

CRITICISM AS A POLITICAL EVENT:
The emergence of performance criticism in the UK
between 2007 and 2016

by
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Declaration of Authorship

I, Diana Damian Martin, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Date: 15 May 2018

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Abstract:

Criticism as a Political Event takes as its object of study the emergence of formally innovative, process-led and collaborative forms of criticism in the UK between 2007 and 2016. I use the term 'performance criticism' to distinguish these forms of criticism, which, I argue, emphasise the process, poetics and politics of writing in relation to performance. Formally, performance criticism emerges from the writing experiments of Live Art and Performance Writing. Politically, it is rooted in a modernist concern with subjectivity's political promise and commitment to the power of appearance, and in eighteenth-century, politically engaged critical practices. By tracing the peripheral development of performance criticism in the early noughties – a time marked by austerity measures and shifts in cultural policy that placed unprecedented pressures on existing infrastructures of criticism in theatre and performance, and also by criticism's diversification into the digital realm – this thesis contributes a formal analysis of performance criticism and advocates its political potential under neoliberalism.

The thesis is based around case studies of performance criticism, including: a response to a performance re-enactment of a 20-minute historical silence (Paterson, *Spill Stings*, 2011); a multi-authored, durational live critical writing project (Boursnell, Burns, D. Damian Martin, G. Damian Martin, Garfield, Guinnane, Linsley, Ramayya, Wakefield, *Exeunt*, 2014); and a piece on a duet about hunting for lost magnetic tape in the city (Schmidt, *Dance Theatre Journal*, 2011). Drawing on discourses of criticism from across theatre, performance and visual art, as well as political philosophy and performance theory, *Criticism as a Political Event* engages with each of these case studies in order to think through the complex negotiations of meaning at the heart of this critical practice. In doing so, it takes an ecological view of the positioning of performance criticism within a landscape of cultural discourse, and advances a theorisation of performance criticism as a politicised critical practice.

Ultimately, *Criticism as a Political Event* gathers together practices of 'trouble-makers' who disturb the conventions of evaluative and journalistic criticism and its traditions of authorship by foregrounding subjectivity, plurality, deliberation and the acts of thinking and interpretation. At a time characterised by the instrumentalisation of subjectivity, communicative abundance, and the coercive force of the cultural market and its commodity discourse, performance criticism, I argue, thinks and constructs the political by means of a departure from performance.

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Introduction

This thesis concerns itself with the emergence of process-led, collaborative and socially oriented forms of performance criticism in the UK, from 2007, the start of Gordon Brown's Labour government, to 2016, David Cameron's resignation and the Brexit vote, whose consequences are still unfolding. The practices I gather here are from a range of artists, thinkers, makers, academics and those who operate nomadically across professional boundaries. These practices share a concern with articulating a nonconforming critical culture to that of the mainstream media, rooted in alternative spaces of deliberation of the eighteenth century, and in the modernist project of interpretation. In this thesis, I spend time with those whom I call 'trouble-makers', that is, artists, thinkers, makers and academics and cultural workers who, by means of their engagement with performance criticism, search for new ways of thinking the political moment, departing from performance. Their work troubles what is visible as criticism, participates in creating collective and discursive spaces that straddle the realms of the artistic and the political, and search for ways to be more present to the urgencies of our political moment. In this thesis, I spend time with trouble-makers, with what they make and rebuild, respond to and enable to appear through their work.

Criticism as a Political Event finds dissent at the heart of the work of these trouble-makers. The term dissent dates from the late sixteenth century and derives from the Latin *dissentire*, meaning difference in sentiments, disagreement, being at odds, in contradiction ('dissent', Online Etymology Dictionary). We find, in the very fabric of the word, an intertwined relationship between difference, feeling and thought; in the prefix 'dis', meaning difference, and 'sentire', dating back to both Latin and Old French,

meaning to perceive, feel, mean and know. This thesis argues that in their exploration of criticism's relationship to performance and the wider social, cultural and political landscapes from which it emerges, their rejection of traditional paradigms of professionalism and objectivity, and their care for how feeling and thought intertwine, these trouble-makers create a politicised practice of criticism. I deploy the term 'performance criticism' to frame this work, found as much in digital projects, live critical writing, experiments with documentation, collections of found texts and digital publications, as it is in salons, think tanks, collaborative exercises in listening and themed conversations. Writers I include in this umbrella practice include, but are not limited to: Season Butler, Laura Burns, Simon Bowes, Maddy Costa, Karen Christopher, Lewis Church, Alex Eisenberg, Bojana Janković, Eleanor Hadley Kershaw, Johanna Linsley, Claire Macdonald, Mary Paterson, Nisha Ramayya, Rajni Shah, Theron Schmidt, Selina Thompson, Nik Wakefield, as well as collective projects *Open-Dialogues*, *Something Other*, *Critical Interruptions* – some of whose works I explicitly unpack in this thesis.

Criticism as a Political Event brings together criticism that does not engage explicitly with valuation or the attribution of symbolic or economic value. Instead, these forms of criticism engage in multiple configurations of meaning and depart from performance, by means of formal experimentation with different forms of attention, and the political potential of authorial release. Their resistance is not oppositional, yet it emerges from the ways in which they examine not only what happens in the moments of performance, but what is on the margins of subjective experience, and negotiated in collective dissent. In this manner, *Criticism as a Political Event* brings together practices that are reactive

and resistant to the threats to deliberation and civic voice resulting from fundamental changes in the mechanisms of representative democracy.

I begin this Introduction by situating my study and tracing relevant genealogies of criticism; I mark the specificity of the cultural and political moment of the early noughties for the emergence of performance criticism. I then argue for the historical grounding of the study as residing in the cultural politics of the eighteenth century, and in the modernist project of interpretation as appearance. I finish by developing the terms for the thesis, namely, criticism and politics, and discuss my methodological orientation and thesis structure.

Background of study and literature review: austerity and the politicisation of value

2007 saw the start of a global financial crisis that became the Great Crash of 2008, leading to the implementation of austerity politics, a fiscal policy aimed at constricting public spending ‘and investment in the name of boosting business’ (Blyth 2013: xxv). The UK was the first in Europe to adopt austerity measures, formalised with the appointment of Prime Minister David Cameron in 2010. As many theorists have argued (Blyth 2013, Brown 2015, Schui 2015), this resulted in a battle with self-regulating markets and the increasing popularity of neoliberal policy. As Blyth argues, ‘it was hard to publicly defend the logic of self-correcting markets when they were so obviously not self-correcting’ (2013: 55). The impact of austerity measures resulted in dramatic cuts to state arts funding, by £29 million in 2010 (ACE, 2011 qtd. in Harvie 2015: 56), a total of £100 million leading up to 2014 (ACE, 2011), and additional cuts following in the

2015–2018 budget. Further challenges came from additional cuts to local authorities. As Harvie argues, the impact of these cuts was both artistic and infrastructural: ‘These multiple, widespread funding cuts have dramatically decreased England’s arts ecology’ (2015: 53) and led to an increased emphasis on philanthropy.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport published a white paper in 2016 under Ed Vaizey that argued for more sector use of ‘commercial expertise’ and the need to ‘strengthen private and corporate support for the cultural sectors’ (DCMS 2016). The report also emphasises that the UK is ‘a leader in soft power’, and respected for its ‘strong and stable democracy, our belief in individual liberty, our diversity and our freedom of expression’ (DCMS 2016). The use of the term ‘soft power’ goes hand in hand with the encouragement of a ‘resilient’ and independent sector (DCMS 2016) as well as a revisiting of the measurement of impact and cultural value. What is exemplified here, and built over a long period of austerity, is the increased economic pressure on the arts that goes hand in hand with the politicisation of its value.

There is precedent for this explicit interweaving of political gain and cultural valuation. For its 60th anniversary in 2007, Arts Council England commissioned a public consultation on the value of the arts, at the centre of which were questions regarding what kind of principles should be guiding funding for the arts, the role of the public in granting money for the arts, as well as the institutional responsibilities of the granting body. This public exercise marked the start of a shift in cultural policy from social engagement to the reassessment of cultural value, which is returning in government literature on cultural policy.

These political and cultural changes demonstrate the ways in which austerity, driven by neoliberalism, impacted directly not only on the sustainability and infrastructure of the arts ecology, but also on the pressures for a more market-driven process of valuation. Parallel to the development of austerity politics is an increased support and emphasis on engagement. As Jen Harvie (2013, 2015), Claire Bishop (2012) and Eleanore Belfiore (2009) have shown, the agenda for access and social engagement changed the terms through which art articulates its relationship to the social and political by means of funding. I deploy neoliberalism not only as a term that encompasses the expansive and global form of governance and infrastructural changes expounded on here, but also as expressing a political rationality that constructs frames of legitimacy (Brown 2005, Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005). By frames of legitimacy, I am referring explicitly to the shifts in the organisation, dissemination and perception of public discourse. As theorist Jodi Dean argues, instead of 'engaged debates, instead of contestations employing common terms', we are confronted by a 'multiplication of resistances and assertions so extensive that it hinders the formation of strong counterhegemonies' (Dean 2005: 52). Neoliberalism results in the collapse of public and private through the means of economic capital, and it is these operations that are increasingly shifting the voice, shape and scope of criticism in today's cultural infrastructure.

Claire Bishop argues that the 'production and reception of the arts was reshaped within a political logic in which audience figures and marketing statistics' have become 'essential to securing public funding' (2012: 12). The encouragement of social inclusion that New Labour incentivised resulted in what Bishop terms a 'devolution of responsibility' (2012: 13). With the arrival of the Coalition government of 2010, this manifested in an increasingly cynical model of civic participation through projects such

as Big Society, fostering a culture of ‘voluntarism, philanthropy and social action’ (David Cameron qtd. in Bishop 2012: 14). In privatising services and realigning fiscal priorities away from a welfare state, this produces government-sponsored displays of care towards civic and artistic ecologies that do not translate into support or policy.

As Bishop argues, the social inclusion agenda is less ‘about repairing the social bond’ than a mission to ‘enable all members of society to be self-administering, fully functioning consumers’ (2012: 14), less reliant on the welfare state. Whilst Bishop’s critical standpoint fails to account for the dialogic process of performance in intervening in these structures, sometimes with sharp critical awareness, Jill Dolan reminds us of the collective capacity of performance to think utopia, despite, or in reaction to, political pressures. To Dolan, utopia is always ‘imagined or experienced affectively’ (2006: 459), foregrounding the possibility for performance to always produce alternative imaginaries with real implications. Dolan’s utopia is ‘always in process, only potentially grasped, as it disappears before us around the corners of narrative and social experiences’ (2006: 6). My own engagement with this cultural moment in the noughties accounts for the multiple specificities of experience that were brought to bear in criticism’s encountering of performance on the margins of hyper-visible public discourse;¹ it is poised among scepticism towards the increasing economisation of value that fosters cultures of competition and consensus (Brown 2015, Kunst 2015), the appropriation of traditional forms of criticism as ‘indistinguishable from government arts policy’ (Bishop 2012:14), and fundamental changes in modes of critical production and their relationship to the politicised

¹ An example is Mieke Bal’s work in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (2002), where she argues that several frames are always available and productively complicate the scholar’s engagement with a work, as a resistance to the totalising effects of explanation.

encounter with performance. I examine practices of performance criticism that position themselves on the margins of cultural evaluation and its economic agendas.

These economic and policy changes have had a fundamental impact on the ecology of criticism. They have led to a different set of demands being placed on mainstream criticism, already facing its own internal crisis of legitimation. Characterised by precarity, dwindling resources, and under pressure from a public decrying of expertise and increasingly corporate ownership of mainstream media, criticism faced not only a crisis of legitimacy in the public sphere, but also a fundamental change in the modes, means and spaces it occupied. This leads me to the second choice behind the case studies, and the link between artistic and political shifts, and the positioning and reactive nature of the practices presented here.

Background of study and literature review: trouble-makers in a shifting landscape

2007 marked the confluence of seemingly disparate, yet fundamentally interconnected, reconceptualisations of criticism. *Open-Dialogues*, a collaborative project between Mary Paterson and Rachel Lois Clapham that ‘produces writing on and as performance’ (‘About Open-Dialogues’, 2008), emerged as a result of *Writing from Live Art*, a programme for emergent critical writers run by the Live Art Development Agency in 2006. In an email exchange with me, co-founder Mary Paterson said the project was aimed at disrupting ‘the (masculinist) hierarchies of knowledge implicit in criticism, including the authority of writing as a medium in relation to performance’ (Damian Martin 2017). Calling for an interest in dialogue and a keen disruption of ‘the field of

criticism in terms of form, function and access', *Open-Dialogues* functioned on a self-publishing model, at a time when blogging was just beginning to gain traction in the wider field of criticism. At the same time, 2007 saw the establishment of what would become a long-term collaborative model between festivals and writers, with the founding of Spill Festival of Performance by Pacitti Company and its artistic director, Robert Pacitti. Dedicated to showcasing work across live art, experimental theatre and performance, Spill Festival incorporated a writing programme, *Spill Overspill*, conceived by participants in *Writing from Live Art*. In its second iteration in 2009, *Spill Overspill* foregrounded its aim of responding 'critically to the work shown, and to create a real-time discursive context for the Spill festival, one that spills out of the usual confines of a festival' ('Spill Overspill' 2009). These shifts were not just tectonic movements on the edges of practices that sit uneasily, yet side by side, with the realm of theatre. 2007 was a distinct moment, marked by conflicts of legitimacy that had been brewing in mainstream media between employed critics and bloggers, who often operated across cultural disciplines. The orientation of the research here encompasses both points of emergence, which intersect in fundamental ways that confuse what might be constituted as genealogies of criticism.

In her recent work, *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes*, editor Duška Radosavljević delineates several competing landscapes as part of this shift: academic criticism, with its conflict between evaluation and interpretation, newspaper criticism, characterised by dwindling resources targeted at arts criticism, magazines (particularly *The Stage* and *Time Out*) and online criticism. Marking a distinction between mainstream media and the realm of online criticism, Radosavljević approached the latter through its adherence to a distinct technological and socio-economic sphere

(2016: 15). The only historicisation of contemporary criticism of its kind, *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes* points to the ways in which criticism experienced both a diversification and a crisis occurring in parallel over the last ten years. In the same collection, critic Andrew Haydon further investigates this paradigm through his account of online criticism. He provides a three-phase overview: 1997, as a gestation period for online reviewing, with the establishment of *British Theatre Guide* and *Whatsonstage.com*; 2006, with the beginnings of the criticism blog; and 2010, the 'third wave of online writing' (Haydon 2016: 125), with the establishment of *Exeunt* and *A Younger Theatre*. Haydon further argues for the identity of online criticism as distinct from newspapers; however, one key point of confluence complicates this as a distinction.

In 2007, the *Guardian* set up a regular series called *Noises Off*, hosted by critic Kelly Nestruck, which provided an overview of the debates within the blogosphere. *Noises Off* followed the establishment of a number of independent blogs, authored by both critics and makers, notably Chris Goode's *Thompson's Bank of Communicable Desire* in 2006 and Andrew Haydon's *Postcards from the Gods* that same year, as well as *Culturebot* in 2003 in the US led by Andy Horwitz. The blogosphere continued to thrive, with the emergence of writers like Meghan Vaughan, with *Synonyms for Churlish* a year later, in 2008, and Maddy Costa, a former *Guardian* critic, who opened *Deliq* in 2011. The *Guardian*, the first newspaper to take an active position in the debate on criticism, was also an equal participant in decrying the legitimacy of the blogosphere, particularly through its chief theatre critic, Michael Billington. As Haydon observes, the fact that Billington 'felt moved to say anything at all on the subject is significant' (2016: 134). It

evidences an engagement that is twofold: on the one hand, a battle for legitimacy, and on the other, an acknowledgement of a significant shift.

What both Radosavljević and Haydon foreground is the importance of online criticism as an active cultural participant in the diversification of criticism, in terms of both form and scope. However, what is also significant about 2007 is the way it anticipates the intermingling of criticism that is reflective both of itself, and of performance, with the changing pressures on the cultural market. For the most part, the forms of criticism outlined in Radosavljević's study remain committed to reviewing as the main paradigm through which writing is approached. Whilst the changing landscape is evidently tied to questions of form, discursive capacity and conceptual ambitions of criticism, it is also equally connected to the changing pressures of the cultural market, and its self-reflective attitude to denoting, advocating and marking cultural value.

This is no more evident than in the discussion of *Three Kingdoms*, an international co-production written by Simon Stephens and directed by Sebastian Nübling that, in 2012, became the heart of a public debate between newspaper and online critics. The point of debate focuses on the contemporaneity and value of the work, which newspaper critics derided for its politics, and online critics praised for its formal and aesthetic boldness. In her article for the *Guardian* summing up the conflict, critic Maddy Costa provides a flavour of the contentions: 'this collaboration,' she says, 'is either self-indulgent, overstated, too enigmatic by half, or one of the best pieces of theatre you will see this year' ('Three Kingdoms: the shape of British Theatre to come?' 2012a). Haydon mentions the same event for its marking out of online critics, and in particular bloggers, as fundamental to changing the paradigms of debating theatre. The appreciation these

writers had for the work, argues Haydon, created a paradigm that is now ‘commonplace’ (2016: 146), by way of mainstream theatre institutions becoming attuned to these voices, which, prior to 2007, were marginal to the public conversations on theatre. By the time *Three Kingdoms* emerged, online criticism ‘had an infrastructure, a readership and reach’, and the voices of those who ‘disagreed with the mainstream assessment were now part of the ecology’ (Haydon 2016: 145). In this way, *Three Kingdoms* marked a public conflict that concerned not only the ways in which performance work is legitimised or recognised, but also the occlusion of voices that had established themselves in the ecology of criticism; for that reason, the online realm disrupted established traditions of criticism, even by using the review as a formula for deliberation.

The debate marked a turning point in criticism’s recent history for several reasons relevant here: first, for the ways in which it evidenced a distinction between a generation of critics working in print and an incoming generation of writers working online, in a cultural moment that brought these two under the same umbrella; second, for the orientation of much of the debate, on both sides, on the contemporaneity of the production and its value, evidencing a cultural conflict of aesthetics that disclosed oppositional politics, and made evident the consensus culture of some mainstream press; third, for making evident the contentions at the heart of both sides of the debate, to do with the question of artistic excess – in other words, critics who argued for the work defended its right of place, and those who decried its artistic politics also sought to destabilise its legitimacy. What becomes evident, then, is how *Three Kingdoms* serves as a key example of the ways in which value and legitimacy intersect. It makes visible the different expectations at play, not only with regard to criticism’s formal

commitments, but its politicised relationship to performance, both responsive to an increasing pressure to make evident the place of contemporary performance in public life, and the role of public subsidy in what some perceive to be experimentation, and others a lack of recognition of established continental practice. The entrance of certain forms of online criticism into the cultural market, fostered institutionally rather than professionally, marks a point of distinction from the practices I examine here, but from a position of solidarity: a recuperation of disruption to change the terms of the debate. *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes* presents an overview of an ecology that continues to engage with valuation and its problematisation; however, my project here seeks to make a further distinction, by rooting the work of trouble-makers gathered here in the cultural conflicts of the eighteenth century, and the modernist project of interpretation, as an alternative to the histories of journalistic theatre criticism we have seen at play here.

It is in this climate that marginal works of performance criticism begin to take shape, both in the form of projects like *Open-Dialogues*, and increasingly nomadic writers navigating a range of platforms, seeking to reconfigure the relationship between critical writing and performance. By re-visiting the relationship between critic and work, these practices make evident a shift in mentality from a poetics of distance to one of relationality. In other words, many of the practices and projects mentioned here occur under a distinct focus, which I have termed performance criticism, but those taking part continue to work across a variety of modes, both in the structuring of their labour, and the extent to which that enters different professional realms.

Background of study and literature review: emergence and marginalisation

There is a question, one of distinction rather than legitimisation, that emerges in the midst of the 2012 debate on the centrality of forms of criticism that fall under the rubric of online. I would propose, beyond the question of legitimation discussed by Haydon and Radosavljević, that there is the matter of communicative flows and their relationship to deliberation beyond the cultural market. In her analysis of the networked communications in the US, political theorist Jodi Dean introduces the term 'communicative capitalism'. This is a conceptualisation of 'the commonplace idea that the market, today, is the site of democratic aspirations' and, she adds, 'the mechanisms by which the will of the demos manifests' (2005: 55). She introduces an important aspect to the debate on the efficacy, reach and potential for political resistance of networked communications through the foregrounding of their context. 'What enhances democracy in one context,' she argues, 'becomes a new form of hegemony in another' (Dean 2005: 54). Dean underlines the importance of forms of antagonism in sustaining debate that calls politics into question. In order to do so, she marks the distinction between politics as a matter of governance, and the politics that marks 'the circulation of content' (2005: 53). I want to consider this in light of the practices gathered under the term online criticism, which favour an engagement with criticism that forecloses the practices of which I speak here, despite their partial positioning within the same digital sphere.

It is undeniable that there is, across the two moments discussed here, 2007 and 2012, an emergence of plurality as a characteristic of criticism. At the same time, the circulation of content that navigates paradigms traditionally ascribed to criticism,

notably, subjective/objective and professional/amateur, results in a dissolution of boundaries, and at different levels and with different implications for what might constitute a politicisation of criticism. These forms of online criticism, notably emergent in 2007 and culminating in 2012, denote their own politics of circulation, to borrow from Dean. Radosavljević argues that ‘viewed genealogically [...] online criticism can therefore be seen as distinctly emancipatory, community-oriented, performative and potentially non-literary in its nature’ (2016: 17). Situating online criticism within a public commons that holds out hope for ‘a more brilliant, a more skeptical, more disobedient’ (Greig qtd. in Radosavljević 2016: 22) public is, I argue, misleading in the ways in which it conceptualises emancipation. As Dean argues, the enmeshment of particular digital communicative spaces with the operation of politics evidences a more complex territory. This is not an oppositional stance, but one that seeks to create a distinction in order to understand further not just where criticism sits, or its importance and legitimacy, but how it thinks, and how it might construct radical resistance beyond the immediate realm of performance.

If we acknowledge that the recent changes in the landscape of criticism foreground multiple sources of value for theatre and performance, we must also take into account the enmeshment of austerity politics with the delineation of that value. I have already mentioned the ways in which austerity politics have placed unprecedented pressure on the valuation of a cultural landscape, with most recent emphasis on a paradox: financial autonomy that goes hand in hand with social servicing. The material conditions that marked the rise of online criticism, where most of the writing took place for free, requiring personal resources to enable ability to participate, constitute another dimension to this. As Kunst argues in her study of artistic work, the subject functions as

a 'pulsating sum of various conflicting powers and forces', and theatre and performance are having to account for being a public good, at the same time as modelling 'how to work' (2015: 151), and being self-sustaining. In this landscape, valuation and advocacy, marketisation and instrumentalisation, are interwoven, exposing criticism as a space for increased governmental participation in communicative networks. Dean reminds us of the contentions over the internet throughout the 1990s that foregrounded how, in its constitution 'in and through conflict over specific practices and subjectivities', not everything goes online (2005: 68). Whilst I divert away from her contention that engagement with the digital necessarily implies technology fetishism, I place emphasis on this genealogy of constituted conflict specifically to underline the ease through which consensus is constituted on the internet.

If we return to the *Three Kingdoms* debate, this becomes evident. The paradigm most often attributed to this moment in criticism is its championing of voices that, until then, had operated in parallel to mainstream media, and this is a significant example of disturbing established structures of criticism. Whilst the online community mentioned here took an active part in reassigning value, and in taking a position that marked itself as different, it was also characterised by consensus at the expense of formal questioning. In other words, the arguments were oppositional, but not the stance itself. This is not to remove value from the importance of the debate as key to voicing the emancipatory potential of criticism; it is to argue that online criticism is not inherently political by nature of its contextualisation. To borrow from Dean, technologies 'should be made to represent something beyond themselves in the service of a struggle against something beyond themselves' (2005: 68). We are still learning, but learning takes time. The problem does not lie with valuation per se, but with the binary thinking it often

propagates: good or bad, worthy or unworthy. As Wendy Brown argues, 'neoliberalism involves an intensification of the market as a site of "veridiction"' (2015: 67), and it is precisely the resistance to the market that I am interested in capturing in this thesis, by means of the work of performance criticism.

Background of study and literature review: spatialising performance criticism and finding autonomy

In 2010, architecture theorist and critic Jane Rendell writes about the importance of considering the spatial politics of criticism: the sites where an artwork is constructed, exhibited and documented. In her work *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*, Rendell returns to subjectivity in a spatial dimension, building on her research on critical spatial practice, in which she proposes that 'criticism is a form of spatial practice in its own right' (2010: 2). Rendell argues that spatial sites of engagement 'which are material, emotional, political and conceptual' (2010: 1) can be examined and explored as modes of critical writing. Rendell makes a case for situated criticism that acknowledges the critic as a specific art user, but for whom proximity to the work is fundamental. Situated criticism considers the critic's physical relationship to the artwork as one aspect of a multiple relationship. In this way, Rendell forecloses the objective/subjective paradigm in favour of associative, attentive models of criticism that take into account the way the sites interlock with the work itself.

Similarly, Gavin Butt tackles this explicitly in his work *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance*. *After Criticism* deconstructs and explores the performative turn in critical writing, taking into account the effects of postmodernism on discourses

regarding the positioning of the critic in the cultural apparatus. In his introduction, Butt outlines the main paradoxes that have historically guided critical practice as those of distance and objectivity. These are reconsidered and superseded by an engagement with notions of embodiment and cultural participation. Butt identifies these as paradoxical for the ways in which they invite a critic's positioning within the cultural fabric itself, and against the common doxa; he speaks of a criticism 'written from the perspective of a spectator immersed in the constructed environments of artistic spectacle' (2005: 9). This implication challenges the idea that criticality might only come with distance, citing Derrida's 'paradoxical structure of criticism's condition of possibility' for the ways in which it is constituted 'by the critic's desire to communicate and be understood within a consensus alongside a coterminous desire to frustrate conventional understandings' (2008: 6). Across these two works, we see an engagement with the spatial politics of criticism and the embeddedness of the critic in the cultural apparatus.

This positioning is shared in theatre criticism too. In the same year as the *Three Kingdoms* debate, US-based publication *Culturebot* published an essay titled *Re-Framing the Critic for the 21st Century: Dramaturgy, Advocacy and Engagement*, which captured and articulated the intent of a growing number of critics operating within, and on the margins of, mainstream media, in the blogosphere and online publications. Horwitz's essay is pivotal for the ways in which it captures a growing sense of unease with reviewing as a totalising and singular form of criticism, resonating beyond the Atlantic. The essay argues for a reconceptualisation of criticism's relationship to performance that breaks away from the valuation at the heart of reviewing. Citing the paradigm between amateur and professional that the public decrying of blogging by newspaper

critics implies, Horwitz proposes a spatial relating of performance to criticism: horizontalism. Horwitz further argues in the essay that, as a publication, Culturebot's aim has been towards cultivating 'a critical voice that embraces subjectivity and the informality/intimacy of the internet' (2012). Rejecting the endeavour of reviewing, Horwitz instead speaks about 'information, examination and exegesis' and 'creating context by connecting the work at hand to larger ideas, to historical and aesthetic precedents and to the world in which we live' (2012). Capturing the growing, totalising force of reviewing, not only in newspapers but also in other forms of online criticism that appropriate its mechanisms whilst changing the form, Horwitz speaks of an alternative ecology of criticism.

Horizontalism is also tied to what Horwitz calls 'embedded criticism', in which the writer is encouraged to engage and be an active observer in the artistic process, taking the 'dual role of dramaturg and expositor' (2012). As discussed at length in the colloquium organised by critic and academic Karen Fricker at Brock University, *The Changing Face of Theatre Criticism in the Digital Age* (2014), embedded criticism sets itself apart as overtly focusing on artistic processes, and formalises a different mode of relating to performance from within. Building on her experience as a resident critic for Chris Goode & Co theatre company, Maddy Costa establishes *Dialogue* with Jake Orr in 2012, hosting conversations on performance with members of the public, as well as curating a festival of work and debate. In this framework, horizontalism approaches criticism as 'a creative practice unto itself' in which the writer 'exists in subjective relation to the work of the artist' (2012). In her contribution to Radosavljević's book, Maddy Costa speaks explicitly to the impact Horwitz's thinking had on her practice, as she moved from being a newspaper critic to a writer working on the margins of

criticism, but in the midst of performance and its processes. 'Dialogue has become central to my conception of embedded criticism,' she says, proposing that it is in engaging with the proximity with performance that critical thinking emerges (2016: 209). What distinguishes horizontalism from other conceptions of criticism is its engagement with the spatialisation of relationships between performance and criticism. Made evident through its foregrounding of the embedded position of the critic within a cultural apparatus, Horwitz made visible a changing attitude prevalent in other discourses on criticism. Horizontalism is an alternative means through which the spatial dimension of criticism's sites of encounter is valorised.

This spatialisation comes about in Horwitz's approach to countering claims of subjectivity as dangerous to criticism. Understood as an acknowledgement of one's own relationships to performance, subjectivity becomes, in Horwitz's model, a mode of engagement that does not displace criticality, but acknowledges the complexity of relationships at play in the encounter with performance. Where Rendell locates meaning as a process of engagement rather than a fixed dweller, and Butt in the encounter with performance, Horwitz speaks of a side-by-side dialogue with performance. This is a fundamental point of departure from my analysis here; as I show in the thesis, my examination considers works of criticism that depart from performance, and engage with what I term a subjective criticality, building on the modernist project of interpretation, and woven into the politicisation of criticism visible in the work of Rendell, Butt and Horwitz. Whilst traditional forms of criticism foreground objectivity as necessary for the maintenance of critical precision (Wardle 1992, Billington 2001, Fisher 2015), the three make a case for the ways in which alternative conceptions of the role of subjectivity in criticism offer a productive critical

tradition, one that has an emancipatory effect on the works I examine in this thesis.

In exploring how the works of criticism gathered here think politically, this interrelating of cultural positioning with subjectivity is important. It takes into account the eventness of performance as much as its embodiment. Butt develops an understanding of criticism as an activity already engaged in a multiplicity of cultural networks, rather than existing outside it. It considers the implications of performativity in art-historical writing, the possibilities for the distracted gaze to shape critical practice and the conditions in which formal artistic experimentation can influence criticism. *After Criticism* delineates the possibilities and conditions of an experimental practice that engages with the fabric of criticism itself in the academy, one made visible in a variety of publics in my thesis.

As I will show in the research presented here, this positioning, which acknowledges that criticism is a cultural participant not distinct from but within performance itself, holds true beyond the conceptualisations offered through the models that Horwitz, Rendell and Butt outline. Indeed, what distinguishes the writers presented here is their partial, temporary or fragmented engagement with criticism, their interest in exposing the mechanisms of interpretation and thought, and their moving away from performance and its encounter. They are resistant to the professionalism of newspaper criticism, as well as the demands made by certain forms of online criticism which require consistent engagement; the trouble-makers I speak of here navigate a variety of structures of work, and occupy performance criticism nomadically, rather than with regularity.

There is something further implied within this reassessment of the enmeshment of criticism with cultural practice, and this is a desire for autonomy. Horizontalism calls

into question the expectation that certain forms of criticism must always *serve* the work, rather than engage with the work. Similarly, site-writing speaks to the ways in which criticism can make a work appear by taking into account its architecture, both literal and conceptual, in relation to the subjective experience of the writer. And in Butt's *After Performance*, performativity emerges as a paradigm through which to engage with meaning-making processes in both performance and criticism.

Maddy Costa, speaking of her relationship to embedded criticism, and Mary Paterson, speaking of hers to the founding of *Open-Dialogues*, both engage explicitly with the desire for criticism to be constitutive of a meaning that can exist independently of the work, even when it is enabling the work to appear. In the two cases I cite, it is in the engagement with dialogue that this manifests itself, as a departure from performance. Yet as we will see throughout the thesis, this movement to appearance comes against the background of shifting subjectivities and multiple territories of meaning. What I want to contend here is that beyond the question of positioning is one of politics, closely tied to aesthetics. The criticism that Horwitz, Rendell and Butt account for is one that sets the grounding for an engagement with performance's appearance, and the politicisation of the encounter with performance. The practices I will speak of here engage this further as a means of resisting neoliberalism's coercion of subjectivity and desire (Brown 2015), in order to constitute publics with deliberative agency.

What distinguishes the work of the trouble-makers cited here is a lack of commitment to any particular, single context, together with a reconfiguration of genealogies of criticism through form that takes into account the emergence of performance writing in the 1990s (Bergvall 1996, Hall 2013), and the shifting paradigms of other forms of

criticism from Enlightenment to postmodernism, and beyond. The scope of this research is to shift the debate from professionally oriented discussions about legitimacy to probing what constitutes a resistant, productive criticism. In other words, *Criticism as a Political Event* positions these forms of criticism first and foremost as a practice with plural manifestations, and second as a transgressive return to questions of cultural value or the productivity of communicative arenas. In order to situate this, I turn to the eighteenth century, as a cultural and political moment in the UK where criticism becomes entangled with public deliberation, political rationality and cultural conflict. It is in the eighteenth century, with the rise of the British press, that we also find a conflict between subjectivity and rationality, public opinion and dissent.

Histories of performance criticism: sociality and publicness in the eighteenth century

The eighteenth century is a cultural and political moment in the UK where the emergence of the public sphere entangles criticism with deliberation and the formation of public opinion. The emergence of this critical public sphere is a historical moment of significance to performance criticism: it provides an early example of the tense relationship between criticism, political rationality and subjectivity. It also roots a practice of rationality of criticism that continues to influence mainstream theatre criticism, where critical authority privileges singularity and rationality. In other words, in the British eighteenth century we locate the tangled relationship between criticism, appearance, (counter) publics and politics.

Critical visibility has always had a relationship to authority and, in the case of criticism, to authorship, dating back to the emergence of a critical culture in the eighteenth century in the UK. The history of theatre criticism is written by means of individual authors, over the histories of publications with which they engaged, since the time of William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, and later Kenneth Tynan and Michael Billington.² A pressing and evident issue here is the homogeneity of the most visible critics, all white and male, rather than that of the individual critical voice per se. It is unsurprising that the early noughties remained marked by a visible conflict of legitimacy and authority, whereby online critics sought to challenge the homogeneity of voices present in the established, mainstream press, as we have seen in the case of the *Three Kingdoms* debate.

For Hazlitt, for example, genuine criticism should ‘reflect the colors, the light and the shade, the soul and body of a work’ and enter into a ‘circuitous explanation of all that can be urged for and against it being in the best and worst styles possible’ (1985: 214). Highly influenced by Romantic philosophy (Costelloe 2013), Hazlitt’s writing was testament to the intercalation of dramatic and literary theory, whilst at the same time committed to universality of experience, in close affinity to the work of Immanuel Kant. Stephen Burley traces this relationship as an explicit one in his study *Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy and Politics 1766–1816*, where he declares that Hazlitt ‘acknowledged a debt to Kant on numerous occasions’ (2014: 110). The knot between criticism and metaphysics taking shape in the eighteenth century, notably through the

² Speaking about London’s literary scene, historian Michael Eberle-Sinatra dates the tradition of the periodical back to 1720 with Richard Steele’s *Theatre*, placing Hazlitt and Hunt as contemporaries concerned with the review as a literary tradition. Further examination is also found in Marvin Carlson’s theatre history, where he speaks to Hazlitt’s concern for the ‘physical rather than metaphysical’ (1984: 220).

work of Hazlitt, constituted the subject by means of subjectivity, and subjectivity as a means of evaluation, continued in the established traditions of modern theatre criticism with figures like Kenneth Tynan. Romanticism, the distinct philosophical and political context that gave rise to figures like Hazlitt, exposes a paradox in contemporary, mainstream criticism: that a tradition of criticism rooted in subjective expression is also cast as one of universal reach; as a result, this tradition creates a conflict of legitimation at the expense of other subjectivities that are outside of the dominant voice- a patriarchal tradition. At the same time, the political terrains of the newspaper and the formation of the Enlightenment critic have propagated this as a singular voice of reason.

This is not particular to the period; the history of the rise of the British press is marked by intellectual conflicts that held significant political sway at a time of the emergence of 'new modes of intellectual sociability' (Benchimol 2010: 5). In his examination of the intellectual politics of the British Romantic period in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, historian Alex Benchimol argues that 'two significant traditions of intellectual practice: one popular and radical, the other bourgeois and liberal' (2010: 11) characterised the emergence of early forms of criticism. This led to the development of a contested 'cultural modernity' (ibid.) that laid the groundwork for traditions of criticism situated within, and on the margins of, the press – from newspapers to periodicals, pamphlets and salons. Benchimol's analysis is an important reminder of the tie between politics and value in criticism and, notably, reviewing practices. Michael Harris and Alan Lee, in their study on the press in English society, expound on how, for example, the stamp tax of 1792 was instrumental in involving the state in newspaper matters (1986: 22), whilst at the same time fuelling an 'active sphere of politically oriented newspapers' that became an 'invariable accompaniment to the formation of an

opposition grouping' (ibid.). What is interesting, echoing across studies of eighteenth-century cultural politics (McKenzie 1949, Shevelov 1989, Gilmartin 2005, Cheetham 2012, Costelloe 2013), is an examination of the development of the collective political voice in tandem with the rise of the journalistic personality.

Benchimol refers to this ongoing cultural conflict as a process of differentiation and struggle 'over control of the very basis of intellectual conflict: the idea of an organised public' (2010: 4), a time when new modes of 'intellectual sociability emerged' (2010: 5).³ This is highly relevant for my discussion here. The history of the British press is one in which collective positions and cultural identities are articulated by means of individual voices. As I will show later in this thesis, this is as much a question of how political discourse makes itself known and articulated in relation to public political rationalities as it is one of changing formal strategies. The work of performance criticism is precisely a confrontation with the problematic authority that sometimes comes with having a critical voice. The commitment to the social made visible in performance criticism, and its politicisation of subjectivity, are rooted in cultural conflicts of the eighteenth century.

Notably in scholarship on the emergence of the press and the culture of dramatic criticism in the eighteenth century is the interplay between the political and the public, where collectivity becomes, to draw on Benchimol's work, a means of defending 'precious non-market cultural traditions' (2010). The enmeshment of the economic and the critical originates with the development of Britain as 'the world's first industrial

³ I speak further on the question of criticism in the public sphere in Chapter Five.

capitalist society' (Benjamin 2010: 11), characterised by 'production and concentration of wealth accompanied by new levels of social and economic inequality' (ibid.) that increasingly favour individual moral autonomy. It is then possible to understand the history of criticism's relationship to authorship as tied to that of the cultural conflicts that shaped it, and connected, from the onset, to a tension between artistic and economic value, publicness and accountability. As Hito Steyerl argues, 'bourgeois subjectivity as such was formed through such a process of critique, and encouraged to leave behind "self-incurred immaturity" to quote from Immanuel Kant's famous definition of Enlightenment' (2009b: 54). To Steyerl, this critical subjectivity was ambivalent because it entailed the use of reason only in those situations that 'we would consider apolitical today, namely in the deliberation of abstract problems, but not the criticism of authority' (2009b: 13). In this way, criticism in the eighteenth century, in the public sphere, produces a 'subject who could make use of critique in public circumstances, but not in private ones' (2009b: 13), a governable subject. My claim in this thesis is that performance criticism marks subjectivity with political potential, navigating the complex territories that exploit it under neoliberalism, but also articulates it as a form of political participation.

Criticism as appearance

Before articulating what might be meant by the term 'criticism', I want to further flesh out the interconnectedness of criticism and appearance as it pertains to this study. I will do so by turning to the discussion surrounding interpretation, understood in relation to subjectivity. Since modernism, the image of the critic has been that of an authoritative, male, prominent individual. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman addresses this specifically in

his work *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (1987), in which he proposes that the effect of postmodern philosophy on criticism has been a cultivating of 'pluralism of experience, values and criteria of truth' (1988: 127). Whilst Bauman decries the relativist politics of postmodern thought, his analysis marks an important point in the acknowledgement of a return to interpretation as a viable operation of cultural discourse, rather than legislative judgement. Whilst the development of the digital in theatre criticism has embraced plurality, what is distinct about performance criticism's mode of engagement with interpretation is precisely the performance of its uncertainty, and a circumnavigation of a concern with authority by accessing critical voice by means of dialogue.

An iteration of the engagement between criticism and appearance is found in Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation*. 'What would criticism look like,' she asks, 'that would serve the work of art, not usurp its place?' (Sontag 1964: 8). Sontag argues for a type of critical engagement that favours transparency, which means 'experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself' (1964: 10). To her, this approach to criticism acknowledges in equal measure the form and content of a work of art, and strives to give it visibility, rather than to excavate its meaning. Sontag is a key thinker in a line of critics interested in an open dialogue between art and criticism, increasingly visible in the language through which the critics presented here approach their work, but also implied in the models from which they draw.

The prologue to the essay comes from a quote by artist Willem De Kooning that speaks of content as 'an encounter like a flash' (qtd. in Sontag 1964: 9). I want to foreground that Sontag's argument is based on the proposition that art is a process of appearance,

and that criticism, in its relationship to it, can destroy that becoming visible as much as it can contribute to its coming into being. That flash which De Kooning speaks of is graspable but incomplete, by nature temporary and fragmented. Sontag places emphasis on a revealing of art that is as much to do with form as with content, and that doesn't seek to excavate meaning. Sontag's essay marks a significant shift in thinking about criticism that posits a reconsideration of the relationship between art and criticism at the forefront of modernism.

I want to draw attention to an even earlier iteration of this conception that is visible in Sontag's argument: Walter Benjamin's thoughts in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Benjamin tells us that 'to pry an object from its shell' means to 'destroy its aura' (1936: 220). Aura pertains to the presence of a work in time and space, but goes beyond the specificity of an encounter with the work into considering wider contextual factors. These are economic and historical. Benjamin's argument proposes that, with the advent of film and photography, the entire aesthetic experience of art shifted; with this shift came a removing of the authority of a work of art, and a problematic revolution of new 'demands in the politics of art' (1936: 217). Benjamin traces an important relationship between modes of production and reception, and between economic structures and aesthetic experience. As I will show in this thesis, by means of the event, performance criticism departs from the encounter with performance, and exposes the work of interpretation and thought: it moves from the work to the political fabric of its making.

Both Sontag and Benjamin evidence a search for a different conception of the experience of art, resistant to the exploitative instrumentalism of capitalism. For Sontag,

this refers to not treating art as an object whose content we must excavate at the expense of formal considerations. For Benjamin, this pertains to an acknowledgement of the deep enmeshment of politics and subjectivity. As Kunst argues, 'subjectivity is at the core of methods of production and contemporary work processes' (2015: 23). My interest here is how performance criticism deploys what I use as 'subjective criticality' to constitute 'counterpublics', to reference the work of Nancy Fraser. In departing from performance, these practices of criticism dispute its instrumentalisation, and search for socially oriented terrains of deliberation; it is only through a subjective criticality that productive differentiation and deliberation occurs.

This resistance is fundamental to *Criticism as a Political Event*, as it provides a point of orientation for the thinking that the works presented here undertake, and the genealogies that have made that possible. Anticipating the marketisation of art with the advent of technology, Benjamin sets out to protect notions of authenticity, which Sontag forecloses in favour of a rejection of interpretation, when this comes at the expense of meaning. This can also be understood in placing emphasis on interpretation as a mode of rendering value. Radosavljević discusses this in her overview of the academic debate between evaluation and interpretation as regards arts criticism. She cites Butt, Ronan MacDonald, John Berger and Noel Carroll as key participants in this debate. Citing MacDonald's condemnation of the 'radical relativism of artistic value' (2016: 7), Radosavljević sets out the paradigm of evaluation and interpretation through the prism of an engagement with different notions of subjectivity. If we speak of criticism in terms of its ability to make meaning appear, we are then speaking of an aesthetic dimension to this engagement. Sontag articulates the possibility that criticism might render a work of art invisible, or excavate its content from its form. My emphasis here will be on how

performance criticism constitutes not only a formal return to interpretation, but an experimentation that seeks to constitute alternative modes of discourse, rather than reproduce established ones.

Interestingly, there is a point of convergence emerging here, between Sontag's foregrounding of appearance at the expense of interpretation and Butt's conviction that, following postmodernism, interpretation is what performs the subjectivity of the embedded critic. This can be advanced by paying closer attention to how certain discourses on performance documentation have engaged appearance and subjectivity. In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), Peggy Phelan examines visibility and its political potential beyond the concerns of the realm of representation. Phelan argues that performance is 'representation without reproduction' and, as such, it 'clogs the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the ideology of the capital' (1993: 146). To her, performance resists documentation; so any writing that concerns itself with performance must 'invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself' (1993: 147). Phelan, then, foregrounds the identity of criticism as an engaged interpretation of the work of art that is nevertheless autonomous from its meaning-making mechanisms. Performance's ontological identification enables this positioning to occur, which is by nature politicised by means of what it reveals, and what it conceals, and problematised by how it orients this in relation to that process of appearance. I propose that this is not dissimilar to how Horwitz articulates horizontalism as signalling a dialogue which maintains identity, without challenging autonomy. Elsewhere, in *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (2011), Rebecca Schneider further engages with this ontological view of performance by challenging 'ocular hegemony' and affording

'political promise' (2011: 139) as a result. Schneider twists the questioning to the ways in which this positioning might offer a challenge to archival thinking itself. Schneider invites us to consider what might happen if we think of performance as 'both the act of remaining and a means of re-appearance' (2011: 142).

I am interested in the ways in which Schneider introduces the body as a site for this reappearance, arguing that performance itself might pose a challenge to loss. This is, for my purposes here, a mode through which the material and immaterial can be reconciled; in which performance can maintain its ontology, whilst also acknowledging that which comes after the event. Schneider provides a way through which to grant independence to performance and its unfolding documents, whilst problematising the instrumentalisation of performance's ontology.

Shared across these analyses of performance and its documentation is the critic as unreliable narrator, whose interpretive engagement must take into account the complexities of how performance appears in the first place. Further discussion of this can be found in Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson's *Performing the Body, Performing the Text* (1999). Examining how performance-art practices that seek to perform the subject also offer up new ways through which to model interpretation through performativity, the editors argue against a fixing of the work undertaken in the projects of modernist art criticism. By valuing a more fluid circulation of meaning in the encounter with performance, Jones and Stephenson constitute a dynamic form of interpretation that enables appearance without expending with subjectivity.

Foregrounding the performative nature of meaning-making (1999: 3) and the invested nature of interpretation, Jones and Stephenson make an important case for the ways in

which embodiment and performativity act as crucial vehicles for understanding new operations of criticism. They argue that this offers a 'recognition of interpretation as a fragile, partial and precarious affair' (1999: 2), making a case for complicity as determining meaning, alongside social, political and institutional factors.

Jennifer Doyle argues convincingly in *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (2013), her influential work on the politics of affect and the discourses of controversy in contemporary performance and criticism, that to account for difficulty and emotion in criticism is dismissive of the position that 'feelings are self-evident, that emotions can be parsed and catalogued, produced and consumed at will' (2013: xiv). We might, she proposes, think of dispossession and unravelling as political variables of a critical encounter with performance. This emphasis qualifies subjectivity as a slippery exchange, in which we might talk less about identity as a means of influence, and more about a critical quality of presence in the event of criticism: a 'seeing differently', to borrow from Amelia Jones (2012). Not coincidentally, Jones also grounds this mode of understanding subjectivity and its slipperiness, not by means of authorship, but through a critical evaluation of its theorisation in Euro-American thought: 'the subject of the modern European episteme is a subject located coherently at the centre of a field of vision', that is, he is 'both subjective and objective and in Kantian terms, unified around the will' (2012: 27). The critique Jones provides is a reminder of the rejection of the feminist and queer theory of neutrality and universalism in spectating, moving towards a situated and often plural acknowledgement of the politics of subject-positions, and the formations of meaning they compel.⁴ In this manner, a

⁴ In addition to Doyle's work, see, for example, the work of Amelia Jones on visibility and identification, *Seeing Differently* (2012), or Jose Esteban Munoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2009).

formal examination of authorship constitutes criticism's politicisation, but does hinder its processes of becoming. As I contend in the thesis, this is fundamental to understanding how dissensus, a making visible by distinction oppositional to consensus, is a productive critical strategy under neoliberalism, and how these works pursue a rejection of consensus, on account of what they make appear.

Building on the work of Sontag on the exposures of interpretation and subjectivity, I am interested in practices of performance criticism for how they move from performance, and constitute readerly, or aural, spaces of sociality. Whilst these works share a dialogue with performance work, they also engage in alternative processes of visibility, exposing the event of interpretation in a wider political fabric, as opposed to a commitment to the appearance of the work. Performance criticism does not seek to serve the work, but rather, meet it; dialogue with it; speak from it. As Radosavljević argues, it is important to understand the operations of criticism in relation to their contexts; but my proposition moves beyond this. I want to understand these forms of criticism in their relationship to both politics and aesthetics; and it is this openness to interpretation that resists market value.

The matter of criticism, and its practice

The research presented here derives from my own participation in an expanding community of artists, writers and thinkers whose work is often excluded from public discussions on the shape of contemporary criticism, but who take an active part within it. Although characterised by fraught and multiple relationships to the word 'criticism', this is a nomadic community; some have emerged as a result of disappointment with

the shrinking word counts of newspapers, others with a lack of space for formal experimentation in publications, and some have sought to take a different approach to writing, given the increasingly palpable issue of funding and sustainability. With a number of case studies of performance criticism in this thesis, I move across territories: from the polemic of Michael Billington to a text published in a Live Art newsletter under a pseudonym; in this way, I show how performance criticism occupies an existing ecology that often seeks to occlude alternative structures of work and thinking. The radical gesture of performance criticism is its concern with political deliberation.

I want to tackle the problem of criticism as a term, and its porosity, in the hope of expressing what might be contained in what I refer to here as performance criticism. For it is worth noting that the works presented in this thesis do not always take a position or encounter their relationship to criticism; nevertheless, what I mean to express here is a commonality that does not attempt to be exclusive to the practice of criticism, but diversify its formal implications, and its cultural gesturing.

To speak of performance criticism is also to invoke the importance and legacy of *Performance Magazine*, a publication that ran between 1979 and 1992, funded by Arts Council England⁵ and founded by long-standing editor Rob La Fresnais, who worked on the publication until 1987. The publication is unique for several reasons: for its support from the Arts Council over a long period of time, for its increasing formalisation of criticism, drawing on conventions from theatre and visual art, and for its bringing together of a range of practices under the umbrella of performance, including

⁵All issues of the publication have been recently digitised. A collaboration between founding editor Rob La Fresnais and Live Art Development Agency, *Performance Magazine Online* provides access to all 66 issues. <http://www.performancemagazine.co.uk/>

experimental theatre, installation and live art. Its chronicling of performance and its shape-shifting iterations against the background of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government established performance criticism as an engaged activity, openly reactive to neoliberalism as it was taking shape. For this reason, I will come back to *Performance Magazine* later in this study.

For the purposes of my unpacking of performance criticism, I want to briefly mention its closing editorial for the double issue in 1992, by Chairman Chrissie Iles and Secretary Gray Watson. Speaking to the reason for the suspension of activity, the editorial mentions the changing financial climate, which has resulted in the need for 'an injection of capital on quite a different scale' ('Editorial' 1992) in order to sustain the current form and ambitions of the publication. In a moving closing statement, the editorial suggests that priorities seem to lie not in finding radically new ways of seeing and reshaping the world – which is *Performance Magazine's* principal *raison d'être* – but in a need to adapt and make existing structures work 'as well as possible' (1992). The editorial ends on a hopeful note, speaking to the need of a 'radical cultural climate' (1992) that supports the economic demands of such a publication, yet recent history has a different story to tell.

This expression of criticism's demand against the backdrop of a radical cultural climate has multiple echoes. As I will discuss in the thesis, the past ten years have not evidenced an increased support for this kind of criticism in the public sphere, although the work has shown its energy, adaptiveness and political prowess. There's something more deeply embedded in the language of the final editorial that pertains to an ambition: of making performance criticism an engaged, radical act. It is here where our trouble-

makers depart, and this is the challenge they take on. It is also where we find the politicisation of criticism, and its expression as a reaction to a challenging cultural and governmental landscape.

Performance Magazine's omission from most British scholarship on criticism is striking, as is that of the majority of works contained within this thesis. My contention is that this omission emerges for two reasons: one, the porosity and implied categorisation the term performance holds, which emerges paradigmatically with the term theatre criticism; and two, the conflation of theatre criticism with reviewing to a homogenising extent. For this reason, I approach the works gathered in this thesis by means of their autonomies as sites for the production of meaning, and point to the kinds of exposures they make visible, which also mark them as peripheral practices, but nevertheless as key to radical liberal and democratic politics of deliberation.

As we have come to see throughout this Introduction, theorisations of criticism often emerge across multiple disciplinary contexts. Such examples are the work of Jane Rendell, Gavin Butt or Amelia Jones, cited here, emerging from architecture and visual cultures. We might also think of the specificity of art and literature as a fervent ground for the articulation of criticism, particularly its periodisation. This is evident in the work of scholars like Terry Eagleton (2009) and Ronan MacDonald (2010), who foreground the changing paradigms of criticism's cultural task in light of wider attitudes surrounding judgement. In art criticism, this is evident in recent publications like *Judgment in Contemporary Art Criticism* (Khonsary and O'Brian 2010) or *Spaces for Criticism: Shifts in Contemporary Art Discourses* (Lijster, Milevska, Gielen and Sondregger 2015). Scholarship on criticism in theatre and performance has been

focused on discussions surrounding legitimacy, authority and the changing paradigms of criticism. Radosavljević's collection is evidently a key participant in this area, providing a grounded overview of a changing field. It follows contributions that are notably from those who practice criticism in mainstream media: Irving Wardle (1992), Michael Billington (2001), Nicholas Dromgoole (2010), Andrew Haydon (in Rebellato 2013) and Mark Fisher (2015). In other contexts, Karen Fricker has contributed to the subject of theatre criticism in Canada (2015, 2016), and Jill Dolan in the US has been key in establishing feminist theatre criticism as a particular area of focus (1988, 2013).⁶ Radosavljević speaks to this historical grounding, proposing that it was not for a 'few decades to come' that the effects of 'a shift from the primacy of text' in mainstream media became visible, as a result of the rise of Theatre and Performance Studies in the second half of the twentieth century. This crosspollination, I will show, makes itself known when we look at practices marginal to those of mainstream media, whose orientations are more in line with the radical ambitions of *Performance Magazine*. It is in this landscape that I position the term performance criticism, not as a form of exclusion, but as a way of denoting a wider umbrella for the practices which sit within it, whilst acknowledging the distinct genealogies of theatre criticism as journalistic and literary.⁷ The works I examine here share formal and political concerns, and do not self-identify with a specific practice of criticism.

⁶ It is notable that, with the exception of Radosavljević, Dolan and Fricker, the majority of the literature on theatre criticism is authored by men. This reflects their long-standing dominance in newspaper criticism since its inception in the eighteenth century, and the power of masculinist political rationalities in creating cultures of exclusion that omit the centrality of affect and subjectivity in democratic deliberation.

⁷ Arguments for this are found in historical accounts of dramatic criticism, by Charles W. Meister in 1917 and S. R. Littlewood in 1939. Both publications cast their net more widely to consider other writing on dramatic arts from within the literary canon, yet remain concentrated on reviewing as a fundamental contemporary manifestation of criticism.

Within this study, I build on Roland Barthes' definition of criticism:

criticism is not at all a table of results or a body of judgments; it is essentially an activity, i.e. a series of intellectual acts profoundly committed to the historical and subjective existence of the man [or woman] who performs them. (1987: 12)

I find, in Barthes' articulation, a deliberate transgression of criticism, from a professional endeavour of cultural valuation to a practice and activity of thinking. I see three characteristics that emerge as fundamental for this definition of criticism: a process of thought that begins with the encounter with a performance, a set of relationships emergent from that encounter, and an interest in deliberation, which takes the form of a response. This engagement with criticism accounts for the possibility of its plurality, without denying its cultural role, distinct professional iterations or genealogies. I have already spoken about the challenges of articulating criticism that result from its contextual scholarly analysis. Of equal significance, particularly emergent in theatre criticism, is the dominance of reviewing, to the point of exclusivity.

This is evident in the key figures often recounted in theatre criticism, whose foregrounding of reviewing has had a lasting impact. William Hazlitt, Kenneth Tynan or Irving Wardle were all engaged in criticism in mainstream media. Hazlitt undertook his first professional job as a theatre critic for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1913, proceeding to write for *The Times* and the *Examiner*. Tynan started his career at the *Evening Standard*, proceeding to write for the *Observer* and the *New Yorker*. Wardle worked for *The Times* and the *Independent*, amongst others. Their accounting of criticism is inherently tied to this professional experience; whilst this historicisation evidences the deep-rooting of

theatre criticism in journalistic practice, it also exposes the enmeshment of the review in this context with economic pressures; at the same time, this remains an under-examined tension in mainstream theatre criticism, where reviewing often acts as a totalising formal remit. Mark Fisher tackles this subject in the introduction to *How to Write About Theatre*, marking the tension between critics and reviewers. He proposes that a reviewer is 'the voice of the theatregoer' whilst the critic is engaged in more deep thinking, 'someone who presents reflections that set the production in a broader context' (2015: 7). However, this is problematic; it contends a false paradigm for the purposes of marking a professional distinction. The side effect is an implied hierarchy of value that does not account for the role of subjectivity in criticism, or the scope of the writing. This is further evidenced in Fisher's argument that a critic is anyone who steps beyond 'the purely experiential' (2015: 8). Yet to speak of the experiential is not to deny critical acuity.

Croatian theatre scholar Sanja Nikcevic provides a more medium-specific definition of reviewing, one that positions it as a genre of criticism. For Nikcevic, the review needs to be written shortly following a performance, be evaluative in scope, provide information, explanation and description of the performance (2014).⁸ Nikcevic is interested in capturing a professional articulation of reviewing shared across different iterations of criticism, yet its disclosure of temporality is also indicative of a newspaper-style approach. The focus on evaluation also forecloses the porousness between description and explanation. Both Fisher's and Nikcevic's approaches are indicative of the power that reviewing holds in delineations of criticism and its professional reach. Both also

⁸ This definition was delivered as part of the International Association of Theatre Critics Congress, 'A New World: The Profession of Criticism in the Internet Era', which took place in Beijing in 2014.

move away from an engagement with subjectivity that discloses a dominance of journalistic strategies in much thinking about criticism, and the legitimacy of alternative approaches. I am reminded of the landscape Radosavljević speaks of, which charts the dominance of newspaper criticism in parallel to the rise of online criticism. These iterations stretch what might be constituted by professional criticism. I chose 'performance criticism' to account for a wider plurality of forms of criticism that, whilst rejecting paradigms of professionalism, also take active part within those domains.

My engagement with the term criticism here seeks to displace the centrality of such claims over its professional boundaries. What I propose in this study is that the forms of criticism presented examine their relationship to performance, and place equal emphasis on form and content of criticism. As I will show, the politicisation of criticism emerges at the point where subjectivity and criticality meet.⁹

The genealogies of subjectivity's role in criticism stretch beyond the postmodernist moment that Gavin Butt speaks of in *After Criticism*, where he brings together practices that disclose their imbrication in the cultural moment, and account for multiple positioning. Performative writing also shares an interest in exploring what subjectivity has to offer for thinking from performance, whilst not always engaged in explicit critical argumentation. Alongside the practices constructed in *Performance Magazine*, this interrelating of subjectivity and criticality is instrumental in establishing the groundwork for a different engagement with performance, at times desiring autonomy from it, and at others intimacy.

⁹ I understand criticality as an engaged activity of thinking both analytical and reflexive. Irit Rogoff speaks of criticality in this manner, as that which 'brings together that being studied and those doing the studying' (2006: 2).

The articulation of performance criticism I speak of here is contingent on its belonging to a wider practice of criticism. By this, I mean a plural set of approaches to critical thinking from, and with, performance. In these instances, criticism is not always professionally oriented, or formally traceable, but makes itself visible in its disclosure of thought, in the exposing of modes of work, and in an interest in collectivity and deliberation.

By way of orientation: methodology and terms

Criticism as a Political Event draws on two intersecting theoretical frameworks: political philosophy and performance scholarship. In political philosophy, I locate a shared concern across the work of Hannah Arendt, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, and Jacques Rancière with radical liberal democracy in a collective, plural process of politics constituted in the public realm. I draw connections between Arendt's philosophy of appearance, Mouffe and Laclau's agonism and Rancière's dissensus as recognitions of the ways in which radical political practice is already embedded in a politics of visibility complicated by the rise of neoliberalism in the UK. In close relation, I look at models of deliberative democratic theories in the work of Jürgen Habermas and Nancy Fraser, and root my analysis in revisionist feminist historiography of the eighteenth century, which exposes the exclusion of affect from the notion of political rationality. By means of these theoretical frameworks, I examine how the work of trouble-makers gathered here is a recuperation of the democratic project rooted in the *sensus communis* of the eighteenth century, but also one that breaks this apart, operating as a site of resistance to neoliberalism. I also draw on the work of Wendy Brown to examine how neoliberalism

operates as a political rationality that enmeshes the wider ecology of criticism in the UK. To this end, I turn to examinations of neoliberalism in performance and artistic practice in the work of Jen Harvie, Shannon Jackson, Bojana Kunst and Gregory Sholette, whose shared concern for locating modes of resistance is fundamental to my argument here.

In this manner, I speak of performance criticism as a practice enmeshed in a wider ecology of criticism that crosses disciplinary thresholds; my contribution to knowledge is not only an examination of the project of radical democracy in contemporary peripheral forms of criticism, but also a bringing together of contemporary debates and discourses on criticism from disciplines adjacent to theatre, notably, visual art, literary criticism and visual cultures, through the work of Mieke Bal, Gavin Butt and Jennifer Doyle. I approach performance criticism by paying close attention to its emergence from an ecology of practices, on account of the fact that its distinct politicisation occurs as a reaction to established traditions and practices; and that by looking at debates adjacent to theatre criticism, we might understand how a cross-disciplinary conversation on what is rendered visible as criticism as political project is taking shape.

Methodologically, the thesis draws from performance philosophy, an emergent, interdisciplinary field of scholarship that examines the relations between performance and philosophy. Performance philosophy, a 'critical activity of thinking undertaken in, through and around certain forms of theatre and performance making' (Fisher 2016: 3), is articulated methodologically in the analysis of and approach to reading the forms of criticism presented here. In other words, *Criticism as a Political Event* is interested in how criticism *thinks* and *constructs* the political, in its plural dialogues with

performance. In line with this, I examine instances of performance criticism as they emerge from wider ecologies of practice by means of case studies.

I have approached the analysis of criticism presented here by means of this methodological grounding; this is neither a comparative study, in which performances and the responses to them are situated side by side, nor a close reading of these experimental forms of criticism. My analysis is centred on criticism as an event. By this, as I will argue in this thesis, I propose that these forms of criticism are experienced, and constitute phenomena of meaning. On the one hand, the critical responses respond to, and are in dialogue with, performance. On the other, they express meaning independently of that encounter. My analysis, then, concerns itself with how that meaning is constructed, expressed and encountered. I am reminded here of writer Tamarin Norwood on the subject of performance's coming into being through writing. 'Being written gives the performed thing the simultaneous immediacy and distance of language', she proposes, 'by which its separation from the world permits the fullness of its expression' ('The Writing of Performance' 2010: 9). It is in the interplay between this coming into being and the thinking posed by its meaning-making processes that this thesis turns to the study of experimental and marginal forms of criticism.

Performance scholarship has addressed the complexities that mark the encounter with performance by foregrounding the interplay between materiality and semioticity. Erika Fisher-Lichte deploys the term 'autopoietic feedback loop' to constitute the shift from the work of performance into the performance event. The autopoietic feedback loop is a process of meaning in which 'perception grasps something as something [...] whose meaning is subsequently attributed' (2008: 141). I am interested here in how Fischer-

Lichte notes the rupture between the 'emergent phenomena' of performance and its 'predetermined contexts' (2008: 143). This disconnection evidences the multiple authorial processes that occur simultaneously in the encounter with performance. This is also the point from which I begin; it is through the work of the trouble-makers presented here that I make a case for the critic as attentive spectator, but also one who invites this simultaneity in the fabric of their own writing, and makes possible spaces for deliberation that think with and from it.

Art writer and theorist Mieke Bal speaks of her encounter with an artwork in similar terms. In *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art Writing*, Bal engages in procedural thinking that follows the outlines contained in a number of works by the artist Louise Bourgeois. Bal deploys narrative as a way of making architecture *mean* within the artwork. Such an encounter is relevant here for the ways in which it is constituted by and through the text, reflecting on the spectatorial implications of two simultaneous events: that of writing, and that of the encounter with the work. Let's take, for a moment, the following passage:

Over this piece of fabric, the enormous spider's leg that is nearest to it curves back to the fabric, duplicating in three-dimensional space the S-shape of the missing part of the woman's body. This leg is the only one that goes back to the cage and stays there. Of the seven legs, the other six bend toward the cage, in a variety of curves, then at the last moment, hover or recede. All seven legs are clearly lively, contributing to the counterpoint of the ancient, woven architecture: they embody anti regularity. (Bal 2001: 11)

Shifting between the poetics of the artwork, and constitutive of its own poetics, Bal's writing is exemplary for its weaving of subjectivity and criticality; it both follows the work and makes the work appear through the writing. Formally, it invites the reader into an encounter that is its own event, whilst simultaneously disclosing the artwork it

is in dialogue with. We can see how the meaning-making process that Fischer-Lichte fleshes out in *The Transformative Power of Performance* is echoed in this encounter, which posits its own, performative engagement with an artwork. The text makes palpable the specificity of the critic's own embodied experience, whilst also disclosing a multiplicity of reference points not solely emergent from within the artwork.

There is a parallel emerging between the articulation of meaning-making in performance, and the event of critical writing. This is fundamental to the method deployed in engaging with the forms of criticism presented here. These are characterised by singular (and in the case of digital, or collaboratively authored, texts, multiple) textual landscapes which contain a plurality of references and events beyond the performance itself. These are also framed by their expression as an event of criticism. In other words, they acknowledge the rupture that Fischer-Lichte locates as residing between the emergence of phenomena and their predetermined contexts. This is, I will argue, where their political potential also lies: in their ability to sustain critical precision and remain open to multiple authorial journeys from the reader herself.

Of importance, then, is to show that criticism does not operate representationally, but through its own formative, phenomenological processes of appearance. It also does not operate in a manner that is literary, despite its engagement with language. Instead, to speak of how these particular forms of criticism operate is to speak of how they perform. Caroline Bergvall's beautiful phrase echoes here, one that reminds us to understand textual contemporaneity through the many 'criss-crossings of sophisticated skills borne out of [these disciplinary] histories' (1996: 2). By this, I mean to say it is imperative to understand how these forms of criticism express an event away from

performance. My choice of periodisation serves to express this: I map out political shifts in relation to cultural conflicts of legitimacy of criticism in the public realm, and see these as equally significant to the emergence of the practices I gather here.

At this stage, I want to foreground how I deploy the term performance in the context of this work, and my engagement with its theoretical axes. The works compiled here stretch, as I have mentioned, across several disciplinary boundaries; some emerge grounded through performance writing, whilst others are firmly rooted in the terrains of theatre criticism. I use performance as an umbrella term for a wide range of artistic practices that are foregrounded through these forms of criticism, including those that might align themselves with theatre, as well as Live Art.¹⁰ This approach is not to deny the specificity of the works in question, but to account for their interpretive openness. I draw on Fischer-Lichte's definition of performance as an event that comes into being 'by the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators, by their encounter and interaction'

¹⁰ A more in-depth discussion of the emergence of the term Live Art can be found in Johnson's *Critical Live Art* and Heddon and Klein's *Histories of Live Art in the UK*. My engagement and use of live art in the thesis accounts for the ways in which it sets an important precedent for the emergence of performance criticism's relationship to writing from or about work. I discuss this in Chapter Two in relation to the work of critical writing project *Writing from Live Art*, and the emergence of Spill Festival of Performance and its collaboration with *Open-Dialogues*, which fostered a critical, experimental culture. Performance criticism encompasses the range of approaches to writing constituted within live art, on account of the often interchangeable use of the terms 'performance', 'performance art' and 'live art' (Johnson 2013a: 12). My intention here is not to delineate criticism solely focused on live art, but inclusive of developments within the practice. In discussing its origins, both Heddon and Klein (2012: 12) and Johnson (2013a: 19) point to the slippery nature of the term and its relationship to cultural politics. This might mark Live Art as a contradictory phenomenon, for its relationship to cultural marginalisation comes despite its status as a cultural sector, following incentives such as LADA; however, as Johnson points out, this is not to single out a particular kind of political efficiency to the work. Johnson argues that Live Art is often 'caught in the interstices of institutional remits, sectors, histories and markets', pointing to the relationship of larger organisations such as the Tate and their omission of such work on the basis of particular art histories. Yet Johnson's position is of relevance here, for the ways in which it carefully considers the overlap between Live Art's emergence and the development of the sector, vis-à-vis wider cultural politics that have shaped policy since the nineties. The result is often a confusion surrounding the political dimension of Live Art's presumed mobility, yet the effect has sometimes been a lack of benefits for "'properly" marginal subjects' (Johnson 2013a: 25). My engagement with Live Art accounts for the ways in which it offered a deliberate conflation between attempts to mark out a sector of work and to flesh out a critical paradigm that joins up certain practices. It is at this interstice that space was made for criticism's own formal explorations, as I will show in Chapter Two.

(2004: 3). This is important for the study, as it foregrounds the ways in which many of the practices discussed here engage with the embodied encounter of performance, in a playful process of iteration of the multiple 'meanings that come into being' (2004: 4). Fischer-Lichte's articulation of performance seeks to delineate the unstable and intersubjective nature of its meaning-making. This is precisely where the trouble-makers enter the encounter with performance. At the same time, I use this openness to approach discussions on criticism from adjacent disciplines, where these expose the political or aesthetic commitments of the case studies; this is also on the proviso that neoliberalism's coercive operations place these different ecologies in tension and dialogue with each other. This is best understood by the ways in which many of the cultural workers I speak of here traverse different professional and disciplinary territories.

It is no coincidence that the performances with which these works concern themselves undertake their own political investigations. Here I am referring specifically to a notion of politics that is porous, and that sustains not opposition, but different forms of antagonism. This is most recently examined in Tony Fisher and Eve Katsouraki's *Performing Antagonism*. In the introduction to the collection, Fisher makes a compelling case for an ontological probing of the political; one that takes account of antagonism not as oppositional, but as taking a 'radical democratic' form of engagement (2017: 5).

Whilst the book attempts to articulate the political in terms of its 'contingency, its constitutive openness, its arbitrariness and its unpredictability' (2017: 4), it also, importantly, does not collapse performance into politics, or politics into performance, by probing their similarities. Instead, it asks not what these practices say, but 'what they show' (2017: 7). I am interested in maintaining this distinction precisely for the ways in

which it accounts for different processes of visibility. I depart from Fisher's articulation of politics in that my interest is not in locating the agonistic power of performances (2017: 6), constituted at the interstice between politics and tragedy; my focus is to flesh out how these forms of criticism articulate a dissensus, understood as 'a conflict about [...] what has to be heard as the voice of pain, and what has to be heard as an argument on justice' (Rancière 2011: 12). This is contingent on understanding the different kinds of thinking performed by our trouble-makers.

Criticism is not inherently political for its engagement with, or contention of, value, or its making visible of meaning. It becomes political, as I will show in the thesis, in its constitution of productive conflicts of meaning that navigate between the encounter with performance, and the encounter with a wider world. Here we might distinguish, then, between politics as a paradigm of understanding criticism, and criticism that operates politically. It is the latter, I argue, that emerges through the criticism presented here. To borrow from Fisher's notion, it is the construction of a 'politics of the visible' (2017: 17) of criticism. It is, then, the audibility of marginal forms of criticism that I make a claim for here.

Whilst my engagement is not with the possible expression of this fabric of authorship in the criticism presented here, this dimension of the political is important to account for. It evidences the ways in which the social and political operate. It would be naïve to claim that what Mouffe terms 'conflictual consensus' (2013: 9) is not emergent in criticism; my contention, however, is that it does so through subjective criticality,¹¹ and

¹¹ It is important to acknowledge that postmodernism constituted a view of subjectivity wrapped in conflicts over autonomy. As Nick Mansfield's account of postmodernist theorisation of subjectivity makes clear, identity is 'neither liberating nor expressive of our selfhood, as much as a trap, something to be

resists making claims for performance as a public good by assuming both performance and criticism as public goods, and as vehicles for political participation.

I have spoken of the methodological orientations of this thesis, of my deployment of the terms performance and politics. In locating how performance philosophy acts as a methodological springboard for the analysis of criticism, I have identified the ways in which I will approach my analysis of the case studies chosen here, and referenced the importance of acknowledging the instability of performance's own processes of meaning-making, before encountering the ways criticism articulates these. I have accounted for the position of the subject, i.e. the author of criticism, in relation to my engagement with the political, whilst emphasising that my focus remains on how the works themselves think and, in turn, become politicised.

Thesis structure

Criticism as a Political Event is divided into six chapters, each introducing a different aspect of performance criticism, and shaped around a case study. The first two chapters examine the emergence of performance criticism's formal experimentation; the next two consider its engagement with the event of meaning and collectivity; and the final two look at its positioning across multiple deliberative spaces in the contemporary

frustrated and deconstructed' (2000: 172). However, posthuman notions of subjectivity account more broadly for this enmeshment of the subject with struggles of power, desire and technology. Haraway's development of subjectivity through the figure of the cyborg offers a more reconciliatory account of difference through a commitment to 'partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity' (1991: 151). Haraway's positing of the cyborg as an 'oppositional consciousness' (1991: 156) provides an alternative conception of subjectivity that places emphasis on coalitions and interconnections (Mansfield 2000: 160). I draw on this implication of subjectivity for its accounting of difference; it is not a conceptual grounding, but an exposure of the possibilities offered by the term, and the resonances I carry with me in the thesis.

neoliberal public sphere. In this way, I move from form, to event, and finally to dissent.

Chapter One examines the formal development of performance criticism as a practice, building on the groundwork laid in this Introduction. I examine the intellectual contexts that shaped a formal concern with subjective criticality, and look at alternative conceptualisations of critical writing in the work of performance writing and *Performance Magazine*. I expound on how appearance and autonomy of meaning, as well as a politics of dissent, came to shape much of the landscape of performance criticism in the early noughties.

In Chapter Two, I look at the emergent formalisations of performance criticism by examining a cultural shift in the context of Live Art, looking specifically at the project *Writing from Live Art*, an influential programme for writers and thinkers that marked a turning point in the recent history of performance criticism, by making evident a conceptual orientation towards the event of meaning, its multiple threads, and its intent in plurality. In Chapter Three I look at how performance criticism stages such multiple events of meaning, drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt on appearance. I argue that the event of criticism is contained in the encounter with performance and the reflection that follows, and emerges in often conflicting and unresolved exposures of thought.

In Chapter Four, I engage with a live, digital, multi-authored collective critical project to consider how this form of performance criticism politicises appearance, and exposes the subject at work. I specifically examine the question of collective work under neoliberalism, drawing on the work of Wendy Brown and Bojana Kunst, and look at some of the structuring conditions of production that performance criticism engages

with and, at times, seeks to resist. In Chapter Five, I explore the porousness of performance criticism in the public sphere, by turning to an examination of feminist revisionist historiography of the eighteenth century, in order to expound on alternative, discursive publics of that time. I look at how performance criticism constitutes counterpublics by means of its engagement with deliberative democracy, and I examine this in reference to the work of Nancy Fraser.

In my final chapter, I consider how performance criticism constitutes a political event, drawing on the work of Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière, and with reference to a range of instances of its emergence in contemporary counterpublics. I explore orality and deliberation in forms of contemporary performance criticism, and conclude with an examination of the emergence of dissent in a critical response that speaks of the slippages of time and writing, performance and politics.

The thesis gathers multiple examples of performance criticism, which are further contextualised in relation to developments in mainstream theatre criticism. To this end, the case studies I collect here concern: a text about a 20-minute silence (Mary Paterson, 2011) in Chapter Two; a critical response to an event within an event (Eleanor Hadley Kershaw, 2009) in Chapter Three; a collectively authored digital project (*Quizoola LIVE!*, 2014) in Chapter Four; a text on Prince Harry as a guerrilla performance artist written under a pseudonym (Chris Riding, 2010) in Chapter Five; and a critical response to a performance about searching for lost magnetic tape in the city (Theron Schmidt, 2011). In addition to these, further case studies of performance criticism present across the thesis include: in the work of *Performance Magazine*, digital, multi-authored projects *Spill:Stings* and *Spill:Overspill* (2011b/2099), *Dialogues's* festival of conversation and

performance work (*Talking/Making/Taking Part*, 2014), Rajni Shah's collaborative *Experiments in Listening* (2015), the work of duo *The White Pube* (2015– current), *Open-Dialogues* (2007–2015), *Something Other* (2014–current), *Critical Interruptions* (2015–current), the activities of Pacitti Company's *Think Tank* (2014–current) and the publishing intervention of biennial *Live Art Almanac* (2010–current). I argue that these works constitute a radical politicisation of the event of criticism, and engage in their analysis by means of how they expose the activities of thinking and interpretation, and how they constitute spaces of possibility for radical democratic politics, departing, but also thinking through, and from, performance. This set of examples also evidences the formal breadth of performance criticism: from publishing activity to digital projects; embedded in existing structures, or constituting new ones. I have paid particular attention to the different relationships to performance, explicit or implicit, that the case studies themselves hold; these works are nonconforming precisely because of their rupture with traditions of criticism. As such, they emerge from a varied set of contexts, including project-specific publications, online projects, temporary websites, limited-series print publications, and are rooted in the alternative cultures of the eighteenth century and the commitment to form and appearance of the modernist project of interpretation. Furthermore, not all the examples gathered here are textual or linear. For the purposes of clarity, I have provided an Appendix where I have not used the full text or work. Whilst performance criticism's explicit concern for the event begins in its probing and stretching the material fabric of language, and the means of writing, it moves to the realm of the aural, multi-authored and collectively constituted.

Chapter One

Performance Criticism and Form as Appearance

In my Introduction, I drew a parallel between the pressures on cultural valorisation, which emerged at a time of austerity and shifts in cultural policy in the UK, and the development of criticism, with respect to its distinct diversification, most notably online (Radosavljević 2016). Introducing the work of embedded and horizontal criticism, I pointed to the role this repositioning of criticism in relation to performance had in making visible changing concerns of the practice. I foregrounded performance criticism as a diverse set of practices that hold in common their relationship to investigating intersections of performance and criticism, notably with a view to examining both the nature of the encounter with performance, and criticism's own formal processes of meaning-making. Shared across these practices of criticism is a concern for the criticality emergent in both the experience of the work, and the contexts that frame it.

In this chapter, I examine the context that gave rise to performance criticism's expressed interest in form. I then propose that this is constitutive of a shift away from evaluation, and towards the exploration of a subjective criticality, one that displaces the centrality of the figure of the critic in discussions surrounding theatre criticism.

I first look at how the visibility of particular intellectual conditions that came to govern the practice of theatre criticism was a result of the public conflicts over professionalisation and legitimacy that came to dominate the early noughties. As I argue, the emergent plurality of practices of performance criticism and their emphasis

on formal concerns can be seen as a response to this conflict. I then trace the roots of performance criticism's formal diversification with a different conceptualisation of the politics of writing that emerged in the late nineties in the UK at Dartington College through performance writing (Hall 2013), and took to expounding on the performativity of writing itself. Unfolding in parallel with *Performance Magazine's* concern for discursivity, I show how and why appearance and autonomy, care and dissent, came to govern much of the thinking of these trouble-makers in the early noughties. Ultimately, I propose that what distinguishes performance criticism is its interest in creating discursive arenas over engaging in acts of cultural valuation.

Objectivity and the figure of the critic

The early noughties bring together the emergent practice of performance criticism and traditional models of theatre criticism in public debates on legitimisation. In my Introduction, I focused on two such key moments: 2007, as the year in which the *Guardian* commissions its blogging overview series, *Noises Off*, as well as the establishing of *Open-Dialogues* as the first self-reflective collaboration involving two critics; and 2012, as the point of convergence between conflicts over the de-professionalisation of criticism and its function in mainstream media. I argued that performance criticism is a mode of relating practices that seek to foreground how subjectivity can enable criticality, and opt for models of collaboration that consider the event of criticism.

In 2007, spurred by a set of mixed reactions to Emma Rice's adaptation of *A Matter of Life and Death*, artistic director of the National Theatre Nicholas Hytner accused

criticism of being undertaken by 'dead white men' ('Are the critics strangling theatre?', *Guardian*, 2007). Speaking to the prevalent sexism in reviews and citing the example of Katie Mitchell, Hytner, himself a white man, also decried the long tenures of critics like Michael Billington at newspapers. His accusation unfolds through two lines of argument: the sexism resulting from a predominantly white and male theatre-criticism establishment, and the problematic duration of positions that make renewal and access difficult. However, there is an additional, and relevant, dimension to the accusation: that more diversity in criticism implies parity, without considering the representational politics hidden within objectivity.

In response to his comments, Billington, in role since 1971, made a case for independent criticism that offers 'some kind of verdict on plays and theatrical policy' ('I may be a white male, but I'm not dead yet, Mr Hytner', *Guardian*, 2007a). Here, Billington conflates independence with intellect, not circumstance, asserting that the only possible use of independence is judgement in the form of a verdict. Billington's remark is telling in the ways in which it conflates a critic's independence with a depoliticised view of objective judgement, despite an institutional posting at a left-wing newspaper, an explicit political bias. In an article written the same year on the status of blogs as distinctly different to theatre criticism, Billington makes the connection between independence and objectivity explicit. He states that 'the professional critic is no longer regarded [...] as a lone, ivory-tower expert. We are all now exposed,' he argues, 'to the democratic hurly-burly of blogs, where our opinions can be countered, corrected, reviled [...]' ('Who needs reviews?', *Guardian*, 2007b). Billington argues for the demise of the critic as expert on account of her increasing accountability. In doing so, he also creates an exclusion: professional critics are called into question by bloggers and, as

such, can never be bloggers themselves. This is evident further in his article, where he marks this distinction explicitly: 'the critic, unlike the blogger, also has a duty to set any play or performance in its historical context' (ibid.). This widens the gap between professional criticism, which has a duty to contextualise, and blogging, which is not affected by the same pressures.

Having marked this distinction, Billington ends the article by stating that 'professional critics live or die by their independence of mind and ability to string a few sentences together'. His constructed binary makes this a damning sentence, where independent thinking and good writing are markers of professionalism, not blogging. Billington creates a contradiction in his argument: whilst he points to the demise of expertise, he does so on the basis of accountability, which does not, by itself, refute that authority, but merely calls it into question. Yet by holding critics accountable, bloggers, in Billington's argument, only serve to reinforce their ivory-tower position, by also being removed from the pressures of certain duties reserved for this elite. This further contradicts his response to Hytner's comments, where he uses courtroom language to expound on a critic's importance. Billington places himself in the position of judge, a single point of authority. His arguments on criticism evidence how objectivity often conceals dominant subjectivities at the occlusion of others in theatre criticism, and reinforces a singular figure of authority.

There is a further aspect to the discussion that has relevance for how objectivity is constructed as an intellectual condition of criticism, one paradigmatic to subjectivity. In the same response piece as Billington, Lyn Gardner answers Hytner's comments by acknowledging the gender divide within criticism. 'The profession remains male-

dominated (“male, pale and stale” is how it is often described)’, she argues. Gardner adds that there has been a diversification of points of entry into newspaper criticism, ‘not only by the traditional Oxbridge route, but via the rise of listings magazines. (‘Nicholas Hytner is right: theatre criticism is too male-dominated’, *Guardian*, 2007). However, she focuses attention away from the gender divide to a critic’s lack of diversity of taste as an equal contributor to the problem. She critiques those who assume that if they ‘trawl the fringe for long enough, they may eventually end up as a first string critic and never have to venture beyond the West End again’. Gardner speaks fondly of colleagues who continue to venture out beyond the West End to gain a ‘wider frame of reference’. What makes good, balanced criticism, she proposes, is the ability to continue to encounter a varied cultural landscape.

Gardner’s argument draws a false distinction between routes into criticism and diversity of taste. In her acknowledgement of the gender issue in newspaper criticism, she fails to fully account for questions of race, ability and class, and how these, in turn, affect the ways a critic engages with and articulates a varied cultural landscape. In her argument, Gardner conflates diversity of taste with that of subjectivities. Similarly to Billington’s upholding of the figure of the critic as sole expert on cultural value, Gardner dismisses the relevance of a plurality of vectors of experience in producing knowledge. Both views dismiss the importance of the experiential on account of a critic’s presumed objectivity.

This debate evidences the ways in which discussions of criticism’s lack of diversity, particularly in the case of newspapers and mainstream media, are often conflated with models that favour the figure of the critic as the central issue. Hytner’s comments

critique the centrality of critics like Billington and their power over a show's commercial and, often, discursive life, by encouraging greater diversity and a shorter lifespan of critics in post. Yet the issue of a critic's monolithic position remains untouched and, as I have shown, is reinforced. In other words, objectivity is accounted for as a means of balanced critique, but, in its constitution across these discourses, paints a singular, authorial, exclusive and representational subjectivity.

In Mark Fisher's how-to guide, *How to Write About Theatre* (2015), these intellectual conditions emerge more formally as paradigms between objective and subjective, intimate and professional. 'If a critic's inevitable subjectivity,' he proposes, 'is backed by an informed perspective, one that takes into account what the theatremakers are attempting and what the production means in the greater scheme of things,' then you emancipate yourself from simply expressing 'a critic's ego' (2015: 244). Fisher argues that it is possible to transgress one's own subjectivity by means of balance, which is both a contextual view of a performance, and an awareness of its intent. Similarly to Gardner, this view fails to account for the multiplicity in which those experiential and analytical territories might be accounted for, and spoken about.

Further on, Fisher cautions against having 'friends in the wrong places', proposing that a way to overcome 'ambiguity' is to either avoid 'theatre people as much as possible', or use them as a way of gaining further insight and disclosing that position (2015: 245). There are two overlapping cautions here. On the one hand, there is a fine line between subjectivity and fuelling one's ego, which is best overcome by tuning into the production's 'meaning'. The other is that social intimacy with artists needs to be navigated with care, and requires disclosure. The established professionalism pertains

to objectivity's ability to enable critical focus, in the service of the audience; social intimacies or inward-looking criticism that does not capture the meaning of a performance are seen as problematic. The concentration remains on criticism's requirement to affix meaning, which reinforces the idea that there is a singular meaning to be communicated, and valued. It is also, at the same time, focused on objectivity, understood as a balance of context and intent which dismisses the need for subjectivity, yet fails to account for how context and intent can be articulated in the first place. The focus of Fisher's argument remains on the balanced critic, without considering the terms of that balance, or its problematic singularity.

There is precedent for the dominance of these associations within theatre criticism in this period. In the abovementioned article for the *Guardian* in September 2007 on critics versus bloggers, Billington argues that the critic's duty is to 'shut one's ears to the relentless din and simply judge a show on its merits'. In an article from February 2013 for *The Stage*, critic Mark Shenton argues that a critic is 'being paid for their opinion' ('Advice to a younger theatre critic', *The Stage*, 2013) and firstly responsible to 'those we are writing for, not about'. Both instances account for a critic's duty as being to their readers, but dismiss the significance of that accountability based on representation. The critic is cast as the expert who is able to discern between meaning and noise, and who is responsible for communicating that to his readers. Both examples associate objectivity with singularity, without accounting for its problematic nature within the realms of representation. This view further upholds the monolithic critic, but qualifies their objectivity through a balance of responsibility and critical acuity in deciphering meaning.

A report in the same year by Jane Edwardes for Drama Critics Circle, the UK arm of the International Association of Theatre Critics, about their conference celebrating the centenary of the organisation, further foregrounds the confluence of attitude and professional expectations. 'The importance of an independent voice was emphasised in the face of an increasingly powerful PR machine, which swamps the media,' she adds, 'with information about the dresses worn on the red carpet while the critical voice gets muffled' (Report, *The Critics Circle*, 2013). The argument is that public relations drown the public sphere in superficial noise, leaving little space for meaningful criticism.

Edwardes further points to participating newspaper critics as valuing their own 'professionalism', 'ability to write about any form of theatre' and 'vast experience of theatregoing', expressing concern about the potential insularity and 'academic' nature of online criticism, 'speaking to each other rather than to the wider theatregoing public' (ibid.). The latter point is particularly pertinent in the context of my examination here: the accusation that online criticism is academic and insular conflates language and form, suggesting that there is an appropriate language criticism might engage with (non-academic), which, in turn, limits the range of its accessibility (insular). As I have already explored, this also assumes a singular theatregoing public, rather than a diverse audience whose attention and interest span several sites of criticism, both online and print.

Edwardes' report further qualifies this when mentioning the first panel, whose membership is exclusively made up of employed newspaper critics, two of whom had recently lost their jobs, and only one of whom was about to be replaced with a temporary post. 'All five', she reports, 'spoke [...] about the need to be readable.' This

shows that the roots of this diagnosis goes beyond professional expectations of journalism as an open and accessible practice, without taking account of the changing interests of the readership, and its diversity.¹ This reluctance is further unsupported by the changing economic pressures on mainstream media, which open up a debate on criticism's role within a shrinking, fragmented and shifting public sphere. More importantly, it suggests that criticism has a duty only to this readership, dismissing the possibilities that formal developments might offer alternative strategies for engaging with performance work, or serving a diverse readership in multiple ways. A recurring consensus emerges across these sources, cautioning against the dangers of what is perceived to be inward-facing dialogue, or the pitfalls of subjectivity, which pertain to distracting away from a performance's meaning, in line with modes of thinking about critique that reside firmly in journalism.

A year earlier, in 2012, *Devoted and Disgruntled*, a long-running series of open conversations for those operating within theatre and performance, hosted a session led by critic Maddy Costa titled 'What dialogue can be set up between people who write about theatre and people who make it?'² In the report on the conversation, Costa points to two intersecting lines of enquiry: the first pertaining to makers wanting more from critics than evaluation – 'thoughtful engagement' being the term at hand; the second being a concern from critics that a majority of online writing 'follows the established mainstream press model'. The report focuses on the common interest of the gathered group, generating excitement at the idea that 'theatre writing/criticism could experiment with form, the way work we watch does', which might enable an

¹ See: Haydon, Andrew, 'A Brief History of Online Theatre Criticism in England' in Radosavljević, Duška, *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes* (2016).

² *Devoted and Disgruntled 7* took place at York Hall from 25–27 February 2012.

investigation into ‘the sculptural possibilities of writing’ (2012b). The Devoted and Disgruntled conversation gave rise to concrete projects, such as Costa and Jake Orr’s *Dialogue*, which I discussed in my Introduction, and captured a growing interest in two intersecting pathways: the formal development of criticism outside a mainstream press model, and the collapsing of some of the conditions that had come to shape contentious ideas around professionalism. Performance criticism arose not out of a desire to single out or legitimate alternative practices, but to retrace criticism’s formal concerns, in close affinity with its relationship to both subject and subjectivity.

In a dialogue piece with me for *Exeunt* in 2012, co-founder of the publication Daniel B. Yates best summarises what these conditions begin to show. ‘Mainstream or journalistic theatre criticism has been understood,’ he says, ‘as solely located in the priestly figure of “the critic” – a site which has suffered an unbearable trauma in recent years’ (‘A Roadmap’, *Exeunt*, 2012). The figure of the critic is central to public discussions on criticism’s survival and its perceived crisis because, to some extent, some of the debates pertain not to criticism’s survival, but to the sustainability of current mainstream media infrastructure, which is, by nature, inherently tailored towards singular expertise. What emerges seems paradoxical: a consensus in mainstream criticism over the pitfalls of subjectivity, because its journalistic roots, and reviewing’s own cultural functioning, come at the same time as the defending of the figure of the critic as an essential expert speaking both to and on behalf of the people. I propose that performance criticism emerges during this public conflict, as a concern not with the critic, but the event of criticism itself.

The critique levied at the intellectual conditions outlined here has different terms than the attack of the mainstream press on bloggers, which tends to concentrate on the insularity and inwardness of online criticism. Instead, performance criticism focuses on the need to establish a dialogue that enables both formal experimentation and an exploration of alternative practices of criticism that account for shifting structures of work, as I discuss in Chapter Four.

On the one hand, the early noughties see the rise of online criticism (Haydon in Radosavljević 2016) and a development of new models of criticism, notably Horwitz's horizontalism (2012), that openly embrace subjectivity. On the other, it is a period of public conflict over the remits of professional criticism, and the growing unease surrounding its visibility in mainstream media. What this shows is a messy emergence, one that points to a porous landscape. Performance criticism emerges as an alternative constituted by varying approaches to formal experimentation, which hold in common a rejection of valorisation as the central tenet of criticism, and a rejection of the monolithic associations tied to the figure of the critic.

Performance criticism: neoliberal intersections of theatre and art

The early noughties were a period in which debates surrounding the crisis of criticism emerged across fields of practice, from theatre to art, at the same time as the practice's diversification. In art, the tension between shifting concerns of criticism were becoming apparent, grounded in divergent historical ontologies. I briefly look at a notable instance in debates on art criticism, for what it marks as a shared interest in the shifting grounds of critique and its relationship to form. In 2002, *October* journal published an

influential roundtable discussion amongst contemporary critics, including Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloch, Hal Foster, George Baker and Andrea Fraser. Opening the discussion, Baker cites Paul De Man's essay on criticism as being in a constant state of crisis, a cycle of 'innovation and obsolescence' (2002: 200), characterised by competing tendencies and swift changes. What is shared across all positions in the discussion is the agreement that criticism has undergone significant conceptual and theoretical shifts prompted by a changing relationship between the art world and capitalism.

In the debate, Andrea Fraser, a key figure behind institutional critique, encourages a relevant distinction between 'different kinds of critical discourse and different kinds of writing about art' (2002: 202). Her argument centres around the umbrella cast over critique, and what is made visible by different agendas: the exclusion, for example, of essays written in art catalogues as a marketing tool, which moves them further away from a criterion of critique, or the relevance of the popular press when criticism becomes as wide as writing about art. Buchloch contributes with an assertion that bypasses classification, instead connecting criticism to art politics: 'you don't need criticism for an investment structure, you need experts' (2002: 202). His contribution evidences the ways in which criticism is circumnavigated in the art world for expertise that can provide strategic views of the landscape. For both Buchloch and Fraser, the politics of the art world are fundamentally embroiled in a debate on criticism's centrality, and the conflicts between different modes of understanding and instrumentalising expertise. Indeed, as Hal Foster's contribution makes evident, underpinning the roundtable's attempt to both identify and transgress the structuring conditions of art criticism is a commitment to plurality and a rejection of the 'apparent neutrality of relativism' (Fowler 2002) on these very grounds.

What the roundtable makes evident is threefold. First, there is a rejection of objectivity as a neutral means of critique, something which *October* sustains from the start. This is best expressed by Foster's reminder that one of the projects of his generation of critics was to work against an identification of criticism with judgement (2002: 209), and Fraser's articulation of 'the notion of the autonomy of the critic' as 'full of holes' (2002: 214), one that plays into a circulation of value based on modes of legitimation. Second, a reassessment of the kinds of models of discursive resistance is constituted by this postmodernist approach to criticism, one closely connected to the specialisation of the art world. Third, the shifts in criticism which emerged with the avant-garde, and diversified in the twentieth century, remain open to the project of interpretation, but provide no release for the interconnecting, and sometimes conflicting, multiplicities of a critic's embeddedness within the art landscape.

The roundtable exemplifies a cultural conflict focused on advancing models of criticism responsive to the embeddedness of criticism in the artistic landscape, and resisting its redundancy, whilst in the context of theatre criticism we see a debate emerging surrounding legitimacy that is similarly capturing a moment of threat for established critical structures. Seen dialogically, these two cultural conflicts exemplify the intellectual culture of criticism and its disciplinary specificities in the early noughties. This also encapsulates a shift in the intellectual conditions of criticism, where an increasingly formalised interest of criticism is on moving away from the centrality of the subject in evaluative criticism, towards examining alternative formal possibilities. In the early noughties, art criticism was fuelled by debates on the importance of its re-evaluation, and a more situated, local engagement with its dominant models of practice,

far exceeding the landscape of mainstream and public press, and inclusive of alternative models that had emerged in the wake of postmodernism. This includes art writing, the increased specialisation of art discourse through publishing initiatives and curatorial projects, and the prominent role of publications like *Artforum*. Whilst performance criticism emerges from a disciplinary nexus, this difference might also go some way towards explaining the lack of visibility or recognition of the practice in the context of established theatre criticism.

Importantly, scholarship on art criticism also evidences a proliferation of examinations on the shifting position of criticism in the art world and the effects of a changing political economy. Notable examples include James Elkins and Michael Newman's *The State of Art Criticism* (2008) and Thijs Lister, Suzana Milevska, Pascal Gielen and Ruth Sonderegger's *Spaces for Criticism: Shifts in Contemporary Art Discourses* (2015). These publications chart a turn to criticism as an event embedded within the art world, exploring new forms of subjectivity resistant to its increasing economisation. I want to briefly look at how this emphasis on formal renewal is tied to an interest in subjectivity's potential after postmodernism.

A year later, following the roundtable, theorist Irit Rogoff publishes her essay 'From Criticism to Critique to Criticality' (2003), in which she conceptualises the shift in criticism by means of a series of distinctions: criticism as 'the application of values and judgments', critique as the examination of 'underlying assumptions that might allow something to appear as a convincing logic', and finally, criticality, articulated as a means of engaging with 'the present, of living out a situation, of understanding culture as a series of effects rather than causes' (2003). Rogoff's essay is significant for the ways in

which it moves beyond a diagnosis, towards an alternative conception of criticism that might circumnavigate the porous landscape of art and the debate surrounding it in *October's* roundtable.

Whilst Rogoff's distinctions omit the professionalisation of criticism and its diversification across different public spaces in art, the essay is effective, if sharply critical, in separating modes of engagement that differentiate the experience of art and its conditions of visibility from its cultural value. This is not a criticism that dismisses one of its primary cultural uses, but that accounts for the much-debated formal diversification of the practice in more political terms. Rogoff's call is apt: a plurality that engages both an analytical mode, and a means of producing new subjectivities, acknowledging our active participation in the mechanisms we are also seeking to see (2003). This shift towards criticality captured by Rogoff is one examined at length by postcolonial critiques of objectivity. In 'Scientific Objectivity and the Concept of the Other', Zuleyma Tang Halpin points to the ways in which objectivity often implies a paradigmatic relationship between emotion and knowledge, self and other (1989: 285).³

By foregrounding objectivity as a constituting element of criticism, what occurs is a rendering obsolete of alternative versions of subjectivity, and their place in criticism; turning to theatre criticism, we might see how the intent to affix meaning and balance context and intent that Billington, Shenton and Fisher argue constitutes a singular rationality for criticism from the perspective of professional privilege. A similar analysis

³ Of relevance here is also the work of Sandra Harding (1998) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000).

is found in Talal Asad's essay 'Free Speech, Blasphemy and Secular Criticism' (2007), in which he argues that there is a Eurocentric bias to the historical notion of the figure of the critic, which is dismissive of alternative vectors of experience on the basis of delegitimising alternative modes of understanding.⁴

To return to Rogoff's distinction, this is an acknowledgement of the complexities of valuation in contemporary criticism, but also an accounting of a range of processes that criticality might be equipped to navigate: the analytical and the experiential. *October's* roundtable captures a moment in which the diversification of criticism also comes with a questioning of critical efficacy. The emphasis is placed on forms of criticism that embrace a view of subjectivity as affording a plural landscape of engaged criticism. In art criticism, this comes with dismissing the centrality of valuation as a singular function of the practice. We see emergent contemporary notions of critique and criticism as tied to, in equal manner, unfolding conceptualisations of the subject (in Asad's case, the liberal subject), and attempts to account for competing meanings on the basis of nuance. In light of this, I want to look at performance criticism's formal intersections.

Criticism as an expanded practice: formal intersections of performance and writing

⁴ The articulation of freedom of speech unfolds under political and economic considerations best understood through legal protections by means of ownership. If freedom is constituted by means of its ownership, then it is also evident that a subject's 'body, affections, and speech are regarded as *personal property* because they constitute the person' (2007: 31). Pointing to the Eurocentric bias of this constitutive notion of freedom and its expansion during modernism, Asad foregrounds an occlusion on the basis of an inability to constitute forms of autonomy through this conception of the subject.

Performance criticism emerges as a rupture with mainstream practices that, in the early noughties, evidence a reluctance to consider an alternative positioning of the critic vis-à-vis the artwork. This rupture however, unfolds, as we have already seen, over a long period of time, navigating points of conflict that bring together growing unease surrounding the potentials of subjective criticality, the restriction of form due to criticism's function in the cultural landscape, and a desire from adjacent disciplines to constitute alternative forms that might meet these. What is distinct about this process of repositioning is that it sees subjectivity not as a formal means, and not even as a point of reflection, which, by example, the early advents of blogging concentrated on; it articulates subjective criticality as one strategy via which to engage in criticism's constitutive processes and, within this, revisits the project of interpretation. The compositional procedures of reviewing, the strategies of public presence of mainstream critics, are replaced with a desire to be closer to the work, to intervene in its meanings, and to move away from fixity. As I explore throughout this thesis, this pertains to a complex process of criticism, an event of intersections that displaces linguistic certainty, engages in affective orders, and seeks to account for difference in a neoliberal landscape: an act of care and dissent.

So far, I have shown how the dominant landscape of criticism in the early noughties was shaped by overlapping conflicts surrounding professionalism and legitimacy, which in themselves made visible palpable intellectual conditions. It is during these public debates that alternative spaces for performance criticism begin to grow: in community-hall debates at Devoted and Disgruntled; informal get-togethers between critics and writers feeling alienated by professional organisations; in emergent, unsubsidised collaborations and partnerships, residencies and fragments of writing. Costa mentions

several such incentives in her report for Devoted and Disgruntled, including collaborations with Chris Goode and Company, Theatre Delicatessen and Oval Theatre (2012b). I have mentioned already the development of projects that focus on hosting criticism, like *Dialogue*, and frameworks for collaboration, such as *Open-Dialogues*.

However, performance criticism, as a gathering of multiple practices, finds inspiration in the work of magazines such as *Performance Magazine* in the eighties and nineties, and the short but momentous rise of performance writing.⁵ I want to briefly look at how *Performance Magazine*'s tenure pivots around similar concerns that qualify criticism as a deliberate navigating of text and context, but positions the critical act in an explicitly political landscape.⁶ In her essay on the history of *Performance Magazine*, contributor Lynn MacRitchie talks about the entanglement of politics and performance from which the publication emerged, in 1979, with the election of Margaret Thatcher, lasting until 1992, only two years after the end of her premiership. MacRitchie reflects:

Its life as a publication was set entirely within a world shaped by a Conservative government bent on deconstructing support for all sections of that society whose existence it denied, including cutting funding for the arts. (2017)

⁵ Another relevant mention is *Dance Theatre Journal*, founded by editors Chris de Marigny and Alastair Macaulay, and took its name in 1983. Up until 2013, the magazine was tri-annual, and hosted writing about a wide range of work, notably 'modern and post-modern dance' ('Dance Theatre Journal', *Oxford Reference*, 2018). The most recent editor for the publication was Martin Hargreaves, between 2003 and 2013. Published by the Laban Centre, the journal ceased publication in 2013. It was an influential publication inclusive of experimental practices as wide-ranging as Live Art and theatre. Such examples include Diana Theodores' piece on 'Rehabilitating Dance Criticism' (18:1, 2002), Jeroen Peteers' 'The Empire of Spectators' (23:3, 2009) on the work of the theatre collective Superamas, and a special edition on Trash in art featuring the work of Penny Arcade, John Sex and Mouse (24:3, 2011). Although departing from the realm of dance, and funded by a higher-education institution, and occasionally hosting academic articles, *Dance Theatre Journal* was a significant contributor to contemporary debates on dance.

⁶ The publications that follow *Performance Magazine* engage more explicitly with the field of Live Art. As Heddon and Klein trace in their history of the practice: 'Live Art Listings ran briefly from Jan/Feb 1992 to Sep/Oct 1992' and was quickly replaced by 'Hybrid, which ran from 1992 to 1994'. Following *Hybrid*'s loss of funding, editors David Hughes and Christopher Hewitt founded the bimonthly *Liveartmagazine*, which ran until 2004 (Heddon and Klein 2012: 32).

In the essay, MacRitchie draws a parallel between the editorial shifts of the publication and the effects of the political landscape on its changing discourse. *Performance Magazine* was, from the outset, an outwardly left-leaning publication, with its founding editor, Rob La Frenais, a Labour Party supporter, who, he recalls in MacRitchie's essay, felt strongly about Thatcherism (2017). For MacRitchie too, 'the personal came under attack, with continuing attempts to restrict abortion rights and [...] Clause 28, which banned the "promotion" of homosexuality in schools' (2017). MacRitchie follows by speaking of how the magazine was alert to the importance of 'debates around sexual politics and regularly covered feminist, gay, lesbian and gender challenging work'.

In the inaugural issue (Issue 1, June 1979), this relationship of criticism to the political makes itself known in two ways, both of which continue to take shape throughout the publication's history. The first is the explicit inclusion of content, such as MP Frank Dobson's 'Life Under the Tories', which speaks to the Tory approach to the arts as a 'commitment to high elitist art', which had sat with patronage, and a 'thundering and distinct philistinism'; these two are presented as conflictual, and dismissive of practices oriented around the community (1979: 21). The second, and importantly to our discussion here, is the interest in formal politics itself, made manifest both through the publication's commitment to mapping a growing practice, and its interest in considering the ways in which it might do so. In its opening, brief editorial, La Frenais positions the publication in relation to a range of works that are 'difficult to pin down, to separate from the sludge of spectacle', and 'consist of people doing odd things in front of others', which he names as 'fringe theatre, performance art, and community art' (1979: 3). In the editorial, he proposes that the magazine is responding to a growing interest in these practices, 'but we will be critical in our approach' (1979: 3).

This interest in form later manifested in the deployment of the term Live Art. Writing about its history, Johnson argues that Live Art is a contested category used to describe ‘a wide range of performance practices’, and was first articulated in *Performance Magazine* in late 1981, in a review of the Midland Group Performance Art Platform, the festival that would later become the National Review of Live Art (1981: 14). A year later, the magazine added a subtitle, ‘The Regular Review of Live Art in the UK’ (1982), yet at this point, the two terms are used interchangeably. The magazine’s commitment to critical mapping of formal developments of the practice set a key precedent for criticism’s explicit engagement with performance, as an umbrella for a wide range of practices inclusive of experimental theatre, but expanding across other mediums. What we notice here is the ways in which these diverse practices also offered a freer home for new models of criticism, given their own marginal cultural positioning.

Performance Magazine is an important milestone in the emergence of performance criticism. From the start, it sought an engagement that accounted for the enmeshment of politics, performance and criticism, and a commitment to form’s political urgency. This commitment becomes more pronounced in the publication’s development. By the mid 1980s, the magazine has several formalised sections, including Reviews and Opinion, and a range of articles that prod the limits of criticism as an expansive practice which navigates between text and context.

My use of the form here seeks to capture the alternative approach the magazine took to models of criticism in theatre in the late eighties and nineties in mainstream media. As discussed at length in the introduction to Radosavljević’s *Theatre Criticism: Changing*

Landscapes, magazines had a history in theatre criticism dating back to the nineteenth century, with the establishment of *The Stage* in 1880 and *Time Out* in 1968, both of which underwent significant structural changes in 2012, and further back in the eighteenth century, with the development of the press (2016: 10). These, however, had distinctly different orientations, and their relationships to criticism pivoted around their cultural positioning as, respectively, trade or consumer magazines.

Seen through alternative paradigms, the development of *Performance Magazine* can be traced more closely to a magazine format that was taking hold in the field of contemporary visual art; however, these magazines also developed funding models that ensured their sustainability. *Frieze*, for example, was developed in 1991 by Amanda Sharp, Matthew Slotover and Tom Gidley and continues to date. *Performance Magazine's* structural use of section headings such as Reviews, Articles and Opinions is similar to that of publications like *Frieze*, though the latter operates a commercial model. Nevertheless, *Performance Magazine* continued to engage with a wide range of practices, never adopting any one model in its editorial development.

In its engagement with form and politics, *Performance Magazine* holds more in common with art critics Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson's *October*.⁷ The editorial that opens the inaugural issue resonates strongly with the kind of critical attitude articulated by La Frenais years later, for the first issue of the magazine:

Our aim [...] is to reopen an inquiry into the relationships between the several arts which flourish in our culture at this

⁷ The US-based journal that, from its inauguration in 1976 sought to introduce post-structuralism to the English academic scene, and was home to some of art's most public critics: Hal Foster, Benjamin Buchloch, Douglas Crimp and Yve-Alain Bois, some of whom participated in the influential roundtable in 2002.

time and in so doing, to open discussion of their role at this highly problematic juncture. (1967: 4)

The foregrounding of both form and the political circumstances that shape it, both in terms of visibility and modes of debate, makes *October* a relevant resonance and precedent for *Performance Magazine's* own interest in mapping performance practice against the tumultuous political climate of Thatcherism. La Frenais and subsequent editors turn to the issue of cultural policy regularly in their publication, from its second issue in the autumn of 1979, with Jeff Nuttall's article 'Subsidy in the UK: The Naked Form of Control Revealed' (1979: 17–18), all the way to its closing editorial in 1992, which I discussed in my Introduction.

Whilst *October* situates itself in its first editorial as a space that provides 'a framework for critical exchange' (1967: 4), *Performance Magazine* also becomes a home for dialogues surrounding the limits of performance, its stretches and boundaries. The first use of the term 'performance critics' comes in 1985 with its 37th issue, in an opinion piece by Rob La Frenais discussing the polarisation of critical opinion in relation to the work of artist Anthony Howell and what he deems to be rigid framings of what is constituted as performance. It is not, therefore, a strategic use of the term, but is evidence of the magazine's consistent engagement with a type of work often omitted from mainstream media. In a later issue in 1990 (61) then editor Gray Watson speaks to this explicitly:

Again and again, important work is written about because it falls between the responsibilities of different critics. The art critic will not touch it because it seems too theatrical, while the theatre critic will not touch it because it seems too arty. [...]
One of the reasons that performance is paradigmatic is that,

situated as it is on the intersection between the visual and performing arts, it brings together the seriousness of purpose associated with fine art [...] with the openness to the diversity of experience, and the realisation of the inevitability of artifice, traditionally associated with the theatre. (1990: 6–7)

The constant engagement and critique of models of classification, across both the public press and the academy, which the magazine engages with over the years, is always presided over by its overt interest in recognising changing forms of performance, and its tensions vis-à-vis the political agenda of Thatcherism in its different stages. Whilst the formal commitment to criticism itself rarely encompasses the kind of experimentation that was to come in the early noughties, or that took shape through conceptualisations of performance and writing in the mid nineties, *Performance Magazine* nevertheless sets the scene for an alternative critical culture.

With this interest in diversification, *Performance Magazine* stretches the remit of critical engagement; first, through its expansion into dialogue pieces and interviews with figures like J. G. Ballard, and second, through its commitment to navigating form as a political means. In its 61st issue in September 1990, *Performance Magazine* features a piece by Andrew Renton titled 'Jeff Koons and the Art of Deal: Marketing (as) Sculpture'. Renton argues that the rise of Donald Trump as a brand, and his self-commodification for profit provides, a 'hyperreal necessity in the art marketplace' (1990: 20) for artists like Jeff Koons. Speaking to the accumulated wealth of Donald Trump from a small fortune to billions, selling his name as a commodity: 'Trump Tower, Trump Parc, Trump Plaza' (ibid.) His argument centres on an exploration of the presence of commodification and art across Koons's work, and, in parallel, to cultures of commodification entwined in the operations of capitalism at many levels. 'Koons plays

the game of assaulting the bastions of capital and commodity,' the author argues, 'together with the collaborators in the game, whilst at once openly embracing all these as his own' (1990: 21). Renton's article is exemplary of the magazine's interest in moving beyond one model of critique, yet remaining alert to the shifting contexts that render work visible. In other words, *Performance Magazine* sets the precedent for criticism in performance as undergoing a shift towards interpretation, one grounded in an argument surrounding the entanglement of form, content and politics. In encountering political conflict and its entanglement with artistic form, the magazine sought to renew the modes in which criticism renders visibility around work and its context.

I want to briefly look at what follows *Performance Magazine*, this time in light of a conceptualisation of form and writing vis-à-vis performance. Performance writing's own roots are diverse, spanning both literary and performance histories, but its development in the UK is most commonly traced to Dartington College, operating in Devon between 1961 and 2008, in the early nineties, and later formalised in a series of publications by John Hall, *Essays on Performance Writing* (2013), as well as a special issue of the *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* (6.3, 2014). As J. R. Carpenter writes when tracing its emergence, performance writing as a term 'is intertwined both with the context of its production and of its consumption' ('Writing on writing in Performance Writing, *Lapsus Linguae*, 2013). Pointing to the deliberate diversity of the term as a series of pedagogical, methodological and practice-oriented strategies, J. R. Carpenter foregrounds its purpose as a mode of thinking about 'what writing is and what writing does in a range of social and disciplinary contexts', pointing to its proponents, aside from Hall, as including Ric Allsopp, Caroline Bergvall, Aaron

Williamson, Brigid McLeer and Redell Olsen, spanning the fields of performance, criticism and poetics.

This situates performance writing as a conceptually oriented practice, emergent, in part, in the academy, one that explores 'textual practice in relation to visual art, digital media, installation, performance, collaborative practices and sound/audio work' and draws on models of work that include, but are not limited to, art and conceptual writing, fiction and art criticism. In tracing its development, Carpenter also mentions the merging of Dartington College with Falmouth University in 2008 as the point at which performance writing develops into different degree programmes spread across UK and European universities, as well as research and artistic-oriented projects, including with Arnolfini in Bristol, Goldsmiths and the University of Cambridge.

In 1996, the college hosted a symposium surrounding performance writing. Speaking as a keynote, Caroline Bergvall asks:

So, what is Performance Writing not? Is Performance Writing not writing? Is it writing which performs not writes? Is it not performance which writes? But then does writing not perform? And when does writing not perform? And what kind of not performance are we talking about? Is it not performance to write or is it not writing to not perform? (1996: 1)

Bergvall's text is both an unpacking of the conceptual tensions of performance writing, and a performance of it. Later in her keynote, she points to the rising interest from cultural studies, as well as visual and performing arts, in applying deconstructive theories 'to question and articulate the importance of the contextualisation of practice, the siting of work, the locations of identity in contemporary arts' (1996: 4) as inherently

connected to a rejection of formal fixity. Instead, she advocates that one 'acutely and insistently [...] makes a point of examining the personal motivations and urgencies for work' and the ways in which 'such forms are used and function in their relation to social, cultural modes of identification and, often, oppressive models for representation'. Her remit in doing so is to provide a grounding for performance writing to provide clarity in a 'cacophony of textual cross-disciplinary' (1996: 4).

In doing so, Bergvall traces performance writing back to postcolonial critique, through her mention of critiquing the locations of identity within art. The focus, therefore, is on the possibilities offered by the experiential order. At the same time, the experiential range cannot be explored without a rejection of formal fixity, a move prompted by modernism's search for autonomy of meaning, and its critiques of occlusion and oppression of alternative histories outside of its periodisation. This makes visible the conceptual orientation of performance writing to models emerging from creative writing and poetics.

Bergvall's relevance here is in teasing out the ways in which, fundamentally, performance writing provided a connective tissue for models of using and playing with writing, both within and outside the realms of performance, inherently connected to an examination of how writing itself performs. This is further grounded in an interest in the plural experiences which frame meaning's visibility; in subjectivity in a political context.

This notion of writing as a mode of performance has been instrumental to the conceptual and formal opening-up of performance criticism, because it established a

precedent within the field itself of interrogating thinking through writing as a mode of considering the dimensions of subjectivity beyond self-reflection. In this, I also propose, an alternative locating of critique has been found, as a practice of interpretation and reflection located outside of the histories of journalism, and in close connection to an interest in discursive arenas. This is evident in Bergvall's keynote, in the ways in which she draws a connection between performance as a critical paradigm and writing as a site of exploration. In her text, the link between the two is not dissimilar to a Mobius strip: 'is it not performance to write or is it not writing not to perform?' (1996: 1).

In their introduction to *Performativity and Performance*, Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick trace the 'loose associations of theatrical practices, relations and traditions known as performance' and performativity (1993: 1). The authors trace performativity back to the work of J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, and his articulation of the term as actions which generate effects. Parker and Sedgwick articulate an inherent relationship between performativity and queerness, by showing the parallel development of speech and act, and act to identity, particularly surrounding the debates on the Pentagon's 1993 policy on lesbians and gay men working in the military (1993: 6). The authors expand the space of the performative to account for an act of witnessing, as opposed to an inherent citationality present in language. 'It's the aptitude of the explicit performative,' they conclude, 'for mobilizing and epitomizing such transformative effects on interlocutory space that makes it almost irresistible [...] to associate it with theatrical performance' (1993: 13). Furthermore, and of relevance to our discussion here, is the way in which this queering of performativity, and its inherent linking of act and identity, makes possible an exploration of the relationships between 'text and context' (1993: 15).

I am interested in how this account of performativity further makes visible the intertwined relationships between performance writing's concern for formal and conceptual examination, and performance criticism's engagement with form through subjectivity. It is, in other words, possible to understand that the influence of performance writing on performance criticism occurs twofold. First, through its interrelating of what constitutes the event of meaning in writing, and second, that of performance; Parker and Sedgwick's revisiting of performativity offers a way of understanding this in light of a constant shift between text and context, between saying as doing, and doing as saying.

Bergvall marks this relationship elsewhere in her noting of how 'the gesture of writing is a gesturing of tracing' (2014). Where gestures 'disappear into their moment of performance,' she adds, 'writing itself really only starts to exist once the act of tracing has been concluded' (2014). This mode of tracing a process that begins with a disappearing gesture, but continues to take shape through writing, offers a mode of reconsidering criticism in light of its interdependence with, and autonomy from, performance itself. It is impossible to distinguish between text and context when considering what is made and unmade, said and done, in and through performance writing, because, I propose, it is subjectivity that acts as an anchor. The event of meaning in performance writing is made through performativity, because it accounts for the act of witnessing as well as the act of making: making as witnessing, and witnessing as a mode of making.

Of relevance here is a closely affiliated mode of writing first articulated by Peggy Phelan as performative writing; this is proposed as a scholarly, analytical approach through which 'the affective force of performance event' is played out in 'an ongoing temporality made vivid by the psychic process of distortion [...] and made narrow by the muscular force of political repression' (1997: 12). As Dominic Johnson argues, Phelan's approach suggests a distinction between 'subjective investment and political effect' (2014: 12), yet, I add, it is also constitutive of a navigation between the event of performance and that of its reflection as inherently connected. Subjectivity, here, is cast as a means through which writing both re-enacts and distorts the event of performance, by also acknowledging the performative dimension of critical reflection.

Whilst Phelan's work disrupts the politicisation of subjectivity brought about by witnessing in Parker and Sedgwick's concept of performativity, it sets another precedent for an interest in the event of writing, and specifically, critical writing itself. In 'Performing Writing', Della Pollock further expounds on the ways in which subjectivity wraps itself into the scholarly critical act, arguing that 'performative writing spins, to some extent, on the axis of impossible and/or regressive reference' and yet 'out into new modes of subjectivity and referentiality' (1997: 76). As I am exploring here, my interest is in understanding how these new modes of referentiality make for a distinct event of meaning in performance criticism that holds a degree of autonomy from that referent.

If performative writing was situated as a scholarly mode of writing, rather than a practice in the manner of performance writing's expansion, it brought together a similar engagement with subjectivity as a means of criticality that resituated the position of

criticism vis-à-vis performance work, whilst accounting for the complex processes of occurrence and eventness made through the means of writing. As such, it engages with a similar, discursive approach to critical reflection that became foundational to the shifting concerns of performance criticism only ten years later.

This interrelating of text and context foregrounded by performance writing, and explored within performative writing, leads me to my second point of confluence. Performance writing, as I have already mentioned, created a confluence between performance as an event that disappears, and writing as an event that might continue, or extend the performance. This mode of relating performance and writing through disappearance can be traced back to ontological explorations of performance and its documentation (Phelan 1997, Schneider 2011), which I discuss in my Introduction as being influential in terms of the diversification of performance criticism due to their consideration of temporality and embodiment.

What marks its specificity in performance writing is not the focus on disappearance, but the modes in which writing might offer a means to explore a political dimension.

Witnessing, in Parker and Sedgwick's expansion of performativity, provides a means through which to consider not only how writing might be saying as doing, but also what it might reveal or deconstruct about the role of the witness – not the subject of writing, but its subjectivity. That performance writing deliberately collapses form and content is a political gesture that refuses to disconnect text and context, subject and subjectivity.

In this way, performance writing lays the groundwork for an engagement with subjectivity and form that surpasses self-reflection, and pivots around the plural effects

of witnessing. This is, I propose, an examination that moves beyond linguistic limitations, enabling a public orientation of form.

Whilst performance writing offers a conceptualisation that collapses text and content and provides renewed political agency to subjectivity, what is omitted explicitly in this articulation is the critical act. As I have discussed here, the interest in shifting criticism's formal abilities is closely connected to a reaction to a consensus culture in mainstream criticism that derides subjectivity as an inward-oriented dialogue. With regard to the notion of criticism's duty towards readers, I find precedent in a looser boundary between the academy and the public arena in the work of *Performance Magazine*, which draws from both in its articulation of critical culture. Likewise, both performance writing and performative writing crossed the territories of theory and practice, and were embedded, in divergent ways, into both scholarly analysis and artistic exploration, particularly the former.

What both the emergence of performance writing and *Performance Magazine's* development, until its ceasing of publication in 1992, reveal is an entanglement of sorts. This pertains to the formal qualities of writing revealed through both witnessing and a turn to subjectivity, on the one hand, and, on the other, an enmeshment of politics and criticism that is explicit, and constituted around the premise of revealing, and giving visibility to, forms otherwise perceived to be marginal to mainstream media.

Emergent formal concerns

Performance criticism arises out of a confrontation with the intellectual conditions that structured the field of theatre and art criticism in the early noughties. I call these intellectual conditions because they pertain to a shifting, variable public debate on the professional boundaries, role and status of criticism. In theatre criticism, these are oriented around the ethics and practice of reviewing; in art criticism, towards locating a criticality that also makes possible the co-existence of multiple subjectivities. Here, I return to examining particular intellectual conditions that shaped theatre criticism, revealing a concern both for its professional identity, and for the sustainability of the figure of the critic within a journalistic model.

In theatre and performance, the formal shifts that account for both experience and its emergent context are articulated by two means – first, in the exploration of postmodernism’s impact on criticism, best explored in Butt’s *After Criticism*. As I have noted before, Butt outlines how criticism, notably, but not exclusively in the academy, positions objectivity and distance as synonymous (2005: 2). What this account does is to foreground a spatial positioning of the critic, notably, but not exclusively within academic methodologies. However, postmodernism’s concern with the relativism of truth is inherently problematic, as Asad, Halpin and others have shown. It is not simply that, in theatre criticism, objectivity and distance become synonymous with each other; it is also that the evaluative, journalistic grounding of mainstream criticism’s most public form, the review, threads valuation with a normative subjectivity. Yet shifting from a paradigmatic view of emotion and knowledge, to an engagement with the embodied, subjective experience, need not, I propose, render criticality obsolete. On the contrary: it valorises a plurality of models of criticism.

Second, and through a different lens, this formal shift is also visible through the increasing interest in delineating socially engaged or oriented practices. In part, this is due to a similar specialisation that also comes at a time of shifting models of work and pressures on funding for the arts, which come with institutional terms of engagement. Jen Harvie, in her book *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (2013), traces the interconnectedness of the UK's shrinking welfare state and models of practice that engage in collective labour. Harvie's study makes visible the ways in which valorisation and performance become intertwined under neoliberalism. *Fair Play* points to the collapsing of categories of social and artistic agency, the movement of problematic models of outsourced labour, and a reliance on entrepreneurialism as a means of incentivising without state support. Whilst I briefly discuss these conditions as they pertain to criticism in Chapter Four, here I turn to Harvie to contextualise how many of the conflicts concerning criticism's intellectual conditions pertain to the social, but are intricately enmeshed in discourses on valuation – who holds the expertise, what are legitimate positions from which to critique work, and what constitutes professionalism.

Harvie's study goes on to show that, in performance, the engagement with the social has resulted in a landscape of practices that hold no singular relationship to value and art's economisation. Within this social turn, the vectors of experience become means through which approaches to performance attempt models of interdependence, without calling shifting cultural policies into direct question. At times, this is a defiant act of resistance that bypasses institutional models, and at others, detrimental in being unable to navigate autonomies and pluralities of meaning within a shifting political climate that strikes, as we will see, to absorb dissensus and legitimate consensus. Harvie's study shows how increasingly neoliberal policies affect not only the infrastructural

production of culture, but also its valuation – the structure gives way to pressures on valorisation, increasingly geared towards the work of art as an entrepreneurial activity, and its production on commercial and philanthropic models. Considering this, criticism is pressurised not only to account for itself, but also to make a case for performance as a public good; the process of valorisation as at the same time political, economic and aesthetic.

Whilst, in art, the tensions manifest in reassessment of the operations of form in criticism's conception, in theatre and performance, the early noughties mark a time of overlapping agendas. These pertain, in part, to the crisis of criticism articulated in adjacent contemporary debates. As I have shown, these are as much a conflict over the possibilities of subjective criticality as a shift towards the analytical possibilities of the experience of a performance. It is in the early noughties that formal diversification gains political traction in criticism, as it had since the performative turn and theatrical avant-garde of the twentieth century. Whilst this rooting in modernism pertains to a search for formal autonomy, it is distinctly oriented around a different premise: the critical possibilities of subjectivity, and the complexities of meaning-making in performance after postmodernism. My engagement with adjacent intellectual conditions that have come to shape a relationship between criticism and subjectivity does not seek to dismiss valuation as a superfluous or secondary discursive space. I discussed recent debates on criticism's development to account for contextual shifts which have come to attach political value to formal reconsideration, and challenge singular notions of subjectivity on the basis of a false neutrality of objectivity. Performance criticism emerges at the intersection of these growing concerns, because it takes an explicit

interest in how interpretation is linked both to positioning, and to an encounter with performance that gives way to its own eventness.

In this Chapter, I examined how debates on the legitimacy and professionalism of theatre criticism in the early noughties made space for alternative conceptions that sought to address the paradigm of objective and subjective. Whilst in mainstream criticism the debates on criticism's diversity also upheld the model of the visible, representative critic, performance criticism sought an alternative means of engaging with interpretation.

My analysis here has focused on expounding the ways in which discourses within theatre criticism uphold the figure of the critic, whilst also drawing a link with processes of valuation. Whilst there is a problematic rejection of subjectivity within the boundaries of the professional fleshed out within these discourses, it is important to acknowledge that the traditional mainstream press is not subsumed by any singular economic or social pressure. As I will explore in further chapters, neoliberalism's grip pertains, I propose, more to changing structures of work and an economisation of value than to any singular co-optation of mainstream criticism into capitalist mechanisms. In other words, there is no one totalising gesture, but a porousness that enables performance criticism to occupy spaces in between, sometimes shifting across critical territories.

This porousness was articulated in its inception in spaces that crossed both theatre and performance, such as *Devoted and Disgruntled*, but also rooted in the analytical, politicised work of *Performance Magazine*, and performance writing's conceptual

deployment of subjectivity as valuable to the formal boundaries of experience. The concern for eventness in performance criticism hinges on an engagement with subjectivity grounded in the navigating of text and context which performance writing undertook, and the politicisation of form that *Performance Magazine* engaged with

Chapter Two

It Begins, with Silence: Live Art and Performance Criticism

In the previous chapter, I examined the intellectual conditions that gave rise to performance criticism. I argued that debates on the crisis in criticism constructed a notion of professionalism dismissive of subjectivity because of its inwardness. Instead, what they upheld was objectivity, as a means through which one might achieve balanced critique. In this paradigm, the figure of the critic is carved as a singular, representative position of expertise. Performance criticism emerges as a reaction to this professional dismissal of subjectivity and upholding of singular expertise, influenced, in part, by *Performance Magazine's* analytical approach to a shifting field of practice, and performance writing, with its conceptual engagement with form at the intersection of performance and writing.

In this chapter, I want to further examine a different aspect of performance: criticism's engagement with formal experimentation, situated within developments in the field of Live Art in the early noughties. Despite the disciplinary orientation, the infrastructural support for forms of criticism able to address the hybridity and critical paradigms of Live Art set an alternative precedent for investigations into the nature of meaning-making within criticism. It influenced a generation of trouble-makers keen to explore how criticism might think differently about performance and subjectivisation. This is a different point of emergence from the disputes on professional legitimacy emergent within theatre, because it pertains more fundamentally to an engagement with criticism outside of its roots within journalism.

First, I look at a text by Mary Paterson on Kings of England's *In Eldersfield: An Elegy for Paul Dirac*, a 2011 performance showcased at Spill Festival of Performance that invited audiences to take part in a restaging of physicist Paul Dirac's 20-minute silence. The text concerns itself with the staging of the silence in the performance, and is a key example of the emergent formalisation of this mode of conceiving of criticism that considers both the event of the performance, and extends its own formal autonomy towards the reader. Paterson's text comes at a time of increasing visibility of collaborations, in this case, with a festival, and marks a diversification of attitudes regarding criticism's conceptualisation.

Second, I locate Paterson's text as part of a larger formal shift, emergent within its contextual project, *Spill:Stings*. I talk about the project's explicit mode of conceptualising writing as a kind of itching, a means of accounting for both sense and thought in different ways of relating to performance. I examine this in relation to a dialogue piece between Paterson and curator-writer Theron Schmidt, whose explicit engagement with such questions presents these debates in a more public setting. I look at how the space for such explorations is opened up within Live Art, prompted by an influential programme of critical writing about live art, *Writing from Live Art*, running on the margins of the debates on criticism's intellectual conditions which I discussed in Chapter One. I expound on how, at the intersection between a concern for openness of interpretation and the politics of form, an emergent critical practice found its roots by orienting itself around the event of meaning, and its pathways.

In silence: formal experimentation and the instability of meaning

Mary Paterson's response, presented here, engages with a performance event that further re-enacts a moment of silence. I am interested in this complication, for how it makes visible common strategies deployed within performance criticism, that hold the performance in discursive play, but also depart from it. This, I will argue, is in synchronicity with the meaning-making processes expounded by Fischer-Lichte, foregrounding instability as a characterising feature of contemporary performance work. I expound on how instability characterises both the performance and the response to it. I tease out how this instability provides both a point of connection and a rupture, by looking at how Paterson's response seeks out competing meanings:

Silence. Twenty minutes of it – foretold at the start of the play but nevertheless, that cold shock: are they really going to do it? Five actors in costume, lined up on stage, staring calmly at us and then at each other, sitting it out like this for twenty whole minutes, watching time pass in coughs and scratches and whispers amongst an awkward audience? Is this really going to happen? Is this literal passing of time going to be the only real event in an otherwise symbolic performance? Is time too precious, too difficult to be represented in lighting, dance, music, costume change? Are we so unused to time (as a group, as a culture) that we cannot understand it except by staring at it, straight on, point blank range, no distance, no metaphor? ('I have so much work to do!' hisses the woman behind me.) Whose time is this anyway? Whose time is it to give away? If you could choose, is this what you would be doing with twenty minutes? Which do you enjoy more – the muffled silence or the muffled noise? Do you move your head when somebody leaves the rows of seats, or do you stare serenely forwards, as if you can handle this, you know the game, you understand about them and us – the performers and the audience – and you want them to know that you are not imagining an escape? [...] Are you waiting for it to be over, or enjoying the gasp of purposelessness? Do we keep the same time? Are you ever late? Do you set your watch fast? Do you check the time, obsessively, on the corners of other people's computer

screens, or do you know it, intuitively, in your body? Do you wish they would at least put the lights in the auditorium down, so that we can all stop pretending that this is free time, that this is anything other than a performance? Do you think you would have handled this differently, a year ago? Do you think you are handling this better than the man in the row in front? [...] Do you really think that this is not a symbol? Don't you realise that time itself is a metaphor for continuity? Do you think this is continuity? Are you still here? (Paterson: 2011)¹

I had not noticed the 20 minutes passing; instead, I focused on my own stillness, on the movements of bodies around me, on whispers and walkouts, shuffles and sneezes, on change, of sorts. Like Mary Paterson, I was experiencing Kings of England's *In Eldersfield: Elegy for Paul Dirac* (2011), the first performance of a ten-year cycle of works about the twentieth century. At its centre is a restaging of a 20-minute silence. The anecdote about Dirac (an eminent quantum physicist), on which this restaging is based, goes something like this: when asked where he will be going on his holidays by an interlocutor, the physicist responded, first with a 20-minute silence, then with the line 'why do you want to know?'

Preceding the silence, performer Simon Bowes tells us that 'we are here to stage Dirac's most notorious silence, not to close it, but to hold it open – in an invocation' ('Spill TV: In Eldersfield, Kings of England', 2011). Appearing within a performance in which children act as famous figures of the twentieth century, where rituals of folk and song frame invitations to consider these figures, this gathering marks a conceptual shift. It moves our attention from encountering gestures, action and fragments of narratives, to inhabiting an open silence, a segment of time.

¹ A full version of the text can be found at the following link: <https://spillfestival.com/show/spill-stings-12-kings-of-england/>

The silence that both Paterson and I experience, at different times, together with others, is a curious kind of event, one that prompts a curious kind of criticism. There is a critical thread that follows the silence back to its roots: how might one stage a moment from history, when that moment, itself, is time? What does it mean, to bring back historical time? How might we re-enact it, invoke it, recall it? Are we contributing towards a gesturing to the past, or to bringing the past here? Or, we might follow the silence forward: is this silence performed, or does it emerge in a theatrical space made possible by the performers? Is this silence a kind of not speaking, or is it the theatrical framing that enables something to occur? What does it mean, then, to critically speak of a silence, particularly when the choice is to only speak of one fragment of a larger performance that deals with the question of time? Paterson's text approaches both directions simultaneously. It is, as I will show in this chapter, a strategy of holding open: a picking of a cue, a release, of sorts.

Theron Schmidt proposes, speaking of Kings of England's performance, this silence 'represents another silence, doubles it, refers it, reflects it, in the way that all theatrical gestures do' (2015: 6).² But it is 'also a silence, palpably, uncomfortably, in the here and now'. I want to complicate this by proposing that performance criticism undertakes a similar gesture: it sits uncomfortably in the here and now of its encounter, as much as the here and now of the encounter which it was inspired by, or focused on.

² Theron also wrote a response alongside Paterson, which I will discuss later in this chapter. This is significant because it means the reader's encounter with these responsive, critical texts is not through them individually, but in dialogue with each other, as much as with the work.

In my Introduction, I noted performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte's notion of autopoietic feedback loop as a process of interrelation between perception and meaning. Fischer-Lichte argues that in the undoing of the opposition between signifier and signified, we encounter 'a new reality in which one thing can simultaneously appear as another' (2008: 75). The effects of performance's own processes of meaning-making, and our spectatorial encounter with them, is a 'continuous becoming and passing'. In encountering performance, I am held by my ideas and thoughts, triggered by association, which appear, sometimes uninvited, visible in the collectivity of my experience.

Fischer-Lichte further designates associative perception in performance as a counterpoint to discourses on spectatorship that assume a logic of equal distribution. She states that 'spectators do not distribute their attention equally over all that appears in the space' (2008: 165). This attention results in a destabilisation between reception and perception. At the core of Fischer-Lichte's argument is her proposition that 'there no longer exists a work of art, independent of its creator and recipient; instead, we are dealing with an event that involves everybody' (2008: 19). What becomes visible, I propose, in this glimpse into the event of performance's own meaning-making, is a fundamental cue to performance criticism's reorientation towards dialogue with performance. In this landscape, what is made to appear by the act of criticism is inherently tied to the critic's own perceptive permutation.

Following Fischer-Lichte's logic necessarily denies the authority of a representational, singular, meaning-making process. Within this mode of understanding how performance constructs meaning, the critic cannot speak representationally, on account

of the spectatorial plurality that fundamentally shapes the performance event, and the encounter with it. This is, I propose, an influential theoretical juncture that offers a means of understanding criticism differently: both to account for the spectatorial specificity of a critic there to encounter the work *for* writing or thought, and also as part of a collective that sustains a plurality of meanings.

In *Kings of England*, the conceptual framing of the 20-minute silence alone invites us to consider how that very silence occurs in real time, in the space of theatre, whilst also manifesting itself across different regimes of thought: embodied, in the shifts of tired audience members or the unconscious movements of a performer; historical, in how it is referenced anecdotally within the work; durational, in how it tries to make itself felt, over time. In other words, it appears both as itself, and as something else, simultaneously. It becomes something else, and passes as something else, as much as it is a concrete encounter with a framed period of time.

In Paterson's text, this experiential range of the performance, and its staged silence, is navigated by accounting for both presence and representation. Towards the end of her text, she asks: 'do you really think that this is not a symbol?', referring to the unfolding of time in the performance. 'Don't you realise,' she adds, 'that time itself is a metaphor for continuity?' The sentence that follows, 'do you think this is continuity?' acts as an anchor. Here, she asks a question about the nature of the silence – does it follow on from its theatrical framing or its historical eventness, or does it continue, as if time has no borders? At the same time, the sentences mark a transition that ends with a question of presence: 'Are you still here?' In the stylisation of the text, the silence keeps slipping, but we do, too, as readers, moving from an experience of the silence, to an interrogation

of its finiteness, its theatricality. Paterson tries to trace the silence, to make it present, as much as she reflects on its letting go, its immediate disappearance. She is not trying to speak on behalf of the audience, but in her account of parts of the encounter, she moves beyond her subjectivity, by drawing on rhetoric as a means to direct critical attention.

Silence, as a theatrical frame, is not without complexity; it can be conceived as a passive gesture, a lack of response, in the same way in which it echoes the violent, colonial project of erasure, assimilation or homogenisation. In silence, one can find both power and vulnerability. In Paterson's text, silence, in its connection with time, holds this complexity at play, by enabling the possibility of plural responses, whilst valuing the instability enabled by this extended moment.

The main device deployed in Paterson's text to this end is the use of anticipation, as a means of accounting for the deliberate lack of clarity within the performance, and the plurality of its responses: 'are they really going to do it?' she writes. This is followed by a rhetorical bringing together of both reader and spectator: 'are we so unused to time (as a group, as a culture) that we cannot understand it except by staring at it, straight on, point blank range, no distance, no metaphor?' This gesture points both to the theatrical framing of the event, as to what points of connection it might offer beyond the stage; then, there is a move to the reader, an open dialogue: 'are you waiting for it to be over, enjoying the gasp of purposelessness?' This accounts once more for multiple responses, but provides weight to the silence as a way of marking out time, and in turn, as a way of reflecting on our own attitudes towards its passing. Throughout her response, Paterson navigates the collective experience of the silence, in both what is

offered in the space of the performance, and what might resonate beyond. It holds at play both the subjective experience of the performance, and its own critical departures.

Paterson's text not only makes visible the perceptive processes at play in sharing in this moment of staged silence, but also the intertwining of representation and presence.

This is significant, for what marks the event of performance is this very interstice, and the instability of its navigation. This is further examined in Fischer-Lichte, who argues that 'the aesthetic experience is shaped more by the experience of liminality, instability and elusiveness that pervades the entire event'. These, argue Fischer-Lichte, precede 'attempts of understanding' (2008: 157). This acknowledgement of our encounter with performance as something we do not experience in a state of clarity, but through constant perceptive permutations, is of fundamental importance to the operations of performance criticism. Fischer-Lichte proposes that embodiment and affect, as well as rationality, are engaged in the critical process of our encounter with performance, without setting the latter as paradigmatic.

What is crucial to Fischer-Lichte's argument is the synthesis of spectatorial difference and its centrality in the event of performance. Neither in *Kings of England's* performance, nor in Paterson's text, is the silence a complete lack of sound; it is, instead, a way to create or direct attention. In the performance space, this is a perceptive attention: an awareness of the movements of the audience, as much as a concern with the stage as a place of waiting.

In its making visible of plural perceptive processes, Paterson's text also evidences a shift between text and context, one expounded by performance writing's own operations, as I

have argued in Chapter One. Returning to Parker and Sedgwick's notion of performativity, as a shift between saying and doing, and doing as saying, something beyond witnessing, I notice a distinct characteristic of Paterson's text. This pertains to a deliberate ambiguity surrounding its own focus of meaning, best understood in light of its use of pronouns: 'is *this* really going to happen?' to 'are *we* so unused to time?' and ending with 'if *you* could choose'. In following the direction of Paterson's reflection, I encounter a polyphonic text where the constant subject of time shifts through different inflections of address. Paterson's text begins with witnessing, but moves on to exploring what this marked time might both say and do, within the remit of its encounter, and slipping into the margins: the activities of audience members, for example, or speculations of thought. At the same time, this performativity is grounded by a commitment to directions of meaning maintained throughout the text, which return to time, and its silent marking in the performance.

In Paterson's text, silence is a way to invoke time, and consider its value, both on and off stage. Silence becomes a proposition: it is a way of dealing with noise and that which is peripheral. We might think of this periphery as the soundscape that envelops the performance space when the collective of bodies gathered there begins to experience this passing of time, or the figurative silence in which action still unfolds, but without any grounding, or specific intent. Silence, most importantly for what I want to speak of here, becomes an unstable space; it is no longer possible to distinguish between who performs and who spectates, because both are occurring simultaneously; neither is it possible to concede where the critique itself might reside in Paterson's text, because the text does not allow itself to be fixed. This is not to concede authorial responsibilities, but to dwell in the space made possible by an approach which directs meaning to both

reader and performance. I begin with silence, because of what it is able to make visible: a productive instability.

It is within this space of instability that performance criticism thinks, in the same manner as Kings of England's performance thinks: it creates a container, a framing, that nevertheless ceases to complete itself, to mark itself fixed; it remains hanging, between its reference – Dirac himself – and the encounter with this re-enactment. Paterson's text responds with an acknowledgement of Kings of England's invitation, and moves along with it. I am interested in the direction of this movement, for what it signals for performance criticism's distinct identity, and ability to gesture both to its point of departure, and its possible intellectual thrusts. Silence, in Paterson's text, is a way of acknowledging and reflecting on the performance, but also an invoking of that encounter to a reader. It is, in other words, a formal device.

This perceptive shift is fundamental not only to understanding subjectivity and how it resides within different forms of criticism, but also in reconsidering the political potential of appearance. To speak of criticism's accountability to this instability of meaning is to imply a rejection of certainty. What marks the emergent practices gathered under performance criticism is their encountering and navigating of this instability, which I understand as an attempt to invest subjectivity with critical agency. I am reminded of Peggy Phelan's assertion in her study of performance's institutionalisation, *The Ends of Performance*, on this very note: 'the challenge for us is to love the thing we've lost without assimilating it so thoroughly that it becomes us rather than remaining itself' (1998: 11). Paterson's text does not lay claim to the same meaning-making territory as the performance; instead, it meets an invitation by

authoring a different journey. This journey is both plural, in how it accounts for different spectatorial destinations, and personal, in how it draws those very connections.

I have examined how, in Paterson's text, there is a constant referencing of the event of performance, by way of an exploration of silence and its dimensions of meaning. I move on to look more closely at the context from which Paterson's text emerges, in order to expound on how its engagement with instability is a distinct cultural gesture, one that politicises subjectivity within performance criticism.

Live art and shifting dialogues between criticism and performance:

Spill:Stings and Writing from Live Art

Paterson's text was part of a larger, critical writing project titled *Spill:Stings*. Curated by Theron Schmidt with Mary Paterson (of *Open-Dialogues*), Johanna Linsley and Madeleine Hodge, *Spill:Stings* was the third iteration of a project that had accompanied Spill Festival of Performance since its inception in 2007. It took the form of a curated website adjacent to that of the festival, collating responses to the works presented from a group of writers. Its first two iterations, in 2007 and 2009, were titled *Spill:Overspill* and curated by *Open-Dialogues*; they foregrounded the project as a means through which to 'explore the event of criticism in relation to performance' (2009).³ *Spill:Stings* moved on to exploring 'the way in which work gets under' the writer's skin: 'the sting of

³ I will examine the event of criticism in Chapter Three.

it, and its itch (2011b). 'This writing,' the text continues, 'is a kind of scratching.'⁴ It presented itself as a collection of 'commissioned critical writings on the festival'.

So far, I have discussed how Paterson's text embraces ambiguity, in that it never settles on singularity, but accounts for the author's own subjectivity. This is echoed in the performance's own instability of meaning, a transformation theorised by Fischer-Lichte as drawing a boundary: 'every attempt to understand a performance retrospectively contributes to the creation of a text which follows its own rules' (2008: 160). As I have discussed in the Introduction, this concern for a partial critical autonomy is not only articulated in performance, but also in visual art (Bal 1997) or architecture (Rendell 2010), to name but a few. It is not that criticism attempts to occupy the same discursive or meaningful space as the work, but that it is also constitutive of an alternative poetics – Paterson's text being exemplary of this construct. I want to look at what led to this formalisation of an experimental concern with criticism's eventness and poetics. From *Spill:Overspill* through to *Spill:Stings*, a shared concern remains on a poetics of criticism, understood as a point of contact with, and departure from, performance. This is performance criticism, I argue.

The itch which *Spill:Stings* proposes makes itself palpable in Paterson's text, as a restless, curious kind of probing of silence, and what it might mean, both in the moment

⁴ In 2012, the festival developed an additional strand of programming situated in Pacitti's local hometown, Ipswich. *National Platform* was designed to support the work of emergent artists working in contemporary, experimental performance and live art, and culminated in a curated festival with selections by an invited panel from an open-call process, to be presented in Ipswich, and mentorship and production support offered to a further selected group of artists, to present a more developed piece within the London edition of the festival, which remained biennial. At the same time, the festival developed *Spill Writing*, a formalised strand of programming dedicated to critical writing which I started running in conjunction with the festival in 2012, and which took the form of a workshop-based model for emergent critics and writers. *Spill Writing* continues to date.

of encounter, and beyond it. Paterson's text is, as I have shown, a series of speculative, critical and subjective iterations of the vectors of meaning of the silence of *In Eldersfield*. It both enacts encounters with the silence, and formally draws on its framing. Paterson invites the silence into the text, where it takes up a nomadic residence. It stings the text, to take up the metaphor, as well as scratching at its meaning. This formal exploration rests on engagements with the sediments and affects of performance, a development from the early experiments in constituting what might be meant by the event of performance.

Spill:Stings upheld a formal commitment to the proposition of the sting, as something which is left by performance, an affect, thought, notion, memory, which the writer encounters openly. In a concluding dialogue piece between Paterson and Schmidt, the question of criticism is touched on explicitly, woven into a wider discussion of the works in the festival, and the kind of work undertaken by the project itself. In the dialogue, Paterson speaks to remembering each piece as 'being involved in the same type of viewing: a quiet, still, reflective audience, which breathes in and out with the performance, breathes it in' ('Spill Stings 20: A Dialogue on Infection [concl]', 2011b). In response, Schmidt mentions how this reflection mirrors 'questions of porosity, of text [...] that is permeable and transformed by the encounter'. Linking this to notions of text and textuality with reference to Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes, Schmidt expresses some frustration with 'those arguments, particularly when they tend toward [...] a fetishisation of formalism, of trying to "break" texts so that they allow gaps for the reader'. As an alternative, he mentions the role of context:

what we bring to the work, and the ways in which the work introduces itself to us, is part of the work. [...] there are multiple vectors of approach to the work, multiple ways of even thinking about what it is to approach the work. (Schmidt, 'Spill Stings 20: A Dialogue on Infection [concl]', 2011b)

What I find in Paterson and Schmidt's dialogue is a shared concern for the plural ways in which meaning might be articulated from the vantage point of a collective audience, but also from a multiplicity of positions. This is contingent on a recognition of poststructuralism's effects on the status of the text, reflections made vis-à-vis performance, as evidenced in Schmidt's thinking. We might also understand this encounter with text and context, through the lens of the performative, which I discussed in Chapter One: a move beyond witnessing. Schmidt's linking of what is brought to performance, and what this reveals, resonates with what Fischer-Lichte has termed the instability of meaning-making, and the spectatorial plurality this shapes. There is a navigating between text and context in the subject of the writing, as much as its form. More fundamentally, it pertains to an engagement with the formation not only of meaning, but of subjectivity through the prism of this writing. It is subjectivisation that enables this linking of what precedes the event, what might infect it, and how this might take shape in the act of criticism itself.

Here I am reminded of Judith Butler's work in *Senses of the Subject* (2015), in which she examines the questions of identity and subject formation in relation to language and affect. Butler's concern is with the ways in which affect often precedes the subject: 'I am already affected before I can say "I" and that I have to be affected to say "I" at all' (2015: 2). Speaking about the narrative authority in literary fiction, Butler problematises how we consider subjectivity in relation to norms, discourse and temporality. Our own

forming is not fixed, but always a process, a confrontation and appropriation of norms, made outside of linear causality: 'I am never simply formed, nor am I ever fully self-forming' (Butler 2015: 6). She politicises the 'I' in authorship by questioning what happens to it, to the 'I', in the moment in which it breaks with its constituting relations, and asking what it might become (2015: 9). There is a line, Butler argues, between susceptibility and subjugation. It is both thinking and sensing that intertwine in acts of subject-formation. Thinking back to *Spill:Stings's* engagement with the itch, what emerges is a conception of subjectivisation and criticism that accounts for both thought and affect. This is made most explicit in Paterson and Schmidt's dialogue, which engages thematically with infection, but also reflects on its metaphorical resonance for ways of relating to performance work. The dialogue between the two writers examines this very question of sense and thought, because it acknowledges a plurality of vectors of meaning, as we have seen. It also remains attuned to a sensing, as pertaining to the role perception plays in constituting journeys of meaning, and allowing for openness towards plurality, which Schmidt discusses openly in his response. Schmidt speaks not to the breaking of a text, but to its identity-formation as well.

Earlier in her text, Paterson mentions the work of Brian Massumi and his describing of 'the nature of perception as a dance between potentiality and possibility'. Her reflection pertains to her experience of being a part of the process behind *Glorious* by Rajni Shah, a work presented at the festival. Answering to the borders of critical distance, she draws on Massumi to propose that:

you cannot perceive an object without entering into a relationship with it; your relationship with the object is based on what you already know; therefore, your perception of the

object is driven (but not determined) by what you have perceived before. Knowledge, then, is not something that builds up like a wall. Instead, it accumulates in a circular motion, bringing a bit of the past into the present in order to guess the future. (Paterson, 'Spill Stings 20: A Dialogue on Infection [concl]', 2011)

Paterson draws a link between the inherently subjective perception that emerges because of our relationship to objects, and its role in shaping our perception of it. This sets an encounter with the temporal plurality of the moment of writing. Paterson's engagement with knowledge as circular, and always, to some extent, speculative, might be understood considering Butler's analysis. This view of criticism's engagement with performance always holds at play its potential speculations, as much as its constant formation through the subject. This is evident in Paterson's return to the conditions of meaning's formation, linked wholly to both sensing and thinking. The break which Butler proposes when thinking about literary authorship is enacted here. This is visible in both Paterson and Schmidt's departure from any linearities of meaning, and their parallel debate on the identity of texts on performance, and performance's processes of meaning. What glues these together is the self, as the means of relating to the performance, as that which, as Paterson says, opens its meaning, and circulates within the encounter.

Schmidt and Paterson's dialogue is exemplary of the reflective thinking on criticism which the project undertakes. This is seen both in the micro, in the approaches which the writers take to navigating between the work and its context, and the macro, in the project design. The contents page of the project is made up of a series of numbered posts, inclusive of dialogue pieces, interviews with artists, reflective pieces and exchanges prior to, and after, the festival. Taking its cue from Spill Festival's thematic

programming, 'On Infection', the posts undertake a series of examinations both embedded within encounters with performance work, and taking relevant divergent and often thematic approaches. The approach hinges on an explicit engagement with formations of meaning, as the dialogue between Schmidt and Paterson evidences; one that is performative, and contingent on an attentive kind of spectating which always returns to plurality. This is most visible in Paterson's reflection of viewing as a kind of breathing in and out; the ambiguity surrounding her use of the audience in the closing remark of her post is a welcome one, because it neither sinks into the singular moment of viewing, nor does it lose itself in attempts to represent the many, but creates a porosity between the two.

Elsewhere in the project, more explicit focus is placed on marking out possible territories of meaning for the festival's theme. In 'Infect/Intersect', Johanna Linsley examines, across several posts, 'the cultural context for SPILL's theme on infection' (2011), inclusive of the work of US-based *AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power* and *Critical Art Ensemble*. Linsley explores these as different 'forms of production and interaction' whose strategies might shed light on the proposition of infection as material and subject. Secondly, she mentions the festival's 'multiplicity of outputs – staged performances, facilitated talks, film and video screenings and various other more or less defined actions, interventions and conversations' (2011). Reflecting on the festival's own structure, the writing project assumes a discursive position vis-à-vis the work. The multiplicity Linsley mentions is relevant for the kinds of formal and contextual conversations which *Spill:Stings* undertook.

Spill Festival of Performance (Spill) was set up by Pacitti Company under the artistic direction of Robert Pacitti as a biennial presentation of experimental performance and Live Art. Spill was intended as a platform for experimental practice (Pacitti in Gardner 2009) and became known for bringing artists working at the forefront of European performance to some of London's notable venues, including the Barbican and Southbank Centre: Romeo Castellucci, Jan Fabre and Raimund Hoghe, alongside UK artists like Forced Entertainment, Julia Bardsley, Rajni Shah and Ron Athey. The parallel development of the writing programme, curated in collaboration with Pacitti Company, arose because of an interest in probing the means through which experimental performance might best be presented, debated and contextualised.

In an interview with *Guardian* critic Lyn Gardner, speaking about the second iteration of the festival in 2009, Pacitti discussed the challenges of this approach to programming, which aims to foster a wider audience around work that is contentious, and emergent from different landscapes of contemporary practice. 'We're not here to usurp, but to add to the ecology,' he states, 'and that ecology includes supporting both artists and audiences' ('Experimental theatre spills into the mainstream', *Guardian*, 2009). This approach is reflected in the curatorial strategies deployed by the festival, which, from the outset, included a symposium⁵ dedicated to the possibilities 'of radical, contemporary performance' and modes of 'activating audiences', as well as a 'critical writing platform'. In the words of Pacitti, 'Spill has [...] always been as much about creating a context for the work, as it has been presenting live events.' This approach foregrounds the festival event as a container for a multiplicity of experiences: salons,

⁵ The first Spill Symposium took place at Soho Theatre on 12 and 13 April 2007, in collaboration with the Live Art Development Agency. <https://spillfestival.com/show/the-spill-symposium/>

performances and discussions sit side by side, and this creates a relationality.⁶ These, in Pacitti's view, act as contexts through which audiences might encounter experimental performance work.

Despite the public nature of fiery debates surrounding criticism's ethical boundaries ('Critical Distance', by Andrew Haydon, *Postcardsfromthegods*, 2007), the first iteration of *Spill:Overspill* occurred on the margins of such conversations. It preceded Horwitz's 'horizontalism' and adjoining discussions on the role of subjectivity in theatre criticism, as well as public debates on the project of embedded writing (Costa in Radosaljević 2016: 201). Against this changing ecology, a different concern for criticism emerged, bringing writers from across these spheres of theatre and performance together. What is curious about its emergence, particularly *Spill:Overspill*, is the move away from the kinds of formats of criticism expounded in publications in other art forms, namely theatre or visual art.

The proposition of an event of criticism made possible through writing that gains its own autonomy has precedence within *Spill*'s writing programme. Since its inception, *Spill:Overspill* presented itself as a 'tailor-made critical writing programme' located at 'the heart of *Spill* festival'. Its foregrounding of the event of criticism is without precedent in the UK, mainly because its move away from valuation is a direct result of the embedded nature of the project, which is explicitly experimental but holds critique to be foundational. *Spill:Overspill* does not claim any links with reviewing or

⁶ In the interview, Pacitti adds that the role of some of its contextualising activities, including salons, feasts, residencies and more, is to 'turn the means of production for radical work inside out, by blurring the line between artist, audience, expert, venue director, volunteer, cleaner, critic' (2017). This is telling of Pacitti's concentration on curation as a means of cultural intervention.

mainstream media practices, instead drawing on the conceptualisation of writing as an event emergent within performance writing.

Spill Festival of Performance was the first of its kind in the UK to formalise a curatorial relationship to criticism that took an alternative approach. It sought to embed a discursive culture from the onset, and positioned this alongside the performance work. As I have already mentioned, for the first iteration of the festival, in 2007, this took the name of *Spill:Overspill*, curated by *Open-Dialogues*. In 2009, *Open-Dialogues* were joined by Alex Eisenberg in continuing to explore modes of critical writing about the works in the festival, made available online via the festival's website. By 2011, the festival had also introduced *Spill Salons*, curated by a Thinker in Residence in what came to be known as the *Think Tank* strand of the programming. In 2011, these were held and curated by artist Oreet Ashery, first to take up the residency, and were accompanied by a new iteration of *Spill:Overspill – Spill:Stings*, which I have discussed here.

What marks out the different iteration of Spill Festival's writing programme, from the start, is its engagement with the culture of the festival, and its dialogic relationship to the work. This is made explicit in the multiple, dialogic reflections presented on the blog, not only on the overlaps between different pieces in the festival, but also on the nature of the critical writing itself. As I showed here, this is made from a position of partial autonomy, where the writing is both a kind of sensing and thinking, rather than taking an evaluative scope. This is never explicitly dismissed, but in the format of the project, and the positions disclosed by so many of its participants, it becomes clear that what is favoured is the kind of permissive intimacy Paterson speaks of, a kind of 'approaching of the work', in Schmidt's work. Elsewhere, this is visible in Paterson's

reflection of the 20-minute silence, where she shifts between the performance and its possible directions of meaning, marking out two parallel operations. Paterson's text navigates the ambiguities of *In Eldersfield* and its silence in such a way that it never seeks to fully reconstruct it, but to account for its plural possibilities.

As I discuss here, this conception of criticism as event made explicit in *Open-Dialogues'* collaboration with Spill, has its roots, in part, in an experimental space made available by an influential, two-year project which precedes *Spill:Overspill*, titled *Writing from Live Art*. The programme was led by artist Joshua Sofaer between 2006 and 2008, and conceived as an 'opportunity for new writers [...] to engage with Live Art and performance work and to move towards seeing their writing in print' (Sofaer 2008). The initiative was part of a larger project, *Into Action*, funded by Arts Council England during the same two-year period and run by Live Art UK Network, a national network for the infrastructural development of the practice (Heddon and Klein 2012: 31). The network project aimed to promote understanding of live art, artist and audience development, curatorial research and new partnership building (Heddon and Klein 2012: 31).

Of significant relevance to the project was an Arts Council of Great Britain 1991 report authored by Lois Keidan, who was to set up the UK-wide organisation Live Art Development Agency in 1999,⁷ titled 'National Arts and Media Strategy Discussion

⁷ The Live Art Development Agency (LADA) was set up in 1999 as a centre for live art ('About', Live Art Development Agency). As Klein and Heddon discuss in their charting of histories of Live Art in the UK, LADA emerged following the New Labour victory of 1997, coinciding with a period of rebranding arts as 'creative industries' generative of 'creative economies' (2012: 27). LADA's alignment with institutional and policy-led discourses of the time is not accidental, Klein and Heddon propose, but emerges as a result of Keidan's experience across the sector, working for both the Arts Council and organisations such as the ICA (2012: 28). 'The agency in the organisation's title [...] could be a provocative spin on government

Document on Live Art' (Shepherd 2016: 128). The document⁸ called for a shift in terminology in marking practices for 'an area of practice that cuts across and subverts traditional art form boundaries' (Keidan 1991: iii in Johnson 2013a: 16), and pointed to the lack of debate on the work produced under this umbrella. The relative singularity of this discursive culture is pointed out by Keidan in her report, published a year before *Performance Magazine* ceases its formal operation. Within the space of *Performance Magazine*, a first shift is marked from the use of the term performance to that of live art (Heddon and Klein 2013: 34), in light of its ongoing interest in maintaining focus on a wide range of hybrid performance work.

The history of Live Art's development, both as a sector and as an umbrella term for a variety of practices (Heddon and Klein 2012, Johnson 2013a) is evidence of the ways in which policy-led, infrastructural changes and concern for supporting, and marking out, a set of experimental practices paved the way for a reconceptualisation of criticism's own ontology. As Johnson argues, 'the betweenness of Live Art should not be mistaken for a suggestion of its inherent marginality' (2013a: 23). This is inherently connected,

practices: here, the agency in question is often the artists' (Klein Heddon 2012: 29). Elsewhere, Dominic Johnson traces the interconnectedness of evolving discourses on live art as a critical paradigm, and its institutionalisation in the late nineties (Johnson 2013a: 23–25). What marks its relevance here is the ways in which Live Art emerged not as a set of practices per se, but as an umbrella term for a series of methodologies, approaches, lineages and histories of work, slipping across formal borders, from dance to visual art. At the juncture between its sector-development and parallel discursive processes of definition emerges a space in which criticism's relationship to meaning-making vis-à-vis such slippery work is explored.

⁸ The report followed an earlier one by Michael McMillan on Live Art and cultural diversity that critiqued the Eurocentrism of definitions of performance (Johnson 2013a: 17), pointing to the double extremity of Black artists working in the field of Live Art (McMillan in Johnson 2013a: 17). As Johnson expresses in his reading of the publication, McMillan's argument articulated this double exclusion of Black artists from Live Art as similar to that of Live Art within wider cultural discourses, arguing instead for 'trans-racial cultural syncretism' (McMillan in Johnson 2013a: 18). Across both publications, a growing unease surrounding the visibility, recognition, infrastructural support and public discourse of practices falling on the margins of histories of art and theatre emerges. And as Johnson traces in his history of the term, contentions over its formal remit and political claims shape the emergent practice, paralleled by a diversity of means of working.

on the one hand, to growing debates around the role of critical culture to occlude or marginalise practices that might fall under that rubric. Johnson traces this back to discussions within *Performance Magazine*. He mentions writer Rose Garrard speaking about the Lyon Performance Festival: 'in Britain the role of live work is often read inaccurately as polarised in opposition to the art object' (Garrard qtd. in Johnson 2013a: 24). The problem is ascribed to the 'scarcity of knowledgeable and committed writers in the UK, which restricted access to international critical reception' (Johnson 2013a: 24). This is important, because it marks Live Art's investment in a project on criticism as emerging from a lack of critical knowledge.

On the other hand, of equal relevance is the concern of Live Art practices with works that emphasise 'identity and identity politics' (Johnson 2013a: 25). This view is not wholly encompassing of the multiple approaches to cultural politics which Live Art often undertakes, and neither does it necessarily imply political efficacy. It is, however, relevant in considering that the work itself probes particular modes of conceiving of the subject⁹ which invite a reconsideration of the positioning one might take in view of this. This is best understood in light of different attempts to formalise a critical relationship to Live Art, first emergent in the pages of *Performance Magazine*, and later in the short-lived publications that follow. *Live Art Listings* ran for two issues following the closure of *Performance Magazine* in 1992, and morphed into *Hybrid*, which ran for two further years.

⁹ See, for example, the work of art historian Amelia Jones, *Self/Image* (2006), or Johnson's *Oral Histories of Live Art* (2015), which document examples of work that deals with identity politics against changing cultural, economic, social and governmental landscapes.

The short history of the development of sector-publications, from editor Christopher Hewitt's *Live Art Listings* to *Hybrid*, edited by David Hughes and Andrea Phillips, and *Liveartmagazine*, also edited by Hewitt, points to a preponderance of infrastructural development over critical discourse. Information on artist bursaries, news articles and degree programmes (Heddon and Klein 2012: 32) feature alongside regular listings and occasional features across both publications. *Hybrid* attempted to maintain some of *Performance Magazine's* structure, but *Liveartmagazine* moved more explicitly towards acting as a source of information on live art, operating until 2004. The funding model also shifted: *Hybrid* had received some funding from Arts Council England, whilst *Liveartmagazine* took on an advertising and subscription model.

Outside of the development of more academic publications, such as *Performance Research*, little space in non-academic publications remained for critically exploring the politics and poetics of Live Art, often omitted from the mainstream press. *Performance Research* was founded by Ric Allsop, Claire MacDonald and Richard Gough in 1995 at Aberystwyth's Centre for Performance Research, and the first issue was devoted to exploring performance and live art specifically, by means of artist-centred writing ('The Temper of Times', 1:1). The publication explicitly sought to make connections across 'theatre, dance, music, time-based and live art' ('About' Performance Research, 1:1), with an explicit orientation surrounding cultures of research.

The lack of sustainability of publications following *Performance Magazine* can be understood in light of the rise of online criticism and internet-based sourcing publications like *Time Out*, which often made that information already available. By 2004, *Liveartmagazine* was the only remaining Live Art-specific publication, with a

focus different to that of its predecessors. Its subtitle, 'a bi-monthly guide to hybrid arts', oriented itself around providing an accessible point of information on the sector. Arts Council England did not pursue any further single-publication funding following *Performance Magazine*. And, as Radosavljević's study shows, similar issues surrounding infrastructural support for criticism in the nineties were faced across cultural practices (2016:10). As Heddon and Klein argue, 'the lack of writing opportunities for engaging with live art [...] prompted the *Writing from Live Art* initiative' (2012: 32).

From this cultural development, and in the background of infrastructural support for Live Art following the publication of Keidan's 1999 report, came the *Writing from Live Art* project. Participants in the project included *Open-Dialogues* co-founders Mary Paterson and Rachel Lois Clapham, as well as Tim Attack, Dany Louise, Rebecca May Marston, Theron Schmidt, Folake Shoga and Hazel Tsoi Wiles. The structure of the project included retreats, seminars with editors from *Frieze*, *the Wire*, *Total Theatre* and *Dance Theatre Journal*, collaborations with Performa Festival in New York in 2007 and Spill that same year, artist interviews for an ongoing website, as well as participation in symposia and conferences.

This structure and declared scope of the project was to provide opportunities for 'writers who are new to Live Art, to engage with Live Art and performance work' with a view to publication ('About' Writing From Live Art, 2 July 2006). Furthermore, the project sought to support writers becoming 'established commentators on Live Art in the arts and mainstream press'. The structure and intent of the project, however, did not explicitly include collaborations within the Live Art sector, but beyond, into the wider territory of theatre criticism (*Total Theatre*), visual and art criticism (*Frieze*) and

dance (*Dance Theatre Journal*). What remains fascinating about the project, however, is its legacy as an innovative series of structured processes fundamentally oriented around a conception of criticism that incorporated embedded writing, with festivals Performa 07 and Spill, and explorations and experiments with writing itself, in the form of retreats. The balance, structurally, sought to provide opportunities to embed discourse on Live Art into more mainstream spaces, inclusive of different media, whilst at the same time opening up a questioning of criticism's relationship to the work beyond the evaluative.

The most cited project emergent from this remains *Open-Dialogues*, a collaboration that explicitly bypasses the project's intention to educate a new generation of writers on Live Art, to focus more explicitly on examining the intersection between writing, criticism and performance. In light of the cultural context and impetus that framed it, the orientation became a formal, process-led experimentation. This is most evident, however, in the make-up of *Writing from Live Art*: the first iteration of *Spill:Overspill* took place as an embedded collaboration foregrounding the event of criticism, and the collaboration with Performa 07, *Writing Hub*, introduced a temporal, live element to embedded writing. These acted as provocations on criticism's critical distance, or the dominance of reviewing practices in mainstream media, because they enacted a different means of conceiving of the relationship to performance.

Criticism in Live Art was, from the inception of the project, and since the rise of *Performance Magazine*, inherently connected to the cultural politics of an experimental practice, prompting a search for new ways of responding to the variety and politics of work. This can be seen in the influential report by Lois Keidan highlighting the need for

alternative critical discourses specifically addressing Live Art, or the historical emergence of the term itself in close connection with formal and representational politics omitted from art histories or mainstream art discourse. It can also be seen in the ambition of *Writing from Live Art*, a project itself held by an artist and educator, Joshua Sofaer, to both enable criticism in terms of its bringing visibility to Live Art, and its formal remit. This is also, not coincidentally, what marks Live Art as such a fruitful ground for the development of performance criticism, because it allowed, more informally in the pages of *Performance Magazine*, and in a more structured manner in the *Writing from Live Art* project, a conception of criticism that was influential beyond the ecology of the practice.

‘From’, ‘on’, ‘as’: positions of criticism

Key to understanding the conceptual importance of the project to the development of performance criticism is its deliberate formal ambiguity through the use of ‘from’. It might seem curious that, from the outset, *Writing from Live Art* declared itself as a training ground for new writers, whilst also disclosing an altogether different position vis-à-vis criticism. This is evidenced through the use of the word ‘commentators’ as the main qualifier for the work of the participants. This acts as a deliberate omission of the word critic, searching instead for ‘writing that is critical but accessible’. This delineates an alternative set of associations with criticism that foreground critical writing as a practice, as opposed to drawing any connections to notions of professionalism that were so acutely debated at the time in mainstream theatre criticism. Unfolding at a time of public debates over the legitimacy of criticism in mainstream media, *Writing from Live Art* engaged across contexts with a view to drawing and building alternative

models. This is evident in its approach, which gives weight to the practice of writing, through retreats, embedded projects and seminars, as well as to criticism, with regular publishing collaborations and seminar mentorship.

This is also what makes its defining characteristic so important: the use of the word 'from'. In part, this suggests a closeness to the work: the writers are engaging in thinking from within the bounds of Live Art, outwards across different cultural terrains. This is already a bold proposition, at a time when debates over the legitimacy of different forms of criticism cautioned against subjectivity, and the kinds of intimacies with work which *Spill:Stings* explicitly reflected on. For that reason, 'from' is also a political decision, casting aside the mechanisms of the mainstream press, which had also come to ignore, for the most part, the phenomenon of Live Art altogether, for a more strategic investment in the mechanisms of the press that spread to other sectors, and drew both on specialised audiences (through symposia or links with more academic publications like *Dance Theatre Journal*) and on a wider audience (through public engagements in symposia and talks, as well as digital projects like *Spill:Overspill*).

'From', however, also serves as a position vis-à-vis criticism; Live Art, as we have come to see in the work of adjacent projects like *Spill:Overspill*, acts as an experimental ground that fuels a similar attitude to criticism, which can also depart from it.

Paterson's text is evidence of this engagement, because it never lets go of critical orientation, merely weaves it through rhetorical possibilities. This equal commitment to analysis and experience is an echoing statement, often expounded in the pages of *Performance Magazine*, that underpins the development of performance criticism on the margins of mainstream media. 'From', therefore, is not a rejection of criticism, but a

search for a plurality of means of enabling discourse on a shape-shifting terrain of work, on account of its cultural omission. Performance criticism departs from performance in search for plurality of meaning.

Additionally, this positioning of performance criticism marks a turn to understanding criticism through a different mode of relating to performance work, which Paterson's text is demonstrative of, building on the *Writing from Live Art* programme. Both the consideration towards forms of performance and those of criticism are impossible to extricate from one another. This is because they pertain to parallel positions on form as means of visibility. It is why performance criticism emerges vis-à-vis a shifting category of work, encompassing a range of approaches that hold in common their questioning of criticism and its normative conception in mainstream media, from the influential debate documented by Maddy Costa at *Devoted and Disgruntled* (in which Theron Schmidt also participated), to the formal explorations of *Open-Dialogues*. In her documentation of the *Devoted and Disgruntled* session run in 2012, Costa mentions the question 'why does a critic have to write from a point of certainty?' Therefore the poetics of ambiguity that emerge in Paterson's text, which are debated in her dialogue with Schmidt, and expounded within the bounds of the *Writing from Live Art* project, begin to occupy a wider cultural terrain.

This is further evidenced with the development of *The Live Art Almanac*, a publication by the Live Art Development Agency, published by Central Books in 2008, bringing together 'found writing about and around Live Art'.¹⁰ The Almanac is an initiative that

¹⁰ *The Live Art Almanac* is a publication that gathers found writing from and around Live Art and contemporary performance, and is edited and published by the Live Art Development Agency. The first iteration was published in 2010, and there have been further publications in 2012, 2014 and 2016.

explicitly brings visibility to texts from across different kinds of spaces of criticism. It seeks to bring together ‘texts which are representative of the most engaging, provocative, thoughtful writing around Live Art and the cultural landscape which it set’ (About, Live Art Almanac, 2008). It documents writing from the same period as the *Writing from Live Art* project, 2006–2008, featuring some of its participating writers, as well as artists and thinkers beyond, including the *Guardian*’s Lyn Gardner.

There is an important further distinction in the means in which criticism is qualified, particularly in the line of experimental work that emerges from the *Writing from Live Art* project. A blog post reflecting on *Writing Live: Writers Hub* as part of New York-based Performa 07’s *Not for Sale* education series, part of the *Writing from Live Art* project and undertaken by Rachel Lois Clapham, Rebecca May Marston and Mary Paterson, argues that the ambition of the embedded project is to support:

a new generation of artists, authors and critics engaged in discussions around prescient issues in Performance and new media, and the related task of writing about art and artists whose work encompasses several disciplines at once. (‘Looking Back at Writing Live: Writers Hub, 01/01/08’)

Formally, the blog outlines 39 reviews, 3 previews, 4 interviews and 2 opinion pieces authored by ‘critics, curators, performers and academics’. These occur alongside meetings, peer-critique sessions and workshops, and face-to-face debates with Performa curator and historian Rose Lee Goldberg on ‘the role of the critic and writing about Performance’. Throughout the post, the term ‘critical writing’ is used to qualify the work of participating writers, providing an umbrella for the writing project. It is only later, in 2012, as I have shown, that the term ‘embedded’ gains cultural traction in

bringing together a range of approaches to critical writing about performance that seek an alternative dialogue.

The Performa 07 collaboration grounds the relating of criticism and writing in the wider realm of performance. At the same time, it also introduces criticism into the debate, and parallels a similar, embedded engagement with writing that was to be formalised four years later. The addition of 'live' also creates a temporality to the writing project, running in parallel with the festival. The position from which the writers operate is both experiential, for they are part of the unfolding events, and analytical, in the orientation and scope of their work.

Building on that approach a year later, *Open-Dialogues* argue for 'writing on and as performance' (Open-Dialogues 'Critical Model', 2011a). The writers express their resistance towards resolution, arguing that writing is a 'living contract with our performance collaborators and an ongoing work in and of itself' (Open-Dialogues 'Critical Model', 2011a). This position explicitly grounds an interest in criticism as a distinct practice, and therefore, as constitutive of its own processes of meaning-making. The addition of 'on' and 'as' suggest both an orientation of the work, and a point of departure: this is criticism that is about the work, but also declares its move away from it. The additional 'as' is not a replacement, but a delineation, one that points explicitly to the ability of writing to constitute performance expounded by performance writing 20 years prior.

The legacy of performance writing is made explicit in the work of *Open-Dialogues*, through an openness towards modes of relating critical writing and performance. This

is explored further two years later, in 2010, when Lois Clapham edits and publishes a guide for the Live Art Development Agency's study room called *(W)Reading Performance Writing*. In the guide, she provides an overview of materials from the organisation's open-access writing that pertain to performance writing, which she defines as a term 'undecided and continually on the move' (2010: 19).

The guide includes key figures in performance writing such as Caroline Bergvall, Claire MacDonald and John Hall, with the addition of a wider set of references that span poetics and conceptual writing, including Charles Bernstein, Tamarin Norwood and Peter Walsh, and younger writers operating at the edges of the practices, such as Johanna Linsley, Alex Eisenberg and Rebecca May Marston, participants in the *Writing from Live Art* project. *(W)Reading Performance Writing*¹¹ firmly traces an interest in the conceptualisation of performance and writing explored across these sources. At the same time, it sits side by side with the critical writing culture that *Writing from Live Art* fuels, and the unfolding debate on dialogue with practice that becomes public with *Devoted and Disgruntled* in 2012, documented by Maddy Costa, which I discussed in Chapter One.

The play on prepositions between performance, writing and criticism is formative in establishing a culture of experimentation in performance criticism. By the time of *Spill:Stings*, the notion of 'itch' the writers articulate can be understood, considering a

¹¹ Writers cited in this curated collection come from several disciplines, including poetics, visual art, art writing and performance. These are Charles Bernstein, Caroline Bergvall, David Berridge, Rachel Lois Clapham, Emma Cocker, Mark Caffrey, Alex Eisenberg, John Hall, Claire Hind, Richard Kostelanetz, Johanna Linsley, Claire MacDonald, Rebecca May Marston, Marit Münzberg, Tamarin Norwood, Mary Paterson, Joshua Sofaer, Danae Theodoridou, Peter Walsh and Simon Zimmerman.

conceptual orientation towards performance writing, and a prior interest in the event of criticism as autonomous. Performance criticism emerges under a culture of experimentation that also manifests a political attitude towards meaning-making away from, but not wholly exclusive of, valuation. At the same time, what marks this conception of the event of criticism is a joined-up, collective space for experimentation.

Open-Dialogues' emergence from *Writing from Live Art* is made possible by the project's own enabling of critical collaboration, in the form of *Performa 07 Writers Hub*, or the later development of *Spill:Overspill*. These projects embrace different forms of collaboration to make space for formal examination, but they are equally reliant on collectivity to articulate plurality. In *Spill:Overspill*, the word 'community' is used to describe the participating writers ('The Methodology', *Spill:Overspill*, 2009). What we see here is the emergence of an experimental culture that is constituted not around singular, authorial identities, but on collective models, which I discuss later in the thesis as closely connected to a belief in the powers of deliberation.

I understand this positioning of criticism and performance as characteristic of a similar mobility which Live Art itself undertakes (Johnson 2013a: 24). This, I propose, is best understood in light of its conception of criticism as a distinct practice, as well as a process of appearance. This conception and experimentation with the borders between criticism and performance, rooted in Live Art, is a significant moment in the recent history of criticism. Performance criticism is significant because it marks an autonomy of practice, which we have seen at play in the writing explored here. This is not to say that performance criticism attempts to take the place of performance; through its

speaking through and from performance, it brings it into view, and constructs its own avenues of meaning in a political fabric. It is this mode in which criticism thinks by means of the event which I move on to investigate in my next chapter.

Chapter Three

Poetics of Appearance: the Event of Criticism

‘All thought arises out of experience,’ philosopher Hannah Arendt declares in *The Life of the Mind* (1971); but ‘no experience yields any meaning or even coherence without undergoing the operations of imagining and thinking’ (1971: 87). This chapter concerns itself with the kinds of thinking operations that come to bear on performance criticism, and that performance criticism helps to shape. In this chapter I ask: what is revealed by the peripheral fragments – memories, collisions of events both within and outside performance, shifts in attention, disclosures of subjectivity – when these are understood as the fabric of criticism itself? I answer this by paying attention to the multiple, embodied and immaterial thinking processes of criticism: from the encounter with a performance through to that of a critical response.¹ I do so by thinking with a text by writer Eleanor Hadley Kershaw, written as part of *Spill:Overspill*, responding to Forced Entertainment’s *Void Story*.²

Engaging with Kershaw’s text, I tease out the ways in which the writerly staging of, and encounter with, multiple events expresses a collision not only with the meaning-making

¹ In this chapter – and throughout the thesis – I use the term encounter with the work over that of spectatorship. This, in part, is to foreground the time and body-bound (phenomenological) dimension of this act, and to privilege the specificity and plurality of the critical gaze, building on the work on spectatorship I have already discussed in earlier chapters of this thesis, that of Erika Fischer-Lichte. My focus is not to contribute to the discipline of spectatorship studies, but to consider, from the methodological perspective of performance philosophy, how we might think through criticism as an event, and, in close relation, the processes of thought and interpretation that move beyond the spectatorial act.

² ‘(w)hole story’ by Eleanor Hadley Kershaw, *Spill:Overspill*, a text about Forced Entertainment’s *Void Story* taking place at Soho Theatre from 20–25 April 2009 as part of Spill Festival of Performance. <http://spilloverspill.blogspot.co.uk/2009/05/whole-story-by-eleanor-hadley-kershaw.html>

processes of performance, but those adjacent to it as well. In this way, the event constitutes an ontological fabric of performance criticism, evidencing how the practices gathered in this thesis depart from performance, thinking both in proximity to it, and away from it. In Kershaw's text, I identify moments that reveal or expose the fractious temporality of performance criticism, which I theorise as 'the event of criticism'. This event performs the multiple, occasionally conflicting, processes that matter; I use the word in its dual meaning – first, the processes that make up the matter of criticism and its thinking, and second, those that bear on the critical subject, but are propelled outwards from it.

I draw on Hannah Arendt's philosophy of appearance. Echoed in this analysis is the aesthetic dimension of the event: a process of appearance. Susan Sontag's argument in *Against Interpretation*, which I also call upon here, is based on the proposition that art is a process of appearance and that criticism, in its relationship to it, can stop that becoming visible as much as it can contribute to its coming into being. This is most evident in the quote by artist Willem De Kooning that starts her essay, which speaks of content as 'an encounter like a flash' (qtd. in Sontag 1964:9). The 'flash' which De Kooning speaks of is graspable, but incomplete, by nature temporary and fragmented. The event of criticism is like a flash: it is contained both in the encounter with performance, and in the reflection that follows; it emerges in between shards and fragments of writing, in the experience of reading, in the noise of parallel encounters with the world, in the attention to performance and its remembrance.

From encounter to event

I have chosen to think with Kershaw's text for its explicit staging of choreographies of attention, and its incorporation of an event within the audience that bears upon that onstage. Kershaw's text is expressive of a shared concern in performance criticism with the event. In a talk given at the University of Kent on the occasion of a one day event titled *What Is Theatre Criticism For?*, Andrew Haydon argues that the 'British Theatre Criticism' model of 'reporting upon the event' ('What is Theatre Criticism For', *Postcards from the gods*, 2011) has often resulted in a concern for its own preservation, at the expense not only of the work, but also of the apparent 'noise' of its event: the arrangement of seating; the temperature of the room; the framing of the work.³ The problem for Haydon is that these aspects 'go without saying', which means there is a lot that 'criticism leaves uninterrogated' (2011). Elsewhere, in a summary of an event at the Bush Theatre in November 2012 asking how criticism is 'keeping up with contemporary performance' (2012), Catherine Love underscores the ways in which the panel⁴ shared an interest in the relationship between theatre criticism and 'the work that is being made.' ('Interrogating Criticism', *Exeunt*, 2012) Whilst the prominence of embedded criticism shifted the conversation to opportunities for collaboration between critics and makers⁵, as early as 2009, *Spill: Overspill*, the project that houses Kershaw's text, was committing to exploring 'the event of criticism in relation to performance.' (2009), which was to become a shared commitment within performance criticism. This

³ The full post is titled 'What Is Theatre Criticism For?' and was authored by Haydon on his blog, *Postcards from the Gods*.

⁴ The event was part of Bush Theatre's New Writing Festival *RADAR* and the panel consisted of Ramin Gray, Sean Holmes, Andrew Haydon and Maddy Costa and chaired by Selma Dimitrijevic

⁵ I have spoken about the relevance of embedded criticism in the Introduction to this thesis, citing Andrew Haydon ('Embedded' in *Postcards from the Gods*, 16.4.2012), Maddy Costa's convened dialogue for *Devoted & Disgruntled 7*, 'What new dialogue can we set up between people who write about theatre and people who make it' (28.2.2012), and, later, Andy Horwitz, writing in the US on horizontal criticism ('Re-Framing the Critic for the 21st Century' in *Culturebot*, 5.8.2012).

concern with eventness is distinct from that of embeddedness, which seeks to participate in performance's making; instead, what developed on the margins of the rise of embedded criticism was an experimentation with the event as critical concern.

An early example of this engagement with the event comes in the form of a collaboration between Adrian Heathfield and Tim Etchells titled *Long Relay (Alternate Worlds)* for Serpentine Gallery's *Experiment Marathon*.⁶ The project took the form of an ongoing writing experiment featuring eight writers working over 24 hours, working from a version of a single text. The critical writing experiment exposed a collective process of writing, constituted and presented as a single event. This approach to foregrounding the event of writing was furthered in *Spill:Overspill*, shaped around a concern with the specificity of criticism. Aside from *Spill:Overspill*, a further example is *NOTA*, an *Open-Dialogues* collaboration that 'presses on the time, place and quality of notes in relation to performance' (2015). *NOTA* is concerned with the event of criticism and its fragments – notes taken on the performance, during the performance, exposed, incomplete and bound as a book following its end, where the writers are revealed, occupied space on the margins of the actual performance space. Elsewhere, performance artist Ron Athey's writing project with *Fierce Festival of Performance's* Press Gang, a group of 16 young people working with the festival, consisted of workshops and a performance of, and by means of, automatic writing; a giant scroll of paper was laid on the floor and writers were asked to scribe their stream of

⁶ Serpentine Galleries' Marathons are 24-hour, curated live events in which writers, thinkers, scientists, anthropologists, artists and more gather to reflect on a common theme, and were first developed under the artistic directorship of Hans Ulrich Obrist and Julia Peyton-Jones in 2006. The 'Experiments' Marathon, which *Long Relay* was part of, took place from 13–14 October 2007, beginning at 1pm on the first day and finishing 24 hours later.

consciousness during encounters with multiple performances of their festival.⁷

Kershaw's text is part of a shift towards the event as a productive space of enquiry, moving beyond a formal concern to exposing the mechanisms of interpretation. A significant number of examples take part in collaborations with festivals or within collaborative structures, which I consider further in Chapter Four.

As these examples show, the exploration of the event in criticism is not limited to the encounter with performance, but to the noise that disturbs it, the writing that intervenes in it, the peripheral moments, revealed in the critical response or text. Much like dance scholar Priya Srinivasan's unruly spectator, 'a corporeal being who critically engages with the female dancing body' precisely to work through 'the seduction of nationalist, Orientalist and patriarchal discourses' (2009: 53), this noise constitutes itself around moments in the performance that might seem marginal, but also peripheries of meaning that move beyond it, that tie it to a wider political fabric. My interest here is in exposing how the event is deployed in performance criticism, exceeding the encounter with performance.

Performance criticism discloses the processes of its coming into being. We might understand this distinct process-oriented ontology as rooted in the relationship between document and thinking subject, examined in performance scholarship. In *The Ontology of Performance*, Peggy Phelan proposes a form of critical writing 'towards disappearance', rather than preservation (1993: 148), one constituted on the experience of subjectivity. Similarly, in his introduction to *After Criticism: New*

⁷ A reflection of part of this process can be accessed here: <https://wearefierce.org/blog/fierce-press-gang-automatic-writing-a-preview/>

Responses to Art and Performance, Gavin Butt speaks of an abandonment 'to the act of criticism itself, with a view to opening up [its] possible futures' (2005: 17). Elsewhere, Mieke Bal, in *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art Writing* (2001), proposes a critical engagement that sets a dialogue between the work, her subjective experience and the act of writing. For Phelan, this is about the value of disappearance and the ephemerality of performance; for Butt, this requires a shift away from criticism, in order to return to it; and for Bal, an attention to what occurs in between encountering and writing. My interest, however, lies in how these emergent practices of performance criticism, from a disparate group of trouble-makers with varying levels of proximity to such methodologies, are concerned with moments that make criticism's process visible: with interruptions, attentions, and the political fabric that often frames a performance as one thing or another. Distinct from the examples I call to here, performance criticism shapes itself around these slippages; it is not limited to the experience of a work, but also to the processes of reflection that encounter or follow it. As I consider here, and explore throughout the thesis, these two are intertwined: the slippages fold outwards from the encounter, moving to the political nexus between performance and its world.

Across Chapters One and Two, I have outlined the conditions that have shaped the emergence of performance criticism. These have been, on the one hand, economic and cultural, marked by fundamental changes in cultural policy since the implementation of austerity measures in the UK, cuts to arts funding and shifting priorities for bodies such as Arts Council England; in this climate, a drive for social engagement prompted by cultural policy coincided with government pressures on welfare and social support systems. At the same time, the conditions that have shaped these have also been intellectual: visible through public debates on and within mainstream media over the

legitimacy of emergent practices such as blogging or online writing, questions about the primacy of authorial practices of criticism especially in newspapers, as well as an ecology-wide questioning of objectivity and the relationship between economic, artistic and cultural concerns and evaluation. The establishment of a diverse digital ecology of evaluative criticism so particular to this moment in the early noughties offered a viable alternative culture to that of the mainstream press; one committed to reconfiguring the role and scope of valuation in reviewing practices.

What is interesting to observe is that in this landscape, performance criticism's peripheral emergence shifts attention from evaluation as fundamental to the identity of criticism as a practice in theatre and performance⁸. It does so by foregrounding the subjective⁹, critical encounter with the work of performance. Intertwined in this emergent subculture of criticism that stretches the practice outwards, away from formal distinctions (critical or creative), and across modes of writing (criticism, performance writing, art writing), is a concern for ways of responding to practices that sit uncomfortably between genres (Live Art, durational performance, gallery-based theatre work) as well as to the significance of formal exploration for addressing that. Under these conditions, it is productive to think of performance criticism in terms of

⁸ As noted in the Introduction, adjacent disciplines, most notably visual arts, have since modernism, formalised different approaches to criticism grounded either in theoretical investigation, creative experimentation or re-examination of the review as political terrain. Since formalisation has not occurred in the same way in theatre and performance; Live Art and experimental performance have however been crucial grounds for experimental approaches to criticism that displace the centrality of evaluation whilst committing to new forms of reactive criticality.

⁹ As I discussed in Chapter One, subjectivity here is used critically; as Bojana Kunst argues in her recent work *The Artist at Work*, 'the subject exists as a pulsating sum of various conflicting powers and forces' (2015: 20). My focus is not on the construction of the subject but its incorporation into the event of criticism – both by means of a formal account of experience as holding critical potential, and as a means of disputing the role of criticism as representational – an issue I will return to later in this study. Elsewhere, Kate Love speaks to the opportunities for using 'the experience of art as a form of criticism itself' (2005: 157).

landscapes of meaning, distinct from the dynamics that shape these. By investigating how the event of criticism takes shape, we better understand the elusive, impermanent and embodied elements of performance criticism, taking into account the ways in which an event holds multiple potential meanings. My focus here is to show how an event of criticism sustains a plurality of these processes, whilst concentrating on the work of interpretation and thought as shared across these. I bring this to the discussion because the distinct identity that performance criticism forges as opposed to that of evaluative criticism is that it constitutes itself as an event: it contains and, sometimes, performs the processes of its making, between meaning-making, presence, the withdrawal that is required of thought, and events that follow an encounter with the work. I deploy subjectivity not as a means of foregrounding the critic, but as a means of making visible the fabric of its coming into being; this is not solely a matter of autobiography or memory, but a form of position-taking: a disclosure of the conflicts at play in the act of spectating, and reflecting. My interest is to expose the plurality of experiences and events folded into the event of criticism, unmasking processes that might be contained within a critical act. I use critical act here to mark the duration of the event of criticism, one that commences with an encounter with the work, takes shape in processes of thought and interpretation, emerges in form and is opened up by the readerly encounter.

My approach in this chapter is to conceptualise performance criticism's relationship to meaning-making as an event. In doing so, I argue that appearance is already woven into the fabric of these practices. I delineate the event of performance criticism by considering how it makes meaning appear in a process that is both internal – for the writer engaged in it – and textual – as it is made to appear in the critical work. This

renders performance criticism a temporality, a palpable duration – occupied by matters that exceed, and enter in dialogue with, the performance encounter. By means of this appearance, I propose that the event of performance criticism becomes a site of politicisation. By this, I am referring to the ways in which performance criticism stages encounters of meaning between performance, experience and the political fabric.

Encounters with attention:

There is whispering in the row behind me.

A young woman is slumped on the shoulder of the woman next to her, eyes shut, the people around are fanning her face.

She has probably fainted. Turn back to the stage
– Jackson is high up in the tree, 'Jackson, be careful'. The balloon is shot by a –

but the whispering gets louder,

a man stands by the young woman. 'Can you hear me? I'm a first aid officer. Can you hear me?'

To the panicked woman at the girl's side: 'Was she with anyone?'

'I'm her mother.'

Her name is repeated several times. 'I'm the first aid officer, can you hear me?'

... Has she eaten anything today?'

Glance back at the screen for a second – Jackson and the sinister girl and Kim

are on the move, they are – then back up to the woman. **Someone**

comes down from the back

bench onto the stage, it is Tim Etchells. The

performers' voices halt, the houselights are brought up. 'I'm very sorry, but we're going to have to stop the show. There's a medical problem.' He looks up at the young woman.

Everyone turns and looks.

A steward: 'Is there anyone with any medical experience here? Is there a doctor in the house tonight?'

No response. Someone says, 'She needs to be put in the recovery position.'

Everyone continues to look at the young woman and her mother in the middle of the seating bank. Her skin is grey.

The first aid officer calls an ambulance: 'yes, she's breathing but she's not conscious.'

We stare.

This moment lasts a long time.

We stare.

A steward asks us all to take a break outside the studio. We slowly filter out, dazed. We wait.

I think: So, is *Void Story* a disaster performance? It has presented us with a post-apocalyptic landscape, but the usual constraints of realism don't apply. With a dream-like logic the protagonists have reacted to each crisis without ever considering the bigger picture (without the 'sop of psychology' as Tim Etchells writes): just like this show's detailed attention to each individual component, and its intentional neglect of a complete, finished end product. We have been presented with a flat pack performance. (Kershaw 2009, extract)¹⁰

In the above extract, Eleanor Hadley Kershaw stages two events which collide with each other. The first is a critical reflection on the performance, *Void Story* by Forced Entertainment, in which two protagonists, Kim and Jackson, become the centre point for a series of crises, composing what Kershaw calls a 'disaster performance.'¹¹ The second is the collapse of a young woman in the audience- a moment which disrupts the show, but is folded elegantly into its own theatrical narrative of crisis. The two become entangled, wrapped around each other, difficult to distinguish.

¹⁰ A full version of the text can be found at the following link:

<http://spilloverspill.blogspot.co.uk/2009/05/whole-story-by-eleanor-hadley-kershaw.html>

¹¹ Forced Entertainment are a leading British experimental performance company founded by Tim Etchells (Artistic Director), Robin Arthur, Richard Lowdon (Designer), Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden, Terry O'Connor in 1984.

These two occurrences – the performance onstage, and that in the audience – are presented as variations of scales of meaning; they are wrapped into each other, as the dramaturgy of one collapses into the other. In the programme notes, speaking to the dramaturgy of *Void Story*, Tim Etchells proposes that the project involves ‘Stupid perspectives. Self-evident nonsense of geography, biology, architecture. A dream view from a window that dissolves as soon as you look closely. A world that flaunts [...] its own cut and paste hybridity’ (2009).¹² Foregrounding how sound and image weave into narratives that are unstable, Etchells speaks to the processes of ‘shattering and splintering’ (2009) that make that work. Kershaw touches on this aspect of the work by means of collapsing the instability of the onstage narrative with that of the offstage one, deliberately dissolving the boundaries between events, whilst also accounting for a dissolving that had already occurred. Once more, I am reminded of Erika Fischer-Lichte’s autopoietic feedback loop, that which collapses ‘the order of representation and the order of presence’ (2008: 157). However, what is of relevance here is not only this collapse of one event into another, but – and this is what I am teasing out – the emergence of the event of criticism itself. This moves beyond the presence of the writer, or the value of her experience, towards what comes after her encounter with performance.

Kershaw’s text does not re-enact what had already happened by means of her memory of the performance; she intervenes into its very fabric by means of writing. Language, as Fischer-Lichte reminds us, ‘commands a specific and unique materiality’ (2008: 158). Kershaw’s text in particular approaches this intervention – a suspension between

¹²See Etchells, Tim. ‘Programme Notes’ (*Forced Entertainment*, 2009)
<https://www.forcedentertainment.com/notebook-entry/void-story-programme-note-by-tim-etchells/>

the moment of encounter, the event within that encounter, and the thinking which displaces them – by means of the whisper. She marks Etchells' declaration of a pause to remind the reader of the lack of boundaries that preceded it, and the poetics of a performance about crisis from which crisis emerges.

The whisper is the means of collapsing these dramaturgies together, of capturing their material realities – one making the other concrete. The whisper captures the confusion of the audience, immersed in the theatrical mechanisms of a disaster performance. The whisper prompts a shift in attention: 'everyone turns and looks', 'someone says', 'we stare'. The visual poetics of Kershaw's text shift from stage to auditorium and beyond, by means of sizing – the loudness of the whisper, or the smallness of a movement on

stage; from **'the whispering gets louder'** to 'Jackson and the sinister girl

and Kim are on the move, they are – then back up to the woman.' Nothing is sensationalised, but it is made to feel sensational, in the ways in which the scales of meaning within the performance are wrapped up in a visibly constructed mechanic; one that nevertheless sustains their occurrence. This is a text in which an event of meaning is staged that moves beyond the performance, without ever leaving it. What kind of event of criticism is taking shape here? In Kershaw's text, what becomes evident is that, by means of a whisper, and through scales of loudness and silence, she stages the collapsing of one event into the other, performance as life, and life as performance.¹³ Something of significance occurs, however, in these events being staged within a text – these events being written.

¹³ I note here that Fischer-Lichte's examination of performance as event foregrounds the ways in which Enlightenment and postmodernist thinking de-valued the experience of the everyday – a staging of meaning which occurs in performance by means of 'autopoiesis and emergence' (2008: 162). Her argument is of relevance to criticism for its capturing of the impact of two significant cultural and intellectual periods that sought an engagement with the autonomous subject. Whilst this is not the focus

My engagement with the concept of the event in criticism is grounded in Gilles Deleuze's thinking.¹⁴ For Deleuze, the event signals both difference and becoming; in other words, it is both constituent and constitutive, bound up with matter. A relevant synthesis of the event's relationship to temporality and embodiment is Alain Badiou's 'The Event in Deleuze', where he speaks to the event's relationship to the multiple potentials of time – 'the event is always that which has just happened and that which is about to happen, but never that which is happening' (2006: 38). This relationship to the present is visible in the event of performance criticism - as exemplified in Kershaw's text, where the event makes itself visible in reflections that either pertain to the past, or the imminent future. I am interested here in the conceptual borders of the Deleuzian event that mark it as matter, folded into the fabric of time. The event is both of past and future, and tied to the subject, by means of its relationship to becoming – in Deleuze's words, 'unlimited becoming becomes the event itself' (2004: 23). This is visible in Kershaw's text, where the writing delineates a past-ness and a continuity, one that echoes the plural temporalities of the performance whilst also constituting its own. The text itself marks its own presence, tied to something that has occurred, but committed to projecting reflection that exceeds that event – that looks outwards.

At the same time, the event of criticism is written (but it might also be spoken, recorded,

of this thesis, it is relevant to underline the event of performance as constitutive of 'heightened attention' (2008: 162) and a transfiguration of the commonplace. This, I propose, is also evident in Forced Entertainment's performance, by way of a deliberate granting of immanence to events of paradoxical scales.

¹⁴ Deleuze develops his concept of the event across two major works: *The Logic of Sense* (1990–2004) and *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1993), drawing on the work of Alfred North Whitehead. My reference to Deleuze here serves the purpose of navigating the conceptual plurality of the event, although my intention is not to examine performance criticism *by means* of the event, but to capture the eventness of performance criticism.

traced) by a body (which could be individual or collective); it emerges from it but it is a whole different landscape: 'the event is of a different regime than the actions and passions of the body, even if it results from them' (ibid.). I am interested in the coextension of becoming, the ways in which the event is unable to grapple with a present, but is always, necessarily, a matter of it; in the same way, I conceive of the event of criticism as always grappling with the body, and necessarily of it – an embodied encounter. In Kershaw's text, this is most evident in the use of both the whisper – poetically and materially – and the movement of bodies: 'stands by', 'to[wards] the', 'comes down from', 'turns and looks'. The body is made explicit both in the singular, 'I think', and the plural, 'we stare'. The event of criticism is always of the body, but also distinct from it.

It is in Deleuzian immanence that I ground my use of event, not as a means of analysis, but to capture both the distinctness and embedded nature of the event of criticism: its belonging to the fabric of an encounter with performance, and its departure from that encounter. In other words, I signal how the event of criticism, whilst enabling divergent phenomena of meaning, is also always necessarily connected to the encounter which it considers. As Deleuze proposes: 'we can speak of events only in the context of the problem whose conditions they determine' (2004: 56). The event determines its own conditions of coming into being, but is also bound by that which causes its emergence, as I have shown with Kershaw's own text. It is at once dealing with an encounter and writing through it; both intervening in the mechanisms of meaning it discloses, and marking out its own territory. The event of criticism is constituted by phenomena of meaning that enable a process of appearance.

Arendt shows us that imagining and thinking are what grants an experience meaning (1971:87). I add that attention shifts and interruptions are slippages that offer moments of its release. In Kershaw's text, the disclosure of an occurrence (a turn, a pause, a dialogue) grants, in my interpretation, the narrative an equal representational stake to events that fall outside of it. It is allowed to sit there, in the ambiguous silence of an audience shuffling out of the theatre; it is allowed to sit there, in the urgency of a faint, and its unexpected rippling into territories of meaning. 'Disaster' is carefully woven into the writing itself: it is associative and iterative, pointing to possible political and ecological events that reside outside of the theatre; disaster implies a sense of urgency, in a year marked by global political shifts. It is not to say that political and ecological shifts were present; but their noise shaped frames of visibility via the means criticism often uses to mark its criticality. At the same time, *Void Story* is a performance that invites such thinking by means of engaging with disasters: as imaginative acts, as tragedies, as small events, or as events with planetary implications. In the emergence of another event from within the performance, itself concerned with events that do not happen but 'which somehow do find a way to happen' (Etchells 2009),¹⁵ Kershaw maps out a performance of political, ecological and affective encounters; she reaches for that which resides outside of the room, without ever quite pinpointing it. What she terms as a 'disaster performance' carries with it all that exceeds the time of the encounter with the performance, but is simultaneously disclosed within the text with increasing urgency, which itself hinges on a faint. A faint as a real-life event, a faint as a reaction, and a faint as response.

¹⁵ Etchells, Tim. 'Void Story Programme Note': <https://www.forcedentertainment.com/notebook-entry/void-story-programme-note-by-tim-etchells/>

I find here a deliberate troubling of borders: Kershaw grants status to this event-within-an-event in order to reflect on the performance and its own immediate echoes of meaning, but also on the ways in which crisis performs, stages itself, suspended in between perspective and urgency. In the meantime, we are left with reflections on a 'flat-packed performance', wondering what of the incident that's paused the unfolding of something that wasn't meant to end in the first place. Kershaw's text is exemplary of the ways in which the event of criticism emerges at the meeting point between experience and criticality, the emergence of phenomena and their predetermined contexts (2008: 143). It is, as Kershaw's text shows, both a shift of attention, and a choreography of meaning, made present by showing how easily one dramaturgy collapses into the other. In Chapter One, I examined how the work of trouble-makers like Kershaw is contingent on exploring new forms of referentiality for criticism. This is a significant process by which criticism foregrounds both its own dialogic relationship to performance, and its departure from it. This process is rooted in a search for autonomies of meaning, whereby the act of critique comes to constitute its own event of meaning-making, exceeding that of the subjective experience of the work.

Thinking as appearance in the event of criticism

So far, I have expounded on the kinds of disclosures within Kershaw's text that mark the event of criticism. I turn to Hannah Arendt, the philosopher of thought and appearance, to further consider the question of thought in the event of criticism. Arendt enables us to understand the ways in which the event of criticism is constitutive of multiple processes of thought; and how this in turn provides an activation of the reader of

criticism. As I will show throughout this thesis, this invitation opens an alternative discursive space.

Fundamental to Arendt's philosophy of appearance is the position that 'nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not predispose a spectator' (1971: 19). I notice the extent to which Arendt's philosophy of appearance is contingent on a theatrical paradigm. The realm of appearance is constituted through spectated actions. It is, in other words, always witnessed. This conception, however, needn't imply a separation that deactivates the witness from participating. In light of this, I see performance criticism as a realm of appearance, in calling the reader to such a participatory witnessing. I want to point here to the visibility of this in Kershaw's writing in this chapter: the use of 'we' as collective, without the problematic speaking on behalf of an audience that much broadsheet criticism still sustains. The 'we' refers both to those who witnessed the event with the performers, and to those who are witnessing the critical text; in the text, Kershaw discloses and reminds us of her own subjectivity – 'I think' - but also invites us into witnessing the event of criticism: 'we stare'. In her text, there is a deliberate collapsing of two dramaturgies - one real, one performative - into one another. As Arendt argues, appearance is 'something that is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves' (1958: 50). Our feeling for reality and, as such, our relationship to reality is governed by appearance, as that which provides a realm in which to see 'what is worthy of being seen or heard.' (1958: 51). Arendt therefore delineates a notion of appearance that is a fundamental characteristic of the public realm, itself a necessity of collective political engagement. As I hope to show in this thesis, performance criticism's distinct identity is its commitment to collective political

engagement and the interplay that its event shapes between the individual and the collective. The event, as Kershaw's text exposes, is shaped by disclosures of thought that implicate the reader as witness and participant in meaning-making.

To Arendt, the event is what signals a shift in the realm of appearance. Arendt locates appearance as fundamental to our perception of, and participation in, reality, and argues that 'being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears a different position' (1958: 78). I propose that this is what Kershaw's text also offers by means of its whispers and slippages of attention: it is inviting a public conversation on what might be seen, or understood, as crisis or disaster in the context of *Void Story*; Kershaw draws on description – 'a whisper behind me', 'a young woman is slumped on the shoulder of the woman next to her', 'the whisper gets louder' – as a mode of intervening into the work as well: 'We wait. I think: is *Void Story* a disaster performance?' In the description, a narration shapes two concurrent events – a crisis in the audience, and one onstage – as well as marking journeys of meaning. 'She has probably fainted. Turn back to the stage – Jackson is high up in the tree, 'Jackson, be

careful'. The balloon is shot by a – **but the whispering gets louder.'** It

is in this choreography that the weight of the proposition of the performance comes to bear, asking: how do we recognise disaster? Who gets to conceive crisis, and who gets to experience it? How is spectatorship complicated by a collective witnessing from within the audience, when a conversation onstage occurs simultaneously with a dangerous faint, and the representational mechanisms that define these two events collide? Whilst Kershaw's text is interested in the crevices between these two occurrences, her accounting of difference is also played out by means of a partial, and probably to some

extent creative, remembrance. Underpinning her critical response, however, is an attempt to think reality – to see how it has always been present in the performance, all along. Kershaw engages community with the politics of performance in her work. The event of criticism is constituted at the intersection between meaning-making, formal exploration and political resonance, and Arendt’s work is of relevance to understanding how it makes itself palpable.

I find a poetics in Arendt’s examination of thinking that is emblematic of a navigation between politics and morality, individuality and community. These are connective tissues of criticism, because they signal the tense relationship the practice has to questions of deliberation and representation.¹⁶ These are pertinent questions to ask of a practice of criticism that has yet to formalise its relationship to deliberation, but seeks an alternative politics, not only with the work, but also the reader. Arendt foregrounds a poetics of appearance, in which morality is posited as the problem of distinguishing between good and evil, contextualised in relation to thinking on the nature of publicness, judgement and thought.¹⁷ Mental activities, which are by default non-appearing, ‘occur in a world of appearances and a being that partakes of these appearances through its receptive sense organs as well as through its own ability and

¹⁶ As I have discussed in Chapter One, in upholding the figure of the critic as a necessary precursor to a healthy critical culture, theatre criticism runs the risk of upholding singular authority on assumption of its representational efficacy. Whilst Arendt’s political theory does not distinctly offer any answers on the nature of subjectivity in relation to the question of authority, her relevance is in the emphasis on plurality and the nature of the process of thinking.

¹⁷ The Eichmann controversy, emerging out of a series of articles Arendt wrote for the *New Yorker*, reporting on the trial in Jerusalem, and discussed at length in Elisabeth Young-Bruehl’s biography *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World* (1982), made visible the philosopher’s approach to thinking questions of politics and morality together. Arendt’s imbrication of the notion of evil with the small-mindedness of bureaucratic practices was later developed in *The Life of the Mind* (1971), in which she asks: ‘Might the problem of good and evil, our faculty for telling right from wrong, be connected to our faculty of thought?’ (Arendt 1971: 5). It is thus in this statement that Arendt introduces the concept of morality to judgement. Her work is highly relevant and underexplored in the realm of criticism, particularly in theatre and performance.

urge to appear to others' (1958: 75). Thinking can only 'come into being [...] through a deliberate *withdrawal* from appearances' (1958: 75). In Arendt, we find thought at the edge of what appears, and what wants to make itself appear. The process of visibility and withdrawal mark the articulation of thought. In her incomplete volume, *The Life of the Mind* (1971), published five years after Sontag's *Against Interpretation*, Arendt contemplates the intertwined nature of thinking, will and judgement. In her opening to the first volume, dedicated to the activity of thinking, Arendt includes a quote from Plato that is telling of the theatricality of thought in her own conception:

Every one of us is like a man who sees
things in a dream and thinks that he
knows them perfectly and then wakes
up to find that he knows nothing. (Plato in Arendt 1971: xvii)

The quote is from Plato's *Statesman*, a Socratic dialogue about the relationship between power and knowledge. On the one side, the argument presents the statesman as ruler by virtue of his expert knowledge, and on the other, the statesman merely presents an appearance of that knowledge, without actually possessing it.¹⁸ Arendt's lifelong examination of the nature of appearance is fundamentally tied to understanding what might be constituted in the public realm, as a realm of plurality, and what might be created in private, in the individual activity of thinking. In her introduction to the volume, Arendt traces her interest in thought and willing back to her work on the Eichmann Trial, and her coining of the term 'banality of evil'. What she saw, she argues,

¹⁸ Arendt's notion of appearance is innately theatrical, for the ways in which it conceptualises a process of appearance in which meaning is collectively constructed. There is a theatrical paradigm present in Arendt's thinking, because it is theatre that acts as an important mode of thought in her work. Theatre acts as a space of visibility in Arendt's conceptualisation, 'the political art par excellence' (1958: 188).

was not evil intent, but ‘thoughtlessness’, by which she means that the ‘deeds were monstrous, but the doer [...] was quite ordinary, commonplace’ (1971: 4). At the same time, prompted by her earlier work in *The Human Condition* (1958), Arendt argues that it is the presumed paradigm of thought and action, that which separates being in the common world, from being private, that fuels a key question: ‘where are we, when we are thinking?’ (1971: 7).

Whilst I take up the public and private binary later in this thesis, by turning to recent examinations of radical democratic deliberation, I am interested in this dimension of thinking in Arendt’s work not as a matter of privacy, but as one that is necessarily made public in the work of performance criticism, and tied to plurality. In Arendt, we find plurality of thought interconnected with political plurality. This is best expressed in the interlinking of the terms *vita activa*, the life of action, tied to political plurality, and *vita contemplativa*, that of contemplation, tied to thinking, which for Arendt draw meaning for one another (1998:17).¹⁹ In recuperating this relationship, Arendt argues, we might find freedom as something ‘located in the public realm’ (1998: 188). Significantly to this position, Arendt argues that modern politics is shaped by a conflation of the social and the political, whereby the realm of freedom becomes subsumed to the ‘maintenance of life’ (1998:40). She argues that it is possible that ‘the modern age [...] may end in the [...] most sterile passivity’ (1998:322). In Arendt’s notion of the social, we find a resistance to instrumentalisation (1998:236), one resonant with critiques brought to neoliberalism for reducing its subjects to ‘human capital’ (2015:44). We also locate an orientation of appearance towards plurality, where thoughtfulness, when tied to action,

¹⁹ For Arendt, action is connected to ‘the human condition of plurality’(1971:175).

becomes a means of collectively reconstituting the realm of freedom. Natality [...] is ontologically rooted' in action to Arendt (1998:246), 'the central category of political thought' (1998:247) and holds the ability for 'startling unexpectedness' (1998:246). At the same time, thinking, for Arendt, is 'sheer activity' (1971:162) and a 're-presenting' (1971:76). In Arendt, thinking and action are tied together by means of speech (1998:178). However, performance criticism evidences the ways in which an exposure of the activities of thinking and interpretation constitutes, to draw from Arendt, an 'urge to appear' (1971:29). Plurality, to Arendt, is a means of being with 'difference' (1971:184) that grounds the activity of thinking. At the same time, Arendt's ideal thinker is someone who 'knows only that he knows not' (1971:173) yet also 'dissolves and examines anew accepted doctrines and rules' (1971:176).²⁰ Performance criticism reveals itself as an example of how appearance constitutes an event that is political precisely for how it exposes its ontology, how it invites participation by accounting for difference.

In the works of trouble-makers that make up the ecology of performance criticism, we find a kind of movement of thought that both discloses subjectivity, and moves beyond it. Arendt's questioning of thinking and its displacement allows us to understand the multiple spaces occupied during the event of criticism: from the distracted gaze to the events that shape a memory as it is marked onto the page. These are not necessarily resolved. They are instead, as Arendt proposes, a mode of being in public, a mode of disclosure without closure, a connective tissue between an encounter and fabric of

²⁰ Whilst Arendt removes the political possibilities of thinking outside crisis (1971:192), she does so by foregrounding the importance of speech; at the same time, Arendt concerns herself with a crisis of modernity where the social dismisses the possibility of collective action, providing an example of how thinking with others, or thinking in the realm of appearance, might constitute the realm of freedom – a plural realm.

performance beyond. In performance criticism, the event reveals itself as wrapped into plurality, where thinking acts as a site of politicisation.

Kershaw's text is exemplary of the ways in which this multiplicity is revealed in text itself: the movement of attention ('there is a whispering in the row behind me'), the interpretive stance ('the performance is two dimensional and we are the third dimension' or 'this framing of catastrophe seems safe – everything is settled from early on – the concept is there, we just need to apply our imaginative glue'), the associative play ('it doesn't allow the quick fix spectacular escapism on offer in *Armageddon* or *The Day After Tomorrow*. Maybe it comes closer to the gritty warning of *Children of Men*'). These are all instances of being with the work, away from the work, and travelling in associative spaces, simultaneously. This is what is constituted as the multiplicity of spaces of meaning within the event of criticism – as much a shift in geographic terrain (in the theatre, in the audience, out of the theatre, in front of a notebook or screen), as a confluence of mental spaces. It is also in Kershaw's text where thinking exposes and displaces the self, to make way for the social. The doubtfulness of thinking, its porosity, is precisely what allows an encounter with the event of criticism to make itself known. It is also, as we find in Arendt, a means of fuelling a quest for knowledge: a thinking with and through performance, rather than of performance.

Arendt sees thinking as 'the quest for meaning' (1971: 78) and reveals it as interruptive and, within this, conflictual: 'the warfare [with] common sense' (Arendt 1971: 80). However, we might understand this differently when thinking about the distinct nature of performance criticism and the event it constitutes. As recent discourses on embedded criticism have foregrounded (Butt 2005, Horwitz 2012, Costa in Radosavljević 2016),

approaching criticism from the position of a spectator immersed in the ecologies of the work encountered presumes a move away from objectivity as a means of positioning a discourse within or in relation to a common doxa. In other words, whilst we might acknowledge the interplay between thought and common sense, performance criticism displaces this as a binary and, instead, stages the conflict at hand by means of a politicised engagement with performance and its meaning-making processes by moving beyond these. This is a tension that this very investigation pursues: what marks the event of criticism a political event? Approaching this by means of Arendt foregrounds a tension at the heart of criticism of performance: subjective criticality makes way for a collective engagement, welcoming of difference and pursuing avenues of thought in a political fabric. Performance criticism constitutes itself around an event of meaning that is made possible by means of subjective criticality; as I will show in the thesis, this practice of criticism resists established discourses on performance, because it seeks to think anew, to draw from Arendt. This is an engagement with appearance. At the same time, subjective criticality refutes the idea that thinking belongs wholly to the realm of the private- as I will show by engaging with historiography of the eighteenth century later in this thesis, this is a counter-position to the idea that deliberation occurs entirely by means of rational discourse.

It is therefore my contention that the question of performance criticism, and the tension between thought and common sense, is a political one. If, as I have argued, we understand authority as a voice, in most traditions of evaluative criticism, presupposing a speaking on behalf – one that, as I will show, is grounded in criticism’s relationship to democratic communicative structures – then what of deliberation? My answer is to seek interpretation and its multiple threads in the event of criticism as a place in which such

tensions are staged, building on the permissions and practices of shifting ecologies of criticism in the early noughties. These concentrated on speaking in dialogue with an audience. In Arendt, I find a relating of thinking, plurality and action, as collectively constituted in the realm of appearance. At the same time, Arendt's philosophy disturbs a binary relationship between knowing and thinking, because of the displaced nature of the activity of thought itself. My own use of thinking here plays out two-fold: in how I have delineated the event of performance criticism and in my methodological emphasis on criticism as a means of thinking performance anew, one distinct from it, but also in constant dialogue.

This displacement offers a way of revisiting Arendt's inclusion of the extract from Plato's *Statesman*, which holds a dual role. It is both a connective tissue between appearance and thought, and suggestive of the political implication that thinking has for representational political rule. It is no surprise, then, that Arendt's inclusion of the extract from *The Statesman* reflects on my earlier examination of the intellectual conditions of criticism that uphold the representational power of the critic as a figure of authority. That, too, is contingent on expertise as representational knowledge, but can in equal manner be undermined by the same questioning of how appearance shapes engagement within, and in, the public realm, by means of subjective criticality.

These are, as I show in this thesis, questions that evidence the fundamental ways in which criticism, across all modes of engagement with art, is an activity that carries implications for political aesthetics. My scope here is to understand how performance criticism conceives of an altogether alternative strategy. The focus is not on the authority of a singular, representational figure, but an emergent discursive culture

constituted through plurality, one that seeks to ask a fundamental question of how criticism thinks. What I have traced so far is an emergent culture of performance criticism that articulates this as a question surrounding the nature of the event of criticism, which presupposes, and exposes thinking itself – with all its doubts, interventions, and quests for the real.

What Arendt presents to this argument is a collapse, rather than a redrawing, of boundaries between thinking as a private activity, and common sense as a collectively articulated consensus. The specificity of the encounter with performance, by means of subjective criticality, is also a process of becoming, in which description reveals the tensions between thinking and interpretation. This tension is not solely formal; it also concerns the multiple iterations of meaning that flood a critical text, and is placed in tension with criticality. The event of performance criticism is a configuration of thinking, knowledge and the processes of meaning-making. What I have done here is to work from Arendt to conceive of a porousness between encounters with performance and those with the world; between memories of a performance, and readers of a critical response. This, I propose, is further illustrated by the role of interpretation in the event of criticism.

Interpretation: staging thought in the event of criticism

So far, I have spoken of the ways in which the event of criticism stages a deliberate complication of the public and private binary, by foregrounding the relationship between thinking, plurality and appearance. If we return to Arendt, this might seem contradictory; after all, Arendt argues that thinking is necessarily an act of withdrawing

from the world of appearance. At the same time, it is one that always strives towards the real; my proposition has been to view the fragments that interrupt the partial memory of a performance not as slippages, but as moments that invite a reader in. It is these disclosures, these shifts in attention and writerly changes, that displace thinking's inwardness. At the same time, throughout this thesis, I refer to what is held in tension by my use of subjective criticality – to the multiple histories of the self in criticism that either condemn its disclosure as self-importance or profess its biographical or phenomenological role.²¹ I bring this up here because I want to further expound on what might be meant by the event of criticism, not only in relation to thought and meaning, understood in the particularity of performance, but also interpretation – the activity of the thinking subject. My argument in this thesis is that the politicisation of criticism emerges at the point of confluence between subjectivity and criticality, and it is by means of the event of criticism that I examine their interrelationship. I see interpretation as the fabric of this dialogue – the intersection between the encounter with a work, the reflection of the work, and the transformation of thinking processes. To speak of performance criticism's eventness is to understand the ways in which appearance is constructed in and around interpretation as a stage of thought. In other words, the event of criticism reveals processes of thought that engage interpretation.

In hermeneutics, interpretation is articulated by means of aesthetics, and a fundamental questioning of the experience of art and its meaning. Alternative histories of reflection on the act of interpretation and its centrality or periphery in the encountering of art and its meaning-making processes focus either on problematics of authorship, autonomy

²¹ As we have seen in Chapter One, such arguments are expounded in both Mark Fisher's *How to Write About Theatre* (2015) and Duska Radosavljević's *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes* (2016).

and originality,²² or on the instability of meaning-making itself, particularly after postmodernism (Bennett 1990, Fischer-Lichte 2008). My interest in interpretation draws on a particular engagement with hermeneutics, by means of the work of Arendt, as well as that of Sontag. I am interested in the ways in which Arendt's engagement with lived experience, and her constitution of a *sensus communis* (common sense) linked to political participation, can shed new light on Sontag's engagement with appearance as a political problem.

Sontag was a voracious diarist, and amidst the volumes of fragmented reflections she produced between 1964 and 1980, published under the title *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh: Journals and Notebooks*, I find a proposition worth dwelling on: that writing is a series of transformations. 'The function of writing is to explode one's subject – transform it into something else,' she proposes (11/5/76). I am interested in what is held in tension within this statement: the explosion of the subject of writing in turn requires a transformation on behalf of the subject who is writing. What might be made visible in further considering the politics of this self-reflective encounter in a wider temporality of criticism? My interest here is to carve out a politics of appearance deriving from Sontag's view of interpretation; one that does not omit the body that is writing, nor erases the politics of that act – but one that equally takes into account the processes that shape subjectivity, and the autonomy of the text as it is encountered. I want to shift Sontag's argument about appearance to a political sphere. Transformation is a key – for the ways in which it reveals a discursive relationship not only between

²² Thinking on the role of interpretation thrived most notably with the modernist critics, expounded in the works of Clement Greenberg (1939), Susan Sontag (1966), Rosalind Krauss (1986) and James Elkins (1997). Interpretation is also covered by the wide-ranging field of hermeneutics, and is defined in relation to the mechanisms and disciplines that pertain to it and define it.

subject and performance work, but also between the processes of thinking that shape interpretation, and the autonomy of the critical text.

Arendt's engagement with appearance is constructed on a hermeneutical approach, but by means of a politicisation of the human condition vis-à-vis notions of judgement and common sense. Arendt's work is concerned in equal measure with the internal poetics of thinking (*Life of the Mind*, 1978) and the constitution of a public realm (*The Human Condition*, 1958); her work lends itself to understanding the ways in which performance criticism's concern for politicising form and exploring the poetics of meaning are woven into a conception of action and interpretation that emerges in the latter half of the twentieth century. If we turn to performance criticism's concern for entering a dialogue with the performance event, we note that this, too, is rooted in a reconsideration of form as an expressive, political means. So far, I have shown how recent engagements with criticism and performance prior to the noughties created an intellectual climate that situated itself at the intersection of the analytical and the experiential. I have pursued this line of thinking to look at a specific instance in which performance criticism declares an interest in its own meaning-making event. But the conception of form as political emerges more broadly with the twentieth century avant-garde's concern with revisiting modernist claims to autonomies of meaning.

Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* marks a relevant distinction between modernism's ideological protectionism, which constructed a self-defining, exclusionary realm of artistic practice on a false claim to autonomy, and the avant-garde of the twentieth century as a reaction to this culture. The collapsing of art and life which the avant-garde sought becomes embedded, in Bürger's view, within capitalism by the late

1970s. 'The avant-garde,' he argues, 'has radically changed the place value of political engagements in art' (1984: 83). The nature of this change is twofold, both in regards to a hermeneutics of art and its political possibilities, which, to Bürger, collapse into the mass production and rising industrial capitalism of the late twentieth century. Pointing to the historical grounding of the avant-garde, Bürger argues that hermeneutics is 'neither to be simply replaced by formalist procedures nor is its use as an intuitive form of understanding to be continued as before' (1984: 82).²³

I want to reference an alternative conception of this avant-garde rooting that gives way to an iteration of subjectivity closely connected to formal experimentation and political value, which I have discussed in Chapter One. Jacques Rancière, whose work I draw on further in this thesis, provides a relevant context to Bürger's analysis. In *Artistic Regimes and the Shortcomings of Modernity*, he argues that what is concealed by the terms modernity, avant-garde and postmodernism is a shifting relationship between aesthetics and politics. He makes visible a confusion that seeks to disentangle the history of relations between 'political parties and aesthetic movements' (2004: 21), denoting two ideas of the avant-garde that conceal two notions of political subjectivity: 'the arch-political idea of a party [...] and the meta-political idea of global political subjectivity' (2004: 31). To Rancière, the avant-garde provides an engagement with

²³ Whilst Bürger's account is important in marking out a political project to the avant-garde, the restrictive nature of the term is often problematised, particularly given the dismissive contemporaneity of its occurrence. This is explored in depth in Ria Felski and Jonathan P. Eburne's 'Introduction' to an issue of *New Literary History* (41:4, 2010), which seeks to generate new, alternative approaches to the problem of the avant-garde and its contemporaneous currency, as well as at length in Evan Mauro's *The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde: Or, Modernism and Biopolitics*. Mauro argues that a 'political struggle over life and reproduction' is central to the avant-garde's 'appropriation by capital [...] as a contingent and liable value struggle that wanted to find new modes of aesthetic valuation' (2012/13: 119). These departures from Bürger's work set out to probe the relationship between the avant-garde's enmeshment into capitalism, and the potential of its political project.

political futurity that distances it from mere historicisation, emergent at the point at which aesthetic autonomy enters in conflict with art that holds an explicit political imperative. 'The idea of a political avant-garde is divided between the strategic conception and the aesthetic conception of the avant-garde' (2004: 32). This view, unlike Bürger's historical engagement, does not see the avant-garde as a failed project but, instead, offers an account of different regimes of aesthetic experience and political movements that uphold the possibility of collective emancipation based on competing forces. It is within this view that I situate my drawing on the avant-garde of the twentieth century as a moment of form's politicisation. This is because it accounts for a politicisation of subjectivity in close connection with the formal pursuits of meaning.

After postmodernism, the turn to subjectivity in art did not concentrate on the relativism of meaning, as a failed modernist project, but on a plural conception of form and its relationship to collectivity (Rancière 2004: 26). I will speak to the role of the aesthetic and political in delineating the kinds of formal engagements of performance criticism later in the thesis. Here, however, I want to focus on what appearance and plurality might offer in terms of understanding performance criticism's relationship to interpretation. Arendt is key to my argument because she engages with the relationship between modernism, culture and meaning in *Between Past and Future* (1961), speaking to a concern of culture's enmeshment in capitalism, with a scope that is altogether more overtly political.

Feminist scholar of Arendt, Seyla Benhabib, has focused on the philosopher's relationship to modernity, responding, in her work *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, to critiques of her antimodernity that also position her as not explicitly a

feminist thinker (1996: 20).²⁴ Benhabib's close reading of lineages of Arendt's thought that suggest an engagement with modernity are relevant here for two reasons. First, they expound on the ways in which Arendt remains a relevant thinker, not despite but because of her identity as a German Jewish woman, and a lone figure in modern political theory. Second, Benhabib's study contributes to an understanding of Arendt's modernism in light of a crisis of authority in political modernity (1996: 139). Through Arendt's work, we can better understand the ways in which performance criticism's departure from questions of authority is not a question of morality, but one of politics. We can also understand, in the background, the changing notions of meaning's political implications, which I have briefly mentioned vis-à-vis the rise and fall of the avant-garde. Benhabib's study engages with the conflicts that shape much of Arendt's thinking: between the public and private realms, and the emergence of the category of the social under capitalist rule following the Second World War. Benhabib grounds her reading of Arendt in a close examination of the biography she undertook of eighteenth-century Berlin salon host Rahel Varnhagen. The biography acts as a space in which the thinker qualifies her engagement with modernity as 'the emergence of new forms of sociability, association, intimacy, friendship, speaking and writing habits [...]' (1996: 22). Benhabib argues that these emerge as an alternative to the narrative of modernism as the rise of 'commodity exchange relations in a burgeoning capitalist economy' (1996: 22). Benhabib gives weight to the meaning of the term social in Arendt's work as 'a quality of life in civil society and civic associations' (1996: 23), best expounded through

²⁴ In *The Human Condition* (1958), Arendt speaks of the ways we see the 'body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping' (1958: 28). For Arendt, modern life is governed by an 'admission of the household and housekeeping activities into the public realm' (1958: 45), devouring, to use her own words, the 'realms of the political and the private' (ibid.). Benhabib offers an alternative conception of the social, which I mention above, that recontextualises this view of the public realm, not as gendered, but as pertaining to a quality of civic life.

the theorist's reading of Varnhagen's salons as a 'space of sociability in which the individual desire for difference and distinctness could assume an intersubjective reality' (1996: 29).²⁵ Benhabib finds in Arendt a reconsideration of the public realm not lost to modernity, but as a plural space in which the social is not only political, but is also freeing. This evidences the ways in which performance criticism's engagement with thought by means of discursive spaces is rooted in such spaces of the eighteenth century, where private and public might operate in dialogue, rather than by means of exclusion – in a similar way in which I've proposed occurs within the event of criticism.

The confluence between Arendt and Sontag emerges not only by means of a concern with modernism, which stems also from the periods in which they were both active, but also a shared interest in art's appearance. For Sontag, this is a rejection of explication, whereas for Arendt, it is an investment in art's 'capacity for thought' (1958: 168).

Arendt's own exploration of art distils its capacity for traces, though she severs art from political practice per se: 'the men of speech and action [...] need the artist, the poet and the historian [...] because without them the only product of their activity [...] would not survive a moment' (1958: 173). The philosopher attributes thinking processes to the work of art itself, as well as the permanence of its trace. This attribution marks a shared concern with Sontag's rejection of the excavation of meaning; both search for ways of capturing the multiple threads of meaning, and its traces, left by the work of art.

Sontag's claim of interpretation as liberating a work of art when resisting explanation

²⁵ Benhabib further acknowledges that the eighteenth-century salons of early modernity were 'topographically confined and structured spaces' (1996: 17), but disengages this limitation from the construction of sociability which they enabled. She attests to the specificity of the salon as an 'amorphous structure' (1996: 18) that enables a negotiation of private and public in which collective thinking can be pursued, without the conflicts and agonistic nature of the public realm. This fluidity allows it to be a particular space, both 'public and private, both shared and intimate' (1996: 18).

offers a mode of locating a contemporary politics to the event of criticism. I want to further explicate the ways in which appearance and thought interweave in the event of criticism, paying attention more closely to their articulation in the work of Arendt. Arendt draws a link between appearance as a means of political engagement and recognition, and the notion of plurality. This is specifically manifested by means of a relating to interpretation that is phenomenological in nature.

Scholar Marieke Borren's work has explicitly concerned itself with tracing this hermeneutic-phenomenological approach in Arendt's work (2013). In her article *A Sense of the World: Hannah Arendt's Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Common Sense*, Borren proposes that this approach, characteristic of Arendt's examination of structures of judgement, understanding and common sense, pays attention to the role of lived experience in common sense (2013: 226) by specifically casting it as neither 'an a priori faculty nor [...] grounded in a particular community' (2013: 228). Borren's turn to this methodological aspect of Arendt's work foregrounds its escape from the dangers of 'both universalism and relativism' by situating common sense as both 'presupposing and maintaining the common world' (2013: 228). This is inherently tied to understanding, as a fundamental human trait, and interpretation, as dependent on this condition (2013: 234). Her approach to political events by means of their intersubjective experience evidence her commitment to appearances and the 'radical openness to the factual, that is, contingent and unpredictable nature of events' (2013: 239). Arendt's engagement with common sense is therefore constituted around a politicisation of appearance, but also a commitment to its experience in the public realm. This is also where my analysis of the event of criticism finds productive ground: in the collapsing of thought and interpretation that open up a critical text towards the

reader, and away from the event of meaning in performance. The distinctness of the event of criticism is, I propose, its interest in plurality, and as I have shown, participatory witnessing. This is made possible by means of subjective criticality, and a formal concern for collectivity. In Kershaw's text, I noted how this makes itself visible in the shifts of attention and the acknowledgement of multiple bodies and experiences in the room; and in the chapter to follow, I examine how a multi-authored project provides another example of this oriented by means of collectivity – and how this, in turn, is reactive to the pressures on subjectivity and its labour resulting from neoliberalism.

The work of interpretation and thought occurring in the event of criticism is not one of excavation, to borrow from Sontag, but one of appearance – an opening up. The event of criticism shows us the multiple ways in which criticality emerges without, in Arendt's terms, fixing meaning as knowledge. Here, a subjective criticality is negotiated alongside an encounter with multiple processes of meaning-making, moving beyond the critic-performance dialogue. Interpretation is what enables a multiplicity of meaning-makings to occur in criticism, in dialogue, but autonomously from those of performance – in other words, it is formative. At the start of this thesis, I spoke about the ways in which the work of trouble-makers gathered here speaks to a social orientation; and in this chapter, I have worked through this question of the social as tied to interpretation, thought and processes of appearance, building on the work of Hannah Arendt. In this final section, I want to talk about the ways in which description exposes subjective processes of interpretation at play in the event of criticism.

Description as invitation in the event of criticism

Fischer-Lichte argues that 'every attempt to understand a performance retrospectively contributes to the creation of a text which follows its own rules' (2008: 160). This assertion accounts for the specificity of performance and its encounter, marked by a temporality that registers differently to other forms of visual art – which Sontag's essay concentrates on. It also accounts for the temporality of the event of criticism itself, tied to memory, but departing from it – what I have referred to as the autonomy of the critical text. In this process, however, interpretation is that which dislodges the fixity of 'understanding' as a singular mode of relation to, and thinking through, performance. Yet it is, I propose, by means of interpretation that subjective criticality takes shape – in the appearance granted to the work, in tension with thinking processes of the writing subject.

It is in the work of interpretation that criticism reveals its plurality – the multiple journeys of meaning it conceals, their differing temporalities and the encounter with the work that concerns them. A critical text – as Kershaw's work demonstrates – stages the appearance of interpretation. In Kershaw's text, the work of interpretation is made manifest by means of a constant shift in positions: between the work and the audience, the actions onstage and the unfolding incident in the auditorium; between crisis as an experiment of performance, and crisis as lived experience. This play between those who encountered the work, those who encounter the text, and the writer herself reveals relationships that mark and author the event of criticism. It also reveals its temporality, extending from the moment of viewing to the journeys it invites for the writer. In the text, this is characterised by movement – a set of choreographies of gaze: 'by the young

woman', 'to the panicked woman', 'we slowly filter out'. This movement also acts as a disclosure of interpretation, as multiple thinking processes of the text; some are explicitly authored by Kershaw – 'I think' – whilst others capture the multiplicity of affective events within the performance space, or disclose the performativity of the incident – 'her skin is grey'. Here, we notice how interpretation makes the work visible, whilst at the same time reinscribing it – constituting it in the political fabric of crisis, echoing the dimensions of meaning of a work dislodged by an external event. Interpretation here departs from work's appearance, but also undergoes a process of transformation, to echo Sontag. This is undertaken by means of a constant making visible of thinking positions in relation to the performance, as made explicit in Kershaw's text.

How might we further qualify interpretation in the event of criticism? Fischer-Lichte's use of understanding provides a connective tissue here, because it is aligned both to fixity and looseness; the practice of association that Fischer-Lichte ties to meaning-making, and to understanding, is phenomenological in nature: 'the act of perception itself is the condition that creates meaning as the object's phenomenal being' (2008: 145). We might then explicate Fischer-Lichte's use of understanding as distinctly temporal – to understand requires a looking back, and a being with. This is evoked in Kershaw's own response, where attention is in constant conflict with the multiplicity of events in the space: the performance, reactions of the audience, the fainting event. Etymologically, understanding implies closeness, intimacy and particularity, as well as positioning; 'to stand' derives from Old English meaning a pause or delay.²⁶ Therefore,

²⁶ In German, *Verstehen* (understanding) has a different dimension, more closely aligned with the English *forstand*, which implies a position (to stand against), but is also equally connected to alignment – the

Fischer-Lichte's engagement with understanding is also a call to interpretation, as a making visible of that temporality, as we have seen with Kershaw's text.

Elsewhere, Alan Read, in his work *Theatre, Intimacy and Engagement*, proposes that performance 'marks and measures' its manifests and processes (2008: 19). He introduces explanation as a form of hierarchy that orders by exclusion. The idea that context is necessarily an 'explanatory principle' (2008: 37) is illusory. This is significant, because it offers a critical reading that shifts the centrality of explanation in exploring meaning-making and spectatorship. Read offers an alternative that supplements the work of context, and that is, description, as a site where critical subjectivity is revealed. It is description which 'maintains and cultivates the variety of frames within which an act might be considered' (2008: 38). Read problematises explanation in a similar way to which Sontag argues against excavation: a removal of the work from its own processes of appearance. In foregrounding the use of description, rather than context, as a productive communicative act, Read draws a link between event and context: 'descriptions link event and context in critical ways, and should replace social explanation whenever possible' (2008: 38). This is a fundamental aspect of the interpretation for which I am arguing here, one that makes up the fabric of the event of criticism.

Read's emphasis on description as making visible the multiplicity of associative processes and frames that are delineated by our encounter with performance is not dissimilar to Mieke Bal's relating of description as a disclosure of subjectivity. As I have

reflexive identity of the word meaning to get along. I mention this as a means of accounting for the work of translation in Fischer-Lichte, which does carry through in the use of the English 'understanding.'

spoken about previously in my Introduction, description for Bal is a key strategy by means of which the multiplicity of the self is disclosed, and contributes to ways of looking at the work. This is, I propose, an embodied position, one in which a bond is created. This is best understood if we look at Bal's assertion of description as a giving of agency, 'a bringing into existence' (2001: 2). When description forms part of a larger network of writerly strategies, it creates a 'bond with the subject that it is speaking about' (ibid.). In this way, for the viewing subject, description 'melts into the narration of the process that makes it possible' (2001: 4). The body discloses its encounter with a work and, as Fischer-Lichte and Read remind us, links event and context, without relying on one to explicate the other.

This is fundamental to how interpretation operates in the event of criticism: a mode of encountering meaning, one that undertakes an action in opposition to a pause – one of constant movement. This relationship between description and interpretation is evident in Kershaw's text, characterised by both temporality, and embodiment, revealed in the choreographies of attention in the text. In this way, the bodies of the audience are brought into play; the sequence of events is reconceived in light of the unfolding performance (one event constantly interrupts the other). The writer herself then, melts, to borrow Bal's language, into the description; a disclosing of a position, without the certainty of explanation. This is the event of criticism: a staging of interpretation that makes itself known by means of a series of journeys: the writer and her body, the audience and their meaning-making, the journeys that follow the encounter that shape its remembrance. In Kershaw's text, the body is made explicit and present – not just hers, but that of the audience too; this is a kind of visibility – what is seen of the work, and how the work weaves its way into the event of thinking itself.

In Kershaw's text, movement discloses the event of criticism – the containing of multiple interpretive processes. However, instead of the liberation of the work that Sontag proposes, the effect of this movement, which I have spoken about by means of choreography within the text, what becomes visible is, I propose, thinking itself. Unlike the modernist quest for appearance as a politics in and of itself, I am interested in how interpretation within the event of criticism discloses multiplicity and shapes a collective politics – one that implicates the reader and reconfigures the work by means of an autonomous, but dialogical, text.

We have seen how formal commitment to meaning-making and its disputed autonomy are grounded in the avant-garde's politicisation of the relationship between form and collective resistance in Chapter Two. This is significant, for it reveals the roots of a committing of form to political agency, in close connection with criticism's history in democratic deliberation, which I discuss further in the thesis. Of importance, then, is to show how performance criticism does not operate representationally, but through its own formative, ontological processes of appearance. Understanding the link between performance criticism's commitment to formal experimentation and the political project of appearance enables a further exploration of its possibilities of resistance. Sontag's essay marks criticism as both an aesthetic practice, and one of interpretation. She argues that it is 'the habit of approaching works of art in order to interpret them that sustains the fancy that there really is such a thing as the content' (1966: 3). It is this conception that politicises interpretation, as a matter of what is being voiced, how and by whom. It is also by means of thinking and interpretation that the event of criticism takes shape. This is exposed in Kershaw's text through a choreography of attention that

values the peripherals of meaning-making beyond the immediate encounter with performance for example, her inclusion of the faint, and her reflections of what might lie at the intersection between that and the unfolding performance.

I have spoken of the ways in which interpretation, thought of in dialogue with, and as a departure from, Sontag's delineation, discloses the thinking processes that make up the event of criticism. In Arendt, thinking is articulated as an activity that discloses subjectivity, but also shapes an active citizenship in the public realm that hinges on visibility. Commonality is, then, the fabric of interpretation. I argued this by returning to the notion of the social in Arendt's work. I showed how this is made manifest in Kershaw's text, which stages a choreography of movements: the collision of two events into one, which sustain each other's meaning. The intervention Kershaw makes by means of her critical text is both interpretive and inviting of the presence of the reader, who becomes witness. Unlike the 'we' in traditional criticism, which tends to speak on behalf of a collectivity, Kershaw's 'we' offers a critical positioning: an appearance. In this chapter, I staged a thinking with a work of criticism in order to expound on the importance of the event of criticism as a space of interpretation, thought and collectivity – a thinking with, through and from performance, rather than about performance.

Chapter Four

Digital Works: Live Critical Writing and Collective Subjectivities

In Chapter Three, I examined the hermeneutics of the event in performance criticism, thinking with a work of writing by Eleanor Hadley Kershaw from *Spill:Overspill* that reflected on two concurrent events collapsing into one another – one in the audience (a faint), and one in the performance (a staging of disasters). I examined how its meaning-making processes depart from the performance, despite maintaining proximity to it. This is disclosed in the text by means of a choreography of shifting attention, unfinished thoughts and interpretations. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's theorisation of thinking, plurality and appearance, I examined how the event in performance criticism reveals process. Furthermore, I argued that Kershaw's writing demonstrates a commitment to subjective criticality by means of the event, shared across practices gathered in this thesis. This consideration for the event can be situated within a late modernist concern with appearance, which I examined by revisiting the work of Susan Sontag and her critical commitment to visibility of the work of art. This renewed interest in interpretation, I proposed, isn't located in or around the work's visibility, but departs from it. I argued that the event, as a mode of unravelling processes of interpretation in performance criticism, is a matter of politics – it concerns itself with the embodied, immaterial traces of writing and thought, the peripherals of performance and its frames of meaning.¹

¹ I return to the question of the political event in performance criticism in Chapter Six.

My analysis so far has concentrated on what is distinct in performance criticism's commitment to thinking from performance by means of interpretation and the revealing of thought. Critic David Joselit, writing for *October Magazine's* 100th issue, decries interpretation as a means through which art criticism lost itself, a shift away from judgement (2002: 203). I argue that, contrary to a loss, this foregrounding of interpretation as a temporary, unstable and often collective process that moves beyond the encounter with performance, and contains formative events adjacent to it, re-inscribes criticality to subjectivity. What Kershaw's text makes evident is that interpretation engages with judgement. In performance criticism, the event is an area of formal exploration that makes possible alternative strategies for interpretation. In this context, interpretation engages with the appearance of performance, but also departs from modernist view of meaning-making processes solely contained by it. Instead, subjective criticality takes shape around a commitment to performance in a wider political fabric. This accounts for meaning as a feedback loop, to use Fischer-Lichte's term. Departing similarly from the work of Gavin Butt in *After Criticism*, who proposes a moving beyond criticism in the moment of its making to trace its possible futures, I also argued that the event in performance criticism moves beyond the experience of a performance, to account for what lies on its margins, but also what frames it, intervenes in it, follows or precedes it.

Key to my argument in this thesis is that performance criticism thinks through, with and from performance, rather than about it. By doing so, it politicises criticism by valuing the peripherals of meaning-making beyond the encounter with performance, drawing on a multiplicity of frames, and attempting to work on the margins of traditions of authorship in theatre criticism. My use of thinking is twofold: formal, in how thought

and interpretation are revealed and foregrounded in the critical response, and ontological, as an exposing of effects of the critical response which thinks with and from performance. As we will see here, in collective performance criticism, this plays out as an exposing of the work of the interpreting subject as well as disturbing structures that instrumentalise that work. In Arendt's philosophy of appearance, work is one of the three core activities of *vita activa*, reactive to the cyclical nature of labour, which subsumes the body to necessity (1958: 83), and action, as the 'condition of all political life' (1997:175).² My use of the term work is rooted in its wordliness, its belonging to the realm of appearance, to draw from Arendt. I am however specifically interested in the resonance of work under neoliberalism, where 'widespread economisation of [...] noneconomic domains, activities and subjects' (Brown 2015:31) complicates this Arendtian distinction, itself oriented around processes of production and durability.³ I use 'work' throughout this chapter to speak of the activity of criticism, as well as the process of undertaking that activity and its making visible. In this way, I use the term in reference to Bojana Kunst's examination in *Artist at Work*. In her study, Kunst examines how 'the artist works today and the things produced by the artist's work place art intimately close to capitalism' (2015:9). Kunst captures the relationship between subjectivity, neoliberalism and modes of work. Kunst makes a convincing case for how 'visible processes of work in the arts [...] become interesting when they disclose the hegemony of difference between art and life' (2015:151). In this way, they reveal the complexities of contemporary exploitation of the subject, whilst also reminding us that

² In Arendt, *vita activa* 'receives its meaning from *vita contemplativa*' (1958:16), where one is dedicated to matters of politics and publicness, and the other, to contemplation.

³ In 'The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art' in *The Human Condition* Arendt speaks to the work of art specifically, and unpacks some of the ways in which art is the most wordly of all things because it is durable (1958:167-174).

‘the formation and creation of life is not singular, but fundamentally belongs to the common.’ (ibid.) Kunst points to a paradox of art under neoliberalism: the artist is to provide a blueprint for how to work, whilst at the same time stands accused of ‘uselessness’ (ibid.). It is the relationship between work as an activity and process that pertains to the common, and one that concerns appearance precisely because of its potential coercion, that I want to maintain in my thinking about the work of performance criticism, specifically in relation to collectivity.⁴

In this chapter I begin to consider how the politicisation of performance criticism occurs. I do so by engaging with a project of digital, collectively authored, live critical writing. I am interested in exploring collective live writing as one of the ways in which performance criticism politicises processes of appearance, and disturbs the subject at work, and the work of the subject, due to neoliberal pressures, specifically, the instrumentalisation of subjectivity and its relationship to work (Kunst 2015, Brown 2015). Digital, live critical writing stages encounters of simultaneous, mediated meaning-making, and as we are about to see, reveals a dissonant collective voice, exposing not only the constitution of subjective criticality, but also its work.⁵ In doing so, it seeks to operate beyond what Bojana Kunst calls ‘the ready-made possibilities of discourse’ (2015: 13) under neoliberalism, that is, the ‘pre-established models of criticality and reflexivity’ in which art and artistic subjectivity often partake (ibid.). This is how performance criticism often operates on the periphery: its mode of conceiving of criticism is deliberately attempting to search for alternatives of valuing beyond the

⁴ Building on Arendt’s distinction, I use the term work, rather than labour, to account for its wordliness, its complex relationship with necessity and use, and its relationship to the political fabric.

⁵ I use mediated here to acknowledge that the entirety of the project, from the act of spectating to that of writing, occurred online.

qualitative binary of good and bad, towards the multiple and possible contributions of meaning, whilst at the same time having to negotiate the challenges of work's instrumentalisation – what critic Brian Holmes calls the setting to work of 'difference' (Holmes 2008: 19).

Collective work in contemporary criticism

Before proceeding to my case study, I want to situate the discussion at hand, following on from my examination of the event in performance criticism in Chapter Three. My engagement with performance criticism and its political thinking is, as I have mentioned in the Introduction, framed by an examination of its enmeshment in the coercive operations of neoliberalism. Viewed by means of a cultural ecology, performance criticism, as an emergent practice, works in proximity to the dominant practices of criticism. It is this proximity as a space that I want to briefly occupy here; I will not be thinking in parallel about the shifting relations of work in theatre and performance criticism, but relationally. My reading of these through the lens of theories of neoliberalism considers how work complicates methods central to these practices, namely, valuation and interpretation. The live critical writing practice I consider here is explicitly reactive to models of authorship in traditional criticism. It is also framed by an apparent proliferation of means of production in criticism, exemplified by the emergence of online criticism, and a navigating of multiple structures of production in search of autonomy. I tease this out by means of an engagement with analyses of neoliberalism that point to the duality of work in artistic practice: the work of the artist, and the artist at work. In the same way, I talk about the work of criticism, and criticism at work. Critical live writing, as an example of performance criticism, exposes this dual

play of work and criticism. Marked by collectivity, live critical writing disturbs traditions of singular authorship in criticism. To this end, I use collectivity to both denote multiple authorship and structures of mutual support that frame it.

Neoliberalism is defined as the 'systematic use of state power to impose financial market imperatives, in a domestic process that is replicated internationally by globalisation (Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005: 3). Whilst neoliberalism, as an ideology and practice of contemporary government, has global reach, it also has local specificity, and has been most widely examined in the context of the US and the UK (Brown 2015, Harvie 2005, Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005) as rooted in the stimulation of 'free market competition among businesses with limited state regulation' (Jones 2006: 2). Shared across overviews of the rise of neoliberalism in the UK (Arestis and Sawyer in Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005, Harvey 2005) is a distinct relationship between the global financial crisis, propelled by US economic restructuring following New York's collapse in 1975, and the widespread privatisation that characterised Margaret Thatcher's Prime Ministership (1979–1990), by means of two distinct processes: 'the sale of publicly owned assets [and] the heading of the private finance initiative' (Arestis and Sawyer in Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005: 199), reactive to the post-war nationalisation programme of the previous Labour government. Despite the replacement of Thatcher by John Major as Prime Minister in 1990 and the election of a Labour government in 1997, there have been only 'minor shifts in policy and in rhetoric of policy' (Arestis and Sawyer in Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005: 199) during its time. The post-1997 Labour government developed a 'private finance initiative', leading to changes 'in the form of public sector investment and the degree of contracting out of services to private sector provision' (Arestis and Sawyer in Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005: 201). I mention this

here as a means of understanding how British neoliberalism is characterised by 'privatisation, macroeconomic policy, industrial policy and inequality (Arestis and Sawyer in Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005: 207) in close connection with the deployment of austerity politics that marked both Thatcher's government in the eighties, and David Cameron's following the financial crisis of 2007–2008 (Clarke, Kellner, Stewart, Whitely 2015). This mapping enables us to understand how cultural policy and discourse have been shaped by an increasing pressure for reparative, socially oriented work (Bishop 2012) and a move towards philanthropy and economic autonomy following severe public cuts to arts funding in the early noughties (Harvie 2013). This is not only the political ecology in which performance criticism emerges; it is also a political rationality that fundamentally alters discourses on value, and the co-optation of some forms of criticism in the interests of monetisation.

I am, however, cautious of deploying neoliberalism as a totalising critique that blankets infrastructural and political changes, without considering that recent accounts I've mentioned here underline the dominance of this at an economic and political level across the spectrum of right- and left-wing politics. Neoliberalism is not solely in the grip of the right. In its reach, neoliberalism operates as a political rationality as well as a governmental approach; it 'tends to structure and organise not only the action of rulers, but also the conduct of the ruled' (Dardot and Laval 2013: 5).⁶ Considering how neoliberalism intervenes into the social and political fabric, as deployed in the work of

⁶ This perspective is explicitly informed by the work of Michel Foucault, who constituted political rationality as 'the intellectual processing of the reality which political technologies can [tackle]' (Foucault 1997: 88). Political rationality is enacted through operations both procedural and institutional. Rationality can only exist through governmentality, understood beyond the specificity of official national governments. Governmentality is an activity that configures the ways in which people 'conduct within, and using the instruments of, the state' (ibid.).

political theorists Wendy Brown, and Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, and in the cultural analysis of Jen Harvie and Gregory Sholette, is significant, because it enables us to understand the conflicts between subject and work, and how performance practice emerges in the shadows of these. I am interested, therefore, in understanding neoliberalism as a context for performance criticism's politicisation, because it is precisely the subject and her work that it concerns itself with. Recent cultural histories since the 1980s in the UK have been marked by radical shifts in policy, not only pertaining to arts funding and its valuation, but also, significantly for my exploration here, for how these shifted the relationship between subject, work and collectivity, although theatre and performance criticism remain underexamined, with no quantitative data on models of production outside established publications being available. What is evident is that the neoliberal ecology places pressure on cultural work's productivity at an economic and civic level, whilst also appropriating its affective structures to an increasingly growing and cross-profession private sector.⁷ It enmeshes subjectivity and collective work in difficult tensions between public and private, political and personal.

As Jen Harvie argues in *Fair Play: Performance and Neoliberalism*, the effects of neoliberalism on performance culture concern not only the rise of the 'artrepreneur', an instrumentalisation of artistic work for 'growth, productivity and profit' (2013: 64), but

⁷ In a special issue of *The Drama Review* (56: 4), edited by Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, on 'Precarity and Performance', the editors remind us of the 'systematic attack upon the welfare mode of organising social relations', one that precipitated the Milan EuroMayDay protests (2012: 6). The editors expose the ways in which 'theatrical labour has a particular purchase on the contemporary scene in which [such] life and work appears' (2012: 7), asking how we might think 'through the labour of performance' to better understand reactions to a commodification of the 'labouring body and its production of affect' (ibid.). Whilst my engagement with work does not concentrate, in this chapter, on the role precarity plays in shaping it, I want to acknowledge here that a dimension of this discussion concentrates not only on criticism's affective work, but also on its engagement with discursive structures enmeshed in a cultural market. This is a tension I briefly touch upon here.

also support 'self-interested individualism' (2013: 25). Harvie's analysis foregrounds how, at the heart of discussions on the role of neoliberalism in shaping contemporary performance culture, is a concern with the autonomy of the subject. This is of core relevance to our examination of performance criticism here; it is specifically this coercion with which I want to grapple, arguing that performance criticism is no stranger to the problems of subjectivity and its work under neoliberalism, but that its politicisation is reactive to these. How might we talk about a commitment to subjective criticality, as a space that values the peripherals of meaning and its experience in the political fabric, when the subject herself navigates such complex networks of value and work?

In Wendy Brown's book *Undoing the Demos* (2015), I locate a relevant exploration of the impact of neoliberalism on the self and the subject, one that accounts for the ways in which both work and affect are often woven together. Brown argues that the reason for neoliberalism operating as a 'normative order of reason' developed alongside a 'widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality' (2015: 9) and is precisely its commitment to the development of what she terms the homo oeconomicus. This results from the ways in which human capital is 'capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its [...] portfolio value across all of its endeavours' (2015: 10). Brown's critique rests on the argument that widespread economisation of previously 'noneconomic domains, activities and subjects' does not necessarily go hand in hand with their monetisation (2015: 32), but results in the pursuit of 'self's future value' (2015: 34). This, in turn, leads to a competition culture where the personal and the public become conflated, entwined in battles over progress always located in a future ideal, but requiring the kinds of personal investment that

shift the value and place of that activity. Two effects are of interest to me. The first is how this becomes a battle over 'public goods and the very idea of a public' (2015: 40) by means of the divisions caused by this competition culture. I will discuss this in relation to the question of performance criticism in the public realm in Chapter Five. The second, and relevant to my discussion here, is that liberty is 'relocated from political to economic life', which narrows not only what constitutes that liberty, but shifts representation to appropriation. As Brown explains, 'the guarantee of equality through the rule of law and participation in popular sovereignty is replaced with a market formulation for winners and losers' (2015: 41).

In my Introduction, I argued that, despite the emergence of online theatre criticism in the early noughties, the review continued to remain a dominant form of evaluative engagement with theatre and performance. Valuation is not necessarily tied to market formulation; there is an important relationship between authorship, form and visibility in the review, that, as I have argued in Chapter One, can be traced back to the emergence of the figure of the public critic. The rise of online criticism indisputably brought with it a diversification of voices and, with that, a redistribution of structures of visibility, but it also continued to contribute to reproductions of traditional critical formats in mainstream media increasingly prone to a marketisation of valuation. As Duska Radosavljević argues in her introduction to *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes*, it did provide an alternative space of discourse and, with it, new modes of engaging with more marginalised theatre and performance practices, but it also made evident that 'the compulsion to offer a response to a work of art and thus produce criticism has thus far proved stronger than a desire to be remunerated for that labour' (2016: 10). It is, however, less a matter of desire, and more one of a lack of autonomy in

structures of production which criticism grapples with. As Bojana Kunst argues in the case of art practice, what we notice under neoliberalism is the fusing of methods of production with the work itself (2015: 145).

In December 2016, digital publication *Exeunt* introduces a Friends Scheme; friends of the publication receive three exclusive 'printed theatre zines' a year in exchange for monthly donations which allow the publication to pay its writers and undertake long-term planning, by means of a tiered system. In order to assert its independence and avoid 'the same familiar power structures of print media' ('Why we need new models for funding theatre criticism', 2016), *Exeunt* makes a case for the sustainability of such forms of criticism that do not rely on for-profit business models but on support from readership. Editor Alice Saville explicitly draws on successful uses of the funding platform *Patreon*, a US-based platform launched in 2013 that enables 'creators' to 'get paid by running a membership business' for their fans ('About', *Patreon*). Saville cites blogger Meg Vaughan's use of *Patreon*, which ran for a year and ceased operating in September 2016. On her page, different monthly and project-based budget brackets enabled various levels of activity: \$200 enabled her to travel to see work outside of London, while \$500 granted her the possibility of spending a full day a week working on theatre criticism ('Megan Vaughan is creating Creative theatre criticism and comment', *Patreon*). Both approaches evidence the ways in which the conditions of work are directly tied to those of the nature of the work itself; at the same time, both account for the ways in which the affective labour of criticism, its desire, as Radosavljević proposes, to contribute to critical debate, is framed by a neoliberal competition culture that needs sustaining, either by means of personal or external resourcing. The approach to the work and the position of the subject are intertwined with the cultural market and its

pressures on criticism to support it. In an earlier article written in 2013 for the *Guardian*, critic Lyn Gardner notes a time of 'huge cultural shifts' that also coincides with a breakdown of economic models ('Is theatre criticism in crisis?', 2013). Whilst Gardner speaks to the rise of blogging as a space of free participation gaining in legitimacy, her article also captures the lack of alternative funding structures for independent theatre criticism. Vaughan's *Patreon* and *Exeunt's* Friends Scheme are attempts at getting hold of one's own means of production, situated at different ends of the spectrum, one for an individual and the other for a publication, without access to public subsidy, and in a market saturated by highly unlegislated rates for freelance writers. This is a model based on patronage that supports a form of self-employment, and therefore creates a particular economic relationship of utility, but one that nevertheless provides a form of (limited) agency in regards to modes of production. As Saville argues, 'we risk sliding into a new normal where younger, disproportionately female writers are expected to write for free, or on vanishing unstable freelance contracts' ('Why we need new models for funding theatre criticism', 2016). Saville sees this in close relation to the shrinking of commissioning budgets in established newspapers, as well as the erosion of writing teams. This reveals a landscape in which singular critics occupy posts at newspapers without means to resource external collaborations or commissions, and publications without for-profit models struggling to examine the politics and ethics of their practices by means of a lack of access to long-term planning, requiring a personal commitment that exceeds working structures and reproduces precarious labour.

This position is echoed across two further events of relevance here. One is an event I co-curated in October 2014 for *Inside Out Festival* titled 'Critical Interruptions', bringing

together critics including Lyn Gardner, Maddy Costa and Donald Hutera, curators including Lois Keidan (Live Art Development Agency), Benjamin Sebastian (artist-led organisation performance space) and Laura McDermott (Fierce Festival), which raised questions about the responsibility of a cultural ecology to support criticism, but flagged the lack of public subsidy available to criticism explicitly;⁸ the second was an informal gathering which took place at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in December of 2014 that revolved around ‘building a critical culture’ and a ‘community’, whilst also concentrating on funding as a topic (‘Minutes 8.12.14’).⁹ Whilst the latter was short-lived, with only two follow-up meetings, it is evidence of a collective desire to think through the sustainability of a growing ecology of criticism that is enmeshed in a neoliberal market saturated with competition, and marked by a porosity between public relations and critical valuation. Across the two gatherings, and evident in Saville’s own argument, we note a desire to seize the means of work in order to sustain the work itself. As Saville proposes, the risk is a loss of individual voices of ‘dissent’ that lose out in a ‘social media world where positive reviews, emblazoned with stars have a clear market value’ (‘Why we need new models for funding theatre criticism’, 2016). Here we see Brown’s diagnosis operating within the ecology of criticism that gave rise to the peripheral practice of performance criticism: a competition culture that simultaneously deploys the working subject to serve market interests, yet one that depends on the commitment of that work to sustain its competition. It is what, in their analysis, Dardot and Laval refer to as a ‘performance/pleasure apparatus’ (2013: 281), a characteristic of neoliberalism that ‘combines the obscene display of pleasure, the entrepreneurial

⁸ *Critical Interruptions* took place as a public, open roundtable, on 25 October 2014, at Westminster Reference Library as part of *Inside Out Festival*.

⁹ Participants were: Maddy Costa, Meghan Vaughan, Matt Trueman, Dan Hutton, Dan Rebellato, Catherine Love, Natasha Tripney, Jake Orr and myself.

injunction of performance and the cross-linkage of generalised surveillance' (2013: 299). In other words, when performance becomes a paradigm of analysis of productivity, and pleasure a means through which more of it can be achieved, alternative systems of valuation are lost.

Exeunt's Friends Scheme is a desire to 'step out of the warp-speed culture of hyping and trashing new work, by giving writers longer deadlines and longer wordcounts' (Saville 2016). This is an example of a very recent shift towards unpacking the ways in which structures of work in criticism also participate in the work's instrumentalisation. Whilst *Exeunt* presents a productive attempt at retaining working practices by means of engaging with modes of sustaining work, other examples show us the ways in which the work of criticism and its value are enmeshed in neoliberal structures of competition that undermine an autonomy of valuation and conflate visibility and authority. In a round-up article for the *Guardian's* blogging section, *Noises Off*, in 2009, Chris Wilkinson cites a discussion on rules of theatre criticism following the revised code of practice issued by the International Association of Theatre Critics, concentrating on the debated element of a critic being welcoming of new ideas, 'forms, styles and practice' ('Noises Off: The Rules of Being a Good Theatre Critic', 2009). Wilkinson identifies two opposing views, those of critic Charles Spencer, whose polemic response revolved around sobriety, awokeness and not leaving until the end of the show, and Mark Shenton, who believes critics should be 'keen [...] observers' who 'encourage good work [...] and police bad work' (2009): one instance where social responsibility is deployed as sufficient method of engagement, suggesting that critical authority is inherent in the position; the other presenting the critic as the artistic police of the cultural market.

Here we find neoliberal rationality at play; these examples of public debate place emphasis on the review as a space of binary, good/bad valuation. Shared across these examples is, to draw on Brown's terms, a conflict on winners and losers. In other words, a culture of competition that plays out by means of a negotiation of the ethical boundaries of reviewing in criticism. Value does not reside outside structuring mechanisms developed under neoliberal political rationality.¹⁰ In the examples I cited here, critical authority, the policing of artistic practice, and the ethics of criticism become intertwined by means of evaluation. Charles Spencer, in this way, marks sobriety as one of the only qualifying factors for critical responsibility, whilst Shenton paints the critic as the safeguard of artistic excellence, without making known the subjectivities, contexts and infrastructures that frame the terms of comparison. This seems paradoxical: one mode of thinking fails to acknowledge conflicting spheres of value, whilst being reliant on that very conflict to legitimise its position; the other inhabits a landscape of conflicting value whilst positioning the critic as an outsider who can legislate the winners and losers, whilst failing to account for how criticism fashions that paradigm. What is exposed here is how neoliberalism makes the work of criticism a matter of competition, participating in a marketisation of artistic value as much as an instrumentalisation of critical work.

Another example of neoliberal structuring of criticism is *My Theatre Mates*, co-founded by critics Mark Shenton and Terri Paddock as a digital hub that selects content from participating bloggers by means of syndication, drawing from 'individual websites and social channels' and presenting the content as a curated selection of 'independent

¹⁰ Because of this, it is fundamental to recuperate value outside of this coercion, though this is an aspect of analysis outside of the scope of this current study.

theatre voices.’(‘About’, *My Theatre Mates*). Founded in 2013, *My Theatre Mates* proposes a mutual agreement to its participating bloggers: in exchange for free posting and reproduction of material from their sites, it promises ‘new readership, improvability of search engine optimisation, increase in social media visibility and the potential for further earning (‘make a little bit of extra money (maybe)’), whilst also requiring participating writers to contribute to the newsletter, add promotional material on their blogs, and comment regularly on content from other writers, share their work and perform additional marketing duties.¹¹ *My Theatre Mates* draws on integrated-advertising and ticket-sales models. It builds on business models for publications like *Time Out*, founded in 1968, having sold a 50 percent stake to Oakley Capital Investments Group in 2010 and currently operating internationally under Time Out Group, a global media and entertainment business, and *What’s On Stage*, founded in 1996 by media corporation EMAP, acquired by Time Out from Terri Paddock, *My Theatre Mates*’ co-founder, and David Dobson, and further sold to TheatreMania.com in 2013.¹² What is interesting is that *My Theatre Mates* deploys a similarly incorporated business model by drawing on existing content from independent bloggers. Its syndication model is a means of monetising and instrumentalising precarious labour, and reveals a contradiction, because it presents itself as a not-for-profit venture modelled on for-profit, corporate business models. The precarious work of bloggers comes from operating without direct financial support, requiring other means of income to support their work, as Vaughan’s *Patreon* has shown.¹³

¹¹ The development of *My Theatre Mates* follows the departure of Shenton and Paddock from their posts (*Sunday Express* and *What’s On Stage*, respectively).

¹² See: ‘Time Out publisher sells 50% stake’ in *BBC New Business*, 26 November, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-11844925>

¹³ Notable are collective incentives that seek to support blogging communities, such as the Network of Independent Critics, co-founded by Laura Kressly and Katherine Kavanagh in 2016 as a means of connecting together a temporary blogging community for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and beyond. The

One of the benefits of blogging, its independence, which allows a self-guided working structure that might be irregular, and tailored to the individual's own working contexts, is co-opted into a form of monetisation that puts pressure on its function within an existing ecology, as the *My Theatre Mates* model shows. This is most evident in the network's declaration of the 'ticket-buying power' ('About', *My Theatre Mates*) of criticism, whilst making apparent that the main gain for the participants is the visibility that comes from the reputation of the site, where all proceeds go back to its co-founders rather than being distributed additionally to syndicated members. *My Theatre Mates* displays neoliberalisation of some forms of criticism precisely to ensure economic sustainability; it does so, however, at the expense of precarious labour, and by means of a politics of visibility that reproduces market culture and competition culture – the more visible you are, the more likely it is that traffic on your website might increase, and you become able to monetise your work independently of the network. Brown's analysis rings particularly true here, when she declares that neoliberalism creates a culture where 'human capital replaces labour', even in the instances where subjects are 'impoverished, or without resources' (2015: 65); and as Brown aptly observes, 'distinctly political meanings of "equality", "autonomy" and "freedom" are giving way to economic valences' (2015: 177). We see these valences at play, in how autonomy is revalued by means of its potential for profit, despite the very emergence of blogging being reactive to institutional structures of discourse, and implicit, dominant working structures. In the example of *My Theatre Mates* and Wilkinson's captured debate, what is exposed is how the review, as a specific tradition of valuation in criticism, also

network is a support system for 'established, independent performing arts critics' ('About the Network of Independent Critics', *Kickstarter*, 2016). A Kickstarter campaign raised 20% of income, £1,279 of £6,500 for funding for the project in 2016.

continues to actively participate in performance's commodification. It reproduces the narratives of success and failure, without making the terms of that discussion transparent, for either performance or the work of criticism. Performance criticism engages with exposures of its work in search for transparency, and finds solidarity in the collective authorship.

This position is echoed in other analyses of criticism, notably, Gavin Butt in his introduction to *After Criticism*, arguing that, in order to remain critical, criticism in the academy needs to situate itself 'para – against/or beside – the doxa of received wisdom' (2005: 5). Butt's strategy is to foreground 'the performative, the paradoxical, conditions of critical address' (2005: 6), precisely as a means through which to resist the institutionalisation of thought brought about by postmodernism, and of its imbrication with matters of capital. I depart from this point precisely because my analysis concerns itself with performance criticism in the public realm, and across contexts, but also moves beyond the critical encounter, towards the event of criticism. This investment is also a hopeful act that values the possibility of still being *with* rather than after criticism. Whilst Butt's diagnosis does not account for neoliberalism's investment into the self for work, his reflection on criticism's enmeshment in operations of capital finds hope in alternative practices.

As we have seen with instances of theatre criticism's attempts at collectivity in order to engage with the problem of neoliberal work, it's important to consider the relationship between individual and collective with caution. Collectivity is not invested with political potential de facto, in a neoliberal ecology where it is often instrumentalised, as we have seen. Harvie speaks to the inherent tensions at the heart of socially engaged practices,

for example, particularly following Arts Council England's shift towards fostering such work at community level, following New Labour policy: 'the agency and egalitarianism [socially engaged practice] proffers can be modest, superficially placating or problematically and spectacularly distracting' (2013: 41). Such practices are often instrumentalised as a means of servicing communities affected by significant decrease in public service, distracting from the 'Conservative-led government's enormous cuts to public services', creating unsustainable intellectual economies and delegating labour to audiences 'who are usually unpaid and indeed often paying', thus replicating, extending and 'potentially naturalising exploitative trends in contemporary labour markets more broadly' (2013: 41). We have also seen such trends at work in theatre criticism, where the competition for visibility supports those who already have the means to resource their labour, whilst instrumentalising that of newcomers who operate more precariously – at the expense of critical examination of how work, value and practice are tied together.

Harvie finds productive structures of collectivity that account for changing labour structures within cultural ecologies, and build on 'models of sociality and mutual responsibility' (2013:59) These can form as much between audiences and makers, as they can across different structures of cultural labour, which Harvie accounts for by means of exploring how enterpreneurialism shapes a plurality of types of expertise from artists that do not necessarily result in problematic de-professionalisation, but allow a navigating of the neoliberal market with some form of agency and valuing of co-dependence. We have already seen these at play in performance criticism's commitment to project-based work that does not foreground one single author (*Spill:Overspill*, for example), and articulates a critical experimentation with the event by means of a

collective voice (*Open-Dialogues*), and we will see here, how this further weaves together work and subjectivity as a mode of resistance.

To this end, Bojana Kunst's examination of how artistic work and subjectivisation are instruments of neoliberalism as much as sites of resistance, is of relevance here. Kunst argues that

on the one hand, the work of the artist is at the core of capital's speculation's on art value; on the other hand, by means of its work, art also resists the appropriation of its artistic powers (2015: 18)

Kunst provides a key insight relevant to our discussion here by identifying a tension that might at first seem paradoxical: the artist as both instrument and agitator of the neoliberal cultural market. Kunst pays attention to how the co-optation of artistic subjectivity is undergone by means of an appropriation of some of its working structures, as well as its affective qualities. The 'crisis of the subject', she argues, 'reveals itself as an endless barrage of human abilities, actions and aspirations' (2015: 25). In Kunst's analysis, echoing Brown's examination of competition culture, we find convincing arguments for how neoliberalism shifts the very means through which a subject engages with work: always creative, aspirational, pleasurable and committed. The working subject is one who works overtime, deploys her skills beyond the call of duty, and is ready to approach every problem with creativity – to rely, in other words, on herself whilst being productive for that which her labour supports. Kunst calls this an 'illusion of endless transformation' that relies on a 'standardised transformation of the subject' (2015: 22).

We have already seen how this is at play in *My Theatre Mates*, where the pleasures of blogging as an irregular activity are erased by a competitive structure of visibility that, by means of its promise of monetisation, also requires it. This is significant in enabling us to understand what exactly of performance and artistic work has been made visible and instrumental in the development of neoliberal working structures. In both Kunst's and Brown's analyses, we find evidence of a shift in how power and authority produce diversity, where 'even the weirdest affective tendencies are in order' (Kunst 2015: 250), and in how 'knowledge, thought and training are valued and desired almost exclusively for 'their contribution to capital enhancement' (Brown 2015: 176). Kunst's work concentrates on ways in which some contemporary forms of performance subvert the enmeshment of artistic work into capitalism by means of a collective reconceiving of the value and terms of productivity. Brown's analysis concerns itself more widely with the mechanisms by which intellectual, artistic and, importantly, affective work is instrumentalised, and sometimes monetised, to create the appearance of autonomy whilst still being subservient to the market.

In light of this, collectivity in criticism under neoliberalism is as much a matter of how work is shared, as how frames of value are at work. In Brown, we find a diagnosis that is hopeful; in arguing that neoliberal structures undo the fabric of the demos, she makes possible a resistance by means of cultivating a democratic commitment that frees up 'collaborative and contestatory human decision making' – a culture of deliberation and recuperation (2015: 221). Similarly, in the work of Jen Harvie and Gregory Sholette, we locate reflections on productive deployments of neoliberal structures to harness 'horizontal networks of support that defy individualism' and explore 'counter-arguments of craftsmanship to neoliberalism's emphases on growth' (2013: 23) in

performance practice, or, to how 'administered collectivity' is opposed by means of 'artistic collaborative practices shaped by conflict and difference' (2017: 170). In these instances, collectivity emerges as a productive structure of resistance. In performance criticism, we see this as individuals working together in the structure of a collective; in turn, the collective reveals the working structures of the individuals within it. This is an exposing of the complexities that mark collective work that might go some way towards resisting neoliberal terms of productivity and value. This is, as Brown proposes, a culturing of democracy, but one that does not de facto mean emancipation from neoliberalism's grip; however, it does, I propose, propel a quest for alternative discourses at a time of their multiplication (Dean 2005: 52) and instrumentalisation (Brown 2015). Performance criticism does have a commitment to valuation, in that it seeks to contribute to a culture of engagement that shifts performance towards a political fabric; in this way, it approaches the matter of performance with the utmost commitment, but its departure from the work and collectivity propels it beyond operations of value imbricated in an already economised market. In light of this, I move on to examine collective interpretation in an example of critical live writing.

Critical live writing at work: collective interpretation

Quizoola LIVE! was a multi-authored, durational live writing project I curated in collaboration with the British theatre company Forced Entertainment for their 24-hour performance *Quizoola!*, a game of question and answer for two performers at a time, which was live-streamed from the Millennium Gallery in Sheffield on 21 November

2014, from 11:45pm, for 24 hours.¹⁴ It featured nine writers, responding to the unfolding, live-streamed performance by means of live writing – critical texts of various formal inflections, uploaded to a dedicated site.¹⁵ It follows on from an earlier iteration, responsive to *And on the Thousandth Night*, a durational Forced Entertainment performance that toyed with the limits and shapes of narrative.¹⁶ *Quizoola LIVE!* departs from a single performance, and its response is mediated by the displacement of the participating writers, all engaging remotely, from different locations, by means of the live-stream. From the outset, the events of criticism and that of the performance are physically separated, whilst the project creates a porousness between the two by means of its digitality. Developing this further, in a recent article for *Performance Research: On Poetics and Performance*, I argue that the work of live writing formally examines the borders between the meaning-making processes of performance and those of criticism (2015: 99). I want to pay further attention to the ways in which the digital stages performances of interpretation, and demonstrates the event of criticism as a series of multiple temporalities intervening into different terrains of meaning. At the same time, I want to examine how the project exposes a particular mode of thinking about the work of criticism, and criticism as work; one reactive to the neoliberal coercions I have outlined here.

As Jodi Dean’s examination of communicative capitalism has made evident, the digital remains a space marked by abundance, where ‘facts and opinions, images and reactions

¹⁴ For the full project website, follow this link: <http://quizoola.exeuntmagazine.com/>

¹⁵ John Boursnell, Laura Burns, Gareth Damian Martin, Mette Garfield, Debbie Guinnane, Johanna Linsley, Nisha Ramayya, Nik Wakefield and myself.

¹⁶ *1000th LIVE* took place between 6pm and 12pm on 22 November 2014, coinciding with the live-streaming of the Forced Entertainment performance *And in the Thousandth Night* at the Millennium Gallery in Sheffield. <https://1000th.exeuntmagazine.com/>

circulate in a massive stream of content', often losing their 'specificity and merging with and into the data flow' (2005: 58). Importantly for my thinking here is Dean's argument that 'specific or singular acts of resistance, statements of opinion or instances of transgression are not political in and of themselves' but rather have to be politicised (2005: 57). My claim is that performance criticism's investment in the work of criticism as tied to appearance, and the structures of work in criticism, have the potential to do just that; and by means of its structured engagement with the frame of work, and deployment of the meta-framing of the project itself, we locate a model for performance criticism that destabilises problematic demands of critique reliant on visibility of singular authorship and concealment of the complexities of its work.

As Kunst argues, 'the project' is the 'prevailing form we work in', one that is connected, however, to temporality that has the dangerous effect of often preserving the present 'through a continuous consumption of human powers' (2015: 164). If work is that which places us in relation to others, the project emerges as 'the ultimate horizon of experience' that situates the subject in a constant state of production where the 'possibility of the future is actually in balance with the current power relations' (2015: 167–168). Therefore, for Kunst, the project enters the work as much as produces it. This is particularly interesting when thinking about the dominance of the project as a structure of work in performance criticism. Despite the co-optations that Kunst aptly examines, the project continues to be a productive alternative space in which the work of the subject, that of the collective, and that of criticism itself is disturbed, and it is by means of its framing by means of the digital that a disturbance occurs. With disturbance comes a deployment of its very work that sustains a form of autonomy, by the very means of acknowledging its enmeshment in multiple processes of meaning at work. Live

critical writing is a means by which performance criticism has sought to engage with a framing that reveals the kinds of work at play within criticism. I will explain this here.

Live critical writing is distinct, but not entirely new to, criticism. Its model of collectivity, of writers being together by means of their collective thinking, builds on the development of an intellectual culture of sociality in the public sphere of the eighteenth century (Benchimol 2010). Its contemporary, digital iteration is rooted in a concern with the event in criticism at the intersection with neoliberal political rationality.¹⁷ As an explicit practice, critical live writing has been incorporated as a site of productive experimentation within the *Writing from Live Art* project that was fundamental to the emergence of what I am calling performance criticism. This set a precedent for the project as a framed engagement with criticism as an event by means of constituent sub-projects, such as *Spill:Overspill* or the collaboration with *Performa* in the US. *Writing from Live Art* set a precedent for organisational support of criticism that foregrounds a different politics of engagement with work, one more attentive to what occurs in the event of criticism, as much as one that experiments with engagement with performance itself by means of distinct formal frames. What remains specific about performance criticism's navigation of work structures is not an exemption from the pressures of instrumentalised labour, but an emphasis on collectivity within the structures of the project that destabilises authorship. At the same time, this engagement with work exposes interpretive acts that reveal the collective at work. Such resources of performance criticism, although disparate, legitimised it as a cultural space for political

¹⁷ Of particular note here is Adrian Heathfield and Tim Etchells' *Long Relay* for Serpentine Galleries' Experiment Marathon in October 2007, and, by means of its interest in documentation, *Open-Dialogues'* NOTA project, exploring live notetaking in the performance space. Though they deploy live critical writing, both projects remain concerned with the events of criticism and writing.

investigation in need of its own economic and work structures, rather than subservient, as we have seen, to existing models that do not account for specificity.

In 2014, Maddy Costa and Mary Paterson co-founded the digital project *Something Other* through an Arts Council England Grants for the Arts dedicated to dialogues between writing and Live Art:¹⁸ 'this space,' its original About page reads, 'is marked for thoughts about the difference between live art and digital art, [...] viewing and reading' ('About' 2014). The project exposes 'how writing is disrupted or erupted by the challenges of the live and the digital', notably, if the 'challenge is to use writing to translate experience from one register to another, without effacing meaning in the process' (ibid.). *Something Other* later took shape as a long-term project at the interstice between performance and Live Art writing, criticism and experimental writing.¹⁹ I mention it here as an early example of performance criticism's interest in the digital as a space for formal experimentation, one that also begins to account for the political possibilities of its exposure of different forms of work – both subjective and structural. The matter of work is accounted for in the ability of *Something Other* to position its experimentation with criticism in writing as an autonomous space, to account for what is at work in the practice, as well as opening that work to public subsidy.²⁰ Performance

¹⁸ *Exeunt* also published its first collectively authored review, written during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in response to the Forest Fringe Programme, titled 'Forest Fringe: You Must Sing', authored by Catherine Love, Billy Barrett and Rebecca Morris and published on 24 August 2014. Whilst I delineate this as a practice with different concerns, I mention it here for the ways in which it displayed a growing interest from independent online criticism to engage with multi-authored reviewing – though the practice continues to be more or less exclusive to *Exeunt*.

¹⁹ Since 2016, *Something Other* has been co-edited by myself, with Mary Paterson and Maddy Costa, as a platform for writings from performance; it is not a project that explicitly orients itself around criticism, but is of importance to mention here as a key player in alternative digital spaces for experimental writing that responds to performance. Alongside regular chapters, themed collections of texts, the project also houses an In Response section, where it curates short critical pieces responsive to a live work.

²⁰ A similar format was adopted by Bellyflop, a 'collaborative artist-led editorial made up of a fluctuating group of people' in the field of contemporary dance established in 2008. Bellyflop undertook curatorial and editorial projects on the basis of a successful Arts Council England funding bid that secured a three-

criticism is here supported in work but also, significantly, articulated by means of a collective position, where authorship is backgrounded in favour of an examination of that which disturbs writing. This is evident in both the project's desire to move away from 'publication' as a frame for critical work online, and in the foregrounding of translation of experience across registers, and of writing as disrupted, and disruptive of that process. I see in this an accounting for the communicative structures of neoliberalism that complicate relationships to meaning. Once more, we notice a parallel between the events of writing and that of performance, illustrated so vividly in Eleanor Hadley Kershaw's writing in my previous chapter, that is, shared across practices gathered here.

The commitment of *Something Other* to examining the act of translation of experience from one register to another also manifested itself by means of an irregular and nomadic performance night called *Reading the Internet* (2016-current). For the event, writers would read out either their own or other texts found online, without revealing the source or author. This multi-platform, multi-vocal exploration attests to the increasing value placed on writing that departs from performance, but maintains a critical commitment to its thinking into the world. Likewise, the project hosted an ongoing, informal monthly gathering for performance writers that commenced in 2016 and continues to date. It is an ethos shared across the work of the trouble-makers I gather here – and I retain the position of trouble because, like *Something Other*, this mattering of the event of criticism, and that of writing, supports the place of contemporary critical subjectivity in cultural deliberation by exposing the tensions of

year-long exploration of criticism from the perspective of dance writers, and continued to work on a project basis, formally closing in 2017.

meaning that make up the practice. At the same time, the collective authorial structure is both a mode of solidarity and a form of authorial release.

Something Other set a precedent for digital examinations of writing, at a time when festivals increasingly incorporated writing projects into their structures, and provided a temporary but supported space for such formal exploration. In this landscape, festivals offered not only access, but also a financial contribution, either to the delivery of the project, or towards its participating writers, and the ability to shape a project-based framing of critical experimentation that attempted to expose that work.²¹ Festivals required the writing to have a specific duration but approached this in the same manner as an artist commission – meaning that the terms of the relationship could be negotiated from the start, and that project placed alongside the different strands of activity. The work itself was framed as distinct but could be accessed by means of the festival site.²² Such notable examples in the UK include *Spill Festival of Performance* (since 2009), under the artistic direction of Robert Pacitti, which developed, as I have already shown, from a live writing experiment to a training programme for emergent critical writers; *In Between Time Festival*, under the artistic direction of Helen Cole, who, since 2013, has collaborated with writers in residence to produce texts in varying formats that documented experiences of the work, as well as brought critical angles towards these; and the *Sick of the Fringe*, conceived by artists Brian Lobel and Tracy Gentles, an initial collaboration with the Edinburgh Fringe in 2016 that brought

²¹ Both *Something Other* and *Exeunt* mostly undertook funded activity by means of such collaborations.

²² Similar models, specifically working with performance criticism, have also developed internationally – such as *Trouble Festival*, Brussels, *Theatertreffen* and *Foreign Affairs* in Berlin, or *Next Wave Festival* in Australia. At a European level, however, the difference is that an already established tradition of resourcing criticism by means of covering expenses for international critics to attend already existed, so a different negotiation occurred where such infrastructures held a precedent.

together critical reflections on performances that explored illness and health, written in the form of prognoses and diagnoses.²³ Another project in this lineage is *Steakhouse: Live Writing*,²⁴ a partnership between *Critical Interruptions*, a collaboration of critics - Bojana Janković and myself,²⁵ and Steakhouse, a DIY²⁶ curatorial and support platform for radical performance work. The pilot project focused on exploring models of writing about Live Art, and consisted of an open call for a number of participating writers new to Live Art. The pilot was structured around two workshops, a durational live writing project to coincide with *Steakhouse Live's* 2016 festival, reflective articles for *Exeunt Magazine* and a follow-up publication ('Critical Interruptions', *Steakhouse Live*, 2016). *Steakhouse: Live Writing* incorporated research and outreach into the structure of the project, and concerned collectivity both as a shared and open-ended experience of critical writing, and as a means to consider the sustainability of such forms of performance criticism.²⁷ As with horizontalism, a movement that intersected with performance criticism in its concern for a more dramaturgically led, discursive criticism, these projects of situated collaboration displace the centrality of valuation

²³ *Sick of the Fringe* was originally commissioned by Welcome and has been produced by Something To Aim For since 2016. The project concentrates on performance that engages with, represents or concerns itself with issues of health and illness, and, since its inception, its core activity, aside from commissions, has been a festival-responsive critical writing strand. This consisted of a team of writers responding critically to works in the festival (Edinburgh Fringe 2016) that engage with the topic at hand.

²⁴ *Steakhouse: Live Writing* took place as part of the LONGER WETTER FASTER BETTER festival, 14–16 October 2016, at Toynbee Studios, Artsadmin and Rich Mix.

²⁵ *Critical Interruptions* was founded in 2014 by myself and Bojana Janković as a collaborative project exploring Live Art and performance criticism. The aim of the collaboration is to 'search for models of critical writing that are formally daring, critically rigorous, contextually relevant and adaptive to the needs of ever-changing shape shifting field' ('About', *Critical Interruptions*, 2016).

²⁶ DIY stands for do it yourself. *Steakhouse* is a platform that, in this lineage, embraces unprofessionalism, cuts across performance art, theatre, visual art, cabaret, sculpture, dance, drag and participatory performance ('About', *Steakhouse LIVE*, 2013). It was founded in 2013, motivated by a desire to support 'challenging and provocative live work' in London (ibid.). *Steakhouse* is a member of Live Art UK. Founding members include Katy Baird, Mary Osborn with Aaron Wright.

²⁷ Participating writers were Jen Boyd, Katharina Joy Book and Palin Ansusinha.

over documentation and response. They also complicate the ways in which criticism supports, subverts or questions the context in which it operates.²⁸

At the same time, the projects act as unstable documents, engaging with events as they occur in the realm of performance, that of the audience, and that of the political fabric of real life as it rubs off in, against, and within these.²⁹ Shared across these examples is an engagement with project-based work that seeks collectivity, both in its engagement with multiple voices, and its exposing of different works of criticism. Kunst, citing the work of Simon Bayly, proposes the rise of 'project agents' that come from the fact that 'nobody is the author of their project' (2015: 175) as a problematic acceleration of subjectivity. I see this, however, as a radical space in criticism, precisely because it destabilises structures of authorship, and distributes the work of criticism across multiple agents. This is not to say that the work structure of the projects is not without complication: there are multiple instances in which labour continues to be co-opted to serve, for example, the agenda of the festival, just as there continue to be no templates for good practice that support a shared approach to resourcing criticism in these contexts. However, by means of negotiations, a reparative space emerges where

²⁸ These questions were at the forefront of a colloquium organised by Karen Fricker at Brock University, *The Changing Face of Theatre Criticism in the Digital Age*, 21–22 February 2014, which I have also mentioned as contributing to the changing discourses on theatre criticism in the early noughties in my Introduction. My interest here is not to revisit this ground, but to focus on the ways in which performance criticism's relationship to the event I discussed in Chapter Three enables a different way of thinking about the politics of the practice; not by means of legitimacy or authority, but by means of performances of interpretation that make visible knowledge and discourse production in the digital era.

²⁹ Recent scholarship on performance documentation has argued the distinct identity of the document from its performance referent; it has dealt with the tensions inherent in performance's disappearance (Phelan 1993) as contingent on appearance, embodied modes of return to the archive (Schneider 2011) or post-colonial critiques of archival languages (Taylor 2003). Particularly relevant to my accounting of criticism's ties to documentary practices and their politics is the work of Amelia Jones in this area, for whom 'neither [attending to documentation nor performance] has a privileged relationship to the historical "truth" of the performance' (1997: 11). My use of documentation in this context accounts for the inherent instability performance criticism grants towards this aspect of the practice, particularly in critical live writing, which positions itself by default as a parallel document of performance's coming into being – by means of duration, without commitment to its representation.

criticism itself is faced with a formal exposing of work in order to work.

The collective dimension shared across the live critical writing projects I mentioned here, from *Spill:Overspill* to *Something Other*, is tied to a political question of writing in the public sphere and its deliberative and representational conflicts. Collectivity is not oppositional to individual authorship, particularly in the case of live writing, where the writing exposes the work of individuals, but is read as a collective text. In her text for the Study Room Guide, *(W)Reading Performance Writing*, Caroline Bergvall speaks to the specificity of live writing as cutting open a performer's presence, 'absented by the writing's own presencing [...] much like late-Beckett, *The Wooster Group*, Laurie Anderson and *Forced Entertainment*' (2010: 35). She adds that the 'performance of writing [...] seeks to locate expressedly the context and means for writing' (ibid.). This perspective on presence as a means of cutting through is echoed in the work of critical live writing, an awareness of the frames of work at play in the constitution of meaning online. This exposure of the means of writing is distinct from performance criticism's interest in collective critical work. Collectivity emerges here as both structuring and formal: a social gathering of writers engaging in the same activity in multiple ways, and an experience of collective authorship.

As I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, subjective criticality is shaped around a proposition of interpretation as a process of appearance (1966: 10). At the same time, I noted, making reference to the work of Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, interpretation is characterised by 'partiality and fragility' (1999: 2). In Chapter Three, I argued how the event of criticism makes visible multiple processes of meaning-making, situated between thinking and interpretation; these complicate what Arendt calls

thinking's withdrawal, because they expose slippery, incomplete thinking in process, oriented towards making something appear: the project of interpretation that Sontag proposes. Arendt's claim that 'there is [no] thought process possible without personal experience' (1993: 32) invites a revisiting of the contemporary project of interpretation – not just making thinking visible, but also a multiple circulation of meanings – posted between fiction and critique, analysis and experience, without these being paradigmatic. My position has been to show that what is specific to performance criticism is an event that makes meaning appear beyond processes contained within the encounter with performance, to disclosures within the critical response, shaped by subjective criticality. Building on this, *Quizoola LIVE!* is a digital project that occurs in parallel with the event of performance, providing a different configuration of meaning than the event-within-an-event in Kershaw's text in Chapter Three. The kinds of work made explicit in *Quizoola LIVE!* enable us to understand the event of criticism in its contemporaneity, rather than solely on the grounds of the phenomenological hermeneutics which I traced and argued for in my previous chapter.

Subjective criticality discloses itself in *Quizoola LIVE!* As I have argued in a recent chapter exploring the phenomenology of live writing,³⁰ it does so through departures from moments of performance and engagement with the embodied work of the writers – posts about heavy eyelids and teary eyes, about tired writing and slipping attention, woven into discussions about conflict and dialogue from the work. The work of interpretation and that of the body are brought to the fore, in a digital terrain where the borders between fiction and fact, critique and admiration, are acknowledged as porous.

³⁰ 'Performance Criticism: live writing as phenomenological poiesis' in the upcoming publication *The Thing Itself: Performance Phenomenology* (eds. Matt Wagner and Stuart Grant).

What emerges is a performance of interpretations that reveal themselves as such, and disclose the processes of thought that shaped the critical encounter – the work – and the multiple avenues of meaning that leave the performance, or are brought to bear on it. *Quizoola LIVE!* approaches this by concentrating on the process of tuning in and zoning out, tackling the provocation of digital mediation, interruption and duration. It makes evident subjective criticality as something constituted on both thinking and interpretation – what I term a poetics of appearance, echoing the work of Arendt and Sontag.

Importantly, the writing project took its cue from the structure of the performance. In *Quizoola*, two performers undertake an hour’s worth of questions and answers, including submissions from audience members gathered prior to the performance. Characteristic of Forced Entertainment’s practice is an exposing of the work by means of duration;³¹ in *Quizoola LIVE!*, similar shifts were undertaken by two writers at a time, always from different locations in the UK and beyond. At one point, because of an error in the backend of the platform, Laura Burns publishes a backlog of writing from several different sessions, presented as a ‘micronarrative’ (‘Laura backlog, brought back (earlier today)’, *Quizoola LIVE!*, 2014), one that displays the work of its making precisely by means of an error, at the same time as tackling the question of the frame. ‘Quizoola has framed my day,’ she says. ‘There is a continuous stealing of life, of words. Coercion, cooperation, trying to disagree, metaphors coming from material. When did we stop

³¹ A relevant examination of how performance reveals a politics of labour in productive, reactive dialogue to contemporary capitalism is Nicholas Ridout’s *Passionate Amateurs*, where he proposes ‘that attempt [...] to realise something that looks and feels like the true realm of freedom [...] but knowing, very often, that in that very attempt, they risk subsuming their labor of love entirely to the demands of the sphere of necessity in which they must make their living’ (2013: 4).

asking each other questions?' (ibid.). Burns stages an encounter with both criticism and performance, but also displaces that encounter in the realm of a fabric that lies outside it; she invites us in an act of cohabitation, one that simultaneously stages multiple journeys of meaning; she also speaks directly to different forms of work at play: coercion, cooperation, disagreement. As with Burns, posts took different formal inflections and, as we've already seen, were often cross-referential, sometimes explicitly so. Nik Wakefield's post-staging duets between political figures, artists, theorists and superheroes (see Figure 1) is a critical play on my own staging of duets, departing from the two performers at the time in *Quizoola* (Cathy Naden and Claire Marshall).

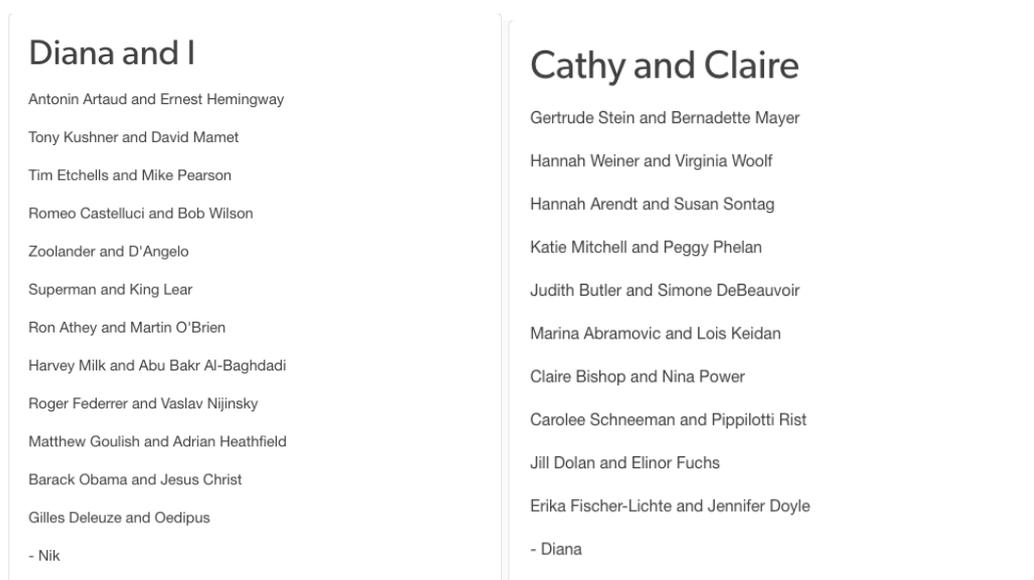


Figure 1: Screenshot, Quizoola LIVE!: 'Diana and I' by Nik Wakefield and 'Cathy and Claire' by Diana Damian Martin

This intertextual approach does more than just play on the association of the duet in the performance; it stages possibilities of political encounters that propose encounters of meaning in themselves. In my own post, I draw only on female artists and theorists to echo the potential dimension of Marshall and Naden's conversation, without documenting its content. Wakefield's reference plays with this politics, by staging

encounters between male political figures, superheroes, authors and theorists; for example, the gestural play of tennis player Roger Federer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky, or the encounter between Barack Obama and Jesus Christ, both impossible stagings that nevertheless deliberately offset historical moments as made equivalent to qualities of time, such as religious (Christ) and political (Obama). Wakefield therefore engages in a collective staging of interpretation, where several events and critical moments are placed in explicit, and unfinished, dialogue with each other, by means of the composition of the performance (the duet). This, in turn, is also an exposure of the interpretive work of the audience in *Quizoola*, which deliberately invites, as is characteristic of Forced Entertainment's work, associative thinking, and participates directly into its event. At the same time, the association across the work of the posts, and the posts themselves, reveals a social process of authorship at play, where someone's thought in process is rerouted by another.

Wakefield's post enters in dialogue with other approaches, such as material experiments. In another post, Debbie Guinnane (Figure 2) documents a fixed duration of dialogue in *Quizoola* on the same sheet of paper, until the writing coalesces into material traces that collide into each other: making the act of reading impossible, whilst becoming a trace of the duration of that fragment. Guinnane also engages explicitly with a framing of her documentation as textual, digital practice; in the image below (Figure 2), her finger pierces the paper, and it is this act of passing through one's own document that is further captured and placed online. Guinnane's work therefore exposes the work of its making, revealing an interpretive, thinking process without referent – the relationship with the work is implied, not disclosed. The number accompanying the caption documents the iterations of this process (the image below is the seventh post in

the series). Importantly, such a material practice exposes its labour; it acts as a document of itself, whilst revealing the mechanisms of its work and place. The photograph is a deliberate decision to account for the displacement of the writing subject, whilst playing with the possible noise of the internet – the rupture, then, becomes a reflection on the operations of the critical writing, whilst also an account of its working frames.

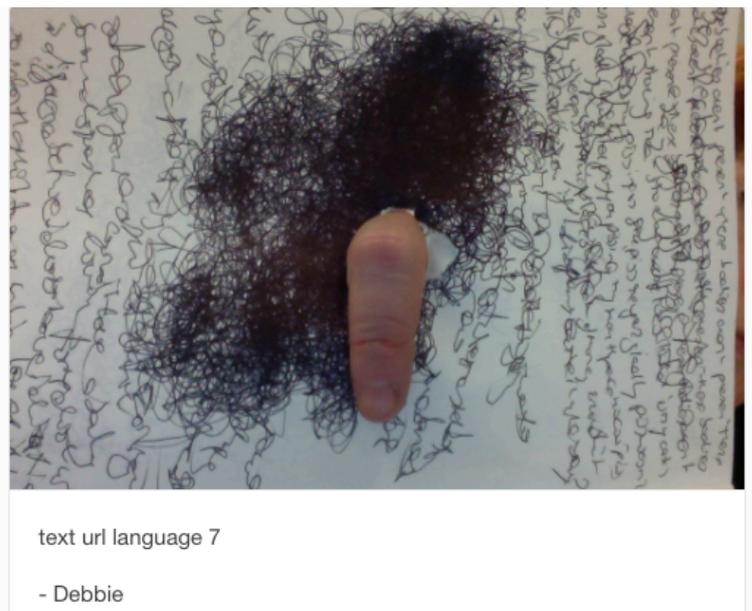


Figure 2: Screenshot, *Quizoola LIVE!*: 'Untitled' by Debbie Guinnane

This play on document and duration also references the author: the piercing through paper is an aesthetic intervention that parallels the engagement between the live critical writing and the performance itself. Regularly, performers on a break in *Quizoola!* read the stream of posts, alongside suggestions of questions from social media which the company invited, and incorporated these as references into their work once back on the stage. This is an example of how meaning intervenes into different events that collapse into each other: it is not possible to distinguish the fiction in the criticism, nor the embedded interpretation in the performance. This is, however, a reparative act; as Kunst's proclamation is for reactive art to 'demand the temporality of work as duration',

Guinnane's approach embodies such a marking of visibility by making any use of that work in valuation impossible. It is, in other words, a material trace that marks time and labour, yet its refusal for function is precisely what grants it productive meaning vis-à-vis the performance, speaking to a critical experience that disturbs the space of the live-stream online. The role of the material is to speak to the digital here.

The meaning in *Quizoola!* itself navigates between the duration that frames the event, the specificity of the questions, and the contexts with which they might be met; it makes itself felt, over time, appearing both as the performance, and as something else, distorted within its unfolded dramaturgy. Writing about an earlier iteration of the project during Spill Festival of Performance in 2013, director Tim Etchells cites unpublished notes about the performance dating back to 1999:

Questions can be asked in any order (at random or by choice). Questions can be repeated [...] New questions are made up and follow-up questions may be asked. The starting point is simply a catalogue of possibilities, a list of suggestions. Answers given can be true or false, long or short, playful or serious. ('An Island, A Prison Cell, A Hotel Bed, A No Man's Land: Some Thoughts about Quizoola24!', Forced Entertainment, May 2013)

Reflecting on the fragments that emerge in the performance, the sense of tiredness, the political exchanges and domestic quarrels that materialise and drift away, Etchells paints *Quizoola!* as a 'perpetual disequilibrium'. The performance makes unequal attention and response feed back into the work. The same disequilibrium that characterises the performance is an inviting way into the critical live writing, which is by nature fragmented, temporary and always speaks to moments individual to the writer, but folded into a meta-narrative, where the performance acts as a mode of

departure. The event, then, stretches into the digital, where it encounters a different layer of errors and of displaced attention, removed from the collective experience of a being in a physical audience. It also intermittently speaks to the durational implications of the writing: fatigue, discomfort, disparate attention spans.

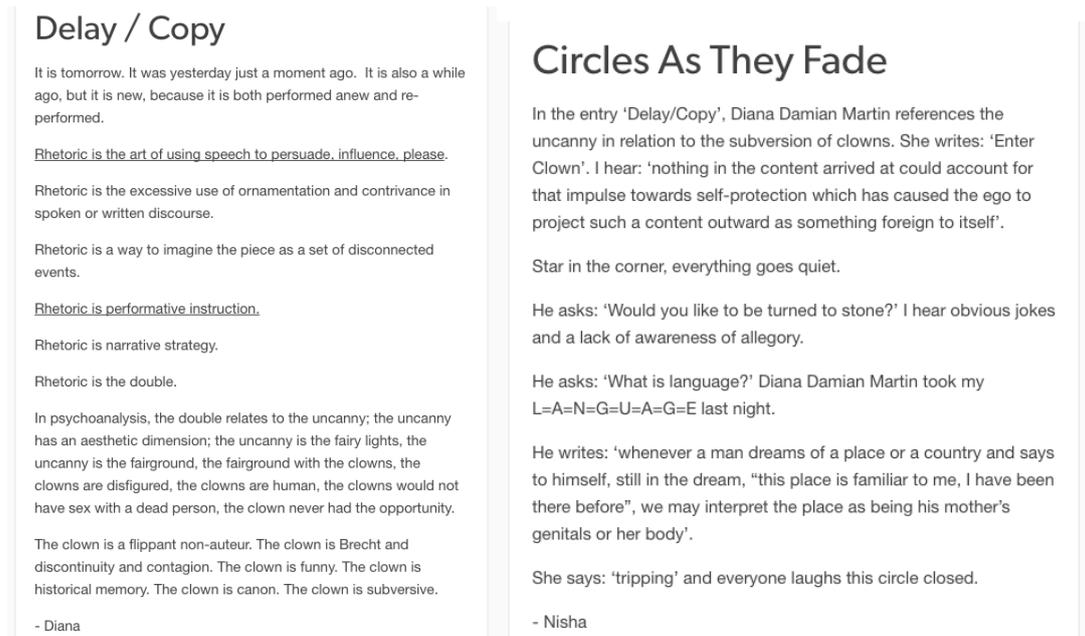


Figure 3: Screenshot, Quizoola LIVE! 'Delay/Copy' by Diana Damian Martin and 'Circles As They Fade' by Nisha Ramayya

I want to take a further example from the project to make this explicit. Figure 3 (above) presents two texts that cross-reference each other, and the performance. The first is my own text, *Delay/Copy*, which speaks to how the performance uses rhetoric as a theatrical device, but also plays with time: 'it is tomorrow', 'it was yesterday just a moment ago'. One of the strategies of the text is to use associative statements: the underlined 'Rhetoric is the art of using speech to persuade, influence, please' hyperlinks to the Google definition of 'rhetoric' – speaking to the internet as a site of mediated knowledge. At the same time, I use this to consider *Quizoola's* own engagement with rhetoric as a narrative strategy, without explicating these performances of interpretation in the work. To echo De Kooning's quote in Sontag's essay on

interpretation, these are flashes of content (qtd. in Sontag 1964: 9): incomplete thoughts, deliberately placed in conversation with the performance. Once more, as with Kershaw's text in Chapter Three, we notice a movement of attention. This dances in and out of the performance, which always occurs on a screen, making moments of thought possible – a literal exiting from the moment of spectating, only to return to it again. In my post, I jump from rhetoric to clowning as a means of staging the multiple associative acts contained within *Quizoola*, where every duet of performers shifts tone with a sudden brutality, by means of intonation and language. In this way, I participate in a collective staging of meaning, that is, as embedded in acts of appropriation (of other digital texts or references), as in acts of interpretation.

Ramayya's *Circles As They Fade* begins by referencing my own entry, speaking to clowns and the uncanny – a common representational tool in the performance. Ramayya is engaging in a citational process – 'he asks', 'she writes', which draws a link between my critical encounters, hers, and that of the performance: simultaneously and actively interpreting its meaning whilst also distorting its resonance. In her writing, several events are brought to bear: an exchange of a book that plays on the role of poetics in her writing ('Diana Damian Martin took my L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E last night'), pointing to Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrew's poetry magazine as a reference to a reference.³² At the same time, the association of posts creates an added layer of symbiosis, in parallel to their framing as responses to the unfolding performance. What becomes visible, I propose, is a glimpse into the event of performance's own meaning-making:

³² L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E was an experimental, US-based poetry magazine edited by poets Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews from 1978 to 1981, formative to the movement of Language poetry in the US. Bernstein also engages regularly in experiments with performance writing, as included in Mary Paterson and Rachel Lois Clapham's Live Art Development Agency Study Room Guide (*W*)*Reading Performance Writing*, which I mention in Chapter Two.

associative, partial and entwined with acts of remembering, where an event in the past frames two concurrent ones – spectating the performance, and reading the other posts of the writing. Ramayya’s post reminds us of Arendt’s question – ‘where are we, when we are thinking?’ (1971: 7)? Here, we are both with and away from the performance; embodied and digitally present. In this landscape, what is made to appear by the act of criticism is inherently tied to the critic’s own perceptive permutation. To speak of criticism’s accountability to this instability of meaning is to imply a rejection of certainty. What marks performance criticism is an encountering and navigating of this instability, and its collective performances of interpretation and thought, as we can observe here.

What is made visible in dialogue between my writing and Ramayya’s are disclosures of interpretation and of thought, staged as a collective dialogue between concurrent meanings. A personal anecdote – the exchange of a book – is given equal interpretive weight to the possible relation of that book to the work of the performance. This collapsing of public and private, however, is not constituted on a phenomenological reflection, but on a critical angle, in which subjectivity is brought to the fore as peripheral to interpretation, but also constitutive of it. What we observe is how strategies that Etchells framing disclose – asking questions; pausing; shifting attention – are redeployed in the critical event. The social emerges in the set-up of the dialogue itself; in Wakefield’s case, this was by means of appropriating an approach (the duet as critical paradigm), whilst in Ramayya’s, it is a folding in on events. Both of these cases show how collective critical subjectivity is at play here, with, through and by means of thought and interpretation.

The chronology of the writing, and the cross-referencing of posts, describes the event as it is occurring – making duration visible. Within this mode of understanding how performance constructs meaning, the critic cannot speak representationally, on account of the spectatorial plurality that fundamentally shapes the performance event, and the encounter with it. This is, I propose, an influential theoretical juncture that offers a means to understand criticism differently: both to account for the spectatorial specificity of a critic there to encounter the work *for* writing or thought, and also as part of a collective with uneven, and sometimes divergent, performances of interpretation. Here, we might return to Arendt's argument about appearance that is both collective and multiple. Appearance is 'something that is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves' (1958: 50). Our feeling for reality and, as such, our relationship to reality is governed by appearance, as that which provides a realm in which to see 'what is worthy of being seen or heard' (Arendt 1958: 51). The exercise in visibility and referentiality that *Quizoola LIVE!* stages, made evident by means of this dialogue that Ramayya engages with my text, is precisely an exposing of the collective work of thinking in the event of criticism, and a distinct trait that performance criticism is characterised by.

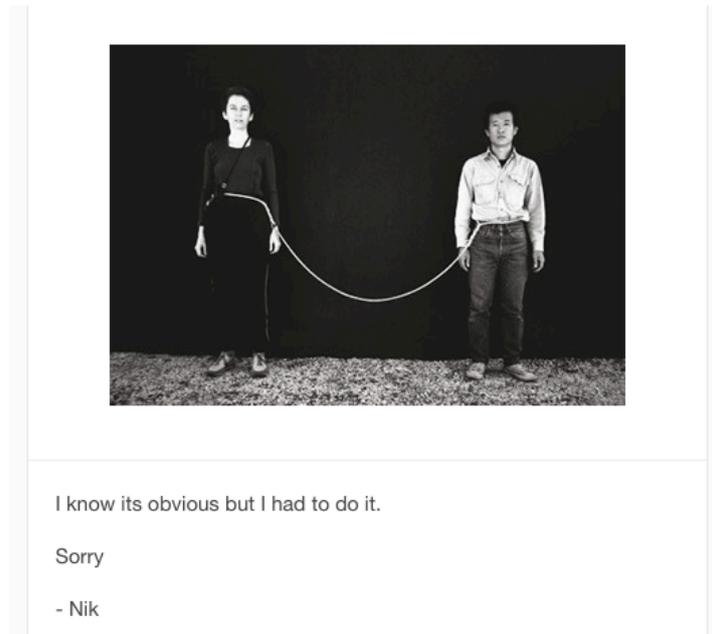


Figure 4: Screenshot, *Quizoola LIVE! : Untitled* by Nik Wakefield

Elsewhere in the live writing, Wakefield references a duet between artists Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh, captioned with ‘I know it’s obvious, but I had to do it’ (Figure 4) – a side thought that nevertheless reveals the certainty of the association between the work of the performance artists and the theatrical proposition of the performance. The work referenced is part of the year-long *Art/Life: One Year Performance* project, titled *Rope Piece*, in which the artists spent a year tied to each other with an eight-foot rope. Wakefield playfully engages with the performance of the duet which occurs in *Quizoola!*, speaking to alternative modes in which two artists relate to each other, particularly offstage. By means of this reference, he brings together histories of duets in theatre and performance both on and offstage, whilst also questioning the kinds of presence that such situations require, and their relationship to lived experience. This is an intervention into the deliberate ambiguity *Quizoola* sets regarding its protagonists, who refuse dramatic characterisation. This incorporation offers a critical perspective on duets as artistic and social relationships, whilst also being prefaced with an apology – ‘sorry’, as if this is a tired reference. This is, however,

also a disclosure of unfinished, tentative thinking, one that reveals the ways in which interpretation, in this case, is constituted around doubt as much as certainty. In this exposure of a reference, Wakefield also exposes the work of interpretation, whilst putting that to work in constituting an event of meaning. The image presents a context around the question-and-answer session taking part in *Quizoola*: a man and a woman, talking about the future. What might they be? How might they be together? This, as we've seen with previous examples, trickles into follow-on posts that explore the duet as a form, from pop to performance, inflecting into the ambiguous dialogue onstage.



Figure 5: Screenshot, Quizoola LIVE!: Product Placement 2' by Gareth Damian Martin

Speaking to the digital dimension of the live writing, Gareth Damian Martin intervenes with a numbered set of 'Product Placements' (Figure 5), in which references within the dialogue of the performance are deliberately decontextualised from it, and displaced by means of reproductions of viral advertising images online, which remain uncredited. In 'Product Placement 5', the image of a woman standing by a car, set against a blue sky and beautiful landscape, sits uneasily with the performance, and departs from a micro reference to a car within it. We find a means of understanding what is at work here in

artist Hito Steyerl's analysis of the circulation of images online and their 'poor' qualities. Steyerl proposes that with every acceleration of the image, that is, its increase in circulation, it 'deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image [...] an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, [...] compressed, reproduced' ('In Defense of the Poor Image', *E-Flux*, 2009a). Steyerl's discussion of the circulation and reproduction of these images foregrounds two relevant aspects to understanding how Damian Martin's intervention operates here. The first is that the circulated image is 'a visual idea in its becoming' (ibid.) In other words, it is an abstraction, an unfinished process whose appropriation depletes its origin whilst also simultaneously investing it with social weight. In our case, the product placement is pointing to the specific encounter of the performance within a live-stream. I see this as digitality equalising the performance with multiple, and infinite, digestible sources. This is an intervention that plays into the very critique of digital space we've seen with Dean, where the circulation of content is precisely what depoliticises that content. Yet, with Steyerl's argument in mind, I propose that in this instance performance criticism orients itself differently to this: it takes the precarity of the poor image and makes it *do* critical work, by means of its very framing as a digital material. Once more, we see an exposing of work that constitutes an event, one that destabilises singular readings of the live-stream by accounting for its situatedness in the digital realm.

This is disequilibrium: when the meaning of the performance's framing and encounter is marked as significant as its content; it is a critical engagement with appearance in the digital sphere. Steyerl proposes that 'poor images are poor because they are not assigned value within the class society of images' ('In Defense of the Poor Image', *E-Flux*, 2009a); as such, their status speaks to their appropriation (ibid.). Despite them

participating in economies of commodification and appropriation, poor images are 'about defiance and appropriation just as [they] are about conformism and exploitation' (2009). Reflecting on the work of the intervention of 'product placement' posts, we notice an exploration of performance's place in a market that is both social and capitalist and, more relevantly for what I am thinking about here, a suggestion that critical acts might follow the same lead: both destabilising and exploiting, valuing and undermining. This is not a cynical position, I think; rather, it is the opposite: a kind of critical sincerity that unmaskes the layers of reproduction, representation and response that the live critical writing project undergoes. The product placement, by means of its image-driven work, is at the same time reductive and productive: it intervenes to pause. It is the pause that offers a critical relief, whilst holding multiple avenues open for readers and audiences to inhabit. At the same time, this reference to appropriation extends the temporality of the critical event beyond the performance, whilst simultaneously engaging in the reproduction of a working frame that, nevertheless, disturbs the circulation of meaning.

As exemplified by the instances of interpretation presented here, in *Quizoola LIVE!*, thought makes itself palpable by means of an opening up. Many of the texts written, by means of intent and circumstance, are unfinished and, by their very nature, require a reader's participation in forming the collective voice. Posts hold different modes of inviting readers in – a pause, an image, a link that sends them elsewhere – suggesting that the social in the event of performance criticism is possible by the rejection of a singular mode of engagement. What is then particular to the unfolding of this collective critical subjectivity in the digital is a material quality. Particular to the digital realm as a site for performance criticism is its recontextualising of text as both material and

abstract, simultaneously meaning and noise. A convincing argument to this effect is made by Steyerl, who argues that our relationship to digital representation is, in fact, one with materiality; speaking of the image, she argues that, online, it ceases to be a representation, and instead becomes material ('In Defense of the Poor Image, *E-Flux*, 2009a). Our participation in the digital is a merging of senses with matter (ibid.). This is an embodiment of subjective criticality, one that makes thinking appear as matter. Scrolling is such an example: a mode of engagement that becomes a connective gesture: physical participation as unfolding and partially authoring a collective critical response. Without the scroll, the page rests, remains abstracted. The scroll and the click are what activate it.

In *Quizoola LIVE!*, a digital poetics emerges that is marked by a different mode of relating authorship to experience, subjectivity to criticality; this is, in part, formally committed to the digital noise of the internet, as a public realm with conflicting politics of visibility. It is also a document of an unfolding, durational encounter with a performance that refuses endings – and, as such, *Quizoola LIVE!* extends that encounter as an openness pouring out into the digital realm. This is not, as I have also argued in Chapter Three, a focusing of the value of experience as constitutive of criticism, but a staging of multiple threads of meaning, some external to the work itself. In fact, *Quizoola LIVE!* attempts to do the opposite: to bring the discursive realm of the internet into conversation with that of the performance, and, as a result, to politicise the conversation. Such an example can be found in writer Johanna Linsley's contribution (Figure 6), in which she appropriates found text from the internet on interview techniques as a means of critical response to the questioning at the heart of *Quizoola*:

Tools #1

Here are some tips for how to deal with interview questions, including the following:

Tell me about yourself.

Why should you get the job?

Where do you see yourself in five years?

What are your weaknesses?

The off-the-wall/surprise question.

–Johanna

Figure 6: Screenshot, *Quizoola LIVE!*, 'Tools #1', Johanna Linsley

This interpretive stance doesn't necessarily suggest that *Quizoola* is undertaking a similar operation, but rather, uses the performance's deployment of questioning as a springboard to speak to the politics of the interview. Turning back to Arendt, if the realm of appearance is necessarily spectatorial, what kind of act is staged at the meeting point between a speculative situation (a job interview) and a performance (*Quizoola*)? In Linsley's work, the market economy (that of the job) is brought to bear on the representational play of *Quizoola*, where the two protagonists enable a projection of sorts, or rather, a critical imaginative act drawing from the real world. The effect is not, however, distinctly comparative, but rather, politicising of the performance; it erases boundaries between theatrical and life representation by collapsing them into the same moment, one which, in turn, holds dramatic irony – 'the off-the-wall/surprise question'.

At the same time, this deployment of work as both a means of exposure and critique, a mode of thinking and one that reveals frames around meaning, is made explicit, for example, in another post by Wakefield titled 'Work is a disease' (Figure 7), which

recontextualises the Karl Marx quote by means of a reference to Croatian conceptual artist Mladen Stilinović, known for his politicised work, which revolved around the relationship between art and life.

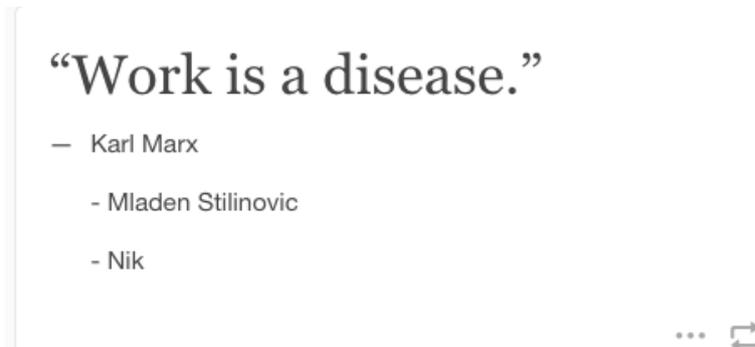


Figure 7: Screenshot, 'Work is a disease', Nik Wakefield

A relevant strand of Stilinović's work is his exploration of laziness as a reactive practice, of which he writes at length in his essay 'In Praise of Laziness', written for *Moscow Art Magazine* in 1998. Wakefield's post collapses the act of encountering *Quizoola* over the same duration as the rotas for two performers at a time in the performance, in his own domestic space; in this way, he points to the repetitious labour of the criticism as parallel to that of the performance and, in this way, questions just what kind of work is constitutive of criticism, but also, relevantly for here, what frames that: what is recognised as work and non-work, to refer back to Kunst, whose book begins with the very same quote. Wakefield is making an explicit reference not to the quote itself, but to Kunst's argument – that resistance to art's usefulness is precisely what can emancipate it from neoliberalisation; that, to quote from Kunst, it is precisely 'artistic life' which enters 'the speculations of capital' (2015: 1). There is an additional layer, however, one that pertains to the technologies of the digital, where work becomes algorithmic as much as human, pertaining to code as much as it does to language.

By that reference, Wakefield also exposes that very question to the act of criticism undertaken in the project, which departs so freely from the meaning-making processes of the performance that it displaces that same use value, in neoliberal terms. It is a standpoint of resistance embedded in a project that creates that is characterised by this politicisation: work as an instrument of rejecting its market value – as, for example, Guinnane’s material exploration also undertakes.

What emerges across the project is a digital performance of interpretations that appear suspended, temporary, unstable – a process of association that draws on the peripheries of experience and the political fabric and deploys frames of criticism at work, in order to complicate its working structures. In Arendtian terms, we might best understand this as a way of being private in public, as I proposed in Chapter Three; and in the instances I have spoken of here, we notice the ways in which interpretation in the event of criticism always folds itself around the temporary, unstable, incomplete, and unfinished. Whilst scholarship on performance has spoken of the instability of memory in valuing aspects of an encounter with performance (Fischer-Lichte 2008, Heddon 2002, Ridout 2002, Verwoert 2010), my exploration of *Quizoola LIVE!* and its performances of interpretation and work delineates the ways in which performance criticism stages and troubles its work, for it engages with it in the instance of its making.

The liveness of live critical writing disables the critic from engaging in formal closure, because it requires multiple attentions – to the process of writing and that of watching the performance, both of which fold into one another. Echoing Arendt, what makes itself visible across these instances of live writing is a collective voice: a temporary common

sense, to borrow from Arendt's term (1971: 49). This is not a collapsing of the social into the political, but a process of construction in which individual voices become enmeshed in a plural, collective one, as the reader doesn't encounter individual posts, but a meta-critique, one that is organised algorithmically and chronologically (the first post becomes the last). It becomes impossible to single out interpretive operations without speaking to the whole project. Posts return to ideas in the work – about spectatorship, the uncanny, interviews, the double and the duet, the clown and the performer – and they do so in myriad ways, whilst deliberately resisting conclusion. Appearance emerges as a staging of thought and interpretation, distinct but not distinguishable from each other. The event of criticism is marked by an exposing of work: the collective at work, and the work of thinking and interpretation, drawing on the political fabric, and destabilising functionalisation.

Quizoola LIVE! is an example of performance criticism that presents a collective performance of interpretation written within the duration of a live and live-streamed performance, as opposed to navigation of multiple live journeys. By means of its framing as a project with fixed duration, responsive, but also running in parallel to the performance, it expounds on the ways in which the event is at work in performance criticism, whilst also accounting for embodied experiences of its labour: fatigue, attention shifts, or physical exhaustion. *Quizoola LIVE!* intervenes into the flow of meaning building up in the multiple terrains of the performance and provides an alternative, critical document that does not hold itself accountable to its representation. By means of its architecture, it equalises the voices of its participants whilst muddying the position from which they speak, and taking account of the structuring conditions for their work, put to work in performances of interpretation.

Quizoola LIVE! is characterised by its desire for both interdependence and autonomy of meaning. In other words, whilst the writing seeks to contribute a plural process of meaning drawn from the performance, it also departs from it. This might seem paradoxical, but it is marked by a perceptive shift, in which subjectivity is not a form, but a means through which to politicise appearance itself. I am reminded of Peggy Phelan's assertion in her study of performance's institutionalisation, *The Ends of Performance*, on this very note: 'the challenge for us is to love the thing we've lost without assimilating it so thoroughly that it becomes us rather than remaining itself' (1998: 11). *Quizoola LIVE!* does not lay claim to the same meaning-making territory as the performance; instead, it meets an invitation by authoring a different journey. This journey is both plural, in how it accounts for different spectatorial destinations, and personal, in how it draws those very connections. This appearance of something as another is both deceptive and productive; it situates the multiple, intertwined avenues pursued by the performance in an event of meaning, one that provides agency to the thinking subject without assimilating the work.

Chapter Five

Porous Terrains: Performance Criticism in the Public Sphere

In Chapter Four, I examined the coercive operations of neoliberalism at play in the ecology of criticism. I argued that criticism is under pressure in a cultural market that destabilises already precarious working structures, and engages subjectivity to sustain it. Under neoliberalism, competition becomes a mode of valuation for both the worker and the work. I analysed the multiple processes of meaning at play in a durational, multi-authored, live critical writing project, to expound on how these characterise a collective dimension central to performance criticism. I explored the rise of the project as a structuring mode of work for a wide range of forms of live writing in performance criticism. My analysis showed how performance criticism is reactive to neoliberal pressures, by exposing collective performances of interpretation; their slipperiness marks a reactive politics to marketisation. Performance criticism displaces traditional models of authorship. Collectivity emerges as both a model of collaboration and one of multiple authorship, but also one of solidarity, as we have across different deployments live writing in performance criticism. In this chapter, I examine how performance criticism straddles and participates in multiple discursive arenas.¹ My analysis departs from the emergence of the public sphere in the eighteenth century in the UK, as a moment when deliberation and politics were at the heart of critical practices, and

¹ My use of the term 'discursive' here draws on Michel Foucault, where discourse is a 'way of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relation which inhere such knowledges and relations between them' (Foucault 1972: 90). Elsewhere, it is argued that discourse is a socially situated process (Gunnarsson, Linell, Nordberg viii: 2014). In curatorial studies, Paul O'Neill argues that with the rise of curatorial criticism in the 1960s came a neo-criticality that incorporated 'more discursive, conversational and geo-political discussion within the remit of the exhibition' (2007: 13). Whilst I do not engage with the curatorial context in this chapter, my use of 'discursive' captures its emergence in the context of criticism specifically, acknowledging its momentum across other spheres of cultural work.

returns to instances of performance criticism that use intervention as a mode of straddling multiple terrains.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Jürgen Habermas argues that the formation of the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century in Western European nations (England, Germany, France) and the United States, developed through democratic deliberation and the exercising and constitution of public opinion.

Habermas is influential in tracing a relationship between criticism, deliberation and political practice that, despite its flaws, has been instrumental in thinking about criticism's role and position in the public sphere. Habermas situates criticism and gives intellectual and political weight to its capacity to operate collectively. He defines the public sphere as the realm of social life in which 'something approaching public opinion can be formed' (1989: 2), proposing that the public sphere is the site for the formation of public opinion. Public opinion 'refers to the tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens [...] practices vis-à-vis the ruling structure, organised in the form of a state' (1989: 49). Habermas traces the origins of the word public in the German language, where it underwent an adjectivisation in the early eighteenth century, in contrast to English publicity and French *publicité*. With the emergence of capitalism as a form of political and economic restructuring, the public sphere emerges as a site situated between state and individual. Therefore, Habermas's notion of the public sphere is shaped by the 'functions of modern democratic political systems' (2008: 9).

Habermas's articulation of the public sphere captures a shift towards capitalist frameworks of labour and modes of state legislation that reconceived of the public-

private dynamic.² Nancy Fraser, a contemporary critic of Habermas's model, foregrounds its exclusivity and its limited applicability in the context of multiple discursive arenas in tension with globalisation and movement of different forms of capital, migration and conflicting borders (Fraser 2014). Similarly, Hito Steyerl argues that the forms of critique which Habermas places in the public sphere of the eighteenth century produced a bourgeois subjectivity that was ambivalent, in that 'it entailed the use of reason [...] in the deliberation of abstract problems, but not the criticism of authority' (Steyerl in Rauning and Ray 2009b: 13). Steyerl reasons on Immanuel Kant's definition of the Enlightenment as 'an encouragement to leave behind "self-incurred immaturity"' (Kant in Steyerl 2009b: 13). Freedom, in this instance, argues Steyerl, is constituted on the proviso that authority remains unquestioned. In this way, this form of criticism is as much 'a tool for governance as it is for resistance' (2009b: 14). This is of relevance to my engagement with the public sphere here; as I will show in this chapter, this institutionalisation of criticism as related to matters of authority is rooted in the same cultural moment that saw the promise of deliberation and its political and emancipatory potential. I am interested in looking at this rooting of performance criticism in order to better understand how it positions itself as reactive to the institution of traditional criticism, and, to borrow Steyerl's term, productively points to the orientation of this relationship to the public.

This movement across multiple discursive terrains undertaken by performance criticism is understood here in reference to deliberative democratic theory. As James

² This argument also resonates with Arendt's examination in *The Human Condition*, where she speaks of the erosion of the modern public realm because of a lack of distinction between public and private, and a conflation of the social into the political. Her philosophy of appearance rests on the possibility of the plural public realm.

Boham and William Rehg propose, deliberative democracy is rooted in the idea of civic participation to create 'an ideal of political autonomy' (1997: ix). Elsewhere, Byron Rinestra and Derek Hook define deliberative democracy as a 'procedural political view that seeks democratic legitimacy through the capacity of those affected by a collective decision to deliberate in the production of that decision' (2006: 2). Criticism's eighteenth-century enmeshment into matters of the political mark it as occupying the realm of democratic practice, where complex relationships between public opinion, cultural analysis, and political participation unfold. What is distinct in performance criticism is its return to this rooting; in other words, precisely its concern for how the event makes possible alternative forms of participation.

In the first edition of *The Live Art Almanac* (2010), one of the texts, credited to a Chris Riding, opens with the revelation that 'Prince Harry has [...] been involved in a bespoke five year undercover operation as a cutting edge performance artist and self-styled "art guerrilla"' (2010: 37). Let me begin with an extract from Riding's text:³

In October 2004 such a statement would have seemed palpably absurd after claims made by his former art teacher at Eton that she had helped him to cheat in his O-level art exam. At the time many art world insiders had suspected that Prince Harry was mounting a Chapman Brothers style attack on the relationship between artistic intention and institutional judgment. [...] Clarence House may have been forced into revealing the true nature of the Prince's choice of vocation after a photograph of him dressed as a member of General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps, replete with a 'prominent' swatiska armband, had been published today in the English press. The photograph was taken at a 'Native and Colonial' fancy dress party given by the Olympic show jumper, Richard Meade, to mark the 22nd birthday of his son, also called Harry, who is also a performance

³ The text was originally posted on the Live Art Discussion List on 17 January 2005. The editors declare that Riding 'appears to be a pseudonym' (2010: 38).

artist. His most recent 'action' involved invading the Labour Party Conference to campaign on behalf of the pro-hunt lobby. Clarence House made the following statement: 'We can now reveal that Prince Harry has, over the past four or five years, been working as a bespoke art guerrilla. His latest "action" should be interpreted as a critique of Nazism and its aristocratic connections (i.e. referencing the political "gestures" of King Edward VIII etc.). The Prince's current "social sculpture" draws on the cultural legacies of Joseph Boyce, Gilbert and George as well as Sex Pistol, Sid Vicious and the Punk clothing and attitude of Vivien Westwood and Malcolm McLaren. As a scholar of Derridean deconstruction, the Prince is fully aware that "meaning" is, at its best, only ever deferred. It is precisely this knowledge that underpins the work's haunting bathos.' A spokesperson for London's leading art gallery, White Cube, confirmed that Prince Harry has been working on a 'major exhibition' over the last few years that had been pencilled in to open in the summer of this year. In this light, his actions over this time now seem not to be those of a buffoon but of an assiduous young man mounting a fervent critique of Blair's Britain. ('Release from Clarence House' in *Live Art Almanac* 2010: 37-38)⁴

In January 2005, Clarence House, the official London residence of the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, released an official statement that apologised for Prince Harry's having caused 'offence or embarrassment' by dressing up as a member of General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps ('Harry says sorry for Nazi costume', *BBC News*, 2005). This followed an incident in October 2004 that involved Prince Harry 'in a scuffle with a photographer outside a London nightclub' ('Prince Harry in nightclub scuffle', *BBC News*, 2004), to which Riding argues further in the text that 'seen in this way, the performance piece in October of last year [...] now reads as a method acted critique of binge drinking and the current parliamentary debates on English licencing hours' (2010: 38). That same year, an ex-teacher of the prince claimed he had cheated in his exams ('Prince Harry, a weak student who was helped to cheat in exam, says ex-

⁴ For the full text, please see: Riding, Chris. 2010. 'Release from Clarence House' in *The Live Art Almanac* (London: The Live Art Development Agency) pp 37 - 38

teacher', *Guardian*, 2005). Riding's text also bears reference to King Edward VIII's 'political "gestures"' (2010: 38), which concern German archival material, specifically telegrams, found at the end of the Second World War, sent to the US State Department for historical inclusion and offering 'Edward the British throne in the event of a Nazi invasion of Britain' ('Churchill tries to suppress Nazi plot to restore Edward VIII to British throne', *Guardian*, 2017), which Churchill claimed to be 'tendentious and unreliable' (ibid.), although these were made public in 1957. By means of its context – a publication on found critical writings about performance – and its form – a fictional informational article grounded in true events – Riding's text is an example of performance criticism for its multiple engagements in the contemporary public sphere.

What is interesting to note here is that Riding's text straddles several discursive arenas in a way that is demonstrative of performance criticism's interventionism. Riding presents the monarchy as a political body, by conceiving of Prince Harry's public controversies as performative public actions. The piece is not about those events; instead, it uses them in a fictional form to access a wider conversation on what constitutes performance in the public sphere. It is, as we have seen with other forms of performance criticism, a departure from the events that, in this instance, politicise both performance and the monarchy's place in the public sphere. Riding places Prince Harry's body of performance work in two concurrent sites: that of an artistic ecology, starting with the conceptual critiques of Young British Artists and ending with the centrality of the living body in the work of Vito Acconci and Joseph Beuys, and a political ecology – Tony Blair's Britain.⁵ Laced through Riding's text is a deliberation on how

⁵ The Chapman Brothers (Jake and Dinos Chapman) are an artist duo, part of the Young British Artists movement whose work specifically engages with Nazism (Delaney 2009), although the reference Riding makes in the text is to a work presented at the White Cube in 2002, a false collection of 'rare ethnographic

bodies appear in the public sphere, and what structures might be responsible for their visibility. Riding places the monarchy in a lineage of performance work that critiques representation, precisely in order to be critical of its representational mechanisms.

Riding's text uses performance to unmask the public narratives of representation of the monarchy, and to recast its relationship to the public. The framing of the text as a fictional informational article is a false disclosure that undermines its own affirmation of authenticity. Riding's anonymity does not allow the reader to ascribe a politics, but participates in its exposure; its anonymity and fictional form undermine its own authority, which is deployed in turn as a critique of the monarchy and its cultural authority. The fictional is deployed to connect subjectivity with the political fabric.

Riding's text reveals the plurality of sites performance criticism occupies, and departs from: that of performance, that of politics, and that of intersecting publics. I depart from this text, which uses performance as a critical lens through which to think the political, to make visible the terrains that performance criticism occupies, and the participation in multiple discursive publics. The intervention Riding's text undertakes echoes the kinds of critical interventions of the eighteenth century that came at the time of the formation of the press and of public opinion. Riding's text reminds us of the deep-rooted enmeshment of criticism with deliberation, and with playful examinations of authorship – despite the exclusionary politics of different forms of public sphere in the eighteenth

and reliquary fetish objects' collected across generations in the family over 70 years (Chapman 2002), in which 'squat fetishes can be read as cheeseburgers, whilst the spiky protuberances on many objects are clearly French fries' (Delaney 2009). The text later references an artwork by artists Gilbert & George, *The Drinking Sculpture*, a series of photographic pieces that use 'fractured viewpoints and titled angles to suggest the feeling of getting riotously wasted' (Tate 2007), placing it in dialogue with Prince Harry's nightclub event. This is connected to the work of artists like Vito Acconci and Joseph Beuys, visible within art histories of performance that foreground the sixties and seventies as a time of 'widespread demand for the centrality of the living body' (Taylor 2016: 45).

century (Fraser 2014). This is rooted in the critical cultures of the eighteenth century, also a site of the emergence of a critical sociality (Benchimol 2010: 5). We have already seen how the work of trouble-makers gathered in the thesis shares an interest in collectivity that destabilises authority; here I depart from this to expound on the multiple terrains that performance criticism crosses.

The political terrains of British criticism in the eighteenth century

In 1780, the London paper *The Gazetteer* publishes an anonymous letter proclaiming the freedom of the press as 'the palladium of English liberty' (1998: 1). Historian Hannah Barker argues that this is a claim for the constitutional importance of newspapers that is not unique; in fact, such claims were repeatedly made for the newspaper as acting like a 'public tribunal in which the behaviour of the country's rulers could be judged, criticised and ultimately kept in check' (1998: 1). Barker cites commentator Vicesimus Knox, who spoke of the potential use of such a space as a powerful engine of oppression, pointing to the double-bind of newspapers as sites of political debate and control. Historians have placed importance on the development of the media as a potent alternative structuring of public politics; one, however, that has always been open to co-optation and division. The eighteenth century is a key historical moment for the emergence of the constitution of public opinion in the public sphere, but it is also a moment where the formation of its fundamental variables – people, public, opinion – takes shape. It does so by means of a plural ecology of critical conflicts that centre around differing positions on what might be constituted in the public sphere of an emergent industrial society, at the nexus between Enlightenment philosophies.

Historian Kathleen Wilson argues that the eighteenth century marks the development of a political imaginary that marked a burgeoning extra-parliamentary political culture, and an emergent conflict over national identity 'sustained by distinctive associational cultures, modes of critical discourse and systems of cultural production' (1995: 11). In this political ecology, the public sphere emerges as a plural site, constrained by multiple regulatory politics.

I am interested in how the emergence of the public sphere in the eighteenth century in the UK is marked by conflicts over private and public, subjectivity and rationality. These fundamentally shape the relationship between criticism and the role of subjectivity in political public debate with contemporary resonance for contemporary performance criticism. Emergent political rationality in the eighteenth century public sphere set the roots for criticism's entanglement not just with journalism and the media, but also with subjectivities that were occluded, yet embedded in communities of readership and writing, and peripheral practices of political intervention. This is significant in two ways: first, in how it reveals that the politics of legitimation in discussions of theatre criticism in the early noughties are informed by a deeply rooted scepticism towards subjectivity as a valid critical procedure; and second, because this engendering has created a democratic problem about how to invite participatory parity and recover the deliberative project without reproducing the same power structures that occluded it. We see this echoed in Steyerl's critique of the Enlightenment model of criticism that renders criticism as much a tool for governing as a site of resistance (2009b: 14).

Jürgen Habermas's account of the emergence of the public sphere foregrounds the development of a representational publicity emergent in the Middle Ages, a time when

lordship was a form of representation. In other words, the publicness of representation 'was not constituted as a social realm but as a status attribute' (Habermas 1989: 3). The representation was inseparable from the existence and display of authority as embodied by one figure, weaving personal attributes and rhetoric into the staging of publicity (1989: 7). This shift from the Greek *polis*, in which political participation was inherently enabled through lexis and action, to the emergence of forms of display of power, gave rise to the displacement of a sphere of political communication (ibid.). In the late seventeenth century, alongside the dissolving of feudal foundations of power in England, the 'final form of representative publicness was reduced to the monarch's court', receiving greater emphasis as 'an enclave within a society separating itself from the state' (1989: 11). The development of spheres of public debate goes hand in hand with structures of governance, and has, since the rise of the public sphere, been embedded in both subversion and sustaining of power structures.

This is most evident in accounts of the development of the press, which mark its centrality in deliberative, communicative forms of publicity, concurrent with its rise as a commercial sector. In their examination of the history of the British press, historians Michael Harris and Alan Lee argue that 'the newspaper in particular has always displayed a peculiar volatility. Material appearing in separate forms was sometimes absorbed in the newspaper press' (1986: 15). Significant to this process of circulation was the way in which 'a continuity of approach existed' that makes it 'difficult to isolate the newspaper from the ebb and flow of alternative forms' (ibid.). Harris and Lee expose how 'throughout the century almost every major politician was involved at some stage of his career with the financing and distribution of newspapers' (Harris, Lee 1986: 22), so much so that the London newspapers of the eighteenth century 'often contain the

most fully worked out statements of the political ideology that was committed to print' (ibid.). In this, we see the emergence of the press as an inherent politicised site, one volatile to political pressure, whilst also interested in participating in alternative communicative forms.

The public sphere of the eighteenth century acted as a space of representation concentrated on deliberation as a form of demanding political recognition or critique, often by means of conflict in the Romantic era (Benchimol 2010). There is as much evidence to suggest that notions of the public sphere were 'perfectly compatible with oligarchic authority' (Benchimol 2010: 10) as there is to suggest that, at the same time, the unstable nature of the concept of the public at this time gave rise to productive moments of collective dissent. Historians agree that the eighteenth century was fundamental in giving rise to modern democratic societies, and providing a site for the formation of national identity (Wilson 1995) during Britain's imperial century (Read 2005). At the same time, 'magazines, pamphlets, almanacs, serials, plays, ballads and posters, as well as other types of ephemeral outputs, each formed a link in the complex process of transmission' (ibid.). What we find in this communicative ecology is a politicisation of criticism as functioning in a plurality of sites, across private and public, and as part of emergent cultures of deliberation. At the same time, the question of who was included in the realm of public visibility, and who was relegated to the private arena, remains problematic, because it reveals a fundamental engendering of critical rationality. I will come back to this, but I want to briefly look at where art and theatre criticism emerges in this ecology.

Criticism is a political, deliberative act in the public sphere of the eighteenth century, but it is also a site and means of contestation, where discourses on rationality, publicity and authority begin to take shape. Historians like René Wellek (1982) and Douglas Lane Patey (1989) have pointed to the ways in which the critical culture of the eighteenth century constituted itself as an institution on the basis of factionalism. Patey argues that the eighteenth century marks a movement from a rationalist criticism, 'older, more court-centred' (1989: 11), to a 'broader-based empirical study' (ibid.). Despite this rooting of reputations of theatre critics who later established the critical tradition in Britain, for example, William Hazlitt or Leigh Hunt, the most productive aspect of eighteenth-century critical activity in relation to theatre criticism was its enmeshment of critical and political spheres, and the crossing of different formal territories. Theatre criticism begins to take shape as much in the work of Thomas Dutton's *Dramatic Censor* (1800)⁶ or Thomas Holcroft's *Theatrical Recorder* as in politically oriented publications like Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's *The Spectator* (1711–1712). Criticism is present across a multiplicity of sites, in the form of reviews, in the case of Dutton's or Holcroft's publications and newspapers, but also in more essayistic, deliberative forms, in periodicals like *The Spectator*, which sought to engage with the coffeehouse culture.

The eighteenth century was shaped by a collective politicisation and socialisation of criticism occurring beyond the realm of the newspaper, across different intellectual sites. Addison and Steele's *The Spectator* (1711–1712),⁷ despite its brief existence, is one of the most cited examples in historical analyses of eighteenth-century critical culture, for its engagement with essayistic writing. It is cited by Habermas as influential to the

⁶ Full title: *The dramatic censor; or, weekly theatrical report: Comprising a complete chronicle of the British stage, and a regular series of theatrical criticism in every department of the drama.*

⁷ *The Spectator* ran for 555 numbers, collected into seven volumes (Bond 1965).

development of the public sphere (1989: 29) for its interest in deliberation and coffeehouse culture. As Brian Cowan argues, 'the papers attracted avid subscribers among individuals as well as coffeehouses,' and circulated outside metropolitan London (2004: 346), rooting a politics of critical taste furthered by emergent ideas of political rationality, and in close relation to the British tradition of philosophy, such as the work of David Hume and Edmund Burke, as well as that of Immanuel Kant (Newman 2008). The 'collaborative periodical prose' (Cowan 2004: 346) of *The Spectator* is best expressed by its will to 'enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality' (2004: 10). The focus of the periodical was precisely to engage in deliberation to critique forms of sociality and politics of taste. In an issue from 7 June, 1711, Mr Spectator, the pseudonymous voice of the paper, argues that 'it is our misfortune that some, who set up as professed critics among us, are so stupid, that they do not know how to put ten words together with elegance or common propriety' (2004: 20). Questions of taste permeated *The Spectator's* writing, but they were deployed in a discourse that was political because it sought to moralise the terms of debate, as the extract here shows. In the pages of *The Spectator*, we find ties between the political and critical voice, and between deliberation and interventions that actively seek to shape public opinion. To this end, I am interested in accounts of *The Spectator* that contextualise its discourse on taste in relation to the emergent culture of political deliberation and sociality.

Sophie Gee specifically argues that there was an 'ambivalence and anxiety about describing selfhood and the life of the mind' in *The Spectator*, despite the periodical's novel interest in the private voice. This was articulated within the social public sphere as a preoccupation shared 'among progressive eighteenth century Whig essayists', marking the private voice as a voice of liberal-leaning politicisation (2017: 1). A similar line of

argument is followed by Cowan, who argues that the challenge of the periodical was aimed at 'precisely those social spaces and discursive spaces that Habermas singled out as constitutive elements of his public sphere' (2004: 347), pointing to coffeehouses and clubs as sites both Whigs and Tories engaged with in their political actions (ibid.).⁸ Cowan proposes that the reason activities like 'newspaper reading, political discussion and club socialisation were objects of the Spectatorial reform project' had an explicit political motivation to do with the 'survival of Whig politics' at a time of its precarity (ibid.). What limited the deliberative scope of *The Spectator's* work, however, was not its politicisation, which was never explicitly revealed in the writing itself, but its deployment of criticism as a means to constitute and control social normatisation. Cowan's argument places this orientation as part of a communicative conflict between criticism, political participation, and political agendas. At the same time, *The Spectator's* interest in essayistic writing and engagement with the private self was crucial to its deliberative stance. At a time when political rationalities were being shaped in relation to a shifting bourgeois public opinion (Habermas 1989), Gee identifies *The Spectator* as exemplary of the precociousness of essays, 'describing sympathetic identification and enabling it to develop among people who were increasingly attuned to their private selves' (2017: 2), aimed towards a collective sensibility. Speaking of the precursor publication *Tatler* (1710–1711) as well as *The Spectator*, Gee argues that the writing was 'trenchantly political', characterising the formal innovation of Addison and Steele. In other words, we might see the ways in which subjective criticality operated in this political, communicative landscape.

⁸ The Whigs and Tories were opposing political parties in England during the eighteenth century, emerging from the Exclusion Crisis (1679-1681) and taking different positions on questions of power, monarchy and the role of Parliament. Whigs were defenders of Parliamentary sovereignty, whilst Tories were Royalists.

The essayistic writing in *The Spectator* was a negotiation of the 'authority of personal opinion' emergent in the seventeenth century (2017: 1), which was to be challenged by the formation of the public sphere and its shift towards political, public rationalities and relationships to governmental critique. In the first issue, dated 1 March 1711, Addison, writing as Mr Spectator, claims he is a 'spectator of mankind [rather] than one of the species' (1711). We observe here the ways in which subjective writing is tied to a concept of spectatorship as witnessing, rather than participation, whilst also reliant on participation as a means of making witnessing possible. The fictional identity of Mr Spectator is precisely what makes it intriguing, because it accounts for the possibility that criticism, from its inception in the emergent public sphere of the eighteenth century, has always been enmeshed in fiction as much as rationality, in the essayistic as much as the deliberative, without polarising these.

Nancy Fraser proposes that the public sphere is not a space for zero-degree culture, but consists of 'culturally specific institutions' (1994: 69); taking this position, we might understand Mr Spectator and the collective form of essayistic subjectivity as a specific rooting of deliberation to the individual, in tension and dialogue with public opinion. In his analysis, Cowan cautions against viewing *The Spectator* as exemplary of an idealised publicness, citing studies that detailed the 'putative rise of a public sphere' in which it is difficult to find 'principled defenders [...] in the political culture of the time' (2004: 34). At the same time, in a later essay examining the role of the virtuosic in Addison and Steele's criticism, Cowan supports the idea that the periodical might be best understood 'as part of an important moment of transition', in which 'an early Enlightenment notion of taste emerged from a template established by baroque virtuosity' (2008: 275). This is

most evident in Addison's writings in Issue 409, where he delineates taste as 'the faculty of the soul, which discerns the beauties of an author with pleasure, and the imperfections with dislike' (1712 in 1965: 382). *The Spectator* provides an example of the ways in which emergent notions of the life of the private self, which I speak of by means of subjectivity, those of criticism, and those of political deliberation were intertwined in the culture of the eighteenth century, made apparent by means of the periodical's interest in occupying discursive spaces, like salons and coffeehouses. The public sphere of the eighteenth century was marked by an enmeshment of publicity with rationality and internal experience. This was shaped, as in Habermas's writing, by the foregrounding of the public as a site for the development of rationality, a terrain which *The Spectator* sought to destabilise by means of a valuation of intellectual experiences rendered private, whilst, at the same time, attempting to dictate the terms of sociality that shaped those discursive spaces.

Revisionist historiography provides a productive complicating of the public sphere as an idealisation of publicity, by pointing to its politics of exclusion, whilst also collapsing the public private as a critical paradigm through which public opinion was constituted. Across the work of Jean Elshtain (1981), Joan Landes (1988), Mary P. Ryan (1998), Dena Goodman (1992), Amanda Vickery (1998) and, as we have already seen, Nancy Fraser (1990, 1994), we notice the formation of rationality as a distinct critical trait of the public sphere that concealed more complex relations between different publics, spheres of debate and the construction of femininity. If *The Spectator* is cited as the site where the public and private were less explicitly delineated, it is in the peripheral arenas often excluded from public visibility, but nevertheless participating actively in communicative politics, that further provide instances of collective. Reactive criticism

was often occluded precisely because of the formation of political rationality in relation to gendered forms of power and socialisation (Brown 1988). Fraser proposes that 'the meaning and boundaries of publicity depend at every point on who has the power to draw the line between public and private' (1998: 314). Historian Margaret C. Jacob underlines that 'the identity of the privileged, literate and affluent participants in the public sphere can be found by examining private societies, clubs, salons, lodges and box office receipts as well as inventories' (1994: 98). These emerge as significant, if peripheral, arenas that engaged in critical and political participation. Jacob underlines that this view of the public sphere as universal and autonomous is subverted by this public fragmentation, and that it is a challenge for these groups to articulate interest-based arguments for their political right (1994: 99). For Geoff Eley, Habermas's public sphere was identified with the 'demand for representative government and a liberal constitution', as well as broadly with 'the basic civil freedoms before law' (1990: 2). It was constituted in relation to a new communicative infrastructure at the same time as a 'locally organised public life' and 'adapted centres of sociability' (ibid.). Expounding on the ways in which the formation of the public sphere in the eighteenth century was constituted from a 'field of conflict, contested meanings and exclusion' (1990: 11), Eley proposes that the most consistent form of this exclusion was gender, arguing that the absence of women in the public realm 'has not been a chance occurrence, nor merely a symptom of the regrettable persistence of archaic patriarchies', but a result of how 'social relations were reordered by conceptions of right, citizenship and property, and by new definitions of public and private' which 'forced the issue of women's place' (1990: 13).

Joan Landes argues that this period marked a turning point 'for women in the construction of modern gender identity', proposing that 'public-private oppositions were being reinforced in ways that foreclosed women's independence in the street, in the marketplace and for elite women, in the public spaces of the court' (1988: 22). Jean Elshtain proposes that the problem was not just an exclusion of women from political life, but a politics of recognition that constituted a public/private binary: the politicisation of the public is part of an 'elaborate defence against the tug of the private, against the lure of the familial, against evocations of female power' (1981: 15-16). Dena Goodman collapses this division to examine how women occupied spheres in which different forms of critique developed, 'constituted by salons, Masonic lodges, academies and the press' (qtd. in Dalton 2003: 4). Goodman argues that 'the very instability of conceptions of public and private spheres [...] helped to create volatile and shifting ground upon which both criticism and revolution were constructed' (1992: 2). In dialogue with Dalton's work, Kathryn Shevelow points to the ways in which salon culture and letter writing constituted a reconnecting of public and private in ways that were not straightforwardly removed from the public sphere, and fought for political authority (Dalton 2003, Shevelow 1989). Shevelow points to how correspondence, communities of readership and writing, and text as a model of intervention constituted a politicised cultural practice that, whilst developing an 'ideology formation', became appropriated and reformulated [to] construct a new, limiting female norm' (1989: 21).

In light of this, *The Spectator*, commended for its engagement with women's writing, also acts as a site where subjectivity held sway in critical discourse in close dialogue with the rationality of emergent political deliberation, with the proviso that such engagement served to socialise, rather than emancipate, political opinion. At the same

time, feminist revisionist history enables us to understand the multiplicity of sites that criticism, inclusive of the confessional (letter-writing) and the deliberative and oral (salon), occupied at the interstice between private and public, legislated and reactive. Significantly for our thinking here, feminist revisions of accounts of the public spheres in the eighteenth century point to the ways in which deliberation 'can serve as a mask for domination' (Fraser 1994: 64), showing how 'political economy enforces structurally what culture accomplishes informally' (1994: 65). Whilst we have seen how the eighteenth century saw the unfolding of dynamic conflicts that shaped both criticism and political participation, we have also noted how its deliberative power came to occlude depoliticised spaces by gendering the private and the affective.

In revisionist historiographies of the public sphere, I find a nuanced landscape of criticism and politics; the exclusion of women from participation in the public sphere of the eighteenth century occluded the multiple forms of politicisation occurring in discursive arenas often peripheral to those occupied by the emerging press. In this way, rationality, as conceived in more traditional forms of criticism, is rooted in a gendered notion of deliberative validity. Rooted in the deliberative cultures of the eighteenth century, performance criticism draws on subjective criticality and collectivity as a means of straddling the private and the public, and occupying terrains of the political and the artistic. At the same time, its straddling of multiple terrains requires attention paid precisely to its specific displacement, whilst its affective dimension marks it as peripheral to the institution of criticism, but central to the recovery of deliberation as its principle of engagement and participation in the neoliberal political realm.

Porous terrains, occluded practices

In their book *Spaces of Criticism*, editors Thijs Lijster, Suzana Milevska, Pascal Gielen and Ruth Sonderegger propose that art criticism today is witnessing a displacement, in that it now ‘takes place in different spaces and on different stages’ (2005: 13). The editors argue that this is not just a formal displacement, but also one that is ‘geographical and institutional’, closely related to critiques of criticism.⁹ We have seen these factors at play in the wider ecology of theatre criticism, where the development of a critical culture in the online realm was paralleled by ongoing debates that called into question the traditional establishment of the critic and his authorship. This might go some way towards explaining how, across different artistic realms, displacement comes hand in hand with a questioning of established power structures that foreground individual authorship as a site of power. Viewed from the perspective of formal diversity, criticism’s emergence in the public sphere of the eighteenth century did not situate it in a singular space, despite the politics of access: from the salon to the pamphlet, the periodical to the newspaper, as we have seen, but at the intersection between competing claims to sociality and deliberation.

In light of this, the displacement Lijster et al. identify is not solely a contemporary development, but is part of the fabric of criticism’s democratic rooting, and tied to the politics of individual authorship – as feminist revisionist history on the gendered nature of the eighteenth century has shown. The public and private binary sustained the notion that deliberation is only constituted by means of rational publicity; but as the multiple,

⁹ These include ‘institutionalised gender and racial borders within the practice of criticism’ (Lijster et al. 2005: 12).

women-occupied arenas reveal, and as we have seen in the curious case of *The Spectator*, it is its very collapse that marks resistance, by valuing the place of subjectivity and its multiplicity. The displacement captured by Lijster et al. is multifaceted, in that it reveals criticism as occupying a range of discursive arenas, whilst resistance occurs peripherally. Recent scholarship on criticism that captures the challenges to the authorial figure of the critic supports this claim (Butt 2005, Lijster and Gielen in Lijster et al. 2005, Elkins and Newman 2008, Felski 2015); it does so by means of an engagement with positionality: Butt invites as a positioning of new criticism paradox (2005: 2), Elkins and Newman point to the 'attribution of criticality' as contributing to legitimating work 'on the market' (2008: 33), and Felski as rejecting an opposing of 'critique to common sense that fails to acknowledge the commonsensical aspects of critique' (2015: 14). I see this as a choreography of positionality unfolding around questions of deliberation, locating a reactive politics for criticism. At the same time, this choreography sustains multiple modes of relating to public opinion. These are fundamental questions of representational democracy; whether embedded in a cultural market or situated within or in opposition to common sense, recent theorisations of criticism operate choreographically. I want to briefly expound on how the institution of criticism, to return to Steyerl's term, takes up this discussion of positioning, before I look at performance criticism's reactive movement across.

In dominant narratives of theatre criticism, the critic emerges as a figure of authority who communicates to a public, separate from the artistic realm by means of objectivity (Fisher 2015, Billington 1993, Wardle 1992). In Radosavljević's recent account of the changes in contemporary theatre criticism, she points to the decreased dominance of newspapers, which are undergoing significant economic pressures and changes, and the

rise of online criticism. Online criticism, as we have seen, often engages similar models, seeking to address the lack of diversity of participating voices. The debate of bloggers versus critics that marked the early noughties is exemplary of the ways in which positionality is tied to authority in mainstream theatre criticism. In an article for the *Guardian's* theatre blog, Jay Rayner references his piece on challenges for established newspaper critics confronted with the rise of the blogosphere. 'Some of our critics,' he claims, 'declared quite simply that it [blogging] is not for them. Others [...] are wading deep in digital waters. But all,' he concludes, 'question whether what's written on blogs and other sites can really challenge the authority of what they are doing' ('Blog critics: A penny for your thoughts?', *Guardian*, 2008). Rayner captures increasing anxieties around the digital as a competing sphere of debate, one that calls into question the authority of more established forms. In a speech presented at a Young Critics Programme at Winchester Theatre Royal in April 2015, Mark Shenton proposes that 'no one ever built a statue to a critic [...] but in 2013 two critics received OBE's in the Queen's New Year's Honours List' ('The past, present and future of theatre criticism', *Shenton's Stage*, 2015).¹⁰ In the same article, Shenton reminds us of the centenary of the Critics Circle, celebrated in 2013, which demonstrated critics' considerable influence 'on setting cultural agendas of the areas they cover' (ibid.). Shenton's line of argument follows the emergence of online spaces as granting the status of critic to everyone: 'everyone,' he argues, 'is now a critic. Or at least, has a voice.' His conclusion is that 'real, experienced critics matter more, not less, in this new world' (ibid.). Shenton's position foregrounds a commonly held belief that the institution of criticism in mainstream media serves a didactic role, speaking to a public; and that the proliferation of critical

¹⁰ The critics Shenton refers to are Michael Billington and Philip French.

voices in the blogosphere further proves the need for expertise. In this way, Shenton's polemic is exemplary of the ways in which critical validity is tied to authority, casting one form of criticism as more real than the other on the basis of its emergence outside of the traditions of newspaper criticism. This position echoes the claims to critical rationality expounded in the eighteenth century, whereby critical rationality is deployed as a means of shaping and controlling discursive spaces, rather than participating in them.

This issue is further politicised by the increasing questioning of expertise from the political Right. Michael Gove, one of the key figures of the Vote Leave campaign in the UK EU Referendum of 23 June 2016, declared that 'people in this country have had enough of experts' ('Britain Has Had Enough of Experts', *YouTube*, 2016). In an article written for the *Financial Times* providing some context around this statement, journalist Henry Mance states that Gove's inability to cite economic evidence to back up his claim that the UK sends £350 million to the EU every week has been pinned to an importing of post-truth politics to the UK ('Britain has had enough of experts, says Gove', *Financial Times*, 2016). The term 'post-truth' politics refers to a contemporary era in which deception is a transparent and powerful currency, fiscally and politically. Originating in America, and elaborated on by Ralph Keyes (*The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*, 2004), and more recently by Ari Rabin-Havt and Media Matters for America (*Lies, Incorporated: The World of Post-Truth Politics*, 2016), post-truth politics makes a case for the ways in which organised misinformation and explicit deception have become viable political and media strategies, pointing to the deliberate fabrication of facts. I am speaking of it here as a relevant change in attitude often

brought to bear, in the context of criticism, on subjectivity's validity rather than factual accuracy.

Post-truth politics relies, as Gove has demonstrated, on an open dismissal of expertise when that expertise provides arguments that are of no use to the political agenda.¹¹ Gove's case evidences a paradox in regard to both criticism and sites of politicisation: a politician with an explicit agenda, redeployed in opposition to the facts presented by economic experts; subjectivity attacking what it presents as subjective. Expertise becomes precarious under these circumstances, and so do experts themselves, because there is a constantly shifting set of paradigms that legislate the nature and definition of that expertise, its validity and viability. This is evident in Gove's statement: the experts are no longer experts when their findings refute the dominant political position. They are merely interpreters of facts, and their interpretation, in this instance, is flawed because of its presumed political allegiance.

However, it is important to distinguish between the deliberate fallacies and co-optation of discourse in neoliberalism, and the role of interpretation in the context of criticism. Both Shenton's and Rayner's debate evidence a conflating of expertise with authority, one that reveals a conflict of authority and legitimacy that seeks to occlude the displacement of forms of contemporary criticism. I will return to the question of

¹¹ In Gove's view, it doesn't matter that economists are providing a counterargument to his own, backed up with sufficient facts to open him up to dispute. There is something, in his view, far more contentious, and that is the inherent bias of the facts. Gove is taking issue with the politically informed, and ideologically oriented, direction of the facts that these experts have gathered. And Gove is not the only one who has championed unsupported facts openly – Boris Johnson, another Vote Leave campaigner, recently supported the same argument, which fails to account for Britain's rebate, which stands at around £100 million weekly.

interpretation, but I want to stay with the critics and bloggers debate as a site of conflict that risks occluding alternative discourses. This debate constituted a visible site of conflict over criticism's institutional voices and cultural reach. On the one hand, as Radosavljević argues, the discussion concerns the rise of the digital as a series of multiple discursive arenas that also probed at criticism's established professional codes; the digital offered the possibility to redeem criticism from 'its association with power and authority' (2016: 29). Whilst my study does not examine the power structures of blogging and online criticism, I am recounting this debate here for the ways in which it foregrounds the institution of theatre criticism as engaged in a politics of occlusion, one rooted in gendered notions of subjectivity, and distant from the deliberative milieu of the eighteenth-century public sphere: coffeehouses, salons, pamphlets and publications, in a conflict that sought to position subjectivity in dialogue with rationality. At the same time, as Lijster et al. argue, the displacement of contemporary criticism requires, in part, a politics of recognition.

What remains specific about the apparent fixity with which the institution of theatre criticism operates in mainstream media in the UK is its foregrounding of the review of a site where authorial practices are reinscribed, rather than participating in a multiplicity of formal variants and deliberative practices. It is not that evaluation is *de facto* problematic, but rather, its deployment in reviewing constitutes a culture that, as I have also argued in Chapter Four, propagates binaries of good/bad over deliberation; the danger, as we have seen in the case of *The Spectator*, is an attempt to moralise critical debate at a moment of its proliferation. Shenton's position, as was the case with many public debates on critics versus bloggers, attempts to create an exclusive culture for criticism precisely as a means to regulate participation within it. This is rooted, as the

feminist historiography I have engaged here shows, in gendered notions of what constitutes critical rationality, developed in close connection to notions of publicness in the public sphere. As Fraser shows, the public sphere became an arena ‘and eventually, the power base of a stratum of bourgeois men, who were coming to see themselves as a “universal class”’ (1990: 60), whilst, at the same time, occluding the political participation of others (notably, but not exclusively, women), despite the proliferation of alternative discursive spaces.

This interplay can be observed in the early noughties as navigating between cultures of critical legitimacy, and an increasing focus on collaboration, particularly at a European level – where critical histories and approaches to cultural debate were considered by means of questions of mobility – pointing to the contemporary relationship between publics, nation-states and deliberative cultural spheres. Such an example is a programme I participated in in 2010–2011 titled *Writes on the MOVE*. The project, was supported by the European Union Culture Programme, S.P.A.C.E. (Supporting Performing Arts Circulation in Europe) and TEAM, a European network of performing arts publications. The project brought together 20 critics to undergo a ‘mobile training programme’ for rethinking ‘the position of the Art critic today’, finding ‘new ways of thinking and writing about Art for a new public’, questioning ‘new ways of collaboration’ and investigating ‘new spaces for writing’ (*Writers on the MOVE: Call for Applications*, 2011).¹² The call-out cites the economisation of criticism, foregrounding the conceptual lens of parrhesia as a means of resisting instrumentalisation of the critic

¹² Participating critics in the project were: Elena Bastieri (IT), Anna Roza Brzyska (PL), Andreea Chindris (RO), Pauline de la Boulaye (FR), Diana Damian Martin (UK), Iga Fridrihsone (LV), Mette Garfield (DK), Angelina Georgieva (BG), Oliver Hespel (BE), Primož Jesenko (SI), Sergio LoGatto (IT), Miroslava Marianova (BG), Vladimír Mikulka (CZ), Anette Therese Pettersen (NO), Pilvi Porkola (FI), Andrea Radai (HU), Karl Svantasson (SE), Ana Tasic (RS), Anna Teuwen (DE), Cyril Thomas (FR).

as ‘rhetorical figure’ (ibid.). Rooting criticism in parrhesia as the ‘fundamental component of the democracy of Classical Athens’, later developed in the work of Michel Foucault as ‘a mode of discourse’ (ibid.), this lens served to question both the mobility of the critic and her politics of writing. In the editorial to the publication following the project, Antoine Pickels argues that ‘the archetypical European critic does not exist’, instead foregrounding how ‘diversity of contexts’, ‘mobility issues’, as well as those of participation and adaptation (2011: 1), shape a reactive contemporary ecology.¹³

Considerations of criticism’s displacement in multiple, transnational public spheres was a project inherently connected with a European Union agenda of promoting mobility and cooperation through the EU Culture Programme (Gielen 2015), at a time of increasing pressure on the European Constitution itself, as well as images of Brussels as a ‘bureaucratic and opaque space’ (2015: 10). In this way, the cross-pollination of political and cultural plays out evidently in this form of collaboration.

This debate has parallels elsewhere, more deeply rooted in political debates. In the US, the Culture Wars of the nineties (Steiner 1995, Johnson 2013b) were marked by a cultural landscape ‘littered with the remains of vilified artworks and discredited orthodoxies’ (Steiner qtd. in Johnson 2013b: 64). One of the most visible conflicts emergent from that period was dance critic Arlene Croce’s refusal to review *Still/Here*, a multimedia show by Bill T. Jones, on account of its containing ‘videotaped testimony from people with life-threatening diseases’ (‘Journal; Dance of Death’ in *New York Times*,

¹³ Another relevant programme to mention is *Critical Practice – Made in Yugoslavia*, a programme dedicated to ‘empowering discursive reflections on contemporary performing arts’ organised by Life Long Burning through Station, Lokomotiva, Tala Dance Centre, workspacebrussels and Het Veem Theatrre. The aim was to encourage ‘more profound, more visible and more accessible critical reflection on contemporary performing arts’ and create ‘critical writing’ as a concrete outcome (‘Critical Practice – Made in Yugoslavia’, *Life Long Burning*, 2014).

1995). Croce mounted a general 'attack on American culture, spicing up the usual neoconservative hit list – the N.E.A. [National Endowment for the Arts], multiculturalists, the “permissive” 60s, Susan Sontag’ (ibid.). As art historian Wendy Steiner argues, these discussions point to the ‘barbed privilege of critical entitlement’ (qtd. in Johnson 2013b: 65), one that rejected Sontag’s position that art must be given space to appear. In Croce’s case, the rejection of critical attention to a work that engaged with the politics of death and dying was connected to a refusal to share the power that sometimes comes with this attention, whilst, at the same time, deploying it as a means of sustaining that very position. This echoes Shenton’s speech, where he begins by pointing to the metaphorical status of critics – a symbolic capital that is granted by means of a position that is not only in decline, as he himself declares, but also desires to protect its function by sustaining expertise that can only come from that vantage point, without being attuned to alternative means of acquiring that expertise.

In a discussion on the role of review for the *Guardian*, critic Andrew Haydon recounts a seminar he took part in in Finland on criticism that marked a schism between ‘critics who felt that an actual judgment of a play’s success or failure was not the aim of theatre criticism and those who couldn’t quite sign up to such a radical departure’ (‘The role of theatre reviews’, *Guardian*, 2008). Haydon argues that taste constitutes a means by which critics cease engaging with work, not dissimilar to Croce’s position: some critics ‘shut down in front of work they do not value’ (ibid.). Concurrently, Haydon decries ‘the interpretive school of criticism’ as falling ‘prey to finding meaning where there is none’ (ibid.). This position suggests a similar rejection of the school of interpretation also found in the Culture Wars of the US in the nineties, on the basis that interpretation can be external to the work, and, most importantly, fictional. Seen in light of my discussion

of the eighteenth century, this discloses a gendered politics of exclusion of subjectivity, where interpretation is cast as belonging to the realm of fiction, not rational debate. This position reveals the power structures at play in institutionalised theatre criticism in mainstream media; a critic's position in the public sphere is one that dispels fictions, when, I propose, it is precisely fiction that grants authorship this kind of value. This is not to be confounded with the politics of expertise tied to wider political conflicts; subjectivity belongs to interpretation precisely because to engage in criticism, in this context, is to participate in meaning-making. Haydon's position seeks to legislate subjective interpretation by means of rationality; but as we have seen, this is an occlusion, rather than a differentiation.

We might better understand this position on interpretation as a work of fiction by engaging with Walter Benjamin's proposition of the author as producer. In his essay, Benjamin requires of the writer to 'think, to reflect upon his position in the production process', providing a Marxist, cross-disciplinary critique of New Objectivity; 'the mind which believes only in its own magic strength will disappear; for the revolutionary struggle is not fought between capitalism and mind; it is fought between capitalism and the proletariat' (1998: 103). Benjamin introduces the problem of fiction as a political problem, designating writing and authorship as intrinsically connected to modes of production, and implicated with questions of access and class. Benjamin's project of resistance also reinscribes the fictional with critical prowess. In *The Storyteller*, he sets out on a project of recovery: 'experience has fallen in value,' he proposes. It has been 'contradicted [by] tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power' (2016: 13). Benjamin searches for accounts of fiction's 'sensory aspect, by means a job for the voice alone',

and holds an ability to 'relate his life' (2016: 15). Seen in this light, resistance might be understood not only as an encounter with modes of production, but also with the realm of the fictional in criticism. Contrary to what Haydon decries as the fictional nature of interpretation, it is the porousness of fiction as it relates to subjective experience, and its encounter with the political fabric, that performance criticism engages with acts of resistance.

The ongoing conflict between bloggers and critics in the early period of the noughties was a cultural conflict where political positions were less explicitly articulated, though, as we have seen, constituted around structures of power related to politics of critical authority and individual authorship. In part, this is because what remains underexamined is the problem of authority as it is related to that of authorship, despite the rise of alternative models that sought to distribute that power. An example of an interest in this redistribution of power is an article titled 'Criticism', published for *The Live Art Almanac Vol 4*, in which artist Andy Field proposes that artists think about 'the responsibility [they] might have for the quality of the critical landscape they make their work in' (2016: 291). Citing the example of replicating star ratings, 'whole constellations of them scattered across the front of every piece of publicity' (ibid.), Field argues that artists 'perpetuate a thinness to the ways in which people can engage with our work' (2016: 292). Despite this, the effects of its exclusion are a weakening of collective public formation. As Fraser argues, publics 'whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion-formation, and does not encompass decision-making' (1990: 75) are created as a result. As we have seen, with Rayner's and Shenton's articles, the institution of criticism continues to be seen as speaking on behalf of publics, rather than a speaking with – a practice explicitly foregrounded in the practices of

performance criticism. At the same time, emergent forms, such as embedded criticism or horizontalism, seek to collaborate across different realms of practice. However, performance criticism's concern with departing from, and thinking with, performance places it at the interstice between the artistic and the political.

Affective densities, subjective criticality and the counterpublics of performance criticism

The collective holds an increasing role in critical culture; it provides a way of differentiating between practices that stage temporary communities, and those that aim for discursive assemblies that make demands on both theatre and politics more widely. Articulated throughout the practices we have seen so far is a commitment to expounding on the event of criticism, and to exploring its autonomy as a practice. This is most explicit in how practices gathered here depart from performance. We have seen this at play in *Quizoola LIVE*, in the ways in which different writers drew from moments of the performance, and placed them in wider political contexts by means of a subjective criticality. Elsewhere, we have also seen this in the work of collectives like *Open-Dialogues*, *Something Other* and *Critical Interruptions*, who openly declare an interest in exploring the event of criticism as distinct from that of performance, and considering its wider entanglements. Here, I look at how performance criticism straddles these multiple terrains by engaging with collectivity and affective density, constituting deliberative counterpublics. We might distinguish between traditional forms of criticism that seek to adapt within existing spheres of discourse, as I have shown here, and alternative practices, notably performance criticism, that work nomadically by

straddling multiple terrains, searching for and participating in deliberative communities.

Hito Steyerl proposes, in her essay *Free-Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective*, that we find ourselves in a constant state of free-fall. This perspective, Steyerl argues, ‘throws jaw-dropping social inequalities in sharp focus’ but also offers a ‘shifting formation’ (‘In Free-Fall’, *E-Flux*, 2011). I am interested in this perspective on emergent visuality for what it might offer to thinking about the ways in which performance criticism straddles multiple terrains. Free-fall, in Steyerl’s proposition, is more than a paradigmatic shift in aesthetic perspective – it is also a means of capturing the contemporary condition as one marked by a paradox: one in which the constant sense of movement is, at the same time, a stasis, a kind of standing still. In free-fall, I find both a confrontation with a multiplicity of vantage points or perspectives, and a glimpse of hope. As Steyerl proposes, free-fall is a means through which to understand a different dynamic of engagement with our contemporary political and cultural moment. This, I propose, is echoed in the alternative, occluded spaces of subjective political participation in the eighteenth century, in conflict with rationality as a form of social regulation as much as resistance.

In Steyerl’s conception, falling is afforded a disruption of balance, in which ‘perspectives are twisted and multiplied’ and ‘new types of visuality arise’ (‘In Free-Fall’, *E-Flux*, 2011). This is not oppositional to the historical horizontal perspective that shapes traditions of visual culture throughout art history, but a move away from the calculable, navigable, predictable promise of linear representation. A culture of ‘3D nose-dives, Google Maps and surveillance panoramas’ (ibid.) has also meant a shift from orientation

to groundlessness: 'if there is no stable ground available,' she concludes, 'the consequence must be a permanent, or at least intermittent state of free fall for subjects and objects alike' (ibid.). The implications of this for thinking about criticism and its relationship to political rationality are far-reaching; free-fall involves a de-territorialisation, from the specificity of situated cultures of public discourse in the institution of criticism, to constantly shifting, displaced communities of critique, both atomised and in close proximity to each other. This is a different moment for criticism; one in which we declare its displacement, as we have seen, but also identify its shape-shifting occupation.

Performance criticism claims its own autonomy, but its subjects also move between established and alternative realms of discourse. That none of the writers who engage in performance criticism do it exclusively is a result of multiple factors; on the one hand, as we have seen, a difficult financial climate infringes on the possibility of sustained practices, notably so since the impact of austerity politics has made a palpable dent in public funding and its circulation (Harvie 2013). Whilst in no way exclusive to performance criticism, this relationship to working structures, as we have seen in Chapter Four, configures models of work that enable formal experimentation in specific temporal configurations. On the other hand, performance criticism's explicit return to the politics of interpretation as a productive ground is rooted in the movement across public and private that revisionist historiography of the eighteenth century has unearthed. Free-fall also enables a movement across, and I see Steyerl's free-fall not as a danger of reaching the ground, but as a displacement of sorts, one through which to understand the movement that performance critics often undertake across different forms and practices of critical writing, in search of the nexus of artistic and political – as

expounded in Riding's text that began this chapter. This navigating of forms and practices of writing in relation to criticism is shared by so many writers I have spoken of here: Simon Bowes is both a theatre maker and a critical writer, same as Laura Burns, Season Butler, Karen Christopher, Bojana Janković, Mary Paterson, Rajni Shah and Theron Schmidt, who we will encounter in the next chapter of this thesis, as well as Selina Thompson. Others, like Maddy Costa, Ella Parry Davies, Johanna Linsley, Nisha Ramayya and Sophie Robinson, work across academia and engage with fiction, poetics or other forms of performative writing. In part, performance criticism straddles multiple terrains precisely because writers who engage with it do so from a multiplicity of positions, both in terms of their identity, and their professional practices. This is where I see the relevance of Steyerl's free-fall, as a lens through which to understand how a multiplicity of subject experience shapes a discursive realm. By means of this multiplicity, performance criticism does not depart from a single point, but rather, moves to a shared concern. In Steyerl, we find this navigation of territories as a condition of contemporaneity, and its deployment. This might go some way to explaining why, shared across the work of these trouble-makers, there is a multiple occupation of terrains; secondary to this is an increased necessity across cultural workers (Harvie 2013, Kunst 2015, Ridout and Schneider 2012, Sholette 2017) to navigate multiple practices and roles.¹⁴

¹⁴ It is worth noting how precarity is debated extensively in relation to theatre and performance for this very reason (Bishop 2012, Harvie 2013, Jackson 2011, Ridout and Schneider 2012). Within this debate, a connection is made between the constitution and problematisation of art as a common public good, the political and economic systems informing that, and the politics of participation, particularly engaged through and in performance. Across these contexts, precarity is seen as both a destabilising and productive condition of neoliberal cultural work, though remains outside the remit of my study, particularly because of this nuance.

This can be observed in the works I speak of here: performance criticism takes the form of essays, texts, live critical writing, collaborations and documents that engage interpretively, and claim a site of autonomous meaning-making. The examples I have spoken about in this thesis occupy physical as much as digital terrains: the live, material, creative documentation work of *Open-Dialogues' NOTA* (2007), the performance nights of *Something Other* (2014), or the physical writing hub and material traces of *Steakhouse: Live Writing* (2016). However, parallel to these examinations is also a return to orality as a space where temporary publics gather to engage critically, and I present some instances in which performance criticism occupies such terrains, straddling the artistic and the political. In these spheres, performance criticism remains a guest or collaborator, as well as a participant. Such an example is the *Think Tank*, housed since 2009 as part of *Spill Festival of Performance* by the Pacitti Company, and later developed into a regular programming strand upon the company's relocation to Ipswich in 2012, with which many of the writers have been involved since its inception, notably Season Butler (*Performing Collections*, 2013) and Johanna Linsley (*The Present Becomes Us*, 2013).¹⁵ The *Think Tank* holds 'an accessible, rolling programme of events where members of the public join artists, experts and non experts from diverse territories in the exchange and transfer of ideas, skills and experience' ('Welcome to the Think Tank', *Pacitti Company*, 2015). When operating as part of the festival, the free events function like salons, by engaging, in this instance, a multiplicity of publics in critical conversation. In 2012, the hub of the festival was located in the Ipswich Town Hall, which acted as the main space for the *Think Tank* discussions. These were only

¹⁵ *Performing Collections* was a *Think Tank*-based activity in partnership with the Ipswich Museum; part of Butler's collaboration was to host conversations departing from museum artefacts, including 'lucky charms and talismans' ('Features Past Work', *Pacitti Company*, 2013). Johanna Linsley developed the project *The Present Becomes Us*, 'A series of projects that imagines the Future as a geographical location, feeding parasitically off the stolen potential of the Present' (Linsley, 2013).

lightly moderated, drew on the writings explored in *Spill: Writing*, the affiliated writing programme originating in the *Writing from Live Art* collaboration, and departed from the work presented in the festival to explore broader topics, including gentrification, death and dying as well as magic and witchcraft.¹⁶ Here, we see a modelling of discourse through and by means of collective criticism, where participation and hosting become forms of intervention rather than authorship. Performance criticism here is not an isolated practice, but a porous engagement with discursive terrains that participates curatorially, as well as deliberately.

In this lineage, we might also think of the collaboration between Maddy Costa and Jake Orr with *Dialogue*,¹⁷ a project founded in 2012, aimed at forging ‘new relationships between theatre makers, audiences and critics’ (‘About’, *Welcome to the Dialogue*, 2012), which culminated in *Talking/Making/Taking Part*, a festival of ‘theatre and discussion’ at Ovalhouse in November 2014.¹⁸ The festival involved two days of informal discussions and interactive performances (‘Dialogue present *Talking/Making/Taking Part*’, *Oval House*, 2014) that foregrounded the role of conversation both as a means of participation within performance, and as a means of thinking about it. In this way, it emphasised the place of collective criticism in the midst of artistic practice, whilst circumnavigating authorship by means of an invitation to a

¹⁶ In an interview with artistic director Robert Pacitti, Bojana Janković probes the efficacy of *Spill*’s commitment to conversation, pointing to the dangers of this becoming a mode of self-support rather than political engagement, by proposing that it could be a ‘subverted Big Society concept’, a community of business owners that work together to help young businesses mature. Pacitti states that the issue of ‘sustainability and resilience’ is at the heart of the festival’s remit, which hopes to ‘serve broad audiences’ as well as enhance working conditions ‘for those involved’ (Interview, *Run Riot*, 2013). The aim is to share ideas in order to share action, and, to this end, Pacitti calls on both the programme and *Think Tank*.

¹⁷ A partner project of the festival is *Theatre Club*, hosted by Costa and Orr until 2017, with Rhiannon Armstrong as co-host following Orr’s departure. *Theatre Club* takes the model of a book club for theatre, inviting spectators and interested audience members to discuss the show.

¹⁸ *Talking/Making/Taking Part* took place on 22 and 23 November 2014 at Oval House in London, in collaboration with Something Other, Culturebot and Theatre Bristol.

conversational space. This is, I propose, an intervention, in that it dislodges criticism's institutional rationality towards a space of deliberation. In an article for the *Guardian*, Costa cites a report compiled by the Brooklyn Commune Project in 2014 that emphasises the performing arts as a space for 'socialisation and communication required by a healthy democracy' ('Can a relationship with theatre change people's relationship to society?', *Guardian*, 2014), citing culture as a site for the 'formation of a shared communal identity as "the public"' (ibid.). Costa speaks to the difficulties in thinking about audiences, participation and citizenship, emphasising that the ambition of the festival is to 'think aloud about how different relationships with theatre might transform the way people relate to their local community' (ibid.). As part of the structure of the festival, *Dialogue* curated a number of open conversations around topics of participation and criticism, foregrounding the importance of discourse as a fabric of participation.

In this iteration of *Dialogue*, we find a meaningful interaction with deliberation as constitutive of participation, as well as identifying the nomadism of performance criticism and its collaboration with performance – in this instance, one that places criticism in equal dialogue with the artistic and the political – a parallel that Riding's textual intervention also expounds. *Exeunt's* founding co-editor, Daniel B. Yates, argues that he sees no value in 'dismantling barriers between artists and critics as if that's somehow a spatial matter', adding that a healthy criticism 'makes apparent the fact that it already comes from the same place as its referent, from the workshop of culture' ('A Roadmap', *Exeunt*, 2012). This position is shared by Mary Paterson, whose hosted conversation in *Dialogue's* festival proposes, 'how we talk about the artwork is the artwork' (qtd. in Costa, 'Can a relationship with theatre change people's relationship to

society?', *Guardian: Stage*, 2014). This is not to be understood as an occupation, but as an act of care, precisely because it finds a commonality with artistic and political practice – one, as I am going to show here, that also expresses how inherent in subjectivity we find both the fictional and the critical, by means of the writerly act. This is a challenge to authorial power precisely because it dismantles the role of public experience in critical deliberation, rooted in the social, political and critical spaces of the eighteenth century.

As Brown argues, 'neoliberalism generates a condition of politics absent from democratic institutions that would support a democratic public [...]: informed passion, respectful deliberation' (2015: 39). Whilst 'pleasure, generosity and the free dispersal of good and services' (Sholette 2017: 190) are characteristics of contemporary political art that attempt to subvert and operate on the margins of neoliberal structures (Harvie 2013, Kunst 2015,)), the ways in which performance criticism navigates these currencies places it as a disobedient practice. If we return to Nancy Fraser, we might understand the multiple terrains that such examples of performance criticism straddle as constitutive of counterpublics. Fraser argues that counterpublics are 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourse (1994: 67) to account for the widening of 'discursive contestation' by means of multiple, sometimes competing, publics (ibid.). By means of their formation, these can be radical and egalitarian, or antidemocratic; their possibility to constitute radical spaces comes from engagement with power structures and forms of inequality. The live, critical writing projects, Riding's intervention, and *Dialogue's* festival offer examples of how performance criticism situates itself collectively in relation to deliberation, straddles the artistic and the political, and aims to constitute discursive

arenas in the public realm by considering the power structures of established forms of criticism. This is a form of resistance precisely because it destabilises authorial practices, whilst expressing the collective potential of collaboration and community-formation. The risk, as we have seen by means of an examination of the eighteenth century, is that these act as sites for opinion-formation rather than discursive activation. At the same time, they provide resistant templates that seek to return to the role of the social in political participation. In the case of *Dialogue's* festival, this plays out by means of an engagement of participation across critical and artistic practice, as a means of relating both to wider questions of citizenship. This involves, to draw on Fraser, a political engagement that moves beyond opinion-formation, as is the case with Pacitti Company's *Think Tank*, where the activity departs from specifics of performance work to consider wider questions that impact directly on its making and visibility. As with much of Pacitti's work, the commitment is to presenting radical work to wide audiences, and the Think Tank is a means of shifting questions across multiple terrains, precisely in order to enable collective decision-making – a dispersal of power.

We also see this counterpublicity of performance criticism at play in Riding's text; if oral spaces grant physical participation, then publishing also presents an interventionist practice that straddles different terrains precisely to engage these beyond opinion-formation. Riding's text is found, according to the editors of *The Live Art Almanac*, as a posting on the Live Art Discussion List in January 2005, a 'discussion list with information and debate relating to Live Art, performance art and new performance' ('E-mail Lists and Forums', The Live Art Development Agency). This is important in that it reveals the work as an intervention into a particular public, one already familiar with, or invested in, the politics of work the text expounds on; at the same time, Riding's text

brings with it other territories of discourse less familiar in this context: the question of the monarchy's relevance to thinking about public bodies and performance, for example. Furthermore, its incorporation into *The Live Art Almanac* attests to how Riding's text is seen to contribute to a critical culture of performance by means of its political engagement, whilst at the same time broadening the possible readerly encounters. As editors Daniel Brine and Emmy Minton propose, the *Almanac* presents 'the most engaging, provocative, thoughtful writing about Live Art and the cultural landscape in which it is set', gathered through an open-call (2010: 5).¹⁹ *The Live Art Almanac* is an example of performance criticism's nomadism, its straddling of multiple contexts because of their porousness. This is a kind of disobedience – the *Almanac* gathers writing that has already taken place, and presents it within a critical narrative about performance. This is an interventionist approach in the same way as Riding's: it repurposes what has already been produced, but, by doing so, also displaces it in a different set of relations, and constitutes an alternative positioning of the work, a counterpublic. *The Live Art Almanac* provides another example of performance criticism's emergence across formal and discursive terrains. It acts as a site that performs precarity precisely because of its curatorial care in gathering and housing such texts that otherwise lose their relationality. It is not, I propose, that the *Almanac* gathers performance criticism; it is also that it constitutes an approach to criticism by itself, by precisely constituted counterpublics across several realms of discourse. It is a collective act of deliberation constituted around a movement across forms and debates – a free-fall that refuses a singular vantage point. This refusal to disclose a sole position

¹⁹ Brine and Minton mention the legacy left by the *Writing from Live Art* project on the critical writing landscape, and place the *Almanac* as a partner initiative to support 'critical writing' (ibid.).

is evident across the discursive formations I have spoken about here, from the plural authorship of critical live writing, to the conversational spaces of *Dialogue*.

Brine and Minton cite that editorial involvement is an act of curation, but that no edits were made to the individual pieces. In this curatorial act, they identify recurring themes that make their way into the texts: 'letters, a focus on walking and travel, and dialogues' (2010: 6).²⁰ As with Riding's text, the relationship to authorship here is placed in the background, to make space for connections across different texts. This is also a side effect of a collation of so many different forms of writing that is relational. To this end, Riding's text is accompanied by polemics on theatre and writing (*Step off the Stage* by Tim Etchells), essays on performance as politics (*Politics in the Age of Fantasy* by Stephen Duncombe, *Artists are now taking the lead politicians have failed to give* by Madeleine Bunting, *Performing in the Flames* by Guillermo Gomez-Pena), letters on racial identity (*Bite-sized chunks from my life* by Rajni Shah) and collaboration (*Dear Artist, Love Audience* by Helen Cole and *The Document Performance* by Rebecca Schneider), as well as numerous pieces on theatre (*You, the Spectator* by Nick Ridout and *Demolish the Theatre!* by Simon Casson). Riding's intervention is part of a number of nonconforming pieces, including the reproduction of an email to the Review Team of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, a previously unpublished response to a workshop, a transcription for a performance presentation, an email and a text written in support of a performance project. Other pieces in the *Almanac* come from established streams: newspapers like the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, art publications like *Frieze*, *Tate Etc.* or *Art Monthly*, as well as a selection of texts from the *Writing from Live Art*

²⁰ This editorial approach remains constituent across iterations of the *Almanac* (2012, 2014, 2016).

initiative. The editorial gesture here is a displacement: one that positions such a wide variety of critical texts by means of their shared concern with performance. In this gesture, authority of voice is dissipated by means of a removal from one context and repositioning into another. The *Almanac* is an act of performance criticism that makes visible alternative models of discourse; it acts as a publishing intervention with, and in dialogue with, performance criticism, precisely because of its embedded critique of existing structures of legitimacy – on the proviso that, by means of its organisational affiliation, it also participates in that restructuring.

Subjective criticality emerges across these instances, not as a reaction to rationality, but as an alternative mode of politicisation of criticism at a time when ‘the very idea of the demos’ is under scrutiny (Brown 2015: 207). Neoliberalism, as Brown examines, contests the role of the demos in political activity by displacing ‘public deliberation with governance and new management’ (ibid.). Perhaps fundamentally, the ‘unruliness of democracy is stifled by a form of governing that is soft and total’ (2015: 208). The counterpublics that performance criticism both engages with and, in certain examples, seeks to create, is constituted around deliberation that takes into account affective densities that shape encounters between different subjectivities. Allow me to explain.

Art critic Jennifer Doyle, in *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, invites us to consider a shift in how critics approach controversial works of performance, such as those of Ron Athey, Franko B, Aliza Shvarts, Nao Bustamante or David Wojnarowicz. Doyle places these works in an ‘expanded conversation about difficulty, emotion and identity’ (2013: xvii) to unmask a productive complicity, where the viewer becomes witness or participant (ibid.). Doyle invites a rethinking of the

critical language that presumes 'feelings are self-evident'; to Doyle, emotions question 'who is being disposed of what, who is unravelled, how and why' (2013: xiv). Riding's work is an example of how performance criticism engages with controversy by shifting its discourse. The text opens a conversation on how performance both creates and unmasks power structures, questioning the monarchy as a public body. Despite the presentation of neutrality which the form of the text takes, it is laced with affective language that exposes an affective labour even more than an argumentative one. This is revealed in brief instances of positionality: 'a fervent critique of Blair's Britain', or 'an attack on [...] artistic intention and institutional judgment' (2010: 38). Doyle does not speak of affective density as something held by any singular agent: the performance or the critic. Instead, she argues that this density is made possible by the encounter between the two: 'developing a deeper awareness of the space around artworks and expanding our sense of what it means to be present to art,' she says, 'goes hand in hand with critical responsibility to the dynamics of representation and participation in the public sphere' (2013: 14). In Riding's text, this perspective unmasks how affective labour of the writer is deployed to question our presence in the public sphere: a being present to politics, as much as being present to art. Riding implicates us by means of his(her) investment in art's unmasking of political structures of visibility.

This presence to art, rather than its explanation, is a value shared across practices gathered here; critical responsibility takes shape in the event of criticism, not by means of a foregrounding of Habermasian rationality, but by attempting to navigate this affective density by means of a subjective criticality. As we have seen, the affective and the political both operate within criticism across alternative sites of debate occluded by the emergent bourgeois public sphere; this interest in collective discursivity is also a

reclaiming of criticality from a feminist perspective. Across these chapters, I have thought with texts embedded in other projects, documentation practices, performative experiments and, as Riding's text displays, interventions. These examples of performance criticism not only work across form, but also by means of situated collectivity. The focus on interpretation, and the movement across terrains of meaning and discourse, is where a reactive politics unfolds.

As we have seen, this is a complex terrain, reactive to neoliberalism's co-optation and erasure of different forms of affective labour. We find this position echoed across feminist studies of neoliberalism's relationship to subject formation. Eva Illouz's work in *Cold Intimacies* traces the relationship between corporatisation of affect and neoliberalism: 'never has the private self been so publicly performed and harnessed to the discourses and values of the economic and public spheres' (2007: 4), with affect made as an 'essential aspect of economic behaviour' (2007: 5). Similarly, Isabel Lorey's examination of precarity centres on its divisiveness and connectiveness, but also the possibility of 'social interdependence' (2015: 20). Lorey's examination expounds how the commons is at risk precisely because neoliberalism requires individuals to protect themselves from vulnerability, whilst propagating an illusory security, where 'care work' (2015: 96) becomes the possible fabric of repair. Subjective criticality, I propose, is an act of deliberative care, despite performance criticism's departure from performance. Its affective dimension unmask the ways in which subjects navigate neoliberal structures, as much as resist them. Subjective criticality is the mode through which performance criticism navigates multiple publics and sites of discourse, precisely because it is enmeshed in constant processes of becoming, at once within the structures it resists, and attempting to evade them.

Of relevance here is my own engagement with the event in criticism, building on the work of Hannah Arendt. In Arendt's critique of modern society, we find a demand on citizens to 'act as though they were members of one enormous family' (1958: 54). To Arendt, the public realm is the site of commonality that enables us to define our own freedom and reality: 'it assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves' (1958: 50). Appearance, in Arendt's work, is plural and occurs in a public realm; action is an 'exclusive prerogative of man; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it, and only action is dependent upon the constant presence of others' (1958: 23). It is also what makes the political, according to Arendt. If thinking is tied to the self, then Arendt allows us to see the ways in which its exposure makes possible collective action. Performance criticism is already in the common world; it makes its witnessing and participation known by exposing the event of interpretation and thought, and refusing to deploy these to work *for* performance. It is this space where deliberation begins to take shape. My use of deliberation builds on the event not as a space of problematic socialisation, as Arendt cautions, but as a site of participation. By means of subjective criticality, affective density and deliberation, performance criticism constitutes temporary and collective spaces of discourse. This engagement with deliberation is constitutive of counterpublics and does not seek to monopolise or legislate, but rather, to stage encounters with meaning, and acknowledge its participation within these publics. In my final chapter, I consider how this operates politically by means of an engagement with dissensus.

Chapter Six

Criticism as a Political Event

In Chapter Five, I examined how performance criticism finds its political roots in the cultural conflicts and alternative discursive cultures of the eighteenth century in the UK; feminist revisionist historiography expounds on the interplay between public and private, and the politicisation of subjectivity in alternative discursive cultures, at a time when the bourgeois public sphere was being shaped by an emergent, male-constituted public rationality. This interplay between public and private is visible in the event of performance criticism, shaped by ‘imagining and thinking’ (Arendt 1971: 87), as exposed within acts of interpretation. Returning to the debate on critics versus bloggers that shaped the ecology in the early noughties, I argued that the institution of theatre criticism, to reference Steyerl (2009b:13), engaged in a cultural conflict of legitimacy rooted in that of the eighteenth century. By means of sustaining authorship as a space of exclusion, contemporary mainstream theatre criticism occludes alternative practices by positioning itself outside of, rather than participating in, discursive cultures. Finally, I turned to recent examinations of criticism in the public sphere that mark its displacement across different terrains of discourse; from this vantage point, the specificity of performance criticism is engagement with collectivity and affective density. These are modes through which counterpublics, to draw on Fraser’s term, are constituted under neoliberalism. I exemplified this by looking at the rise of orality as a site of deliberation, in projects such as Maddy Costa and Jake Orr’s *Dialogues* (2012–current) and Pacitti Company’s *Think Tank* (2009–current), as well as the role of editorial interventions, notably the work of the biennial *The Live Art Almanac* (2010–

current). I looked at how these examples straddle multiple terrains of practice, and constitute and participate in the formation of counterpublics, both in their formal orientation, and by means of a nomadic community of performance critics who operate across the artistic and political realms, and engage from a multiplicity of subject positions and structures of work.

In this chapter, I want to look at what precisely marks the politics of performance criticism. With reference to moments of productive political interaction, I articulate how performance criticism operates as a political event. As Jodi Dean argues, acts of resistance require articulation ‘together with other struggles, resistances and ideals’; they are not political ‘in and of themselves; rather, they have to be politicised’ (2005: 57). Working from this, I analyse how a practice emerging peripherally in the ecology of criticism, and nomadically across different spheres of discourse, enables productive dissent by politicising the event of criticism. If performance criticism constitutes counterpublics, what marks these as sites of resistance, and not co-optation? Drawing on the work of Chantal Mouffe and performance scholarship on the participatory turn, I look at a range of examples of performance criticism to delineate how porousness characterises the practice, but also marks it as a site of resistance. Finally, I think with a text by Theron Schmidt on a duet of artists searching for magnetic tape in an urban intervention, published in *Dance Theatre Journal* in 2011, in dialogue with the work of Jacques Rancière on the politics of aesthetics. Performance criticism finds its politics in the eighteenth century, the legacy of which continues to shape established forms of mainstream criticism. Performance criticism pushes up against this legacy, dissenting from established structures, foregrounding subjective criticality and affective density as well as participating in temporary counterpublics that straddle the artistic and the

political. Performance criticism, as I show here, constitutes its politics in this resistance to established forms of criticism, as well as in its accountability to the present.

I ask: if performance criticism constitutes an event that is collective, affectively dense and marked by subjective criticality, what distinguishes it from other critical terrains under pressure from neoliberalism? In some ways, my answer here is partial, because it attests to the porousness of performance criticism as a practice. As we have seen, performance criticism crosses multiple terrains: it exists in publishing initiatives, online criticism, live critical writing projects, contemporary salons and think tanks, playful performative documents and nonconforming texts. Its occupation of both artistic and political terrains is made possible by this nomadism, where the trouble-makers who self-identify as examining what lies in the space between performance and criticism do so from a multiplicity of positions – to borrow from Steyerl’s examination of contemporary visuality, in free-fall. This constitutes a simultaneity: a speaking from performance and away from it; and a participation in counterpublicity that is at once destabilising and deliberative.

On porosity: performance criticism’s multiple terrains (a return)

I return to the question of performance criticism’s participation in counterpublicity, and its crossing of multiple terrains of discourse. In *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse* (2007), Paul O’Neill argues that ‘the ascendancy of the curatorial gesture in the 1990s’ extended the parameters of the exhibition to incorporate more ‘discursive, conversational and geo-political discussion’ (2007: 13), speaking to the ways in which exhibitions simultaneously maintain power structures between ‘art, display and

reception' (2007: 17) and recuperate 'any dissent from viewers as part of the totality of the overall event' (ibid.). O'Neill argues that the biennale emerges 'as part of an institutional superstructure at the level of discourse' (2007: 19), one contextualised by the rise of globalisation and the circulation of artistic practice across different international markets, and one embracing peripheries as its curatorial scope. O'Neill proposes that the curatorial shift from practice to discourse propelled by the internationalisation of exhibition structures exposes 'discourse' as a 'word to conjure and perform power' (Wilson qtd. in O'Neill 2007: 20). I take up this question in relation to my discussion of performance criticism in Chapter Five to unpack the ways in which orality shapes a collective space hosted by means of performance criticism; one that, rather than iterating existing power structures that perform temporary communities, participates in counterpublicity.

The institution of criticism remains closed to these kinds of temporary explorations of the event of performance criticism, and to the formal porosity of this set of practices. The Drama Critics Circle, the UK arm of the International Association of Theatre Critics, which operates an invitation-only model, began to account for its terms of membership as inclusive of non-newspaper publications and different levels of freelance work in 2013; this, however, excluded the rise of project-based, embedded, collaborative work ('An Introduction to the Drama Section', *The Critics Circle*).¹ The International Association of Theatre Critics' membership terms dictate that 'candidates must prove that they have been consistently active [...] in daily or periodical press [...] for at least three years, or by publication of [...] critical works on theatre' ('Membership',

¹ Membership of the Critics Circle on this basis was one of the items on the agenda of the meeting of independent critics and writers that took place at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in December 2014, and which I discuss in Chapter Four ('Minutes 8.12.14').

International Association of Theatre Critics). These exclusions from professional bodies exemplify how working structures continue to be connected with individual critical legitimacy and notions of professionalism, in a culture where work is a complex territory, and publishing only a constituent of activities for and of criticism; as Bojana Kunst argues, changes in contemporary capitalism fundamentally alter contemporary production (2015: 18). As I have discussed in Chapter Four, this is connected to the role of collectivity, both as an instrument of neoliberalism, and as a productive reaction to it. At the same time, professional bodies continue to connect the question of traditions of work to that of authority, rejecting multiple terms of self-identification in situating one's work. This is despite a participation in cultures of competition, as we have seen in Chapter Four. As Jen Harvie notes, 'where the welfare state and its principles of democratic support [...] face aggressive erosion by neoliberal capitalism', increased reliance on entrepreneurial activity fosters a culture of competition and delegation of labour (2013: 46) which is connected to professional legitimation. By trying to maintain a position of privilege, the institution of criticism risks isolating itself from an ecology of critical practice that is, as we have seen in Chapter Five, already displaced, often productively so.

Writing for the British Council, *Exeunt's* current editor-in-chief, Alice Saville, speaks of the 'gradual erosion of industry jobs'² at a particular moment in time, when the days of 'a handful of hugely influential broadsheet critics (overwhelmingly Oxbridge educated men over the age of 40) ha[ving] the theatre scene hanging on their every word' ('Why the theatre industry needs to support critics, before it's too late', *British Council*, 2017)

² Saville gives the example of 2017 events that continue to shape the conversation: the closure of BBC's *Saturday Review* programme and Lyn Gardner's *Guardian Blog* ('Why the theatre industry needs to support critics, before it's too late', *British Council*, 2017).

are gone. Saville points to the rise of online criticism as a viable alternative, one marked by a blurring of lines between 'professional journalist and enthusiast' (ibid.). This position continues to be contradicted by those writing from within the institution of criticism; in an article on *The Critics Circle* signed by 'Dangle and Sneer', they argue that 'critics galore abound – rather would be critics abound. [...] Few offer a genuinely serious platform' ('Advice for Aspiring Critics: The world of the web', *The Critics Circle*, 2015). Across these two conflicting positions, we see how the debate over legitimization is shaped by means of counter-positioning, changes in work structures, and a shared concern for articulating the necessity of criticism under neoliberalism. This is also apparent in Saville's article, which proposes that 'theatre professionals are happy to benefit from favourable write-ups'; however, they 'don't often respect the people who've dedicated their free time to writing them' (ibid.). At the same time, Saville calls for more industry support of online criticism instead of reinforcement of a 'value system that places some of their most dedicated champions at the bottom of the profile' (ibid.). What is staged here is a debate over criticism's necessity, one that is much needed at a time when structures of support are dwindling; but one that also presumes the centrality of the individual writer and her legitimacy as taking primacy over deliberative structures that go beyond evaluation.

Performance criticism emerges in an ecology with an alternative set of concerns: an interest in the event of criticism; a concern for collectivity and deliberation; and a departure from performance to challenge established structures of discourse. Yet by neither articulating their work as traditional criticism, nor occupying established spaces for criticism in the online realm, those who engage in performance criticism are often structurally occluded from disciplinary conversations on criticism precisely because

their participation often seeks to deconstruct what is read and visible as criticism, as much as subvert, model or occupy it. At the same time, this model of work that is cross-territorial, and, as a result, porous, is not distinct to criticism, but is more deeply rooted in the mechanisms of capitalist production. O'Neill discusses this in the context of the curatorial cultures of the 1960s, citing Seth Siegelaub speaking about 'the idea of gallery dealer, curator, artist-curator, critic-writer, painter-writer, all of these categories [are] becoming fuzzy' (qtd. in O'Neill 2012: 19). In his work *Passionate Amateurs*, Nicholas Ridout speaks precisely of the interplay between work and leisure under capitalism, looking at examples of its disruption in theatre; 'the passionate amateurs of this book,' he argues, 'are those who attempt [...] to realise something that looks and feels like the true realm of freedom' (2014: 4), risking 'subsuming their labour of love entirely to the demands of the sphere of necessity in which they must make their meaning' (ibid.). The momentary disruption that Ridout finds in three acts of theatre criticism (2014: 162) is resistant precisely because they encounter the commodification of feelings, such as love, in a space that is at once solitary and relational. This position is not dissimilar to Saville's argument on the collapsing of borders between professional and amateur in online criticism. Ridout's work, however, shifts this away from a debate on legitimacy, to one of resistance, where the interplay between spectatorship and theatre, labour and love constitutes an alternative site of freedom. At the same time, Ridout accounts for how situated this resistance is.

We might understand this in relation to performance criticism's constitution of counterpublics, as situated within neoliberalism, as attempting to resist the terms of its coercion. In Chapter Five, I spoke about performance criticism's engagement with affective density as such an example. At the same time, by means of free-fall, I noted

performance criticism as a porous practice, one that moves across territories of the artistic and political, where, sometimes, these territories are not always distinguished from each other. Neoliberalism complicates the entanglement between work and non-work, desire and sacrifice. As Brown argues, in the transition from liberal to neoliberal democracy, 'citizen virtue is reworked as responsabilised entrepreneurialism [...] and reworked in the austerity era as the "shared sacrifice" routinely solicited' (ibid.). Brown identifies this paradoxical condition: where neoliberalism unmakes the democratic polity and ability for self-rule, it also builds on the logic of participation to uphold this division. The notion, Brown argues, that 'loyal citizens must "share sacrifice" in accepting austerities [...] indexes the neoliberal economisation of the political' (2015: 212). The categories of 'political' and 'democratic' are mobilised as much in the rationality of neoliberalism's instrumentalisation as in spheres of resistance to it. In light of this, I consider further how agonistic politics offers a lens through which to further understand performance criticism and its constitution of counterpublics.

A relevant analysis that accounts for deliberation in the context of neoliberalism is the work of Chantal Mouffe, where we find another possibility for the development of radical democratic politics by means of agonistic pluralism, in opposition to the rational consensus of established models (2002: 12). Mouffe's critique of traditional models of deliberative democracy found in the work of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls is based on analysing the limits of consensus and processes of argumentation. There is no free, unconstrained public deliberation, Mouffe argues (2002: 13). Mouffe's development of the deliberative model of democratic theory hinges on the idea that 'democratic politics does not consist in the moment when a fully constituted people exercises its rule' (2013: 178); 'liberal democracy,' she argues, 'is precisely the recognition of [a]

constitutive gap between the people and its various identifications' (2013: 178).

Agonistic pluralism, as a model of liberal democracy, rejects the idea of rationality in favour of 'competing forms of identification' (ibid.). Viewed through this prism, performance criticism's porosity between professional and social roles, its unseating of clear distinctions, is a productive terrain from which to constitute a critical deliberation through these competing forms of identification (Mouffe 2013: 178). For Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, antagonism is the 'limit of all objectivity' (2001: 10): 'what we are witnessing,' they argue, 'is a politicisation far more radical than any we have known in the past' because of its dissolving of 'the distinction between the public and private [...] in terms of a proliferation of radically new and different political spaces' (2014: 165).³ We might recognise such spaces in the ecology of criticism, where performance criticism rubs off against the political struggles of online criticism, striving for legitimacy and infrastructural support, and the institution of theatre criticism, occluding alternative modes of discourse by means of reiterating authority as tied to established forms of authorship in broadsheets. The ecology of criticism is marked by displacement precisely because of the different journeys of critics across these terrains, which posit cultures of consensus against each other – as we have seen in looking at Saville's and Dangle and Sneer's speaking on behalf of communities of criticism engaged in conflicts of legitimacy.

Mouffe and Laclau speak to the distinctions we've seen at play in the emergence of criticism in the eighteenth century, where the public realm erased the emergent

³ In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Mouffe and Laclau return to Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony on account of the 'plurality of contemporary social struggles' and its ensuing theoretical crisis (2014: xxii). 'We are confronted with a plurality of subjects, whose forms of constitution and diversity is only possible if we relinquish the category of "subject" as unifying essence' (2014: 165).

plurality of alternative realms (ibid.). In Mouffe, I find a recuperation of subjective criticality as it is negotiated and confronted with difference across multiple publics; and in performance criticism, I further locate the political event as an antagonism with the institution of criticism that makes itself evident by means of porosity; performance criticism is less visible because it is slippery, in free-fall across habitual sites of critique, whilst also rooted in the cultures of the eighteenth century. This is evidenced in the example of the work of *The White Pube*, 'the collaborative identity' of two critics, Gabriella de la Puente and Zarina Muhammad, established in 2015 as a website, YouTube channel, podcast, curatorial endeavour and digital publishing project ('About', *The White Pube*, 2015). 'We started writing about art because everything else was boring/overly academic/white nonsense///and male' (ibid.). The duo articulate their work against the established traditions of criticism and its disciplinary reach, in opposition to the dominance of white men who constitute a site of exclusion, and, importantly to my discussion here, by drawing on multiple forms and languages to constitute a distinct practice, one that manifests performance criticism without being fully committed to that as a singular category of identification. *The White Pube* makes visible performance criticism's porosity because it hosts it; but also because it wraps its work in concerns that consider subjectivity as holding political power, therefore not only straddling the two terrains of artistic and political, but making these the concern of criticism. Although *The White Pube* is the work of the two writers alone, they also host a Library, which collates writing from *The White Pube* with open submissions in order to share readership and resources ('Library' in *The White Pube*, 2017). This act of collation is a primary example of cross-terrain publishing interventions, where the texts can range from criticism to poetry and beyond – thus having no formal specificity – and the Library itself acts as an open invitation and a series of open-sourced public texts.

The White Pube's work is a 'personal reaction, and a record of an encounter with an aesthetic experience' (ibid.), one that considers subjectivity in the encounter with a work, and departs from the work in order to consider how it accounts for that subjectivity. At the same time, *The White Pube* engage explicitly in evaluation as much as they look inward to the experiencing of the work – carving a practice where the two are not mutually exclusive. De la Peunte and Muhammad position their identities as a critical strategy in their writing, with an interest in rejecting 'any kind of professionalism' ('Interview: The White Pube', *Debut Magazine*, 2018). Speaking to the ways in which the initiative stems from the lack of visibility of alternative discourses on art from women of color, *The White Pube* takes this positioning as a departure point for finding alternative routes for criticism: 'we don't write about art like it's a normal thing. We normalise the things that go on around the art' (ibid.). This statement makes visible their concern for the politics of art, and for the politics of criticism, as they relate to each other; the two argue that they want to 'write GOOD ~have politix' ('About', *The White Pube*, 2015). Enmeshed with this identity for the work is the fact that the two are young women of colour who also work as artists and curators, and see criticism as a discursive space ('The White Pube', *Young Artists in Conversation*, 2017).

As Morgan Quaintance, writing for *E-Flux*, argues, *The White Pube's* 'irreverent criticism comes from a personal perspective that is publicly attributable to both authors' ('The New Conservatism: Complicity and the UK Art World's Performance of Progression', *E-Flux Conversations*, 2017). Quaintance also speaks to the increasing need to create avenues for funding 'separate from exploitative networks' (ibid.); *The White Pube* consider this as an exposing of work and funding structures, making their accounts

publicly accessible on their website ('Accounts', *The White Pube*, 2016–current),⁴ including all fees received for work, where they were received from, and when. The collective uses *Patreon*, the platform that raises funds to 'pay for travel to exhibitions' ('The White Pube are creating better criticism than JJ', *Patreon*), and is in residence at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (2017–2018). The duo make explicit and visible the 'constitutive gap between the people and its various identifications' (2013: 17). In the conversation fuelled by Quaintance's article, *The White Pube* explicitly talk about the conditions that made the collaboration possible as residing as much with the political orientation of their university course at Central St. Martins as with them moving back into their homes post-university in order to 'take a risk on [our] self-employment' (*The White Pube* comment in 'The New Conservatism: Complicity and the UK Art World's Performance of Progression', *E-Flux Conversations*, 2017), despite having '47k worth of debt' (ibid.). *The White Pube's* explicit engagement with work structures, and their own strategies of making the collaboration possible in the ecology, point to how the two make difference a constitutive factor of criticism, resistant to the economisation of the political. By means of this engagement, *The White Pube* participate in, and constitute, counterpublics in their delineation of alternative strategies for criticism that foreground difference, as opposed to homogeneity.

Formally, *The White Pube* occupy existing critical forms, such as the review, to reconceive of their critical function, whilst pointing to its forms of exclusion, as we have seen in the ways in which the duo talk about their work. *The White Pube* draws on existing critical categories, notably the review, whilst also exposing its possibilities as

⁴ *The White Pube's* accounts commence in January 2016 and run to date. They can be viewed at the following link: <http://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/accounts>

an interpretive act. By means of their collective identity as a publication and series of critical forms, *The White Pube* mark out a space of appearance, one already embedding itself into existing critical culture and setting itself apart from it. By means of self-identification, the project identifies a gap between the representational politics of criticism institutionally, and the alternative possibilities from a different identitarian position. At the same time, the work of antagonism here is a reactive politics to the whiteness of critical culture, in parallel with a negotiation of working practices. In a critical text on *The Sex Worker's Opera*⁵ from 2016, de la Puente speaks comparatively about the performance and a film work by Jenkin Van Zyl, titled *Escape from Fort Bravo*,⁶ as works that had 'at their art-heart a tight polemic, a didactic push, something brazen and willed and sharp'; 'my position [is] jammed/almost redundant to experience something that I didn't quite feel myself experiencing' ('The Sex Worker's Opera, *The White Pube*, 2016). 'It is,' de la Puente argues, 'like formal sincerity, like saying something in the exact tone it should be meant and said and heard/and then hearing the sound of your own voice and knowing it is right' (ibid.). Towards the end of the piece, moving across these two works by confronting the complications of affect in the encounter, de la Puente proposes that 'maybe the edges of the play and the film are bevelled, like these forms (stretched loose and tight over production and polemic) are onomatopoeic to their own formal sincerity' (ibid.). What is particularly interesting about this approach is how it rests on the formal conventions of the review – the section under which the critical text is filed is explicitly named as such. However, this is

⁵ *The Sex Worker's Opera* had its run at the Pleasance Theatre from 17–29 May 2016, and was presented by Experimental Experience Theatre Company. The work is developed from 60 stories, submitted by sex workers from 17 countries, including 'the experiences of escorts, strippers, webcam models, porn actors, street based workers and others' ('Venue Pack', *The Sex Worker's Opera*) and was supported by Royal Opera House.

⁶ This was presented at the Slade School of Art, UCL, Degree Show in 2016.

destabilised by the comparative thinking that moves between embodied experience and formal comparison.

There is something productive in the language that this piece of performance criticism seeks; it moves between two works to enable an open-ended thinking process that doesn't commit to expounding on the content of either, but moves across their formal boundaries. At the outset of the text, de la Puente declares that she is 'jammed and awkward', in part because of her agreement with the politics of the work; towards the end, she qualifies this conflict, comparing the piece to being 'like [when] your face comes undone after you have cried away complexion' (ibid.). Here, we find the affective density I have discussed as emergent in other forms of performance criticism, by means of Doyle's work. It is precisely the difficulty that Doyle examines that is palpably articulated here. The critical text moves between subjective disclosure and critical problematisation, 'a narrative structure that seemed to cough' (ibid.). Its staging of an encounter with two works that share form, not politics, begins to carve out a space to think with a problem in the work, away from the work. This is not resolved in the response, and it is this instability that is productive and exposing at the same time. In this example, we find the review as an unstable formal category; at the same time, the disclosure of the politics that bears upon it enables a discursive arena that exposes affect across several works, but also departs from them to return to the subject.

Performance criticism discloses itself as porous, weaving in and out of the work of *The White Pube* – a collective of two who explicitly politicise the work of criticism by means of an engagement with subjectivity. Performance criticism's porosity emerges precisely at the point where the artistic and political meet; where its nonconforming nature reveals layers of affective density in which difference becomes a key social vehicle for

constituting counterpublics. *The White Pube* offers an example of the ways in which the collective both discloses authorial collaboration, and participates in creating alternative cultures of deliberation as counterpublics.

In *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler exposes the ways in which “the people” are not a given population, but rather, are constituted by the lines of demarcation that we implicitly or explicitly establish’ (2015: 3). In her book, Butler uses performativity as a means to expound on public assemblies under neoliberalism; ‘when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or in other forms of public space,’ she proposes, they are exercising ‘a plural and performative right to appear’ (2015: 1).

Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt on appearance, Butler argues that such gatherings, despite their ethical, social and economic conflicts, ‘establish new forms of appearance that overcome that differential form of power’ (2015: 51). Butler’s study is relevant here for the ways in which it complements Fraser’s work on counterpublics by returning to the notion of political negotiation of groups rendered outside politics. If Fraser’s model of counterpublics is based on the value of autonomy as a means of participation, Butler follows the work of Arendt to value ‘forms of political agency that emerge’ in alternative domains (2015: 78). We find this relationship between appearance and collectivity in Arendt’s argument that the ‘equality attending to the public realm is necessarily an equality of unequals who stand in need of being equalised’ (1998: 215). In the instances of performance criticism I speak of here, the public is constituted by means of differentiation, as we have seen in the case of *The White Pube*; in that instance, the collective construct publicity by means of their work, but also the exposing of the conditions of that work by means of, for example, publishing their accounts. This is an engagement with making the work of criticism

appear – shared across practices of performance criticism – as well as exposing its thinking; in this instance, *The White Pube*, seen as a collective and operating as an assembly, approach this by destabilising and occupying the review as a form through which to depart from performance, and conceive of a problem. As exemplified by their Library project, *The White Pube* also conceive of readership as a shared space, in which they assemble an open-sourced collective of non-form-specific writers who engage in similar politics. This collectivity and appearance is also constituted by means of participation and hosting in *The White Pube*, as is the case with practices of oral performance criticism, which I want to briefly return to here. In these instances, the encounter with a public is undertaken away from a position of specificity, towards a mutual concern that is shaped by the collective, and performed by it. The encounter is oriented simultaneously towards collectivity and participation, and performance criticism emerges as a porous site for its politicisation.

A productive analysis of this enmeshment of participation in relation to the social is found in scholarship on the participatory turn in theatre and performance. In *Social Works*, Shannon Jackson refers to social practice as a term that ‘combines aesthetics and politics, a term for art events that are inter-relational, embodied and durational’ (2011: 12). Jackson expounds on the complexities that mark such experiential practices precisely because of the multiple implications of the term ‘social’, which for some enable the formation of ‘social bonds’, whilst for others radicality is in its disruption (2011: 14). The involvement in social works, or socially engaged practices, terms which Jackson deploys throughout, also constitutes a disciplining. Jackson engages with critiques brought to socially engaged practices, notably the work of Claire Bishop and Sara Brady, by pointing out how they make a case for radicality as residing in

maintaining aesthetic autonomy. This is argued by means of the artist recuperating authorial vision from the collaborative ethos (Bishop), or fostering a transparent, accessible structure, a 'legible appeal' (Brady 2011: 58). Jackson argues that these critiques share a 'mistrust of "feel-good" collaboration' (ibid.) that disables radicality. I am interested in Jackson's analysis for how it recuperates radicality in a wider variety of practices that negotiate authorship. As we have seen in previous examples of oral performance criticism, such spaces are held but not led, by invitation or open, and negotiate differences both in terms of those who share that space, and in the directions that the deliberation takes shape. Jackson's work shares another similar concern, which is to draw a connective tissue between the realm of theatre and that of the visual which these works occupy. Jackson's analysis considers this through the work of Santiago Sierra, who provides an alternative where collaboration is articulated as 'a radical experiment in authorial release', and in which 'collaborative authorship is a kind of formal experiment' (2011: 70). In this analysis, collaboration becomes such a radical experiment when it is constituted by means of authorial release. In performance criticism, the authorial release, to draw on Jackson's term, is constituted by means of collectivity – a being together for the purposes of deliberation.

In thinking about what constitutes the political in performance criticism, I want to dwell on this question further for how it might helpfully complicate established delineations of critical practice and its reactive capacities. Neoliberalism complicates the lines between artistic and political, and between coercion and autonomy. Gregory Sholette tackles this explicitly when talking about how 'so many art world pundits, institutions and policy makers continue to use the language of social justice and democratic ideals' whilst at the same time remaining 'faithful to the capitalist principals of maximum

growth, unremunerated cultural labour, and deregulated supply and demand' (2017: 31). Just as we have come to understand the ways in which artistic practice is both autonomous and enmeshed in neoliberalism's operations and its competitive drive, so must we understand performance criticism as straddling a similar terrain; one where its relationship to work and shared labour is also its potentially radical position; one where deliberation can constitute opinion-formation, or counterpublicity. In performance criticism, authorial release is constituted within collectivity, and by means of deliberation.

Wendy Brown argues that neoliberalism's fostering of homo oeconomicus risks 'the body politic ceas[ing] to be a body politic', relegated instead as 'a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers' (2005: 43). In Jackson's analysis, we find supportive terms for understanding how authorial release is not necessarily a co-optation into neoliberalism's existing discursive structures, but a reactive participation in the institution of criticism, one that can constitute counterpublics; subjective criticality and its collective negotiation becomes a way of navigating neoliberalism's political rationality. For Gregory Sholette, the collective holds a possible space for assembling 'needs, affiliations, differences [...] in a space suddenly open to the possibility of social equality', where the collective is 'fuelled by these differences and also destabilised by them' (2017: 183). As we have seen by means of an engagement with Nancy Fraser's term of counterpublicity, productive autonomy is one that enables the public to engage in its own decision-making; she argues that the 'proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is [...] a step toward greater democracy' (1990: 62) precisely because it rejects a 'sharp separation of (associational) civic society and the state' (1990: 75). Whilst Fraser distinguishes between the deliberative and contestative nature of

counterpublics (1992: 125), she also points to their discursive relations, which account for difference (ibid.). In my examination of the work of *Dialogue* and the activities of the *Think Tank* curated by Pacitti Company, I spoke about performance criticism as a mode of hosting and participation. We might also see this in *Experiments in Listening*, where Rajni Shah conducts a series of week-long, documented conversations among herself and 'friends who are also performance makers' ('Experiments in Listening', *Rajni Shah Projects*, 2015). The project asks, 'what happens when friendship isn't held by niceness but by honesty, when a conversation is not just about talking, and when it lasts all week' (ibid.). Part of a doctoral research project and culminating in three films, the project declares its capturing of 'moments of laughter, intimacy, frustration, confrontation, silence and dance' (ibid.) among Shah and Karen Christopher, Chris Goode and Andy Smith. Here, we notice a return to attention as a space for performance criticism, posited as a dialogue on and from performance making; Shah stages conversations that are as much about the work of making as they are about the encounter between two artists; as much about friendship as they are about work.

The project is characterised by the shared concerns of other examples of performance criticism I've examined: duration (for example, the work of live writing); dialogue as public exchange (for example, the work of *The White Pube*, *Something Other* or *Open-Dialogues*); and an engagement with the porosity between the work of desire and that of making (for example, Mary Paterson writing on a 20-minute silence for *Spill:Overspill*). With duration, Shah's project collapses the boundaries among different valuations of time, resonating with Ridout's passionate amateurs as destabilising within the realm of necessity. By means of inviting friends, the project draws on the multiple affective terrains in which boundaries are renegotiated, whilst also placing dialogue as a form of

collective, critical thinking. This is the work of interpretation exposed, as it sits in moments of silence, of confrontation and of disagreement between two participants and their shifting public. Shah is a trouble-maker here who engages in a temporary act of performance criticism, precisely to find the porosity between different terrains. This work of friendship is also seen across collectives I have mentioned here: *The White Pube*, *Open-Dialogues* and *Something Other*, for example. The distinctions between assembly and collective, participation and sociality, collapse across these instances, where the public constitutes itself as authorial collaboration or relegation, gathering or site of resistance. I am reminded of Mouffe's pointing to the lack of existence of unconstrained deliberation; in all these cases, the structure of work becomes both model and site of negotiation. In the case of *Experiments in Listening*, for example, this is a matter of orientation of conversation as much as point of departure – both a fuelling and a destabilisation. It is a formal experimentation that departs from performance, in that it thinks with its processes and away from them; but it also uses them as a lens through which to think collectively, in dialogue, attuned to the negotiations at play when different subjectivities meet.

What the interest in orality and the social in performance criticism constitutes is a counterpublic in which collective thinking is put to work; this is as much a mode of collective attention, where the subject emerges from the assembly, as Butler expresses, as it is one of criticism, where difference becomes a means of deliberation that constitutes what Arendt calls common sense, without this being a practice of agreement. In this ecology, performance criticism's engagement with orality is a productive entanglement of discursive orientation, creating an embodied assembly for the examination not of social engagement, but of critical participation. With *Dialogue's*

festival, *Talking/Making/Taking Part* (2014), the format of the long table becomes a means through which to foster critical participation whilst dismissing professional allegiances. The long table is 'a means of generating open discussion about a specific topic, using a stylised environment and participation protocol to turn ordinary conversation into a performance' ('Background' in *Public Address Systems*). It requires a table, a tablecloth for writing on, and chairs positioned at a distance from the table. As part of the etiquette, there is no one individual who hosts the conversation, and participants can come and go as they please. It is precisely the performativity of this format, and its critical orientation, that mark its relevance here. At the same time, as is characteristic of much of *Dialogue's* work, there is ongoing experimentation in how criticism might participate in communities of debate. This porousness does not undermine the identity of performance criticism's participation in a temporary counterpublic, but rather, reinforces its orientation towards spaces that are social, as well as collectively authored. As Jackson argues in *Social Works*, 'to reckon with the experience of social work means reckoning with its force as both support and constraint' (2011: 247).

The exposure of affective density is a political intervention of performance criticism precisely because it seeks to complicate the encounter between multiple subjectivities and difference; it is, in other words, a means of sustaining competing forms of identification, to reference Mouffe. The work of *Dialogue* is that of creating a space for being present to art (Doyle 2015) as well as to its political demands; as Costa argues, 'to enjoy thinking aloud about how different relationships to theatre might transform the way people relate [...] to wider society' ('Can a relationship with theatre change people's relationship to society?', *Guardian*, 2014). This position is woven into the fabric of

performance criticism as a site where contestations enter in productive conflict. In a series of published dialogues about the work of *Something Other*, Costa and Mary Paterson disclose different perspectives on the digital project as being '(not) art and [...] (not) about art' ('Something Other Dialogue (2)', *Medium*, 2015). For Costa, this impossibility discloses a 'suspicion of the critic', arguing that 'simply by virtue of who I'm seen to be, SO [Something Other] becomes about criticism and its related practices'; 'if you're writing about live art and not making live art, then you're a critic,' Costa proposes (ibid.). Paterson, who is interested in 'how writing communicates first, and in what it communicates (a close) second', proposes that the distinctions of the digital project are not between 'writing and performance', but 'types of experience and paradigms of knowledge' ('Something Other Dialogue (1)', *Medium*, 2015); for Paterson, 'talking about art and ideas constitutes and perpetuates art and ideas' (ibid.). We distinguish the social here as operating as much in a space of intimate, public dialogue as in the public invitation set out by *Talking/Making/Taking Part*, yet what characterises both of these examples is a resistance to immediate conclusion or consensus, and rather, the exposing of difference. This space becomes politicised because of the value it places on deliberation and the ability of counterpublics to collectively challenge established modes of viewing and thinking, not only about performance, but also about contemporary life – a collective attention.

A further example of this is in the work of Simon Bowes; in a post titled *Manifesto (First Provisional)* (2015), Bowes captures the ways in which desire, affect and responsibility constitute performance criticism. 'Write as though you are in dialogue with the artist. You might write as though you are a student of their work or a fan of their work.' He continues: 'where the work in front of you does present a problem – aesthetically,

ethically, politically – judge how and why this problem emerges’ (‘Manifesto’, *Simonbowes.com*, 2015). Foundational to this position in Bowes’ *Manifesto* is the work of John Berger, critic, writer, playwright, painter, poet and translator, whose image begins the post, and who is the final reference in it. Berger’s publication and TV series *Ways of Seeing* (1972) begins with the proposition that ‘seeing comes before words’ (1972: 2).⁷ Berger shares Susan Sontag’s⁸ position that interpretation, for it to not excavate the work, unfolds as an unstable act of appearance, proposing that ‘the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled’ (1972: 3).⁹ This rooting of subjective criticality in the politics of meaning at play in, and beyond, an encounter with the work, discloses an interest in the potential care of the event of meaning, and its peripheral and unstable exposures of thought. Despite moving from the work, performance criticism thinks with and from it. This porousness is exposed in the dialogue between Costa and Paterson, as well as negotiated in encounters with wider publics outside of the community of performance criticism in *Dialogue’s* festival, or, as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, in the work of *The White Pube*.

In *Undoing the Demos*, Brown argues that ‘from its emergence in the late eighteenth century through to the present, European liberal democracy has always been saturated with capitalist powers and values’ (2015: 205). We have seen this at play in the ways in which a politics of exclusion in the eighteenth century served to delineate territories of public legitimacy whilst confining alternative modes to the realm of the private; but we

⁷ John Berger (1926–2017).

⁸ This is further explored in a dialogue between Susan Sontag and John Berger for the BBC Voices, ‘How to Tell a Story’ (1983). To Berger, ‘a story exists somewhere between fiction and truth’, and for Sontag, fiction is a productive ‘kind of speculativeness’ (‘How to Tell a Story’, BBC, 1983).

⁹ Berger argues that post-Renaissance European paintings and their portrayal of female bodies caused a rift in the formation of female consciousness, where a woman is engaged in ‘how to survey everything she is and everything she does because of how she appears to others’ (1972: 10).

have also seen this at play in the explicitly politicised roots of the mainstream press, and the effects of the conflict on criticism that shaped the early noughties, conflating subjectivity with the fabrication of facts in the post-truth era. Brown's study expounds on how 'neoliberal rationality has been extremely effective in identifying capitalism with democracy' (2015: 209). Although Brown is careful to point out that democracy can be mobilised as counter to its constitutive principles (ibid.), it also enables us to be accountable to the present (2015: 210). It is this space that I claim the political event of performance criticism occupies: an attention, and an accountability to the present. Across the examples I have looked at here, we see performance criticism's porosity as a means through which to deploy solidarity as constitutive of counterpublics of deliberation. These collapse clear boundaries, crossing from social spaces to those of friendships; from hosting to participation. In the final part of this chapter, I want to turn to a text by Theron Schmidt and the work of Jacques Rancière to show how these acts constitute a political event; where performance criticism is at play, it holds the potential to destabilise cultures of consensus – as we have seen here – and operate by means of what Rancière calls a redistribution of the sensible.

If I have referred to practices gathered here as the work of trouble-makers, in free-fall across multiple terrains and publics, it is because I constitute their work as reactive to the divisions and coercions of neoliberalism; to its establishing of sites of consensus that contribute to uphold existing divisions, not tear them down (Brown 2015, Kunst 2015, Sholette 2017). Importantly, for Rancière, art is not separate from political practice, because it actively configures the realm of the sensible, the distribution of bodies and voices in society. Rancière's work deals with configurations of existence, bringing together art in its collective and discursive impulses, and political practice,

understood as a process of collective organisation and visibility. Rancière's work provides a necessary link between modes of intervention and discourse across realms of sensibility – and by this I mean the experiences of art and politics. In building on my examination of the ways in which performance criticism engages both the artistic and political realms, I address how, building on Rancière's work, the making visible through dissent that performance criticism undertakes is a productive act of resistance.

Dissensus: criticism as a political event

Earlier in this chapter, I looked at how counterpublicity is constituted in forms of performance criticism, through the lens of Mouffe and Laclau's agonism, recognising competing forms of identification (2013). I argued that neoliberalism's propagation of self-sacrifice as a form of affective work upholds an economisation of the political (Brown 2015: 212). At the same time, I showed how performance criticism turns to structures of discourse and thinking as constitutive of political democratic practices, and deliberation. I looked at how several examples of performance criticism constituted politicised spaces of debate: in the case of *The White Pube*, a reactive position to the whiteness of the institution of art criticism that seeks to subvert established forms, such as the review; and in those of oral forms of performance criticism, from *Experiments in Listening to Dialogue's* festival, a participation in discursive counterpublics. Viewed through the prism of Rancière's work, these instances expose how politicisation of the event of criticism is undertaken by means of dissensus: a making visible of something, and a constituting of counterpublics. I want to examine how this making visible occurs in this final section.

A connective tissue to the work of Rancière is a concern for alternative models of political process – agonism, on the one hand, and dissensus, on the other. What this political thinking shares is a constitution of democracy as ‘the always conflictual and disruptive manifestation of the principle of equality’ (qtd. in ‘Don’t they represent us?’, *Verso Blog*, 2015). Across these examples, equality is sought as the principle of deliberation – one, however, that accounts for difference. In this thesis, I have made a case for performance criticism as a mode of making visible peripheral practices of criticism that share an interest in constituting alternative discourses under neoliberalism’s coercive operations; the porosity that characterises performance criticism for this very reason is also its dissensus, its capacity for resistance: it grants aesthetic weight to thinking processes, and invests subjectivity with criticality. As Kunst argues, the contemporary crisis of the subject is one of ‘imperative pleasure’ (2015: 25), where confession can be as much an instrument of resistance as one of subordination (2015: 30). The engagement with processes of making visible shared across examples of performance criticism I have looked at here is a formal engagement with democracy, and an attempt to constitute counterpublics by means of dissent. As echoed in the work of Wendy Brown on neoliberalism, democracy is something that requires constant engagement – a process of politics, as Rancière posits. This process of politics ‘makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where there was once place for noise (ibid.)’. Performance criticism makes visible the operations of thought and interpretation; its movement away from performance is a shift towards alternative models of deliberation that straddle artistic practice and the political fabric, and account to and for the present moment. The examples of performance criticism that we have looked at here negotiate authorial release with collective deliberation; whilst their efficacy is not always evident, the potentiality of this politicisation is. In Rancière,

we encounter how political participation is constituted around argumentation as much as affect and subjectivity; but also, how it requires community: a process of moving together, of making visible.

Rancière demonstrates how politics is constituted in the social realm as an activity and process, that is, 'whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination' (Rancière 2010: 30).¹⁰ Rancière's articulation of politics is closely aligned with his concept of the redistribution of the sensible: a system of facts that discloses both commonality and difference through sense perception (2004: 11). The system of distribution is the symbolic realm of the social, which is dominated by a 'set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved' (Rancière 2001: 28). Key to this conception of the distribution of the sensible is the operation of sensibilities in political participation, which also pertains to aesthetics. Aesthetics is, in this instance, 'the way in which the practices and forms of visibility of art intervene in the distribution of the sensible' (2009: 25).¹¹ Sense perception is fundamental to Rancière's delineation of politics and its enmeshment into artistic practice; they are both frames of visibility, whereby the contestation of artistic borders correlates to political equality (Rancière 2006). To Rancière, art is 'the framing of a space of presentation' (2009: 23). It gains its political power through its modes of reconfiguration and reattribution of constitutions both symbolic and material, and its

¹⁰ For Rancière, politics is shape-shifting according to different historical projects. This is evident in the thinker's own investment in the analysis of projects that seek to reconstitute a position in light of their historical misconstructions. My reading here explicitly refers to the study of the workers' movement and intellectual emancipation in *Proletarian Nights* (2012b) and *The Philosopher and His Poor* (2004), which demonstrate a paralleling of class histories with an unpacking of modernism as an aesthetic regime of art.

¹¹ Rancière draws on a Kantian notion of aesthetics, defined as 'the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience' (Wolfe 2011: 2). In his work, aesthetics is posited as a 'regime of identification' (2006: 20). Rancière denotes the relationship between aesthetics and politics as located in 'the way in which the practices and forms of visibility of art themselves intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration' (2004: 24).

resistance to categories of identification. This is fundamental to my use of the terms artistic and political across Chapters Five and Six, whereby performance criticism is a porous, cross-territorial practice; its relationship to formal experimentation and collectivity as an authorial mode of disruption exposes a commitment to blurring the boundaries between artistic and political precisely to sustain a space of democratic, agonistic thinking that refutes instrumentalisation because it does not resolve meaning; in this way, we might understand performance criticism as the making visible of a space for deliberation and thinking. Performance criticism exposes thinking in the instances of its occurrence, and enables others to participate in its shaping.

In Rancière, a distinction is made between politics as a process, and policing as a legislative one. Policing pertains to the legislative and authoritative activities of the social order; it is ‘an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying’ (Rancière 2001: 29).¹² As such, it is an order that regulates ‘that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise’ (2001: 28). We have seen this at play in examples where the institution of theatre criticism decries interpretation (‘The role of theatre reviews’, *Guardian*, 2008) as finding fiction in critique; yet the fictional is a realm of critical occupation that enables collectivity to occur, without losing sight of the fundamental importance of facts. In Rancière, the damage of police order is a fostering of a culture of consensus; this is evident, for example, in deploying this as a lens through which to understand how neoliberalism operates as a political rationality, transposing democratic terms like freedom and equality to ‘an economic register’ (Brown 2015: 41). As we have seen here, the damage

¹² Rancière defines the police as a ‘partition of the sensible whose principle is the absence of a void and of a supplement’ (2001: 12).

of some forms of participation is their depoliticisation and instrumentalisation. As Kunst argues, there are instances where the “life force” of [these] performances’ freezes ‘the experience into spectacle’ (Kunst 2015: 69). Participation can be at once an instrument of resistance and one of coercion, where the erasure of difference acts as a performance of community, rather than a counterpublic. In the neoliberal measures of austerity, argues Kunst, artistic practice is often expected to model ‘how to work, exploit the workforce and abstract the content’ (2015: 151), critiqued when it is not ‘in the public interest’ (ibid.). What I am arguing here is that dissent is precisely a rejection of instrumentalisation: criticism not working *for* art, but from it. In porosity, exposures of unfinished thought, and collective experiments in authorial release, performance criticism resists consensus culture and seeks alternative negotiations of deliberation as recuperative of the democratic process.

For Rancière, the work of politics is ‘the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen’ (2010: 37). The fabric of the political is ‘the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one’ (ibid.). The specificity of dissensus, as oppositional to consensus, is that ‘its partners are no more constituted than is the object or stage of discussion itself’ (2010: 38). Performance criticism is a constitution of such participants: operating peripherally in and from performance, and collectively in formal experiments. It denotes a community of cultural thinkers who share these concerns, and render them visible by means of their relationship to work and care for deliberation. Dissensus, in the political process, is about making something appear, and implicating communities in that appearance. Rancière attributes dissensus to political argumentation, which becomes the ‘possible world in which the argument could count as an argument’ (ibid.). He puts forward the example of a worker arguing

for the public nature of a wage dispute as having to ‘demonstrate the world in which his argument counts as an argument’, as well as ‘demonstrate it as such for those who do not have the frame of reference enabling them to see it as one’ (ibid.). In this political terrain, the distribution of the sensible is the mode of foregrounding commonality and partition. Rancière constructs a productive correlation between dissensus and egalitarian aesthetics and sense experience. To Rancière, emancipation is also ‘a kind of aesthetic emancipation’ (2004: 11). We have seen this at play in examples of performance criticism here: collectivity as a form of solidarity that also dissents from established models of authorship, participating in multiple discursive publics. This is a formal experimentation in alternative actions of resistance. I want to consider, however, how this unfolds in the context of a single-authored critical response, where deliberation is not as explicitly articulated .

This Is Happening in Real Time, an extract of which begins this final section, is a response to a performance work titled *Beside the A-side* by Graeme Miller and John Smith, written for *Dance Theatre Journal*, a dance magazine published by the Laban Centre.¹³ The performance consisted of the two artists searching for magnetic tape in outward spirals in the city, starting from Siobhan Davies Studios (London). With each iteration of *Beside the A-side*, found magnetic tape is used to document found audio, later presented as an installation whose duration is determined by the length of the tape (‘Beside the A-side’, 2011). In the critical text, what becomes visible are the ways in which the work, its experience, its witnessing and its making are wrapped into each

¹³ Schmidt’s article here is exemplary of the formal remit of the publication. Theodoridou’s article on criticism argues that ‘in a rehabilitated critical dialogue critic and maker honour the contract that makes art and ideas about art public property’ (2002: 37). This position is exemplary of the magazine’s commitment to dialogue as fundamental to criticism of experimental work. I mention it here because *Dance Theatre Journal* was a significant host for performance criticism throughout the noughties.

other; in writing from the work, Schmidt decomposes it. And in doing so, he makes space for a preoccupation with time, movement and document that is attentive to the time of its making, marked by a series of exposures that refuse to be reconciled:

This is what happens when you work with chance.

Suddenly we're all three wide awake. They want to make the most of the low morning light before it moves past the building. They want to make the most of the still-quiet day, the shifts between the traffic whirring by and the quiet snatches of birdsong, the quality of air and presence, the rare good fortune of two beautiful English days in a row.
[...]

This is what happens when you work with chance.

And this is what happens when you work with deliberate composition. When you work with careful, painstaking exhaustive attention to detail. The arrangement of the ladder. The clamping of the camera. The framing of the shot. The timing of the record period. Waiting for the wind to make the tape dance. Waiting for a pedestrian to pass; waiting for a bus; waiting for the light.

Chance is something we wait for.

This is what happens when the chance comes. This is what happens in the real time of filming:

Move the ladder.	Adjust the camera.	Look at the tape.
Place the clamp.	Tighten the clamp.	Climb up the ladder.
Turn the clamp.	Look at the sun.	Put on the headphones.
Loosen the clamp.	Wait for pedestrians.	Wait for pedestrians.
Move it to another spot.	Look at the road.	Climb down the ladder.
Tighten the clamp.	Climb up the ladder.	Shake the branch so the tape flaps freely.
Adjust the camera.	Adjust the camera.	Plug in the headphones.
Look at the sun.	Look through the frame.	Loosen the clamp.
Look at the frame.	Plug in the mic lead.	Adjust the camera.
Move the camera.	Climb down the ladders.	Look through the viewfinder.
Climb down the ladder.	Place the hands on the hips.	Tighten the clamp.
Loosen the clamp.	Cup the hands against the sun.	Pick up the microphone.
Tighten the clamp.	Look at the traffic.	Press record.
Move the ladder.		

And wait.

. . .
. . .
. . .

[...]

I open my eyes.

I see:

the shadows of three men on the pavement.
the 53 via New Cross
the metallic sheer of a woman's leggings
the 12 via Oxford Circus
a tuft of old growth caught between the paving stones
the Demerstee via Leuven

This has been carefully framed and prepared: what you can hear, what you can see, and the words I use to describe them. move the ladder one foot to the left. move the ladder six inches back to the right. I change my mind and write something else. This next bit you'll never hear.

[. . .]

[...]

Some flashing trace of us is reflected down the lens, and onto the sensor, and encoded into digital information, and laid down in strips of ferrous metals on a spindle going round,

and round,
and round
and round.

(Schmidt 2011: 7–9, extract)¹⁴

The text integrates a conversation with one of the artists: 'It is Wednesday. I am sitting at a table opposite Graeme Miller. There has been a pause' (2011); a journey alongside the itinerant performance work: 'Friday morning [...] Before it began, it's already over. There is tape hanging from the branches above the gate' (ibid.); and moments of shifting attention in between: 'It's Thursday night. [...] I am imagining myself in a precarious scenario' (ibid.). Schmidt's formal strategy is to speak of these events by means of multiple temporalities: 'this is happening in real time. But when is this' (ibid.). This is best expressed at the outset of the critical response, where the writing infiltrates the

¹⁴ For the full text, please see the following link:
[https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/37318263/Schmidt This is happening in real time.pdf](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/37318263/Schmidt%20This%20is%20happening%20in%20real%20time.pdf)

lived experience of the reader, and is woven back into that of the performance: 'These words reach backward, trying to capture what has happened over the course of a *today* that is slipping away.' It adds: 'And these words reach forward, moving delicately through time, to the page you feel in your hands' (ibid.). This sense of movement continues: we never read Schmidt explicitly speaking about walking, but the text captures a collective movement: we are in the city; we see several buses – the 53 and the 12; old growth on paving stones; the repeated process of the camera capturing the magnetic tape. These observations constitute an event of meaning that weaves in and out of the encounter with the performance, but also dissolves it into its urban landscape.

The positioning of the page on the text also constitutes a series of movements through space: there are pauses; shifting text that appears to move along the page; gaps where there should be none. In this way, an affective density marks the writing, and despite the presence of the gaze of the writer ('I see', 'I hear'), a collective soundscape of the city emerges, one that is 'full of potential' (ibid.), where the camera's spinning wheel, the 'swaying trees', 'the boy running for the bus', are all co-present, 'reflected down the lens' (ibid.), melting into space. Something shifts, I propose, in Schmidt's text: not only objects and bodies, but also a resistant, reactive time, one filled with the possibility of what has not yet happened, and activating as a result 'the hope in the step', 'the length of this time' (ibid.). This exposes a constant movement and making and unmaking of time, one that makes visible the centrality of these peripherals of meaning, from an alarm signal or a squeak of the gate, to an act of recovery (the performance) and one of communication (the critical response). This is a political shifting of attention, a tuning into the present moment, also evident in the text's capturing of actions of the

performance, presented as gestures: 'look at the sun', 'look at the frame', 'cup the hands against the sun', 'wait for pedestrians' (ibid.). In this way, Schmidt creates a choreography of bodies, time and the city, one that reverberates around the magnetic tape as an object both of the past – as in the performance – and of the future, as in Schmidt's looping of meaning : 'and round, and round, and round' (ibid.).

In Schmidt's text, the performance acts as a frame through which to inhabit moments of interaction with the urban landscape; this is expressed, for example, in the presentation of gestures of the performers, shifting these from parts of the process of recording with a camera, to a choreography of movement: 'look through', 'pick up', 'adjust' (ibid.). This is a shifting of discourse from the artistic to the political, which Schmidt creates through a series of interruptive questions that echo through the descriptions: 'What kind of place is this?'; 'What kind of dance happens here?'; 'What is there to see if you only stop to look?' (ibid.). In these occasional questions, Schmidt moves focus away from the act of capturing presentness onto something nearly obsolete – the magnetic tape – to asking what kinds of capturing and moving through time criticism itself makes visible, and what alternative attentions might we grant to peripheries of the contemporary city. 'What if we don't find anything?', Schmidt asks in anticipation. 'Then there will be a blank screen, a silent room, and imaginary tape' (ibid.). This displacement of the tape is also one of the critical text: thoughts waiting to arrive, anticipated but shape-shifting; silence, despite the noise of the city.

In the text, multiple timelines coexist; they are wrapped into the timeline of the magnetic tape, treated by the performance as a historical artefact; and they are also sustained by the readerly encounter, the framing of our participation, one that discloses

the thinking work and invites us in. 'In my private time,' Schmidt writes, 'it is taking me some time to put these words down and I am taking exactly *this* much of your time. Thank you. *Let me rewind the tape*' (ibid.). In this movement staged here, the critical response is correlated with the magnetic tape: an attempt at capturing its own authorial gestures, an imprint in time. Schmidt's text unfolds at the interstice between past-ness and presence: a tuning into the work, and a tuning out: 'In the time that doesn't exist anymore,' he says, 'I am laying out these words before me [...] You are waiting to get to the end of these words' (ibid.). Schmidt's formal approach is to parallel a tape's double-sidedness with a critical writing intervention in time: a thinking about presence as much as an attempt to reveal its loss; the sense experience of time, wrapped into the politics of magnetic tape and the chance work of its finding. In addition to repetitious uses of 'I hear' and 'I see', the text is also marked by moments of exposure: 'this has been carefully framed and prepared,' Schmidt writes; 'what you can hear, what you can see, and the words I use to describe them' (ibid.). However, this is not a disclosure of subjective criticality, but a deliberate play on chance and writing: a disclosure that seems untruthful precisely because the author disappears in the patchwork of descriptions, where the actions of the performers and that of the city are woven into each other. It is impossible to extricate the performance from the city. In this, a productive collapse occurs: of different temporalities; of witnessing and participation; of the politics of urban space and a realm of the sensible, to invoke Rancière. It is a text I finish on, precisely because it takes us back to the beginning: to the event of criticism. In Schmidt's work, I locate a movement with the reader, with the city, and with time: one that reflects on interpretation and its unreliability; and one that deploys its slipperiness as a political strategy: a dissensus.

Like the practices I have examined here, Schmidt's text exposes this commitment to plurality by means of staging concurrent temporalities of meaning, but also by playing with authorial agency. This is a resistant position: the repetition of chance as 'something we wait for' is deployed in relation to authorial debates: 'this is what happens when you work with chance', or 'you are waiting to get to the end of these words' (ibid.). In this way, Schmidt's text works with slippage: that of time; that of meaning; that of performance; that of urban space. The repetition of the line 'this is what happens when you work with chance' exposes multiple subjectivities at play in the text, because it contrasts the careful actions of the artists with the intent of the writer, whilst collapsing these into each other. In the text, we move from 'the spinning wheel inside the camera' to the trace left by three bodies 'off a surface onto another surface and into the shot', to 'that blink on the bus mirror as it goes by' (ibid.). The encoding of time is also an unmaking of time, where bodies and space melt into each other. In these moments of the text, Schmidt stages loops of thinking into the fabric of the city: 'the scaffolding staying level and the world sinking downward away from it as the scaffold grows longer' (ibid.). Instead of a critical sharpness, Schmidt's writing here melts subjectivity and fiction, conversation and urbanisation, as a means of granting time a materiality, but also in the midst of an act that is inherently preserving a material of preservation. This is a making visible, a redistribution of the sense experience of the urban as a site of simultaneous technological preservation and loss: Schmidt reconceives of a work that seeks to mark time folding onto material as an occupation of the city that intervenes in its rhythms, but is also invisible to them. This double take reminds us of what Kunst calls 'enabling life by doing less' (Kunst 2015: 193); a being with words, with movements of the gaze, with movements of time, with the actions of two artists using found material to document the sonic landscape of that moment; Schmidt departs from

this by deploying this conceptual dimension of the work into the writing. These actions reverberate beyond the specificity of the work – turning, loosening, adjusting, moving, looking, placing. This exposes the labour that serves such a minute moment; one, however, that folds into the temporalities it invokes. These are layers in Schmidt’s text through which he unpacks chance and agency, contrasting with the sense of purpose the text discloses: ‘I change my mind and write something else,’ Schmidt says. ‘This next bit you’ll never hear’ (ibid.). This is, I propose, an affective density that is also marked by a form of discursive visibility: a shifting of meaning and thought, a finding of affect in interpretation, and a travelling through a work, more so than with it. In this way, the critical response configures an alternative space to that of the work; it makes both the operations of the performance and those of the writing seen, and, in bringing these together, makes visible a dissensus: a bringing of two worlds into one.

Schmidt’s text is an occupation of time, thinking from performance: ‘I am taking exactly *this* much of your time’ (ibid.). In this invitation, the reader becomes participant in navigating the multiple meanings that stem from the performance; the dissensus in Schmidt’s text is a refusal to resolve these. In part, we are confronted with magnetic tape as a historical and contemporary document, one correlated with critical writing; on the other, we are lost in the rhythms of the city, in the promise made by the text to us: ‘*your now*,’ Schmidt argues (ibid.). This implication into the event of meaning in the critical text is a politicisation because it occupies multiple terrains: of time, of place, and of form. Interpretation in Schmidt’s text becomes a technology, just like magnetic tape occupies peripheries of the city, unnoticed unless sought for; performance criticism is posited here as a movement through time, one that shifts the activities of the bodies it encounters and those of the bodies it invites in. It stages a temporary community,

sharing a concern for what constitutes time and its capturing; what thinking is layered onto technologies of recording, be they aural or written. In Schmidt's critical response, I also see a meditation on history: on how it is captured, and who authors it. In writing about a performance that searches for obsolete technologies of recording, Schmidt also writes about the unreliability and porosity of documents, and the multiple frames of experience that shape them: the presence of two worlds that collide, and the making visible of a stage for discussion. In the critical response, by means of interrogations of time, and with time, Schmidt brings a political aesthetics to the fore, whilst exposing how performance might work to *make* time, in the same way as criticism intervenes in its perception.

At the start of this chapter, I asked what distinguishes performance criticism's forms of resistance from other terrains at risk of pressure from neoliberal coercion. I have answered this by looking at a range of examples that foreground dissensus by means of making difference visible; we saw this in the politically oriented writing of *The White Pube*, the foregrounding of the activity of listening as social and collective practice reflected as personal and artistic work, in the deliberative spaces of *Dialogue's* festival and in the materialising of time through language, and by means of the urban landscape, in Schmidt's text. In this nexus, I argue that performance criticism's porosity also constitutes its politicisation: an opening up of alternative forms of discursive visibility. In this manner, what marks the event of criticism – subjective criticality, collectivity, affective density – serves to open up, to shift vocabularies of art onto political terrains, without marking a clear distinction between the two.

Conclusion:

I opened this thesis by speaking of trouble-makers, whom I identified as critics, writers, artists, thinkers and cultural workers who straddle different professional domains and whose engagement with performance criticism constitutes a search for new ways of thinking the political moment.. Performance criticism asks fundamental questions about, and offers some answers to: what is visible as criticism; what are alternative, plural ways of thinking from performance and new forms of authorial release; what modes of resistance might be possible in thinking collectively; what might be revealed in the exposing of criticism's processes of interpretation and meaning-making; what forms of solidarity might be found in new ways of working; and what choreographies of attention might make being present to performance, and to the current political moment possible.

The practices I examine here, occurring in digital and physical spaces, by means of publishing initiatives, live critical writing and nonconforming texts, through collective authorship and orality, formed as projects or embedded in festivals, expose an experimental and often radical mode of criticism under neoliberalism. They are porous, in that they occupy a multiplicity of spaces, straddling the artistic and political, in 'free-fall' across established and peripheral sites for criticism. They participate in the constitution of counterpublics, in their authorial release, their collaborative identities and ways of negotiating difference. They are marked by affective density, in that they complicate the encounter between multiple subjectivities, performance and the political fabric. They are distinct by means of their investment in subjective criticality, made manifest in their process-oriented formal explorations. They create an autonomous

event of meaning from that of performance, one in which thinking and interpretation, and their partiality, instability and unfinished nature are exposed. Finally, they constitute a political event in dissenting from established models of criticism, and searching for new ways of being present to performance and political life.

Neoliberalism, examined here as a form of governance and political rationality with global reach and specific local impact in the UK, shapes the emergence of performance criticism and its commitment to, and exploration of, radical democratic deliberation. The early noughties in the UK are marked by political, economic, cultural and intellectual conditions that include austerity, major shifts in cultural policy, marketisation of cultural work, instrumentalisation of the subject, and an increasing economisation of noneconomic realms that have fundamentally altered the relationship between criticism, performance, value and modes of radical thinking about performance. Marked by a cultural conflict of legitimacy in the early noughties, the institution of theatre criticism seeks to re-consolidate power as a result of mounting economic and cultural pressures, often by speaking on behalf of publics, and occluding alternative practices when these are seen to undermine its authority. Performance criticism thus emerges at a time of shifting power structures within the institution of criticism, and as a reaction to the dominance of the review as a form of cultural evaluation whose authority is rooted in the ties between criticism and politics in the eighteenth century.

In Chapter One I examined the intellectual conditions of the early noughties in the UK that gave rise to performance criticism. I argued that the figure of the critic in established forms of criticism in the UK rejects subjectivity and its political project. I

further argued that performance criticism draws from experiments of performance writing as well as the seminal work of *Performance Magazine* and its politicisation of form. In Chapter Two, I further examined the emergence of performance criticism in the field of Live Art in the early noughties, focusing on the *Writing from Live Art* project. This set a precedent for exploring the event of criticism and its relationship to subjectivity, and marked a conceptualisation of criticism outside of journalism, and a form of thinking with and from performance. I examined this by thinking about Mary Paterson's critical response to the twenty minute silence in the performance of Kings of England's *An Elegy For Paul Dirac* (Paterson, 2011) for *Spill:Stings*. I took up the question of what constitutes the 'event' of criticism in Chapter Three. After having identified what I understand as the 'event', I turned to Hannah Arendt's thinking on appearance, and the work of Susan Sontag on interpretation. I argued that the event constitutes the ontological fabric of performance criticism and its examination of meaning-making, departing from the encounter with performance to the political fabric. In the event of criticism, I found multiple, sometimes conflicting processes of thought and interpretation and the emergence of what I am calling 'subjective criticality'. I explored this in the case study of a critical response by Eleanor Hadley Kershaw on an event within an event in Forced Entertainment's *Void Story* (Kershaw, 2009).

In Chapter Four, I took up the question of collective authorship and the relationship between performance criticism, neoliberalism and work. Turning to Wendy Brown's examination of neoliberalism and Bojana Kunst's study of the contemporary artist at work, I argued that *Quizoola LIVE!* (2014), a digital, multi-authored, critical live writing project, is an example of how collective performance criticism exposes the work of the interpreting subject as well as disturbs the structures that instrumentalise it. Looking at

how neoliberalism fosters a culture of competition despite shrinking resources, I argued how performance criticism's collectivity is both a form of solidarity and resistance, and a challenge to established traditions of authorship in criticism. In Chapter Five, I examined how performance criticism is marked by porousness, straddling multiple terrains of discourse, and rooted in the eighteenth century as a moment when deliberation and politics were at the heart of critical practice. I started this chapter with a text on Prince Harry as a guerrilla performance artist written under a pseudonym, and collated in *The Live Art Development Agency's Live Art Almanac* (Riding, 2010), as an example of the porousness of performance criticism, and the role of the fictional as a means of connecting subjectivity to the political fabric. Drawing on revisionist feminist historiography of the emergence of the public sphere in the eighteenth century, the work of Jürgen Habermas on the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere and Nancy Fraser's critique thereof, I argued that the cultural conflicts of the eighteenth century in the UK revealed scepticism towards subjectivity, which continues within contemporary mainstream theatre criticism. At the same time, I located the political roots of performance criticism in the alternative discursive cultures of the eighteenth century, where subjectivity was foregrounded. I concluded by looking at examples of performance criticism that seek to constitute productive counterpublics, including Pacitti Company's Think Tank events as part of Spill Festival of Performance (2013-current), *Dialogue's* festival *Talking/Making/Taking Part* (2014) and *The Live Art Almanac* (2010-current). In Chapter Six, I characterised performance criticism as being marked by porosity, a straddling of the artistic and the political, and drew on the work of Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière to look at examples of performance criticism that foreground difference, and reject consensus, including the work of *The White Pube* (2015-current). I examined how performance criticism constitutes its resistance not

only by dissenting from established forms, but also in its accountability to the present, thinking about a text by Theron Schmidt in response to Graeme Miller and John Smiths' *Beside the A-Side* (Schmidt, 2011). Performance criticism, I argued, sustains a space of democratic, agonistic thinking that does not seek to resolve meaning, and instead, constitutes an authorial mode of disruption, blurring the boundaries between the artistic and the political, enabling participation in collective thinking.

My methodology in bringing these forms of criticism together *as* performance criticism has been to position them in a wider critical ecology that includes – but is not limited to – established, mainstream practices. This is to show fundamental tensions that collectively shape this ecology, and are influenced by the coercive operations of neoliberalism. At the same time, I closely examined examples of performance criticism in order to flesh out the concerns of this emergent, contemporary practice, moving from form, to event, and to the question of politics. In addition to introducing performance criticism as a practice, my contribution brings into dialogue scholarship of criticism from adjacent disciplines such as visual art, literary criticism and visual cultures, revealed shared concerns at disciplinary cross-roads. I drew from political philosophy, contemporary political theory and performance scholarship to examine how the project of radical democracy might manifest itself in performance criticism. This approach is rooted in political philosophy and performance theory, which enabled me to look at criticism as undertaking its distinct process of thinking and doing. To this end, this thesis brings together a wide range of examples of criticism previously undocumented in scholarship on criticism. By means of its ontology as an emergent practice, these remain partial, and continue to develop to date, shaped by a rapidly changing political and cultural landscape in the UK. Whilst I have limited my study to the UK, this is not

solely a local practice, and the concerns with which the trouble-makers gathered here grapple are shared by an international community of thinkers, writers, artists, cultural workers and activists.

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