could relate to the audience how the narrative, characters and actions within the performance were developed from such responses.

Such metatheatrical elements (cf. Zarilli et al, 2010, p.599) allowed the work to interrogate Dember's notion of meta-reflexivity (2018). Diverging from a postmodern application of metatheatrical elements to 'draw attention to the way that the author's own perspectives, flaws or belief systems may distort any meaning that might be drawn from the work' (Dember, 2018), a more contemporary metamodern application highlights the 'the author's [in this case, both myself *and* the millennial participants'] own lived, inner experience' (Dember, 2018), which, by extension, provides 'a model for the reader's own self-reflection' (Dember, 2018). Metamodern metatheatricality not only highlights the construction of a performance as it would in a postmodern application but brings focus to the audience's 'felt experience' (cf. Dember, 2018) in their viewing of the piece. In allowing my actors to frequently step 'out of character' in order to discuss the construct

of the piece itself, I would also create instances in which they could refer to the audience's

own felt experience regarding such a performance;

> JACOB: But what do you care? We are just playing characters - in
> a play - in a room where you are sat expecting something
> more than this (<u>Appendix A.6.10.1</u>).

In framing the performance around instances in which the actors could contextualise the

performance against the series of workshops, I was able to create a clear structure in

which I could further develop the forms of storytelling focused on the portrayal of

simultaneous fiction and non-fiction which I had begun to identify in *Twentysomething…*

four years earlier.

In order to do this, however, I also required a narrative in which I could investigate the

six main concerns I had located in the workshop responses. I also wanted to examine

whether I could create an intentionally metamodern performance by using the

metamodern aesthetics and concerns I had located through my research in the design of

the structure of the piece, as well as its later staging. Specifically, this included an

oscillation between disparate polarities, stemming from my interest regarding the

fluctuation between the fictional and the authentic in performative storytelling and

highlighted in the oscillation between hope and hopelessness I had located throughout

works in the Listening Theatre frame. Through making reference to the construction of

the performance, I would be utilising Dember's meta-reflexivity and, by asking the

audience to simultaneously 'commit' (cf. Eshelman, 2008, p.3) to the story despite

emphasising the unreality of such, I would also be engaging with elements of Eshelman's

performativity or 'double framing' (3). Following this, I had therefore defined the below

list of concerns that I intended to use in the development of the both the content and form

of the performance;

Fig. 34. Responses collected by participants during the *What Now?* workshop at The University of East London, 28th April 2018. Each of these six responses were used in the script of *Like Lions*.

<u>List of subjects I intended to include</u>

- Lost Futures
- The Strive for Utopia
- Lack of identity
- Geographical / Locational Issues
- Anxiety induced by Precarity
- The Authentic / Constructed Realities / Kant's Transcendental Aesthetics
- The 'Mythical Millennial'
- Oscillation (Sincerity / Irony; Hope / Hopelessness)
- Meta-Reflexivity
- Performativity / The Double Frame

To develop these strands into a performance that focused largely on telling a story, I had to first focus on developing that particular narrative. I turned to Scarlett Thomas, author of her self-labelled ''Postmodernism is Rubbish' trilogy' (Thomas, 2014 in Sánchez, 2014, p.155), for inspiration for this, having previously used her method of ideation (idea-generation) (cf. Thomas, 2004) to develop narratives. Whilst I had drawn conceptual links between each of the above topics in my research, making thematic links within a narrative, character driven structure required a different mode of thought. In order to access this, I utilised Thomas' concept of the creative matrix (cf. Thomas, 2012). This method of narrative-development is based on the premise that, rather than attempting to generate material from nowhere, 'our imaginations are very good at doing new things with specific material we give them' (199). By collating information and ideas from the above list in a matrix, the development of a narrative becomes a task of drawing connections between subjects, as though solving a puzzle.

Thomas' matrices, however, are not built only on topics that interest the writer at the time of planning, but, importantly, include 'their experiences, ideas and feelings around various characters, work in any philosophical views they have, along with their hobbies

and interests and unique world views' (200). As such, an ideation matrix becomes a table of ingredients unique to the writer's own experiences which can be drawn together to form the narrative. The inclusion of my own positioning within such was important to me, as I am fully imbricated within this research as both a member of the millennial generation and as an artist working within the frames I am discerning. I have reproduced the matrix I produced for *Like Lions* below, built from Thomas' instructions (404). In order to distinguish between my own input and the input gained in the research, the former is in blue text whilst the latter is orange.

Through this method of ideation, I developed the two characters and basic narrative structure of *Like Lions*. By connecting the millennial and metamodern concerns with my own experience, I developed a plot that revolved around a set of twins. This allowed me to examine the different responses relayed to me in the workshops regarding degree degradation; exemplified by two characters from the same background having different educational experiences but finding themselves in similar precarious employment. Jacob could quit University due to his lack of identity within the system, finding himself working as a Barista. Sam, instead, would graduate and work in a school, giving me space to incorporate my own knowledge around the poverty experienced by children I have worked with in my local London Borough of Newham. This could, in turn, be the catalyst for Sam to become politically active. Such political activism could then draw upon the development of the Momentum campaign, which was at its height at the time of my research, and explore the large millennial-aged support base for Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader at the time, a campaign that is currently reapplying the metanarrative of socialism in a contemporary political climate; calling for a utopia. I could then juxtapose this against

Character names	4 locations you know well	Jobs you have done (or identities you have had)	Problems you have faced	Skills / Knowledge you have	What do you worry about?	List your 4 favourite novels and one reason you liked them	What are your current obsessions?
Theo	West Ham, London	Student	Lack of solid employment opportunities	Skateboarding (?)	Being a good enough boyfriend & friend	The Dark Tower by Stephen King. An epic, sprawling mess that includes other universes which relate to other books.	Cults – very interested in Heaven's Gate & how two v. usual looking people got people so enthralled
Alice		Barista	Not knowing if I'm doing enough / the right thing	Drawing	Overpopulation / Ecological crisis		The Millennial Generation (mythos)
Pve	Torridge area, North Devon	Lecturer / Drama Teacher	Not feeling close to family for various reasons	Skiing	Animal Welfare	Our Tragic Universe by Scarlett Thomas. Down to earth story w/ interesting ideas & weirdness seeping through.	Trying to understand Metamodernism OSCILLATION
Alex		Boyfriend / Son	Girlfriend's family breakup	Metamodernism!	Neoliberalism		The Magnetic North's Prospect of Skelmersdale album
Jacob	Worcester	Primary School Teaching Assistant	Lack of identity (individual & generation)	Theatre & Directing	Becoming old and having wasted my youth / body	The Art of Fielding by Chad Harbach. Campus novel w/ expertly written believable characters.	Meta-reflexivity / The Double Frame
Jayda		Director	Anxiety induced by Precarity	The Mythical Millennial	Suspended adulthood		Lost Futures – Mark Fisher's concept re: futures that we long for but don't exist anymore
Sam	Exeter, Devon	Stage Hand	Geographical / Locational issues (Rent / Home / Cities)		Fear of Missing Out / Social Media Comparison	A Little Life by Hanya Yanagihara. So enveloping; love the characters, very emotional and also epic but tiny.	Kant's Transcendental Aesthetics
		Millennial	Precarious Labour		Utopia / Constructed Realities		

Fig. 35. Reproduction of completed ideation matrix produced at the initial planning stages of *Like Lions* as per Scarlett Thomas' 'Novel Matrix' (Thomas, 2012, p.408). Personal input is coloured blue, whilst input from research and workshops is orange.

Jacob searching for a different kind of truth, brought on from him being obsessed with an alternative reality. This would then allow me to apply my own adaptation of Kant's transcendental aesthetics, which would highlight the impossibility of reaching particular utopias whilst also sincerely striving towards them.

Through finding thematic connections between the subjects in this matrix, I began to construct concrete character and narrative points that examined the thematics drawn from my research. However, I was concerned that the plot of the piece was lacking. I began the process with the intention of investigating meta-reflexivity through Eshelman's performatism. Because of this, I wanted to create a narrative that had some form of fantastical element (cf. Eshelman, 2008, p.3), drawing me to including Kant's theories of transcendental aesthetics through some form of utopian longing. But how could these fit together in a cohesive, character driven way? And how could I incorporate the important sense of lost futures that I saw as embedded within a majority of the millennial responses to the workshops, as a central thematic within the piece? My thinking appeared to oscillate between the concept of future (hopeful) utopias and an obsession with lost (hopeless) futures, but I could not formulate a concrete story device which incorporated the two in a meaningful way. I was to find, however, that the answer to this problem would be found in a satellite town on the outskirts of Liverpool, who's strange history incorporated both; Skelmersdale.

Fig. 36. Excerpt from notebook with ideas for character called 'No'. Certain factors, including a focus on the *Ding An Sich* and the importance of a friend's death in the character's own narrative carried on over to Jacob's final characterisation.

Fig. 37. Excerpt from notebook with more defined ideas for characters that would become Sam and Jacob. Note the idea for the final scene between the twins on the right-hand page, in which Jacob gets Sam to try on his blue sunglasses, which carried on over to the final script. Also noteworthy is the connection between the idea of separate universes between the 'real' (actors), the 'performed' (characters) and the 'Noumenal' (imagined).

4.2.2   The Lost Futures of Skelmersdale's Utopia

The Magnetic North's 2016 album, *Prospects of Skelmersdale* was developed around band member Simon Tong's experience having moved to the Lancaster town with his parents in 1984. Reflective of a number of aesthetic modalities that have held my attention within this research, Paul Scraton's review of the album describes it as 'filled with story-telling, reporting, memory, myth, (re)imaginings and descriptive beauty' (Scraton, 2016). It was through being exposed to this album around the time I created my ideation matrix that I was introduced to the history of the town of Skelmersdale and, subsequently, how the multifaceted thematic connections drawn from this became metaphorical foundations for the narrative of *Like Lions*.

The town of Skelmersdale encapsulates Mark Fisher's conceptual lost futures through its complicated evolution over the last 50 years. Designated a New Town in 1961 (BBC Lancashire, 2011), Skelmersdale, or Skem as it is known locally, was (re)built to handle the overspill from the increasing population of the northern Merseyside area (Koncienzcy-SOU, 2015). In *Like Lions*, Jacob distils the narration of Skelmersdale Development Corporation's 1971 film promoting the town, *Prospect of Skelmersdale* – from which The Magnetic North took their album title, as follows;

> They designed the town completely from the ground up. Houses far enough away from factories. Every home with a garden. Pedestrianised walkways all over town. Playgrounds. Trees. Dining rooms.
>
> A modern utopia. Just two miles off the M6.
>
> They restructured the idea of a town. The *ideal* of a town.
>
> (Appendix A.5)

The result of such planning was a 1960s vision of utopia made manifest in concrete, in which upwardly mobile, working-class families from Liverpool could secure a 'new
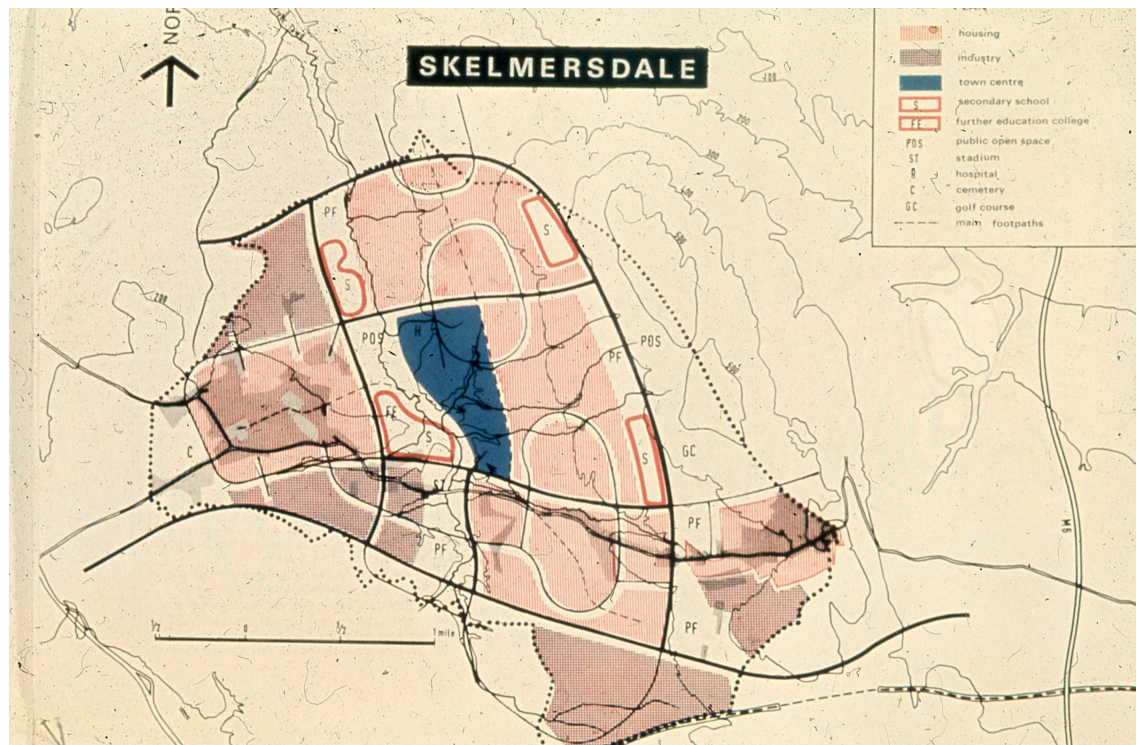
Fig. 38. A figure used in a lecture from JR James at the Department of Town and Regional Planning at The University of Sheffield between 1967 and 1978. Copyright: The JR James Archive. Reproduced under the CC BY-NC 2.0 licence. Available at: shorturl.at/abQZ4 (Accessed 6 December 2019)

home and a garden – something unheard of for many then living in terrace houses in the city' (Pattinson, 2011). The purposefully pedestrianised streets meant that cars skirted around the town through a series of roundabouts in order for children to walk safely around the town, through what the Liverpool Echo would later described as 'airport like underpasses serv[ing] as dark, oppressing channels linking up the housing areas' (Guy, 2016). Reflecting this shift in tone, Skem quickly fell from grace. It was cut off from Liverpool by having no railway connections and only ever reached around half of its intended population of 80,000 (tcpa, 2019). The discrepancy between the town's contemporary inhabitants' experiences and its utopic origins has even led to conspiracy theories detailing the secret placement of an 'Aspiration Dispersal Field [ADF] generator' (Guy, 2016) by scientists investigating mind-reading technologies, which could produce a low-frequency sound that made the inhabitants of the town 'despondent and sapped of all ambition' (Guy, 2016).

Skelmersdale's history of attempted utopia, however, does include a similarly eccentric addition to the ideal village, but one that is based in historical fact. In September 1980, Skelmersdale was chosen by the followers of guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to house 'The European Sidhaland' at the Golden Dome of Enlightenment, which opened in 1988 (Maharishi Foundation, 2019). This utopian community practices Transcendental Meditation (TM) and Vedic philosophy. In direct opposition to the mythical ADF generator, and perhaps what birthed that myth in the first place, the group believe that if they were to meditate in a great enough number, their effort 'raises collective consciousness in the population and generates a peaceful and harmonising effect on the world' (Maharishi Foundation, 2019). Such utopic practice is constructed around the custom of Yogic Flying, which consists of meditators bouncing 'three to five feet off the

Fig. 39. A figure used in a lecture from JR James at the Department of Town and Regional Planning at The University of Sheffield between 1967 and 1978. Copyright: The JR James Archive. Reproduced under the CC BY-NC 2.0 licence. Available at: shorturl.at/abQZ4 (Accessed 6 December 2019)

ground while sitting in the lotus position' (Pearson, 2004). One practitioner describes this as 'a state of bliss that, if instituted on a large scale, would bring irreversible peace to the world, seriously […] A route to an enlightened utopia no matter where you are' (Pearson, 2004). According to the Maharishi's followers, it is through such 'flying' that a world-wide utopia could be created. As director David Lynch, famously a practitioner of TM, asserts; 'If the square root of 1% of the world's population practiced Yogic Flying […] we could create world peace. That's all we need. That's 8,000 people' (Pearson, 2004).

The Golden Dome of Enlightenment, and the attached Maharishi Free School that specialises in 'Consciousness-based Education' (Maharishi School, 2015), are still in operation today, however, the popularity has decreased from its initial waves of incoming, ambitious meditators (cf. Christie, 2012). When journalist Caroline Christie, who grew up in the TM community of Skelmersdale, returned a number of years later in 2012, she found that a majority of those she spoke to hadn't heard of the Maharishi Foundation's attempt to create their 'own utopian village in a failed urban planning experiment in 1970s Merseyside' (Christie, 2012). As Christie describes, upon her return, it appeared that 'the idea of a holistic lifestyle seems to have waned in the new build town […] the community has veiled itself and turned inwards, landlocked by the local housing estates and the legacy of a has-been alternative lifestyle' (Christie, 2012).

Skelmersdale's twofold utopian beginnings have both shrunk in scope and diminished in returns. The Maharishi Foundation's age of enlightenment appears to have dwindled to irrelevance within the ideal village. In addition, the original urban development programme, based partly on Ebenezer Howard's 1898 proposals for 'slumless, smokeless cities' (Fahmy, 2011) and which promised a 1960's utopian existence for those who left

the larger Merseyside towns, was decimated by the economic downturn of the 1970s, leading to 'large industrial employers [leaving] the town en masse, resulting in an increase in unemployment, drug abuse and poverty' (McCoy, 2014). Skelmersdale was twice built on foundations of optimism for the future; two distinctive attempts to work towards forms of utopia. Today, however, Skelmersdale exists in the remnants of the constructs of such possible, but unrealised futures.

In an article for *The Guardian* in 2016, Frank Cottrell Boyce describes The Magnetic North's album as making the listener 'question whether we have dismissed these failed utopias too easily' (Cottrell Boyce, 2016). When I first presented *Like Lions* as a rehearsed reading in April 2018, audience members noted that my use of Skelmersdale was reflective of another article published in *The Guardian* that day. This article linked both Conservative and Labour party pledges to allow the construction of further 'new towns' such as Skelmersdale, or Telford in Shropshire, to the accommodation problems faced by the millennial generation. Despite reasons to reflect on what went wrong with such developments as they enter 'middle age' (Walsh, 2018), Paul Walsh argues that, 'With millennials leaving London in droves, perhaps instead of offering them £10,000 – as a thinktank suggested earlier this year – give them new towns as places to dream and experiment in' (Walsh, 2018). As Cottrell Boyce contends, however, 'the discipline of dreaming has all but vanished from British politics' (Cottrell Boyce, 2016).

In the development of the narrative of *Like Lions*, Skelmersdale's peculiar history revealed itself as a thematic focal point that encompassed the millennials' concern with issues surrounding rental anxiety and homeownership; the sincere and hopeful strive towards forms of utopia; and the eventual failure of such actions leading to a seemingly

Fig. 40. Nye Bevan Pool, Skelmersdale, 2014. Photo copyright David Dixon. Reproduced under the CC BY-SA 2.0 licence. Available at: https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/4825255 (Accessed 6 December 2019)

static existence within the structural remnants of lost futures. Through utilising Skelmersdale as a pinnacle in Jacob's narrative journey, it allowed me, as playwright, to localise, physicalise and humanise the rather large conceptual themes that I had wished to address in my matrix. Skelmersdale is a geographical physicalisation of such ideas. It allows the narrative to explore the concept of utopia both in and outside of reality and serves as a form of idealised goal for Jacob's utopian dream, despite its inherent failures. In turn, I was also able to use it as a focal point for the politics of the piece. The concept of the ultimate utopia being epitomised by the Golden Dome, a motif repeated throughout both Sam and Jacob's journeys. Through Skelmersdale, I was able to investigate the concept of utopia in a way that was grounded in real, historical terms, but that also explored such unrealised futures within the narrative fiction. If, as Cottrell Boyce claims, our politics has stopped dreaming, 'maybe that's the function of utopia – to be an idea to which reality is unanswerable. Utopia asks questions we have allowed our politics to ignore' (Cottrell Boyce, 2016).

4.3 *LIKE LIONS* - CONTENT

This section focuses on the content and narrative of *Like Lions*. Whilst the form and the practical methodologies used in its development will be the focus of the next section, this section explores how the conceptual themes were explored in the script. I have utilised the six concerns located from the *What Now?* workshops, as detailed at the end of Chapter Three, as a framework for this analysis in order to compartmentalise how each concern has been translated into the piece.

4.3.1 The Narrative

Like Lions follows millennial twins Jacob and Sam for roughly a decade as they negotiate their formative adult years alongside a particular convergence of political and economic crises in Britain. As the play begins, the audience find the twins being pushed 'along the conveyer belt of education ending up at university fulfilling one societal expectation after another' (Minnit, 2018). Whilst Jacob drops out after one year, having found it hard to fit in on campus, his sister graduates. However, they both find themselves 'ending up in similar positions of endless job-hunting and a desire to find a purpose' (Minnit, 2018). For Sam, this purpose comes in the form of political protest and her burgeoning relationship with a politically active student. The pair become involved in the Occupy movement and student protests, before they move to Sam's partner's flat in London. However, the relationship begins to turn sour when Sam realises that her partner was only interested in politics on a surface level and is content to live on her parent's hand-outs.

Meanwhile, Jacob has been struggling to find meaning in his work as a barista at a small coffee counter in a bookshop. After seeing a documentary about Skelmersdale on TV, he decides to visit the town. He becomes enamoured with the Maharishi Foundation's teachings on Transcendental Meditation and the idea that a collective group could positively influence the world. When his childhood friend Alex is killed by a car, Jacob finds himself drawn to Kant's transcendental aesthetics, particularly the concept of reality being 'just out of reach'. He finds connections between this philosophy and his favourite series of books, Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* (1982 - 2012), in which a young character called Jake is also killed by a car, waking up in another world that turns out to be one of many such parallel universes. When Alex's death mirrors that of this fictional protagonist, Jacob starts to develop his own philosophy based on a combination of TM,

Kant and the Dark Tower's multiverse. Through a series of blog posts, this internet-spread pop-philosophy begins to gain devotees who, following Jacob's lead, start permanently wearing blue sunglasses in reference to Bertrand Russell's analogy (see section 2.2.5) regarding being unable to see actual reality.

After her breakup, Sam begins working at a local school. She starts to become involved with the Labour Party's Momentum campaign in response to the stories regarding overcrowded accommodation that she hears from the children she works with in the London borough of Newham. She attends Glastonbury Festival in 2017 and watches Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn's speech on the Pyramid Stage. She doesn't know that Jacob is also at the festival to speak to a number of his followers in person.

An unspecified amount of time later, Jacob has invited Sam to the banks of the Llyn Celyn reservoir in Wales, created in 1964 by flooding the village of Capel Celyn to provide water for Liverpool. The pair had visited the lake, as they refer to it, as children, and it is here that Jacob has decided to set up his own, utopic society based on his new philosophy. The tented commune reflects both the out-of-place camp Sam was part of at Occupy London and their experience at Glastonbury. The camp includes Jacob's own version of the Golden Dome, in which he and his followers meditate. Whilst Sam had originally been unaware of Jacob's philosophy, and his burgeoning online and offline following, she now becomes sceptical of his reasons for creating such a cult, as she terms it, and the two fall out. Sam leaves Jacob in Wales, still sceptical of the reach of his output.

Following Labour's defeat in the 2017 UK General Election, Sam begins joining Momentum-led door-to-door campaigns. At one house, she is greeted by a person wearing

blue sunglasses and is shocked to discover that they are a follower of Jacob's teachings. After some research, she finds that the number of subscribers to his web-based output are far higher than she could have imagined. Late at night, she receives a call from a very panicked Jacob. He directs her to a news article stating that a young man, who subscribed to Jacob's philosophy, had taken his own life, crediting Jacob as the reason for the young man's death.

The story picks up again with Sam visiting Jacob in hospital. He eventually tells her that, following the suicide of the young man, he attempted to walk to the town at the centre of Llyn Celyn reservoir, 'just to get under the surface'. Jacob convinces Sam to try on his blue sunglasses. Although reluctant, she agrees. In a moment of magical realism, it appears that she can see the 'reality' that Jacob had been describing as out of reach this entire time. Jacob, however, cuts in with a laugh, clarifying that the glasses 'had always been a metaphor', making clear that Sam had been feigning her reaction in order to save his feelings. The narrative ends with the two appearing to reconcile; Jacob asks if it's wrong for people to believe in something these days, leading to the pair revealing that the previously unmentioned death of their father has affected their outlook more than they would care to admit. Sam states to Jacob that they cannot see themselves as defined by their differences; their beliefs, or lack of, or their careers, or, specifically, their failures; her relationship, his degree, the commune, the Momentum campaign. She says that they're more than all that. He asks what they are, and she replies that they are *hopeful*.

In the following sections, I detail how I translated five of the six concerns distilled from the workshop input into this plot. The sixth, authenticity, is detailed in section 4.4 which is focused on the structure and form of the piece rather than narrative content.

4.3.2   Lost Futures

I located reflections of Mark Fisher's lost futures within the workshop responses that referenced the millennial generation being 'raised during the boom times and relative peace of the 1990s' (Williams, 2015), to emerge 'into an adult world where only one rule exists – the certainty of uncertainty' (Huntley, 2006, p.15). Both characters finding themselves in employment positions typical to the millennial input I had gathered emphasised this. Additionally, focusing on the aftermath of both Jacob's quitting university and Sam's ending of her relationship forced the characters and the audience to confront the unrealised nature of other such promised futures. My inclusion of Skelmersdale as a physical, urban manifestation of a lost, utopian future also served to underscore the inherent failures within Jacob and Sam's attempts at working towards their respective utopias whether socialist or Kantian.

In addition to this, the inclusion of the reservoir covering what was once Capel Celyn as the site for Jacob's new, utopic society to be built was intended to accentuate this dichotomy between current forward motions towards future utopia, and physical, real-world evidence of unrealised futures. The remains of the town of Capel Celyn have been visible from the reservoir on particularly dry seasons, and such an unrealised, unreachable, alternative future served to reflect Jacob's obsession with an inaccessible, 'true' reality that, as he defines, is 'just underneath the surface'. Both Skelmersdale and Capel Celyn served as geographical metaphors for the unrealised (lost) futures of the millennial generation, whilst also serving as concrete reminders of previous, hopeful attempts at utopia, and the implied failures that befell them.

The theme of lost futures, and the dreams, to paraphrase Cottrell Boyce (2016), of what might have been, is also accentuated in Jacob's fixation on his friend's death having not

Fig. 41. Actors James Glynn and Faye Carmichael in *Like Lions* at The Bread and Roses Theatre, Clapham, October 2018.

occurred within alternate universes. For Jacob, Alex's lost future still exists in an unreachable reality, one that, as per his skewed application of Kant's transcendental aesthetics, we are unable to experience through our *Anschauugen*. Our constructed reality, for Jacob, limits our ability to access other realities in which his friend might be alive.

4.3.3 Constructed Realities

Such an application of Kant's transcendental aesthetics applies the implication within the concept of hauntological lost futures, in that the *haunting* refers to the presence of the *what* could *have been*. Whilst Sam does discuss the impact that online image construction has on herself, and her paradoxical self-awareness of the unreality of such constructions underlying such a reaction, I felt that the concept of constructed realties required further exploration within the narrative.

By initiating Jacob's early fascination with alternative realities through his favourite series of books, I was able to lay foundations in the character's background that could then logically lead to his reappreciation of Kantian philosophy. Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series, made up of eight volumes published between 1982 and 2012, focuses on a series of heroes stopping a malevolent force from causing 'every other reality, including many only subtly different from our own – [to] be destroyed' (Vincent, 2004, p.3). The story flits between multiple realities, including King's catalogue of famous novels, tied around the concept that 'there are other worlds than these' (King, 1989, p.211). Then, by replicating specifics within the novel in Jacob's own life, I was able to transfer the idea of alternative realities from King's fiction to Jacob's reality, with his desire for an

alternative reality in which his friend was not hit by a car echoing King's protagonist being transported to another reality when the same thing happens to him.

As I had with the Magnetic North's *Prospect of Skelmersdale*, I pulled *The Dark Tower* series from my creative matrix, as per Thomas' methodology, as one of my favourite stories during the time of writing the piece in order to make use of the aesthetics and narrative structure within it that particularly spoke to me at the time. However, the thematic connections between the concepts of alternative realities and the ideas I wished to explore surrounding alternative, lost futures in my own piece were clear. As a foundation for Jacob's narrative arc, my inclusion of *The Dark Tower* as an influence on Jacob's own thinking meant that I could frame Kant's transcendental aesthetics in a way that emphasised the concept of an un-reachable reality as manifestations of many potential, unrealised futures. Jacob's familiarity with the concepts in the novel laid the groundwork for his susceptibility to the allure of the aspects of Kantian philosophy explored when the catalyst of his friend's death occurred. Through this, I developed his own fictional philosophy and the idea for the utopic commune on the banks of Llyn Celyn reservoir was formed.

4.3.4   Utopia

The concept of utopia was brought up repeatedly within the workshops in the participants' longing for reconstructions of current systems, from social housing to national identity, as well as in the analysis of the millennial and the metamodern as congruent structures of feeling, encapsulated by Turner's observation of a contemporary tendency towards an act of striving for utopia despite an inevitable failure (cf. Turner, 2015). I refer, again, to Dolan's averseness to defining the concept of the utopic categorically, respecting its

literal meaning of 'no place' (Dolan, 2005, p.7). Instead, I also refer to the utopic as 'a metaphor, always a wish, a desire' (170). Such definition highlights the inevitable impossibility of achieving, or reaching, utopia despite both the characters' struggles to achieve such in their parallel journeys, and the real-world reflection in the now collapsed utopic project of Skelmersdale.

The concept of utopia as a wish or desire, and the inevitable failure in achieving or sustaining such, are main thematic threads in the show's narrative. Chronologically, this begins with Sam's experience at the Occupy London protests in 2011, in which she takes part in the camp erected outside St Paul's Cathedral which lasted for four months until the high court forced an eviction in January 2012 (Press Association, 2012). Sam describes the camp as being 'set up as a new society, a new town. On the steps of St Pauls […] something else. Something new. People really talking. Really working together. Focussed on each other. A community' (Appendix A.6.10.2). She emphasises the speedily put together, yet resilient structure of the campsite, echoing journalists in October 2011, listing the camp as having '150 tents […] a kitchen […] a tech tent […] a library [..] and a "university" that holds daily lectures' (Kingsley, 2011). The protestors' use of the human microphone method, in which 'the speaker delivers the speech several words at a time and the crowd repeats these words in unison' (Selwyn, 2012) in order for those further away to hear, leads to Sam describing the process as 'proper democracy. Inclusive' (Appendix A.6.10.2). For Sam, the democratic forms on display at the Occupy camp are utopic in nature, but the reality of such a construction is challenged in two ways. Firstly, when Sam describes having to use the toilet facilities of the local Starbucks, Jacob points out the hypocrisy of such an action; 'You're saying that at this protest, against everything Starbucks embodies – tax avoidance and all that - at this protest, right, the

Fig. 42. Actors James Glyn and Faye Carmichael in *Like Lions* at The Bread and Roses
Theatre, Clapham, October 2018. [Video still]

only way that all these – occupiers – could take a crap was by buying a coffee at Starbucks?' (Appendix A.5). Secondly, Sam addresses the fact that, despite the utopic experience at the time, the reality of the protestors' lives outside of the camp disrupts such a construction; 'The next day, though, people go home. Back to their houses outside London, to their office jobs on Monday morning' (Appendix A.5). She emphasises that, although, within the frame of the protest, a utopic society was constructed, the reality is that the protestors are 'trapped' (Appendix A.5) in a system that does not allow them to sustain it.

Jacob's commune on the banks of the Llyn Celyn reservoir owes much to the European Sidhaland in Skelmersdale, as well as the aesthetics and structure of the Occupy London camp outside St Pauls. Sam's descriptions when she visits evoke similarly utopic ideals as her previous experience in the protest and are additionally infused with the serene aesthetics of the countryside setting. She describes vegetable plots and solar panels, laughing children and sleeping dogs, 'Candles. Fairy lights. Prayer flags […] Tents and tents and tents' (Appendix A.5). Jacob tells her about how his 'new society' offers some form of respite for those weary of the system they found themselves in;

> Look – that guy there. He came in the first wave. Brought vegetable seedlings, cooks for everyone. Loves it. Has such pride and happiness in being able to help do something. Over there? She worked in Wetherspoons. And next to her? He was an investment banker until last month. Now, they're helping each other learn how to meditate. Never been happier. It doesn't matter whether I believe in Kant, or his reality, or - anything. Point is, these guys have got a purpose. We created a new… *thing*. (Appendix A.6.10.3)

Jacob's commune is a small-scale enactment of what Sam has been fighting for in her work within the Momentum campaign as a burgeoning socialist; a restructured society based on equal, communal relationships. However, she is quick to criticise the situation,

questioning the authenticity of his belief in the philosophy he espouses, and consequently, the ethics of such a 'cultish' (Appendix A.5) organisation. She also questions the legality of setting up a rapidly expanding campsite on the banks of the reservoir. When Jacob replies that 'people like' (Appendix A.5) those that shut down her Occupy protest decided to drown the village of Capel Celyn and that he and his commune have simply 'created a replacement […] home' (Appendix A.5), Sam confronts him with the fact that he already had a home. She consolidates her frustration and, to an extent, jealousy, into a critique of his intentions, highlighting the disparity between those who have chosen to live within Jacob's camp and 'All those refugees, people who *had* no home because we'd decided to bomb the shit out of it' (Appendix A.5). She goes on to criticise his 'running away' (Appendix A.5) from reality and that, whilst he is critical of her integration into an increasingly socialist organisation, an ideology he sees as inherently flawed, at least she realises that the 'system is buggered and I actually care and want to do something about it!' (Appendix A.6.10.4).

Both twins attempt to enact their differing visions of utopia, only to see both of them fail by the end of the narrative. Sam witnessed the Occupy protest being disbanded by court action, and, within the final scenes of the piece, the audience see her attempting to remain optimistic after having suffered defeat with the Labour Party in the 2017 UK General Election. Jacob reacts to his inadvertent utopia breaking apart from his follower's suicide in an extreme way, despite him acknowledging to Sam that the utopia was built upon a flawed and, as revealed in the final scene, false philosophy in the first place. Whilst the Occupy and Llyn Celyn camps serve as narrative points in which I, as playwright, could explore the concept of millennial characters re-constructing reality in order to form their version of utopia, they were also imbued with an inherent and

inevitable failure in order to reflect the sentiment expressed by the millennial workshop participants; as Jacob states in reference to the Occupiers' protesting against capitalism, they eventually had to leave their camp to go back to work – 'they're trapped' (Appendix A.5).

My inclusion of Skelmersdale as a central location and Jacob's obsession with the Golden Dome of Enlightenment as a place in which followers attempt to create utopic, world-wide change imbricated the theme of utopia further within the narrative. The failures inherent within each conceptual utopia, however, emphasised the inevitability of failure that is seemingly in-built within such attempts, as according to Turner (2015). Such inbuilt failures, however, do not affect the sincere endeavour towards utopic forms that still occurs within the narrative. After all that transpires in the story, including the collapse of their respective utopic structures, Sam still describes the twins as 'hopeful' (Appendix A.5).

4.3.5   Geographical / Locational Issues

Following input from participants concerning the precarity of a rental system 'set up for profit & not to live' (Appendix A.7.2) alongside research revealing that 40% of millennials are living with their parents (CBRE, 2017, p.15), I decided that both of these issues needed to be portrayed in *Like Lions* through Sam and Jacob's disparate experiences. Initially, I purposefully refrained from locating the twins' hometown and university, in order to give their backstory a sense of relatability. However, following Sam's graduation, I placed a strong emphasis on the geographical elements of the story in order to ground the narrative in real historical terms and, more broadly, as a play embedded within the geography of Britain. The narrative takes place across the UK,

with sections in London and Devon (the locations of the *What Now?* workshops) as well as Lancashire, Somerset and Gwynedd. As I have focused on British millennials within my research and attempted to draw upon case studies from a range of locations, I was adamant that *Like Lions* should reflect this. In the characters of Sam and Jacob, I am attempting to encapsulate a *British* millennial structure of feeling. By this, I do not mean to imply that the two are constructed as avatars for every British millennial and their multitudinous experiences. As Williams admits, a structure of feeling will not be '"possessed in the same way by many members of the community"' (Williams, 1965, p.65). Instead, the pair are cyphers for an 'experience of the present' (Williams, 1977, p.128). Their experience as millennials is decidedly British, firmly located in both the recent history and specific geography of the UK but does not reflect that of every British millennial.

4.3.6   Anxiety Induced by Precarity

Particular precarities experienced by the workshop participants were used in developing the narrative of *Like Lions*. As suggested above, Sam's moving to London allowed me to explore precarities in the rental sector – and Sam's initial guilt at having bypassed such through her relationship. This instability is exacerbated by further precarity in the employment sector, detailed in workshop responses describing experience in zero-hour contracts 'mak[ing] people feel worthless' (Appendix A.7.1). This issue is addressed by Jacob when he details to the audience his experience applying to jobs, following the pair, out of character, detailing a number of responses from the workshops regarding the anxiety induced by similar experiences. In such a way as to critique this anxiety, the pair bringing up the fact that, of course, they could have it worse;

> But then, at least you have a job, right? At least you've got a roof over
> your head. At least you don't have to flee the fucking country that

you're born in just to get away from war and torture and death. Just to survive. It's, like, there's sadness there – in the people we talked to. A deep sadness and hopelessness and frailty. But then there's also guilt? (Appendix A.6.10.5)

This doubt and conflicting thought are portrayed by the actors rather than characters. In this way, it serves to emphasise the conflicting thoughts presented to me within the workshops regarding this. It also encapsulates my own apprehension as playwright regarding the inherent selfishness of a project attempting to analyse and platform the problems faced by my generation. In such a way, the anxiety surrounding the portrayal of anxiety becomes part of the portrayal itself. This conflicting critique of the piece in the piece itself is reflective of the oscillation between the sincerity and the cynicism or hope and hopelessness that I had located in the work of my millennial case studies. Through developing a critique of the piece in the piece itself, I was able to further investigate the fluctuation between acting and non-acting I had initially posited during my reflection of *Twentysomething.* My own anxieties about both the efficacy of the piece, and inherent entitlement of such self-referential PaR, were the catalysts in developing the modalities of The Listening Theatre.

4.4 *LIKE LIONS* – FORM

This section examines the theatrical aesthetics and modalities I used within the development of *Like Lions.* This is underpinned by the development of my practice concerning an oscillation between the fictive and the authentic in intimate, performative storytelling. Through this, I detail how I experimented with and developed practical methodologies taken from my case studies in order to investigate how the theatrical modalities of the Listening Theatre can be utilised in the development of my own practice, as well as how I employed certain metamodern modalities to intentionally develop

metamodern theatrical forms within this. I have divided this analysis into five sections in order to distinguish between particular modalities, however, the tension between the real and the fictive within storytelling is the underlying thread connecting these modalities. The section following this will detail the critical and audience reception to these theatrical forms.

4.4.2   Meta-Reflexivity and The Double Frame

In the structure of *Like Lions*, I combine Dember's concept of meta-reflexivity with Eshelman's performatist double frame through the actors repeatedly 'stepping out of character' to disrupt the narrative by discussing how the narrative itself has been developed from the workshops;

> THE PLAY PAUSES
>
> SAM: Here is where a lot of responses were very similar when
>   we talked to people   (Appendix A.6.10.5)

or even to ask each other if they are ready to continue their performance;

> THE PLAY PAUSES
>
> SAM: Look - do you want to finish now, or?
>
> JACOB: No - no, let's carry on to the end   (Appendix A.6.10.6)

Such meta-reflexivity enables the piece to reflect upon its own form, to be 'about itself' (Dember, 2018). By highlighting the fact that the actors are performing the narrative, the audience are forced to acknowledge the theatrical form of the piece and, as per Dember, their own felt experience in viewing it.

Eshelman's performatist framing enables the 'implausibility [of an outer frame to cut] us off – at least temporarily – from the endlessly open, uncontrollable text around it and forces us back *into* the work' to fully engage with the narrative (Eshelman, 2008, p.3).

207

Within *Like Lions*, I utilise this framing through the actors acknowledging the unreality of the performed narrative. By admitting that they are performing a story, the actors draw attention to the framing of the construct and force the audience 'back into the work' itself. This acknowledgement of the falsity inherent within the performative act, whilst also asking the audience to sincerely engage with the story despite this, reflects Eshelman's understanding of performatist artworks '*performing* belief […] even while understanding the postmodern doubt about such' (Dember, 2018). The actors' disruption of the narrative to call attention to the piece's form does not undermine the attempted sincerity of the narrative itself, but actively invites an audience to engage with the narrative whilst *also* being aware of the context of the piece's construction. Rather than disrupting in order to destabilise the narrative, these interruptions underscore the sincerity of the attempt to encapsulate the millennial's experience, as presented to me in the workshops;

SAM: When we decided to do this play, one of the main problems we had was addressing all of the ideas and hopes and worries that people had given us in a way that made, well, sense.

JACOB: The right way. A way that wasn't just a Buzzfeed listicle of 'Things Millennials Find Fucking Annoying'

SAM: 'Top Ten Reasons Why Young People Aren't Buying A House Right Now.'

JACOB: 'This Young Person Suffers From Anxiety And Crippling Debt – What Happens Next Will Shock You!'

SAM: That's why we're here. To tell it to you as a story. Just a story. About two twins, some tents, a town under a lake, sadness, hope… something.

JACOB: Some of it's true.

             Not this bit though.   (Appendix A.6.10.6)

The above extract exemplifies the paradoxical nature of such disruptions. These interruptions appear to entreat the audience to engage with the narrative on a level that

acknowledges the sincerity of the work, but the disruptions are also, at times, cynical of the worth of the work itself. At the end of the piece, after Sam has declared the twins 'hopeful', the actors then question the overall point of the narrative they have just performed;

> JACOB: […] It's like, we want change. We need change. But we don't know how to do it.
>
> SAM: Or we can't be bothered.
>
> JACOB: So, instead of creating this new society, instead of reclaiming an old one, we write a play. About drowned villages and university and a silly fake commune.
>
> SAM: I think it's better than nothing.
>
> JACOB: If you say so. (Appendix A.6.10.7)

This inbuilt criticism highlights the oscillation between hope and hopelessness that I have located as integral to the Listening Theatre. Through the performative double framing to emphasise the authentic origins of the narrative themes, alongside the sincerity of the attempt to create work that both interrogated the mythical millennial and platformed actual millennial concerns, a simultaneous, oppositional, cynical critique can also take shape. The actors' comments, too, oscillate between hope and hopelessness or sincerity and irony within these interactions, offering an intentionally undecided and paradoxical position in regards to the efficacy of the piece. This develops the practical modalities I had located in the case studies in a way that extends such inbuilt *moments* of critique, as exemplified by Lung, Feat.Theatre and Eager Spark, to become a fully embedded, structural modality within my work. As was my intention in developing my own practice from *Twentysomething* in 2014, using this form of meta-reflexivity encourages the audience to engage with the piece in a way that simultaneously buys into the narrative

and critiques it, all through the actors' continual commentary on both the narrative and their own performance of it.

4.4.2   Oscillation and The Tiny

Continuous oscillation between qualities associated with modernism and postmodernism is what defines the metamodern (cf. Dember, 2018). I locate similar oscillations in the Listening Theatre; between hope and hopelessness, sincerity and irony, the fictitious and the authentic. I attempted to utilise this oscillatory movement in crafting *Like Lions'* structure, employing Vermeulen and van den Akker's description of a pendulum swing to ensure a continual oscillation between states; 'each time metamodern enthusiasm swings toward fanaticism, gravity pulls it back toward irony; the moment its irony sways toward apathy, gravity pulls it back toward enthusiasm' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.6).

My use of meta-reflexivity in the storytelling allowed the actors to continually shift between portraying a narrative and presenting the context surrounding it; oscillating between performing the twins and versions of themselves. The structure of *Like Lions*, in fact, oscillates between; staged snapshots of Sam and Jacob's journey presented as intimate, naturalistic glimpses of a narrative; the characters' comfortably explaining the omitted plot points or their own thoughts and feelings, as Sam or Jacob, to the audience; and the actors out of role discussing the findings of the workshops and how these developed into the piece. As one reviewer described, 'without hyperbole, *Like Lions* is unconventional in its structure, and the way that it tackles its subject matter. There is an acknowledgement from the beginning about the 'meta' nature of the show, and the elements that are 'fictional' versus 'truthful'' (Davis, 2018).

This acknowledgement is heightened through the intentionally intimate and lo-fi staging choices developed from my previous practice. Upon entering the space, prior to the piece beginning, the audience are approached by the actors for informal, unforced conversation. As Greg Stewart noted in his review, 'It all feels very relaxed, as if they are inviting us in to share their side of the story over a beer' (Stewart, 2018). The narrative begins with the actor portraying Sam, without a discernible transition other than a slight raise in volume, talking to a small amount of audience members that she had earlier struck up conversation with about on a show she has apparently seen. As other audience members begin to take notice, she interrupts herself to let the audience know that 'This isn't the performance by the way, I just wanted to tell you' (Appendix A.5). As the second actor joins her onstage, she ends her conversation and asks if he is ready to start the performance. Just after the main narrative has begun, they then come back out of character to frame both the narrative and their characters as developed from input gathered in the workshops, whilst simultaneously questioning the overall merit of the piece;

> JACOB: Some of their responses, conversations, ideas and discussions made their way into what you're about to see.
>
> SAM: Take it as a small snapshot on the collected ideas, thoughts, worries and hopes of a generation.
>
> JACOB: Or take it as a story. About two twins who are growing up after the millennium.
>
> SAM: That's what it is.
>
> JACOB: And isn't.
>
> SAM: We don't have all the answers. Or questions. Or a point. Really.   (Appendix A.6.10.1)

Such a conversational nature is able to underscore both the contradictory request for the audience to 'buy into' (Dember, 2018) the narrative, as per Eshelman, through being consistently aware of the outer frame of the piece's form. This intimacy is reflective of

Dember's concept of metamodern minimalism or 'The Tiny' as a repeated motif in artworks reflecting a metamodern sensibility, aiming 'to create vulnerability and intimacy, bringing the reader of a work closer to the felt experience expressed in the work' (Dember, 2018). Such intimacy heightens the meta-reflexivity of the piece; both the audience and the actors are aware of the fictitiousness of the piece, but the intimate framing allows the audience and actors to 'perform belief' (Dember, 2018) with both sides engaging in the story whilst also remaining outwardly aware of its falsity. This theatrical oscillation, building on Eshelman's performatist framing through an intimate, conversational aesthetic, reflects metamodernism's central 'in-betweenness' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2017, p.10).

The pendulum swing of oscillation was also a driving force in the development of the 'dreamy' (Stewart, 2018), 'almost meditative soundscapes' (Minnit, 2018) produced by the Philadelphia-based duo, The Dagen-Smiths. At times, the score is intimate and minimalist, with synth- and guitar-based environments that subtly underscore narrative moments such as Jacob experiencing Skelmersdale for the first time or Sam first meeting her partner in a nightclub. At others, it feels larger, with brass-focused pieces whose dynamics crescendo to uplifting heights. The composers and I used these larger moments to highlight particularly emotional or evocative instances, in order to heighten the artificial theatrical emotionality of such moments, before attempting to curtail any emotionality through the insertion of an oppositional moment, in order to oscillate between sincerity and irony.

In the first of these, Sam describes how she realised she was in love with her partner during the climax of a student protest (Appendix A.6.10.8). The moment is underscored

212

by a stirring, trumpet- and piano-based piece that peaks at the instant Sam exclaims, whilst enacting her position on top of a statue at the march; 'I hold her hand and I think I love her' (Appendix A.5). It ends, however, on a singular, echoing piano note as the actor quickly drops out of character in order to ask the audience to 'Imagine the Skype ringtone' (Appendix A.5) and her face as pixelated during the next scene set over a video call. Such jarring, humorous dichotomy following an intentionally emotion-stirring use of music highlights the artificiality of the piece and ceases any emotional connection the audience may have experienced, whilst also emphasising their active engagement. Similarly, the final conversation between the twins is underscored by a piece featuring synth, drums and trumpets that builds to a slow, emotive crescendo as Sam declares that the pair of twins are 'more than' their failures - they are 'hopeful' (Appendix A.5). The music builds to a joyful climax as the actors smile at each other and clear away the space, only for the music to cut out one note before the end of the melody, and for the actors to, again, oppose the optimistic, emotive atmosphere created by stating that, 'People told us, when we asked them, that they hoped less' (Appendix A.5).

Such confliction does not serve to detract from the sincerity of the emotions that may have been felt because of the intentionally emotive sections; it does not lessen the genuineness of that experience. Rather, I attempted to instil an immediate switch to an opposite state in order to employ an oscillation between emotion and cynicism through not only the text, but the use of music. Through such musical oscillation between minimalist soundscapes and emotive, swelling compositions, alongside the actors shifting in and out of character, the form of *Like Lions* employed a metamodern oscillation in order to express theatrically what reviewer Kimberly Turford described as 'the impossible

mix of blind optimism and sense of impending unstoppable doom we [millennials] seem to have' (Turford, 2018).

4.4.3   Authenticity

The responses to the workshops that were read out, verbatim, during the piece, were kept onstage in illuminated jars throughout. I used these jars as another emphasis on the constructed nature of the piece by highlighting authentic elements of this construction; in that the narrative is built upon 'real' participants' 'real' responses. In Chapter One, I detailed a repeated concern with 'authentic' elements in certain case studies using their own experiences within the narrative of their performances as well as employing 'authentic' staging devices, such as the Gramophones' displaying jars of 'memories' (Appendix A.1) brought in by the audience members as part of *Wanderlust* (2015). I appropriated The Gramophone's use of these jars in the *What Now?* workshops to get participants to collect and record their own input, portions of which were then read out, verbatim, by the actors. This was an intentional application of Feat.Theatre's technique in *The Welcome Revolution* (2018), in which they recited responses to the questions posed within their tea party, reading them from slips of paper that are implied to be actual, physical remnants of the workshops themselves. The jars, then, are used to frame *Like Lions*, with the actors taking slips of paper out from each and reading questions that were, apparently, posed in the workshops. This occurs first at the beginning of the piece, and again in the 'hopeless' responses of the final section;

      SAM: They said they 'used to be interested in campaigning or protesting, but it feels like these cannot achieve change now and I sometimes stop listening to politics for self-preservation'

      JACOB: That the idea of their future gave them 'Mixed feelings… but mostly *meh*.'

SAM: That their Instagram account was 'compensation for feeling like a failure. Fake success is better than nothing.'

JACOB: 'An online illusion of what you should be.'

SAM: 'Survival.'

JACOB: 'Shame.'   (<u>Appendix A.6.10.5</u>)

However, there is palpable deceptiveness in this attempt at engaging with the authentic. When the actors perform this final scene, they are not actually reading out responses written on the paper they pull from the jars but reciting a pre-prepared list of these responses as part of the script. Similarly, the questions listed at the beginning of the piece include actual questions used in the workshops alongside some added to the script for humorous effect. Additionally, the actors imply that they were present during the workshops themselves, when in actual fact neither of them were. I framed the workshops in this way in order to streamline the discussion regarding the development of the narrative from them. Additionally, I felt that this would also highlight the collaborative nature of Pregnant Fish Theatre as a company. The use of the plural personal pronoun 'we' in lines such as 'Over the last year, we've spoken to a lot of people' (Appendix A.5) references the efforts of the company working collectively, from the original *Plan B* workshops to the performance of *Like Lions*, to develop the piece rather than claiming myself as solitary author of the entire work.

There is a fundamental *inauthenticity* in the attempts at enacting authenticity within this performance. This may be an issue inherent within the medium, in that acting a scripted piece is innately inauthentic. However, the act of *performing* authenticity reflects Eshelman's concepts surrounding performatism, in that, within the frame of the work, the viewer can continue to perform belief in such structures through wilful self-deceit (cf. Eshelman, 2008). A similar method is utilised by Feat.Theatre in *The Welcome Revolution*

Fig. 43. Actors James Glynn and Faye Carmichael as Jacob and Sam reading 'responses' from workshop participants from jars in *Like Lions* at The Bread and Roses Theatre, Clapham, October 2018.

in which the performer appears to detail autobiographical details of her childhood 'political awakening', with the truth and fiction within such retelling becoming blurred throughout the performance. This act of performing authenticity, within the context of *Like Lions*, is fundamentally connected to my use of meta-reflexivity. The performers are explicit and honest to the audience about the fact that they are actors 'just playing characters - in a play - in a room where you are sat' (Appendix A.5) whilst also being adamant that this fact does not make the ideas explored within the narrative any less real. In this way, my endeavour to present authenticity within *Like Lions* is affected by being inherently aware of the inevitable failure of such an action due to the limitations of the theatrical form, but the piece endeavours towards some form of authenticity through these theatrical oscillations.

4.4.4   Audience Engagement

By getting my actors to invite the audience 'in to share their side of the story over a beer' (Stewart, 2018), I attempted to coax the audience into a one-sided conversation. The piece endeavours to elicit a feeling of being involved within the performance, in an intimate, conversational level, whilst actually giving the audience no agency. Whilst this advanced my previous practice, it was also developed from the work of the case studies, with The Gramophone's *Playful Acts of Rebellion*, similarly seeming to involve 'the audience in a lively conversation' (Hart, 2014), whilst actually mostly offering a one-sided discussion. Yet, as an audience member of The Gramophone's piece, reviewer Ellen Hart felt as though she 'actually wanted to chat about [her] own thoughts and feelings' (Hart, 2014). My staging of intimacy attempts to elicit *feelings* of engagement, rather than actual engagement itself. This reflects both Harvie (2013, p.59) and Shulze's (2017, p.74) critiques of performances that seemingly offer audience engagement but, in fact, actually

only offer the *illusion* of such. And yet, as Shulze describes, despite, or perhaps because of this, 'it is absolutely clear that the audiences will at least *feel* more actively involved in the construction of the show' (74).

This builds upon the problematics of performing authenticity and that of creating a seemingly intimate connection between artist and audience through pre-scripted storytelling. I originally problematised this in my efforts to create dialogically engaged, performative events in the original *Plan B* workshops. As detailed in Chapter Three, the solution to the impasse I found myself in as an artist was to re-inject levels of theatricality that built upon my previous practice as a playwright and director. As such, a level of inauthenticity accompanied this, in that the 'return to clear-structured storylines' or 'dramatic drama' (Schuhbeck, 2012) necessitated particular performative constraints. Nevertheless, through such inauthenticity, there is still a paradoxical level of authentic connection achieved. As Schuhbeck observes in the reapplication of the 'dramatic' within 'drama' such aesthetics 'don't allow the viewer to be distanced anymore' (Schuhbeck, 2012). She argues that a return to 'fiction [being] separate from reality again' (Shubeck, 2012) reinstalls theatre's political function through 'human interaction and personal conflicts' (Haas, 2007). I feel that Claire Minnit's review of *Like Lions* echoes this in her emphasis on the intimate, conversational level of the piece indicating an innovative, contemporary modality when she states that the '*inviting* performances [means that] *Like Lions* paves the way for a new kind of storytelling [that is] incredibly tranquil yet provocative' (Minnit, 2018, italics my own).

4.4.5   (Meta)Narratives

My own engagement with a 'return to […] the urge to tell stories' (Schuhbeck, 2012) in contemporary theatre reflects Schuhbeck's understanding of this as a post-postmodern sensibility. *Like Lions* develops my previous practice focused on the interplay between fiction and the authentic within performative storytelling as part of this. The actors consistently remind the audience that they are portraying a fictional narrative and, regularly revert to narrating the story rather than enacting it;

> JACOB: (TO AUDIENCE) Outside *Squirt*. Student Night. Thursday. Feet walk on sticky concrete. Fag ash. Vomit.
>
> They stand close. Leaning against the wall. Ultraviolet blue picking out a thread on her top. The spilt drink on her shoes. Her smile   (Appendix A.6.10.9)

In addition to this, a section of the piece is devoted to Jacob telling the audience the legend of Tegid Foel. This Welsh folktale, first recorded by Elis Gruffydd in the 16th Century (BBC, 2014), concerns the mythical creation of the real Lake Bala. The tale retroactively echoes the fate of the village of Capel Celyn four hundred years later and the connections between both are insinuated in Jacob's retelling. In brief, the story concerns a musician who unwillingly plays at the feast of an evil ruler of a town at the bottom of the valley. Despite not supporting this ruler, the pay he is offered will feed his family for a year, and so the musician agrees. As he is playing, a bird quietly whispers to him. Intrigued, the musician follows the bird out of the ruler's palace to the top of the valley. There, he falls asleep, and, upon waking, finds that the valley, and everything in it – including the palace, the village and, presumably, his family – have been drowned by a large lake. The bird, too, has vanished.

Jacob's retelling of the story reiterates *Like Lions'* repeated metaphor of echoes of lost futures being unreachable; 'Some say that there are nights, when the moon is dark, that

you can still see the lights of the palace submerged just beneath the surface of the lake, just out of reach' (Appendix A.5). This allegory comes to a head in Jacob's attempted suicide towards the end of the piece by walking to the sunken village of Capel Celyn. The story, however, also alludes to particular aspects of the millennial structure of feeling as defined within this thesis; millennials undertaking labour that opposes their ethical stance for necessary monetary gain, the impression of isolation following the cancellation of particular futures, as per Fisher (2014, p.8), and anxiety surrounding environmental precarity. However, I aimed to let the story speak for itself through its own, rich, metaphors. Rather than drawing concrete links between the play's thematics and the folktale's narrative, I chose to let Sam ask one question following Jacob's description of the sunken palace, reflecting her political positioning;

SAM: What about the villagers? The oppressed? The slaves?

JACOB: They drowned.   (Appendix A.5).

This act of storytelling echoes the form of the play in whole, which, in being built around the act of telling a story, differs from theatrical forms that attempt 'subjective representation of reality without referring to its own limits' (Schuhbeck, 2012) and returns to the 'urge to tell stories' (Schuhbeck, 2012). I see this theatrical form reflecting Schuhbeck's remarks concerning not 'an open (postmodern) stage, rather it serves as a virtual closed space' (Schuhbeck, 2012), in which fiction can, again, be separate from reality. This fiction acts 'as a critical force […], instead of simply giving up in face of an overcomplicated world' (Schuhbeck, 2012). As Freinacht asserts, in order to improve, 'We need stories about stories' (Freinacht, 2017, p.69).

4.4.6 Hope/lessness

The majority of concerns I have drawn upon in both the content and form of *Like Lions* emphasise the oscillation between hope and hopelessness I originally located in the theatre of the millennial case studies and subsequently in the workshop input. The focus on conceptual and actual ***utopias***, the ***failures*** that have inevitably befallen such, and echoes of ***lost futures*** are entrenched within the narrative structure of the piece, encouraging a constant ***oscillation*** between optimism and cynicism, emphasised by The Dagen-Smith's music. The ***meta-reflexivity*** of the piece, and the focus on conveying the ***authenticity*** of its foundations, enables a similar oscillatory movement between the real and the fictive within the performance that brings into question the purpose and efficacy of the piece whilst simultaneously espousing the platforming of millennial concerns; oscillating between purpose*ful*ness and purpose*less*ness. The eleven structural and performative modalities I have detailed in the previous two sections combine within *Like Lions* to create a piece that is primarily concerned with a paradoxical positioning fluctuating between hope and hopelessness. Through developing elements of my own practice concerning intimate storytelling, I have utilised each of the above modalities to also develop what I located as the main recurring thematic in the millennial-made works of the Listening Theatre; the performance of hope/lessness.

4.5 THE PRODUCTION

4.5.1 Development

I organised a rehearsed reading of *Like Lions* at The University of East London in April 2018 in order to gain audience feedback for development in advance of the proposed run. The small audience of invited millennials, a number of whom had been invited back after taking part in either series of workshops, were given the opportunity to voice feedback or

questions after the reading and offer any advice in terms of clarity of the narrative. Particular feedback was worked into the subsequent redrafting of the script; the imbalance between the detail in Sam and Jacob's characters, for instance, was addressed specifically. Of particular note was the audience's positive response to the sections in which the actors address the audience out of character. It was suggested a number of times that these moments could be 'teased out [because] when they step out and say "this is what happened [in the workshops]", it's interesting because, yes it is made up, but it's based on fact' (Respondent A). This indicated a positive audience interest in the modality I was aiming to create that fluctuated between fact and fiction. In response to this, I added a further instance, and extended those instances already in the script.

Once I had reworked the script in response to feedback, I began rehearsals for the production in September 2018. Having cast Faye Carmichael, who has acted with Pregnant Fish since 2010, and James Glynn, who was cast specifically for the role of Jacob, the first task in staging the show was to develop the intimacy and understated naturalism of their performances. Through my previous directorial practice, I had developed a style of acting based on intimate, conversational performances. *Like Lions*' form, as above, was developed specifically with this in mind, allowing the structure to oscillate between storytelling, enactment and conversation. In a review for *Twentysomething: A Reading List* (2014), Roger Jarman described this form as 'the hardest challenge in acting' but that the actors 'do indeed do an extraordinary job in persuading us that they are sincere' (Jarman, 2014). In order to develop this form, and the fluidity between enactment and narration, I cast actors who showed an instinctual ability to pare down the theatricality of their performance; to perform the piece as if they were telling it to their friend.

Fig. 44. Actors James Glynn & Faye Carmichael post their respective character's main 'life events' on a timeline during one of the first rehearsal sessions for *Like Lions*, September 2018.

Exercises concerning character objectives and the larger timeline of each character's journey formed the basis of the first few rehearsals. The majority of the rehearsal period was then spent finding how it felt right to us, as a collective, for the actors to shift between narration, enactment and 'out of character' moments. The ability to work with recordings of The Dagen Smith's music, which could then be edited by the band in order to account for specific timings in the staging, meant that larger, theatrical moments could be timed to meticulously match the music. Whilst, in other, contrasting moments of narration or conversation, the actors could remain fluid in their performance in order to emphasise the relaxed performance form. This embedded a metamodern oscillation between forms of staging, allowing actors to shift between the theatrical and the conversational, all whilst maintaining an intimate, audience-inclusive atmosphere within the piece's structure.

4.5.2 Staging

Like Lions was performed at The Bread and Roses Theatre, Clapham, in October 2018 as part of the Clapham Fringe. I applied to the venue firstly because of the intimacy available in its 40 – 60 seat black box space, and that the pub that houses the theatre is the base of operations for Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Union Council. Since 1986, this company has been trading at major festivals as The Worker's Beer Company, with volunteer staff made up of 'trade union branches, the labour movement, grassroots organisations, community groups and charities' (Worker's Beer Company, 2019) whose would-be-hourly-pay goes directly to each organisation. The Bread and Roses was named by the company after a poem associated with the 1912 US textile workers' strike (Worker's Beer Company, 2019) which includes the line; 'Hearts starve as well as bodies, give us bread but give us roses!' (Fowke & Glazer, 1973, p.71), alluding to an appeal for fair wages, cultural access and dignified conditions.

Fig. 45. Developing the conversational level of performance. Actor James Glyn attempts varying levels of theatricality within the rehearsal of a monologue, whilst actor Faye Carmichael and I provide advice and feedback. Rehearsals for *Like Lions*, The University of East London, September 2018. [Video Still]

Fig. 46. Rehearsing with timed music. I provide direction to actors Faye Carmichael and James Glyn in the rehearsal of a section of the piece timed to music by The Dagen Smiths – the timing of the track is projected behind the actors for the rehearsal. Rehearsals for *Like Lions*, The University of East London, October 2018. [Video Still]

Reflecting this origin of the venue's name, I appropriated the title *Like Lions* from current Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn's speech at the 2017 Glastonbury festival in which he quoted Percy Shelley's 1819 poem, *The Masque of Anarchy*;

> Rise like lions after slumber
> In unvanquishable NUMBER!
> Shake your chains to earth, like dew
> Which in sleep hath fall'n on you,
> YE ARE MANY – THEY ARE FEW (Shelley, 1832, p.47).

As one of many millennial Labour supporters at the time of this research, I was, as Sam also relays in the piece, impressed by the spectacle of Corbyn's appearance on the Pyramid Stage. Whilst Shelley's poem was chosen by Corbyn predominantly because Labour's 2017 slogan 'For the Many, Not The Few' (The Labour Party, 2017) was derived from it, I also felt that the ideas described in the prose had particular resonance with some of the ideas I was concerned with whilst developing this research. The reference to unshackling destabilises the current system as immaterial and urges the public to rise and free themselves. It is arguably within the territory of populist rhetoric, but reflects particular ideas surrounding the utopic being accessible beyond the current construction, which Corbyn and Shelley imply as immaterial, dew-like or a dream. The title *Like Lions* being derived from Corbyn's use of the poem evokes the metamodern in current political discourse, as I defined in Chapter Two, in that it refers to the ideal of 'an outside […] the possibility of creating a society that is different from the one at hand' (Krumsvik & Co, 2017).

The production was advertised predominantly through social media, including teaser and rehearsal videos (Appendix A.6.9), as well as preview articles (Bakchormeeboy, 2018; Drayton, 2018b) discussing issues from the piece, leaflets, radio interviews and online listing sites. It was described in marketing material as an 'intimate and authentic look at

the complexities and crises surrounding the millennial generation' (Pregnant Fish, 2018) alongside an endorsement of the fact that the piece had been produced as a product of a series of workshops with millennials.

The poster I created for *Like Lions*, seen below, features models as proxies for Sam and Jacob, standing in Llyn Lluncaws, or Chees Lake, in Powys, Wales, as a stand-in for the Capel Celyn reservoir. The title appears as though it has been cut out of the hill that both of the figures look towards; as though forged as an opening through the insurmountable structure ahead. It is an image filled with possibility and impossibility; both figures stare up towards the blue sky, and the opening ahead of them, but are walking deeper into the lake. They are forging on hopefully but risking sinking in the process.

Following the strong advertising campaign, the show was featured as a Top Pick at the Clapham Fringe by London Pub Theatres Magazine. Audience numbers were largely high for the festival, with audience members representing a broad range of ages, varying from early 20's to late 60's.

4.5.3   Audience and Critical Reception

Following each performance, a member of Pregnant Fish Theatre approached audience members in The Bread and Roses to record their reactions. A total of twelve audience members agreed to offer their responses. Alongside this, *Like Lions* received five critical reviews that were published online. Following a consideration of these sources, I have compiled the following analysis of the reception of three main aspects of the production; the narrative form, the focus on authenticity and the oscillation between hope and hopelessness. As such, the following endeavours to gauge how an audience received a

Fig. 47. Promotional poster for *Like Lions* at The Bread and Roses Theatre, Clapham, London. October 2018.

piece that purposefully attempted to utilise and develop specifically metamodern sensibilities as well as modalities adopted from the work of other contemporary millennial theatre makers in order to investigate the theatrical form of Listening Theatre.

My experimental form of storytelling developed in *Like Lions* was received positively by both audience and critics. As detailed previously within this thesis, the structure of the piece attempted to invoke the *feeling* of the audience being involved in a conversation, developed from my own practice and advanced through modalities appropriated from the work of The Gramophones and Feat.Theatre. A number of audience members made reference to the conversational level of the performance, with one stating that 'it was a different way of storytelling […] It's a story, but it's also a conversation […] a really cool way of interacting with the audience' (Respondent 1, 2018). This sentiment was reflected in the reviews, with The Spy in the Stalls stating that 'Like Lions paves the way for a new kind of storytelling' (Minnit, 2018) and Two Lasses in London dubbing it 'unapologetic storytelling' (Turford, 2018). Theatre Weekly similarly stated that, with the scenes being 'intercut with little asides which give us some context, or a tantalising line about what's to follow […] It all feels very relaxed, as if they are inviting us in to share their side of the story over a beer' (Stewart, 2018).

One audience member stated that the act of 'breaking in and out of the fourth wall [and] chatting with the audience' (Respondent 7, 2018) meant that the piece as a whole 'felt very genuine' (Respondent 7, 2018), which I see as pointing towards my intentional focus on authenticity within the piece. Another respondent emphasised the focus on the narrative being 'developed from direct contact with groups of the young people that it represents [which] made it very real' (Respondent 6, 2018). Reflective of this, Theatre

Weekly stated that, through this focus, the piece 'does justice to the young people who have contributed to its development [and] manages to capture the hopes and fears of a generation' (Stewart, 2018). The same review expands on this by detailing that 'some of the words spoken by the millennials involved in the development process are read out from pieces of paper pulled from jars [serving] as a reminder of the process that has led us to the finished piece' (Stewart, 2018). This evidences that the use of the jars, developed through the workshops from a method appropriated from The Gramophone's *Wanderlust*, draws the audience's attention to the process and form of the piece; that my use of meta-reflexivity made the piece feel 'real' (Respondent 6, 2018).

A number of audience members made specific reference to the piece being both hopeful and hopeless. One respondent stated that the piece made them 'go between hope and despair' (Respondent 8, 2018). Another pair of audience members interviewed together had conflicting emotions upon leaving the piece, with one stating that it 'made me think that there's not hope' (Respondent 3, 2018) and the other replying that they 'left with a sense of optimism' (Respondent 4, 2018). Again, the reviews seemed to reflect these responses. Breaking The Fourth Wall stated that 'In some ways, what the show proposes is the exploration of ideas and the asking of questions. There are no panaceas, no ready-made answers, but the will to carry on and holding on to hope is all important…' (Davis, 2018). The Spy in the Stalls' review appeared to reflect my use of an oscillation between disparate polarities in their use of oppositional adjectives to describe the show as a '*powerful* piece carrying a lot of gravitas [that] is cleverly delivered in a *gentle* style […] an incredibly *tranquil* yet *provocative* performance' (Minnit, 2018, italics my own). I argue that this analysis indicates that the oscillatory modalities I attempted to imbue within the content, form and staging of *Like Lions*, as an experiment with metamodern

sensibilities, was discernible within the performance and contributed to the success of the staging. Similar consideration was also present in Greg Stewart's review, stating that the piece simultaneously offers 'real insight to the political thinking of millennials in today's society, without being overtly political' (Stewart, 2018). In addition, David Weir stated that 'the ambition to represent an entire generation is curiously matched with a diffidence about the ability to do so' (Weir, 2018). Whilst Weir meant this as a critique of the performance, this is exactly what I intended the piece to provoke. The closing lines of *Like Lions*, of which Weir refers to, include an acknowledgement that the piece is just 'a play. About drowned villages and university and a silly fake commune' (Appendix A.5) and yet, despite this, it 'might be better than [doing] nothing' (Appendix A.5). Weir's assessment is completely valid in that *Like Lions* critiques its own ability to achieve its goal of platforming the millennials' own voices, and the overall point of such a goal in the first place. However, such a confliction was my intention, as that is the essence of the Listening Theatre; it is at once optimistic and cynical, instilled with both self-belief and self-critique.

Although a majority of the responses collected from audience members and that of the critics were positive, there is one issue of particular note which raised questions for me concerning my responsibilities in working with the forms of participation I developed in the workshops. One audience member had attended a number of the original *Plan B* workshops in 2016. In offering feedback, they stated that they had attempted to situate themselves in the piece whilst watching it, aware that the original workshops had been part of the development. However, they 'couldn't really connect [their] own experience' (Respondent 12, 2018) within the narrative, apart from 'the stuff at university' (Respondent 12, 2018). This was of particular interest to me, as it had been roughly two

years since the preliminary workshops this respondent had participated in and, therefore, the project had evolved far from the original exercises. As I was embedded within the process, I could see the connective tissue from the *Plan B* workshops, specifically in the themes carried over into the later workshops and subsequently developed into the narrative. However, such a reaction indicated that their own specific input, or what they remembered of it, hadn't been addressed in the piece.

However, another respondent who *had* been present in the final *What Now?* workshop that year offered feedback that indicated that they felt as though their input *did* contribute to the piece; '[people can come and] hear the voices of a generation that are currently being spoken by those other than themselves, [it's] an opportunity to hear their thoughts, their feelings first hand' (Respondent 11, 2018). Whether this was because their input informed the piece more directly – it is worth noting here that this participant had the opportunity to 'archive' the responses they felt should be included in the piece in jars at the end of their workshop whilst the previous respondent didn't – or whether it was because their workshop occurred more recently, is unclear. Whilst it was never my intention to be able to represent all of the input gathered through the workshop sessions, but to offer an impression of the structure of feeling inherent within such input, it is interesting to note the disparity here, and unfortunate that I do not have more information from additional respondents in order to investigate this further. In regard to my responsibility as a practitioner-playwright platforming the issues, narratives and concerns raised in the workshops, this discrepancy raised particular questions about how I promote this platforming within such workshops. Whilst I had attempted at giving participants agency in being responsible for selecting the input collected in each workshop in the *What Now?* series, the *Plan B* series didn't offer this form of agency. In the examples above,

this translated into a disconnect for the millennial participant / audience member. I see my later use of the jars in the *What Now?* workshops as the beginning of an experiment in facilitating a longer-lasting effect from the participants on the development of a piece. The development of this methodology will inform my future practice which, as per the Listening Theatre, will aim to extend the effort and effects of dialogical engagement past the performative events themselves.

4.6   OUTCOMES

Like Lions was an experiment in theatrical form that applied metamodern sensibilities through the development of practical modalities taken from millennial theatre companies whose methodologies sit within the frame of an emerging theatrical structure of feeling; the Listening Theatre. Through this, I applied the metamodern to a theatrical frame, offering specific new insights into how the metamodern can be observed and applied within contemporary political theatre.

The input gathered through the *What Now?* workshops fed into both the development of the characters and the narrative of the play, as well as providing an opportunity to call attention to the development of the piece within the piece itself. The actors referring to the original workshops and the development of the narrative from these, as well as reading actual input from workshop participants, developed forms of meta-reflexivity. This allowed me to advance the elements of my practice I aimed to develop at the outset of this research: the paradoxical asking of an audience to believe in characters and narratives whilst also being completely aware of how these have been constructed.

The critical and audience reception of the work confirmed that my experiments with metamodern modalities in the structure and form of *Like Lions* were discernible by the audience and, in a majority of cases, positively contributed to the reception of the piece, as detailed above. Claire Minnit states that the structure of *Like Lions* 'paves the way for a new kind of storytelling' (Minnit, 2018), indicating that there is an original theatrical form in *Like Lions* that points towards future contemporary developments. This corroborates my intentions for the piece to experiment with metamodern sensibilities and the particular modalities of the Listening Theatre.

Like Lions offers specific, new insights into original forms of practice that develop practical methodologies located in the work of other British, millennial political theatre makers. Additionally, this practice both maps and applies the metamodern onto a theatrical framework. By developing practical modalities of engagement located within the work of other millennial artists and utilising them to engage with the millennial generation itself, I was able to both interrogate and platform the millennial experience according to the input gained through such engagement. In turn, my application of these companies' modalities within the staging of *Like Lions*, and embedding the metamodern within this framework, developed such modalities for future use, paving the way, to use Claire Minnit's phrasing, for new forms of metamodern theatre.

CONCLUSION

5.1   SOLVING *TWENTYSOMETHING*'S PROBLEMS

This thesis is the result of a practice-based Ph.D. study focused on developing my own artistic praxis, culminating in developing new metamodern forms of theatrical practice through what I term the Listening Theatre. In this research, I have mapped the Listening Theatre as an emerging structure of feeling in the landscape of contemporary British theatre, fundamentally connecting theatre makers in the millennial generation to these new shifts in performance practices. By developing this as a speculative theatrical framework, I have been able to develop new theatrical forms of storytelling that aim to speak with and to the millennials as a generation affected by the particular oscillating tensions between hope and hopelessness, optimism and doubt, irony and sincerity. Through this, I have located the metamodern within a theatrical framework, allowing me to intentionally develop metamodern forms of political performance. This contributes important new insights into possible future trajectories for British political theatre in the post-postmodern paradigm.

By locating my practice as part of a wider sphere of work created by other millennial artists, I have been able to understand how my work has been affected by this broader structural shift from the postmodern to the metamodern. In this context, postmodernity refers to a historical structure of feeling defined through 'ironic detachment' (Gorynski, 2018) and Lyotard's 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (1984) culminating in 'deconstruction, parataxis and pastiche' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p.10). As an ensuing cultural structure of feeling, metamodernism emerges from, and reacts to, the

postmodern. This cultural shift oscillates between both postmodern and pre-postmodern aesthetic structures; 'between irony and enthusiasm, between sarcasm and sincerity […] between deconstruction and construction' (van den Akker & Vermeulen, 2017, p.11). As metamodernism emerges from and reacts to the postmodern, I locate my own practice as emerging from and reacting to the postdramatic, when the postdramatic is defined as the exclusion of 'mimesis, narration and representation' (Lavender, 2016, p.87) as per Lehmann's definition (1999). In this respect, my practice reflects Schuhbeck's initial tracing of a new application of the 'pristine urge to tell stories' (Schuhbeck, 2012) in contemporary theatre. Through framing my practice within these wider cultural shifts, I was then able to reapply this new understanding onto my own practice, using the millennial and the metamodern as artistic, aesthetic and theoretical frameworks in which to intentionally develop aspects of my practice that I originally problematised in 2014's *Twentysomething: A Reading List*. In this piece, I developed a methodology which I had previously built with Pregnant Fish Theatre that experimented with re-centering an intimate, transferential act of storytelling in performance. Through this, I had begun to investigate how performance could fluctuate between the 'fictive' and the 'real'. I saw this modality as the beginnings of a methodological approach that was built on a paradox of dis/belief centered around a fascination with the 'authentic' within performance and felt that further experimentation was required to develop this paradoxical element of my own work.

Twentysomething… also attempted to performatively explore issues surrounding the millennial generation through fictionalising my own experience, and that of my peers, as part of the group that began our formative adult years within a period of particular precarity in Britain. Whilst the piece was based largely on my own experience, I was

particularly interested in the dichotomy between how my generation was being defined through the media and the actual, lived experience of the millennials ourselves. I then became interested in how my developing methodology, which allowed for an intimate and determinedly honest connection between actor and audience, could be used as a political tool to platform the *actual* experience of the millennials in order to challenge dominant stereotypes as defined by the media. I began this PaR research, therefore, with the intention of developing forms of intimate storytelling as a way to simultaneously investigate and develop work from the millennials as a generational cohort.

5.2   MILLENNIAL POLITICAL PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

This research project mapped a number of common theatrical, aesthetic and political concerns within the work of millennial theatre makers that point towards an emerging millennial theatrical framework. In analysing four case studies as representative of a cross section of millennial theatre in Britain – The Gramophones, Feat.Theatre, Lung and Eager Spark – I located four principal interconnected modalities that were evident in the work of each company; *social engagement*; *audience engagement*; modalities concerning the *authentic*; and an oscillation between the *hopeful and the hopeless*. These forms of *social engagement* and *audience engagement* build upon, and develop beyond, the previous performance practices of Bruce Barber's littoral art (1998), Grant Kester's dialogical art (2005) and Andy Lavender's theatres of engagement (2016) in their attempts to facilitate dialogical engagement between artist and community, or artist and audience, that extend beyond an initial or subsequent performative event. Additionally, the elusive concept of the *authentic* is an essential concern in these millennial theatre maker's performances, with aspects of the artists' and audiences' 'real' lives being integrated into the texts through verbatim platforming, or into the performative space through, for instance, jars

of memories donated by audience members (*Playful Acts of Rebellion*, 2014). This endeavour towards authentic forms of dialogically engaged political performance are optimistic attempts at enacting political or societal change through theatre.

However, each case study is also inherently sceptical, questioning and critical of this attempt at affective political theatre. Whilst a critical evaluation of performance practice undertaken by the company itself in order to better develop such practice is not inherently unusual, what sets these companies apart in this respect is that, throughout their works, the act of critiquing the performance's political and social efficacy is part of the performance itself. Such self-reflexive performance both strives for political affect through theatre *and* questions the power, purpose and positioning of such an endeavour. These performances oscillate between optimism and doubtfulness, striving towards forms of political affect whilst also embracing a possibly inevitable failure. They attempt change whilst acknowledging futility, through a constant fluctuation within a *hope/less* space of liminality.

Through identifying these interrelated concerns between the millennial case studies, I define the structure of feeling emerging within the work of millennial political theatre makers as **the Listening Theatre**. By applying Raymond Williams' structure of feeling as a theoretical frame, the Listening Theatre is not intended as a theatrical framework or artistic movement, but encapsulates a number of interrelated methodological choices within the work of millennial companies that create a state of metaxy between hope and hopelessness; aiming to improve the dialogue between communities, artists and audiences through listening to others whilst also critiquing, and listening to critiques of, its own listening.

Whilst there are implications revealed by this study regarding possible future trajectories for millennial-made performance modalities, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this. As I have derived the modalities of the Listening Theatre from the work of four British companies alongside my own work, this encompasses a relatively small portion of the substantial amount of millennial-led theatre companies in Britain. The Listening Theatre, therefore, is not an overarching, millennial structure of feeling within contemporary theatre. Rather, it encapsulates a particular sensibility within certain forms of political theatre created by British millennial companies over the past few years. It is one of many such structures in place at the current time and is situated within the broader metamodern structure of feeling.

5.3   THE METAMODERN IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

Whilst the Listening Theatre builds upon previous theatrical modes concerned with the dialogical, the littoral and the engaged, this is coupled with its inherent connection to the millennial generation in two important respects. Firstly, the central oscillation between optimism and doubtfulness, the repeated concerns regarding the authentic and the endeavours towards progressive, utopian performatives all reflect particular metamodern sensibilities. Secondly, the trends of the Listening Theatre also build upon foundational aspects of the British millennial generation when viewed, similarly, as a structure of feeling. These include an oscillation between the irony and cynicism instilled within us through postmodern, Gen X culture in our childhoods and the optimism implanted in us through our Baby Boomer parents and the educational system of the late 1990s and 2000s. This oscillation is then exacerbated by the particular anxieties faced by millennials in

their formative adult years. The precarity made prevalent through the imposition of post-financial crash austerity and dominance of insecure, neoliberal work models instils a sense of lost futures (cf. Fisher, 2014) within the generational cohort. Following Daniel Shulze's view of an historically repeating interest in authenticity as a 'counter-movement to feelings of uncertainty and instability' (Shulze, 2017, p.23), the particular prolonged precariousness experienced by the millennials, exacerbated by economic and employment precarity, has led to a renewed interest in the authentic and the analogue (cf. Olvera, 2018): indicating that my own artistic preoccupation with intimate theatre that rejects postmodernist distancing and digitisation is inherently affected by my own position within the millennial generation.

Through understanding the Listening Theatre as part of the wider shift beyond postmodernity, I then located the four central modalities as reflective of the essential properties of the metamodern structure of feeling as the concept that best encapsulates the current post-postmodern paradigm. I apply Vermeulen and van den Akker's principle definition regarding metamodernism as an attempt to speak to a number of interrelated cultural and artistic shifts that oscillate between what the pair 'may call – and of course cannot be reduced to – postmodern and pre-postmodern (and often modern) predilections' (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2017, p.11). The Listening Theatre's concerns surrounding the authentic and a central oscillation between disparate polarities such as optimism and doubtfulness or sincerity and irony are reflective of the main components of the metamodern as defined primarily by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010; 2015; 2017). The endeavours towards social betterment enacted through utopian performatives (cf. Dolan, 2007), despite a possibly inevitable failure, also encapsulate Luke Turner's definition of the metamodern as a structure that does not 'propose any kind of utopian

vision [but] the climate in which a *yearning* for utopias, despite their futile nature, has come to the fore' (Turner, 2015).

This application of the metamodern is 'neither a movement, nor a manifesto' (Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2015), not something to 'aspire to or distance ourselves from' (Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2015), but a descriptive rather than prescriptive terminology. Despite this, I have also drawn on Hanzi Freinacht's application of the metamodern. His *Listening Society* (2017) reconstitutes the oscillation between predominantly modern and postmodern predilections towards a specific political movement focussed on improving the eudemonic happiness of each individual by crafting better dialogues between disparate polarities (cf. Freinacht, 2017, p.73). Freinacht's use of the metamodern repurposes, and inherently transforms, how the term was originally construed through cultural criticism. My application of Freinacht's political metamodernism does not conflate these two diverging terminologies. Rather, there are particular elements within his Listening Society that are reflected in the structure of feeling I located within the theatre of my millennial case studies. Specifically, this includes his focus on a collective sense of loss being borne from an awareness 'of potentials that never materialize' (Freinacht, 2017, p.6) leading to endeavours towards social betterment through facilitating better, 'authentic' (72) dialogical engagement. Whilst my understanding of the metamodern is situated alongside what has come to be termed the 'Dutch School' (Cooper, 2018), based on Vermeulen and van den Akker's popularisation of the term, I also appropriate Freinacht's *Listening Society* in my naming of the Listening Theatre. Both of these theses, political and theatrical, share particular foundations and intentions concerning utopic improvement through dialogical engagement. The Listening Theatre, however, differs from Freinacht's political manifesto

in the self-scepticism apparent within it. Whilst these artists want to be optimistic and sincere in their endeavours towards some form of progress, they cannot help but oscillate between this and an inherent doubtfulness and critique of such endeavours.

In my application of Raymond Williams' structure of feeling to define the millennial, I am able to encapsulate 'embodied, related feelings' (Williams, 1969, p.18) in order to, as per Vermeulen and van den Akker's use of the term to frame their understanding of the metamodern, 'periodize the contemporary and think the present historically' (Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2015). As definitions of the millennials are varied, conflicting, and largely perpetuated via negative media stereotypes surrounding the 'mythical millennial' (Cairns, 2017), this framework allowed me to generate my own understanding of the millennial as an 'experience of the present' (Williams, 1977, p.128). This was initially built upon a broad analysis of the particular structures that have affected millennials' formative years, particularly focused on the impact of being 'sold a career ladder that doesn't exist anymore' (Thompson, 2018) and emerging 'into an adult world where only one rule exists – the certainty of uncertainty' (Huntley, 2006, p.15). My definition of the millennial as a structure of feeling encapsulates dominant **anxieties** within the generation that have been brought about by a **precarity** unique to our historical situatedness and the prevailing sense of **lost futures** that this evokes which, in turn, leads to a resurgence of interest in the **authentic**. By applying the methods of engagement located in the Listening Theatre to the members of the millennial generation, I was then able to investigate the validity of this analysis through my developing praxis; utilising millennial-created modalities to examine the millennials themselves.

5.4 THEATRICAL APPLICATIONS OF A STRUCTURE OF FEELING

In this study I have explored and investigated how particular practical methodologies located in the work of the millennial case studies can be used to create new forms of dialogically engaged performance. Through my analysis of a number of workshops with millennial participants, I have detailed my attempt to facilitate dialogue between participants through simple, performative exercises that built upon The Gramophones' forms of *gentle interaction*. This study aimed to apply millennial methodologies to the millennial generation, concurrently facilitating a space in which I could investigate how millennial participants related their own experience to that of the 'mythical millennial', and whether their input supported or contradicted this dominant appellation or my own parallel understanding of the millennial as a structure of feeling. In this thesis, I have detailed how this initial research was limited in its ability to, as per Freinacht, create better dialogues between different polarities. This was due to the shared attitudes of the participants revealing a largely agreeable bias within the group. This gentle interaction did, however, provide a 'therapeutic' space for the participants, enabling forms of catharsis to occur and developing exercises that enabled detailed personal responses to aspects of the mythical millennial to be recorded and then used as primary material to generate a subsequent performance.

It is important to note that the relatively small cross section of millennials in both series of workshops limits the extent of my conceptualisation of the millennial as structure of feeling. My definition is derived from this particular set of data and, whilst I was able to use detailed qualitative input gained from these, the limitations of this data is in its (lack

of) representation. This unintended absence in the analysis is also an important factor to note regarding the exclusion of particular voices within the workshops. The initial series of workshops engaged with millennials that had previously worked with Pregnant Fish Theatre; majority-white, predominantly degree-educated members of the largely left-leaning creative class. Whilst I organised an outreach effort in order to engage with a wider variety of millennial participants for the subsequent *Plan B* workshops, the disparity between those who engaged with this online and the number of workshop attendees was considerable. As such, it is important to note certain factions of millennial society that were under-represented in the workshops; particularly BAME millennials and those without university experience. Additionally, the tasks undertaken in the workshops asked participants to engage empathetically and critically with each other and particular concepts; thereby necessitating that participants possessed the skills required for such engagement. Moreover, whilst the outreach effort was extensive for a project of this size, the publicity (see section 3.3.2) will have engaged *some* millennials whilst also disengaging others. Whilst I attempted inclusivity throughout the entire project, each of these factors will have excluded particular participants from the process, and their voices from *Like Lions*.

Although I have highlighted the communal effect of storytelling between performers and audience, the corresponding exclusion of other audiences from the performance is also of note. While audience numbers from *Like Lion*'s run at the Clapham Fringe were high for the festival and demonstrated a broad age range, as also evidenced by the variety of reviewers, this demographic is largely limited to those who would already engage with similar festivals or theatres in London. The scope of outreach, in this respect, was highly restricted, and reflects that of the workshops in terms of engagement. In further

244

developing the Listening Theatre, it will be important to broaden the scope of the listening being undertaken. I share reviewer Claire Minnitt's view that *Like Lions*, and by extension the methodology of the Listening Theatre, 'will hopefully engage wider audiences in the future, particularly those who are not keen theatre-goers' (Minnitt, 2019). In order to broaden the variety of voices listened to in such future projects, and the scope of audiences listening to these voices, further outreach work is vital to challenge the London-based, university educated, majority white, creative class -centric perspective that *Like Lions*, and its reception, was inadvertently built upon. This would offer a wider range of participants the opportunity to engage in cathartic listening and enable a broader demographic of narratives to be explored, staged and listened to.

By reorienting my praxis to focus on providing a cathartic space for the participants in exchange for their input as primary material, I was able to collect detailed insight into how the millennial participants related to, or located themselves within, the millennial as a structure of feeling. In analysing this input, I located six repeated concerns that largely supported, and developed beyond, my initial understanding of the millennial. This included; a ***lack of an authentic identity***, in part due to the millennials being defined by those outside the generation itself, but also inherently related to the sense of ***lost futures*** as detailed above; ***anxiety induced by precarity***, specifically in relation to precarious employment, which also related to certain ***geographical issues*** concerning rental precarity; ***constructed realities***, particularly in regards to the effect of social media *despite* an inherent understanding of the unreality of constructed online-selves; and ideas reflective of ***utopia*** as per Dolan's understanding of the utopic being 'always a metaphor, always a wish, a desire' (2005, p.170).

These six main concerns then became the thematic strands that made up the narrative of *Like Lions* alongside verbatim accounts of the input provided by workshop participants. As a piece of new political theatre, *Like Lions* applied methodologies taken from the millennial case studies to my own practice. This allowed me to develop my practice through new insight gained from an analysis of, and investigative engagement with, similar millennial artists' methodologies. As well as intentionally developing the theatrical forms of the Listening Theatre, my development of *Like Lions* deliberately utilised and applied metamodern aesthetics, modalities and theoretical concerns in order to intentionally create metamodern forms of theatre. Whilst the metamodern is a descriptive rather than prescriptive terminology, once I had located the thematics within the Listening Theatre to be inherently connected to the metamodern, I became interested in how, for the purposes of this research, the metamodern could be intentionally applied through certain aesthetic, artistic and structural methods to deliberately develop metamodern forms of theatre. My development of *Like Lions*, therefore, contributes new insight into how the aesthetics of the metamodern can be purposefully implemented into theatrical practice.

To develop the specific aspects of my practice I had originally problematised concerning simultaneous fiction and authenticity within intimate forms of storytelling, I have applied particular metamodern concerns alongside practical modalities taken from the case studies in experimental workshops, script writing and rehearsals. Through Eshelman and Dember's understandings of *the double frame* and *meta-reflexivity*, I was able to define my concerns regarding the tension between the real and the fictive in order to isolate the theatrical modalities that would allow me to develop this. In my application of this meta-reflexivity, I have reconstituted metamodern *oscillation*, usually located in a fluctuation

between predominantly modern and postmodern modalities (cf. Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010), as a practical *theatrical* method in order to continually fluctuate between; the fictive and the real, the sincere and the ironic, the emotional and the analytical, and the hopeful and the hopeless. This intentionally developed integral aspects I had located in the case studies of the Listening Theatre, allowing me to cultivate a theatrical framework that emphasised the inherent oscillation between a sincere strive towards constructive progression and authentic representation within political performance alongside an equal scepticism and critique of such an endeavour. By locating and defining these modalities in my own practice and the work of concurrent millennial companies, I isolated and defined particular practical tools that allowed me to develop the two paradoxical aspects I was particularly interested in within the work of the Listening Theatre; the oscillation between the fictive and the real and the continual fluctuation between hopeful and the hopeless.

If, as Claire Minnit's review suggests, 'Like Lions paves the way for a new kind of storytelling' (Minnit, 2018), this is because it is built upon modalities located in the work of emerging millennial companies and intentionally develops them through a metamodern lens. *Like Lions* is my attempt at developing currently emerging theatrical trends, both mapping and experimenting with these shifts in contemporary performance practice as they happen. By locating my work alongside the performance of other millennial companies, defining a speculative theatrical framework from this, and locating the essential shifts within these as part of the wider cultural shift to the metamodern paradigm, I have been able to develop my own practice in a way that consciously utilises, experiments with and interrogates the wider frames that have affected it. This has both allowed me to understand the reasons for my original artistic preoccupations, as well as

signposting towards future trajectories for the development of this work; enabling me to 'pave the way for a new kind of storytelling' that oscillates between being 'incredibly tranquil yet provocative' (Minnit, 2018) in its attempt to sincerely and progressively platform urgent issues in a way that, as reviewer David Weir made clear, 'is curiously matched with a diffidence about the ability to do so' (Weir, 2018). In both platforming the millennial experience and developing millennial-made theatrical modalities, the Listening Theatre and, by extension, *Like Lions* are inherently affected by the particular anxieties of the millennial generation in our continual oscillation between optimism and cynicism. As Michael Davis' (2018) review of the piece confirms, what *Like Lions* 'proposes is the exploration of ideas and the asking of questions. There are no panaceas, no ready-made answers, but the will to carry on and holding on to hope is all important…'.

5.5   TOWARDS THE LISTENING THEATRE

I suggest that my mapping of emergent trends within the work of contemporary millennial theatre makers, and my practical development of the modalities within this, offers original insight into current performance practice as it is continuing to develop. The Listening Theatre, as a theatrical structure of feeling, encapsulates these current developments and points towards a possible future trajectory for millennial, political performance practice.

This research project also provides an innovative understanding of how the metamodern is both located within, and can be intentionally applied to, the contemporary theatrical framework. It is one of the first studies to locate the metamodern within the field of theatre and performance, and the first to focus specifically on British theatre. Throughout this

study, I have disseminated this insight through five conference papers and two journal articles.

In my 2018 article for the Performance Philosophy Journal, 'The Listening Theatre: A Metamodern Politics of Performance' (Drayton, 2018c), I detailed a foundational understanding of the Listening Theatre as a speculative theatrical structure of feeling apparent within the work of Lung and Feat.Theatre. In this, I argued that the oscillation between optimism and doubtfulness in these companies' performances indicated that particular sensibilities ascribed to the metamodern could be located within these performances and, therefore, the metamodern could be used to understand certain methodological and aesthetic shifts that were becoming apparent in contemporary theatre practice.

My following article, 'A Silent Shout: Metamodern Forms of Activism in Contemporary Performance' (Drayton, 2019), for the ArtsPraxis Journal, located further metamodern oscillation in the political performance practice of London-based performance artist Mem Morrison and New York-based group LaBeouf, Rönkkö & Turner. This further developed how a fluctuation between (shouted) hope and (silent) hopelessness within these works exemplified shifts towards metamodern sensibilities within politically minded performance in both Britain and America.

This research, therefore, contributes significantly to current gaps in literature surrounding the interrelatedness between the metamodern as a cultural structure of feeling and emergent contemporary performance practices. My analysis follows Birgit Schuhbeck's initial, tentative tracing of 'new elements that imply a re-negotiation of known credos and

concepts in contemporary theatre' (Schuhbeck, 2012). Although her original article doesn't use the term metamodernism to describe the return of 'dramatic drama' (Schuhbeck, 2012), Daniel Shulze's later tracing of authenticity in contemporary performance practices invokes Schuhbeck's analysis in his provisional application of the metamodern onto the theatrical frame. Whilst he admits that it 'may not even [be] useful to try and find a label for an ongoing process' (Shulze, 2017, p.54), he applies metamodern terminology as a 'shorthand for contemporary structures of feeling without allowing it to become set in stone' (54) as a method of encouraging debate to 'refine concepts and encourage further discussion' (54). My own application of the metamodern functions as a further understanding of how metamodern sensibilities are observable in emergent theatre practices, locating integral aesthetic modalities that are recognisably part of this congruent shift from the postmodern to what I understand to be the metamodern. The Listening Theatre, therefore, proffers *one* strand of such evidence that the metamodern shift is evident within contemporary performance practice.

Following this, my research also offers new insight into the working practices of four British millennial companies who continue to create important, innovative and urgent performances across the country. Whilst I have primarily used their input to investigate whether there are interconnected sensibilities apparent in their methodologies as members of the millennial generation, it is my hope that this study has provided original contextual understanding of these exciting companies' work. By including my conversations with each company in the appendix of this thesis, I aim to offer a platform for further discussion and valuable, new insight into this millennial performance practice as it continues to develop.

Finally, I would like to suggest that my research offers a possible mapping in terms of how this millennial, metamodern performance practice *might* develop. In this PaR project, I have intentionally developed particularly metamodern aspects located within the methodologies of millennial artists that I saw as related to the particular anxieties bred through the precarities experienced by the millennial generation I am a member of. I posit that this development of the Listening Theatre towards a performative form that 'paves the way for new forms of storytelling' (Minnit, 2018) indicates potential trajectories for future developments of these millennial performance practices *if* such precarity continues to affect the sensibilities, lives and working practices of my generation.

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APPENDIX

A.1   A CONVERSATION WITH *THE GRAMOPHONES*

24th April 2016

Hannah Stone and Ria Ashcroft are Co-artistic Directors of *The Gramophones*, an all-female theatre company based in Nottingham. The company was set up in 2009, and 'use[s] inventive storytelling, physical theatre, clowning, circus and autobiographical work to create accessible theatre with a focus on women's voices' (The Gramophones, 2019). In 2016, I spoke with Hannah and Ria about their 2014 show, *Playful Acts of Rebellion* and their approach to creating playful, political theatre.

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Tom: I wanted to know as a background, for the purposes of research, how did you guys set yourselves up right at the beginning? I know this is an awful question!

Hannah: I had always had the idea that I wanted to run a company. I trained as an actor, but five years later I'd not really done anything about running a company. I'd moved out of where I was living, I'd split up with somebody and kind of like, "Right, I need to do this now and set up a company." I met Christie, who's in *Playful Acts of Rebellion* as well, on a clown course and we were like, "Why aren't women considered funny?"

We had a big rant about why there weren't that many female comedians or there weren't at the time, there's a lot more now, I think, and went, "Why don't we get together and play and be silly and see if anything comes of it, based on the clown stuff that we'd done?" Then I was like, "Let's get a group together that we can open it out a bit". I got a few more funny women together, made a little note and put it up around lots of cafes in Nottingham

saying, "We're looking for quirky female performers for a theatre project". Having no idea really what it was, and Ria responded to that and a couple of others. We started-

Ria: We started playing really. There was an old space that was a bit like a squat basically that we could use as a personal space so whenever we had evenings free or Sundays, or Saturdays, we'd meet up and try out lots of different clown games and drama ideas and devising techniques and stuff.

The other thing is that, in Nottingham, there's not really anywhere that you could do a degree in theatre anymore, you used to be able to do it at Trent, but you can't anymore. You can at Derby but there's nothing there for after - if you are an actor or theatre maker and you come back as a professional, there wasn't anything to keep your skills up, to keep doing new classes and stuff. So, we started doing that and it was a really good to have that opportunity to work with other professionals and learn from each other.

Hannah: I had a relationship with Hatch which is a platform in Nottingham that put on performance-y work-- that's what they say, 'performance-y work'-- in different locations in Nottingham. At the time that's what it was, it's generated into something else now. I knew them and they said, "We'd love you to do something for this festival we're doing," which was the theme of *abroad* and it was on Broad Street. We went okay we can make some kind of clowny, comical thing about seaside's and holidays and made this twenty-minute piece and we really weren't sure how it was going to work, how it was going to go down.

Ria: It was a bit experimental, a bit of a gamble.

Hannah: It was in a cafe, with audience and non-audience, some people were expecting it, some people weren't so it was really exciting, and it went down really, really well.

Ria: Yes, they loved it. It was really fun.

Hannah: So, we kind of went, "Oh, we should really carry on!" And I still had the burning ambition of it being a professional thing, and it progressing from that stage.

Yes, then it just grew from there. We got offered opportunities and started to develop ideas. We developed that show a bit further, and another show, and then we got quite a big grant to develop two shows. Then *End to End,* which you've probably heard about, and to develop the organization of the company. It was that that really gave us a firm grounding and organisational side definitely, and having a chance to play with those ideas, put them together and tour them as well.

Tom: Yes, of course. So, working in a small cafe space as your original show, did that influence the way you were going on?

Hannah: I think we really enjoyed that and it's something we are going back to. Another piece that we're making later in the year is site specific. I think although our work went away from that, we went into more touring, we like to find ways to respond to location if we can. To feel like the show is part of that place, not just shoved in it. Which is quite hard thing to do, especially in theatres. I think in the village ones and community centres there's more of that DIY feel, and you can make it your own a bit more and your audience is right there, so it's a lot easier to feel like it's an event, it's a happening, rather than just a show that's coming in.

Ria: Because we always do stuff before and after shows, always.

Tom: Yes. Can you expand on that, please?

Hannah: Is there a specific show you want us to talk about in relation to?

Tom: Well, I'm thinking in terms of when I came to see *Playful Acts of Rebellion*, of course, we had to write things on our sheet of paper and throw them on stage. Then later on, of course, we wrote on post cards to help make *Wanderlust* as well. So, you have that concurrent, continual aspect. […] I'm just thinking of theatre as a continual event in that time, not just as the show itself.

Hannah: Yes exactly, so *Wanderlust* - we-- What did we do? We didn't do a huge lot beforehand and there was only three people. But we greeted the audience and said hello. Then we had a bit of a chat and sit and like say, "Have you come far?" Just trying to get a bit of rapport going, nothing specific. At the end we have, the whole stage is full of jars with those stories that we collected. Something that represents that story in the jar, or some new writing itself depending on what we and the designer decided. Then we invite the audience to come and open jars, read things, touch things. Add their own jar, which a couple of people did.

Ria: Yes, that was something we did. We tried to make it that when people booked a ticket at the box office, we'd ask them to ask the person to bring something in a jar that represented some memory, or something that was important to them. Which, to be honest, not a lot of people did do, but I think that is because it is quite a-- Probably people from the box office maybe didn't say, because that is quite a difficult thing to say. Obviously, if they rang up us to book the ticket, it could be a lot easier.

Hannah: But, the ones that did, it made them interact more. I remember a woman brought a whiskey bottle in with a notice of death certificate or something in it and told us about her estranged father who she'd wanted to find, and then eventually found him and found out he was an alcoholic. It wasn't a positive relationship, but she gave us that -- It was really interesting that the people that did, and then lots of people who didn't bring jars did

come tell us about it. "Oh, reminded me of seeing the northern lights in Scotland when I was working out there. I'd never seen it before and I didn't know what it was," things like that.

Ria: Actually, it was *Wanderlust* where there was a huge amount of people who really did want to talk to us. I had a few people who wanted to talk to me about illnesses in their family, or hereditary diseases because that's part of my journey in that show, which was really wonderful and really beautiful for people to come and want to share that with you. Because it's so personal, so you don't normally hear those kinds of stories when you could say, "That felt really good to hear" - that's really nice.

Hannah: Yes, and to go back to *End to End,* what we did with that was obviously at the beginning we ask people for what feels like home to them. Christie was marking the audience's heights on a sign post. Not only do you see yours, you see the previous audiences. And then it comes out later in the show that we did that at someone's house, and it makes a mark on that place from that journey.

Then the 'feel like home for you' things-- because the moment where Rita says, "I want to go on the adventure. I don't want to be staying at home. I want to be out there seeing the world." She actually wants to stay still and, in that moment, she reads out all the things from the audience about their 'home' descriptions. Then at the end we give them a seed and a little instruction basically saying, "Go on an adventure. Plant a seed. Then write to us and tell us about your journey." The postcards that we got from people on the original journey kept getting added to from the audiences. It was just, we still get them now.

Ria: It's so true!

Hannah: Still like, "Oh, I kept your seed for you, and I've just been to Norfolk and I planted it." I could say it does feel like it stretches further than the moment and further than that night. It stretches beyond that, before the show, leading up to it, and after. Even *years* after.

Tom: That's brilliant because that's one of my questions is about the efficacy of theatre. I'm looking a lot at theatre that has a-- whether it's intentionally political or not, but you guys obviously, you're including the audience which makes a statement about the theatre. In order, really, to create this lasting experience. How important is that within your methodology? To create an experience that isn't just within the theatre. And - do you think the theatre *can* do that successfully?

Ria: I think when we start the devising process, we're always thinking from the beginning of the audience's relationship within their experience. Are they going to have-- this really important to us to create from that viewpoint, so that we're not-- It's not really about us, it's more about what they're going to take away from it? How it's going to make them feel.

Hannah: Yes. I think it is tough to extend it past that night, but I think if you really care about your audience, which we do-- we're always saying, "If we've collected a story from somebody, how would we feel if that person is then in the audience, will it mean a lot to them, or will they hate what we'd done with it?" We always think how it affects them and about strengthening the relationship rather than-- We're not a company that wants to push our audience to kind of-- I think that's probably what we did without us meaning to. We want to bring them in. We want to involve them.

Ria: The subject matter and the things we talk about within the show– it's really important to us, it all comes from a place of honesty. We're not trying to alienate them, I guess. We want them to be with us and to come with us on a journey.

Tom: Yes, that's a huge part, for me, of what you create, it does come from honesty. It also comes from not trying to theatricalize that kind of thing I suppose. It's a connection with the audience that is, very definitely, a conversation.

Hannah: Yes, I think I would say particularly *Playful Acts of Rebellion,* and *End to End* is along those lines, although *End to End* is more storytelling and it's less talk back to us in that way. Yes, it's interesting, and I'd like to explore more how theatrical stuff can still have that conversation because I think *Tarzanna*, by the nature of what it is -- it's going to be an aerial piece. It's going to be theatrical. It's going to have characters. It's not going to be a talk to the audience, because it's for children as well, so it needs to be visual. But how can we still find ways to make them involved and make them part of the conversation rather than like, "This is our piece. Good bye." [laughs]

Tom: I think that's a really important part of what you attempt to do and my understanding about it is that you have that lasting conversation with the audience that you're hosting.

Hannah: Yes, try to. It will be interesting to see is there anybody from our audience or people that have seen our shows that do still think about it or it has made them go on a journey that they wouldn't have gone on and then they've met somebody or they've changed their career because that will be *incredible*. [laughs] That will be pretty arrogant to assume that really.

[laughter]

Ria: Of course, there must have been someone.

Hannah: Yes. There was a guy who said after *Wanderlust*, "I've been through a really shit time". And you know when you don't know what that is, but you know it's something really bad? He went, "This show has just made me feel uplifted, like I need to grab hold

of the moment and not dwell on what's happened." That was incredibly powerful to hear that and surprising because you do sometimes think, well I'm just making theatre-- we are trying to do all those things but also trying to entertain for the night, aren't we?

Tom: Yes, exactly.

Ria: Yes. And it is really important, because people come to a theatre show with lots of preconceived ideas and some people just find it really difficult to suspend their disbelief or go on that journey. And for you to be able to actually take somebody somewhere. Maybe they were feeling really depressed but if you could break somebody out of that through theatre it's pretty amazing. It's pretty encouraging that we have this.

[laughter]

Hannah: Therapeutic.

Ria: Yes, therapeutic.

Tom: It's interesting looking at this sort of theatre that aims to have a relationship with the audience as well. There's an academic called Jen Harvie who has written about companies like Punchdrunk or Shunt. Theirs is a very different connection to what you guys are trying to create but there's this connection with the audience in their immersive work. They're companies that involve the audience, interact with the audience.

She debates whether it's actually a lasting effect or not. Whether it's just a perceived moment within the theatrical space and, actually, once you leave the theatrical space, those connections between actor and audience, between audience and audience don't exist anymore and it's just faked connection. I don't know if I agree with her or not.

It depends-- especially with your postcards coming back to you-- that proves *some* sort of lasting connections on the shows that you've created?

Moving on from there, though. Although you started with clowning-- your shows have a poignancy to them, I suppose, and a very human connection obviously. What kind of message do you think-- if there is any kind of message-- you are trying to put across within your methodology, if it could be distilled?

Hannah: I think it is different with different shows, the message. Like the message of *End to End* was "go on an adventure". Or, "do something that you haven't done before", because a lot of people have been on an adventure or they have been travelling the world and all sorts of thing, but "do something that scares you or take a risk". And also, "talk to strangers"!

Ria: Yes, talk to strangers!

Hannah: I would say a lot of our work is "talk to strangers", isn't it? To seize the day, isn't it?

Ria: It's like, don't forget to actually live. That kind of thing - of don't walk around with your eyes shut, like actually have a look around at the world and see how beautiful it is. And how horrible it is, too. It's just all of it. Yes.

Hannah: That's why we found *Playful Acts* so difficult because our work before that had been very uplifting and positive and "everything is wonderful" and "travel from London to John O'Groats – you'll have a great time!" and then it's like, we actually wanted to make something more political and we are only-- or particularly me and Christie-- are only just becoming politicized and we're making a show about that. And we suddenly go, "Oh god, how do we end this in a positive, uplifting way or how do we get the message

across that doing something is worth it, when you still feel all those emotions?" We're not doing anything, is anything really changing? It was a bloody hard slog that show.

Ria: I think it's really difficult to make political theatre and obviously because everybody's got different politics.

Hannah: And an agenda.

Ria: Yes, also, it felt like we'd opened ourselves up to far more criticism. If you make a show that's like, "everything's great" and it's really quirky and free and what a journey, everyone's like--

Hannah: "Love it!" Well, not everyone, but.

Ria: Some people might be like, "Oh shut up", and "You're too twee, I'm not interested in that. I want the dark, raw side of life!" But those people just didn't come see it. They're just like, "Oh no, we're not going to watch it. I'm not going to watch a colourful show about that. I don't want to." With the political stuff, we certainly opened ourselves to a whole different audience I think, and we were like, "Oh, God. Shit.'

Hannah: But at the end of the day, it still got people talking, and whether or not they disagreed with us or agreed with us, it started conversation. We did it in Scotland at a rural touring conference. It wasn't really right for that audience. It wasn't really right for what they wanted. And, afterwards, we just thought it was really weird. Normally, when you go to the pub afterwards, everyone comes and says, "It's brilliant and we really enjoyed it. How are you doing?" They just didn't really speak to us, but--

Ria: They didn't completely like the fact that we were English.

Hannah: No.

Ria: No, because it was before the independence [referendum]. I think they didn't-- well, some of them.

Hannah: Maybe the fact that they wanted a Scottish company rather than the fact that we were English, but the women who ran one of the schemes, apparently was up until 4:00 in the morning debating the issues of the show with her colleague. She was one of the people that was a bit funny with us. At the end of the day, if we've got someone that doesn't like the work debating all the issues, not debating whether it was any good, but the issues--

Ria: It's bringing up other things, isn't it? Actually, the next morning, she came and had a chat with us, didn't she? She was really nice the next morning.

Hannah: Creating conversation would be kind of-- it's really useful to talk about, actually, because although we've got our business statement and our mission statement and creating colorful, playful-- for our audience, it's actually really good to say what's your message, what is it that you want to get across? And obviously, after doing *Playful Acts,* I think our work now *is* going to be more political because we are all much more involved and much more aware.

So, *Tarzana*, it's obviously got a political element to it, a political edge. We're making a piece in Bolsover and Mansfield, and so we were just thinking about it today, which is a walking tour with female characters in history and thinking what-- we need to think about what we're saying about the women of that town. What is it that we want to say? What's the message that we want to get across - because we don't know the answers to that question, and it'll come from meeting people, but actually, rather than just putting it all in a big splodge, what's the key thing that we want to say? Bolsover women are hardy. Probably. [laughter]

Ria: Hardcore.

Hannah: Hardcore, yes.

Ria: Hardcore women. Could be some hardcore women.

Hannah: That's what the show is about.

[laughter]

Tom: Going back to *Playful Acts*, obviously, as you say, opening up your own personal politics on the stage is almost a bit more personal than telling your own story in that respect, isn't it? Especially in England, we tend not to talk about politics, especially around friends.

Ria: Yes, it's considered rude, isn't it, to ask who they voted for.

Tom: Where did that desire to-- because what's interesting to me is the distinction between, "We want to do something political on the stage, we want to present our political views", and also, the millennial idea of, "But we can't really do anything about it". Like, "We're angry but we don't know the answer". Where did the idea to put this on stage like that come from?

Ria: I think it was through the current affairs that were happening. Malala had been shot by the Taliban, and then there was Pussy Riot, that had happened. We were all feeling quite like we wanted to be able to do something.

Hannah: We were quite inspired by those women, really.

Ria: Yes, and wanting to feel like we were, in some way, part of the solution and not just sitting back and not saying anything. I think that's the thing. It is really difficult because

it's not like there is one answer as to how to fix all the problems in the world and everything, but also, it feels like, if you don't speak out and say something, then you're adding to the problem. For us, we just felt we had to do something.

Hannah: And our way of doing that was through theatre. A lot of people have been a bit critical and said, "Which came first? The idea of the show or the political movement?" And it came together. I said, "I'd love to make a show about Pussy Riot", and then someone in the room went, "Well, yes, but we're not that. We're not Pussy Riot." I said probably five or 10 years before, "I'm not interested in politics" to my uncle, who I've never had a relationship with since because he's very political. I obviously *had* been political but not considered myself-- I'm not really got actively involved. Then went, "Oh, I should probably do some stuff before making a show about it rather than just going, 'let's make a show about it'."

Ria: It's quite different for me because I was part of a creative activism scene in Nottingham and part of the group called Mischief Makers. There's actually an article about Mischief Makers written by Wietse van de Werf. He's a Dutch activist who was part of Mischief Makers. It's in this book about modern day eco-heroes which-- You should read that too.

Hannah: You could send us both the link if that's easier.

Ria: I'll send you the link. Emily Hunter wrote the book. It's called *Next Eco-Warriors*. That's worth reading because that was sort of about the time in Nottingham when we all decided to come together and do that kind of creative activism and get on the streets and engage people in activism in a fun colorful way which was basically street theatre. I was doing that at university. I got involved with people in Nottingham who were quite eco. They did lots of making stuff out of rubbish and stuff like that.

They had this big event called The Rubbish Day Out. That was a really lovely time and it was just, sort of, lots of creative people coming together wanting to do something and that was the way want to do rather than being shout-y and wearing black. That wasn't for us. For me, it was kind of a journey coming back to doing *Playful Acts of Rebellion* because I stopped being an activist and started doing theatre stuff. So, it felt really nice to actually feel like I'd reached a point where it felt like it came back together again. And it was a really nice way to get back into it and share it with you and Christie and--

Hannah: Yes, I think that kind of feeling of "I can't do anything" is something that has lasted since doing the show. Even though I think doing the show is kind of doing something, and I have got involved with other things.

But then I listen to a podcast the other day of Caitlin Moran being interviewed, and she said about-- gender inequality was obviously my focus. She was saying about how you really write that and she was saying it's about showing women alternative roles and that's why she writes these incredible, hilarious female characters and I was thinking, "That's what I've been doing" and that's what making theatre is, we're making alternative human roles. We're showing ourselves on stage, who aren't a typical woman or aren't fitting into stereotypes and so that *is* doing something and whoever watches that theatre can think about that.

Ria: From when you decided you wanted to start an all-female theatre company. That is-

Hannah: Already a political choice.

Ria: It's already a political choice and they don't realize it.

Hannah: That's like hardcore women.

Ria: People might not necessarily go, "I'm doing something political." "I'm not political." But that doesn't matter and that's fine. Loads of people don't realize that everything they do in everyday life political.

Hannah: That's what's made me feel a little bit better about the current situation-- feeling, obviously, angry about politics and thinking my way, maybe, of doing stuff is to show alternative female role models and that might feel like a tiny thing and it probably is a tiny thing in the grand scheme of things but that is my contribution.

Ria: But that is what we are, isn't it? We are tiny.

Hannah: We are tiny.

[laughter]

Ria: We are tiny. Irrelevant. We're tiny.

Tom: That's taking what you're skilled at and what you do and doing something with it. That's a statement in itself as well.

To move on a little bit, though-- obviously there's an intimacy and connection with the audience in the spaces you use and the kind of audience interaction. How much do you tend to not use big, theatrical--Obviously, for your next show, *Tarzanna*, that's going to be a big, aerial--

Hannah: I always say theatrical-aerial spectacular.

Ria: Spectacular!

[laughter]

Tom: Yes, exactly—spectacularly theatrical. But, do you shy away from huge big technology and then try and concentrate on smaller, intimate things at all?

Ria: No, not really.

Hannah: We have to work to a budget and the spaces that we know we're going to be in, like we're on rural tours and obviously have got great contacts and that we did a lot of that. So, we know that the spaces are limited, the power points are limited, what we can take in the van is limited-- but I think if we could go bigger we would and we will obviously be for *Trazanna,* and it's going to be outdoors so that's going to give us an opportunity to be-- But then that's going to have its own restrictions.

Tom: Yes, of course.

Hannah: So, I wouldn't say so, it's more like what's suitable to the show as well and *End to End* did feel like it needed to be very DIY, maybe small and handheld projectors because it was like our home-movie and that felt appropriate—if we tried to do a big multimedia--

Ria: I think it would have been really odd.

Hannah: -- all singing, all dancing show about our journey, it wouldn't have been right.

Ria: A big tractor dance.

[laughter]

Tom: There's a line isn't there, where if you're trying to have this complete and honest connection with the audience and the level of theatricality you use there-- I think, from what I've seen you guys have done this quite-- well, fixed, it's never one way or the other.

Ria: I think also sometimes that big massive theatrical things can disconnect you from it, can't they, whereas it's quite nice just for it all to be they say quite handheld and--

Hannah: Close into this.

Ria: Yes.

Hannah: I definitely think intimate is something that I'm really interested in. The Bolsover and Mansfield pieces that we're doing are going to be an audience of two at a time, that's going to be of a completely different scale to *Tarzana*. But we need to think about how we still make it intimate, *Tarzana*, even though it could be a hundred people stood around looking up-- how do we still reach out to them? How do we still make it intimate even if it's not?

Because the thing I hate the most is going to see something where you're up in a balcony and you don't even get looked at by anyone and you just go completely cut off from it. That was one of the original things I said when we started the company was, I don't want to make it where the audience feel like a voyeur.

Tom: It's exactly what led me to you guys and the other companies I'm researching, because when we set ourselves up in 2010, the first show we did was - we wanted to take a musical and sort of de-musicalise it. So, we took *Sweeney Todd* up to the Edinburgh Fringe for free-- the first ever free Sondheim-- without any instruments, just kind of tribal drumming, in the back of a nightclub, where you can squeeze about 20 people in. And we squeezed about 40 and sacrificed our stage in doing so. So, we were in and around the audience doing this non-musical musical, but that connection with the audience we just fell in love with, and that's what we based ourselves on - this sort of intimacy.

Part of the research into this has gone into online social media and image crafting and then that kind of stuff. What I'm trying to work out is whether there's any kind of correlation between that and the intimacy certain young theatre makers search for in their theatre craft and whether there is a connection.

Hannah: Do a lot of people in theatre making search for that?

Tom: I'm homing in on the ones that do.

Hannah: Yes. I think it's like a rebel against that in a way really, although I do use social media and I am a fan of social media. But real human connection, it's like almost the antithesis of that isn't it? Maybe in some way it is a revolution to get away from that. I didn't think that it's as clear cut as that-- or is that is it?

Ria: No, I'm not sure.

Hannah: Because you can connect through that as well.

Ria: Yes, it's a great way to bring people together. Yes, I don't know.

Tom: I've been doing some generational research into what position we're in especially as artists and theatre makers economically as well. Has that [situation] affected your theatre? Personal economics and theatrical economics.

Hannah: I think you asked about this before [in 2014] and I read back in some answers and I think we were like "We've been really lucky because we've had successful Arts Council applications"-- and we *have* in that respect but also—us as individuals we've had times when we've been really struggling to make ends meet without having to do a minimum wage job or whatever which fills in half your time when you want to be creating.

Tom: Yes.

Ria: It's also, it's like-- where we live? I was talking to my friend the other day, like, "I couldn't live in London and do what I do. I wouldn't be able to afford to do what I do." I obviously spend a lot of time making theatre, I train my aerial stuff. I just wouldn't have that money to do that because I'd have to find £900 a month for my rent. Which I don't have to do in Nottingham because rent's nothing like this at all. I think living in London, it would be really difficult to be a theatre maker.

Hannah: Yes, definitely, you need to spend a lot more time working.

Ria: Yes, exactly […] It's just really expensive. I definitely understand the appeal, there's so much going on. It's so exciting and there's so many people that you can connect with. It's great but it's quite-- I think-- Realistically, it's quite nice being able to still make those connections. Obviously, not as much because I don't live here, but living in Nottingham and being able to come down and do workshops or meet companies or do stuff that way.

Hannah: I'm not really sure how much that current economic stuff is-- I'm not sure how much it's affected me. I don't know if I've had less work because of it. I don't know if I've been paid less than-- One of my jobs has-- Well, they tried to cut it-- My boss is amazing and managed to get around it. It was a county council youth theatre job and it was already low for what youth theatre money normally is. They were like, "You don't pass this points test or whatever-- And then you go down to 12 quid an hour." I only did two hours and I was driving in Nottingham. I was like, "Argh, can't do it." Luckily my boss found a way to basically-- Made us all quit and then transfer the job to freelance.

They could stay the same rent if we paid our own taxes. Still, it's still a crap rate. I guess that would have been a result of the cuts. They were trying to cut that down. I think it's

experience as well. It's even just the last two or three years, where I've been able to just do theatre and there's still times when money's tight. You know what I mean? It's not always plain sailing. I don't know. After September, I don't have any work, I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know whether, if this was 10 years ago, whether it would have been easier-- I don't know.

Tom: Yes, it's hard to know and it's hard not to talk in broad terms in that respect, as well, as in '10 years ago' or 'the last generation', all that kind of stuff. That kind of almost, like, fragility of not knowing, especially in the Arts, not knowing exactly where the next bit's going to come from. Or, if you're going to have enough time? Time is a huge thing. I studied my BA at Worcester, and when we finished there, there was a group of about five of us who stuck around purely to carry on making theatre-- we stayed together, we still had rehearsal space, and then we ended up working different minimum waged jobs on zero hour contracts. Was that ever an issue for you guys?

Hannah: Definitely at the start. When we were doing the evenings and weekends.

Ria: Yes, before we got any funding it was always really difficult to--

Hannah: Get everybody together.

Ria: Yes, definitely and find enough time.

Hannah: That definitely creates tension, as well. I can remember a few times when people cancelled rehearsals and me just being like--

Ria: When we looked over our first mission statement, one of the things we'd put was like, "If somebody wants to cancel the rehearsal, they have to rearrange it!"

Hannah: "And give at least three days' notice." [laughter]

Ria: We don't really have that problem now. We can take them out and we're like, "We were all really angry, weren't we?"

Hannah: We were really lucky because someone had a shift, or someone was exhausted because they have been working six days. It was "I can't face it," kind of thing.

Ria: Yes.

Hannah: It still is tough. I feel all the time, torn between-- If I got a proper job or a job in theatre, a marketing job that paid regular wage, I'll be able to get a mortgage. I'll be able to plan ahead-

Ria: [laughs] Plan ahead.

Hannah: - plan a holiday, whatever. Well, I can't do that because of this life that I choose to live. That's really hard, and I'm always going, "should I, shouldn't I," but then something exciting happens, we get a commission that we weren't expecting to get, and we were like, brilliant, we've got to do it, even if it's still going to be the same thing in six months' time. How long that will last and how long we'll be able to keep going on that, I don't know. [laughs] Hopefully, forever. We've got to re-do *End to End* when we're 70, that's our plan. Re-do it when we're ancient.

Tom: You'd say, though, for now that making theatre is more important than the—I was going to say constant worry [laughter]

Hannah: Economic rewards. [laughter] Definitely. I've always said do more if I can-- as long as I've got money to live.

Ria: Yes, definitely. We wouldn't do it if—you have to love it.

Hannah: It doesn't mean you don't question it. You still question it and think everybody that does theatre and no matter how much they love it, still goes, "Am I doing the right thing in terms of me carrying on. How long can I do this for?"

Tom: "Why am I investing all this energy into this when it's gone a few weeks later?" The show's over!

27ᵗʰ January 2018

Co-artistic Directors Matt Woodhead and Helen Monks founded *Lung* in Barnsley in 2012. The company is committed to making 'theatre by communities, for communities and with communities' (Lung, 2019) which has been described as work that 'blurs the line between art and activism' (Tripney, 2019). In early 2018, I sat down with the pair in Stratford, London to discuss their work with the local Focus E15 campaign, as well as their theatrical and political ethos.

—

Matt: I've never really thought of us as millennial theatre, either, which I guess is interesting because obviously we are, because that's our age. Because millennial theatre is starting to become a bit is a thing, isn't it now? Am I wrong? Am I right? I'm thinking of--

Helen: I don't know anything.

Matt: Maybe, or is everything millennial lately?

Helen: Well anything that's made by millennials will be millennial theatre, won't it? I bet it's a bit of an outside in term that's put on to- Because I doubt many companies would describe themselves as millennials.

Tom: No, I don't think so. I think for me it's just kind of looking within this age bracket. I think a lot of it is- because, actually, millennial hasn't been decided upon as like an actual academic term yet, as well, so it's kind of going-- Actually it's kind of a theme and there is this- generational research is quite hard because you start to generalize quite a lot.

It's like, "Oh yes, well, not everybody from 18 to 34 is the same, obviously, and not everybody from 34 to 50 is the same".

Like it's affected by where you are in the country, it's affected by your areas of the country, and all those kind of things but you can kind of start to talk about this idea of, it's called, a structure of feeling which is like a general kind of thing that you understand in life and culture and that kind of thing and you can't ignore it. You can't pinpoint it down, but you can kind of go, "Well, actually, we feel that and it's kind of there." Does that make sense?

Helen: Yes, totally.

Tom: Okay good. [laughs]

Matt: Totally. No, no yes.

Helen: I'm sold!

Matt: I'm sold.

Tom: Okay, I've got a few questions but if you need to rush off or anything let me know because I won't go on for too long.

Matt: That's fine, just go for it. If you need us to say anything or explain something just-

Tom: Yes, I will, thank you. I wanted to ask, first off, how you came to start-- and I've put it in quotes, "platforming political issues?"

Matt: Yes, that's interesting because--

Helen: You go because you started the company. I was involved later.

Matt: Not that much later though. The company began kind of like a response to- we were students at the University of Sheffield. It started as a response to arts cuts in the area. A lot of secondary state schools had had their funding cut for arts. Schools having people coming in to do workshops wasn't a kind of norm. I guess it probably had been cut even when we were at school.

We specifically went in to a lot of different schools in Sheffield and Barnsley, ran workshops and then we would then get, maybe, some work based on the stories of some of the young people, or it might just be like a show that connected with something that they were studying. Then we would invite all those different schools together to then go and see a show. Like, kit a theatre out for the night. We all pulled together-- We did about six or seven shows, kind of ran on that model and then we did *The 56*. Would you say it was political, maybe?

Helen: I would say that it responded really directly to an event within the community and so maybe as a consequence-- I don't know if I'd say it was political.

Matt: No, but basically it was about- in 1985, it was the last game in the season in Bradford. A wooden football stand went up and 56 people were left inside. Yes, maybe it's actually, but-- Anyway, I had a family connection to- I'm trying to condense this down because I have realized the full story can sometimes be really long-winded. Our producer, Gemma, was a Bradford City fan. She grew up not knowing anything about the disaster. It was something that people didn't really speak about.

We were coming up to the 30th anniversary. We wanted to find a way to empower survivors to tell their story and pass that legacy on to the younger generation. It was a piece that was about working with the different communities in Bradford, particularly like emergency services, football fans, people with low arts engagement but who wanted

to tell a story. Everyone wanted to remain anonymous. We ended up pooling lots-- We had like three main stories.

We worked quite intensively with three individuals and with their consent we then filtered and filled out more of their testimonies with different voices from the community. Put it on, and it was great. We raised money for Bradford Burns Unit as well, so it was that all profit from the production went back into that, even though it wasn't technically profit, because we didn't pay ourselves.

[laughter]

Helen: All of your fee went into that.

[laughter]

Matt: It felt really active. It was a piece about remembrance and how an older generation remembers an event that defined the community, but also how a younger generation engages with that. And then we were like-- There was this Focus E15 campaign. That was happening and we were based in Sheffield. We were just in Park Hill, one of the biggest housing estates in Europe and it was pretty much all, I believe, social housing. You'd go to the train station and the whole thing towers over you. It's literally all you see in the city. It was all boarded-- We went and looked round it all the time because we were all just really close. You'd find that the more that you went back, the more houses were boarded up. People were being evicted. You knocked on a door and some of them were like, "Russell Brand was here a couple of weeks ago. That's all we've had."

We were kind of interested in, particularly as a young company-- We were interested in telling that story, but the community had already disappeared. They'd already been disbanded. It was being sold off by Urban Splash, who have now gone bust. It's all just

empty now - people got re-housed and moved out and they're not going back. The Focus E15 Campaign were an example of how a community, facing a similar problem, that was national, were fighting and winning -- and we thought it might be interesting and it felt like it sat really nicely alongside *The 56*, which was about the passive remembrance, whereas *E15* was about active and fighting this company and empowering a younger generation. We were only 22-23 at the time but it was actually people who were younger than us-

Helen: Running the campaign.

Matt: -who were running a national political campaign.

Helen: Also, there was something in the fact that *The 56* was really responsive to people who were still there and real communities that still existed. I think the thing about going round Park Hill is that the people didn't exist anymore. They weren't there. I think that's also the job of the E15 campaign and why it probably is quite similar to *The 56* is it's about going into something that already exists. A community that already exists and trying to tell their story.

I would agree that *The 56* wasn't necessarily political, but I think just by nature of writing about active communities, the work then becomes political because the way they're engaging in the world will be-- I mean, Focus E15 very specifically is a political campaign but even with *Who Cares,* since and *Trojan Horse*, the next project we're working on, just by working with communities that are affected in some way by-- I would say mostly by establishment. It's about how the establishment impacts on normal individual people. You just accidentally are writing something political, aren't you?

Matt: Yes, so the two play *E15* and *The 56* ran alongside each other in Edinburgh. That was really interesting. It was really weird when, if you were speaking to a programmer or a producer or something, they'll be like, "Oh, you're a political theatre company." I don't know about you, maybe it's just my ignorance, but I hadn't necessarily thought that that was what we were. I thought we were just empowering a group to tell a story.

Helen: I feel like, the reason I got involved was because you were making *E15* and that was a story I wanted to talk about whereas I wasn't as arsed about *The 56.*

[laughter]

Matt: Fantastic.

Helen: It's such an amazing play. It was very specifically about this thing that had happened, whereas I got involved because *E15* was-- I feel like we did really overtly make that play to be political and then since then-- we realised that that created a really amazing response, which was actually galvanizing audiences. People left *E15* equipped to do something. I think the power of *E15* in the community was so amazing in terms of people then getting involved in the actual campaign or people knowing how to respond.

We did this tour that went around non-theatre spaces, so we would build the set on the day and do it to communities that might never have been to the theatre before, for them to see their own lives reflected back and to validate that and for them to then know how to respond if they might be getting evicted felt like, oh this actually really ties community and theatre together. I think that's then influenced all of the other shows that we've done. E15 was a big turning point.

Matt: Yes, totally. It becomes holistic and I guess you figure it out project to project. You don't necessarily always achieve-- or you achieve something different. With *E15*,

once we'd made the work it then became about trying to find the right audience for it as well. It varied.

It went to the Battersea Arts Centre. It went to Gloucester, Thanet, Hull, Salford. It went all over the country, but particularly we looked at trying to get people from housing associations in and sometimes, that meant kitting out a community hall. There was also the Battersea Arts Centre were amazing and then being able to get people from a housing association, who had been evicted, to then come in and do the show. Also, facilitating and running workshops. We were there for four weeks in each city and did workshops alongside that. That meant we could unpick the issues in the play as well and make sure that anything that what was thrown up for people with those issues was then discussed or at least attempted to resolve as well.

Helen: To answer your original question, though, correct me if I'm wrong, just talking about it makes me think that it sort of happened by accident, really. That it was by making responsive pieces, we then got huge response. You then become responsible for responding to that response, if that makes sense. The thing that we constantly are struggling with is what our role is within that. You can't just give somebody a piece of theatre that's incredibly triggering for lots of issues they might have in their life and then just leave. Then there becomes a responsibility around that play and what that play is trying to do.

For example, with *Who Cares*, it's trying to identify young carers. Then we have to provide the support around that. If someone comes to see it and goes, "My God, I'm a young carer. I recognize the story," then we have to provide all of the support around that that points them in the direction of the service they can access and stuff. I feel like it just happened by accident.

Matt: I feel like in this climate, you're making a particular-- like the last three years and looking forward, you're making work that's about empowering different communities and active communities to have a voice. You find, with the nature of this government, the climate that we're living in, that work is just going to be political because so people are getting fucked over.

Helen: Yes, you write a play about anything and they will be affected in some way by austerity and the establishment, won't they?

Matt: Yes. Maybe we should do a play about finding where the establishment is winning.

Helen: [laughs]

Matt: Maybe that's the challenge.

Helen: No, you're alright.

Matt: Isn't that depressing, though. Can you imagine if there was like a parallel universe in a couple of hundred years, or maybe five years' time, when there's a company who are looking for the unheard story, and the unheard story is finding a friendly, loving establishment.

Helen: That's the aim though, isn't it?

Matt: The good Tory.

[laughter]

Tom: Set it in one of those president's dinners or something, awful.

Helen: God, but how cool is that? This is a tangent, but that that's got shut down. I just think a year ago, those women would have complained, and nothing would've happened.

Tom: Nothing at all, no. The fact the FT [Financial Times Newspaper], that they could send in two undercover people and just have it actually told, like the story properly told. It's great.

Helen: So great, yes.

Tom: That was all really good. That's thrown up lots of other questions. I want to, I think, to summarise what I want to talk about, really, in that, because you're talking about the aftereffects. For me, there's this idea of there's a continual discussion going on. The discussion that you're having with people, it's with communities before, during, and after a piece. It's not just happening on stage, but it's happening before to make the piece, and it's happening after to deal with aftereffects, for want of a better word, to help the community afterwards as well.

In that respect, what part do you think that the theatre has to play in the politics? We'll talk about the working communities before and after in a minute, but what do you think that the actual show has to play in that?

Helen: I think that one of the most amazing things with *E15* was people coming to the theatre and realising that a play could be about them and their lives. Normally, you see it as this-- you go and you watch people, who talk in clipped voices, talk about how their marriage is falling apart and they will drink a lot of gin and I think that--

Matt: You read my play!

Helen: [laughs] I think theatre should be-- it's such a cliché but it should be a mirror that reflects the world but also prevents maybe an alternative ideal world, and I think what's cool about it being real people is then it offers this stage that, to quote us back, "becomes

a platform" for those people. It validates you, but also, it presents the reality. Rather than theatre being an elitist thing, it presents reality to people.

Matt: I feel, as well, there's something about, "in the age that we live in", there's only a couple of-- I say maybe, not even a gig. Maybe theatre is one of the only places left where we all go into a shared space. We'd turn our phones off, and we sit next to a stranger. There's an element of democracy about it, unless you're going into West End theatres, where you've got your different tiered places and stuff.

It is a real opportunity to democratize, get everyone's attention and you have the opportunity to speak to someone for an hour and fifteen, unrestricted, no phones. Even in the cinema now, people have their phones out and stuff.

Helen: You're so right as well and what's really exciting as a writer, is that it's also a space where there's no one telling you what you can and can't say. Like, whenever I've tried to get things in development for TV, there are then a million voices telling you of what it needs to be like this, because they're putting so much money into it, this is what the story needs to be like. Whereas theatre is-

Matt: [laughter]

Helen: - they literally give you a room and you can pretty much poo on the stage, you can do whatever you want.

[laughter]

Matt: Whatever you want, you might have to talk to the stage manager or whatever about that.

Helen: But there's no limitations on how political you can be in the theatre, is there?

Matt: That's really interesting though, because it's like, okay, that is fringe theatre, isn't it? Is it like when you take, hopefully, when you take money out of something and people aren't financially investing in something, you then have a space to do it. Is fringe theatre one of the only platforms left that you can--

Helen: Yeah, you're right, because that for me--

Tom: Say what you want to say.

Matt: Say what you want to say.

Helen: It's like for example Theatre Royal Stratford East are funded by the council so they're not going to take-- There were a lot of people making plays about what's happening in Stratford, but they're not going to put them on because that would politically be really bad.

Matt: Buildings are incredible and there are so many generous buildings that have supported us. But as well like, there's an element, I'm sure, in lots of buildings, and this is purely speculative, actually no it's not, but like purely speculative which is like, if you're putting a play on that's posing a risk to that building, like if you're sticking two fingers up to your local council or something like that then, if that council is funding you, and you piss someone off and then your funding is cut, people are going to start losing jobs and stuff. Then, it's really tricky.

Helen: You're so right.

Matt: I think the industry is becoming really careful because I don't know if I can get into slightly sticky water, but there's a wider discussion about who's funding buildings and how to democratize that a little bit.

Helen: Yeah, you're so right. And I'm wrong, actually, there are totally limitations as soon as you step into a building. Which is why if you're making stuff independently as a company-- It's probably why you find that's what companies are doing, because if they were just writers who wanted to write plays then they would get the Literary Office to commission them to write a play. Whereas part of the reason that we make our own work is so that we don't have to adhere to those people who are giving lots of money or the people that are sat in buildings deciding what's going to offend their trustees or their board members or whatever.

Matt: The politicization of the sector as well so that you go, "Okay great, so the solution is go to the Edinburgh Fringe", isn't it? That's where we can have all of our politically-driven work. But increasingly like, you know, five grand on accommodation, a grand on trains.

Tom: Exactly.

Matt: It's so incredibly squeezed, which it then goes-- Okay, so then make it in your own community.

Helen: Yeah. But then that ties into-- It's more a question about what's the actual play, what's the service of the play?

Matt: Sorry, yeah.

Helen: No, no, it's just really interesting because then are you-- Would you say with *E15* we were doing that for the people it was about? Or was it also about trying to invite political people, people of influence, to actually tell them a story. It's what happened with *Who Cares?* as well.

For example, *Who Cares?* I think, as a play form, is the best way of educating people on what a young carer is. Because you can read as many documents as you like and specifically for teachers as well, or people who might have young carers that they know but haven't identified, even if you read on paper "this is what their responsibilities are", it's only by hearing the voices of real young carers who are saying, "I'm really aggressive, I'm really late for school. These are symptoms of what being a young carer means." That then people would start going, "Oh my God, that's like a person in my class who behaves like that." Or a young person going, "Oh my God, I do that, I act out because of what's happening at home." Because if you just present them with a big document of "here's this cause and effect of what a young carer is", then it's not as effective, I don't think. So that really specifically served that purpose.

Matt: It's nice to have work that does have a function, whether that's identifying more young carers or galvanizing people politically. Yeah, I think it's got a huge value. I think sometimes when you get into conversations about engagement and art as well, sometimes, there's always going to be a natural push and pull between the two. You have to value them. You have to value them both, especially when you do real issues. I'm going off on the question here.

Tom: It's fine.

Matt: No, no no, no no. But just to answer your question, yes.

[laughter]

Helen: Also, I think what's really about- when you're making work about real things, you just treat every case really individually. So, like I say, with *Who Cares?* that was about--The purpose of that play was to identify young carers, but then I'd say with *E15* it was

really varied. An audience isn't just holistic. Some people there are watching something they find really entertaining and other people are thinking, "Oh my God, that's me in that situation," or, "Look, that validates experience I had. I wasn't alone." It's so obvious, but it just has really different impacts on different people which is why we very specifically think about who the audience is and who we're trying to target. Like *Chilcot*, for example, was a whole other kettle of fish. What was the purpose of that?

[laughter]

Tom: What was the point?!

Matt: [laughs]

Helen: Was it for a purpose?

Matt: [crosstalk] *Chilcot* had a really clear point. I'm so glad you brought that up, Helen, which was like to--

[laughter]

It was 10 years since everyone gave evidence at Chilcot. We've not heard the voices of the military families, people who worked in the SAS, Iraqi refugees. It was staged a couple of weeks before Chilcot's long-awaited report came out. It was about timing. It was about platforming new voices at a time that we needed it because there was so much media bombardment and spin and stuff. It was about democratising that process of people that wanted to engage with it.

Helen: But loads of stuff as well like I feel just by having that play on, everybody wanted the Chilcot report to be swept under the rug a bit and the timing of it coming out was all a bit fudgy, and just by having that play on in the weeks leading up to it coming out,

meant that suddenly you've got the context of what that report meant. A ten-year gap is so massive.

I remember finding that play just genuinely really educational in terms of it distilled all of the evidence of the enquiry in a way that was really accessible so that you don't have to again, trawl though the paperwork and reports and do it yourself but you were given an entertaining-- because I think fundamentally, that's the thing, theatre should be entertaining. By making it that, you then get away with, "Oh, look. It can teach me something as well."

Matt: Oh, hello! It was about specifically bringing audience together as well. We worked a lot with Iraqi refugees and all those other different communities that I've mentioned. I'm bringing them into a space with people who want to go and look at the process that a country can go through and what an illegal war is. It's really cool to bring those two groups into a shared space.

Helen: It's just really interesting because of your question, the problem is that the play never exists independently of all those things so it's really hard to talk about it without thinking about the process that it goes on as well, if that makes sense.

Tom: You said you weren't originally a political company, but now even the name Lung, which I take it was developed from FYSA, that's a call to arms as well. You say, "theatre at its loudest". It's all about platforming voices. It's like you want a direct political reaction. But what particularly would you like to happen? Is it on a community level, or is it on a larger political level, or what would you like to happen because of your work? What's the outcome that you'd like?

Helen: I think it's two strands always. Everything that we've done is really directly working with communities or a specific group of people, for example, using *Who Cares?* as an example.

Matt: We've talked loads about *Who Cares?* today!

Helen: I know, but it's the last thing we did, so- That was really specifically about identifying young carers and working really like graft like-- I say "we", it was The Lowry bunch that were working on a really frontline level.

Matt: So, it's taking over two years' of interviews with for young carers and then and we had another round interviews and it went round like 26 young carer services, schools, youth zones and ended up at the Houses of Parliament just to give you a bit of background.

Helen: Just those two-- That's really good because the two things were that it was very like grassroots, identifying young carers, but then it was also incredibly like holding the establishment to account and that's why we ended up at the House of Lords, because it was looking at the direct effect of the establishment on a specific group of people. It's two-fold the ways of looking at it. *E15* was the same. It was the human story of these people who've really, personally, directly been affected by this huge failure of the establishment. I'd say *Trojan Horse*, which we're currently making, is exactly the same again where it's looking at the really personal experience of teachers in Birmingham who are at the mercy of huge policy issues and policy mishaps.

Would you agree that it's always those two things? It's incredibly personal, and we have really personal relationships with all the people that we work with. There's an accountability there, as well, because we look after these people, but I'd say that one of

the big things with plays is always to try to shine a light on the failures of the political establishment.

Matt: Yes, I completely agree. That's really good. It's about, yes, I think you said that all really well.

Tom: In terms of working with real people and staging real people's stories. We're talking about two years of interviews with young carers, and then, obviously, working with the Focus E15 Campaign. Could you take me through just how that happened? That actual process of identifying what we're going to do, and then approaching people, and then how do you collect these stories? How do you go about that? It might be quite hard to generalize.

Matt: It really, really varies.

Helen: Every project is so different.

Matt: I think the main thing is making sure we have a bit of a structure before we go in and always remaining contactable once that interview's over and being open about what the process is, being transparent about what that process is, and finding out the ways that different communities want to engage with the project, and how they can have the most autonomy in the artistic process without it being an imposition on their lives. They're making an active choice to be a part of that.

With *Who Cares?* it was very much a partnership between The Lowry, Salford Young Carers Service and Lung. It brought four young carers who represented a really different spread, they came from very different paths. They very much wanted to be involved in an interview process and sharing their stories and then feeding into casting the actors, the set, the props, the costumes, the tracks that went in the show. It was really quite holistic.

With *E15*, what I thought they [the Focus E15 campaign] really wanted was people to make something, but also people to campaign and to get stuck in. That involved going on marches, occupations, demonstrations, going and standing at Bridge House, so, for three years now, continuing to be a part of that campaign. With *The 56* it felt like people wanted their story to be told, but they were very nervous about telling it, because they'd not spoken about it. I think there was a lot of, really understandably, the difficulty of going back to those memories, because it was just so awful.

There were people who just wanted to engage once, and you might meet them in a pub. I remember one guy I met in a pub at like 1 A.M, because he'd psyched himself up to finally come, and that was an engagement. We saw him when he came to see the show. Then there were three or four people who wanted to keep coming back and speaking to us about it. But being open in that process, whereas, I don't know-- is there anything? Maybe *Trojan Horse* might be an interesting one to touch on? I guess we're still figuring that out.

Helen: No, but I think you said it all. *Who Cares?* was really specific, because that was already an established thing. You said it all, really. No, no, it's really good. I think that the only thing I'd say is that, yes, we have all these structures in place, and you've said this really, but it's really responsive to what they want. We were thinking about this, we were like, "We should set up some kind of guidelines. Can we do it?" The problem is, because it is just like using your common sense a bit and really case by case responding to what people feel and what people want, it's hard to know. It's always so different, isn't it?

Matt: Yes. I guess the main strand that runs throughout, though, is making people feel like they've got a clear role to play in the production and they feel really involved in it, as well. Like, marching at the Battersea Arts Centre; when we did *E15*, we stopped the traffic

in Clapham Junction and we marched up from the station into the theatre, and then let everyone campaign on stage and then the production began. Because that felt like a really—you know, we had babies crawling around the stage and that felt like a really cool thing to do.

Helen: Also, something we do is make sure that there are stages within the process where they're never going to be coming and seeing it on the first night not knowing what it is that we've made, because I think we don't have any interest in making something that isn't representative of what they want. Our lead is taken from them quite a lot in terms of them feeding into what the project, actually how it represents and what it looks like.

Obviously, when it's verbatim, that's a lot easier because they're literally using their voices, but for example, with *Trojan Horse* where we're adapting it from interviews and it's more of a traditional format of lots of conversations happening between people and trying to go back and actually be there as it happened, as the scandal of *Trojan Horse* unraveled. With that, we'll need to set out sharings, where people can come. We did it with *Who Cares?* with feedback sessions. We did it with *E15*, where there are safe spaces where people can come and watch where we're up to and feed into it and feedback, and make sure that they always feel like they don't have to-- if someone wants to pull out, that's always an option.

Matt: It is, even though it's--

Helen: It would ruin us, but it's fine.

Matt: There's an interesting thing as well about-- not interesting, but there's something about, with the communities that we're work with that if we are interviewing people from the establishment, who are accountable--

Helen: Oh, yes, we don't give a fuck about them.

Matt: Then I think they get less say.

Helen: Oh, my God. They get no say.

Matt: Yes. Obviously, they still consent to the interview and they know the process but there's no, "What do you think about this?" Once they're interviewed, we're done.

Tom: That's it.

Matt: That's it. I think when they've got a voice, they've got a platform all the time, it's really important to be managing that and to be empowering the other group as much as possible. That's why we pay those people. No, we don't pay them, but the taxpayer pays those people. They are accountable to us as well, and it's important to remember that.

Helen: Yes. I think you've covered it.

Tom: You started to talk about this for *Trojan Horse* now, but in terms of using verbatim and taking actual people's testimonies and accounts and stuff, what complications come from that in terms of staging and how do you go about working around any complications?

Helen: One of the things I would say, this is me speaking for you, because Matt always directs the plays. When we're writing stuff, I'd say we're always thinking visually. It drives me a little bit mad. We're always thinking what it was going to look like. Because, obviously, if I was just writing alone in my room, I would just write and then I would give it to a director. That's how I would work but because you're there, we always are thinking about--

Matt: Freaking out about how we're going to do it.

Helen: Where will they stand?

Matt: [laughs]

Helen: *The 56* being the exception, because that was incredibly still, because that fitted in to the mood of the play. Other than that, and I would say this is something we said with *E15* from the very beginning, is to counter the static-ness of just people talking. We wanted the drama on-stage to be incredibly active, and I think since that worked so well, we've always done that, haven't we?

Often, you go and see verbatim plays, three people sitting on a chair talking, whereas the way we try to edit and adapt the interviews is that they are very inter-cutting and that it is incredibly live and incredibly active. Then the way you stage that, it's always playing against the instinct of to just to have people talking - people running around.

Matt: Totally. I feel like some of the verbatim can feel self-reflective and making something active that has a purpose is really exciting. I feel like, as a genre, there's still so much more to be explored about it. Verbatim's something that's been around for hundreds of years. It's just in the past 30, quite a lot of practitioners-- and this is excluding ourselves from this, quite a lot of practitioners. Other people like […] Gillian Slovo, who I just think are incredibly good at it.

I think there is still so much more to be explored in terms of the role that music plays within that genre and physical theatre as well. There is a lot of exciting collaborations, and I'm excited for us to find out how the work develops with that.

Helen: Totally. There are loads of challenges. Like memory isn't very reliable and something that we've often struggled with is you'll talk to different people about the same things, and they'll all tell you slightly different stories. You're always instinctively trying to find the truth in something.

Then, actually, you've got to get let go of that and go, "The fact is that there isn't one truth," and actually, there's something really interesting sometimes about putting contradictory things side by side, and I think that that's going to be really exciting when you start editing, you know, where things are going to go and in what context we're going to show, you know an MP or whatever saying this next to somebody who was at a march saying this, in order to show those sorts of contradictions of memory. That can be a really dramatically interesting thing to do.

Matt: Staging, it's a tricky beast.

Helen: Just like on a really fundamental level as well. The challenge of-- we did, what? 250 hours' worth of interviews for E15. Transcribing that--

Matt: There's a picture of you--

Helen: There's a picture of me holding the transcribed and printed out final interviews and it goes from here up to my head. Like it's just so-- and you just think, "Where do you even begin with that? How do you choose whose story to--" because you have to make it dramatically interesting. You can't just include everything that you have.

Matt: Otherwise, you'd do a conference, wouldn't you?

Helen: Yes, and that can be really hard because I don't think we ever set out with the idea to not use somebody's story or to exclude certain narratives from it and you find yourself having to make loads of choices.

Tom: There has to be parameters, doesn't there, I suppose?

Helen: Totally yes.

Matt: Well, you never know when that person's story might come later on. Particularly with the work we're making, if somebody who doesn't quite fit in one place will sometimes pop up somewhere else.

Helen: That's true.

Matt: There's loads of really exciting stuff. I think Breach are a really good example of this. They're another political theatre company.

Helen: Millennials.

Matt: Millennials as well. They are very interested in looking at the way that their experience on reflecting back upon an issue as well. I can't imagine reading out my emails on stage because they're all drivel but looking at that stuff as well. They've done loads of imaginative ways to bring those testimonies to life.

Helen: Yes, that's true.

Tom: In terms of characterization, do you have like any issues with how to present that person on the stage? Because you're thinking about the fact that it has to be truthful. There's ethics surrounding that - you're representing someone. How do you go about the characterization process?

Matt: I think it's kind of something about that, the middle ground. The nature of you being just another human being, someone else, you're never going to become that person. There's something interesting, I think, in what happens when you have that actor telling those people's words, and those two meet.

There's something really exciting in casting. What happens if you're taking, you know, someone's words and putting them in the mouth of someone completely different. Politically, there's something really exciting about that. I think more than anything-- and there's lots of ins and rehearsal techniques that you can use to get into a character. There's something that Nick Kent did in The Tricycle, which is this idea of trying to capture-- and this sounds really fucking loosey-goosey, but like the spirit of the person rather than copying or imitating them.

You sometimes find that you lay a lot of that groundwork and you do a lot of studying, then sometimes that person will start to form. I think there's something about-- you'd need to look it up, but there was an actor who-- it was someone who was delivering testimony at the inquiry did something like they used to rub their hands a lot and it wasn't televised, but they staged it and they did all of the groundwork and all of the process to do that and then the actor just naturally started to do this.

Then people from the enquiry were coming and saying, "Oh, you've captured that amazingly. That's exactly what that person did."

Helen: That's so freaky.

Matt: Yes, I think it can come. I do think it can come, but it's not a surface level. Again, like you've got the verbatim where you put the earphones in and by disabling all of your

consciousness and just purely focusing on that speech pattern and that stuff organically comes out. It is interesting. There's a lot to be experimented with.

Tom: In terms of *E15*, going back to *E15*, we talked a bit about sort of how it was, how it began and the process there. What is *E15* now - at this current stage in terms of its after-story?

Helen: You mean in terms of the campaign?

Tom: In terms of the effect that the show had on the campaign? Or how you see the event now, if that makes sense.

Helen: We still go to the street stall every week.

Matt: The show was really cool because, for lots of different occupations around the country, it had an effect on people to either galvanize into seeing some of these come together or to realize that coming together and using art as a way—I'm thinking of a group in Salford who were a bit of a collective. They came together realizing that art was something for them, and really effective tool to tell that's the way we--

It's been incredible to raise awareness and we collected hundreds of signatures for the campaign and collect donations for the campaign. We raised consciousness**.** Sometimes, that is quite hard to evaluate what that is. Someone will go, and then they'll leave. We don't know who really saw that show. And collecting data, even if you have all of those things in place, it's really hard. It would be cool to have something that documents that, documents the campaign, and the script being published is a really cool part of that.

I think there's also something about the fact that we did the show at different places to bring them in together and did Q&As with different housing occupations, using it as a

tool, then, for people to touch base as a meeting point for people for people to come together from across different parts of London. I think as well, it's important to realize that there are some time limitations to our work as well. It's still done lots of cool things for the campaign, but -

Helen: The housing process got worse. It didn't solve that. I think that you hit it when you say the one thing that we can measure is-- I remember _____ and _____, the main mums who were in it, who were in it, coming to see it and saying that it was the first time that they've seen everything they've done in front of them, in a sequential way. They realized how much they'd achieved.

I think even small things like the fact that now, the campaign has continued to-- The way that they view *themselves* as the campaign, I think has been influenced by the play, because they've realized the power that the actions that they've had *had*, if that makes sense. Potentially, it's really galvanized the campaign itself to see what they've done. That's something we can measure.

Matt: That's something we can measure up.

Helen: Also, it happened at a time when the campaign was-- If those were historical things, and it was a celebration of everything that have been intuitive to that point.

Matt: At risk of sounding patronising as well, I can think some of the people say that when, and it's a bit of a stereotype, but when people say the most incredible stuff in a really nonchalant way. It's really cool to-- We found it with *Who Cares?* as well. It's really cool to be able to put it on. When you put it on stage, and you give it the weight of everybody listening, then you're able to see that experience reflected back at you and

realize how huge these events were as well. You get the opportunity to process something again, don't you?

Helen: I remember _____ coming to and see it as well. She just has a monologue in one of the bubbles in the play. She's a Turkish woman. She's so incredible. She finds housing. I remember her hearing herself back and being like, "I'm really cool. I'm really badass," [laughs] and realizing her own power. Like you said, the power in the words that she said that she said while she was chain smoking, looking out the window in her flats, suddenly put on stage, said into a microphone. It seems so powerful.

But, I've got to say something. I do think looking back is that the power of this kind of theatre is in the liveness of it, is in it physically happening, and everyone coming together in that room and celebrating a campaign that's happening.

Also, when austerity is so bad, when the housing crisis is so bad, feeling empowered by the fact we can all at least get in a room and do something. But then, I think as soon as that play stops touring, I don't feel like "Oh well, that happened. That was great. Job done." I feel like the play really, has any power when it is still a play. It's still okay if it was still touring.

That's why I think we always find it really difficult to go, "That's the end of that life for a bit with that," because in theory-- and this is the situation we're having with *Who Cares?* now, is that we're coming up with what the next life of it is going to be, because as long as there are young characters you need to identifying, that play always needs to be on its feet. It's not like a film that you make, and then that's it. Then, you can step away from it. Because the issues of the play are always active. The play feels like it should always be touring-

Matt: Yes.

Helen: - but we haven't got the money.

[laughter]

Matt: *E15* is a really specific example, because they are actually, everyone that we've worked with, were the most active community, and the play ran alongside that. With other people, like the young carers, for example, we're talking a lot about them today—or *The 56* as well, having a published script or having your voice and your story go on a national tour.

It's a really cool thing to say your voice is worth something, and it's something that people want to listen to. That's what's really cool about making theatre is that it recognizes and celebrates people who don't get the recognition that they sometimes need or deserve.

Helen: You're so right, actually, and *Chilcot*, I feel like was like, your voice has been listened to, it's been platformed, and then also, go away now, please.

Matt: Yes.

Helen: They're not theatre makers. They don't want to have an active long-term relationship with us for the rest of their lives.

Matt: No, and they don't want to relive the most traumatic thing in their lives every day as well. Sorry, I interrupted.

Helen: No, no, you didn't.

Matt: As well, sometimes it's important to know when it's right for those people to engage with it. Those young carers shouldn't have sat through that show every day on the tour,

because it would just ruin-- I don't know what the appropriate terminology is, but it just wouldn't have been healthy for the viewers to see that, or for anyone really. [laughs]

Helen: Yes, and that really specifically with *Trojan Horse*, which we're writing at the moment**.** The story being about this issue that was really publicized in the newspaper, but the people who were on the receiving ends were these lifetime teaching bans and a lot of Islamophobic attacks and stuff have not yet had their side of the story told. I think that we have a really specific aim with that, which is to tell that side of the story and to try and show it in a bit more of a balanced way than the papers did. Then, there might be a point where we go, "Right, that has now happened," and then you can shut the book on it. I think *E15*'s a really specific example, actually, because the housing crisis is ongoing. The play feels like it should never end.

Tom: I understand that. I keep coming back to it as well, because I'm so invested in the local area. It's affecting the kids I work with and all that stuff.

Helen: Yes, of course. I mean, it is the highest level of homelessness, I think, in the country. One in every 25 people in Newham is homeless.

Tom: Yes. It's ridiculous, really. When I moved to London, I lived up in Leyton for a year, right next to Olympic Park. I'd go for walks in Olympic Park, and then you'd walk into my street and the change is ridiculous. There's no trickle-down anywhere from the 'Olympic Legacy' that was promised to the area. You've got these huge things going up all around Stratford, and who's going to live in them? It's ridiculous. I live in Plaistow. It's like 15 minutes' walk away. As you just walk down there, it looks like the poorest part of that sector as well. It's ridiculous. The trickle-down economics of the Olympic Legacy never happened at all for the local population.

Helen: No, but Robin Wales [former Mayor of Newham] said it. I was reading when he first got into office, he said, "My aim is I want to increase property value." He explicitly said that. He was aware of the fact that it will affect some people, but he wanted rich people to come into the area and get rid of all-- It's really explicitly what he wanted. When we first started *E15*, we thought, "Well, we need to try and find a balanced argument," and then we realized there isn't one. It doesn't exist. Some people are just greedy and horrible. It's really hard to process that, because obviously, when you make art, you think you can be empathetic with anyone, and everyone fundamentally is the same. Then, you just think, "Actually, no, some people are just awful."

Tom: Yes. It's hard as well as an academic as well, because you do have to take everything into consideration. Then, you look at- my own personal politics, but also the politics of companies we're looking at, it is a fight. It's a call to arms. There is a sort of push against something.

Helen: Yes, and as Matt said, as well, the reason that we would the *E15* ended up not necessarily being very balanced is because they already have that platform. Switch on the news, and they decide what the news is, actually. I guess the same is true with academia. That voice is already represented and established. You don't need to be going, "but this is the establishment think". [laughs]

Tom: No, exactly. Going back to *E15* once again, there was a moment, which I got called out for a little while, that was very Tim Crouch-esque, I thought, with the audience member standing up. It felt like we should have to check this, that it was a critique of a lot of different things at that point. Am I right? The guy in the audience who stood up, and it was critiquing the financial aspect of the theatre, the show, the message.

It's a lot of different things. It felt realistic, and it felt like, "Oh, I don't know what I'm doing". I had gotten done when I realized that they hadn't stuttered once, because I was like, people stutter. [laughs] Other people that I was with, actors and stuff, that they wondered until the end, and then he comes up on stage to take a bow and everything. Was it important for you to have that critique of your own work and the message and the financial situation *within* the work? I think it's a very interesting statement to make that you want to critique it. Can you just talk to me a little bit about that decision?

Helen: Do you want to go or should I? It was a mix of things, but yes, it was a critique of that, but it was also-- You'd be surprised how much he got told to be quiet and, "We're watching a play".

Matt: He got heckled a lot.

Tom: I can imagine.

Helen: "This isn't about you". I just think that - he was a real person that we met by accident, a homeless person that we just met. We were at this conference about housing, and he came over and he said, "I'm homeless." And I laughed! And he said, "Oh, I know I don't look it". It was just a complete chance meeting. There was also the context in which we met him that we wanted to feed in to that.

Tom: It wasn't verbatim and then a performer playing this, this was the actual person in the performance?

Helen: No, no, this was verbatim. This is the person that we met. The homeless person.

Tom: I see, sorry. Sorry.

Helen: - if that makes sense. But it was the words that he said that were performed. There were a few things. It was also the way in which we've met him, which was, we were looking over there, and then suddenly, homeless is everywhere and all around us. Also, people looking forward and seeing this as a separate thing to themselves. Actually, you could be sat next to somebody who is homeless. I don't know how much we were thinking about it, really, is the only thing.

Matt: I think it just happened. I, more than anything, it just felt like this is an *incredible* story that we need to get in. It just felt like the idea of it being around you, and it could be someone that you're sat next to. Especially with hidden homeless, it's not someone on the street, it's someone who could be sat next to you on the bus or on the tube at the cafe. Or potentially the theatre - that's pushing it a bit, but... It just needed to be in there, and the meaning came after that.

Helen: I'd say that's true. I think there is something as well about whether it was intentional of not, the interrupting of a play, for everybody to look round that way and look at this essentially, real personal, believably real person. Also, just felt we wanted people to actually have to confront it on a personal level. They have to actually think how they would respond in that situation. It turns out a lot of them respond really badly!

Matt: Structurally, as well, it felt important when it pertained to a particular point when the campaign really started to take off-- It was a danger, I think. The audience could be, on the whole, believing that you could actually come together, and it will be okay. It was really important to my audiences as well, that irrespective of the story, it was happening on stage, and whatever you take away from it, there's someone who could be amongst us-- or again, walking, you pass on the street or whoever, who's living that reality right now.

Helen: I think that our anxiety with the play as well, is that at the end, everybody feels great, applauds, and then leave and continue to walk pass that homeless person on the street without acknowledging them and feeling like--with or without recognizing them. That's just a way of making people think about that, I guess. I think you've analyzed it a lot better than we ever could with your introduction on it. Yes, what you said!

Matt: Yes, what you said – that's what we wanted!

Tom: To me, it really legitimizes the piece and your politics a lot more. It heightens the show. Just that small moment really legitimizes everything. What I'm interested in on a political and philosophical level as well, is that I think there's a move in our culture that's particularly looking at "yes, we're pushing forward with hope, but also we're really cynical about it". We're really sincere, but also ironic.

I think that is an example of you've got this really truthful and important piece happening on stage. It ultimately does show hope, but it's galvanizing together, which is what was happening. But then, to undercut that and go, "Well, actually, no, I disagree". It felt truthful at that point - someone disagreeing with it. That makes it a very interesting point.

Helen: That's really cool because—Thanks! [laughs] Do you remember, though, when we were writing it? That's what we wanted the structure of the whole play to be. It was that constantly - there's a moment of hope, and it's undercut, and we do it throughout. When they come back and the guy's hanged himself from outside the hospital, and also the very end of the play, if you want to do something, but then Sam grabs the microphone and actually saying it's continuing, and she's been made homeless again.

Again, you've summed it up perfectly, but I think that's just what is happening, isn't it, which is that campaigns are coming together, but the quest is getting worse. You don't galvanize people by going, "Woo, happy story. It all worked out well in the end."

Matt: Can you imagine it? It would then legitimize things to continue. That's the thing, and it's where the story is born from, which is the Focus E15 campaign, they're the one exception. They're the one group of people that we found in a nation of fucking empty housing estates who have managed to stand up and fight. It's important to tell that story by doing it, you have to pay homage to the people who have it.

Tom: That's really interesting. Helen, I've got a quote from you here.

Helen: Oh God, no!

Tom: It says, "This is a message that needs sharing far and wide. We want this play to reach people like us before we met the mums. People who feel hopeless and think that nothing can be done." Do you remember saying that? I can't tell you where it's from at the minute.

Matt: It's great!

Helen: I know, I'm so smart! [laughs]

Tom: Do you think, particularly our generation as well, 'young people', do you think we feel like nothing can be done?

Helen: I think that quote will have been when we went up to the Fringe, which in the last year has been really exciting and really amazing. You've seen the power of protest with things like Donald Trump postponing his visit and the women's march and the #metoo campaign. What is really cool about our generation is, because of technology and the

internet, there's a real split and divide, but look at how many people voted in the last election. So, I used to think that, but I don't know if I do anymore, really. What do you think?

Matt: I feel like it changes by day to day.

Helen: That's true. I think the thing is, I felt like we lived in a complete age of apathy. I always just thought we were the most apathetic generation. We think that we're not. We think that we're-- the whole 'clicktivism' and stuff. Actually, I think that was really unfair of me to millennials before now, because you've seen in the last year the impact that they've had and how people do come together and affect change.

Also, it comes out of austerity, doesn't it? If you push people to their limits, then they will get together and wise up. I think it's also, although it's hopeful, it's also a sign of how bad stuff has got that there's been so much fight back.

Matt: I feel like as well-- well, maybe we'll get the opposite of this, but I feel like you expect change. Maybe we can see too many films, but whatever. You feel like change is going to be epochal and it will come in a huge way. It'll be a big revolution. I think it takes time, and the campaign is actually a really good example of this. They have individual victories and losses but they're always there every week, and they're going to keep-- They've been there for four years, now. It's about everyone just taking responsibility for your own life to affect the change that you want.

We push out what we believe that that is and hope maybe that will change someone's mind, hopefully, maybe. I think it's a bit of a slow burn. Things *can* change, but we've all got to take responsibility to do that in our own lives as well. Seeing your job beyond being

a theatre maker or a doctor or a lawyer or whatever it may be – is that quite wooly? I feel like I'm saying wooly things.

Helen: No, I totally agree. You, as an individual, have a level of accountability. I think we wanted to do that with E15 - make people feel accountable. The housing crisis isn't something that's happening over there. It's something you need to actively engage in. It's like what you said in the beginning, we shouldn't just say millennials are this one thing. I think it's individual to people that you meet.

Some people see politics as a thing that happens in Westminster that doesn't affect them. As soon as you see behind the veil-- What's the expression? Through the looking glass. As soon as you-- This is what we found with *E15*, and, Hannah, who's the huge revolutionary communist campaigner involved in the Focus E15 Mums. You can't unsee it. As soon as you recognize the inputs that campaigning and activism can have, you can't undo that. I think it's just about trying to educate people as well.

Matt: Yes, I agree. There's a lot of, "What, me?" isn't there? I think we aren't a generation of people – actually, y'know, fuck it – there's lots of people isn't there? Yes, what you said, I agree with what you said.

Helen: I know what you mean, though. All the time, you meet really apathetic people, and it's frustrating.

Matt: But they're not just millennials, they're like 40, 50, 60. There's just a real-- It's a mix of people.

Helen: I'm really excited about the new system. It's just about spreading knowledge in that theatre. I also think its technology. I feel like we're still honing how to create technology so that it really does reach everybody rather than just being your own little

treaty-bubble that you're on. I feel like since Trump, in the last year, and the #metoo campaign and stuff, it's managed to genuinely influence things, like the power of collectivism, rather than individualism is actually happening a bit. It's been exciting. Now, are these wrong?

Tom: No, I don't think you were wrong. I think you were right in that range of time definitely. I started this in 2015. I started it with the idea that our generation knows that something's wrong, but we don't know what to do. We don't have the answers. I don't think we have all the answers, but there is some sort of movement. What legitimized it to me now is that you got people calling Momentum extremists. It's not, it's people trying to do something and galvanize together. You've got the establishment labelling them as such, because they're actually scared of people like that.

Helen: Yes, even just Corbyn, that was a massive turning point, the amount of people that--

Matt: This is rubbish. I'm conscious that we've got to get to the Street Stall as well.

Tom: Yes, sorry.

Matt: No, please don't apologise. I want to make sure we answer all your questions is the only thing.

Helen: It's me. I'm rambling on.

Matt: No, it's not you. It's me. Ask-- make sure you've asked all your questions.

Tom: We covered quite a lot of these things. One thing I do want to ask is how much of your work has been influenced by your own experience as well? It's obviously you're

taking other people's stories, but does anything get influenced from your own life or experience?

Matt: That's a really good question. What do you think? I think - Sorry, I said what you think and--

Helen: No, you go, because I was still working it out—I mean, not overtly.

Matt: You're inevitably in the work. You're inevitably in the work that you made, in this work particularly, by being the person that goes and interviews people. You're in control of the edit. You're in control of the story that you want to tell. That inevitably is shaped by the experiences that you have, and certain things that you're watching and reading, and where you are in your life as well.

I'd say 70% of our plays are about young people. It's no coincidence. That's who we are. I think it's really important. That's a really great base to go in with. Then it's about empowering that. Empowering that group that you're there to engage with, to tell *their* story.

Helen: Yes, but you are right though. Of course, it's not an accident how we fell into stuff like the Bradford City fire, that came out of Gemma's connection to Bradford. Even *E15* came out of the fact that we were in Sheffield looking at Park View Estate. And *Trojan Horse*, which we're writing, is set in Birmingham, where I'm from, and I was there when it was all happening. There, of course, as always-

Matt: That personal link.

Helen: - that personal link.

Matt: You look around you, don't you--

Helen: Also, I think one of the things, what I really, really liked about working together is when I'm on my own writing-- I guess, I'll write, not with love, but I'll write some personal experiences, and other stuff. It's just a totally different thing where I've not got anyone challenging me or questioning, "Why'd you think that? Where's that coming from?"

What we always do is-- For example, with *Trojan* Horse, not go in with any pre-bias. Try really hard to - everything we feel to then question it and challenge it. Can't we go against what our instinctive questions might be? You're such aware of your own position, really.

Matt: It's holistic as well. You go and you meet people and your opinion and the way that you see things, changes as well. I feel like every project you do, you develop as a person. I think sometimes, if you're making work, sometimes, your development as a *person* is really important as well. It's not just only like-- It's not always--

Helen: Oh, my God. The process of writing, and you must find this-- You can meet someone and do and interview them that will change your life. I found that with _____, who I was talking about earlier. You go to her flat, and you knock on the door, and you think, "Another interview," getting any tips from that. Then, you leave with your life completely having been changed, and your perception and stuff, and having learned a huge amount.

I think what was exciting with _____ is that we try to then present the journey that wasn't visible in the show, which was the amount that you've learned from their perspective and their voices. That was such an amazing process of writing. We would just be literally interviewing people on occupations or interview someone while we were moving house with them. It's really hard to not get really personally involved in people's lives. "Hi, we're still here!"

Matt: [laughs] "How's it going?"

Helen: "How's it going?" The same with *Trojan Horse* a little bit. We've now been back to interview _____ about four times. We go around for tea now! [laughs]

Matt: Yeah, that's really interesting! [laughs]

Helen: You can't separate the personal, I don't think. It's all personal, isn't it?

Matt: It's about giving those people the opportunity to reengage at any point and to make changes so that door's always open.

Tom: That's interesting.

Helen: Where is that from? Don't say this isn't personal-- It might be from *Friends*.

Matt: It sounds a bit like-- What's it called? Sounds like *Die Hard*.

[laughter]

Tom: Bruce Willis is in both.

Helen: That's true.

Matt: Is Bruce Willis in *Friends*?

Helen: Oh my God, he plays Rachel's girlfriend. No. Rachel's boyfriend.

Tom: Rachel's girlfriend. [laughs]

Helen: [laughs] Rachel's girlfriend. He plays Ross's girlfriend's dad, who he eventually hangs out with.

Matt: Oh, amazing!

Helen: It's great. It's a great cameo. I would say it's really personal, but not necessarily in the way that you'd expect. Of course, it's really about us and our experience of writing it, even if you try to think that it's not.

Matt: Yes, I think you'd be denying something. It's not about you. But you can't deny that it affects you.

Helen: Yes, it really does. When we were writing *E15,* there's this one guy that Matt was interviewing who then didn't get rehoused that day that you were interviewing him. Suddenly, he didn't have anyone. So, Matt just became responsible for trying to find him somewhere to sleep that night, because he was made street-homeless. I just remembered thinking, "My God, you're not qualified to do this. It's not what we signed up for." But equally, it's not about necessarily being *qualified*. It's just about being a *human being* sometimes.

We're just starting on this project, *Refugee Tigers*. Matt was working in Leeds this year for about three months in the theatre there. One of your jobs was setting up these refugee groups. We're interested in making a play that's about Leeds as a community. A celebration of refugee living in Leeds but with super, super, super early days. One of the huge questions is exactly what I was just saying about not being qualified.

We would never want to go in and make a play about people and then leave, obviously. But how do we begin to engage with the most vulnerable people in society? What is our goal and why are we doing it? Is it for them? Just all of those questions, when you immediately start a project that get thrown up of what our personal role is and what our personal responsibility to those people is. That takes the most amount of time. Then, the project happens really quickly once you got to those particular circumstances.

Matt: Making sure that are well supported in the process, as well, having those structures in place. It gets tricky sometimes.

Helen: You just can't ever predict what you might be opening a can of worms onto as well, and that--

Matt: Yes, and that goes to audiences as well-

Helen: Yes.

Matt: - making sure there's aftercare and all of that stuff. Especially when it's so personal. You've just got to make sure you're doing it for the right reasons and the right steps are in place and everything. Especially if you're engaging people who might be having their first experience of putting into the art. You want to make sure that that's an incredibly positive experience for them as well. And there's huge debate about the role that you know of making autobiographical work and engaging groups for plays and that as well. It's a lot of stuff for people just try to figure out.

Helen: We've said a load of shit.

Tom: No, it's all really good. Thank you so much for coming in today.

Matt: It's been a pleasure!

Helen: Let's be friends!

Tom: Yes, please.

Helen: Can we see you? We're here every week, so--

Tom: Okay, cool, brilliant!

A.3   A CONVERSATION WITH *EAGER SPARK*

2nd February 2018

Corinne Furness is one-third of Exeter-based *Eager Spark*. The trio have been working together since 2009, originally under the name *Write by Numbers*, creating 'inclusive, imaginative theatre about the things that excite, scare, or intrigue us' (Eager Spark, 2019) and are committed to creating work in and around the South West of England. In February 2018, I spoke to Corinne about how the company's history of community-engaged performance had affected the development of their political theatre.

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Tom: I've got here that, in an article for the Bike Shed about *Regeneration*, you stated that *Write by Numbers* started as part of the regeneration project in Brixton. I think it was *Ovid Reworked*?

Corinne: It was, yes.

Tom: Could you take me through, as an introduction, the beginnings of the company, how you approached that project? How did you go around curating and facilitating it and the impacts that that had on the future of your work as *Write by Numbers*?

Corinne: Absolutely. Quite a big impact. This is why, when I tell this story, I wish that there'd been more planning. What happened was; myself and Charlie Whitworth who is the original co-founder of *Write by Numbers*, we met doing our Master's at Goldsmiths which was Writing Performance. We finished that in September of 2009. We decided that we wanted to keep making work together so we would start a company.

We didn't have any specific plans for what was going to be our first project or anything like that. Simultaneously, I was living in Streatham at the time. Just down the road from Brixton. I heard about a regeneration project that was going on for Brixton Village Market, which is this glorious 1920's arcade, it's beautiful but at the time, most of the units weren't occupied.

Initially, they had wanted to bulldoze it to build flats obviously, but then the arcade got listed. The community managed to get it listed. They couldn't do that [bulldoze it], so they decided that they're going to have a regeneration project instead. As part of that regeneration project, they were doing free lets of units and most of the lets were startup businesses, but amongst that, they also wanted to have an arts element - principally for footfall rather than any big social purpose.

Tom: Yes, okay.

Corinne: They opened up applications to; "do you want a shop for however long?" Charlie and I seizing on this moment of being like, "Wouldn't this be great?" Because it will force us just to make some work. We put in an application and we chose to do *Ovid* because we'd done some work on our MA, doing short adaptations, and all the stories in *Ovid* are about change.

We thought that was a really nice thing to tie in with what was going on in the market and how we might explore it through that. We put in an application to do *Ovid Reworked* in the Brixton project - taking over an empty shop and turning it into a theatre with the idea being that we would show lots of short plays so we would be able to get things that we'd made but also things that our friends would make. That was the plan. Then, I think we applied in late November or early December, and in mid-December were told that we

were being given a unit for two weeks at the end of January. It gave us about a six-week turnaround-

[laughter]

- which retrospectively makes me want to *weep*. I don't know how quite-- Particularly given the Christmas and New Year in the middle of it, really that six weeks turn around was probably about four weeks. We were just like, "Okay, we're going to do this" and it really gave us the impetus like, "We have to. We've got the shop; we have to do it." In the end, after begging and borrowing and poking people that we knew, I think we ended up with eight short plays and we banded together as many actors as we could find.

Again, everyone was doing this for free, which again is an important thing in the economics of this slightly because, yes, we were getting the shop for free, but we weren't getting any other financial support. Our whole thing was like, well, we know we're just out of doing a Masters, we're living in London. We don't have any money. Hence why we were going to our peers, I guess, to come in and make some work. It'll be quick, it should be fun! In the course of those four to six weeks, we [laughs] managed to create a series of short plays. Then we opened the unit and with a really, again, we roped in our friend Emily who is the designer, who made the unit look really beautiful - and we ran short plays.

An adaptation of *Ovid* during the afternoons. We also did our writer's workshop. We had six writers come in and do workshop and they created versions of stories from *Ovid* that we staged in 24 hours. Oh, my God, what else did we do? Local artists came because the thing that I found out actually with having the shop, maybe something that we hadn't anticipated because we went to this relatively naive, I would say, was that just by dint of

having a shop, people came in and would talk to you. I always think that shops work in that way, anyone can just walk into a shop and so anyone did.

[laughter]

Corinne: Our policy was, we would always have tea and cake and the tea was incredibly practical at the time because it was January in the market in Brixton it was utterly freezing. So, the tea and cake were bribery for people to come and talk to us but also for audiences. We were like, "Come and see a free play and have free tea and cake."

Tom: [laughs]

Corinne: You do that. Certainly, during the week, at first it was quite slow. We had to be very proactive. But the first Saturday we did, it was one of those beautifully incredible moments where we we'd been out flyering in Brixton and suddenly, we have so many people. The unit was packed, and it was really great, and people wanted to talk to us. On one of the walls of the unit actually, we'd done the 'Wall of Change', which had questions about "how do you think Brixton has changed? How would you like it to change in the future?" Loads of people added to that which was really nice. The people who were running the regeneration project didn't have much… [they were] more business focused. I think they were very surprised by going, "Crikey, look at what's happened just by putting in some people doing theatre". And because they weren't practical-minded, they haven't thought you need a performance license in order to do things. Whereas obviously, we knew that, so we had one. They had to use our shop. They brought some musicians in. We were like, "Okay, they can come and play in our shop," because with a license, you can do that. That's the overarching project.

The thing I would say I really learned from it, because both Charlie and I went in from pockets of "we want to make work" and that's our most important thing. I was vaguely socially aware at the time, but the most important thing was just getting up and making some work. By being in the market, you have to engage with the traders who were there. Certainly, I did, because I kept going to market meetings. You'd hear people talk about the fact that they'd been there for 20 years and all of that.

Suddenly, I was really aware of this community of people I hadn't been before and actually how potentially our project was maybe helping them a bit, which hadn't been a dimension I directly thought about at all. It was when market traders came to see shows – that's probably the nicest thing in the entire project. It was one of those things that - it felt at the time like a really lovely experience. We asked for donations. Nothing was ticketed and we asked for donations for the shows. Overall, I think we only made a loss of £70, which Charlie and I joked, "Is the best collectively, the best £70 pounds we have ever spent". Because it gave us all this work that we made.

The Sunday Times came down and they interviewed us. That ended up in *Sunday Times*. We were like, "Woah, what is this?" Our parents were very pleased. It's always helpful. At the time, it felt really, really great. I do have a little coda to that, which is something that was one of the reasons we ended up five years later, making *Regeneration*, was that the regeneration project as a whole in Brixton market ended up becoming a 'cultural hub' as *Timeout* calls it. It does mean that some of the traders who were there when we were there are no longer there. I think it might have been in 2015, it might have been just as we were making *Regeneration*, there was an anti-gentrification thought there. One of the things that people felt that the market had been cleansed of black locals. I certainly can talk much more about how that particular project led to other work *Write By Numbers*

made. Certainly, at the time, it was a very positive thing, but retrospectively, I've been incredibly aware of-- We were part of the pilot fish for potential gentrification. How do I feel about that? It's all mixed up with that.

Tom: What's really interesting with it is that you address that within the work, within *Regeneration* as well. I've been talking to other companies. I was talking to Lung the other day. I don't know if you know about their show, *E15* at all? They did with the *Focus E15* mums?

Corinne: Oddly, at Camden People's Theatre, we got paired with that show.

Tom: Really?

Corinne: In their *Whose London is it Anyway* Festival.

Tom: They address it quite in a different way. They use the voice of a homeless man that they met during one of their workshops. They use his verbatim text to spring out of the audience and go, "Hey, whatever you're doing is like - you're talking about homelessness and you're talking about being made homeless, but all of you walked here and spent £10 on a ticket and walked straight past a homeless person", that kind of stuff.

I think it's very interesting. The similar stuff that you're doing is that you're critiquing your own process in the show and in the performance. I think that's quite a really interesting thing to see. I could go into details, but part of what I'm looking at is oscillation between hope and deconstruction, and hope and hopelessness, that kind of thing, which I think is quite evident in in that work.

Corinne: Yes. I think it's a recurring theme. Yes, absolutely.

Tom: Yes. Okay. We'll go back to that in a bit. What would you say the intended outcome of- I completely forgot for life me now but the second empty space project that you did-

Corinne: *Theatre 41.*

Tom: Yes. What were the intended outcomes of those kinds of projects be for you?

Corinne: We went into *Theatre 41* probably because of all that we've learned at Brixton. As for the fundamental difference was that, yes, we did want to make work as part of *Theatre 41* but that wasn't the main reason that we were doing it. We very much saw ourselves as being part of this regeneration project and also being part of the particular community that we were in. The idea that the work would come out of the community was going; "We've got this theme; we've got these stories. Okay, they're generically about change." We were like, "Okay, we want to make work that is about change". That was one part there. The other part was that we wanted the thing that had been glorious about Brixton; how accessible the work had been. It has audiences where people are going, "I haven't seen plays since I was at school." You don't get it - because of the £10 a ticket or whatever it is. You just don't get that elsewhere. I would say the second plank was that we wanted to make work be seen by people who wouldn't normally see our work. Then the third part was about we generally wanted to create footfall**.** You don't see the arts in the place within these projects which I guess I still believe albeit with [laughs] reservations.

We approached *Theatre 41* very differently partly because the build-up that was quite different. We actually had a four-month build up for it. It was off the back of Brixton. I was approached by some to say, "Would you be interested in having space as part of this project?" I was like, "Yes, okay." We were initially given the space, and it was going to be a five-week project, longer, but we were given a four-month build up which, in these

projects we should think about economics, so it was the big thing then we got space for free. There was a bit of marketing support for - what the time did was it allowed us to apply for Arts Council money which we got off the back of having the experience of having done Brixton.

We very much got that funding for a large engagement project that ran throughout *Theatre 41*. We're mainly calling it a theatre, but we ran it much more as an open art space. Probably three of the weeks had work that was created by *Write by Numbers* and the other weeks were work that was other people. We had a range of things. We had music - and it was a tiny, tiny shop – [but] we had music and we had the Festival of Triangles; a friend of a friend runs math projects for children, so she did that. We had a children's theatre company come in.

Again, we did lots of tea and cake. There was a whole writing project. We had local schools come down, we did an intergenerational project with an old people's group and the primary school and the market traders and we made short plays out of that. A group of friends did an immersive show about Walthamstow dogs. It was the dog track had closed down, but it was still like such a thing in the community and it was really great. They did this 25-minute immersive "come down, have a night at Walthamstow with dogs with song and dances".

One of the things that was very nice is they formed a company from it, and they still do work in Walthamstow which is one of the really nice-- Because my other big reservation about project is the fact that you come in, you do your thing, and then you go. Even when you live in the area, it's really tough to keep doing work because even in Brixton where I live very locally, I can't afford to do work for free. The company who was overseeing the regeneration project didn't speak to us as we were always in dialogue about what can we

do? Can we help you in any way? Until it's always money. I've got to pay my rent. I'm living in London, you can't-- It's really nice, actually, that one of the things that did come out of the Walthamstow was a company formed out of that-- I think we approach Walthamstow much more strategically with a greater awareness of what-- It was like we've done this before so we know the problems and they were-- It was different challenges, it was still cold, it's always cold and you're still trying to actively drive footfall which takes work but maybe because we have the build-up and we were going into community groups, that helped.

It was, whereas the company who was overseeing the regeneration project at Brixton, would be really enthusiastic and didn't have maybe that much knowledge, the company who was overseeing the regeneration project in Walthamstow were much more experienced in running regeneration projects but we were less enthusiastic and we were hands off and it was almost like once they had done that thing into programming everyone and filling the empty shops, it was like, "Yes, and there you go everyone," which was fine for us but not so much maybe for the traders. It was one of the things that I noted.

It made it difficult but then *Theatre 41* was bringing in a lot of footfall. We got some really nice things for the traders and then they asked as to stay on, so we ended up extending the theatre for another five weeks. Then at that point, you're scrambling for stuff because we'd obviously programmed the initial five weeks of things. [chuckles] It was like, "Okay, it's free, who would want...?" There was a nice spontaneity to that.

Again, because you're in the shop and you had lovely windows we were like, "If you're an artist come in and talk to us." You can have this space, we can't pay you, but we can give you the space. Again, it felt like a really enjoyable project. It felt properly embedded in the community in a way in which the Brixton project hadn't been to the same extent. It

felt like it had contributed to the market and keeping that open and then the coda to that is that, ultimately, the regeneration project failed, and they demolished that part of the market and its now high-rise apartments!

Tom: It's hard, isn't it? It's so weird. Again, it's that hope and hopelessness kind of thing. It's coming to real life. I'm really interested in what you're saying about having an effect on the market and the community in that respect. Did you have a conversation with - or did you have some dialogue with the marketeers, or the market traders and keep that relationship going?

Corinne: Yes, absolutely. That's one of the things that we've learned from Brixton like it almost accidentally happened in Brixton just by dint of turning up, whilst we made that a real priority. Because we have this build up, we went to the market quite a bit before we opened the shop as the theatre. The fact that we did go around, and we spoke to everyone and we explained what we were doing. Some of the older traders were a bit like, "What on earth is this?" but the fact that we were doing that I think it felt like we weren't just plonking ourselves and going, this is what we do regardless of what you want. Which as you know, is hopefully not what any of our subsequent projects would be. The fact that we had that time to talk to them. I always say, a *Write by Numbers* project is that you go in and you have a cup of tea with someone and that is our process and kind of, like, "Just chat to us and we'll see what we can do." It felt like that was really important as part of *Theatre 41*.

Tom: That's really interesting. In terms of that then, what would you say if your process is, come in and have a chat and a cup of tea, which I think is a great process by the way - what would you say the mission statement of the company is in general?

Corinne: That's like a question that our board ask us!

[laughter]

Corinne: Again, this is really difficult because actually, we are part of the coda is we are totally rebranding at the moment. So, partially, we're shifting what we do. I'm trying to think in terms of *Write by Numbers*, because we always say that we're a community theatre company and we use that term quite broadly. Pretty much all of our projects had some sort of-- Again, I don't like something when you've been doing is thinking. "Oh, using the word engagement is really problematic". Just, like, two and a half years, I would have been fine to go all of our projects have an engagement aspect.

Tom: Sorry I'm not trying to grill you; it's just getting really interesting.

Corinne: Absolutely, I should be able to answer this better than I was doing, and I guess maybe it's because of how *Write By Numbers* started. We were just like let's make work, we ended up doing this and we followed that path. Because, certainly for me, it changed how I thought about the community I lived in and how I might participate in that. I was someone who was very much an incomer in that I'm not originally from London as many young artists are at the time, and it changed how I felt about that.

Maybe because my-- I can't speak for Charlie, but my politics were shifting slightly, and I always wanted to be more engaged in the community. That's the direction *Write By Numbers* took. Maybe that's why I'm struggling to go this is our ethos because we often talk about what is *Write By Numbers* project and what is a *Write By Numbers* show. I'm not sure we can give it up in a sentence but other than we go we are a community theatre company. Wherever we are performing our work we have to feel like we're part of that community and that's really important.

Tom: That's really interesting.

Corinne: I think.

Tom: That's great, skipping ahead to more recently, I've written this whole question out this time. 2015's *Regeneration* was both inspired by and critiqued your own input in the process of gentrification. In the same article, you stated that it was 'becoming increasingly unclear who these regeneration programs were actually for or in the case of one whether anyone actually wanted it to succeed, rather than embracing diversity were this projects actually contributing to gentrification and the pricing out of traditional working class communities. We were we as the artists part of the problem rather than part of the solution?' Which is what you've touched on already. Could you expand on this and how important was it for you to critique this within your own art which is what we've been talking about already?

Corinne: Maybe if I tell you about how Regeneration the play came about, I think it--

Tom: Go ahead because that's actually one of my next questions. [chuckles]

Corinne: Seamless, because that sort of is why. We were on a scheme at Rich Mix. They gave us space to just try and make something and then they gave us a short showcase. Charlie and I had been talking about making a show about *Regeneration* and that we wanted to tackle a big theme and it felt really personal for us as a company. Make work about things that you know about and this is something that we'd been implicated in.

Outside of my work in *Write By Numbers* I worked in a large regeneration project running the art elements of it, I was pulling that in too. We created this big sprawling show about various strands of regeneration stories, and we did a showcase of it. At that point, it would probably have been about 60 minutes long and then after the showcase, there was a Q&A

session. As part of that, I ended up talking about why we made this work and how I felt about that.

During the Q&A someone was like, "That's really interesting, I'd really like to see that in the piece". It was one of those moments when I was like, of course, why on earth have we not mentioned it – like, it's really obvious? As you talked about having that internal reflection, maybe it's because I hadn't maybe seen much work at that time, that did that. That I hadn't felt like, "Oh, it's really important!" The reasons why we've made this and why we are the people to make this piece is important to an audience.

From out of that initial scratch we then were like okay we need to address this and to be entirely honest because I feel like there are no easy answers. Having done all this work and all these projects, I still don't quite know what I believe. Maybe one of the reasons we were making the show was to maybe try and work out what we believe and how we might help better or even if it was just like "get out of the way". As part of that, it felt like we needed to reflect, it was more honest to reflect why we were doing it and we needed to put that in and so we did put that in.

Any actor who has performed and there's been various people that have performed regeneration, we always insert a section that talks about that where we are and what we're doing and the perspectives that we bring to this. Actually, another thing that *Regeneration* touched on is that we are a group of white, young, 20-something people and we acknowledge that we have to go, look, this is entirely our perspective. Potentially, there are whole sections of people we are not representing here. It's really important for us to acknowledge the elephant in the room. I guess that's how I ended up in that.

Tom: That's really interesting. I've been talking to a company called the Gramophones from Nottingham.

Corinne: They made a show about a walk.

Tom: Yes- a few things at the Bike Shed-- I saw them in the Bike Shed originally. They do something really, not similar, but in their *Playful Acts of Rebellion* show, they basically go, "Okay, we're three women that want to protest and complain but even though we are women we are straight white women." That's like addressed straight away. I think it's really interesting that you want to discuss something, you want to address something politically, but you are also talking about your own failings. Not failings in your voice but limitations in your voice as well which is--

Corinne: Absolutely. Totally. That's really interesting. I'm so interested in your thesis. Just on a personal level, it's lovely to actually see all these links between work.

Tom: It's really interesting. To be honest, what keeps me going is that I actually enjoy it.

What would you say you wanted people to come away with from regeneration? Was there a particular message or a feeling that you wanted people to come away with?

Corinne: We always go like, "Does *Regeneration* have a point?" The only thing that *Regeneration* explicitly says is bad is Thatcherism and selling council houses off. The only thing that we say explicitly in *Regeneration*, "That is not a good thing. Look at the damage that it has caused." Whereas everything else, we recognise that there are shades of grey and that different people are going to have different things.

It's one of the things that we never quite got to do with any venues that we're in, I always felt I needed more space to have a discussion. In an ideal world, you'd have a discussion afterward really. Or the very least you'll give people things that they could go away and read or talk to. I think if we'd have had proper funding to do it properly, I would have wanted to give people space to explore that because it felt very much like *Regeneration*

was going, "Look, we've gone out, we found out all these things I did not know, think about all the different elements. What do you think?" Because I think maybe the message of *Regeneration* is, we want people to be able to have a conversation about it.

Tom: That's interesting.

Corinne: Because there is no right answer. Thus far, everything that people are doing is failing. We desperately need to be talking about these issues now. How about let's have a conversation about it and can we think of new models?" Because one of the things I would maybe critique the show for is that it doesn't offer-- because it's going like, "Look at all these different possibilities in these different areas," it doesn't necessarily offer a way forward. It doesn't go, "This is the way moving forward. This is how we might do it better."

Which might be another show entirely, but it would be nice if in an ideal world, audiences would have had the space. That we could have given them the space. Certainly, from talking to people that when you talk to people in the bar and doing it in the *Bike Shed* with the traditional-- people coming and talking to you afterwards. We definitely got people going, "I'd not thought about", or "This is my experience." The conversation is the important part of *Regeneration*.

Tom: That's really interesting and I'm very glad you've mentioned that. I might be pressing you here but in terms of how you-- How would you facilitate a conversation after the show? Have you got any ideas of how you would do that?

Corinne: Yes. That's a difficult one, isn't it?

Tom: Yes.

Corinne: In that how you make the space. I'm always thinking how you make the space welcoming and inclusive, what you provide, and the fact that people want to do different things. One of the things that we noticed from the scratch actually when we did-- because *Rich* Mix given us the space, they weren't shooing us out afterwards. In the initial performance, we had loads and loads of Lego all over the floor. We had to clear that up.

What happened was that the audience were like, "Oh, we'll come and help you clear up the Lego and we just want to play with it!". Actually, maybe part of the conversation would have been if we could have got a load of Lego and the space subsequently afterwards and been like, "Let's come and play this." You want to come and play with some Lego or build something or…?

Part of the set for regeneration was drawn actually. In some places people did draw on it. Starting with an activity that's very low maintenance and then maybe having some prompts or something would have been a nice way that didn't feel too distinct from the show. There's always a thing like, "We're going to sit down and have a serious conversation." Which would have been entirely wrong and wasn't what it was really pushing towards. Having something like that that was maybe a little bit playful, that could have been the way into it.

Tom: It's really interesting because part of what I'm doing in my practice is trying to facilitate some political discussion with participants and audience members. It's very exclusionary because however you build it up you start to exclude people through different conversations. You have to think about what skills people need to be able to engage in that conversation. It's like, "Well, how is there a way of easing people into it?" Something physical like Lego and stuff like that is great. Or drawing. I'm going to do some workshops with lots of pieces of string, which seems a bit weird.

[laughter]

Tom: But something physical that leads into conversations rather than going, "Now it's time for political discussion. What do you think on--"

[laughter]

Tom: One of the reasons I wanted to talk to you in particular, was the idea that I'm looking at companies that do two strands of performance. One is that they include the audiences' political views within the show itself at the time of the show. It's like a dialogue between them. Then other companies which I would say you fit more into which is that they engage with communities before, possibly during, and after the show. That's really interesting that you wanted that conversation to carry on after *Regeneration* as well. Because that's what I was imagining that the piece was about. That's really interesting.

Corinne: Totally what we want.

Tom: I want to talk quickly about *Beneath the Albion Sky* as well because that was the first piece that I saw by you guys. For me, that was personally quite a moving piece that looked to the connection of our land and to history and nature in general. Because I grew up in Devon, so I found it quite immediate and easy to connect to, in a way. There's something that's quite romantic about it and in a-- Do you know what I mean?

Corinne: Yes.

Tom: I was just wanted to know about the inspiration for that and how that project came to be as well.

Corinne: This is one of those stories where I wish I came out of it better. We were doing *Theatre41* and being one of those-- I'm sure you're aware, all companies have those

moments when you start making work and because you're making work and people are seeing you, you get other opportunities in that. 2012 was one of those snowballing years for us.

We were doing *Theatre41* and the BAC [Battersea Arts Centre] were doing scratches at Latitude Festival. Because I wanted to go to Latitude festival for free, I was like, we should apply for this. Probably because we were in the midst of doing this project, they gave us a spot as part of their scratch. I can't remember what the theme of Latitude was that year, but it was something where it was about legends. They mentioned that the festival site was on the ley line. From that I was just like, "We're going to make a story about someone who walks along the ley line, we'll look at what this ley line is and there'll be some connection to this about storytelling." Because again, in overarching, *Write by Numbers* themes, how we tell stories is one of our big things. It'd be something about how we tell stories, and there'll be something about his dad in there, but I didn't know what.

Charlie and I decided we'll try and write something together. We made up 20 minutes of *Beneath the Albion Sky.* Which was a bit that basically told the audience effectively what the set-up was. This is a travel log, it's a walk. Then there was a bit where he fights, where Joe fights-- I said Joe. Gosh I'm forgetting the characters in my play. Where *Paul* fights the dragon and then the bit that is set at the festival where he meets his friend. We did 20 minutes scratch of that in order that we could go to Latitude for free. It absolutely bombed at the festival. It was like the worst [laughs] artistic moment. It was so awful that you got numb to it actually. [chuckling] Maybe there are some worst moments. It's one of those things where you can't quite work out what went wrong?

Some of it, maybe it was the wrong setting, there was really loud music, and it's quite a quiet show. Maybe the actor wasn't responding quite so well with it. It was awful. Even

though we'd done it just for the free tickets, we really liked the story by this time, obviously, in coming up with these 20 minutes we'd done a bit more research and been like, "I could totally see how this walk would be."

Then we ended up scratching the same 20 minutes with a different actor at the Bike Shed in the bar. From that, we were like, yes - we have a show. Then we went away and finished it so we could perform it at *Ignite* [Fringe Festival]. That's the reason that *Albion* was finished because we had to get it ready for *Ignite*. We found that we wanted to use the walk, but to pull stories from the areas that the walk went through, and it very soon became we were writing about stories about being English and the narratives that we tell each other. That's how it came to be.

Tom: It's really interesting because there's like something that I find personally-- Basically the other day I was asked, "Why are you doing this thesis" by one of my supervisors. "What's personally interesting to you in this thesis and the companies you're looking at and all that kind of stuff?" I started to think about actually, reasons why I enjoy things a bit more, I suppose, or I'm interested in stuff. One of the things that's interesting to me is that there's this mix in your work. It's like the urban and the countryside and the future and history and community and individual. There's all these, I don't want to say opposites, but all these things that-- Different –

Corinne: Contradictions

Tom: Contradictions, yes. I think that's a really interesting thing. It's quite present in it, would you say-- Would you agree, I suppose is the question?

Corinne: Yes. There's definitely that tension and it often feels like we do have maybe have two strands of work and what links them – and you're right, *Albion* is by far the

most romanticized show that we've ever made and can be seen to be apolitical maybe. It talks about the right to walk and et cetera et cetera but it's certainly softer and it's been our most popular show and we've made the most money out of it et cetera et cetera. Because it's quite an easy show and there is that tension.

Again, you're right, it's a very rural show. It's by far the most rural, given the most of our other work. Some of it is not set specifically somewhere but often there is a connection between place. That's one of the things that we're interested in. You're right. I absolutely agree with it. It's definitely playing with those tensions and also the tensions of making that show, which again is a bit of naivety - it was the first full length show we'd ever made and it didn't come out in the planned way that we would go; "We want to make a show about this let's do some research". It was very ad hoc. At the time, I didn't do much outdoor walking and the show totally converted me! That was one of the glorious things about doing that show that I feel in love with the wonder of doing this. Obviously, then you perform it and you meet people who have done these walks and it's incredible.

I remember a friend of mine seeing it and being like "That's not a show I would have expected you to have made." Because I'm someone who grew up in a big city and have always lived in cities and now living in Stratford Upon Avon this is the smallest place by far and the most rural place I've ever lived. There's something up with the tension [in the show].

Tom: That's really interesting. I want to quickly talk about the Bike Shed because obviously-- I know. It's [the closing of it] hit everybody, hasn't it? It's quite -

Corinne: [laughing] Initially, I was really quite practical about it because David Lockwood let us know a little in advance. At first when I heard it was like, "I'm being

really practical." Then when it got announced publicly, I was just like "I can't deal with this. My heart hurts."

Tom: It's hard to accept, isn't it? Because it's always just been there. Not all the time but certainly throughout my-- The first time we did something there was in 2011 and that was in my second year of my BA. That's when we formed the, well, we formed the company the year before. Throughout my whole actual career in theatre, it's been a part of it, and it's been like a, I don't know, a stone. It's always been there to go back to, to watch something or to get a drink and feel quite homely.

Corinne: Totally that. It feels like it's our home. Maybe because *Albion* was the first full-length show we made, and all our subsequent following shows have played there. It feels like such an important space. And now Charlie's living in Exeter, so we're properly basing the company there. It feels like that we're losing the stone. So many emerging companies around our age have done work there so there's this whole ecology that I'm like, what is going to happen in the next 10 years of equivalent theatre makers who might not get the fact that the Bike Shed was just so open about giving us space.

Tom: It has really made a mark on, particularly young-- or companies around our age and that kind of thing. It's really made mark in their career and just how they've, I don't know, developed, I suppose really. Could you take me through, because I know you guys have had a connection obviously, from *Albion*, I suppose. Could you just take me through a little bit of your relationship with the Bike Shed?

Corinne: Our relationship with the Bike Shed. Yes. Our initial thing was the 20-minute scratch of *Albion* in 2012. That would've been the autumn of the 2012 and they gave us a slot because Charlie went to Exeter Uni. That was the connection there. Then from that, we performed at *Ignite* with the full-length *Albion* and David [Lockwood, former director

of The Bike shed] saw it in the first night it was being performed and afterwards he was like you have to come and have coffee with me the next day.

Then he did and he was like, "I'm going to give you a two-week residency." Literally. [laughs] It was one of those weird things that never happened. Things like these don't happen I think and probably never will again. It's probably a mark of how amazing that David is that he would just see this one show and just go, "Okay. Have some space." From that, we then had a two-week residency in the autumn of 2013. We predominantly did *Albion* and then we developed a new show during the day in traditional Bike Shed style, and we did a community project on a small scale.

I'm trying to think which year. It's a blur in my head. This is the year where we did walking stories connected to *Albion'*s. We were looking at walking stories about people who may be had more difficult experiences walking. We worked with Headway Devon who support adults who have acquired brain injury. Their experience in their walking through Exeter and made short plays based on them that we perform. Before *Albion* into the nights.

We worked with a local youth group as to looking at their experiences walking around Exeter. That was our first residency, then David asked us to bring back *Blueprints* - the show that we were developing for *Ignite* the following year. We brought that back and then he gave us a three-week residency in the autumn of that year, 2014 and where we did so many-- We did another community project that resulted in the *Exeter Living Library*.

That was lots of stories that we collected from people who'd seen shows and then again, we worked with the couples. We went back to Headway Devon and worked with some of their users again and a few other community groups we worked with to create a living

library. We did a couple of performances of *Albion*. We did *Blueprint*, we scratched. Then, I don't know why we always go, "Let them do loads of stuff." It probably comes out of the urge of "Let's just do lots of stuff. We've been given a space!"

We did scratches of four short plays or longer. Again, it's just the things then spin off from that. Two of the plays that we scratched, some of them that Charlie wrote, we then performed in Lewisham. We did a *People Politics Festival* for Lewisham council. That show became part of that because it was looking at-- Charlie interviewed the then Lewisham MP. She was just about to retire and her experience of working in politics and particularly working in politics as a woman.

That show which was initially scratched by the Bike Shed then became part of the heart of the *People in Politics* Festival. Then the show that I wrote, it's like a 60-minute one-woman show, was then performed and they took it on to do a showing of that. That's a spin-off from that. [chuckles] What else? Then obviously, we took *Regeneration*. That developed independently.

They gave us a week in the unit to just mess about and try and make a show. At that point, we were thinking that *Regeneration* was going to be part of a trilogy and that that was the urban element and we were going to do a rural and a coastal one. We still very much have an idea for this coastal show, but we were in the unit to try and think about how we might make a rural show.

It's was really nice having the space just to play. Which you never get. It wasn't even that we had to do a showing at the end of it. It was like, "Come and have a chat with us and see what you've got." Which was really nice actually, because that show also didn't come to anything and part of that I was going, "We maybe we aren't the people to make a show about rural Englanders now."

That show still needs making but again, knowing your limitations or something, we decided not to. The other thing I will tell you about, obviously, he's brought us back all these times and it's been great. It's the support that's allowed us to do other things, *Albion* would not have toured to the extent that it has had it not been for the Bike Shed going, "Here, put it on."

We did rural tours because of other theatres would take it. It is just having that stamp. Someone said to us, because David had recommended it, he was going to take it. There's all those sorts of things come off it. You go, without the Bike Shed would we have had much of a career over the last-- or we'd have been just very, very different.

Tom: I'm really interested now in that work with communities. In taking stories from communities and voices from different people and that kind of thing. Could you just take me through a bit of the process of how that works? How you facilitated that, really.

Corinne: Yes. Actually, the person in *Write by Numbers* I haven't already talked about- initially, it was started by Charlie and I - and then Estelle Buckridge, who's now Charlie's wife, we dragged everyone we know on board - She was dragged in to do a bit of directing, but what she actually does in her real life work, is that she's a facilitator.

She does a lot of work with people with disabilities and with older people. She's become a specialist increasingly in that. Again, it influences her. She would always want to do a community project because it works perfectly. Because that's absolutely what we should be doing. A lot of the early things, rather than us going in as artists, is Estelle maybe going in and doing a workshop.

She would do a workshop as she does with other clients. Where it's entirely about what is best for the people in the room not what is best for others, writers or the material that

we need to get. That's a really important part of any project that we do now. That it doesn't start off with like, "These are the things that we need to get. We need to carry these." It's what comes up and that we will respond to what they provide us.

One of the things that we found with *Walking Stories* was that one of the service users was a great storyteller. He was just brilliant. He wouldn't have been able to come up and perform with all the attentive pressure of standing on the stage, but because he was so good and his stories were so lively, we recorded him. We played his voice. We had lots of visual things going on, but his voice was effectively, the narrative.

We never went in going, this is how we're going to do the show, but because of working with him and discovering this, we were like, "Let's make the art that works best." It's really important that we go in and we go, "There's no story. We don't know what we want to get out of this. Whatever is in the room is what we will work with."

Tom: Are people invited to the shows that you've worked with and that kind of stuff? Does that conversation still carry on?

Corinne: Yes. Again, what's really nice doing with the Bike Shed is that we were like, particular with this particular user whose voice was being used, we were like, "We really want him to come to the Bike Shed." We're happy to give up some comps or we'll buy the tickets. The Bike Shed gave us a few free tickets to give to the service users, which was great. Also, when this ticket user came, because he came with his girlfriend and the *Bike Shed* were lovely and they gave him a cocktail and so he got to see it.

Often what we do is we often find that if we're doing things in venues, it might not be accessible to the people that we're working with. One of the slight downsides of the Bike Shed is that, particularly for users who have mobility issues, is those steps. It's not a

particularly accessible, friendly venue. Often, what we will try to do is we'll take stuff out back to the people we worked with.

When we did *The Living Library,* we had elements of it set up in the Bike Shed so that the audience could come and listen, but we used Headway Devon's centre for a day. We took them over so that all of the users could actually engage with the material in a way that they couldn't have done if it was just in the Bike Shed. We've done that quite a few times in projects. Again, with *Theatre41,* some of the work that we made, the intergenerational work, we took one of those back into the schools. The piece that was for the children we took that so that the entire school could see it, as opposed to just the 20 or so students we directly worked with. We took the piece that we made from with the elder people's group, we took that back to their centre so again, everyone at the centre can see it. That's a really important thing actually for us going, we actively need to make our work accessible to the groups who have helped create it.

Because often it's time, and it's costs and it's all of that and even if you, and we often do put money in budgets and we're going, "Can we hire a taxis for people?" If we need to get tickets, can we have an allocation? Still, that isn't going to get as many people as if you take the work to them. That's always the ultimate thing.

Tom: That's really interesting. One final question, because I don't want to take up loads and loads of your time. It's been absolutely brilliant talking to you, and I've got so much great information.

Corinne: I'm glad it has been useful. [laughs]

Tom: It's been really useful. Thank you. Why is it important for you personally, to work with communities and to tell other people's stories as well as your own?

Corinne: That's good. That's a very good question. Again, this is very personal. I want my work to have a purpose. I spent quite a lot of time maybe in the last eight, nine years going, "Am I doing the right thing? Would my skills be used better given the situation that we are in? Should I retrain in something that could actively make a difference in communities?" Part of my answer to that and to stop me not making or going and working for the Citizens Advice Bureau where maybe I would on a one to one basis make more difference. Going, "Actually, I do have these skills. I can be articulate to a certain degree. How can I use and how can I give these skills to other people?"

It's using your privilege. It's owning my privilege and going, "What is the best use I can make of that?" Again, it's quite personal just because of my own background. I'm very much from a working-class community where no one goes to the theatre. We went to Panto, you'd go to Panto but you didn't see people-- You're on stage and you didn't see stories about people that you knew on stage.

Maybe using that and going, actually because I've been lucky enough to have been supported and educated to the extent that I have been, I've got voice in a way that other people don't and therefore I want to use mine as much as I can to enable other people to do that. Some of that is working directly with the people and allowing them to experience all or whatever I'm making it. Because the making it is as important as the watching.

Some of it is going, "I want people who haven't heard these stories to hear them." If you put those things with theatre you will get that. Just because however diverse people try to make theatre audiences, in the end, they're not that diverse. You can hit people with stories that they won't hear elsewhere.

5th March 2018

Stella von Kuskell and Josie Davies set up *Feat.Theatre* in 2017. The company aim to be 'constantly attempting social & political feats through performance' (Feat.Theatre, 2019). In Spring, 2018, I spoke with the pair following the performance of their new show, *The Welcome Revolution*, as part of the *Stronger than Fear* Festival at Gerry's Café, Theatre Royal Stratford East.

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Tom: Thank you so much for coming to talk [...]. You've described [the act of] welcoming as a radical act, and I know that comes from a symposium at Goldsmiths [University] a little while ago.

Could you just talk about that a little bit? About how welcoming *can* be a radical act, and the levels of welcome that you see in your piece, and the development of your piece as well?

Stella: I guess the 'Welcome is a radical act' stemmed from specifically the Syrian refugee crisis. That was what the symposium was about. It was in that context that I went to this talk. It was talking about, I guess, people opening their doors to strangers is radical. Then I came back, and we already had the discussion about what we want our show to be.

Our first show was about the refugee crisis. Then we were like, "We need to go more into active psychology of people." What makes you open or close your door? What makes

you an open or closed person? We took it down from the big scale to the smaller scale. I came back with the statement, "Welcome is a radical act." This could really work for us.

Josie: Yes. We've always been really interested in how the personal is political and vice versa and merging the really small-scale everyday activism versus changing the political landscape of the globe, and shit like that. Sorry, I shouldn't swear!

Tom: No, it's fine!

Josie: Our first show was really overtly political and really fucking angry. That's really useful in one context. We were talking the other day about how it was very much like a reactionary piece that spoke a lot to 2017. We were quite like, "Okay. The world feels like it's come out of that whole, well Brexit and Trump and everything, the refugee crisis." All of that happened.

What do we do now? It feels like those movements that feel of hope over hate, and all of that kind of thing. Gerry's [Café at Theatre Royal, Stratford East] festival had a whole *Stronger than Fear - a Festival of Hope*. It feels like everything's trying to now find the positivity through that political mire that was 2017. We wanted to make a show that was still addressing those big things, but also on a really personal level.

Tom: Is that as a response to that crisis of 2017 in a way? The turmoil?

Josie: Yes. The idea first stemmed from both of us living in Germany and seeing – we were there over-- was it 2016. That was literally the crisis. Specifically, in Syria, of course. It was going on for many years already, but that was when the media stormed everything. This is a follow-up from that follow-up of the process.

Stella: Yes. It's kind of like a roundabout. It stemmed from feeling like actually in Germany in 2015/16, there was a lot of positive action that was pro-refugee. Meanwhile, Brexit in the UK felt very anti-immigration. While we were in Germany it was like this positivity. Going back to the UK and not feeling that. It was an absence of that, that then felt very angry.

Now we're trying to almost meet in the middle and find that thing of like, "Okay. There's nuance within all of this." It's not black or white. It's not you're either pro or anti. There are whole shades of grey between that where people's own lived experiences and privilege and all of that intercepts with how they respond to all of this.

Even the questions that you ask at a tea party became very like, "Do you trust strangers?" like, "Would you welcome somebody to your house?" like, "Do you usually feel welcome?", because all of that impacts on it. It's not just like, "Are you left or right wing?" of course not. I think it's become trying to talk about that, and just like common sense.

Tom: Was that almost a reaction then, coming into the anger and turmoil of Britain again, in a way? Is that what you're saying?

Stella: Yes. I think it was. It was kind of attacking an apathy in Britain in particular, again compared to Germany especially because there was just nothing going on except, kind of, Facebook activism - and they're small-scale things. It was a direct, not attack, but it was -

Josie: It felt like, "Why have you swept it under the blanket?" It was just not visually there. It was like, "Is it just because we have an island mentality? Why is it possible to ignore?" Also, we made that show while we were at Uni. We were within a university setting.

We went to Warwick, a university that is very privileged in a lot of ways. The people that are there are privileged in a lot of ways to be there. Within that specific community as well, I think that shaped it a lot because that became very much an attack on, "You're privileged. Why aren't you using that to do something?"

Whereas then coming out of university it's like, "Our audience no longer are all privileged." That changes the attack, and whether or not we should even be attacking because people have their own reasons. More than at a Russell Group Uni where mostly everyone is in a position to help if they wanted to-- I generalise, but--

Tom: I think you are completely right about that, because, thinking about politics in general, UK-based politics, and especially youth-based politics - in 2015/16 until last year, it was apathetic. There was no-- You had movements in Europe, in the rest of Europe, young people, and a lot of ways in different countries - even revolts in Egypt were led by millennials on their computers. Whereas in Britain it was apathy and disengagement until last year when we suddenly got a big sort of broad youth engagement drive. Which is interesting that your shows from that as well link into that drive for hopefulness.

Going back to welcoming. Tea parties. Why a tea party in particular? I'm interested in the tea party.

[laughter]

Stella: I'm trying to think back. Can you remember?

Josie: I can remember. Yes.

Stella: Okay. Good.

[laughter]

Josie: It's really convoluted. It's such a weird way how we got there, but I do remember.

Stella: I'm glad you do.

Josie: Essentially, I think what happened is that we went to the National Student Drama Festival with this last show. The last show was a multi-author piece. Basically, we were like, "Right, we want to get a diverse intersection of opinion and experience." The way that that happened was that we were like, "Let us just be like 'give us writing donations.'" The stimulus was just 'the refugee crisis', quite naively, but we went there.

Stella: Yes! [laughs]

Josie: We were like, "Just respond!". What we got was a lot of poetry. Not a lot of theatre because obviously a lot of people – if they're going to write a short piece, it will be a poem. We got a lot of poems. We got some short scenes, just random bits like rants. Lots of stuff basically. We made that into a show. It was kind of like--

Stella: An amalgamation of different sequences.

Josie: Yes. Like a patchwork of different writers and writing. Then post-that, at the National Student Drama Festival, there's some amazing mentors, and people like Chris Thorpe, especially. That show got the Camden People's Theatre Award, which basically just meant that because Chris Thorpe was on the-

Stella: I think he's an associate for Camden People's Theatre

Josie: - he was basically like, "This could really fit into Camden People's Theatre". It could be interesting because what that show was writing donations, it meant that people

365

who were coming forward with writing. It was very pro-refugee, anti-apathy writing. I thought it was quite an echo-chamber. If you're going to write about refugee crisis, you're going to engage people that A, are already comfy writing - other artists, B, they probably already care about the refugee crisis, and C, they're probably pro-refugees. They're going to be proactive to do something.

Tom: Yes, well.

Josie: Especially not in our circles because then there's a whole conversation about how we distribute it. That was mainly through people we know.

Tom: Through your engagements?

Josie: Exactly. Essentially, Chris Thorpe was like, "I think you could do something really interesting with this idea. Do it in Camden where there's a really diverse borough, and try and get different perspectives, not just a whole show of the same perspective in different ways."

Then the original thought was okay, let's run writing workshops with these people, non-theatre makers specifically and non-artists, non-left-wing people, or default leftist. Let's run writing workshops and get them to write something, and then use their stories. But then it was part of this whole ethical conundrum of, is that fair? Is it fair to just make people write up stories for us to [crosstalk]-

Stella: Then use them.

Josie: -and then tell them as though that because there's such a fine line between platform and just appropriation. Then we were like, right, what's the more equal exchange? Can

we actually facilitate these writing workshops in a fair way and who is it for? Is it for us or is it for the participants?

I'm such a believer that if the workshop's not for the participants, it's not a workshop anymore, it's just taking people's creativity, I think. Then we were like, right, what's--

Stella: Not everyone likes writing.

Josie: Not everyone likes writing.

Tom: Yes.

Josie: Then we were like, what's the more equal exchange? What's going to engage a more diverse group of people? Okay, maybe if we give them something like a cup of tea or a biscuit, then maybe a conversation for that is a more equal exchange and feels more fair and feels less exploitative.

That was it basically. Then we were like, right, if we give them something free, what could we give them? Maybe a hot drink. All right, okay, well let's do tea parties. That's quite fun because that also ties into the nationalism and using the British trope of tea parties. How can we turn that on its head and do it to something that's actually really pro-immigration or welcoming others?

Stella: Using small-scale kindness to promote much wider ideologies. That's how we [crosstalk] – [it was] such a long process!

[laughter]

Tom: That's really interesting. It does feel very British. It feels quite quaint and-- Twee isn't the right word, but do you know what I mean, compared to -

Stella: Yes.

Josie: Yes. So much of the time we're like, this is so cutesy. We're not cutesy. Why is this?

Stella: How have we ended up with loads of bunting?

Tom: It's quite interesting that it came through that as well because I think that's very true about the exchange of creativity as well, and what you give people in exchange for that. I think tea and beverages, in general, are really interesting. I did a whole show about how I feel that we don't have conversations until we offer a-- You don't really have a conversation unless you're having it over a tea or coffee or a beer or something.

Josie: Exactly, it's so true.

Tom: I think that's really interesting. It's such a--

Josie: It's tangible.

Tom: Yes, and it streamlines it straight into a conversation if you offer someone a drink.

Josie: That's so true.

Stella: We spoke a lot about tea. Tea's not just British. We actually, this whole, not like a couple of hours maybe looking at the history of tea. Tea is in every culture in different ways, in ceremonies. That's a really nice thing to use as well. The symbolism of tea doesn't really come out in our show per se, but it's nice to have that backdrop where it's like, "Have tea!".

Josie: Most cultures have a hot drink that is specific to their culture. In a different world, we would've done all of the different cultural hot drinks!

Stella: Even tea is, you know, the Brits stole it off – It's the Brits appropriating it a couple of hundred years ago.

Josie: There's another show-

Stella: There's another show about the history of tea.

Josie: -where we could explore colonization through tracing teabags.

Stella: Yes exactly!

Tom: Immigration and importation, tea is a global thing. You can't grow it in Britain. It's not a British thing.

Josie: It's such an interesting way to explore global politics.

Tom: I know it is isn't it? I'm going to drink some tea.

Josie: This is the show.

Stella: Oh, we could do that! [laughs]

Josie: [laughs] No! [laughs]

Tom: In terms of the tea parties then, I'm really interested in the level of engagement you've had through that and how that's developed. We spoke really shortly when I met you about how it's-- I think it's in the show as well, actually, well it is in the show, how the tea party, how the tea party developed into what it is now? Can you just take me through that process and any challenges, difficulties, or good points as well?

Stella: I don't know, I guess we should probably say that it's not exactly how it was in the show.

Josie: The show uses a lot of creative license.

Stella: Gosh, how do I begin? Basically, in the show, we didn't accumulate the different statements, we had them all already.

Josie: That was a way to release information in the show as opposed to we didn't actually build up our statements. We had to do all of the stuff.

Stella: We had a test trial at Josie's house before we did our first tea party with strangers during a residency in artsdepot in Finchley, who got us in contact with all of their different communities. It was really nice of them. They actually helped us a lot with bringing people in.

We tested out loads of statements that might be interesting in this game. Then honed them down and decided which ones actually produce the best answers. Then we came up with those seven. That's how that began.

Josie: Not even all seven are in the show. We had other statements too. The statements that are in the show, currently are: *I Usually Feel Welcome; I Trust Strangers; Displacement Affects My Daily Life; The Refugee Crisis is Important to Me; Things That I Do Make A Difference to the World*. There are actually a further two, which are, *I Care About Politics,* which is really interesting. What was the other one?

Stella: The other one was, *I Feel Part of a Community*.

Josie: It was the way the order which we asked them as well, in the tea parties. It was quite a good way to facilitate getting to the bigger questions. We did actually ask them in a similar order to how they're shown in the show because it does build you up, those kinds of things, and asking people if they feel part of communities, and if they care about

politics, it really contextualizes everything that they're going to say about the refugee crisis and displacement.

Stella: It was a very interesting process because, the first tea party we did, artsdepot gave us the contacts to their over 65's group. It was just them there. It was a basically two-and-a-half-hour conversation because they wanted to share their stories. They have so many stories from their past.

That was a very kind of conversational tea party, and really easy to do. Easy, not really easy, but - because it's just talking and they were willing to come into the space already, and they were going to be there. They were used to coming into the building.

The Tea Parties really changed because then the next day is when we had-- In our show we have the homeless person coming. That was then the second day. That took a completely different turn and that's really how it is in the show. That is exactly what happened.

Josie: Yes, that was the encounter. That actually, for us, I think, changed the course of the tea parties because at that point we actually went out to flyer and we're trying to drag people in. Then when someone turned around and went, "I really needed this," and he looked-- He had a black eye. He looked really worse for wear.

At that point, we stopped trying to flyer the event and we realized that, actually, we just wanted to do everything that we could in that scenario to do a small thing to help that person. Then we were like right, "The tea party's irrelevant now. Let's just give this person a hot drink and food, if that will help."

That was a turning point as well because for us we were talking about displacement and the refugee crisis in terms that were quite broad. Then, you just have a person, a rough

sleeper, who's actually in your life. Okay, well, we're not going to ask him our questions, for example, because that's feels inappropriate.

Then you have this whole internal conflict of if it's not appropriate to ask them, who is it appropriate to ask. That's why we've structured it into the way that, *Displacement Affects My Daily Life*, very much comes before *I Care About The Refugee Crisis*, so that if somebody is affected, it really changes *how* we have that conversation. Then from that, yes, it gets kept developing.

Stella: A lot of it was our intuition and what we think is okay, talking about to this person. Lots of people were willing to talk. It's just to be sensitive in it and not put your own opinion into it ever. It's just focusing, which was something to learn. We weren't even doing that, but the more we did it -- Now we realize we're just listening, which is I think-

Josie: Taking your voice out of the conversation is a really useful skill that I don't utilize enough in my own life. It's really just like sitting back. I don't think, even when people were saying racist things to me, not rising to the bait as I usually would, and going, "You can't say that." Actually, just going, "Why are you saying that?" and really digging, digging, digging, as opposed to just being like, "You can't say that," which I think tends to be my reaction.

Stella: Also, with the tea parties, this is I guess a more of an emotional response, but as they started— it was the first week we'd ever done them, and I was like, "Now I've seen how this is not just becoming a show." It became more like a project. It was, "Actually, this is really lovely, and we want to keep doing it."

Josie: We want to keep doing the tea parties. Initially, it was like, right so, we'll use that as material for the show. Then the show will happen. Now it's like, "No, no, those two

things are the same thing." It's the same project. We can't do the show without the tea party and vice versa. It should be a community engaged show about community, and neither one of those elements stands alone.

Tom: Is the idea for the show that you'd go to a venue, engage with the community, then a certain amount of time later you'd make the show?

Stella: Exactly yes.

Josie: That's exactly what it is.

Tom: That's perfect. This idea of listening is really interesting. You're actually the first company that's phrased it as 'listening', which is really interesting because I've noticed that there's a lot of young companies who are, I've termed it, the Listening Theatre, really. They're taking in communities' viewpoints and audiences' viewpoints. They're basically engaging in a discussion or a dialogue with the audience whether pre the performance, during the performance and post the performance.

You guys, obviously, engage in a very intricate discussion with the audience beforehand or community beforehand, then that communication and that dialogue happens during the show as well. It's not just that you go, "Okay we're going to take all these things and then I'm going to tell you stuff." The level of engagement within the show itself is a dialogue in a way. It's a staged dialogue. I think that's really interesting, that idea of listening and empathy.

You were saying about almost having to keep your mouth shut at points. Did you have many conflicting ideologies presented by people? Was it rounded?

Josie: I think so.

Stella: Yes, with certain people. We obviously were in different conversations all the time. I know you had your own.

Josie: Yes.

Stella: Mine was probably when I spoke to an 80-year-old woman who had a completely different background to me, and they were telling me how in 1974 they voted against going into the European Union. They had this whole different generational upbringing to what their own view of refugees would be. That's probably my personal 'most different' one, but I know you had other people who were much--

Josie: Yes, I had quite a few people that were quite vocally against immigration essentially. It was really fascinating because, again, just listening to it, I felt surprisingly empathetic towards some of their feelings. That's not to say I agreed with any of the opinions they drew from those. For example, they were saying things like, "I can't get on a bus anymore and still get a seat. Every where's chock a block." I was like, "Yes, do you know what? Transport isn't great, buses *do* get full."

I'm not going to draw from that that, therefore, we should stop immigration. I can understand that you feel not getting a seat on a bus is sad - because it is! It's how you relate those things, and actually because I'd gone, "Why, why, why?" and then they go, "Well, it's because I can't get a bus anymore, it's because I see people on the street and I don't think it's fair that they should be on the street, we should be helping them in their country, not inviting them to this one, because then maybe there'll be fewer people on the street here." I understand what you're saying, but I'd rather they were-- This isn't my place to say, but there's an argument that being on the street in a country where they're not going to get killed might be preferable to being in a war zone. It gets-- Do you know what I mean? There's nuance within that, but it doesn't-- The key thing that I took from hearing

a lot of those ideologies that really conflict with my own is that those people are still human. They're not aliens, they're not monsters, they're not bad people. They have their own reasons. There was a much more well-rounded set of views that we got from this than we did from speaking to other artists and theatre makers.

Tom: One thing that stuck out for me in the show was the "where are we going to put them - we're completely full?" argument. It's just because, obviously, if your life is London then, yes, of course, that could be what you think. But I grew up in the middle of nowhere in Devon - there's plenty of space there! [laughs]

It's interesting, and to engage in a dialogue with people that we might not be able to-- Because we do live in echo chambers, both online and in real life. To be able to engage with them for a community project, a theatrical project, and strip away those layers of very divisive opinions--

During these conversations, though, practically how does that happen? Is it you guys going up to people individually? Is it a big group thing or does it depend how many people are there?

Stella: It depends how many people.

Josie: It depends on how the group forms itself as well. I think we try and do our best to slot ourselves around the environment that is the most comfortable. Often, sometimes we didn't even bring our exercise out. If somebody just wanted to chat, but not about what we want to talk about, then we just talk to them about what they wanted to talk about. If people wanted to have a group conversation, then that's fine. Also, it was really important to us to speak to people long enough, that we'd actually got to know them a *tiny* little bit before we then brought out this agenda activity.

Often it was really, "Where have you come from? Do you come to this venue a lot? All of those kinds of personal things before we went in, like, "I feel welcomed a lot."

Stella: It was really funny as well because when we did the one at Gerry's, we just had a table at the back, so people naturally sat the same place. Then without even starting any kind of questions, people started talking to each other. It was funny because one woman had come from Hackney Council, and another man who was really into local politics. They were having this conversation without even anyone initiating, from our perspective, in talking about the state of community in Newham.

I hadn't even started this, we haven't even started this, but it just happened organically.

Josie: Sometimes it's about facilitating a space.

Stella: We're just going to let that happen and because it's nice enough that now they're in a place where you can talk about this. People often said to us, "Oh, it's really nice because I usually don't talk to much community, but this is the only space where I can." It's also just having that space rather than coming up with statements.

Josie: Something that was as interesting as people's opinions was, what brought them to us? What makes people come to that sort of event? It was really different things, actually, that brought people, which I thought was really interesting.

[For] some people, it was because they were interested in doing something themselves. We had a couple of people that were like, "I don't feel welcome, and so I needed somewhere that I felt was actively trying to welcome me because I'm not feeling that in the world at the moment, so I want that. Seeing this gave me hope. That's why I'm here."

Then there were other people that have their own agenda to do their own community engagement. There were some people who were just trying to get out or wanted the free food. It's really interesting why people came.

Tom: It is interesting that you got a variety of people as well. I'm particularly interested in Newham, because that's where I'm based. What was your particular experience with community engagement in Newham?

Stella: A rundown [of] who came, type of thing?

Tom: Yes, who came?

Stella: This was the one, yes, where it was around one table. There was one person who worked for an arts organization across five different boroughs in East London, and had seen this event, and marketed through Gerry's, and was like, "I want to find out more about community engagement."

Then there was this woman who actually directly works for the council and had a notebook with her, and was like, okay, this is what to do!

Tom: Very interesting. She came to your space to perfect her work, in a way?

Stella: She came to our space for her own research! I was like, "This is really interesting." I was totally out of my depth because then they started talking about the council stuff. I was like, "I don't know anything about Newham council, and I hadn't even thought about this!"

Then these two women came. One woman had dragged her friend along. They were like, "Let's go to this free event because I saw it online", type of thing.

Yes, everyone, there was a similar vibe. A lot of them had come alone or come as one. It was a kind of a mutual agreement through them that not enough happens in their community.

This one man said a really interesting thing. He was like, "I know there's lots going on, but I don't ever feel like I'm invited to them, so I don't know which one I would go to."

Josie: It was also really interesting for us, on the more theatre side of it than the community side of it-- Which venues have been the most engaged with what we're doing?

Actually, we've been so fortunate to have the support of the places that we've had. artsdepot are amazing, Gerry's, Camden People's Theatre, because they care about what we're doing. They've been in a position to help us. Whereas some of the theatres maybe that aren't so interested in it, wouldn't be the right spaces for us to go because they wouldn't have the community there for us to engage with.

We have to acknowledge that we've tapped into communities that already exist. By and large, you can't create community in one of them. It doesn't work like that. I think with artsdepot, that's a very community-based venue. They have people coming in and out of that building for lots of different things. People are used to going to things there. That really helped us.

I think also it's about *where* we've done it. There's that classic thing with community engagement, bringing it *to* community groups, rather than trying to get community groups to come to you. There's a fine balance, how much we should be going into community centers, and how much we should host things outside of those.

Stella: What was also interesting about Newham was that we asked, "Do you often come to the theatre?" And they said no. Nobody there was used to going to Gerry's or used to going to Theatre Royal Stratford East. It was completely out of that field.

Josie: Then it was like theatre people or certainly a very small-scale bubble of that, theatre people haven't really been that engaged with the event. Even our first show, and fair enough, it's because a lot of our bases aren't necessarily in Newham, but it wasn't people that we knew and it didn't seem, from the conversations briefly we had, like they went to the theatre a lot and they were there because it was theatre. It felt like they had to come because it was about community. It feels like a very different thing.

Stella: Yes. It makes you think a lot about who goes to community centers and who goes to these community engagement things. I thought, "I don't do that." Because my community is my university, or my home, or my family, and it's such a different mind-space for me, which is great.

I think it's amazing to do that because there's people I would never speak to in my bubble. I live in a community bubble of Uni and school. Some people don't have that in the same way.

Tom: Newham's got its own problems, so I was interested to see what level of engagement there was and stuff. When the show is developed more, the project. How you can compare different places and that kind of thing would be interesting.

Stella: We're really interested in how that gets presented on stage differently. How much this show can reflect the place. How much we should be reflecting back or challenging. What the position of that is in relation to what we get. It's like, "What happens if we do get an echo chamber response at one tea party? Does that change the piece? Should we

then only have one view in the piece, or do we continue to try -- ?" Do you know what I mean?

Tom: Yes. That is interesting. It's not site-responsive, it's community responsive.

[laughter]

Stella: Yes.

Josie: Yes.

Tom: You have to find a certain phrase for that. You might be able to coin a new term. One quick question actually. I'm interested in why [you included] the children's literature revolution, what the reasonings for that was?

Josie: We've had a lot of conversations about this. I think, partially, it's to introduce the idea of story, and story being fictional and non-fictional. They're both valid mediums. Basically, because the idea that some of our show is fiction and some of it's not. It's bridging those two worlds.

Also, we wanted to disguise the most overtly political stuff in a non-political framework so that it displayed in it. I think probably that's the main drive.

Also, there was a version of this show - and I think that it might be a slight hangover from that as well -

Stella: It is for sure, yes.

Josie: - there was a version of the show where what was going to happen was that there was a protagonist, that was probably a child just because children generally speaking are more open-minded, and more influenced by things, basically. There was going to be a

version where this child went into parallel universes to different forms of welcome revolutions. One of the forms was this fairy tale that was really overtly political. It was about protests. It was about-- We've now re-written that bit anyway - It's now about a king abdicating. More political and shorter.

Stella: Much shorter.

Josie: Then there was going to be things like, how do we, maybe, imagine if the Suffragette Movement if it wasn't about gender equality, and it was about welfare? It was about trying to find these ways. Then, there was one where it was like-- there were so many abstract ones.

Stella: Yes, because initially, the child was going to see all these worlds and then be like-

Josie: Bring it.

Stella: - bring it into the real life. Then, what happened to the show was, actually, the performer actually learns more from the tea parties and the story is there in the background, that political agenda is maybe there in the background. But then it's actually from the tea parties that they learn to make a difference, and that this is the way to introduce a political change on a small scale through [the act of] Welcome.

Josie: Yes, but I think we were also going to restructure it massively anyway, the process. We don't want it to feel narratively like, okay, there's all the exposition and there's the context of the stories, and then there's the tea parties that happen.

We want it to be more, like, here are the things that the tea party brings up. Then there's musings on it that are slightly away from the reality. We want to try and work out if verbatim is the best form for it and how we can set those views that isn't-- How it--?

I don't know. We're still trying to work out how to best present it all.

Stella: I think the story is going to take a much smaller part in it as more of a fun break, where everyone's involved - a bit more like the dancing with the kid scene. That kind of thing rather than-- Because it was a long, long thing.

Josie: Yes, and it's also just breaking it up in terms of, formally, there's only so much you can listen to somebody speak aloud what somebody [else] said. We were trying to find a way where it will still thearically engaging as well as saying what we want it to say.

Tom: That was really interesting, because I think it worked for me-- it's definitely the political through the personal. You're sitting down, we know it's going to be-- especially we're sat down on sofas and stuff in that kind of place, you know it's going to be quite an intimate thing. You start talking about your childhood, and then the welcoming for me felt like-- you're not pushing the audience to interact too much. With such a small audience with so many interactive bits, you are like, pretty much everyone is going to do something, but it's quite a relaxed way of doing it. We don't have to stand up--

Josie: We want it to be gentle.

[laughter]

Stella: That's good to hear.

Tom: It was gentle! Because I work with a lot of students that do interactive stuff, but they are very much-- You have this, "Do this now." The audience, even if it's drama students, are, "Why am I wanting to do that?" You have to welcome them in. I felt like the story worked in that respect, in a childhood-like re-imagining. It was fun, the hats and the wigs and all that.

I want to talk about the appropriation of stories and the challenges that I think you've probably thought of and addressed in terms of verbatim and appropriation. What platform the show offers, and what you feel is the reasoning for platforming these stories. If the platform ultimately matters, in a way? That's quite critical, but in terms of theatre in general, but the kind of complications you see from that? If that makes sense?

Stella: I'm not sure I understand the question. Like specifically--

Tom: So, you're taking people's stories and you're putting them on stage. Have you found any complications in that, really, in so far as, okay, well, I'm using somebody else's stuff for—specifically, you're [both] university educated, white people. You're taking stories of people who might not have the same experiences as you. Does that make sense?

Josie: Yes, it does. It's something we've spoken about a lot in different forms throughout all of our work, actually.

Stella: Because originally, we didn't really want to do verbatim, because of that reason. We wanted the tea parties to influence the show and then re-work that. Then we found that, actually, it's really hard to do that. It's really difficult to do that. We've had a lot of conversations about how ethical it is when we do put that on the stage.

Tom: Also, that's also completely different. There's other ethical complications in that--

Josie: That's what I was about to say, yes!

Tom: --because then you're rewording it.

Stella: Exactly, re-working it, yes.

Josie: That's it because I think, initially, we were on this where we thought, if we directly take somebody's words, are we re-appropriating them for our own purposes? Equally, if you just fictionalize it, then I think you're probably even doing that even more. Actually, are either of them problematic, and if they are, which is more problematic? I don't know, because in our last year, in a really different sense, we decided nobody was ever going to embody another character. That was a big thing.

It's about whether you're presenting words or whether you're embodying them and reclaiming them as a character. I think that's important to us that we don't characterize these people. We don't stereotype people. We don't give them a physicality and a voice and a performance that ultimately is never going to be theirs, and no actor is them.

That's why the reading it has come from, because then it's very clear that it's somebody else's words. This isn't a white person embodying and attempting to *claim* somebody else's experience. It's more presenting what they've said. I think that's where we've drawn the line, I think. We've never want to *play* that person. We would only want to present what that person presents.

Tom: I think that's really interesting. To be honest, that was what came across in the piece as well. It's something I spent a lot of time thinking about. Talking to different people who've created verbatim work, some people just don't think about it, in a way. They haven't thought about it. Then you ask them that question they're like, "Oh, actually." Because it's interesting. There is a platform. People have come to this because they want to share these thoughts, don't they?

Stella: Yes.

Tom: They want, and they've, obviously, given you permission to use it in different ways. But there is this-- I don't think there is a right answer. I think it's right to be able to do this kind of stuff. Bu it's a complication, and I think that that idea of presenting it as written or as-- There's a difference between embodying as a performance and then embodying as a caricature. And I think character can fall into caricature too much within verbatim theatre.

Josie: Yes, exactly.

Stella: It's something we talk about a lot. When we put it on its feet and we're reading it. We're like, "How do you *say* this?"

Josie: How do you make it theatrically engaging vocally without coming into embodiment.

Stella: Exactly.

Josie: But, I also think that it's a much wider responsibility that potentially falls outside even the realms of how you present *words*. I think it's more like the whole gesture of what somebody said to you. Your responsibility to capture the essence of what they are about.

That sounds so wanky.

[laughter]

I think it's so much more going, "Actually, we took the time", we didn't just ask them questions to quote them and then leave. We actually built up to those conversations and spoke to them after that. We got to know *why* they were saying these things and *what* they were saying them for.

That, I think, was what we tried to then present. We had even a conversation with you this morning. If that person thought that we were saying that that thing they said in this context, is that what they meant?

Stella: Exactly.

Josie: Often it's about not twisting things they said and changing it. It's actually trying to maintain the gesture of what they've said.

Tom: On that note, in the shows, how many of the participants from the tea parties have come back and seen the performances. Has that happened?

Stella: As of yet, no.

Josie: But then we've only had one performance!

Stella: Yes. We had a conversation this morning about what's going to happen if that--

Josie: We did have that, yes. We want to develop a world in which that is-- And whether it's a financial constraint, as well. We have offered discounts to people that have come to the tea parties for the shows. Is it a scenario like, if they come to the tea party, then do they even have to buy a ticket anymore?

We're really interested in accessibility and that. It's how our accessibility extends to that.

Stella: We really want them to come!

Josie: We want them to come.

Stella: It's engaging again the non-theatrical audience to come to theatre later and also on a different date.

Josie: On a different day. Re-engaging them.

Stella: To reengage them keep them interested in it. I guess it's a really tricky scenario. It's also where do you do that? Do you do it on social media? Basically, they probably don't follow us on Facebook or on Twitter.

Josie: If they don't sign up to a mailing list, and you can't force people to do that because, fair enough, I don't join a lot of mailing lists. Then it's, how do you even get in contact with them? I think we need to work out what is it at the event that we do to invite them back, and whether we even ask them to pay or not. If it even is that.

Tom: It's interesting.

Stella: There's also a scenario, maybe in future, to have them on the same day. Because we've been in the process of developing the show at the same time as doing the community engagement.

Josie: We don't really know how much time we need between them, as well. Yes, if it is on the same date-- but even then, it's like you're asking a lot of hours of the day.

Stella: We have to do the transcribing as well! Oh my God! [laughs].

Josie: [laughs]

Tom: Also, people might be free in the mornings, and then they're not free in the evening for that same day.

Josie: Exactly. Yes.

Tom: I think this dialogue, the idea of building up to those questions. That kind of stuff is really interesting because it's really obvious in the show that it's not just a, "Okay, fill

in this form and we're going to tally your answers and do that." This idea of engaging in the dialogue is really interesting.

What was also interesting in the show as well, and I think for me it came when you were talking about the homeless participant. It's that level of, in a way, critique of the process that you present as well, which I think is really interesting because I've noticed this thematic of hope and hopelessness at the same time, or like, "Yes, we can do something." Also like, "We're also doing things wrong." I think you were quite open about that in the process of the show.

Josie: I think, really, it's been *so* important to ask, not to just be virtue signaling. Not going, "Look at us, we're fucking fantastic, and we're perfect, and we're really good. You should all look at us and do what we've done," because it's not that at all. It's not that.

And we've had these conversations of like, "Okay, so what's the motivation?" Even looking at ourselves and going, "What is *our* motivation as theatre makers and as people, and as attempting to be activists? Where do all of those motivations come from? Why are we doing it? Why is the character on the stage doing it?" As well as, we're floored because we're learning through doing it. I think if you present as somebody that's got all the answers, it's just uninteresting and really arrogant! [laughs]

Stella: Untruthful.

Josie: Yes, untruthful.

Tom: Well, yes.

Josie: That's it. I think it's like you have to acknowledge those moments in life where you do something with best intentions, and sometimes it doesn't always come out. I think that is community engagement down to a tee.

Tom: Yes.

Josie: You can try everything in the best spirit, and it doesn't always work. That's fine. I think that's actually something that can be galvanizing even though it's hopeless at the time. It's, like, okay, but that means that we have to appreciate the time it does work out! [laughs]

Stella: Even more!

Josie: It's so amazing that people do come because when they don't, it just reminds you of how great it is when they *do* come. Things like that.

[laughter]

Tom: Brilliant. Thank you so much for this. It's been really, really good. Really good.

Josie: No, thank you.

Stella: It's a really fun three hours.

[laughter]

Josie: It's sort of like, "Yes, I can talk *fun* things today."

Stella: And about something we're interested in.

A.5 *LIKE LIONS* SCRIPT

Tom Drayton
Pregnant Fish Theatre

August 2018

First performed at
The Bread and Roses Theatre,
Clapham, London, October 2018.

Cast: Faye Carmichael and James Glynn
Music by The Dagen Smiths
Directed by Tom Drayton
Produced by Pregnant Fish Theatre

SAM: (TO AUDIENCE) Hi.

JACOB NODS TO THE AUDIENCE

SAM: I saw a play about David Bowie a couple of years ago.

It was shit.

I –

This isn't the performance by the way, I just wanted to tell you.

I expected something I could really relate to. I really love Bowie.

But it was just… shit.

And I thought – David Bowie is so many different things to different people, right? And if you go in expecting one particular thing - one particular aspect that obviously matters to you – you're going to be disappointed.

I thought – fuck. That was bad. So, I told myself: 'Don't ever agree to do a play that even mentions David Bowie.'

But this isn't the play.

JACOB: The thing about him is –

SAM: Yeah

JACOB: - he was always one step ahead of – collapse.

SAM: Uh huh.

JACOB: Always narrowly escaping, like, his own end. Changing before he imploded in on himself.

SAM: You ready to start?

JACOB: Yeah. You?

SAM: Yeah.

THE PLAY BEGINS

JACOB: They're in bed. Sam and her new girlfriend. The record player begins to skip. Sam gets up and switches it off. Student house. Feet walk on stained carpet.

SAM: Whatever happened to Bowie?

JACOB: She says.

SAM: He's just…. silent.

JACOB: In a week's time, people will set up tents outside St Pauls Cathedral.

            She will be there.

            In a few years' time, others will set up tents beside a lake. They will fly inside them.

            I will be there.

            Meanwhile, in the student house: a small flat screen. On it, a midweek, midday documentary plays on some forgotten Freeview channel.

                    ON THE SCREEN:

                            EXCERPTS FROM THE DOCUMENTARY
                            'PROSPECT OF SKELMERSDALE'
                            (SKELMERSDALE DEVELOPMENT
                            CORPORATION & CINEPHOTO FILM
                            PRODUCTIONS LTD)

            Images of a town on the outskirts of Liverpool. Skelmersdale. A 1970's camera captures 1960's new builds.

            Semi-detached, Sam's girlfriend watches.

            Back at home, in a semi-detached, I watch along.

            And I'm fucking hooked.

                    THEY WATCH THE SCREEN

SAM: A week later. I'm outside St Pauls, placard in hand, surrounded by a society of tents.

            Jacob is *there*. Skelmersdale.

JACOB: You drift through the suburbs. Feet walk on cracked concrete.

            Chip shops and garden fences and white vans.

Gang sign graffiti.

Over roundabouts - no traffic lights - endless, endless roundabouts.

Red bricked semis. Neighbourhood watch.

Until suddenly –

SAM: - Suddenly –

JACOB: - a golden glow in front of you.

Across the road, stretching from left to right – covering my vision:

The Golden Dome of Enlightenment.

> THE SCREEN PLAYS SUPER-8 FOOTAGE OF THE
> BUILDING OF THE DOME

Bursting through the suburbs. Growing out of the take-aways and daytime TV and 9 to 5s. Erupting through the net curtains and begonias and dog shit.

The Golden Dome.

Like a glint of precious metal in a field of dirt.

Just –

> HE STOPS. APPRECIATES IT

SAM: It's the otherness of it that affects him. The perfect simplicity of its not-supposed-to-be-there nature.

JACOB: It is -

SAM: What?

JACOB: Not supposed to be there.

SAM: But it is.

JACOB: In the suburbs of Skelmersdale.

> A BEAT

That's when it started. For both of us.

SAM: Yeah, there's a few beginnings. That's one.

You in the suburbs and me in a tent.

      A BEAT

Let's take a moment.

      THE PLAY PAUSES

Over the last year, we've spoken to a lot of people.

JACOB: Young people.

SAM: Young-ish.

      And they've told us -

JACOB: - what they hope for -

SAM: - how they feel –

JACOB: - what they worry about –

SAM: - what makes them cry.

JACOB: Are you happy?

SAM: Are you lonely?

JACOB: Do you regret anything?

SAM: In the 2016 referendum on Britain's Exit from the EU, what did you vote for?

JACOB: Have you got a Blue Peter badge?

SAM: What's the best way to show a softboi you're not interested

JACOB: Did you go to University? Was it worth it?

SAM: How many smashed avocado brunches have you had this month?

JACOB: Do you sometimes look at old friends' Instagram accounts late at night with a weird empty feeling in the pit of your stomach?

SAM: Question Time or Love Island?

JACOB: Are you tired of being tired? Try Floradix!

SAM: When and how will you ever learn to cook the right amount of pasta for the right amount of people?

JACOB: How long is long enough?

SAM: What keeps you from tumbling into the deep dark pit of despair that
            we're constantly circling around and around and yet always drifting ever
            closer - towards its inevitable and inescapable centre; the sweet, sweet
            release of death?

JACOB: Y'know, the usual.

            Some of their responses and discussions made their way into what you're
            about to see.

SAM: Take it as a small snapshot on the collected ideas, worries and hopes of a
            generation.

JACOB: Or take it as a story. About two twins who are growing up after the
            millennium.

SAM: That's what it is.

JACOB: And isn't.

SAM: We don't have all the answers. Or questions. Or a point. Really.

JACOB: But what do you care? We are just playing characters - in a play - in a
            room where you are sat expecting something more than this.

                    A BEAT

SAM: Let's get back to it.

                    THE PLAY STARTS AGAIN

JACOB: A quick introduction. 2009. Year of the prospectuses. Picture them, in
            piles on my bedroom floor. Doorstop-thick books made of doorway-
            thick paper.

SAM: Thicker the better | That's what she said.
                                   |
JACOB: | That's what she said.

            A pre-destined path has led us here. A holy walkway designed for us to
            stride toward the future of education on. And so, it was written that the
            Mason twins would traverse into the wide world of Uni, never to look
            back on past mistakes, always onward to the next exam. Down the long
            rainbow road of education.

SAM: Isn't that Mario Kart?

JACOB: …yep.

SAM: Urgh. How am I supposed to lay down some sort of future plan when I don't even know what I want to do?

            How come you've got it all sorted already?

JACOB: Predetermined Rainbow Road. Thanks Mario Kart. *And* thanks to Mr Chatterly for rewriting my UCAS application for me.

SAM: He only did that for himself, you know. Either he fancies you or just really wants you to go to Uni.

JACOB: If he fancies me, he would've made me apply for somewhere closer to home.

SAM: Not if he's sending you away because he just can't resist you when you're so close. The tortured college tutor, lusting for young Jacob, but never giving in to his desire. Sending his love away just to keep himself sane.

            Cry-wanking to your yearbook photo in the toilets.

JACOB: Nice…

SAM: Ten years ago, I would've been happy just, I dunno –

JACOB: Playing Mario Kart?

SAM: (SARCASTIC) Yeah, actually – that's a good one. Pass me the one that does the Nintendo course…

JACOB: (TO AUDIENCE) Their mum – our mum – drives them – us – to the University they both chose. Bin bags full of clothes. Boxes of crockery and cutlery bought from a small shop in the high street after the Woolworths had closed down that summer.

SAM: They collect keys and student cards and weird first meetings with new flatmates.

            Feet walk on communal hallways.

JACOB: I meet Alex that first day. Turns out he's studying psychology too. We go to some Freshers events together. Toilet paper each other up as mummies, that kind of thing.

SAM: Have you actually been to lectures yet?

JACOB: … I did some introduction thing. You?

SAM: I've got 9am starts Monday and Wednesday

JACOB: Fuck.

SAM: Yeah. It's alright though. We're going to this thing at the SU later, they're playing The Dark Knight and then drinks are, like half price or –

JACOB: I've just seen that.

SAM: Yeah, but… Kerrie probably wants to – would *like* to meet you. Bring, uh, Alex if you want?

JACOB: Maybe.

            A BEAT

SAM: You okay?

            THE PLAY PAUSES

JACOB: I want to take a moment here and tell you about my favourite book.

            HE GETS IT OUT

            It's called The Gunslinger by Stephen King – the first in this series called The Dark Tower. I know that isn't exactly highbrow literature or anything, and in 8 years they'll release a shit film of it, but still. It's about this, well, cowboy basically, in a different universe to ours – a desert. Searching for, well, Dark Tower. Which is always on the horizon, always out of reach.

            Then this boy, Jake, dies in our universe. He gets hit by a car. And he wakes up in the desert of the Gunslinger's universe.

            He says, to the Gunslinger - and I always remember this part - 'There are other worlds than these.'

            That's the important bit.

            THE PLAY CONTINUES

SAM: Fast forward. The next year. May 2010.

            Ready?

JACOB: Yep.

            A BEAT

            AN ARGUMENT

397

Why would I care? It's not like it would ever make a fucking difference.

SAM: What do you mean why would you care? Have you not seen the fucking news?

JACOB: You really think I'd be watching the news?

SAM: Yes! I don't know. Maybe you're an ignorant dick who might need to look out of his own arse at what's going on some day?

JACOB: I don't want to.

SAM: What?

JACOB: Watch the news.

SAM: See? Exactly – Why the fuck you did psychology – head up your own fucking arse -

JACOB: I don't like Hugh Edwards.

      A BEAT

SAM: What?

JACOB: I just don't like him, okay? There's something behind his eyes that I don't trust.

      A BEAT

Welsh evil.

      A BEAT

Why does this even matter to you so suddenly?

Sam?

Look, I know you told me to register, but I forgot, alright?

Sam? Seriously. Why do you care?

SAM: (TO AUDIENCE) I'd met someone.

She –

Was a she, which I didn't expect to be perfectly honest.

	And it was so clichéd, man. She didn't know, and I didn't even attempt to make any kind of move.
	In fact, I ended up sleeping with Bobby Richardson that month.
JACOB:	I didn't know that.
SAM:	Yeah.
	And he cried. During.
JACOB:	Somehow, I'm not surprised.
SAM:	But all I could think about was how it would feel to touch her arm, her hair.
	She wasn't doing sports, but we had mutual friends.
	Politics.
JACOB:	Oh.
	(TO AUDIENCE) Outside *Squirt*. Student Night. Thursday. Feet walk on sticky concrete. Fag ash. Vomit.
	They stand close. Leaning against the wall. Ultraviolet blue picking out a thread on her top. The spilt drink on her shoes. Her smile.
	She talks to Sam about the state of the country. About anger and hope and the system. About Thatcher and Blair and about there now being a choice despite people saying otherwise.
	Sam tries to be smart here though she's way out of her depth and has had too much.
SAM:	But it's not Blair now.
JACOB:	Sam says, confidently.
SAM:	It's Brown.
JACOB:	She laughs and takes a swig.
	She tells Sam about Lucas.
SAM:	Who's he?
JACOB:	She laughs again. Caroline. The Greens. She –
	- a text. From Kerrie. They're going to get chips. Want to go?

SAM: No. I want to stay here, with you.

JACOB: Is what Sam thinks.

SAM: I want to kiss you. I want to feel the warmth of your tongue against mine. I want to press my hand against you. I want to take you home.

JACOB: Is what Sam feels.

            But –

SAM: Yeah.

            Okay.

            Cool.

JACOB: Is what she says.

                    A BEAT

            (TO SAM) Alex didn't register either if that makes any difference.

SAM: Fuck Alex.

            And fuck the Lib Dems apparently. Way to go.

JACOB: It wouldn't have made a difference.

SAM: (TO AUDIENCE) Turns out, her family is minted. Like, weekly-Waitrose-shop minted.

            I meet her, that summer, at her family's holiday home in Devon. Pastel coloured house on the coast. Sea salt in the air. Feet walk on cobbled pavements.

            There's a Smeg fridge in the kitchen.

            Crispy chips and ice-cream. Sit on a wall by the sea.

            Fucking great, mate. Like, literally, the best first date you could think of. If that's what it was.

            Lips sweet and salty - cider and sea.

            We go back to her family's holiday home, and…

JACOB: In a few years' time, Sam will tell her about the fact that because so many people are buying second homes on the coast, houses there are almost twelve times the average salary in the area.

SAM: She will say that she *knows that, Sam.* She will say that I'm *being over the top.* That I should stop *being so fucking self-righteous.*

            But that's later.

JACOB: Okay.

            I want to explain something.

                    THE PLAY PAUSES

            Start simple.

            You know how we call colours by their names?

            Red is called red. Blue is called blue. And so on.

            Simple philosophy – what if your red is not the same colour as my red? What if we both call it red, but my red looks like your purple? Or your red looks like my green? There's no way, is there, of knowing if my red is actually the same colour as your red. We can only describe it by saying it's… red. Dark red, light red, blood red. Like purple except without the blue.

            I know this has been said on stage before – it's in that fucking Matilda musical, but it's important, right, because - your red might be completely different to mine, your blood green, your grass maroon, but because I can't actually see through your eyes, we'll never know.

            Keep that in mind.

                    THE PLAY CONTINUES

SAM: She takes me through it all. Her views. And I swim in it. Sometimes, in bed, I see her from the top down, right – her scalp and the top of her nose, and her eyelashes. Sleeping in her childhood duvet, her head resting low on the pillow. Her face and body a mountain I want to get lost in, scale, traverse and conquer. Her mind is so – big. So vast and complicated and funny and –

            Sleep stained smiles. Charity-shop-singles playing on this old vinyl player she gets me. Coffee in chipped mugs in the morning. Missing lectures in a duvet-draped dream.

            I mean, fuck.

She takes me to these rallies. I sign up to the NSU. We hold a protest at the Uni alongside those student ones outside the Tory headquarters. We're standing on this, statue, right, and we've put this banner on it, so it looks like the statue's holding it – joining in.

We stand there, chanting, singing.

I hold her hand and I think I love her.

      A BEAT

(TO AUDIENCE) Imagine the skype ringtone here, right? And it's 2011, so the internet's a bit shit still, so, imagine us glitching and getting pixelated every so often.

Or not. Your call.

(TO JACOB) How's Mum?

JACOB: She's alright.

      Well, she's shit, but y'know.

SAM: How's work?

JACOB: It's alright.

      Well, it's shit, but y'know.

SAM: (TO AUDIENCE) Jacob didn't go back to Uni after first year.

      When people ask him why he tells them that -

JACOB: The system's just crap, man.

SAM: One evening he tells me that -

JACOB: That can't be all there is.

      … it can't be.

SAM: And I think that's more like the truth.

      Mum got laid off. Ethel Austin went bust. Forced redundancy.

      In a month or two, she'll ask Jacob to move out. He'll get a flat share with some post grads. Move from job to job to cover the rent.

      THE PLAY PAUSES

Here is where a lot of responses were very similar when we talked to people.

JACOB: A lot of minimum wage jobs. Zero-hour contracts. Unpaid overdrafts. Rent prices barely covered by payslips.

SAM: The job centre whether or not you went to Uni.

JACOB: Taking another job in retail even if you didn't know the first thing about clothes.

SAM: Stacking supermarket shelves during the night. Pulling pints, making coffees.

JACOB: For too long. For too little.

SAM: But then, at least you have a job, right? At least you've got a roof over your head. At least you don't have to flee the fucking country that your born in just to get away from war and torture and death. Just to survive.

It's, like, there's sadness there – in the people we talked to. A deep sadness and hopelessness and frailty. But then there's also guilt?

Like, it could be worse – but, also, is it enough?

I dunno.

JACOB: In that documentary on Skelmersdale there's a segment on all the factories built there. A helicopter shot of the building, with some twinkly little folk tune on a panpipe – then - sudden cut to the deafening noise of the inside. People making various parts, medicines, rugs, whatever.

And, like, for some reason, now, it's like… Is that gone? Is that not enough? Are we all expected to do something new, make something new, go somewhere new, or…?

SAM: Yeah….

Yeah. I dunno. It's hard to know what's… enough. Or where things will –

JACOB: - go? End up? Finish?

SAM: Let's carry on.

THE PLAY CONTINUES

JACOB: I sign up to everything.

Literally – everything.

403

Gumtree, Monster, Jobsite, Indeed, Prospects, Splashfind, Linkedin, Linkup, Reed, Adzuna, Universal fucking Job Match.

And I apply.

Here's one thing, right. Why do they get you to fill in all your qualifications and previous job experience on some stupid form on their website only to ask you to upload your CV at the end anyway? What's the point in that?

Or you get to an interview, but they've obviously already chosen who they're hiring and make it out like they're doing you a favour…

I took an online test to apply to work at Greggs and failed.

SAM: And?

JACOB: Nothing. Sometimes, actually most often, nothing at all. Not even a – 'Sorry, not this time' email.

It's completely set up against you.

SAM: What do you mean?

JACOB: It's just…

Nah.

A BEAT

Do you think Bowie would've failed the test to work at Greggs?

SAM: When they report on the inquest, some papers will refer to Jake as 'egotistical' and 'manipulative'.

They have photos of him wearing those sunglasses indoors, and he does look the part.

But that's later.

A BEAT

Okay. We'd all heard the statistic - the 1% versus the 99. And we were going to take it down. Challenge it. Claim it back. Restructure it all.

JACOB: How?

SAM: Through community. Through communication. Through –

JACOB: Communism?

SAM: No. Nope. This is different. We're going to rethink the whole idea of politics.

JACOB: (TO AUDIENCE) She didn't even have an idea of politics before last year.

SAM: (TO JACOB) You should come. Get a Megabus.

JACOB: (TO AUDIENCE) It was a week after where we started this just now. I was on my way to Skelmersdale. But I hadn't told Sam – yet.

            (TO SAM) I can't afford it.

SAM: Fuck off. We made a banner and everything.

JACOB: Is it funny?

SAM: Funny?

JACOB: Yeah, like, 'Where's Robin Hood When You Need Him?'

SAM: How's that funny?

JACOB: Well, give me a moment. What's yours say?

SAM: Occupy.

JACOB: That's it? The fucking title of the protest? God, that's like when they say the title of the film in the film itself.

            (TO AUDIENCE) Okay, that's hypocritical writing right there. You'll see. Anyway.

SAM: (TO AUDIENCE) I'm not sure what I expected before I got there, but –

JACOB: 'Capitalism? More like Crap-italism!'

            That'd be my one.

            Sorry.

SAM: Banners, backpacks and flags. Feet walk on streets chalked with ideas.

            It's not just a protest, right? We were going to march but, instead, we meet at St Pauls. Sit in groups and talk. About what to do next. About what to *do*. About how to do it. About how to listen.

We all agree. We'll set up camp here, on the cathedral steps. There's a guy with a megaphone. Everything he says, we repeat back behind us, shouting it so that everyone in the crowd can hear.

It's proper democracy. Inclusive.

Someone sets up a kitchen. Puts tarpaulin and rope and tables together. Starts feeding people. An itinerary is drafted up on a big blackboard.

Tents, tents and more tents. All set up as a new society, a new town. On the steps of St Pauls.

The not-supposed-to-be-here quality of it.

JACOB: Feet walk on cracked concrete.

Endless, endless roundabouts.

Red bricked semis. Neighbourhood watch.

Until suddenly –

SAM: Shit. Literally. No toilets.

Instead, there's a huge queue to the Starbucks -

JACOB: Okay – hang on. What? You're saying that at this protest, against everything Starbucks embodies – tax avoidance and all that - at this protest, right, the only way that all these – occupiers – could take a crap was by buying a coffee at Starbucks?

Starbucks literally making money out of your shit.

Oh, that's good. That's fucking irony right there Sam.

SAM: You weren't there Jacob. This was, like, a real change. We were working to, to restructure –

JACOB: But it doesn't work like that Sam – you can't take down whatever system you think is there by buying a fucking flat white before you can take a crap.

SAM: (SHE IGNORES HIM) We meet these guys from Sheffield that have come down with two tents, and they offer to double up so that we can stay too. As we set everything up, people light candles, hang fairy lights, start playing music. I mean, sure, there was some police shit, but we weren't in that. It was pretty peaceful to be fair.

JACOB: Endless, endless roundabouts.

Until suddenly –

There it is.

SAM: The next day, though, people go home. Back to their houses outside London, to their office jobs on Monday morning. The Sheffield guys have to take their tent back, say they'll be back next Saturday. We decide to find a coach back home. Get on a National Express with a few other sleep- and sweat-stained protestors.

And that's the reality.

JACOB: They're trapped.

SAM: I saw it carry on, on the news. The next day, all these city workers walked past, and the reporter asked them what they thought of it. One of them had a sign: 'Get a job – love from the 1%'.

But for that time - that time we were there. It was something else. Something new. People really talking. Really working together. Focussed on each other. A community.

A group of tents outside St Pauls –

JACOB: A group of tents on the side of the lake –

SAM: People listening, working together -

JACOB: - living, flying together –

SAM: Until they weren't.

JACOB: Until….

But that's later.

        A BEAT

Skelmersdale was built to handle the overspill from Merseyside in the 60s.

They designed the town completely from the ground up. Houses far enough away from factories. Every home with a garden. Pedestrianised walkways all over town. Playgrounds. Trees. Dining rooms.

A modern utopia. Just two miles off the M6.

They restructured the idea of a town. The *ideal* of a town.

SAM: Jacob walks through it 50 years later. Feet walk on cracked concrete. Weeds and graffiti push through pavements.

              He has just completed his first session in the Golden Dome.

              Transcendental Meditation is taught one on one with a licenced practitioner. Passed down from the Maharishi. 7 levels, all costing slightly more. 15 – 20 minutes. A mantra repeated.

              It clears your mind. Accesses your subconscious.

              Life, they tell you – Ellen and David Lynch and The Beatles - is like the top of the ocean. Choppy. Unpredictable.

              Underneath - underneath is calm and true. And –

JACOB: - real.

              But I don't tell her about this. About Skelmersdale. About moving on from the Transcendental to - to something else. About flying. About the group. Not until she visits our -

              Later.

SAM: We moved in together. Well, I moved into a flat that, get this, right – her parents had bought for her in London.

              Wanted to *help start her off.*

              Dalston.

              Feet walk on rent-free floorboards.

              There's a Smeg fridge in the kitchen.

              We get into a fight about bananas. Well, it's more than just bananas, but –

              Ten thousand young people were marching. Clegg had been a little bitch and rolled right over on his tuition fee pledge.

              She didn't want to come.

              And she'd bought these bananas. Okay - actually, maybe it was the Coco Pops. The way they were sat there. Next to the bananas. On top of the fridge. Proudly.

              We shared bills and shopping, right? For the past three months, I'd been working at the council's leisure centre down the road.

She hadn't even looked. For a job, that is. Didn't see the point. What with all her parent's money and all.

But still, we shared the cost equally.

And she'd gone and bought branded cereal.

And next to this box was a bunch of bananas, right? So, she spends the extra two quid on branded Coco Pops, but won't stretch to Fairtrade bananas?

At Uni, we started a petition through the SU for the canteen to serve Fairtrade food. That was her idea actually.

If she couldn't afford it, fine. But they're sat there next to that fucking monkey on top of that fucking Smeg fridge.

I know, it seems stupid, but –

Look, I'd already mentioned the house prices thing. I'd already mentioned how I thought it weird that she wasn't even looking for work. I'd already mentioned that I wanted to actually *do* something with my life. What about her? What about her politics degree? We were in London for fuck sake, living there for fucking free, and we weren't fucking *doing anything!*

JACOB: You okay?

SAM: Yeah. Yeah.

            And that was it.

            One of those things that isn't actually a thing but a valve that lets the actual thing loose.

            (TO JACOB) And, then, like – I never….

            Never mind.

                    A BEAT.

JACOB: (TO AUDIENCE) This is when I start writing everything down.

            Thoughts. Feelings. Ideas.

            It'll become the blog they'll all refer to. Later.

            For now, it's just –

            Remember the colours? My blue might not be your blue?

Okay, I wanna try something. I want you all to relax. Take a deep breath. Close your eyes. Let it out. Open your eyes.

Okay?

Imagine that everyone in this room is wearing blue sunglasses.

HE GETS SOME OUT AND PUTS THEM ON

Imagine, actually, that we were all born wearing these blue sunglasses.

Everything you see is blue. The trees, the sky, the road. Everything coloured in shades of blue. And it has always been that way, and always will be that way.

Okay?

SAM: Okay.

JACOB: Now, imagine that we can never take off these sunglasses. Blue would just be our reality. Our whole world, our whole universe, would be blue.

            But what if someone could take them off? What if someone could see reality for what it really is. It's reds and yellows and deep purples and silvers? They could see –

                HE TAKES THEM OFF

            -    reality. Truth.

                A BEAT

SAM: This is where he gets complicated.

JACOB: It's not – it's –

            Okay – Kant, right, is a German philosopher. The bookshop I make coffees in has a few of his books stuffed away in the section no-one goes in. And, I'm not sure how, but I start reading them.

            He says that, and I'm paraphrasing here, but he says that we are kind of already wearing blue sunglasses, right? We can't see *real* reality because we can only experience it through the limitations of our own senses.

SAM: So, everything is blue?

JACOB: No, no – it's just – our sight, hearing, sense of time – they're all, like, really complex blue sunglasses that limit how we experience reality, right?

410

SAM: Right…

JACOB: We can never actually experience *objective* reality because we can only
         ever experience it through our senses. We can't actually see reality – we
         can only see what our eyes can see. We can't really experience, like,
         time and – and space, for example, as they *actually* are because we can't
         escape the fact that we've evolved to exist in a three-dimensional
         understanding of space along a linear understanding of time. But maybe
         space, time, reality isn't like that – maybe it's something else entirely.
         But we can never get to it. It's always out of reach, or on the horizon. Or
         right on top of us, but invisible.

SAM: But how would you know that reality *isn't* what we see? How could you
         prove that?

JACOB: Aha - we already *do* know! Okay – right now – what can you see?

SAM: Um – you. Stage lights. The audience.

JACOB: Good. Except that's a lie.

SAM: Okay – I can also see a chair, a –

JACOB: No, you don't see any of those things. You *think* you see those things,
         but your brain is only conjuring up images that it can understand from
         data that it has received through your eyes –only reflections of beams of
         light, not even the objects themselves. You never even actually *see*
         anything *but* light. Things might look completely different. Be
         completely different. And we would never know.

SAM: That's… depressing.

JACOB: Is it? Kant calls this reality that we can't experience the *Ding An Sich*,
         The Thing In Itself. And we're always one step away from it. We can
         never really get to it – it's always on the horizon, underneath the surface.
         For now.

SAM: Tents.

         Again.

         Tents and tents and tents. As far as the eye can see.

         Feet walk on mud and glitter and spilt beer.

         Portaloo stink.

         I managed to get us tickets last year. Saved up. Jacob paid me back.
         Didn't trust the internet at home, so got to a library early that morning.

Laptop, phone and the decrepit library desktop all open on the same page. Refresh, refresh, refresh.

There're a few decent bands on. A great flag of Theresa running through a field of wheat. Some EU banners below that.

Then the chant starts. Thousands and thousands. Nothing like it before.

    SHE HUMS THE OPENING TO 'SEVEN NATION ARMY' BY THE WHITE STRIPES.

Then he's there. Like a collective grandad. Smart shirt and sweat stains. White beard. Smile.

God, can you imagine anyone in the Tory party doing anything remotely like this?

JACOB: She stands there, sweating beer. Glitter peeling off her face.

She doesn't know that he is sitting in a tent, a few fields away. Cross legged. Eyes closed. Repeating, repeating, repeating.

Others sit facing me. They have followed the blog, the tweets, the Youtube videos. They have come to see *him*. To hear the ideas. To meditate. To get closer to the Thing In Itself.

Each person in that tent wears a pair of sunglasses, goggles, spectacles.

Blue eyed insects, they look towards me.

    ON THE SCREEN:

        FOOTAGE OF JEREMY CORBYN'S SPEECH AT GLASTONBURY 2017

SAM: 'It's the sense,' he says, 'of unlocking the potential in all of us that I find so inspiring.'

'Everyone we meet,' he says, 'is unique. Everyone we meet knows something we don't. Everyone we meet is slightly different to us in some way.'

'Don't see them as a threat,' he says, 'Don't see them as an enemy. See them as a source of knowledge, a source of friendship and a source of inspiration.'

| 'Let us come together and recognise another world is possible.'
|
JACOB: | Let us come together and recognise another world is possible.

SAM: He quotes a poet. Percy Shelley.

                   Rise, like lions after slumber
                   In unvanquishable number

JACOB: *Shake your chains to earth like dew*
                   Which, in sleep, hath fallen on you

SAM: The crowd roars.

                   Rise *like lions.*

                   The year before, I'd joined Momentum. Campaigned online. Or outside -
                   for the election - knocked on doors.

                   Some people wonder why we got behind him so much. Why we cared
                   about this allotment-keeping uncle-figure. But, like, here, in this
                   moment. Among the crowd. You can feel it. The energy. The urge for
                   change.

                   When I started working as a Teaching Assistant, I met more local people
                   around Stratford. Kids and parents and teachers.

                   One kid. Year 8. Asked me what my house was like. I said I shared it
                   with a few other people.

                        A BEAT

                   No, not my family. They live far away.

                        A BEAT

                   I suppose I do sometimes.

                   He says that his family live in one room. A few streets down from the
                   school. Not just, like, two parents and him, though - he has three younger
                   brothers, his mum and Dad, his Uncle and his Gran. In one room.

                   I did some research, right? Turns out that a house in Newham is 14 times
                   the average annual salary. Two more than that pastel village on the coast.
                   Half of the privately rented houses here are overcrowded. The council
                   knows this because they wanted to see why so many people are so
                   unhappy and unhealthy. In 2012, right, when the Olympics came to this
                   borough, Newham had the lowest household income in the whole of
                   London.

                   I don't know…

I'm not trying to throw facts and figures out here. And I know it's not just a local problem. And that doesn't even take into account people on the streets, or in-work poverty, fucking knife gangs and other shit too.

And it's not just London.

I know.

But that kid and his family. In a room.

That's why I *decided* to care.

'Let us come together and recognise another world is possible.'

There has to be better than this.

More than this.

      A BEAT

JACOB: Alex dies.

Yeah.

That feels kind of out of place here. I didn't give you some dramatic lead up. But there wasn't. I haven't even mentioned Alex in ages. It is out of place.

Because it was.

Hit by a car.

He lived near me when he finished Uni. He'd drop in to the bookshop. Get a free mocha off me and sit and read some crap sci-fi book.

At his funeral. Feet walk on dirt suffocated bodies.

Awkward black tie. Shined shoes. Sunglasses.

      HE PUTS THEM ON

I talk to his parents. Tell them about The Thing In Itself. Give them a copy of the Gunslinger. Hit by a car. Wakes up in the desert.

They nod politely.

I find out a few months later that some people came up to them after the funeral. Told them that Alex would come back at the end of the world. Now they wait for it to happen.

Lucky for them it feels like it's getting closer.

'Let us come together and recognise another world is possible.'

It's like, that was a schism, a shift, y'know. In another universe, another world, Alex had walked one step slower that day. In another, he slept in an extra hour. In another, cars didn't even exist, everyone just rode skateboards, and no-one ever got run over.

But in this one. In this one -

 A BEAT

In the golden dome in Skelmersdale, they're flying.

In a tent on the edge of the lake. We will fly further.

 A BEAT

SAM: I get right into it. I have to. I mean, how come people can see what these guys are putting us through but can't get off their arses and do something about it?

Why do so many of my *friends* not care? Why do they ignore the headlines and Facebook shares and Instagram adverts?

And then I look.

And I think that's the dangerous thing.

 THE PLAY PAUSES

JACOB: This came up a lot, talking to people.

Like, cropping out their sadness online.

 THE PLAY CONTINUES

SAM: You can't help but compare, can you? Jobs, holidays, days out, girlfriends, whatever.

Like, I know that that barbeque you went to was probably a bit shit, to be honest, but you've managed to slap the right filter onto a nice photo of you all smiling.

Looks fun. Wasn't invited.

And I know I do it too. Trying to make my life look better than it is.

We'll only post Instagram worthy food, ignoring the noodles you cooked in your pants, rushing to get back to your Netflix binge.

But, like, it still… affects you, y'know?

(TO JACOB) I don't think you do.

I think it's another *level of reality* for you to ignore.

JACOB TAKES HIS GLASSES OFF

JACOB: I left University because I thought I wasn't good enough, Sam.

I get it.

SAM: (TO AUDIENCE) And I suppose I shouldn't care. And I don't. But I do.

JACOB PUTS HIS GLASSES BACK ON

But I throw myself into it. The campaign. Just because we lost doesn't mean we can't still fight. This whole government is screwing us over by being fucking children in the Europe negotiations. We need to get people on our side.

JACOB: In a tent, on the edge of a lake, they're flying.

A BEAT

We grew up near it. The lake. Took a dingy out on it when we were younger. Hung out there with friends as teenagers, drinking cheap vodka out of a plastic bottle.

It's man-made. A reservoir, really. Created in the sixties.

As Skelmersdale was built, another town was destroyed.

They flooded it - to make the lake. One of the last Welsh-only speaking villages.

SAM: Thirty-five out of thirty-six welsh MPs opposed it. One didn't vote.

JACOB: Forty-eight people who lived in the valley lost their homes. Drowned. Submerged under this lake.

The post office. The school. The chapel. The cemetery. A Quaker meetinghouse.

All still there, just - lost, unreachable. Under the surface.

	Sometimes, when it hasn't rained for just long enough, you'll see the spire of the chapel. Just – trying to come through. Trying to come back. And then it's gone again.
SAM:	When she gets there, he shows her the – we'll call it a camp. Alongside the lake; tents and tents and tents. Scaffolding poles and pallets and tarp strung together to make meeting rooms. He takes her through the tents -
JACOB:	- home -
SAM:	- he calls it.
	Lines of earth raked into the field. Seedlings sprouting. The smell of frying onions and garlic coming from large pots steaming in a makeshift outdoor kitchen. A bonfire. Three small dogs, sleeping in the shade. Candles. Fairy lights. Prayer flags.
	Feet walk on grass and stone.
	Tents and tents and tents.
	(TO JACOB) How many?
JACOB:	Forty, at last count. But it sounds like we have more coming this weekend.
SAM:	How do you know?
JACOB:	They tweeted.
SAM:	(TO AUDIENCE) He motions to a makeshift fence strung up with solar panels. A child runs past, chased by another with a tree branch. They are laughing.
	Jake –
JACOB:	Wait…. Here.
SAM:	And then, suddenly -
JACOB:	- Suddenly –
SAM:	- a golden glow in front of you.
	Stretching from left to right – covering her vision.
JACOB:	Remember what I told you? About Skelmersdale?
SAM:	The town off the M6? With the… meditation… temple?

JACOB: Dome. This isn't it. It's not what they did. This is… something else. But, like - that got me thinking – got me into it. And, then – all these people, they just… believed, y'know. Listened.

I – I never….

SAM: (TO AUDIENCE) She walks up to it. A huge tent. Yellow and orange and gold.

She touches it. The not-supposed-to-be-there tent. On the edge of a lake that is drowning a town.

(TO JACOB) Never what?

JACOB: Never –

Never expected this. These people. But here they are.

            A BEAT

(TO AUDIENCE) Inside the tent, they are flying. Blue sunglasses. Minds flowing. Down. To the submerged chapel. Out. To the factories of Skelmersdale. In. To reality, to truth.

SAM: Later -

JACOB: - on the bank of the lake.

            SAM LIGHTS A CIGARETTE

SAM: (TO JACOB) So, what's going to happen.

JACOB: We'll live.

SAM: Here?

JACOB: Why not?

SAM: Nah. There must be some rules about this. You can't just set up a camp just anywhere.

JACOB: Can't we? We seem to be doing alright at the moment.

SAM: But the press? The council?

JACOB: People like that decided to destroy the town just out there. We've just created a replacement. A home.

SAM: But you have a home, Jacob. You already had a home and a job and – What about that camp in Calais, right? All those refugees, people who

418

had no home because we'd decided to bomb the shit out of it. What is this, some kind of middle-class re-enactment, or, or, commercialised camp-experience?

> A BEAT

What?

JACOB: You know it's not.

> A BEAT

> SHE OFFERS THE CIGARETTE TO JACOB

> HE DOESN'T TAKE IT

You were at Occupy. You told me about the structure there – the tents, the community, the change. How is this different?

SAM: No, that was – *real*, Jacob. We were going to restructure the system. It was going to change the world.

JACOB: And did it?

> A BEAT

SAM: Will this?

JACOB: No. It doesn't need to.

SAM: You really believe all of this? That we can't – *see* – things. That nothing is real. That nothing matters?

JACOB: What difference does it make?

> HE TAKES THE CIGARETTE

Look – that guy there. He came in the first wave. Brought vegetable seedlings, cooks for everyone. Loves it. Has such pride and happiness in being able to help do something.

Over there? She worked in Wetherspoons. And next to her? He was an investment banker until last month. Now, they're helping each other learn how to meditate. Never been happier.

> HE HANDS THE CIGARETTE BACK TO HER

It doesn't matter whether I believe in Kant, or his reality, or - anything. Point is, these guys have got a purpose. We created a new… *thing*.

SAM: But you do believe?

                HE DOESN'T ANSWER

            And what about you? Have you found your purpose?

JACOB: (HE IGNORES HER) For… some reason, these guys look to me for
            something. Or, not to me exactly, but to what I – represent? This
            community. This new town.

SAM: Jake –

            Do you charge them?

JACOB: What?

SAM: I read up on the that meditation stuff. It's a lot of money. Celebrities and
            stuff - they pay thousands to –

JACOB: No. I told you, this is different.

                A BEAT

SAM: It's a bit cultish.

            Charlie-Manson-like.

                JACOB SCOFFS

            Sorry. Sorry, that was unfair.

                A BEAT

            I'm just… Jake. This seems like, I dunno – a waste. Look, if people are
            unhappy, we can sort it out. It all stems back to this system set up against
            them that keeps them from –

                JACOB REMOVES HIS SUNGLASSES. SIGHS.

JACOB: That's just it, Sam. There is no fucking system. Or if there is, it's so fully
            fucking entrenched in whatever your reality is that its literally impossible
            to make any slight change. Why are you so pissed off? What? You think
            some government grandpa in gardening gloves is going to make a
            fucking difference to anything? You think that a group of students
            shouting to themselves on social media will de-rig the whole capitalist
            money-fucking world? That *is* the world, Sam. That's your world.
            Nothing's going to change that. I've seen your posts, Sam, I've watched
            and listened to the whole fucking gang of you. Calling each other
            comrade like you're socialist, Leninist martyrs – I mean come the fuck
            off it! You're like little children –

SAM: Oh, and you're not? Running away to a fucking, fucking *lake* to play house with a group of people who are so fucking incompetent that they just run from reality when the going gets tough? Come and meditate guys! Close your fucking eyes and the whole problem just goes away! Simple isn't it? Well that's not enough for some people, Jacob! Some people need to feed their family from a fucking foodbank. Some people need to flee their fucking country and live somewhere safe. Some people don't know how they're going to make it through the next week without a fucking payday loan because, yes, the whole fucking system is buggered, and I actually care and want to do something about it!

Y'know, sit here and meditate all you want.

You can believe in reality or not, but from where I'm standing, it's fucking real and real people are hurting and there's *got to be something better than this!*

JACOB: But that's just it, Sam. There is!

SAM: Oh, fuck off Jake.

SHE EXITS THE STAGE

A BEAT

THE PLAY PAUSES

JACOB: In a lake like this – a lake that was a village before - there was a palace.

Before it was drowned, a cruel man ruled over this palace. He was greedy, and harsh and oppressed the people of the village.

One day, he decided to hold a huge feast in celebration of his rule, inviting other noblemen, lords and princes around the land.

Some refused to come, as they didn't want to associate with such a barbaric leader. But many still came to feast on his fine food, to drink his slave-made wine, and to bask in the glory of his golden throne.

The prince had hired the most accomplished musician in the land to play at his feast. Although this musician didn't agree with how the prince ruled over his village, he knew that the payment would feed him and his family for a year, so he agreed to play.

However, the noblemen that came to the prince's feast didn't care for the musician's playing, and largely ignored his beautiful music throughout the evening. Nevertheless, the musician played on.

Suddenly, the musician heard a very quiet voice breathing right behind his ear. He couldn't make it out, however, and carried on with his playing.

Then, the voice came again, a little louder this time.

'Vengeance will come,' it said, 'vengeance will come.'

Startled, the musician turned around, only to see a small bird perched on the sill of the open window, its little eyes staring directly into his.

'Vengeance will come,' said the bird and flew off out the window.

The musician, intrigued, followed the bird out onto the balcony. It waited in the air, seeming to beckon him forward. The musician climbed down and followed the bird.

Together, they climbed the valley, continuing up and up. Feet walking on Welsh stone. Until, with the village and the palace far below them, the bird perched itself on a rock. The musician sat down next to it and, as they both looked down on the village below, the bird sang the most beautiful song the musician had ever heard.

Slowly but surely, the musician, exhausted by the climb, and lulled by the music, fell into a deep, comfortable sleep.

When he woke, he was surprised to find the bird had gone. As he looked around for it, his eyes fell upon the valley below him. Gone was the village and the palace. Instead, a new lake had submerged them both and covered the valley in glistening, crystal clear water.

Some say that there are nights, when the moon is dark, that you can still see the lights of the palace submerged just beneath the surface of the lake, just out of reach.

SAM: What about the villagers? The oppressed? The slaves?

JACOB: They drowned.

           THE PLAY CONTINUES

           A BEAT

           SAM STANDS, WAITING

SAM: Hello there! Sorry to disturb you, I just wondered if –

           SAM WAITS

Good afternoon. Sorry to bother you, do you have a few moments to talk? Okay, can I leave you – no? Okay, thanks anyway.

        SAM WAITS

Hi! How are you this afternoon? Great. Do you have a few moments to discuss the Labour Party?

Well, that's a bit harsh.

Okay.

Cesspool of Antisemitism isn't exactly true –

Okay. Thanks. Bye.

Twat.

        SAM WAITS

(TO AUDIENCE) Owen Jones is here. He's down another road, partnered up with someone else. You're always partnered up so it's not as… awkward.

Still have some... weird conversations though. And meet some interesting people. And some dickheads. Still, it actually feels like you're doing something worthwhile, you know?

        SAM WAITS

People get a bit defensive when you tell them you campaign for Momentum. Hard left group, they call us. Disruptors. But we need to – I need to… Look, we didn't win, and, yeah, we lost some constituencies. When you tell people you're on an unseating campaign they think you're mad, but – if we can just get people to talk – talk about what the government's actually done...

        SAM WAITS

It's the little things, right – the talks to people. It matters, doesn't it?

Can't all have a fucking festival on the bank of a lake –

        SHE IS INTERRUPTED

Oh – hello! Sorry to disturb you this afternoon. We're from Momentum, and we're just wondering if you've got any time to talk about - ?

JACOB: (TO AUDIENCE) She doesn't hear his reply. She's staring at the blue sunglasses he is wearing. Inside.

It's the colour of them. The not-supposed-to-be-there nature of them.

(TO SAM) You should probably say something now – he stopped talking a while ago.

SAM: Uh – have you seen a copy of the manife- I'm sorry, can I – Can I just ask you about your sunglasses? I mean, I don't mean to be rude. It might be a health thing, or dyslexia – my friend had to wear green sunglasses to be able to read in school and –

Ah.

Okay.

Mhm.

Yes, if you see it like that then who you vote for wouldn't –

Hm.

Yes.

Alright.

Can I just – ask you one thing? How did you find out about all this?

    A BEAT

I tell my campaign partner I have to leave, and I google it on the train home. At first, I don't know what to search for. Blue sunglasses, Kant? Gunslinger commune? Skelmersdale offshoot?

Then, I find it. Tons of it. Twitter, Youtube, thread after thread on Reddit. A blog with links to philosophy videos, pictures of the – what? Camp? Commune? Cult?

I miss my stop, scrolling through comment after comment. Posts about the nature of reality. The unreality of it. That it's meaningless, that it doesn't matter. That there's something else. Something bigger. Always something bigger, elsewhere, just beneath the surface. A camp by a lake…

But there's people here in America, France, Australia, all talking about this… whatever it is. This… escape from reality.

JACOB: (TO AUDIENCE) I would tell her it's not an escape. It's an acceptance of reality. It's an acceptance that we're not the be all and end all. It's an acceptance of our miniscule place within the universe and time and space. It's…

It's because there's something more.

But I don't get the chance.

> A BEAT

SAM: (TO AUDIENCE) A few days later I get a call.

Hello?

JACOB: Sam? Sam. Oh shit – Sam.

SAM: Jake? It's – what's – what's?

JACOB: Sam. I never wanted this – this is – oh, shit.

SAM: Okay, what's happened? Take a moment – just –

JACOB: Have you seen the news?

SAM: What? No, I –

JACOB: Google it.

SAM: Google what? I –

> A BEAT

Oh –

(TO AUDIENCE) I still have the search open on my browser. The top result is a headline published a few hours ago.

> ON THE SCREEN, THE HEADLINE:

>> *HARROWING SUICIDE OF 19-YEAR-OLD FOLLOWER OF ONLINE CULT*

Oh shit.

JACOB: I didn't even know him, Sam. I've never –

I didn't –

> A BEAT

SAM: Jacob, it's not your fault. It's –

JACOB: Read it, Sam.

SHE READS IT

ON THE SCREEN:

> *A 19-year-old man was apparently targeted and driven to suicide by an online cult, state his parents. According to the pair, their son was singled out by cult followers through online forums, before being persuaded to take his own life.*

SAM: Targeted? Jake?

JACOB: No.

ON THE SCREEN:

> *The cult, apparently calling itself The Nou Order, operates from a self-proclaimed 'commune' in Wales but has a large and wide reaching online following. Members describe the teaching of the 'unreality' of the universe, loosely based on the philosophy of 18th Century German writer, Immanuel Kant.*
>
> *The deceased's parents describe posts left by the boy on forums populated by cult members as 'deeply disturbing' and of clearly pointing towards his intentions to end his own life. Forums that they had no access to whilst their son was alive.*
>
> *'It's abhorrent that this online group could target my child and drive him to do this to himself,' stated the boy's mother, who described the deceased as a 'generous and outgoing' son.*
>
> *The boy's parents have called for an investigation into the group, headed by one Jacob Mason. However, the situation is complicated by the group being predominantly based online.*

JACOB: Sam?

A BEAT

Sam?

SAM: Jake, I –

JACOB: I don't know what to do.

Tell me it's not my fault.

SAM: It's not your fault, Jake.

(TO AUDIENCE) But…

I've seen the forums online, it's -

You can't blame yourself

(TO AUDIENCE) But…

A BEAT

THE PLAY PAUSES

Look - do you want to finish now, or?

JACOB: No - no, let's carry on to the end.

SAM: Okay.

When we decided to do this play, one of the main problems we had was addressing all of the ideas and hopes and worries that people had given us in a way that made, well, sense.

JACOB: The right way. A way that wasn't just a Buzzfeed listicle of 'Things Millennials Find Fucking Annoying'

SAM: 'Top Ten Reasons Why Young People Aren't Buying A House Right Now.'

JACOB: 'This Young Person Suffers From Anxiety And Crippling Debt – What Happens Next Will Shock You!'

SAM: That's why we're here. To tell it to you as a story. Just a story. About two twins, some tents, a town under a lake, sadness, hope… something.

JACOB: Some of it's true.

Not this bit though.

THE PLAY CONTINUES

SAM: I get another call, the next day. It's Mum.

I go there was quick as I can. He's in hospital. I can't go into his room yet. They're not finished with him.

I hold mum as she cries into my shoulder. I'm surprised at how thin she's got. How old she suddenly seems. I hadn't seen it happen.

Later – a lot later – I can go in.

I go down the corridor. Feet walk on disinfected lino.

He's at the far end of the room, propped up on a white pillow. Tubes up his nose, in his arm. He looks at me flatly.

(TO JACOB) Hi.

JACOB: Hi.

SAM: How are you doing?

JACOB: S'alright.

             Well, it's shit, but y'know.

                    A BEAT

             How's Mum?

SAM: She's okay.

             Do you need anything?

JACOB: No. Thank you.

SAM: Jacob – I know - I know that it must be… shit, what with the –

             But, you –

             I am here for you. You can talk to me.

                    A BEAT

JACOB: I know.

             I'm sorry that I haven't.

                    AN AWKWARD SILENCE

                    HE LOOKS AT HER

SAM: What?

JACOB: It's like that old John Carpenter film. The one with the guy with the
            mullet? He finds those sunglasses and can suddenly see the world as it
            really is. Adverts and TV secretly telling everyone to work and sleep and
            spend.

            And grow mullets, I guess.

SAM: What do you mean?

JACOB: That's what happened to you. You found your own sunglasses.

SAM: Jake –

                A BEAT

JACOB: I just walked. To the village. Under the lake. Kept on walking. And
            when the water reached my face, I didn't stop.

            I just wanted to -

            - get underneath the surface.

            I'm sorry.

SAM: Can we stop now?

            Can it stop?

                SHE TRIES TO TAKE HIS GLASSES, BUT HE STOPS HER

                A BEAT

                HE THEN TAKES THEM OFF AND OFFERS THEM TO HER

JACOB: Try them on.

SAM: Jake –

JACOB: Please.

                SHE PUTS THEM ON

            Can you see it?

                A BEAT

SAM: Yes. Yes, I can see it.

            It's – it's beautiful.

429

	A BEAT
	HE LAUGHS
JACOB:	Bullshit. There's nothing there.
	It's a metaphor. It's always been a metaphor.
	SHE TAKES OFF THE GLASSES
JACOB:	I'm sorry Sam.
	Is it wrong for people to really, like, really believe in something?
SAM:	I don't think many people do these days.
JACOB:	You'd be surprised. People want to know there's more to life.
	A BEAT
	What do you want? In life?
	A BEAT
SAM:	My life is a list of things I haven't done.
	HE LOOKS AT HER
	Sorry, that was crap.
JACOB:	No. No, it wasn't.
	SHE GETS INTO BED NEXT TO HIM
	Oof! Mind the tubes.
SAM:	Sorry.
	Where do we go from here?
JACOB:	You… go back to fighting. For what you believe in.
SAM:	I'm not.
JACOB:	What?
SAM:	Fighting for me - for my beliefs.
JACOB:	Are you sure?

A BEAT

SAM: Yes.

            '*Rise, like lions after slumber*'

            It's for that. It's for another chance.

JACOB: So was Skelmersdale.

                    A BEAT

                    SAM PUTS ON THE GLASSES

SAM: In another dimension, reality, whatever, do you think he's still around?

JACOB: Dad?

                    SHE NODS

            What do you think?

SAM: I think –

            I don't know what I think.

            And I think maybe that's enough.

JACOB: Maybe it is. Maybe we have to get on with what we have, where we are,
            when we are. The moment. If we're stuck in the past or the future or
            elsewhere it's just too – much. It's all too - big.

                    SHE LOOKS AT HIM

SAM: Dad would've like that. What you just said. He would agree.

            'It's all too big.'

            | That's what she said.
            |
JACOB: | That's what she said.

                    A BEAT

            I'm not my campaign, Jacob. Like I know you're not this commune, or
            weren't a barista, or weren't a drop-out. *You're* not your job. *I'm* not my
            campaign.

JACOB: Then what are we?

                              431

SAM: More than that.

                    A BEAT

              We're hopeful.

                    THE PLAY PAUSES

JACOB   People told us, when we asked them, that they hoped less. As they got
              further into their twenties, their thirties, that the hope – for stability, for
              fulfilment, for understanding, for some sense that the world is getting
              better, that people can progress more, that people will be safer and
              understood and respected more - the hope for all of those things got
              smaller.

SAM: They said they 'used to be interested in campaigning or protesting, but it
              feels like these can't achieve change now and sometimes stop listening to
              politics for self-preservation'

JACOB: That the idea of their future gave them 'Mixed feelings… but mostly
              meh.'

SAM: That their Instagram account was 'compensation for feeling like a
              failure. Fake success is better than nothing.'

JACOB: 'An online illusion of what you should be.'

SAM: 'Survival.'

JACOB: 'Shame.'

              It's like, we want change. We need change. But we don't know how to
              do it.

SAM: Or we can't be bothered.

JACOB: So, instead of creating this new society, instead of reclaiming an old one,
              we write a play. About drowned villages and university and a silly fake
              commune.

SAM: I think it's better than nothing.

JACOB: If you say so.

SAM: Okay. That's all we've got. No more story, no more questions, no more
              non-answers.

              Thanks for coming.

JACOB: Cheers.

THEY EXIT

THE PLAY ENDS.

A.6 VIDEO LINKS

A.6.1 – *Plan B* Workshop Moment: Groups define millennial 'issues'. Available at https://youtu.be/bOuGMFJ6NBI

A.6.2 – *Plan B* Workshop Moment: Participants add their responses to 'issues'. Available at https://youtu.be/5NWIHcazLqI

A.6.3 – *Plan B* Workshop Moment: Participants build the 'Politi-Web'. Available at https://youtu.be/tKnxBo932OQ

A.6.4 – *Plan B* Workshop Moment: Participant responses to the 'Politi-Web'. Available at: https://youtu.be/8OCI86K5JN0

A.6.5 – *Plan B* Workshop Moment: Groups discuss 'order' of issues. Available at: https://youtu.be/SEupnZLap7Q

A.6.6 – *Plan B* Workshop Moment: Participants order the issues. Available at https://youtu.be/U8IiBf5wNtI

A.6.7 – *Plan B* Workshop Moment: Both group's (im)possible five-point-plans. Available at: https://youtu.be/ajc4AWpTXD4

A.6.8 – *Plan B* Workshop Moment: Plan B 'boardgame' performative workshop. Available at: https://youtu.be/pQ7EyZK-ckY

A.6.9 – Marketing Material: Rehearsal footage for *Like Lions*. Available at: https://youtu.be/T3ajbQVewrc

A.6.10 – Recording of *Like Lions* at The Bread and Roses, London, 14 October 2018. Available at: https://youtu.be/aHSgY822WyU

A.6.10.1 - Excerpt of *Like Lions*: James tells the audience that he is just playing a character. Available at: https://youtu.be/aHSgY822WyU?t=304 **05:04 – 05:40**

A.6.10.2 - Excerpt of *Like Lions*: Sam's experience at the Occupy protests. Available at: https://youtu.be/aHSgY822WyU?t=1185 **19:45 – 22:52**

A.6.10.3 - Excerpt of *Like Lions*: Jacob describes the commune. Available at: https://youtu.be/aHSgY822WyU?t=2563 **42:43 – 43:53**

A.6.10.4 - Excerpt of *Like Lions*: Sam confronts Jacob about his intentions. Available at: https://youtu.be/aHSgY822WyU?t=2663 **44:23 – 46:39**

A.6.10.5 - Excerpt of *Like Lions*: Faye and James discuss the workshop responses regarding precarious employment. Available at: https://youtu.be/aHSgY822WyU?t=962 **16:02 – 16:58**

A.6.10.6 - Excerpt of *Like Lions*: Faye and James decide to carry on and discuss the development of the piece. Available at: https://youtu.be/aHSgY822WyU?t=3213 **53:33 – 54:35**

**A.6.10.7 -** Excerpt of *Like Lions*: Faye and James discuss hope/lessness. Available at: https://youtu.be/aHSgY822WyU?t=3711 **01:01:51 - 01:03:19**

A.6.10.8 - Excerpt of *Like Lions*: Sam discusses her relationship underscored by The Dagen Smiths. Available at: https://youtu.be/aHSgY822WyU?t=827 **13:47 – 15:16**
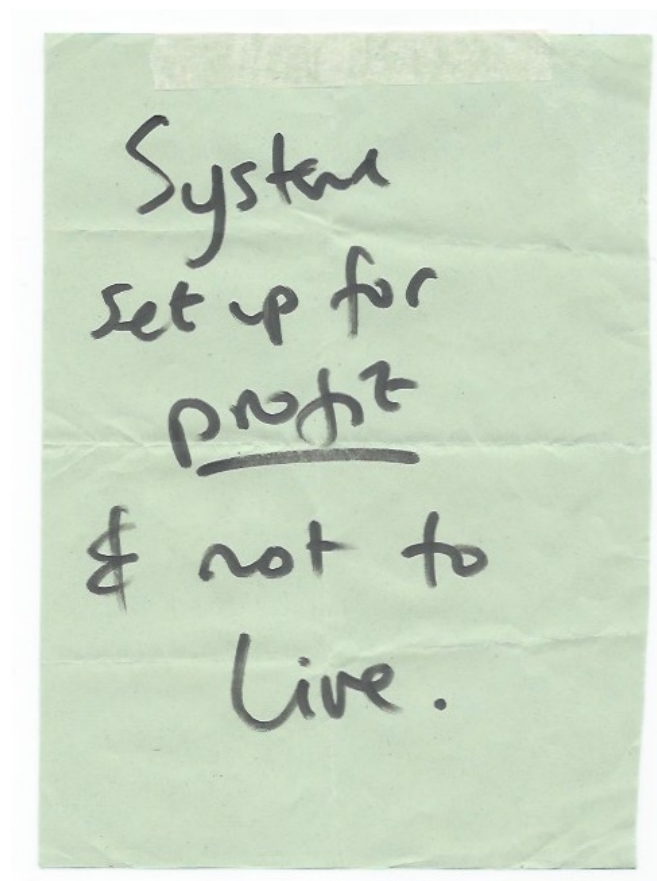

A.6.10.9 - Excerpt of *Like Lions*: 'Squirt' Nightclub described through storytelling. Available at: https://youtu.be/aHSgY822WyU?t=623 **10:23 – 11:58**

A.7   ADDITIONAL WORKSHOP RESPONSES
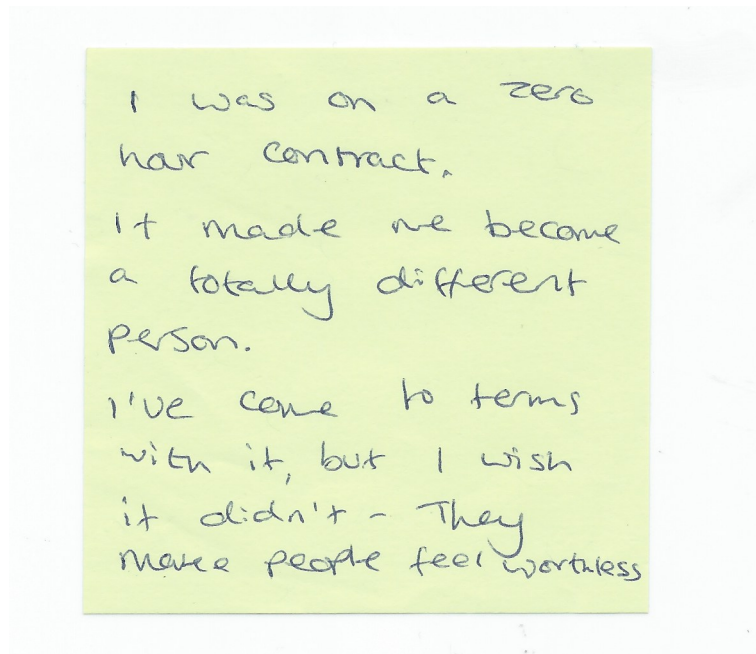
A.7.1 – Response from *Plan B* workshop concerning precarious employment

A.7.2 – Response from the *What Now* workshop concerning precarious employment

A.8 RESEARCH DEGREES AND ETHICS SUB-COMMITTEE LETTER

Mr Thomas Drayton
C/O Dr Dominic Hingorani
University Square Stratford
1 Salway Place
London
E15 1NF

27th September 2019

Dear Mr Drayton

Project reference number: UREC 1718-40
Project title: The New Political: Horizontal, Transactional Performance in Millennial Theatre

I am writing to inform you that the Research, Research Degrees and Ethics Sub- Committee (RRDE), formerly University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), has received and reviewed your documents, which you submitted to the RRDE Committee. Please take this letter as written confirmation that RRDE has assessed the case in question with regard to you conducting your research project without ethical approval, and whilst we are satisfied that appropriate measures to mitigate risk have been outlined and implemented, we do not follow any protocol for granting retrospective ethical approval. If you had followed the correct process by submitting your amendments and obtained confirmation that ethical approval had been granted for your research project, it is likely that the Committee would have approved your research project. However, this does not place you in the same position you would have been in had RRDE ethical approval been obtained in advance, and merely acknowledges that appropriate mitigating actions have been recorded and acknowledged. Therefore, it is critical that any subsequent reference to the ethical aspects of your research make reference to and explain these considerations in an open and transparent way.

The University has a responsibility to ensure that research is conducted with integrity and that good research practices are upheld. Researchers must adhere to the highest standards of rigour and ethical conduct, demonstrating the principles of research integrity, the expected standards of ethical conduct and a culture of honesty, care, and respect for all participants and subjects of research. Whilst RRDE recognises that your actions were not malicious or intentional, they have shown a lack of judgement and transparency. RRDE requests that you familiarise yourself with University's Code of Practice for Research, Code of Practice for Research Ethics and the Data Management pages on the University Intranet.

The RRDE Committee hopes that this allows you to complete on your research in a timely manner and that you have a clearer understanding of how ethical conduct impacts the design, delivery and completion of research projects.

For the avoidance of any doubt, or misunderstanding, please note that the content of this letter extends only to those matters relating to the granting of *ethical clearance*. Any queries regarding ethical clearance should be emailed to the Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Catherine Hitchens.

Yours sincerely,

For and on behalf of
Research, Research Degrees and Ethics Sub-Committee (RRDE) Catherine Hitchens
Research Integrity and Ethics Manager
researchethics@uel.ac.uk