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The Scottish Journal of Performance is an open access refereed journal which aims to promote and stimulate discussion, development and dissemination of original research, focusing both on performance in Scotland (contemporary and historical) and / or wider aspects of performance presented by scholars and reflective practitioners based at Scottish academic institutions.

Published biannually and run by doctoral students, the Scottish Journal of Performance welcomes submissions from both established and early career researchers and operates a peer review system ensuring presentation of quality research in performance.

Performance in this context encompasses a wide range of arts and entertainment and takes as central themes dance, drama, film, music and television. The Scottish Journal of Performance takes as a key focus the creation and execution of performance in various contexts, encouraging the adoption of a wide range of range of research methods and approaches.

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Editorial

LAURA BISSELL, MONA BOZDOG, LAURA GONZÁLEZ & ABY WATSON

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WITH C-A-R-E

C for Context

This special issue of the Scottish Journal of Performance, Art of Care presents a diverse selection of papers that have materialised as a result of The Art of Care-full Practice symposium which took place on 5 March 2017 at the University of Glasgow. This event was a collaboration between The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, The Glasgow School of Art and the University of Glasgow and was part of the inaugural Take Me Somewhere festival of contemporary performance that took place in various locations in Glasgow. The initial context that led to the live event and an account of the actual day is discussed by Laura Bissell, Laura González, Deirdre Heddon, and Simon Murray in their afterword Acts of care. Perhaps reading that text first will help to understand why Art of Care is structured in a manner that emulates the symposium itself. We have composed the structure of the written pieces chronologically, unfolding in the same order as the symposium, with several works in the journal presented at the live event itself, and here expanded in written and visual form.

We begin the journal with contributions from a few speakers from the ‘Caring Thinking’ part of the symposium, perhaps the most overtly, symposium-like. We gathered practices born out of genuine and unconditional care (Stephen
Greer’s reflection on the work of the artist known as ‘the vacuum cleaner’), and practices which engage with people and with places. You will find, for example, discussions of some of the opportunities and challenges of caring for oneself when caring for others in the work of Rosana Cade; the transformative potential of care in performances located within a social-care organisation in Will Stringer’s writing; caring for the spaces in which we perform as discussed by Ben Harrison; as well as caring to nurture safe spaces for Inês Bento-Coelho’s collaborative practice, and the empowering effects of care for participants as outlined by Lois Weaver. Bento-Coelho was a volunteer and participant in the symposium; Weaver was unable to attend at the last moment, and though neither presented at The Art of Careful Practice, their indirect contributions to the day and their thinking about care and listening, then and afterwards, were examples of what we hoped to achieve by opening up dialogue around the issue of care in performance practice. We are particularly honoured that Weaver has written for the journal, offering us a chronology of the Long Table practice, the first of its kind and which marks the ‘mid-point’ of this special issue; her Care Café concept also inspired the communal lunch which participants shared on the day.

Another feature of the symposium reflected in the journal are the contributions from the ‘listeners’, Peter McMaster and Ben Harrison, whose role it was to practise care through the simple act of listening, and who shared their responses at the end of the symposium. Within his contribution for this issue, Harrison expands his notion of the hos(t)pital in the form of a play script about site-specific performance between the guest (artist) and the host (owner / manager) of the site. McMaster’s contribution to Art of Care presents the findings of his listening practice in a poetic and reflective performative report that directly retells the order of events through his own positioning, illustrating his responses—be it contemplations, feelings, or personal memories. His contribution is openly intimate with
the reader, allowing his own autobiography to surface.

As well as offering accounts of discourse presented at The Art of Care-full Practice, there are collaborations here that have arisen post-event. John Hammersley’s dialogical reflection with Rachel Davies and Daniel Saul, who presented Quarantine’s film Winter at the symposium, is a good example of the chance encounters and thoughtful, deep conversations that occurred in March 2017. We are especially grateful that this aspect of what we lived is not lost. Care and reciprocity: a conversation between Rhiannon Armstrong and Mel Evans, is the result of Armstrong and Evans meeting for the first time, and the conversations that followed regarding their care-full practices. Mel was also our third listener at the event. This work, with its creative articulation and its considerate quality, is something we aspire to when we think of artists caring for each other. Steven Fraser’s comic What I wish I had said is also a contribution developed in response to the symposium and reflects on his experience as a neurodiverse emerging artist within the neurotypical-normative symposium environment.

For our beginning (after Laura Bissell’s dedication to Adrian Howells, who is present in all of the texts as an absent mentor), we had to include Rosana Cade’s letter, which set the tone of the day and made all of us, through recognition of the words she read, nod in agreement. With her contribution, we knew we were not alone in experiencing the need for care. It was her that told us to breathe. Breathe. The perfect, life giving word. We hope you will breathe with us.

A for Aims

As you can see, the conversations initiated at the symposium did carry on in this journal, and we hope that you, our
reader, will continue this dialogue beyond these pages. We aim to make it as far reaching and inclusive as possible, covering the many forms and facets of practices that are care-full. Importantly, Art of Care opens the conversations which began in March 2017 to a wider audience. The decisions we made about the symposium event prioritised a small and intimate number of attendees, and while this was appropriate for the event we curated, we were keen to disseminate the thoughts that were shared beyond the event itself. By publishing Art of Care, we hope that the day itself is captured and documented, but also that the dialogue is kept open; we hope that the themes of care that were so central to the event can find a new form and new voices, readers, and listeners. While the 'liveness' of the day cannot fully be captured in the written form, we hope that Art of Care will provide access to the ideas shared in Glasgow during the inaugural Take Me Somewhere festival to audiences all over Scotland, and, with the primary platform for the journal being digital, readers beyond the UK and across the world. To take these ideas and conversations somewhere else was always the intention of the wider festival context. In publishing Art of Care we are attempting to transcend the time-limits of one day; transpose the ideas into another form; and translate the themes, conversations, listenings and shared moments of The Art of Care-full Practice into print and digital form to capture, curate and continue them. In this, we hope we are being true to the ethos of the Take Me Somewhere festival.

**R for Rationale**

Our rationale for creating Art of Care was closely aligned to our reasons and intentions for the symposium itself. We were keen to explore and disseminate some of the enquiries which permeated the late Adrian Howells’ work (as discussed in the dedication to Adrian) and to explicitly—and critically—examine what ideas of care mean within artistic contexts, processes and practices. Some of the contributions
to this journal are closely aligned with what was presented on the day. However, we hope Art of Care offers more than a document of the day itself, in addition developing and nurturing the seeds of conversations which were planted at the event.

And E for Ethos

In the preparation of Art of Care, as we did with the symposium itself in 2017, we have practised our intentions and attempted to edit a care-full special issue. We know that the field of academic publishing can be regarded as uncaring. For us as editors, the inclusion of artists’ voices was an essential part of the process; in these pages you will find the writing of authors who have not shown their work in a journal before, but for whom care is at the core of what they do. We cared for our ways of working in our discussions and in the communications with authors, reviewers, editors, proofreaders and typesetters. In this process, we realised how important tone is (in addition to, but distinct from, voice) and how one should pay attention to the ways in which communication affects others. Editing Art of Care has made us appreciate the work that a large number of artists, academics and researchers do for free. Well, not for free, for the love of the subject (which is more impressive), and for the care of others: you, who are reading this.

As editors, we have worked together with one another, our authors and reviewers, to bring together an issue which covers a topic which is as important as it is subtle. It is the subtlety and nuanced nature of care which makes it elusive. In this, we want to acknowledge the difficulty of the task presented to the authors: discussing care-full practice is challenging, but it is also as vital as care-full practice itself. Writing about care-full practice is an art; it requires skill, a flair for capturing the intangible and eliciting conversation, and not least, a great amount of care. We want to thank all the artists who have taken risks and contributed to their art
of care-full writing about care-full practice. Without them, you would not be reading this and continuing the critical discussion on care. The tone we perceived in our discussions, apart from nurturing, supportive and helpful, became grateful.

For tone to be effective, it has to be listened to attentively, and this is also something we put in practice when editing. We listened to reviewers (who were supportive and thorough, with beautifully written reports to our authors, giving feedback solely aimed at helping to publish good writing), and we also brought the listeners we had at the symposium into the journal, to continue their work. Listening is at the heart of any care-full practice.

This special issue, as the symposium did a year ago, has helped us realise that another way is possible within academia. To be care-full does not mean to avoid either treading on eggshells or critiquing what needs to be discussed, or to be risk averse. A care-full institution gives flexible space, which one would hope is safe for the person entering it, allowing for risks to be taken and supported, but where there are no threats (personal or to one’s work). Thus, a care-full way offers time to think and create, with consideration, honesty, integrity and listening. Steven Fraser’s comic titled What I wish I had said, is a perfect example of what we wanted to do within the pages of this special issue. Not feeling he could articulate what he wanted to at the symposium or through what might be considered an academic paper, he submitted a comic book to us, saying what he wanted to say at the symposium. The obvious was made manifest to us: why are there not more essays articulated through the medium of comics? It is accessible, humorous, contemporary, and captures an experience that many readers will feel is familiar and which is worth opening research doors to. We are aware that despite our aspirations to include diverse voices from varied
backgrounds, we are far from achieving this goal, which is precisely why we hope that Art of Care, like the symposium before it, will reach where we could not, and inspire more voices to join in the conversation. We are hopeful that this issue will start conversations about care and kindness in academic and creative practices, as well as in our daily practice of life. This is becoming increasingly important, particularly now, as we are facing the devastating and long-lasting consequences of social, geopolitical and ecological change; Art of Care is a call to care and kindness which, we feel, is as timely now as it will ever be.

Academia can feel exclusive, and there may be a perception that journals are read by people who keep speaking the same language, often in a vacuum, while they ignore other people outside it who might speak another dialect. This is not communication, it is a soliloquy; at best an echo chamber. We chose the Scottish Journal of Performance to continue our conversation on care because of their ethos, their open access, their inclusive range of writers and their willingness to engage in alternative modes of editing and publishing for this, their first special issue. They listened to us, and allowed us to give practice the weight we believe it deserves in a published research context. What you have in front of you is rigorous, considered, discussed, questioning and ethical. It is cared for, for you.
DEDICATION:

It’s all allowed: inspired by Adrian

LAURA BISSELL

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The work of Glasgow-based performance-maker Adrian Howells who worked and taught at both the University of Glasgow and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland was in our thoughts as we devised the frame for the collaborative symposium The Art of Care-full Practice. Adrian’s solo work focused on a communal live moment, a one-to-one exchange, a shared touch, a taste, and a moment of care from him to you in a framed performance setting. When Adrian took his own life in 2014 after a long struggle with depression, Dee Heddon (one of the symposium organisers) and Dominic Johnson embarked on an edited collection celebrating the artist’s life and work in the field of intimate and one-to-one performance. It’s All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells was published in 2016 and, like The Art of Care-full Practice (and this subsequent special issue of the Scottish Journal of Performance, Art of Care), attempts to understand the key themes of care and intimacy that permeated Adrian’s performance practice. My dedication to Adrian draws on this book—an act of love—and the documentation of Adrian’s live works, which I introduced and showed at the symposium. These, and our memories (many of which are in the book), are the precious materials Adrian left behind. The book, the symposium and this journal continue to ask the questions Adrian grappled with in his performances: How do we take care of each other? How can we take care of ourselves?

Before commenting further on Adrian’s work and the book
which reflects on his processes, practices, and how his life informed his art (and vice versa), I must do something which I hope Adrian would approve of. I must confess. Adrian often invited me (and many others) to confess within our shared performance moments and so I do this willingly (it is all allowed after all). I confess that in this exploration of Adrian’s autobiographical work my self is also present. In It’s All Allowed, I co-edited a section with Jess Thorpe called ‘Pillow Talk’ (a discussion with fellow artists and friends of Adrian towards the end of the book [pp.288–300]); I was curator of the 2013 Arches Commons events; and, more enigmatically, I am the unknown photographer who captured the image of Adrian in full Adrienne attire blow-drying Rhiannon’s hair as she looks into the mirror (Adrian Howells in Salon Adrienne, 2005, photographer unknown [p.135]).

This recognition of my self in the work is relevant to this reflection, as Adrian’s approach in many of his performances was to ask you to share a bit of your self (or one of your selves) and in return, he would give you a bit of hisself (a story, a touch, an experience or a gift). The themes of intimacy, risk, generosity, and identity feature in most of the contributions to Heddon and Johnson’s book (including Adrian’s own), but the dark side of this is evident when one negative review of Adrian’s 2011 show May I Have the Pleasure sent Adrian’s mental health into decline. In sharing so much of hisself in his work, he was vulnerable to perceiving critique of his work as a critique of himself: (‘I gave so much of myself’[p.91]).

The book opens with Adrian’s ridiculous aim—he laughs as he is saying it—he wants to generate a ‘global catharsis’ and for his art / life encounters to bring about a ‘collective transformation’ (p.13). While this may seem both sublime and ridiculous, the moral imperative of Adrian’s art / life and his fluctuation between serious and silly as he
interrogates what is permissible and impermissible in a performance space is clear throughout the collection. *It's All Allowed* voices the various versions of Adrian Howells in all of their glorious multiplicity and contradictions. Both delicate (as in *Lifeguard*, [2012]) and daringly naughty (as in *The Homosexual* [1971]—described as ‘a hymn to tastelessness’ as discussed in Stewart Laing’s essay and Johnson’s interview with Adrian), Adrian’s various selves come through the articles, essays, creative responses and images. Meditative, (*The Garden of Adrian* [2010], explored by Heddon, Ibal and Zerihan) or explicitly bawdy (*An Audience with Adrienne* [2006-2010], as Cairns acknowledges in his own confession), self-flagellating (as in *The Fourteen Stations of the Life of Adrian Howells* [2007-2008]) or self-effacing (as in his work at Touchbase [2011-2014]), the *Adrians / Adriennes* of this book are as multiple, conflicting, and complex as Adrian was in person. Of course, there are *Adrians* this book inevitably misses or erases, but the richness of the sense of his identity, creative practice / research and personality comes through vividly and provides a beautiful interweaving of performances, documents, stories, legends, myths, memories and experiences of the late artist.

In Katie Gough’s *Sole History: The Grammar of the Feet in Foot Washing for the Sole*, she imagines the various churches of her childhood, the church in Glasgow where she experienced Adrian’s piece and *The Church* as ‘like a single melody of an arpeggiated chord, where the notes are not played together but spread over time’ (p.207). Reading *It's All Allowed* creates a similar feeling, a collection of notes (mostly in the same key) coming together to create an audio loop, some notes repeated more frequently, and some resonating longer than others.

Time, and the passing of a person, particularly an artist, changes the way in which we view their work. What is
experienced *live* as a continual process of working, attempting, applying for funding, being programmed and produced (Shelley Hastings and Jackie Wylie, ‘Duty of Care’ [pp.252–59]), administrating (Steven Greer, ‘What Money Can’t Buy’ [pp.260–70]), becomes a canon of work, or as Heddon and Johnson offer, a *corpus* This body of work that Adrian created, transcends Adrian’s life and has provoked a new analysis and critical focus on some of the areas he held so dear. The contribution by Nic Green (the first recipient of the Adrian Howells Award for Intimate Performance), ‘Legacies of Darkness and Light’, attests to this (pp.300–4).

Some of the voices in this book writing about Adrian are also voices in *Art of Care* Steven Greer, Rosana Cade and myself all speak about love, care, self-love, intimacy, risk and the life of an artist. The echo of these themes explored in *It’s All Allowed*, can be heard resonating clearly through this journal and this is a testament to Adrian as an artist who was able to explore these ideas in such a vulnerable, fragile and sometimes dangerous way. The palimpsests of overlapping voices speak about Adrian and his work through varying degrees of grief, sadness, joy, Marcia Farquhar’s ‘utter selfish fury’, and love (p.183).

Howells’ own voice appears throughout Heddon and Johnson’s book, (a physical impossibility for this journal but the impact of Adrian’s voice, work and attempts can be seen, heard and felt here through others) and I paid particular attention to these documents of Adrian’s own voice, what was he saying about his work? That his voice is in this collection is vital and although already published elsewhere, Johnson’s interview with Adrian provides a powerful but painful read ending with the artist’s words:

*I’ll put my hand into the fire. I’ve been burnt. I put my hand back into the fire. When I do so I know I am alive. That’s the power of*

You, (the reader) are the audience-participant to this particular performance text. Like Adrian’s work it depends on dialogue, connection and intimacy. You, (like me) are in it, without you it is nothing, and that is the legacy of Adrian’s work that It’s All Allowed gifts to a wider community. Inspired by Adrian, we hope that the live event of The Art of Care-full Practice symposium and this Art of Care special issue can keep Adrian’s lifelong enquiries about connection, intimacy and risk alive: How do we take care of each other? How can we take care of ourselves? How can it be ‘all allowed’?

Like It’s All Allowed, this Art of Care special issue of the Scottish Journal of Performance is dedicated ‘To Adrian’. You are missed.

References


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DR LAURA BISSELL is a lecturer in Contemporary Performance Practice and part-time lecturer in Research at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Laura is a visiting lecturer on the MRes in Creative Practices programme at Glasgow School of Art and has taught on the Transart Institute MFA in Berlin. Laura has presented her research on contemporary practices at conferences nationally and internationally and has had her work published in the International
Dear self

ROSANA CADE

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This text was originally read by Rosana Cade at the The Art of Care-full Practice Symposium on 5 March 2017.

Dear self,

Breathe.

Well done. You are here. You made it out of bed, and even though you feel really nervous, and all those familiar voices in your head have been telling you that you aren’t good enough, and that everyone else is much more intelligent, or relevant, or witty, or academic, or insightful, or experienced, you are overcoming your fear and writing here. That is a brave thing to do.

You are brave. I know you don’t like it or believe it when people say that to you, but you are. Putting yourself in front of people, be it to perform, or to facilitate, or to talk on a regular basis, makes you vulnerable. You are repeatedly exposing yourself. It takes a certain resilience to be in this kind of role, and recently, you have been finding that harder. You need some strength to be this brave.

There were times last year when you were performing and facilitating a lot; you didn’t have a day off for two months, and were barely at home, and then, when you finally took a day off, you just cried all day, feeling incredibly anxious and
you couldn't enjoy yourself.

You don't think you need to give yourself a break, but you do. Maybe you see it as a sign of weakness, or not being a fully committed artist. You need to learn not to take on too much. You don't have infinite energy to give out. Put some energy into yourself. Treat yourself like one of your participants. What do you say to them? 'Listen to yourself', 'All feelings are allowed', 'Stay present', 'Check in with yourself', 'If you need to stop at any time, let me know and you can stop', 'Nothing is more important than your wellbeing'.

And yet you feel so self-indulgent saying these things to yourself.

Audre Lorde wrote: 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare' (1988, p.131).

You think you're privileged. That you shouldn't complain. That you shouldn't be feeling down. That you don't deserve to be looked after, or that there isn't time to look after yourself when the world is in such a mess. You want to give your energy to helping others, but you don't always know how, or you feel overwhelmed by how awful everything is, and you end up living in a state of fear and inaction.

You don't think you deserve care, or you don't need it. That your practice should be for others and not for yourself. And yet, you've been feeling so low. You are a queer woman in the time of Donald Trump and Theresa May. You suffer misrecognition, you don't feel represented. You are allowed to create something for yourself.

You are feeling confused at the moment, but that's OK.
You’re OK. You’re not a bad person. You are allowed to stop. You are allowed to spend time not engaging in art or research.

Sometimes you forget that the process is for you, as much as for the other people engaging in it. You aren’t above the need for art. You create these spaces so that you can be open, connect with people in a meaningful way. You gain insights and support from the people you meet and work with. You’ve been questioning the role of art in the world, and what effect you are having in these alarming times, and yet you forget how much art means to you, and the effect it has on you and your well-being.

Does that lessen as you get older and art becomes your career? Do you need to find space to enjoy performance for the joy of performance, and not as a place of work? You’ve started to feel guilty for engaging in processes that you enjoy, as if your work is only valuable if it’s hard or if you are sacrificing something. Where has this ideology come from? I don’t think you really believe that. Punishing yourself won’t solve the problems of the world.

You’re confused about the boundaries of caring for the self and caring for others and the world. There’s something about self-care that feels selfish to you, or like it will cut you off from caring about the world. And in current times, with this government, with the awful cuts, the relentless individualistic ideology fuelling feelings of competitiveness, the rise in people begging on the streets, the media telling you that you and all your friends are out of touch with the real people, you are wary of focusing on yourself.

Knowing how to live is not easy. Carving out an ethical life is not easy. We exist in structures that make it very difficult, and you are doing your best. You can’t do everything. Some
days you can't do anything. It doesn't make you a less valuable human being.

It's hard to know exactly what you need in any moment in order to feel well, to feel like yourself. You don't need to buy into a pre-packaged commodified version of self-care.

You are fragile like everyone else. You are vulnerable like everyone else.

You are feeling confused at the moment, but that's OK. You're OK. You're not a bad person.

Be kind to yourself.

I'm not sure how to finish this letter.

I will do my best to be kind to you.

Take care.

x

References


About the author

ROSANA CADE is a queer artist based in Glasgow. For her, queerness means rebellion, imagination and celebration: 'Rebel passionately against anything that tells you how to be normal, wildly imagine new ways of being/doing/thinking/seeing/moving, and celebrate ferociously all those who are under-celebrated’. In 2011, Rosana
created *Walking: Holding*, shown extensively across the UK and internationally, and which continues to tour across the world to great acclaim. She regularly collaborates with her partner Eilidh MacAskill, with whom she has recently created MOOT MOOT. Rosana is co-founder of //BUZZCUT//, a collaboration dedicated to creating holistic and progressive environments for artists and audiences to experiment with live performance in Glasgow.
Between care and self-care: dramaturgies of mindfulness in the work of the vacuum cleaner

STEPHEN GREER

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Since 2009, the performance work of ‘art and activist collective of one’ James Leadbitter—better known as the vacuum cleaner—has repeatedly engaged with issues surrounding mental illness, ‘madness’ and mental health discrimination. This paper explores the relationship of that work to the discourse of ‘mindfulness’, a form of cognitive therapy centred on cultivating a non-judgmental and present-focused attentiveness to one’s own mental state. While an increasing body of evidence suggests the potential health benefits of mindfulness, its broader application has been challenged for invoking forms of self-critique which elide the social factors that undermine well-being.

In response, this paper examines how Leadbitter’s staging of the relationships between care and self-care might challenge the imperatives of individuated responsibility that are characteristic of neoliberal discourses. Rather than reproducing existing social relations, Leadbitter’s dramaturgies of mindfulness suggest how an attentiveness to one’s own wellbeing may be extended outwards as a response to others in prefigurative encounters which allow us to imagine and rehearse alternatives.

Keywords: mindfulness, mental health, neoliberalism, autobiographical performance, self-care.
Since 2009, the performance work of ‘art and activist collective of one’ James Leadbitter—better known as the vacuum cleaner—has repeatedly engaged with issues surrounding mental illness, ‘madness’ and mental health discrimination. In the following paper, I briefly explore three of these projects: Ship of Fools (2011), Mental (2013–ongoing), and Madlove: A Designer Asylum (2014–ongoing) as negotiations with the increasingly significant concept of ‘mindfulness’ in its relationship to the politics of care and self-care in neoliberal times. Informed by Buddhist meditative practices, mindfulness techniques centred on an attentiveness to one’s thoughts and feelings in the present moment have become the focus of considerable attention for health practitioners, researchers, and policy makers as a form of cognitive therapy shown to reduce many forms of psychological distress (Bishop et al., 2006). Through a process of non-judgmental reflection which ‘accepts the present with moment without criticizing or judging’ (Kang, Gruber and Gray, 2014, p.170), practitioners of mindfulness learn to become aware of automatic behavioural patterns that are detrimental to well-being and, in time, learn to disengage from them. At the core of mindfulness, then, is a process of reflexive attentiveness through which patterns of cognition and association are acknowledged but are no longer allowed to ‘mindlessly’ determine one’s responses to the world (Langer, 2014, p.11).

While an increasing body of evidence suggests that mindfulness may be used to address conditions as diverse and serious as anxiety disorders, depression, parasuicidal behaviour, and chronic pain, its widespread application has also been challenged as inculcating forms of moralising self-surveillance which serve to obscure the social factors that undermine well-being (Barker, 2014; Reveley, 2016). This perspective is informed by an understanding of neoliberalism as not only involving the ‘financialization of everything’ (Harvey, 2005, p.33) but as a discourse characterised by what Michel Foucault theorised in his
lectures at the Collège de France as governmentality: a form of governance which arranges conditions ‘so that people, following their own self-interest will do as they ought’ (Scott, 1995, p.202, original emphasis). This dynamic is evident within neoliberal policy discourses in the UK and elsewhere around the world which:

...implore individuals to become self-critical, to take personal responsibility for their lives, to adapt specific practices of self-regulation and improvement, and to embrace entrepreneurial and materialistic self-identities (Howard, 2007, p.5).

In this context, the discourse of mindfulness—centred on a belief that individuals may play an active role in managing their own psychological well-being—may be problematic insofar as it is highly compatible with neoliberalism’s preference for subjects willing to take ‘full responsibility for their life biography no matter how severe the constraints upon their action’ (Gill, 2008, p.436). On these terms, mindfulness may invoke a form of Foucaultian self-governance which ‘brings the level of required therapeutic surveillance down to an ever-smaller increment of time: moment to moment or breath to breath’ (Barker, 2014, p.172).

In response, this paper argues that Leadbitter’s practice suggests how mindfulness may be deployed in service of relational dynamics which extend beyond the imperatives of individuated responsibility that are characteristic of neoliberal discourses. While the model of the hyper-responsible self may promote the idea that ‘a good citizen cares for herself or himself best by evading or denying social relations’ (Rimke, 2000, p.61), Leadbitter’s engagement with mindfulness suggests how we may (re)negotiate the social structures through which
responsibility itself is conceived and understood. Rather than reaffirming the logic of autonomous personhood, a mindful dramaturgy—which is to say a mindful strategy for the composition of a performance and the social relations present within it—might serve politically transformative ends beyond those prescribed in neoliberalism by calling attention to the intersubjective encounters through which care for self or other becomes possible. As I will elaborate below, this involves an understanding of mindfulness as a praxis of encounter in which alternatives are not only available in the future, but may already exist in the here and now. Such an interpretation turns on a sense of Leadbitter’s work as a form of prefigurative intervention which ‘theorizes through action, through doing’ (Maeckelbergh, 2011, p.3). First theorised by Carl Boggs (1977) as the embodiment of the goals of a movement in its social relations, decision-making structures and culture—and since deployed to describe many elements of the anti- and alter-globalisation movement—prefigurative activity proceeds by removing ‘the temporal distinction between the struggle in the present and a goal in the future; instead, the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present’ (Maeckelbergh, 2011, p.4).

The vacuum cleaner

Since 2003, Leadbitter’s practice under the name of the vacuum cleaner—taken from an early performance intervention named Cleaning Up After Capitalism in which he dressed in a hi-vis vest to literally clean the public spaces of Wall Street and the City of London—has encompassed a range of direct actions, short films, art installations, and performances. This work has been informed by the artist’s involvement in the alter-globalisation movement, a grassroots network of groups and individuals opposed to neoliberalism but which support global cooperation and interaction in matters of social and economic justice, and environmental protection (Steger and Wilson, 2012). Art
works include: *Put The Fun Between Your Legs* (2009), a giant banner originally installed on the outside of London's Arnolfini Studios listing climate activists' favourite forms of civil disobedience; a performance lecture on climate change titled *The Problem Is The Solution* (2008) presented at the National Review of Live Art; and a UK-wide series of street interventions and public acts of ‘creative disobedience’ as a founder member of the *Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination* (2004–2009). Following Leadbitter’s experiences within the UK’s mental healthcare system following a period of hospitalisation on an acute psychiatric ward in 2009, that practice expanded to directly address issues surrounding ‘madness’, mental health, and neurodiversity. Here, too, Leadbitter’s work has involved a range of art forms and practices: bad jokes about mental illness in 2012’s *Dam maD* (a contribution to Forest Fringe’s Paper Stages project), visual gags appropriating public signage (as in a work rebranding a public bin with the words ‘LOONY’), and pieces made for theatrical presentation as in *The Assessment* (2014), commissioned for Anxiety Festival.

These works can be located within an increasingly diverse field of autobiographical performance concerning mental health and neurodiversity by artists whose practices straddle theatre, comedy, one to one performance, and visual arts. Whether in the form of Demi Nandhra’s ongoing Live Art-informed *I’m Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired* project concerning ‘political depression and incomplete projects of liberation’ (Nandhra, 2016), Kim Noble’s exploration of suicidal impulses in the stand-up show *Kim Noble Will Die* (2009), or Bobby Baker’s self-staging in *How to Live* (2004) as ‘a mental health guru who has invented an 11-step programme for mental well-being’ (Gardner, 2004), this body of practice is frequently concerned with the possibilities—and limits—of self-help and self-care. Such work also manifests a claim on the relationship between the personal and the political in which biographical details of
lived experience are brought to bear on larger questions of identity, wellness, and social welfare. I am particularly interested in Leadbitter’s practice, though, for how his pursuit of ‘solidarity and mutual care’ (Leadbitter in Costa, 2013) suggests a resistance of neoliberalism’s forms of compulsory individualism. That resistance is not premised on the refusal of individuality, but involves a mindful negotiation of where and when one’s own agency may find its limit, and where it may be extended in support of others.

Ship of Fools

This dynamic is apparent in the dramaturgy of Leadbitter’s month-long ‘self-initiated anti-section action’ Ship of Fools (2011), discussed at length in his performance lecture ‘I Went Mental And I All I Got Was This Lousy T-Shirt’, first given at Nottingham Contemporary in 2013. Conscious of a downturn in his mental health and wanting to avoid returning to a secure ward as experienced during his previous period of illness, Leadbitter committed himself for a period of 28 days to his own self-made mental health institution—in actuality, his flat in Hackney, London. Through an online call out, Leadbitter sought creative residencies from ‘both artists and non-artists alike in an attempt to find creativity in madness’, with the only condition being that ‘the residencies must involve the vacuum cleaner in some way - as material, as collaborator, as helper, as observer or as anything else that is creative and useful to both/all’. Participants would join Leadbitter in his flat—working with friend, artist, and activist Sophie Nathan—and accompany him while he attempted to make work, receiving in return ‘a small honorary fee, space to work, computers, fast internet access, stills camera, video camera, screen printing facilities, cake and cups of tea, maybe even some lunch’.

The larger function of the project—described simply by Leadbitter as ‘to stop me from killing myself’—was served
by Leadbitter’s ability to resist institutionalisation (drawing on friends and a mental health solicitor to avoid forcible removal from his own home under the UK’s mental health law sectioning powers), to continue living in the public sphere and, crucially, to make work even as he experienced serious mental anguish. Though his collaborations with other artists and activists (including Sue Keen and Thom Scullion) during Ship of Fools took a range of forms, the most significant, recurring feature of that practice was its public orientation—that is, in actions which took place outside of the notional asylum space of Leadbitter’s flat. In his lecture, Leadbitter describes on day five spray painting a sign reading ‘Paradise Lost’ around a letter box in hoardings surrounding the site of a former local café demolished by property developers: peering through the slot, passers-by could see the wild garden that had sprung up on the derelict land; on day eight, Leadbitter noticed letters missing from a sign outside of his local police station—appearing as METROPOLITAN LICE—and embarked on a later project of rebranding in which he changed the police logo on signs across London; on days 16 through 18, Leadbitter worked with artist Sue Keen to produce a representation of being in bed (where one can spend a lot of time when experiencing depression) that could be installed in a public space.

In his account of the project, Leadbitter also describes how recognition that he would be inviting strangers into his home led him to devise some rules for the space and the process. With Nathan, he produced a series of guidelines that appear as pragmatic, enabling strategies for making work and—at the same time—the first draft of a radical manifesto for mental health:

**NO RESTRAINT**

**RESPECT LIMITS AND LIMITATIONS**
ACTIVE ANTI-BURNOUT

NO VIOLENCE

BE GOOD TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS

TRUST (IF YOU CAN)

TELL IT LIKE IT IS

TAKE PLEASURE IN THE LITTLE THINGS

DON’T SUFFER IN SILENCE

QUESTION EVERYTHING

NEVER STOP TRYING / NEVER GIVE UP HOPE

NO SUDDEN MOVEMENTS

(reproduced from slide shown during ‘I Went Mental And I All I Got Was This Lousy T-Shirt’, 2013 at 20 mins 12 secs)

While specific to Leadbitter’s needs, these guidelines can be understood as resonant with the broader strategies of mindfulness, most clearly in promoting a present-focused attention to the detail of one’s environment (‘take pleasure in the little things’) that accepts and recognises negative thoughts or emotions rather than attempting to deny them (‘tell it like it is’), and which seeks to pursue contemplative
responses rather than sudden reactions (‘question everything’).3

Leadbetter’s account of the project also makes plain that these instructions described—or sought—mutually applicable conditions for action. The call for ‘no restraint’ on the imagination expressed in the first guideline, for example, also expressed the desire for no restraint in the literal, physical sense of being held down so that treatment might be administered (as experienced during his time on a locked ward); a desire, Leadbetter explained, which involved the agreement that he himself was not allowed to put anyone in a situation where they had to restrain him. Correspondingly, Leadbetter described the call for ‘no sudden movements’ as a way of managing impulsive action in moments of distress that might lead one to hurt oneself or another person. In this context, ‘be good to yourself and others’ describes a practice of continual negotiation, such as that being good to others is only possible if one also attempts to extend goodness to oneself. Consequently, ‘tell it like it is’ not only articulates the value of disclosure (that if someone asks you how are feeling and you are thinking of hurting yourself, then you need to say so) but serves as an invitation for one to take one’s own pain seriously. This sensibility is mirrored in artist and theatre maker Bobby Baker’s multimedia performance lecture How to Live. Informed by Baker’s own experiences of depression and its treatment over more than a decade, the show is structured as a public seminar in which a patient—a single green pea—is guided through the techniques that will transform its life. While offering a tongue in cheek commentary on the universalising certainty of psychoanalysis, the show’s life lessons are nonetheless rooted in an understanding of mindful cognitive therapy as a means of learning ‘to watch yourself without getting caught up in an emotional or judgmental way’ (Baker in Gardner, 2004).
Here too, the possibility of self-knowledge—as in Baker’s advice to retrace your steps to ‘find the niggle’ that is causing distress—is coupled with an assertion of the need for self-care. If you take time to walk in someone else’s shoes you must ‘never lose sight of your own shoes’, as empathy for others involves and requires empathy for oneself: ‘self-validate: your pain is real’ (Baker, 2004). Crucial here is how the invitation to ‘take the time to stand back from what you’re feeling, as much as you can’ (Leadbitter, 2013) contains within it recognition of one’s potential inability to adopt a mindful stance. As psychotherapist Susan Woods observes, ‘one needs to have a certain level of energy to be able to practice mindfulness. If the mind is being affected by profound states of depression or anxiety, there is not enough intentional energy to practice’ (Woods, 2016, p.329).

Oriented on contextual need rather than an imperative of self-surveillance—or a predetermined, normalising conception of mental wellness—Leadbitter’s practice suggests how mindfulness may be deployed against the conceit that one is always and merely ‘free’ to make choices about one’s welfare as a responsible subject. In this, the framing of mindful self-care as an intersubjective process (in Ship of Fools, as an informal contract) suggests how an overemphasis on the individual and underemphasis on the social—common to both orthodox medicine and mindfulness (Barker, 2014, p.174)—may be subject to ethical deliberation. Correspondingly, a mindful dramaturgy becomes the means of examining how an increased imperative to exercise responsible choices in our lives has not been accompanied by the resources ‘which would allow choices to be effectively made and realised’ (Dawson, 2013, p.57) as caring for oneself may require, for example, the ability to work flexibly, or perhaps not work at all. Perhaps more importantly, it draws attention to how such imperatives may constitute a particular ethical violence towards neurodivergent persons or others for whom
‘choice’ often or always involves others, as well as—more broadly—how neoliberal claims on autonomy may involve a denial of the social conditions and relations which underwrite them.

Mental

Though grounded in his own lived experience of mental illness, an important feature of Leadbitter’s engagement with mindfulness is that it does not present self-knowledge as self-mastery. Rather than reinvigorating the individual duty of ‘assembl[ing] a self-identity and biography that reflects a life of one’s own choosing’ (Brown and Baker, 2012, p.12), it understands that claims on mastery may involve an appeal to forms of institutional authority oriented on (punitive) control rather than (reparative) care. This dynamic is apparent in Leadbitter’s following work Mental (2012–3) which emerged from a year spent working with film-maker Chris Atkins exploring the black market of personal data, with Atkins going undercover to purchase personal and confidential information relating to health, financial, and police records from private detectives⁴. In the resulting documentary broadcast as part of Channel 4’s Dispatches documentary series, Leadbitter was presented with a record of his past and ongoing benefit claims, his bank account numbers, and records of appointments at his GP surgery, one which had taken place only days before the beginning of Ship of Fools. Concerned for the other kinds of information that might exist about him, Leadbitter then worked with his producer to make freedom of information requests under the Data Protection Act—the overarching framework through which UK citizens can seek access to state held records on their lives and person. This six-month process produced around eight thousand pages of information: his full psychiatric history, his partly redacted police intelligence file relating to his activist work, details of time spent homeless and records of corporate injunctions taken out following various direct actions. This material
formed the basis for *Mental*, initially staged in his own bedroom and later presented in other private homes or performance venues temporarily converted into intimate, domestic spaces. In the following section I draw on first person accounts from critics and other audience members of the performance as staged during the SICK! Festival of Contemporary Performance Art in Brighton and as part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival in Glasgow in 2013, as well as Leadbitter’s own account of the performance in interview (Hughes and Parry, 2015; Costa, 2013; Hoggett, 2013).

In the show’s first ‘chapter’, Leadbitter recounts his early encounters with the mental healthcare system though a trail of formal records naming hospitals, hostels and temporary accommodation which stands at impersonal distance from the person whose experiences they describe. At age 19, Leadbitter is experiencing multiple mental health conditions: depression, anxiety, panic attacks, but no one tells him what he is being medicated for—borderline personality disorder. In the second sequence, Leadbitter describes withdrawing from psychiatric treatment and becoming more heavily involved in activism and direct action. Documents and stories trace his involvement with activist group Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, his participation in protests against Starbucks and the G8, and his growing consciousness of the attention of police intelligence officers (and their infiltration of his own network of friends and fellow activists). In the third movement, the moment tips towards the (then) present of the work’s creation and a health crisis which led to a lengthy period of hospitalisation. He turns out a large cardboard box onto his bed containing countless boxes of the drugs prescribed to him over the years: psychotropics, mood stabilisers and drugs to counteract their side effects. In the final sequence—echoing *Ship of Fools’* act of self-commitment—Leadbitter writes his own Mental Health Act and sections himself under section 1.
Throughout *Mental*, moments of institutional cruelty or dispassion are married with memories of acts of kindness from friends and strangers, some of whom overstep boundaries of professional conduct to help (a nurse who takes him home and rolls him a joint, and allows him to sleep on her sofa). As theatre critic Maddy Costa observes, ‘the contrast of that care with the official language of the documents is sharp. Here, Leadbitter is a number, a sequence of actions, a list of medication’ (Costa, 2013). If the intertwining of these registers allows Leadbitter to describe and simultaneously resist a regime in which you become ‘the accumulation of your diagnosis, you become the accumulation of the medication that you’re on, you become the accumulation of how the police refer to you’ (Leadbitter in Hughes and Parry, 2015), it does this by extending care to both the performer and his audience. That extension of care, though, marks the opening of an uncertain and potentially precarious relationship in which the terms of possible responsibility for self or other cannot be conclusively determined in advance of their enactment. Leadbitter’s role as sole performer in control of the work means that the desire to make challenging and potentially distressing material accessible to an audience is held in tension with a need to safeguard his own mental health, so far as that is possible. Though mindfulness practices may be oriented on the discovery of ‘a very different relationship to what has previously been perceived as anxiety provoking or overwhelming’ (Woods, 2016, p.325), the work invites recognition of how such a process should not be confused with a linear narrative of recovery from either trauma or ill health.

Leadbitter suggests:

In many respects, this is the most traditional piece of art I have ever made, but I’m okay with that, because some of the stories that I have to tell
can be very, very difficult to hear. So, creating a nice convivial environment where everybody gets in my bedroom, gets under the duvet with me and gets a cup of tea, and then I tell the stories... (Leadbitter, 2013).

Though this frame involves a conscious theatricalisation of the domestic sphere as one of safety and comfort, it involves something other than naturalistic illusion and, moreover, owes its efficacy to the fact that:

It’s not pretend. I’m not pretending. It still has the transformative act in it. Yes, it has narrative in it, yes, people sit and watch something, yes, I’m telling a story but I think it’s closer to a piece of documentary film than a piece of theatre ... If when I’m doing it, I don’t feel anything, then that’s what happens. Sometimes I get very, very distressed and that’s what happens (quoted in Hughes and Parry, 2015).

If mindfulness can be ascribed a dramaturgy, it is one in which whatever happens, happens—and in which an ethical encounter may first only involve the work of paying attention to that instance, and taking its contents seriously enough to find them consequential. In this sense, Leadbitter’s choices of self-staging also call attention to the limits of a performative mastery of the self, sometimes assumed for solo autobiographical performance as a mode uniquely expressive of the human capacity for self-fashioning.

In any case, if the stories are hard to hear then performing them is also difficult; here, too, the gesture of care is bound up with the necessity of self-care. As Costa recounts:
Many audience-members have commented that they could do with sharing the cup of tea after Mental, rather than before, to decompress after inhabiting such an intense space; Leadbitter understands that need, but asks his audience to leave directly after the show, because he too needs space to look after himself and decompress (Costa, 2013).

While the performance of self-sectioning—and the claim on an ability to design one’s own treatment—which closes Mental 'contrasts the passivity of being a patient with the exhilaration of taking direct action' (O'Donoghue, 2014), it does so by asserting the ongoing and constitutive vulnerability of the performer and his audience as both the field and condition of ethical encounter.

**Madlove**

Common to *Ship of Fools* and Mental is a sense of how 'managing at home' (the desired outcome of 'care in the community' health policies) might not merely involve reproducing the controlled conditions of an acute ward in a domestic setting, but support people with mental illness to seek assistance without isolating themselves (or being forcefully isolated) from broader social and creative communities of support. At the same time, those works articulate that the negotiation of care and self-care involves a range of different potential structures of power: between a patient and their doctor, between an individual and the state, and between an artist and their audience. An attempt to acknowledge and transform (rather than merely refuse) this dynamic underwrites Leadbitter's ongoing Madlove 'designer asylum' project, a collaboration with artist Hannah Hull centred on the creation of an experimental, alternative asylum space that might offer 'a positive space to experience mental distress ... and enlightenment', and counter 'the popular myth that mental illness is dangerous and scary'
The project began as a series of workshops spanning festivals, arts venues and secure psychiatric hospitals, and centred on questions such as: ‘what does good mental health care feel like?’, and ‘what does good mental health look, taste, sound, touch and feel like to touch?’. The project has brought together mental health care professionals, academics and artists, and people with and without experience of mental illness to reimagine the concept of the asylum as a whole. As one workshop attendee observed, this has not merely involved asking ‘what colour we’d like to repaint the healthcare system’, but inviting its participants to ‘redefine the actual blueprint of what mental health care could be’ (Delaney, 2014).

While both *Ship of Fools* and *Madlove* are sharply attentive to the lived experience of spending time in mental health hospitals, they also invite their audiences and participants to think about mental illness—and the trope of the asylum—in terms of social and cultural structures rather than buildings alone, and to do so in terms of what Leadbitter and Hull have described as: a project of ‘mutual care’, that might allow madness ‘to be experienced in a less painful way’ (Leadbitter and Hull, 2014). Such a project pursues the destigmatisation of mental ill health while querying the forms of assistance that we might offer to ourselves and each other. That query is not paranoid—always fearful of hidden structures of power—but respects how such assistance may necessarily take the form of a negotiation between self- and other-oriented care. It also asserts that care may be possible without invoking the kinds of normalising and objectifying judgments which characterise many self-help regimes. It is, in short, a process which proceeds by perpetually asking ‘who are you?’ and ‘what do you need?’ without any expectation of a full and final answer (see Butler, 2005, p.43).

In later development of *Madlove*, Leadbitter and Hull have
worked with designers Benjamin Koslowski and James Christian alongside illustrator Rosie Cunningham to prototype concepts and share findings from the workshops, leading to a contribution to Wellcome Collection’s 2016–7 exhibition *Bedlam: the asylum and beyond*, involving an installation of material from the research process, and a figurative scale model of the designer asylum itself. At the end of the exhibition, visitors were invited to reflect on their own care, and how they support those around them, by making a ‘Madlove Pocket Asylum’—a wallet-sized leaflet asking three questions:

How could you change your environment to better support your mental health?

How would you support a friend/relative/co-worker if they were struggling with their mental health?

What support might you need if you were struggling with your mental health?

*(Leadbitter, J. and Hull, H., 2014)*

Here, too, one may detect strategies of mindfulness in the appeal to consider how one might attend to one’s own wellness while, at the same time, reflecting on how that attentiveness may be extended outwards as a response to others. That reflection is not oriented on the pursuit of conclusive answers premised on the individual ‘as a free but ultimately responsible agent’ *(Gergen, 2009, p.79)*, but attends to the dynamics which might emerge between and among individuals. In doing so, it manifests an attempt to think and practice forms of care apart from those most readily compatible with neoliberal priorities—that is, forms
of care which acknowledge that our accountability to one another cannot be conclusively determined through an appeal to the ideal of autonomous personhood.
Conclusion

While neoliberalism may be closely associated with practices of self-governance, any analysis that assumes practices of subjectification are inherently problematic may act to secure neoliberalism as a totalising regime in which ‘any response to it ... tightens its colonization of emotional life’ (Cook, 2016, p.152). In each of the performance works considered here, emotional life is given its own credence such that the attentiveness borne of mindfulness points towards the potential decolonisation of dominant logics for individuated responsibility. By deferring a demand for self-governance in preference for exchanges in which relative
and shifting claims on agency and autonomy are acknowledged and given credence, Leadbitter’s work points towards the potential of vulnerability as an enabling and even transformative political affect. In making this claim, I am wary of valorising vulnerability as a politically desirable state: at the least, we must remain critically conscious of the relationship between the forms of exposure which may be constitutive of subjectivity, and those which are the product of inequitable social conditions, ill health, or the pathologisation of neurodiversity. Nevertheless, in its framing of care as a field of prefigurative encounter rather than a fixed relationship of power, Leadbitter’s practice suggests how a mindful dramaturgy might allow alternatives to the dominant, individuating logics of neoliberalism to be imagined, rehearsed, and sustained.

Notes

1. For documentation of the work of the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, see <http://labofii.net> [Accessed 10 November 2017].


3. For an overview of mindfulness strategies, see Rebecca Crane (2008).


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Negotiating care: an exploration of non-place within a deafblind performance project

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This article brings together diverse theories on disability, place, non-place and care to explore a process involving deafblind performers. The article is based upon work within a five-month residency with a performance group in a social care organisation. The article seeks to unpick and uncover the role of care in the creation of performance with disabled performers.

Keywords: disability, care, contemporary practice, participatory performance, deafblind.

Over the last few years the prominence of disabled artists within theatre has grown. In Scotland there are a number of artists, companies and festivals integral to this current movement including Unlimited Festival, Robert Softley-Gale, 21 Century Challenges, Caroline Bowditch and Claire Cunningham. The growing strength in this area of performance has increased its reach, with Scottish works staged as far afield as Australia and South America (21 Century Challenges, 2017; Cunningham, 2016). This article is a result of workshops undertaken with a performance group whose participants are congenitally deafblind. The term congenital deafblindness is used to describe a person ‘who is born with a sight and hearing impairment or develops sight and hearing loss before they have developed language in their early years’ (Sense, 2015).
Although the participants within the workshops were congenitally deafblind, this article has wider implications for the field of disability and participatory arts as I unravel the complexities of care within these projects. The five-month residency involved a two-hour workshop with participants and support workers every Tuesday. These would usually be led by Jon Reid (director) and supported by myself, and we would plan the workshop together, including which activities we would like to use and which areas of the performance to develop. The workshops followed a similar structure throughout the five months. We would begin in a circle, enquiring as to how people were and catching up on any events that had happened since we had met last. In this introduction, we would also inform participants what we would be doing over the course of the workshop. We would then begin a variable warm-up exercise where people would explore the space, usually in pairs, consisting of a person who is deafblind and a support worker. The workshops were centred on the creation and realisation of the performance *It's All Allowed* ‘It’s all allowed’ was a phrase synonymous with the late performance-maker Adrian Howells who worked on the project in its infancy. The performance was for one audience-participant at a time. The participant is blindfolded, and then explores a room within the building of the organisation, guided by one of the actors. Whilst in the room the audience-participant engaged in a series of sensory experiences, from playing a harp with an actor, through to being made a heady chai infusion.

The performance was for invited audience-participants consisting of artists and support workers. It was exclusively performed in the building belonging to the organisation due to the procedural and financial complexities of realising the performance in another space. The six congenitally deafblind performers were part of a group with over ten years of activity. When I began the residency the structure of the performance had already been loosely decided. Within
the performance there would be stations for each performer, the audience member would be blindfolded and support workers would be on the periphery of the performance space. Outwith the workshops, I would be involved in scouting for potential opportunities for presenting the work, contacting audience members, and exploring funding opportunities. During this time I worked closely with the director, whose wealth of expertise and experience in working with congenitally deafblind performers was invaluable to this project.

This article will seek to establish connections between theories on disability, non-place, deafblind communication systems and care, in the context of a performance project. In doing so, the article will demonstrate the disabled performer’s position within non-place, and how care as a transformative act can change non-place into place. I will argue that care within a social care organisation can reinforce feelings of non-place, but that the theatrical medium of performance holds the potential to reverse symbols and sign systems. Through the creation and realisation of performance, care can be established.

Within this article, I am working with an enhanced version of the social model of disability, as set out by Philip Cole in *The Body Politics: Theorising Disability and Impairment* (2017). Cole describes a bolstered politicised social model of disability through:

a relational model...the relevant relationships are between (1) a bodily impairment, (2) a particular action or ability, and (3) the social structure that frames that impairment and the action or ability in such a way that the person with the bodily impairment cannot perform it (Cole, 2017, p.171).
Cole claims that we should reject ideas suggested by Terzi (2004) of disabled people having more needs in order to achieve normal function. Instead, Cole argues that we should view this in terms of a political model of citizenship whereby, in this case, society is disabling the performer who is deafblind by not allowing them to engage in active citizenship (2007, p.174). This article represents a view of disability that sees social structure and impairment causing the disability as opposed to social structure alone (Cole, 2007).

In the seminal book *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan (2001) posits space and place as co-dependents. He writes:

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value...the ideas 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place (Tuan, 2001, p.6).

If space is movement then it relies on our pauses of reflection and stability to give it meaning. There were challenges to this during our project due to the process being held within a social care organisation. I often found myself wondering what space / place and movement / pause were allowed, and how this was negotiated between support worker, performance makers and disabled person.

The congenitally deafblind person’s experience of the world is constantly negotiated via a support worker who operates in a variety of capacities. Within the social care system of the
UK, and in Scotland where this residency was undertaken, the social care worker’s role is largely reduced to the logistical and operational. For example, when the person needs to use the bathroom and may need physical support doing so, the support worker would provide the solution—the ‘access’. It is often the support worker getting to know the person on a regular basis that forms the relationship needed for the individual to communicate to others. Due to the myriad of other support needs that may go along with and be linked to their congenital deafblindness, there is not a standard communication system that can be relied upon unlike, for example, the use of British Sign Language within the Deaf community. Therefore, the support worker constantly defines the deafblind experience and the person’s relationship to the world due to the need to know and develop individual communication methods with that individual. Tuan states ‘experience is directed to the external world. Seeing and thinking clearly reach out beyond the self. Feeling is more ambiguous’ (Tuan, 2001, p.9). Tuan also draws on the work of Paul Ricoeur who writes:

Feeling, for instance love or hate, is without any doubt intentional: it is a feel of “something”—the lovable, the hateful. But it is a very strange intentionality which on the one hand designates qualities felt on things, on persons, on the world, and on the other hand manifests and reveals the way in which the self is inwardly affected. (Ricoeur, 1986, p.84).

This is an eloquent description of experience and the external, providing a source of considerable concern. If feelings are not translated and placed within the external world, the person who is deafblind can become agitated. They may do seemingly irrational things in order to express what is happening for them, and to receive communication.
Once communication is understood, their inward experience is being confirmed or ‘listened to’, thus reinforcing that what they feel / think has consequences to other people and the wider external world. One of the actors repeatedly touches hair and is regularly informed by his support workers to ‘not do this’, therefore he repeats the action. In this example, his inward experiences are being confirmed by other people, ‘the external’—there are consequences to what he does within the world. There are a number of quite clear opportunities for performance acting as a method of translating and curating collective and individual experiences, offering a medium in which there is representation of expression(s) of the individuals.

This article has so far touched upon two main protagonists in this project, namely the actor / performer and the social care worker. It would, however, be remiss to negate the role of performance maker / director and audience-participant when attempting to problematise the relationships within the space.

Within this project there were two performance maker / directors within the room, myself and Jon Reid. Jon had significant experience with the performance group, working with it since its inception. There were clear, comfortable relationships between him and the ensemble built up over the years. I was a new and fleeting addition to the ensemble, spending only five months with the group, though I had previously known and worked with one of the performers intermittently for almost three years.

There was a significant challenge to making a performance within a space of a social care organisation, not least due to the frequent conferences that forced us to vacate the room. As directors, we believed in the ability of the project to negotiate and transform symbolic orders, norms and values through a well-discussed heterotopic lens (Wihstutz, 2013).
Critically analysing the extent to which we as performance-makers were effective in making this possible lies outwith the remit of this article. It is, however, important to discuss the potential of the performance to negotiate and transform symbolic orders by summarising the variety of relationships within the room, and their relationship to the disabled performers.

The support workers engaged in the process by being invited to participate in the making and rehearsal exercises to varying degrees. This altered the existing relationship between the person who was deafblind and the support worker. Within the process, the three roles within the room, that of director, performer and support worker, were worn lightly. This allowed a co-creation of experiences that supported communication between the deafblind person and the non-deafblind person as shown by Souriau in *Blended Spaces and Deixis in Communicative Activities Involving Persons with Congenital Deafblindness* (2015). In one of Souriau’s examples, a child (Emil) who is congenitally deafblind and his mother are having a conversation about meeting a girl with a cochlear implant (2015, p.19). Souriau describes how Emil’s translation of what had happened with his body does not directly match what had happened. The mother and child understand each other because of their shared experience. One such example occurred within the workshops: I had forgotten to put out the paint for one of the performers, and we were about to do a rehearsed performance, when she indicated to me with a gesture of her thumb. This could have been read as a ‘thumbs up’ to begin the performance. However, having worked with the performer before, I understood that the thumb and paint were linked, thus jolting my memory to retrieve the paint.

The body is involved both in producing standard signs whose form-content relationship is
iconically based (the form of the sign looks like the content from a given perspective) and when partners perform body movements grounded in the shared space in order to collaboratively implement their communicative project (Souriau, 2015, p.6).

It should be noted that this did not mean that the support workers, directors or performers divulged experiences in some cathartic explosion, but that we experienced making the work together; for example, reflecting on rehearsals where a support worker would be guided through the work and then feedback their experiences within it. Often, we would then ask questions to provoke solutions from the participants. This had deep ramifications for the real space-blend. As we were making together, co-creating as a community, we had a wider shared vocabulary on which to draw upon for the creation of the real space-blend, whereby narrative space (what has happened) was translated onto physical objects and / or people, for example, through gestural language. The narrative space is informed by these dramatic-framed collaborative experiences, allowing for a broadening of communicative approaches and methods that can then be used as tools for the creation of a performance. Due to the nature of communication systems and impairments of many of the actors, touch and holding provided ample opportunity for intimacy. In Edward Hall’s proxemics model, the radius of skin through to eighteen inches is regarded as intimate space, ‘the distance of love-making and wrestling, comforting and protecting’ (Hill and Paris, 2014, p.12). The described conflict within intimacy of vulnerability and protection mirrors the complexity of care (Trigona, 2012, p.199). I propose that this intimacy provided opportunities for exchanges of care between the participants (directors, support workers, performers) throughout the performance-making period. This intimacy could be regarded as being at odds with the social-care environment within which we operated, and certainly gave
rise to fascinating conflicts of interest. However, underscoring ‘intimacy’ and a ‘social care environment’ as being mutually exclusive would be a reductive interpretation of the social care environment.

One important aspect to highlight is the time frame allowed within this context. We met once a week, and, as mentioned above, the Performance Group had been creating *It’s All Allowed* for over three years with no financial pressure on the product, allowing for relationships and experiences to inform communicative systems between the director, performers and support workers. Seen by some areas of the organisation as simply another timetabled event to fill up the day of the participants, the performance could be nurtured, performed and re-worked over a relatively long period of time. This time-intensive method which would be considered rare in the arts funding climate was standard practice due to the activity being held within a social care organisation.

Whilst many of the support-workers were supportive of directorial risks, others erred towards the protective, seeking to prevent risk. This latter group struggled to accept the complex relationship of co-dependence (being cared for / caring for) with people they were used to viewing as to-be-cared-for, and as such the social structure often disabled the performers from engaging with the co-creation of performance. This disabling via the social structure is demonstrated through the disabled performers often looking to the support worker(s) and / or director(s) for instruction. To refer back to my earlier comments on space and place, the performer’s emotions and movement were placed within this disabled realm, therefore the role of movement with abandon, figuring out and making / creating together was frequently lost. I propose that the performer’s actions are disabled to such an extent that they are cradled within the field of non-place.
Augé describes non-place as a term that ‘designates two complimentary but distinct realities: spaces found in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure) and the relations individuals have with these spaces’ (2008, p.76). This is a marked difference from an anthropological place; as places ‘create the organically social, so non-places create solitarycontractuality’ (ibid.). Augé uses this to describe how individuals interact with motorways:

if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places (Augé, 2008, p.63).

Within this article, I am primarily concerned with how non-place denotes actions based on instruction and a feeling within the solitary experience. I propose an extension of this: that the deafblind body within the social care system can be at threat of being positioned within non-place. As care is an inherently relational action, participants are disabled from engaging with care when through the process they are constantly awaiting instruction from director(s) and support worker(s) to determine their actions.

However, there is an interesting duality occurring within the performance project, that of the performance process and the performance product. Within the field of participatory performance / social theatre we often celebrate the process, and rightly so—it can provide citizens with the skills and the ability to amplify voices on issues relevant to individuals and communities, with the subsequent product / performance reflecting the process.
Interestingly, within the performance of *It’s All Allowed* the influence of the support worker was reduced, allowing for more dynamic exchanges between audience-participant and performer. As space and place also negotiate between risk and support, I suggest that a significant method of that negotiation is through care. If you are able to negotiate that care for yourself, with or without support, then you are provided with the tool to create from experience. The placement of experience in the external world is a vital and challenging part of creating with congenitally deafblind performers.

The performer is liberated from the social care worker within the performance, and the relationships of care are negotiated between the performer and the audience-participant. Through this intimacy and care, the individuals can find new conversations, even if just for the brief duration of the encounter. There remain questions over the long-term effect of such a performance. It is easy to confuse visibility and encountering of the other with sustainable and fundamental political and social change (Wihstutz, 2013, p.191). However, the potential for care to transform non-place into place is a powerful one.

Within this article, I have sought to demonstrate that the disabled performers operated within non-place particularly when undertaking the process of making the material for the performance. Through the staging of the performance, care can allow for a co-placement of experience between audience-participant and performer. This transforms non-place into place. This posited the disabled person as the person with knowledge to negotiate through the space, and the audience-participant as reliant upon this. Care that navigates muddy waters of trust and risk became the communicative form that transformed non-place to place. Care is a transformative act within participatory performance and its value within work with disabled artists.
should not be underplayed. Whilst doing so we must wrestle care from a sanitised notion that disables participants and performers and does not recognise its implicit relationship to non-active citizenship. As festivals, theatrical spaces and performance projects open up to different bodies and experiences, care can be a vital tool for all involved. We do not need to relegate this care to the exclusive realm of performance-process, but we must allow the potential power of the performance product to radically change theatrical spaces from within.

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Listen to the others: the rehearsal process as a constant act of care

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While artists and performance makers use different strategies when engaging with participants in the rehearsal room, their presence provides the practitioner with a chance to care and ethically embed the other’s agency in the making process. In performance, care has often been discussed in the context of performance’s relationship with the viewer. In this article, I argue for listening as a rehearsal practice using a framework grounded in care. I propose DAR—Direction, Action, and Reflection, a way of making which fosters awareness of the other—that may be incorporated, adapted, and applied by practitioners across different creative fields. I discuss the rehearsal process of This is Not About Dance, a performative installation presented at the Reid Gallery in 2016, to argue for a conception of the rehearsal as a constant act of care, one that has the potential to grow one’s practice through co-listening.

Keywords: care, rehearsal, process, listening, performance, reflection, awareness, collaboration.

Introduction

In performance practice, listening is often interpreted as a metaphor for awareness, a strategy to enhance our understanding of the world. While composers (Buzzarté and Bickley, 2012), sound artists (Voegelin, 2010), and somatic practices (Eddy, 2009) for instance align with specific
nuances of the listening activity, the literature reveals little discussion on its potential within the rehearsal process. Working alone in the studio, the practitioner is responsible for the work and the self, often focusing on the work's development. Working with participants enables the performance maker to incorporate their viewpoints into the work. Although creative processes can differ greatly amongst performance practitioners when engaging with others, their presence creates a chance for makers to listen even more carefully, and to care. While care in performance has been examined in the context of the performance event itself (Johnson, 2016), few studies address care within the rehearsal environment. Nonetheless, considering a care practice (Tronto, 1993) where the practitioner aims to unveil the reality of the other person (Noddings, 1984) offers a framework for performance makers to adopt an inclusive approach in the rehearsal context. The emphasis on awareness of the other during rehearsals lays the foundation for an understanding of the rehearsal process as a constant act of care.

In this article, I focus particularly on rehearsals for performative installations with a site-responsive component, the area of practice where my work is situated. I begin with a discussion of the piece This is Not About Dance, This is Not About Movement, This is Not About Performance to argue for an understanding of listening as a rehearsal practice. I discuss how the different nuances of a listening practice have been approached by various artists, and propose a view of listening as an act of conscious engagement with the world around us (Vogelin, 2010). I address the potential of listening in the rehearsal setting, proposing a care framework entitled DAR—Direction, Action, and Reflection—a method of making which fosters awareness of the other. The framework emphasises the facilitator approach in the Reflection step, opening a space for participants to engage actively with how the work takes shape. The analysis of making This is Not About Dance
demonstrates how the Reflection step enables the performance maker to uncover new layers, only reachable through careful dialogical sharing. Reflection opens a forum for co-listening throughout the rehearsal, creating distinct ways to consider what collaboration is. The DAR approach may be incorporated, adapted, and applied by practitioners across different fields, such as dance, theatre and live art. Listening to the other has the potential to enhance the participants’ agency in rehearsal, and perhaps in performance, although the latter is outwith the remit of this study. Furthermore, listening to the other can positively contribute to the development of performance work in an ethical and supportive manner, opening new avenues for creation while engaging the participants in the process.

**A performative installation: This is Not About Dance**

*This is Not About Dance*, presented in 2016 at the Reid Gallery in The Glasgow School of Art, focuses on presence and spatial awareness, exploring how the human body activates space through everyday movement. It was performed by five participants with different backgrounds and levels of experience—painting and performance students and graduates, a curator, and a dancer—wearing bright plain costumes in blue, red, or green, enhancing the notion of a live painting or sculpture. Performers stood still for five minutes (Fig. 1), then walked in straight lines, paused, and changed direction, generating new spatial configurations. Performed over twenty minutes within and outwith the gallery, the piece is structured as alternating choreographed and improvised sequences separated by a few minutes of stillness. During the work, performers listened to the environment, to each other, and to the audience, responding to their surroundings as they made decisions on when and where to walk, turn, or stop, within a geometric set of lines, points, and intersections (Figs. 2 and 3). Each score was different: performers engaged with the
whole space, a particular area, or in specific configurations, and started and finished in a different location as the piece travelled throughout the gallery. The work resembles the formal repetition in Samuel Beckett’s television play *Quad* (1981), Trisha Brown’s proposition of how we perceive movement in *Walking on the Wall* (1971), and Anne Truit’s minimalist sculptures from the seventies.

*Figure 1:* This is Not About Dance. Installation view. Photo: Jack McCombe.

*Figure 2:* This is Not About Dance. Performance detail. Photo: Inês Bento-Coelho.
In *This is Not About Dance*, I use walking as a composition material to explore how the performers’ bodies relate to the space in which they perform. German-American phenomenologist Erwin Strauss (1966) suggests that while dancing, a person moves ‘within’ space, whereas walking is a means to ‘traverse’ space. By considering walking as dancing, transporting the walk into a performative environment where performers move ‘within’ space, participants engage in a distinct relationship with the gallery: they dance. However, their gestures lie at the intersection of choreographed movement and the everyday, as explored by the Judson Dance Theatre in the 1960s (Childs, 2003). Brown writes ‘I may perform an everyday gesture so that the audience does not know whether I have stopped dancing or not’ (1975, p.61). *This is Not About Dance* sits at the boundaries of dance, performance, and site-specific installation; a choreographic sculpture that is simultaneously static and moving, fostering new relationships with the gallery environment.

**Listening as a rehearsal practice**

Listening in performance has been approached by somatic practices, sound artists, and composers in different ways.
Somatic practices focus on listening to the body as a process to develop awareness of movement (Eddy, 2009), often for therapeutic purposes. The Alexander Technique and the Feldenkrais Method for instance, attend to movement perception to improve well-being, while Body-Mind Centering fosters a greater sense of self-awareness by focusing on the relationships between body and mind. In *Listening to Noise and Silence*, Salomé Voegelin (2010) talks about listening as a process used to navigate and explore a sound artwork, as opposed to passively receiving it. For her, listening is an active act of discovery: 'What I hear is discovered not received' (2010, p.4). This engagement with listening was widely studied by composer Pauline Oliveros, the founder of Deep Listening practice. She describes it as an intense activity of listening to all possible sounds in all possible ways, regardless of what one is doing (see Buzzarté and Bickley, 2012). Heloise Gold considers Deep Listening as a practice that allows one to 'become present, and to respond spontaneously and creatively from a deep source or wakefulness' (Gold, 2012, p.149). She discusses the concept of a 'listening body' as an activity where the whole body listens as if one had ears in every cell, a practice that allows one to 'respond more sensitively and immediately' (Gold, 2012, p.150). While Deep Listening is focused on listening to sound and somatic practices attend to listening to movement through the body, I propose to shift the focus of listening—from sound and movement—towards the surroundings. I consider listening as a form of perception that allows one to carefully pay attention to the other, the space, and the work, in the sense of Voegelin’s (2010) understanding of listening as an active mode of engagement with the world, and Gold’s (2012) view of listening as a form of presence. As such, listening is an open framework for awareness of, and engagement with several aspects of performance practice: the performers, the space, the work, and the self.
A listening framework has potential for practitioners to embed a position of care within it. Care, a difficult concept to pinpoint, has been interpreted in distinct ways by several authors (Sander-Staudt, n.d.). Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings (Sander-Staudt, n.d.) proposed care ethics in the 1980s as a theory essentially underlined by moral fundamentals. Noddings (1984) argues that care forms the basics of an ethical response, a reciprocal relationship, one that sits at the foundation of human existence (Sander-Staudt, n.d.). For her, ethical caring is ‘the relation in which we do meet the other morally’ (Noddings, 1984, p.4), and she further describes care as a form of accessing the other person’s reality. Amongst the philosophers who propose care as a form of practice, Joan Tronto and Berenice Fischer define it as:

... a species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, contain, and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web (Tronto, 1993, p.103).

While Tronto’s approach to care has been criticised for being too broad (Sander-Staudt, n.d.), considering it as a practice allows us to integrate it in other domains of action and interaction, such as the rehearsal process. In rehearsal, care requires the practitioner to engage deeply with the participants they work with, requesting a level of involvement for ‘reaching out to something other than the self’ (Tronto, 1993, p.102). In privileging the focus on engagement with the surroundings, a sense of paying attention to the other, care aligns with Voegelin’s (2010) understanding of listening as an active mode of engagement with the world.
Adrian Howells’ approach to the other is an example of listening as care in performance practice. His ability to ‘really listen and sense what his audience needed’ is a key aspect of his one-to-one performances and reflects his ‘uncompromising duty of care’: his interest in reaching out to the other led him to create safe spaces for the encounter with the audience during performance (Hastings and Wylie, 2016, p.253). In my approach, a listening framework grounded in care allows me to pay close attention to the performers during the making process.

Noyale Colin and Stephanie Sachsenmaier propose a useful understanding of collaborative processes in performance practice as approaches that ‘embrace the unknowable at its outset, in that they entail encounters with any given “others” [...] inherently productive in creative terms’ (2016, pp.15–16). The rehearsals become a ground for a dynamic encounter with performers: safe spaces, where their perceptions, ideas, and thoughts can be transferred to the work through a process of active attentiveness. Colin and Sachsenmaier further describe collaborative performance practice as ‘characterized by a significant input on behalf of the performers’ to develop the work’s material (2016, pp.8–9). As care implicitly leads to an action (Tronto, 1993), listening to the performers’ thoughts enables me to integrate them in the activities and the decision-making process, tailoring my actions to the participants’ requirements, interweaving their agency in the artwork’s complexity, thus re-enforcing the argument for the rehearsal as a constant act of care.

Listening to the other is therefore central to my rehearsal practice. While several practitioners structure the rehearsal around three main activities—directing, performing tasks, and discussing material—I incorporate an element of care in my process. I developed the DAR approach with a constant collaborative dialogical reflection at its core. Like any other rehearsal, the session starts with introducing the tasks to
participants, the Direction; followed by the participants’ response to the tasks, the Action; followed by gathering the group for dialogical Reflection. This process is repeated several times until the rehearsal finishes. DAR—which in my first language, Portuguese, means giving or offering—emphasises a caring outlook in all stages, supporting the wellbeing of performers and makers through providing them opportunities to give through listening. Performers show emerging material while I observe, take notes, and listen, paying attention to what they do and how their bodies act in the space: physical observation. I am also aware of their emotional involvement in the work: emotional observation. In performance, Howells creates safe spaces ‘for the work to thrive’ (quoted in Johnson, 2016, p.115); I create safe spaces in the rehearsal context, where participants explore and take risks within their own limits. My decision-making contributes to a caring environment, as I attend to how much longer to spend on a section, whether participants appear to need a break, or whether a change in approach is necessary. Throughout the framework, I facilitate collaborative exercises where performers devise movement material; direct the development of the material generated, run rehearsals, and make creative and logistic decisions; facilitate dialogical reflections for participants to share views on the process and the work; choreograph the material devised collaboratively; and make decisions on the work’s visual qualities. In This is Not About Dance, for example, the different roles at specific moments—director, choreographer, and facilitator—reflect the nature of non-traditional approaches to complex contemporary and changing practices operating within the gallery context. Colin and Sachsenmaier (2016) discuss the shift of the director / choreographer’s role in performance towards a facilitator role as a key element in contemporary practice. The DAR framework further contributes to this complexity, valuing the facilitator approach with specific goals at particular moments.
Reflection as a listening platform for a care practice

The rehearsals for *This is Not About Dance* followed a practice of listening through the DAR approach. In the dialogical Reflection step (Fig. 4), I took a facilitator role offering an open and supportive space for participants to share their thoughts. Regular dialogical Reflection enables participants to take agency within the process, and supports two goals: it allows me to listen to the performers’ experience of the work and to identify challenges, and it enables their experiences to emerge and permeate the work. Throughout the conversations I infer what participants need, I consider how to better support them, and I integrate their contribution into the piece, as learning how participants perceive the work contributes to the making of it. These conversations inform the next Direction: attending to the performers’ views opens possibilities for change in the work. The Reflection moment is instrumental in accessing their reality through care for the other, using Noddings’ proposition of ethical caring (1984).

*Figure 4: Reflection during rehearsal for This is Not About Dance. Photo: Eszter Biró.*

During the rehearsals for *This is Not About Dance*, performers were instructed to listen to the space and to one
another. I began each rehearsal with warm up exercises to enhance awareness of the body, the space, and the other. In an exercise, participants walked side by side in a straight line. I integrated variations, such as stopping, and walking together at different speeds or with the eyes closed. The latter instigates awareness of each other in the space, as participants concentrate on listening to the others’ sounds to know where they are. An invisible connection between performers is stimulated, fostering an awareness mind-set that becomes perceptible throughout the work. The warm up was followed by exercises where participants choreographed scores in small groups based on walking, turning, and stillness through paying attention to their surroundings. Performers created movement as opposed to working with pre-defined scores: a personal relationship with the material is thus fostered, and connections built between performers. The rehearsals finished with improvisation practice.

The development of the piece’s structure exemplifies how the listening framework guided the decision-making in This is Not About Dance from an ethical and careful position. In the first rehearsal, I instructed participants to improvise with walking, pausing, and turning in response to one another; observe the improvisation from the outside; and gather to share insights. I asked, ‘what did you find when you were watching the others?’, and facilitated a space for participants to share their perceptions of the work, placing them briefly in the director’s role with the potential to bring their agency into the piece. One performer said, ‘she turns, and you know, I need to be ready [...] it is quite exciting inside [yourself ] [...] if you relate [...] because you have to listen more’ (anonymous 2016, personal communication, 6 October 2016). The exercise required participants to be present in the space, to be connected and alert, to listen to one another at all times. Another participant remarked: ‘structure will be really useful in terms of the duration, because I think it will be really easy to lose track [...] , it is
hard to say how much time has passed’ (anonymous 2016, personal communication, 6 October 2016). While the improvised sections hold a strong sense of presence and awareness, throughout the dialogical Reflections, participants mentioned a need for a recognisable structure to hold on to and feel confident. Attending to their perception of the piece’s nuances contributed to my decision to alternate choreographed and improvised scores in the work’s structure, creating a situation where participants would feel supported. The choreographed sections provided a sense of security within the work, a platform from which performers could improvise with confidence, responding to one another, the audience, and the space. Tronto’s four concepts of ethical care—attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness (1993)—closely relate to listening to the other within rehearsal. In particular, attentiveness, paying attention to and recognising the needs of those around us (Tronto, 1993), enables me to make decisions from a care and ethical standpoint. It allows me to identify how participants see the work, and value their understanding of the piece. The Reflection step can be fundamental in developing work operating from a listening framework embedded in care, in an ethical manner, allowing the work to adapt to the participants, enabling their agency to permeate the piece.

Larry Lavender discusses three main points at the core of using dialogical approaches when teaching choreography:

the activation of artist, performer, and the spectator in order to foster through the experience of art a greater agency; shared authorship that cedes to others some or all control of a work’s structure and meaning; and a notion of community as collective responsibility, a view that is aligned with systems theories of
creativity, deep ecology, and collaboration theory
(Lavender, 2009, p.284).

Listening as a rehearsal practice correlates with Lavender’s first two pillars of what he describes as dialogical aesthetics. Nonetheless, listening focuses on activating the people involved towards achieving a greater sense of awareness and valuing the participants’ inputs. This suggests a distinct form of collaboration grounded in listening, where the DAR approach allows space for contributions from the maker, through directing and navigating a listening process; and the performer, through bringing their agency into it. In this perspective, collaboration may be defined as co-listening: we listen together throughout the process. This framework allows for a constant co-listening activity, which varies throughout the session. When I am directing, the participants listen and respond to my instruction. When they engage in the tasks responding to my direction, they listen to each other and the space, while I listen to them, and the work we produce. When I facilitate dialogical reflections, we all listen to one another. When I choreograph the work in the gallery, making decisions on how the work is shown, I pay attention to the space and the work. While the listening focus—who is listening, and what are they listening to—alters throughout the different activities in the rehearsal, it nevertheless remains continuous, suggesting a constant act of listening, of care. An example of a co-listening activity, although not in rehearsal but in the work’s appraisal, is *Table of Contents* by Siobhan Davies (2014). The piece integrates the viewer’s presence in the room while constantly negotiating the space and the relationship with the audience. The performance is composed of several parts, and after each section, dancers open a space for dialogue with the audience by inviting the public to gather around a table before performing the next section. The work’s immediacy and the connection with the audience through the dialogical activity contribute to the success of the piece. Although in *Table of Contents* listening to the
other is tangible in how the work is shown, it is not clear for the viewer whether the listening process was part of the work’s making. Perhaps Davies’ understanding of dance as a collective activity made by a community (Davies, et al., 2016) manifests in her interest in displaying co-listening moments.

![Image](image-url)

**Figures 5 and 6:** This is Not About Dance. Window score: inside view (above) and outside view (below). Photos: Jack McCombe.

Although listening during performance remains outside the scope of this paper, it is relevant to note that listening as
care emerges both in the locations of making and showing throughout the artistic process. This is particularly the case in site-specific practices, as the relationship with space is a key element of the work. During the research stage, I visited the gallery several times to consider how the work may respond to its architectural features. I listened to the possibilities that the gallery environment offers by paying attention to and being present in the space, which I then incorporated in the rehearsal plans. Following two studio rehearsals in *This is Not About Dance*, the gallery sessions were instrumental in how the work took shape, as a new layer of complexity—listening to the space—was incorporated. In the first gallery rehearsal, the participants’ bodies appeared reflected in the windows multiplying the number of performers in the room: this yielded the integration of the windows in the work. As such, I instructed two performers to go outside to test the relationship between outside and inside activity, which later became an integral part of the score, as performers in both spaces interacted with one another (Figs. 5 and 6). Italian architect and author Bruno Zevi (1957) suggests that one can only experience architectural works through spending time in them. He argues that by moving in a building to comprehend it from different points of view, one ‘creates, so to speak, the fourth dimension, giving the space an integrated reality’ (Zevi, 1957, p.27). Spending time in a site enables one to become more aware of its characteristics, thus gaining a heightened understanding of the space: it becomes a metaphor for being present. Some aspects of a site-specific piece—of which the window sequence is an example—can only be grasped through spending time in the location of its appraisal, allowing space to be perceived as a physical material to be incorporated in the work. As American artist Donald Judd states, ‘actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface’ (1965, p.209). Being in the space before, between, and during rehearsals, enables one to grasp the performative nature of the site and incorporate it in the piece. While one may listen to the other both in the dance
studio and the performance space, the latter allows one to listen to the space itself, offering other potentials for action, particularly in site-specific performance.

Conclusion

Although in performance practice care often focuses on the wellbeing of the audience and the performance maker when the work becomes public, here, I emphasise care within the rehearsal in performative installation contexts. Conceiving the rehearsal process as a constant act of care opens the door to an understanding of performance making as a conscious act of co-listening, engaging in new forms of collaboration. In considering listening as an integral activity which focuses on developing awareness of our surroundings in performance making—including the other, the space, the work, and the self—listening can also become a metaphor for understanding care as a practice within the rehearsal setting. Operating from a framework of listening to the other, DAR—Direction, Action, and Reflection embedded in care—allows the practitioner to foster an open and ethical environment that supports the participants’ agency in the process, as in the rehearsals for This is Not About Dance. In placing performers in a listening framework, one is simultaneously caring for the integrity of the work, and strengthening the relationships between performers and the piece, as participants are the work: their place in the piece relates to who they are and how they feel. Listening as a practice can be applied to other creative fields, opening new possibilities to create through co-listening, supporting the growth of one’s practice ethically. Considering care in rehearsal as an activity that fosters a co-listening approach has implications for makers and performers, a matter beyond the scope of the present study. As this article focuses on listening to the other, the implications of the DAR modus operandi for practitioners and audiences during and after the performance have not been addressed. Further research would allow for an
understanding of how a practice of listening may be perceived by an audience, and how a constant act of care may be present throughout the entire process.

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Long table

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Discussion etiquette: (inspired by Lois Weaver’s Long Table)

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The Art of Care-full Practice discussion etiquette
(inspired by Lois Weaver’s Long Table)

This is a discussion of themes raised in the 5 morning presentations.

* Anyone seated at the table has a voice.
* There is a host (one of the speakers) but no chair. The discussion does not have to centre on their presentation.
* Three listeners will come and go. Their role is to roam, listen and participate.
* You can talk about anything care-related.
* Make sure you don’t forget to be care-full.
* The paper acting as table cloth is a document. Feel free to write anything you want on it.
* There is no need to conclude on anything, just to open up conversations.
References


About the authors

This material was prepared by Laura Bissell, Laura González, Dee Heddon and Simon Murray, organisers of *The Art of Care-full Practice* symposium, which took place on 5 March 2017 at the University of Glasgow. This event was a collaboration between The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, The Glasgow School of Art and the University of Glasgow, and was part of the inaugural *Take Me Somewhere* festival of contemporary performance that took place in various locations in Glasgow.
Care Café: a chronology and a protocol

LOIS WEAVER WITH HANNAH MAXWELL

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An introduction

Care has become a central component to my practice, performance and research in recent years, made necessary in part by age (as I approach my seventies), by the aftermath of stroke (in the case of my performance partner, Peggy Shaw), and by the need to respond to hierarchies, systems and global events that render ‘caring’ a radical act.

In my recent performance work as part of Split Britches, the adjustments and allowances made for the performer or participants are rendered visible and co-opt the audience in an exchange of care and understanding. This ethos disrupts our expectations of both theatrical spectatorship and the responsibilities of audience and performer. Exchanges of care between performer, participants and audience are built into the design, aesthetic and text of the work. This is most evident in the case of Peggy's solo performance RUFF (2013), and my performance / chat-show / engagement project, What Tammy Needs to Know About Getting Old and Having Sex (2014).

Aside from live performance, I have devoted much of the last decade to developing my series of Public Address Systems; re-imagining institutional spaces and conventional formats for conversation within new architectures of care. For example, the Porch Sitting and the Long Table make use of familiar, domestic phenomenologies, to stimulate different kinds of dialogue and modes of interrelation.
In the aftermath of the US election, I devised and trialled the Care Café, a temporary venue for communitas, conversation and activity within a spoken and visible frame of 'care'. It is a space which allows us to acknowledge social anxiety, our own vulnerabilities and our desire to enact and feel care. The Care Café is an open-source and unfixed protocol; it is still developing and evolving as it encounters new questions, contexts and communities. Anyone can stage their own iteration in their local arts centre, church hall, shop front or front room. The life of the project, as in so many of these practices and protocols, seems to be in the repetition, the reciprocity and the interconnection of disparate peoples and places through the principle of care and gathering.

The chronology

On 7 November 2016, I was sitting in the lobby of a disused bank somewhere near Wall Street in New York City. There were hundreds of people next to me, sat in folding chairs pulled up to long municipal meeting tables, sending texts and making calls. We were 'getting out the vote' and 'saving our democracy', or at least our version of it. It felt good to gather there with strangers in this purposeful social space. In fact, in those tense few days before the 2016 US Presidential Election, I couldn’t stay away. I wanted to do my part, but I also just wanted to be in the company of others. We didn’t know each other, but as we sat side-by-side and engaged in our repetitive tasks, we struck up easy, free-flowing conversations. We spontaneously ordered pizzas for the entire room, went out on chocolate runs and shared common and uncommon histories. It seemed that while we had come there to work or to allay our anxieties or to express our hope and enthusiasm for the future, we mostly had come there to be together. Sitting amongst that gathering, in those last few hours before the polls closed, reminded me of the concept of café described by Carson McCullers in Ballad of the Sad Café. She talks about the
importance of sociality and the significance of place. She talks about how we need to gather and when there is a place, we do gather and think and talk and wait until ultimately there comes a moment when we act. I resolved to find a way to sustain this feeling of café after our labour here was no longer needed.

Two days later, sitting alone and traumatised in my apartment, I realised sadly that my nearest café was a banquette full of solitary, ear-phoned millennials working away at their computers at the Starbucks down the street. I felt lonely and needed to gather, much the same way people in my neighbourhood in southwest Virginia needed to gather around food and mundane tasks when there was an illness, birth or death in the family. Knocking on the door, placing a casseroles on the table and sitting together in the front room was one way that friends, strangers and the estranged could come together to care for members of their community. Something had to be done.

The next Sunday, I devised and trialled a Care Café, a temporary venue for the kind of assemblage of support, solidarity and purpose I had experienced a week earlier. It was a simple invitation to drop by the Club at La MaMa in NYC for a couple of hours on Sunday afternoon; to sit around small tables and chat while making homemade badges with individualised slogans or producing hand-outs with lists of survival hotline numbers and 'how to care for each other' advice.

The Care Café was set up to replicate the kind of café I imagined in Carson McCullers' story. It re-appropriated some of the aesthetic of café culture, with the arrangement of small tables, quiet conversation and provision of shared food and drink. However, the space also acknowledged and dismantled the common social anxieties associated with these spaces: closed conversations between strangers, a
school-canteen-esque difficulty in knowing where to sit and with whom. Just by entering the Care Café, participants acknowledged something of their own vulnerability, their needs in the present moment, and their desire to give and receive care. It also allowed for different kinds of conversation. Small roundtable discussions took place concurrently, with participants moving around and engaging with other groups as the two hours progressed. There was room for questioning, wondering and personal anecdote without the pressure of speaking in front of a larger group of people, yet the proximity of the tables created a feeling of a shared experience, as conversations were overheard and bled into one another. The tables focused attention on a particular activity or selection of activities. These included cutting and pasting, filling envelopes, badge making, stickering, or other simple actions. They were not so demanding as to preclude conversation, but rather provided an underpinning rhythm. Moments of silence were sustained through re-focus upon the activity, allowing for reflection, listening to surrounding conversations and an organic shift in topic. And more than anything, this Sunday afternoon Care Café was a simple space that allowed us to take comfort in our gathering, without having to respond to any particular agenda or call to action.

Thinking back, elements of care and the café have been essential to my practice since I began working with Peggy Shaw and Deb Margolin in the Split Britches Company. As we crafted our feminist performance methodologies in the 1980s, we believed that good political satire had to be based in good will, so we decided that if we were going to perform the villains of this time (the likes of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher or Phyllis Schlafly), we had to find ways to care about them. The concept of the café was also a fundamental aspect of our practice as we worked to grow a community for performance alongside the performances themselves. This was evidenced in the sibling upbringing of
our company, Split Britches, and WOW—a performance café for women artists in New York City.

In recent years, care has moved into a foregrounded position as both subject matter and aesthetic for the work. In the case of RUFF, for instance, the allowances made for the performer are not concealed; rather, the facilitating apparatus is core to the show. The audience are invited to participate in this support, right from the opening section of the show, where Peggy swiftly brushes away the usual expectations of passive spectatorship. She explains to the audience how she sometimes gets coughing fits since her stroke and speaks about how great it is when a performer coughs in a show. The audience gets on their side, wants to help—they are ‘in the palm of your hand’. Peggy realises this dynamic in performance, that an audience may care for the performer, and hands out a bottle of water to an audience member in the front row in case they want to give her water (despite the fact that ‘water does not help [her] cough’).

Much of my current performance work and research is conducted in collaboration with diverse groups of elders—
considering intimacy, sex, health, wellbeing and community with older people in the US, UK, Australia and Europe. These projects, predominantly under the guise of my performance persona Tammy WhyNot, demand both the practice and demonstration of care. Small groups of elder participants form temporary collectives as my ‘WhyNets’, supporting each other through the creative process. As Tammy, I encourage them to share their thoughts on somewhat difficult topics, building their stories into a performance framework. I observe the connections they form with one another outside of the business of the show itself, connections grown organically through the space and time to gather and talk, in an environment in which they all recognised and shared one another’s vulnerability. In performance, the care they demonstrate for one another—in moving on and off stage, reminding each other of choreography and words, applauding their individual set pieces and anecdotes—empower them in the eyes of the audience, as a collaborating ensemble rather than lone participants.
The Care Café also follows on somewhat from a consideration of care in Public Address Systems; a series of open-source strategies for new kinds of public conversation. These systems often re-purpose the domestic to disrupt the ‘panel-of-experts’ exclusivity of conventional discursive formats. They allow the institutional spaces in which they are held to be re-imagined within architectures of care. In a Long Table, participants are actively invited to share responsibility for the flow of the conversation and the respect shown to each other as speakers and listeners; an ‘Etiquette’ is read out by a host at the start, the space is intimately lit, turns are taken, microphones are passed and shared. Everyone in the room has the power (and imperative, with the communal interest for a more satisfying discussion) to shift the direction of conversation, to mediate moments of tension and to make space for voices less easily heard.

Similar nuance can be observed in a Porch Sitting, where participants sit side-by-side and face out in one direction to ‘muse’ on a particular topic. This inspires a gentler mode of discussion, with room for pause, welcomed tangents and a
calm familiarity amongst the participants—evoking the feeling of sitting out in the quiet of the porch at the end of the evening. There is no official summation, no bullet-pointed conclusions; the conversation folds into a silence, its ending natural as bedtime.

As of 1 September 2017, the Care Café is still in the experimental stage. I have set Cafés up in New York City in the US, and in London, Folkestone, Brighton and Glasgow in the UK with more scheduled in London and Sydney, Australia. The contexts vary: from landscapes of political aftermath, such as the US Presidential Election and the UK’s Brexit, to small grassroots performance festivals, to large national festivals focused on art, mental health and human rights. Venues so far include empty performance spaces, theatre bars, cafés and multi-purpose rooms in state libraries.

As with other Public Address System projects, I make this format open for anyone to use, trial, or change to suit their
situation and need for care. I invite you to take the guidelines laid out below in the Protocol and host a Care Café in your own town, to further engage and connect with your existing community—or as a starting point for a new one. Pass the idea on to people you think might be able to make use of it, whatever their field, passion or politics, wherever they are in the world. In some ways, I feel, sharing this idea is even more important than it has been with the other Systems. The radical power and personal comfort in acts of gathering can grow exponentially with the knowledge that the experience is being replicated in different locales worldwide—a truth perceived on a massive scale in the case of the 2017 Women’s March.

These are still very early stages of development. Trialling the Long Table took ten years before settling on the final protocol. However, the Care Café is a simple idea. It is simply an invitation to sit with others for a specific period of time within a framework of care. Perhaps it’s hard to improve on simplicity. It has been a pleasure to see how little explication Care Café requires; the importance of gathering is something felt instinctually².
The protocol

Care Café is a place, either public or domestic, for people to gather their wits, thoughts and comrades in action.

- It can be a hall, a hallway, a meeting room or someone’s living room—even the corner of a real café.

- You will need chairs and a few tables for sitting around and leaning on, placed so that there is room to move and mingle, as well as sit and talk.

- There doesn’t have to be a specific agenda or discussion topic, just an open framework for self-selecting small group or one-to-one conversations.

- Food and drink are not necessary, but tea and biscuits are always welcome and it’s fun to see what might arrive if you set up an informal potluck table.

- Music is optional but remember that conversation is optimal.

- Provide each table with small manual tasks of care. Think of things that need to be done for someone or some group, like folding laundry, texting appeals, stamping mailings, cutting out cookies, preparing art projects or political information. Or simply make your own custom badge for a cause of your choice. Having everyone engaged in simple physical tasks keeps the conversation easy and flowing.

- Think of a way to share resources for action, activism
and care—post-its, sign-up sheets, a wall poster, bulletin board or blackboard, video diary corner. Resist the urge to finish with a group discussion or public announcements. Let everyone go gently on their way.

- Document and log your activity on the Care Café Facebook community page so we can stay connected and share care strategies.
  https://www.facebook.com/cafeofcare

And remember that this is primarily a state of mind that we can carry with us, asking ourselves daily: how can we maintain an attitude of care in an uncaring world?

Notes

1. RUFF (2013). Created in collaboration with Peggy Shaw and performed by Peggy, this piece employs green screen technology to represent the ‘dark spaces’ left in her brain after her 2011 stroke and displays her script on three movable monitors to assist with performance and the memory of text. RUFF toured to Alaska, New York, the UK, Poland and Tasmania, including a run at the Barbican in London. The piece also prompted the development of an interactive workshop, Greenscreening, for survivors of stroke.[1]

2. What Tammy Needs to Know About Getting Old and Having Sex (2014). After premiering in New York with a cast of 16 elder participants (or WhyNets), the show was re-created with local older people in Brighton, Manchester, Glasgow, London, and Lublin, Poland. The show draws on practice-based research into ideas of sex, sexuality, friendship and intimacy in the over-50s and includes personal stories, ‘guest spots’ from local participants, and a number of the country-western hits of trailer-park survivor (and my alter-ego), Tammy WhyNot.[2]

3. The Porch Sitting. First trialed at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club (ETC), New York on New Year’s Eve 2012 / 13, this protocol has the audience all face the same direction, allowing for a gentle mode of conversation based more on wondering than knowing. Porch Sittings have since been held in the UK, Ireland, Australia and Los Angeles.[3]

4. The Long Table. Inspired by the ever-extending table in Marleen Gorris’s film Antonia’s Line, this conversation protocol uses the etiquette of the dinner party to encourage a more democratic exchange of ideas. Anyone can come and take a seat at the table.
Conversation is the only course; there is an end, but no conclusion. The *Long Table* has been set in diverse spaces around the world, for a variety of topics: on technology, housing, gender, age and sexuality, to name but a few.[1]

5. *Care Café*. First trialed after the 2016 US election at La MaMa ETC, New York on 10 November 2016, this protocol is designed as a place for people to gather, encouraging gentle, politically-based conversation and activities. *Care Cafés* have since been held across the UK and Australia.[2]

**About the authors**

HANNAH MAXWELL is a writer, performer and artist collaborator based in London. She has worked with Lois Weaver and Split Britches since 2014 and is co-writer on the performance text for their latest major work, *Unexploded Ordnances*. In 2015–16 she was lead writer for *The Sick of The Fringe* at Edinburgh Festival Fringe; her performance *Diagnoses* were featured in *The Scotsman*. An essay on the project, co-written with its co-founder Brian Lobel, was published in *Contemporary Theatre Review*. Her debut solo performance, *I, AmDram*, premiered at Camden People’s Theatre in May 2018.

LOIS WEAVER is an artist, activist, and Professor of Contemporary Performance at Queen Mary University of London. She has been a writer, director, and performer with Peggy Shaw and Split Britches since 1980. Her experiments in performance as a means of public engagement include *Long Tables, Porch Sittings, Care Cafés*, and her facilitating persona, Tammy WhyNot. A book on her performance work, *The Only Way Home is Through the Show: Performance Work of Lois Weaver*, edited by Jen Harvie, was published by Intellect Live and the Live Art Development Agency in 2015. Weaver is a Guggenheim Fellow, a Wellcome Trust Engagement Fellow, and recipient of the 2018 Women of the World (WOW) Women in Creative Industries Fighting the Good Fight award.
Lunch

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Salad lunch and gift instructions

THE ART OF CARE-FULL PRACTICE SYMPOSIUM

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The Art of Care-full Practice
Salad lunch and gift instructions

We have provided you with bowls, lettuce, salad dressing, toppings, bread, chopping materials, cutlery, plates, soft drinks and cups.

With the materials you have brought for lunch, negotiate with your group about what to include in the salad and how.

You may want to continue the discussion on care. Nutritious food is a great invitation to converse.

What is the relation between food and care?

Enjoy the lunch you have created as a group.

Sometime during the lunch, discuss how you want to pass on the gift or token of care you have brought.

What is the relation between care, giving and receiving?

The paper acting as table cloth is a document. Feel free to write anything you want on it.

There is no need to conclude on anything, just to open up conversations.
About the authors

This material was prepared by Laura Bissell, Laura González, Dee Heddon and Simon Murray, organisers of The Art of Care-full Practice symposium, which took place on 5 March 2017 at the University of Glasgow. This event was a collaboration between The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, The Glasgow School of Art and the University of Glasgow, and was part of the inaugural Take Me Somewhere festival of contemporary performance that took place in various locations in Glasgow.
A reciprocity of care: a dialogical reflection on the artwork Winter.

JOHN MARK HAMMERSLEY, RACHEL DAVIES & DANIEL SAUL

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Introduction

The work Winter is an artists’ film by Rachel Davies and Daniel Saul, commissioned by Quarantine as the third in the quartet suite of primarily performance works: Summer. Autumn. Winter. Spring. that explore the themes of life, death and time (Quarantine, 2017). It features Mandy, who has been told she has terminal cancer, and addresses the film’s themes through a series of conversational interludes juxtaposed with scenes and details from her everyday life. Quarantine are a theatre company that have been making work for over 25 years, led by the creative directors Richard Gregory and Renny O’Shea. They are known for creating theatre that explores everyday themes, and which grows out of working with the public. In Quarantine’s work there is a respect for and love of people, which means they are able to get people up on stage and ask them to speak openly, without feeling they are putting them on the spot or exploiting them. They create a space for having conversations. The quartet was commissioned by: SICK! Festival, Compass Live Art, Contact, Dublin Theatre Festival, HOME, Göteborgs Dans & Teater Festival, In Between Time, Lancaster Arts, National Theatre Wales, Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival Groningen, and Northern Stage; it was performed at the Old Granada Studios in Manchester in 2016 and at The Space as part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival in 2017. The film Winter was shown as part of The
Art of Care-full Practice symposium in Glasgow in March 2017.

Winter: was made through a series of audio recorded conversations and film shootings in and around Mandy’s home. In their first meeting, Davies asked Mandy if she would mind her recording their conversation. This unstructured conversation lasted for over four hours and provided the material for a planned, three-day shoot which included: recording Mandy at her kitchen window looking out onto the garden, taking the dogs out for a walk, another long interview, sequence shots of the garden at sunrise, and a portrait shot of Mandy. While producing a rough edit of Winter, Davies and Saul invited Mandy to visit London for the first time to do some studio slow motion shots of her sewing. However, as Mandy’s health became worse, the trip was called off. Shortly after, Mandy received news from the doctors that there was nothing more they could do for her. Davies and Saul visited Mandy’s home once more to share and show the work in progress, and conduct one more recorded conversation, as they felt Mandy might wish to add to what she had previously said. Mandy died a few months after the film premiered in Manchester, March 2016. After the quartet’s showing in Norfolk in 2017, John Hammersley met the film-makers Davies and Saul to discuss and reflect on the process of collaborating with Mandy in the making of Winter; and to explore what insights about care might emerge from their dialogue.

Mandy’s death raises the question of whether talking about the production of Winter; for the purpose of research risks constructing an objectified representation of Mandy, onto which the artists’ ideas can be superimposed. Artistic and research representations may be reductive of the complexity of lifeworlds (Husserl, 1970) and their participants, unavoidably involving generalisations and selections. However, this text is offered as an artists’
reflection of their experience of collaborating with Mandy. Hammersley’s aim in this constructed account is to represent the dialogue with the artists Davies and Saul, and to convey some of the complexity of the dynamics of care that emerged in the process of making Winter.

Constructed research accounts are a feature of Hammersley’s practice-based approach to dialogical research-as-art (Hammersley, 2015). Combining a Platonic maieutic (Leigh, 2007), a non-linear and multi-perspectival mode of written dialogue, with Wittgensteinian informed social constructionist approaches to meaning-making (Wittgenstein, 1958) allows for the preservation of multiple thematic concerns and perspectives in conversation. This seeks to avoid reducing concepts such as care to a singular authorial perspective or overly narrow definition. In this manner, dialogue is not construed as an argumentative exchange of reason between two interlocutors, but instead, as a multi-layered process of meaning-making that sustains tensions between ideas in an on-going process of knowledge performance. This promotes a more active and reflective consideration of the text. The implication is that a textual account of conversation does not mirror real events. Instead, this text is a performative act of representation and construction (Rhodes, 2000), and one of many possible accounts of the dialogical event of meaning-making between Davies, Saul and Hammersley. It is offered as a dialogue in which the reader is invited to actively participate and contribute further resources for interpretation.

A dialogue

Daniel: We use the word ‘portrait’ as a starting point.

John: Is it a film portrait of Mandy who has terminal cancer?
Rachel: Richard, who runs Quarantine, proposed the film to me. He put it in the themes of the quartet *Summer. Autumn. Winter. Spring.* which are about the human lifecycle and our relationship with time and hope. He wanted *Winter.* to be about time, but through the experience of someone who knows that it is acutely precious—a younger person, Mandy, whose time is cut short and knows it.

D: He used the phrase ‘close-up’ which really informs the work. In terms of art-language, it is a portrait, and in film-language, it is a close-up. They wanted a big screen close-up of one person in contrast to *Summer,* which comes before, which has lots of people on stage. *Winter* has one person on screen looking at the audience, but the viewer is very conscious of that person being magnified.

R: This was looking at one person’s life and using it as a microcosm. There is always the thought that this person’s experience, even though it is particular, hopefully resonates with all. That’s not to describe too much, or to become too much her story. It doesn’t become about her survival. It tries to point to the themes of life, death, and time, which Richard stated at the start. We were talking about value with Richard and he mentioned a friend who had a terminal illness. His friend said that things that were small took on the biggest value, taking pride in making a nice meal, or watching the kids drawing.

D: Finding the profound in amongst the small things is a theme throughout the quartet of works, but we also use objects to symbolise human experience and relationships. Small objects became a theme we picked up upon within the film. We used a split screen approach, juxtaposing objects and details alongside Mandy talking to or looking at the camera. You might notice the detail of smudges on a window. It talks about Mandy’s world closing in and getting smaller.
J: As film-as-theatre it is constructed through complicated relationships, but it is largely performed through voice, and at some level, it feels like a theatrical monologue; but at the same time I wonder about whether this is Mandy voicing her own monument?

D: It is something we have both done a lot in our work. A lot of the conversations that make up the soundtrack were recorded with just a little sound recorder.

R: I didn't want to make a film about watching somebody dying. I didn't want it to be, 'Oh you can see she's getting worse', or that sort of thing, and I think we got that from Mandy. I think she interpreted it as a monument, yes. I think she wanted that. She always said, 'I want to leave something'.

J: How were you introduced to Mandy?

R: With Quarantine we discussed who might be the subject of this film. Richard said we would be making it with SICK! Festival, and they have their networks to find someone to work with, but he said, 'does anyone know anybody who they think might be interested?'. Lisa said, 'Well there's my auntie Mandy. In our family, she's really looked down on. She's got four dogs. She's got bad sight. She's a bit deaf. She just works in Asda'. She portrayed the family attitude to her favourite auntie Mandy.

D: She said her family call her common.

R: Yes, [Lisa said] 'in our family she's called common'. This might be describing Lisa’s relationship to her parents which is estranged. So, immediately it is a very complicated personal relationship. Lisa was crucial to building a bridge between ourselves and Mandy; she was continuously there
as someone to refer to, to ask how Mandy might feel about things. She had an intimate knowledge of how to adapt our needs to Mandy’s needs. Lisa is a film maker, as well as being Mandy’s niece and working for Quarantine. And that’s quite common to how they work. Quarantine often approach participants for projects by starting with its wider family, the members’ families and friends, as they believe this helps establish relationships of trust.

J: Do you think there are risks working with vulnerable people we know?

R: I think it has got to come down to the particularities of that specific relationship. Lisa wholeheartedly had Mandy’s care centrally in her mind. That was clear.

J: Is care just about good intentions, or is care about having deeper insights into the risks of projects?

R: At this stage, nothing was assumed. The conversation was very careful, and Richard was particularly careful about rushing in. It was very gentle, ‘Perhaps, would a conversation with Mandy be appropriate, to talk to her about Quarantine?’ And Mandy knows what Quarantine do, and she knows Lisa, and so it is... I mean obviously that is open to exploitation.

J: Are vulnerable relationships open to exploitation by us as artists, or do we use our family and friends?

R: Obviously it could be the first, but in this case, I don’t think it was that. But yes, if you were hell-bent on trying to fashion a story out of something, or just get something on the screen. But I can confidently say that none of that was there in this case.
J: Such works can be read as using our relationships as an artistic resource, but conversely, they can be seen as a participatory act of giving; our relatives giving to us, as support. It isn’t just mining or exploitation if there is an understanding of what it is for. You were suggesting that Mandy knew what Quarantine did.

R: Yes, because she knows Lisa incredibly well.

J: There is still a question of pace, of not rushing, and was that important in enacting the care in the work, the pace of starting out, making decisions?

R: Yes. That was as long as it took, and yes, in reality, you are working to a deadline, but we had lots of time. It wasn’t like we had to pressure her to agree. It wasn’t like that. It was, ‘let’s find out’, instead of, ‘let’s go with this subject’. There was quite a lot of time when we went away, and thought, and then I went up and met her before anything had been established or suggested, really.

J: Early on, with Quarantine, were there conversations about the risks?

R: Of course. Those conversations weren’t formalised in any way, but 25 years into Quarantine, they are absolutely full of them, as they know the territory.

D: Can I just interject? Because there were conversations with Dr John Troyer from the University of Bath, which were happening before your meeting. He was involved in the conceptualising of the quartet, and when Quarantine started talking about working with someone close to dying, they did go straight away to talk with John, and they had a lot of ethical conversations which, funny enough, we weren’t
part of, but the company did explicitly talk about risks at that point.

J: But, when I see the work in a theatre, I see an edited film piece, I don’t see a work that is constructed through many layers of careful conversation. I am curious about representing the complexity of care. I wonder about how risky this work would be for an individual, or just you two working in isolation, because you talk about the unique relational situation of this work.

D: One of the things which is very important is Lisa’s introduction to the film which you see on a display in the theatre. So just before the screen is brought on to stage, she is typing.

R: She says, ‘Hi I’m Lisa, I’ve been at the back all the time. The film you are about to see is about my favourite auntie. When I was 11, I chained myself to the fence because I didn’t want to leave’. So, it was just a little statement about how much she meant to Lisa, and now she says that she has died, relatively recently, in July last year.

J: Mandy’s reflections remind me of epimeleia, a concern with care for oneself that is more than self-interest, it is part of the art of life, or paying attention to what is important in life (Rabinow, 2000). Do you think Winter: and the quartet represent life as a shared work of art, that the things we make are all part of constructing our lives artistically?

D: Yes. We are only as much as the stories we tell ourselves.

R: That links to how much impact making this film has had on my life. It has had a big impact on me. I feel absolutely energised and empowered. I was brought into a very
privileged role to work with Mandy, and it was a big experience for me as well. There is an aspect of care, of the ripples of impact that it has had on my life. And I have written a little bit about how I felt coming back after the second shoot. I had a conversation with Dan and I just felt awful. It was just half an hour before our taxi was coming to take us home, having to be on a certain train and I am aware of what Mandy is going through, she needs to go to hospital to find out why she has lost feeling in her right side, and she is very worried that the cancer has gone to her brain. So, she expressed that during the day, and as I say, we’ve got a job to do. A job of not only being commissioned by Quarantine, but a job that Mandy is expecting us to do and wanting us to do. I have got a film to make, and I have ideas which need to be in that film to best portray the beauty that I want to convey, predetermined or whatever, but I need to do it justice within my set of criteria that means a good film. So, I felt terrible. I said we need more close ups of the wallpaper, and we need more sounds of the dogs, but it has been known from that morning that she felt quite bad that day. So, she is going to go off to hospital as we got on the train, but she hadn’t been given the big news which came after the visit, which was that there was nothing more they could do for her. In the film, she is talking about possibly having two years left, but she actually had two months. Very soon after we made the film she died, and that is common with lung cancer, it can go very quickly to the brain.

J: You are trying to care for the work of art and for yourself as an artist, but you are almost in a therapeutic role of listening. Mandy is telling you about her concerns; she has family, she has a niece, but she is telling a film maker about her concerns.

R: And the care side of things which resonated with me is as a mother also. She is a mother of two children, so that was the involvement I felt wrapped up in. So, there are conflicts,
and there are going to be, aren't there? You're a human being, you can't really divide and you can't compartmentalise completely. But I would also say I didn't feel adrift in that. Lisa had been with us all the time. Lisa and Lisa's partner were there as people who knew Mandy well. So, I felt, to a degree, able to function in my role as a film director.

D: My perspective is that we absolutely went through a crisis of confidence about the project at that moment, which looking back on it, was part of the process for us. I just noticed one of those awful ironies that one person is going through a life-changing piece of bad news, and at that particular moment our concentration was in the details, and it brought about that questioning. We asked ourselves, 'are we using someone else's life, are we exploiting someone else's life to make a piece of art?', and for me, at that moment, we didn't know the answer, and I felt bad because a project that we had felt quite confident in, and felt that it was a caring project, suddenly came into question.

R: It didn't come into question for me, I just let myself feel those feelings. I didn't feel wrong, I just acknowledged the feelings which are complex, and which are probably part of what any documentary maker might go through.

J: Was any care offered to you?

R: Yes. I spoke to Richard about the feeling. I said, 'this is quite tough at this stage. I am feeling quite affected', and he said, 'we've been working with John Troyer, talking about how these things might affect the making and whether you would like to talk to someone about this, whether you feel John is the person, or some other form of counselling. Can we suggest that to you?', and I said I'd think about that. I think that helped me to think it is part of things, and I don't
think I developed that need, but I was quite conflicted for a while.

D: I was quite conflicted for weeks. But I also think it is a really good thing to do because you don’t take things for granted, and you do engage critically in the process.

J: Is it a key part of the work that it can only be made with someone who is likeable, that we can care about?

D: No. I don’t think so.

R: It would be a different film with a different person. Any person different from Mandy, we would notice different things.

J: But is it important that the viewer cares for Mandy?

R: Well that is a question about what constitutes caring for, whether it is about thinking that person is a bit like them, and I don’t think it is.

D: I don’t think it is either, but I do think it is important that people empathise with Mandy on some level.

R: But if we had been introduced to someone who it was very hard to like on those surface levels, then I think we’d have certainly found ways to work with that, and ideas of empathy.

D: There have been a lot of documentary films specifically about people with cancer, and there are quite a lot online made by relatives that tackle a very parallel area.
J: I wonder how many of those relatives are also artists? It raises issues of representation: what does it mean to represent someone in portraiture, in documentary, to represent somebody dying? What are the risks of representation?

R: It leads me to think about how and why Lisa wasn’t making the film.

D: Which was a conversation we used to have quite regularly.

J: What do you think about that now?

R: Some of the complexities we were just talking about would be far bigger, I think Richard thought that might have been too close. Maybe it was something that wouldn’t have been helpful for Lisa.

J: Could filming be a deflection, seeing things through the camera but not being present as a grieving person?

R: Indeed, having a kind of filter that distracts, and there are big stresses involved in delivering a product on time that could complicate the grieving process. It would have been very complicated for Lisa to make the film. She is a niece, and this is about family dynamics and rivalries, potentially. There is a complex relationship between Lisa and Mandy’s children. How might Lisa have started to feel with the building relationship she was having with the reconciled children?

J: To what extent do you think the care you showed Mandy in constructing the film might obscure her anger, the grief, the
hurt and create a representation of the end of life that edits those things out?

D: I don’t know because there is a lot in the film where she talks about her siblings and her parents which is absolutely about her anger, and she talks about how that will never be resolved now. It finishes on the unfinished garden just after she has talked about how she will never be able to heal the bonds with her siblings.

R: And that she is not ready to go, and she says, ‘I can’t possibly die until I’ve done these things’. So, it is left with that. I do think she is like us all. She knows she is being filmed. She is a performer. There is also a kind of censorship to that. I didn’t want to push and push and push. I was listening more than asking questions. I wanted to take what she wanted to give me and make something from that. I didn’t want to think there must be more. That was a care that I had. It wasn’t an interview. It was a listening.

D: We had lots of very loose questions.

R: We called it an interview, but I wasn’t trying to shape it into anything. You are aware of themes you are trying to get at.

D: We like to expand the term *documentary*, as I like responding to material, which for me is analogous to listening in how we approach documentary. With filmmaking, you go and gather the material. Then you bring it back to the edit suite, and then you spend ages listening and listening, over and over again, and rereading transcripts. Because sometimes, when you’re in a conversation, you are not really listening. You are sometimes thinking about
what’s going on for you. Taking it home, you can think about it in a new way.

References


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**Inside the hos(t)pital**

BEN HARRISON

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**Prologue**

Grid Iron is a theatre company based in Edinburgh which, since its corporation in 1995, swiftly gained a national and international reputation for site-based, site-suggestive and site-generic work. The author of this paper joined the company as Co-Artistic Director and has directed the majority of its productions. Highlights in a 21-year trajectory with the company include: *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter staged in the then abandoned Mary King’s Close (1997–8); *Gargantua* by Ben Harrison, based on the novel by Rabelais and staged in the abandoned vaults of the City Library and an old bank (which the company named the Underbelly, 1998); *Decky Does A Bronco* by Douglas Maxwell staged in children’s swing parks (2000–2010); *Those Eyes, That Mouth* staged in an abandoned series of New Town apartments and then again in the former security headquarters of the Syrian Secret Police in Beirut (2003–5); *Roam* by Ben Harrison, staged in the airside and landside areas of Edinburgh International Airport (2006); and *Crude* by Ben Harrison, staged in Shed 31 at Dundee Ports, a vast industrial shed alongside three oil rigs berthed in the Tay River. Since the author joined Grid Iron, the company has won 29 awards across all aspects of its work. He has also made site work as a freelance director all over the world, and most notably with the Almeida Theatre in London and Muztheater in the Netherlands.

‘Just remember it’s our swing park!’, 12-year-old girl, Portree Swing Park, Isle of Skye, April 2000.
'In Lebanon, we prefer our theatres to be theatres and our hospitals to be hospitals'. Issam Bou Khaled, Alexandria, Egypt, December 2003.

'This is a wicked film'. Nine-year-old audience member, *Caledonian Road*, promenade site-based production, Almeida Theatre, 2002.

Scene One

*A Host* and a Guest *meet in a location.*

**Host:** So you want to come to do a show in my space. Why would you want to do it here? Wouldn’t you be better off in a theatre? That’s what they’re for. Can’t see what you would want with this dusty old place...

**Guest:** Well, the subject matter of the play really suits your space. That’s what we do as a company, we try to create a dance, a conversation between the content of the piece and the architecture and feel of the site we choose. Sometimes one leads, sometimes the other. For instance, in 2006 I wrote and directed a piece called *Roam* (Harrison, 2006), which was inspired by a philosophical text by Michel Serres called *Angels: A modern myth* (2000). The text is constructed as a dialogue between two friends. He is a representative of an airline who has to fly around the world for his work. She is a doctor based in the airport. Together they muse on the travellers they see, characterising them as contemporary angels, as they carry messages across the globe. That concept really needed an airport to make it work in its fullest expression. Once we persuaded Edinburgh Airport to host it however, the particular architecture of that space began to construct the dramaturgy.

**Host:** You’ll need to translate some of that into English...
what’s dramaturgy?

**Guest:** Well...

**Host:** I can’t believe the airport hosted you! Were they not worried about security?

**Guest:** Dramaturgy... we’ll need to discuss that over several glasses of wine! But for now, in terms of the airport, there were many factors that made it possible. The most important aspect was the timing. It was far enough away from 9/11, being staged in 2006, and it was just before the so-called liquid bomb plot. It was also the inaugural year of the National Theatre of Scotland, and the British Airports Authority (BAA) wanted to have a good bit of PR as the expansion of the airport site was proving controversial with local residents and with the environmental lobby. On a personal level, the terminal manager had been a theatre producer on the Fringe (when she was a student at Edinburgh University), so she had a bit of a handle on what we were about. That’s by no means the case always. We recently made an enquiry about a site for our 2016 show *Crude* (Harrison, 2016) about the oil industry (see Fisher, 2016). The person on the other end of the line for an industrial lettings company didn’t know what theatre was. He hadn’t heard of it as a concept. It was eventually explained to him as like stand-up comedy (which he had heard of) but with more people!

In terms of security, all the members of the team were background-checked, we all had official security passes, and the audience all had to bring their passports to gain entry to the terminal.

**Host:** If you came and did your show here, my manager
would want to read the script, to check that you’re not implying anything negative about our business.

**Guest**: Of course. Most (but not all) hosts ask to read the script. And of course, we are careful not to offend those who are hosting us. We didn’t make much of a feature of the environmental impact of air travel in *Roam*, because that was obviously something BAA wouldn’t like. It would be the equivalent of serving a roasted hog at a dinner party for Muslim vegans. In the end, we made a very small comment in that one of the characters held up a taxi driver sign with ‘CO₂’ written on it. We hid it in a crowd of other ‘taxi drivers’ with signs like ‘God’ and ‘The End of Time’. In fact, the airport did censor one thing, which was the code for a suspicious abandoned bag. Ironically, I wouldn’t have known the code unless someone had told me about it during my research at the airport. So, we just changed the number and it was fine.

**Host**: I’m not being funny, but you guys have your heads in the clouds, don’t you? I mean you’re just making mad stuff up, stories, whereas we’re trying to run a business in the real world. Don’t you just end up rubbing people up the wrong way?

**Guest**: Thanks for your direct question! Most people think that theatre people are a bit away with the fairies, yes, I think that’s true. But what we do is go in and be more prepared than the hosts are. We have already done the risk assessments, the fire protocol, evacuation procedures, radio communication protocol, and all the myriad aspects of making a site-based promenade performance run smoothly in a multi-functioning space, whose lowest priority would be the show itself. In fact, in my experience, if the staff of a location haven’t been won over in the early stages, they normally will be once the actors arrive for the first day of technical rehearsals. The actors bring glamour to the
workplace. And we only work with actors who are open-hearted, curious about the world, resilient, and courteous human beings. One loud-mouthed actor, confirming the biases of the hosts, can undo months of careful preparation.

**Host:** You can’t make much money at this. I mean there’s not going to be much space for the seats.

**Guest:** Well, we wouldn’t actually be using seats for a project of this nature. The audience will walk around, following the action.

**Host:** But do you make any money at this?

**Guest:** We make enough to cover our costs. But no, we certainly don’t make a profit!

**Host:** I still think you’ve got your head in the clouds. But anyway, I’ll give you the guided tour. I can’t promise anything mind, it’ll be down to the higher-ups.

**Guest:** That would be great, thank you.

**Host:** There are some rooms we won’t be able to go in because they’re being used. I’ll see if we can just pop our heads around the door of the main room though if that’s being used. It would be good for you to see that.

**Guest:** Great, that’s very kind thank you.

*The Host and the Guest begin to walk around the building, along corridors, up stairs, into rooms, and down into the basement.*
Host: Don’t worry about these walls here. We’re getting the plasterers in. It’ll be all fixed up by the time you guys get here.

Guest: Well, actually, that quality of these walls is one of the aspects of your building that really attracted me. It gives a real sense of the building’s history—see those fragments of wallpaper and peeling paint? That kind of thing is very inspiring for us, for the actors, and for the audience. One of the characters in the piece has inhabited the building for a very long time; I’d probably stage one of her key scenes with that wall as a backdrop.

Host: Really? How odd. OK, well, I’ll check about the building works schedule. We might be able to work around you. Just this stairwell now and a balcony area at the top and you’ll have seen everything.

Guest: Thank you so much for your time. It’s great to see all these hidden spaces. The building is just perfect for the piece. It far exceeds my expectations already.

Scene Two

The Host and the Guest have met up in a pub a couple of days after the opening night of the show. The Host is a little bit tipsy and gushing about the experience.

Host: I really liked how you made me see the place I work in in a new way. I mean, I walk down that corridor every day, but I had no idea about all those messages the builders had left up there, high up towards the ceiling. And, then, when we walked back down it, and it was all red, and you’d changed all the signage. It took me a good couple of minutes to realise it was the same corridor.
Guest: Thanks, it was a lot of work and involved a lot of people working at speed to make that transformation, but I’m glad it worked for you.

Host: And then that dark room where I thought I was next to a speaker and then, when the lights went on, I realised there was actually an actor behind the grille! I nearly jumped out of my skin!

Guest: Thank you, that really means a lot. We do really try to investigate the site thoroughly and figure out its unique possibilities. Even now, sitting in this pub, my brain is fizzing with how one might use the bar, that door, that large table... how one could override the lighting to create the right effects for the action. The actors should be as familiar with it as their own bedroom, as familiar as I am with this bar we are sitting in. I’m a regular here. They really need to inhabit the space and not do anything that could be done in the more neutral space of a theatre stage. We always say things to actors like have you noticed the window, the light socket, the tap? What is your character’s attitude to the staircase, the wooden knots in the floor, that trailing cable, the temperature, the light falling through the window, and so on?

Host: But you really didn’t have much time in the space to prepare.

Guest: Sometimes that’s a good thing. It’s a mindset, more than necessarily having to live in the space. You can work quite quickly. In fact, sometimes you can spend too long in the space and then the actor starts doing the thing that isn’t obvious, because good actors are naturally inventive beings and can get bored quite quickly. You need to do both the obvious and the extraordinary. For example, in Roam, the first location was the check-in area, so, of course we had to
have characters staffing the desks, and other characters checking in. But then, later, we did the extraordinary by changing the departure destinations on the monitors to Beirut, Kigali and Sarajevo, staffing the desk with an Arab actor dressed in a militia uniform, having Scottish characters as refugees trying to flee a civil war-ravaged Scotland. But you have to do the obvious thing first.

**Host:** I felt involved. I felt like I was really *in* it. And it was a lot funnier than I thought it would be, the jokes you made with the audience, like when you turned those guys into filing cabinets. We had a much stronger role than I thought we would have, like we were actors too.

**Guest:** That’s key I think. In fact, in quite a profound way, as soon as you become an audience member for the piece our roles reverse. I am the host, since I am in control of the fiction, the code, the flow through the building and the casting of you as an audience member. I have a duty of care. In a sense, you are in my *hostpital...* the building is transformed into a fictionalised version of itself, rooted in its own reality, but transformed into something other. It’s my space now that I invite you into, even though you invited me in, in the first instance. But I will limit what I will ask you to do because you are encountering the fiction for the first time, in the moment. You haven’t had the luxury of rehearsals, obviously.

**Host:** I did feel looked after, I felt safe that you knew where I was meant to be. I felt like the cast were ahead of me, showing me the way. I knew I had to do things in the show, but I didn’t feel panicked. Just a bit excited that we were going into the unknown, but somehow, I trusted the actors to look after me.

**Guest:** Casting the audience is a huge part of that. When we
did the show in the airport, we cast the audience as air passengers—who else could they be? For a show based on the writings of Charles Bukowski, *Barflies*, which we staged in our local pub, a bit like this one, we cast the audience as bar regulars and bought them a drink. In the show *Decky Does A Bronco* (Maxwell, 2001) which we staged in children’s playgrounds across the UK and Ireland, we cast the audience as children by seating them in low stools in a circle (which lowered their eyeline) around a scaled up set of swings, which made the adult actors look smaller and made the audience feel smaller too. We once did a show, *Those Eyes, That Mouth* (Harrison & Grid Iron, 2005), which was about a woman who had shut herself away from the world, which somewhat begged the question as to what the audience were doing there. So, we made them into the paranoid projections of her deep fear of the Others; most of the time, she didn’t acknowledge our presence, but in the depths of her paranoid attacks she would suddenly stare, startled, at us. Years ago, in the first site piece I made for Grid Iron, an adaptation of Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (Carter, 1979) which we staged in Mary King’s Close in Edinburgh, we needed to create the illusion of a library. We were in a narrow vault and there was no room to fit a library as well as the audience in. So, we cast the audience as the library shelves with the lead actor stroking their noses as if they were the spines of the books. In our follow-up show *Gargantua* (Harrison, 1998), which we created in a space that I named the Underbelly, in a series of vaults and chambers between Victoria Street and the Cowgate in Edinburgh, we used the audience as filing cabinets, filing paper in between their armpits and chests and then more daringly between their legs. We developed the idea of the hotspot in the audience, that is zeroing in on the person that is having the most fun and engagement and is therefore the most likely to be up for playing a more active role. In *Gargantua*, we picked two people to be the filing cabinets, and then in subsequent scenes kept building up a more a more flirtatious interaction with them, from glances to casual touching to the fifth scene where two
actors had wrestled them to the floor and were licking their faces. Not something we would have attempted in the first scene!

You have to build up trust and even an erotic charge steadily and carefully to reach these moments of surprising intimacy. And you have to be a good host from the beginning. At the entrance to the site, typically Judith Doherty, the producer and co-artistic director of Grid Iron, will do an orientation and health and safety briefing for the audience at the end of which she wishes them good luck. This normally gets a laugh and just the right amount of nervous anticipation.

Host: I like the idea of a hostpital I guess a hospital does have all kinds of rules and mysteries that the patient doesn't know. Perhaps doesn't want to know.

Guest: It's not an exact term because it is medicalised, and in a way, our kind of site-based work would be more erotic, sensual and funnier than a hospital would be. But I like it, because it absolutely centralises the idea of the host and the notion of care. Sometimes artists can get this so wrong. I once saw a promenade show about the Holocaust, where we were treated as prisoners and were shoved around and barked at—deeply unpleasant, especially as the actors playing soldiers were getting into their roles with the wrong kind of relish. At another show, the conceit of the piece was that we were escaping a zombie attack on Edinburgh and being protected (but also screened) by, again, soldiers. One of them was getting far too into his role, shoved over and swore at my partner, who went over on her heel and nearly broke her ankle. Not looking after the audience. Being terrible hosts in fact.

Host: It sounds like there's almost an unwritten contract?
Guest: Yes, there is, although sometimes it can be written. One of the most successful castings of the audience I’ve seen as an audience member was a show called Office Party (see Cramer, 2008), in which we were all given sticky labels with a character name. I was Maureen, part of the domestic services team. The company had worked out biographies for all the characters and I was happy to play along with such statements as ‘looking forward to your retirement Maureen?’ and ‘it’s two sugars Maureen, isn’t it?’. Sometimes the silent contract can be disregarded however or deliberately ignored. I spoke to the performance artist Bobby Baker years ago, who staged a show about mental illness (her own), in her own house (see Kellaway, 2009). In the first week, there was an audience member, in a small audience of about 20, who was unbelievably aggressive to Bobby during the show. She felt particularly violated, and for a long time didn’t feel the same way about her kitchen, didn’t feel safe in it. Making intimate work, where the audience outnumbers you, and where the site might have a very profound personal significance can be quite dangerous for the mental health of the artist. This is why we try to make work in an ethical, supported way, in rehearsal rooms without shame, but which nurture a sense of folly and adventure, and aim to respect the equal rights of all members of the team. We hope that this spirit transfers over to the experience of the audience.

Creating these alternative worlds away from the formality of a theatre setting helps to build alternative communities. The Comedy Theatre² in London used to have a man in a dinner jacket guarding the entrance, like a casino doorman or gentleman’s club concierge. It was pretty clear what kind of clientele the management were aiming for in terms of social class. Again, a consideration of who the host is becomes critical, as are the signals that the host send out. When we were planning the first Scottish tour of Decky Does A Bronco, we started chatting to a group of children in Portree playground on the Isle of Skye. They were very interested in
the idea of a show about kids staged on a set of swings. A 12-year-old girl shouted after us as we said our goodbyes: ‘Just remember it’s our swing park!’ . This was a revelation to me. Previously we had been planning to seal the swing park to stop non-ticket holders gaining entry. But of course, the local children were the hosts and we were the guests. It was, indeed, their swing park. So, we kept each park open, with the result that the local kids played during the show in the background, adding a real layer of poignancy as the subject matter of the play darkened. The children trained the actors in the most demanding acrobatic tricks on the swings (which they could perform with ease). They swapped the football cards which made up our programme, with one girl collecting eight cards of O’Neill, the cool boy in the gang who she clearly fancied. They learned lots of the lines, sat around for the acrobatics, ran away during some of the longer speeches. They were co-creators, even more than hosts.

**Host:** I guess what you are creating with your hosts are more like events than plays. They are one offs...

**Guest:** I do think of them as plays, in that they almost always have a strong narrative drive, but also, as what I call, intimate spectacles. The audiences can be small, and very close to the action, but the cultural, social and ethical effects can be spectacular. That could be as different as the Department of Transport suspending aviation law for three weeks to allow us to perform in the restricted zone of a working international airport, to a nine-year-old boy thinking that he was in his own live film, as he happily participated as an active audience member in my show *Caledonian Road* (Harrison, 2002). His reference for the event was a film location—its reality and immediacy. Or it could be a spectacular effect such as that experienced by an audience member at a show we created in the former security headquarters of the Syrian secret police in Beirut. I was chatting to him about his experience of the show and he
seemed particularly animated about a scene in the second room we visited, ‘I loved that scene—it was very special to me because the last time I was in that room I was being interrogated’. He explained to me that we had re-written his memory of that room, had redefined the space as being closer to the beautiful French colonial era sitting room that it had originally been in the nineteenth century, rather than its unpleasant repurposing in the 1990s. Art had overwritten politics. On the other hand, working in Beirut was an important part of my development because it challenged some of my aesthetic presumptions. I was very attracted to the ruined buildings of Beirut from an aesthetic point of view—full of meaning and ravaged beauty. In 2004, we staged a workshop in a hotel building which had a rooftop pool that had been planned for an opening in 1975, the first year of the civil war. It had never opened, was thick with debris and dust, but pregnant with meaning, like a hugely detailed and realised stage design. Issam Bou Khaled, a leading Lebanese theatre maker, said to me once that he was sick of this ravaged history and said that he preferred theatres to be theatres and hospitals to be hospitals. When I staged my show Ghost Ward in the abandoned St Andrews Hospital in Bow for the Almeida in 2001, I was surprised by the anger of some of the local community who wanted it to be reopened as their hospital, not used for theatre. However, a few of them came to see the show and were deeply moved by the subject matter and commitment of the mixed community and professional cast. The anger is understandable, however.

**Host:** I like the film idea that the boy mentioned. I get that. It was like being a protagonist in a film. It made me feel powerful, active, involved.

**Guest:** It’s a truism that Western culture now certainly is clearly demanding more agency, more involvement. Look at the online world: Twitter, Facebook, blogs, the human need
to articulate an individual view. But in the hospitai this individualism is balanced by a sense of community; audience and performers sharing the subject matter in a common space full of intimacy, significance, meaning and reality.

**Host:** Can I get you another drink?

**Guest:** Let me get you one. We’ve swapped roles remember? We’re inside the fiction. I’m your host now.

**Host:** Thank you very much.

**End**

**Notes**

1. I am using the term host / guest in a more practical sense than the metaphor of host / ghost employed by Mike Pearson and Cliff McLucas in Kaye (2000, p.128). Whereas their term is used more in the aesthetic sense of the ephemeral nature of performance, as opposed to the solidity and relative permanence of the site (although of course its unfolding history shifting its nature through time), I am concerned here to articulate the actual flesh and blood relationship between the keyholders of the site and the intervening artist as the keyholder’s guest.

2. The Comedy Theatre on Panton Street in the West End of London. It was renamed the Harold Pinter Theatre in 2011 in honour of the late playwright.

3. Issam Bou Khaled, former director of the Beirut Theatre until it closed in 2013. He now works extensively as a film actor.

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**About the author**

BEN HARRISON has been co-artistic director of site-based theatre
practitioners Grid Iron since 1996. He was associate director of the Almeida Theatre London from 2000–2002, director of the Dutch company Muztheater from 2004–2008, and a fellow of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) from 2001–2004. He has directed for the Edinburgh International Festival and the following theatres: National Theatre of Scotland (NTS), Traverse, Tron, Óran Mór, The Arches, Citizens. He has directed theatre companies Dogstar, Tromolo Productions and Paper Doll Militia. He also directed the show Peter Pan for 360 Entertainment (UK and US tour 2009–2015) which was seen by more than 1,000,000 people.
Care and reciprocity: a conversation between Rhiannon Armstrong and Mel Evans

RHIANNON ARMSTRONG & MEL EVANS

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There are two versions of this piece:

- the interactive online version, where we maintained the meandering texture of our live conversation¹

- the written version, where we streamlined the content to focus on the core ideas

Mel Evans and Rhiannon Armstrong met for the first time at The Art of Care-full Practicesymposium. They share a belief in the importance of acknowledging the fluidity of roles of giving and receiving in participatory performance practice. Through their encounters with participants and public in Birthmark and Can I Help You?, Mel and Rhiannon reflect on the complex and profound relationships of trust at work in these performances, and attempt to be open about vulnerable questions of personal agency and what we get out of the work as artists and activists. They do this with the intention that acknowledging the fluidity between when we are giving and when we are receiving will lead to a better, more sustainable practice.

Birthmark is a performance intervention work by Liberate Tate, an art collective of which Mel is part. Founded in 2010, Liberate Tate takes action, and its performance
interventions have involved hundreds of people. After six years making unsanctioned live art interventions in Tate galleries, Liberate Tate succeeded in ending BP sponsorship of Tate. In Birthmark, performers receive a permanent tattoo of the parts per million of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere in the year of their birth. As of 2017, around 150 people have birthmarks: some of them from Liberate Tate tattoo-givers as part of interventions inside Tate (December 2015) and the National Portrait Gallery (June 2016), or by commission at galleries and events.
Rhiannon’s performance *Can I Help You?* toured to eight UK towns as part of Battersea Arts Centre’s Collaborative Touring Network in autumn 2016. In it, Rhiannon offers free help to strangers by basing herself on the local high street wearing a T-shirt saying ‘FREE HELP!’ and a tool belt equipped with items such as an umbrella, the Little Book of Calm, MP3 player, bin bag, change for a tenner, etc. The resulting interactions and encounters form the work.
Rhiannon and Mel continued their discussions for this special issue of the journal in the form of a writing exchange, and a (transcribed) meeting over lunch in Manze’s pie and mash shop on Walthamstow High Street, London. By exchanging stories, the two seek to form a common understanding around ideas of care, giving, receiving and holding space for others to give and receive.

The questions

The questions Mel and Rhiannon reflected on, in writing and in person, were:

- What does care mean to you in your work?

- What does vulnerability mean in your work?

- How do you understand personal agency and the exchange of care?

- How do we receive care as we give it, and vice versa, and allow the work to sustain ourselves as artists and activists?

What does care mean to you in your work?

Mel writes: For me, it means taking care of each other in a collective throughout the creative process. As Liberate Tate explores different ideas for performances, the collaborative process is—almost necessarily—fraught with disagreement and competing theories, both strategic and aesthetic. We always make each other laugh: this is caring. It softens the debate and loosens our collective grip on the shape of the thing, allowing the artwork to take its own form between us and our respective thoughts and ideas.
Later, care takes on a different centrality to the work. Care means involving other artists, activists and performers in the piece: requiring questions around how to make it enriching and empowering; how to sneak adequate amounts of food and water into the gallery for people to last the duration of the performance; leaving enough space in the performance design for the creative licence of performers; and considering which decisions will need to be made by consensus on the day, for example when the intervention ends. Interventionist practice necessitates care for agency as well as for physical and emotional needs. Oh, and legal care—should it be necessary—is always ready and waiting! Tate has called the police multiple times during Liberate Tate’s performance interventions, and although no performers were ever arrested, we needed to take care around that possible eventuality.

Rhiannon writes: I like how you begin your thoughts on care with a description of conflict and the collaborative process. Also, when you describe the physical and legal needs side of care with Liberate Tate—the basics—it makes me think of the phrase ‘I’ll take care of it’. When you are going through something major (an operation, a bereavement perhaps) you might need people to just take care of certain basic things for you, like food or cleaning, so that you can focus on recovery. Have the basics covered, so that you can focus on the important stuff.

There is another intention that can exist in the phrase take care of it when a security guard is told to take care of a group of street drinkers, they are supposed to move them on. So, in some instances, take care can mean get rid.

Something basic with Can I Help You? is that there are no collaborators to negotiate with ahead of time. My preparation involves spending a whole day in the town centre I’ll be working in, looking and listening, getting to
know whose space it is. The premise of the work is that I am standing around offering free help of any kind, to anyone. It is a way to meet, to begin a conversation.

I scope out the location the day before, sit and observe the environment and its inhabitants, speak to anyone whose territory I might be entering into (Big Issue sellers, people who are street homeless, café and market stall owners). I consider it part of my job to explain my presence and interruption here.

When I think about care and what it is in this work, in one way I am thinking about taking care over how we bring about a meeting between strangers:

To care for

To take care of

To take care with how we meet one another.

To take care over being together.

To care about what people are saying.

To listen.

Mel writes: It’s interesting to me that practising observation within the site of the performance is so important to both of us. This suggests observation is a core part of the care taken—to understand the movements and flows of people in a space, and therefore how to act or intervene in that space care-fully; to think critically about the social politics of the
What does vulnerability mean in your work?

Mel writes: Vulnerability goes to the core of what Liberate Tate does. By blending forms of live art and direct action, our vulnerable bodies become the site of the performance. In direct action, people put their bodies in the way of the harmful activity they are trying to halt. In live art, performers explore the world and ideas from the site of their individual bodies, experiences and identities. In Birthmark, the centre point of the performance is the tattoo-needle inking our skin. This is a bearably painful act, and the tattoo-receiver is vulnerable to this sharp object held—extremely carefully—by the tattoo-giver. I was one of four women in our collective who learned to give tattoos to make this performance ritual possible. When giving tattoos, I ask people why this piece spoke to them, why they wanted to be a part of the performance, what moments or choices in their life making this mark speaks to or emerges from. So, the act itself, and the conversation held between us during it, were similarly intimate.

Rhiannon writes: What does vulnerability mean? I am thinking of how people seem to be ready to go to a difficult place with me as we converse on the street in Can I Help You? I am thinking of how often I have ended up hearing from people for a long while about really personal things, listened to stories about difficult childhoods, abusive relationships, money problems, the death of a son and the missed grandchildren who now live a long way away with their mother. I have ended up crouched at a café table holding a woman’s hand as she wept over her loss, walking a man to a drop-in centre for alcohol recovery. I wrote this note to myself following an interaction with a couple in Rochester:
'Thanks so much, this is the least I can do!' Steve giving me a piece of fudge, who spent a lot of time talking to me with his wife about life making you emotionally hardened and wanting to be more open.

The thing about seeing that note now is I am reminded that this effort to stay open and receptive, to keep soft and connected, is something I know intimately. I know that hardening, and I am reminded that this difficulty is not unique to me or even to those I am close to. Complete strangers in the street told me so!

I think it can sometimes be more possible to be yourself with a stranger. Is this because there is less weight of expectation or emotional investment in who we are to one another? I put a lot of commitment into trying to be clearly and most openly myself when I do this work, and I find myself having a kind of tantrum ahead of each start time. It’s like some kind of real life version of stage fright, life fright if you will. As if someone else is making me do this and it isn’t a situation I am exclusively responsible for bringing about!

There is a pay-off though. People are more direct with me in this performance than I’ve ever experienced in my life and I find that refreshing and inspiring: it is something I try to take into the rest of my dealings with the world.

Mel writes: That definitely resonates. I’ve had conversations with people through this piece, people that I’ve known for years and people that I’ve only just met, that I can’t imagine us having any other way, than with our bodies so intimately connected physically as I tattoo them. During the tattooing, we’re both focused on the ink and the conversation, cocooned in our tight combined aura, blocking out all distractions. Each Birthmark session has held dozens of
beautiful moments when people have shared defining experiences and histories. Each of us who give the tattoos has described feeling like a library of stories and personal journeys around art, activism, and climate change.

Mel and Rhiannon pick up the conversation in person in the pie and mash shop.

Rhiannon says: Has there ever been a thing with the tattoos where you’ve thought *I’m not sure this is what you need?* Have you ever thought *I don’t think you should be doing this?* Is there such a thing as the wrong reason? Would you say anything if you thought there was?

Mel says: With this piece we’re hyper-cautious about readiness and consent as part of the caring process. That’s primarily part of the learned culture of tattooing that we’ve embraced by immersing ourselves in sub-cultural tattooing spheres as far as possible. Sometimes it’s really obvious—we wouldn’t give a tattoo to someone who had been drinking alcohol or taking anything stronger, just like a tattoo studio wouldn’t. We also look out for the time people are willing to allow themselves for the ritual / performance. If someone’s in a rush or wants a clear deadline on when we’ll be finished, we take that as an indication that the moment isn’t right for them to do this, and that we can be more attentive with them if there’s no imminent deadline to work towards.

Rhiannon says: So, no one walks up and says *I’ve been inspired by your piece and I want to get a tattoo?*

Mel says: If they do, we say: *Let’s be in touch about a future date.* Overall, there were as many people who reached out to us about the project as we directly invited. There was always space for people to share among each other why they’re
doing it, by speaking in small groups or speaking in a large
group saying This is why I'm doing it or This is what it
connects with for me. Birthmark always takes place within a
group, and that's part of the community-building aspect to
the work. In all these ways it was clear there was a lot of
thoughtfulness from everyone involved around questions of
Why this, why now, what meaning does it carry for you?

Rhiannon says: It sounds like it is also about being listened
to, being heard. Because I imagine it would be easy to feel
like you're part of a giant thing where you're serving
something else, and your own story is being lost.

Mel says: In a way that tension is what we're exploring,
because there are these numbers that mean so much for our
lives and yet are so alien or soulless. Carbon emissions feel
like abstract data to most people, but that have these very
visceral implications. So, we ask how can we find a way into
those numbers that makes them more personal? It makes a
community out of the coldness of the numbers, and offers
this sense that the levels could return to something safer. It
takes them from being these abstractions and makes them
into something more personal.

With the interactions that you were having with people in
Can I Help You?, how did you negotiate that sense of
beginning and end, and the expectations of the relationship?
Did you stop and say, Bye, I'm off duty now?

Rhiannon says: Once we're past the assumptions where
people think I'm selling something, when they know that my
proposition is this weird thing that I am just a normal
human being and I'm offering free help in whatever way one
human can offer another, the thing that characterises
people's reactions is their concern with taking up too much
of my time.
You might assume that if you stand around on the street offering up attention someone would be bound to come up and want it all, but that just doesn’t happen. So much of it is actually about reassuring people.

For many people, after 30 seconds they think that they should leave me alone. A lot of the work I am doing is really about prolonging it to get past the three-minute mark, where then it can become half an hour and something really great can happen. So, most of that stuff that you might think would be about saying *I’m off now* is actually more about saying:

*I’m still here,*

*I’m still here,*

*I’m still here.*

and finding another mode to be together.

**How do you understand personal agency and the exchange of care?**

Mel writes: When centring on vulnerability in the work, it’s of course vital to consider agency and consent. It’s about allowing vulnerability to be a source of strength and power. In *Birthmark*, this came down to the relationship between the tattoo-giver and tattoo-receiver, one based on mutual trust, understanding, and shared community.

Mel and Rhiannon pick up the conversation in person in the pie and mash shop.
Rhiannon says: I wanted to ask you about conversation and intimacy in Birthmark: about physical contact, and about conversations that happen when something else is happening with your hands. I'm thinking about it because I've been hosting a craft table every week at a migrant support centre where people come for emergency assistance. It's there as a place you can be while you wait to be seen, which can be a very tense time. It facilitates conversation and companionship, talking about really difficult stuff to people you don't know in a language you maybe don't know very well, but meanwhile there are things being made and we've all got our eyes focussed on those. We had the idea that that might be easier somehow.

Mel says: Definitely both physical contact and a focussed task was a way in which the rhythm of the conversation in Birthmark got set up. Because we're giving these tattoos in a range of different spaces, having carried all the kit we need to do a tattoo, but without all the apparatus found in a tattoo studio like a bed where you can position your body exactly for the right angle. It's important for the person who's having the tattoo to be relaxed and their muscles loose, so that you can stretch the skin in all the right ways.
You get into some intimate positions, and by doing that you've already stripped away a lot of the what might we talk about? Also, you don't have any awkward or somehow audience-like I'm staring into your eyes as I'm listening to you talk, and that can free up the conversation to happen more loosely. Also, there's a bit more space for quiet performance than a private one-to-one conversation would bring, both because of others in the space, and because the person receiving the tattoo really has the stage, the tattoo givers act more as prompt. We're not going to be looking at the person speaking except for the occasional checking glance, and when we're talking to them there'll be lots of pauses while we focus on something fiddly. There might be more questions to the person getting the tattoo or there might be moments where you say I'm just going to pause now, because you're focussed on giving them the tattoo and you're listening. Also, talking is a helpful way of staying calm while you're receiving a tattoo. I don't know if you've ever had a tattoo; it's not extreme pain but it is sore, there's a recognised painfullness to it, and talking through it is an established convention!

Rhiannon says: I think in the beginning, the relationship between the audience and I for Can I Help You? is one of distrust. There is always suspicion and disbelief: the suspicion that I want something from them (money or a signature) and disbelief that I won't ask for or accept payment, that I am really here for anyone, for any length of time, and will go anywhere.

There was a conversation with one woman that I really loved. It was quite sunny and actually quite hot, and I had sun-cream on me, and a fan and plant-mister, and I was offering people sun-cream and free breeze. And this woman was like, What's this then, are you doing samples for beauty products? and when I said that I was offering free help to people for a few hours, she kept asking What's the catch? So
I told her it was part of an arts festival and said *I guess the catch is that it’s art* and she said, *Oh all right—in that case go on then!* I really liked her reaction and afterwards, I started using that as a way to speak to people: *The catch is, it’s art.*

What I really reject in how I am often required to talk about participatory performance is the idea that what you will get out of your engagement with a work is predefined, that your relationship to it is going to be of a certain type or quality. *With Can I Help You*, the thing that I feel so energised by when I do it is that people make their own relationship to it. The opener is this helping thing, but then what people get from it, how it transpires, what happens, is up to us to determine together.

Mel says: There’s something about the way that in *Can I Help You*? there’s an openness of the amount of time you spend with people. It’s not fixed which allows people to find their own ways to shape it and give it closure.

Rhiannon says: There was this guy in Paignton, Devon. When I met him, he was carrying some wood in a trolley, and he had this little dog that was also with him. I offered to carry the wood, which he wouldn’t let me do, but he said *you can hold my dog while we walk.* He was one of the people that after 30 seconds say *OK, thank you, I mustn’t use any more of your time,* but he also said repeatedly how much he valued being listened to, so I just kept reassuring him saying *I can carry on walking with you, I have nowhere else to be* and we ended up walking back to where he lived.

He was talking about his flat and the kennel he wanted the wood for, and he ended up telling me about his childhood and his life. He’d had a tough time of it and when he became ill and couldn’t work and was homeless, the council had given him this flat, but it was unfurnished. He took the wood
up to the flat and I waited outside with the dog, Cranky. When he came out he was carrying a little wooden doorstop and he was like you must take this doorstop. It was hand-painted, it looked like Robin Hood to me. And then he started asking who my boss was, he wanted to know who he could report to—he had been quite moved a number of times about being listened to—and so I said I guess there’s the Arts Council, they’re not my boss but you can write to them if you like. And he wrote this:

![Image of a note pad with handwriting.](image.png)

### What a Great Friendly Girl. Rhiana Has My Thanks and Gratitude. Well Done Arts Council.

My name is Luke, I'm on a study holiday in Folkestone from Kent. I'm here because we need live Arts. Can I Help You?

*Courtesy of Rhiannon Armstrong*
How do we receive care as we give it, and vice versa, and allow the work to sustain ourselves as artists and activists?

Mel writes: In Birthmark, the idea of exchange was central: as tattoo-givers we were holding the needles, but together with the whole group we all held the space of the performance. Keeping a site of intervention calm and quiet was part of the performance design in order to create the right conditions for people’s tattoos and the dialogue that was central to the process. Thinking about the work more
broadly, there are various spheres of care at play: caring for each other in the collective, caring for performers and activists who join to take part in interventions, and caring for the public space of the gallery, protecting it from the insidious presence of oil company BP (the campaign to end BP sponsorship centred around the critique that Tate’s implicit support of the company’s harmful activities was at odds with Tate’s values).

In all these modes, the work of care is fundamental to sustaining spaces of creativity and resistance, which in turn sustain each of us involved. So, it’s not about giving or sacrifice or any of these notions that sometimes people relate to activism: it’s about creating ethical spaces and practices that sustain and empower those involved, which is a very different power dynamic, a much healthier one, I would say.

Mel and Rhiannon pick up the conversation in person in the pie and mash shop:

Rhiannon says: Thinking about what you described as the ethical and sustaining spaces of Birthmark, I am reminded of a conversation I had with Adrian Howells backstage at a festival of one-to-one performance in London in 2010.

We were bemoaning the lack of care over audience members who were opening themselves up in challenging works. He was doing The Pleasure of Being: washing, feeding, holding, and I was doing a piece I made for Coney called The Loveliness Principle. We were united in our suspicion and irritation with the festival which was marketed with a message like do you dare to get intimate; it seemed to have an attitude approaching titillation and didn’t have much in place to support audiences who might be deeply affected.
We talked about a duty of care to the audience: that if you are getting people to do something challenging then you need to have thought about what support might be needed. On the one hand we were just bitching about the festival in the green room, but on the other it gave me the assurance to stand up for the experience I want to create for an audience, which I have done rigorously ever since.

The whole conversation was about the audience not being cared for by the holding pattern of this festival, but we were in the green room and I wonder if we were also talking about ourselves as artists.

Mel says: You were looking after each other perhaps?

Rhiannon says: I think so. Because doing these intense things with audiences is amazing and also very draining. So, when we felt like the context of the festival wasn’t caring for those audiences enough after they left us, we took on that responsibility. You can take on all those layers of responsibility, but then you find yourself left alone at the end. I think it helped to talk about it: we were shoring each other up.

Mel says: Then I guess the difference, in some of the experiences you’re talking about, and in Birthmark, is finding ways to build community through these interactions and through these moments. So how do these intimate moments lead to something beyond the one-to-one relationship?

If I try to remember specific conversations, I think of those ones where I was having a conversation with someone about why they’d chosen to have this tattoo, what it meant to them, what points in their life were steering them towards this
moment. With one person we found similar experiences really shaped us, we were like, No way, you were at the G8 protests in Stirling in 2005—I was there too, we were there together, we weren’t friends then, oh, and then you did this action, yeah we would have both been there on the same day and then you end up building up ten or fifteen year parallel histories and being like Oh, we’ve always been part of this broader community and having this moment of intimacy to tighten it and almost commemorate or celebrate it in some way.

Having community-building as a really asserted part of the work helped avoid that thing in the arts where there can be a slant towards ticketed, compacted, consumable experience. And yet, so much of the arts is about that community, is about how—especially in terms of your relationship with Adrian and so many people’s—is that actually the arts are sustained by communities. *The Art of Care-full Practice* symposium where we met was just one of those moments: a community event, a space to recognise, celebrate and exist as a community.

**Notes**

1. The interactive online version of the conversations can be seen at https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/twinery/RA-proof/3+A+conversation+about+care+and+reciprocity+between+Rhiannon+Armstrong+and+Mel+Evans.html.

**About the authors**

RHIANNON ARMSTRONG makes works under the lifelong series title *Instructions for Empathetic Living*. She puts empathy, dialogue and interaction at the core of her practice, and brings the audience-focus of a theatre background to interdisciplinary work that has included intimate performances, interactive digital works, textile, music, and collaborative theatre projects. She is perhaps best known for her performance and web project *The International Archive of Things Left Unsaid*, and *Public Selfcare System*.

MEL EVANS is an artist and campaigner who is part of Liberate Tate. Her book *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts* was published by Pluto
Press in 2015. Mel is interested in blending art and activism to create new political possibilities.
You do not have to walk on your knees

PETER MCMASTER

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I am an experimental performance maker who lives in Glasgow. In my role as listener-in-residence for the Art of Care-full Practice symposium, I decided that the most care I could exercise in my role would be to present back to the audience an unadulterated account of what I had heard throughout the day; words either directly extracted from a talk, from a passing conversation, or something I might have overheard walking down the corridor or whilst having lunch. I was aware of not wanting to process any material I heard through my own personal frames of reference, at least not consciously. I feel a particular responsibility in this regard as a male maker. As a white cisgendered man, I am constantly battling a sense of entitlement and the ways in which I occupy, or inadvertently command space. In a small way, I wanted my experience as a listener to allow other people’s thoughts and experiences to occupy me, and to reflect back that experience in the text I compiled and eventually read out aloud.

At the start, I hear statements.

Love is analogous to genius.

Fluffy, touchy, feely.

I hear questions.
How do we practise care?

Is this writing for me, rather than at me?

There’s a man talking, and he’s thinking of us.

There’s a woman, and she’s making room for a reply.

I feel an onslaught of academia.

Effective, ethical and practical.

There’s a man, talking about a man who’s alluding to the male gaze.

A man talking about this father, thinking about a fortunate man. About another man who ended up taking his own life.

A seventh man.

I am a man.

Dismantling and reassembling.

Thinking feelingly, and feeling thinkingly.

(I have a memory of my younger sister’s friend, who was bullied so badly she stopped eating and ended up in hospital.)
When my Mum tells me in our utility room, I burst out crying and she holds me.

There's a woman, and she's thinking a lot about care, and about who benefits.

gHosting with a capital H.

Hosting.

There are Freud case histories, and she is erasing the doctor.

I hear about the man who said:

‘Your work means nothing to me’, and then leaves.

I hear a woman, talking about and speaking of women.

About learning how to take care of one’s self when taking risks. Taking risks, taking care.

Pink words on paper, like the enigma code book.

I hear about Sophie Calle, and the 'break-up email'.

Taking time, taking care.
The rhetoric of care is the work, not separate to the work...

but what matters is what works.

Then there's talk about time and money.

A king interrupts a queen, and he is blind.

(I am wondering how long I have dominated the arm rest in this cinema auditorium.)

She says that Calle speaks of sisterhood.

This woman talks about a woman talking about women.

What is hidden should be exposed.

And now there is another man.

Now there are a lot more words.
I hear my brain cogs whirring, concentrating.

Tell it like it is!

I think I need the safe zone.

Another man talks about another man.

About how need is contextual, not prescriptive.

And then I hear about care in a non-place.

I hear a quivering voice talking about feelings.

It’s all allowed.

These are sensitive translations.

He says space is movement, place is pause.

I think I’m getting this.

I’m not often in thinky places like this.
Feeling reflects the way the internal world is affected. I get this.

There are consequences to what we do.

But when the truth slips, you’re lost; lost in 18 cm of intimate space.

There’s a woman, and she finds this hard.


Her voice shakes, she feels vulnerable.

Break, weakness.

Too much infinite energy.

I think, ‘treat yourself like one of your participants’.

Think self-indulgence.

Self-preservation.

We have to.
It’s all allowed.

The world is such a mess!

It’s political warfare.

It’s a state of fear.

You don’t need this.

We don’t need this.

And then a queer woman talks of Donald Trump and Theresa May.

This time, punishing yourself won’t solve anything.

Cuts, and cutting yourself off.

Knowing how to live isn’t easy.

Neither is cutting out space.
You are not a bad person.

You say domestic models are inspired by caring.

Including breakfast. She needs to have it; if she doesn’t, she won’t have the energy to care for her children.

It’s art as maintenance.

But then, sometimes the artists who are asked to care the most are exploited the most heavily.

Why does talking about self-care feel so hard? Surely it should feel... lovely?

Progress is a path inwards, not bums on seats, not box office returns.

And then I hear bird song,

wind,

dogs barking.
She says, 'I get up, and I do what I want to do.'

It’s absolutely phenomenal. You can see for miles and miles, I wonder if someone is watching over me?

Trust me, it’s hard.

It’s hard.

It’s not dismissing my life or making any less of my life.

But if someone tells you you’re terminal, the thing you have to face up to essentially is that you have no future.

I have to be, not because I want to be.

And now I am listening to stuff about Adrian Howells.

And now I am listening to Adrian’s obituary.

And now I am listening to Adrian and the Carpenters.

Karen Carpenter.

It’s Yesterday once more.
I'm listening to a second video today in which the subject is deceased.

Bring it back to care-full practice.

I don't know what to say.

(I'm listening to my memory of Adrian staying in my home when he couldn't take care of himself.)

And then there was silence, for a while.

I hear her say that she places listening at the heart of what she does.

And then I notice she has a sticker of an ear placed just over her heart.

There it is again, a work for someone at the end of their life.
I hear breath and crow calls.

Is it a murder of crows?

Or was that ravens?

I hear:

A laugh.

A sigh.

A scream.

A sobbing.

A voice becoming bird song.

It really is happening, it is great, and it makes me care about her project.

And then back to care-full practice.
And I listen as she says,

‘You

Do

Not

Have

To

Walk

On

Your

Knees’.
About the author

PETER MCMASTER’s practice includes directing, performing, solo and intimate performance, mentorship, collaboration and facilitating within the making of live experimental performance in and beyond the UK. As an artist, Peter has a pedagogical approach that he lives through working in educational contexts, and he has delivered professional development opportunities for other artists. His concerns as an artist are to obfuscate contemporary typical masculine identities, as well as to find sustainability and appreciation within the life of being an artist and a resident of planet earth. Peter has toured nationally and internationally; he has conducted international research commissions, and he holds positions of consultation on the boards of venues and festivals.
What I wish I had said

STEVEN FRASER

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What does community actually mean?

Why should I care?

What do you do if you feel like you can’t join a community?

Where are the toilets?

Why is it so LOUD in this room?

Is there a safe quiet space I can hang out in for a while?

How do I introduce myself to other people?

How come everybody already knows each other?

What is CPP?

Are safe spaces really safe, if you don’t know the people you are sharing them with?

Why do I feel awkward talking about my own stuff?

Do you actually give a shit about community workshops or are you just doing them cause it was a requirement of your Creative Scotland funding?

What do you do when you have something to say, but don’t know how to say it?
Can I leave lunch early to take a walk?

Should we check if someone has an allergy before we add nuts to the salad?

Do people think I am rude because I don't talk much?

Why does no one introduce themselves to me?

Is it rude if I read my book instead of talking to people?

* I did manage to actually say this.

You made it through lunch. Why is that so hard?

Is the work I do actually performance?

Does it matter if people think my work isn't a performance?

Why is it still so loud?
IT'S SO EXHAUSTING
Why do I act like a depressed idiot all the time?

I think I heard lots of good talks and saw lots of good things... But is that enough?

Am I inspired to create my own work?

Yes! I am inspired to create more work!

But... is that enough?
About the author

STEVEN FRASER is a writer and artist who has a background in theatre, comic books and animation. His work focuses on mental health and autism and has been staged at The Pleasance Theatre, Hidden Door Festival, Rich Mix London and New Diorama Theatre London. His work has received Creative Scotland Funding, a Tom McGrath Small Grant Award and a Starter for Ten Award from the National Theatre of Scotland.
AFTERWORD:

Acts of care

LAURA BISSELL, LAURA GONZÁLEZ, DEE HEDDON & SIMON MURRAY

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It began with the question of care, but soon enough more practical ones took over: how to organise a symposium in under three months, using standard university spaces, with next to no money while still practising care?

This is the challenge we set ourselves with The Art of Careful Practice, held on Sunday 5 March 2017 at Gilmorehill Halls, University of Glasgow, as part of the inaugural Take Me Somewhere festival. Jackie Wylie, now Artistic Director of the National Theatre of Scotland, conceived this Glasgow-wide festival of contemporary performance as a small act of repair following the closure of The Arches on 9 June 2015. The Arches was the working home of many Glasgow-based performance-makers and live artists, including Adrian Howells and Ian Smith, both of whom took their lives in 2014. The symposium, ghosted by their presence, work and practices, was a way of attempting to understand our losses and shaped how we began to understand care. It is this context that helped us focus on our task, despite all the challenges.

Identifying the key principles of the event, we established at the outset that a necessary condition for care, in the way we wanted to explore it, was intimacy. We chose to keep the event small with a maximum of 50 people in attendance which we hoped would enable us to attend to everyone present, to really see them, and provide the opportunity for
everyone to feel part of a discussion. The design of our event responded to our experiences of symposia where the aim is to make money, or to meet imperatives set by funders, or to be a blatant cover for something else (including recruitment and networking). By contrast, we wanted to construct a careful, stimulating and creative environment for the people who gave up their Sunday to join us in thinking through what a care-full practice might be. To support access, the event was free of charge. We asked participants to apply, explaining how care is valued and voiced in their work. We wanted dialogue to be at the heart of the event, which would require a collective engagement and commitment to exploring care. We also fulfilled our role as care-full organisers by giving careful attention to those given more formal time and space to present at the event, ensuring a diversity of speakers, practices and experiences. Many of them are represented in this journal. We thank them warmly for their diligence, their interest and their generosity.

At registration, each participant was given a sticker (colour-coded with ten different groups), and one of five ‘care-full’ drawings: a hand, a heart, a tree, a cup of tea and an ear (for listening). These were conceptualised and hand-made by Laura González. The colours and symbols were designed to encourage unexpected encounters and to foster new, surprising connections and conversations. After starting the day together and setting off with a series of short provocations intended to prompt our thinking about ‘care’, participants separated into rooms assigned according to their symbols. Their discussion of care was ‘held’ around the carefully designed architecture of the Long Table (as devised by Lois Weaver and discussed in this journal). Operating as a horizontal space of dialogue without hierarchy, the long table provided everyone present with the space to share thoughts, questions and experiences, responding to the initial provocations. Contributions could be made verbally and / or in writing. As prompts to
reflection and discussion, we asked:

• How do we ensure the practice of working with non-professional participants in the processes and production of performance is ethical?

• How do we care for the other(s) in work that might be difficult, challenging, demanding?

• How do we care for the self in work that requires complex configuration of aesthetics, relations and responsibilities?

Our participants asked, in turn:

• How do you allow for disagreement and divergence of opinion while still performing a culture of care?

• How do we deal with loss productively in this fragile ecosystem of artists, makers, producers and academics?

• When is a provocative act generative and when is it destructive?

• Where and how do we set boundaries?

• How do we take care of ourselves?

• How can it all be allowed?
The very act of asking, questioning and acknowledging the multiple issues in making, seeing and discussing performance work, seemed to be an act of care.

If we were keen to avoid typical symposia structures, we were equally keen to avoid the typical university lunch (curling sandwiches filled with cheese savoury or coronation chicken). With limited resources, how could we provide sustenance? Food and feeding are so intimately connected to care. The answer for us was simple: sometimes, the best way to practise care is to ask participants to share in its practice, so we invited everyone to bring a contribution to a collective salad-lunch. One of our most vivid memories of the day was the queue to register: people clutching bowls, plates and platters of delicious home-cooked food, healthy roast vegetables and favourite recipes. This was a communal lunch made with love. We also asked participants to bring a gift to be exchanged with someone over lunch: something that represented ‘care’, however subjective. We saw the gift as providing a doorway to interacting with people we had just met that day, had not seen for a while, or who were complete strangers. The gift offered a means of telling and exchanging stories of care.

We set lunch up in the long, glass-fronted, functional corridors of Gilmorehill. Rather like a train carriage, the tables became loci of convivial conversation and culinary laboratories of care. While still retaining the intimacy of the event, there was a chaotic energy of togetherness, culminating in a spontaneous, joyful rendition of Happy Birthday sung for one of our participants—strangers and friends joining together as a chorus.

We had moved from the architecture of the long table, to two long corridors of tables accommodating four. The careful format of the former offered important, sympathetic preparation for the practice of making and sharing the
lunch in these smaller gatherings. This lunchtime intimacy was in turn a necessary preparation for the afternoon, which required different registers of listening, attention and response. We were invited to view Quarantine’s Winter: (written about in this journal) and video documentation of Adrian Howells’ live performances (to whom this journal is dedicated), and witness Nic Green’s process through her sharing of an early work in progress. As the first recipient of the Adrian Howells Award for Intimate Practice, Green offered a choral performance exploring grief through song.

Mindful of the difficult politics of the plenary session, a form not always inclusive and sensitive to the participants at the end of a long day, we did nevertheless recognise the value of coming together to draw some provisional conclusions. Throughout the day, three people undertook the role of ‘listeners’; they could move fluidly between the sessions and groups, with the aim of offering their own accounts of the event. The observations of these listeners were presented in the final session, along with the invitation for attendees to share their experience of The Art of Care-full Practice through this special issue of the Scottish Journal of Performance.

In the spirit of symposium, we ended the day with more food (this time prepared by the nearby restaurant, The Left Bank) and more intimate and convivial conversation, celebrating all we had seen, heard, thought and shared, continuing our dialogue and care for each other into the night.

Through the organisation of this event, we learned that care has agency—it doesn’t count if there is no act; doing nothing is not an option. Care needs action, however small or subtle that might be. The food, the gift, the long table, the listening, the seeing, the work, the space and the time, all these reflected our desire to create an event that was neither
overly-busy nor tiring. We wanted the day to breathe, and for conversations to develop naturally over that Sunday and, beyond, in and through this journal. For this reason, we will not overstay our welcome. We just wanted to conclude with where it all began: with the idea that if we care, perhaps things can turn out differently.