

CHAPTER 3

Practice as Research: Transdisciplinary Innovation in Action

Baz Kershaw with Lee Miller/Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and
Rosemary Lee/Niki Pollard

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INTRODUCTION

There would be no theatre or performance studies without the creative practices of performers, actors, directors, designers and the many other kinds of talent that populate the performing arts. Yet the relationship between the academics who created the disciplines and the practitioners who made the art has been mostly an uneasy one historically. In the traditions of modernism, the cogito of Descartes – I think, therefore I am – ensured the head and the heart were in conflict alongside mind and body, sciences and arts, culture and nature and all the rest. But the so-called 'postmodern moment' of the late-twentieth century, happening sometime between 1950 and 1990, radically upset that philosophical applecart to create a mash-up world in which binary habits of thought and practice were challenged profoundly. In this now famous putative paradigm shift the modernist model of the nineteenth-century scholar-poet re-emerged as the 'practitioner-researcher', and fresh methods of melding art and scholarship were invented. Named variously as 'practice as research', 'practice-based research', 'practice-led research' or simply 'artistic research', by the twenty-first century a well-founded and sometimes controversial methodology had been added to research repertoires in university theatre and performance studies.

Practice-as-research genealogies in the UK can be traced back to at least the 1960s. This was part of a broader international trend to develop methods of creative enquiry that would be recognised as cognate to established scholarly research procedures and techniques. Sometimes called the 'practice turn', the trend was widespread across many disciplines – from philosophy through science and technology to cultural studies – and characterised by post-binary commitment to activity (rather than structure), process (rather than fixity),

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action (rather than representation), collectiveness (rather than individualism), reflexivity (rather than self-consciousness), and more. Its relevance to theatre and performance research is evident in Theodore Schatzki's claim that practice is crucially constituted by 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity' and 'shared skills and understandings' or 'tacit knowledge' (Schatzki et al. 2000: 2–3). Hence practice as research in the performing arts pursues hybrid enquiries combining creative doing with reflexive being, thus fashioning freshly critical interactions between current epistemologies and ontologies.

Since the early 1990s practice as research in theatre/performance has grown remarkably in a range of countries around the world, with practitioner-researchers in the UK collectively being widely identified as among its pioneers. In 2009 three books of collected writings and other materials on its purposes and approaches (mainly in the UK, USA and Australia) were published, marking an important evolutionary milestone in theatre/performance research (Allegue et al.; Riley and Hunter; Smith and Dean). The generic terms their titles adopt – practice-as-research, performance as research, practiced-led research – suggest the wide range of definitions the methodology has acquired. But this chapter adopts a straightforward one: 'practice as research' (PaR) indicates the uses of practical creative processes as research methods (and methodologies) in their own right, usually but not exclusively in, or in association with, universities and other HE institutions.

PaR is primarily a methods-focused enterprise, though its specific projects – as demonstrated below and elsewhere in this book – spring from the passions and interests of hands-on creative researchers. Hence the case-studies approach of this chapter is a response to an extraordinary diversity within its overall methodology. Inevitably though, whatever the project topic, PaR research engages specific aspects of theatre and performance as innovative process; but even so a tighter focus of analysis is required to make useful comparisons between different projects. To narrow my case-study focus I rule in five aspects of theatre and performance that together may be the minimal constituents of PaR, i.e. take any one of them away and it disappears or becomes something else. They are: Starting Points, Aesthetics, Locations, Transmission and Key Issues.

Viewed from the broader perspective of the practice turn, each of these aspects produces fundamental tensions and/or dynamics that, between them, can generate an uncommon instability in the interactions of epistemology and ontology. As the next section briefly explores, this is because PaR is, so to speak, at ease in generating troublesome contradictions. The aspects therefore perform as provocative entry points for debate about its purposes and qualities. They also enable us to take an oblique approach to this chapter's

examples – by Miller/Whalley and Lee/Pollard – in a bid to show that, paradoxically, the similarities they share in combining these minimal PaR constituents highlight their unique qualities as individual practices. Hence these PaR ‘not-without-which’ aspects are positively productive of conundrums and paradoxes in theatre and performance arts. Because of course unpredictable couplings and unexpected conjunctions are essential to artistic creativity and, methodologically, PaR is no exception to *that* rule. From this it follows that PaR practitioner-researchers must grapple with a curious query: What are methods for, but to ruin our experiments?

NOT-WITHOUT-WHICH ASPECTS OF PaR

PaR thus presents fundamental challenges to established processes of knowledge making in the academy, but what is the basis of that potential? Short answers can be derived from the centrality of *creativity* to its research methods, and especially from the capacity of creative acts to embrace contradictions. That has been the source of PaR’s fundamental troubling of the epistemology/ontology binary, of unsustainable bifurcations between becoming and being. Its creative projects can be productive in subjecting such binaries to flights of imaginative fancy as a method that *logically* stretches the bounds of established sense. Hence performing arts PaR has been a paradoxical project because, as I have argued elsewhere, performance (and therefore theatre) is rife with paradox (Kershaw 2007: 23–6). It becomes appropriate, then, to introduce its minimal constituents through contradiction and paradox.

Starting points

In PaR, the methods for creating starting points are *countless*; generally there are *two* main methods for creating starting points in use for PaR. The main UK research funding bodies, for example, require applicants to state the *questions* to be answered of the *problems* solved by their proposed projects. Yet many researchers encounter *hunches* (or more conventionally *intuitions*) that spur them to root around for a starting source. The clearest contradiction here is between the predictability-quotient of questions (even the most open ones imply a range of answers) and the unpredictable prompting of hunches. The latter ensures the meta-contradiction between the countable and countless starting points for PaR. In PaR as elsewhere in the state called knowing: the more you know, the less you think you know.

Aesthetics

Every particular example of PaR is imbued with other practices and thus is an integral part of evolving artistic genealogies, always beholden to aesthetic traditions. But its place in the academy is differently demanding because that puts a premium on advanced research innovation and originality. So the 'freedom' of independent avant-garde traditions, for example, is transformed into a disciplinary 'order' to perform at the cutting edge. Creative licence is compelled, as an income stream, to conform to the contradiction of legitimate lawbreaking. University bursars may as well adopt Samuel Butler's paradox as a motto: the dearer a thing is, the cheaper as a general rule we sell it.

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Locations

All performance and theatre is bound by location in space and time, tied to limits that it cannot completely escape. Yet nothing, but especially theatre, exists without performance, so performance itself is boundless. Hence the incorrigible specificity of theatre and performance is crucial to what they are or will become, even as the exact nature of their being can never be pinned down for good. They are a part of yet apart from the disciplines that constitute them, therefore they are trans-disciplinary, always operating in yet-to-be-defined intersections between disciplinary fields. Hence PaR participates in the paradox of boundless specificity that calls a ring a hole with a rim around it.

Transmission

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As PaR is pursued through time-space events its transmission – the means by which any knowledge/understanding/insight it produces are communicated – is always multi-modal and has the qualities of a moveable feast: always already the 'same' project but forever differently displayed through diverse channels. This diversity of dissemination reflects the hybridity of its specific methods of enquiry, as it evolves unique 'messages' that constitute a singular chorus, the PaR bandwidth. It broadcasts exactly as John Cage once said: I'm saying nothing and I'm saying it.

Key issues

This is the joker in the PaR pack because, as inescapable diversity is its chief overall quality, it will always be generating innumerable key issues. Usually these disrupt a powerful parade of binary formulations:

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theory/practice, process/product, ontology/epistemology, artist/academic, resources/infrastructure, multiple formats/singular outcomes, and so on. So *its* key issue becomes how to fall into contradiction without only contradicting itself. When it's done as performance and theatre it might routinely save itself from this fate because, as Oscar Wilde said: life imitates art far more than art imitates life.

TWO CASE STUDIES AND AN INTERMISSION

As PaR is practised in very diverse ways, the following case studies focus on the unique dynamics of creative research processes and methods in particular projects when viewed through the optic of the five aspects presented above. The case study projects are Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Lee Miller's *Partly Cloudy, Chance of Rain* (2002) and Rosemary Lee's *the Suchness of Henni and Eddie* (2002/2007). A brief observation on my *Mnemosyne Dreams* (2002/2005) provides a linking reflective Intermission on reception. Together the case studies demonstrate how specific research methods can be combined to create the particular methodologies of different projects, and how they may engage with key issues of PaR overall. They also reflect the tendency of PaR to be inherently collaborative, and they engage with research concerns typical of UK theatre/performance studies at the start of the twenty-first century, namely: space and identity; spectatorship and participation; bodies and technology. They indicate as well some of the main objectives served by PaR in universities internationally: the awarding of higher degrees (MA/MPhil/PhD), experimental arts development and postdoctoral research investigations.

The specific ways in which the five 'not-without-which' aspects of PaR were approached by the projects are indicated below by **Baskerville Semibold** font. Each case study is followed by a short commentary describing how the aspects combined to produce its unique qualities in practice. The commentaries also group their key research methods together and this points up how PaR methodologies can variously articulate the individual and/or collective concerns of a great variety of researchers. The case studies together aim to suggest that, whichever of the 'not-without-which' aspects predominates in retrospective analysis, the five together in practice may ensure a generally coherent methodology for PaR overall which positively supports the remarkable diversity that it enjoys.



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Figure 3.1 Welcoming the guests: *Partly Cloudy, Chance of Rain*, at M5 Sandbach Roadchef Service Station, Cheshire, UK, 2002. Devised by: Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Lee Miller. Photographer: Martin Nealon. Reproduced with permission.



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Figure 3.2 One of the ten wedding couples enjoy a dance: *Partly Cloudy, Chance of Rain*, at M5 Sandbach Roadchef Service Station, Cheshire, UK, 2002. Photographer: Martin Nealon. Reproduced with permission.

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Case study I

*'Bob' Whalley and Lee Miller***YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE:**
Notes on a collaboratively written PhD

When you undertake a PhD, you write a lot. Not just in the sense that there is an institutional expectation that a weight of words will be generated to fulfil the requirement of the thesis. Rather, we are thinking about all of those ghost words, those sentences, paragraphs and chapters that you elide, skate away from and ultimately try to let slip from your consciousness. But they don't really leave you. All of those drafts that your supervisor makes responses to accrete in a very particular way, but perhaps not one that you are always aware of. They hide away in the way you think about things, they inform your writing, leaving traces of their cadence in the writing that will follow.

When Baz Kershaw asked us to write about our PhD, the first collaboratively written practice-as-research PhD to be undertaken within the UK, we knew we would struggle. It was ten years since we began the project about which he asked us to write, and six years since we finished. Ten years is a long time, and being given the opportunity to revisit a completed project, especially one that has in many ways defined who we are, is a rather daunting prospect.

(Transmission) The process of writing from the early moments of uncertainty where the whiteout of the page blighted us with snow blindness is on our minds and in our laptops.

We return to articulate a project that was determinedly **multi-modal**, each mode of **articulation** (performance, written submission, exhibition and DVD) informing the other, but each complete and incomplete in its own right. The process of conjoined writing constantly raises curious questions from interested parties as to how it is done. In a bid to suspend our audience/reader inbetween the two writing voices, we entertain a series of methods where, amongst others, we use overlapping writing, correspondence, talking-at-the-same time as writing, editing, leaving gaps for the other one to fill. Our writings are not in conversation, there are no distinct and separate voices, and this is to dissolve the oppositional grading which might assume a hierarchical response.

What follows is a piece of writing from 2002. It didn't make it into the thesis. So here we offer the reader a commentary, similar to the one we provide when we write to each other about our practice. The boxes function in the same way as the letters, e-mails and Post-it notes that were generated by the writing process of our thesis; we continue to employ them as we write our way towards each other.

The practice-as-research PhD project of Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Lee Miller explores through performance the 'non-place' as defined by Augé of a specific section of the M6 motorway. Through a series of performance strategies that will culminate in a larger-scale performance, they hope to reinscribe the motorway as 'place'. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'two-fold thinking', they intend for the project to challenge the individualist focus of knowledge creation, and explore collaborative practices within their own practical work.

They travel the motorways. Sometimes they stop at the transport cafes to talk to truckers

about their ultimate destinations. Sometimes they pick up hitch-hikers and in exchange for a treasured memory they will ferry them from A to B. They trawl through the narratives that prop up this space, seeking their own truths in other people's stories.

(Starting Points) Our experience of the motorway has found articulation in the terminology of Marc Augé. In *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Augé suggests that 'supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places' (Augé 1995: 78). We are now in the process of reclaiming the motorway, of inscribing it with its hidden narratives in an attempt to bypass its supermodern position as a non-place, and return it, even if only temporarily, to the position of an anthropological place.

(Starting Points) A journey in a car seemed to provide us with the space for this venture, and we are now exploring the motorway as site for performance.

Perhaps it is useful to offer a little context here. The abstract at the opening of the written element of our PhD states:

The entire project, processes and products are collaborative and the writing includes an overt reflection upon the joint creation of knowledge, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of two-fold thinking, primarily articulated in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Consideration is also given in this context to artists engaged in collaborative practice with whom Whalley and Miller share a genealogy (Whalley and Miller 2004: 4).

Thus it is this conjoined interest in the articulation of place and an interrogation of the shifting modalities of knowledge creation that were central to our PhD, and continue to inform our postdoctoral practice-as-research.

(Starting Points) The project grew out of a chance observation of what appeared to be a bottle of urine, lying abandoned on the hard shoulder of the M6 motorway. In order to confirm our suspicions, we stopped to collect it, and having seen one bottle, we began to see them at regular intervals along the hard shoulder. Knowing that these bottles and their contents were the product of fellow travellers, Bob felt uncomfortable about simply taking them, and so we needed to make some sort of exchange. At first we left behind whatever we had in our pockets (coins, tissues, paid utility bills), but this developed into keeping a selection of items in the car, gifts that had been given to us, things with some provenance, things we could exchange for the bottles of urine.

(Location) We were thus compelled to consider the service station, and its collusion with the motorway, to view it in any way other than that of a non-place. Unlike on the motorway, we can get out of our vehicles and function in this area, which suggests that the service station could be read as a *place*. But the service station exists merely as a utilitarian place, somewhere to drop out of your journey and procure what you need: a toilet, a bed for the night, food, fuel. It conforms to the model Augé describes as an 'abstract space' (Augé 1995: 98), a place that most people pass by as it lacks spatial coordinates with 'real places'.

In our attempt to bring a public consciousness of place to the service station through performance we are presented with a series of time-space problems. (Method) As we pass into the motorway space from the sliproads it is increasingly difficult to place oneself in accordance with the surrounding landscape. The motorway therefore affords a sort of limbo status.

These small, almost invisible actions continue to dominate our performance strategies. Initially we make things for each other, trying to elicit a laugh or prod the other body in to some sort of action. Each offer is insular, inward looking. Eventually critical mass will be achieved and the actions will become too frequent or exaggerated to remain for us alone. (Aesthetics) It is at this point that we are forced to raise our eyes, and begin to think about the wider audience/user of the space.

In the *Polaroid Act*, first enacted at Lancaster Services in 2000 and subsequently performed at service stations between Junctions 16 and 40 on the M6, we undertake a series of evening meals. After consuming a popular choice from the menu, we take a Polaroid of the table we have eaten at. (Method) The Polaroid is signed, dated and placed in an envelope. The envelope is then stuck to the underside of said table with chewing gum. The Polaroids are left for another diner to find.

As we cross from service station to service station, northbound to southbound, a network of glimpses of our motorway lives is formed. These incorporate Augé's notion of a 'series of snapshots' (Augé 1995: 86), which describe the traveller moving through space capturing fleeting partial glimpses of the landscape. Here, the Polaroid, unlike the snatched view from the frame of the car windscreen, poses a moment of rest and contemplation within the perpetual movement and sound of the motorway.

(Method) It seems important to recognise that the collaboration, both with each other and the potential hidden viewer, encourages a felicitous place where the practice of looking can be seen as a delightful and playful experience.

(Method) We deliberately **displace ourselves** from the arena of the non-place in an attempt to assemble, build or state connections with anthropological place.

A repeated performance entitled *Losing Purses*, first performed in 2001 at Sandbach Services Northbound, involves one of us attempting to lose a leather purse or wallet under a table, in the toilets or by the arcade machines. Displayed in each purse and wallet is a variety of paraphernalia: coins, wedding photographs, false business cards, supermarket receipts, doctors appointment cards. There is a contact number in each purse, with an invitation to leave us a message by telephone. Each purse is then stuffed with feathers to form a nest. The avian imagery references our magpie-like tendency to collect anything shiny. (Method) In **losing an** apparently personal object we are offering something of ourselves to the service station clientele. Those who find a purse have to thread together various strands of text and image, some real and some created.

Central to our praxis has been the engagement with the imagined viewer/reader. The abandoned purses and the Polaroids stuck to the underside of tables were not considered a failure when no one responded. (Method) This imagining extends to the reader of our written documents, as we hope they (you) will find the intrusion of a more ludic discourse analogous to the strategies of gentle resistance we offer in our sited practice.

From very early on, a small sense of ritual was ghosting the edges of our practice. And if ritual was ever-present, so too was the domestic context from which we might have imagined ourselves to be fleeing. To choose a wedding service as the final element of our practical interventions, was to find a way for both to exist within the space of the service station and to challenge its normative/social construction.

Thus, on Friday 20th September 2002 we invited fifty family, friends and interested parties to the Roadchef Sandbach Services between Junctions 16 and 17 of the M6 for the performance event *Partly Cloudy, Chance of Rain*. From 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., the site was occupied by ten performers in wedding dresses, ten performers in morning suits, a six strong choir, a three-piece jazz-funk band, a keyboard player and a priest. At twelve thirty, we renewed our wedding vows in a ceremony that was open to all the users of the service station.

Our performative acts occur in the non-places of the service station and the hard shoulder. These are strange places that are neither part of the journey nor belonging to the surrounding landscape: '[t]he non-place is the opposite of utopia; it exists, and it does not contain any organic society' (Augé 1995: 111–12). Yet despite the displacement, abandoning the relative comfort of our car on the motorway, respite is evoked in the form of shelter from the frequentation of these places. In this depersonalised space of the motorway where can we find narratives to connect the travellers with the space?

(Method) We found our narratives around the *Bottles of Urine*. And so in their place we leave something of ourselves: coins, tissues or a telephone bill long since paid.

(Method) Also we left small gifts that friends have given us, or that we have given each other. We offer our own possessions in lieu of being able to initiate an exchange face to face with the drivers.

We are interested in examining the fluxal nature inherent in our performance work. Thus finding space, not only for the oscillation between liminal places and spaces, but the oscillation between ourselves. Occasionally, more than occasionally, one or the other of us thinks that the other one is not pulling their weight. But more often than not, one of us will bring the other one something that they've found, something diverting, disturbing, amusing. We surrender it to the other one, and this is when the 'n' fold thought comes into play, the thing fits into the bigger picture, makes sense of itself and of the things it is brought into contact with, a metamorphosis that has, to quote Deleuze and Guattari, 'multiple entrances and exits and its own lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21).

(Key issues) There are moments when one of the collaborators talks too much, and the collaboration is always subject to the other voice. Sometimes, there are moments when neither of the parties will say a word for a long time. Because we are yoked together in the action of daily life, and carry with us prior combined knowledge, it becomes necessary to set controls and limits. (Method) One of these is to articulate a joint ownership over all ideas and concepts generated, even in those moments when individual knowledge creation appears to be at play. It has become increasingly impossible to untangle the origins of a particular concept. Thus we assume joint responsibility.

(Key Issues) Collaborative writing for us brings about no single space where meaning can be sought, but a multitudinous array of spaces for interpretation.

This is described aphoristically by Deleuze and Guattari: '[t]he two of us wrote Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 3). Deleuze and Guattari's writing is described by Stivale as 'two-fold thinking' (1998: ix), which challenges the individualist location of knowledge creation, as accepted in academic research.

(Method) If to be 'intertwined and enfolded' (Stivale 1998: ix) is reflective of collaboration, so we must address the in-between space in our work. This terminology reveals a thinking shared by two, and describes a collaborative process that folds together two individual perspectives in flux.

CASE STUDY I: COMMENTARY

Baz Kershaw

Partly Cloudy, Chance of Rain was the first fully collaborative performance/theatre doctoral project to be successfully completed in the UK. As such it achieved an innovative impact as creative research in its own right, as well as setting a new milestone in PhD awards. Its combination of research methods was shaped by the deeply intimate professional and personal relationship of Whalley and Miller in conjunction with the highly public location of a service station on the nation's motorways. It was also the first ever arts research collaboration between a university (Manchester Metropolitan University) and a motorway service station company (Roadchef Costa Coffee). Its transmission involved a broad range of 'multi-modal' outputs – a jointly written thesis, an exhibition, DVD documentation and a television broadcast – all articulated to a two-year long preparatory series of low-profile, surreptitious motorway actions and culminating in a highly visible performance event. The latter centred on a formal ceremony conducted by a priest in the service station café where Miller/Whalley reaffirmed their marriage vows before family, friends and colleagues (including PhD External Examiners), as well as many passing members of the British public as the café was open for business as usual.

The ritual framing of vows itself was the verbal correlative of a suite of conjoined writing research methods that included correspondence (letters/emails/Post-it notes/etc.), talking while writing together, leaving textual gaps for filling by the other and more. These tactics corresponded to the performative exchange methods of gift giving and sharing finds with strangers and each other devised for the research process – leaving letters, purses, Polaroid images, etc. – which depended on repeated motorway car journeys. These included swapping stories with hitch-hikers and transporting and placing/losing objects, which performed as service station contact points for the public. The artefacts' apparent provenance produced a key method of the research, as

they represented a *placing/displacing of the self* in the motorway landscape, literally opening a space that might never be filled by a reciprocal gift, but which could always become a focus of *practising looking* for the absent other(s). This *addressing of in-between spaces* as method was fundamental to articulating a dynamic of theoretical **starting points** for the project in the writings of *Augé* (non-place) and *Deleuze/Guattari* (folded thinking) that eventually materialised in the written thesis, but also to the aesthetics of its creative practices. The culminating marriage-vow ritual, like the deliberately placed artefacts, constituted an *audience framing* for the motorway-going public who could treat it as an *ignored invitation* or as a *found narrative* – a wedding in a motorway service station! – well fit for retelling, especially as the site was populated by ten other couples formally dressed as brides and grooms.

The reward of the public's interest for Whalley/Miller as researchers was animation of their project's **key issues** regarding conventional relationships between *space and place* on motorways. The research event challenged how that transport system tends to render the *domestic absent* by manifesting a foundation of the domestic – marriage – as present via *collaborative/contra-individualist creativity* as a *strategy of resistance* regarding the site's tendencies to commodify the travelling public. While the passing public might be puzzled or intrigued by the spectacle, the service station staff clearly enjoyed being in the picture. As the eleven waltzing wedding couples on the lawn alongside the three-lane carriage-way almost brought the busy motorway traffic to a stop, so it was amusing to reflect that the most vital **starting point** of this remarkable example of PaR was the *chance observation* of a bottle of urine on the thin strip of its hard shoulder.

INTERMISSION: RECEPTION, SPECTATORSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Partly Cloudy, Chance of Rain engaged the motorway-going public through a mix of participation and different modes of spectatorship that is representative of reception regime combinations in PaR more generally. Indirect and direct participation through the carefully placed artefacts, hitch-hiker stories, work-place entertainment and so on overlapped with the intimate and in-the-know spectatorships integral to the marriage-vow ceremony, plus the accidental spectatorship of the service station customers, then implicated spectatorship and – through the honking of horns – participation of the motorway drivers. Though no formal system of feedback was included, the patterns of contact in these differentiated modes enabled Whalley and Miller to gain comparative knowledge of, and insights into, reception of the event on a spectrum ranging from closely private to generally public.

A comparable mix was built into my environmentally specific durational

production *Mnemosyne Dreams*, presented on the heritage site of the Victorian ocean-going liner *SS Great Britain* at Bristol Docks, UK in 2002 (Kershaw 2005). With solo performer-artist Sue Palmer as chief collaborator, the project investigated one-person small-scale spectacle through performances that ran for six hours and were accessible to all visitors during its four-day run. Its three main shipboard locations – the promenade deck, women’s boudoir and first-class cabin – positioned spectators as semi-formal audience, accidental eavesdroppers and intimate voyeurs, and its free-ranging walkabout sequences were an open invite that produced commentators, co-walkers, pied-piper followers and other quasi-roles. Invited spectators and randomly chosen visitors participated as four distinct ‘memory groups’ in a formal feedback system that also included one-to-one conversations. Modelled on reception research methods used in an earlier show on the ship (Kershaw 2002, 2008), *Mnemosyne Dreams* extended its findings to show how both large-scale and miniaturised spectacle can evoke acutely contesting histories often currently invisible at such sites.

The relatively restricted spaces of performance studios and rehearsal workshops are no barrier to equivalent experimentation in PaR mixed-mode reception. This is often designed to explore reactions to the hybrid aesthetics and fissionable thematics that often feature in PaR projects and productions. The diverse forms of attention, engagement and response this produces encourage the invention of tailor-made feedback methods that aim to clarify the fine and frequently fluid distinctions created in and between spectatorship and participation. Readers might be interested to detect something of this kind in the terms of address created by the subtly structured relationships of dancers, choreographer and audience members implied in this chapter’s second case study.



Figure 3.3 Head finding a nest: *the Suchness of Heni and Eddie*, at ResCen NightWalking Conference, Greenwich Dance Agency, UK, 2002. Performers: Henrietta Hale and Eddie Nixon. Choreographer: Rosemary Lee. Writer: Niki Pollard. Photographer: Vipul Sangoi, Raindesign. Reproduced with permission.

Case study 2

Rosemary Lee and Niki Pollard

the Suchness of Heni and Eddie

an inside out performance

This hybrid performance/lecture-dem unpicked and exposed the layers of exploration within the creative process. Intimacies, subtleties and fruitful accidents were revealed as the audience witnessed the dancers' thought processes and physical challenges and heard the choreographer's struggles and discoveries. Simultaneously an intimate duet unfolded before their eyes.

the Suchness of Heni and Eddie explored a new form of presentation that is both educational in its broadest sense and a performance at the same time. It was designed to be presented in more intimate settings such as studio spaces. It toured to the main UK higher education institutions offering dance at postgraduate level as well to various dance agencies and festivals, including NottDance06. It was first shown at the ResCen conference *NightWalking* (2002) and was then developed and toured in 2006–7. The development of *the Suchness of Heni and Eddie* was supported by ACE and ResCen.

Choreographed by Rosemary Lee with the dancers; performed by Henrietta Hale, Eddie Nixon and Rosemary Lee; writing and devising by Niki Pollard and Rosemary Lee. *the Suchness of Heni and Eddie* DVD (Bristol: PARIP and London: ResCen, 2007) is an interactive DVD that is part of a research project by PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) that investigates how new technology can be used for the documentation of performance, as well as part of ResCen's ongoing research into revealing the creative process of the artist.

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[The ResCen website includes video clips from the performances and DVD, referenced by the thumbnail images keyed to research methods below (reproduced with permission): http://www.rescen.net/Rosemary_Lee/suchness_vid.html (accessed 1 July 2010) – viewing advised. It also has the full version of the following interview, so text missing from the blank spaces in the edit below can be accessed by readers.]

Interview (edited BK and NP) • Transmission: website

In December 2004 Niki Pollard interviewed Rosemary Lee about her work *the Suchness of Heni and Eddie*. This interview took place between its first performance at *NightWalking* in 2002 and Rosemary's revival and development of it for touring in 2006. It was also prior to her involvement with PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) to produce the interactive DVD.

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NP *the Suchness of Heni and Eddie* is a project in which I have collaborated with you as a writer.

RL *the Suchness of Heni and Eddie* I suppose originally started when I watched two dancers, Henrietta Hale and Eddie Nixon, dance together in the rehearsals of a work I made in 2001 called *Passage*.

- **Starting Point:** an unfinished dance

I wanted the duet to be about my sense of who these dancers are when I watch them in the rehearsal studio. When I speak of 'suchness', which is in fact a translation of a Buddhist term (**tathata**, eds), I am trying to mark this quality. I borrowed the term as I felt it could suggest my interest in what I am seeing in a dancer, that is an essence and potential which I want to draw out through their dancing. By this, I do not mean any impossible idealisation of who they 'really are', but rather that I am focused on who they are to my eyes as they dance.

- **Key Issue:** performers' presence

I decided to give a kind of performative lecture . . .

My idea was that I would reveal what was happening for me choreographically as I started a creative process from what felt like nowhere – other than in this conviction that whatever was created be about how I saw these two dancers dancing together.

the Suchness of Heni and Eddie became I would say an 'inside-out' performance in which I tried to show the workings of a piece and particularly the layers of influence that come into play when a choreographer tries to make a piece.

I am now researching how it can tour as a duet in which I still talk and read as part of the performance. It will somehow start from seeing the workings of the duet, like listening to a musical performance while following a score annotated by the composer's notes.

- **Transmission:** multi-modal duet for three

NP How did you approach that first week in the studio?

RL

I started with **tasks** that were about the dancers being 'present' and 'arriving' in the space, but in a duet form. For example, I remember asking Heni and Eddie each to sense their arrival – in their bodies, their readiness for rehearsal, how they were noticing the space, how they felt – but to be simultaneously sensitive to the arrival process of each other. They could only move when the other moved.

- **Method:** connection first [Clip 1 balance]



I remember strongly wanting to 'start from scratch', with 'a blank sheet', I consciously tried not to prepare in my usual way. I can't even remember having written any ideas in a notebook. My thought was simply to start with finding themselves in their own bodies, of becoming present with each other. In that sense I wanted to begin *in* and *from* the present moment.

- **Starting Point:** scratch/blank sheet

I gave them improvisation tasks with formal structures like the spatial patterns of partnering in a court or folk dance. each day, I would set a relationship such as 'far away' or 'left shoulder to left shoulder', or 'face to face'. Think of the squareness of the two bodies in a folk dance. You are often side by side or front to front or you might circle each other.

- **Method:** bodies in measured proximity [Clip 2 pivots]



What I did bring to the space too, besides an empty notebook, were many postcards that mostly featured two people or two animals – images of different partnerships and duets. I imagined that we would each write on these postcards every night after rehearsal.

Some of that writing was read or circulated through the audience during the 'inside-out' performance.

- **Method:** writing postcards

NP During that first research week for *Suchness* you seemed concerned that the stamp of your voice would impose itself too strongly on Eddie and Heni's dancing?

RL Yes, I questioned the integrity of what I had set out to do.

- **Key Issue:** questioning/reflexivity

The potential I can draw out of them is inevitably inseparable from who I am and how I see.

in *Suchness* the process *is* the product.

- **Aesthetics:** be spontaneous

How I try to draw out their individual qualities, I think, is to find images which release ways of moving that feel right for who they are and so empower them in some way.

NP Can you describe an image or task during your research week which drew this 'suchness' from Eddie?

RL One task I set was for one dancer to manoeuvre the other to walk through the space. Imagine only moving if your partner moves you and their task is to make you walk by picking up a foot, getting your body in the right place, placing that foot down on the floor again and so on. In other words every detail of a walk had to be attended to by the active dancer in this exercise.

- **Method:** moving others' bodies [Clip 3 transient moments]



Eddie can seem taller than he actually is and muscularly solid . . . In this task, I can see the solidity of his bones and musculature by how laborious it is for Heni to move him. Yet I am also drawn to how he surrenders his authoritative quality of strength and is quietly absorbed in how Heni is trying to move him.

NP The dependency imposed by the task could seem disempowering even humiliating, but Eddie neither resists, nor is helplessly passive within the task?

RL Yes, he is fully engaged in this task of not being able to move on his own.

NP What then is the 'suchness' of Heni?

RL

Her presence is very open – one that I find extremely beautiful. I see abandonment in her dancing, a kind of wild, 'limby' grace.

I remember describing to Heni the feeling of being out in the endless long grass of a prairie, under a huge sky. I was thinking of the extraordinary descriptions of prairie lands in *Little House on the Prairie*.

I feel that Heni's dancing existed in a place like this.

- **Method:** imagined location

NP I remember you questioned yourself as to whether you were looking at Heni and Eddie's own 'suchness' if you sometimes gave them movement tasks that you have used elsewhere.

RL Could I shape a task that was purely about finding out who these people are?

I realised that obviously my tasks impose structures and spatial relations constantly. For example: How, then, can I claim that I am investigating their 'suchness'? I sometimes fear that I am being hypocritical. My aspiration to uncover a dancer's 'suchness' may be more bound up with my ethical sense of wanting to respect and recognise a dancer than a reality.

- **Key Issue: ethical self-critique** 8a64c11d0faf1ca97b8725e06ae856d6
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So this question of whether I can actually really get at the suchness of Heni and Eddie without imposing my own pre-existing tasks was a constant question in my head.

In my defence, though, the tasks I gave in *Suchness* were usually only skeleton suggestions that left a great deal of room for interpretation.

I was trying to find forms that were formal and simple that allowed the poignant content of seeing Heni and Eddie together to spill in and about the forms.

- **Aesthetics: uncontainable flows**

NP You worked on tasks with their eyes closed. Can you explain more about that?

RL While realising I would impose structures, I also tried to be very receptive to Eddie and Heni's qualities of movement. One way I did this was to ask them to move with their eyes closed. In part this was to do with asking them to sense one another's movement profoundly through senses other than the visual.

Witnessing them work without sight makes their sensitivity to each other all the more apparent.

I am interested in the audience knowing the dancer is facing a problem. For example, seating them side by side on chairs, with eyes closed, and asking them to try to move in the same way as the other person; this makes you acutely aware of the struggle to sense in the dancer. This struggle to find their way in the dark seems to me not just to represent this couple's desire to find each other but perhaps a state familiar to many people finding their way on their own journey.

- **Method:** relating blind [Clip 4 rehearsal]



The tasks that I gave were almost all of partnering, creating a physical dependency which might also have indirect emotional resonance to an audience. I do not give physical tasks that might be 'about' an emotional situation, for example the grabs and pushes of a fight. Rather, I might give a practical task of Heni being always held away from the ground, while Eddie walks an imagined tightrope. Their interdependency is in physical terms. The intimacy that arises between them then is abstract, belonging to the dance form, but it can hint at the unspoken complexities of human relationships.

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NP Several of your duet tasks made them move clumsily, for example, restricting them to moving while always standing on the other's feet.

RL

I was interested in their struggle to achieve the task perhaps because it is evocative to me of the struggles we experience with partners in our own lives.

Heni stands on Eddie's feet and leans far out. You will see a beautiful image, suspended like the figurehead at the prow of a ship, but you also see Eddie straining to counterbalance her as he holds onto her hips. The audience knows that she is on the cusp of falling.

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- **Method:** stepping on each others' feet [Clip 5 on moving feet]



I want the dancers to keep working at this edge. My dilemma is to compose work that can also be 'raw' and 'unpolished'. Do dancers inevitably sometimes fake rawness?

The challenge to me as I direct dancers then, is to discriminate finely between over- and under-rehearsing material depending on the dancers I am working with.

NP

'inside out performance' at *NightWalking*?

What did you learn from the

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RL

I think *Suchness* gave the audience an intimacy with the dancers that I had not realised was possible.

This relationship felt deeper and much more tangible because of the form the performance took.

Just as I want them to sense Heni and Eddie's state as they dance, so, we can sense the audience as they watch intently; they are part of the action.

- **Transmission:** interactive live performance

CASE STUDY 2: COMMENTARY

Baz Kershaw

the Suchness of Heni and Eddie confounded normative assumptions about relationships between process and product in the creation of contemporary dance. Its hybrid combinations of movement and text, presentation and commentary, improvisation and choreography exploded many of the presumptive rules that separate arts creativity research and experimental dance. Its mix of research methods was founded in the well-rehearsed uniqueness of strong professional-personal bonds between dancers Hale and Nixon and choreographer Lee and amanuensis-confidante Pollard. It belied its classic combination of PaR locations of *academic conference, dance studios and festivals* through an extreme hyphenation of communicative modes – lecture-demo-choreo-impro-pas-de-deux/trois/quatre-motion – while still being broadcast through a relatively familiar roster of multi-modal **transmission** channels: *participatory live performance, website writings/videos and interactive DVD*. The whole suite of creative manoeuvres was crafted in intensive periods over five years from conception to DVD publication. In actual performance the super-cool live combination of the energy rich un-dancing duet plus a softly spoken voice-over exposé of first-frontier bodily techniques and raw personal-professional ethical honesty of judgement was clearly revelatory to its intensely attentive audiences.

The **research methods** leading to that effect were like a countdown of deliberately wrong-footing moves designed to evolve a complex creative clarity. The mundane business of *writing postcards* with source images for audience members to reflect on before and during the performance was especially

consonant with the choreo-improvisational score's technique of *moving others' bodies* – an everyday aspect of care, of course – that established the dancers'/spectators' utter interdependence. For example, the delicately advancing travel while *stepping on each other's feet* echoed the many demanding passes, balances, traverses, lifts as Heni and Eddie *related blind* through visceral contact obviously charged with tentative but certain trust. These interactive routines conjugated into sequences of shifting *bodies in measured proximity* and always implied the grounds of an *imagined location* which could be anywhere that spectators chose: a thin cliff top, a maze with transparent walls, a dance hall of dreams. Such randomness seemed planned to become predictably unpredictable, sustaining a boundless flow of creative exchange, as the event's first rule was to make *connection first* – between dancer and dancer and choreographer and correspondent and spectator-participants and dancers – and to be ethically finely calibrated in whatever ensued.

The **aesthetics** of this highly dexterous *duet for three* was founded on simple stratagems which magnified the two base elements of all efficacious performance – namely paradox and excess – as if by serial on-off switching of a light one could really see what the dark looks like. That impossible order to *be spontaneous* was its core conundrum, through which the bodies of the two dancers seemed to search for *uncontainable flows* from one moment to the next. The project's **key issues** together might be considered an object lesson in how to distress the principle art of deconstruction: to destabilise each and every form of address. The key term in its title – 'suchness' – cleverly performed as a detonative stand-in for *performers' presence*, a substitution wholly informed by a disarming commitment to *questioning reflexivity* in order to produce a stunningly rigorous *ethical self-critique*. Yet the main **starting points** of *the Suchness of Heni and Eddie* signal provisional in-between events and the radical openness in simultaneous acts of bodies moving, voices speaking and hands writing: an *unfinished dance* and a *scratch blank sheet*. If one were searching for a paradigmatic PaR event, what better place to start than with a foot already lifted to make an invisible mark creatively right?

POSTSCRIPT: AN ANTI-CONCLUSION

If diversity characterises the nature of practice as research in theatre and performance studies, can it be said to have any general unity of purpose or usefulness? If a lifted foot can stand for a multitude of other starting points, what might we make of its sole? These are not 'what is the meaning of life' kinds of question. The two case studies together indicate that the quality of particular PaR projects rests in their ability to make specific sense of very

common properties. Including Key Issues as a minimal PaR aspect, thus generated: space, place and absence; movement, presence and reflexivity; and, in the intermission example, memory, the past and power. Each group of properties generate particular multiple meanings for every specific PaR project. In this they align with the *paradigm shift* (assuming it happened, c.1950–1990) between modernism and postmodernism, between a world organised around the (apparent) stability of binaries and one in which multiplicity, complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity rule.

A key component in the ‘practice turn’ in the disciplines has been a vertiginous traverse between discursive and embodied ways of becoming/being, doing epistemologies and creating ontologies. I have implied throughout this chapter that PaR in theatre/performance studies increasingly has aimed to rest, as it were, on the point of that turning. One major sign of the criticality of that conundrum is the ‘foundational problem of where knowledges are located’ (Piccini and Rye, in Allegue et al. 2009: 36). And that indicates a profound principle of practice as research in theatre and performance: that its methods always involve the dislocation of knowledge itself.

Paradoxically, the annals of philosophy provide corroboration of that principle, often in the form of reminiscence and anecdote. One of the earliest and shortest examples in the Western tradition is about a famous cynic of Ancient Greece.

Diogenes once observed a child drinking from his cupped hands. ‘In the practice of moderation, a child has become my master,’ he remarked, and immediately threw his goblet away.

The goblet leaving Diogenes’ hand is the moment of practice as research. Philosophy becomes action and the location of knowledge is temporarily entirely undone by performance. Ecologically speaking, a more sustainable future may be drawn closer through creative acts and events. Could this become why one of the most common mottos in the practice of theatre and performance-making will be that next-to-briefest of paradoxes: less is more?

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