Space and spontaneity: an interdisciplinary understanding of improvised performance, site and process

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Gwilym Lawrence

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures
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Abstract

This practice as research (PaR) thesis explores improvisation within site-specific theatre practice. Drawing on theories from within human geography, as well as both theory and practice from theatre and performance, the thesis argues that improvisation is a relational, contingent and emplaced practice – one that continuously and inevitably draws upon its immediate surroundings, as well as on the previous lived experiences of the improviser.

Using an original improvised walking performance around the Peak District village of Hope as the case study, the thesis explores the ways in which improvised performance can intersect with notions of place, landscape, memory, personal biography and community – as well as how these things might intersect with one another. Further, by examining the use of improvisation as a means of engaging an audience and drawing them into a process of collaborative recollection, the thesis ultimately shows that improvised performance is an effective technique for inviting people to encounter their immediate environments afresh, bringing new perspectives to seemingly familiar places.

The thesis aims to be of interest to theatremakers, theatre and performance scholars, and human and cultural geographers – particularly those working in more-than-representational theories.
Declaration

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As this thesis attempts to show, creativity and ideas happen between people rather than within them. As such, this research project, and the work which enabled it to come into being, bears a debt of significant gratitude to Soraya Nabipour. Her input as an outside eye on The Hope Ceremony of Recollection is recounted in Chapter Four. Beyond this, the shows we made together over the years – and her belief and support – enabled this PhD to be conceived of in the first place. Thanks also to Richard Wing, whose inquisitive and playful nature – both as a performer and as a person – were so influential in opening up possibilities.

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The author

Gwilym Lawrence is a theatremaker and researcher working predominantly in site-specific performance.

Running through Gwilym’s work is a fascination with notions of place. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), in 2014 Gwilym completed an MA in Advanced Theatre Practice at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London, where he explored audience interaction, site-based work and non-traditional methods of collaboration.

He has been an associate artist with Newcastle-based theatre company Cap-a-Pie since 2013, having directed Under Us All, The Town Meeting and The Assignment for them. Gwilym was formerly co-artistic director of the Sheffield-based company Sad Siren Theatre, for whom he directed the devised shows The Hoults Yard Project, Starr and Pitt, The Gods of Pick ‘N’ Mix and I LOVE YOU WILL U MARRY ME. Elsewhere, Gwilym has made work with Shakespeare’s Globe, Live Theatre, York Theatre Royal, Forward Theatre Project and nabokov.

Gwilym has published a co-authored book chapter with Michael Richardson, with whom he collaborated on Under Us All, entitled “Under Us All: ‘What you’ve been through...is what we’ve all been through’” in Masculinity in Crisis: Depictions of Modern Male Trauma in Ireland edited by Catherine Rees.
“On the way back from Liverpool last time we stopped for the night at Alstonefield, and as I was strolling among the fields south of the village in the evening I suddenly had the distinct sensation that it mattered, this place, that its very existence mattered. I surprised myself, because obviously there’s nothing there that any version of cultural modernity needs for half a second. Limestone hills, sheep pasturage, meandering river dales – what does any contemporary claim want with any of it? Yet there it was, all around me, manifestly necessary. I was amazed.”

Peter Riley
Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Prologue

In the winter of 2012, a friend and I were busy making plans to put on a new play of his the following spring, which would be written for and performed in a small room within Morden Tower, a turret on the original west walls of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, which dates back to 1280. The project never happened. Morden Tower was discovered, rather inconveniently, to have a rat infestation, and my friend became fatigued attempting to hold down a teaching job and multiple writing projects simultaneously. Determined to put something on, and with two brilliant performers - Soraya Nabipour and Richard Wing – already signed up to the project, I found another space in which we could take up residency: the attic of a former industrial pottery building in Hoult’s Yard, not far from the River Tyne.

In lieu of a playwright, I suggested that the three of us devise a show for the space. We set to work observing and absorbing the site as best we could, and using improvisation exercises from a variety of books – chiefly Keith Johnstone's *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (1981) and John Wright's *Why is that so Funny?* (2006) – to develop a familiarity and complicity between the two performers, and to generate ideas and material that might give us a kernel from which to work. Both performers were skilled improvisers, bringing a sense of ease to their work, and the days we spent in the attic saw a plethora of different stories and characters brought to life. The attic itself – with its single-glazed windows at either end and its thick dust, exposed floorboards, sloping corrugated-iron roof and wooden beams – was richly atmospheric and imposing. In fact, it seemed actively to resist the creation of improvised scenes or plots that bore no relation to it. It quickly became apparent that the improvisations that worked best were those which actively drew on and incorporated their surroundings, absorbing the weather, light, temperature and time of day, as well as the materiality of the attic, into the action. A rule emerged amongst us that every improvised scene should feature two people who could conceivably have found themselves in the attic at that moment in time.

As the first performance loomed, there was a watershed moment. The previous year, Chris Goode had written a blog post in which he suggested that performances might benefit from becoming more like rehearsals because 'that's where theatre is most like itself: a liquid thing, restless, full of spontaneities and unexpected shifts' (2011). With our thinking informed by Goode's proposition, at Soraya's suggestion we decided that rather than selecting one of the many scenarios that had
emerged from the improvisations and attempting to sculpt it into a coherent script (as we had originally imagined), we would present the audience instead with a formalised version of the improvisation exercises themselves.

Each night, I would deliver a series of simple instructions to the performers in front of the audience, which the other performer (wearing headphones) was unable to hear. The performers had no idea in advance what these instructions were going to be. Over the following hour or so, I would scrutinise the action taking place, stopping and then re-setting what became successive scenes that charted a series of meetings between the same two characters, with each scene following on from the last. A scene might last for two minutes or for three quarters of an hour, and would only finish when one of the performers left the space. At this point, a new scene would begin. Beyond the opening scene, my own instructions to the performers were part-improvised too, as I responded to the narrative as it emerged. The only rule was that when it came to the site, no suspension of disbelief was required; every scene was set in the attic at the time of day at which it was performed. Each night the scenario that played out was completely different, as the two performers responded not just to each other, but to the total environment in which they found themselves, moment by moment.

In the weeks and months following The Hoult’s Yard Project, I thought a lot about site-specific performance and improvisation. Having initially found ourselves working in this way out of necessity as much as design, it now seemed to us all as though improvisation and site-specificity were natural bedfellows. The majority of theatre auditoria are designed in such a way as to control environmental factors such as light, temperature and sound as much as possible, in order that a performance can be replicated multiple times with little variation. Making performance outside of such spaces often removes this control, forcing the work to consider its relationship with its (sometimes unpredictable) material environment in a different way. In light of this, the link between site-specificity and improvisation, it seemed to us, could be argued through from either end. When asking a performer to improvise – that is, to be outward-facing, open and alive to the environment in which they find themselves – the site of performance surely has to be figured into the equation. Likewise, when making performance at site, in order to incorporate the temporal, meteorological and other conditions of the location from one moment to the next, as well as its happenstance, the strategies and dispositions of improvisation appeared to us to be hugely useful. Yet despite this, there seemed to be an almost total lack of critical reflection on the link between improvisation and site-specificity in the existing performance studies literature. Over the next few years, I continued to make and direct
site-specific performances with Soraya, Richard and others – all of which incorporated at least a degree of improvisation – and to reflect on the (as I saw it) generative possibilities opened up by thinking through improvisation and site together.

The doctoral research detailed in this thesis grows out of that work. Despite not mentioning the fact beyond this introduction, the work laid out here was only made possible through a number of years of practical enquiry into site-specific improvisation. The project adopts, as a direct result of this, a practice-as-research (PaR) methodology. The thesis begins to fill the significant gaps in the existing literatures on both improvisation and site-specific performance, and proposes that these two branches of practice, viewed by many as disparate, might constructively talk to and about one another, to the benefit of both.

1.2 Site-specific theatre and geography

In recent decades, a broad range of socially, politically and materially charged sites away from purpose-built theatre auditoria have been used as the stimulus and location for the production and consumption of a growing number of diverse performance events. Loosely gathered under the umbrella term site-specific – which first emerged in the 1960s in relation to sculpture and visual art – these works have adopted a variety of relations to the sites with which they interact, in pursuit of a wide array of social, political and artistic aims. At the turn of the 21st century, Fiona Wilkie (2002) conducted a major survey of contemporary site-specific theatre practice in the UK. In direct conversation with performance companies and solo artists via questionnaires and telephone conversations, Wilkie attempted to sketch a map of professional practice, so as to achieve a clearer view of how the landscape lay. Borrowing terminology from Stephen Hodge of the Exeter-based collective Wrights and Sites' (Wrights and Sites, 2001), Wilkie attempted to categorise this work along a continuum, with performance in a traditional, purpose-built theatre building at one end, and fully site-specific work – which takes its location as the primary artistic stimulus – at the other. In doing so, and by incorporating into her study a body of work that adopted vastly different approaches to notions of site, Wilkie succeeded in demonstrating the sheer volume and variety of work occurring at the time. Since then, there has arguably been further proliferation; in part as a response to the looming climate catastrophe, a significant environmental turn in the discipline has occurred, led by the likes of Deirdre Heddon and Sally Mackey (2012), Baz Kershaw (2007) and Carl Lavery (2016). This work has attempted to think through the meaning and possibilities of human performance within the
Anthropocene – the current geological age in which human activity can be seen as the most significant influence on the global climate.

The early part of the century, then, has seen the kinds of site-specific practice taking place diversify beyond recognition. Within this body of work, Mike Pearson (2010) has identified a significant turn away from fixed, architectonic and expositional modes of engaging with site towards a set of relational, mobile and peripatetic approaches. There has, undeniably, been a noticeable groundswell in performance practices that both engage non-artist participants in their creation and development, and seek to nurture in spectators a more relational mode of engaging with their surroundings. In some ways, the turn towards site can even be seen to have come full circle, with a concern for the environmental being reincorporated back into the auditorium itself (see, for example, Ontroerend Goed's 2016 World Without Us).

Within all this, a clear strand of peripatetic, conversational practice has emerged, through which artists have sought to harness mobility and dialogue as means to engage audiences with their immediate surroundings. Work by the likes of Deirdre Heddon (2016), Bill Aitchison (2016), Misha Myers (2011) and Tim Brennan (2008) in particular stand out as adopting a structural fluidity and, in some ways, an improvisatory disposition. Yet even here, improvisation has yet to be foregrounded as a formal or thematic concern of site-specific performance, either by the artists themselves or those reflecting critically on their work. This research project aims to fill this gap by building generatively – albeit implicitly – on the walking performance work of these artists, maintaining a sharp focus on the improvisational qualities of site-specific work, as well as the inherently site-specific nature of improvisation. For whilst theatre auditoria are generally designed to control conditions, when working at site there is an inevitable unpredictability that must either be worked with or resisted. As performance maker and scholar Cathy Turner, a member of Wrights and Sites, has suggested, ‘theatre and performance taking place on the street is necessarily forced to consider its encounter with quotidian movements and expectations, where the audience member, as pedestrian, will encounter serendipitous events and objects, unanticipated by the artist’ (2014: 199). This is undoubtedly true, yet as this thesis will show, the improvisatory qualities of site-specific performance far exceed the moments in which a performer or audience member reacts with virtuosic skill (or otherwise) to some unexpected happenstance of a site. Rather, as will be argued in what follows, improvisation is continuously present as we carry out both planned and impromptu tasks amongst the complexity of a world that is in a perennial state of flux.
Given the research’s focus on notions of space, and in particular the relationship between improvised performance and the site in which it unfolds moment by moment, this doctoral project reaches out beyond the boundaries of performance studies to draw on the discipline of geography, which takes as its primary focus the interrelations between people and places. A fuller rationale for working across disciplines is given in the first chapter of the thesis, but in simple terms it arises from a desire to complicate notions of site ‘as a static and critically pre-emptive object of inquiry’ (Hawkins, 2013: 104), conceptualising site instead as a somewhat fluid amalgamation of processes. By generatively combining performance studies and geography, the thesis establishes a discourse on the ways in which the processual, immediate and contingent nature of improvised performance render it highly appropriate to site-specific work. In her influential book For Space, for example, Doreen Massey argues that ‘space […] is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories so-far’ (2005: 9). In so describing it, Massey suggests that space, like improvised performance work, is continuously emerging. This project seeks to demonstrate that adopting this understanding of site might usefully inform the way improvised performance is made and thought about; and that, more than this, improvised site-specific performances might themselves contribute to new understandings of site for theatre-makers, audiences and scholars. As Harriet Hawkins argues, in recent decades there has been ‘an exponential increase in artistic practices for which a specific localised “situation” or “context” is variously understood as impetus, inspiration, research subject, and medium for art making’ (2013: 87). Yet within this work, ‘the road less followed […] is that which leads us toward the microgeographies of artistic practices’ (Ibid: 91). In response, this doctoral research project homes in and critically reflects on the process of creating a site-specific, improvised performance, whilst also looking at the broader social and political questions that arise from this.

The practical work that makes up half of this PaR doctoral submission took place in the Peak District village of Hope, Derbyshire, UK. In choosing the village there was of course a punning element, not least because hope and futurity are important concepts both in improvisation and in non-representational and more-than-representational theories (NRT/MRT), branches of geography that this research draws on. As Nigel Thrift suggests, MRT is ‘a hopeful conception – or so I hope – which attempts to undo some of the damage inflicted by numerous orderings on our capacity for

\footnote{For exact location, see Appendix One, p.149.}
thoughtfulness and to amplify responsiveness’ (2004: 127). Like improvisation, MRT is ‘oriented by and to an open-ended future’ (Anderson and Harrison, 2010: 3) and both are concerned with how the future might be related to without fixing it and rendering it inert before it has had the chance to unfold. As this thesis goes on to suggest, one answer to this might be: through improvised performance. The village itself is a cross-roads – a place of indeterminacy and in-betweens – and lies between the popular tourist destinations of Castleton, Hathersage and Edale. It is not a place often visited in and of itself, but is rather passed through on the way to somewhere else. It is – or at least it seemed to me to be at the outset of the project – an example of what Victor Turner (1969) might call a liminal space, a village that finds itself in a potentially productive state of indeterminacy. From walks I’d taken in the Peak District prior to the project’s conception and from my initial informal field trips, it also appeared to be a place of economic diversity, comprising both enormous, stone-built period houses and semi-detached social housing and flats. All this, I hoped, would throw up a variety of responses when I began to interview residents about their relation to the landscape around them. More than anything, though, I was drawn to Hope by something ineffable – an atmosphere, or an affective response the village evoked for me. There was an ordinariness that I like, and the village seemed to be performing its own identity to tourists less consciously than some of the villages nearby. It was also situated conveniently on the train line, almost exactly halfway between Sheffield, where I live, and Manchester, where the research was based. For a research project concerned with openings, unfoldings and improvisation, all this seemed more than enough: I had chosen Hope, and set forth to see what would come of it.

Broadly, the project described in this thesis follows Robin Nelson’s triangular model for PaR (2006), combining my own knowledge as a practitioner with a strong conceptual framework and critical reflection on the practice carried out. It was never the intention to use this research as a vehicle for forging a new model of PaR. Instead, I aimed to use Nelson’s established formulation, building on the strength of practical performance making in the pursuit of research questions which can’t be fully answered either through theoretical consideration alone, or via reference to existing practice. This thesis contends that improvisation, whilst necessarily present, is rarely foregrounded as a feature of contemporary site-specific performance, either as a formal feature of the work itself or in how artists account for their practice. Therefore, it stands to reason that, in investigating the role of improvisation within such work, original practice is required.

Notably, the thesis doesn’t contain a dedicated methods chapter. Rather, a reflexive analysis of the
research's methodological concerns and approaches is dispersed throughout. The thesis proceeds (in Chapter Two) by offering a selected overview of approaches to improvised theatrical performance that have emerged historically, from the semi-improvised routines of the Commedia dell’Arte to the experimental work that emerged on the fringes of US performance practice in the 1960s and 1970s. By focusing on how these various manifestations of improvisation have related to their immediate spatio-temporal contexts – before going on to reviewing the relevant literature on improvisation and geography – Chapter Two establishes the foundations on which the remainder of the thesis is built. In Chapter Three, the focus shifts to the fieldwork that was undertaken in Hope to lay the groundwork for the performances that followed. The chapter explores and critically analyses the project's use of mobile, site-based interviews in an attempt to get beyond more traditional, representational accounts of place – with varying degrees of success. The thesis then moves on, in Chapters Four and Five, to provide a detailed account of The Hope Ceremony of Recollection itself, the improvised, site-specific walking performance that comprises half of this doctoral project. Adopting a slightly more performative register, these chapters offer both an immediate, affective account of the show and its making-process from the first-person perspective of the performer-researcher, and a more distanced, critical and traditionally “scholarly” analysis of the work. The thesis concludes by summarising the project's key findings in relation to improvised performance, site and process, before offering some questions and considerations for further research.
Chapter Two: Clinging to the Particular: improvisation and site-specific performance

2.1 Theatrical improvisation

For veteran improviser and performance artist Ruth Zapora, improvisation occurs in a vacuum. She opens her 2014 book *Improvisation on the Edge* by giving a description of the moments preceding one of her performances:

I’m standing in the center of the stage facing the audience. This stage could be anywhere: Macau, Beijing, Dubrovnik, New York City. Wherever it is, the theater begins to take on a slow vibration. The silence itself is nearly tangible, and the lit space that I’m standing in becomes potent, a thing of substance [...] This particular performance arena, whether it’s a small black-box theater, an art gallery, or an enormous cinder-block state-run performance structure, will soon transform into whatever environment my imaginary landscape conjures up. (2014: 1)

The implication here is that for Zapora, the performance space, like the image of the work to be created within it, is a blank canvas, an undifferentiated ‘empty world’ (ibid: 6) hermetically sealed from the street outside and the city beyond; it is primed and ready to be transformed, via the performance event, into somewhere and something else. Created *ex nihilo*, rather than a relational practice in continuous dialogue with its surroundings, improvisation for Zapora is premised on the skilful and unimpeded channelling of a performer’s profound, internal creative force; it is the unrehearsed and immediate revelation to an audience, without premeditation, of the artist’s ‘inherent nature’ (ibid). She is far from alone in this; there seems often to be a tendency amongst improvisers to view their practice as somehow untethered from considerations of time and place, occurring against a blank slate and absolved of any temporal, spatial, cultural or political context; as Zapora states in the passage above, *this stage could be anywhere.*

What’s more, Zapora writes about her practice in a language that verges at times on the euphoric. The same can be said of other improvisers. Elsewhere, Viola Spolin has suggested that spontaneous improvisation ‘creates an explosion that for the moment frees us from handed-down frames of reference, memory choked with old facts and information, and undigested theories and techniques of other people’s finding’ (1999: 4), whilst Keith Johnstone
claims to have ‘found tricks that can make the world blaze up [...] in about fifteen seconds, and the effects last for hours’ (1981: 13). On one level, the kind of language found within such accounts is symptomatic of the comparative dearth of critical discourse concerning improvisation; as Gary Peters quipped during his keynote speech at the 2015 Transdisciplinary Improvisation Network conference, ‘every book on improvisation is about practice’ (2015). At a more fundamental level, however, the tendency amongst improvisers to offer hyperbolic accounts of their practice is arguably a result of the widespread belief within the discipline of improvisation – if such a broad church can usefully be termed a discipline – that improvised performance is somehow inarticulable, occurring beyond the limits of the language we have to describe or make sense of it.

Encapsulating this position, musician Derek Bailey begins his monograph *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* by claiming that:

> whilst [improvisation] is today present in almost every area of music, there is an almost total absence of information about it. Perhaps this is inevitable, even appropriate. Improvisation is always changing and adjusting, never fixed, too elusive for analysis and precise prescription; essentially non-academic. (1993: ix)

Even Chris Johnston, in his wide-ranging study *The Improvisation Game*, suggests that ‘as soon as you start to discuss an intuitive process like impro, you’re bringing clumsy vocabulary to bear’ (2009: 270). Anecdotally, improvisation is often referred to as nebulous, the most ephemeral manifestation of performance, which itself is a phenomenon notable for its impermanence. To further complicate matters, improvisation’s apparent elusiveness arguably makes it hard even to determine where it ‘starts and ends’ (Landgraf, 2011: 93), leaving critics, audiences and performers struggling simply to identify it, let alone describe and dissect it retrospectively.

However, despite the commonly assumed difficulties in attempting to discuss, document, recall and effectively analyse improvisation, in recent years a small number of theoreticians and practitioners have begun successfully to repudiate the image of improvisation as beyond or outside the boundaries of detailed and precise articulation, challenging in the process the very concept that improvised performance is somehow ontologically different from more scripted or rehearsed modes. This move has brought about a small but concerted effort to place improvisation more properly within the critical context of performance studies, and of cultural
analysis more widely, in order to talk generatively and specifically about its practice and potentials (Peters, 2009; Landgraf, 2011; Hallam and Ingold, 2007; Johnston, 2009). Yet despite this promising turn, the link between improvised performance and its environment, or between improvisation and site-specific theatre, remains largely unaddressed. This chapter will proceed by demonstrating that, despite the lack of contemporary scholarly attention towards the interrelation between improvisation and site, such connectivity has in fact been integral to the emergence of improvised theatre in a variety of historical and cultural moments. Indeed, it is only in recent decades that the link between improvisation and its surroundings seems to have fallen by the wayside. In seeking to recover and reassert the relevance to contemporary performance of thinking through improvisation and site together, this chapter will provide a selective critical overview of the contemporary literature on improvisation, before examining and clarifying the ways in which the discipline of geography might aid a consideration of improvisation at site. The chapter will close by highlighting some possible gaps in the way improvised performance has been defined, practised and analysed, with particular attention to its emplacement. In this way, the chapter lays the theoretical foundations for the remainder of the thesis.

2.2 A sketched history of improvisation

As Landgraf argues in his 2011 book *Improvisation as Art*, any attempt to understand and discuss improvisation necessarily draws on categories and values that are always already reflective of culturally and historically delimited criteria. This defines, at a basic level, the way improvisation is conceived of and analysed, affecting in turn the way in which we experience improvised performance, both as audience members and as performers. Given this, it is worth revisiting briefly where contemporary notions of improvisation emerged, and to what broader cultural shifts they might usefully be traced.

Amongst theatre historians, the *Commedia dell’Arte*, originating in Italy in the 16th Century, is widely considered as the antecedent to modern-day mime, clowning and improvised comedy (Zarrilli et al, 2008). Deriving stock characters and plot devices from the works of Roman playwrights such as Plautus and Terence, the travelling troupes would entertain local crowds with ‘carefully planned’ (Zarrilli et al, 2008: 155) improvisations: somewhat like stand-up comedians, the actors relied on memorized lines from *Commedia Erudita* and pre-arranged comic business and
then plugged these speeches and gags into pre-set scenarios. This ready store of comic material freed Commedia dell’Arte performers to charm and entertain the public with their considerable skills, charisma, and virtuosity. (ibid)

Whilst the underlying structure of the performances would today be considered improvisatory, or at least semi-improvisatory (in that actors had not memorised an entire script to be delivered verbatim), improvisation within Commedia performances was not seen as an end in itself, but as a means for incorporating specifically local subject matter. To the extent that the works were acknowledged as being made up on the spot, improvisation was not considered to be predicated on transcendence, inspiration or the immediate generation of novel content in front of an enraptured audience – such ideas would have been entirely anachronistic. Rather, it was seen as being firmly rooted in existing material: a form of ‘creative variation on familiar patterns’ constituting ‘a common artistic practice that was governed by rules like other artistic practices’ (Landgraf, 2001: 115). More important to Commedia audiences was the fact that the travelling troupes would include (and often satirise) local scandals and topical news, as well as making use of the flexibility of the form to reflect regional tastes. Whilst perhaps not site-specific according to our current understanding of the term as ‘performance specifically generated from/for one selected site’ (Wilkie, 2002: 150), by capitalising on their improvisational structures to include plot-lines and jokes that were specific to the places in which they performed, Commedia performances demonstrated a strong acknowledgement and incorporation of their temporal and spatial situation.

However, despite its popularity throughout much of Western Europe from the 16th Century through to the 18th Century, the Commedia dell’Arte was often considered in critical circles to be an unworthy, or low, form of art. In the 1730s, for example, the German critic Johann Christoph Gottsched dismissed improvised theatre as lazy and ignorant, targeting the Commedia dell’Arte in particular for ‘not following the model of nature and for failing to elevate because [...] improvisation does not pursue the universal, but instead clings to the particular’ (Landgraf, 2011: 43). This is key. In attempting to discredit improvisation, Gottsched highlighted one of its central qualities: rather than taking as its subject the supposedly universal (i.e. that which is seen as occurring outside of time, space, or sociopolitical context), improvisation

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2 The Commedia dell’Arte might be considered as an example of ‘site-sympathetic’ theatre, which Wilkie defines as ‘an existing performance text physicalised in a selected site’ (2002: 150).
concerns itself rather with the minutiae of the immediate. Given the emerging taste, during the Enlightenment period, for universality, truth and beauty, *Commedia dell'Arte* and improvisation more broadly largely faded from official accounts. As Landgraf puts it:

this does not mean that improvisation would have disappeared altogether from the stage or even that it would have lost much of its popularity during the Enlightenment era; it does, however, lead to improvisation being positioned outside of the realm of art at the very moment when modern aesthetics emerges as a discipline and fundamentally rethinks the function and meaning of art. (2011: 43)

When improvisation re-emerged in popular theatre at the beginning of the 20th Century, it was arguably in even closer dialogue with its spacio-temporal context than the *Commedia dell'Arte* had been. The re-turn to improvisation can be largely traced back to Jacob L. Moreno, a frequently overlooked but highly influential Austrian theatre director, doctor and therapist who began working in Vienna in the early 1910s. Moreno considered that, rather than a technique used in the servitude of scripted drama, as Konstantin Stanislavski had used it some twenty years previously, improvisation ought to be treated as an end in itself. Moreno saw Stanislavski's utilisation of improvisation exercises in the rehearsal room to deepen psychological realism on stage as simply a way to revitalise what he referred to as the 'cultural conserve' (ibid), written texts which he considered to be 'antipodal to the spontaneous creative matrices which emerge every time a creative process is in the making' (1955: 112).

For Moreno, the twin concept of spontaneity-creativity was the 'primary principle' (ibid: 105) underpinning both the social and mental universe, and was tangibly evident 'in the interplay between person and person, between person and things, between person and work, between society and society, between society and the whole of mankind [and] between mankind and the physical world around it' (ibid). Moreno saw spontaneity and creativity as distinct categories that were nevertheless strategically linked. Whilst creativity is the ‘act’ itself, spontaneity is the readiness and appropriateness of that act to its present circumstance. Taking Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* as an example, Moreno described the process by which the composer's initial act of spontaneity-creativity has been retrospectively stripped of its spontaneous nature:

As Beethoven was walking through his garden trying intensively to warm up to his musical ideas, his whole personality was in an uproar. He made use of every possible physical mental starter he could muster in order to get going in the right direction. These visions, images, thoughts and
action-patterns – both musical and non-musical inspirations – were the indispensable background out of which the music of the Ninth Symphony grew. But all this background (which cannot truthfully be divorced from the state in which Beethoven was when he was truly being a creator) is not to be found in the finished product – the musical score or its performance by a noted orchestra. Only the result is there. (ibid: 110)

For Moreno, the systematic erasure of its spatial, temporal, social and personal context from our present-day concept of Beethoven’s music is a result of ‘an intellectual trick which is played upon us by millennia of being indoctrinated by cultural conserves’ (ibid). From a determinedly avant-garde position, he railed against such conserves, arguing that ‘even the smallest amount of “free” spontaneity […] is of greater value than all the treasures of the past’, because ‘what “conserved” creativity truly represents, at best, is power’ (ibid: 112-13). Moreno was determined that his own theatre practice would break away from this cycle of conserving cultural power at the expense of the spontaneity that catalysed it. He was thus adamant that his own work would bear no relation to Stanislavski’s method, in which improvisation was simply an aid to ‘playing a great Romeo or a great King Lear’ (1985: 38). The breakthrough moment for Moreno came when he realised that it made no sense to ‘liberate the actor from cliches by improvisation, and then fill him again and again with […] the cliches of Romeo, King Lear or Macbeth’ (ibid: 39), and decided instead to permit his cast to be 'entirely spontaneous-creative' (ibid). As a result, Moreno formed Das Stegreiftheater (the Theatre of Spontaneity), Europe’s first professional, fully improvised theatre company, in Vienna in the early 1920s.

The Theatre of Spontaneity encountered mixed fortunes. Whilst the company operated for several years in Vienna, as well as touring further afield to Germany, their work was the subject of criticism. Moreno later recounted that a particular problem facing the company was that whenever performances went well there were accusations amongst critics that, contrary to its claims of being entirely improvised, the work must really be scripted or rehearsed (Casson, 2000). As John Casson recounts, Moreno later explained that ‘the idea of using the news of the day as a source for the Theatre of Spontaneity was to counter the suspicion’ of such critics (ibid: 110). Moreno came up with the idea of performers and performances responding to that day’s local and national news stories, creating a form which he called ‘dramatised newspapers’ or
’living newspapers’ (ibid). Gently echoing Commmedia dell’Arte performances, by including temporally and spatially relevant events (i.e. the latest news), the work of the Theatre of Spontaneity began to demonstrate a clear acknowledgement and incorporation of its own situatedness and context. By responding to local and national news stories each night, the performers were rooting the content of their improvisations firmly within the wider milieu of their social, political, spatial and temporal circumstances. As Moreno himself declared, ‘spontaneity does not operate in a vacuum but in relation to already structured phenomena [and] cultural and social conserves’ (1955: 108). Crucially, for Moreno, spontaneity wasn’t merely about generating novelty on the spot, but about ensuring that improvised behaviours were appropriate to their given location and context. To put it another way, ‘novelty has to be qualified against its adequacy in situ’ (ibid, my emphasis). Unlike the stance that was to be taken by many improvisers later on in the 20th Century (including Ruth Zapora), for Moreno, improvisation was an inherently situated practice. Rather than delving inwards and producing something original that bore no relation to its surroundings, spontaneous improvisation was a relational process built on interactions with the people and environments that surrounded the performance.

In laying out his views on the relationship between an artistic process and its surroundings, and by overtly criticising theatre practices that appeared to be detached from their environment, Moreno could almost have been writing a manifesto for an early site-specific theatre company. In one passage of his book Psychodrama, he claims that ‘every thing, every form or idea has a place, a locus, which is most adequate and appropriate for it, in which it is the most ideal, the most perfect expression of its meaning’ (1985: 26). He went on to conclude that whilst much of ‘the legitimate theatre’ operates as if ‘out of’ or detached from its locus, ‘the true locus of theatre is the theatre of spontaneity’ (ibid, my emphasis). Time and place, then, were inextricably linked for Moreno. Unlike many improvisers that were to follow, in addressing what he called ‘the ongoing, here-and-nowness’ of creativity (1955: 117), he was just as concerned with the here as he was with the now. For Moreno, improvisation was inherently emplaced, a position which opened up a rich set of relations between a performer and the complexities of their immediate context. In 1925, Moreno emigrated to the US, where he attempted to

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3 This is a different use of the term than developed around the same time in Russia to refer to a propaganda tool of the Soviet regime.
establish the Theatre for Spontaneity in New York. His fortunes here were no better. As a result, he increasingly opted to use the improvisational techniques he had developed in therapeutic settings, where his work went on to form the foundation of modern-day psycho- and socio-drama, and therapeutic role-play (also known as dramatherapy).

Despite Moreno having been largely forgotten by today's theatre studies literature, aspects of his approach were adopted by the influential practitioner Viola Spolin, whose early practice in therapeutic and educational settings in the 1940s involved developing “theatre games” for young people and adults. As Robert Keith Sawyer recounts, 'Spolin acknowledged the influence of Moreno on her work, once describing it using Moreno's term sociodrama' (2003: 22). In seeking to establish a ‘living, organic, non-authoritarian climate’ (Spolin, 1999: iii) in her workshops, for example, Spolin 'drew heavily on Moreno’s innovation of basing improvisations on audience suggestions' (Sawyer, 2003: 22). This technique has since become more or less ubiquitous within improvised sketch comedy throughout the US and UK via its use by Second City Theatre in Chicago, founded by Spolin's son, Paul Sills. Via this lineage – from Moreno to Spolin to Sills – much modern-day improvisation (or “Impro/Improv”) can legitimately be traced back to Moreno, including forms and strategies used by television programmes such as Whose Line is it Anyway?.

Spolin's use of audience suggestions was not the only echo of Moreno's work in her own. Whilst Spolin didn't adopt Moreno's use of the term 'conserve' to describe 'the finished product of a creative process' (Moreno, 1955: 109), she nevertheless followed his lead in mistrusting the apparent and misleading completeness of such works. Spolin suggested that within improvisational practice, 'when the goal appears easily and naturally and comes from growth rather than forcing, the end-result, performance or whatever, will be no different from the process that achieved the result' (Spolin, 1999: 12). Here Spolin, like Moreno, actively resisted what she saw as the endemic privileging of end-product, suggesting that improvisers might benefit from erasing the false distinction between performance and making process. Spolin’s work operated with the conviction that absorbing and reacting to the total environment of performance was crucial to successful improvisation. In her book Improvisation

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4 There is a clear precedent here for the position taken by Chris Goode in the blog post mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, which influenced my own early experiments in improvisation.
for the Theatre, first published in 1963, Spolin argued that, for the improvising performer, fully experiencing one's surroundings requires 'penetration into the environment [and] total organic involvement with it' (ibid: 3), going on to suggest that improvisation itself operates 'in the moment of spontaneity, the moment when we are freed to relate and act, involving ourselves in the moving, changing world around us' (ibid: 4). This notion of relating organically to one's surroundings was crucial for Spolin. Like Moreno, she believed that improvising wasn't simply a matter of acting spontaneously in a vacuum, but of cultivating a relational disposition to the world around us through the bodily senses – ‘by touching it, seeing it, feeling it, tasting it, and smelling it – direct contact with the environment is what we seek’ (ibid: 6-7). For Spolin, the process of improvising was founded on an open, outward-facing attentiveness towards not only one's fellow improvisers, but the surroundings in which we find ourselves, from one moment to the next. In this way, it can be considered a profoundly situated act.

The impact of Spolin's work on improvised theatre practices has been significant. As Scott Proudfit and Kathryn Syssoyeva describe:

> the theatre game practices of Spolin, so profoundly influential for collectives such as The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre, and The Performance Group, in turn had roots in the urban social reform movements of the 1920s in institutions such as Chicago's Hull House, where [...] Spolin developed her methods of play. (2013: 119)

Along with the increased popularity of free jazz improvisation during the 1950s and 1960s, and the work of several theatre and performance companies that were inspired by the translation into English in 1958 of Antonin Artaud's collection of essays The Theatre and its Double, Spolin's work played its part in a cultural moment that saw the popular re-emergence of improvisation in fringe and avant-garde theatres in the 1960s and 1970s. The work of New York-based company The Living Theatre, for example, for whom Artaud was something of 'ghostly mentor' (Proudfit and Syssoyeva, 2013: 119), used continuously evolving improvisational structures in an attempt to explore 'the theatrical “here and now” [...] as opposed to the “there and then” of representational drama' (Bottoms, 2009: 237). The Living Theatre's improvisational approach to making performance was itself informed in part by the work of one of its actors, Joseph Chaikin, who in 1963 set up The Open Theatre as an acting laboratory with a particular focus on improvisation. As Stephen Bottoms notes, Chaikin 'sought to find ways for actors to explore and harness their own spontaneous creativity, rather than resorting to intellectual rationalization for every gesture' (2009: 171). Fascinatingly – as Eileen Blumenthal traces –
some of [Chaikin's] early ensemble exercises were adaptations of Viola Spolin's theatre “games” (1984: 72). Chaikin's work with his offshoot company The Open Theatre fed back directly into the approach adopted by The Living Theatre, and in this way Spolin's work entered the wider theatrical bloodstream. Via Spolin and others, then, the lineage of much of the experimental and devised performance work to emerge in the 1960s lay ultimately in the progressive education movement. Because of this, a great deal of the work of this period was motivated by political and social struggle, and the desire to transcend ‘forces and ideas that hinder the fulfilment of human purposes; large corporations [that] standardize and limit choices; [and] philosophies of behaviourism [that] condition people to deny their potential freedom’ (Jencks and Silver, 1972: 15). Shaped by her work in educational and social contexts, Spolin (like Moreno) had ultimately seen improvisation as a way of liberating oneself from social, cultural and political conventions.

However, somewhat ironically given these roots, the various influences which came to bear on improvisation during this period ultimately led to the steady detachment of improvisational practices from their spatial contexts. In part, this was a reflection of aspects of Spolin’s own thinking. For in attempting to identify and pin-point the apparently pre-cultural realm she believed to be opened up by improvisation, Spolin had coined the term X-area to describe ‘the undefined and perhaps undefinable nature of intuition, the hidden well-springs, the unlabelled, beyond intellect, mind or memory, from which the artist draws inspiration’ (1999: iv). Departing somewhat from the emplaced, relational approach to improvisation that had overlapped with Moreno's formulation, Spolin went on to make the case that intuition can legitimately be considered ‘that area of knowledge which is beyond the restrictions of culture, race, education, psychology and age; deeper than the “survival dress” of mannerisms, prejudices, intellectualisms, and borrowings most of us wear to live out our daily lives’ (1999: 19, my emphasis). For Spolin, formulating improvisation in this way was a means of creating a programme of training that might transcend potential cultural barriers experienced by the immigrant children with whom she worked. Following Moreno, by providing a framework through which they might escape the social scripts they had either inherited or developed, Spolin hoped that participants in her workshops might become better equipped to navigate life's obstacles and unpredictabilities by learning to play and be more spontaneous. Improvisation in this context was more than a mere game, it became a powerful force for liberation and self-knowledge, and for freeing the improviser from social and cultural
oppression.

Yet despite its laudable, emancipatory bent, as a result of this strand of Spolin's thinking – and of the influence of both Artaud and Peter Brook, whose desire was to establish a universal theatre language that would exceed cultural boundaries – the door was opened for a range of practices that foregrounded notions of transcendence above all else, moving towards a realm of almost mystical introspection. In searching inward and rejecting representations (and often language), these new approaches to improvisation largely divorced the practice from its temporal and spatial contexts. As a case in point, Ruth Zaporah – whose career began in the 1960s – suggests in the introduction to her book *Action Theatre: the Improvisation of Presence* that: 'who we are, how we perceive our world, and how we respond to those perceptions are the same regardless of the surroundings' (1995: xxi). Recounting her early work in the 1970s, she recalls: 'I was so dedicated to the discovery process that I isolated myself from my dance and theatre colleagues, not peeking outside my laboratory, not wanting to see what others were doing' (ibid: xx). This introversion became symptomatic of much improvisational practice of the 1970s, as improvisers journeyed ever-inwards in pursuit of abstract notions of beauty or truth. In seeking to isolate and home in on an internal world of creativity to the exclusion of all else, such practices stripped improvisation of its temporal and spatial situation.

Spolin's work was not the only causal factor here; the influence of Artaud can again be felt, as many improvisers sought to follow his conviction 'to put an end to the subjugation of the theater to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought' (Artaud, 1958: 89). For Artaud, the theatre ought to pursue a kind of spontaneous action that is either unprompted by thought or doesn't know that it is prompted, because the thought itself is not quite conscious. Yet in formulating action in this way, it is inevitably divorced from its surroundings, erupting from the preconscious mind rather than from a relational engagement with its surroundings; as he suggests in Theatre and the Plague, 'the images of poetry in the theater are a spiritual force that [...] does without reality altogether' (ibid: 25). In addition to the influence of Artaud, the broader social and cultural shifts of the period also had a bearing on the way improvisation was being practised. The period witnessed the dawning of the so-called *Global Village* in which, through technological advancements, it was alleged that all people everywhere would eventually become connected without friction, eradicating the importance of local, lived space (McLuhan and Powers, 1989).
These, no doubt, were just some of the cultural conditions that led to a form of improvisation arising that was almost entirely detached from its spatial context. Whilst the residual influence of Moreno was still evident in this work through the use of improvisation as a means of exploring inner worlds – in a way not dissimilar to psychodrama – there was now a tendency to see action as divorced from its immediate surroundings, emerging instead from individuals' preconscious creative mind.

Despite the methodological introspection of much of this work, and the fact that it was spuriously premised on temporarily evading deeply-engrained, socially constructed behaviours and influences, the relative lack of scholarly writing on improvisation means that a whole raft of practices continues to flourish that is cloaked in the language of mysticism and spirituality. This body of work has increasingly taken the focus of improvisation away from outward-facing, relational practices rooted in their social, political, personal, material, temporal and spatial contexts, and towards a form of improvisation that bases itself upon the notion of 'inward intensity' (Cope et al., 2014: 72), in order to reveal supposedly pre-cultural inner truths. In this way, the period since the late 1960s has seen improvisation become steadily more detached from its surroundings, replaced by the popular and enduring image of the improviser in a state of tabula rasa.

2.3 Contemporary counter-readings

In recent years, several counter-readings of improvisation have emerged from across the arts and humanities, of which Gary Peters' is perhaps the most well-known. Attempting to go against what he sees as the 'dominant paradigm of surprises and individual virtuosity' (2015) within improvisation, and using the television programme *Scrapheap Challenge* as his exemplar, Peters reads improvisation as the productive interpenetration of origination and re-novation within a strictly material universe. Despite the claims of many improvisers that their practice is premised on the spontaneous creation of novelty in a vacuum, Peters argues that the old and the new are in fact entwined and entangled at a fundamental level. *Scrapheap Challenge*, in which contestants have to build a functional machine from strictly delimited resources within a strictly delimited duration, holds value for Peters precisely because the improvised machines
have none of the elevated inspiration so often associated with improvisation as promoted within legitimate and legitimating cultural practices; on the contrary, they are crude and messy, they speak of fallibility, error and erring, and triumphs that are fragile, temporary, and often dubious. (2009: 10)

From this, it would seem that for Peters improvisation is not the creation of novel artworks ex nihilo or the channelling of a pre-conscious creative force. Rather, improvisation here depends on the ability to find new and novel ways of inhabiting the old and revivifying dead forms through a productive process of re-appropriation that promotes improvisation more as a means of salvation and redemption than of creation’ (2009: 18). This model, with its emphasis on reworking existing material, echoes the structure of the Commedia dell’Arte and Moreno’s living newspapers. In all three, improvisation is understood in terms of the performer’s ability to survey a variety of existing materials – local gossip, the latest news stories or bits of an old gearbox – and combine them in new ways in order to shape the emerging work. In one particularly rich passage, Peters makes the observation that Walter Benjamin’s reading of Paul Klee’s painting Angelus Novus can tell us something about the figure of the improviser. For Peters, Klee’s image – which Benjamin famously came to call the angel of history, ‘his face turned toward the past’ (Benjamin, cited in Peters) – has in common with the improviser the fact that both are, with their backs towards the future, only able to see what has come before. In making this observation, Peters also opens up a link to the suggestion by veteran improviser Keith Johnstone that the improviser ‘has to be like a man [sic] walking backwards [...] He sees where he has been, but he pays no attention to the future’ (1981: 116). For both Peters and Johnstone, the improviser’s task is to look backwards, surveying proceedings as they unfold in order to incorporate and reincorporate existing material, without attempting to predict where the work might end up. There is much to admire here, not least the fact that Peters’ reading of improvisation takes the practice away from introversion and puts the improvisers’ attention once more onto the world around them.

Yet elsewhere in the book, in taking issue with the language that he argues has come to surround improvisation, Peters can be accused both of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, and of putting forward a historically misleading argument. He objects in strong terms to what he sees as the ‘disingenuous’ language which dominates the discourse on
improvisation (2015). Whereas Spolin wanted to establish within her rehearsal room a ‘living, organic, non-authoritarian climate’ (Spolin, 1999: iv) with an emphasis on improvisation as a form of social collectivism, Peters rails against what he sees as improvisation’s increasing alignment with ‘healthy living’, arguing that ‘for the last four decades the discourses of improvisation have become increasingly submerged in a collective language of care and enabling, of dialogue and participation, a pure, aesthetically cleansed language of communal love’ (2009: 24). Peters’ argument here is that in becoming increasingly synonymous with its use in applied settings such as social work and therapy, improvisation has forgotten its relationship to aesthetics. Indeed, Peters dismisses the suggestion that improvisation might constitute an intersubjective, ethical or even sociable act, suggesting a formulation of improvisation that prioritises direct competition between artists whose primary relation is not to each other, but to the emerging work. Drawing once again on Scrapheap Challenge, he contests that whilst collaboration is an element of the work:

the human interaction that provides the dramatic tension [...] should not be allowed to obscure the fact that it is the knowledge and will of the individual participants “in the midst of what is” and their preparedness to use this will to preserve the openness of the wreckage that is piled up before them that ultimately determines the success or failure of their improvised response to their predicament. (2009: 16-17)

Without the necessity to interact meaningfully with fellow performers, his reading of improvisation falls back on an image of the artist starting out by, in his own words, ‘confronting an empty space’ (2015) within which imitation, and especially self-imitation, must be avoided at all costs. Indeed, Peters even goes on to suggest that ‘free-improvisation is able to achieve, or at least strive to achieve, a prior degree of aesthetic erasure beyond the reach of other art forms’ (2009: 37), slipping back into the paradigm he originally set out to dispel – according to which improvisation is synonymous with originality. Despite his apparent insistence on re-generation and re-incorporation, for Peters the essence of artistic creation comes back ultimately to the existential marking by a single performer of an un-marked space, a position which strips improvisation of its spatio-temporal context and, with it, its potential for intersubjective, collective creativity.

Peters’ is a well-worn argument. Claire Bishop, for example, in her 2006 essay 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', makes a similar point:
[There is an] expanded field of relational practices [that] currently goes by a variety of names: socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art. These practices are less interested in a relational aesthetic than in the creative rewards of collaborative activity – whether in the form of working with pre-existing communities or establishing one’s own interdisciplinary network. (179, emphasis in original)

The crux of Bishop’s argument here (and of Peters’) is that by concerning themselves too much with relational and socially engaged practices, many contemporary artists (including but not limited to those working in performance) have lost sight of what should be their raison d’être: a concern with aesthetics. In becoming preoccupied with the ethical and the social such artists have, according to this line of argument, lost their ability to disrupt, confront or disturb aesthetic conventions. Despite attempting to present their arguments as somehow commonsensical (i.e. artists should be concerned with art), Peters’ and Bishop’s discourse is founded on historically produced, rather than given, notions of what art is expected to be, or to do. As Grant Kester points out, ‘the assumption that the work of art should challenge or disrupt the viewer’s expectations about a given image, object, or system of meaning’, and that the viewer ‘requires this disruption to overcome his or her reliance on habitual forms of perception’ is at the heart of many twentieth century avant-garde movements (2004: 17). Yet Kester challenges us to think beyond the modernist position in which aesthetic innovation can be seen as the barometer of an artwork’s success, and to consider instead how we might 'understand the aesthetic significance of the collaborative process itself’ rather than just the end product, and how we might 'grasp as a work of art a project that changes the perceptions of its participants through conversation and collaborative production' rather than through shock or confusion (ibid: 25). What’s more, in attempting to establish a reading of improvisation that privileges individual virtuosity over the collective, Peters' work tries to return to a model of improvisation that arguably never existed in the first place. Peters frames his argument as a temporal one, suggesting that improvisation has only become preoccupied with relationality in 'the last four decades' (2009: 24). But as this chapter has already shown, the history of improvisation both in the 20th century and before is rooted in forms of collaboration and social engagement that actively acknowledge, draw on and work with their immediate spatial and temporal contexts.
Edgar Landgraf, in his own counter-reading of improvisation, also takes issue with Peters, suggesting that by questioning the appropriateness of theories of improvisation that are subject to ‘the dubious openness of discussion and theoretical disputation’ (Peters, 2009: 147), Peters aligns himself with the likes of Bailey and others who insist that improvisation is somehow Other – an inarticulable phenomenon unsuitable for academic interrogation. Drawing to begin with on shifts in aesthetic and anthropological discourse during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and latterly on systems theory and cybernetics, Landgraf begins by asserting that improvisation ‘is not about the absence of rules and structures, nor about the advent of true Otherness, but rather can be understood as a self-organizing process that relies on and stages […] particular constraints’ (2011: 5, emphasis in original). Landgraf begins his book with a discussion of Jacques Derrida’s ideas on improvisation.

During an interview in 1982, Derrida laid out his position on improvisation by stating that:

it’s not easy to improvise. It’s the most difficult thing to do. Even when one improvises in front of a camera or a microphone, one ventriloquizes or leaves another to speak in one's place, the schemas and languages that are already there. There are already a great number of prescriptions that are prescribed in our memory and our culture. All the names are already preprogrammed [...] One can't say whatever one wants; one is obliged, more or less, to reproduce the stereotypical discourse. And so I believe in improvisation, and I fight for improvisation, but always with the belief that it is impossible. (Kirby and Kofman, 2002)

For Derrida, improvisation must in one sense be considered unachievable because the freedom, authenticity and singularity so often associated with it are irreconcilable with the iteration on which all communication – mediated by language and discourse – is based. Nothing can be considered truly original, for Derrida, because all ideas, text, speech and gestures are a recombination of existing culture5.

5There are echoes here of Derrida’s critique of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, put forward in Writing and Difference. In it, Derrida attempts to demonstrate the impossibility of Artaud’s aspiration to escape the perceived tyranny of textuality, authorship and meaning and to recapture primal, embodied, meaningful vitality. Whilst for Artaud ‘the theater of cruelty is not a representation [...] it is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable’ (1978: 234), Derrida suggests that, on the contrary, ‘because it has always already begun, representation therefore has no end’ (ibid: 250). For Derrida, Artaud’s attempt to escape textual alienation relies on an impossible romantic dream; one cannot set up life and text in opposition in the way that Artaud attempts to, because thought, gesture, and lived experience are always already mediated by textualised structures, such as discourse.
Yet despite his assertion that improvisation is 'impossible' (2002), Derrida nonetheless sought to unsettle the assumed distinction between a 'planned, textually prescribed act and improvised doings' (Landgraf, 2011: 21). This notion is highlighted most clearly by a performance that was given by Derrida in 1997 entitled *Play – the first name*, alongside the American saxophonist and 'father of Free Jazz' Ornette Coleman (ibid: 20). During the performance, Derrida – 'probably not recognised by many in the audience' (ibid) – proceeded to read aloud from a text that he had written in advance. He began by asking:

*Qu'est-ce qui arrive?* What's happening? What's going to happen, Ornette, now, right now? What's happening to me, here, now, with Ornette Coleman? [...] This chance frightens me, I have no idea what's going to happen. (Derrida, 2004: 331-32)

In beginning his performance in this way, Derrida introduced from the outset a sense of the unpredictability that underpins notions of improvisation as an ongoing and contingent practice, predicated on an uncertain future. Having done so, he went on to playfully announce that:

As all of you see, I have here a sort of written score, you think that I am not improvising, well, you are wrong. I am pretending not to improvise, I just pretend, I play at reading, but by improvising [...] One day Ornette said that the written parts [of his music] are as improvised as the improvisations themselves. That is a great lesson, your lesson, on what's happening [...] to the improviser, unforeseeably, without seeing it coming, unpredictably. (ibid: 332)

Here, Derrida works to dissolve the pervasive binary opposition between script and improvisation. Despite the fact that his words are read aloud from a pre-prepared sheet in front of him, his performance is rendered improvisatory by the particularities of that reading. Whilst for many improvisers such an act would be anathema, for Derrida the reading aloud of a pre-prepared script – a seemingly static artefact – 'remains in a strict sense an improvisational exercise', because the reader 'cannot fully plan or anticipate the event, for how and what defines the event hinges on various factors' that are beyond the reader's control (2011: 21). In this way, for Derrida, improvisation is evident in many situations where most people would expect it to be lacking. Whilst Derrida isn't explicit here in discussing his immediate surroundings, if we consider his argument that a scripted reading constitutes an improvised doing, the immediate context of the performance clearly plays a part. For Derrida, then, improvisation is not the summoning up of novel utterances or gestures – for all such acts are recombinations of existing, textually saturated culture. Rather, improvisation lies in the
inherent singularity of an act when considered within the context of its particular, specific and unrepeatable surroundings.

Drawing substantially on Derrida's work and on systems and cybernetic theory, Landgraf challenges us to move away from traditional notions of innovation and improvisation as an Other of repetition and structure, but as instead deriving from them. Rather than the introduction of novelty into a system from outside, he suggests that we instead think of improvisation as an iterative and recursively operating process. Pointing out that whilst the term “emergence” in the language of systems theory refers to the unpredictable arrival of something qualitatively new, he stresses that such arrivals do not come from outside the system but are ‘the result of’ the recursive process itself, where errors, interferences, disruptions, and so on lead to alterations’ (2011: 36, my emphasis). For such iterative systems, then, change is not something that warrants consideration as a metaphysical Other from without, but as a quite ordinary, inherent aspect of the system itself.

Crucially, Landgraf goes on to suggest that the structures and rules which may at first appear to prevent improvisation are in fact the very conditions which enable it to occur. He cites Heinrich von Kleist relaying an anecdote concerning the Berliner actor Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Unzelmann during a performance in Königsberg around the turn of the nineteenth century:

There is a story of how the Director forbade [Mr Unzelmann] to improvise. Herr Unzelmann, who detests obstinacy, complied with his orders, but when, to the horror of the audience, a horse having been led on stage during the performance suddenly began dropping manure all over the set, he suddenly wheeled about, interrupting his speech, and addressed the horse: “Were you not forbidden to improvise?” Whereupon even the Director is said to have laughed. (Kleist, cited in Landgraf, 2011)

Whilst on one level this incident demonstrates the impossibility of removing from the theatrical event the unpredictability and particularities inherent to corporeality, more significantly for Landgraf, because the event (manure) is submitted under the law (improvisation is forbidden), it is not the absence of rules but their presence which makes improvisation possible. He argues that ‘without law and without Unzelmann citing the law, there would be no improvisational act, but merely [manure] interrupting the performance’ (2011: 113). For Landgraf, then, this example demonstrates conclusively that far from unbridled spontaneity, freedom or the absence of rules, improvisation can in fact be seen as a certain mode of engaging with,
appropriating or staging rules.

Landgraf’s account is compelling. By drawing on Derrida he succeeds, firstly, in moving concertedly away from a conception of improvisation as something mystically Other. Secondly, by introducing a comparison with systems theory he suggests an iterative, everyday quality to improvisation that moves it beyond an existential image of the improviser marking an undifferentiated empty space. And finally, Landgraf astutely highlights the contingency of the (seemingly ubiquitous) notion that improvisation necessarily brings forth something qualitatively new. For Landgraf, ‘the association of improvisation with inventiveness is not only a modern, but also a Western, expectation’, one which is ‘closely linked to concepts of agency and expressivity that originate from eighteenth-century notions of subjectivity and genius’ (20011: 7). As Landgraf identifies, this aligning of creativity with qualitative newness, which diverges from the processual and emergent approach to improvisation put forward by Spolin and Moreno, has ultimately left an indelible and damaging mark on contemporary practice and thinking surrounding improvisation.

Anthropologists Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold take up the issue of historical notions of creativity and novelty in the introductory chapter to Creativity and Cultural Improvisation (2007). They argue that until the Renaissance, the dominant reading of creativity in Europe was one which looked ‘forwards’, maintaining that to create something was to be part of an ongoing process of emergence drawing from existing material within the world. However, as the classical aesthetics of the Renaissance took hold, perceptions of human agency and creativity began to undergo fundamental alterations, eventually leading to significant changes in the ways in which authorship (including theatrical authorship) was imagined and practised. Hallam and Ingold suggest that the Renaissance saw, amongst other things, a major shift in conceptualisations of creativity, towards a ‘backwards reading’ (2007: 3) that began with a consideration of a finished product or artwork before working backwards to read the process that produced it. From this position, they argue, the value placed on novelty increases, as only those artworks which are considered to be qualitatively new are considered as examples of creative virtuosity. As a result, the capacity to create gradually becomes more closely associated with notions of individual agency and innate human faculties, rather than with processes of flux and emergence, and consequently a formulation emerges in which to be considered creative an art object has to be the truly original work of a single artist, rather than
an emulative or processual collaboration between many.

It is hard to overestimate the difference between these two conceptions of creativity. On the one hand, it is considered to be a process of flux, involving the reorganising of existing materials within the world according to accepted rules; on the other, a model in which a single human mind strives to create a work which breaks with convention, becoming something entirely new. Largely, this latter understanding of creativity as the introduction of novelty into the world by an individual still underpins dominant popular conceptions of what it means to be an artist, and of the artist as creative genius. Even in the field of theatrical improvisation, which appears to be inherently collaborative, the view that creativity is synonymous with individual innovation is persistent. As a case in point, Chris Johnston claims that the pursuit of novelty is built into improvisational practices at a fundamental level, arguing that ‘improvisation seeks out newness, it’s a natural digging tool, its radar is always searching for something that’s never been seen or heard before’ (2009: 7), a potentially individuating position that emphasises the virtuosity of single performers, rather than relational processes of emergence between an ensemble and its environment.

Given their incisive and insightful work on creativity, then, it is no surprise that perhaps the most wide-ranging contemporary reading of improvisation comes from Hallam and Ingold. Broadening the debate around improvisation to take in improvised behaviour in all its forms, including in everyday life, they open their chapter with the assertion that ‘there is no script for social and cultural life […] People have to work it out as they go along […] In a word, they have to improvise’ (2007: 1, emphasis in original). In seeking to establish a working definition of improvisation, the pair propose four defining characteristics of the phenomenon:

- it is *generative* in the sense that it gives rise to the phenomenal forms of culture as experienced by those who live by them or in accord with them […] It is *relational*, in that it is continually attuned and responsive to the performance of others […] It is *temporal*, meaning that it cannot be collapsed into an instant, or even a series of instants, but embodies a certain duration […] [and] it is the *way we work*, not only in the ordinary conduct of our everyday lives, but also in our studied reflections on these lives in fields of art, literature and science. (ibid, emphasis in original)

Arguing that improvisation is no more in evidence when individuals are intentionally making it up on the spot than when they are attempting to follow a rigid plan, Hallam and Ingold argue
for a highly differentiated approach to improvisation that is rooted in context. For them, the
gap that exists between our intended actions as put forward in plans, and the specific
conditions of the world as we encounter it, not only creates the possibility of improvisation,
but makes it essential if we are to respond to our environment as it shifts and changes from
one moment to the next. And for Hallam and Ingold ‘because improvisation is generative, it is
not conditional upon the judgements of the novelty or otherwise of the forms it yields’ (2007:
3). Or as Ingold puts it elsewhere, ‘improvisation [...] augurs no surprise for the simple reason
that it does not endeavour to predict’ (2006: 18-19). Rather than a unique or inherently
innovative phenomenon which re-entered the modern art system as a result of increasing rules
and structures, as Landgraf suggests, for Hallam and Ingold improvisation:

is a process that living beings undergo as they make their ways in the
world [...] This process is going on, all the time, in the circulations and
fluxes of the materials that surround us and indeed of which we are
made – of the earth we stand on, the water that allows it to bear fruit,
the air we breathe, and so on. (2007: 11-12)

For Ingold and Hallam, the living planet on which we find ourselves is in a continuous state of
emergence and flux – and human beings are caught up in such processes just as much as any
other form of life. As Stephen Bottoms, Aaron Franks and Paula Kramer put it, ‘there is no
outside (’the rest of it’) to human experience, no reverse face to our place-in-the-world [...]”
whether we begin with the interiority of subjecthood or the exteriority of being-in-the-world,
we are already in the middle, and we are already implicated’ (2012: 3). Whilst Ingold and
Hallam’s work concerns itself with cultural improvisation rather than performance per se (they
discuss, for example, the improvisation required of a builder enacting an architect's plan in situ),
there needn't necessarily be a clear distinction drawn between improvisation undertaken in
daily life and that carried out in performance. For as Moreno claimed:

it is the small, average and minute types of creativity which are
important in the daily life of human beings, in their work relations,
family relations, business relations, etc., and not the great creativity of
exceptional individuals. (1955: 113)

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly given his own choice to work in professional theatre, Moreno
emphasises the importance of quotidian improvisation, blurring in the process the binary
opposition insisted upon by many between improvisation in performance and that which
occurs in everyday life. Where Chris Johnston, for example, argues that ‘while there are parallels
[between theatrical improvisation and] the kind of improvisation required for ‘getting through
the day’, it really is not the same’ (2009: 8), Moreno disagrees. For him, drawing on his background in psychotherapy, one can usefully trace a continuum rather than a boundary between these forms of improvisation.

It is no coincidence that this reading of improvisation has been adopted by Tim Ingold, an anthropologist best known for his ecological approach and writings on human-nonhuman relations. For Ingold, continuous calibration to each other and to the constantly changing world around us is the foundation of sociality. In a passage from The Perception of the Environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill that strongly echoes Spolin's work, Ingold suggests that ‘by watching, listening, perhaps even touching, we continually feel each other’s presence in the social environment, at every moment adjusting our movements in response to this ongoing perceptual monitoring’ (2000: 196). All improvisation, then – in stark contrast with Peters’ reading – is predicated on relationality; ‘attending more closely to the environment’ (Ingold, 2000: 56); and being-together-in-the-world.

In light of this, readings of improvisation as a phenomenon that comes from within to mark an undifferentiated, empty space appear highly reductive; our surroundings are not only a significant factor in our improvisations, they are fundamentally constitutive of them. As Hallam and Ingold argue, ideas are not ‘the spontaneous creations of a mind encased in a body’ (2007: 8) but rather, as John Wylie puts it, they ‘occur through interactions between people, and interactions between people and environment. Importantly, neither ‘people’ nor ‘environments’ are [...] fixed, stable, already-given entities [...] Both are rather [...] continually developing and elaborating via interactions’ (2007: 159). Even for David Toop, improvising in an unremarkable black-box studio, ‘in the beginning I am confronted by space, with all the complexities that word brings [...] the buzz of the air conditioning is something I can either respond to or shut out, but it exists as part of what I’m doing’ (2015). In suggesting that we call this awareness ‘environmental consciousness’ (2015), Toop points towards the necessity for all improvisers – indeed, for all human beings – to appreciate more actively the symbiotic relationship between improvisation and its environment, between our actions and their emplacement. Whether the improviser is aware of it or not, improvisation is always already specific to the temporal, spatial and material conditions in which it occurs, and in this way can be considered – regardless of where it takes place – an inherently site-specific act.
2.4 Introducing geography

For the geographer Doreen Massey, space is continuously being constituted and reconstituted through interactions between human and non-human agents. For Massey, space is not – as it was often formulated – an empty vessel or blank canvas within or against which human activity is performed (as it is for Zaporah, for example), or even a static entity with fixed meanings and resonances. On the contrary, Massey argues that ‘what is needed […] is to uproot “space” from that constellation of concepts in which it has so unquestionably so often been embedded (stasis; closure; representation) and to settle it among another set of ideas (heterogeneity; relationality; coevalness…liveliness indeed)’ (2005 : 13). Because it is the product of ongoing, lively and unpredictable interactions between a variety of agents, space, according to Massey’s reading, ‘is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed’ (ibid: 9). Ultimately, Massey suggests that ‘we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories so-far’ (ibid).

Whilst the object of its study might at first appear to be very different, Massey’s notion of space as a collection of ‘stories so-far’ resonates strongly with Hallam and Ingold’s reading of improvisation. Both theories emphasise relationality, process, openness and futurity, and both hold a conviction that the foci of their enquiries (space and human activity respectively) are in a continuous state of emergence. For Massey, space is comprised of 'loose ends and missing links' (2005: 11). The geographer’s task, for Massey, is not to determine the fixed meaning of a site before looking backwards to understand why it has developed in the way that it has – as she puts it, 'the present is not some kind of achieved terminus' (ibid: 137). Rather, for Massey, both space and the future must be considered 'open' (ibid: 12) and, to an extent, up for grabs. This formulation of space chimes with Hallam and Ingold’s forward-reading of creativity and improvisation, in which creative processes are open-ended and unpredictable, continuously emerging between and amongst subjects. The unpredictability that Ingold attributes to the way in which social life unfolds between agents through a continuous process of adjustment and reaction is much akin to Massey’s suggestion that:

the chance of space lies within the constant formation of spatial configurations, those complex mixtures of pre-planned spatiality and happenstance positionings-in-relation-to-each-other […] It is in the happenstance juxtaposition, in the unforeseen tearing apart, in the internal irruption, in the impossibility of closure, in the finding yourself next door to alterity, in precisely that possibility of being surprised […]
If our relations with both human and non-human agents are ‘constantly forming and unforming’ as Ingold suggests (2016), and space is – as Massey puts is – 'an ongoing product of interconnections and not' (2005: 107), then our way of being in the world, and relating to the world around us, is at least to some extent always and continuously improvised. In light of this, one begins to wonder about the ways in which adopting deliberately improvisatory strategies for making theatrical performance at site might provide intriguing opportunities for exploring space’s openness and flux. This is the central question with which this thesis will grapple, using theoretical frameworks from Massey and Ingold.

In addition to Massey’s influential work on space, which has become a cornerstone of contemporary cultural geographies, there is a somewhat more divisive strand of work within the discipline of geography, initially known as non-representational theories (NRT), which could also prove valuable in considering improvised performance at site. Derek McCormack, a prominent figure within its emergence, suggests that NRT:

- insists on the necessity of not prioritising representations as the primary epistemological vehicles through which knowledge is extracted from the world. That does not mean that representations are dispensed with. Rather they are reanimated as active and affective interventions in a world of relations and movements. (2005: 122)

This focus on broadening the means through which we might come to know and understand the world around us is particularly relevant for a practice-as-research project such as this one. Ultimately, as this chapter will now go on to explain, the suggestion that NRT can deepen and extend the reading of improvisation that will underpin this project as it develops is built on a number of its defining characteristics, including its emphasis on interconnectedness; its approach to body-landscape relations; its inherent futurity; and the weight it affords to process and experimental practice.

In his much-cited article charting the varied terrain of NRT back in 2006, geographer Hayden Lorimer described the field of NRT – which he re-termed more-than-representational (MRT) – as a body of diverse work ‘which seeks to cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds’ (2006: 83). The emergence of more-than-representational thought can be viewed as a clear reaction against what was seen as the deadening effect of
critical and cultural theories that implied a ‘Cartesian divide’ (Anderson and Harrison, 2010: 5) between real life and the representations and signs used to ascribe it with meaning and value. Such theories were seen to be ever-more removed from their objects of study and the material world at large – fixing and making inert ‘all that ought to be most lively’ (Lorimer, 2006: 84). In response, those scholars working across MRT sought to establish modes of enquiry that they hoped might allow them to ‘recognise the richness of the world [...] take an expressively formed embodiment into [their] thinking [...] and produce a different ethos of engagement with the world’ (Thrift, 2004: 121). This approach strongly aligns with the reading of improvisation put forward by Moreno (and Ingold), and renders MRT well-placed to contribute to this thesis’ consideration of improvised performance works taking place at site.

One way in which MRT is able to shed light on this research project is via its position on body-landscape relations. For Nigel Thrift, who has been central to MRT’s establishment since the turn of the millennium, recent academic work across the arts and humanities has successfully moved beyond previous conceptions of the body as a finished, organic whole beginning and ending at ‘the wall of skin’ (Thrift, 2004: 126). Rather, the body is now more usefully thought through as a collection of interdependent interactions and associations with its surroundings – a formulation that emphasises relationality over isolation. Rather than discrete minds that use the separate bodies in which they are encased to enact pre-planned actions upon their material surroundings, within MRT:

humans are envisioned in constant relations of modification and reciprocity with their environs, action being understood as a relational phenomena [sic] incessantly looping back and regulating itself through feedback phenomena such as proprioception, resistance, balance, rhythm and tone; put simply, all action is interaction. (Anderson and Harrison, 2010: 7)

Here, one thinks again of Ingold’s suggestion that emergent interactions form the foundation of sociality, and of Hallam and Ingold’s forward reading of creativity. What’s more, the interconnectedness on which MRT is based does not simply apply to human-human interactions, for ‘to arbitrarily stop relational understandings of phenomena at the boundary of the human is to re-inscribe precisely the divides between inside and outside, meaning and world, subject and site’ that MRT seeks to dispel (Anderson and Harrison, 2007: 12). Rather, we are in a state of perpetual emergence and interrelation both with each other and the landscape around us. Key here for MRT – and for this project, with its focus on site-specificity
– is the spatial dimension of these relations, and their inherent emplacement. Writing specifically about the human body, David Bissell argues that one of MRT's concerns 'is about recognising how different sets of things, their configuration, their assemblage and their spacing; their energy, have different capacities to do things. Put simply, it is not about what the body [...] is, but about what the body [...] has the capacity to do, and how it can go on, depending on the configuration of individuals, objects and places' (2010: 83). For improvising performers, then, creativity issues forth from what John Wylie calls ‘a milieu of engagement and involvement’ (2007: 149), an unfathomably complex web of co-constitutive interrelations between one another, the spectators and the site. MRT, with its geographic sensibilities towards a consideration of place, offers this research project a critical framework to account for the emplacement, and the spatial specificity, of this emergence. The key here is that MRT focuses on experiential processes of being in situ, departing from Massey's somewhat abstracted reading of space to put forward a formulation which emphasises embodiment.

What's more, MRT's understanding that human subjecthood emerges through emplaced, relational and emergent bodies necessarily brings with it a sense of futurity, holding a sense of ‘uncertainty and openness’ (Thrift, 2010: 186) about the future. The manifold theories which go together to comprise MRT all share a desire to contribute, in a small way, 'to the opening up of different futures' (Anderson and Harrison, 2010: 23). MRT works to foreground the spatial qualities of the present performative moment, emphasising the latent uncertainty and fluidity of our social and cultural lives; for this reason, like improvisation, MRT is ‘oriented by and to an open-ended future’ (Anderson and Harrison, 2007: 3). MRT, like improvisation, does not endeavour to predict a future, nor even the product of its own processes. As Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison put it, MRT is concerned, amongst other things, with 'how to bear and extend the potential that events open up, the sense of promise and futurity they may hold? How, to put it differently, to relate to the future without capturing it and neutralising it before it happens?’ (2007: 22-23). Improvisation, then, is a cornerstone of MRT and its attempts to forge a set of theories that, through a consideration of place, can ‘take into account the on-going or improvisatory element of social life’ (Thrift, 2010: 185).

Further to this, another key aspect of MRT that makes it useful to a practice-as-research doctoral project is its predilection for creative and experimental manifestations of research. One criticism often levelled at MRT is that given its existence as a body of academic thought
communicated and disseminated primarily through the written word, it is itself as guilty of resorting to representations as any other theory. Indeed, its very naming as a theory (or theories) implies a certain separation between it and the world with which it attempts to engage. As Paul Harrison suggests, 'the modus operandi of giving an explanation can, and often does, prevent us from acknowledging the practical and the performative, from witnessing the taking-place of meaning and understanding' (2002: 487). However, to argue against MRT in this way is to misunderstand the nature of its project. For as J-D Dewsbury, Paul Harrison, Mitch Rose and John Wylie argue:

non-representational theory takes representation seriously; representation not as a code to be broken or an illusion to be dispelled, rather representations are apprehended as performative in themselves; as doings. The point here is to redirect attention from the posited meaning towards the material composition and conduct of representations. (2002: 438)

In other words, ‘non-representational styles of thinking can by no means be characterised as anti-representational per se. Rather what pass for representations are apprehended as performative presentations, not reflections of some a priori order waiting to be unveiled, decoded or revealed’ (Anderson and Harrison, 2010: 19). So whilst written forms such as traditional academic chapters, articles and theses remain the most common communication tool used by advocates of MRT, a growing number are seeking, and championing others to seek, more creative and experimental ways of giving form to their research. Wylie is one writer to have made an impassioned case for such modes of expression, arguing that ‘geographers should engage freely with the techniques and presentational formats of the creative arts’ (2010: 99). Hawkins (2014), Lorimer (2006), Macpherson (2010), Matless (2010) and Somdahl-Sands (2013) are among the many others to suggest that the outcomes of research into notions of place might take forms that extend beyond and complement the academic essay, such as photography, film and creative writing. Because MRT insists that representations should be understood as performative gestures put forth into the world in a way which contributes to rather than reflects it, a more open mode of engaging with representations is cultivated, and the impulse to experiment with representational forms becomes increasingly strong. This is particularly relevant to a practice-as-research project such as this one in that it offers a critical framework that suggests that creative and/or non-representational modes of output might open up possibilities for giving affective form to research that has notions of place among its key concerns. In adopting theatrical performance as form of output, this project might benefit
from aligning itself with the sensibilities of Wylie and others, by taking the position that adding a performative gesture into the world – in this case, an improvised, site-specific performance – might constitute a method of understanding it more deeply. What’s more, Thrift argues that performance – which ‘has built up a knowledge about technologies of carnality, space and time which is aware of itself and its effects’ – is an art form which is particularly well placed to ‘[add] something into the world’ (2004: 129). For performance, with its necessarily spatio-temporal preoccupations and manifestations, and its inherent embodiment, is a fitting means of investigating notions of place, affect and belonging.

MRT’s most basic concerns, then, focus on ‘multifarious, open encounters in the realm of practice’ (Lorimer, 2006: 84); recognising the world’s richness; emphasising embodied thinking; and fostering practical experimentation. These characteristics have significant and generative overlap with the relational, mobile manifestations of site-specific performance that Pearson identifies as growing in popularity, as discussed in the previous chapter. Here, Pearson (2010) suggests that the last few decades have seen a shift away from more fixed, architectonic engagements with sites of performance towards something more contingent, fluid and multifarious. When Thrift argues that ‘we need to inhabit and take responsibility for the world differently […] we need to be more open to attentive openness and less concerned about control’ (2004: 128), he could easily be describing the precepts that underpin the site-based performance practices of such artists as Pearson himself (2000), Graeme Miller (2003), Janet Cardiff (1999), Misha Myers (2010), Deirdre Heddon (2016), Bill Aitchison (2016) and countless others. Relational modes of site-specific performance and MRT both have at their heart a commitment to attending to our surroundings; opening up new modes of human-human and human-non-human engagement; and experimenting practically, boldly and riskily with form. As a direct result of their attitudinal similarities and disciplinary differences, then, this body of theatre practice (site-specific performance) and branch of cultural geography (MRT) have, I argue, much to teach, and much to learn from, one another.

Yet despite the clear value of more-than-representational thought to this doctoral project, it is for a number of reasons by no means to be a strictly or purely “MRT project”. Non- and more-than-representational theories have come under fire from a number of camps since they first emerged in the early 2000s, and chief amongst the criticisms levelled at them is the suggestion that their focus on the present performative moment has a flattening, atemporal quality which
underplays the significance of existing power relations. As Deborah Thien puts it, some aspects of MRT 'seem to be founded on an unreal and apolitical basis: on a ‘virtual’ world where an undifferentiated people have the power to make bargains with their fortunes, and where an acknowledgement of power relations must be left behind precisely as an unethical movement' (2005: 452). Similarly, Owain Jones remarks that particularly in Thrift's work, 'memory seems underplayed in relation to its close cousins, imagination, emotion, affect' (2011: 875), a trait he suggests recurs throughout non-representational geographies. For Jones, there is a methodological issue, too. Writers who have been associated with or influenced by more-than-representational theory have a tendency to enter the landscapes they write about 'as strangers' (ibid: 879). Jones stresses that:

\[
\text{this does not devalue these accounts, the strangeness of landscape is key to the project as the moment of encounter is pure. But these works would have had to be markedly different if these were familiar places to the writers through their own memories – maybe as landscapes of childhood, or as walked with a lover in previous times. Most people live and work in landscapes familiar to them and thus their immersion in them is temporal and memorial as well as performative/embodied and spatial. (ibid)}
\]

Such atemporality and strangeness – and an overlooking of memory in favour of present-tenseness – could prove highly limiting for a research endeavour that seeks to find ways of engaging substantially with a site and with those who dwell there. For this reason, the work described in the remainder of this thesis seeks to draw substantially on more-than-representational thought without subscribing to it fully; borrowing the aspects of MRT which speak to its aims of moving beyond or getting in behind standard or traditional representational forms, without hamstringing itself with MRT's potentially constrictive prioritisation of the present performative moment over history, memory and existing power relations.

2.5 Looking ahead

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that despite the spatial and temporal abstraction with which it has become synonymous since the avant-garde movements of the 1960s and 1970s, theatrical improvisation is in fact rooted (both theoretically and historically) in a generative and relational connection with the time and place in which it emerges. On the other side of the coin, whilst much contemporary site-specific performance work has utilised improvisational structures, techniques and dispositions, the specific language of improvisation has been
strangely lacking in the way these works have been accounted for, both by the artists who make them and by the wider literature.

Guided by the improvisational theory of Hallam and Ingold (itself echoing the work of Moreno); the spatial theories of Massey; and work that loosely gathers under the umbrella of more-than-representational theory, this doctoral project will seek to fill a gap in both practice and theory by generatively combining the disciplines of performance making, performance studies and cultural geography to consider critically the relationship between improvisation and site-specific performance. By drawing on and following the generative overlap between improvisation, site-specific performance and selected strands of cultural geographies, the following research questions emerged throughout the work described in this thesis:

- What qualities of improvised performance might uniquely position it to articulate and respond to a site’s provisionality, contingency and ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey, 2005: 140)?
- How might improvisation help me to make a performance that draws on, frames and makes explicit the multiplicity of perspectives, knowledges and ways of dwelling that coexist in the village of Hope, Derbyshire?

and

- Do more-than-representational theories offer a useful paradigm for the creation of site-specific performance rooted in improvisation?

Guided by these questions, the remainder of this thesis accounts for the process by which I went on to research and devise an improvised, perambulatory performance piece around the village of Hope. Throughout, the anticipation was that this process might allow me as the researcher/performer, those whom I interviewed for the fieldwork and those attending the performances to extemporise collaboratively; respond to our surroundings in the moment; and ‘follow the ways of the world, as they open up’ (Ingold, 2010: 97).
Chapter Three: The fieldwork

3.1 Introduction

It is Friday 18th November 2016, a crisp, clear morning. I arrive in Hope early to interview a woman who has volunteered to be a participant in my fledgling research project. Having heard me briefly address a recent meeting of the Hope Historical Society, she approached me at the end to ask if I would like to speak to her, given that her back garden encompasses the remains of what was once Hope’s motte-and-bailey castle. Of course, I replied, I would love to. We step out into the frost and quiet of her not inconsiderable back garden, which runs down to the river, and as we walk conversation drifts from medieval history to rural life in the valley now:

Participant 6: Goodness me it's a beautiful morning. It's a pity you're not filming.

Me: I know, yeah.

P6: Look at the steam just rising off the water because it's warmer than the air. The wonderful thing about living here is the weather. I grew up in suburban Hertfordshire, not very far from the country. There were woods all around and things [...] but the house was a suburban house. It was a small town – a village that had grown and become part of the commuter belt [...] my mother was a country woman. But it is just... it's such, such, there's such pleasure living really in the country. And somewhere like here we get – not as extreme as some part of the country – but more extreme weather. You know, because of the hills we get mist and rain and snow and hot and all sorts of things, and lots of sky. And the seasons, and I have to say it's just wonderful.

Me: It feels very different to the countryside in the South East.

P6: It's very different to the countryside in the South East, yes, yes.

Me: It feels sort of historic in a way that you don't... I don't know if that's the right word, but... ancient.

P6: Yes!

Me: You can really feel that connection with those periods of history that you were talking about. They seem so present, in a way.
P6: Yes, yes. That’s absolutely right. And you can just see the bones of it, you can see why things were built here, and also having something like a river that floods your garden – it responds to the weather, it feels... this is how it is... this is what living on this living, breathing planet is about. (Participant, 18.11.16)

She pauses for a brief moment, during which time the peace is broken by the sound of a distant but distinct blast at the cement works, around a mile and a half away. She continues:

P6: You can hear the noise of the cement works, which is busy making cement to no doubt build more and more concrete blocks! (ibid)

From here, the participant goes on to talk in great detail about her environmental and ecological concerns; about the widespread loss of bird and insect life in Britain that Michael McCarthy refers to as 'the great thinning' (2015, 87); and of her recent relief at returning to Hope after a short trip to London. Here, the improvisational nature of place-based walking interviews becomes clear. Having talked animatedly and with great enthusiasm about her perceived proximity to nature and the natural world, the participant's train of thought is interrupted by an explosion from the nearby cement works, on hearing which she seamlessly responds by folding it into her narrative of place in the form of a perceived, grave threat to the environment. All of this stems from her responding – in the moment – to our immediate environment, and to the happenstance of the place in which the interview is being conducted.

3.2 Fieldwork structure

In practical terms, this doctoral project’s engagement with Hope consists of two distinct but interconnected elements: an extended period of fieldwork spent collecting stories, memories, “official” histories, half-rememberings, affective responses, tall tales, hearsay, gossip, folklore and more via participant interviews; and the creation of an improvised, site-specific performance that grew out of this ethnographic research. This chapter addresses the former. It begins by discussing the rationale behind the project’s fieldwork phase, which involved conducting walking interviews with 38 residents in Hope in an attempt to get “under the skin” of the village, and with the hope of gathering a range of affective, more-than-representational responses. The chapter goes on to recount what emerged from these interviews, before reflecting on the extent to which the fieldwork’s methodology succeeded in achieving its aims.
The chapter concludes by detailing the impact that this fieldwork would go on to have on the performances that followed.

In his 2010 monograph *Landscape*, John Wylie declared that ‘body and environment fold into and co-construct each other through a series of practices and relations’ (2007: 144), and according to Tim Ingold ‘it is from this relational context of people’s engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance’ (Ingold, 2000: 192). In keeping with Ingold and Hallam's work on improvisation, which renders quotidian life as an ongoing process of improvisation *in situ*, for Wylie and Ingold a place’s character is both emergent and contingent, deriving from the ongoing and improvisatory behaviours of those who live and work there. Their claim that people and landscape are intimately and complexly entwined suggests that an artistic and/or research engagement with a site, such as the one undertaken by this project, could benefit from a concerted effort to interact not just with a place’s topography or “official” history, but with those who dwell there. For whilst it might be possible to gain a certain sense of a place by traversing it as a stranger, as Wylie himself has often done, or by reading about it in local history books, in order to dig deeper into a place’s past and to gain a feeling for its heterogeneity and the 'multitemporal densities of experience' (Pearson, 2010: 57) that coexist there, it may be necessary to speak directly with some of those who have either long-standing or short-lived embodied and affective relationships with the place.

As Mark Riley and David Harvey suggest, one of the benefits of collecting oral histories of a place via participant interviews lies in the fact that the responses gained through such encounters have the potential to ‘demonstrate unique insights into the history of places’ (2007: 348). This both provides the distinctive knowledge of a ‘place- and practice-specific insider’ and, at the same time, acts ‘to disrupt unproblematic and one-dimensional accounts of the landscape, reminding us of the importance of the personalised and lived experience of individuals’ (ibid: 349). In this way, the process of conducting multiple participant interviews about a place has the potential to foreground the contingency, provisionality and situatedness of knowledge, as well as the expertise of those who live in a place to speak about it. In line with this, within theatre and performance studies Sally Mackey and Nicholas Whybrow have described how contemporary applied theatre is increasingly adopting ‘an engagement [...] not only with “certain sites” but also with a mobilisation of activity involving *the users of those sites*’
(2007: 1, my emphasis). This reflects a growing understanding amongst theatre practitioners and scholars (as well as amongst geographers) that the substantive meaning of a site is determined in large part by those who occupy and traverse it.

Aiming to add to and extend this work by generatively combining the disciplines of drama and geography in both practical and theoretical ways, this doctoral project began by engaging with residents of Hope over an extended period, using geographical fieldwork methods. The express aim of the first phase of fieldwork was to gain as many different insights into, and affective responses to, the village as possible. In order to do this, and in pursuit of more-than-representational insights into Hope, it seemed that interesting possibilities might be opened up by shying away from a traditional social sciences interview in which a participant responds to a number of pre-defined questions in a supposedly neutral environment, and towards something more open and improvisatory.

3.3 Planning the fieldwork

Reflecting on the contribution made to ethnographic fieldwork by more-than-representational theory, Phillip Vannini has suggested that by seeking new methods of research it may become possible to gain an insight into what he describes as the ‘fleeting, viscous, lively, embodied, material, more-than-human […] dimensions of spatially and temporally complex lifeworlds’ (2014: 317). This process can begin, in a fairly straightforward way, simply by thinking through more deliberately the location of the research encounter. For, as Edward Casey suggests:

the relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence […] but also, more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other […] In effect, there is no place without self and no self without place. (2001: 684)

Despite Casey’s assertion having more than a hint of anthropocentrism about it, on the back of his work a growing number of geographers and other social scientists have begun to acknowledge the significance of where (and how) interview encounters take place. For if, as Donna Haraway suggests, knowledges are ‘situated and embodied’ (1988: 583), the situatedness of interviews ought also to be more consciously thought through. Building on Casey’s and Haraway’s work, Jon Anderson (2004), Misha Myers (2010), Mark Riley and David Harvey (2007), Sarah Pink (2015) and others have begun to explore the possibilities opened up conducting place-based (or site-specific) interviews. As Mark Holton and Riley suggest, because
the place in which interviews are conducted can often serve as a prompt for respondents’ recollections, ‘place-based interviews have the potential to move beyond simply gaining responses to questions and instead offer the potential to unpick more experiential understandings of these places’ (2014: 60), possibly leading to a more spontaneous set of interactions; the (co)construction of knowledge; recollections that are in and of place rather than simply being about it; and, ultimately, a richer dataset that is more reflective of the complexity of the participant’s lifeworld (Holton and Riley, 2014). Holton and Riley's work here suggests that simply by talking with participants in a place that has been chosen specifically for its significance to the subject of the research (and, by extension, to the participant), one can start to gain insights into some of the more embodied and affective qualities of their lived, emplaced experience which may lie beyond the scope of more traditionally discursive research processes.

Having become familiar with the work of the scholars listed above, for a number of reasons I decided that the fieldwork method of choice for this project should be mobile interviews. Even early on in the process, I began to suspect that the eventual improvised performances within this project might manifest as walks around the village. As a result, it seemed as though conducting walking interviews might feed into the latter stages of the project in generative ways. As an outsider in Hope, engaging in walking interviews would enable me to gain an embodied, affective understanding of the village, as well as offering me ‘the added benefits of providing visual references to participants’ narratives’ (Wheeler, 2016: 2). What's more, for reasons discussed below, it might also lend the interviews an informal and improvisational tone.

Following Holton and Riley, I was intrigued to see what kinds of relations with the landscape walking could enable. In Wanderlust: A History of Walking, Rebecca Solnit suggests that there is a ‘sense of place that can only be gained on foot’ (2002: 8). Whilst this claim carries undertones of ableism, and can be construed as implying that wheelchair users and other non-walkers have a compromised ability to engage with and experience the world around them, there are particular modes of thinking and feeling produced by slow and steady movement through a landscape, whether walking or travelling by wheelchair or other mobility technology. It produces a different set of sensations, and engenders different modes of being-in-the-world than, say, driving, sitting still, or cycling. Pushing this further, Kenneth Olwig has suggested that in the crudest sense, there are two ways of understanding a landscape: one can either imagine
it as a fixed and map-like form, a visual demonstration of the boundaries within which life is enclosed and a backdrop to our daily existence – the monocular view (one thinks here of de Certeau’s totalising, God’s-eye view of the City from atop a New York skyscraper (1984)) – or one can think of landscape binocularly, as a mobile, lived, enmeshed phenomenon concerned with doing. For Olwig, walking (or any movement at slow speed which entails direct contact with the material world around us) offers the chance to experience bodily this second understanding of landscape, of “feeling” it and ‘living in its imagination’ (Massey, 2005: 139). The walker or wheelchair user, as he points out:

experiences the material depth of the proximate environment through binocular vision and through the effect of motion parallax created by the blurring of near objects in contrast to those further away. The touched, smelled and heard proximate material world is thereby woven into the walker’s sensory field, leading him or her to experience the landscape as a topological realm of contiguous places. (2008: 84)

Conducting walking interviews would thus hold potentially interesting and illuminating effects both for me as the researcher and for the residents as participants, enabling us to experience the village sensorially and immediately, rather than simply discursively via conversation.

Given that the principle research question driving this project concerns improvisation within site-specific performance, walking interviews also seemed appropriate in that the practice of walking itself has much in common with Hallam and Ingold’s reading of improvisation. As Hallam and Ingold so eloquently put it, ‘to improvise is to follow the ways of the world, as they open up’ (2007: 97), offering an understanding of improvisation that is founded on processes, interrelation, attentiveness, emergence and sociality. In this, already, the parallels between improvisation and walking start to emerge. Even when attempting to traverse a well-known route or straight-forward path – even when taking a stroll around our own neighbourhood – we are always monitoring and respond to the changing environment around us, rather than attempting to traverse some remembered version of the world. As Jo Lee Vergunst suggests:

many people who walk the same or similar routes very regularly, whether for ‘work’ or ‘leisure’ purposes, have commented on the seemingly endless variability that their journeys present to them in practice. There are different sights, different weather conditions and different things going on around them, not to mention the varying
Walking is a practice predicated on difference within repetition and is, as such, inherently improvisatory. Because it is a mobile practice that leads us to encounter the world around us on the move, it continuously foregrounds the mutability and ‘present-tenseness’ (Macfarlane, 2013: 324) of things. Both walking and improvisation – and the improvisational qualities of walking – are generative: as we walk, we navigate the unpredictability of the world around us, by doing which we become more aware of its unpredictability, leading us to improvise in response, through which we encounter the world’s unpredictability afresh, and so on. Walking thus leads us into a constant cycle of attentiveness and response, ‘an ongoing generative movement that is at once itinerant, improvisatory and rhythmic’ (Ingold, 2010: 91). As Solnit suggests, ‘it’s the unpredictable incidents between official events that add up to a life, the incalculable that gives it value, [and] both rural and urban walking have for two centuries been prime ways of exploring the unpredictable’ (2002: 10). What's more, the cycle of attentiveness and response that walking inculcates is not simply focused on our material surroundings, but also on those with whom we walk. As Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst have suggested, ‘walking is a profoundly social activity: […] in their timings, rhythms and inflections, the feet respond as much as does the voice to the presence and activity of others’ (2008: 1). As a result of all this, Holton and Riley have observed that walking interviews have the tendency to provoke spontaneous and specific discussions, as opposed to generalised ones. Ultimately, for them:

walking [...] allows us to ‘get into the gaps’, not only by encouraging respondents to reflect on places ‘in the moment’, and thus move away from superficial or rehearsed narratives of the place, but also in giving an understanding of the more everyday, mundane and less easily storied spaces. (2014: 63)

In light of this project's research questions - and given Massey's notion that a place's 'throwntogetherness' (2005: 140) is in large part determined by 'the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of thens and theres)’ (ibid) – for the reasons explore above, walking interviews seemed to present themselves as a potentially generative research method for this work.
3.4 Conducting the fieldwork

Between October 2016 and April 2017 I met with and interviewed around 45 Hope residents of different ages, occupations, educational backgrounds and relationships to the village, from life-long residents whose families had dwelt in Hope for centuries to retired “incomers” who had been in Hope no more than a few years. Each interview followed a route that was either informally predetermined by the participant – “I thought it might be nice to show you X, Y, or Z”- or improvised by them, or by us both, on the day. This allowed participants to show me the village from their perspective and according to their interests, past experiences or habitual patterns of behaviour.

Habit, whilst by no means the principle focus of this study, is of real interest here. Its relevance to a consideration of the ways in which people dwell within particular landscapes is highlighted by Elizabeth Grosz, who describes habits as:

the ways in which living beings accommodate more of their environments than the constitution of instincts generally permits: habits are how environments impact and transform the forms of life they accommodate and are themselves impacted and transformed by these forms of life. (2013: 218)

For Grosz, habits are not self-contained behaviours that render us automatons, but inherently connect us to our surroundings, enabling us to thrive within our environments without the need to consciously process every decision or action. Habit is to be considered, she suggests, 'as a fundamentally creative capacity that produces the possibility of stability in a universe in which change is fundamental’ (ibid). In many ways, then, habit can be considered as the other side of the same coin as improvisation – both are modes of behaviour that are profoundly emplaced, and both allow us to cope and flourish within a world of flux. Habit, then, is the unconscious foundation upon which more conscious, improvisational behaviours can build. Grosz consolidates this point further by arguing, building on the work of Henri Bergson, that habit:

constitutes a kind of substratum that supports and enables acts of great unpredictability and creativity. Without habits to support the movements that constitute our daily activities, we would not have the backdrop of assured actions against which freedom and unpredictability are highlighted. (2013: 226)

Not only does habit enable us to function within a given environment, then, but without the
reliability and routine it provides, we would have no counterpoint against which to measure and understand the more spontaneous, improvisational responses that such surroundings often provoke. Within the walking interviews, habitual routes around the village along which participants took me shed as much light on their lived experience of the landscape as those which were clearly being made up on the spot.

Reflecting the tension between originality and repetition that lies at the heart of debates surrounding improvisation, each interview was in some senses both a unique undertaking and a re-staging of prior interviews. Whilst no two encounters were exactly alike – carried out with a different resident and along a unique route – there was some degree of structure. I was holding a microphone, for example, offering prompts, and often walking alongside the participant around the village along the same streets I had walked with another resident days or weeks previously. As Edgar Landgraf suggests, improvisation can never fully escape fixity in the form of 'structure, repetition, planning, practice [and] experience' (2011: 2), and in this respect, rather than existing in discrete isolation from one another, the interviews became layered up with my growing confidence as an interviewer, the stories and memories I had been told in previous interviews and my own increasing familiarity with Hope. In this sense, the interviews themselves – initially formulated simply as a fieldwork method – gradually emerged as a kind of informal performance.

As Hayden Lorimer and Katrín Lund have described of mountaineers “collecting” proximate peaks in North-east Scotland and thus encountering ground they have walked over or near before, ‘what can be seen, and thereby recalled, are versions of walks in the past, [and] here, “storying” with events can render landscape memorable’ (2008: 192). The same was true of the interview process in Hope. Whilst interviewing one participant, I would be reminded of something another had told me in a similar spot days, weeks or even months before. Or, leading the performances in June, I would find myself in the same place in which I had interviewed one of the attendees some time previously, allowing us to draw directly on that conversation during the show. All this points towards the significant generative potential of conducting multiple walking interviews around the same terrain to build up a deep, sedimented and cumulative knowledge of a place. Such a method serves not only to provide the researcher/performer with an eclectic and wide-ranging knowledge of the location at hand and under foot, but also allows them to work/walk themselves into a sense of place in the way that Casey describes when he
says that:

when I inhabit a place – whether by moving through it or staying in it – I have it in my actional purview. I also hold it by virtue of being in its ambience: first in my body as it holds onto the place by various sensory and kinesthetic means, then in my memory as I "hold it in mind." [...] In this way, place and self actively collude. (2001: 687)

By spending a prolonged period of time working in and moving around Hope, a space was opened up through which place and self could begin to interact in precisely this way. Yet beyond this significant sense of the work placing me in Hope as researcher/performer – which, as will be discussed later in the chapter, was invaluable in enabling me to devise and perform the resultant show – the question of what I learned from conducting these interviews is a complex one. To some extent, my hope that walking interviews would lead to improvised responses did indeed prove to be the case. Walking around Hope during the interviews forced participant and researcher alike to navigate the obstinate materiality of the world as it presented itself to us in the moment of encounter. Amidst avoiding traffic, circumnavigating roadworks and potholes, experiencing the rich and varied soundscape provided by the village and enveloped by that day’s climatic conditions – in short, encountering the village as it manifested at that moment and on that day – participants engaged in conversation whilst directly encountering the village’s ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey, 2005: 140). Regardless of whether the route of the interview was improvised or had been planned in advance by the interviewee, there were numerous examples of participants’ memories being jogged by buildings or objects that we encountered during the walks. Often, participants would spot a feature of the village and launch into a tangential account of it that either interrupted or segued on from what they had been previously talking about, or would cite our immediate environment in order to add further evidence to something they had already mentioned. In this way, a huge variety of sites within the village became the focus of impromptu conversations in a range of registers: a mark on the wall of the old Post Office where there had once been a Wrigley’s chewing gum dispenser; a barbed wire fence from which a participant received a cut some fifty years previously whilst running away from a bull in a field that is now houses, the scar from which remains to this day; or the corrugated iron hut that was once part of the “Tin Town” that accommodated workers who were building the nearby Ladybower reservoir in the 1930s, and which now finds itself in Hope housing a beauty salon. Whilst none of these (or the countless other stories told off-the-cuff in response to our surroundings) was in itself especially extraordinary or illuminating,
together they formed a steady pattern in which participants would respond to what we were walking past in order to incorporate narratives or anecdotes into their account of the village which would almost certainly have been lacking had we conducted static interviews. Yet despite these numerous instances of participants being prompted to recall things by our immediate surroundings, the manner in which such things were discussed was arguably often highly representational and neatly narrativised, throwing doubt on the project's aspirations to tap into more affective, fleeting and more-than-representational renderings of the village.

3.5 Narrativising the history of Hope

One determining factor in the kinds of responses I was able to collect during the walking interviews was the fact that that many of the participants I interviewed demonstrated a keen and active interest in the history of the village, regardless of whether they were born in Hope or had moved there more recently. When invited to walk with me around the village and talk about whatever they chose, despite having been informed that I was conducting a geography and drama project, many of those I interviewed deferred primarily to historical information. Despite its modest size, Hope, it turns out, has a long and in parts illustrious history, much of which I learned about from its residents during the walking interviews. I learned, for example, that Hope was once the centre of the largest parish in northern England, stretching almost from Glossop in the north to Buxton in the south, and the village retains a sizeable Norman motte which is thought to have been topped by a wooden bailey, and which is now to be found in the back garden of one of the project's participants. Due to the village’s historic strategic importance, the graveyard of St. Peter’s Church is alleged by some, rather incredibly, to have received the bodies of around 300,000 people over the last two millennia (Participant 8). The village is at the meeting point of two rivers, the Noe and Peak’s Hole Water, and has lain on a crossroads since at least Roman times, when the nearby fort at Navio was a major centre for lead mining. Overlooked by the shale, sandstone and gritstone peaks of Winhill, Losehill, Mam Tor, Back Tor and Shatton Edge, the earliest evidence of settlement on the site of the current village dates to pre-Roman times. Over near the cement works there’s a burial mound called “the folly” that juts out into the valley – as one participant declared proudly: ‘the roots run deep – there’s Bronze Age and Iron Age aplenty’ (Participant 7) – and down near the river some ash deposits from a kiln or smelting hearth were recently discovered that date back to 3000BC.
As of the 2011 census, Hope was home to 864 people. Today, the village boasts three pubs; two schools (one primary and one secondary); a Church of England Church and a Methodist Chapel; a doctor’s surgery and chemist; a dental clinic; a Spar; a delicatessen; a butcher’s; a greengrocer; a mechanic’s; a bike shop; three cafés; an Indian restaurant; a playing field; and a camping and caravanning site. It has an active Historical Society with a membership of around 80, whose various publications – amongst them Discovering Hope and Re-Discovering Hope – are available for purchase in the village shop. The village is a popular stopping-off point for walkers and cyclists, and a thoroughfare for those heading to the nearby tourist honeypots of Hathersage, Castleton and Edale, where the Pennine Way begins. Property prices are high, with much of the social housing in the village having been sold off during the 1980s and 90s (Participant 6). As a result, young families have largely been priced out of buying houses in Hope, with many residents pointing out to me with a mixture of frustration and lament that Hope has an elderly, and ageing, population. A significant proportion of the village’s residents are relatively affluent retirees – former academics, surgeons and doctors amongst them – a demographic that would traditionally be labelled as incomers to the village (Woods, 2011), although one of the project’s participants who was born and brought up in Hope preferred to use the more welcoming moniker ‘joiners’ (Participant 10).

In some senses it was unsurprising that so much historical information was offered to me through participant interviews. After all, many participants (particularly towards the beginning of the research) were recruited via email contact with the Hope Historical Society, direct contact at society meetings, or through ‘stratified snowball [sampling]’ (de Wit, 2013: 129) originating with society members. Yet my decision to begin recruiting participants in this way was in turn no coincidence, as the Hope Historical Society is arguably the most prominent group within the village; has an active membership that amounts to nearly 10 per cent of the village’s total population; appears high on a Google search of ‘Hope, Derbyshire’; and was at the time involved in running the Twitter and Facebook accounts of ‘Hope Valley Online’.

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6 Since the completion of the fieldwork, the greengrocer’s has closed down, having been a fixture in the village since the late 1960s.
7 As of November 2018, the website for Hope Valley Online is no longer operational
regularly posting news and updates concerning local events and information.

From time to time, whilst recounting aspects of the history of the village, those being interviewed began to reminisce fondly about times past in which, for example, more of the shops were run by ‘local people’ (Participant 2), and young couples in Hope would stay to bring up families rather than moving away to Sheffield, Buxton or Chapel-en-le-Frith. For whilst some participants acknowledged that change is an important (and inherent) aspect of village life – ‘I don't generally have a problem with transience, people moving in, moving out, whatever [because] people bring new skills that we don't always have’ (Participant 12) – there were many others that expressed a sense of sadness or loss regarding significant change. Several interviewees spoke of developments as inappropriate or ‘not in keeping’, and one cited notions of ‘the way things would have been done years ago’ (Participants 6) in support of, or opposition to, a variety of issues. One participant, for example, complained about the fact that houses which had originally been built by the cement works for its workers had since been sold off privately. He argued that ‘from an aesthetic point of view, when you start selling off properties to individuals, they all want to start putting their own stamp on it, and they don't look as nice as when they were all owned [by the firm]’ (Participant 10). Here, a point that I had initially assumed was being made with an eye on the economic or social implications of selling off centrally owned housing turned out to be a concern about the aesthetic appearance of the village. Yet in a physical, material sense, change in Hope has been limited to a large degree by the strict planning regulations enforced by the Peak Park planning authority. Because of this, there is a feeling amongst some in the village that ‘in a way Hope hasn't changed as much as some places have because [of] Peak Park – they are very restricting [sic] on what they allow, which, yes, it does affect property prices – but it keeps the village as a village, not a suburb... and that is good’ (Participant 10). In many ways, this has perhaps provided the conditions for a somewhat preservationist temperament to take hold in Hope.

One of the most pervasive stories about the village that emerged through these interviews was the notion that, despite the steady inflow of joiners, unlike Hathersage to the east or Castleton to the west, Hope has remained a ‘working village’ (Participant 8 – reflecting the views of many others). Amongst the participant interviews, this term – ‘working village’ – came up several
times, and seemed to be used fluidly to signify a number of factors, including but not limited to: a relatively low number of properties having been converted into holiday lets; an adequacy of shops and services for local residents; low unemployment; and the continued survival of nearby industries – amongst them a number of farms, a manufacturer of industrial furnaces and a cement works, the last of which is credited by many with having effectively “saved” the village either from economic destitution or from becoming over-reliant on tourism. This term working, then, holds a double meaning. Firstly, the village is understood to be working in the sense that residents of working age are able to find employment with a small number of local employers, meaning they are, quite literally, working. But more broadly, and rather less tangibly, the village is seen to be working in the sense of being operational, of functioning in the way that a village, or at least Hope, “ought” to function. Living in Hope, for example, it is seen as possible to get by day-to-day without having to go elsewhere for essential groceries, to see the doctor, to fix the car or to have a lively social life. There are activities on in the village ‘every day of the week’ (Participant 11), including pub quizzes, Zumba, Pilates, amateur dramatics, Historical Society meetings, live folk music, supper clubs and a walking group. In this sense, Hope is understood by its residents to be working in a sense that Castleton (seen by many in Hope to be saturated with holiday homes, tearooms and gift shops) or Hathersage (seen as being full of doctors who commute to work in Sheffield) is not.

This is arguably a form of self-authentication by some of those living in Hope. Many participants attempted through our discussions to construct an image of Hope as a bona fide Derbyshire village in a way that other villages in the valley were seen not to be. Depicting Hope as unrelian on tourism, for example – an industry that is just as legitimate as manufacturing – serves to differentiate the village from those that surround it by claiming a higher degree of authenticity. As mentioned above, Castleton and Hathersage in particular were regularly spoken of in terms ranging from pitying to pejorative, as examples of what Hope might have become had the cement works not been built, or had it been slightly closer to Sheffield. This positioning of Hope as an authentic village, which came up time and again during the research, relies on the implication that – unlike Castleton and Hathersage (which are also subject to the Peak Park’s planning restrictions) – something essential to Hope’s character has endured from the past,

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8 I was told several times that Hathersage has ‘forty two doctors’ (Participants) because it is just within the prescribed maximum distance from which medics in Sheffield are permitted to live.
linked to notions of labour and articulated through the specific notion of Hope as a working village. There is, then, both a temporal and a comparative quality to this understanding of Hope as a working village. Temporally, its workingness is bound up with qualities of endurance or continuity – Hope has maintained enough of its “original” character or purpose to be seen as still working. For Hope to be described in such a way, there is an insinuation that at least some other villages must have, either through idleness or ill-fortune, lost their “original” purpose. As one participant put it, Hope:

[is] not a pretty village, it’s not a sexy village. People don’t say “I want to live in Hope”; [they say] “I want to live in Froggatt, I want to live in Curbar”. I want to live in Hope? Oh gosh, no. It’s not got that cachet. It’s not the Cotswolds, but that’s why we like it. It’s ordinary in the nicest sense of the word. (Participant 10)

Of course, views such as these are by no means unique to Hope. Offering examples as wide-ranging as Paris, the Wye Valley and London’s Docklands, in her 1995 essay Places and their Pasts Doreen Massey describes the phenomenon through which its past can come to be ‘seen in some sense to embody the real character of [a] place’ (1995: 183, my emphasis). For Massey, this understanding of what constitutes a place is predicated on the misapprehension that the (often idealised) past now serving as a reference point for the present was somehow a stable, fixed state, and not itself the result of contacts and connections with ‘the world beyond the place itself’ (ibid). Massey points out that in many instances, much of what is now understood as a “local” or “authentic” feature of a place was once as much an imposition as the so-called “intrusions” that are opposed today – such as Hope’s cement works, for example. In fact, the make-up and constitution of places is always, and always has been, changing, and what we encounter today or tomorrow at one place or another – be it a city or a village – emerges out of a ‘long history of interconnectedness with elsewhere’, failure to acknowledge which ultimately leads to the kind of ‘(implicitly or explicitly) internalist and essentialist constructions of the character of places’ (Massey, 1995; 183) that I was arguably presented with by several residents of Hope.

In light of all this, I began to wonder what the significance of basing an ethnographic and performance-making project in Hope might be. I was concerned by the possible pitfalls of conducting work which adopts a decidedly local optic; by the politics of working with a demographic such as Hope’s; and how I might conduct the work without slipping into a
nostalgic staging of the village as somehow quintessential of the English rural idyll— for there are certainly those would frame it as such. As the Hope Valley Online webpage for Hope once declared, ‘if you ask someone to close their eyes and picture the English countryside, they would be picturing a scene much like this’ (Hope, Hope Valley Online: Guide To The Peak District). As a number of cultural geographers have noted, a preoccupation with either localness or local history is often looked down upon within the discipline as an outdated or unfashionable foundation for a research project. David Matless points out that scholarly discourse within contemporary geography is widely understood to have moved on from local concerns such as village life and small-scale rural analysis, arguing that ‘for the self-consciously modernizing geographer a regional pursuit might [...] appear a backward step, a retreat from modern subject matter and styles of enquiry’ (2010: 76). Regional research of the kind described by Matless is at risk of stirring up the spectre of chorography, a mode of strictly bounded, local enquiry that originated as early as the 16th Century and continued into the early 20th (Pearson, 2006; 2010) and which, through intense focus on a specific region, ‘collected and arranged natural, historical and antiquarian information topographically’ (Mayhew, 2000: 240). Today, chorography’s perceived lack of mobility and dynamism often leads it to be characterised as fusty or archaic, and ‘cast as geography’s pedestrian cousin’ (Matless, 2010: 76) – so much so, Matless argues, that it was in part the vehement desire to move away from chorography that ‘drove geography’s mid-twentieth-century modernization from regional study into quantitative spatial scientific modelling’ (2010: 76). In the context of ‘the hypermobility of (post)modernity’ (Tomaney, 2015: 507) in a world which, we are told, is becoming ever more globalised, a “return” to such small-scale, local enquiry might be viewed within the discipline as companionable with regressive, traditionalist tendencies.

Further, David Harvey suggests that a preoccupation with heritage or with the past, particularly at the local level, can also tend towards obscurantism, noting that there can be an inclination within heritage discourse towards the kind of ‘parochial, exclusivist, inward-looking, narrow-minded and localist agendas’ (2015: 585). Arguably, this began to emerge during some of this project’s participant interviews. Rebecca Wheeler concurs, arguing that within local contexts, ‘processes and practices of recalling and recording the past are often associated with a sense of regressive preservationism and resistance to change’ (2016: 2). Indeed, as Marcos Natali points out,

The very word traditionally used to refer to the [political] left in English
and other European languages – variations of ‘progressive’ – emphasises commitment to the future, while the words that describe the left’s adversaries – ‘conservative’ and ‘reactionary’ suggests devotion to the past. (2005: 129)

If, in addition to feeding one another, both a focus on the local (Matless, 2010) and a preoccupation with the past and with heritage (Harvey, 2015; Wheeler, 2016; Natali, 2005) are propagative of, and propagated by, reactionary conservative agendas, the suggestion begins to emerge of a self-reinforcing cycle comprising conservatism, small-scale enquiry and historical interest. I represent this in the diagram below.

![Diagram](image)

Arguably, the apparent resonances between conservatism, localism and enthusiasm for history is articulated most clearly by the existence of local history groups who, as Andrew Jackson suggests (2008), are frequently accused of indulgently yearning for a romanticised past at the expense of progress and development. Here, the cycle depicted above finds concrete form, as a fascination with history and the regional and a desire to “keep things as they are/were” feed into and reinforce one another – or so the popular narrative of local history groups tells us. There is a strong link here to the narratives surrounding Hope that emerged across many of my participant interviews, described above. Hope was depicted as a strictly ‘ordinary’ (Participant) village, preserving a link to its historic character by repelling or resisting the threat of modernisation and change, despite the fact that this perceived preservation was itself reliant on the arrival of a cement works from Hull in the 1920s.

However, whilst some participants prescribed to the aforementioned perspective, it is worth
noting here that a number of others did acknowledge a sense of the region’s interconnectedness and fluidity. A clear example of this was provided by a participant whose family has been traced as having migrated from Cornwall to north Derbyshire in 1585:

Participant 10: we came from Cornwall as tin miners in Cornwall, and we came up to Tideswell area to be lead miners, and then lead mining, farming, and then they migrated from Great Hucklow down to Hope [... and] If you know Bradwell, if you know Tideswell, their architecture is very similar to Cornish villages, little cottages clustered up the hillside, and they were developed for the miners.

Here, the architectural design of villages which have since come to be thought of as “typical” of the area is acknowledged to have been heavily influenced by the movement of labour some 350 miles, over 400 years ago. The participant’s knowledge of his own family history provided him with an insight into the transience of the village’s character. Despite the fact that he is seen by many other residents in the village as being “from”, or perhaps even “of” Hope, he understands that his own presence there is a product of historic economic and social forces. From this example, we can see that in the imagination of some residents, Hope as we encounter it today is built upon a history of interconnection with both proximate and distant places, and that new importations (of ideas, people and goods) have been folded into and assimilated with the perceived identity of the village. As Massey reminds us, the identity of a place ‘is always, and always has been, in process of formation: it is in a sense forever unachieved’ (1995: 186).

It is important to note here that even this understanding of Hope as in process of formation is itself a form of discursive representation. Despite having gone to great lengths to carry out walking interviews in the hope that they would throw up more-than-representational responses to the village by knocking participants off more rehearsed and comfortable depictions of Hope, I was still overwhelmingly presented with sedimented, rehearsed and narrativised accounts of the village – albeit often offered impromptu in response to immediate surroundings. Perhaps this is hardly surprising, for as Massey suggests, ‘over and over we tame the spatial into the textual and the conceptual; into representation’ (2005: 20). And in retrospect, such responses were also probably precipitated in part by my interviewing style. In striving to spark improvisational conversations, I deliberately left the encounters as open as
possible. I didn’t predetermine questions or provide unsolicited prompts, preferring instead to give participants the floor and then gently inquire further in direct response to what they offered. I intentionally cast each participant in the role of the expert and, as a result, was given several dozen guided tours of Hope, each with the express intention of learning as much about the village from the person guiding me as possible. Yet, in hindsight, this dynamic may have encouraged participants to present their knowledge and experience of the village in an authoritative, representational manner - one at odds with notions of being thrown off guard by fleeting and contingent stimuli.

3.6 Carrying the fieldwork forward

Despite not throwing up the kinds of more-than-representational responses I’d hoped for and imagined, the walking interview process was central in laying the foundations for the performances that followed. Firstly, in a reasonably straightforward sense, through the process of carrying out 38 walking interviews I had become intimately familiar with the village’s topography, including not only its main streets, which I walked several dozen times, but also its lanes, footpaths, farms and rivers. This familiarity became valuable in a very concrete sense in that it gave me a solid foundational knowledge on which to draw when designing the skeletal route of the performance. Having been toured around Hope so many times during the interviews, I was able to identify the parts of the village, the buildings and the stories that came up frequently, or that seemed particularly present in its self-narrative and, as will be discussed at length in the subsequent chapters of the thesis, I was also able from this to determine those spots within Hope that were less visited, and less well-storied.

Alongside a strong topographical familiarity, the extended interview process and the diversity of Hope residents it encompassed also enabled me to build up a relatively “deep” understanding of the village in a range of registers, including “official” histories, detailed personal and family histories, meteorological anecdotes, agricultural insights, social and economic information about the village, hearsay, gossip, folklore, speculation and more. By gathering a range of oral histories, the project had been able to ‘co-construct the landscape through people’s contextualised recollections of [...] place’ (Harvey and Riley, 2005: 25). By the
end of the process, I had a clear overview both of Hope’s history, and many of the social relations of which the village is composed. The vast majority of this had come directly from the mouths of Hope residents themselves, supplemented on occasion by photographs, books, diaries, home-videos and other documents they shared with me, as well as one or two items of village ephemera I had purchased on eBay (such as a copy of *Derbyshire Life* from the 1980s featuring an article on Hope). The intimate knowledge of the village and its complex social structures that I had built up across the interviews enabled me to pick up on the nuance of the contributions made by audience members during the ceremonies that followed. For as much as I could have become familiar with the topography of the village simply by walking it alone over a period of several months, or learnt something of its history from books, as Doreen Massey suggests, we should ‘think of places, not as areas on maps, but as constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time’ (1995: 188). For Massey, the meaning of a particular place is constituted through the complex and continuously shifting human-human and human-nonhuman interactions that occur within it, and adopting this reading in relation to Hope it is possible to understand the village as constituted not just by its Church, the views it affords, the topography of its Parish or the hills behind it, but through the shifting social relations that occur within it, and between it and the world beyond; as Massey argues, ‘the identity of places, indeed the very identification of places as particular places, is always [...] temporary, uncertain, and in process’ (1995: 190). Through the extended period of ethnographic research that led to the performances, it was this temporary, uncertain and socially constructed sense of Hope that I was able to feel my way into. Having conducted the interviews, I could facilitate the performance from a position of at least partial understanding of the village’s social relations, drawing threads and suggestions from different audience members together, and instinctively picking up on whether each new contribution made by an audience member conflicted, aligned with or developed the emergent work being created by the group. This approach to conducting “deep” fieldwork chimed with much of the contemporary research in human geography discussed above that emphasises the importance of moving away from epistemologies that prioritise “official” histories and accounts at the expense of other forms of knowledge, and towards a paradigm which – alongside “official” accounts – also values the expertise of participants in regards to their own lifeworlds (Riley, 2008; Pink, 2015; de Wit, 2013).
It is also worth noting here that through the use of walking interviews, the knowledge being
gathered about Hope was collected \textit{in situ}. This rendered it diffuse – built upon a combination
of my own experiences, perceptions and affective responses whilst conducting the interviews
and the experiential knowledges that were relayed to me orally by the residents I was
interviewing. By taking multiple walks around Hope with a variety of participants, the interviews
became acts of place-making sociality that both drew on and produced a sense of place.
Walking the roads, fields and footpaths of the village with a variety of residents across autumn,
winter and spring allowed me, by increments, to “place” myself in Hope. Sites around the
village became laden and sedimented with memories, stories, anecdotes or ponderings that I
had been told in those places by a variety of people previously, or by my own affective
experiences or embodied memories of those prior interviews. Edward Casey suggests that we
might think of place as ‘the immediate environment of [the] lived body – an arena of action
that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural’ (2001: 683), and Hope had
increasingly become this for me.

At this stage of the research, I was conscious of wanting the remainder of the project to begin
destabilising some of the more sedimented narratives of Hope I had been offered; of wanting
to find ways in which the improvised walking performances might kindle some of the more
affective and contingent responses to place that more-than-representational theories aim to
arouse. This would not be about trying to enlighten the audience. I wasn’t going to attempt to
teach the audience Doreen Massey’s configuration of space in the hope that they might
reappraise their surroundings in the light of this knew knowledge. Rather, I hoped that the
performances might be able to inculcate a version of Bertolt Brecht’s \textit{Verfremdungseffekt} (or
Alienation-effect) in order to open up for questioning some of the more accepted and
sedimented narratives about the village. As Brecht describes:

\begin{quote}
the achievement of the A-effect constitutes something utterly ordinary, recurrent; it is just a widely-practised way of drawing one’s own or someone else’s attention to a thing [...] The A-effect consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one’s attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected [...] However frequently recurrent, modest, vulgar it may be it will now be labelled as something unusual. (1964: 144)
\end{quote}
Brecht’s idea of stripping a quotidian object of its familiarity, I thought, could prove highly useful in attempting to unsettle some of the more taken-as-read narratives about Hope. Rather than telling people what to think, the performances would aim to give people a playful opportunity to look at (largely) familiar things with a fresh perspective, should they choose to do so. Guided by the project’s hypothesis that improvised performance might be uniquely positioned to frame, articulate and respond to a place’s ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey, 2005: 140), there seemed to be some generative potential in the project exploring the idea that amongst the plethora of often familiar stories, memories, folklore and historical details that make up the village, Hope’s identity remains in a state of continuous negotiation – that it is, to use Massey’s phrase, forever unachieved.
Chapter Four: The Hope Ceremony of Recollection; initial reflections

4.1 Introduction

As Jenny Hughes, Jenny Kidd and Catherine McNamara have pointed out, 'situations of practice are inherently unstable, messy, interconnected, conflictual, uncertain [and] complex' (2011: 193), and the making process of The Hope Ceremony of Recollection was no different. The journey from conducting the first participant interview in October 2016 to performing the ceremony in June 2017 was, perhaps unsurprisingly, not altogether direct, and pleasingly – given its focus on improvisation – took a number of turns I couldn’t have foreseen at the outset. The remainder of the thesis recounts and critically reflects on that process, and on The Hope Ceremony of Recollection itself.

As Sally Mackey has noted, researchers conducting PaR projects such as this one can often end up simultaneously taking on the role of practitioner and knowledge creator. In this capacity, she argues, they can become 'the subjects of the research as well as the authors of its ideas: researcher and the researched, the insider, the practitioner-researcher, and the researcher as auteur' (2016: 481). This can lead to a writing style that verges on self-portraiture, often including extensive use of the artist's own voice within written work which focuses primarily on their self-positioning within the project. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, offering the reader a very particular insight into the creative process. Yet it also has the potential to fall short in accounting for the work in relation to wider thematic or theoretical questions. And as Mackey argues, this mode of writing doesn't necessarily have to be 'symptomatic of all' PaR work (ibid), with a focus on external objects and practices very possible. In her own recent work, for example, Mackey has homed in on 'how performance and performative activities might shift people’s perception of place' (ibid: 482). In the remaining two chapters of this thesis, I have endeavoured to traverse the most useful aspects of both these styles of writing, providing the valuable first-person perspective of a theatremaker-researcher in the midst of practice (without, I hope, becoming solipsistic), as well as the more outward-facing orientation of a scholar reflecting retrospectively on the subject of their research – in this case, improvisation and site-specific performance. Of course, these two positions by no means exist in binary opposition to one another, and over the course of this project both have been vital in allowing me to understand and reflect critically on the work I have carried out in different ways. In broad terms,
this chapter thinks through and accounts for the journey of making *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection* from the unique first-person perspective of the researcher-performer, whilst the following chapter offers a more temporally distanced reflection on the work and the broader questions it raises.

In this chapter, two key concepts gradually surface as recurrent preoccupations of, or problematics within, the emerging performance: script/structure and actor/performer. The chapter charts – from a present tense, first-person perspective – my attempts to transition away from more traditional practices involving script and actor, and towards a more relational mode of performance that utilises the post-dramatic strategies of structure and performance. Drawing on Chapter One, this chapter reflects on the process of improvisation from inside, ultimately arguing that the various formulations of improvisation put forward by Moreno, Spolin and Ingold and Hallam have significant generative potential when applied in the context of making site-specific, interactive performance. The decision to frame this chapter in the way outlined above is further informed and underpinned by MRT’s conviction that representations are not fixed and static entities that reflect a world from which they themselves are detached, but rather can be considered as performative gestures put forth into the self-same world from which they arise. As a result, this chapter was written in the midst of (and attempts to capture) the affective swirl of nervousness, anxiety, excitement, dread, joy, fear, stress, frustration, pride, relief, exhaustion and so on that performance-making and performing can stir up. In doing so, it offers an account of a period of embodied, emergent and apprehended learning that could only have been arrived at through *doing*.

The writing style adopted in this chapter is intended to constitute an effective – and affective – way of documenting the work. This is supplemented, where necessary, by a small and carefully selected collection of photographs of the performances, each taken by an audience member during *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection* on 35mm film, using a single-use camera given to them at the outset to share amongst themselves. The photographs are included for illustrative purposes only, where they are deemed to add significant context for the reader with regards to particular locations or moments that feature prominently in the chapter’s analysis of the work. For further images of the performance, and a full transcript of one of the performances, readers may refer to the thesis’ appendices.
4.2 From interviews to making

By the beginning of April 2017 I had completed 38 participant interviews, and Wakes Week – the week of village festivities in Hope at the end of June at which I’d been offered the chance to perform the piece – was starting to loom. As described at length in the previous chapter, during the interview process I had wanted participants to respond to their surroundings as freely, openly and spontaneously as possible, in order that I might gather as broad a range of ways of relating to the landscape as I could. Whether as a direct result of the use of walking interviews or not, this breadth of responses had indeed been achieved. I ended up with a huge variety of facts, memories, stories, tall tales, statistics, family histories, anecdotes, hearsay, gossip and folklore on topics as diverse as cement, farming, parking, traffic, leisure, tourism, religion, gender, marriage, social change, walking, climbing, money, economics, race, Brexit, Donald Trump, land management and more. I was now faced with the formidable task of processing this material and giving it some semblance of shape. I listened back to over 33 hours of interview recordings and made extensive handwritten notes. I sketched a rough map of Hope on A1 paper and scribbled all over it with stories, memories, facts, figures and turns of phrase that related to specific places in the village. As I started to think concertedy about how these performances were going to manifest, the main questions in my head were as follows:

• How do I begin to do justice to the huge amount of material I have gathered, and to those people who gave their time to be interviewed, all of whom will be hoping their stories and memories make an appearance in the show?

• Faced with such an overwhelming amount of material, how do I begin to remember it all? (Or even half of it. Or even a quarter of it.)

• If I can’t remember it all, how can I hope to draw on it in a performance which has to be at least partially improvised?

• Given that some of the people I interviewed have lived in the village for twenty or thirty (or in some cases as many as seventy) years, how can I begin to presume to tell them anything they don’t already know? If each performance is attended by ten experts on Hope (which, given that everyone is an expert on their own life, is in some ways inevitable), what role can I usefully play as the performer, or facilitator, or tour guide?
Faced with this set of questions – or, as they seemed at times, insurmountable obstacles – the constant I returned to time and time again was the central focus of the research project: *improvisation*. I had, to some extent, lost sight of the initial research questions of the project. In fact, when I looked them up sometime that Spring, they seemed almost foreign to me. Although it wasn’t always articulated as sharply or precisely in my mind as it would eventually come to be, the question-shaped anchor to which I was tethered during the making process for this performance went something like this:

*How might improvisation help me to make a performance that draws on, frames and makes explicit the multiplicity of perspectives, knowledges and ways of dwelling that coexist in this village?*

There were times when a facetious voice in my head would answer: *it can’t*. In many ways it would have been easier to sift through the material I had collected, collate some stories and memories that complemented or juxtaposed with one another, and carefully construct a guided-tour-style performance which sought to demonstrate the village’s history and variety. That’s also what many Hope residents probably expected and wanted me to do. But for reasons already laid out in this thesis, I remained committed to the idea that improvisation might offer something different, and could be used as a strategy for responding to a site’s provisionality, contingency and ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey, 2005: 140). There was something very exciting to explore here, I thought, about improvisation’s potential for *opening up* possibilities. After all, Doreen Massey suggests that ‘for the future to be open, space must be open too’ (2005: 11-12), whilst Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold argue that ‘far from attempting to bring closure to the world, or to tie up loose ends, improvisation makes the most of the multiple possibilities they afford for keeping life going [...] for the world will not be closed, and goes its own way regardless of what we may have to say about it’ (2007: 15). This notion of *opening up* is both a political and an aesthetic one (of course, the two are inextricably linked). In terms of politics, openness in this context implies an unpredictability of present and future that is at odds with an authoritarian desire to close down or restrict certain behaviours. And in terms of its aesthetic qualities, openness here refers to a sense that within the performance itself, the audience is free to create a set of circumstances or narratives that might not previously have been foreseeable, and which could lead away from the more conservative, sedimented narratives that emerged during the fieldwork. Massey’s reading of space, Hallam and Ingold’s
reading of improvisation and my own practitioner’s instinct when making site-specific performance, then, are all open and future-orientated. Rather than create a pre-designed, pre-scripted guided tour around the village – however much the content of such a tour might draw on some of these notions – there was something in the form of improvisation, I thought, that could gesture in a more committed way towards Hope’s openness, unpredictability and throwntogetherness. But what exactly this performance might look like, I didn’t yet know.

I returned again and again to Tim Ingold’s conviction that ‘to improvise is to follow the ways of the world, as they open up, rather than to recover a chain of connections, from an end-point to a starting-point, on a route already travelled' (2007: 97). How could I make a piece of performance that would follow the ways of the world as they open up, and that would allow (or even force) me as the performer to do the same? And in the spirit of acknowledging the participants’ expertise in their own lives, how could I make something that allowed for this without attempting to “teach” or “enlighten” those attending, particularly regarding a topic – Hope – about which they would almost certainly know more than me?9

Thinking through these questions, it became increasingly clear that what I needed to create was not a script, or a show, but a structure. When I’d interviewed Mike Pearson over Skype at the outset of this project some 18 months before, he explained that over the last few years his work had been increasingly exploring what he called ‘open frameworks’ for performers to work within (Personal Communication, 25th November 2015). He went on:

> What I’m talking about is task-orientated work which is taking account of a number of random factors, one being the audience. [In] Brith Gof [...] in 1997, [...] we were interested in involving the audience, actually giving the audience a role. We did three or four productions in the so-called Arturius Rex project where we were dividing the audience, either by language or by predilection [...] But what we did in Prydain – I suppose with a certain amount of arrogance – we went into a production without really knowing what we were going to do. So although we had a very schematic structure for the show, at the very beginning of the show we ask for (I think) forty volunteers, and as the show went along, we were teaching groups of performers what was coming next, minutes before they actually performed it. Now that’s

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9 I think a lot of this, in retrospect, had to do with issues of “entitlement”, and of not feeling entirely justified in to making this piece in a place where I wasn’t from, or to which I didn’t “belong”. Up to and even during some of the performances, I experienced a persistent sense of having to earn the right to make this show, and a desire or obligation to please those who would be in attendance, even though I knew that my priority first and foremost had to be to the emerging research.
quite different from notions of improvisation one may have, but I think that that’s about working within structures really, as opposed to “making-it-up-as-one-goes-along” – so leaving very open frameworks so we know, or did know, the sort of effect we wanted to bring about, but it was in the moment that we were bringing it about. (ibid)

Although Pearson hasn’t written at length about improvisation specifically, it is clearly built into the structure of his work in fundamental ways. And he provides here an interesting blueprint for performance-making: an attempt to design a schema, structure or framework for performance, and then allow it to be filled at least in part by the audience, and by their response to their immediate surroundings in the moment of performance. Of course, there is a long history of this kind of structure in performance, dating back at least as far as the Happenings of the 1960s. What renders the work Pearson alludes to as distinctive is an attempt to incorporate such structures into the tradition of contemporary site-specific performance-making, in order to mobilise them within an exploration of the performance's locale. I wondered if might be possible to take this further still, encouraging audience participation in an even more open-ended sense in order that those attending might have a significant bearing on the ultimate direction of the performance, both figuratively and literally.

I began to think, too, of Ingold’s suggestion that ‘telling a story...is not like unfurling a tapestry to cover up the world, it is rather a way of guiding the attention of listeners or readers into it’ (2000: 190). As Ingold argues, creating a piece of art (whether expressly in the form a story or otherwise) is not an act of covering up or clothing the world with meaning, for the landscape beneath is not a fixed entity waiting to be represented. Rather, it ‘has both transparency and depth: transparency, because one can see into it; depth, because the more one looks the further one sees' (ibid: 56). He concludes, therefore, that 'far from dressing up a plain reality with layers of metaphor, or representing it, map-like, in the imagination, songs, stories and designs serve to conduct the attention of performers into the world, deeper and deeper, as one proceeds from outward appearances to an ever more intense involvement' (ibid). I returned again and again to this image of an artwork guiding the attention of both performer and audience further into the world. What made the idea particularly compelling in relation to site-specific performance was that rather than creating a hermetically sealed fiction and throwing it over the existing site like a gauze – requiring suspension of disbelief, or an engagement with an imagined version of the location – Ingold’s formulation would enable the work to respond to the site here, today, now, as it actually and materially manifested from one moment to the
next. This, I thought, made it particularly apt for an investigation into the possibilities of improvisation.

As part of my desire to avoid attempting to cloak Hope in a fictional veil, I began to consider what my own role within the piece might look like. Having spent around nine months cultivating and nurturing relationships with many residents of the village via the fieldwork, my gut feeling was that I should appear in the final performances as myself, as opposed to in character. For, in essence, my own presence within the village (certainly for me, but also for those whom I'd interviewed) was qualitatively just as much a part of the village as any other. In discussing site-specific performance Pearson has suggested that, rather than sitting outside of or atop its location as a distinct entity that reflects back on it from a position of remove, it does in fact 'becomes a local feature of, and an active contribution to, the distinctiveness of a region' (2010: 32). Arguably, the same can be said of geographic fieldwork. The time I had spent in Hope, the almost 40 interviews I'd conducted with residents and my presence at Historical Society talks and so on were now a part – however small – of the village's fabric. I was not arriving in Hope to observe, unseen, from a distance. Quite the opposite, my engagement with the village had been deeply relational, interpersonal and improvisational. Here, there are strong parallels too with MRT's conviction that representations are performative gestures put forth within and alongside the world from which they arise, rather than distinct forms that reflect upon it from some abstracted, discursive plane. Having conducted the fieldwork in Hope, I felt that the same could be said of the research processes which generate such representations.

Considering all this, my instinct dictated that for me to take on a fictional character in performance would not only be reductive, but might risk throwing away much of the hard work I had already put in. If someone I had interviewed came along to one of the performances, I wanted to be able to acknowledge and draw on the conversations we'd had previously; to make connections between things that different people attending the performances had told me; and to admit as much of my own positionality into the work as possible. The task, then, was simple if not straightforward: to create a structure for a performance that would be as open as possible and create the conditions for the sharing of a story; that would invite the audience to take an active role in shaping the emerging work; that would require me and the performance to follow the ways of the world, as they open up; and that would enable me to appear in the piece as myself.
4.3 Decisions, decisions

In the end, the idea that eventually turned into the final piece came from a conversation with my supervisor, Steve Bottoms, during a meeting on the 20th April 2017. Feeling totally stuck in the midst of the questions listed above, I’d decided that the only way for the performance to fulfil all the necessary criteria was to frame the piece in terms of my relationship with Hope, and how that had changed as I’d gone through the process of carrying out interviews. *I was standing here when so-and-so told me such-and-such, and it really changed the way I thought about x, y, z.* This could then be used as a way of opening up a discussion between me and the audience about the landscape, and different ways of thinking about it. I had requested an informal supervision with Steve to brainstorm ideas for the practice, and put this suggestion to him. *I’m not convinced that’s the best way to go,* he quite rightly advised. *If you’ve spent nine months interviewing residents of Hope, don’t you need to make a piece about them? They’ll probably be turning up to the performance eager to see how you’ve taken their contributions on board and how you’re going to show the material back to them. How is it going to look if you disappear off and come back with a show all about yourself?* Of course, he was right. I ran through the criteria for the performance out loud again. The piece, we realised, needed to be a game about them. Various ideas were mooted, before it was suggested – playing on the idea of *Wakes* and *Wakes Week* – that the piece itself might be a wake of some kind, a rite to remember a former member of the village. Steve went on: *Perhaps you could skeletally sketch a number of possible characters – a cement worker, a farmer, a local historian, for example – and let the audience decide which one they want to remember that day.* It was evident to me more or less immediately that this was the beginning of a solution. Further, I had also made a show a couple of years before in an abandoned Woolworths in Sheffield which had paid tribute to a fictional former employee of the store; this new practice would thus have a pleasing sense of continuity with the site-specific work I had already made.

I left the supervision feeling galvanised. The idea of a ceremony for a fictional former villager ticked all the boxes: it would enable me to create a fixed structure, within which the audience

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10 Throughout this chapter, quotations from me and others that appear in the body of the text in italics are not necessarily their exact words, but rather my faithful attempt to represent the gist of what they said as closely as possible.
could imaginatively contribute and build a life story according to their own memories and desires; it would allow me to appear as myself and acknowledge my own outsiderness in Hope, but in a theatrical role as leader of proceedings; and it would require me to be highly attuned to what was going on around me, to respond in the moment to whatever the audience created and, ultimately, to follow the ways of the world as they opened up. I also wanted to test the idea that mobile performances might admit a greater degree of improvisation and porosity into the work. As recounted in the previous chapter, the walking interviews conducted as part of the project’s fieldwork had not resulted in the spontaneous, more-than-representational and affective responses I had envisaged and hoped for. Yet I remained curious to see whether a group scenario, in which no-one had sole control over the route of the walk, might have the potential to jog people out of more fixed and rehearsed narratives of place, encouraging them instead to respond to what was actually emerging in front of them from one moment to the next.

Less than a week later I discussed the idea further with Katy Vanden, the producer of Cap-a-Pie—a theatre company based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, with whom I’ve been collaborating since 2013. She suggested a number of ideas which seemed to add further weight to the emerging notion of a ceremony. Perhaps the ceremony is a long-standing part of Wakes Week. Perhaps the person being remembered has made a particularly special or notable contribution to village life. Perhaps there are a number of traditions, rites, rituals and practices that accompany the ceremony (that could be fun, I thought). Maybe you could introduce the piece out of character, so people would know exactly what the game was to begin with. Also, think about how the piece can be constructed so as not to conflict factually with the audience’s experience of the village – this, she elaborated, meant adding to their reality, not changing it. Maybe the ceremony is led by a different person each year, and this year you’ve been invited.

I was getting excited. I could have a lot of fun creating an elaborate, playful ceremony that would clearly flag up for the audience that this was a game which we were all entering into together. The weight of tradition (this being a time-honoured ceremony) would lend everything a helpful gravitas, and the fact that I had been invited to lead the ceremony this year despite my limited knowledge of Hope would cleverly mirror the real dynamic here, with me as slightly intimidated outsider seeking validation from experts at the same time as trying to take charge. I started to write. I wrote, and wrote and overwrote: great passages of text, addresses to the
congregation, lengthy explanations of what the ceremony was, who I was, what they could expect over the next hour or so, and even what the history of Wakes Week was from the introduction of Christianity to Britain through to the present day; it was highly verbose, almost buffoonish text. Below is an extract of the first draft:

Before we begin the ceremony, it’s probably also worth mentioning that if you’re looking for an expert on matters historical, rural, social, economic, geographical, geological, archaeological, agricultural, manufactural, natural historical or mythical, you’re out of luck – you’ve come to the wrong man. In fact, many of you will know much more about Hope than I can ever hope to, built up over years of research or a lifetime living here, so if, during the course of this ceremony, there’s information I get wrong, or something I fail to mention that you think might be of interest to the group (which is inevitable), please do feel free to interrupt, contradict or contribute at any point, although I ask that you keep those contributions within the spirit of the ceremony. Reverent.

And so it went on. I was giddy. I had found (or been offered) a structure for the show that would allow me to express and give form to every insecurity I had about creating a performance in Hope, my own lack of knowledge and my perceived lack of entitlement, and I was running with it.

I shared the first draft, along with the prologue above (about the photograph), with Soraya, my long-time collaborator. I like the prologue; it’s open and honest and accounts for your own personal connection to Hope. But after that almost everything you say is a way of apologising for yourself. Audiences don’t want to go to a performance and see someone who doesn’t think they have a right to be there, they want to be given confidence and presented with something they can invest in. There’s too much bluster, too much business and it doesn’t really feel like you.

It was an invaluable insight. Sitting in isolation writing reams of text for performance in the room I had been offered the use of by one of the participants in the research, I had written a script which presented a façade – a hapless and apologetic version of myself that wasn’t really me at all, all jokes and asides and self-deprecation. I worked at writing less.

This session of working on the piece with Soraya also threw up another key element in the final performance: the use of an old Guess Who? board. Having jumped over the obstacle of what

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11 Guess Who? is a popular children’s game created in 1979, in which two players are faced with a rack featuring 24 tiles, each of which sports the cartoon image and first name of a different fictional person. The tiles can also
the show might be with the help of Steve, I was now faced with what seemed like an equally daunting (and at times unsolvable) dilemma: how would it work? How would the person being remembered get chosen? In keeping with the idea of an open framework, I really wanted this aspect of the piece to remain as undeveloped as possible prior to each performance. I said as much to Soraya. In an ideal world, I want the audience to do all of the work. I don’t want to be responsible for any of the content. I don’t want to have a Plan B in case they don’t participate. I want there to be (in fact I think there needs to be) a possibility that the show could just fail. It’s got to be up to the audience, that they get out of it what they put into it, and the potential risks and rewards for them should be as high as possible.

Well, said Soraya, then that’s what you need to do. I don’t recall exactly how the idea of Guess Who? came up, but it was certainly Soraya’s. I remember her saying: I just keep thinking about all those people in rows, all those faces that you don’t really know anything about; it was like a flash of lightning that illuminated everything. First and foremost, it gave a further open framework into which the audience could contribute the content. They were free to choose any character they wished, which would demonstrate to them from the very outset that this performance was unpredictable, unrepeatable and improvised, and that even I didn’t know what was going to happen. It offered 24 different faces about which nothing was known, establishing a name and a face for the group to work with but leaving every other decision about that person’s life up to them. It would demonstrate at the very start of the performance that this is a game that we are all playing together concerning a fictional person that we can build together and in any way we like. And it also had an element of nostalgia for audience members of a certain age. To put the cherry on the cake, the theme for that year’s Wakes Week was childhood games. I could begin to picture, for the very first time – albeit in a still indistinct and somewhat hazy way – that this performance might actually work.

At the same time as all this, I was walking around and around and around Hope trying to find the best locations to take an audience. For a number of reasons, I decided that the performance would begin at Hope Sports Club and its adjacent playing field. In terms of logistics, the Sports Field is a fairly central location that is very well known in the village, making it a straightforward place for the audience to congregate. It is also the locus of much of the Wakes Week activity, be moved so that they lie face down, obscuring the faces.
housing the marquee and hosting several show-piece events, such as the crowning of the Wakes Queen. This, I hoped, would further enhance the sense of occasion surrounding the performance. Finally, the playing field is also a flat and reasonably exposed spot which affords views across to the two peaks that overlook the village – Win Hill and Lose Hill – as well as an aspect on the Church spire and the cement works. I doubted that anyone would notice these latter features of the starting location, but they were somehow pleasing to me.

The cemetery also appealed immediately. Several participants in the research had taken me there and said things like all the families are here, or this is where we all end up. The possibility struck me that you could live your whole life in Hope and then end up in the ground 10 minutes’ walk from the centre of the village. There seemed a completeness, a self-containedness about the cemetery’s proximity to the rest of the village. It also felt like a quiet, contemplative place to bring an audience; and for obvious reasons it chimed strongly with the idea of remembering and recounting a person’s life. The cemetery was a given, then. Where else should I take people? Again and again I looked over the map I had made of the village. Where were Hope’s hotspots as Steve Bottoms had put it during one of our supervisions – the specific places within the village at which the trajectories of many different stories-so-far might intersect? Well, farming and cement were the two obvious themes that ran through many of my interviews. Walking and re-walking the village, I could only find one place that offered a clear view of the cement works, and it just so happened to be next to a field of sheep. Great, I thought, that’s another definite stop. The spot, next to a gate just beyond the village in the direction of Castleton, had the further bonus of not being somewhere that many people would normally go – or stop – in their daily lives; it certainly isn’t somewhere you’d imagine ending up on a guided tour of Hope. The peculiarity of this site, I thought, would play into the idea of imbuing the performance with a sense of verfremdungseffekt. Finally, I thought it best – or possibly just necessary – to take the audience into the very centre of the village. Containing the church, the shops, the pubs, the crossroads, a number of the oldest houses and buildings in Hope – this was both the historical and the social hub of the village. This is where so much of the village’s social relations are made manifest, where many of the fleeting, unplanned meetings between people occur; where hellos are exchanged, daily routines acted out; gossip swapped; and where everybody gets to see what newspaper everybody else buys. I felt that neglecting to explore this part of village life in the performance would be a real missed opportunity.
As for the other stops on the route, I decided it would be best for them to be determined by the audience each night. For whilst I wanted to create a rough outline for the performance – a beginning and ending that might shape the piece dramaturgically – I felt that between these fixed points some degree of flexibility and openness was important. By choosing the locations for the beginning and end of the performance, I would be able to set up the piece in a certain way in order to establish the appropriate mood and sense of occasion, before opening it outwards to audience suggestions. I would then be able to round off the performance in order to give a sense of closure and completeness to proceedings. On a very basic level, this open structure would demonstrate categorically to the audience that what was happening was indeed improvised; this would enable the performance to anticipate and thereby sidestep the kind of accusations levelled at Moreno that his work must really be planned out in advance despite its claims to improvisatory status. More than this, though, I was strongly drawn to the idea of creating a performance that held open gaps within an otherwise fixed framework. Thinking back to the literature on improvisation which I'd spent the previous year reviewing, I was reminded of the assertion by Derrida, Landgraf and others that improvisation is not a matter of eliminating rules and structures in order to create a completely open, uninhibiting space. Rather, the opposite is true; perhaps paradoxically, it is the constraints that make improvisation possible in the first place. Here, then, the performance would begin and end in the same location each night, but between these points we might end up almost anywhere in the village, depending entirely upon the audience's suggestions. The structure for the show, then, goes like this.

1. **Sports Club**;
   - Prologue
   - Introduction
   - Housekeeping (including handing out a disposable camera and a sound recorder for the audience to document the show)
   - Ceremony commences & rite (Guess Who?)
   - Explanation of the Ceremony
   - Discussion of X's voice, mannerisms and general demeanour

2. **Gate outside village, looking towards cement-works**
   - X's job/history in Hope & understanding of the landscape

3. **House(s) of X (location to be determined by the audience)**
   - Discussion of their domestic life
4. Centre of the village?

Depending on time, a discussion of the village’s “official” history and the shops frequented by X)

5. X’s Favourite spot (location to be determined by the audience)

Toast to X

6. Primary school?

Depending on time, discussion of school days

7. Cemetery

Ending/Epilogue

4.4 Fine tuning

There is a week to go before the first performance. The Guess Who? board, which I ordered from Ebay, has arrived. I open it to find that of the 24 people pictured 19 are men, and all except one are white. There’s a dilemma. Do I stick with the characters included in the game, or come up with a selection of alternative people so as to have a greater gender and racial balance? The latter option would, in itself, cause a number of problems. In inventing new names and faces, would I try to accurately reflect the demographic of the village in terms of age, race, gender and so on? Would I try to choose names and images that mirror the high number of affluent, middle class retirees in the village, for example, or aim for names that sound more “working-class” (whatever they might be)? And would I try to avoid names which I know belong to real residents of Hope?

Keeping the board as it is avoids the problematic process of trying to invent individuals myself, but raises the likelihood that most of the individuals remembered during the ceremonies will be men. There is something further to consider here. It dawns on me that the Guess Who? board is itself a historical artefact of a particular time and place, and as such reflects a certain set of social relations in which men – and male narratives – are prioritised over women (to say nothing of trans or non-binary experiences). This weighting towards male stories, it occurs to me, is not dissimilar to the way in which the history of Hope was conveyed to me during my research. On more than one occasion, amongst long term couples whom I sought to interview
it was the man who was deemed to be the bearer of the “history” of the village, despite both parties having spent the same amount of time living in Hope. Words to the effect of “you’ll be wanting to speak to my husband about that”, or “my husband knows about that sort of thing” were not uncommon, despite my best efforts to make it clear that I wanted to collect a broad range of lived experiences of the village. In light of all this, and in part to avoid entering into the knotty process of coming up with 24 alternative Hope residents with whom to populate Guess Who?, I decide instead leave the game as it is.

As well as the Guess Who? board, I now have what I think is pretty much a full script for the performance. I am on the seventh draft. Other than the supervision with Steve and the session with Soraya – both of which brought major breakthroughs – I have worked in complete isolation. I have written and re-written and learnt word for word a number of set-pieces, each of which is to be delivered at a different location in the village before opening up a conversation with the audience. Having more or less finalised the script, I have two days to work on the piece with Soraya, and a nagging feeling that I should also try to do at least some kind of dress rehearsal before the first performance, just so I’ve had the chance to go through the show once, speak it all out loud in front of an audience and practice dealing with their responses. I get into costume and stand in front of Soraya in the garden of the participant whose writing room I have been using (we figure that since the piece is to be performed outdoors, it’s a good idea to get used to what this feels like). I start to speak the prologue, and then the introduction. Everything feels wrong. In practising alone in the writing room, I have developed (and then eventually come to write the script in) an unnatural, lilting rhythm, pausing after every few words. I am speaking as if delivering a sermon to a faceless group of a hundred people, bestowing every word with a gravitas it doesn’t deserve. I feel rigid, and fixed, and distant and distinctly un-improvisatory. My voice doesn’t sound like my own. I’m having trouble actually hearing the words you’re saying, Soraya says, it’s so oddly rhythmic that it’s making me tune out. Try just speaking it to me normally. Don’t try to deliver it to an imaginary crowd, even if that imaginary crowd is only ten people. Just speak it directly to me. I try again. I try to shake off the patterns I’ve fallen into whilst speaking this text over and over again to myself, or to the wall. It’s a little better. My eyes keep darting to one side of Soraya and the other, as if she is part of a small group. Each time I catch myself doing this I try to stop, to speak just to her. I go through all the set pieces: the prologue; the introduction; the game of Guess Who?; the bit where we start discussing the person to be remembered that day; the bit about the landscape; and what they
did for work, and how long they lived in Hope; the bit about the history of the village and which shops they frequented; the bit about their house; the bit about their favourite spot in the village; and then the ending. This time, Soraya can at least make out what I’m saying, and she likes the script. But it is definitely a *script*. It is wordy and poetical and still delivered in an oratorical, unnatural style. I feel like an actor. I do the prologue again, trying to make it as conversational as I can. It sounds good, but I’m no longer sure it fits. *I just thought it would be a nicer way of starting the piece than saying something out of character before we begin,* I say. Out of character? What character are you playing? I say: *I didn’t mean character, I just meant before the piece begins,* but it’s a telling slip of the tongue. Despite my intentions, my manner in performance is almost unrecognisable from the everyday me; I am hammily playing some kind of priest, and it’s getting in the way.

At this point, a week before the first performance, whilst the self-deprecation and bluster of the first draft have gone, I am still attempting to convince the audience that this ceremony is an age-old tradition in Hope, and that I’m the first person not-from-the-village to have been invited to lead it. There is a village poem which, tradition dictates, must be read out loud by the congregation before the ceremony begins. There are a number of other fictional devices. The photos and audio recording of the ceremony are for the Hope Village Archive. The whole structure of what we are about to do – this ceremony – has been handed down year after year. Most of the lines in the introduction start with *as many of you will know,* or *for those of you who have never been to one of these ceremonies before.* Astute as ever, Soraya says: *The problem is, there’s an inconsistency. On one level, there’s the fictional person being remembered by the congregation, and the fiction of that – the framework and mechanics of how that’s done – is completely explicit and exposed, it’s out in the open for everyone to see. But then there’s this whole other layer of fiction that you’re not acknowledging: the fiction that this ceremony has been going on for years, the fiction of the village poem (which, actually, you’ve written). You’re asking people to engage not with the real Hope, but with a version of Hope in which this ceremony has been a part of Wakes Week for fifty or a hundred years, and that’s a slightly different proposition. Why can’t the ceremony just be something that you’ve made up, especially for Hope, especially for Wakes Week? That way, you wouldn’t be asking for a suspension of disbelief; you have actually made up a ceremony, and we are all actually going to perform it together, here and now, so then everything you say can be true.* It feels like an epiphany.
The next day, the Sunday, we leave the garden and head towards the Sports Club. I’ve dropped the prologue, and go straight into the introduction. The trouble is, I haven’t had a chance to re-write the script properly, let alone re-learn it. There are children playing on the swings and I get distracted, imagining what I would do if they called out or interrupted during the performance. I’m doing my best to conflate the latest draft with the new ideas from yesterday that the ceremony is acknowledged as my own invention, but I’m struggling to remember my lines whilst simultaneously trying to re-write them in my head. I keep stopping, and apologising, and starting again. *It’s fine,* Soraya says, *just try to speak it as naturally as you can, to me. Just be yourself, be more casual, be more matter-of-fact about everything.* I do, and it’s better. I feel like I’ve shed a layer since yesterday, stripped off the fictional trappings I was getting caught up in, but the lines are still a stumbling block. *If you were actually leading a ceremony,* Soraya says, *which, as we talked about yesterday, you are…would you even have a script to begin with?* I say: *No, I’d just have a kind of structure in mind, or some bullet points. I mean, I might have one or two phrases I’d definitely want to get in, but I wouldn’t write and learn it word for word.* Soraya says: *Well then. Another epiphany – a breakthrough equal both to the one with Steve and the previous one with Soraya about Guess Who?*. From now on, I’m going to think about the ceremony not as a performance or a show, but as a ceremony – and, perhaps more importantly, as an improvisation rather than a script. I’m going to prepare for it as I’d prepare for a ceremony. I’m going to refer to it as a ceremony when I’m talking to my housemates. I’m going to let go of the script I’ve spent five weeks working on and try to deliver the whole thing off the cuff, because if I was actually conducting the Hope Ceremony of Recollection, which I am, that’s what I’d do. So that’s what I’ll do.

Additionally, this new approach might help me to become as loose and free as possible in the necessarily improvised exchanges between me and the participants, which will form a significant part of the ceremony. Losing the carefully worded script will, hopefully, blur the distinction between the set-pieces and the conversations that follow, allowing me to speak in the same register throughout the ceremony, rather than dropping in and out of an obviously scripted (and rather stilted) mode of delivery. This breakthrough strikes me as being one that is expressly about improvisation, the spaces that necessitate it, and the differences between a script and a structure. Of course, Derrida argues that even reading text verbatim is an improvisatory act, and Ingold and Hallam suggest that there is no categorical difference
between making it up as you go along and attempting to follow a pre-formed plan. The issue, then, concerns the extent to which one’s immediate context and surroundings necessitate improvisation in order to complete a task successfully. In the case of the ceremony – during which I will be responding to audience suggestions off-the-cuff in order to elicit further contributions and draw links between the various strands that emerge – it will clearly be of great importance for my manner and disposition to be as deliberately improvisatory as possible. Part of this, I am now realising, means working from a structure or framework, rather than from a script.

I am starting to feel that the ceremony is taking shape in accordance with Tim Ingold’s assertion that ‘telling a story is not like unfurling a tapestry to cover up the world, it is rather a way of guiding the attention of listeners or readers into it’ (2000: 190). Thanks to two days’ work with Soraya, every element of *unfurling a tapestry to cover up the world*, in terms of creating a fixed fictive scenario, has now been removed. All that remains is a ceremony, which I have actually created, and which I will actually lead five times next week, during each of which the congregation will create a fictional former resident of the village. Rather than presenting them with a fully formed fiction that sits across the village like a blanket, covering up everything beneath it and presenting instead an alternative version of the site, the ceremony will hopefully guide their attention further into the landscape that is already there. In keeping with the aims of MRT, rather than holding up a fully-formed representation of Hope, the ceremony will instead constitute a performative gesture that aims to invite and inculcate a deeper affective engagement with its surroundings. The only pretence in all of this, the only suspension of disbelief remaining, is the creation of the person itself, and that comes in the form of what is expressly a game that we are actually playing together. I feel like a weight has been lifted.

4.5 Leading the ceremony

On Thursday 22nd June at 6pm, two days before the first ceremony, I have a practice run. The audience of four (as many people as would fit in my 1995 Rover 216), all from Sheffield, wait outside Hope Sports Club. On Saturday, I tell them, I’ll emerge from inside the Sports Club, but today it’s locked, so I’ll just go round the corner and when I come back, it’ll begin. As I turn my back and walk away, immediately this feel odd. I have just driven them out to Hope and now I’m disappearing round the side of the Sports Club so I can “make an entrance”. Not, I
immediately realise, what I would do if I was really leading a ceremony.

But once I return, it feels good to speak the words out loud to more than just one person. I feel stilted, and awkward, and stiff, and nervous, but I manage to talk to them, delivering everything I say directly to one or other of the four, not imagining a bigger crowd or slipping back into what had become my default “delivering a sermon” style. It feels to me – and, I think, to all of us – that there is a lot of unnecessary stage business at the beginning. The camera, the sound recorder, the poem: it feels like too much has to happen before we can get on with the ceremony itself, but when we do, broadly speaking, it works. Guess Who? goes just as planned (the first time I have ever tried it with a group). It feels sort of special. They choose Joe. We start to build a picture of who he was. They are listening to each other, building on what each other says. When someone offers a new detail or impression of Joe’s life I paraphrase back to them their words to make sure I have understood them correctly, before opening it out to the group – is that how you all remember Joe? Even at this early stage, it feels at times as though Joe is really emerging amongst us. We go to the gate that looks across to the cement works and discuss different understandings of the landscape; we plot the biography of Joe’s life; we go to his house, to the centre of the village, to his favourite spot, to the cemetery. The whole thing is long, around two hours. By the end, it feels like we have built something together, and there are certain moments – a lengthy, charged pause after we toast Joe as we sit together on his favourite bench looking up at the trees – that feel particularly poignant. But there is still something not quite right, something a little heavy-handed in my delivery. The set-pieces which initiate the conversation in each location still feel very rote, both to me and, as I learn later over a drink in the pub, to my four friends. For some, this isn’t a problem. One of them in particular says they found this a useful device for shaping the piece. It felt as though we would come in and out of the performance, he says. At each stop it felt like we were in a show, and then as we walked between the stops it felt like you’d come out of character, which I quite liked. It felt as though the show appeared and disappeared, and that had the effect of heightening the moments that felt more concentrated. This wasn’t what I’d had in mind, and after the conversation with Soraya the previous weekend, my heart sinks a bit to hear him describe me as having been in character. Did the rest of you feel as if I was in character? Some did, some didn’t. The things to take forward from the dress rehearsal, then, I decide, are as follows:

• **On the whole, the ceremony works.** The invitation to the congregation is clear, and they’re able to sustain – and invest in – the creation of a fictional person over the course
of the evening, even when they don’t know in advance that that’s what’s going to be required of them.

• My manner in leading the ceremony needs to become more natural. The more I relax, the better it will be.

• I need to let go of the script even more. I need to consciously try to forget it.

• Making an “entrance” feels weird. I should be there to greet the congregation as they arrive.

• There’s still too much faff at the beginning. The camera, the recorder and the rosemary can be given out and explained before the ceremony begins, rather than as “housekeeping” once we’ve set off. The whole “housekeeping” section can go – we can just go straight from the poem into the ceremony.

Overall, I feel good. The ceremony, as it manifests on that Thursday, isn’t quite what I’d wanted to make, but it’s close. And, in the way that often happens when you first present work to an audience, I can at least see now what it is that I’ve made and where it needs tweaking. I feel ready, and excited, to lead it “for real” on Saturday.

* * *

Saturday’s performance makes me feel as though I’ve cracked it. With Soraya’s help, the tone has transformed. Less a funeral now, more a celebration. I feel calmer and more relaxed, more playful and upbeat. I’m not loading the text with false gravitas and melancholy, I’m just speaking it out loud, to the congregation, as myself. Shortly after the Saturday ceremony, I write the following:

The ceremony was enormously enjoyable. It felt natural and gentle and focused. The pauses – at his favourite spot, outside his house, outside the church – felt active and held. It felt as though the congregation was pulling in the same direction, nobody forcing anything, everyone listening to each other, developing each other’s points and suggestions. It felt light, and sad, and spacious and poignant. There were differences of opinion, but nothing clashed. It felt as though a coherent, cohesive
Despite some trepidation at facing a congregation of 11 people from Hope for the first time (Saturday’s only had five people, and only two of those were from Hope), I look ahead to Monday’s ceremony with high spirits.

They are short-lived. On the Sunday evening I receive an email from one of Saturday’s congregation raising the issue of ethics in relation to the ceremony. It was a really stimulating evening, he writes. It made us think differently about the village – enrolling the audience into the commemoration and situating the conversation in the place that was being recalled really worked. But he’s thought about it later, and realised how many of his recollections had focused on one or two real people within the village, and is concerned about what I am going to do with the audio recording and photographs. He is, it just so happens, a university lecturer in geography. The transcript will not be published, I reply next morning to reassure him, and anything I do quote will remain completely anonymous. I thank him for raising the issue, and admit that I find the issue of ethics in the piece very interesting. I further inform him that the Ethics Committee have cleared the performance, and agreed that those attending need not sign disclosure forms in the way that interviewees had needed to. My thesis, I tell him, hinges on the notion that when improvising we are continuously drawing on our previous experiences and our immediate surroundings. Figuring improvisation in this way, I go on, of course it is only natural that Alfie became an amalgamation of real people that the group [...] had known. He replies at 3pm, just two hours before the Monday ceremony. He seems content with my reply, but recommends that I preface each ceremony with a short talk explaining my research. Other audiences later in the week will probably be expecting much more of a guided tour – and rather less a creative and group-led commemoration, he summarises. By introducing what you are going to do with the material at the start, and indeed saying a bit more around how the commemoration might relate to your research, you might even get more buy-in and creative storytelling. I am thrown, and feel defensive. I am determined that I don’t want to begin the ceremony with a talk about my research, or ethics, or why and how I need to record the ceremony. This, I feel, will have the effect of instrumentalising the ceremony for my own research agenda, rather than allowing the congregation to experience and enjoy it at face value. Besides, I am asking everyone’s permission to record, and handing out a slip at the end with
my contact details and some more information about the research in case there are any concerns.

I turn up for Monday’s ceremony with this email exchange buzzing around my head. Coming out of Saturday’s ceremony, the only part I felt might need more attention was the very beginning – I still felt there was work to be done to make the opening more relaxed and informal, to loosen myself up and keep things as fluid and un-stagey as possible. Now I am feeling even less sure of the start. In part because of this, and in part because of the congregation, I find Monday’s ceremony in which we end up remembering Max almost entirely unenjoyable. I presume at the very least that the congregation will enter into the piece in a similar spirit to Saturday’s. Even if I can’t loosen the beginning, I think, the ceremony will surely still be a contemplative, poignant and imaginatively rich experience. I feel flustered and distracted, though, and in some ways it must carry through to how I lead the ceremony. The evening (as I experience it at the time, at least) ends up being a story of wild suggestions; contradictions; refusals to commit to, or even make, decisions; and chit-chat between stops that mean I have to work hard to get people’s attention each time we arrive at a new location. Where Saturday’s congregation had looked to me for guidance, turning expectantly in my direction each time we stopped, this is a louder, less meditative and more unruly group. At the time, this all frustrates me enormously. After Saturday, I had thought that I’d succeeded in making the show I had set out to make. Now everything has been thrown into doubt. I don’t recognise what is happening – speculations by the congregation that Max might have been a career criminal, suggestions about crimes of passion, evasions and diversions when I ask for simple facts about Max’s life. I feel like a supply teacher doing their best to keep a lively class in check, but failing. During the discussion outside Max’s house the atmosphere changes¹², but the moment of contemplation in his favourite spot in the village doesn’t feel as though it’s earned its own existence in the ceremony. I feel as though I’m milking it, trying to force poignancy when in truth we don’t have a shared picture of Max to go on. I am relieved when it’s over, but immediately my mind turns to the next three ceremonies (Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday) with a sense of anxiety. I feel really rattled.

* * *

¹²This section of the ceremony will be discussed at length in the following chapter.
Tuesday is a day off, a chance to reflect on the previous two ceremonies. What had I done so differently last night? Why had the congregation taken on the mission of remembering Max with such a different energy and intention? Or was it just that they were a different group of people, wanting different things from the show? And if that was the case, how could I have encouraged them towards the kind of generative, contemplative, moving experience we’d shared on the Saturday night? I feel frustrated: just when I thought I’d cracked it, it’s all come crashing back down. And at the back of my head, however much I resist it, a voice: *Tomorrow night is The Big One, the night my external examiner is coming, better make sure that’s a good one.*

After a morning of tense reflection, I call Soraya. I tell her everything, about how frustrating and flippant the audience had been, how much I’d had to battle for space and force my leadership on the group, which wasn’t how I’d wanted it to be at all. As ever, she counsels wisely and perceptively. *Isn’t the whole point of improvisation that you don’t know where it’s going to go? If an audience want to create a farcical, or a ludicrous, or even an inconsistent portrait of a person, isn’t your job to let them, to support them, to reflect that back to them? The whole point of this piece is to stage them; to stage Hope. You say to the congregation at the very beginning that “this ceremony is for you”, so you have to let them take it where they want. Imagine if you went to see an improvised show. If someone in the audience made a suggestion you thought was stupid, would you have more respect for the performer if they got into a battle of wills with them, or simply embraced it, followed it, saw where it went? Let go; it isn’t your piece, you’re just leading the ceremony, it’s up to them to fill it however they want.* Of course, this is what I’d spent most of my first year trying to assert in writing. ‘Improvisation,’ as Ingold argues ‘augurs no surprise for the simple reason that it does not endeavour to predict’ (Ingold, 2006: 18-19). I’ve been trying to predict what the audience might do. I’ve even gone so far as to think quite consciously about what I hoped they would do, what atmosphere I hoped the piece would have, how I hoped the congregation would engage.

In discussing the various ways in which theatremakers think about audiences before, during and after a performance, Chris Goode suggests that:

*A theatre work [...] that sets out to act responsively and sensitively in genuinely meeting its audience will have to build into its own operations*
an unusual degree of tolerance for that unpredictability, and to live with – and, ideally, thrive in, be nourished by – its doubt and its not-knowing. (2011b: 466)

For Goode, any act of making theatre necessitates a projection of who the audience might be comprised of, how they might behave and what sort of responses they might have to the work. In striving to create a piece which seeks to have a dialogue (either literal or figurative) with its audience, for him, it becomes possible to have a more open mind about audiences. It is a disposition I have, hitherto, neglected. Rather than remaining open (or tolerant, to use Goode’s term) to whatever the audience might bring, I have instead unconsciously been forming an image of how an ideal audience might participate in the ceremony. Without realising it, rather than truly following the ways of the world as they open up (including the creation of an open dialogue with an unknown audience), the piece has instead been trying to create a very particular atmosphere of focus, reverence and melancholy – in a way which is, I now realise, distinctly un-improvisational.

With the words of Soraya and Tim Ingold ringing in my ears, on Wednesday I endeavour to go into the ceremony for the first time with a real sense of openness, of following whatever might open up, of supporting the congregation in whatever they want to do. It all comes back, I realise, to the very first thing you learn in a class on improvisation: say yes.

* * *

On Wednesday, oddly enough, the congregation chooses Max again. I’ve prepared differently. Rather than driving from Sheffield straight to Hope Sports Club in costume, aiming to arrive around 30 minutes before the ceremony starts, I instead head out to Hope earlier, and give myself over an hour to compose myself and get into costume. During this time, I focus on being open and light and embracing anything that might happen. Rather than thinking about myself in the ceremony – the lines, the intonation – I try to relax. I am excited again, and looking forward to seeing what this group of people will want to create, and how I can best support them in doing it. I think about listening, about attending to them, and to following the ways of the world as they open up. I repeat this phrase out loud to myself as a kind of vocal-warm-up-cum-mantra. Follow the ways of the world as they open up. Follow the ways of the world as
they open up...

The ceremony itself has an early blip. One of the congregation is visibly confused by the game of *Guess Who?* and says loudly: *Who is Max? I don’t know any Max.* I answer, as simply as I can: *Max is the former resident of Hope who we’ll be remembering today.* For a split second I’m not sure if the invitation will translate, if the ceremony will even get off the ground. *Not today, please,* I think, *not in front of my external examiner!* Sure enough, the congregation rallies. Despite atrocious weather, the group proceeds to commit, unhurriedly, to drawing a detailed and sensitive portrait of Max. Members of the congregation contribute naturally and gently – I don’t get the sense that anything is being forced or hunted for too hard. It feels easy on both our parts – mine and the congregation’s. I am enjoying myself, enjoying the recollections of Max and Hope that are being shared, and enjoying the atmosphere given to the ceremony by the heavy rain, which quietens the village and (to me at least) offers a kind of poignancy to proceedings. I write afterwards:

> A generous and focused and supportive group, all building something together. Members of the congregation I hadn’t expected to participate getting involved. All contributions feeling natural, supported. People even being willing to adjust their own suggestions: “oh, I must have been wrong about him working on the dams then”.
> Pleasure at no-one being bothered about the rain. An open, held, reflective experience. Me, feeling under no pressure to be “interesting”; feeling listened to – people listened to the house speech particularly intently. Nodded. Added more details. “Reader’s Digest” “Yes, Reader’s Digest”.

As the ceremony comes to a close and I chat warmly with the congregation, I am already looking forward to the following night.

* * *

Wednesday’s ceremony – focused and contemplative as it was – hadn’t really put my newfound resolve towards openness and *following the ways of the world* to the test. Although, as discussed, I was no longer trying to predict or hope for certain outcomes and atmospheres from the ceremony, Wednesday night’s iteration was very much what I had *originally* had in mind when designing it. Thursday’s, however, is not.
Guess Who? is presented. The tiles are knocked down. We are left with David. Almost immediately, warm remembrances are offered. *He was kind. He was friendly. He had a twinkle in his eye.* I ask: *Is that how everyone remembers David?* One member of the congregation reacts fiercely. *That’s not the David I knew. The David I knew was a quite foreboding figure.* I can’t tell, to begin with, whether or not he is playing the game. Soon enough, it becomes clear: rather than offering contrasting impressions of the same man, the congregation have become fixed on two different Davids, and both are genuinely former residents of Hope. As we leave the Sports Field, I overhear Steve speaking to the two members of the congregation who have quickly emerged as ringleaders: *It sounds like you’re thinking of two different Davids. Are you going to keep them separate or try to merge them somehow?* Even now, I’m still not sure they understood the question. For the first two stops on the ceremony, our time is split between the two Davids. Or *my David* and *his David* as one of the ringleaders repeatedly refers to them (Participant, 28.06.2017). I am fascinated to see where it will go. Only once does one of them ask me, in response to something I say, *Which David?* – to which I hold up the Guess Who? card with David’s face on and say: *This David.*

The two Davids, it transpires, belonged to different generations, and lived in Hope almost exactly consecutively; the first was born in the 1880s and died in the 1960s, the other born in the 1960s. This enables the ceremony to dig deeper into the history of Hope than any of the others, as we discuss in sustained and detailed ways what the village had been like before the railway, before the cement works, before Piano Row and The Marshes and before the Peak Park was established. The two men that have emerged as leaders, each representing a different David, clearly both have thorough and intimate knowledge and memories of the village, which they give of generously and willingly. I still feel as though I’m guiding proceedings, but these two men are providing the vast majority of the content, and I am able easily and confidently to embrace that. *Is this what’s happened on the other ceremonies?* One woman asks me between stops. *No,* I reply, *the other nights have seen the congregation working together imaginatively to build a composite – or, I guess you could say fictional – person. But I’m finding this really fascinating and I can’t wait to see where it takes us.* She grins at me conspiratorially. As the ceremony goes on, other Davids are remembered by the congregation and are duly incorporated. The ceremony has become, as Steve points out, a recollection of proliferating Davids.
This is the first time during any of the ceremonies that members of the congregation are explicitly remembering real people. In all likelihood, various of the other recollections shared on other nights must have been based on people the congregation had really known, but never has it been overt as it is here. I find it strangely moving, hearing people talk so earnestly about these two, then three, then four different men, living in Hope across different eras, linked by their given names. The closing speech takes on a different meaning too as I work, in summarising the recollections we have heard, to conflate the four Davids into some kind of compound, almost mythic, David-figure.

Had the ceremony gone down this road on the Saturday or the Monday night, I’m absolutely sure I would have panicked. No, no, I would have thought, this isn’t what the show is meant to be at all. I would have tried desperately (and quite possibly clumsily) to convince the congregation that they had to amalgamate their Davids into one, or even to forget entirely the idea of contributing memories of people who had actually been called David. This, as became evident, is something they had no intention of doing; it is something, I am almost sure, that hadn’t even crossed their minds as a possibility. They were asked to remember David, so they remembered David. A clear invitation, taken at face value. On this Thursday night, following three days spent trying to nurture in myself a real and genuine openness, a commitment to following the ways of the world as they open up, and not endeavouring to predict, I feel happy and light and excited to support the congregation in doing what they want to do, how they want to do it. It is their ceremony, and I am simply reflecting it back to them.

* * *

The Friday, fittingly, feels in some ways like a compilation of all the previous nights. With the openness and complicity of Thursday’s ceremony still coursing through my veins, I approach the evening with even greater confidence and excitement. For the majority of the ceremony – held this time in memory of Paul – the congregation works together to build a very convincing portrait of a man who worked for most of his life as a wagon driver at the cement works. Committing wholeheartedly to something that is very much of Hope, but without (I feel) resorting to cliché or caricature, Paul’s life is drawn in fascinating detail: a man who had been sociable and interconnected within the village in his early years, but who became increasingly isolated and introverted later in life as the village changed around him, ultimately leaving him
alienated and alone.

The only break from this is when one participant takes us to her own father’s childhood home, a man whose life in Hope was contemporaneous with Paul’s, and who also had the same job. She talks in detail about what this house and this street had been like in the 1920s and 30s, and gives us a candid, generous and moving insight into her father’s early years. She speaks for several minutes, holding court, answering questions from the group, and then says: he wasn’t even called Paul. Anyway, that’s enough from me. And the ceremony carries on as before, with the congregation continuing to collaborate on their portrait of Paul. I’m normally quite shy and retiring, she says to me a little while later, I certainly didn’t think I’d be talking in front of everybody like that. In feeling the desire or need to share her father’s story with the group, she clearly surprised herself. I check in with her to make sure that she is okay, that she hadn’t felt uncomfortable, or put on the spot. Oh no, she reassures me, not at all!

And that’s that. Five ceremonies in seven days. Five different men remembered, or nine if you include the four Davids and the man who wasn’t even called Paul. In simple terms, three of the ceremonies went more or less how I had wanted the ceremonies to go before I gave up wanting them to go in a particular way. Of the other two, one had been frustrating, the other revelatory. The next chapter will take on the task of unpicking, processing and reflecting on the five ceremonies – and the process that created them – in greater detail. From my perspective as a researcher-performer, though, suffice it to say in this chapter that if it hadn’t been for the Monday night – which I found singularly frustrating and demoralising at the time – (and without Soraya’s input), I never would have had the breakthrough that allowed the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday ceremonies to be as open and enjoyable as they were. It is perfectly plausible to imagine a scenario in which all five ceremonies went exactly as I’d imagined to begin with; five focused, poignant, contemplative evenings spent collaboratively building and remembering fictional former residents of Hope. But where would have been the fun in that? I would have been pleased, and relieved, and heartened, of course, that I’d made the show that I’d thought I’d made. But I wouldn’t have learned the most important lesson of all in this: Rather than anticipating, directing or hoping for certain responses (or certain kinds of responses), or for particular atmospheres and moods to be created during the ceremony, my job all along as an improvising performer was simply to follow the ways of the world as they opened up. By moving away from the comfort-blanket of a fixed script and clearly defined
character – both of which were initially adopted through habit as much as design – I had put myself (and the ceremony) in a position to be more responsive to, and engaged with, my immediate surroundings. This allowed me to follow audience contributions without value judgement, in order to end up in unforeseeable places. It was a lesson that shed light directly on the project's central concerns: that responding openly and generatively to one's environment, and to the audience, from one moment to the next requires a genuine commitment to improvisation.
Chapter Five: The Hope Ceremony of Recollection; Findings

5.1 Introduction

In June 2017, I gave five performances of The Hope Ceremony of Recollection. This chapter, written around a year after the event, reflects with a degree of temporal and critical distance on the structure of the ceremony as a whole; the invitation made by the show to those attending; and how the audience took on the task being presented to them each night. It unpacks and analyses how the performances intersected with, and strove to give form to, the research's theoretical and thematic preoccupations: improvisation; memory; landscape; and what Doreen Massey calls place's 'throwntogetherness' (2005, 140). It also outlines a number of the key contributions made by this project to the field of practical theatremaking, and to the literatures on theatre and performance studies and human and cultural geographies.

To summarise, The Hope Ceremony of Recollection was a participatory, site-specific walking performance. It was designed for audiences of around ten people at a time, and required those attending to contribute and share “memories” of a (usually fictional) deceased resident of the village in order to pay tribute to that person. The rationale for creating the ceremony was to test the hypothesis that improvised, site-specific performance might offer practical strategies for drawing on, and giving form to, Doreen Massey's notion that space is 'never finished; never closed', that 'perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (2005: 9). By taking the form of a ceremony to celebrate a deceased resident's life the project sought, in part, to open up and explore the co-constitutive relationship between personal biography and landscape history; between person (or people) and place. As Edward Casey has suggested, 'the relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence [...] but also, more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other [...] in effect, there is no place without self and no self without place. (2001: 684). For Casey, place is predicated on human inhabitation; places only come into being through being dwelt or lingered in – or moved through – by human bodies. As he clarifies elsewhere, 'bodies build places' (1993: 116), not simply through literal acts of architecture and construction, but by inhabiting and traversing those places that have already been built. Casey's reading offers a rich provocation to geographers, theatremakers and others engaged in place-based research, suggesting as it does that human behaviours and their surroundings are more intimately and complexly linked...
than they might first appear. Reflecting directly on his own performance piece *Bubbling Tom*, Mike Pearson poses an open question concerning the particular ways in which conversational, walking, site-specific performance might be able to flesh out this co-constitutive relationship between places and those who dwell in them. In particular, Pearson asks whether such work might be able to offer 'mechanisms for enacting the intimate connection between personal biographies, social identities and the biography of a place' (2010: 56). This became a kind of unofficial research question for the project.

Further to this, writing elsewhere (and again recounting his own work), Pearson has also suggested that the topic of death specifically 'provokes reflection upon past and future, on memory and aspiration, genealogy and inheritance [and] exists as a cluster of conflicting narratives, personal and public, individual and communal, functional and mythical' (2006, 27). For a project seeking to explore, through improvisation, a community's relationship with the place it dwells in, and the complex interrelations between identity and landscape as they unfold with and into one another, a ceremony to recall a deceased person seemed an apposite form to adopt.

As alluded to in one participant's recollection of the ceremony, shared during an interview we conducted almost exactly a year after the event, the performance's form and structure – both dramaturgically and topographically – was highly significant in organising the audience's experience of the evening:

> I personally – and I guess the rest of the group – recalled experiences as we went; we looked on the old show field, and then we came back through the village and into the church, and up Edale Road and all that, so we recalled instances that had happened and then related them to this “Max”. (Participant, 12.06.2018)

Throughout the course of the ceremony, as we processed around the village those attending were invited to recall and share such specifics as the characteristics and temperament of the person in question; when he was born; when he died; where in Hope he had lived; what he did for work; and what his significant relationships were like with friends and family in the village. Crucially, the biography of each ceremonies' subject was then expressly woven into a broader discussion of the history of the village and the subject's place within it. By actively encouraging the audience to talk about the social and economic changes that occurred in Hope during the
person's lifetime, and about their perceptions and affective experiences of such change, the ceremony provided a platform for the group to talk through person and place, biography and history, in a single gesture. In doing so, the project was able to usefully extend existing walking performance work by not only enacting the intimate connection between personal and place histories, but by inviting the audience to come together and stage an improvised conversation that directly addressed the topic in situ. In being mobile, the performance was also able to move around the village along a route determined to a large degree by the audience, according to the specific nature of the person being remembered. In this way, the notion of a guided performance as it manifests in much contemporary walking performance work began to disintegrate, as those attending were invited to remember details of the person's life before directing the group's next move accordingly. As a result, the content of each ceremony and substantial parts of its route were both unforeseeable in and of themselves, and significantly different from the others, giving the performance a genuinely improvisatory relationship with its surroundings.

Throughout the ceremonies, the audience's role in sharing details, memories and anecdotes from the life of the person being recalled was central. Across the performances, every detail established about these former residents of Hope was contributed by audience members. The ceremonies therefore gave form to the notion that ideas are not 'the spontaneous creations of a mind encased in a body' (Hallam and Ingold, 2007: 8), but rather that they 'occur through interactions between people, and interactions between people and environment' (Wiley, 2007:159). The individuals that were remembered as part of each ceremony were brought into being through an act of collective imagination, and whilst the labour of this endeavour was not necessarily spread equally and without friction between the participants, each group nevertheless negotiated its own dynamics to collaboratively create and reflect on a shared portrait of a former Hope dweller. In this way, the project was successful in framing, opening up and concentrating a handful of what Massey might call Hope's stories-so-far. Through its playful structure, The Hope Ceremony of Recollection offered those attending an opportunity to mobilise their own everyday expertise of the village in an act of collaboration, working with other audience members to construct a detailed and affective portrait of the person being recalled, whilst intricately weaving this into the landscape of the Hope valley.

This chapter will work through the ceremony chronologically. Beginning with an interrogation
of the invitation that was extended to the audience, the chapter will then go on to explore the ways in which those attending engaged with the show – particularly in terms of improvisation – and the overall structure of the ceremony as a whole. The chapter will ultimately argue that by engaging a group of residents in a playful, extemporaneous conversation about their surroundings, *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection* was able to open up new perspectives on the complex links between memory, landscape, personal biography and community.

5.2 Inviting the audience in

As alluded to in the introduction to this chapter, the process of inviting audience members into an extended improvisation wasn’t always without friction. Nevertheless, each performance of *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection* saw a group of audience members work together extemporaneously to depict a fictional former resident of the village, with no preparation and no prior knowledge that this would be required of them. Beginning with a discussion of some potential barriers to participation, this section will go on to unpick moments in which improvisation within the ceremony can be seen to have operated successfully, and what can be drawn from this, before exploring what the findings of this project might offer to the critical literature on improvisation more broadly.

Audience demographics for *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection* are provided in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Audience Size (of which Hope Valley residents)</th>
<th>Audience members known to have lived in the Valley since birth</th>
<th>Audience members who had previously participated in research as interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>24.06.17</td>
<td>5 (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>26.06.17</td>
<td>8 (7)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>28.06.17</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.06.17</td>
<td>8 (6)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>41 (32)</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Across the five performances, just over a third of audience members had already been involved with the project as interviewees. This meant they had a level of familiarity with me, and possibly some notions (whether correct or otherwise) about what the performance might entail. However, given the research project’s focus on improvisation, I felt that it was important to keep the structure and content of the ceremony secret from the audience prior to their attendance, in order that they wouldn’t arrive with preconceived ideas about what to say, which areas of the village to visit or what kinds of people to focus on. As a result, those attending came with divergent (or possibly no) expectations of what the performance might entail. Via participant interviews carried out in June 2018 with five audience members who attended the ceremony on different nights, all of whom had previously participated as interviewees, I have since gathered that at least some were expecting some kind of guided storytelling performance, through which I would lead the audience around the village sharing a variety of the anecdotes and memories I had collected during the interview process. Most, I think, had no idea that there would be elements of audience interaction at all, leaving them in a (potentially productive) state of unpreparedness. Whilst this had its distinct advantages in terms of the research, it left a number of audience members initially confused. Indeed, even once I thought that the “game” had been set up, the rules and method of engagement remained unclear to some of those attending. The following are extracts from interviews with audience members conducted around a year after the ceremony:

Me: Well I think, as well, people were expecting much more of a guided tour.

Participant: And that you were going to tell a story...

Participant 2: ...that you were going to tell a story about an imaginary person, that’s what we all – well I thought, yes. (12.06.2018)

***

Participant 3: I’d never been part of any kind of performance art before [...] I remember feeling a little out of my depth, because I didn’t know what to expect. It was obvious that other members of the group did know what to expect. And they jumped in very quickly in choosing the person that we were going to concentrate on. And I wasn’t being very imaginative and I kept thinking “but I don’t know this person!” However, somebody said to
me “you don't have to know them, it's alright, they're just a figure from the past who would have memories of the village” and I said “Oh!” So I was fine after that.

Me: So it needed that clarification from somebody else, that that was the device or the game that was being played?

Participant 3: Yes, yes it did.

[...]

Participant 3: I wasn't sure of what was expected of us [...] I thought that you would be performing, and hadn't realised as the audience, or participants if you like, we would be... and I kept thinking “I ought to keep quiet because this is Gwilym's...” and you were obviously not doing a song and dance act anywhere along the way and were just encouraging us with our memories, but it did take a while for it to sink in I'm afraid! (12.06.2018)

As revealed by both extracts above, even once the game of Guess Who? had been used to select an individual and the idea of a ceremony to celebrate that person had been set up, some audience members still assumed that I would be the one generating the improvised material. And despite my best efforts to indicate, albeit implicitly, what the game of the performance was to be, it wasn’t clear for every audience member even once others had begun to contribute in the way I had anticipated. In addition, the second extract above shows that at least one audience member had the feeling that 'other members of the group [knew] what to expect', despite that categorically not having been the case. This is not necessarily unusual – I have directed interactive shows before in which some of those attending have been utterly convinced that certain other audience members were plants or professional actors. However, it points to something important about the role of prior knowledge and experience in dictating an audience member’s affective response to being invited to improvise (and, indeed, whether they recognise the invitation at all).

The participant responses above demonstrate the general lack of experience of interactive or participatory performance amongst the audience members attending The Hope Ceremony of Recollection. Indeed, it seems to have been a novel and quite unexpected experience for almost all of those who came along:
Participant 3: My abiding memory is that I'd never really experienced anything quite like that before. (12.06.2018)

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Participant 1: None of [us] had done anything like it before. So it was all completely new to everybody.

[...]

Participant 1: This was completely alien to everybody. So to say that you got lots of positive reactions is a very positive thing. Because you were really going out on a limb! Because you could have got a group where [they said] “I don't know what the hell he’s on about”. (12.06.2018)

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Participant 4: It wasn’t what I expected. At all. When we went onto the field and you produced that game to narrow down the name, it was “uh, what’s going off here?”. (12.06.2018)

In conducting these interviews a year after the event, it struck me that most people’s lasting impressions of the performance had as much to do with their own feelings about the novelty of the form as they did about any content that had been thrown up relating to Hope or to the individual being remembered. Given this, it is perhaps no wonder that it took a few moments for some audience members to understand what the rules of the emergent game might be. I had of course been broadly aware that interactive, participatory and improvised performance would probably be outside the experience and comfort zone of most of those attending, but I hadn't factored in quite how 'alien' (Participant 1) the ceremony might feel to them. Intriguingly, one participant was convinced that the struggles of some audience members to get to grips with the ceremony were primarily attributable to generational differences:

Participant 1: Younger people get the idea that they can think freely. [...] This “invent a character” – to our generation it’s completely... Our generation was very much “learn this, learn that, learn the other” there was no freedom of thought...

Participant 2: We were parrot-fashion.

Participant 1: I would say anybody over 55 in those groups, free
thinking is a concept that they were never taught to do or allowed to do when they were being educated. (Participants, 12.06.2018)

This, then, appears to rebut Keith Johnstone’s claim that it is ‘possible to turn unimaginative people into imaginative people at a moment’s notice’ (ibid: 75). For those (perhaps particularly the elderly) with little or no prior experience of what they consider to be experimental theatre or 'performance art', a lack of confidence and of familiarity with established cues and conventions can be a significant barrier. Even on the same night, whilst some audience members seemed to understand almost instantly the game they were being invited to play, for others the process took longer and, as shown above, on occasion even required clarification from colleagues.

Yet whilst it might have generated a degree of discomfort for the audience members involved, this was far from problematic for the ceremony as a whole. One of the strengths of the work was that it allowed audience members to participate on their own terms; some jumped in early, as soon as I asked them what Max, or David, or Paul was like in person, whilst others waited until the second, third or even fourth stop on the tour before contributing to the work, which they often did with a degree of sincerity that caught me by surprise. Indeed, one or two audience members over the five performances hardly spoke at all, yet still appeared to be actively engaged in the work, listening conscientiously and bringing a certain presence or demeanour to the group. As this section will go on to explore, it was largely the work’s dramaturgical structure that enabled this to happen.

In terms of its framework, the performance started with a discussion of the person’s characteristics and manner – aspects of their being which didn’t require a deep knowledge of the village in order to be established. The intention here was to offer everyone a way in. One audience member not from Hope, for example, shared a story of how he had once met Max on a classic motorbike rally in north Wales some decades previous. And for those audience members who were from Hope, it established the rules of the game: you all knew Max, or David, or Paul in one way or another, and it’s down to personal choice how much of that you want to share. Most often, audience members would jump in fairly quickly at the beginning of the show. On the Monday night, for example, the following conversation took place:
Me: Today’s ceremony, as decided by the congregation, will be held in memory of... Max. Did you all know him as Max, or was he Maximillian to any of you?

[laughter]

Audience Member (AM): Maxwell.

Me: Maxwell?

AM: Yeah

Me: You knew him as Maxwell?

AM: Yeah he was quite a sort of stern character in the village, even though he had a comedy sort of tache.

(Participant, 26.06.2017)

Here, we can see that some audience members picked up on the cue to begin reminiscing about the individual being remembered before the invitation to do so was even extended. The openness of the ceremony’s initial stages, and the playful nature of the Guess Who? board, gave off signals to many audience members that they were being invited to play, and that any response would be incorporated into the work. Having begun with a broad discussion of the individual's main character traits, the performance then moved on to elicit discussions on how they experienced the landscape, where they worked and lived, and where their favourite spot in the village had been. This had the effect of creating a show in which the audience began by making decisions that needn't necessarily have a huge bearing on the remainder of the performance, before being given an increasing amount of agency as the ceremony went on, culminating ultimately in the group determining the route of the performance. This structure – which unfolded as it went on – was essential to the way the ceremony proceeded, offering the audience a gentle and safe platform on which to build as they gradually took greater collective ownership of the performance. As a result, audience improvisation generally worked as a generative and productive feature of the ceremonies. Within the structure and rules provided, and in response to my role as facilitator, the audience frequently drew on their deep, tacit knowledge of the village extemporaneously in order to build the image of a former resident, demonstrating significant skills of improvisation in the process. For example, the following exchange took place near the beginning of the second ceremony:
Me: So tell me, what was Max like in person?

AM: Well I think he was a man of routine, he would always order the same drink in the café, he’d always sit at his favourite table on his favourite chair. Um, he didn’t really like things being messed around with, so he was a real man of tradition really...

Me: Right

AM: And I don’t know if that’s just his upbringing or the fact that, you know, he was like that as a person, um, but that’s sort of my memory. But he was always very polite, and we liked having him in the café.

Me: So he would come into the Grassopper café?

AM: Yes, and he would always pick the certain time of day, he would always bring in the same paper and he would always order the same thing. So you knew exactly what he would have, so he was no trouble really.

( Participant, 26.06.2017)

As I had learned during the interview stage of the research, the Grasshopper Cafe had (and perhaps still has) a somewhat contentious standing in the village. The owners had taken over relatively recently from the previous proprietor of the Woodbine Cafe. By all accounts, the Woodbine had been kept the same for many years and was, as a result, something of an institution in the village. On taking over, the owners of the Grasshopper proceeded not only to rename the premises but to entirely renovate the cafe, bringing bare wooden benches, smashed avocado on sourdough toast and fine, freshly-ground coffee to Hope. The owner of the Grasshopper herself told me that in the first few months after opening, many customers were deeply disgruntled to learn that the cafe no longer sold cream teas. All this provides an enormous amount of colour to our idea of who Max was, and what kind of character he had been. Clearly, he was not one of the old guard of the village who would mutter and disapprove at the first hint of change; neither was he impoverished – to eat in the Grasshopper every day wouldn’t be cheap. The fact that he patronised the cafe must have made Max a relatively affluent, open-minded and perhaps even cosmopolitan member of the village’s community, and there is strong evidence that other audience members picked up on this – perhaps without even realising it – through their own expertise and knowledge of Hope. The following extracts are from about fifteen minutes later in the same ceremony:
AM: Did someone suggest he worked at the cement works?

Me: Well it was a question I think, that was asked, whether he did.

AM: Just seeing it there...

AM: I don’t think so.

AM: I don’t think he did.

AM: No.

AM: No. (Participants, 26.06.2017)

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Me: I mean were there people in the village that were closer to him? Did he seem to have any friends here? Or was he a sort of lone figure?

AM: Well the only time I saw him outside of the café was at the Cheshire Cheese, where he... he used to like sloe gin, he used to enter, do you remember, he used to enter the sloe gin competition, and he was always quite quiet about it but he was definitely involved.

AM: He never won. He was rubbish, he’d not got the knack. [Laughter]. It’s a special dark art and he’d not got it.

AM: But he used to go there.

AM: He was game for trying. (Ibid)

In the first extract, the group's general sense that Max didn't work at Earl's cement works is fascinating. What's more, I had the same feeling about Max myself. There was a consensus amongst the audience, based on relatively limited prior information about Max, that he must have worked somewhere else – and this despite a flippant remark from another member of the group earlier on that 'everyone' was employed by the cement works at some point. It seems
possible, then, that something was going on here at a level of which none of us was consciously aware at the time. For some reason, the emergent image of Max as a regular at the Grasshopper Cafe (arguably a symbol of Hope's gentrification) had become incompatible with the idea of him being a retired cement worker. He was much more easily pictured as a maker of sloe gin and a patron of the Cheshire Cheese – perhaps the most up-market of the three pubs in the village. This, then, points to the notion that audience members were instinctively drawing on their understanding of Hope's social structures, and the class divisions latent within them, as they continued the process of describing and remembering Max. It is worth noting, too, that without the project's lengthy ethnographic research process in the village, I wouldn't have been able to appreciate, understand or follow the nuance of what was unfolding here.

In terms of improvisation, the above example clearly demonstrates that despite their relative lack of prior experience, the audience was learning to play the game as the ceremony proceeded. Triggered by what appeared to be a casual comment about Max regularly sitting in a particular cafe, other audience members picked up on the cues latent within this contribution and ran with them, allowing the image of Max to be fleshed out accordingly. Crucially here, nobody blocked what was happening – there was a complicity amongst the audience that allowed them to work together to build up a coherent picture of Max that was more detailed and substantial than any one of them could probably have come up with individually (particularly on the spot, and in public). As an audience member on a different night (in which the audience again selected the name “Max”) recounted:

Participant 4: I think [Max] evolved. There was no preconceived “Max”, so it didn't matter what we said. It felt as if it didn't matter, it was a pure reaction and a pure experience – comment – to what we were looking at and to what you were saying and to what everybody else was saying. And there was no preconceived [idea] of Max, so he could have been in the RAF, he could have lived there, he could have done this... (Participant, 12.06.2018)

Whilst, strictly speaking, I might take issue with the notion of ‘purity’ here, the point about reacting to a combination of the site, my facilitation and the contributions of other audience members is key. By and large, those attending weren't trying to come up with something original, or surprising, or dramatic, or to bring some already-decided-upon version of a person
into being (except on the night of the proliferating Davids), they were simply reacting to their immediate surroundings, in-the-moment, in order to give form to the emergent image being created. As attested to in the audience feedback above, they were — in the language of improvisation — accepting rather than blocking the ideas provided by others, so that they might build on from one another, snowballing into something substantial.

Contrary to the emphasis that improvisers such as Ruth Zaporah put on their practice, in which planning can be considered as a form of ‘vanity’, a ‘fever’ and a ‘neurotic desire’ (Zaporah, 2014: xiii), the above examples support the suggestion that improvisation is in fact predicated on ‘structure, repetition, planning, practice [and] experience’ (Landgraf, 2011: 2). Whilst those whom I interviewed a year later couldn’t generally recall the specifics of how the structure of the ceremony was established, it nevertheless required careful and precise planning in order for the audience to be able to build and develop the person being “remembered” in the way they eventually did. Improvisation within the ceremony, then, can be seen to have operated in a way that agrees with Tim Ingold’s suggestion that the ‘the role of the artist [...] is not to give effect to a preconceived idea, novel or not, but to join with and follow the forces and flows [...] that bring the form of the work into being’ (2010: 97). Through careful planning of the process by which it invited the audience into the participatory endeavour being proposed, The Hope Ceremony of Recollection was able to encourage those attending to practice improvisation in the way that Ingold describes. Building on and extending beyond the walking performance work of many other artists, this structure ultimately opened up the possibility that a collaborative, emplaced act of creative imagination might occur. As a result, audience members drew on their own memories of landscape, as well as their affective responses to their surroundings in the moment, to co-operatively and intuitively build the image of a former Hope resident, and to weave a narrative between person and place as they did so.

5.3 Landscape as protagonist

Given the project’s desire to enact and explore the interrelations between personal biography and place history, having started by inviting the audience as gently as possible into a collaborative improvisation around the nature of the person being recalled, the job of the ceremony now was to bring the landscape of the valley into sharper focus. To do this, I had
decided it might be useful to take the audience “off the beaten track”. As I saw it, the ability to take audiences to parts of the village less-visited in their quotidian routines would be particularly significant to the research’s focus on improvisation, as it might open up the possibility of more extemporaneous contributions from those attending. As Mark Holton and Mark Riley have suggested, walking interviews have the potential to disrupt more stale and unquestioned understandings of landscape by foregrounding a transitory engagement with place and by opening up the possibility of unexpected encounters, and I was keen to harness these qualities in *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection*. Following the fieldwork, I was well positioned to choose which location within the village might suit these purposes best.

During several participant interviews, I was regaled with tales of how the nearby cement works had employed landscape architects to conceal the vast majority of its structure from the village (and it’s true that from most of Hope the works can be heard but not seen). In one interview, however, I was taken by a participant out along the road towards Castleton to visit his childhood home, which lay at the extreme westerly end of the village in an area some residents refer to as “no man’s land”, or, more playfully, “beyond Hope”. En route, away to the left – across farmland and beyond the river – a view opens up to show the cement works in all its glory, disrupting the popular idea that the works and the village are topographically or aesthetically separate, or remote from one another.

This spot became the second stop on the procession (see Fig. 1), visited directly after the playing fields at which the ceremony began, and ultimately emerged as a pivotal part of the performance, through which the group was able to talk reflexively about the landscape of the valley and their own attitudes towards and affective relationship with it, as well as those of the person being recalled. This section will now go on to analyse a series of moments that occurred at this location across the five performances. In them, the contributions made by participants – overlooking sheep fields and the cement works – involve ruminating openly about landscape and their multifaceted and complex relations with it in a way that seldom occurred during the initial interviews themselves.
AM: I quite like the striking landscape, and the Works, it really makes you... you really know it’s the Hope Valley, like you see the cement works, I quite like it, but I quite like industrial... I like, I like, I like it, I think there’s a difference between the countryside and the industry.

AM: We’ve heard visitors call it the sweet factory.

AM: I like the cement works. I think it’s lovely.

AM: Great in pictures as well.

AM: It says something about the community, it’s a living community, not just a farming community.

(Participants, 26.06.2017)

In the extract above, attendees of the ceremony engage in a conversation that specifically relates to landscape aesthetics, and the ways in which the appearance of the village and its surroundings intersect with ideas of how the village might (or ought to) function. The assertion
that Hope is 'a living community, not just a farming community' holds the clear implication that farming is a dead, or defunct, practice. This seems to relate to the idea, recounted to me in several interviews, that Hope's economy, which was once built on agriculture, suffered badly as the number of farming jobs dwindled, before effectively being saved by the arrival of the cement works in the 1920s. The Works, so the story goes, rescued Hope from a fate suffered by many other rural communities, and the influx of jobs it provided allowed Hope to remain a 'working village', or a 'normal' place (Participants). As a result, dislike of the cement works or expressions of displeasure at its appearance, or the noise made by the lorries that trundle to and from it on an almost hourly basis, are generally considered anathema in Hope; as someone exclaimed during another of the ceremonies, 'we don’t have anything said against them do we Jean?!' (Participant, 30.06.2017). Negative attitudes towards the Works, when they are voiced, tend to be associated with tourists:

AM: When, uh, the many visitors come here, and they consider this an eyesore, and people – well, like father – resent that. They've been good for the village, and to everybody in it, you know. And you hear people saying, you know, “oh look at that. Fancy having to look across at”, you know.
(Participant, 30.06.2017)

As evidenced by the extract of the performance transcript above, all of those attending the ceremony that evening seemed eager to express their appreciation of the works. Interestingly, only two of the audience members that night were originally from the Hope Valley, with the others all having moved to the village more recently. This demonstrates the propensity for incomers to fall into line with the (overwhelmingly positive) dominant perspective on the cement as part of their assimilation into the village. During the ceremony itself, I had a clear sense that those attending were actively (perhaps even consciously) performing Hope's dominant narrative regarding the Works, at times seeming almost to compete with one another to demonstrate just how much they liked not only what the cement factory represents, but also, perhaps more surprisingly, its appearance. To be clear, there is no suggestion here of disingenuousness on the part of those speaking, more a drawing of attention to the persistence and pervasiveness of this positive narrative regarding the Works. To put it another way, for an incomer to express displeasure or negativity towards the works would be, effectively, for them to reveal themselves as an outsider – someone who doesn't fully understand the village's historic social relations and the important role the Works is seen to have played in defining
Hope’s identity. As a result, when asked about the view across the field, most participants engaged in zealous praise of the works.

The paradox here of course is that the Works itself was once an imposition on the valley from outside, with Earl’s, the company that founded the factory, having come down to Hope from Hull in the 1920s. As Doreen Massey reminds us, 'new “intrusions” [into a place] are no more from outside, nor more “out of place”, than were in their time many of the components of the currently-accepted “character of the place”’ (1995: 183), and the cement works in Hope is a prime example. Despite having come from Hull and transformed the landscape of the Valley, bringing enormous industrial machinery, noise and dust to Hope, and creating a sizeable quarry above the village, the cement works is now roundly thought of as part of what makes Hope Hope. Perhaps the “incomers’” identification with the works as a source of life and livelihood is linked to their own positionality, regarding both the cement industry and themselves as markers of positive, modernising change within the valley. In the extract above, industry itself is used as a synonym for life (‘it’s a living community, not just a farming community’), whilst agriculture is pitted as its antithesis, rather than as a parallel and contemporaneous (albeit smaller) source of employment in the valley. Despite their view of it being literally framed by farmland at the time (again, see fig. 1), by framing it as antithetical to a living village, the congregation that night was happy to dismiss farming – a significant part of Hope's heritage and economy – in order to demonstrate that they are “in the know” regarding the village's dominant narrative of the cement Works. By taking the audience to a location that directly overlooked the works, then, The Hope Ceremony of Recollection was able to open up a space for these complex and multifaceted narratives about the village to be given voice publicly and in situ, providing a platform for a group conversation to be staged that tapped into potentially contentious, highly localised issues of landscape history.

In a turn that might at first appear to contradict the above, the second extract from a performance transcript – taken from the night of the proliferating Davids – does show members of the audience expressing negativity towards the cement works, in the form of concern at the environmental impact caused by (particularly historic) localised pollution and dust.

AM: Yes he, he – the David that I was talking about – he’d remember the old cement works, the really crude, two-chimneyed um, hillside-covered-in-dust cement works. Um, and it’s, it’s a sobering thought and I’m sure that
people around me won’t probably admit to this, but there seem to be a lot more trees than when we were kids, there seem to be...

AM: More growth

AM: Yep, it’s much more lush

[...]

AM: Well they were covered in cement dust

[Laughter]

AM: So we’d got white trees in those days

AM: Yep

AM: Seriously

AM: That was the old quarry, the Hadfield quarry

AM: See that quarry, the dust clouds used to come – because we lived just up there, and the dust clouds, you would see – well the whole village was dusty.

AM: And until recently...

AM: Yep, yeah

AM: And until recently my father grew dahlias. But he didn’t, he grew Hovis bags on sticks!

AM: Yes!

[Laughter]

AM: Keep the dust off

AM: Dust off

AM: And also, you look at the building there now, of course it’s taller

AM: Oh it’s much bigger

AM: And it, the actual chimney is taller, and if you look at the building over the other side, that didn’t exist
AM: No no

AM: That didn’t. That’s only in the last, what?

AM: Twenty years

AM: Twenty years. But you actually see that, where they get the um, stone and it’s, uh, you know, and everything’s mangled up and brought down to the bottom here, it’s fantastic to watch it all happening. What always amazed me is if you go behind there and see how the quarry has grown and grown and grown over the years, and how...

[...]

AM: How large it is now, it’s huge

AM: And it will eventually mature to look like that one [...] because when we were younger, that one... that was the quarry, and that was the active one, yes, and you can barely tell now.

(Participants, 29.06.2017)

Fascinatingly, all those expressing negative opinions towards the works in this extract were born in the village, with some having lived in Hope their whole lives. Not only can they remember a time when the dust pollution was reputedly much worse than it is nowadays, but they are also sufficiently secure in their positionality as locals to be able to openly voice counter-arguments (‘I’m sure that people around me won’t probably admit to this’) regarding the cement works. The speaker in this instance is not only sharing and establishing his own personal memories and ideas relating to the works but is, at the same time, clearly aware of his role as provocateur within proceedings. In putting forward a statement that he knows to be contentious, he is both demonstrating his own depth of knowledge about the village, and at the same time asserting a kind of power, daring to question the dominant narrative of the cement works as a straightforward force for good.

The extract ends with a fascinating longitudinal contemplation by the same participant on both landscape history and futurity, zooming out from the materiality of the present view in order to consider how the hills might have manifested before the works was built, as well as how they might look some decades in the future, likely far beyond the lifespan of any of the audience...
members that evening. Crucially, it is only through knowledge of the former (where the previous quarry was located, which has since been filled in and covered with grass) that the latter becomes possible (imagining how the current quarry will look once it too has undergone the same process). This is an excellent example of the process described by Rebecca Wheeler in her recent work on rural local history groups, whereby rather than inducing a conservative, backward-looking and introverted nostalgia, or an essentialised version of a place's past or identity, knowledge of our local history can actually '[facilitate] place attachment and acceptance of (rather than resistance to) change within a local context' (Wheeler, 2016: 2-3), by helping us ‘to locate our lives in linear narratives that connect past, present and future’ (Ashworth & Graham, 2005: 9). Here, again, by staging a conversation about the Works in situ, it became possible to create the conditions for an in-depth group conversation about landscape to occur through the optic of a former Hope resident. Those attending the ceremony responded to their immediate surroundings (the view of the old quarry next to the current one) in a way that provoked a deep reflection on both the history of the village and its future at a variety of depths and scales, encompassing both “official” histories regarding the cement works' construction and development, and more quotidian details, such as domestic horticultural practices. In this way, the performance opened a space for an active and reflexive conversation about place history (and future) to be staged publicly, complicating the notion that reminiscence is somehow inherently backward-looking, or conservative.

The third example from this stop on the tour involves a more direct rumination on what the person being remembered (in this instance, Paul) might think of the landscape, and how that compares with those attending the ceremony:

**AM:** No doubt although we think the surroundings are special, they wouldn’t have been special to Paul, he’s lived here all his life, it’s what he’s used to and he would just accept it.

(Participant, 30.06.2017)

Here, the participant demonstrates an appreciation that different people relate differently to the same landscape, and that ‘those for whom a place is familiar domicile – *insiders* – do not necessarily see land as landscape’ at all (Pearson, 2006: 10, italics in original). In doing so, they also make a clear assumption about who the audience (‘we’) might comprise. On this, the final
ceremony, Paul had already been established as a former cement worker – a working class man who was born in Hope and who 'liked living here, as though it’s the only place on earth' (Participant, 30.06.2017):

Me: So I wonder, if Paul was standing amongst us now, leaning on this gate, looking out at this view, what would he be seeing?

AM: Probably the place that he works at.

AM: Yeah, the source of his livelihood.

Me: And how would he be feeling about that...

AM: He wanted to get home and have a cup of tea I should think, after a hard day’s work! Just a place of work to him, wouldn’t it be.

(Participant, 30.06.2017)

This, in some senses, was the purpose of the ceremony: to invite those attending to use the fictional framing of a former Hope resident to reflect on (and perhaps even question) their own assumptions about the village and its surroundings. Here, the speaker clearly positions themselves and the rest of the group as somehow different from Paul – 'we think of the surroundings as special', but 'they wouldn't have been special to Paul'. In this moment, Paul becomes the constructed Other of the group. According perhaps to birthplace, class or education – or a combination of all three – the speaker seems to implicitly identify themselves and the rest of the audience as being somehow different from Paul. Whilst they attribute to themselves a heightened ability to appreciate the specialness of the landscape, likely derived from its aesthetic beauty, social relations or some other intangible quality – Paul is imagined as having a very practical, straightforward and common-sense approach to the village and the valley: 'he wanted to get home and have a cup of tea I should think!'.

On the one hand, this could be seen as demonstrating the success of the ceremony in encouraging those attending to begin thinking outside of, and critically reflecting on, their own positionality, assumptions and everyday lived experiences of the village. Here, the participant acknowledges the partiality of their own appreciation of the landscape's apparent beauty by demonstrating an understanding that such a feeling towards one's landscape is potentially afforded through the relative privilege of education, employment or mobility. By “remembering”
someone whose positionality they imagine to be decidedly different to their own, they are invited into a consideration of the variety of lived and affective experience of the valley that coexists within the village.

Yet, on the other hand, there is a danger that in doing so, the audience member in question is simply performing a reaffirmation of the existing fault-lines she believes to exist within the village’s social fabric. Despite what might have been their best intentions, an individual within the group asserting that Paul wouldn’t have had an appreciation for the landscape’s apparent beauty due to his employment and educational background can be seen as a rather patronising turn. As Jacques Rancière discovered from written correspondence between two French workers in the 1830s, those deemed to be working class are just as capable of partaking in an appreciation of aesthetic beauty in landscape as are artists and philosophers, with whom such sensibilities are more commonly associated. As Rancière puts it, ‘these workers, who should have supplied me with information on working conditions and forms of class consciousness, provided me with something altogether different: a sense of similarity, a demonstration of equality’ (2009: 19). For him, it is important to move beyond the insidious distinction that is often drawn between those understood to be workers and those understood to be thinkers, or between ‘those who act and those who look’ (ibid)13. Here, then, the ceremony can be seen both to have drawn audience members out beyond their own thinking and their own lived experiences of the village, and, at the same time, to have opened a platform for the performance and articulation of existing fault lines and assumptions between the different social groupings in the village. By engaging its audience in a creative act of place- and meaning-making in situ, The Hope Ceremony of Recollection was able to open up dialogues between Hope residents that might not otherwise have manifested.

Across the three examples above, participants are shown to have conversed openly and in public about industry, community, transience, ecology, landscape history, landscape futurity, and their own affective relationships with their surroundings. Admittedly, this may have been partly down to the fact that I had deliberately framed a landscape in the traditionally visual, scopic sense, according to which landscapes ‘turn us precisely into detached spectators, and the world into distant scenery to be visually observed’ (Wiley, 2007: 3); audience members

13Pleasingly, the audience that night moved towards this realisation as the ceremony proceeded; a development that will be explored in the next section of this chapter.
were confronted with a view of the cement works and a sheep field, which invited them to explicitly contemplate the nature of that spectacle. But it was only by posing questions to the audience in that location as part of a walking tour, confronted by the obstinate materiality of the cement works and the field, that those attending had to articulate their own relationships to landscape in situ and on the hoof – to see, think of and experience landscape ‘in terms of active, embodied and dynamic relations between people and land, between culture and nature more generally’ (Wiley, 2007: 143). As a result, and as demonstrated above, a variety of different conversations was staged, articulating and digging down into both well-established narratives within the village and more surprising reflections, encouraging participants to give voice publicly to the affective relationships with their surroundings which often remain unspoken. By seeking out less well-known and well-storied spaces, and by confronting participants with unfamiliar aspects within seemingly familiar surroundings – echoing Brecht’s use of verfremdungseffekt – it became possible to gather a more rich, differentiated and unexpected set of responses to landscape.

5.4 Dramaturgical porosity

Whilst the site overlooking the cement works was deliberately chosen in order to open up a sense of the unexpected (and unscripted) early on in the ceremony by taking the audience off the beaten track, not every stop on the tour was predetermined. The nature of the cement works stop, I hoped, would free the ceremony and those attending it to go off in different and unpredictable directions thereafter, both physically and in terms of content. In line with this, much of the remainder of the route after the cement works stop was left open, so as to take in the locations where the audience remembered the person to have lived in the village, as well as their favourite spot. In this way, the ceremony embraced what Cathy Turner refers to as dramaturgical porosity, which revolves around the adoption of underpinning concepts and formal structures that encourage the audience to engage in an act of co-creation through such means as interactivity, immersion and site-specificity. In her own words, ‘this notion of the porous is [...] expressive of theatre/performance that creates a space, or spaces, for what is beyond itself and is brought to it by an audience’ (2014: 200). Turner doesn’t refer to improvisation explicitly, either on the part of the performer or audience member, alluding instead to a quality of performance in which meaning can be produced in ‘unforeseeable ways'
(ibid). As she suggests:

"voids" within this kind of performance might represent the moments when the work steps back from mediation and allows or prompts the audience member to become the mediator and lead explorer of site, and to experience it in a sensory, embodied way, particular to themselves [...] This might sometimes be important in facilitating a thoughtful and active engagement with place and group and [avoid] a tendency for the artwork to impose its own dominant narratives of place, obscuring or suppressing what is already present. (ibid: 206)

In *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection*, such spaces were abundant. This, I hoped, would allow the ceremony to reflect the audience's predilections, memories and affective experiences of the village, allowing them to take charge not only of the discursive content of the performance (by constructing Max, or David, or Paul), but also its shape and direction. Within the penultimate two stops on the ceremony, the congregation certainly became lead explorers – literally guiding us to particular places within the village that they associated with the person being recalled. This, then, goes further even than what Turner describes, not only leaving room for a highly personal, affective meaning-making experience, but inviting audience members to articulate and give form to their responses through improvisation and, in doing so, to take control of the ceremony's route and storytelling process. Across the five performances, we were taken to streams, fields, well-dressings and war memorials, as well as a variety of different houses in the village. These sections arguably constituted some of the richest moments, serving to significantly deepen, complicate and nuance the audience's depiction of the individual being remembered, and their place within the village's complex social structures.

An example of this can be seen in the ceremony during which Paul was recalled, as the group's depiction of his characteristics became significantly more complex as the evening went on. Whilst they had earlier intimated that Paul's relationship to the landscape was entirely practical, towards the end of the ceremony when asked to remember where Paul's favourite spot in the village might have been, they decided that it was in fact the top of nearby Win Hill, which overlooks the entire village (see Fig. 2). Unable to walk up there within the allotted time, we decided to think of somewhere from which we could at least get a view of the hill: 'Oh if you go and stand at the bottom of Sherwood Avenue by the war memorial you get a super view' (Participant, 30.06.2017).
Me: This might be a good point, if anybody wants to take the weight off their feet for a few minutes, this might be a good place to have a little rest. So. There we are. The top of Win Hill, Paul’s very favourite spot in the whole of the Parish. I wonder what it was about that point that he liked so much?

AM: The peace.

Me: Yeah.

AM: 360 [degree] views.

Me: Yeah.

AM: Looking down on his home.

Me: So a sense of perspective in a way, yeah.

AM: A bit of exercise getting up there.

AM: Building up a thirst for the pub that we know he went to!
At first glance, it might appear that this is a direct contradiction of Paul's previously-established, highly practical attitude towards his surroundings and that, as such, it represents an example of unsuccessful improvisation, in the sense that the portrait of Paul being drawn by the group wasn’t cohesive and consistent with the contributions that had already been made. Yet within the context of that night's ceremony, it shows evidence that the audience's engagement with the person being recalled became more developed and nuanced as the tour progressed. Two stops prior to this, one participant (with some very gentle cajoling from me and the group) had made use of the ceremony’s porosity to take us to the childhood home of her own father, a man whose life in the village was contemporaneous with Paul's and who, like Paul, had been employed by the cement works. At times, it wasn't entirely clear as to whether she (and the group at large) were discussing the real figure of her father, or the fictional character of Paul. Standing outside the building – 'the house that’s been all sorts' (Participant, 30.06.2017), including a doctor's surgery, a general groceries shop, a cobbling shop and a telephone exchange – the participant took the opportunity to talk in depth about what the street would have looked like in Paul's lifetime, who his neighbours might have been and how he had begun his working life as a private chauffeur at one of the big houses on the edge of Hope, before going on to drive lorries for the cement works. At the following stop, in the centre of the village, we then discussed which pubs and shops Paul might have patronised ('he did like a pub!' (Participant, 30.06.2017)), and what his routines in the village were like. All this had the effect of substantiating and humanising the burgeoning picture of Paul that the group was developing; by attending closely to his nature and habits in and around Hope – and having heard from an elderly female participant about her father’s life in the village, it had become perfectly conceivable that despite his job at the cement works, Paul might well have liked a walk up to the top of Win Hill to survey the view. This, then, ran contrary to the group's earlier assertion – made before such a substantial image of Paul had emerged – that his job at the cement works effectively blinkered him, preventing him from considering his surroundings as a landscape of aesthetic beauty. By opening up the possibilities of where we might visit, then, the ceremony created the possibility of different kinds of recollections being shared, including the personal,
subjective and confessional. In doing so, it enabled the group to complicate and extend the image of the individual being depicted, making evident the variety of lived experience that coexists within Hope.

Another striking example of this can be seen in the second ceremony (26.06.2017), one moment of which in particular proved productively unsettling for many members of the congregation. The ceremony was attended by a congregation of eight, who chose at the outset to remember Max. Of those eight, one was born in Hope and had lived in the village her whole life, and another (her husband) was born a few miles away in Bamford, and had lived in Hope for many years. Of the remaining six, five had moved to the area between eight years and eighteen months previously, and one – Mark, my supervisor – was a first-time visitor. Of all the congregations across the five ceremonies, this group had spent the fewest combined years living in Hope.

It was established early in the evening that Max had been ‘quite a sort of stern character in the village’, ‘a man of routine’, ‘always very polite’ but ‘a man of few words’ (Participants, 26.06.2017). At the second stop, the group decided that Max was born in Hope in the late 1920s and died just after the turn of the millennium. Max’s parents, it was concluded, had moved to Hope from Hull in the 1920s when Max’s dad was offered a job at the cement works.\footnote{Having been based in Hull, G&T Earl – the company that founded and built the works – transferred a lot of employees down when the new plant in Hope was opened.} The congregation determined that having grown up in Hope and then left for Sheffield, Max had retired back to the village alone in the late 1980s with no family to speak of. When asked to recall where he had settled, the following conversation took place:

AM: If he was on his own – nobody’s mentioned any family, any wife that anyone can recall...

Me: Does anybody have a memory of him leaving the pub, and which direction it was that he walked in?

AM: Maybe it was one of the old folks’ bungalows, because if he’d retired [to Hope] he could have been on Eccles Close in the bungalows.

AM: Yeah maybe it was in...
AM: Yeah that’s true

AM: I think it was, think it was the back of the field wasn’t it, in those...

Me: Would you possibly take us there?

AM: Yes.

Me: Wonderful.

AM: I think it’s most likely to be there.

(Participants, 26.06.2017)

We set off towards the old peoples’ bungalows. Built in the 1960s and 1970s as social housing, they are still dwelt in by (mainly single) elderly residents. It was not an area of the village with which many of the congregation were familiar. On the way there:

AM: So there’s people living in the bungalows on Marsh Avenue by themselves?

AM: I think we’re going to Eccles Close, actually...

AM: Eccles Close, okay.

AM: Yes, there... yes, yes, yes, they’re mostly living by themselves there. Are there any couples there? I don’t know whether there is now. I don’t know them all.

(ibid)

The participant asking the question in the above, who had only lived in Hope for around eighteen months, did so with a tone of some consternation. It appeared that the idea of elderly people living alone in Hope hadn’t previously occurred to her, and was proving difficult to reconcile with the image of the village as a social community that she had either constructed for herself or had relayed to her by others. We took a short-cut past the medical centre and along a footpath:

AM: I didn’t realise you could go that way to those houses.

Me: Sorry?

AM: You know those houses round the back of the old tanner’s, I didn’t realise you could go this way to them.
(Participants, 26.06.2017)

The participant quoted above runs a business around 100 yards away from where we were walking. Yet despite the fact that the bungalows on Eccles Close are 50 yards or so behind Hope’s main street, for most members of the congregation we were clearly going into uncharted territory (see Fig. 3). Soon after we arrived at the bungalows, another member of the congregation confided that:

AM: I don’t know anybody who lives in here, and I thought I knew half the village. In the eight years I’ve lived here, and I don’t know a single person who lives in there. I think I know the lady that lives in that one over there, with the white door, I’ve met her litter picking…

(ibid)

The sense was building that we had stumbled across another side to life in Hope, and, with it, the dawning realisation that even in such a small village, starkly contrasting lives could be unfolding concurrently and within a stone’s throw of one another, without ever coming into contact.
We began recalling what Max’s bungalow might have been like:

Me: I presume that nobody ever went into Max’s house. It doesn’t sound like he was a man who invited many people in, but I wonder what his house might have been like, or his bungalow, what it, what it might have been like on the inside. What kind of colours, what kind of atmosphere, what smells, what ornaments and photographs did Max have?

AM 1: Did he smoke?

AM 2: I’m not sure he’d have had recipe books.

Me: He wouldn’t have had recipe books?

AM 2: I’m not sure he’d have had recipe books.

Me: No.

AM 2: I think he, I don’t think he had a very wide repertoire of things that he ate, actually.

Me: No, but he would have been eating alone I suppose, every day.

AM 2: Yeah, or in the pub maybe.

Me: He probably never learned to cook very well though, a man of that generation.

AM 2: Yeah, no exactly.

Me: So I wonder what he would’ve...what he would have had.

AM 2: All a bit simple, beans and sausages.

Me: Yeah.

AM 2: I wonder if he had some fruit in the back garden. Perhaps he had some, grew a bit of rhubarb. Couple of gooseberry bushes, he might have liked a bit of...

AM 3: Yeah, they’ve all got little back gardens, no reason why not...
AM 2: Just had some simple stewed fruit because he knew about that from his parents, his mum and dad, you know that’s quite easy to cook.

Me: Yep

AM 3: Going back to the, when was it, what were we talking about, the 90s, maybe 80s, 90s...

Me: I think he moved here in the late 80s, yeah.

AM 3: Well if he lived there, they were actually warden-supervised in that time.

AM 4: Yes.

AM 3: And the lady that ran it, Margaret, she used to do the shopping for them.

AM 2: Okay.

AM 3: She’d knock on the door – “what do you want from the shop” – sort of thing.

AM 2: Kept an eye on them.

AM 3: Kept an eye on them, yeah.

Me: And some regular sort of... interaction with somebody, then.

AM 3: Yeah, yeah, most days, a bit of contact, yeah.

Me: “Are you okay?”

AM 3: That’s what she was paid for.

AM 4: They’d got buzzers and things.

AM 2: What, in this complex here?

AM 3: Yeah, yeah.

AM 2: Really?

AM 5: Where did she live then?

AM 3: She lived in one of the bungalows here, the end one I think.
Me: Well, I was going to ask, you know what would this area have been like to live in when Max moved here? What would the other residents... They would all have been retired I suppose?

AM 3: They would all have been retired, yeah.

Me: And was there a community feel amongst them, did you get the impression that everybody here knew the names of everybody up and down?

AM 3: I think so.

AM 4: Possible, yeah.

AM 3: I think it was, I think in those days, um, most of the people that lived here had got village connections. Either coming back to the village with a reason, or living in the village and downsizing.

[...] Because there was none of this bringing people in from Glossop and Whaley Bridge what have you, like happens now. They were all local people. I mean, village people.

Me: And if he had have lived a little longer, what would he have thought of the changes that have happened in the village since the early 2000s?

AM 3: As far as he’s concerned the Warden got chopped with the spending cuts.

Me: Right.

AM 2: Oh right.

AM 3: And there was a system of, what do you call it, airwaves, was it, where people’d got monitors, in each one, and that was cut.

AM 4: They got a buzzer system hadn’t they.

AM 2: Oh right.
Where they could contact Chapel-en-le-Frith or somewhere, maybe they still have that, I don’t…I’m not sure.

Sandra that lived round there was basically a remote warden, and covered all the villages in the valley.

So they had someone they could call on. Not sure what happens now. (ibid)

Providing all of the information in the above were the two long-standing residents of Hope, whose memories stretched back far enough to remember the time in which Max had moved to the village – the late 1980s – and the changes that Hope had undergone since then. Asking the questions, a selection of the other six participants – none of whom had been in the village long enough to remember the period in question, and none of whom seemed to have visited, or perhaps even fully registered the existence of, the bungalows before.

The ceremony had taken a turn. Having been led to the bungalows by a congregation in seemingly high spirits, with members of the audience speculating freely about Max’s work life and his relationship to the landscape, a portrait of his later years – and the lives of other solitary elderly Hope residents – was now being brought into sharp focus. This included, amongst other things, a stark account of the realities of government cuts to local services, made manifest by the disappearance of the warden. Many of the interviews I had conducted with residents of the village over the previous nine months had been spent hearing various accounts of how friendly, sociable, welcoming and community-orientated Hope is, often from middle-class, financially comfortable retirees to Hope. Here, that same demographic was witnessing this narrative being substantially undermined. By recalling – or, more properly, by speculating on Max’s later life in Hope through a sustained discussion of the micro-geographies of his home and domestic life, itself taking place directly outside his former place of residence, unknown and obscured details of the lives of former residents were shared, requiring the congregation to re-orientate their understandings of the landscape to accommodate these previously concealed social histories. For those attending the ceremony, this was not the village they were

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13 Since few of the participants had co-existed with Max, it was hard for them to frame their contributions as “recollections” per se.
used to discursively constructing, nor was it the village of their 'everyday inhabitation [...] grounded in an embodied knowledge of working, moving across and sensing [the] landscape' (Edensor, 2017: 597). Rather, the ceremony was expounding a quite different side to Hope. Here, outside Max's house, the majority of the congregation was being confronted with the kind of story that is so often concealed or forgotten in official accounts. And as with so many other moments from across the ceremonies, it was only the improvised, walking nature of the work that enabled this to unfold. The congregation’s exploration of the quotidian stories presented by the bungalows was entirely place-based and contingent; it was only by virtue of the group’s decision that Max was a single retiree to Hope that we visited the bungalows in the first place. Had they chosen for him a different socio-economic or familial profile, we could easily have ended up in a more affluent and picturesque part of the village, in which the congregation would almost certainly have felt more at ease with the narratives they perceived to have been held there. In taking the congregation, on foot, to the very spot where Max had lived, the ceremony opened the possibility for those attending of an immediate and emplaced re-evaluation of Hope.

The dramaturgical openness in both the content and the route of the ceremony, then, enabled the work to reflect (and, at times, subvert) the desires, memories and imaginations of those who were attending. Resultantly, the ceremony took in parts of the village which wouldn’t otherwise have been visited. In one participant interview, carried out a year on from the performances, this was highlighted as one of the things that made the ceremony particularly effective and affecting, as we visited parts of Hope 'that we don't really go to, or that I don’t really go to' (Participant, 12.06.2018). As with the site overlooking the cement works, this tendency to walk to less-visited and less well-storied parts of the village enabled the ceremony to open up a space in which those attending were taken out of, or beyond, their habitual, sedimented and quotidian patterns of behaviour in Hope, allowing unexpected insights in a range of registers to be shared. Afterwards, many of those attending described the experience as 'very thought-provoking', with one audience member stressing, a year on, that the ceremony had 'really had an impact!' on those who attended (Participant, 12.06.2018). Several others relayed that they had been eager afterwards to exchange experiences at length with those who were at the ceremony on other nights, further evidencing the fact that audience members were acutely aware that what they had experienced was unique and unreplicable.
It is worth noting here that it wasn't only the audience's verbal contributions that had a bearing on the nature of the ceremonies. As Misha Myers suggests, there were a range of other conditions 'which the artist may create space for, but cannot pre-determine' (2010: 67), such as the time of year and season; the size, speed and demographic of each group; the various Wakes Week decorations around the village; and the specific meteorological conditions each night. The decision to locate the performance in the real Hope as it was encountered each night, rather than in some fictive version of the village (or the village with a layer of fiction cast across it) enabled the performance to actively embrace the Well Dressings, the festival bunting, the scarecrows, the distant sounds of curlews and the countless other phenomena that were continuously unfolding around it. Ultimately, this allowed these spatio-temporally specific events to contribute to the audience's (and my own) affective experience of each performance. For those attending on the first night, the amplified voice of a hackneyed children's comedian drifting across the playing field from the Wakes Week marquee during the opening of the ceremony undoubtedly contributed to the atmosphere. For those attending on the Wednesday, the abiding memory might be of the steady drizzle that both soaked us to the skin and brought us huddling together as a group (see Fig. 4).
As Cliff McLucas has suggested:

at their best, works that fold together place, performance and public
have no edges or frame to hold their identity discrete, no clean
backdrop against which their outlines may be thrown into crisp focus,
and they do not rely on containment for their identity and their integ-

A “bastard” theatre, it is a theatre “to the horizon”. (Quoted in Pearson
and McLucas, no date: 12)

The Hope Ceremony of Recollection succeeded in mobilising McLucas’ notion of a theatre to
the horizon in an improvised, interactive form. This meant that not only did the ceremony’s
permeability enable the multifaceted spatio-temporal phenomena surrounding the
performance to bleed into and dictate the affective atmospheres that manifested throughout
the tour, but the performance itself manifested in such a way as to enable the audience to draw
on and incorporate these surroundings as they contributed to the emerging performance
through memories of the people and places being recalled. The porosity that enabled all this
was of course tightly bound with the project's focus on improvisation. In seeking to explore
improvisation within site-specific performance, the project was seeking to act on Edgar
Landgraf’s suggestion that the discourse on improvisation needs to move away from an
individualising formulation that seeks to reaffirm the improvising subject's agency, and instead embrace a mode of improvisation that emphasises collaborative doings that go beyond the scope of individual creativity. Here, the show again demonstrated Ingold and Wiley's suggestions that ideas and creativity emerge through interactions between people, and between people and their environments, rather than as discreet flashes of inspiration from within individual psyches. What's more, the interrelations and interactions through which improvisations emerge are themselves held and supported by certain external frameworks. As Landgraf argues, improvisation 'cannot be decoupled from structure and repetition', because 'rather than being the expression of unbridled freedom, improvisation must be seen as a mode of engaging existing structures and constraints' (ibid: 11). In this context, these existing structures and constraints were provided by the nature of the ceremony itself, the topography of Hope, the immediate material, meteorological and more-than-human conditions, the myriad memories of those attending and, more diffusely, the complex social relations of which the village is constituted including (but not limited to) existing relationships between those who attended each performance and their relationships to the village more widely. These factors combined to create a 'stupendously complex' (Hallam and Ingold, 2007: 4) milieu within which those attending the ceremony were invited to improvise. And holding open within the tour what Turner calls voids or spaces for them to direct proceedings was a key factor in the ceremony's ability to reflect and give form to each group's improvisatory endeavours.

By beginning with a stop designed to deliberately throw the audience off track, and then opening up its own dramaturgical structure for them to direct the performance's next moves, The Hope Ceremony of Recollection invited its congregation not just to create an imagined former resident of the village, but in doing so to negotiate its relationship both to itself, to the rest of the community and to the materiality of Hope as we encountered it. Thus, the individuals depicted by the audience each night can be seen to have grown out of a combination of our immediate surroundings, the rules and structures of the ceremony, the patriarchal biases of Guess Who?, the group dynamic amongst the audience each night, and the tacit knowledge of Hope's complex structures of those attending. And Hope, here, is key. When asked whether the person created within the ceremony could be considered to be from (or of) Hope, one participant replied:

Participant 4: Well yes because it built, didn't it, and the persona of
Max was built on all our thoughts and recollections and so he was made up of all of those, as we got down Green Drive [where the cemetery is], the sum of it was all the experiences we’d had, of the village – and sights and things like that [...] I haven’t got a picture of him in my mind, so I couldn’t tell you really what he looked like, other than that daft picture on that game [...] But you could recall a presence, as it were, and he came to life through what we recalled of the village. (12.06.2018)

The suggestion here of a distinctive, affective atmosphere – a clear presence emerging amongst the group – is clear. The person being remembered in each ceremony gave temporary and affective form to a complex combination of memory, place and imagination. To bastardise the assertion by Edward Casey that ‘there is no place without self and no self without place’ (2001: 684), one might suggest that there is no Max without Hope. All this clearly demonstrates the extent to which the improvised contributions being made within the ceremony both drew on and articulated the audience’s deep tacit knowledge of their immediate surroundings, and of their social structures. Rather than occurring in a vacuum as the result of innate, precognitive, prelinguistic creativity, or the channelling of some kind of divine external creative force as many improvisers would have it, improvisation in The Hope Ceremony of Recollection can be seen as a deeply-rooted and highly relational practice. Not only this, but as the participant testimony above shows, there was something unfolding amidst the ceremony that extended beyond the traditional, representational narratives of the village with which residents were familiar. Here, as a result of the ceremony’s form and thematic concerns, a ‘palpable presence’ (Participant) could be felt, which wove together personal and place history in ways that extended beyond linguistic representation and into the realm of the affective, the apprehended and the more-than-representational.

5.5 The final stop

Participant 3: There are bits that are sort of a blank, but I know at the end we went up to the cemetery, and that the ending was very poignant and moving, but I can’t remember the details, I just remember that it finished on a very satisfying note. (Participant, 12.06.2018).

Having designed an increasingly open, porous ceremony which allowed the audience to take
charge of both content and route, I felt it necessary to find a way to conclude each performance that would both give some sense of dramatic closure to the evening and reflect back what the congregation had created. Thematically, the final stop allowed the tour to make explicit notions of flux and impermanence that had (hopefully) been latent throughout, both in terms of social relations and physical geography. Writing about *Bubbling Tom*, Mike Pearson recalls his own use of what he calls ‘theory-lite’ (2010: 55); whilst, unlike Pearson, I didn’t directly quote the work of others in order to incorporate this, the speech that concluded the ceremony nevertheless drew heavily on the spatial theories of Doreen Massey:

**Me:** During the course of my research, lots of people said to me that they hope that Hope doesn’t change. Doesn’t lose its character. But it is changing. The Hope we’re standing in now... [Pause] ...Or now, isn’t quite the Hope that we set off from. It isn’t quite the Hope that Paul knew. It isn’t quite the Hope that we’ll find here tomorrow morning, or next Wakes Week, or in ten years time. At the beginning of the last century for example, it was genuinely unthinkable that women in Hope would be able to vote in parliamentary elections. Many didn’t go out to work. There was no Earl’s cement, no Marsh Avenue, no Sports Club, no secondary school. No cars, no television, no telephones. Within living memory, many of the houses in the village didn’t have electricity or hot water, or indoor bathrooms. Many things that are now thought of as part of what makes Hope Hope would once have been quite alien here. A cement works, a railway line, even a church. If Paul was born in Hope tomorrow, how different his life would be. Sixty years ago, you could be walking through a field and disturb a flock of twenty lapwing, watch them all burst upwards. Nowadays, you’re very lucky if you see one. The grass under our feet, the trees and hedges around us, are changing. The ground we’re standing on is moving at roughly the speed at which our fingernails grow – a change you can see at that scale from one week to the next. If we come back here tomorrow, it won’t be quite here.

(30.06.2017)

Focusing on arguments put forward by Massey in *For Space* and ‘Places and their Pasts’, the above speech functioned as a kind of epilogue, seeking to draw the ceremony to a close by emphasising a sense of openness, change and contingency that her work encourages us to adopt in relation to our surroundings. In pointing out that many things that would once have
been thought of as quite alien in the village – such as the cement works and the railway – ‘are now thought of as part of what makes Hope Hope’, the speech strongly echoed Massey’s suggestion that ‘new “intrusions” are no more from outside, nor more ‘out of place’, than were in their time many of the components of the currently-accepted “character of the place”’ (1995: 183). Further, the observation that the ground under our feet is moving ‘at roughly the speed at which our fingernails grow’ is lifted directly from the end of a passage in Massey’s *For Space*, in which she points out that what we imagine to be the timeless shape of mountains is in fact no such thing, nor have they been here forever, for continents move on average a few centimetres every year. By drawing to a close in this way, the ceremony invited the audience to consider the immediate relevance of spatial theories to their lived environments. In this way, the ceremony was able to conclude by framing its own openness (in terms of both form and content) in relation to that of its site; that is to say, it highlighted for the audience the notion that the landscape of the village – like the ceremony itself and the image of the person created within it – is always emerging.

In addition, the final speech also enabled the ceremony to explicitly reincorporate the improvised material generated by audience members during the course of the tour, in order to round off the evening with a degree of fulfilment and completeness. In the section of his book that focuses on narrative skills, Keith Johnstone writes that:

*[The improviser’s] story can take him [sic] anywhere, but he must still ‘balance’ it, and give it shape, by remembering incidents that have been shelved and reincorporating them. Very often an audience will applaud when earlier material is brought back into the story. They couldn’t tell you why they applaud, but the reincorporation does give them pleasure […] They admire the improviser’s grasp, since he not only generates new material, but remembers and makes use of earlier events that the audience itself may have temporarily forgotten.* (2007: 116)

Johnstone spends much of the remainder of the chapter focusing on exercises that can assist performers in honing the necessary skills to do this, such as a two-player game in which one person introduces a variety of ‘disconnected material’ and the other has ‘somehow to connect it’ (ibid). There is something compelling here about the notion of narrative completion through reincorporation – of a performer or performance achieving a sense of unity and wholeness by tying up loose ends. In this instance, given that the audience were often improvising in a highly sophisticated and intuitive manner, their contributions were far from ‘disconnected’ from one
another. Yet there was still potential for the ceremony to draw the various strands of the person's social, work and family lives together, as well as their personal qualities and characteristics, by giving a eulogy-of sorts at the end. The final stop on the tour aimed to do this by taking the audience to the cemetery at Green Drive and summing up the distinguishing characteristics of the person that had been celebrated that evening. The final speech each night concluded with something along these lines:

Me: Picture a birds' nest. It's always changing, constantly being made and remade. Over time, some twigs fall to the ground not to be recovered, and new ones replace them here and there. Eventually, over time, none of the original twigs remain. But it is still the same birds' nest. And a village is the same. Today, we've remembered a very special individual. We've remembered Paul. We've remembered how to some of us he seemed an introverted man, a man of few words, a man who wouldn't open up, who could even be – as we heard from Dominic – quite hard to engage with. We've heard about Paul’s life working in the cement works, driving the wagons, the matter of fact, practical way of engaging with his job, and his village, and the landscape around him. We've heard about his love of the top of Win Hill, his favourite spot. He liked the walk up there, he liked the view, and he liked the pub afterwards. We have remembered one small stick in a birds nest. One twig in an entire forest. But what a stick, what a twig, what a triumph. We will remember him. (30.06.2017)

The final stop, then, gave a sense of formal completeness to the evening. Just as the ceremony had begun with an address to the audience – outlining the game and introducing the themes of the performance – so it ended. By reiterating and distilling, on the hoof, what the audience had contributed over the previous 90 minutes or so, and in giving a cohesive overview of the person they had collaboratively created, placing them discursively within the context of a shifting, fluid village, the final stop encapsulated many of the themes and formal devices that underpinned the ceremony as a whole: improvisation, memory, biography, place history and change.

5.6 Conclusion

So far, this chapter has focused on the form and structure of The Hope Ceremony of Recollection in order specifically to shed light on the relationship between these aspects of the performance and its improvisational nature, as well how they enabled the performance to inculcate a similarly improvisatory disposition in those who attended. Drawing on Chapter Two, it has also
shown that improvisation within the ceremony operated as a relational, emergent and inherently emplaced practice in the way that Moreno, Spolin and Ingold have formulated it. As it draws to a close, the chapter will shift its focus slightly to reflect more broadly on what the ceremony, and the fieldwork that preceded it, might demonstrate about Hope as a social location.

For Doreen Massey, social relations are a key consideration when analysing places. In fact, she goes so far as to suggest that places themselves ‘can be understood as articulations of social relationships’ (1995: 186). Given this – and the significant extent to which this thesis draws on Massey’s work – it seems appropriate to conclude matters by looking directly at the social fabric of Hope itself, and what can be gleaned of it through the lens of The Hope Ceremony of Recollection. Arguably, the most interesting moments in the ceremonies came when the performance inadvertently laid bare existing tensions within Hope’s sociopolitical make-up. It had become evident to me during the fieldwork that within Hope’s population there were significant, albeit latent, class divisions. This was given form through seemingly innocuous details such as which pubs people would drink in, or to which groups and societies they might belong. The Woodroffe Inn, for example, was spoken about in disparaging terms by many people I interviewed; phrases such as “oh we don’t drink in there” and “it’s a bit rough in there” were not uncommon. However, from my own (admittedly anecdotal) experiences of visiting the pub – which included interviewing the landlord – it seemed a very welcoming and friendly place, and clearly the hub of a community of Hope residents who work in nearby industries. The landlord also informed me that the pub puts on regular events for families, including Halloween and Christmas Parties, which are very well attended. From this example alone, it became apparent to me that Hope plays host to a number of very different communities, some of which coexist in the village with almost no cross-pollination. As discussed in Chapter Two, Hope also has a significant proportion of affluent retirees who have moved to the village from elsewhere, and there seemed to be relatively limited social interaction between this demographic and working-age “locals”\(^\text{16}\).

In the spirit of Brecht’s *verfremdungseffekt*, I hoped to create a performance that might invite the audience to see these familiar, mundane social relations in a critical light – opening the

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\(^\text{14}\) It should be noted that this is not intended as a criticism; the same is probably true of many villages around the country.
possibility that they might encounter their village in estranging new ways. With Rancière’s *Emancipated Spectator* (2009) in mind, I wanted to do this without resorting to instruction. Rather, I wanted the ceremony to present an invitation for audiences to discover their own new perspectives on the landscape, should they choose to. One moment in particular that stands out as a successful example of this occurred during the second ceremony (26.06.2017), when – as already discussed at length in this chapter – we made a detour to some of the village’s only remaining social housing. In this moment, a space was unexpectedly opened up within the ceremony for the irruption of what Kathleen Stewart terms ‘unforgetting’ (Stewart, 1996: 67). For Stewart, in thinking about how we navigate and articulate the complexities of history and landscape, the most pressing question becomes one of ‘how to “un-conceal” through un-forgetting […], how to arrest the progress of transcendent critique long enough to recognize the practices of concealment and forgetting inherent in all modes of explanation, description, and analysis’ (1996: 71). As part of his contribution to the Peak District special issue of the journal *Landscape Research*, George Steve Jaramillo adopts Stewart’s notion of unforgetting to explore a selection of narrative fragments that he collected whilst talking to people in the southern region of the Peak District. The stories he relates cover subjects from fly-tipping to abandoned mines, from cattle dying of lead poisoning to teenagers breaking and entering construction sites. Throughout, Jaramillo seeks to mobilise Stewart’s notion of unforgetting as a form of recollection that emerges via the re-construction of landscape narratives through the identification of ‘fragments that tend to be cast aside, that do not fit into a coherent account or spectacular representation’, and by ‘exploring how [these] might become starting points for the compilation of ‘minor histories’ (Benjamin, 1974; Polsky, 2005)’ (Jaramillo, 2017: 664). Ultimately, for Jaramillo, unforgetting is achieved through the re-circulation of obscured everyday stories, and can materialise unexpectedly in ways that rupture official narratives of heritage and landscape. In this way, unforgetting deepens and enriches the cultural landscape of a region by airing voices that exist beyond or without the common heritage narratives and stories of everyday life that are ordinarily shared. This was clearly evident at the bungalows, as previously untold stories of Hope were shared by a small number those attending, confronting and complicating the rather cosy image held by most other audience members of Hope as a socially integrated, gregarious and welcoming village. This forced those in attendance to rethink their own narratives of Hope in order to incorporate some rather less-comfortable lived experiences of isolation, poverty and austerity.
Beyond this example, *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection* at large, it could be argued, sought to tease out a sense of unforgetting by inviting an examination of the village through the sustained and detailed retelling of the lives of often unremarkable former residents. In the discussion of the cement works, for example, a steadfast loyalty regarding their importance to the village – often from those with nothing to do with them directly – was complicated by older memories, recalled *in situ*, of local flora (and, indeed, the entire village) being covered in cement dust. Again, this lesser-known story served to problematise more straightforward and accepted village narratives, illuminating the ways in which both class and “local vs. joiner” tensions play a factor in landscape narratives. Across the five performances, the majority of the men remembered could broadly be described as working class, and all were born in Hope. This, given the audience demographic of predominantly (though by no means exclusively) middle class ‘joiners’ (participant 10), is significant. It suggests that, in attending, audience members began to think outside of their own lived experiences of dwelling in Hope to consider the village from a variety of perspectives, both contemporary and historic. From an army veteran who returned to the village after years of military service to an entrepreneurial shopkeeper who built his local business up from nothing, and from a wagon driver at the cement works in the 1930s to a steelworker in Sheffield, *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection* put front and centre the figuratively and topographically marginal 'everyday stories' (Jaramillo, 2017: 666) that fall between the cracks of 'common-sense understandings' (Edensor, 2017: 598) of Hope, according to which both visitors and residents ordinarily orientate their production and consumption of the landscape. By walking around areas of the village to which their habitual routines do not attend, and considering the affective and lived experiences of those who exist outside their own social groupings, a mode of spectatorship was fostered in which – in line with Brecht’s *verfremdungseffekt* – the familiar landscape of Hope was made strange. In this way, by exposing the existing tensions and nuances of Hope's 'social relations' (Massey, 1995: 188), *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection* was able to mobilise improvisation at site in order to open up and complicate a number of long-standing, sedimented narratives of place. By doing so, the work ultimately provided its audience members with an opportunity to experience their surroundings in new ways through an act of sustained, collective improvisation, carried out *in situ*.

All this, hopefully, serves to demonstrate in specific ways the productive possibilities that have been thrown up by the project’s integration of performance and geography. Firstly, the work
laid out here has demonstrated that improvised performance does not occur in a vacuum but is rather, regardless of the improviser’s claims, a relational practice in continuous dialogue with its surroundings, both human and non-human. Further, by bringing together the seemingly disparate fields of theatre and cultural geography – and, more specifically, of improvisation and more-than-representational theory – the research has been able to tap into a number of affective, tacit and imaginative responses to place that extend well beyond the scope of traditional geographic methods of enquiry. By engaging audience members in a collaborative act of semi-fictional memorialisation in situ, The Hope Ceremony of Recollection enabled its audience to come together in an act of site-specific storytelling and play. In doing so, it used the optic of a former resident of the village as a means through which the audience could open up and perform their own relationships to place both individually and collectively. This had the effect of uncovering a number of latent schisms within the village’s social fabric, as well as more broadly demonstrating the co-constitutive nature of personal and place histories. Ultimately, the thesis shows that collaborative improvisation at site can be a creative tool for illuminating, thinking through and even refiguring our relationships with our immediate surroundings.

In drawing the thesis to a close, it seems appropriate to return once more to the notion of hope, and to very briefly look ahead. In her book Hope in the Dark, Rebecca Solnit writes that ‘hope locates itself in the premises that we don’t know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act’ (2016: 4). One is reminded here, of Doreen Massey’s suggestion – cited earlier in the thesis – that ‘for the future to be open, space must be open too’ (2005: 11-12). Improvisation, this thesis argues, offers us a technique – or, perhaps more properly, a disposition – with which to give temporary form to these ideas. As shown by The Hope Ceremony of Recollection, our human and non-human surroundings from one moment to the next – as well as the myriad ways in which we interact with them – are lively and unpredictable. It’s not the case that anything might happen next; but we certainly don’t know what will. Whilst the performance practice recounted and analysed in this thesis might not be overtly radical, or even overtly political, I hope it gestures towards a number of questions for further research which pertain to the ways in which improvisation, performance and site-specific work can, however humbly, offer approaches to thinking through our relationships with the world, and with those around us, differently. The research detailed here has shown that – even in minute ways – improvised performance at site has the potential to inculcate other ways of relating to the world around us, both for the performer and the
audience member.
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Appendix One: Maps demonstrating the location of Hope, Derbyshire, UK.
Appendix Two: Photographs of *The Hope Ceremony of Recollection*, taken by audience members using a single use camera and 35mm film.

24.06.2017
If you just want someone to carry it?
Me: Can I just have a volunteer to, yes, yes. It’s recording now.
Is it running continuously?
Me: It’s running continuously, and all you need to do is hold it. If that’s okay. And if you get tired, you can just hand it on to somebody else.
Okay
Clever
And I can scupper the whole thing by pressing the red button
Me: Well, I’ve locked the keys so hopefully not!
I remember you coming to the historical society actually. And, um, James introducing you.
Me: Yes
Do you live in Hope?
Me: No, I live in Sheffield
You’ve not come to live here have you?
Me: No, no. Not yet anyway! That’s the logical next step.
Oh is it?
We’ve got a spare room!
You’ve got a spare room? Yeah, we’ve got a spare room actually.
[Coming off the phone] He’s very busy, he can’t do it, but it’s just Mel and she’s on her way up.
Me: Right, okay. So in addition to the recording, there is also a disposable camera for the group to use collaboratively, there’s 27 exposures so I suppose that’s about three photographs each, and you can use it in any way you like to document today’s ceremony. If I can give that to you to begin with.
Mm hm.
Me: Thank you.

How did it go on Saturday?
Me: Very well, we had a very nice ceremony.
Good.
So is the whole thing called a ceremony, or is it just the beginning bit?
Me: The whole thing is the ceremony, that’s what we’ve gathered here for today, the ceremony of recollection.
Okay
Okay
Hello!
Sorry I’m late.
Me: It’s okay.
I just phoned Graham, he told me what was happening.
Yeah, sorry, we’re a bit late because we’ve got a table tennis table and we’re trying to re-arrange it in our café.
Oh of course, it’s the sports morning tomorrow isn’t it, the world ping pong championship.
Yeah
World ping pong?
Is that what the games is tomorrow?
Yeah
Oo, right.
Oo, I wouldn’t mind a game of table tennis.
I wondered what games there were.
I’m not sure if Graham’s going to be able to make it unfortunately, sorry.
Me: That’s alright
Unless we collect him on the way
Yeah, he might be able to, I should know which way we’re going to go so...
Is Claire coming?
She’s doing the teddybear’s picnic.

Right boss, over to you.
Me: Thank you very much.
I’ll be quiet now, honest – honest.
Me: No, no, please don’t be! Well, first of all, thank you all for coming. To the Hope Ceremony of Recollection. The ceremony that we’re about to perform is unique to this village.

[laughter]
In fact, I’ve created it especially for Wakes Week. It is a ceremony for Hope. I’d like to thank the Sports Club, particularly David, for giving me this opportunity
Gee shucks
Me: And I would like to thank all of you, for coming. This ceremony is for you. The congregation. This group of people here, today, now. You will make it. And it will be unrepeatable, it will be a ceremony like no other. Before we begin, the custom is to prefix the ceremony with a reading of the village poem – which I have written.

[Laughter]
Ah!
I was going to say, I didn’t know there was one.
Is this also unique to Hope as well?
Me: It is certainly unique to Hope. So, uh, can I have a few volunteers to read maybe a couple of verses each? Anybody else happy to read a verse, I think there’s eight verses in total, but there’s no obligation to read if people would rather not.
I’ll read one.
Me: Anyone else happy to read? Okay, so, if we start with you David and just go along, and then it’ll come back to you once Mark’s read.

Mid Castleton and Hathersage and just below Losehill you’ll find
A working village, modest size, with limestone, gritstone, shale behind

The Roman roads, a Norman motte, an ancient iron-clad [sic] burial site,
The church and graveyard, pubs and wells, the past hangs heavy here alright

But sepia postcard this is not, no quaint retreat for which to strive,
Hedgerow river street and sports feel are all vibrant, all alive

From substances that form these hills cement is made around the clock
The altitude, the climate, soil, the perfect land for rearing stock

The cawing rook, the limestone blast, the barking dog, the cyclist’s call,
The rhythmic parp of passing trains, this village, Hope, comprised of all
Brambling, siskin, longtailed tit, and verside cowslip freshly out,
Badger, lapwing, linnet, fox – all are neighbours hereabout

Between the Marshes and Townhead, from Earls to Station Road that way,
In every building, doorway, room, a million small events each day

From dressing wells to village hall, past and present here converging,
Village is as village does, not in aspic, still emerging.

Me: Thank you very much
Nice poem
Yeah, very nice poem
Me: Wonderfully read, thank you very much.
I’ve lost my bit of greenery
Me: Do you need some more rosemary?
Yes, sorry.
Have you lost your rosemary?
Yes, all the excitement of reading a poem
Oh dear. Did you eat it?
No I didn’t eat it, thank you very much
Me: I find the best way is to stick it through the eyelet, if you stick it through the eyelet it tends to...
Through the eyelet
Well I’ve got it on back to front because it goes through the eyelet
It’s a nice evening isn’t it.
Thank you.
Yeah we’ve done well, it is a nice evening
Me: Okay, well the starting point for the ceremony is actually just over there, so if you’d like to follow me
The top of Winhill!
[Laughter]
You know with something like this, I never know whether you look through the viewfinder like an old-fashioned camera, or whether you just like – it says “point and snap” – whether you just go like that like it’s a phone.
I’d look through the viewfinder
I’ve probably messed up those first two photos then.
You read very well, are you sure you don’t want to be in our drama group
I don’t think I’m funny enough.
Hmm?
I’ve got no sense of humour [laughs]
Why do you have to have a sense to humour?
I don’t know, because they’re all very good at doing the humour and the timing
I’m more than happy to take beginners and train people up. As long as you aren’t embarrassed about projecting yourself, it hardly matters
Are you looking for people?
Well we’re particularly looking for people to help with things like set painting and back stage, that stuff, but if any actors come along on the way we’re happy to take them
Well I’m not a natural...
We’re trying to decide if we’re going to have a panto because we don’t have some of the
support staff we need.
Support staff?
The support, the infrastructure, set painting and things like that
Right

[we stop for the start of the ceremony]

Those, um, what do you call them, sand...dunes? Not sand dunes.
Humps. Are they new?
Lovely, um, playground isn’t it. Is that new? [To me] Sorry.
Me: It’s okay, no it’s fine. I now declare the Hope Ceremony of Recollection underway. [Pause].
So. Here we all are. In Hope. In Wakes Week. In a Ceremony of Recollection. The Ceremony begins with a game. It’s very simple.

Good
Me: If I could ask you to stand in a straight line facing me.
I wasn’t warned about this.
No, no.
[Laughter]
Me: Who can tell me what the theme for this year’s Wakes Week is?
It’s childhood games.
Me: It certainly is.
What are we going to play?
Guess Who!
Oh, Guess Who!
Ah! [laughs]
Have I got to hold this for the whole of it or do I give it to somebody else?
Me: Some of you remember this childhood game I take it?
Yep.
Oh! I remember that.
We’ve got that! We still... We’ve got that version.
Me: So this is how the game works today. You – the congregation – will take it in turns to flick down one tile. The game finishes when only one tile remains standing. Does that make sense?
Yep
Me: Okay, then let’s begin
I think my mum and dad had this actually, I think they had it and the kids used to play it. I think mum and dad had it, and the children played it at their house.
Wow.
Ah.
Max.
Me: Max.
Max
Mm.
Mm hm, yep.

Trying to test our memory.
Ask questions later.
Oh I see. Huh, is that how it works?
It’s like, Rosemary, recollection.
Oh gosh. [laughs]
Me: Max, then.
Max, yes.
Me: Well the ceremony of recollection was created, by me, as a way to remember, and to pay tribute, during Wakes Week, to a life lived in Hope. A life lived, at least in part, here. Amongst this. A life spent hearing – this. Breathing – this. Today’s ceremony, as decided by the congregation, will be held in memory of... Max.
Did you all know him as Max, or was he Maximillian to any of you?
[laughter]
Maxwell.
Me: Maxwell?
Yeah
Me: You knew him as Maxwell?
Yeah he was quite a sort of stern character in the village, even though he had a comedy sort of ‘tache.
Me: Yeah, I don’t know if this picture really does him justice.
No, maybe in his younger years I think.
Me: So Maxwell to you, but Max to some others? Max. Well the first thing to say about Max is that whether you’ve lived in Hope your whole life or whether you’ve barely been here before today, Max clearly touched all of our lives in some way or another, however incidental it may have seemed. Maybe you knew Max his whole life. Maybe you were neighbours. Maybe you went to school with him. Maybe you’d just see him every so often on his way or your way to buy a paper or a pint of milk. Or maybe you just met Max on holiday somewhere, years ago, and something about him struck you and stayed with you. Maybe it was just one conversation – just a very few moments shared. What you all choose to share of your memories of Max today is entirely up to you, but I do hope that this ceremony can be a chance for us to come together in commemoration, yes, but also in celebration of Max. Maxwell. And above all, pay tribute to a way of seeing and being in the world, and way of seeing and being in Hope, that was unique to Max. So it might be nice if we start the ceremony today just by sharing some of the impressions that we took from the time that we spent with Max. We’ve already heard a couple from you, and later in the ceremony obviously we’ll go on to reminisce about some of the details of his life – where in the village he lived, where he worked (if indeed he worked) – but I think you can a lot about a person – I’m sure, running a café, you’d agree – from the almost inarticulable things about a person. The way they look at you, the sound of their voice, their energy and rhythms. So tell me, what was Max like in person?
Well I think he was a man of routine, he would always order the same drink in the café, he’d always sit at his favourite table on his favourite chair. Um, he didn’t really like things being messed around with, so he was a real man of tradition really...
Me: Right
And I don’t know if that’s just his upbringing or the fact that, you know, he was like that as a person, um, but that’s sort of my memory. But he was always very polite, and we liked having him in the café.
Me: So he would come into the Grasshopper café?
Yes, and he would always pick the certain time of day, he would always bring in the same paper and he would always order the same thing. So you knew exactly what he would have, so he was no trouble really.
Me: Does that seem to, to correlate with other people’s memories of Max? A man of habit, and man of routine?
A man of few words.
Me: A man of few words? Was he a friendly man, or was he reserved? How would you describe his personality?
Umm, very reserved, very shy.
Kept himself to himself.
He didn’t like being teased about being ginger.
Me: He didn’t like being teased about being ginger? Well, who would really, to be honest? So...in some ways a sort of closed off person, would you have said?
Down to his history, though – a broken heart.
Me: Right.
Really?
Yeah, did you not hear about that? I think it was unrequited love, actually.
Me: Right.
That’s what I definitely got the hint of.
What was it he said that made you think that?
It wasn’t Susan with the dark curly hair was it?
No, I don’t think she was from the village. I think it was some time after the war.
Me: Right.
Because obviously he’s old. Older.
Me: Yeah, yeah.
And he, I think there was definitely a sort of... maybe it could have been a crime of passion, I don’t know.
A crime of passion!? A Crime!?
In Hope?
[laughter]
Another murder mystery.
[more laughter]
Me: But you definitely got the sense of some sadness around...
Some, definitely, sadness, a certain – he’s sometimes pick up on a conversation someone was having, you know, young lovers in the café, and you could feel, you could see him getting tearful.
Me: So he always came in on his own?
Yeah
Me: You never knew him with a companion?
Never saw him with anyone, never.
Did he have a dog or anything, no?
No.
Well I saw him with a dog actually.
Did you?
Green Lane, late in the morning. I had a phase of going down fairly regularly late in the morning to get my paper and milk, and I would often see him with a small dog, it was probably a sort of, was it like a Corgi dog?
Me: Maybe he just didn’t bring it into the café.
I think he was looking after it for somebody else, that’s what he told me once when I met him when I was walking my dogs, I said “I didn’t know you had a dog” and he said he said “no, I’m looking after this for somebody else”. He liked having a dog and going for a walk with it, but he didn’t have it all the time.
He was quite friendly, I mean yes you didn’t get into conversation like some people did, but he...
would always smile and say hello and good morning.
Me: And in the village was he the sort of person who knew half the village by name, or did he, was he more of a private person who kept himself to himself?
Hmm.
No.
Quiet bloke. No harm in him.
Me: No harm.
Apart from that crime of passion, 50 years ago!
Me: So a picture’s already emerging then of who Max really was, a possibly solitudinous, maybe a lonely character, a reserved man, a man of few words, I’m sure not dissimilar to many men of his generation in some ways, not somebody who would open up or be particularly chatty in the café, but like you say, always friendly, never a hint of rudeness, “no harm in him”, as you said. Well I think, to a certain extent, all of us, we are who we are and how we are in part because of where we are and where we live, and so today’s ceremony will be a chance for us to reflect on Max’s life through the village in which he lived, through Hope, and vice versa, to look at the stories and the memories that reside in this landscape through Max’s eyes. Since we’re already at this end of the village, it seems to make sense to me that we head just to the other side of the railway track, and then we’ll make our way back through the village, and as we’re walking around today I’d just ask you to keep in mind that we are walking not just in memory of Max, but also in his very footsteps, around this village where he lived out his life, along the pavements he must have walked thousands of times, so we’ll just make our way over there, and the ceremony will continue.

[We set off]
Do you think Max was married?
He was married three times.
How do you know? How do you know?
He told me that.
So you did have a conversation with him?
I met him once in the pub.
In the pub? Who started the conversation off?
He did, he was obviously…
Well he can’t have been that reserved then.
No, no, but he’d had a few that evening. It may have been the anniversary of the crime of passion, because he did say he had three wives. I think, at that time he had three wives.
Oh right.
Hello!
Hello, how are you?
Good thanks, how are you?
Not bad, we’re going on this very interesting walking tour.
Yes!
It’s fascinating.
I was wanting to come to that.

Me: Just on a logistical note, I’m keen that we find a pace of walking through the ceremony that everyone is comfortable with. So if you feel as if we’re going too fast at any point, or you need a sit down, just say so.

Would he have gone to Hope Valley School?
Demographically, Hope is a very healthy village.
Yes.
It’s old people go on forever.
There’s probably a Max memorial bench somewhere
That’s what we need, yes. If there is one it doesn’t have his name on it, but there may be one he used to use.

Who judges the scarecrow competition?
Uh, there’s a [something] residents who do it.
To enter it you have to have an entry form, so they knew who had entered. They went down on Saturday morning, first thing, and looked at all the houses that had been dressed and pubs that had been dressed, and gave certificates...

Me: I think we’ll cross over here. [calling back] Just take care when you cross the road.

Me: We’re just going to gather in here against the gate. As far away from the road noise as we can.
Did Max work at the cement works?
He might have done.
Me: My next question!
[Laughter]
Doesn’t everybody?
Me: Well, one of my next questions. So, um, I don’t know if you want to come in a bit closer so you’re away from the road noise, it might be good if we sort of mush in a bit against the gate maybe.
Are we allowed to take pictures by the way?
Me: Yeah, go ahead, by all means.
I won’t, yeah, I’ll take them subtly.
That’s fine.
As long as nobody else has an objection
There’s someone taking a picture of you behind you
Not very subtly!
Me: So, um, just something to bear in mind throughout the ceremony today, is that we can’t ever known everything about a person. Even people we know very well, we don’t know everything. Um, and we certainly don’t know everything about Maxwell. Max. But I think it might be good at this point in the ceremony if we just remind ourselves of some of the key details of his life, I suppose you could call them, particularly in relation to Hope. So does anyone remember how long Max lived in Hope?
He wasn’t born here was he, because he came back after this upset.
But if he came back, that implies he was here before.
He may have been born here, that’s right, then gone away, and then come back as a refuge.
I didn’t know Max, but judging by the time you said he lived here, I wonder if he had a council house and Thatcher’s right to buy gave him the retirement plan he needed.
Me: Right.
I’m assuming there’s council houses in Hope.
There are.
Was.
Me: Does that chime with anybody else’s memory of Max?
I didn’t quite hear that, could you say it again please?
I think he perhaps had a, one of the council houses, and then right to buy gave him a sort of retirement plan.
Right, okay. So he came here to retire in the 80s then?
Well he lived here in the 80s, and then maybe retired out, or?
Does anyone know what he did for a job?
Me: Well that was, that was something else... Does anyone remember what... ever hearing him mention what he’d done for work?
I think it was crime.
Me: A career criminal, you think?
Yeah, yeah, but that’s why he kept quiet about it.
Me: Okay.
He must have had another alibi. He wouldn’t have come and said that was his job would he.
Well he didn’t say it!
You might be right though. He used to write things down in a note pad. Always taking notes. Maybe sussing people out, so he was quiet, but keeping an eye on other people’s conversations.
I don’t think he pursued his criminal career here. I think he was-
Do you not think?
No, no. I think it was a criminal career elsewhere.
Well if he, if he walked up Green Drive up towards Aston, there’s some very nice houses up there, a lot of rich pickings up in Aston
He was casing the joint up there.
He had an expensive watch didn’t he. Do you remember that watch?
Was it a real one?
Yeah, well it looked like it.
Well that could have been...

Me: So. Let’s not get into the realm of wild speculation.
[Laughter]
You started it.
[Laughter]
Me: What I’m asking you to do here is to remember what you knew of Max. Um. And I mean it may be that what you say is true, but was it something he ever mentioned to you or, or did you get hint of some sort of dark backstory behind him?
There was just something about his manner that made me think...
Did someone suggest he worked at the cement works?
Me: Well it was a question I think, that was asked, whether he did.
Just seeing it there.
I don’t think so.
I don’t think he did.
No.
No.
Me: But it’s interesting that this figure who lived in Hope at least since the 80s, and nobody knew exactly what it was that he did, I mean that speaks volumes of his... of how reserved he really was and how private he was in his, in his matters, that nobody here was friends with him or even on speaking terms enough to know what really his life had been like, what he’d done for work. What this possibly failed relationship had consisted of years and years before.
Robert and Hazel would know. Robert and Hazel would know for sure. Me: It’s a shame… Yeah they would have known.

Me: I mean were there people in the village that were closer to him? Did he seem to have any friends here? Or was he a sort of lone figure?

Well the only time I saw him outside of the café was at the Cheshire Cheese, where he… he used to like sloe gin, he used to enter, do you remember, he used to enter the sloe gin competition, and he was always quite quiet about it but he was definitely involved.

He never won. He was rubbish, he’d not got the knack. [laughter] It’s a special dark art and he’d not got it.

But he used to go there. He was game for trying. That’s more recent, sloe gin. No it’s no No, it’s in the last twenty… In the past they might have had it.

Me: And was anybody here living in Hope during the 80s? Were any of you… We were.

Me: And just in a few words, what was the village like back then? Not much different actually, there’s not been…

No, not a lot different. Still Wakes Week, still Well Dressing… No more houses been built. Eccles Close was built then. It’s, physically it’s almost as it was in the 80s, no change really. It’s only lately there’s been new houses. But in the 80s there were more kids in the school. Oh yeah.

School was full in the 80s. What, the primary school? Yep. With the terrapin classroom.

So were there more younger families then? Me: So the population’s changed? Yep, the population’s changed. Oh definitely. We’ve got more older people.

There’s an older population in Hope than it is for example than in Bradwell. Bradwell’s a much younger village.

Eccles Close was for young families, other than the old people’s bungalows, and lots of young families and then suddenly they’d all grown up and gone, and older people bought, because it’s nice and flat in Hope isn’t it.

There were 20 or 30 children on that estate. On the increase again though

Huh? Going up again though, the number of young children is going up again.

Me: And for Max was that ageing population that he was part of from – we know at least from the 80s that he was here, possibly longer ago than that – was that changing population something that he embraced, something that he was sad to see, you know that when he’d moved here there were young families that grew up and weren’t replaced or…

I think he was sad to see it
Me: Was he quite happy to be amongst people of his own generation?
In those days there was a lot better community feel.
Do you think?
People spent more time out and about.
Well there’s quite a good community feel now, isn’t there?
Yeah I think so, I don’t know if...
In comparison to a city there’s a community feel, but...
Well of course it was better when there was a post office.
We were saying that people didn’t... might not know what he did, but then I don’t know what you do, or what you did before you retired.
Crime.
Absolutely. It’s not something you ask about people. If they volunteer... if a someone volunteers what they did for a living, fair enough, but you don’t necessarily ask somebody, so... You’re quite right, David. I don’t know what 95% of the people I know in the village did for work.

Me: So something else that’s interested me during the research that I’ve been doing in Hope over the last eight or nine months – if you need to gather in a bit closer because of the road noise; I think it might be good if we line up against this gate actually, if you could gather in a bit and line up – something that really interested me was just hearing how differently different people think about, see, relate to and live in what is essentially the same landscape, the same village. I mean, if we take this view out across this gate for example, somebody who’s worked in the cement works; somebody who farms, somebody who knows about local history, someone who’s a walker, someone who’s just moved here, either in retirement or with a young family; and someone who’s lived in Hope their whole life will look out across this view and they’ll see, and think about very different things, they’ll understand different things by this landscape. And they’ll have different knowledge that relates to is. So although we don’t know what Max did for work, we do know that he was in Hope at least since the 70s or 80s, and I just wonder – if Max was standing with us now, this figure that we’ve talked about, this kind of lonely, quite reserved gentleman – if he was looking out across this gate, I wonder what he would be seeing?
A lot less trees.
Yep, yep
All those trees are within the last 20 years.
Really?
On the hillside there, they’ve been planted within the last 20 years.
So who planted them?
The Works.
The Works did?
Part of their... a shield.
I quite like the striking landscape, and the Works, it really makes you... you really know it’s the Hope Valley, like you see the cement works , I quite like it, but I quite like industrial... I like, I like, I like it, I think there’s a difference between the countryside and the industry
We’ve heard visitors call it the sweet factory.
I like the cement works. I think it’s lovely.
Great in pictures as well.
It says something about the community, it’s a living community, not just a farming community. It used to be called the jam factory.
Really?
I don’t remember that.
Because it was money for old jam if you worked up there.
[laughter]
There used to be a lot more employers [sic.] than there are now, of course.
Oh really?
About 6- or 700.
That’s a shame isn’t it.
What I see is grassland.
Yep.
Much of my professional career was in grassland and the upland areas.
Me: I wonder, what would Max have been thinking about or seeing, looking out across here. I mean, how did he think about this village in relation to its appearance, its function, the work that goes on here? Was he somebody that, like you, enjoyed the cement works and liked the look of it, or did he lament it?
I think he just lived with it like. We all do.
It was just part of his life.
Me: Just part of his life, yeah.
You know, it provides employment for local people...
Most people just accept it.
Me: Yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah.
It’s been there a very long time.
Because it gives employment.
What is it, 94 years or something?
And a lot back in the day.
29, wasn’t it?
End of the 20s, certainly
Me: So just a very practical…
I should imagine he loved the countryside, perhaps he was a hiker, perhaps he liked walking.
A lot of people actually came to the village with the works.
Yeah.
Because they relocated from Hull, G and T Earl.
Yes, all these houses were built for the cement works.
They were built for people who came from Hull.
Me: So Max would have moved here during that move, during that big jobs boom probably.
Yeah, and then went away...
Perhaps he came from Hull.
Yeah.
Perhaps Max came from Hull.
What, to work here?
Yeah.
Me: Come down with the company.
20, 1920 something. 9?
Me: Or it could have been that his parents came...
Yes, that might have been – they came, and he came as well so it was kind of a new start for the whole family.
Me: Yep.
Because it was very different, Hull was a port, it was very industrial, by the sea…
If he didn’t work there he’d have known people who did work there so he’d have had a connection to it.

Me: How long ago did Max die, does anyone remember?
I was just thinking that actually.
Before we came here, and we’ve been here for eight and a half years.
Me: Does anyone who’s been here longer remember when it was he died?
I can’t remember. If he was there for sloe gin...it would probably be ten years.
How long have we been doing that?
Well you remember him in the café, so... it can’t be that long ago.

[laugh]
He’s everlasting isn’t he.
Unless that was his twin brother.

[Laughter]
I think around 2001, 2002 maybe.
Me: Right, okay.
That would figure if he came here to retire in the 80s, do we think it was retirement in the 80s, that brought him here? Perhaps he had early retirement.
A lot did in those days.
Me: And how old was he when he died? In 2000.Was he an old man when he passed away?
I think so. Difficult to tell.
Me: So he would have been born in about the 20s probably, or the early 30s.

Yeah, he could have been born in the 1920s. Early 80s.
Me: Well I wonder if we might make a move at this point in the ceremony, and go back to where it all began for Max in Hope. Does anybody recall where it was in the village that he moved to back then? In the 80s, when he moved here? Um, I should say at this point that it’s not necessary for us to identify the exact house, but maybe just the road or, or the part of the village in which Max lived.

He wouldn’t be, if he was, if he was...
Middle of the village somewhere?
If he was on his own – nobody’s mentioned any family any a wife that anyone can recall...
Me: Does anybody have a memory of him leaving the pub, and which direction it was that he walked in?
Maybe it was one of the old folks’ bungalows/ because if he’d retired there, he could have been on Eccles Close in the bungalows.

Yeah maybe it was in
Yeah that’s true
I think it was think it was the back of the field wasn’t it, in those
Me: Would you possible take us there?
Yes.
Me: Wonderful.
I think it’s most likely to be there.
If he retired to the village and he’d got connections to the village, than that’s where he would be.

(walking to second stop)

He might have taken over a house his parents had lived in, if he’d been here before – that’s another option isn’t it, whether he was brought up here, had gone away, and came back
when his parents were older. Maybe it was just because he liked the village, you
know...somewhere to retire to, he knew it...

Whereabouts are you then?
Hmm?
Whereabouts are you?

So there’s people living in the bungalows on Marsh Avenue by themselves?
I think we’re going to Eccles Close, actually...
Eccles Close, okay.
Yes, there, yes, yes, yes, they’re mostly living by themselves there. Are there any couples there?
I don’t know whether there is now. I don’t know them all.
I don’t know.
You’ve got to have imagination [laughs]

Maurice told me that his family had come, his father had come to work in the cement works.
He did.
When was that?
Was that from Hull as well?
I think it was wasn’t it.
Who’s that?
Maurice.
Maurice Deane’s father came from Hull, yeah.
He was called Harold. His mother was called Nancy, and Harold was a lovely man.
He was, he was a great boy. He lived on Eccles Close. They lived on Eccles Close.
Yes, they lived where Sheryl lives now.
Yes cos Maurice was telling me about the school actually, that um, the school used to be in the
old school didn’t it.
Yes, well that’s a long time ago, but that was the school.
Turn of the century I think. But before that, after that as well.
The primary school, was that built in the 1930s?
Yes, I don’t know, somewhere around then.
They had the centenary of the old school didn’t they.
That was when Catherine was about... that was in the 80s, so that must have been 1880s, or
1870 something. The centenary. So But the actual primary school now, what era was that
built?
30s I would have thought. 30s.
I mean I went to the school there.
Must have been
You went to school in Hope?
I went to the Primary School, yes.
So were you born in the village?
Yes. I’ve always lived in this village. Different houses, but always in the village. And you’re from
Bamford aren’t you, so we’ve lived here a long time.
I was going to say you’ve seen some changes, but from what you’re saying there’s not many. Do
you have family who live here?
I’ve got one daughter who lives next door to me, she’s only just moved back, a couple of years
ago, and the other one’s in Hamble near Southampton.
Oh yes, okay.
With our little grandson who’s six.
Does she come back much?
Yes. She’s coming up on Thursday night. My grandson’s got a couple of inset days in the middle of term, I don’t know how that’s cropped up. So she’s coming up for the carnival.
Yeah.
That’s unusual because they wouldn’t normally be able to come at Wakes Week because of, he’d be at school, but he’s got these inset days.
Funny time of year isn’t it.
When William had those he thought it was insect day. So they call that insect days!
Aw.
This is a new head here isn’t it?

Where have you come from?
Er, Warrington.
Okay.
It’s a wonderful ride down here isn’t it.
Yeah. So you came on the train from Piccadilly? Manchester?
Yeah, yeah.
Particularly the last bit, once you come through Edale, it’s spectacular.
I’ve never actually been to Hope before. My nephew goes to the college here.

[DG rips down a poster]
That’s now over.
Haha, rip it down.

So were you saying you’ve been here eight years?
Five. We were in Sheffield. We lived in Sheffield for 20 years. More, actually. We live over the other side, over there. Um. So we’re incomers.
Absolutely, yeah, yeah. How do you go about ingratiating yourself to the locals in this area, did you have a sort of initiation or...
Um. No, well not that I’ve been aware of, might have... There’s still time yet.
Just bedding in.
Just getting involved in local activities I think.
So are you in the Am Dram?
No. No, um, I’ve been working quite hard until relatively recently so I’ve not really had time to do it. My wife, Mandy, she runs a local walking group, which has meant she’s got to know more people than I have.

I didn’t know you could go that way to those houses.
Sorry?
You know those houses round the back of the [something], I didn’t realise you could go this way to them.
Oh yes.
I didn’t realise where Caroline Court was.
Ah, that’s it. Evelyn Medical Centre and Caroline Court are named after the two daughters of the man that gave the land.
I’ve never been to the doctors either, that’s terrible isn’t it.
So what are they named after David?
They’re named after the two daughters of the man that owned the land.
Oh right, okay.
Caroline and Evelyn.
Okay.
So I’m told.
Oh right.
And he gave the land or whatever, he owned the land, whatever, the land was his, and he... and so the two buildings were built in commemoration of his two daughters.
Okay. And what happened to him?
I don’t know, ask Steve, he’s been here a long time. I’m an incomer, I wouldn’t know about that. Gosh it’s definitely exceeded expectations though, today. It’s bloody warm isn’t it.
Yeah.

Oh I’ve seen a picture clue.
Hmm?
[Laughter]
You’ve seen a picture clue.
Oo, we’re just looking for picture clues as well, we’ve just seen one.
Oh, have you?

Oh about a year, so not very long at all.
Where from?
So we lived I, we come from Gloucestershire. Like, Cheltenham. Everyone says that, they always seem really shocked, and I’m like, well lots of people move around don’t they?
What brought you here?
Um, well, we were looking for a property and we were looking in Gloucestershire actually, and a couple of other areas, and the Peak District was another one of those areas we liked, because I went to University in Lancaster, so I had a lot of friends in Stockport and Manchester and we used to come out here, and I saw the property on Rightmove and thought it was kind of interesting, so we looked at we thought yeah we could do something with this, is...we, yeah, we kind of put in an offer and we got it. I knew the village quite well because I used to camp here a bit.

Okay.
So it was familiar territory.
And I like the fact you can get to Sheffield and Manchester quite easily. It had to be on the train line for me, because I like going out in Sheffield a lot, so I didn’t want to feel really cut off.
SO this has been quite good, so I wanted a business in a touristy area but I didn’t want to be cut off. Does that make sense?
Yeah, yeah.
What about you, how long have you lived here?
Just five years. I say just, because it’s gone quite quickly.
I suppose, compared to some people that’s quite a short amount of time isn’t it.
So we were in Sheffield before. So we knew the Peak District quite well, and loved walking...
I’ve heard Aston’s lovely.
Ten minutes over the field, 20 minutes in the winter...

What tree is that, is that a tulip tree?

No, I feel I’m part of Hope.
It’s massive.
It’s seems to have grown in the last...
Do you know what sort of tree it is?
A sort of lime or, what is it?
No, it’s not a lime. No.
No? Are the leaves not like that?
No. It’s different shaped leaves and different bark.
I don’t know what it is.
Limes have got smoother bark.
Have they? Yeah.
I wonder if it’s a tulip tree.
I don’t know what sort of tree it is.
It’s very big isn’t it.
It’s massive. I think it’s grown this year...

I think the likelihood is.
One of these.
One bedroomed, one bedroomed.
Be a lot lighter than it was then.

Me: So.
Equally, I don’t know anybody who lives in here, and I thought I knew half the village. In the
eight years I’ve lived here, and I don’t know a single person who lives in there. I think I
know the lady that lives in that one over there, with the white door, I’ve met her litter
picking.
Me: So. Here we are outside Max’s house. On the pavement where he must have walked
hundreds of times over the years, possibly even over the decades.
So do we know which house he lived in?
I don’t think we know exactly which one.
No.
No.
No.
Me: No.
His view would have been different because this tree, we were saying this tree wouldn’t have
been anywhere near as big as it is now.
It’s huge.
It’s a linden isn’t it? A lime tree.
A linden.
Is that what it is?
Well a linden’s a lime tree.
It’s so big.
I thought lime didn’t I, I said to you I thought it was a lime.
Tilia.
Okay.
I’m pretty sure it’s Tilia.
I’m not sure it is a lime.
I don’t know what it is David, I don’t know.
The leaves look like they’re shaped like lime.
Cherry trees would have been planted.
My guess is it’s a lime.
Are they cherry trees, those ones?
Well the garden, yes the garden...
That’s the millennium garden, that was 2000, that bit, with the seat. So those trees wouldn’t have been there. That wouldn’t have been there.

Oh.
That’s a stone that they brought down from the quarry under which is a time capsule.
Oh.
Under which is a...?
A time capsule.
Okay.
There’s a time capsule under the rock in the millennium garden.
Me: So that was put in just before Max died then, 2000?
Round about that time.
Me: I wonder, do you remember, was he involved in the curating and the putting together of that capsule, and what went into it?
I don’t think so.
Me: He wasn’t?
All of the village had an input, there was a little committee and they asked for suggestions, so he might have suggested something from the works maybe, if he worked up there.
We don’t know do we.
Me: Well, I was just talking to David on the way over here, and I don’t know if you want to...
I got the feeling he didn’t work in the cement works because he’d come over here, I thought he was much more likely to have worked in the steel industry or the cutlery industry in Sheffield. So he was out of the village a lot of the time, which might have been why less people knew him.
Me: Which would figure with this idea that is seems not many people knew his story in the village.
Would be like Graham, who worked for...
The capsule would be a wonderful place for hiding evidence that you don’t want anyone to find for a long time.
So you’re saying dig it up and pin the crime on him? Find out what that passionate crime was?
Yeah.
It’s very interesting.
Maybe he confessed all and buried it.
Maybe.

Me: Well during the course of the research that I’ve been doing in Hope, I’ve been invited into about a dozen different houses in the village, um, and each one of them is so distinctive, and so reflective of the lives that are lived out within it, and the owner or the owners of that house. Houses are the nest of everything. The Christmases and the birthdays. The summers and the winters. The rows, and the Friday night teas of chips and beans and sausages. If you were to think about the houses that you’ve lived in. From the front door to the back, from the end of the garden to the loft or the cellar, from the bottom of the stairs to your bedroom: if you were to close your eyes you could probably still trace every square inch. Your hands on the wallpaper, the bannister, the doorhandles. Your bare feet on the carpet, or the floorboards, or the tiles. And the house, too, would remember you. The thousands or marks and scuffs. This house, for Max, was no different. The gurgling and fading and sagging and hum of wallpaper, pipes, sofas, kitchen appliances. The old
photographs, and the thumbed recipe books. I presume that nobody ever went into Max’s house. It doesn’t sound like he was a man who invited many people in, but I wonder what his house might have been like, or his bungalow, what it, what it might have been like on the inside. What kind of colours, what kind of atmosphere, what smells, what ornaments and photographs did Max have?

Did he smoke?
I’m not sure he’d have had recipe books.
Me: He wouldn’t have had recipe books?
I’m not sure he’d have had recipe books.
Me: No.
I think he, I don’t think he had a very wide repertoire of things that he ate, actually.
Me: No, but he would have been eating alone I suppose, every day.
Yeah, or in the pub maybe.
Me: He probably never learned to cook very well though, a man of that generation.
Yeah, no exactly.
Me: So I wonder what he would’ve…what he would have had.
All a bit simple, beans and sausages.
Me: Yeah.
I wonder if he had some fruit in the back garden. Perhaps he had some, grew a bit of rhubarb.
Couple of gooseberry bushes, he might have liked a bit of...
Yeah, they’ve all got little back gardens, no reason why not...
Just had some simple stewed fruit because he knew about that from his parents, his mum and dad, you know that’s quite easy to cook.
Me: Yep
Going back to the, when was it, what were we talking about, the 90s, maybe 80s, 90s...
Me: I think he moved here in the late 80s, yeah
Well if he lived there, they were actually warden supervised in that time.
Yes
And the lady that ran it, Margaret, she used to do the shopping for them.
Okay.
She’d knock on the door – “what do you want from the shop” – sort of thing.
Kept an eye on them
Kept an eye on them, yeah.
Me: And some regular sort of… interaction with somebody, then.
Yeah, yeah, most days, a bit of contact, yeah.
Me: “Are you okay?”
That’s what she was paid for.
They’d got buzzers and things.
What in this complex here?
Yeah, yeah.
Really?
Where did she live then?
She lived in one of the bungalows here, the end one I think.
Oh I see.
Me: Well, I was going to ask, you know what would this area have been like to live in when Max moved here? What would the other residents… They would all have been retired I suppose?
They would all have been retired, yeah.
Me: And was there a community feel amongst them, did you get the impression that everybody here knew the names of everybody up and down?
I think so.
Possible, yeah.
I think it was, I think in those days, um, most of the people that lived here had got village connections. Either coming back to the village with a reason, or living in the village and downsizing.
Me: So how would it have been for Max moving here as an outsider to the village, in, back then before...
Maybe he wasn’t if he...
No.
He came back.
He went away and came back. Maybe, the sort of age group he was living with he knew.
Me: So he’d moved away and worked in Sheffield.
Because there was none of this bringing people in from Glossop and Whaley Bridge what have you, like happens now. They were all local people. I mean, village people.
Me: And if he had have lived a little longer, what would he have thought of the changes that have happened in the village since the early 2000s?
As far as he’s concerned the Warden got chopped with the spending cuts.
Me: Right.
Oh right.
And there was a system of, what do you call it, airwaves, was it, where people’d got monitors, in each one, and that was cut.
They got a buzzer system hadn’t they
Oh right.
Where they could contact Chapel-en-le-Frith or somewhere, maybe they still have that, I don’t...I’m not sure.
Pauline that lived round there was basically a remote warden, and covered all the villages in the valley.
So they had someone they could call on. Not sure what happens now.
Me: But that was cut more recently than when Max died?
More recently, yeah. I mean there was, in the time we’re talking about, there was the warden. Would he have seen the banks disappear in the village, because one thing we’ve been told is that 20 years ago there were three banks in the village?
Two.
Really?
Natwest and William and Glynn’s.
Natwest in the market place where uh, next to Loxley Hall where the physio is.
Really!?
And on the corner of Edale Road and uh,
I didn’t realise there were any banks.
Me: And they were still here...during Max’s lifetime.
Yeah, yeah.
That was when we had a market, a cattle market, and the farmers would bank there and... at Natwest in the market place.
Me: So Max passed away before some of the more dramatic changes. The cattle market was foot and mouth wasn’t it, so that was...
I can’t think, he must have, yeah, how long’s it now?
It was a big event, a big event.
And how often did that happen?
Well it was every Wednesday.
Every Wednesday.
Unless there were special sales like [something] lambs or... So definitely every Wednesday.
And where was it?
In the market square.
Where the new houses are in the market close.
Oh, okay.
Just on the right of the Old Hall
The auctioneer wasn’t daft, because the Old Hall let him put his auctioneer’s office in one of
the back rooms of the Old Hall. So when they’d been paid, the first thing they did was
come past the bar.
[laughter]
Yes, yes, that’s how it worked. Yes, they did that.
That’s back in the 60s, isn’t it?
60s, 70s, yes.
The landlord used to be very obliging.
Me: And that, that, that agricultural side to the life of the village, the market and the farms, was
that something Max would have known anything about?
Everybody in the village would have known about that.
Me: But was it...
For one thing, the pubs were open all day, well the pub was open all day on market day.
Me: Yeah. But was there crossover socially between Max, say, and the people that would have
farmed the land, or...?
If he’d got connections with the village, at that time, there were a lot of farming families in the
village.
It was a very busy village on market day.
Me: So he would have gone to school with...
Yeah maybe. On market day, the market was always full, and the tractors and the trailers used
to stretch down the main road to... Aston Lane, and up Edale Road to past Eccles Close,
just parked.
Before the days when Edale Road was full of cars now, which you know. Those were the days
when there were no cars down there, and they would be able to park their farm vehicles
down there.
It used to be a big social outing you see, because people used to use it as a social event as well.
Me: And what do you all, what do you remember of Max in the middle of the village? The shops
– you know, you talked about how much was still, was still here while he was here, the
banks, the shops – were there particular shops you remember him frequenting? As a man
of habit?
I remember he was a man who liked to drink.
Me: Yeah
We’ve already heard that he went to the Cheshire Cheese, so...
Propping up the bar somewhere.
The Old Hall and the Woodroffe.
Didn’t he like fine clothes as well? Because he was always quite smartly dressed sometimes,
didn’t he go to that old, the department store? Which was the Hope Chest?
Oh, that was ladies’ clothes.
Oh right, sorry!
[laughter]
He wasn’t a cross-dresser.
Oo, unless we’re hearing another side to Max!
Me: Another side to Max that’s coming out now.
That sheds a new light on it.
It does, doesn’t it!
Crime of passion
Sorry, sorry, sorry, I didn’t mean to say anything about that.
I don’t think there was any men’s clothes in there
Me: I think that should stay between you and Max, I don’t think he’d want that aired in public.
What’s said in the café stays in the café.
I can’t remember any men’s clothes there, so...
I thought it’s quite interesting that/ there was a department store though. It sounds quite grand, doesn’t it? Or, like the way it was described to me, it was like a very up-market... is that right?

Nice shop that, though, in the day...
Yep, it was a lovely gift shop and it had a delicatessen on the side, and a lovely gift shop, and upstairs it was clothes, and... really nice.
A chemist where Peak Fruits are.
Chemist used to be, when I was a child, where Peak Fruits is.
Sounds lovely.
So really...
Mr Waterhouse.
So was there a greengrocer in the village then?
Yes, there was, yes, yes
And a travelling one that came round as well
Yep, a mobile one, yeah
Me: So even more so then now/, everything that Max would have needed...
And a haberdashery
Everything he would have needed.
Was here
Was on the spot, yeah.
Me: And would he have been going back and forwards to Sheffield, do you think, or would he have just stayed, you know, never leaving the village, everything he needed was here?
I suppose it yeah, it was in, yeah it could buy everything here/ we used to, used to buy everything here
I think that generation had gone then, when people just lived in a village. I mean I grew up in Bamford, and there was a farmer there who had never been to Sheffield in his life. And he didn’t want to go!

[Laughter]
Well why should he?
Why should I go? Don’t want to go there.

Me: Well in the, in the 20 years that Max lived in Hope, I suppose he must have developed a, well a connection certainly, and probably an affection for the village, too. It sounds as though he’s not the sort of man that would have shared that openly with anyone, but I wonder if anybody here has a, has an inkling or an idea of where Max’s favourite spot in the village might have been? Either somewhere that had some kind of emotional or sentimental significance to him, or somewhere where he just liked the view? Of all the
square yards in Hope, which was Max’s favourite?

Is that apart from the Old Hall pub then?

[Laughter]
I was going to say.
I was going to say the same thing.
Or was it the Cheshire Cheese?
The bar.
Maybe the Woodroffe?
Yeah the little footpath was there then wasn’t it.
This footpath? Yeah, it was the original footpath.
Footpath One.
Yeah, that’s right.
Hmm.

Me: Anyone want to hazard a guess? If Max could come back to Hope just for five minutes, where would he want to be?

Where would be his favourite place?
I think he’d want to be on one of the hills.
Yes.
Above the village.
I think he was a bit of a hiker.
Looking, looking out over the view. Maybe Losehill. Maybe Winhill.
Somewhere up on the Brinks.
Maybe up on the Brinks, yeah.
Is that where you’re taking us now!?

[Laughter]
Me: Well I wonder if we might be able to get a clearer view maybe.
Yeah we’re not going to go to the Brinks now, that’s he Brinks.

[Laughter]
Me: Yeah. Well, I wonder if we might move somewhere where we get a slightly better view of it, at least. Um. If we head out and left, maybe? Into the field behind Eccles Close we’ll have a clearer view up onto Losehill.

Yeah.
Yeah.
Or up the footpath there.
Footpath One.
Me: Yeah?

When are the guests coming?
Um, seven.
They’re coming at seven?
Well that’s what their email said.
Oh. So...

Are you recording the whole show?
Yeah, I was asked to hold this... All sorts of words of wisdom.

So do you have your own kind of community feel in Aston then?
It’s quite friendly, yeah, um, so I live next door to Judy Morley, and she and her mum and their
family lived in my house, so she brought her children up in my house and then they moved – and she’s now next door – in the mid 90s, and then someone else had our house in the meantime. So she knows the house very well. Um, yeah we do know a lot... I’m in a walking group, which sprung up from the historical society, and there’s several people up there who are in the walking group.

Me: Car coming behind
Without wanting to accelerate things unnecessarily...
Me: Mm
What time were you expecting to finish, because we’re going to have to go at about seven. We might just peel off.
Me: Well, hopefully... looking at finishing just after seven, maybe seven or five past.
Okay
Me: But, but but do feel free to make your exit if you need to.
Except the car’s back at the Sports Club.
Me: Yeah, I think we might just finish on about seven, but then as I say the walk back, but you can speed up at that point if you need to.

So did you have a café before?
No, but we had a mobile pizza business. We were kind of in that industry
And very nice pizzas they are
We did that and then we wanted a café cos it was quite a lot of work in the winter, and things like that. So we can still do our pizza nights as well, which is really cool.
We’re heading home! Haha

Great view of Losehill isn’t it?
It is, yeah.
[sheep baaing in background]
Almost time to put the sheep back.
We’ve decided in fact that his best view was this one, which is the ridge between Losehill over to Mam Tor, via Back Tor there.
Yeah
That’s my favourite. My favourite bit: there’s Back Tor, and then there’s a single tree on the very top.
Yes.
I love that. I’ve got a painting of it on my wall. I got someone to actually paint it for us.

Me: So David’s just remembered which section of the ridge was Max’s favourite.
That’s the one, good thinking.
Me: I was saying, David’s just remembered which section of the ridge had the view which was Max’s very favourite.
Yes. It’s that view over there, and I think like me I think his favourite was Back Tor there, which is that bit in the middle next to Hollins Cross.
There’s a little lone tree,
Yeah
Yeah
I like Back Tor
Being on back Tor looking back over here. Is that your favourite?
Max liked that one best.
It is a great view.
I like Winhill as well but it’s very different isn’t it. Losehill you can kind of sit on those spongy bits and have a picnic, and you can see across the vale of Edale. It’s really sort of...
You can see from there you can see all the way up
It’s just amazing really
And that walk from Mam Tor right along the ridge, up to the top and then down.

It’s lovely.
And when you come down from Losehill, if you come down the far side – not the far side- but you don’t come through the farm, you’re into a footpath which is so sunken because of its use, obviously it’s been used by pack horses
Yeah, yeah, yeah
And...its really quite a sunken footpath, because it’s been used, probably, for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years.
Me: I wonder what it was about that spot that Max liked so much. Or about walking into the hills, that he enjoyed so much, was it the...
I think it was part of his soli...
Solitude, again.
Up there, it was completely different in those days.
Just the birds, listen to the curlews... beautiful, wonderful.
No bikes, no mountain bikes, no handgliders...
Particularly in the winter, because all the tourists were in the summer, there was nobody much, only the...
Only the hardy walkers came out in winter.
It wasn’t all year round like it is now.
Me: So if Max could have been up there at any point it would have been in the winter, when he could have got some...
Well both probably, but he’d have got more solitude in the winter months.
You could go up now and not see anybody.
Me: Yep. Well this seems like a good point at which to raise a glass to Max. We can’t be in his favourite spot, but we can see it from here.

[laughter as ginger beer is revealed]

Me: If you could pass those out, would that be okay?
You’ve dragged those all around?
Aahhhhhhh
That’s nice of you.
Me: I would do anything for Max.
Ah.
You’ve done it very well, thank you.
Very considerate considering you didn’t know him an hour ago.
[Laughter]
Did Max make ginger beer himself?
Me: Well, he may have done
Most probably.
Me: Yeah
With the old ginger beer plant, do you remember those
Yeah
If you weren’t careful, it would explode.
Pass that round. Don’t mess up the microphone.

I can’t imagine doing the fell run. It takes a really hardy sort doesn’t it.
I’d have a job to walk up that bit, never mind running.
Me: Thanks for assisting with this.
Do you think he did do the fell run? Max?
No, but actually maybe he did.
I don’t know... I think he was more retiring actually.
He could have been a bit of a poet actually, that’s why he was writing in his notebook.
[Laughter]
I am coming straight back, I need to text this man before...
Oo, he’s on business.
What’s David doing in that field with them...
[Phone rings]
Hello? Hello, no it’s not just at the minute, can I call you back later? Yeah, I’ll do that
Me: You’ve drunk your toast and we’ve not toasted yet.
Sorry!
[Laughter]
Me: That was just to whet the whistle.
Sorry!
Me: No, it’s alright.
I’m actually really thirsty, thank you. I haven’t had a drink all day, apart from coffee.
It’s very nice ginger beer
Did you make it yourself?
Me: Let’s say yes. To Max.
To Max.
To Max.
To Max, David.
To Max.
Thanks for the memories.
That’s delicious.
Nice and gingery.
It’s better isn’t it, it’s looking better.
Sorry about that [being away on the phone], the chairman of the Parish Council leads the
carnival parade on Saturday, but the chairman of the Parish Council’s not going to be here,
and Brian is the vice chairman
Can he walk?
I’ve just talked him into doing it. Yes.
He’ll wear the chain?
Yeah.
Good
So, to Max. But it is a great view from here all round isn’t it. Beautiful valley.
Me: Yeah, not a bad place to retire and to have lived out his days.
Nope
Reminisce about his life of crime.
[Laughter]
I think you’re rather over-egging that, I think you’re making a lot of it.
The steel industry.
Very good.
That’s what it was, steal.
Ah yeah, yeah, yeah.

People’ll be looking at us in that house thinking “what are they doing?”
I don’t know, I bet they are.
Martin and Barbara drove past us so they won’t be.
They’re to the theatre.
Oh, two of them are out then.

Me: Well I’m aware that the ceremony was advertised as 60 to 90 minutes and we’re coming
up to the 90 minute mark, um, there is one more stop for those who would like to come
along, not very far from here, but I do understand if people need to make their exits at
this point, that’s obviously absolutely fine.
We’re not in a hurry.
Where is the next stop?
Me: It’s, um, well it’s a very short walk from here.
[laughter]
Is it back towards the Sports Club?
Me: No, in the other direction.
Okay, need to think...
I think we should go.
We’ve got, um, someone’s coming to the house.
Me: Right, okay.
Any time from seven.
Me: Okay, right, yes.
So we probably should go. We should, you know...
You’ll have to carry that.
Yes, no problem.
Me: Well, thank you very much for coming.
Thank you.
Well, thank you.
And apologies it’s overrun.
I’ve been wondering about max for as long as we’ve been living here.
We’ll hear from the others, I shall come into the café and say “so tell me, you know, any more”
Me: How did the ceremony end.
I shall tell you. I’ll show you his favourite table.
[Laughter]
And give you his favourite drink
He hasn’t carved his name on it?
Oh, I haven’t checked. There could be a love heart.
Oh yes, I’m determined to find out about his secret love life.
What would he have made of the pizza?
Oo I don’t know, too modern for him I think. Too modern, you know, I think it’s right, he was
more of a simple pie man.
His grandchildren might have introduced him to pizzas
I don’t know if he had any family though, you know.
We never saw any, he never talked about it
Unless he had... from the romance he had
Well, you don’t know
The story continues
How many children
[Laughter]
See you soon
Are we going this way?
We’re going this way.
We’re going this was are we? Oh, right, okay.

Thank you, bye!

That’s a beautiful house isn’t it, that one – both those ones I think are lovely
Could do with the trees taking down
This one...
I just think they’re quite...
Too many trees
Quite pretty. I think that one with the big barn, I like that one.
Oh this one, yes

Mind the bramble.
Me: I might just hold that out of the way.
Be such a dingy house, you know.
Thank you.
Do you know what time your train out of Hope is?
Twenty to... twenty to eight.

There’s a lot of trees chopped down.
Yeah.

That’s not legal.
What’s that?
That’s meant to be at least eight feet off the ground, that branch, otherwise you could walk into it and damage yourself.

We are going over the stile.
I imagine we are until Gwilym says “stop”
It’s a tricky stile.
Is it hard? For us old people...
Got a skirt on...
You okay?
Yep, I do it the other way!
Well you do it more often
I do it more often than you!
That’s how you do it.
...Get a housekeeper, and...
We’d better wait.
Is this the stop?
No. I don’t know what we’re doing, we’re just waiting for him.
I think we’re going to go where he’s been buried.
We’re going to the cemetery to see where he’s buried.
Yeah
Ah, could be!
Ah
Ah
That’s pretty isn’t it? I love the chair, the kind of gate and the matching door
Car coming
This way
Car coming
That’s where my eldest daughter lives.
Is it Alison? Is that Alison’s house?
Well it’s actually my house but Alison lives there.
Jo’s house is there.
Ah, I didn’t realise that’s where Alison lived. Very nice.
Can’t you tell by the immaculate garden!
[Laughter]
Dad mows the lawn for her.
She must hardly be here
She’s there now by the look of it
She works the most ridiculous hours
Is she still, um, seeing that, I can’t remember his name?
James, yes
James, he seems a nice guy
He’s a nice lad, yeah
He seems quite quiet
He’s actually very quiet I think
I think once you talk, get him talking
I think it was him that was walking along the field, I think he’d been feeding his sheep
Ah yeah. Because I’m sure I’ve seen him around here, down here somewhere.
He’s got some sheep in [something]’s field.
Ah has he? Did he, did he have his, um, car stolen recently?
Yeah, yes, or Alison’s.
Ah
Car stolen, yeah
That’s really sad. Who would do something...
That was about a month or so ago, about five or six weeks ago
Really? And nothing’s been discovered?
No, no
That’s really sad
Because they’ve all got passports and everything... they’ve got suspicions... no sign of them
Ah, bless
It was awful
It’s really awful isn’t it, cause they’ve kind of got personalities...

[Something indistinct]
Where does your other daughter live?
Near Southampton. Hamble
Oh
Hamble
Oh right, okay
Yeah. Down on the South coast
Yeah
With our grandson, who’s six.
You can do a good run there, from there can’t you
You can takes a long time though
Could be worse, could be Cornwall
Yeah, that’s true. Can’t go there and back in a day.
No, no. No, because a lot of my family live in Hampshire. In Havant.
Havant, yeah.
And like, um, Emsworth, um, that area. And I don’t really go down there very often to be honest,
haven’t been down there for about two years I don’t think. Very pretty though, a bit more
built up though.

[Something] Where Catherine is in Hamble, it’s nice.
Yeah. I don’t know Hamble but yeah
It’s... [something] place
Oh is it?
Yeah, it’s got Hamble river [something] it’s great, yeah, nice place.
Very nice

[Of new path in cemetery] I don’t know. Nowhere, it’s just...
Me: Road to nowhere
Me: Well this is the final stop on, on the tour, the ceremony today, and unless we go on and
raise a glass of sloe gin to Max at the Cheshire Cheese...
Could have brought some!
Me:...this is where we part ways. During the course of my research in Hope, lots of people have
said to me that they hope that Hope doesn’t change, doesn’t lose its character. But, it is
changing. The Hope we’re standing in now...or now...or now...is not quite the Hope that
we set off from. It’s not quite the Hope that Max knew, it’s not the Hope that we’ll find
here tomorrow morning, or next Wakes Week, or in ten years’ time. At the beginning of
the last century, for example, it was genuinely unthinkable that women in Hope would be
able to vote in parliamentary elections; many of them didn’t go out to work. There was
no Earl’s Cement, no secondary school, no sports club, no medical centre, no Eccles Close,
no Marsh avenue. Within living memory, some of the houses in Hope didn’t have
electricity, or indoor bathrooms, or hot water taps. Many things that would once have
seemed quite alien here are now considered part of what makes Hope Hope. A cement
works, a railway. Even a church. If Max were born in Hope tomorrow, how different his
life would be. Sixty years ago you could be walking through a field and disturb a flock of
twenty lapwing: watch them all burst upwards into the air. Nowadays, you’re lucky if you
see one. The grass under our feet, the trees and hedges around us, are changing. The
ground we’re standing on is moving at approximately the speed at which our fingernails
grow, a change you can see at that scale from one week to the next: if we come back here
tomorrow it won’t be quite here. Picture a bird’s next: it’s constantly being made and
remade. Over time, old twigs fall to the ground, not to be recovered, and new ones are
added here and there. Eventually, over time, none of the original twigs remain, but it is still the same bird’s nest. A village is the same. Today we’ve remembered a very special, if somewhat reserved, individual. We’ve heard of Max’s politeness, his kindness, but also his insular nature, and the fact that nobody standing here today really knows the story of Max’s life, shows just how much the village changes, from 2002 to now. We’ve remembered, as best we can, just one small stick in a bird’s nest, one twig in an entire forest. But what a stick, what a twig, what a triumph. We will remember him. Thank you for coming today.

Thank you.
Thank you, well done.
Thank you very much.