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Bites of Passage: Thresholds, Permeability and Hand-Fed Food for Thought

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This paper will discuss two performances created between 2013 and 2014 titled *Host* and *Host(s)* that explored how openness and trust are gained through the promise of hospitality. These performances saw strangers open the borders that separate the inside and outside of their bodies to allow hand-fed food to cross their accepting thresholds in return for personal narratives. Openness suggests potential passage into or through something, and here there is literal openness as the permeable body opens to receive the food on the spoon. The body as site becomes accessible once trust has been gained, and an emotional openness plays out as audience-participants both mentally and physically open up to their host.

The paper will explore social thresholds through the analysis of performance using Marie-Eve Morin and Jacques Derrida's writing on the conditionality and thresholds of hospitality. Morin comments that the threshold 'functions both as the place of closure and the place of openness' (Morin, 2015: 31), and, underpinned by Nick Kaye's positioning of site as a process rather than fixed location, these movements between being open and closed frame processes of becoming social with strangers. Doreen Massey's ideas on social 'throwntogetherness' are interwoven with this framing as intimate personal details are exchanged through the collision of trajectories in social space. Massey proposes that 'we understand space as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist' (Massey, 2005: 9). This framing of coexistent space converges with Marc Augé's positioning of place and non-place to propose an interrelationality that opens new dialogues and modes of participation.

Introduction

This paper focuses on two performances (*Host and Host(s)*) that contributed to my practice as research doctorate completed in 2018. The research produced outcomes that speak to what I refer to as a 'mechanics of becoming social', produced within

a site-specific art framework. Through the development of performance methods, which I hereafter refer to as mechanics, this project added new insights into the relationship between site-specific performance and social interrelationality. There were core research questions and conceptual concerns that motivated the production of the project. The first overarching question asked 'how can the concept of becoming social be framed as a site-specific process when realised through particular performance mechanics?' The research as a whole spoke to this question, but within this there were two sub-questions: 1. how, through positioning site as a process rather than fixed location, can the material of place, space and personal experience become imbricated to produce new insights into interrelationality?, and 2. what does this imbrication reveal about the potentials of intimacy and proximity in the context of site-specific performance and social space?

To answer the questions posed above, the larger project was composed of a series of elements, or, to appropriate the multi-voiced approach of artists Lee Miller and Bob Whalley, 'multiple sites of articulation' (2010: 222), which worked together as a whole. These sites of investigation encompassed reflective writings, performance works undertaken with the public, and performance lectures. The investigations were often developed in an iterative mode that overlapped, combined and enfolded material that had been produced before. This purposeful method of re-iteration keyed into a conceptual concern that positioned material documents as interlinked with what went before and what may come after. Rather than artworks being presented as standalone 'finished' pieces, they were presented as amorphous site-specific materials that were prone to slippage, which, I argued spoke to my broader positioning of site and social space as a process. This conceptual concern allows social space and site-specificity to be open to spilt matter from other agents, materials, subjects and objects which accepts and encourages moments from one 'event' in time and space to be present in another.

Audience-participation, Responsibility, Care and Ethics

The work discussed in this paper brought together artists and audience-participants to speak to ideas around hospitality, care, and responsibility, themes that threaded through the project as a whole and which are part of the main focus here. It 'uses'

the narratives and reflections gathered from audience-participants to explicate the material of becoming social and to give form to the matter of getting to know one another. The use of the term interrelational in this context of 'using' audience members raises initial concerns with the ethics of interrelationality and engaging with participants, something I will discuss here briefly.

In *Towards an Ethics of Intimate Audience*, a 2012 article published in the journal *Performing Ethos*, Helen Iball refers to *Theatre Personal: Audiences with Intimacy*, a project launched in 2009 to research contemporary audience participation in the United Kingdom. Iball observes how the project has a 'determination to work *with* – rather than solely writing *about* – key practitioners' and how it employs 'case studies of audience-participant experiences, rather than just relying on the scholar's own experiences or those of arts journalists' (Iball, 2012: 42). The work discussed here focuses its attention on the experiences of being with my audience-participants, converging my reflective analysis with their remarks and responses in what I position as a 'with/about' approach. This is to say that whilst much of the focus of the reflective writing is *about* my audience-participants, I explore the agreements of working *with* them and what it is to 'be with' those people in a process of becoming social, before, during and after the event of the performances. This approach seeks to 'resist the binary of active/passive' positions of artist and audience member (Miller and Whalley, 2017), resulting in reflective accounts that combine their words and my analysis.

The documentation of *Host* involved the act of 'giving' the camera to an audience member to document the work. In the idea of 'giving', a gift is implied, and it is in this gifting that both generosity and trust are established between artist and audience-participant. This gesture risked having the documentation 'fail', leaving me with little visual evidence of my performance investigations. The gift of responsibility was a two-way contract between me and my audience-participants that relied on the tacit agreement that they would 'take care' of the recording for me. My trust in them demonstrated the importance of my participants in my work, and rather than them being passive to the work, they became active in the technological making of its documentation. This gesture also signalled to other audience members that there was an agreement of trust between artist and audience, one that could

destabilize the documentation of the work at any point. What I am leading to here is an ethical framework that invites trust, care, and creative dialogue between bodies and technologies in space.

The performances discussed in this paper are underpinned by theorists and practitioners across the arts and social sciences who can broadly be understood to work with ideas and practices of social space, dialogic practice and relationality which I hereafter refer to largely as interrelationality, the 'inter' being used to emphasise the connection between subjects in relational space. Ideas of place and memory figure prominently and here Doreen Massey lends a framework from a human geography perspective. Massey's writing in *For Space* (2005) calls for a way of thinking spatially that inspires the trajectory of the research-practice discussed here. It is through the examination of Massey's ideas of spatial togetherness and social interconnectedness that the performances I present are born. I will return to Massey below, but at this point I will pay attention to the mechanics of *Host and Host(s)*.

Host and its subsequent iteration *Host(s)* (**Figures 1** and **2**) were performed in 2013 and 2014 in Nottingham. Both performances involved the exchange of personal histories for food which I cooked on site and hand-fed to my audience-participants.

Figure 1: Fossey, S, *Host(s)*, 2014. Image credit: Julian Hughes.

Figure 2: Fossey, S, *Host(s),* 2014. Image credit: Julian Hughes.

The performances differ slightly in that *Host* was a one to one performance whereas *Host(s)* (pictured) saw several other performers work alongside me to do the hand-feeding. This paper explores both pieces, moving between them to reveal the aims and methodologies at the core of the research. I will begin the discussion here with *Host. Host* took place in a large empty shop in Nottingham in a space between a kitchen and toilet and was part a live art event titled *Little Wolf Parade.* The piece involved inviting participants to sit opposite me and share the food I had cooked for them in the adjacent kitchen. As participants entered the space I approached them and asked them if they would like to sit with me and share some moments together.

Once my participants were seated, I explained that my intention was to hand-feed them the food I had cooked, and in return maybe they might share something with me that they hadn't shared before. Once this agreement had been understood, I preceded to hand-feed them in between their admissions (or confessions). A scene

was set where acts of social exchange were played out on a more intimate level than is usual when sharing a meal. Proposing this action aimed to cause a rethinking of what it is to be hospitable. I welcomed strangers into the space I had created, but my welcome was conditional on the agreement to interrelate on an intimate level. The question of what to let out and what to let in arose as we recalled fond memories, times we felt young, places we fell in love, places we were from…

The sites of my participants' bodies became porous and would leak and be penetrated as they allowed their physical and emotional borders to be opened. The abject body was evoked as the social body's border was breeched. To compound this abjection I would share my own stories of abject embarrassment, like the time I had Spanish tummy in a Majorcan restaurant, only realising that the lock on the toilet door didn't work the moment someone entered the cubicle I was in. The exchange of narratives of this nature in a space between a toilet and a kitchen, alongside the act of hand-feeding, set up a situation that spoke to 'the impossibility of clear-cut borders, lines of demarcation, divisions between the clean and the unclean, the proper and the improper, order and disorder' (Grosz, 1990 in Counsell and Wolf, 2001: 144). My audience-participants and I engaged in a sharing of stories that embraced our coexistence and what it is to be bodies in open dialogue.

The Embrace of Stories So Far: Place, Space and Instability

In thinking about creating spaces for the sharing of narratives that might be considered personal and private, I would like to return to Doreen Massey. Massey proposes that,

> 'We understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity' (Massey, 2005: 9).

Massey's 'sphere of coexisting heterogeneity', evokes a way of thinking spatially where the potential to connect the disparate narratives that exist within our distinct trajectories opens up. Her proposition that '[p]erhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (ibid), foregrounds this paper's practical imagining, with the notion of 'simultaneity' supporting the exploration of becoming social and

my proposition that social space is 'always under construction' and 'always in the process of being made' (ibid).

Becoming suggests a non-linearity that, when applied to notions of site, creates a tension for specificity and stable definitions of place. *Host and Host(s)* embraced this tension by exploring the potential of locational fluidity to suggest that the meanings of social interactions, the authorship of thoughts and comments, and the stability of our histories can be scrutinised through site-specific participatory art. This scrutiny's agenda has modes of interrelationality at its heart, where slippage and indeterminacy are realised in practice.

The indeterminacy of place and a slippage of stable site-specificity can be seen in Massey's comment that,

> 'Places are collections of (those) stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space. Their character will be a product of these intersections within that wider setting, and of what is made of them. And, too, of the non-meetings up, the disconnections and the relations not established, the exclusions. All this contributes to the specificity of place' (Massey, 2005: 130).

The 'articulations within the wider power-geometries' that Massey refers to should be read in the context of this paper as the forces that govern and shape our shared social space, and the statement that '[t]heir character will be a product of these intersections' implies a creative potential that gives the performances discussed here their impetus; I actively seek to expose and animate this character. Massey provokes a social potentiality of place where one can navigate the 'wider power-geometries' and produce an interrelationality that celebrates the richness of these 'stories'. In thinking about site, space and place in relation to Massey's 'intersections', 'contemporaneous pluralities' and 'wider power-geometries', the term site itself, as a multiplicitous concept, needs attention.

The Slipperiness of Site

The term site-specific has become problematic in terms of its qualification, the definitions of which are both interchangeable and often contested. Furthermore, it is the contestation of the term site which I purposefully embrace. What I am leading to here is the embrace of a site-specific framework where site is not fixed geographically,

therefore place and the subjects creating space in and through place defies a locational and geographic fixity. The 'stories so far' that Massey positions as the simultaneities of space collide and overlap, creating interweaving narratives that my research teases out and uses as performance material. The very instability of site's classification calls geographical location into question, with producers of social space in a site becoming hard to delineate with regards to their interrelationality to one another, and how these relationalities are identifiable with place. It is these ruptures and (dis)organising principles that I foreground as opening potentials for social space.

In *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (2000) Performance scholar Nick Kaye foregrounds two definitions of the term site: *substantive* and *transitive* (Onions, 1973, cited in Kaye, 2000: 1). The substantive definition of site defines site as having an 'original or fixed position', with the transitive definition positing site as that which is 'situated' or 'placed' (ibid). Site is understood in the context of this paper as existing in wider spatial terms as that which is fluid and connected to a multiplicity of people, events and specificities. Space and place also become unstable as events and situations *take place* in site, quickly becoming *displaced* through moments of recognition and misrecognition. What occurs is a porous conceptualisation of site that embraces ruptures, connections and imbrications. In this conceptualisation, bodies, places, memories and dialogues collide in moments of becoming social. Alongside Kaye's writings on site, anthropologist Marc Augé's definition of place provides an important framework here.

Augé defines place as that which is 'anthropological': 'places of identity, of relations and of history' (1995: 52) that have their historical signifiers on show and where social life is possible. Place as a stable concept is contested in Augé's '*Non-Place: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity'* (1995) where he describes how the excessive space of Supermodernity has led to the inhabitation of non-place, a term which can be understood differently to place as that which is resultant of an overload of information and meaning. Places like 'high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports' become non-places through lacking the characteristics of 'a culture localized in time and space' (Augé, 1995: 34).

Augé argues that in our constant and excessive need to give meaning to the 'whole of the present' (1995: 34) we are losing our sense of place, but I argue that there is

potential for a greater social interrelationality and sense of place if place is seen as multiplicitous space that embraces excesses of connectivity. Place, as perceived in this way, can be opened up to a spatial re-imagining where histories and futures spill into one another and social trajectories collide, a notion that resonates with my positioning of Massey. Here social space can be perceived as that produced through a process of being – both then and now – with others we know and others we don't, people we have been with and people we might *imagine* being with. Thinking of our relationships with others in this way unites us not only in the place we are in, but also the place we remember, or the place we imagine, or indeed the place *of* our imagination, where the tacit agreements of intimacy, proximity and social interaction can be rethought. There is potential for a poetics of social space in imagining space, place and site in this way, and it is this poetic potential that I develop through performance.

Colliding Autobiographies and the Embrace of Spatial Excess

The poetics of rethinking social interaction in the way I propose here is echoed in Massey's description of Raymond Williams' observations of travelling across the landscape. Massey (2013) describes how Williams observes looking out of a train window and seeing a woman clearing out her grate, and how that image of the woman performing this action is forever etched into his mind. In his imagination, that moment with that woman repeats itself as though it were stuck fast in time and space. Rather than simply moving across a flat plane, the interconnectivity of space as illustrated here can be thought of as a movement through a myriad of stories.

The ability to imagine social space as a site-specific network of intersecting locations with people moving in and through one another allows the possibility to imagine our sociality differently through interconnected senses of being together. Massey comment's that 'if time is the dimension in which things happen – it's the dimension of succession, one (thing) after the other, then space is the dimension of things, being, existing, at the same time; of simultaneity – it's the dimension of multiplicity' (Massey, 2013). To conceive of simultaneity and the multiplicity of being is to encounter spatial excess, but as I propose above, rather than embrace Augé's 'disappointment', there exists the potential to celebrate this excess of meaning and possibility to the advancement of social interrelationality. What happens when we talk openly in public places with strangers, moving back through our autobiographical

histories to reimagine our presents and speculate on our futures? The work discussed in this paper takes this spatial thinking and plays creatively with it in performance, as the physical and psychological borders of our bodies open up to others.

When making work involving the exchange of autobiographical histories there is a responsibility that the performer has to her participants. It is not my desire to make those I interact with uncomfortable, on the contrary, it is my discomfort that I endeavour to use as a mode of creating an ease in my participants. I am arguing here for a shared ethics between social selves, constructed through the private exchanges I have been describing. To consider this further I would turn to theatre scholar Deidre Heddon's proposal for ethical alternatives to the dominant models that imply the notion of a fixed social self. Heddon writes how,

> 'Autobiography has traditionally been understood as an unearthing or revealing of the deep (typically hidden) self. Ethical appeals to tell the truth, or say it correct, are similar appeals to a knowable fixed subject. (…) such a self – an individual, autonomous subject – is itself a discursive construct' (Heddon, 2008: 151).

The idea of a discursive construct implies the formation of social selves that are in a process of becoming, and whose ethics are negotiated *in* this process of becoming. With ethics in mind, it is my responsibility to manage this dialogue and sense when our shared confessions begin to compromise those that agree to participate. This is achieved by expert management of the performance situation and careful hosting and hospitality skills.

Thresholds, Openness and Hospitality

Hospitality is itself a problematic term which my work seeks to explore. There are conditions to hospitality and there were conditions to *Host* and *Host(s)*. The conditions of these works dictated that there would be openness between me and my audience-participants. I embraced this openness on several levels to explore the potentials of social interrelationality, and, to evoke Massey again, it is the openness to the process of becoming social that the works discussed here explored. *Host* saw the provision of hospitality, but with the implicit agreement that my participants

would listen whilst I confessed my stories of social horror and bodily failure. I would punctuate the conversations with my participants by engaging with people going in and out of the toilet. This was a deliberate method of interaction that established a level of mutual embarrassment just sufficient enough to put us at ease with one another. As food entered our bodies in one space, it left other bodies in the space adjacent. We were all too aware of this.

Openness suggests potential passage into or through a thing. In *Host* and *Host(s)* there is literal openness as the body opens to receive the food on the spoon – the lips being the threshold which, once crossed, signifies entry into another place: the inside. It is the border that allows the body as site to become accessible once consent has been given. There is also the emotional openness as my participants agree to share their intimate histories with me; they both mentally and physically open up. Indeed, one of my participants described themselves as a "very open person" – "open up then" was my response as I placed the food in their mouth and crossed the threshold that separated their outside from in.

To expand further this framing of the threshold I am mindful of philosopher Marie-Eve Morin's analysis of Jacques Derrida's discussions on hospitality and the home. Morin comments that the threshold,

> 'functions both as the place of closure and the place of openness. It defines the rules of belonging and not-belonging, it separates the inside from the outside, but at the same time it delineates the criterion that will allow for the passage' (Morin, 2015: 31).

The tension that separates openness and closure, inside and outside, resonates with Derrida's observations of hospitality's binary tensions. As my audience-participants entered into the performance space, there was the immediate acknowledgement of the power and control a performer has over the space and what will take place therein. When the rules of engagement aren't explicitly clear, the performer has to clarify, and this leading role establishes its own hierarchy. As I have discussed, *Host and Host(s)* sought to create situations where trust could be established between strangers, where borders could be breeched in order to create openness. However, the tension

between hospitality's conditionality and unconditionality haunted these situations. My audience-participants were fully aware of the fact that they were entering into a performance situation, and of course could have refused to sit down with me and be hand-fed, but, in every instance, they participated. Their willingness to participate activated in me a desire to care and be hospitable, but again, this desire existed in a space between the conditional and unconditional, or indeed the hospitable and inhospitable. This tension speaks to what Derrida refers to as aporia (2000).

Host and Host(s) demanded particular actions take place for the performance to 'succeed', and this in itself is problematic for notions of hospitality. Hand-feeding was crucial to the success of the piece, as was the exchange of autobiographical narratives. Without these, the performances wouldn't have 'worked'. My role as performer, even as one who strives to create a shared ethical mutuality, establishes a power relationship that creates an inescapable conditionality. It wasn't as simple as asking strangers to enter my space, there had to be participation of the kind necessary to make the work successful. This tension is echoed in Gerasimos Kakoliris's observations of John Caputo's writing on Derrida in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*,

> 'When the host says to the guest, "Make yourself at home," this is a self-limiting invitation. "Make yourself at home" means: please feel at home, act as if you were at home, but, remember, that is not true, this is not your home but mine, and you are expected to respect my property' (Caputo, 1997, as cited in Kakoliris, 2015: 48).

Morin speaks of the possibility of belonging, and it was through the exploration of physical and psychological thresholds that I sought to create a sense of belonging in the situations of hospitality that *Host* and *Host(s)* established. However, Caputo's observation above speaks to the problematics of this claim. I did indeed want my audience-participants to feel at home in my company and enjoy the food, but the food I shared was 'mine' and 'my' audience-participants were invited to be there in 'my space' until the performance ended, and not a minute after!

Although aware of these tensions of aporia, my aim *was* to create situations that were generous and caring. In further consideration of these ethics, I will point briefly to a wider ethics akin to those which Morin explores in relation to Derrida's writing on ethics, Bruno Latour's discussion of the 'spatial' turn in contemporary thinking, and Massey's scepticism of Latour's formulation. Massey displays 'reservations' (2005: 147) about Latour's reflections on coexistence and his formulation that 'we are slowly moving from an obsession with time to an obsession with space', which in her view has a 'flavour of linear temporality' (ibid). It is Massey's call for 'a politics of the negotiation of relations, configurations' and 'practices of relationality' (ibid) that underpins how my performances speak to an ethics of coexistence and becoming. In critiquing Latour's ideas of coexistence, Massey places emphasis on 'conformation' and the 'inevitability of conflict'. This view, posits Massey,

> 'Does not eliminate an impetus to forward movement, but it does enrich it with a recognition that that movement be itself produced *through* attention to configurations; it is out of them that new heterogeneities, and new configurations, will be conjured' (2005: 147).

In returning to the conditionality of hospitable and how to move forward through the problematics I describe above, I wonder about the inevitability of conflict and question how one reconciles these elements in a conformation of social space. *Host* and *Host(s)* ask this question and exploit the inevitability of conflict through the employment of mechanics of awkwardness. If we understand *Host* and *Host(s)* to do what their names suggests, then those who I host become my guests, but guests with whom I will challenge with hosting mechanics which subvert the expectations of a host.

The invitation to share space is to propose cohabitation of sorts. When I ask you to sit with me and tell me something you haven't told anyone else while you trust me to hand-feed you, I enter into cohabitation with you in the agreement that this space has conditions that are particular to you and I, and the (co)formation of social space relies on our particular occupancy. I have to find strategies to gain trust, ways to embrace the inevitability of conflict, ways to recognise that our movement forward

is created by performance mechanics that pay attention to our configurations. In further analysis of these mechanics I will situate a question posed in a critique of *Host(s)* written by art writer Wayne Burrows.

Burrows writes,

'On one level, *Host(s)* is an uncomplicated staging of social generosity, in which guests are fed and attentively listened to, but this structure also echoes focus groups and corporate strategies, inviting us to trade our privacy and independence for an illusion of caring and belonging from our service providers. Does *Host* itself have a concealed agenda?' (Burrows, 2014).

The 'illusion' that Burrows refers to speaks to the performativity of the situation and the acknowledgment that this is a performance and our conversations are part of a performance event. Whilst we are indeed sharing autobiographies, our narratives are exchanged in the knowledge that we are performing, and that our performing selves fluctuate between modes of being social that blurs the line between who is a participant and who is a performer. Indeed, as Burrows points out, 'it's hard to tell exactly who is a 'host' and who a 'guest'.

The 'trade' that Burrows refers to is indeed an exchange between me as the performer or 'service provider' and my participants or 'guests', but this trade cannot be definitively qualified as an illusion, as I *do* indeed care about the participants and I do want to make them feel like they belong. It is my responsibility to activate this belonging and to do so I attempt to find common ground with my participants, asking how, as Massey writes in discussion of Henri Bergson 'throwing oneself into the past' (Massey, 2005: 194) might produce a shared present, a proposition I mobilise by retracing the steps of our personal geographies in conversation.

This responsibility involves carefully managing my connectivity with others and handling their offerings sensitively. Indeed, as Massey writes, 'responsibility, like hospitality, in some accounts can be read in terms of a one-way-ness (a kind of hierarchical geography of responsibilities) which itself arrogates unto the responsible figure the superiority of a position of power' (2005: 194). The trust and responsibility discussed here is troubled when we consider that my performances purposefully play

between reality and fantasy, and with this interplay inauthenticity occurs that makes it hard for the participant to know what parts of our connection are real and which parts I am exploiting for the sake of a more interesting artwork. How can they trust me? The question of whether these intimate moments and exchanges represent meaningful transactions or deceits played out in performance is difficult to answer, but, as Burrrows points out,

> 'Much rests (…) on the gesture of hand-feeding, which is both literally and symbolically placing us in a position where we allow ourselves to be spoon-fed by strangers with unknown motives. As with the simultaneously real *and* synthetic connections of social media, exactly how we process the experience of *Host(s)* – and whether we fully or partly trust, or refuse, its seductions – is left entirely in our own hands' (Burrows, 2014).

At this point I will focus on some of the specific moments of exchange encountered in *Host*, beginning with my interaction with an audience-participant I will call X. Tension and awkwardness were the feelings that ensued initially as I asked X her name two or three times in the deceit that I had forgotten it the first time. My purposeful disorganisation and uncertainty was compounded further as I fumbled with the microphone and food container I was holding, thinking out loud and asking myself how best to make things 'work'. Through my display of ineptitude she did what I expected her to do and came to my aid by offering to support me in my efforts to perform properly. She felt compelled to act as a member of what sociologist Erving Goffman would describe as the 'team', attempting to co-operate in the 'understanding' of the situation and aid its proper function (Goffman, 1959: 85). X quickly tried to rescue the situation from failing by helping to take care of things.

Once I had re-established our roles, refusing her help and clarifying my immediate intentions, I asked her if I could hand-feed her. She remarked that she "hadn't been fed by hand since she was a baby" and that she "liked it". My next attempt at haptic interaction was refused as she denied my request to move her hair from her face which was obstructing safe passage to her mouth. Rather than let me touch her hair, she moved it herself, clearly demonstrating that this would be overstepping the mark

in terms of physical acceptability. This refusal was turned into a humorous moment to avoid unnecessary awkwardness, but did demonstrate how the parameters of intimacy between strangers extend to hand-feeding but not touching each other's hair. The etiquettes of the situation began to be established as X and I set out what Goffman might describe as our promissory characteristics, tacitly agreeing what we were to offer one another. Permission was granted for certain haptic transactions but not others.

We encounter haptic interaction of varying degrees in social contexts all time, from visiting the hair salon to shaking the hand of people we are introduced to for the first time, but, and at risk of stating the obvious, these contexts strictly dictate their rules and we struggle to erase this tacit propriety when participating in performance. It is my intention to create performance situations where 'real' exchanges and those of inauthentic performance collide. I am aware however, that in a research context, notions of authenticity and inauthenticity are moot points. Artist Adrian Howells', in discussion of his 2005 performance *Salon Adrienne*, points to the problems of asserting authentic experience. Howells comments how he 'prioritizes interpersonal connectedness' and the 'authentic experience between two people' but how the 'question of "authenticity" in the field of performance is always vexed' (Howells, 2011: 2). The rules of touching are clear though in Howells' piece, as the site is a hair salon and here touching is common place. Touching over dinner is less well-understood it seems.

The initial agreements of *Host* centred on food and conversation and the parameters of these agreements were governed by their staging: there were two people seated close together next to a kitchen with the performer signifying the offering of food by feigning the role of the waiter-cum-host. Even though this was a performance situation and therefore imbued with the theatrical deceit of any other, the loose dinner party mise en scène governed the initial social actions. In performance, the act of touching, or haptic interaction as I have referred to it above, remains governed by its social context as understood in everyday life, even though, arguably, social contexts become void when a performance, with its own unique set of contextual agreements, begins. The refusal to allow the intimacy of

touching a stranger's hair was perhaps in part due to this individual's desire to maintain a physical distance, but was, I suspect, also due to the performance staging.

In *Salon Adrienne* Howells washes his participants' hair whilst engaging in conversation with them. *Salon Adrienne* can be described as an autobiographical performance in much the same way as *Host and Host(s)* in that life stories are exchanged. However, the rules of touching are clear, as Howells' site is a space where touching is common place, belonging to our family of 'familiar, frequently domesticated spaces' where a sense of 'safety, familiarity and security' can be experienced (Howells, 2011: 3). Although Howells' site provides this safe frame within which to operate, his expertise as a performer is what allows the content to be produced successfully.

A site that works in the performer's favour is only half the battle when making participatory work that requires dialogue; there has to be expertise in drawing conversation from one's participants. During *Host* I hit walls of silence and awkwardness. These could, as I will go on to wonder in the conclusion below, perhaps be seen as the most authentic moments of the piece, where my interlocutor and I had actually stopped performing momentarily and started being real? This is something I can neither prove nor support, but what I can do is point to it as a moment of unconditionality that breaks from the tension of aporia. With performances like *Host* where the interaction is one to one, albeit with intermittent interjections from others, each conversation has to be felt out in situ with the individual. A series of observations take place where I use, as philosopher Susan Melrose might describe it, 'expert intuition' (Melrose, 2017) to maintain the performance's potential, even when this means deliberately encouraging failure through props and techniques I know will not work, so in turn will 'work'.

There were moments during *Host* where conversation was laboured which created a different kind of awkwardness to that purposefully encouraged through playful interaction. It was when the silence I mentioned earlier occurred that efforts had to be made to move the interaction to a more comfortable place. This need to fill the void with conversation troubled me as I performed *Host*. I had been interested in the exploration of the imagination as a place that becomes imbricated with one's

physical location, but gaps occurred where there were opportunities to be silent and perhaps reflect on the questions we asked and narratives we shared. During these moments I reverted back to the safety of humorous conversation to avoid a too greater sense of awkwardness. This reversion can be seen as masking unintended tensions with words. Indeed, Heddon observes the shift in Howells' performances where he himself 'radically' dropped 'the mask provided by "talking"', commenting that 'in shared silence, he found a different mode of risk-taking, communication and transformation' (Heddon, et al. 2011: 2). Humour became our mask and in reflection I wonder about the potentials of silent hand- feeding and where this interrelationality may have taken us.

Conclusion

This paper began by establishing a site-specific framework in which to understand the performances discussed. This framework positioned site as porous and susceptible to spills and ruptures from people, places, times and spaces that collide in moments of 'throwntogetherness'. Site has been positioned as being somewhat at odds with its stable specificity. Fixed and proper understandings become unfixed and improper, and borders and thresholds become hard to delineate. The sites of our bodies are destabilised as they open up and connect with the objects and foodstuffs held by other bodies. As they let in foreign matter, they let out intimate histories in an exchange of food for thought. The locations of the performances play host to dialogues that revisit places and times from elsewhere and else-when. Co-ordinates are hard to define and attempts to make intentions clear reveal our criteria for being with others in places whose social rules are uncertain. Attempts at unconditional hospitality are made, but there is no proof of success as the burden of performance and its inauthenticity looms large.

As I have discussed above, there were times during *Host* where I hit walls of silence and there was unintentional awkwardness. These could perhaps be seen as the most authentic moments of the piece, where my participants and I had found a 'real' place of connection, when there was nothing left to say and all there was was the action of silent feeding. I think about what it is to feel these moments and propose that another threshold is crossed that is unique to that moment of

exchange between performer and participant. This threshold might be truly social in that there is interrelationality without linguistic dialogue, momentary hospitality without condition. Awkward silences speak loudly and I wonder what these silences 'said' about our bodies in space with one another. When these silences occurred I made efforts to move the interactions to more 'comfortable places', but what if the comfortable place *is* the place of silence between strangers? I wonder about what my audience-participants were thinking during these moments. Not knowing allows us to visit the place of the imagination for possible answers to what it means to be social with others.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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