Troubling Community: community theatre, praxis and politics in a neoliberal context

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Abstract:
Tracing the work of three community-engaged theatre projects in different UK urban contexts, this thesis considers the ways in which contemporary theatre might constructively and proactively engage with and mobilise community as a progressive political force. Set against sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's contention that, in the context of contemporary neoliberal society, community can no longer be seen to reflect a realistic model of social relations but, rather, a symbolic articulation of 'everything we miss and what we lack to be secure, confident and trusting', I consider ways in which theatre could be understood as a performative framework through which different models of interrelational praxis and productivity might be imagined and realised. In dissociating community, as it is implicated in the practice of theatre, from an inherent relationship to social context as it exists outwith or beyond theatre practice, I draw attention to the contingent relationship between the circumstances in which theatre takes place and the modes of social, cultural or political agency that might be associated with its practice. I argue, in particular, that contemporary efforts to mobilise theatre as a political force are required to articulate ideological ambitions through and, at times, in collaboration with the systemic conditions in which they operate, even when those conditions represent values, practices or ideals that appear contrary to theatre's progressive aims. It is from this perspective that I argue for a model of practice that overlooks representational or epistemic registers of affect to privilege an ontologically informed measure of relational praxis, agency and politics.

Framed by a consideration of the history and development of community theatre since the late nineteen-sixties, I attend to three contemporary case studies that sit within the rubric of community, socially-engaged or participatory theatre: The Create Course, a collaboration between the Battersea Arts Centre, the Katherine Low Settlement and lead artist Naomi Alexander that took place in London and, over eight weeks, aimed to replicate the praxis of socio-political action framed by theatre maker Joan Littlewood's imagining of a Fun Palace. Albert Drive, led by Glas(s) Performance, which took place in Pollokshields, Glasgow and, over the course of eighteen months, sought to engage residents in a shared consideration of neighbourliness, and the ways in which this connection might be leveraged to influence the socio-affective environment in which they lived. And, Seeing Red by Melodramatics, a drama group that emerged out of a partnership between the Octagon Theatre, Bolton and social housing charity Bolton at Home, who sought to mobilise theatre to address issues of domestic abuse in the Farnworth area of Bolton. Methodologies differ depending on the circumstances of the practice, however, all projects were studied in the field and most studies are based on observation over several months, in-depth, qualitative interviews with artists and participants, and combine elements of discourse and performance analysis.
Declaration:

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Chapter 1:

Introduction - the politics of community, community as political praxis

There are nineteen people sitting in a circle in a rehearsal space at Tramway, Glasgow, on a sunny Monday afternoon in May, 2013. They are participants in Albert Drive, a year-long arts and theatre project delivered by Glas(s) Performance that worked with people from Pollokshields, in the south-side of Glasgow, between 2012 and 2013. The project gave rise to multiple works, including a film series, a letter writing project, a shared meal, a series of installations, and a guided tour of the local allotments, but these people are meeting to make a performance that will be shown on Tramway’s main stage on the 6th and 7th of July, 2013. I had the opportunity to meet with and interview artists and participants who took part in Albert Drive, and the project as a whole will be explored in detail in chapter three. Here, I mention the group who worked on ALBERT DRIVE Performance specifically because of the ways in which they help illuminate the multiple registers of community in operation in the context of this study and, in particular, a challenge facing theatre’s political aspirations that I associate with the enclosure of community within economically defined discourses of value and relation, and position as the background to this study more generally.

The group that made and staged the performance were recruited from all over Pollokshields. As Vivienne Hullin, who was responsible for engaging people from Pollokshields in the project, noted in an interview for this research:

> We had this huge, amazing period of the project […] where we went to all the existing community groups in Pollokshields, and we literally just, like, got this - I made this huge spreadsheet of, like, who they were, when they met, and how you could contact them, and we just, like, divided them up between us and went, and did like Bingo, and I did cultural cookery, like, did all this amazing stuff. (Hullin 2015)

There was no criteria for involvement in the project other than a personal relationship to the area and an interest in making a performance, and the performers represented a diverse range of ages, cultural interests and experiences, abilities, and ethnic backgrounds. Pollokshields is a large ward with a population close to 10,000 people, and, although some performers, such as Alison and Rene who both live at Forrest House residential care centre, or mother and daughter Hajera and Rahela, knew each other before the project began, the majority of the group had never met. Rather, as Laiqa, one of the performers, noted when asked how she would describe the process of making the performance: “Basically, lots of people from
different backgrounds, and different ages, coming together […] to just come and be a community” (2015).

Laiqa’s statement illustrates an elision that often occurs at the threshold between theatre and social context, in which creative activity is seen as equivalent to or expressive of the performative and relational infrastructure of community itself. In the context of theatre scholarship, this equivalence is often taken for granted and, indeed, has become central to the ways in which the affective, political and creative potential of theatre in social contexts is imagined and discussed. Theatre scholar Tim Prentki describes this praxis in terms of a ‘poetics of representation’ in which the cultural expertise of the visiting practitioner/facilitator serves to translate the experiences and values of particular social groups into politically resonant cultural text that both reflects and speaks for those groups (2009: 20). Drawing on a socialist inflected lexicon of agency and activity, Prentki associates this model of practice with a counter-hegemonic imperative, as a mode of consciousness raising that frames a need for change by drawing attention to potential inconsistencies between the logics that inform and perpetuate society at large, and those that constitute community itself.

Moving away from a strictly socialist notion of political struggle, Jan Cohen-Cruz identifies a similar principle in her articulation of theatre as ‘call and response’, suggesting that theatre’s political dynamics are not innate to cultural practice itself but, rather, emerge out of a dialogic relationship between theatre practice and social context (2010: 2). Social context, as she writes, might refer to moments of heightened social or political tension that associate cultural practice with particular and unusual potency, as in the case of Bread and Puppet Theatre’s anti-Vietnam street parades that took place in New York in the late 1960s and early 1970s, against a backdrop of anti-war sentiment and fierce public debate (ibid.). In these instances, theatre’s function is to speak for and represent a political community already gathered together around a specific, historically contingent cause. More commonly, and in terms more obviously associated with ALBERT DRIVE Performance, however, social context might be understood, simply, as “the people whose lives inform the project” (ibid.). Considered from this perspective, the dialogic relationship between context and practice is associated with the inverse phenomenon, as a strategy through which localised and previously unacknowledged views, values and experiences are re-presented as public discourse. It is this process which, Cohen-Cruz argues, ‘brings a community together’ in terms that are significant and applicable to the practice of theatre, as performance serves, not only to represent participants’ interests to external audiences, but as a technology through
which the otherwise disparate knowledges, values and experiences of the people involved are implicated in a shared discourse that might also be understood in terms of community.

Whether, however, community is seen as a specific articulation of socialist politics, as in the case of Prenkti’s poetics, or as a more generalised expression of the political dynamics of social practice, as in Cohen-Cruz’ call and response, theatre’s function as a political practice is understood as fundamentally contingent, not on the aspirations of the practitioners, nor on the broader social context in relation to which theatre is positioned and practiced, but on the political potential of community itself. To briefly revisit, therefore, Laiqa’s framing of community as the outcome of her participation in the cultural practice of _Albert Drive Performance_, we can see the emergence of a specific, localised community within and in relation to the 10,000 strong population of Pollokshields reframed, not as an incidental or peripheral counterpart to the deliberate practice of theatre making, but as central to the notion and practice of theatre as a political project.

Laiqa’s recognition that the work of the group was not just to make a performance but to make a community usefully illustrates the particular intersection between theatre practice and social context at which I hope to make a contribution. In particular, in light of what could be seen as the disavowal or complication of community from fields as diverse as performance studies (Bishop 2012: 7; Snyder-Young 2013: 97), philosophy (Nancy 1991), and post-Marxist scholarship (Bauman 2006; Joseph 2002; Virno 2004: 33) as a response to the range of social and political effects that might be associated with progression of capitalism over the last fifty years, it seems necessary to revisit what it is that is being enacted and required of participants when they are brought together to ‘be’ a community.

It is the ambition of this study as a whole to advocate for a new way of thinking theatre’s relationship to political practice, centred around a reconsideration of the relationship between community and theatre, and the case study chapters to follow will examine various ways in which the imperative to be a community has been realised in practice. Here, as an introduction to this work, it seems necessary to outline three areas of discussion: first, the ways in which the notion and construct of community might be associated with the theoretical and social context of contemporary capitalism; secondly, the various ways in which community is understood in relation to theatre, and the implications of these models for our understanding of theatre’s role and potential as political practice; and, lastly, a framework for thinking beyond these constraints, which I associate with the notion of political praxis, and underpins much of the analysis to follow.
Troubling community

What I experienced at this performance [...] was the very faint possibility and the powerful hope that theatre might offer an image of the unconstrained community of fellow-feeling that might ground a utopian politics—communism—to which I remained affectively attached. (Ridout 2013: 4)

Community, in the capitalist context of the twenty-first century, is a troubling concept. In the first instance, it might be understood as a necessary conceptual and ideological position from which to critique, re-imagine and potentially resist the interests and machinations of capital as they inform and are mapped on to social context. Performance scholar Nicholas Ridout, drawing on philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (1991), takes this view, positing community as the performative counterpart to communism’s a formal political project. As he suggests, while 1989 and the destruction of the Berlin Wall might be seen as the beginning of the end of communism as a utopian political movement, community continues to operate beyond the ideological and infrastructural collapse of communism as a vernacular articulation of ‘communitarian’ politics, where localised practices of interpersonal care, attention, organisation and production are positioned in opposition to capital (2013: 4-5). In linking community to communism through the notion of communitarianism, Ridout associates the political dynamics of community with, as he writes, an ‘experience of relation’, that challenges configurations of time, work and social context as they are organised by capital by introducing them to new logics of organisation and productivity founded on collectivist principles. As he writes, community, as it might exist within the construct of theatre, relates to those ‘passionate amateurs’ “who work together for the production of value for one another (for love, that is, rather than money) in ways that refuse - sometimes rather quietly and perhaps even ineffectually - the division of labor that obtains under capitalism as usual” (ibid.: 15). Within this framework, community and communism are almost interchangeable and though, as Ridout examines in his writing, community retains an important complexity as an articulation of social context, or as a differentiation between social and capitalist interests, theatre that engages with, mobilises or privileges community in its working practices might nevertheless be understood as a continuation of the same political struggle expressed by and associated with that term.
Secondly, however, community might be seen as either unrealisable or, at its most jeopardised, as an adjunct or continuation of capitalism itself. Writing in a study of the relationship between community and society, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman posits community, not as a practicable model of social relations, but as a territory of warmth, care and inclusion that is fundamentally fictive. As he argues, what compromises community as a realisable form of social or political practice is its dependent relationship to the social, economic and political conditions it is imagined in relation to. As Bauman writes, community articulated as a socially constituted environment in which “we can count on each another’s good will” (2006: 3) has no historical basis but, rather, emerges in the context of the present as a reaction against the ‘ruthless’ competition, insecurity and individualism that could be seen to characterise capitalist society. Rather than offering a realistic alternative to these conditions, therefore, community could be seen as a reflexive acknowledgement of the ‘noncommunal’ interests that characterise modern society and social practice more broadly. As Bauman writes: “What that word evokes is everything we miss and what we lack to be secure, confident and trusting. In short ‘community’ stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us” (ibid.).

Pursuing a similar argument in ethnographic terms, neo-Marxist scholar Miranda Joseph recognises community’s symbolic function as an articulation of hope or possibility as a response to occurrent experiences of insecurity, injustice or inequality (2002: ix), but offers, too, a more targeted analysis of the ways in which the interface between social practice and capitalist interests might be seen to co-opt the communitarian ethics generally associated with the notion and practice of community. She argues, in particular, that experiences of communal subjectivity commonly associated with community and, in particular, with community as an antithesis to capital, cannot be productively separated from practices of production and consumption that both support and are managed by the interests of capital (ibid: viii). To constitute community as a social practice is, in these terms, to constitute, too, discrete market contexts that underwrite the progression of capital, not only as a dominant influence on governance and politics, but as the principal force and obligation in relation to which nominally social forces are organised and expressed. Further, as she argues, the articulation of community in this context successfully provides experiences of collectivity, shared identity and belonging that might be allied with a notion or experience of communitarianism, as outlined by Ridout, but, in a context of global capital, they can no longer be seen to resist or oppose capitalist logic, but to localise and ameliorate its most impersonal and exploitative characteristics. As she writes: “Community is posited as
particular where capitalism is abstract. Posited as its other, its opposite, community is often presented as a complement to capitalism, balancing and humanizing it, even, in fact, enabling it” (2002: 1).

These are, of course, only cursory rearticulations of arguments which are, themselves, nuanced and carefully positioned. It should perhaps be noted in particular that all of the above authors recognise in community a political complexity that is neither necessarily left or right wing, progressive or conservative, and, though they approach this complexity differently, the notion of oppositionalism between their perspectives is, in some ways, artificially constructed. Nevertheless, as a lens through which to consider the implications of the imperative to ‘be’ a community, identified by Laiqa, or as a frame for this thesis more generally, the range of perspectives outlined here could be seen to associate community with a varied and uncertain field of relations, politics and potential, which, I suggest, should be seen as central to considerations of community’s political potential and, specifically, the intersection between theatre practice and social context.

Joseph draws particularly clear attention to the, perhaps, disquieting ease with which the notion and practice of community might be adapted to suit the needs of different political agendas. As she writes:

> Because it carries such positive connotations, community is deployed by any and everyone pressing any sort of cause. Identity-based social movements invoke community to mobilize constituents and validate their cause to a broader public. Both Clintonian communitarianism and Republican family values rhetoric depend on an image of real Americans living in communities in the ‘heartland.’ Even industrial interest groups often call themselves communities to suggest that they and their interests are legitimate sites of empathy and concern. (2002: vii-viii)

What Joseph identifies in her analysis is not the corrupting influence of capitalist interests specifically, but an essentially malleable characteristic that allows community to effectively contribute towards a spectrum of ideologically distinct agendas. As she notes, just as feminist groups might be seen to mobilise community as a strategy with which to posit a different future and contribute towards a sense of solidarity that is both personally and politically meaningful, so corporations articulate their work and their value through the lens of community because it is financially profitable.

In the context of this study, therefore, community is ‘troubling’, not because it operates definitively as a disruption of capitalist logic, nor because it represents the collapse of social opposition in the face of capitalist progress, but because it serves to outline a field of
thought, practice and politics that seems, at once, to suggest both. Or, conversely, because it invokes a sense of malleability and pluralism that suggests neither reading is definitively true. Where, broadly speaking, Bauman and Joseph mobilise community as a technique with which to narrativise the progress and preeminence of capitalism as a social and political force, and Ridout, instead, to articulate the persistence of communitarianism within a society dominated by capitalist values, here, I am interested in community as a conceptual and relational lens that positions competing fields of discourse, value and practice in tension within one another. What is at stake here is not the realisation of community as distinct from capitalist society, but a politicised interest in community as site of possibility in which the themes identified by the authors here are not yet or, at least, not permanently resolved.

Locating Community in *ALBERT DRIVE Performance*

The potential significance of community outlined in these terms is usefully illustrated by closer consideration of *ALBERT DRIVE Performance* and, in particular, the various claims that are made about community at the intersection between cultural practice and social context framed by this project. In the first instance, Glas(s) Performance characterised *Albert Drive* as a “collaboration between a local performance company […] and the local community of Pollokshields” (Gore, O'Neill, and Thorpe 2013). Glas(s) Performance are a Glasgow based company and, at the time of delivering the project, their two artistic directors - Jess Thorpe and Tashi Gore - lived in Pollokshields, within a few streets of Albert Drive, the road from which the project took its name. As Thorpe noted in a video documentary that accompanied the project, “[*Albert Drive* is] basically about the people that live on, work on and visit Albert Drive and what it means to be a neighbour on that street” (Howkins 2013).

The company’s interest in linking community to patterns of behaviour, relation and practice as they occur and are apparent in material space might be seen to ally the cultural and political aspirations of the project with theatre scholar Helen Nicholson’s consideration of ‘communities of location’. In common with Bauman and Joseph, Nicholson identifies community as a primarily symbolic construction that articulates ideas of collectivity and socially constituted identities more effectively than it describes their actuality (2005: 83). For these reasons she presents a discussion in which community becomes an effective support for theatre practice only as it is implicated in performative strategies that mobilise the notion of community within specific discourses of value and politics. Nicholson identifies various
lenses through which community might be understood and differently mobilised, including frameworks of shared experience or identity, and phenomenological encounter. As she notes, however, drawing on the work of feminist theorist Elspeth Probyn, understood in specific relation to location, community might be seen to draw attention to the intersection between material and social context as a political terrain: as a site at which discourses that inform a sense of place and belonging or, conversely, experiences of exclusion or isolation, are made apparent and potentially subject to change (ibid.: 87).

In rehearsals for *ALBERT DRIVE Performance*, Glas(s) Performance’s interest in locality as a social and cultural text was made particularly apparent. As Hullin’s earlier description illustrates, the project intentionally sought out participants from distinct and otherwise isolated contexts within Pollokshields. In bringing these people into a room together, and asking them to view themselves and each other as neighbours, however, Glas(s) Performance’s creative enquiry might also be seen to encourage a reinterpretation of Pollokshields itself. As Thorpe notes, Glas(s) Performance “work from an autobiographical starting point, so, working with people to tell their own stories through performance” (Howkins 2013), and throughout the four months of weekly rehearsals, participants were asked questions about themselves - where they came from that day, the people they knew, the places in Pollokshields that they visit and care about - and their experience of living in Pollokshields:

- What is the funniest thing that you have seen or heard one of your neighbours do?
- What would you like to see change in this community?
- What is hard about living in Pollokshields?
- What have you seen change?

(Howkins 2013)

Responses to these questions, and questions like them, formed the basis of the performance. They refer to Pollokshields as a landmark in geographical, personal and emotional topographies, and help create a collaborative impression of the varied dynamics that constitute and represent Pollokshields for the people who live there. In the context of rehearsal, however, they serve to tell the people in the room about one another, providing a forum and a vocabulary with which they can begin to make public what anthropologist Setha Low might describe as the ‘embodied space’ (in Gieseking & Mangold, 35: 2014) of Pollokshields: the “feelings, thoughts, preferences and intentions - as well as out-of-awareness cultural beliefs and practices” (ibid.), that inform subjective experiences of place, belonging and relation. It is the translation of these individuated frameworks of knowledge
and understanding into a shared discourse of place and relation which, on the 6th and 7th of July, was re-presented as community.

On Tramway’s main stage, under soft, warm lighting, the performers introduce one another, describe themselves as they are seen by other people, and tell their own stories of living in Pollokshields. Rene explains what it’s like to live in assisted housing and see people passing by on the street. Adam skates around the stage on rollerblades, showing the audience how he prefers to position himself in relation to the space and people around him. In so doing, the performers not only tell their own stories, but the story of the group’s knowledge and acknowledgement of one another. In this model, the performance reflects Ridout’s ‘hopeful’ articulation of community as a site of communitarian potential, in which it might be possible for theatre to interact with social context to establish an arrangement of practices, values and understandings that represent, in some ways, the realisation of a collectivist politics and a departure from the social and political world as it is mapped out by the interests of capital. Performed in front of an audience of family, friends and neighbours, the performance’s representation of community, too, tells a story about what Pollokshields might be like, reflecting Prentki’s interpretation of community as a conscientizing influence by inviting the audience to reflect on how they might act differently to reconfigure the socio-cultural landscape of Pollokshields to better reflect the version of community modeled in the performance.

The group’s status as a community is also, however, central to the narratives that associate Albert Drive with notions of value within the localised economy of the project’s partners and the broader economy of public arts funding. Albert Drive was supported by two main partners: Tramway, a venue and producing house for theatre and visual art who commissioned and helped to coordinate the project, and Creative Scotland, the main development and funding body for arts in Scotland, who provided the majority of the project’s funding. The project received organisational and financial support from a range of other sources, including, significantly, many local businesses with premises on Albert Drive itself. However, it is the interests of Tramway and Creative Scotland in particular that might be seen to exercise specific influence over the ways in which community was understood in relation to the project, the performatve and social characteristics of community as it was expressed in relation to the project, and the values that the communities associated with Albert Drive were seen to represent.

Tramway is located on the very eastern end of Albert Drive, a 1.6 mile long road that runs from one end of Pollokshields to the other. The organisation has worked with Gore and
Thorpe over a number of years, supporting projects delivered as Glas(s) Performance and with their young performance company Junction 25. Tramway’s involvement in Albert Drive could, in these terms, be seen as a continuation of this relationship and an expression of support as Glas(s) Performance developed their practice to focus on creative collaboration with their own ‘local community’. As Rosemary James, project manager on Albert Drive and audience engagement manager for Tramway and Glasgow Arts, explained in an interview for this research, however, Tramway’s interest in Albert Drive was also, and perhaps primarily, strategic. As she noted:

*Albert Drive* really came out of some audience engagement work that we’d been doing [...] which looked at exploring the relationship between the local community of Pollokshields and the contemporary art venue, Tramway, and it looked at the disconnect [...] between the programmed activity in the venue - in the performance spaces and the exhibitions - and the local community who really didn’t know much about the venue and hadn’t participated in its programme. (James 2014)

She cites, in particular, findings from the 2008-11 audience development project *Footprints*, as justification for Tramway’s support of *Albert Drive* noting a gap that they had recognised in Tramway’s audience profile that showed that while the venue was successfully attracting people from other areas of Glasgow, very little of their audience came from Pollokshields itself, with the Black, Asian and minority ethnic population particularly poorly represented. As James explained:

Tramway is situated in the most culturally diverse ward within Scotland. At the time that the research was going on, it was between 57 and 63% non-white […]. We were getting between 6 and 10% non-white audiences in our general programme and, in terms of Scotland wide, that’s actually quite good, but when you look at it in the context of the local community and its demographic makeup it’s a big disconnect. (James 2014)

For James, therefore, the project’s operative value was not to foster and support inclusive social practice within Pollokshields but, rather, to bring specific sections of the population from Pollokshields into Tramway itself. In contrast to Glas(s) Performance’s interpretation of community as interpersonal and collaboratively constituted, James’ comments suggest a new epistemological perspective, in which community is disassociated from an essential relationship to social practice, to, instead, operate statistically, as a quantifiable field of data. In this context, the performer’s status and value as community is contingent, not on their
knowledge of one another, but, rather, on their function as an expression of the demographic profile associated with Pollokshields.

Whilst this perspective does not, in itself, preclude the possibility that participants in *Albert Drive* might also exhibit qualities of interpersonal awareness, care and production that might be understood as communitarian, it nevertheless introduces to community principles of order and legitimacy that associate their work together with registers of value located, specifically and deliberately, beyond their constitution as a socially determined network. In her consideration of Jacques Derrida’s writing on supplementarity, Joseph draws attention to the implications of this shift for the structural and political constitution of community. As she notes, if it is to exist in practice and actuality, community cannot be understood as a discrete and otherwise inviolate realm of order and politics, but in supplementary relation to the world within which it is realised or expressed (2002: 2). As she argues, supplementarity is not simply a quality of addition, in which community might be seen to extend the reach of capital or as an adjunct to other principles of logic and organisation, but a praxis of co-constitution, in which cultural structures are defined, understood and practiced in mutual and indivisible relation to one another. As Joseph writes: “The structure constitutively depends on something outside itself, a surplus that completes it, providing the coherence, the continuity, the stability that it cannot provide for itself, although it is already complete” (ibid.). It is this quality that Joseph argues makes community, as a symbol of progressive political ideals, vulnerable to the interests of corporations or conservative politics, not because the notion of community is, itself, ideologically incoherent, but because it is structurally dependent on institutions of practice, logic and value that are politically opposite or exterior to its own symbolic value.

In the context of *Albert Drive* specifically, the epistemic framework highlighted by James could be seen to introduce to the structure of community a new principle of organisation in relation to which community is associated with coherence, not as a self-defined or self-organised field of relational practices, but in specific relation to priorities leveraged by Tramway. Here, the politics of location no longer operate alone as the preeminent principle governing the constitution of community within and in relation to the project. Rather, interest in exploring the intersection between community and location is made subject to additional logics of value and legitimacy that are imposed on the population of Pollokshields as a technique that informs both how community might be realised performatively as a social reality, and the discourses of social and political value that might be associated with that community.

Lastly, and as a final level of abstraction, the community of *Albert Drive* were also
seen from the perspective of Creative Scotland. *Albert Drive* received what was, at the time, the largest single project fund ever awarded by Creative Scotland. As part of Creative Scotland’s ‘Year of Creative Scotland 2012’, *Albert Drive* was funded through the ‘First in a Lifetime’ programme, which aimed to “increase ‘first in a lifetime’ opportunities for people who do not normally get the chance to participate in creative activity in Scotland” (Creative Scotland n.d.) by supporting projects in areas characterised by high levels of social and economic deprivation and low levels of cultural engagement. In an effort to map the activities of the project onto this agenda, tools such as the demographic segmentation framework ACORN and postcode sector analysis were used to introduce the population of Pollokshields into a discourse relating to cultural access and opportunity on a national scale. Within this framework, the intricate mapping of social interests and cultural identities evident in the performance is replaced by a system of categorisation in which Pollokshields is characterised by the proportion of ‘Flourishing families’, ‘Educated Urbanites’ and ‘Inner City Adversity’ within its boundaries, where each term is linked to national data sets such as the census, multiple deprivation index, and Department of Work and Pensions Benefits Data (ACORN 2017: 12-14). In relation to a bid for funding, the function of these devices is, by design, to create a narrative relating to Pollokshields and the project’s potential value that can be objectively compared to any other project and district in Scotland. In this register, the notion of community is divorced from a necessary relationship to interrelational practice, or, even a statistical correlation with a geographical location and, instead, takes on a purely symbolic function as part of the language with which the project aligns itself with Creative Scotland’s own agenda. Writing in the end of project evaluation report, Brian Grogans and Rosemary James illustrate this dynamic, observing in the summary of key findings that: “[e]vents were inclusive of the whole community” (2014: 10), and that “[p]ostcode analysis found that ALBERT DRIVE attracted a large local audience, who were often not from ‘traditional’ arts audiences” (ibid.). The notion of community articulated here deliberately overlooks contingencies of place and relation that might associate the constitution of community with a localised political function to, instead, operate as a shorthand for the types of participants framed and prioritised by Creative Scotland’s own interests. In these terms, community no longer serves to describe the circumstances or experiences of those people who are nominally contextualised by the term and, instead, circulates as a unit of value within the economic and evaluative discourses that contextualise the project at a national level.
Locating Community in Theatre

The three registers of community identified here, which could loosely be categorised as ‘interrelational’, ‘statistical’ and ‘symbolic’, not only illustrate the complex layering of ideas and values that occur in the context of an individual project, but help illuminate some of the key themes that characterise academic commentary on contemporary community theatre and help to locate *Albert Drive* and this analysis at a particular moment in cultural and political history. Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett (2010: 7), Jen Harvie (2013: 73-74) and others identify the cultural and economic policies instituted under the Labour government that came to power in 1997 as a significant development in the history of the arts in Britain, and as a key influence on the cultural and political framework within which arts practices continue to operate. In particular, analysis concerned with these developments offers a useful perspective with which to consider how notions of community articulated through a statistical or symbolic perspective might reflexively curtail the aesthetic, social or political ambitions of practitioners working in social contexts and, subsequently, as a delineation of the political potential of community itself. As Belfiore and Bennett observe, Labour’s pursuit of a ‘third way’ approach to politics that sought to marry free-market economic practices with traditionally left-wing social policies created a context in which all areas of the public sector, including arts and culture, were required to “make demonstrable contributions to government objectives” (2010: 7). Whilst authors such as Francois Matarasso (1997) and Michelle Reeves (2002) sought to advocate for the arts’ position within this paradigm and, as James Thompson highlights, the years after 1997 did see a demonstrable increase in the number and diversity of theatre projects taking place in social contexts (2009: 117), New Labour’s efforts to formally integrate the arts into the workings of government under the guise of the ‘cultural industries’ have cast a long shadow over writing and practice in the field.

John Holden, writing for the independent think tank Demos in a contemporaneous report, associates these developments with a significant structural shift in arts funding as public bodies such as the Scottish and English Arts Councils and the Heritage Lottery Fund began to bring their own plans in line with Treasury objectives (2004: 13). Along with many others, including Claire Bishop (2012) and Belfiore and Bennett (2010), Holden associates this turn with the rise of impact studies and new demands for artists to substantiate the value
of their work by providing evidence of its positive contribution towards social policy objectives. As Holden observes: “Many artists feel that they are made to jump through hoops and that they create art in spite of the funding system. Their ability to ‘play the game’ and write highly articulate funding proposals is more important than the work that they make or facilitate” (ibid.: 14).

Writing retrospectively, Belfiore and Bennett similarly associate Labour’s cultural policy agenda with the institution of a schism between art, as a cultural or aesthetic practice orientated, as they write, around the register of “individual subjective experience” (2010: 6), and arts practice as a subsidiary to other, more utilitarian forms of productivity and impact. They identify urban renewal, increased tourism, social cohesion, health benefits, employment and economic stimulation as just some of a range of effects that were subsequently associated with the arts (ibid.) to suggest that Labour’s interest in instrumentalising the intersection between cultural practice and social context created a powerful imperative for artists to describe and understand their work in ancillary relation to broader processes of production or change, sanctioned and supported by government interests. Holden gives particularly clear voice to this dynamic, noting that “[e]ven where targets refer to cultural activities, they are often expressed in terms of efficiency, cost-per-user and audience diversity, rather than discussed in terms of cultural achievement” (2004: 13-14). For both Belfiore and Bennett and Holden, therefore, Labour’s relatively blatant efforts to mobilise the arts to support and advance government policy through strategies such as impact studies, increased demands for evidence, and the imposition of quantifiable registers of success and efficacy, could be linked to a more profound and pervasive reconstitution of cultural value itself as notions of utilitarianism, economic viability and social impact replace or supersede measures of value and success born out of the artists’ own practice.

The turn identified here by Belfiore and Bennett and Holden illustrates a differentiation between registers of cultural activity that has been the subject of much critical attention in the years since Labour came to power. Articulated by Belfiore and Bennett as a distinction between ‘intrinsic’ and ‘instrumental’ cultural value, governmental interest in the arts as a tool for social policy and economic stimulation has variously been associated with a discourse of knowledge and understanding that excludes or overlooks arts’ affective dynamics (Thompson 2009); the disavowal of subjective experience as a legitimate register of affect and phenomena (Belfiore and Bennett 2010); the mobilisation of culture to facilitate the reduction of state infrastructure (Bishop 2012; Jackson 2011); the commodification of culture’s social and interpersonal dynamics (Harvie 2013); and, the redefinition of cultural
value to privilege notions of efficacy and functionality (Holden 2004), or a standardised and subsequently exclusionary hierarchy of forms and practices (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). Taken together, these perspectives illustrate a more expansive field of scholarship and critique that has, in common, an ambition to understand and ameliorate the effects of cultural policy and contemporary governance on the cultural, social and political ambitions of artists. Each of these discussions has something to offer a study of the relationship between community and theatre, and the resonances of their arguments will inform my thinking throughout this thesis.

Writing on the subject of community performance specifically, however, Caoimhe McAvinchy gives a direct account of the implications of Labour’s instrumentalist policies for artists who aim to work with communities or in other ways implicate the notion of social context in their practice. She notes, in particular, Labour’s interest in mobilising cultural practice to address issues of ‘social exclusion’, a term defined by that administration’s Social Exclusion Unit as: “a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown” (in McAvinchy 2014: 3). Within this context, McAvinchy draws critical attention to the intersection between cultural practice and social context framed by notions such as Cohen-Cruz’s ‘call and response’ or Prentki’s ‘poetics of representation’, to suggest that, within an instrumentalist paradigm, a politicised interest in community as an interpersonally constituted network of practices and values is replaced by a discourse that mobilises the language of community as a technique with which to localise and direct the generic drive towards ‘social inclusion’. As McAvinchy observes, practitioners operating within this context are both constrained and motivated by the ‘promise’ that “their work would have a positive social impact” (ibid.).

In contrast, therefore, to a principle of political action that sees community as a proactive constituent of a radical social politics, community, here, is reframed as a language with which to describe specific categories of deficiency or need. McAvinchy draws attention to this dynamic, noting:

Performance practices categorising communities through their perceived risk or experience of social exclusion offer only a partial picture: individuals and groups identified as being something highlights only that aspect of themselves, i.e. prisoner, homeless, refugee, teenage parent. Such singularity of approach negates the glorious complexity of human beings and how fluid, accommodating or even
contradictory our identities and notions of community can be. (2014: 3)

As McAvinchy writes, community, as it is implicated and mobilised within an instrumentalist paradigm, could be associated with two substantial deviations from a notion of community as the seat or progenitor of communitarian politics. The first is that a group’s constitution as a community in these terms is, itself, partisan; designed, not to illustrate a self-determined category of identity, experience, practice or belonging, but as a lens with which otherwise disparate individuals are grouped together in terms that are meaningful to institutional and governmental interests that supersede the group itself. Secondly, if, as McAvinchy observes, practice with communities is ultimately facilitated by economic opportunities which are, themselves, the result of government policy, then what emerges in these contexts is not community as a socially delineated site of potential, but as commodity within a discourse of economic exchange orientated, at all times, around the interests of government. In terms that might be allied with Claire Bishop’s categorisation of cultural practice in social contexts as “soft social engineering” (2012: 5), work with ‘communities’ of refugees, prisoners, or any other category that sits within the matrix of public funding, is financially viable only as long as, and to the extent that, groups identified by those terms are seen as legitimate sites for intervention, and the work associated with them is seen to produce results that effectively progress policy objectives. It is from this perspective that McAvinchy suggests that instrumentalist policies introduced and leveraged by New Labour effectively reframe the relationship between cultural practice and social context, to implicate community within a discourse of funding and evaluation as a resource with which practitioners provide funding bodies and government, “with proof of the social return on their investment in the arts” (2014: 3).

Commenting, specifically, on the ways in which cultural policies introduced by New Labour have been taken up and progressed since Labour last held power in 2010, Jen Harvie offers a final complication of theatre’s political and social dynamics through her consideration of the ‘artrepreneur’. As she argues, policies introduced under New Labour could be seen, not only to have reconfigured the economic landscape in relation to which arts practices operate, and, through this, to have associated cultural practice with notions of economic and social utility, but to have effectively recast “art practice as economic practice and the artist as entrepreneur” (2013: 62). In general terms, Harvie associates this turn with the same developments identified by Holden and Belfiore and Bennett, noting that economically derived definitions
of value, efficacy and success blur the distinction between cultural and economic productivity. However, as she notes, against the backdrop of substantial cuts to public spending overseen by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government that came to power in 2010 and Arts Council England’s subsequent and sustained efforts to encourage partnerships between cultural institutions and private capital (ibid.: 159), pressures to frame art as economic practice that have their origins in New Labour’s cultural policies have been reaffirmed and progressed. In what might be read as an elaboration of Holden’s observation that artists are under pressure to ‘play the game’, Harvie associates the artrepreneur with characteristics of risk taking, innovation, self-interest and economic productivity, to suggest that as state funding recedes from a notion of art as intrinsically valuable, so the artist is made answerable to the flux of a cultural economy that is orientated, at all times, around the interests of a capitalist government. Whereas, however, Holden casts the shifting priorities of funders and policy as a logistical problem that might be resolved through a more considered argument for those aspects of cultural value that are either circumstantially or institutionally overlooked (2004: 50), Harvie traces these effects in political and ideological terms, as a technology through which the competition, individualism and instability of a market economy are transferred to and enacted by artists.

It is as a response to these conditions that Harvie associates the political constitution of theatre practice with a configuration of capitalist governance that she identifies as neoliberal, and which could be seen as the background to this study more generally. Neoliberalism, as Harvie writes, might be understood historically, as a “revived form of liberalism which thrived first in Britain in the seventeenth century and which recognizes and prioritizes the individual’s right to seek self-fulfillment and to do so in conditions unrestricted by state-instituted regulations” (2013: 12). Considered from this perspective, neoliberalism could be interpreted as a structural development, marked by policy decisions directed towards the deregulation of financial markets, a turn towards international trade and competition, the privatisation of state assets and the reduction of the state or public sector. In the context of Britain specifically, the turn towards strategies of governance that could be categorised as neoliberal might generally be associated with Margaret Thatcher’s premiership of the Conservative government that came to power in 1979, and, as Oliver Bennett observes, her government’s pursuit of a market economy in collaboration with other world leaders including, then president of the United States, Ronald Reagan (2001:150).

As Harvie observes in relation to the artrepreneur, however, neoliberalism might be also be understood as a new form of subjectivity that has found its fullest expression as a
principal characteristic of cultural and social practice only in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. As she writes, neoliberal capitalism can be differentiated from other forms of capitalist governance as a principle of organisation, logic and value that not only determines the production and circulation of objects and the value of labour but also “infiltrates and reconfigures structures, practices and subjectivities” (2013: 65, italics in original). Broadly, this differentiation can be aligned with academic commentary that associates contemporary society with ‘biopolitical’ forms of governance, organisation and control. As neo-Marxist philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri observe, “[t]he ultimate core of biopolitical production […] is not the production of objects for subjects, as commodity production is often understood, but the production of subjectivity itself” (2009: x). Within this context, as they note, the logic and priorities of capitalist interests are not only internalised within the social body of the population but also, and significantly, within the various epistemological and representational strategies through which we express and understand ourselves socially, to collapse any meaningful differentiation between social and economic practice. In similar but more targeted terms, Harvie associates the advent of neoliberalism with influences that compromise the ideological and political integrity of the artist. Harvie articulates her understanding of neoliberal influence through the framework of ‘governmentality’, drawing on political philosopher Michel Foucault to suggest that “political ideologies such as neoliberalism are not principally imposed through top-down government ‘controls’, but rather […] the dissemination of knowledge that people internalize so that they become self-governing” (2013: 3). As she suggests, situated within this context, the artist and arts practices are not only reconstituted, at least in part, to serve and advance an economically determined agenda and, in this way, subject to neoliberal governmentality, but could also be seen to embody and promote capitalist impulses and, in this way, operate as agents in support of a neoliberal paradigm.

As an example, Harvie identifies state funding as a structure that has obviously been adapted to reflect the interests and priorities of a capitalist economy, but notes, too, the behavioural impact of reduced public funding as artists are compelled, not only to produce work that is perceived as valuable within a context of heightened economic competition, but to work independently, beyond the infrastructure of the state, to replace the economic, institutional and administrative support that was previously financed and provided by the government (2013: 66). Within this context, the artist/artrepreneur cannot be fully distinguished from the socio-economic framework of contemporary capitalism, not because they are intellectually or politically sympathetic, but because the strategies through which art
making is manifest in the world - the ‘structures, practices and subjectivities’ through which artists understand themselves and the value of their work, and establish themselves as professionals - are also and indivisibly implicated in the constitution of capitalism as a social and political reality. In this way, Harvie’s figuration of the artrepreneur might be allied with Joseph’s consideration of supplementarity, as the artist that emerges, not in deliberate or strategic response to the conditions in which they operate, but in structural complicity with them. As Joseph observes, “a given structure cannot be by itself coherent, autonomous, self-sustaining” (2002: 2) but must be provided coherence and continuity by something beyond itself.

Harvie highlights the problematics of this paradigm for a notion of social practice as political action, suggesting that just as the artrepreneur alludes, terminologically, to a nexus of artistic and economic interests, so the activities of the artist in a neoliberal context must be differentiated from, as she writes, “social democracy’s commitments to collective good” (2013: 64), as indivisibly inflected with characteristics of privatisation, self-interest and profitability that are seen as opposite to the performative and ideological infrastructure of communitarian politics. Read in concert with Bauman and Joseph’s cautionary articulations of community's intersection with capitalist interests, Harvie’s positioning of the self, social presence and creative practice within a paradigm of economic production outlines an environment in which community and social practice might both be seen as irrecoverably lost to the interests and priorities of capitalist logic. Theatre scholar Dani Snyder-Young usefully illustrates the implications of this perspective for practitioners who, like Ridout, continue to hope theatre might provide a device with which to explore, experience and potentially realise a collectivist or communitarian politics. As she writes: “the utopian promise of communion, of ‘pure’ connection with others, is undermined by the real limits of individual ontology. Humans desire connection, but not at the expense of individual identity, individual choice, and individual agency” (2013: 97). Whilst, as I will address in chapter five in consideration of Helen Nicholson’s theorisation of ‘relational ontology’ (in Hughes and Nicholson 2016: 251-254), there have been some recent attempts from within the field to rethink notions of subjectivity and the self beyond discourses of economic production, the fundamental assertion that the social and subjective characteristics of contemporary capitalism have corrupted the political dynamics of social practice remains. As Nicholson writes:

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is no longer possible to suggest that participation is in and of itself radical. Nor is it the case that tapping into local issues will produce either a collective political vision or shared social
Beyond the Romance of Community - Community as Praxis

Considered in this way, the persistence of ‘community’ in the language with which theatre’s relationship to social context is described could be seen, not as a reflection of ongoing efforts to articulate a communitarian politics through theatre, but, conversely, as an allusion to decades of cultural policy development that have successfully reframed the practical and ideological function of the arts and, fundamentally, the relationship between cultural practice and the state. It provides a lens with which scholars from various fields confirm the supremacy of capitalism as a social, ontological and political paradigm, and a vocabulary with which to describe the tight grip of the present on our aspirations for a more socially responsive and responsible future. However, while I accept a reading of contemporary society as one that privileges economic interests and promotes characteristics of individualism, competition and precarity that undermine a perception of social practice as distinct from the interests and machinations of capital, I suggest that what is compromised here is not community in totum, but a particular way of imagining community’s relationship to the interests of the political left.

Ridout helps illustrate this distinction in his discussion of the ‘good community’, which he identifies as a central tenet of “the diverse field variously named as applied, socially engaged, political, activist, and, of course, community theatre” (2013: 25). As Ridout writes, the good community highlights an assumed correlation between community or, more specifically, community as it might be implicated and engaged with through the practice of theatre, and a ‘prepolitical harmony’ understood in terms of primitive communism, or a broadly communitarian ethics of relation, logic and value. Snyder-Young identifies a similar correlation in her writing, suggesting that contemporary thought on the social value of theatre is dominated by Marxist and neo-Marxist analysis that posits theatre as a tool for social change based on its capacity to interact with and amplify progressive, communitarian dynamics that are seen as an innate characteristic of social context and human relations (2013: 9). Community, in this context, is seen as ‘good’ not because it offers a response to circumstantial experiences of oppression, coercion or exploitation but, as Ridout observes, because its prepolitical characteristics are seen to constitute an escape from the infrastructure and interests of capital more broadly. It is arguably this characteristic that we can see...
rearticulated through Prenkti’s appeal to a poetics of representation, as a strategy through which the community’s essential goodness might be made public and apparent as political text, and the good community might, in more general terms, be understood as the presupposition that underwrites an essentialist correlation between community theatre and the political ambitions articulated formally through the discourses of the political left.

It is this configuration of community in relation to capital and, through this, theatre in relation to politics, that I suggest is effectively undermined by arguments such as those advanced by Joseph and Bauman, and the subjective characteristics of neoliberal governance more broadly. If, as Harvie and Hardt and Negri suggest, neoliberal capitalism is characterised by forms of governmentality and economic production that both precede efforts to organise alternate discourses of political value and also exploit the social technologies through which such a politics might be realised, then the political and ideological distinction between community and capitalism becomes difficult, if not impossible, to sustain.

The first contribution of this thesis could, therefore, be described as the re-politicisation of community itself. In her monograph on the intersection between community, as a concept and social context, and the infrastructure of contemporary capitalism, Joseph argues against, as she writes, the ‘romance’ of community, suggesting that community operates most prominently, not as a reference to or articulation of particular, localised categories of social relation, but as an abstract symbol of togetherness (2002: vii). As with Ridout, Joseph allies this quality with a nostalgic turn to the past, and qualities of ‘understanding, caring and belonging’ that are supposed to have existed in a pre-modern version of social and political order that somehow predates and avoids the complexities of the present. It is in these terms that Joseph describes community as the “defining other of modernity” (ibid.: xxxi), noting that its constitution as a conceptual or rhetorical alternative to occurrent circumstances of the present is evident across the political spectrum. She argues, however, that this ‘othering’ might also be seen to disempower community as a site of discourse, social practice and politics, invoking a structural and ideological correlation between communities and the conditions they are imagined to oppose, improve or redress. As she suggests, set against the backdrop of contemporary capitalism, the work of community is not to represent or facilitate alternative models of socially-engaged political relations, but to extend the reach and authority of capitalism itself by providing a social counterpart to capitalism’s fundamentally asocial project. As she writes: “the work of community is to generate and legitimate necessary particularities and social hierarchies (of gender, race,
nation, sexuality) implicitly required, but disavowed, by capitalism” (ibid.: xxxii). While, however, in the context of a capitalist hegemony the values associated with community might generally be seen to represent and advance capitalist interests, it is fundamentally community’s romantic characteristic, as the politically malleable ‘other’ to the realities of the present, that might be seen to arrest its usefulness to projects interested in supporting or advancing political change. As Joseph writes, it is this quality that underwrites community’s “relentless return in the relentless elaboration of capitalism” (2002: xxxii). However, in the context of a broader consideration of community's social constitution, it might also be seen to associate community with structural and political instability, as always a reaction to and articulation of interests that work beyond the localised, interpersonal infrastructures of community itself.

With Joseph's concerns in mind, my interest here is not to work against, but to look beyond the romance of community. Joseph’s intention, as she writes, is to engage critically with “a celebratory discourse of community” (2002: viii) in order to highlight the political complexity that might be associated with community and, in particular, its potential complicity with interest that are conventionally seen as external or opposed to community as a context of social and political discourse. In looking ‘beyond’, therefore, I do not intend to overlook the insight and authority of Joseph’s analysis but, rather, to consider what value community might continue to offer theatre’s political aspirations once it has been disassociated from an essential relationship to communitarian good.

In the first instance, I acknowledge the appropriation and recirculation of community within neoliberal discourses of value and economic production, and recognise the implications of this enclosure for ideological positions that link the liberatory potential of community with ‘prepolitical’ models of social relation. Secondly, however, I acknowledge, too, that my own interest in community is not coincidental, but born out of a legacy of leftist thought and practice, and I recognise in community an aspirational or, as Jill Dolan writes, ‘utopian’ (2005) dimension that is perhaps necessary, both as a conceptual/phenomenological retreat from the conditions of the present, and as a way of prefiguring or temporarily experiencing more ethical, compassionate, socially responsible models of relation, being and production. Just as I accept that some influences associated with community might legitimately be mapped on to discourses of value and productivity that could be described as capitalist or neoliberal, so I do not intend to disavow community’s ongoing significance as a counterpoint to qualities of individualism, self-improvement, and economic self-realisation that could be seen to characterise contemporary social contexts.
In suggesting that theatre’s political potential is contingent on the ‘re-politicisation’ of community itself, therefore, I recognise that community is already and powerfully politicised. The distinction that I hope to offer is not a reaffirmation of community’s capacity to service discourses of political value and productivity as they are already marked out in the dialectic of left- and right-wing politics but, instead, a politicised reframing of community as praxis, which is to say, as a contingent and uncertain context of political becoming. In this turn, I hope to highlight characteristics of practice, relation and production that might be seen as immanent to and constitutive of community itself. This is not in preparation for a revised articulation of community’s association with communitarian good per se, but, rather, to begin to identify some of the strategies through which community might be seen to organise itself, as way of differentiating between the constitutive agencies exercised by and contained within the structure of community, and its reflexive or supplementary relationship to other world ordering agendas.

Praxis has, in recent years, come to the fore in the language with which practitioners and scholars describe the effects and practice of theatre. Its formal integration within the discourse of performance studies is illustrated in publications and projects from a spectrum of specialist fields including live art (Farrier 2005; Lambert 2013; Live Art Development Agency 2014; Pagness 2011), socially-engaged and applied performance (Heap 2015; Prendergast 2010; Ridout 2013; Sánchez-Camus 2017; Shaughnessy 2012), theatre in education (Jackson 2003; Nah 2016; Neelands 2006) and devised and post-dramatic theatre (Bay-Cheng et al. 2010; Fryer 2010; McKinnon and Lowry 2012). However, its colloquial usage might be linked back to Raymond Williams’ ever-present Keywords, in which he describes praxis as: “a word intended to unite theory [as a scheme of ideas] with the strongest sense of practical (but not conventional or customary) activity: practice as action” (2014 [1976]: 318, italics in original).

In an editorial in which she evokes this interpretation, theatre scholar Stacey Ellen Wolf further focuses Williams’ definition to identify praxis as a dialectic in which theory and practice form two sides of a mutually constitutive discourse (2002: v). In these terms, practice constitutes ‘action’ in so far as it constitutes, also, the translation or mobilisation of theory into practice, where theory represents particular, intangible, ways of knowing, understanding and interpreting the world and practice represents their performative, public expression. Though neither Williams nor Wolf associates praxis with social contexts specifically, the understanding of praxis they support might be allied with social practice in
two ways that are informative to this discussion. The first relates to the processes and resources with which the individual realises themselves as a social agent, and might be linked back to Harvie’s articulation of the artrepreneur. As Harvie identifies in her discussion, the ways in which we understand, represent and conduct ourselves publicly cannot be seen as the unadulterated expression of an internal schema of interests, drives and politics. Rather, the realisation of the self in practice is subject to the performative, relational and epistemological frameworks in relation to which the individual is located, and the particular ways in which those frameworks posit the social and political value of the self. As Harvie’s discussion suggests, therefore, we can see the individual as subject to a praxis of self-expression, where the ‘action’ of self-expression introduces the self to broader discourses of value, order and logic that are revealed by and articulated through the framework of social practice. Secondly, and as a continuation of this dynamic, we can see communities as subject to similar influences, as socially constituted networks of otherwise disparate or differently connected individuals who are, by virtue of their association with one another, subject to two levels of constitutive influence: those that supersede their constitution as a community, and might be allied with governmental or institutional interests, the influence of capital, or categories of social practice and belonging that are in some ways exterior to the community itself; and those that arise out of their performative engagement with one another, in so far as their interaction might be associated with the ‘action’ of realising community itself.

The notion of praxis has, of course, been mobilised critically and conceptually, notably by Bauman (1999 [1973]) and, as I will address, Paolo Virno (2004), but the general principle of praxis as theory in or as action could nevertheless be seen to introduce to community qualities of malleability, plurality and self-determination that are excluded from its constitution as a symbol of romantic past-times or ‘good’ politics. Considered in relation to community, therefore, praxis could be allied with the dynamics I earlier described as ‘troubling’, as a label that recognises in social contexts framed or engaged with as community a variety of social, cultural and political positions that do not, inherently, reflect or represent a conventional notion of coherence, logic or social identity, and are only associated with these characteristics through the performative action of social practice. However, in contrast to the romantic constitution of community as politically and ideologically distinct from hegemonic concerns, community as praxis suggests, too, characteristics of permeability and instability, as individual members are continually exposed to influences beyond the reach and interests of the community as a discrete network of social
relations, and the community, in as much as it constitutes a coherent structure, is also and always exposed to constitutive influences beyond itself.

In these terms, community as praxis might be productively aligned with Cathy Turner’s articulation of dramaturgy, which she identifies, not in the conventional sense as concerned with the arrangement of performers, materials and events on stage, but as any coordinated series of practices, relationships and responses directed towards the ordering of knowledge and experience more broadly (2010). What is key, however, to Turner’s interpretation, and to my interest in her ideas as an illustration of community, is as she writes, an ‘open-ended’ characteristic that posits dramaturgy as processual and unending. As she states:

[T]he concept of dramaturgy could be characterized as an idea of composition, structure or artistic programme as a dynamic and always shifting constellation of events, actions, interactions, performances and contexts, rather than seeming to isolate and arrest the composition as artefact. (2010: 151)

In this way, and regardless of what material or performative outcomes might also be associated with its processes, Turner invests dramaturgy with the principal quality of irresolution, as a structure always emerging in relation to itself, caught in the flux between material and immaterial, experience and discourse, theory and practice. It is not, therefore, represented by the linear progression from theory to practice but is perhaps more accurately cast as a series of asynchronous praxes which, when taken together, constitute dramaturgy as a generative site of continuous becoming. To introduce praxis as a constitutive element of community invites a similar interpretation, invoking community, not as a static configuration of practices and order that invoke qualities of belonging or identity on the basis of their consistency and repetition, but as a performative structure that is, by necessity, continuously enacted.

The intention of this distinction is to introduce a way of understanding community that resists circulation within already politicised discourses of value and exchange and to suggest, instead, that if we are to associate community with a political function that is also understood as in some ways expressive or representative of community itself, then it must emerge from or relate to community’s performative actualisation as social context. To this end, the notion of praxis helps illustrate qualities of contingency, locality and performativity that characterise community as action and, I suggest, begins to provide a framework with which to situate community beyond the constraints of romantic supplementarity. In these
terms, to return to the example with which I opened this chapter, the imperative to be a community cannot be differentiated from the practice implicated in being one, and while interpretations of community might continue to operate within institutional, evaluative and economic discourses that contextualise the practice of theatre, to paraphrase Joseph, the notion of community as praxis invokes a new epistemological perspective in which community ‘relentlessly returns to itself’ as a self-realising dramaturgy of social and political relations.

Community as Political Praxis

The differentiation between the romantic community and community as praxis can be seen to complicate discourses that posit community as the antithesis or counterpart to capitalism by framing an imperative to attend to the circumstances, strategies and processes through which the community expresses itself. What is absent from this perspective, however, is a specific relationship between these processes and theatre’s political aspirations or, more specifically, a political economy beyond the community itself. It is this additional dynamic that I associate with a politicisation of praxis, and which I outline in the following, final section.

What I identify as community as political praxis sits somewhere between the vernacular understanding of praxis as the realisation of theory in practice, and Virno’s more specifically politicised differentiation between praxis and poiesis. Virno addresses these subjects in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, the published outcome of three connected seminars delivered at the University of Calabria in 2001. In these papers, Virno considers the constitution of society and governance in the context of what he describes as ‘post-Fordism’, but might generally be understood in terms of post-industrial or neoliberal capitalism as a label that identifies the primacy of economic interests as a social, governmental and political force in contemporary contexts. In characterising contemporary society as post-Fordist, however, Virno draws attention to what he considers the preeminent dynamic influencing or delimiting the political constitution of the present: the expansion of labour, governed and directed by economic interests, into the realm of the social or, more specifically, the ‘praxis’ of social life.

For Virno, therefore, praxis retains an essentially social characteristic as a quality of becoming associated with social presence and practice. Where, however, in its colloquial
sense, all praxis might be associated with action as the public realisation of otherwise intangible knowledge and experiences, for Virno, praxis constitutes ‘political action’ only as an expression or outcome of relationships between people, and only to the extent that it remains caught in the flux and discourse of social practice. As he writes, “political action is public, consigned to exteriority, to contingency” (2004: 50). It is in these terms that Virno contrast praxis with the notion of poiesis, suggesting that poiesis be understood as the transformation of political action into labour, defined and administered by external interests (2004: 50-51). It is in in relation to this framework that Virno characterises the post-Fordist environment as a struggle between praxis and poiesis or, more accurately, as the resolution of that struggle, as the conditions of life under a capital are seen to redirect the nominally autonomous field of social practice to underwrite the institution and perpetuation of capitalism itself.

Crucially, however, where authors such as Harvie and Snyder-Young and even, to an degree, Joseph, see capitalism’s annexation of social fields of discourse and productivity as a coup that constitutes, too, the taming of social practice’s political potential, Virno maintains social praxis as a powerful constitutive force. He associates contemporary society with a ‘crisis of politics’, but where, as I have addressed, Snyder-Young sees the problematics of political practice in purely ontological terms, as a perpetual and pervasive drive towards individualism, Virno suggests, instead, that it is the result of “too much politics in the world” (2004: 51). As he suggests, we are, at all times and in all areas of our lives, implicated in the constitution of a political project that operates beyond our own interests. What is at stake in Virno’s conception of post-Fordism is not, therefore, the suppression or displacement of the social instinct to be and act together, but a principle of order and production powerful enough to redirect, almost in its entirety, the politics that are produced and enacted through the praxis of living. Virno identifies this dynamic in his consideration of ‘common places’, noting that the strategies through which we understand and order the social world - including language, customs, interpretation and understanding - continue to exercise political influence, but that they have become divorced from qualities of specificity, contingency and locality to, instead, give voice to the ‘logical-linguistic’ structure of capitalism itself. As he writes: “Everywhere, and in every situation, we speak/think in the same way” (2004: 36). In these terms, the problem facing political projects in the twenty-first century is not the depoliticisation of social practice, or, even, the decline of social forms of production and organisation, but the fact that the immaterial labour of social life is already directed towards the constitution of a
particular, partisan reality. As Virno writes: “political action now seems, in a disastrous way, like some superfluous duplication of the experience of labor, since the latter experience, even if in a deformed and despotic manner, has subsumed into itself certain structural characteristics of political action” (ibid.).

It is here that I introduce community as a potentially valuable intervention, as framing a theory of relation or social production that might also invoke the performative redistribution of political labour. As Virno observes, it is precisely at the point at which the logic and constitution of the social environment “does not yield to a public sphere” (2004: 40), which he articulates as “a political space in which the many can tend to common affairs” (ibid.), that social practice might also be seen to support and advance a logic beyond itself and which, reflexively and inevitably, emerges out of its exploitation. Here, Virno’s discussion finds a parallel with that of Hardt and Negri, whose analysis of governance in a capitalist context looks beyond the dialectic of left- and right-wing politics to, instead, suggest that contemporary forms of oppression and exploitation emerge, not as the outcome of one political regime over another but, more specifically, as a result of economic forces that interrupt the capacity for social practice to attend to and express interests immanent to itself (2009). It is in relation to the apparent collapse of political opposition that they suggest that both capitalism and socialism might be seen as ‘regimes of property’ which, though nominally opposed, aim to commodify the political dynamics of social practice, and ultimately deploy the outcomes and practices of social life as technologies with which to manage the activities of the population (ibid.: ix). In positioning community as an intervention or response to the preeminence of capital as a social and political domain, I do not intend, therefore, to correlate community with pre-existing categories of political value. Rather, and more specifically, community is political to the extent that the processes through which it enacts itself constitute, also, a disruption or departure from logics of order, value and production that precede or persist beyond the community itself. It is this formation that I associate with community as political praxis, where the praxis of community is, itself, politicised, and the workings of community could be seen as action that gives rise to the possibility, if not the certainty, of alternate paradigms of political and social relation.

In slightly less abstract terms, the differentiation between praxis as a generic constituent of becoming, and praxis as a political strategy is usefully illustrated by Ridout’s consideration of ‘freedom’ as it might emerge within and in relation to the practice of theatre. Ridout characterises freedom as liberation from economic obligation, not simply as freedom
from work but, in terms he deliberately aligns with Virno’s discussion, liberation from a paradigm of relation in which the social, material and political value of ‘being in the presence of others’ (Ridout 2013: 17; Virno 2004: 51) is situated and contained within a framework of economic production. As he writes, however, in a context of near total economic obligation, “there is not a process through which we may pass from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom” (2013: 53). Rather, what he categorises as the ‘fleeting realm’ of freedom is differentiated from the generic oppositionalism of the good community to reflect, instead, particular strategies of relation and production that must be found within and in relation to the broader hegemonic context as it is established and developed by capital.

It is here, therefore, that we might also reinstate communitarianism as a necessary prerequisite, not of community in all its possible expressions, but of community as a structure of immanent politics. In discussing the potential for theatre to give rise to freedom, Ridout posits theatre practice as an environment in which hierarchies of time, labour and productivity as they are mapped out by the interests of capital might be temporarily challenged and disrupted. As he suggests, however, this capacity is not inherent to theatre in its entirety which has, since the 1800s, become ever more closely associated with the characteristics and imperatives of industry (2013: 7). Rather, what theatre provides is a field of relations, obligations, rules and responsibilities within which there exists the potential for narratives of work and time, as they are associated with the context of the capitalist present, to be differently politicised. As Ridout argues, however, to examine or develop the political potential of social practice within and in relation to a context governed by capitalist interests it is necessary, also, to engage in a practice of ‘unworking’. Drawing on the writing of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, Ridout suggests that all aspects of social life, including those aspects visible and implicated in the practice of theatre, constitute work in as much as they are already associated with value and functionality within a framework of capitalist production. As he suggests, therefore, to facilitate the freedom of performers, audiences and participants, it is necessary, too, to instate new principles of relation that liberate social labour from the work of capital. As he writes, theatre that possesses the potential to support the practice and experience of freedom “will first of all be a theatre in which work is somehow in question” (ibid.: 11).

Ridout aligns this ambition with a particular articulation of communist politics but notes, too, that the technologies through which it might be achieved do not relate to broad ideological narratives, but, rather, to performative interaction between people, in contingent
relation to their own circumstances. As he writes:

My gamble then is [...] that it may be possible to actualize in collective or socially oriented artistic practices something that is elsewhere only an idea or a vision of the future (often based on a romantic nostalgia for a mythical past): production and pleasure beyond the division of labor. (2013: 15)

While Ridout associates communitarianism with a communist politics and, indeed, aligns the political potential of theatre with the advancement of interests that he defines and understands as communist, here, we can see communitarianism operate much more dispassionately, as a practice of relation that represents, too, a strategy through which resources made available through the infrastructure of a capitalist society are turned towards the constitution of much more localised economies of discourse, value, interest and production. In highlighting this distinction, I do not mean to suggest that outcomes produced through interpersonal praxes might not also be seen as a productive contribution to discourses of communist politics, just as they could also be seen to support capitalist progress. Rather, I hope to invoke a critical distance between community and communitarianism in an effort to reframe communitarian principles of relation - collectivism, collaboration, communal practices of care, knowledge making and production - as a strategic move that necessitates innovations in social practice that are, by virtue of their differentiation rather than their obligation to preexisting discourses of political production, differently political.

Conclusion

What I hope to offer as a contribution towards conceptions of theatre’s political role in a capitalist context is not a community aligned with discourses of change articulated through a narrative of left- and right-wing politics. Rather, I am interested in the possibilities of community associated with Hardt and Negri’s articulation of ‘altermodernity’ (2009: 102-118). As they write, altermodernity is not defined in opposition to the social and political order precipitated and progressed by capital, which they identify as ‘modernity’. Nor, should it be understood as a retreat from categories of identity, relation and production established by modernity, which they classify as ‘antimodernity’ and might, in the context of this discussion, be allied with Ridout’s articulation of the good community. Rather,
altermodernity and, consequently, community imagined in these terms, represents a form of political expression concerned, not with overarching ideological regimes, but with the contingent circumstances and experiences of the political agent; with the social and material resources that are available to them; and, fundamentally, with a critical appraisal and revision of the circumstances that produce the political subject as a precondition to new forms of political thought and action. As they write, “[altermodernity] is two removes from modernity since it is first grounded in the struggles of antimodernity and their resistance to the hierarchies at the core of modernity; and second it breaks with antimodernity, refusing the dialectical opposition and moving from resistance to the proposition of alternatives” (2009: 114).

What I propose and hope to examine throughout this thesis is, therefore, a notion of community, not as a differentiation from capitalist interests per se, but as a context in which socially constituted agencies might be applied to the politics of the present in ways that allow them to be rethought and performed differently. In practical terms, and in terms that most easily translate over to the contexts of the case studies to follow, Hardt and Negri’s description of altermodernity as a field of relations that support a practical shift from opposition to alterity might be understood in relation to political philosopher Andrea Zevnik’s theorisation of a ‘different thought’. Writing on the constitution of the political subject, Zevnik draws attention to the role of ontology in determining and delimiting the political sphere (2016). In particular, she highlights a differentiation between, as she writes, ‘being qua being’ and being as it appears and is expressed in the world, associating self-expression with circumstantial, historical and institutional factors that determine how the political subject is realised, and the forms of agency through which subjecthood might be experienced and expressed. As she writes, “the limits of what one can comprehend and understand are set by language and by other forms through which one can be cognitive of the world” (ibid.: 6). Zevnik notes that this paradigm is of practical as well as philosophical concern as our understanding and interpretation of the world inevitably reflects regimes of logic, order and power that supersede and contextualise the outcomes of our activities, either alone or together. As she writes, “the conditions which predetermine the existence of the political space and the political subject […] will inevitably ‘return’ acts of resistance to their starting place” (ibid.: 2). It is here that she offers a ‘different thought’ as a preliminary condition of an alternative politics, suggesting that for politics to be thought and practiced differently it is first necessary to establish the conditions that allow for the constitution of a new political subject. A new politics, she suggests, cannot emerge against the institutions and influence of
hegemonic order, but, must be pursued beyond them, as an ontological project that associates being itself with new fields of possibility, agency and production.

As Zevnik argues, new forms of subjectivity and self-expression are contingent, not only on the disruption of ‘everyday political micropractices’ through which the logic and authority of the hegemonic order are established as a social and political reality, but on the institution of a different ordering principle in relation to which notions of self, agency and understanding might be allied and expressed. It is here that I position community in the context of this study: not as a politically static field of behaviours and values, but as a malleable and uncertain discourse of logic and relation that might, as has been considered, be allied with discourses of capitalist production and socialist resistance as they already exist but retains, also, the potential to give rise to new logics of self and relation that exceed these constraints. What I hope to argue for over the course of this thesis, therefore, is not only that community remains salvageable as a conceptual and performative framework with which the logic and influence of capital might be challenged and subverted, but that it outlines an interface between social and economic interests in which capitalism’s most potent and powerful claims about the world are made uniquely uncertain. It is this quality that I suggest is essential to a rethinking of theatre’s political role in the capitalist context of the twenty-first century, and that I hope to examine in the case studies to follow.

Structure

As a whole, this study consists of four main sections: a consideration of the history and development of community theatre which serves, also, as a literature review; and, three case study chapters that each attend to the work and context of a distinct theatre project which, through its practice, addresses issues of community, praxis and politics. In chapter two, I offer a selective history of community theatre that examines, first, the relationship between community theatre and the expansion of alternative theatre during the 1970s, and, secondly, the implications of this lineage for the ways in which the intersection between theatre and social context continues to be thought and practiced. In particular, as a continuation of Ridout’s politicised interest in the coercive influence and infrastructure of work, I identify an intersection between notions of political labour galvanised in the socialist crucible of the 1970s and principles of work and productivity as they are proposed and instituted by
neoliberal interests. The purpose of this analysis is to trace what I see as a complicity between notions of political activity and value as they are informed by the ideological foundations of alternative theatre, and neoliberal discourses that aim to commodify and manipulate the political potential of social practice. I examine the layering of social and economic interests that might be seen to characterise the practice and politics of theatre in social contexts, and conclude with the introduction of an idea that I describe as the ‘felicitous community’ but that suggests, more broadly, that community’s political constitution is not assured but, rather, is contingently related to the conditions within and in relation to which the community encounters and experiences itself. Within this context, as I argue, the work of practitioners is not the liberation of the politically problematic ‘good community’, but the more nuanced effort to facilitate circumstantial instances of social context and praxis beyond the capitalist inflected imperative to be productive.

This subject is then taken up in specific reference to the three case study examples. Chapter three addresses The Create Course, a collaboration between the Battersea Arts Centre, the Katherine Low Settlement and lead artist Naomi Alexander that took place in London in 2015 and, over eight weeks, aimed to replicate the principles of socio-political action framed by theatre maker Joan Littlewood in her imagining of a Fun Palace. Of the three case studies, Create Course is most clearly positioned in relation to the lineage of ‘radical’ theatre as it emerged during the alternative theater movement. This chapter bridges the gap between models of cultural activism galvanised in the context of the British counter-culture in the sixties and seventies, and conditions that form and inform social, cultural and political practice in the context of the present. Considered through the lens of reenactment, as informed by Rebecca Schneider (2011), this chapter traces the social and temporal complexities of attempting to restage historically specific forms of social or political agency. Attending, in particular, to the role of Create Course participants as reenactors, implicated in the performative attempt to return to or restage thresholds of social and political activity identified by Littlewood over fifty-years ago, this chapter addresses the uncertain politics of creativity and self-realisation when framed in relation to a neoliberal environment which, as authors such as Feher (2009), Harvie (2013) and Nicholson (2009) have observed, not only values qualities of creative thinking, adaptability, self-improvement and entrepreneurialism that might be associated with cultural practice, but implicates these within modes of subjectivity and production that establish and progress the neoliberal regime. As I will examine, it is possible to argue that the conditions in relation to which the Create Course took place intervened in the ideologically informed ambition to reenact Littlewood’s politics.
However, it is in this apparent failure to return to the Fun Palace as it was imagined by Littlewood that I suggest the project’s most valuable and potent forms of political agency were made apparent, and it is through a consideration of the participant’s improvisatory redistribution of the project’s resources that I trace ideas of praxis and community through this chapter.

Chapter four addresses Albert Drive and, in particular, Everybody’s House, as referenced earlier. Positioned in relation to models of agency articulated by Jen Harvie (2005), Sally Mackey (in Hughes and Nicholson 2016) and Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks (in Cochrane and Russell 2014), that tend to correlate theatre’s socio-political function with the materiality of space and the spatial dynamics of culture, I draw on Doreen Massey (2010 [2005]) and Setha Low’s (2016) articulations of interactional and embodied space respectively to consider Everybody’s House as a form of socio-spatial imagining that allowed Pollokshields residents to encounter and realise new ways of enacting their community together. In particular, I consider the ways in which Glas(s) Performance mobilised the figure of the neighbour to posit and promote a model of interrelational praxis that I link back to Nancy’s interest in community as a pre-epistemological state of ‘being-in-common’. I suggest that the practice and politics of neighbourliness, as they are expressed through the project, might be contrasted with Ash Amin’s characterisation of contemporary life as a “society of strangers” (2012: 2), to represent the performative expression of a reembodiment of space orientated around collectivist forms of logic and responsibility.

Chapter five concerns the drama group Melodramatics and, in particular, the development of the play Seeing Red, which addresses issues of domestic abuse and was informed and inspired the group members’ experiences. I consider their work through the lens of epistemic and ontic forms of participation and production, as articulated by James Thompson (2004), and, in so doing, associate their work with two complementary fields of affect and productivity. Considered, in particular, through the lens of vulnerability, as articulated by Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds (2014), I consider how an ontologically informed notion of theatre’s social, political and affective potential might provide a perspective from which to link otherwise distinct fields of productivity and practice in a shared, interrelational discourse that might also be understood as community. In particular, I consider the ways in which the group’s interdependent characteristics might be seen to have supported their constitution as a distinct field of social and political production, in terms that might be allied with Hardt and Negri’s theorisation of altermodernity. It is this final formation that I associate directly with a notion of community as political praxis, as a form of
collectivist discourse that exceeds the conditions of supplementarity earlier outlined by Joseph, to express the communitarian dynamics of social practice as a political force beyond discourses of political labour as they apply to the context of contemporary society in general, and as they are specifically manifest in relation to the group’s practice.

I conclude this study by returning to a consideration of those characteristics earlier described as troubling, to suggest that community’s political value is expressed, not in opposition to capitalist discourses of order and production, but as a site of possibility in which the logics, interests and values of any ideological or political regime are subject to social processes of reconsideration, rearticulation and change. In particular, I suggest that the relationship between community and political alterity is contingently related to the capacity for community itself to support the exploration and articulation of new forms of collectivist subjectivity. To support a consideration of the relationship between these principles and the practical delivery of theatre, I return to the idea of the felicitous community to suggest that the politics embodied within and expressed through community are circumstantially informed by the social, representational and material resources through which they are able to realise the political dynamics of their relationship together. Informed by Jenny Hughes’ assertion that the “theatricalisation of the social world” (2015: 80) produced at the intersection between performance practice and social context might be seen to interrupt the ‘smooth processing’ of social practice into neoliberal discourse, I suggest that theatre’s most valuable contribution towards political change might be as an intervention within the performative reproduction of capitalist society in ways that liberate space, time and resources for the circumstantial articulation of collectivist or communitarian praxes.

Methods

In the first instance, the projects included in this study have been selected as a result of their specificity. As I have outlined, though we might posit neoliberal capitalism as a generic paradigm of governance and control, the ways in which it is expressed as a discourse of power are highly circumstantial. In response to Joseph’s articulation of the supplementary relationship between community and capital, and a more general disavowal of the ‘good community’ as a viable political strategy, it seems necessary to attend, not to the broad ideological ambitions of socially-engaged or community theatre practitioners but, rather, to the ways in which the relationship between theatre and social context is enacted in practice.
The projects included here support this project in two main ways. In the first, they each
demonstrate a highly specific sense of relation to the social and material context in which the
work takes place. Though these relationships are, necessarily, articulated in different ways
dependent on the context and conditions of the practice, they might each be aligned with the
broad ambition to pursue qualities of political discourse beyond narratives of
instrumentalism, prosumerism and work as outlined above. Through close and careful
attention to the circumstances of their participants, the forms of agency and self expression
that are available to them, and their capacity, as individuals or as a collective, to exceed
restrictive discourses of social, spatial or cultural order, the projects considered here
explicitly link political action with the contingent circumstances of social context and social
relation in ways that might be framed as altermodernity or a ‘different thought’. Despite their
relatively broad geographical and methodological range, therefore, it is precisely the highly
localised conditions of the projects considered here that allows them to contribute towards a
broader consideration of resistance or response to contemporary capitalism. Collectively,
these projects are all based in the United Kingdom, and while there might be some superficial
variations in public funding or cultural context between projects in Scotland and England, for
instance, it is assumed that they all share consistencies in relation to the social and economic
conditions of neoliberal governance that allow them to contribute towards shared discussion
about the political dynamics of theatre and community in a capitalist context.

Secondly, and in more practical terms, the artists leading these projects were each
interested in the political and social dimensions of their work, and in allowing me access to
their practice and to the people they had worked with. Whilst, in the first instance, this might
seem an arbitrary or even mundane concern, as I have noted, I am interested in the ways in
which capitalist discourses might be seen to have misrepresented, appropriated or
commodified community as a social and symbolic expression, and the possibilities that
remain for social practice to exercise political agencies beyond the neoliberal. In these terms,
uncomplicated and, even, generous permission to observe, participate and document in ways
that feel appropriate to both research and practice might be seen as a necessary resource with
which to begin to approach ideas of community beyond its supplementary relationship to the
capitalist agenda. I conducted some degree of field research for all of the projects included
here and, in each instance, tried to remain open to possibilities of social context and practice,
not as it might be predetermined by scholarship and theorisation, but as they were expressed
locally and performatively by the subjects of the study. This required a flexible
methodological approach. My hope is that the textures and benefits of this approach will be
evident in the case study chapters to follow, but I will include some insight here as an overview of the study in general.

*Albert Drive* is unique in the context of this study to the extent that it had concluded by the time I begun my research. What was of interest, therefore, was not specifically what had taken place within the framework of the project, although Glas(s) Performance and other interviewees were invaluable in supporting my understanding of *Albert Drive* as cultural practice, but, rather, the resonances that remained of the project as I undertook my research nearly two years after it had ended. My access to project participants was facilitated by Glas(s) Performance, who remained in contact with many of the people they had worked with and, over the course of several visits to Pollokshields, I met or spoke with artists and participants involved in every aspect of the project. Where possible, I asked to meet interviewees face-to-face, in places they felt comfortable in, or felt reflected something of their relationship to the project. These experiences involved travelling to and through Pollokshields, meeting in coffee shops, homes and performance spaces, and provided an invaluable perspective from which to map the social and political effects of the project on to the material context of Pollokshields. During one particularly memorable visit, a participant took me on a guided tour of the area so that he could explain just how *Albert Drive* had informed or related to that context. Although I brought the same list of questions to each interview, the style tended towards the conversational, allowing space for residents to direct discussion towards areas of the project that they felt were of particular importance. I had been provided with a detailed time-line and evaluation report by the project manager, Rosemary James prior to many of these interviews, but this approach allowed experience, memory and personal politics to distort or reframe the facticity of these documents in ways that drew attention to alternate, local registers of value, influence and importance, and eventually to *Everybody's House*, which became the subject of my study.

In the context of the other two case studies, I was able to observe practice as it was being delivered. Melodramatics’ project took place over several months in the first half of 2015, and the *Create Course* for eight weeks from May to July of that year and, in each case, I made the weekly journey from Manchester and attended most, if not quite all, of the sessions that constituted the project. At the advice of the lead artists, Naomi Alexander and Lisa O’Neill-Rogan in London and Bolton respectively, my role in the room was as a participant-observer, engaging in discussion, taking part in exercises and, in some instances, helping develop the cultural outcomes of the projects. In the first instance, there might appear to be a degree of imprecision embedded in this approach. Just as I engaged in conversations
or helped with rehearsals, so my attention might be drawn from otherwise notable events taking place at the other side of the room. Similarly, as I came to understand more of the participants’ personal lives, their relationship to their practice, their experiences and difficulties beyond the context of the project, perhaps some critical distance is eroded. I would suggest too that while I would not describe my methods as practice-as-research, to the extent that I did not direct the activities that took place, my presence in the room and contribution as colleague or participant inevitably blurs the sense of disciplinary distinction embedded in this kind of terminology. As will be made clearer in the relevant chapters, the specific focus of each of these projects might be seen to mitigate for some of these factors, making it clear where my contribution was useful and appropriate, and where it was not. I would suggest too, however, that this quality of relationship might be seen in terms similar to those outlined above, as an approach that allows for the productive disruption of totalising narratives as they might relate to the project’s function and value by exposing me, as the researcher, to specific registers of productivity and influence as they emerge in relation to and between project participants. As I will attend to at a later stage in this study, James Thompson identifies a distinction between forms of participation and engagement that he describes as epistemic and ontic (2004: 159). Drawing on the work of E. Valentine Daniel (1996), Thompson suggests that while epistemic participation relates to the production of knowledge, understanding and discourse - as he writes, “how a group sees the world” (2004: 159) - ontic participation could be seen as an expression and practice of being, with and in relation to others. I suggest that the disciplinary uncertainty of the participant-observer might be seen to provide unique and methodologically significant opportunities for ‘being’ with participants. While I don’t wish to erase the significant distinction between the participants’ interests and my own, therefore, I draw on these experiences, too, to inform my understanding of the practices included in this study, and the intersection between them and discourses of productivity and interrelation that might also be described as community. As a final comment, and perhaps as a corrective to the blurred methodological boundaries I have just described, I would like to note that my role and responsibilities as a researcher were, in each instance, clearly explained, both by me and the artistic team involved in the delivery of the project, and that appropriate ethics clearance was sought and granted for each case study included in this research.
Chapter 2:

Community Theatre - work and politics

Community Theatre in the 1970s - drama as a weapon, drama as a voice

[T]he difference between political and community theatre ultimately lies in the differing perception of the social function of theatre: whether theatre is seen as a weapon or community expression. (Craig 1980: 23)

Sandy Craig wrote the above at the end of the 1970s, a decade closely associated with experimentation and expansion in the field of theatre. Bookended by social, cultural and political tensions that came to the fore during the 60s, and the market driven economic policies of the Conservative government that came to power in 1979, the decade after “The Moment of 1968” (Craig 1980: 14) stands out in scholarship documenting the history of British theatre as a beacon of liberated creative, collaborative and political energies. The narrative that appears, and is repeated by authors including Bradby and McCormick (1978), Bull (2017), Davies (1987), Craig (1980), Itzen (1980) and Kershaw (1994), is that, during the 1960s, while commercialism and cultural conservatism alienated audiences and theatre makers alike in the context of the arts, the failure of the Labour government that came to power in 1964 to institute a meaningful socialist politics, increased access to and uptake of higher education, anti-war sentiment and galvanising global narratives such as the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement, contributed to a growing sense of disenfranchisement and dissatisfaction amongst large sections of the British population, which boiled over in 1968. This boiling over took numerous forms, including student protests, worker’s demonstrations, and an intense period of cultural experimentation which provided the basis for what would later be termed the community arts movement (Jeffers in Jeffers and Moriarty 2017: 38-39), and the groundwork for the broad spectrum of theatre projects that would come to be characterised as ‘alternative theatre’. It is, in particular, the nexus of 1968 that is used to help frame and articulate the values associated with theatre as it emerged during this time. As Peter Ansorge notes, “[i]t is impossible to deny […] a link between the most publicized political events of 1968 and the creation, in practical terms, of the new ‘alternative’ circuit of arts labs, cellar theatres and environmental venues which played such a dominant role in the life of our theatres” (1975: 56). Craig echoes this assertion and draws attention to the role of television in helping to translate otherwise discrete moments of political activity - student
protests in Paris and Chicago, political uprisings in Prague, anti-war and civil rights protests in the United States - into a general counter-cultural discourse of popular protest and institutional oppression (1980: 15). Though, what has been identified as ‘alternative theatre’ is associated with an array of aesthetic and methodological experimentation, undertaken with and in relation to a diverse range of audiences, in a variety of contexts, as Ansorge notes, these events helped to provide a “[w]orking mythology and a political background” (1975: 56) that associates these practices with a common social and political imperative. Reflecting from the vantage point of 2017, theatre historians John Bull and Graham Saunders link this background with a substantial shift in the social and political values associated with the practice of theatre in Britain, suggesting that practices in the decade after 1968 “undoubtedly reshaped the ecology of British Theatre” (in Bull 2017: viii). It is the constitution of this mythology, and its implications for the study and practice of theatre in contemporary contexts that are the primary focus of this chapter.

Just as ‘1968’ is positioned as the background to the emergent field of alternative theatre, alternative theatre, too, is employed as a conceptual framework within which a variety of less easily defined cultural and theatrical developments take place, community theatre among them. As Craig notes, “[a]lternative theatre resists easy categorisation. The boundaries between different areas remain unclear and shifting. Individual groups often start out as one thing and end up as something different” (1980: 20). As a way of beginning to map out this uncertain landscape, Craig offers five categories that sit within the field of alternative theatre - Political Theatre, Community Theatre, Theatre and Education, Performance Art and Companies Presenting Plays - but points out, too, that the consistent flow of styles and approaches between companies that might be seen as representative of these categories means that, in practical terms, the distinction between them is less than definitive.

In common with Ansorge, Itzen and Kershaw, Craig suggests that the practical and ideological commonalities of the alternative theatre movement can be traced back to the events and context of 1968. As he notes, demands for cultural and creative freedom articulated by the student protesters in Paris were answered in Britain by artists ready to establish new practices and venues in urban centres such as London, Edinburgh, Leeds, Brighton and Bradford (ibid.: 15). Amongst other beginnings, 1968 saw Thelma Holt and Charles Marowitz establish Open Space in London as a home for new writing and experimental theatre (ibid.: 10), the formation of Inter-Action which aimed to support “experimental theatre that was of genuine use to the community” (in Itzen 1980: 52), and
gave rise to several other creative practices that aimed to work with communities such as the Ambiance Lunch Hour Theatre Club, Dogg’s Troupe, and Leeds based Interplay (Khan in Craig 1980: 60), the formation of the Agitprop Street Players, who would later become Red Ladder Theatre Company, and, of particular significance to both Ansorge (1975: 25-26) and Kershaw (1994: 100), the establishment of Jim Haynes’ Arts Lab in a disused warehouse on Drury Lane. Though many of the venues and practices that emerged during this time were short lived, Craig and others position these activities as the infrastructure that supported the emergence and development of alternative theatre over the subsequent decade as new venues, new approaches to engaging and communicating with audiences, and new cultural and aesthetic values altered the context of theatre practice in Britain.

In addition, however, to its value as an interjection within the practical development of theatre and theatre infrastructure in Britain, 1968 is seen, too, in terms of a historically unique union of cultural practice and ideological intent. Craig characterises this period as a ‘blossoming’, while Catherine Itzen, writing in a more general sense, describes 1968 as a “coming to consciousness […] of the war-baby generation” (1980: 3) as young adults came to frame their own experiences in global terms, seeking to take new responsibilities for issues such as pollution, environmental destruction, economic inequality and civil rights (ibid.). In either case, the expansion of theatre during this time and its development into an alternative theatre movement are posited as an almost organic response to broader and more pervasive developments in political discourse that began to reframe how artists and the population as a whole imagined themselves, their actions and their responsibilities in relation to a global context.

This lineage is made explicit by John McGrath, artistic director of 7:84 and 7:84 Scotland, a company that has become closely associated with the expansion of community theatre and, in particular, the interlacing of social and political interests that has become characteristic of the field. In an interview for Itzen, McGrath describes the formative influence of his experiences in Paris, witnessing the atmosphere of the student and worker’s protests first hand. As he states:

[T]he importance of the thinking around that whole time, the excitement of that whole complex set of attitudes to life which that para-revolutionary situation threw up was incredible - the thinking about ordinary life, the freshness of the approach, the urgency and the beauty of the ideas was amazing. (in Itzen 1980: 120)
This experience, and what he saw as a contradiction between the socialist rhetoric of the protests and an unwillingness on the part of the middle-class student agitators to commit to the consequences of revolutionary change, served as the ideological foundation for 7:84, which he established in 1970. McGrath positioned his work as working-class theatre, aiming, not only to speak to and for suppressed working class populations, but to contend with the social, organisational and economic infrastructure that supports and contextualises theatre as a forum for political activity. As he notes during a talk given at Cambridge University in 1979, “the nature of the audience, the nature, social, geographical, physical, of the venue, the price of tickets, the availability of tickets, the nature and placing of the pre-publicity, where the nearest pub is, and the relationship between all these considerations” (1981: 5) are all implicated in the social and political dynamics of theatre practice. For McGrath, therefore, the events of 1968 served as a backdrop that helped to illustrate, not only the appetite for and the possibility of change, but the ideological lexicon with which change might be understood, and the field of relations that the practice of theatre might hope to influence in order to effect such change.

In a study of theatre during this decade, David Watt observes that Gramsci’s theorisation of cultural hegemony “underpinned the thinking of most socialist touring groups of the 70s” (1991: 74). Within this model, dominant modes of cultural production and reception are seen to reflect and perpetuate hegemonic values by protecting cultural practices that legitimise the constitution and consistency of the status quo, while suppressing or devaluing culture that represents difference or encourages change. In this context, theatre’s political function is understood in relation to its capacity to disturb or confront this paradigm by creating work with and for populations that are in some way excluded from or overlooked by mainstream culture. The work of 7:84 demonstrates a clear and consistent effort to use theatre to articulate and advance an ideological position founded on socialist principles and this imperative is particularly evident in McGrath’s interest in the intersection between cultural practice and the working class, but it might also be mapped out onto the field of alternative theatre more generally.

Welfare State International, who were founded in 1968 and have, similarly, become central to the ways in which the cultural and political implications of alternative and community theatre are discussed and understood, employ a different rhetoric, contextualising their work as imaginative, affective, humorous and sensual (Fox, S. in Coult and Kershaw 1997: 31). Though this way of positioning Welfare State International’s work is less clearly
politicised than McGrath’s, it nevertheless alludes to an alternative register of production and affect which, to draw on Gramsci’s terminology, could be described as counter hegemonic. Welfare State make this intention explicit in an early manifesto in which they state that “imagination, original art and spontaneous creative energy are being systematically destroyed by current educational processes, materialism and bureaucratic decision-making of western large-scale industrial society” (in Itzen 1980: 69). Within this context, the pursuit of creative practice, and the facilitation of imagination and creativity in others is infused with a political dynamic as a resistant or dissident practice that aims to disturb the legitimacy of the dominant socio-political order by supporting cultural formations that resist the logic of hegemonic control and, in so doing, allude to the possibility of new paradigms of social relation, cultural value, politics and governance.

As Kershaw suggests, practices that emerged during this time and might now be described as alternative theatre reflect a “broad variety of different ideological groupings, from fundamentalist Marxist to the softest-edged liberalism” (1994: 89). Despite Ansorge’s assertion, therefore, that the socio-political nexus of 1968 be seen as “the watershed” (1975: 56) that gave way to a decade of interlinked cultural experimentation, the field of alternative theatre is not characterised by a coherent political identity. Rather, it might more usefully be understood in relation to a general counter-cultural ethic, in relation to which all forms of social and cultural expression that take place outwith the infrastructure and constraints of mainstream, capitalist society are associated with political value. It is this approach to political activity that Craig draws attention to when he notes that ‘the difference between political and community theatre’ is not methodological, cultural or aesthetic but, rather, ultimately rests on how the practice of theatre is understood and perceived. In the shadow of 1968, as Craig notes, theatre was perceived as the “cudgel of the imagination” (Craig 1980: 9); as a device through which the anger and the discontent of the 1960s might be made manifest in cultural forms designed, not just to identify or comment on political problems, but to attack the societal conditions that were seen as the root cause of those issues.

**Categorising Community Theatre**

There is, as Nicholson, Bull and Saunders, and others, have noted, a direct line between the ways in which the social, political and methodological dynamics of community theatre were imagined and practiced during the 1970s and the forms of agency, politics and social value
that are associated with socially-engaged or community theatre in the present day. Further, as Bull and Saunders note, though the companies and practitioners that emerged during this period were notable precisely because their work demonstrated a departure from cultural and social convention, “over the years both their work and more significantly much of their influence have been assimilated into mainstream British theatre culture” (2017: ix). The ways in which these practices positioned the value and political function of community and community theatre are no longer, therefore, the concern of a relatively small number of intentionally experimental theatre makers, but have come to characterise the working practices of the country’s major theatre institutions and, as Judith Ackroyd (2007: 4) and Helen Nicholson (2005: 3) observe, have become a mainstay of academic discussion and university drama programmes.

With these perspectives in mind, I would associate the practice of community theatre in the decade after 1968 with a social, aesthetic and political framework that continues to inform how the interface between community theatre, political expression and social change is imagined, and the ways in which community continues to be expressed in relation to theatre practice today. I will, shortly, outline three categories that illustrate the model of community theatre that has followed Bull and Saunders’ trajectory from the cultural fringe of the alternative theatre movement into the broad field of socially-engaged theatre in the twenty-first century. To frame what is at stake here, however, I would like to briefly consider what underwrites claims that 1968 be seen as a formative moment in the development of British theatre, or, perhaps more precisely, the social, cultural and political values that 1968 itself serves to underwrite.

I have associated the significance of 1968 with claims made by Bradby and McCormick (1978), Davies (1987), Craig (1980), Itzen (1980) and Kershaw (1994). In each case, however, these claims are qualified by a series of caveats that position community theatre in relation to more expansive and indirect lineages of practice and politics. Bradby and McCormick’s analysis, for instance, concentrates on the theatre’s aesthetic form and traces the impetus towards cultural experimentation, that was given particular voice in the context of the alternative theatre movement, back to the late nineteenth-century and a popular dissatisfaction with the content of the repertoire of the late-Victorian stage (1978: 11). Their narrative parallels the popular interpretation of the 1960s as a period of mobilisation against the cultural values of the bourgeoisie and the oppressions of a class-based hierarchy, but situates this tension, instead, in the final decades of the 1800s. They recognise the turn.
towards the cultural and political interests of the general population as a radical shift in the way in which theatre was practiced and valued during the twentieth-century, but link this turn with the establishment of the Worker’s Theatre Movement in 1926 (ibid.: 97) which, in turn, they associate with a Europe-wide interest in establishing working-class or popular theatres in the early years of the twentieth-century, citing examples such as the ‘volksbühnen’ (people’s stages) in Germany, or the establishment of Théâtre National Populaire in Villeurbanne, France in 1920. Craig, similarly, associates theatre practice in the 1970s with a genealogy that problematises the sanctity of 1968 as an originary moment. In contrast to Bradby and McCormick, Craig’s study focuses specifically on the characteristics and constitution of alternative theatre and, drawing on Ansorge’s analysis, privileges an interpretation of alternative theatre as a unique example of cultural liberation and experimentation, characterised by an intrinsic relationship to the conditions of the 1960s. Beyond this framework, however, Craig acknowledges the movement’s reliance on and relationship to historical narratives that predate the events of Ansorge’s discussion and complicate a reading of alternative theatre as a pure expression of radical intent. In particular, he positions alternative theatre in relation to the introduction of subsidies for theatre after the formation of the Arts Council of England in 1946 (1980: 11-12), arguing that subsidies helped to disassociate theatre from a commercial imperative and make space for theatre makers to experiment with ideas brought over from mainland Europe by touring companies such as Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble. Though these experimentations did not demonstrate the variety of forms later found in the 1970s, they similarly reflected a “rejection of West End show-biz aims and practices” (ibid.: 13), which made way for models of production and cultural value driven by ideas rather than commercial interests. Combined with the effects of the 1944 Education Act, which ensured access to secondary education for the majority of the population and began to inform both artists making work and audiences engaging with it, these conditions constitute what Craig describes as ‘The First Theatre Revolution’, which provided the cultural and social stage on which the ‘Moment of 1968’ would take place over two decades later.

It is clear then, even from a cursory consideration of the genealogy of alternative theatre, that 1968 is only nominally associated with theatre’s practical or methodological development. Closer inspection quickly uncovers information that troubles the notion that the development of theatre in Britain can be traced back to a single originary point. It is in recognition of the disparity between the prominence of 1968 within discourses and
scholarship that seek to describe and contextualise alternative theatre, and the historic realities, both of that year and as they apply to the development of theatre, that Kershaw identifies what he terms “The myth of ‘68” (1994: 90). As he argues, “the tendency to make [1968] the first one in an epoch” (ibid.: 91) interrupts productive ways of thinking about continuities between social, cultural and political practices throughout and beyond that decade to establish a largely fictive sense of coherence and synchronicity. From Kershaw’s perspective, what is being referred to when practitioners and scholars discuss 1968 is not the year itself, but a particular way of narrativising or interpreting the events associated with that year designed, predominantly, to situate the practice of theatre within a specific field of social and political concerns. What remains of 1968, once its role as a nexus of cultural experimentation is diffused, therefore, is its influence as a hermeneutic framework that returns discussion about the social and political dynamics of community theatre to the same principal questions. In these terms, and to refer back to the quote from Craig with which I opened this chapter, community theatre as it emerged during the 60s and 70s is perhaps most productively understood, not as a revolution in the methodological context of theatre specifically, but as a shift in perception that altered the field of social, cultural and political relations with which theatre was associated, and continues to inform the ways in which the political dynamics of theatre are practiced and understood. It is for this reason that I suggest that what is of interest in a consideration of community theatre during the 1970s is not the specific interrelation between theatre and historical context during this decade, but, rather, the ways in which the notion of community was operationalised during this time, and how these processes might be seen to frame community theatre as a discipline or field of practice in ways that extend beyond the historical and ideological context of alternative theatre.

The Lens of Community Theatre

Within the context of alternative theatre - a field of practice characterised by its differentiation from mainstream, commercially orientated, modes of production and performance - community theatre is notable for an interest in audiences that are in some way distanced from urban centres of cultural production and participation. In the first instance, as Kershaw notes, “the expansion of community theatre was fuelled by the fact that there were
vast tracts of Britain in which live theatre simply was not available, let alone accessible. Cultural experimentation was stimulated by this geographical vacuum” (1994: 142). For Kershaw, the turn towards community during the late 60s and early 70s can be traced in the movement of artists from urban centres of culture and education towards rural populations either on or beyond the fringes of mainstream cultural infrastructure. Organisations such as Attic Theatre, Insideout Overall Company (part of Interplay), R.A.T. Theatre and Welfare State illustrate this trend, demonstrating a widespread and sustained commitment from within the alternative theatre movement to models of practice that enabled artists to work in settings not supported by the conventional infrastructure of cultural production. In the introduction to a survey of alternative theatre companies, published in 1976, Itzen draws attention to this dynamic, noting that:

In this handbook is a list of one hundred and thirty ‘theatre’ companies operating in the UK at the moment. The general theatre-going public (that notorious two per-cent), for whom theatre means plays produced in theatre buildings in London’s West End or on London’s fringe or in regional cities, will never have heard of most of them. (1976: 1)

Itzen characterises alternative theatre as ‘often community-orientated’ and, in the context of the companies she surveys, this focus is articulated through practical strategies that allow companies to work in particularly close relationship or proximity to their audiences. Many of these companies explain that they don’t require a stage, simply ‘adequate performance space’ (Insideout) which, in the context of groups interested in engaging with rural populations, could be seen as a synonym for public or communal spaces such as car parks (Insideout), town squares (Natural Theatre Company), the street (Attic Theatre), factories (Broadside Mobile Worker’s Theatre), youth and community centres (Community Theatre; Half Moon Theatre) and parks, fields and the outdoors (Lumiere & Son, Mikron Theatre Company, The Puppet Tree).

However, the year before Welfare State showed *Uppen Down Mooney* (1978) in an open courtyard at a festival in Corby, Inter-Action, after nearly a decade dedicated to working with and for communities in London, moved into a purpose built venue in Kentish Town (Itzen 1980: 51). Along with Bubble Theatre and East End Abbreviated Soapbox Theatre, Inter-Action help to outline a particular category of practice within the field of community theatre that remained interested in and engaged with urban space and context, conducting their practice alongside the same infrastructure and values the turn to rural communities was
designed to avoid. Though the vivid expansionist narrative articulated by Kershaw and
demonstrated by Itzen’s study helps to illustrate how community theatre practitioners
exercised their politics, it cannot completely account for the scope and interests of
community theatre as a whole. Rather, it is perhaps more useful to consider the journeys
identified by Kershaw as a geographical illustration of an ideological commitment that
associates community theatre with populations, cultures and interests that the conventions of
mainstream society designated as marginal. As well as geographically marginalised
communities, these came to include ‘the disabled’ and ‘the elderly’ (Kershaw 1994: 143),
children and ethnic minorities (Craig 1980: 23), women, from a feminist perspective, and gay
men and women, from a social and civil rights perspective (Itzen 1980: 229, 234), as well as
many other categories of interest and identity based groups.

In the context of alternative theatre, therefore, the lens of ‘community’ provided
practitioners with a way to visualise people and populations that weren’t included in the
social, cultural or political lexicon of the mainstream, and provided a vocabulary with which
to imagine and discuss the relative needs of specific groups in relation to the hegemonic
framework of society. Though, as activist and cultural commentator Naseem Khan observes,
by the end of the 1970s, the term ‘community’ was “so thoroughly annexed by everyone that
it can mean almost anything, from ‘the gay community’ to the Commonwealth’s ‘community
of nations’, from small interest groups to society at large” (in Craig 1980: 61), it nevertheless
served a strategic function as a conceptual and linguistic device with which to identify groups
on the basis of a common experience or sense of identity that differentiated their needs from
the general milieu of society.

The Aesthetics of Community Theatre

Whilst it is not practical to consider community theatre as delimited by a particular aesthetic
style, the practice of community theatre could, nevertheless, be associated with a specific
aesthetic agenda that is linked to a common interpretation of the interrelation between social
and political activity. Khan illustrates this dynamic when she notes that the defining
characteristic of community theatre is a participatory ethic based on the principle that “the
communication of meaning and value is seen as a two-way flow between ‘artists’ and
'people’” (in Craig 1980: 68). For Khan, the innovation and political gesture that sits at the heart of community theatre is that it remains open to the influence of people, cultural practices and experiences that are not necessarily recognised by commercial, social or political convention. Craig echoes these assertions, suggesting that while political theatre practitioners, who envision their audience in terms of a generic ‘working-class’, are required to work with familiar forms of cultural expression in order to communicate with the largest audience possible, community theatre avoided the problem of mass popularity by pursuing an aesthetic agenda with the cultural knowledge and experiences of the community at its core (ibid.: 22). In contrast to the generic commercialism of the mass market, community theatre sought to create work that demonstrated a clear relationship to “the network of relations” (ibid.) within a particular locality, and, in so doing, establish an aesthetic vocabulary that reflected and represented a specific community, whilst also fulfilling a role within a cultural product such as a performance or play.

Itzen’s description of Community Theatre’s *The Motor Show* (1974) helps to illustrate the layering of social context, politics and performance that could be considered characteristic of the aesthetic agenda of community theatre during this time. *The Motor Show* was staged in Dagenham, East London, and examined the relationship between working-class communities and the Ford Motor Company, one of the main employers in the area. Community Theatre were, as a company, motivated by a socialist ideology and, to this end, sought to use the play and the process of making it to galvanise the working-class population in Dagenham against the forces of industrial capitalism as manifest by the Ford factory. The play itself took the form of “a 24 scene epic spanning sixty years” (Itzen 1980: 163) and pursued this aim by detailing the history of the company’s antagonistic relationship with trade unions in the area. In this sense, the play provided a representation of local experience in which the population of Dagenham were cast as an oppressed population, subject to the influence and economically driven interests of their employer. This narrative articulates a clear socialist politics, and tallies with Craig’s assertion that the purpose of political theatre is not to stimulate or effect change independently, but, rather, to draw attention to existing social movements, provide information and analysis that supports their political and ideological position, and contribute towards a more pervasive and far reaching sense of solidarity (1980: 36). In this sense, the value of *The Motor Show* is, primarily, as a representation of a socialist discourse that supersedes and contextualises the community itself.
What differentiates The Motor Show, however, from the context of political theatre is Community Theatre’s interest in the specificities of the audience’s experience. As Itzen observes, Community Theatre “researched the show at the Ford works, talking to car workers on the assembly line and to shop stewards who were also instrumental in arranging [the] performance and drawing the workers and their families to see the play” (1980: 163). The company drew on these relationships to inform a specific sense of the conditions of working-class life in Dagenham, and their interest in the people that lived in the area populated the play with narratives and experiences that are specifically illustrative of life in the area as it was understood and experienced by the people who lived there. Khan identifies two qualities of participation that differentiate the field of community theatre from the context of alternative theatre more generally: the participation of the artist in the community in which they are working, and the participation of the community in the creation of the art (in Itzen 1980: 68). Both qualities are evident in the context of The Motor Show, but the artist’s participation in the lives of the community, in particular, associates the play with a quality beyond the reportage that might be associated with political theatre. In this context, the form of the play represents an intersection between the socialist ideology that underpins the
company’s activities, and the experiential, social and cultural conditions that characterise working-class life in Dagenham.

What is apparent in the example of *The Motor Show* is the extent to which, in the context of community theatre, the generic political ambitions of the alternative theatre movement were articulated through the socio-cultural lens of the community itself. This dynamic is echoed in Welfare State’s interest in working with the community to design and build materials, such as windsocks, lanterns and puppets, that appeared in their performances, processions and ceremonies (Coult and Kershaw 1990: 61-104), but also in the approach of issue based groups such as Gay Sweatshop who pursued their mission to “expose and end media misrepresentations of homosexuals” (1976: 23) by presenting work by and about gay people in an aesthetic language that reflected and represented their experiences. If, as I have suggested, community theatre is characterised by an interest in groups that are marginalised by conventional societal norms or neo-capitalist politics, community theatre’s aesthetic values are central to its effort to represent or speak for those groups. It is in these terms that community theatre reflects an aesthetic agenda, rather than a consistent aesthetic approach, as the field as a whole is characterised by an attempt to balance the cultural values and expertise of the practitioner - which, as Kershaw’s trajectory highlights, are ideologically and politically associated with the bourgeoisie - with knowledges, experiences, and social and cultural values that reflect and represent specific experiences of oppression and marginalization.

**The Politics of Community Theatre**

As a final layer of differentiation, community theatre could also be understood as a distinct category of political expression. As has been noted, what distinguishes community theatre from the milieu of alternative theatre is its relationship to community as a constituent of the language with which theatre practitioners articulate their politics. As a constituent of the broader alternative theatre movement, community theatre practice in the decade after 1968 is characterised by its proximity to socialist politics and, in particular, an intention to introduce a socialist perspective into social and political discourse as part of a broader project to alter the constitution of society as a whole. As the poster for *The Motor Show* (Figure a) illustrates,
the dynamics of this struggle were generally understood in terms of a hierarchical structure in which the socially, economically or politically privileged oppressor exploits the inherently unequal framework of society in order to control and profit from the labour of the majority of the population.

Companies that could be characterised as political theatre, such as Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre (CAST) and Red Ladder, responded to this context by drawing on a history of theatre as political intervention, making use of forms such as agit-prop to create a socialist inflected iconography that illustrated the generic oppression and exploitation of the working-class. As Brady and McCormick note, commenting on its development in Russia after the 1917 revolution, the primary function of agit-prop, and the intention of its practitioners, was to present a polarised version of the national context in which the masses of the proletariat were positioned on the side of socialist good and in opposition to capitalist, institutional or ideological oppression (1978: 45). As they note, as a result, characters in agit-prop are not meant to represent distinct personalities, but, rather, serve as archetypes designed to illustrate a consistent political message. These strategies are also evident in practices operating within the alternative theatre movement. CAST, for instance, created ‘Muggins’ - a recurring character, who represented the working-class everyman and, in the context of their plays, served to demonstrate the mistreatment and misfortune of the working-class as a whole - while Red Ladder employed a cast of stock characters, such as “Joe the militant young worker, Harry the older staunch Labourite, Britannia the boss and the trades union official Slicker (an elision of ‘arse licker’)” (Itzen 1980: 44). In each case, the characters were not designed as nuanced individuals but, rather, as a framework with which to reveal otherwise abstract systems of oppression and exploitation and, in so doing, galvanise a sense of injustice and add to a sustained call for change. Community theatre also operated within or in relation to this paradigm. In the context of The Motor Show, for instance, Community Theatre generalised and depersonalised the characters in the play, representing Henry Ford as the generic ‘Mr Big’, and drew on forms such as vaudeville and music-hall that Bradby and McCormick link back to efforts by agit-prop companies of 1920s to create a popular, accessible theatrical language (1978: 46). Welfare State’s early focus on street theatre (Itzen 1980: 68), Edward Berman’s pay-what-you-can Almost Free Theatre, and a tendency within the field in general to view the differentiated interests and experiences of community groups through the lens of class-struggle, could be seen as reflections of agit-prop as a popular and accessible form of political theatre.
What differentiates community theatre, however, is the foregrounding of community itself as a mechanism of political expression. As Kershaw notes, referencing an international conference on Theatre and Communities that took place at Dartington College, Devon in 1983, the legacy of practices that emerged during the 1970s was an understanding of community theatre as political practice that was indistinguishable from the ‘regeneration’ of community itself (1992: 60). In the context of the conference, if not necessarily the field of community theatre in general, the notion of regeneration was supported by Victor Turner’s theorisation of ‘communitas’, which he describes as a “communion of equal individuals” (2007: 90). Within the context of Turner’s discussion, communitas serves as a temporary state of non-hierarchical relation that precedes but supports the constitution of formal, repeatable structures of relation and behaviour. Within this framework, ‘regeneration’ could be understood as a becoming of the social and relational structure of community, and the work of the practitioner, in turn, to interact with and facilitate that becoming as political practice. In the context of *The Motor Show*, for instance, the purpose of Community Theatre’s engagement with communities in Dagenham was not simply to understand and reflect their experiences, but to contextualise those experiences within a narrative of class struggle. To these terms, the company’s work was not an impartial facilitation of the community’s expression of itself, but a partisan reinterpretation of the community’s value that aimed to orientate the processes through which the community realised itself around the politically resonant notion of the working-class.

Conversely, companies constituted on the basis of a lack of recognition, opportunities or rights for specific groups such as the black theatre company Dark and Light Theatre, feminist groups such as The Woman’s Theatre Group, Cunning Stunts and The Perils, and gay advocacy groups such as Gay Sweatshop, pursued a notion of empowerment best articulated in social or societal terms. Whereas the explicitly socialist narrative of Community Theatre provides a conceptual framework that incorporates the entire population within a class-based paradigm, the political gesture of these companies is much more closely linked to the evocation of what theatre scholar Helen Nicholson describes as ‘communities of identity’ (2005: 93). In contrast to the far-reaching topography of class-based struggle, communities of identity, as Nicholson suggests, link the notion of community to “empathetic identification with like minded others” (ibid.: 95) to provide a conceptual, affective and phenomenological framework with which to differentiate the needs and experiences of specific groups from the general population. The work of theatre in this context is not to
translate the discrete experiences of individual community groups into a comprehensive language of political resistance, but to facilitate a mode of community orientated around shared values in an effort to mobilise those values as a social force. In these instances, the counter-hegemonic agenda identified by Watt is advanced, not through a direct attack on the social, economic or political institutions of the hegemony, but by facilitating the emergence, visibility and recognition of social and cultural difference. The inference, however, that theatre’s political potential is articulated through the partisan regeneration of community remains consistent.

The Epistemology of Community Theatre

The characteristics that I have associated with community theatre here reflect the ways in which theatre was mobilised in response to the context and conditions of Britain during the 1970s. The rise of socialism and identity politics during these years could both, as historian Eric Hobsbawm suggests, be traced back to the ‘cultural revolution’ (1995: 320) as younger generations sought to differentiate themselves from the social and political standards of their parents. Considered in this context, the experimentations that came to constitute the alternative theatre movement reflect and are part of a broader but historically specific effort to reshape society informed, as Hobsbawn writes, by “[t]he emergence of the adolescent as a self-conscious social actor” (ibid.: 325). This sense of historical and generational contingency is echoed by authors such as Itzen, Craig and Ansorge, who ally the political significance of alternative theatre with the urgency of a youth led counter-culture. As Itzen writes:

In the case of 1968 so many events coincided on a global scale that it clearly marked the end of an era in a historically unprecedented fashion, and the beginning of a period of equally unprecedented political consciousness and activism […]. For theatre it was the radicalisation of the students that was most significant. For this was the period when the war babies generation came of age. (1980: 1-2)

As Kershaw identifies in his consideration of the myth of ‘68, however, the ways in which theatre was understood and operationalised during these years might also be seen to exercise influence beyond the historical circumstances of the 1960s and 70s, in ways that
both complicate and extend alternative theatre’s legacy. For Kershaw, the prominence of 1968 in histories of alternative theatre is indicative of a particular way of understanding and narrativising the development and politics of the movement that has emerged in the absence of substantial documentation and, subsequently, analysis of the practices that constituted it (1994: 90). As he suggests, consistent reference to 1968 within discourses that aim to trace the development of theatre in Britain should be seen, not as an accurate reflection of the significance of that year, but as a result of its relative proximity to the context of the present, and, specifically, the fact that people who lived through the decade after 1968 as artists and activists continue to act as the interlocutors of its social and historical significance. As he writes, in the absence of careful analysis and scholarly consensus: “If 1968 was a crucial year, and if you were there, then that gives your analysis more weight” (ibid.: 91). Kershaw discusses this phenomena in terms of historical misprision, as a willful misinterpretation of the facts of the past designed to underwrite and advance the authority of the speaker.

Whilst I do not intend to argue against this assertion, I am inclined to interpret the ongoing significance of a mythologised version of 1968 slightly differently. In recognising the active role of artists and scholars in establishing and advancing the myth of ‘68, Kershaw suggests that it should be seen as “part of the formation of a new theatrical and cultural elite” (1994: 91). Whilst, for Kershaw, this is evidence of a problem that is fundamentally historiographic, it begins, also, to acknowledge the structural influence of the myth of ‘68 as a way of thinking and understanding theatre in the context of the present. Though Kershaw’s intention in describing 1968 as a myth is simply to draw critical attention to the legitimacy of historical narratives that privilege that year, we can also observe in his analysis resonances that are more closely aligned with philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes’ interpretation of myth as a hermeneutic technology that supports the constitution and continuation of meaning. For Barthes, myth is defined, not as a fictive or fantastical articulation of an imagined past, but as a “mode of signification” (1991 [1972]: 107) that actively informs how we engage with and understand the present. As he writes, “myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion” (ibid.: 128). As Barthes suggests, therefore, mythologies are not inherently meaningful, but become associated with meaning as conceptual frameworks that determine what logical or interpretive approaches might be legitimately deployed to establish understanding in the context of the present. It is this effect that Kershaw hints at in the constitution of a ‘theatrical and cultural elite’, suggesting that a common interpretation of 1968 as a unique nexus of counter-cultural interests, characterised by a socialist aspirations,
has become central to a hierarchy of social, cultural and political values that continues to inform how theatre is thought and practiced. Barthes highlights the constitutive influence and cultural limitations of this type of hierarchy, noting that when articulated through or in relationship to myth as a signifying construct, the meaning of social, cultural and linguistic expression “is already complete” (ibid.: 116).

I am not, of course, undertaking a semiological study of community theatre. Neither am I specifically concerned with the facticity of the narratives associated with 1968 and repeated here as part of the history of British theatre. Rather, the general idea of 1968 and, by extension, alternative theatre as constructs that inform and determine meaning as it is understood and articulated through theatre is instructive, in as much as it helps associate the legacy of alternative theatre with particular categories of expression and affect: not as the chronologically distant progenitor of contemporary practice, but as a system of understanding that continues to operate with authority even as the circumstances in relation to which theatre is practiced develop and change. It is in relation to this layering of cultural, methodological and academic discourse that I suggest that what I have identified as the lens, aesthetics and politics of community theatre are perhaps most usefully understood as an epistemological framework that operates beyond the socio-historical context of the alternative theatre movement to continue to make sense of theatre’s relationship to politics and community.

Theatre scholar Nicola Shaughnessy makes similar point using the linked categories of ‘pedagogy, politics and art’ (2012: 25) to trace the influence of companies such as Living Theatre, Bread and Puppet Theatre and Welfare State International on the ways in which the relationship between performance and social context continues to be thought and practiced. In contemporary contexts, Shaughnessy associates this lineage with a field of practice and scholarship that she characterises as ‘applied’. As she notes, her interest in the notion and language of applied cultural practice is a reflection of its wider usage in the field, and invokes a paradigm in which theatre or performance is brought to bear on contexts that are understood as in some ways beyond or outwith the practice itself. Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston make this link particularly clear in their introduction to the Applied Theatre Reader. As they write:

'Applied theatre' has emerged in recent years as a term for describing a broad set of theatrical practices and creative processes that take participants and audiences beyond the scope of conventional, mainstream theatre into the realm of theatre that is responsive to ordinary people and their stories, local settings and priorities [...]. Frequently those who engage in applied theatre are motivated by the belief
that theatre experienced both as participant and as audience, might make some difference to the way in which people interact with each other and with the wider world. (2008: 9)

In common with community theatre’s diverse aesthetic and methodological spectrum, Shaughnessy observes that an interest in the application of performance similarly implicates a broad range of otherwise distinct cultural disciplines, including “‘devising’, ‘performance art’, ‘durational’, ‘site/place responsive’, ‘intermedial’” (2012: xv), and live art (ibid.). Just as Nicholson, for instance, characterises applied drama as a shorthand used “to describe forms of dramatic activity that primarily exist outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions, and which are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies” (2005: 2), Shaughnessy suggests applied performance works “across and between disciplines and forms” (2012: xv) in relation and response to the contingent experiences, circumstances and interests of participants.

For Shaughnessy, however, what links these disciplines together under the rubric of applied performance, and posits them as a continuation of practices that emerged in the context of alternative theatre, is not simply an interest in contexts, spaces and practices that exist outwith the infrastructures of commercial or mainstream theatre, nor, specifically, a responsive relationship to the people involved in the practice as participants or audiences, but a common intention to reframe art as ‘work’, to the extent that they link cultural participation with the labour of political practice (2012: 15). In terms that echo the resonances associated with the myth of ‘68, Shaughnessy associates the work of cultural practice with “a common interest in socialist politics, social activism, audiences, community engagement, marginalized groups and collaborative methodologies” (2012: 15), framing cultural participation as a strategy through which otherwise disparate groups, in diverse and disconnected settings, are associated with coherence as an expression of socialist values.

I will consider this differentiation in more detail shortly but, as a description of applied performance and, by extension, the perspective that I associate with the epistemological framework of community theatre, it is worth noting the contrast between Shaughnessy’s mobilisation of ‘work’ as a politically potent term, and Nicolas Ridout’s interest in ‘unworking’ as a necessary antecedent to political practice. As noted in the previous chapter, Ridout allies the political significance of unworking with Jean-Luc Nancy’s consideration of society as a self-regulating structure that implicates all aspects of social life, including cultural practice, in the institution and perpetuation of itself. Nancy aligns these
effects with the principle of production and, specifically, with the notion of work, suggesting that work is at all times associated with the surplus task of reproducing principles of public life and relation as they already exist, or as they relate to interests that supersede the needs and experiences of individuals in praxis with one another. It is in these terms that he writes: “it is the work that the community does not do and that it is not that forms community. In the work, the properly “common” character of community disappears, giving way to a unicity and a substantiality” (1991: xxxiv). As Nancy writes, work is imbued with characteristics of legibility and resolution, as a technology through which the infinite possibilities of ‘being-in-common’ with others are resolved in the articulation of a social and political regime that operates above the structure of community itself. However, where Ridout, in response, posits unworking as a necessary precondition to political action precisely because it constitutes, also, the liberation of social activity from an obligation to the production of something beyond itself, Shaughnessy recognises in the epistemological and ideological framework of contemporary theatre an imperative to put the public to work to serve a notion of social change and political value that operates above and beyond their interaction with one together.

As I have explained, I am interested in community theatre precisely because I am convinced of community’s value as a site of discourse and production in which the values and order of the world external to the community’s becoming might be disturbed or made uncertain. To examine this possibility, however, it is necessary to engage critically with the legacy of alternative theatre on the ways in which we think and practice the politics of community, and the possibility that the ways in which community is understood and mobilised in relation to theatre might also be seen to institute certain restrictions on community as a form of political expression. In particular, I am concerned that reliance on a paradigm of political action in which communities are required to work on behalf of practitioners and, more broadly, a socialist mission, makes political practice as it is articulated through theatre especially vulnerable to strategies of enclosure and exploitation that are endemic to the capitalist regime. As Nancy writes, community, as an innately political quality of relation, “cannot be presupposed” (1991: xxxix), and interpretations of theatre’s relationship to social change that presume to understand the political value and constitution of the groups that are engaged with through theatre practice could be seen to exist in complicated tension and, perhaps, complicity, with capitalist interests that seek to disempower, contain or direct the political potential of social practice.

It is, of course, possible to trace the burgeoning complicity between cultural and
governmental practice in historiographic terms, through the 1980s and the rise of the market economy. Reporting on a conference titled ‘Theatre in Crisis’, organised by New Theatre Quarterly and Goldsmiths College in 1989, Andy Lavender offers some insight into the impact of these years, associating the decade with an ‘atmosphere of compromise and circumspection’, suggesting that practitioners and scholars alike felt that “the prioritizing of monetarist values had replaced a more sensitive response to the social and aesthetic function of theatre” (1989: 210). The consequences of these developments were profound, but have been effectively addressed or documented by authors such as Kershaw (1994; 2004), Sara Freeman (2006), Alison Jeffers and Gerri Moriarty (2017), Andy Lavender (1981), Graham Saunders (2015), David Watt (1991) and others. My interest, therefore, as I develop this discussion in the following section, is not to trace the legacy of alternative theatre through a consideration of cultural policy and social context in the years since 1979 but, rather, to consider how the seemingly ahistorical imperative to mobilise theatre as political work might be understood in relation to the social, political and, crucially, economic influences that contextualise cultural practice in the twenty-first century. Specifically, if, as Barthes’ analysis seems to suggest, the legacy of alternative theatre might also be read as a system of understanding that presupposes the meaning and value of theatre’s relationship to social context, in deviating from a conventional genealogy of political or alternative theatre I hope to signal a break from this lineage and offer justification for a rethinking of community’s relationship to theatre and, through this, theatre’s relationship to political practice.

Work and Theatre - process and refuge

In their introduction to Commonwealth, an extended consideration of power and politics in the twenty-first century, Hardt and Negri comment on the instinct to imagine a realm of productivity and order beyond the capitalist present. As they suggest, in the face of “suffering, misery and exploitation” (2009: vii) frequently associated with the capitalist paradigm and contemporary life, it appears necessary to seek refuge in ways of understanding and ordering the world that represent something beyond the logic and order of capitalist society. In describing this possibility as a refuge they, perhaps unintentionally, echo Virno who describes the conditions of ‘post-Fordist’ society as a dialectic between dread and refuge.
As he suggests, the uncertainty of a world continually remade in the image of economic interests that supersede the control and understanding of its subjects gives rise to an irresolvable impulse for protection “from the risk inherent in my very being in this world” (ibid.). In both cases, the authors associate this instinct with a turn towards notions of collective production and organisation, such as might be allied with socialism or communism as a formal political project, and which posit communal labour as an alternative to the ‘absolute insecurity’ (Virno) or ‘precarity’ (Hardt and Negri) of contemporary life.

In the context of theatre practice, the instinct towards this form of refuge might be identified in John McGrath’s description of the ‘urgency and beauty’ of the Paris protests, and Shaughnessy’s assertion that “the process of applying performance is a bringing together of elements […] to make something new” (2012: xiv). In both cases, the authors associate the value of the activity they describe with a radical break from the conditions that precede or contextualise it, to make way for new logics of organisation and production. For McGrath, the protests in Paris, 1968 signaled the possibility if not, as he notes, the reality of a profound reconfiguration of social order based on the rejection of capitalist values in favour of the collective interests of the working class (in Itzen 1980: 120). While, for Shaughnessy, the collaborative nexus of cultural and social practice framed by the notion of applied performance is seen as a strategy with which to “challenge or to transform existing systems of representation, hierarchies and ideologies” (2012: xvi) to make way for models of practice and social order orientated around collective or communal values. Their discussions relate to different scales of political activity, and there are notable differences in the vocabulary with which these authors articulate their ideas. McGrath, commenting as one of the instigators of the alternative theatre movement and, to this sense, as an interlocutor of the significance of 1968, describes his ambitions in strictly socialist terms, identifying 7:84 as ‘revolutionary theatre’ positioned against the bourgeoisie and the ruling class. Shaughnessy, in less starkly ideological terms, associates applied performance with performative strategies of disruption and redistribution, drawing on notions of pedagogy, play, participation and process to describe a more modest field of politics and affect (ibid.: 32-43). In both cases, however, the political significance of cultural practice is understood in broadly similar terms: as a capacity to facilitate territories of discourse, production and relation that are ideologically and performatively distinct from the logics and influence of capitalist control.

The ways in which this ambition is articulated have necessarily developed in response to context and academic insight, but the fundamental effort to reclaim or redirect the political
potential of social practices that have been contextualised as economic or hegemonic labour is a consistent characteristic of political action as it is understood in relation to theatre. Snyder-Young identifies this dynamic in her consideration of theatre as ‘tactic’, noting that practice delivered within the methodological or academic rubric of ‘applied theatre’ might be assumed to embody an anti-hegemonic agenda, expressed as an intention to work against “the complex cultural processes that normalize the status-quo” (2013: 4) and the social and economic inequalities embedded within it. She is critical of the extent to which theatre is, in practice, capable of supporting this project, but nevertheless associates the tactical dimensions of theatre, as they are understood and enacted by practitioners, with efforts to disrupt the recirculation of social practice within hegemonic discourses of labour and productivity. Nicholson identifies a similar nexus in her consideration of applied drama as ‘interventionist theatre’, noting that: “At the heart of this book there lies a struggle […] between the overarching ideal of a radical, just and inclusive democracy for all and a respect for local circumstances, the social contexts of the participants and cultural differences” (2005: 13). What is at stake, as she writes, are the ethics of applying theatre practices to discrete social contexts in service of a generalised model of political citizenship. Whilst, as she notes, in the context of theatre practice ‘citizenship’ might be understood as a responsive, strategic relationship to diverse experiences, cultures and circumstances (ibid.: 24-26), in foregrounding notions of citizenship, as opposed to other collective nouns, relational frameworks or organisational structures, Nicholson explicitly aligns the political function of theatre practice with the constitution of a coherent political regime.

Shaughnessy provides a particularly detailed account of the strategies through which the bald socialist imperative of the alternative theatre movement has been translated through to context of the present in her consideration of ‘seven principles of applying performance’: ‘pedagogy, process, play, presence, participation, performance and pleasure’ (2012: 32-43). As she notes, these principles were developed to support her own analysis and are not intended as a definitive account of the field. Nevertheless, they are informative as an example of the language and practice with which the politics associated with the myth of ‘68 are re-expressed in the twenty-first century. There are obvious parallels, for instance, between Kershaw’s suggestion that theatre’s political dynamics are most clearly expressed through the ‘regeneration’ of community, and Shaughnessy’s interest in the pedagogic dynamics of theatre in contemporary contexts. Shaughnessy draws specific attention to the educative function of performance in social contexts, to suggest that applied performance is
characterised by a ‘purpose’ (2012: 32) that extends beyond the entertainment value of theatre or the generic intention to deliver practice with communities, to, instead, frame an imperative to effect the structure and constitution of the social environment. Where McGrath, however, states with conviction the intention to transform the political constitution of the audience through theatre (1981: 97), Shaughnessy associates this imperative with less direct conceptual and methodological lexicon, drawing on notions of collaboration, participation and play to describe its effects, in terms not completely distinct from Cohen-Cruz’ consideration of call and response (2010: 2).

The notion of a political agenda is similarly diffused in her writing. Drawing on authors such as James Thompson (2009), Mary Helen Immordino-Yang (2010) and Antonio Damasio (2003, 2010), Shaughnessy identifies what she describes as a ‘turn to affect’ in contemporary theatre that recognises the constitutive role of intangible dynamics such as emotion, beauty and bodily experience in the social and political work of theatre. In contrast to McGrath’s conception of theatre as a politically transformative force, Shaughnessy allies performance’s political dynamics with a notion of ‘process’ (2012: 34), divorced from the finality and cultural artefact of public performance. As she notes, in reference to Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth’s consideration of affect (2010), process emerges, and is enacted and experienced, as a paradigm of relation in which those involved are simultaneously the instigators and recipients of experiential, cognitive, cultural and social registers of interrelation and affect. As she suggests, the process of applied performance constitutes an environment in which cultural practice, aesthetic exploration and sensual experience might inform the sense and experience of the self and the self as social and political actor, and, conversely, social experience and identity constructively influence the material and performative dynamics of cultural exploration. In privileging notions of process, therefore, Shaughnessy moves the political dynamics of contemporary theatre from the declamatory or representational strategies of agit-prop, to much more nuanced and localised discourses of relation, understanding and experience that are supported by but not, as she writes, contained within the cultural ‘event’ of performance, or the practices that lead directly towards its constitution.

Despite these differences, however, the ideological ambition of politics articulated in these terms might still be seen as an expression of the anti-hegemonic agenda popularised through the alternative theatre movement. Usefully, though coincidentally as she does not address Virno directly, Shaughnessy examines the politics of applied performance through the
lens of praxis and poiesis. Shaughnessy identifies ‘process’ as a practice that relates specifically to the notion of praxis as an unresolved but purposeful discourse between people, but associates the broader influence of applied performance with a Heideggerian articulation of poiesis as a ‘bringing forth’ or materialisation of new territories of discourse, experience and relation (2012: 36). Identifying in applied performance a dialogue between the material and the immaterial, the representational and the experiential, Shaughnessy invites the collapse of these distinctions, suggesting that we might understand performance in social contexts as an ‘autopoetic’ structure, characterised by the reorientation of praxis to serve in the constitution of itself. Even in the absence, therefore, of the explicitly politicised vernacular associated with alternative theatre, we can see in Shaughnessy’s analysis a continued interest in performance as work: as a technique with which the productive dynamics of social practice might be liberated from the reproduction of capitalist society and, in this way, turned towards the constitution of new structures of social and political order.

**The Problem of Work in Contemporary Theatre - theatre, globalisation, and the common**

I am interested in Virno's ideas as a lens with which to understand the political dynamics of the present and as a vocabulary with which to discuss theatre’s political potential and, in these terms, the liberation of praxis, or the remobilisation of praxis to serve localised, interpersonally constituted interests, appears to be a relevant and necessary concern. Both Virno and Hardt and Negri, however, offer perspectives that seem to complicate the possibility of change as it has been articulated by the authors addressed here and, I suggest, as it remains embedded in contemporary conceptions of theatre’s political function. In contrast to the relatively clear differentiation between social and economic interests that allows practitioners operating in relation to an anti-hegemonic agenda to disturb and redirect the productive function of their participants’ labour, they recognise, in labour and interrelational activity of all forms, characteristics that might be linked back to a paradigm of economic production and, through this, characteristics of economic or hegemonic oppression. Despite, therefore, Virno's assertion that the “unchecked uncertainty” (2004: 33) of life under capitalism creates an urgent need for forms of vernacular, interpersonal protection that he
describes in terms of refuge, and which might be allied with practitioners’ efforts to leverage collaborative practice as a political force, from the perspectives of both Virno and Hardt and Negri, such an unconditional or uncompromised retreat cannot be seen to exist.

Virno outlines his discussion in existential terms, as the collapse of an experiential differentiation between the categories of ‘fear’ and ‘anguish’. As he writes, following Heidegger, fear and anguish might be understood as different categories of dread, where fear is understood as a public feeling, or as a feeling that might be addressed and attended to through public, communal action, and anguish as individual, intangible and internalised (2004: 33). Through a consideration of public life in a post-Fordist environment Virno argues that “the dividing line between fear and anguish, between relative dread and absolute dread, is precisely what has failed” (ibid.: 32). This is problematic, as he suggests, because the social body of the population has come to internalise and perpetuate the very insecurities they might previously have worked together to address. In these terms, the forms of refuge identified by McGrath and Shaughnessy, and embedded in the ‘work’ or socialist progress, are no longer possible because we, as the capitalist ‘multitude’, are no longer in possession of the technologies with which to articulate a public politics differentiated from the anguish and isolation of capitalism. As he writes:

In today’s world, impulsive changes do not overturn traditional and repetitive forms of life; what they do is to come between individuals who by now have gotten used to no longer having fixed customs, who have gotten used to sudden change, who have been exposed to the unusual and to the unexpected. (2004: 33)

In other words, what occurs in the constitution of McGrath’s socialist public, or Shaughnessy’s articulation of autopoesis, is a temporary coalescence which, while it appears to demonstrate the characteristics of social and political innovation, is, in fact, structurally consistent with the conditions and paradigm of contemporary capitalism. This is the case both because the constitution of temporary publics models characteristics of improvisation, adaptability and instability that Virno suggests characterise contemporary public life and, in this way, reinforce the inadequacies of social practice as a practical alternative to capitalist order; and because, as an indivisible and indefinite influence, the insecurity and anguish of life under capital will continue to orientate the interests and concerns of those involved, as practitioners and participants, away from the communitarian potential of their work together and towards the logics and imperatives of post-Fordist production.

In perhaps more practical terms, Hardt and Negri consider the challenge of
articulating new regimes of social and political order through the lens of globalisation. Establishing a perspective not dissimilar to Virno’s, they understand capital as a total global influence, characterising it as a form of social relation that has come to supersede national and cultural boundaries to operate as a ubiquitous paradigm of order, value and production. As they write: “Through processes of globalization, capital not only brings together all the earth under its command but also creates, invests, and exploits social life in its entirety, ordering life according to the hierarchies of economic value” (2009: ix). However, where Virno describes these effects in metaphysical terms, Hardt and Negri’s analysis is more closely concerned with the material and performative dynamics of contemporary capital. For instance, their assertion that “[o]ne primary effect of globalization […] is the creation of a common world, a world that, for better or worse, we all share, a world that has no ‘outside’” (ibid.: vii) is both a philosophical and a practical concern. It suggests, in the first instance, the collapse of agencies constituted on the basis of oppositionalism or alterity, such as the anti-hegemonic strategies highlighted by McGrath and Shaughnessy, but foregrounds, also, the reflexive influence of a global economic paradigm in reframing our most intimate and seemingly autonomous activities as forms of work that serve to substantiate and maintain the integrity of capitalism as a total global interior. As they write, “we are destined to live in this world, not only subject to its powers of domination but also contaminated by its corruptions” (ibid.: ix).

It is with this notion of contamination in mind that I suggest that the ways in which work has been reframed by contemporary capital presents a significant challenge to conceptions of political action predicated on the liberation or reorientation of political labour. In the context of their discussion, Hardt and Negri trace this influence through a consideration of ‘the common’. For Hardt and Negri, the common is a multifaceted idea that sits at the heart of contemporary capitalist production. In the first instance, it refers to material realities that are constituted as common on the basis of their indivisible relationship to our being and living in the world, such as air, water, food and the physical world (2009: viii). Secondly, as Hardt and Negri write: “[w]e consider the common also and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth” (ibid.). In these registers, the common serves to signify, not only those aspects of the social and material world to which we are all equally exposed, but also the resources with which we understand and experience ourselves, subjectively and in relation to others. As Hardt and
Negri suggest, therefore, what is central to the idea of the common is not simply that it constitutes the world in which we live, but that it represents the strategies and materials through which that world is produced as an experiential, social and political reality. From this perspective, while an anti-hegemonic philosophy might posit community as pre-political, the common could be understood as pre-poietic: as resources established by and articulated through praxis, but not yet implicated in broader regimes of order and politics.

It is also, however, this differentiation that exposes the common to specific categories of exploitation that Hardt and Negri align with contemporary capitalism. As they write: “Neoliberal government policies throughout the world have sought in recent decades to privatize the common, making cultural products—for example, information, ideas, and even species of animals and plants—into private property” (2009: viii). As they note, what occurs in these instances is not that particular ways of thinking, speaking, valuing and interacting with the world are withdrawn from public circulation, but that public life embodies and advances private interests. Addressed in the previous chapter, Miranda Joseph’s consideration of community in supplementary relationship to capital (2002: 2) might be understood in relation to this paradigm, as evidence of capitalist interests enclosing non-specialist practices of social interaction within discourses of economic production. More broadly, it is this characteristic that Hardt and Negri associate with neoliberal governance and control, as a strategy through which the ostensibly social activities of the population are transformed into capitalist labour. This transformation, as the authors note, has two main effects. The first is to extend the reach of capital by shaping, directing and distributing the common to reflect hierarchies of value, notions of social and spatial order and discourses of private and public ownership that underwrite the capitalist paradigm. Secondly, and more significantly, it creates the conditions for qualities of subjectivity orientated around economic rather than social values which, as Hardt and Negri argue, are necessary for the institution of capitalist order beyond the influence and control of state infrastructure. As they write, “[c]apital, of course, is not a pure form of command but a social relation, and it depends for its survival and development on productive subjectivities” (ibid.: ix). In addition to the geographical dynamics of globalisation, therefore, contemporary capital might be understood as a ‘world without an outside’ in performative and subjective terms, as a principle of relation that expropriates the common through personal and interpersonal activities and which, subsequently, interrupts or obscures the possibility of alternate forms of social and political expression.
The intersection between this discussion and the context of theatre is perhaps most clearly illustrated by theatre scholar Jen Harvie in her consideration of participatory theatre (2013). Writing about the relationship between theatre practice and ‘neoliberal governmentality’, Harvie draws attention to the political dynamics of cultural participation. She approaches participation as a form of labour which, while it might allow us to “negotiate our similarities and differences” (ibid.: 2) in ways that are politically significant, could also be seen to complement the decentralised characteristics of a neoliberal economy. Harvie positions her discussion in relation to developments in cultural policy enacted by New Labour between 1997 and 2010 and progressed by the subsequent Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition and Conservative administrations. As considered in the previous chapter, in these contexts there is a clearly articulated link between the activities of cultural practitioners, and those who engage in their work as audiences or participants, and notions of economic value and productivity that have been used to frame the cultural sector as an industrial subsidiary of the national economy. For Harvie, however, what is more significant are the particular ways in which a neoliberal paradigm might be seen to lay claim to the outcomes of participatory labour or, to ally this discussion with Hardt and Negri’s consideration of the common, to direct the social, epistemological and experiential dynamics of participation towards discourses of value and productivity that are fundamentally economic.

Harvie describes the neoliberal paradigm as a context in which the role of the state in governing the national economy, as well as other areas of responsibility such as social care, health, and arts and culture, has, in large part, been replaced by social and performative infrastructures orientated around capitalist characteristics of ‘individual liberty, self-reward and private profit’ (2013: 12). Within this context, the social and political resonances of cultural participation are made uncertain, not because the work of artists necessarily mirrors the structural and ideological constitution of contemporary capital, but because the qualities of subjectivity that emerge in the context of a neoliberal society ensure that participation itself is unavoidably ‘contaminated’ with the characteristics of capitalist labour. As Harvie notes, referencing the work of American economists Joseph Pine II and James Gilmore (2011 [1999]), audiences operating within this context might be identified as ‘prosumers’: a category of economically determined agents “who fulfill their own needs by producing what they want to consume” (2013: 50). Harvie aligns her discussion with a category of cultural practice and experience that she terms ‘delegated art’ (ibid.: 29) and refers to examples, such
as You Me Bum Bum Train’s immersive theatre, or one-to-one performance pieces by artists such as Adrian Howells and Oreet Ashery, in which audiences are structurally and performatively essential to the constitution of the art work. There are obvious parallels between the categories of practice identified by Harvie as ‘delegated’ and the methodological and aesthetic values of work that might, in other contexts, be described as socially-engaged, community or applied performance. Indeed, many of the positive qualities that Harvie associates with delegated art, such as collaboration, the democratisation of cultural practice and meaning making, and the stimulation of social forms of engagement (ibid.: 36-38), could, without much difficulty, be translated over to Shaughnessy’s seven principles of applied performance as characteristics that position work that draws on these techniques within a lineage of politically progressive, culturally ambitious artistic practice. What is central, however, to Harvie’s consideration of the relationship between participation and contemporary capitalism is an assertion that cultural practices that share the labour of cultural, social and political production with audiences and participants could also be seen to expose the artwork, or the work of making art, to the social mechanics of neoliberal production. Positioned as prosumers, participants are seen not simply to take part in cultural opportunities curated and controlled by the interests and expertise of the artist, but to use their labour to enclose the cultural product or the act of cultural participation within economically determined discourses of value and productivity. Within this context, theatre works, not to liberate the political labour of participants, but, rather, as an interface that facilitates the translation of otherwise independent qualities of affect, productivity and relation into economic commodities.

These dynamics are usefully illustrated by philosopher Michel Feher in his consideration of human capital (2009). Writing about the role of subjectivity in a neoliberal economy, Feher identifies human capital as the lens through which all aspects of human activity and interactivity might be associated with economic value and responsibility. As he writes:

[T]he things that I inherit, the things that happen to me, and the things I do all contribute to the maintenance or the deterioration of my human capital. More radically put, my human capital is me, as a set of skills and capabilities that is modified by all that affects me and all that I effect. (2009: 26)

It is in these terms that Feher allies the accumulation and appreciation of human capital with the ‘neoliberal condition’, suggesting that the individualistic imperative to work against the
Depreciation of our value and potential in economic terms has become central to the constitution of contemporary forms of subjecthood and subjectivity. Within this context, as Feher notes, life in its entirety “may be thought of as a strategy aimed at self-appreciation” (2009: 28) as all behaviours, activities and events, “in any existential register” (ibid.), are implicated in an economically determined discourse of self-worth.

To return to the framework established by Hardt and Negri, therefore, we might suggest that what occurs at the interface between subjectivity and contemporary capitalism are strategies of self-expression, agency and self-improvement that serve to translate the pre-poietic characteristics of the common into economically determined discourses of relation and value. In characterising these areas of economic productivity as ‘work’ what I hope to highlight is not simply the social dynamics of contemporary capitalism, and the challenges they pose for any project invested in the notion of socially constituted political change, but a contradiction between notions of work and productivity as they are framed by theatre’s relationship to a lineage of leftist ideology and these same principles as they are mobilised and contextualised by neoliberal interests. Considered through the lens of the common, the politically motivated imperative to use theatre to facilitate collaborative practice in social contexts, identified by Shaughnessy as socialist work, is positioned in uncomfortable proximity to forms of personal and interpersonal labour that constitute the social infrastructures of contemporary capitalism and, in fact, might be seen to aid rather than obstruct the spread and influence of capitalist interests.

I am, of course, not the first to highlight the apparent complicity between theatre practice and economic forms of subjectivity and production. This subject has been identified and addressed by authors such as Judith Ackroyd (2000), Jenny Hughes (2017-a, 2017-b), Shannon Jackson (2011), Nicolas Ridout (2013) and James Thompson (2009), amongst others. Though their perspectives necessarily differ, these authors offer nuanced discussions that acknowledge and respond to the intricate layering of social and economic interests that could be seen to characterise contemporary life, and it is not my intention here to advance a new theory of the relationship between social and economic practice specifically. I am, also, not the first to identify theatre’s relationship to a lineage of socialist thought and activism as a problem for the ways in which notions of agency are thought and practiced in contemporary contexts. As noted in the previous chapter, Dani Snyder-Young draws critical attention to the ontological limitations of a collectivist politics in a capitalist context (2013: 97), and identifies exactly this relationship as the foundation of theatre’s potentially questionable
‘good intentions’. As she suggests, the aspiration for practitioners to articulate positive change through work in social contexts or with social groups can serve to obstruct or displace a critical consideration of the political constitution and localised consequences of such works (ibid.: 21). What remains, she argues, is a narrative of social good, significantly informed by socialist principles of collective praxis, that can seem startlingly disconnected from the actual effects of the work in both social and political terms.

What I hope to contribute, therefore, is not simply a justification for turning away from a paradigm of political action that posits theatre practice as a form of socialist work, but a critical position that supports the consideration of possible alternatives. Just as Harvie asserts that prosumerism might be seen, not as the reserve of particular class of commercially minded consumers, but as a ubiquitous principle of relation and production (2013: 50), and Feher posits human capital as a synecdoche for the experience and ambitions of the neoliberal subject in general (2004), so it seems clear that it is no longer enough for those interested in the possibility of progressive, socially-driven change to simply identify examples of capitalist expropriation and exploitation. Rather, to give Hardt and Negri’s articulation of the common full voice, the social infrastructures of contemporary capitalism, the efficiency with which they operate, and the irreducible complicity of social practice within the mechanisms of capitalist production invoke an urgent and unavoidable imperative to consider forms of politics, agency and production that might continue to offer the possibility of difference, even as the influence of capital becomes impossible to ignore or avoid.

For Hardt and Negri, a response to this imperative is articulated as a move away from a paradigm of left- and right-wing politics. More specifically, as they argue, notions of agency and productivity constituted on the basis of an essential dissimilarity between capitalist and socialist politics might be seen as a “false alternatives” (2009: ix), to the extent that both capitalism and socialism can be understood as political regimes constituted by and articulated through the privatisation of the common. As they suggest, whilst the privatisation of the common might be interpreted as a progression of capitalist interests, where capitalism is seen as a continuation of the ideological principles of the political right, the political topography of the twenty-first century might more accurately be described as a ‘republic of property’ that oscillates between polarities of public and private ownership, but, nevertheless, continually invokes economically defined logics of organisation and value to determine, as they write, the “conditions of possibility of social life” (2009: 8). As they note:
The seemingly exclusive alternative between the private and the public corresponds to an equally pernicious political alternative between capitalism and socialism. It is often assumed that the only cure for the ills of capitalist society is public regulation and Keynesian and/or socialist economic management; and, conversely, socialist maladies are presumed to be treatable only by private property and capitalist control. Socialism and capitalism, however, even though they have at times been mingled together and at others occasioned bitter conflicts, are both regimes of property that exclude the common. (2009: ix)

As Hardt and Negri argue, even where the rhetoric of socialism implies a quality of public ownership in contrast to the privatising influence of capital, as a political regime, it is nevertheless reliant on a totalising logic that prescribes value to the common rather than opening up the common itself as a public resource. As they suggest, read in relation to the common, and despite events in cultural and political history that have sought to oppose them, socialism and capitalism are essentially equivalent as projects that similarly aspire to enclose the common within systems of governance and order understood in relation to the logic of privatisation and the management and distribution of the common as property.

As Hardt and Negri note at a later stage in their discussion, what is shared between these ostensibly opposed ideological frameworks, and brought together here under the rubric of work, is a model of political labour that strategically overlooks the contingencies and complications of the body. As they suggest, forms of political activity that rely on the ‘commodification of life’ within totalising narratives of order and productivity might be seen to abstract notions of agency from an essential relationship to the interests and activities of other people to, instead, implicate and acknowledge bodies only as a proxy for the “quantity of economic value that stands above or behind them” (2009: 35). Considered from this perspective, the notion of political work framed by Shaughnessy and sustained by the legacy of ‘68 is problematised, not simply as an attempt to protect a differentiation between social and economic labour that is apparently unviable, but as a political strategy that requires participants to adopt models of social and political production that work, not to address localised concerns, but to introduce the common resources of their work together - their relationships to one another, the knowledges and experiences that are produced through theatre - into abstract and reflexively appropriative discourses of order, value and productivity. It is for this reason that Hardt and Negri argue that for social life to be associated with possibilities beyond the institution and circulation of property it is necessary,
not only to identify the influence of capital on the ways in which social life is organised and expressed, but to take seriously the role of the common in articulating these environments, and the possibility that the liberation or rearticulation of the common might give rise to territories of social and political production beyond the logic of socialist resistance to capitalist oppression.

The possible implications of this shift are helpfully prefigured by Hughes in her consideration of Bradford based theatre company Common Wealth’s *The Deal Versus the People* (2015) (2017-b). In this article, Hughes directly addresses the notion of the common, drawing on Peter Linebaugh’s linked articulation of the ‘commons’ to observe that: “The idea of the commons has gained powerful traction as a way of addressing the limitations of democratic governance systems associated with neoliberalism and state welfarism, and the challenges of economic austerity and ecological crisis” (ibid.: 77). As she notes, mobilised in this way, the common might be seen as a lens that not only helps to reveal those aspects of public life that serve to articulate and advance neoliberal interests, but also allows us to look beyond the dialectic of social and economic productivity to draw attention to resources to which we remain equally exposed and which might, by virtue of their commonality, provide the basis for new forms of socially constituted politics and productivity. Hughes identifies theatre as one such resource, noting that theatre making in social contexts relies on the commonality of theatre itself as a practice that facilitates communication, encounter and the production of knowledge and experience within a particular, localised, public (ibid.). In *The Deal Versus the People*, Common Wealth worked with ten Bradford residents to develop a response to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) that was being negotiated between the European Union and the United States at the time. In the context of her analysis, Hughes identifies theatre’s ‘common’ characteristics as the resource that facilitated the cultivation of a uniquely localised political voice amongst the project’s participants. In contrast to Harvie’s characterisation of participation as ‘prosumerism’ and economic labour, Hughes’ interpretation of the common allows space for participants to operate as both social and economic agents or, perhaps more accurately, to manifest social forms of knowledge, expression and productivity within social and material infrastructures that are also and inevitably iterative of economic interests. As Hughes notes, “[h]ere, the ‘common’ self and common social realm inhabit the same space and time as […] the economically productive, self acting agent of neoliberalism” (ibid.: 79). What is framed by Hughes, therefore, is not simply a rearticulation of the contention that neoliberal capitalism
posits social and economic interests as one and the same, but a figuration of subjectivity and agency as inherently or, at least, possibly pluralistic in their political constitution, and a subsequent call to recognise within social acts that might be read as economic the possibility, if not the certainty, of radical social praxis.

It is this *possibility* that I suggest should be taken more seriously within the socio-economic construct of contemporary neoliberalism: not just because it signals the potential for theatre in social contexts to contribute towards the politically significant redistribution of common resources, but also because it invites a break from the socialist legacy of alternative theatre by highlighting a contingent relationship between the practices, relationships and forms of knowledge made available through theatre and the political dynamics of social practice mobilised on behalf of theatre. If, as Hughes suggests, the common and the economic self exist in the same time and space, and might even be articulated through the same activities, the responsibility of artists similarly shifts from the liberation of the ‘good community’, as considered in the previous chapter, to the facilitation of localised forms of communitarian discourse in strategic response to the particular ways in which the social dynamics of contemporary capitalism inform and contextualise the subjective experience of participants. As Hughes makes clear, whilst Common Wealth’s interest in galvanising their participants against the explicitly capitalist TTIP might, in the first instance, appear to reflect the generic oppositionalism of the alternative theatre movement, in practice, the process of making *The Deal Versus the People* intentionally supported the constitution and rearticulation of a localised commons, to invoke, rather than prescribe, the public possibility of socially constituted resistance to the capitalist regime. Hughes draws attention to the project’s reliance on ostensibly common spaces such as youth and family centres, homelessness agencies and arts centres, and the company’s interest in framing these, not as subsidiary to the production of theatre, but as commons resources embedded in the infrastructure of the city (2017-b: 81), as evidence that the project’s influence was not simply to mount a social opposition to the capitalist ideology embedded in the TTIP, but to demonstrate how this opposition might productively interrelate with the conditions of the participant’s own lives. What Hughes identifies in her consideration of Common Wealth’s practice, therefore, is not simply the company’s interest in facilitating political discourse that might be understood to oppose the interests and mechanisms of capitalist progress, but a necessary concern for the material and performative resources through which such discourse might be established, and an attention to the subjective experiences of participants that ensures that the anti-capitalist ambitions of
the company relate to and speak for registers of inequity and disenfranchisement at a local level.

For Hardt and Negri, the common represents both those aspects and outcomes of being and social life that are contained within and exploited by hegemonic regimes and, also, the localised resources with which we construct politics in our everyday lives. Whilst, as they make clear, the social dynamics of contemporary capital ensure that these two paradigms are, for the most part, aligned, they also see in the common the potential for new expressions of politics, social context and subjectivity. Whilst, therefore, I continue to hold on to ‘praxis’ as a valuable articulation of the political potential of social life, there is an important differentiation to be made between praxis and the common, for where Virno considers praxis as a form of agency that is exhausted by or subsumed within the expression of the capitalist ‘multitude’, Hardt and Negri associate the common with characteristics of persistence and duration to suggest that even as it is turned towards the constitution of a capitalist regime, it might still be leveraged to articulate a politics grounded in the imperatives and contingencies of social life. In place, therefore, of the oppositional paradigm established by the alternative theatre movement in the 1970s and translated through to contemporary contexts through continued deferral to the radical lineage of 1968, the lens of the common invites a more nuanced and, potentially, duplicitous approach, in which the social interests of practitioners are articulated alongside and through practices that are also implicated in a paradigm of economic production. The challenge facing practitioners operating in relation to this paradigm is not to facilitate the constitution of a liberated public, as expressed by McGrath and Shaughnessy, but to support publics who inevitably reflect the interests and logics of capital to examine and realise aspects of themselves beyond economies of labour and production as they are posited by that domain.

Felicitous Community

The projects that will be considered in the following chapters each offer insight into the intricate layering of social and economic labours framed and facilitated by theatre practice in contemporary contexts, and their analysis will help develop discussion about how this task might be pursued in practice. As a final development before considering practical examples
of theatre’s relationship to social context, however, it seems necessary to revisit the quote with which I opened this chapter in order, both, to reiterate the ongoing significance of the political left on the ways in which we think and practice theatre’s political dynamics, and frame the notion of the ‘felicitous community’ as a response to these concerns. As Craig writes in summation of theatre’s development and expansion throughout the 1970s: “the difference between political and community theatre ultimately lies in the differing perception of the social function of theatre: whether theatre is seen as a weapon or community expression” (1980: 23). In this statement, Craig posits a fundamental separation between theatre’s value as a tool for political change and its relationship to community as a self-determining network of practices and values. In a rhetorical turn designed, therefore, to ally community theatre with the aspirations of the political left, Craig inadvertently distances the political values of theatre from a necessary relationship to community as a site of social practice. Whilst, as I have considered, the language and methodologies through which this relationship is articulated have developed in the years since Craig’s statement it is, ultimately, this separation that I associate with the epistemological framework of ‘68 and suggest continues to inform contemporary understandings of theatre’s relationship to political discourse.

As Hughes alludes to in her articulation of the common self and common social realm (2017-b: 79), what is absent from much of the scholarship that aims to make sense of theatre’s relationship to contemporary capitalism is a framework with which to think through, not only those aspects of social practice that are implicated in a network of economic production, but the possibilities that exist within social practice to exceed or subvert these limitations. For this reason, as a final step before approaching my case study examples, I want to suggest a way of thinking community and, more specifically, community’s constitution within and in relation to theatre, that refocuses consideration of theatre’s political dynamics around the constitution of community itself. This is an articulation of social context that recognises community’s function as a symbol of the political left, but aims to differentiate the performative articulation of community from its symbolic or operative value within this context in an effort to invite more specific and critical consideration of the ways in which theatre might be seen to interact with the political dynamics of social practice. In response to the social dynamics of contemporary labour, I suggest that what is required is not a heightened sense of community’s value to a socialist struggle - an effort to make community work better - but an inversion of this relationship that sees theatre’s interaction
with social context as a continuation of processes of production and becoming that are innate to community itself.

To return to my earlier consideration of Nicolas Ridout’s writing on the political dynamics of community, this is not a return to a way of thinking that associates community with political value because it is seen, too, to represent a category of communitarian practice that somehow precedes or predates the political complexities of the present (2013: 27). Rather, this is a perspective that builds on Hardt and Negri’s assertion that contemporary politics might be associated with the characteristics of the event. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s consideration of biopolitics (2008), Hardt and Negri mark a differentiation between political regimes that exercise power over life, and the power of life to exercise and articulate power (2009: 59). Within the framework of the common, these two principles of expression and relation are brought together in performative actions undertaken by individuals, groups and governments that serve to translate the ‘commonwealth’ into circumstantially and locally specific regimes of order and politics. It is in this relationship too, however, that Hardt and Negri consider the event as a disruptive and, potentially, productive force. As they write, “[t]he biopolitical event comes from the outside insofar as it ruptures the continuity of history and the existing order, but it should be understood not only negatively, as rupture, but also as innovation, which emerges, so to speak, from the inside” (ibid.: 59). This form of political action is associated with the characteristics of the event both because of its dissimilarity to social and political consistencies that contextualise it and inform societal order more generally, and because it is performatively constituted in time and space, by people acting together. It is these conditions that Hardt and Negri posit as a response to the republic of property, as a form of praxis that might create the conditions for “alternative forms of life” (ibid.: 58). In the context of their discussion, however, they do not identify the source of this alterity. In recognising that the disruption and subversive reanimation of the common might be seen as the only viable response to neoliberalism’s appropriation and mobilisation of subjectivity and social labour, they do not provide a position from which to think through and potentially articulate this form of agency. In contrast, therefore, to a preoccupation with community’s genealogical relationship to a discourse of leftist activism, it is here that I suggest community might continue to make a valuable contribution to discourses of political agency: not as a generic model of communitarian values, but as a relational principle that might support the performative rearticulation of commons values in the context of the present.
In a move away from the ‘good community’ and its supplementary relationship to discourses of the political left, the critical framework that I posit as the felicitous community is significantly informed by the work of Nancy and his interest in community’s inoperative dynamics. In contrast to interpretations of community in which interaction with community or social context is explicitly understood to advance pre-existing political aims, Nancy suggests a fundamental differentiation between ‘community’ and all ideological, logical and administrative regimes that seek to organise social practice. In terms not dissimilar to Hardt and Negri’s theorisation of the republic of property, Nancy argues that communism has failed as an alternative to capitalist society not simply because of the historically circumstantial collapse of communist governments around the world, but because it continues a principle of governance that aims to direct and contain the productive dynamics of social life. As Nancy observes:

[I]t was the very basis of the communist ideal that ended up appearing most problematic: namely, human beings defined as producers (one might even add: human beings defined at all), and fundamentally as the producers of their own essence in the form of their labor or their work. (1991: 2)

In relation to this assertion, Nancy posits community, not as an articulation of political good, but as an innate state of relationality, beyond principles of productivity and work.

As Nancy suggests, divorced from ideological and societal structures in relation to which it might otherwise be given form and value, community is no longer allied, specifically, to social practice but, rather, to the instinct to live and act collectively that he terms the ‘clinamen’. As he writes:

[O]ne cannot make a world with simple atoms. There has to be a clinamen. There has to be an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other. Community is at least the clinamen of the ‘individual.’ (1991: 3-4)

As Nancy conceives of it, community exists, not as practice or social context, but as an ontological dynamic that constitutes the state and condition of being as inherently and indivisibly relational. Though we exist in singular terms - “a body, a face, a voice” (Nancy 1991: 8) - the clinamen invests the condition of being with an indivisible plurality that ensures that there is no such thing as the truly individual. As Nancy writes, considered in this way, “Being "itself" comes to be defined as relational, as nonabsoluteness, and, if you will […] as community” (ibid.: 6). For Nancy, it is this characteristic that defines community as...
inoperative for where the idea of community might be mobilised and implicated within overarching regimes of order, value and politics, to foreground its relational constitution is to suggest, too, that community, as an expression of itself, is never resolved. To this extent, it remains immanent to itself as a process and condition of relational flux - a form of praxis, to return to my discussion from the previous chapter - which, by its nature, cannot be arrested or commodified. In this way, Nancy opposes community to formalised structures of society and government that might otherwise aim to associate it with operative value, characterising their influence as “the autarchy of absolute immanence” (ibid: 4).

Considered in relation to the practice of theatre in social contexts, this model has two significant implications. Firstly, Nancy’s characterisation of community as a formless, relational instinct associates praxis, as it is theorised by Virno, with an influence that is inherently opposed to formal structures of organisation and governance. If, as Nancy writes, “[c]ommunity is what takes place always through others and for others” (1991: 15) then all organisational principles, whether social, political or economic, could be seen as regimes that aim to contain and direct the expansive potential of true communality. Nancy’s community, therefore, associates the practice of communal becoming framed, for instance, by the practice of gathering strangers in a room to make performance, with an inherently radical quality of disorganisation that resists categorisation and persistently alludes to outcomes and possibilities that contradict or overlook the rigidity of hegemonic governance. Secondly, however, it infers that community as it appears to us in any form of discourse or practice is no longer community as communitarian essence, but a new entity that appropriates the ontological inclination towards one another in the constitution of a culturally legible formation of relations and activities. As Nancy conceives of it, community does not possess, and is not constituted of, the strategies of self-representation that implicate social relations in the framework of society. Rather, for community to emerge as a culturally legible entity, the innate communitarianism of being-together must find a felicitous relationship with the social and political frameworks that facilitate its becoming. As Miranda Joseph notes in her study of community in the twenty-first century, in the context of society at large, these frameworks could take the form of patterns of consumption or the accumulation of cultural markers that facilitate the articulation of differentiated social and personal identities (2002: 44), while, in the context of the contingent community of rehearsal, the theatre practices that help to give voice to and facilitate collaborative practice between participants also operate as a framework that governs the forms in which the innate potential of community is made manifest.

The felicitous community, therefore, represents an elaboration of Nancy’s inoperative
community. Or, perhaps, the articulation of the inoperative community in practice. What I hope to highlight in establishing the felicitous community as a distinct category is a fundamental differentiation between community as a theoretical expression of relational potential, and the politics that might be associated with community as a performative event. Where the good community relates to an ideological position that posits social practice as inherently sympathetic to a progressive political agenda, the felicitous community is articulated through representational frameworks that are inherently partisan and, inversely, lay claim to community’s value. As political philosopher Andreja Zevnik suggests, it is ontology, not intention, that “creates the conditions of possibility in which politics is thought and practiced” (2016: 1), and the political potential of community might, similarly, be associated with and constrained by the conditions of possibility within which community members encounter and articulate their becoming. The political value of the felicitous community is complicated, therefore, by the community’s contingent relation to regimes of representation and forms of praxis that are simultaneously the mechanism through which community becomes socially present, and yet also reflect and perpetuate interests and values beyond themselves. This is not to divorce the practice of community theatre from a socially progressive potential but to suggest that theatre’s potential outcomes are more powerfully informed by the conditions through which community emerges than the inherent nature of community itself, and that the conditions that facilitate community remain subject to broader discourses of becoming and relation that neither the theatre practitioner nor the participants are fully able to control. The community that emerges in these contexts is not simply the community that we - as theatre practitioners and scholars - would like to imagine but also, and significantly, the community that is allowed.

The purpose of the felicitous community, both as a conclusion to this chapter and in relation to my thesis overall, is to introduce a new imperative to the work of making theatre in social contexts. As it is discussed here, the community that emerges in the context of theatre practice is a multifaceted confluence of the people in the room, the conditions of rehearsal, and the social and cultural systems that facilitate the legible manifestation of communal relationships, and there is an obvious differentiation between community in these terms and the communitarian instinct that Nancy posits as an ontological commonality. If we accept Nancy’s reading of community and social context it is, in essence, impossible to leverage community as political discourse and still describe the politically operative community as community at all. In acknowledging this contradiction, however, I do not intend to suggest that community no longer represents a necessary resource in theatre’s
relationship to and interest in socially constituted political change. Rather, it is my hope that it might make way for a reconsideration of this relationship that takes more seriously the work of practitioners in providing opportunities for the groups they work with to articulate their sense and experience of community and communitarian value in ways that are specific to them, and that this practice, in itself, might be seen as political. As Nancy notes in his disavowal of communism as a practicable articulation of progressive politics, “"left" means, at the very least, that the political, as such, is receptive to what is at stake in community” (1991: xxxvi). Elaborating on the historical dialectic of left and right wing interests, Nancy contrasts this perspective with what he identifies as the right-wing imperative to leverage politics to prescribe and enforce order, but it might also be read as an entreaty to actors on the political left to move away from narratives of political agency that rely on the discursive and symbolic value of community and social groups, to one that foregrounds the contingency and uncertainty of the inoperative community as viable political praxis.

In terms that echo Hardt and Negri’s consideration of the biopolitical event, for Nancy, the political is not represented by the coherence of a governmental regime but, rather, as he writes, “the moment, the point, or the event of being-in-common” (1991: xl). In his writing, Nancy acknowledges that his discussion is fundamentally theoretical and that positing the possible forms of community as a political gesture is “beyond [his] competence” (ibid.). I, similarly, do not intend to speculate about how an ideally politicised expression of innate communitarianism might appear in practice. Indeed, in relation to the highly circumstantial characteristics I have associated with the felicitous community, this project might, in itself, be to misrepresent or misunderstand how community might operate in relation to an ambition to leverage or articulate political change. Instead, it is here that I turn towards the case studies to be covered in the following chapters, and where I hope they might make their most valuable contribution. In each of the three examples I have chosen, the imperative to use theatre to advance the political interests of practitioners and participants is balanced against and articulated through the complex infrastructure of social, institutional and economic interests that characterise and contextualise theatre practice in twenty-first century Britain. Just as I hope I have made clear in the differentiation between the inoperative and the felicitous community, therefore, the conditions in which these projects occur ensure that they are already compromised as a pure articulation of alternative or progressive politics.

In considering the felicitous community through these examples, it is not my intention to uncover moments in which Nancy’s inoperative community is somehow given full and unprecedented voice. Rather, I am interested in the imperfect translation of
community through theatre, and the extent to which theatre might allow the innate communitarianism theorised by Nancy to come into critical and potentially disruptive contact with discourses of order, politics and value that aim to arrest or commodify the political potential of being-in-common. In deference to Nancy’s discussion, I recognise that the social formations articulated through theatre are essentially distinct from the inoperative ideal that constitutes true liberation from the capitalist regime. Nevertheless, it is through a more concerted and deliberate interest in what is at stake in the becoming of community that I suggest theatre might provide genuinely new ways of understanding and articulating the common and social life, even as social life is put to work privatising the common.
Chapter 3:

What went well? What didn’t go so well? What would we do differently next time? Revisiting Littlewood’s Fun Palace and the Create Course, London

The questions that form the title of this chapter are drawn from reflection sessions that followed each of the ten workshops that made up the Create Course, a collaborative initiative between the Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), Katherine Low Settlement (KLS) and lead artist Naomi Alexander that took place in the Battersea area of London between the 4th of June and the 18th of July, 2015. Based on the principles of theatre maker Joan Littlewood’s unfulfilled Fun Palace project, the purpose of the Create Course was to provide space and support for Battersea residents to explore their relationship to creative practice. As Alexander notes in a blog post that appeared on the KLS website in support of the project, “[t]he course aims to enable local people who don’t think of themselves as artists, to discover their creativity” (Alexander 2015). Though the project was run by theatre practitioners, participants were invited to define the notion of creativity for themselves and, amongst other things, the course supported participants to bake, make performance, paint, write poetry and prose, and organise a community barbecue. In this way, the project echoes Littlewood’s original ambition to establish the Fun Palace as a place of learning and creativity that could adapt to suit the interests of the people within it. As Littlewood noted in an article for the New Scientist in which she outlined her vision for what the Fun Palace was to be, “the essence of the place will be its informality: nothing is obligatory, anything goes” (1964: 432). Though she described the Fun Palace as a “university of the streets” (ibid.), Littlewood’s intention was to differentiate the Fun Palace from formal institutions of learning to, instead, establish a cultural and educational resource with which individuals, groups and communities might pursue interests that were relevant to them. In this spirit, the questions were designed to foreground the interests and experiences of Create Course participants and to institute a dialogue between these and the ways in which the project was delivered. What went well and what didn’t go so well were documented - quotes and comments from the participants were noted, levels of participation and engagement were discussed - and used to shape the session the following week. For Alexander, this approach echoes Littlewood’s own ‘figure of 8’, a model of cultural production based on continuous communicative exchange between community and creative practice. In the context of Littlewood’s practice, particularly during
her tenure as Artistic Director of Theatre Royal Stratford East (1953–1974), the function of this technique was to incorporate localised, vernacular and popular cultures into the process of making theatre and, in so doing, establish a theatrical language that reflected the knowledges, experiences and interests of its audience. Translated to the context of the Create Course, it served, instead, as a technique with which to constitute the course as a reflection of the people who chose to take part. This aspiration not only reflects, but repeats some of the ambitions embedded in Littlewood’s model, intentionally revisiting thresholds of social and political activity identified by Littlewood over fifty-years ago. As performance scholar Rebecca Schneider observes, the performative return to historical thresholds in the context of the present is not an impartial or inconsequential gesture, but, rather, offers a challenge to the sanctity of the temporal present by creating an environment in which the ‘past’ is not yet truly over (2011: 15). Writing particularly about the practice of historical reenactment, Schneider argues that the deliberate and public return to battlegrounds of the past be seen not simply as a hobby, but as an embodied attempt to constitute social and political struggles that might otherwise appear to be resolved as fundamentally unfinished. As I will examine, the Create Course’s interest in Littlewood’s model is, itself, contextualised by a broader return to Littlewood’s ideas and renewed interest in the relationship between theatre and left-wing ‘radical’ politics more generally. Schneider’s perspective helps to frame these otherwise discrete instances of remembering as part of a more expansive socio-political discussion, and opens up space for thinking about the motivations and consequences that underpin contemporary interest in historically contingent modes of ‘radical’ theatre. In specific reference to the Create Course, the framing of artists and participants as reenactors invites us to look at the social and temporal dynamics of their work and consider the complications of attempting to restage a model of practice that was never fully realised in its own time within the present of Battersea in 2015. It is the consequences of this return and, in particular, the ways in which the Create Course participants realised and enacted the political potential of Littlewood’s model in the context of the present, that are the subject of this chapter.

Revisiting the Fun Palace

Littlewood’s original ambition was to build her Fun Palace as a physical structure on the banks of the Thames, on disused land on the Isle of Dogs in the East End of London.
Designed in collaboration with architect Cedric Price, the *Fun Palace* was imagined as a new, open-access architectural structure designed for social, cultural, and scientific exploration. It was an expansive and ambitious vision, that intended to provide access to lectures in science and philosophy, acting (as both therapy and performance), a ‘plastic area’ for construction and crafts, CCTV that would relay the activities in the rooms to the general public and screens that would transmit “without editing or art, whatever is going on in and out of London” (Littlewood 1995: 705). Despite its scale, however, changeability and flexibility were central to Littlewood’s model as both the physical structure of the building and the activities offered within it were designed to adapt to suit the needs and interests of the local community. As she noted, “[n]othing is to last more than ten years, some things not even ten days” (1964: 432). As Nadine Holdsworth illustrates in her study of Littlewood’s professional life (2006), for Littlewood, the *Fun Palace* represented the culmination of a lifelong interest in linking cultural practice with the interests and values of the working-class, of which she considered herself a part. Born in 1914 and raised in poverty, Littlewood’s work was informed by the worsening conditions of the working classes during the first half of the twentieth century as traditional industry declined and unemployment increased (Holdsworth 2006: 4). After leaving the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1933, only a year into her scholarship, Littlewood began to develop her practice as a director and playwright, collaborating with Ewan MacColl, then known as Jimmie Miller, to create politically charged theatre that drew from the aesthetics of agit-prop and protest to advance the communist politics of the Workers Theatre Movement.

Littlewood’s interest in class politics and, more specifically, the rights and experiences of the working class, was a consistent influence on her work. Her plays, including her most critically and commercially successful productions such as *A Taste of Honey* (1958) and *The Hostage* (1958), which she directed, and, *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963), which was developed by Littlewood and her ensemble, Theatre Workshop, drew on the aesthetics and cultural forms of popular entertainment, making use of regional accents and vocabulary, folk and music-hall songs, sketches and comedic turns, and conventions of performance and presentation familiar to variety shows. As Nadine Holdsworth observes, Littlewood pioneered “theatre that moved beyond a polite regurgitation of middle-class life to capture the exuberance, wit and poetry of working-class lives and communities” (2006: 1). For Littlewood, these decisions were a political gesture that expressed her frustration with British theatre’s domination by middle and upper-class interests and aimed to produce
performance that challenged and expanded theatre’s cultural and aesthetic boundaries. Originally proposed in 1963, Littlewood conceived of the *Fun Palace* as a continuation of this trajectory, as a response to the “quaint old theatres” (1995: 701) of London’s West End which she saw as elitist and commercial. For Littlewood, therefore, the *Fun Palace* was designed, not simply as a space for entertainment, but as a continuation of a life-long interest in the political dynamics of theatre, and the potential for politically motivated cultural practice to facilitate real change. From this perspective, if Littlewood’s career prior to her plans for the *Fun Palace* could be characterised as a persistent effort to represent the lives and experiences of the working class on stage as part of a project to establish and reinforce an opposition to mainstream elitism, the *Fun Palace* represented a context in which the communities she had included in her narratives were to be given the opportunity to use culture to animate and mobilise themselves as a socio-political force.

Whereas, however, the Workers Theatre Movement saw theatre “as a weapon” (Holdsworth 5: 2006) in a political struggle understood in broadly oppositional terms, by the 1960s Littlewood’s interpretation of the intersection between culture and politics had become much more nuanced. As Holdsworth observes, for Littlewood the *Fun Palace* represented a specific, calculated response to the ‘spirit’ of the 1960s as advancements in computing and automation during this decade led political and social commentators to speculate about how the lives of the working classes might change as “robots took over the bulk of manufacturing processes and domestic labour-saving devices freed people from time-consuming domestic chores” (2006: 33). Littlewood saw the *Fun Palace* as a response to these developments, as a space and a resource with which “[t]hose who at present work in factories, mines and offices” (1964: 33), might fill “their leisure with whatever delights them” (ibid.). However, though the ideological opposition of culture and commerce reflects what Holdsworth describes as Littlewood’s “anti-establishment views” (2006: 1), Littlewood’s model does not, in essence, reflect an anti-establishment practice. Rather, it emerges out of and in relation to conditions that Littlewood acknowledges are created by capital. In her article for the New Scientist, Littlewood identifies economically driven industrial and technological progress as a precursor to the availability of leisure time that is a prerequisite of her model, invoking a close relationship between the realisation of the *Fun Palace* and forces that serve to advance capitalism as a social and political reality. The *Fun Palace*, in these terms, is not a departure or corruption of the capitalist model specifically, but an attempt to engage both critically and creatively with conditions as they already exist. This is not to imply that Littlewood’s model...
was ideologically unsound, but, simply, to highlight a pragmatism that informed Littlewood’s thinking about the value and function of the *Fun Palace*, and through which she posited the political potential of her work in contingent, if possibly uncomfortable, relation to the forces and interests it was nominally designed to oppose.

As the project was never fully realised, the notion of returning to or revisiting the *Fun Palace* is a complicated one. As Littlewood conceived of it, the project’s essential value was not as a conceptual or even practical model, but its capacity as a framework with which to examine and pursue the social and political potential of cultural practice within a capitalist environment. What we have been left with are records that suggest what the *Fun Palace* might have been, and questions remain about the extent to which either Littlewood or an audience of contemporary scholars and practitioners could be said to understand the implications of her model without the benefit of seeing it realised in practice. As Littlewood notes, reflecting on why the project didn’t receive more widespread support, “[t]he design didn’t fit the rule book. It wasn’t a stadium. It wasn’t a theatre, nor even a circus. A new attitude to free time? What’s that?” (1995: 741).

The schism between the material and conceptual landscape is not, however, foreign to the realm of reenactment. As Schneider notes, while some battles of the American Civil War are revisited in the present on the same ground on which they were fought in the 1800s, it is common for alternative sites to be called on to ‘pass’ as the original battlegrounds as circumstances, development, or physical distance render the real sites unusable (2011: 12). As Schneider observes, though historical authenticity is key to the mimetic dynamics of historical reenactment, “[p]roblems of ambivalence, simultaneous temporal registers, anachronism, and the *everywhere of error*” (ibid: 8) continually interrupt the performative fabric of the past to reveal the influence of the present on the ways in which it has been revisited and remembered. ‘Again-time’, as Schneider describes the temporal-social realm of reenactment, is not, therefore, simply the result of material or behavioural props but, rather, a performative intention that seeks to reintroduce past events to the context of the present. The restaging or reiteration of actions, behaviours, and practices from the chronological past are not, she suggests, inconsequential acts of remembrance, but, rather, politicised articulations that contest the values and interpretations of both the past and the present by creating a performative nexus in which the boundaries between these designations are uncertain. What
is at stake in these moments is not the authenticity of the remembered past, but the ways in which the context of the present - material, social and political - influences which aspects of the past are of interest and they ways in which they are represented and remembered. It is, as Schneider writes, “a battle concerning the future of the past” (2011: 4).

In the context of the Create Course, the absence of a material or methodological representation of the Fun Palace make this conflict particularly clear. What is at stake in their revisiting of Littlewood’s ideas is not an authentic reproduction of an objective, verifiable model of practice, but the topography of social and political interests represented by the Fun Palace, and in relation to which that model was conceived. As Alexander notes in an essay examining the framework of the Create Course, submitted for her MA at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in 2014, her interest in Littlewood’s model is, fundamentally, politically driven. As she writes, “My starting point in this dissertation is that […] current UK public funding of the production and consumption of culture replicates and reinforces damaging social stratification, so that not everyone has equal chances in this arena” (2014: 7). Though she doesn’t articulate her politics in terms of class struggle, she nevertheless positions her work as a reaction against an inequitable cultural landscape that excludes or overlooks sections of the population that are less economically and socially privileged, and posits the Fun Palace as a viable technology with which to mount a productive intervention within that domain. The Create Course’s turn, therefore, to the Fun Palace is associated with a return to Littlewood’s ideas about the political value of culture, and the potential for collaborative cultural practice to leverage more substantial political change. Alongside her work in theatre, Alexander has over ten years experience in community development, at one point directing a three year campaign to establish a Community Allowance in the UK benefits system that involved over 100 community organisations. As Alexander discussed in an interview for this research, in the context of her work, theatre practice with communities and community development in the third sector are closely linked and both are ultimately seen as a strategy with which to mobilise community as part of an effort to address issues of social, cultural and economic inequality (2014). In turning to Littlewood’s model as a device with which to pursue this aim, Alexander draws on the Fun Palace as a way of revisiting the equivalence between community and progressive political action which, as I examined in the previous chapter, was a central concern of community and political theatre of the previous century. In returning to this threshold, the Create Course not only posits Littlewood’s model as a viable intervention within conditions and circumstances of the present, but reanimates
ideological debates about the political value of culture and community that influenced the development of theatre as a political practice during the 60s and 70s.

As a reflection of Littlewood’s ideas, the Create Course was designed to introduce participants to creative practice and implicate the notion of creativity within a network of inequality, positing creativity itself as an ameliorative act of cultural and political agency. This intention was made explicit during a conversation exercise in the first week of the project, in which participants were encouraged to consider whether they felt they had the right and the opportunity to be creative, and the potential benefits of creativity within the context of their own lives (Appendix A). These conversations set the benchmark for the activities to follow over the subsequent weeks, as a way of registering the influence of creative practice in addressing personal experiences of disenfranchisement, and contextualising individual acts of creative exploration within a broader discourse relating to the political dynamics of cultural representation. Just as Schneider suggests that, in revisiting the historic threshold of the civil war, reenactors “fight to keep the war ‘alive’” (2011: 8), Alexander’s return to Littlewood’s model could be seen as a return to a ‘battleground’ of relations, first articulated by Littlewood herself, in an effort to constitute the struggle evident in Littlewood’s practice as fundamentally unresolved.

As Schneider argues, however, the epistemic and experiential qualities of reenactment are not insulated from the social and temporal environment in which they take place. Within the political framework of the 1960s, the drive towards creative expression could comfortably be contained within a socialist inflected rhetoric that associated political progress with the cultural, social and economic emancipation of the working classes. As Helen Nicholson observes, however, in a neoliberal context, creativity has become central to mechanisms of capitalist production as a characteristic that associates individuals and groups with qualities of resilience, adaptability and malleability that are particularly suited to the dynamic characteristics of contemporary capitalist labour (2011: 94). Within this context, the political significance of the Create Course’s imperative to ‘be more creative’ is complicated as creativity itself is associated with a social and political ambivalence, and there is scope that the project’s ambition to mobilise participants as creative agents to address endemic inequality in fact replicates the values and behaviours that underwrite the conditions through which that inequality is produced.

The Create Course’s turn towards Littlewood’s model, therefore, illustrates a tension that exists between theatre’s legacy as a ‘weapon’ of the political left, and the ways in which
the conditions of the present could be said to inform, influence or compromise what is made manifest through the practice of theatre. As a continuation of the discussion that I developed in chapter one, Alexander’s interest in leveraging the Fun Palace as a political strategy helps to reveal some of the complexities faced by practitioners interested in the possibility of community as political praxis. More specifically, it reveals a tension that exists between the aspiration to mobilise community politically, and the strategies, both philosophical and methodological, through which that aspiration is understood and realised. In describing the relationship between the Create Course and the participants as reenactment, it is important to acknowledge that the participants themselves were not informed of the project’s relationship to Littlewood’s ideas. Nevertheless, the practitioners’ explicit efforts to return to or express Littlewood’s politics through the project’s work in Battersea implicates Create Course participants in the performative framework of reenactment in the sense that it associates their work together with a demand for verisimilitude that relates to a place and time in the past more specifically than it does the social and temporal present of their work together.

As I will consider, the Create Courses’ interest in Littlewood’s practice is indicative of a broader shift within the field towards theatre’s ‘radical’ past in an effort to mobilise theatre as a response to social, political and, particularly, economic inequalities in the context of the present. I am interested in the performative resonances of this shift and, in particular, how it might be seen to give form to praxis as it is supported by and mobilised through theatre, and its impact on the political constitution of community as it is formed in relation to theatre. As my writing in the previous chapters might suggest, I am sceptical that an approach to political action so clearly indebted to the ideological and methodological discourses of the previous century represents the most apt or agile response to the environment of the present. My interest, however, in studying the Create Course in detail is not simply to examine a trend in political theatre that I find problematic but rather, to consider the temporal discourse instigated by this turn. As Schneider writes, in performance, time is no longer tied to a linear chronology, rather, it is made theatrical: caught in the flux of citation, repetition, error and improvisation (2011: 21). While the aspiration of practitioners operating in this mode might be understood as an effort to orchestrate the social and political resonances of this flux, I am interested, too, in how this imperative is interpreted and enacted by participants. In framing participants as reenactors, therefore, I hope, also, to make space for a consideration of their influence on the rearticulation of Littlewood’s model and, more specifically, the ways in which their interpretation of the project might inform our
understanding of the present and future value of theatre’s radical past.

The Create Course

The Create Course was developed jointly by Alexander, Aaron Barbour, director of the KLS, and Liz Moreton, senior producer at the BAC. Though the organisations had not worked together before, the KLS and BAC are located a mile apart from one another in Battersea, a London district bordering the Thames, nine miles up-river from Littlewood’s original Isle of Dogs site. The district is characterised by high levels of ethnic and cultural diversity, with findings from the 2011 census revealing that over one third of its population identify as mixed ethnicity or non-white (Office for National Statistics 2012), and is notable as an area of particularly acute economic disparity, with areas within Battersea ranging from the 10% most to the 30% least economically deprived in the country (City of London 2015). The BAC and KLS both articulate a strong interest in cultivating relationships with the communities that live in the area and, for Barbour and Moreton, the project was, in part, a continuation of ongoing efforts to build relationships between their institutions and people in Battersea. As Alexander notes in her essay, at an organisational level, the partnership between the organisations was framed as a bringing together of “the high levels of social capital held by KLS in the local communities and the high levels of cultural capital held by BAC” (2014: 30). The ‘local people’ that Alexander refers to in the blog post referenced earlier are, therefore, Battersea residents, and the project was designed as an intergenerational, intercultural offer, to include as broad a spectrum of the local community as possible. In practice, as a result of the KLS’s active relationships with communities in the area, the
majority of the people who attended the sessions came from the area around the KLS building, which includes some of the poorest and most ethnically diverse sections in the district. The number of participants varied over the duration of the course, but leveled out at around fifteen, all of whom lived in Battersea. Perhaps as a result of the timing of the session, which ran from 10am-1pm on a weekday, the majority of the participants were mothers with primary responsibility for childcare and domestic labour, who were able to attend, in part, because of crèche facilities provided by the KLS. Although it wasn’t an intention of the project, all of the participants who completed the course were women, and though many worked professionally, issues relating to motherhood, affective responsibility and work in the home significantly informed the ways in which the value and practice of creativity was understood within the context of the course.

The Create Course took place between June and July, 2015 and was delivered by Alexander and Moreton, with help from Nazha Harb and Alexandra Reisinger, MA students studying Applied Theatre at Goldsmiths, London, and Mohamed Mohamed, a local spoken word artist. My relationship with the project began in August, 2014 with an email exchange with Alexander after I posted a public call out on the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD) email list, asking for feedback from theatre practitioners on how they understood and engaged with the notion of community through their practice. In part because of a cross-over between my research interests and Alexander’s own interest in the political dynamics of community-engaged theatre, Alexander was interested in including me in the project as a ‘critical friend’. I was invited to attend planning sessions between Alexander, Moreton and Barbour, as the outline for the project was developed towards the end of 2014, and I went on to attend the majority of the Create Course workshops as a facilitator/observer, contributing to the delivery of the project. The programme was divided into two sections, with sessions taking place at both the KLS and the BAC. The first four sessions took place in a long, wooden floored room, on the top floor of the KLS, and were designed to illustrate the scope of what might be considered creative practice. Most of the participants had never met before, and the sessions were bookended by spaces for the participants to meet and talk, over tea, coffee or juice at the start of the session, and a shared meal at the end. Though each of these sessions contained practical elements, the first four weeks were principally designed to examine how the group conceptualised creativity, and the types of activities that might be said to constitute creative practice. Typically, these sessions encouraged participants to reflect on areas of their own lives in which they felt they were or
had been creative, undertake a simple creative or imaginative task - for instance, imagine twenty-five uses for a paper clip, or, create a costume out of only tin foil - and introduce ways of thinking about creativity by thinkers and public figures such as cognitive neuroscientist Vincent Walsh and designer Tim Brown. These ideas were used to frame discussions and activities in the final hour of the session, and, in a more general sense, to help frame creativity as an innate skill that can be expressed and explored within the context and conditions of everyday life. During the first session, Alexander shared a video by Matthew Taylor, chair of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts. In it, Taylor argues that everyone can realistically aspire to a ‘creative life’, which he describes as “a life that feels meaningful, fulfilled. Where we’re free to express ourselves as individuals” (The RSA 2014). Creativity, as Taylor describes it, is a process of self-actualisation that is not tied to talent or virtuosity, but rather, to the confidence and opportunity to adapt and articulate the self through action. The implication, which was brought up in discussions after the video, was that, though the notion of a creative life applies equally to everyone, its value - what a creative life looks like and how it is practiced - is necessarily determined on an individual basis.

By drawing attention to the individual dynamics of creative practice, the course aimed to both frame creativity as an innate form of self-expression, and posit the right and ability to be creative as a fundamentally political concern. In her essay for her MA, Alexander cites a report commissioned by Arts Council England in which the authors found that of the near 29,000 people surveyed “84 per cent of the population fall into either the ‘Little if anything’ or the ‘Now and then’ groups, attending arts activities occasionally at most” (Bunting et al. 2008: 7), and that educational attainment and high social status were the most reliable indicators of engagement in publicly subsidised arts. Findings such as these suggest that the benefits of arts funding are distributed unevenly across society and that, despite being supported by public money, the majority of the arts are seen or engaged with by only the most educationally and socially privileged sections of the population. Considered from this perspective, creativity and the right to be creative are not governed by the drive towards self-expression, but, rather, by the ways in which characteristics such as age, race, gender and social and economic background facilitate or inhibit creative opportunity. As Alexander argues, these conditions reflect and exacerbate inequalities that characterise society as a whole and help to constitute who has the right or opportunity to be creative or participate in cultural activity as a political concern. During the first session, the Create Course aimed to
draw attention to the real world implications of these discussions, inviting participants to reflect on the types of people that they felt were allowed to be creative, and the barriers that they had encountered in their own experiences of cultural or creative participation. These were small group discussions, with participants split up into facilitator led groups of three or four. In the group that I was part of Chichi, one of the participants, shared her experience of going to the National Theatre on the South Bank, London and recognising that she and her daughter were one of only two black couples in the entire audience. As she noted, this experience didn’t stop her from wanting to take her daughter to the theatre, but it did contribute towards an environment in which she was uncertain of the extent to which she was welcome in that space, and whether or not she and her daughter were valued equally as audience members. For her, not seeing people who represented her own ethnic, social and economic background in the audience at the National Theatre reflected more expansive questions about the values that inform mainstream cultural production, and the values, therefore, that mainstream, publicly subsidised cultural practices reflect and perpetuate.

This sense of uncertainty links to the second assertion that underpinned the delivery of the Create Course, that creative expression represents a device with which the population express and integrate themselves, their interests and their views into the broader social, cultural and economic framework of society. Drawing on the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1996 [1979]), Alexander frames society as an ontological framework that facilitates particular modes of being while repressing others and, in so doing, creates contexts that determine the ways in which individuals are allowed to be present and participate, reserving the highest levels of agency and autonomy for those who are, already, most privileged within that environment. Through the lens of ‘habitus’, Bourdieu offers a paradigm in which issues of taste, agency and autonomy within the field of cultural production are intimately linked with one another through a network that he describes in terms of capital. As he argues, “[i]ndividuals do not move about in social space in a random way” (ibid.: 110), rather, what is possible for a particular person within a particular field is governed by their relative levels of social, cultural, educational and economic capital, and the values they are understood to articulate and represent within that context. Considered through this lens, the Create Course’s call to ‘be more creative’ illustrates a broader ambition to confront privilege and inequality as it is embedded within these economies, and an intention to mobilise creativity as a device with which to disrupt the logic that informs individual and societal preconceptions about who has the right to express themselves by creating an environment in
which those values are subject to change.

In the second four week block, sessions alternated between the KLS and the BAC. These weeks were less structured as the workshops moved away from a collective discussion about creativity and, instead, were intended as a resource to support participants in the development of their own, individual, creative projects. In relation to Alexander’s contention that hierarchical forms of cultural production mirror and emphasise an inequitable socio-cultural landscape, the cultural forms associated with the project were not established in advance, but determined by the participants. In the first four weeks, Alexander and Moreton facilitated exercises that framed creative practice as a reflection of the concerns and interests that characterised the participants’ lives, asking the women to cast creativity in terms of the practices they had enjoyed when they were younger, the activities they got pleasure from in the present, and how they imagined the pursuit of creative practice might positively influence their lives in the future. Within this context, creative practice is framed, not as a reflection of a wider economy of cultural values, but as a tool of self-determination with which participants might explore and represent aspects of themselves that are otherwise concealed or suppressed.

The implications and potential resonances of this shift are reflected in the divergent ways in which the women made use of the final four weeks of the course. In these weeks, group members offered support to one another where relevant, but, in general, worked alone on separate projects that were shown together at the BAC on the 18th of July. Chelsea, a participant who had lived in Battersea her entire life, discussed using creative writing to help mobilise local people against the demolition and redevelopment of flats in the district, including the block in which she lived, utilising the framework of the course to translate creative practice into the language of political activism. Chichi, in contrast, chose to engage with creative practice as a way of reflecting on her own needs. As she noted during these sessions, the invitation to consider areas in her life where she had been creative in the past had helped her to recognise that the responsibilities of working full-time as a teacher whilst also raising her daughter as a lone parent meant that, in the present, she paid little attention to her personal and emotional wellbeing. To narrate this experience, and mark a commitment to addressing this imbalance, she used the second four weeks of the course to make a papier-mâché bowl that she decorated with symbols that represented what she saw as her journey from the adversity of her younger years, to the pleasure of starting her own family, and her hope for a life of peace and tranquility in the future.
These projects, and others undertaken by participants during these weeks, associate the project with a range of outcomes the planned programme of the course could not have predicted. It is in this aspect that the *Create Course* most clearly reflects what might be understood as Littlewood’s original intentions, providing a resource with which participants were enabled to give voice to experiences and aspirations that the circumstances of their own lives inadvertently or explicitly suppressed. Whereas, however, Littlewood’s intention was for creative activity to contribute towards a long term exploration of the social and political implications of community led cultural practice, the *Create Course* operated in a much more confined environment, limited, as it was, by an eight week programme of three hour sessions, that took place once a week and involved only a small section of the broader community. In this sense, though the rhetoric with which the project was described echoes Littlewood’s ideals, the work facilitated by the programme is necessarily associated with a different register of affect which, I suggest, is most usefully understood in relation to Jill Dolan’s articulation of the ‘utopian performative’. The utopian performative, as Dolan writes, refers to the capacity for performance to evoke an experience or encounter with the logical, experiential and phenomenological dynamics of a different, better future. It is not, as she argues, the equivalent of that future, or even a practicable version of the social, experiential and political dynamics with which a better future might be realised but, rather, an expression of alterity based in and limited by the realities of the present. As she suggests, “[u]topian performatives persuade us that beyond this ‘now’ of material oppression and unequal power relations lives a future that might be different” (2005: 7). Whilst Dolan frames utopian performatives as a collective phenomena that emerge at the interface between audience and performance, their potential applies equally to the individual, engaged in their own performative exploration of difference. Within a context in which participants could only examine the potential of creative practice in relatively limited terms, what is invoked is not the robust interaction between cultural practice and social context framed by the idea of the *Fun Palace*, but a performative encounter with a future that is both uncertain, and articulated in terms that are much more personal than those nominally associated with Littlewood’s vision.

It is this differentiation that I suggest is key to understanding the temporal resonances of the *Create Course*’s interest in Littlewood’s radical aspirations and, specifically, the distinction between the project’s value as it was imagined by the artists who delivered it, and the values that were realised through the participants’ performative articulation of the course.
in practice. The material conditions within which the *Create Course* took place necessarily limit the extent to which the project was able to model Littlewood’s interpretation of the *Fun Palace* as a practical contribution towards a broader agenda for socialist change. Nevertheless, it provided a forum in which the women involved in the project were able to mobilise creativity to examine and realise versions of themselves that the context and conditions of their daily lives did not accommodate or support. What is of interest, therefore, in the imperfect translation of Littlewood’s model to the context of the present, is not simply that the project’s relationship to political discourse becomes proportionately less clear as the various material and economic infrastructures that support it are, similarly, made less reliable, but also the ways in which participants’ actions might be seen to inform or direct the social and political constitution of this imperfect return to the past. Just as Schneider suggests that reenactors’ performative articulation of chronologically distant events might be seen to reform the past as political discourse, so the *Create Course* participants’ seemingly incomplete realisation of Littlewood’s *Fun Palace* might be understood as a legitimate rearticulation of its politics in the context of the present.

In relation to Bourdieu’s ideas, Alexander argues that creative practice has the capacity to operate, not simply as a privileged form of self-expression, but as a means of disturbing the circulation of social and cultural capital more broadly. In the context of the *Create Course*, creative practice was seen as a nexus that positioned the cultural authority associated with the BAC and the practitioners delivering the project in praxis with the interests and values of participants, as a strategy with which to underwrite the constitution of new, inclusive economies of social and cultural value. Alexander’s interpretation of Littlewood’s model associates this process with a broad narrative of social activism, where the constitution of these economies is seen to work against inequalities of opportunity embedded in the context of contemporary society, and to give collective voice to sections of the population conventionally excluded from discourses of power due to a lack of representation. Without dismissing the potential benefits of agency articulated in this way, however, what is of particular interest in the context of this thesis, and in the absence of a sustained articulation of Littlewood’s model, is the extent to which participants’ interaction with the project might be seen to subvert or even lay claim to this technology. In relation to a methodological and ideological framework that explicitly framed the function and value of participants as political agents, there is space here to think through their responses to the course as strategic improvisations that subverted the performative imperative as it was
framed by the artists leading the project, and reflexively associated the *Create Course* with new discourses of value and agency. While, from either perspective, the activities of participants should be understood as an allusion to a possible, better future, rather than its realisation, the futures modeled by participants through their work are nevertheless manifestly different from the collaborative mobilisation of free time anticipated by Littlewood. Rather, participants drew on creative practice as a strategy with which to address differentiated and highly personalised registers of need and value, to move the threshold of political struggle from the broad parameters of socialist opposition to a more nuanced and knotty interaction with the circumstances of their own lives.

The resonances of this shift are perhaps most usefully illustrated in the celebration event that took place at the BAC on the 18th of July and marked the end of the course and the culmination of the participants’ work. Though the event was open to anyone who wanted to come, for many of the participants it was the first time they had shown their work in public and, rather than publicising the sharing, Alexander and Moreton decided to let the participants determine who should be invited. Although some participants chose to distribute flyers to local business and organisations, in practice, this meant that the audience was almost entirely made up of people with personal relationships to the participants. The event took the form of an exhibition style sharing and visitors entered through the BAC’s main entrance, advanced up a wide imperial staircase, past a drinks reception, and into a high-ceilinged, white-walled room. Art works and photographs from the eight weeks of the course were hung from the walls, illuminated by spot lights positioned by the BAC’s technical team. A small stage was set up for readings, story-telling and performance. Jewellery, a multi-tiered celebration cake and other art objects were displayed on pedestals and tables throughout the room, and a large craft and activity table was set up in one corner for visitor’s children. The event opened at one o’clock, with bright sunshine streaming through tall, wood framed windows. As participants shared their work with people they knew, photographs were taken next to art works, the chairs at the activity table filled up, craft materials and improvised art works spilled over the tables and onto the floor, and lively conversation filled the room. The atmosphere of genial disorganisation was occasionally punctuated with performances from *Create Course* participants that drew the audience’s attention to the stage. Angela read poetry that had been written during the final four weeks of the course, and Caroline presented *In the Forests of Time*, a performance that explored memory through a combination of story telling and recorded interviews. The exhibition was open for three hours, with the audience
increasing steadily throughout the afternoon. As a closing gesture, after all of the works had been shown, Hanan, who had used the kitchens at the BAC to bake her first wedding cake, cut her cake and shared it with everyone there, keeping the top tier aside for staff at the BAC who had helped her in her work.

The ‘figure of 8’ as Radical Reenactment

As I have noted, for Alexander, the framework that links the activities undertaken as part of the course with broader processes of social and cultural change relates to Littlewood’s practice and constitutes an effort to return to, revisit or reenact political praxis as it was imagined by Littlewood in relation to the conditions of the 1960s. Whilst Alexander’s interest in the Fun Palace makes this intention particularly explicit, the impulse to look back through theatre’s recent history in an effort to address contemporary political issues is not unique to her practice. The Create Course is, itself, contextualised by a more widespread return to Littlewood’s ideas. Stella Duffy and Sarah-Jane Rawlings have, in recent years, spearheaded a Fun Palaces initiative that makes use of Littlewood’s concept as a frame for community centred cultural practice. It is, as they write, a campaign to put “culture at the heart of every community” (Fun Palaces n.d.) and has led to over 500 Fun Palace events in Britain and internationally since its launch in 2014, and whilst their version of a Fun Palace varies from
the model pursued by Alexander, they nevertheless continue to promote Littlewood’s ideas as part of an ongoing struggle against cultural inequality. More generally, *Rediscovering the Radical - Theatre and Social Change*, a three day international conference at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA) in 2016, made a similar effort to articulate political action in the present through methodological and ideological forms from the past. Brendon Burns, head of Applied Theatre and Community Drama at LIPA, opened the conference with this statement:

This event was really born out of a number of conversations about what we described or thought of as the widespread depoliticisation of our field - of the field of participatory and community arts. How, all too often, practice is expected to function as some kind of quick fix for social problems. How instrumental applications of theatre as a pseudo therapy pathologises the individual, the marginalised, whilst in the same breath normalises the oppressive elements of the system. (Collective Encounters 2016a)

Burns’ assertions link to recent observations by authors such as Claire Bishop (2012: 275) and Jen Harvie (2013: 3-4) who recognise a trend in recent decades that has seen participatory practices that might otherwise be included within the rubric of community or political theatre, incorporated within the delivery streams of mainstream cultural institutions. As they suggest, and as I examined in the first chapter, this turn has begun to associate these practices with a commercial or outcome driven imperative that is potentially at odds with their ‘radical’ origins. The charge of depoliticisation is, of course, contingent on particular ways of imagining theatre’s relationship to political discourse. Specifically, the notion of a dichotomy between instrumentalisation and politicisation could itself be seen as a reiteration of the oppositional logic that informed the political dynamics of alternative theatre in the twentieth-century. Burns, however, is not alone in characterising contemporary art and theatre in these terms. Nato Thompson supports this position by arguing that the systemic conditions of cultural practice within a capitalist infrastructure radically alter the ways in which art and activism operate in the context of everyday life (2016: vii), to suggest that the institutionalisation of activist practices within museums, art galleries and publicly funded theatres is commensurate with a taming or curtailing of their political potential. In the field of performance studies, Shirin Rai and Janelle Reinelt similarly assert that in recent years, interest in the relationship between performance and political process has been ‘displaced’ by less specific thematic and aesthetic concerns that diminish the function of theatre and theatre
scholarship as a political force (2016: 2). Considered collectively, these concerns, and the commensurate appeal for artists to articulate a clearer, more confrontational politics through their practice, speak of a broader sense of uncertainty about the relationship between culture and politics in a neoliberal age. In the context of the conference, practices drawn from a familiar lexicon of political activity - agit-prop, collective action, telling the stories of marginalised communities, the public representation of minority identities, single-issue community theatre, and foolery - were all revisited as viable strategies for leveraging political change in the context of the present. Though the programme did include some more contemporary interpretations of radical practice, the accumulative contribution of theatre companies such as Banner Theatre, Red Ladder and Unity Theatre, Liverpool, each of whom spoke or presented work at the conference that illustrated a strong, clearly articulated, relationship to left-wing activism of the 60s and 70s, was a genealogical contextualisation of radical efficacy, and the indirect inference that the work of ‘rediscovering’ community theatre’s political potential is contingent on a performative reiteration or return to the forms in which it had been expressed in the past.

Alexander’s interest in Littlewood’s ideas echoes this instinct. For Alexander, in the absence of a definitive outline of how to deliver a Fun Palace, the model of practice that sat at the heart of the Create Course and linked the activities of the programme with Littlewood’s politics and methodologies was the ‘figure of 8’. As Alexander notes in her essay, the concept of the figure of 8 is born particularly out of Littlewood’s work at the Theatre Royal. In the context of a cultural landscape which, as Holdsworth observes, privileged “heroic, virtuoso performances exemplified by Sir Laurence Olivier or the presence of an ‘acteur’ figure such as Sir John Gielgud or Noel Coward, who relied on transmitting their own dignified elegance” (2006: 47), Littlewood focused her energies on developing work that realistically reflected the attitudes and experiences of everyday lives. To realise this goal, she rejected the conservatoire led conventions of actor training in favour of recruiting “willing amateurs, ordinary working people” (ibid.), relying on improvisation, collaboration and continual reworking to create performances that reflected the culture and energy of her audiences.

In relation to Littlewood, the figure of 8 could be seen as a framework of communication and inclusion through which she not only expanded the aesthetic range of her practice, but aimed to realise her theatre as a political voice. Translated to the context of Battersea in 2015, the decision to embed the figure of 8 model at the heart of the Create
Course is, similarly, an attempt to mobilise cultural practice as a response to wide-spread inequality, and it is in relation to the dynamics and possibilities framed by Littlewood’s model that the work itself is seen as politically productive.

It is of note, therefore, that I have not been able to find a direct link between Littlewood and the ‘figure of 8’ terminology. As Holdsworth observes, Littlewood resisted articulating her work in terms of a methodology and left very few written accounts of how she worked or the convictions that underpinned her practices, tending instead to invest in the practical realisation of her ideas (2006: 44). In the absence of written material, much of Littlewood’s legacy is articulated through the practitioners that she worked with and influenced. I assume here, then, that the prominence of the ‘figure of 8’ within the discourse surrounding the Fun Palace relates to this genealogy, perhaps specifically to Philip Hedley, assistant to Littlewood during her time as Artistic Director of the Theatre Royal, who attributed to Littlewood the idea of a ‘continuous loop’. As he writes:

Joan's theatre was a working class rebellion, a working class voice, which didn't otherwise exist at the time. It was based on a very simple philosophy, which Joan used to call 'a continuous loop' between the community and the stage; you draw themes, ideas, talent, people from your community, you create theatre with them and give it back. There's a 'continuous loop' between drawing from your community, making a play from that material and reflecting it back. (1996: 24)

Though the continuous loop represents a similar figurative metaphor to the figure of 8, Hedley’s description relates, specifically, to the contingencies of building based theatre practice. As it is described by Hedley, this model could be associated with three main characteristics. In the first instance, it operates as a mechanism with which to rearticulate working class voices within the domain of mainstream culture. Though struggling commercially and seriously dilapidated by the time Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop came to occupy it, the Theatre Royal nevertheless positioned Littlewood’s work in relationship to the broader cultural environment of London during the 50s and 60s which was, as Holdsworth observes, dominated by “middle-class intrigue, drawing-room comedies and Shakespearean star-vehicles” (2006: 23). Considered in relation to this context, this technique is ‘rebellious’ to the extent that it acts as a technology with which to bring working class people and experiences onto the stage, foregrounding their interests and perspectives within a cultural discourse that neglected and devalued them. Secondly, the continuous loop is durational. Rather than appropriating working class stories as cultural text for a middle-class audience,
the notion of a continuous loop positions what is shown on stage as part of an ongoing conversation between the theatre and the community. It is not, therefore, a process dominated by the focus on a cultural product. Rather, the relationship between performance and community is refined over time as community members, the creative team, and the work they make are implicated in a discourse that is itself associated with continuity and significance. As Holdsworth notes of Littlewood’s practice during this time: “[s]he wanted a theatre based on human contact and exchange - director to company, actor to actor and actor to audience - with each relationship rooted in a two-way dialogue” (2006: 45). Lastly, the continuous loop is associated with a notion of locality or specificity that is determined by physical proximity and the practical limitations of working with and getting to know the audience for whom the Theatre Royal was their local theatre. A continuous loop could also, therefore, be associated with what Nicholson identifies as a “community of location” (2005: 86): a socio-spatial arrangement in which networks of relation and identity rely on and refer to a common geographical territory.

The terminological differentiation between the ‘continuous loop’, and the ‘figure of 8’ appears to be coincidental but nevertheless helps to illustrate an important shift between the practice as it was deployed by Littlewood and its reiteration in contemporary contexts. Whereas Hedley posits the loop as a technique with which to transpose community experiences onto the stage for a general public, the Fun Palace, as it is reflected in the Create Course, exists only for the community: its function shaped and enacted by the community, solely for their own benefit. Though it represents an enclosed system of relation, we can associate the continuous loop with an outward trajectory of influence that aimed to disturb social and cultural convention by using the stage as an interface between working-class interests, a middle-class audience, and society more generally. Transporting this model to the context of the Fun Palace, however, removes the notion of an audience and introduces a new interpretation of political activity, in which cultural practice is positioned as the medium through which the community encounters itself, and the language with which they conduct a reflexive discourse about their own constitution. In this model, the political dynamics of cultural practice are no longer implicated in direct communicative exchange with a more expansive field of political process but, rather, rely exclusively on the actions of the participants and the agencies they develop through their interaction with the practice. In her articulation of reenactment, Schneider writes of reenactors putting themselves “in place of” (2011: 9) the past in an effort, not simply to restage past events, but to return the past to the present through through the gestic and phenomenological interface of their own bodies. In an
effort to enact Littlewood’s socialist ethics through the figure of 8, the Create Course hands this responsibility over to its participants, relying on their performances to accurately revisit and remind us of Littlewood’s ideals.

What went well? The Create Course as Domestic Disruption

There are several levels of resonance or influence at play in the context of the Create Course. As has been noted, Alexander considers the project in relation to a broad perspective of political action, attending to issues of social inequality and cultural division through the lens of socially integrated cultural production. As a discrete eight week programme, centred around the interests and experiences of the participants, however, the implications of the project are effectively framed by the celebration event itself. The course's framing of creativity as an act of self-expression positions creative practice in practical and political relationship to the personal circumstances of participants. To be creative, in this context, is not only to negotiate with the dynamics associated with the public sphere of work, economic responsibility and social relations, but to act within and in relation to the intimacy of family, affective responsibility and home life. Within the context of the celebration event, therefore, the art works were associated with values beyond the representation of individual participants’ creative expression, and operated, too, as a metaphor for intimate interpersonal renegotiations that took place alongside the creative activity of the course and created the context in which the art works could be made. Considered, specifically, through the lens of the celebration event, the broad assertion of Littlewood’s model - that the redistribution of cultural production is commensurate with a socially-engaged political struggle - is brought into relation with the intimacy of family and friendship.

This is not an inevitable outcome of the project’s model but, rather, reflects the ways in which the participants’ interaction with the course informed and directed its social and political effects. During the first week of the course, Alexander and Moreton facilitated an exercise in which participants were split into small groups and asked to consider the role of creativity in three areas of their lives: work, family and holidays. In the group that I helped facilitate, the notion of work and family were very closely linked, and the relationship between this field and creativity was mapped out in two contradictory ways: in the first, unpaid domestic labour such as cooking and decoration were identified as areas of self-
expression, operating as a form of vernacular creative practice. Housework was, in this narrative, positioned as a networked field of responsibilities that could be seen to support or enable creativity by producing the circumstances for particular, if limited, forms of creative practice. This was balanced, however, by discussion that identified responsibilities such as caring for children, ensuring the house was clean and the preparation of food for the family as emotionally and physically demanding, leaving little motivation for creative practice, or energy to explore a sense of self that was disassociated from those responsibilities. During a whole group discussion that followed the exercise, these findings were echoed by other participants, and the relationship between creativity and personal domestic life became a central theme of the discussions that characterised the rest of the course. Though, as Alexander articulated, the implications of Littlewood’s model could be considered in relation to a political project on a national scale, the group’s contention that the forces that most directly impeded their right to creative expression were found in the home positions the social and political potential of the Create Course in relation to a much more intimate field of affect and relation. If the figure of 8 can be seen as a process with which to incorporate specialist knowledges and interests within the creative process and, in so doing, associate the outcomes of creative practice with value in relation to specific social contexts, the experience and contribution of the participants during these discussions clearly positions the Create Course in specific relation to the individuated contingencies of their own lives.

As a framework designed to facilitate the reenactment of Littlewood’s ideas and, specifically, Littlewood’s conception of the political value of cultural practice, the Create Course couched these discussions in a much more explicit and instrumentalist form of activist discourse. Framed by Taylor’s discussion (The RSA 2014), the right to be creative was positioned in tension with issues of class and privilege, as he argues that whilst everyone has an innate capacity to be creative, societal convention - articulated through governmental policy, corporate culture and economic inequality - creates an uneven landscape of creative opportunity that delimits the ways in which the majority of the population are allowed to represent and express themselves. Following Taylor’s video, participants were divided into groups of three or four and led through a discussion of the following points:

- What is creativity?
- Who are the people who have ideas / who can be creative?
- What are the myths? (lone genius etc)
- What are the barriers stopping people from being creative?
These two elements were designed to encourage participants to begin to develop a critical framework that mapped their interest in creative practice on to Taylor’s discussion, and, in so doing, framed creative expression as a form of political action. The individual pursuit of creativity, and the re-modeling of the self around a self-determined creative agenda was, in this way, positioned as a political technique that exceeded the parameters of the course and individual creative interests to productively inform social and political narratives that characterise society more generally. Taylor himself contextualises people engaged in creative practice as ‘change makers’, and the notion of equivalence between creative activity and a fairer society was frequently referenced throughout the course.

The questions could also, however, be seen to allude to a more specific and contained field of relations. Taylor’s argument relates to a notion of creativity as a fundamental right and the questions, too, served as an invitation for participants to consider how this assertion related to the circumstances of their own lives. In this context, creativity no longer operates as an abstract, politicised notion, but rather, as a register with which to reflect on the specific conditions that constitute your daily experience. If, as Taylor argues, everyone has a fundamental right to express themselves creatively, the factors that restrict or obstruct creative practice are problematised as inhibiting a basic right of self-determination. In the group that I was part of, responses to the final question - ‘what are the barriers stopping people from being creative?’ - moved the plane of political interaction from the broad themes of Taylor’s argument, to the intimate realities of daily life. By holding creative practice up as a fundamental right, factors that inhibited creative expression were problematised, giving participants permission to critique aspects of their lives, such as childcare and the extended social and personal implications of motherhood, that they might not otherwise feel entitled to challenge. Responses to this question were strikingly personal and, often, emotional, as the group considered the extent to which domestic roles allowed them to explore their own interests and assert a sense of self, independent of their role as a wife or mother. The women talked about feeling exhausted and overworked, leaving them unable or uninterested in pursuing creative practice. As an influence on the particular ways in which the Create Course framed or revisited the figure of 8, these statements had two main effects. Firstly, the specificity of the women’s description of context and experience associated the activity of the course and, specifically, the liberatory potential of creative practice as framed by Taylor’s discussion, with highly personalised registers of influence and value in which change and
progress is made measurable by the participant’s own sense of self and self-expression. Secondly, they helped to redefine what constituted creative barriers within the context of the course as notions of social privilege and economic inequality were overlooked in favour of the socio-relational context of family life.

From the perspective of participants, therefore, it was this highly localised articulation of context, relations and struggle that provided the framework against which the influence of the course was measured and experienced. The outcomes that I highlight here do not, directly, relate to the pursuit of an overarching agenda that links back to the historical rubric of radicalism and oppositionality, but, rather, to a particularly intimate quality of radicalism that was enacted as the participants drew on the framework of the course as a resource with which to imagine and enact practical solutions to problems posed by personal circumstances. There are, of course, important political resonances to practices that challenge entrenched gender roles which could, in turn, be mapped on to broader narratives of political activism and change. Practices such as Lenka Clayton’s *Residency in Motherhood* or the national support network Mothers Who Make, both of which evidence an effort to reframe the social, cultural and creative dynamics of motherhood and to contextualise this project as a form of political activism, begin to illustrate some of these resonances and reflect a growing interest in forms of creative practice that challenge and expand the ways in which motherhood is understood. More broadly, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri observe, unpaid ‘affective, domestic and reproductive’ labour can be seen as a necessary and non-negotiable counterpart to more blatant forms of capitalist production (2009: 134), and intervention within this context might be seen, too, as a strategy with which this uniquely gendered form of exploitation might be confronted or disturbed. However, I use the notion of intimate radicalism to highlight what appeared in the context of the *Create Course* as a deliberate disavowal of broader political narratives to focus, instead, on a highly pragmatic mobilisation of creativity as an intervention in the social, relational and affective discourses through which the women understood and experienced their own lives.

The framing of the *Create Course* as a resource with which to explore a personal relationship to creativity invited an individualised interpretation of the factors that inhibit or facilitate creative practice. In this register, what was implicated in the participants’ practice was not the broad themes of systemic oppression evident in Taylor’s narrative, but the practical difficulties of taking care of young children when you have chronic back pain, the emotional challenge of taking time to invest in creative practice when you are a lone parent,
or the insecurity that comes from years of neglecting the practical and imaginative tools that might conventionally be associated with creative practice. What is revealed in the specificity of these concerns is a vernacular economy of cultural value that emerged within and alongside the broader framework of the course and implicated creative practice as a response to these experiences and conditions. Within this context, rather than framing a generic dialogue between community and cultural practice, the Create Course, and the fundamental goal of individual creative expression, is associated with a powerful heterogeneity that allowed for the cultivation of specialised practices that mobilised creativity as a productive influence within the specific socio-relational environment of the participants’ own lives. Within this context, Chichi’s bowl, for instance, reflects not only the practical skills with which it was made, but the potential for creative practice to operate as a device with which participants were able to explore and realise ways of being and understanding themselves that the extant circumstances of home, family and social life otherwise constitute as unrealistic or untenable.

For Alexander, the political potential of the figure of 8 lay, particularly, in its relationship to community, and an apparent capacity to mobilise the social, cultural and political values of community as a framework with which to support artistic outcomes that both represent the community and offer a challenge to elitist discourses that seek to confine who has the opportunity to be creative, and the particular forms in which creative ambition is allowed to be expressed. In contrast, however, to Littlewood’s conception of cultural practice at the heart of a progressive political project, the quality of agency traced here invites a decentred notion of culture’s political function. Rather than reflect a praxis of culture and politics, enclosed by the social and relational framework of community, the model of practice enacted by the participants, instead, encloses the notion of productivity, value and agency associated with the course within the differentiated and seemingly disconnected frameworks of personal experience.

Framed by the actions of the participants, the Create Course could be associated with a politics that sees creativity as a progressive and malleable practice of self-realisation, which, in turn, might be described in terms of agency when brought into critical relation with the interrelational dynamics that delineate and inform the individual artist’s sense and experience of self. The version of Littlewood’s ideas that appeared in practice in 2015 necessarily and inevitably diverges from her description of how the Fun Palace was to look, where it was to have taken place, and the types of activities it would have encouraged and supported. In restaging her model, however, participants nevertheless returned to the
threshold between cultural activity and political action, framing the contemporary resonances of culture’s ameliorative or liberatory potential in distinctly and deliberately personal terms.

What didn’t go so well? The Create Course and the Repertoire

To refer back to the video with which Alexander opened the Create Course, what we see in the work shared at the celebration event are the various ways in which the women involved in the project interpreted the notion of a creative life, and the utility of the programme as a way of beginning to enact some of those ideas in practice. In reference to Taylor’s description of a creative life as one that ‘feels meaningful’, the project’s commitment to establishing a malleable economy of cultural value could be seen to have allowed participants to consider the ways in which creative expression might productively interact with other areas of their lives to create a context in which the value of creative practice could be determined in relation to vernacular economies of social, cultural and interpersonal worth. It is in this sense that the Create Course mirrored Littlewood’s original intention, by facilitating forms of self-expression that the participants themselves recognised they did not feel able to realise outwith or without the context of the course.

From one perspective, this model mirrors the ethics and politics of community theatre as it was understood and practiced in the latter half of the previous century, positioning creative practice as a lens through which the circumstances and experiences of specific social groups might be animated, refined and amplified. The call to individualise both the politics and the practice of creative expression within the context of the course appears also, however, to open up creative practice to a much broader field of productivity and relation, not all of which necessarily aligns with the nominally progressive rhetoric of community theatre and the Create Course specifically. For example, Hanan used the course as an opportunity to revisit her ambitions of opening a bakery and while, within the framework of the project, her efforts supported the constitution of the Create Course as a discrete economy of social and cultural values, as a rehearsal for a potential business, they served also as a precursor to modes of entrepreneurialism that evoke the economic subject at the heart of the capitalist paradigm. In pursuing her creative ambitions within the context of the course, therefore, Hanan’s practice illustrates an apparent paradox in which creativity operates both as a means of resisting the values that govern the socio-cultural construct of the status quo, and as a way
of rehearsing forms of productive behaviour that are sympathetic to capitalist values.

Alexander’s interest in creative practice as political expression might be linked back to attitudes that characterised cultural practice during the 1960s and 70s and saw creativity as a necessary constituent of social life that was curtailed or controlled by elitist interests. This perspective is evident in Littlewood’s model, but also in theatre scholar Baz Kershaw’s discussion of the differentiation between ‘cultural democracy’ and the ‘democratisation of culture’ (1994: 183-185), Welfare State International’s contention towards the end of the 1960s that ‘imagination and spontaneous creative energy’ were being suppressed by the infrastructure of state-funded education (in Itzen 1980: 69), and in Su Braden’s triumphant assertion in a survey of arts practices towards the end of the 1970s that “‘artistic expression’ can no longer be withheld from those who wish to have some measure by which to view their lives and by which to expose that view to others” (1978: 4). In each case, the political potential of creative practice is mapped on to a class-based hierarchy in which creative expression is seen as a right that is controlled by social and political elites as a result and continuation of more pervasive and endemic inequalities.

As political philosopher Michel Feher suggests, however, the advent of contemporary capitalism might be understood in relation to the dissolution of this dichotomy, as neoliberalism brought with it new forms of capitalist governance that not only accommodate creativity as a constituent of self-expression, but privilege creative thought and practice as necessary resources with which the neoliberal subject might effectively participate in a market led economy of the self. As he argues, within the deregulated market of neoliberal capitalism, the conditions that determine the relative value of a person’s skills, experience, social connections and background are subject to the constant and incalculable flux of appreciation and depreciation (2009: 28), positing the individual, not as a producer of goods or labour, but as a producer of themselves as a viable commodity within the unpredictable flow of market values. Within this context, as he writes, “our main purpose is not so much to profit from our accumulated potential as to constantly value or appreciate ourselves — or at least prevent our own depreciation” (ibid.: 27). Nicholson, adds to this perspective, suggesting that creativity provides a valuable, if not necessary, resource for life in a globalised, capitalist culture and notes, in particular, its prominence within government policy and school curricula since the turn of the century as a subsidiary for other, more economically viable, forms of productivity (2011: 94). Within this context, as Nicholson argues, creativity is no longer associated with fulfilment in terms that might be allied with
Taylor’s ‘meaningful life’, but, rather, represents “a commercially exploitable and marketable commodity” (ibid.) that has become indistinguishable from the cultural and economic framework of capitalism itself. The question, therefore, that is raised by Hanan’s relationship to the Create Course is not whether or not she was able to express her right to be creative but, rather, the extent to which the context of the present might be seen to complicate creative expression as a form of political discourse and, more broadly, the influence of the present on the forms of agency that are realised through the performative return to political strategies of the past.

Theatre and performance scholar Tracy C. Davis would associate the Create Course’s interest in Littlewood’s practice with the concept of the repertoire. Writing about the context of nineteenth century British theatre, Davis departs from the Victorian understanding of the repertoire as “an actor's accustomed parts or a musician's stock of tunes” (2011: 6), to reframe the repertoire as a way of understanding the intersection between the milieu of cultural practice and social experience at a particular moment in history and common characteristics of genre, aesthetics, methodology and epistemic value. The repertoire does not, as she suggests, belong to the individual performer or theatre company. Rather, it delineates the generic conditions of convention, dramaturgy, practice and reception within and in relation to which theatre is made. As she writes, the repertoire is “that which constitutes the day-to-day competencies of performers and audiences to make and understand theatre” (ibid.: 13).

In practical terms, Davis' repertoire operates as the field of practice and relation that associates theatre with particular forms and phenomena at particular moments in history. As I write this, at the beginning of 2018, we are at a historical moment in which narratives of division and inequality are gaining increasing publicity and, in turn, an imperative for theatre practitioners to use their work politically is being articulated with growing urgency. The return, however, to cultural forms from the middle of the previous century suggests an inconsistency between practice and politics that problematises the value of the repertoire as a resource with which to leverage progressive change, even as it illustrates the constituent relationship between the repertoire and those forms of social and political discourse it is possible for theatre to express.

Alexander’s aim when she begun conversations with the KLS and BAC was to establish the framework for a permanent Fun Palace project. As the course was developed
towards the end of 2014, institutional support for this idea wavered and the Create Course was reframed as a pilot project, a trajectory that mirrors Littlewood’s own efforts to convince funders and local authorities of the virtue of her ideas (Littlewood 1995: 739/741). Whilst, from an institutional and financial perspective, there were grounds for this decision, it also presents a significant challenge to a form of political practice founded on principles of longevity and creative autonomy. As a pilot project, the Create Course was not only reduced to an eight week programme, but associated with the imperative to produce evidence of its own efficacy in order to secure future funding and institutional support. As part of an effort to evidence the benefits of the project, participants were asked to assign numerical values to a series of weekly indicators, including the extent to which they felt they had the skills, support and confidence they needed to express themselves creatively. In this context, the productive potential of the programme is, at least in part, directed towards an instrumentalist agenda as the project itself is reframed as a way of producing data that illustrates the model’s efficacy in terms that are determined by the interests of potential funders and its institutional partners rather than the participants themselves.

The ideological implications of this shift are significant for while Littlewood’s model is built on the assertion that the activities that constitute valuable creative and cultural practice should be determined by the people involved in the project, the introduction of external interests into the delivery of the project necessarily foregrounds economies of value that overlook and potentially compromise this intention. In a recent study for the AHRC, Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska illustrate some of the challenges associated with a model of cultural delivery that privileges notions of cultural value as they are embedded within the conventions of mainstream cultural institutions and the infrastructure of arts funding. Drawing on the work of sociologist Alison Rooke and findings from the recently concluded AHRC funded study Understanding Everyday Participation (2013-2017), the authors suggest that an expectation that culture should appear in certain predetermined forms or reflect established aesthetic values “can deflect attention not only from informal participation but also from cultural engagement and production that is not recognised within the mainstream” (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016: 32). In the context of the Create Course, therefore, the decision to contextualise the participants’ activities in relation to a trajectory of improved cultural participation replicates Crossick and Kaszynska’s concerns, creating a discourse of value that begins to overlook the specificities of social and cultural context that the application of Littlewood’s model was originally meant to prioritise.
Whilst these developments, and their consequences, could not necessarily have been predicted by Alexander, as an effort to replicate the mechanisms of social, cultural and political production framed by Littlewood’s ideas, the Create Course was unquestionably compromised. To refer back to Dolan, as a utopian ideal, the Create Course alludes to a sustained praxis of interpersonal and cultural practice. In the absence, however, of assured funding or institutional support, and the imposition of an eight week time-frame, the project could never convincingly model this possible future. Though the discourse surrounding the project continued to tell a story of the political potential of creative practice, in practical terms, the course modeled the politics of short-term, interventionist cultural practice and unintentionally mirrored the very contexts it had originally been designed to subvert. What is evident here is that, for a number of reasons, the project did not have the resources with which to deliver and support the forms of political resistance it sought to pursue and, further, that the outcomes of political agency imagined in the terms framed by Littlewood’s model are made uncertain by the socio-economic influences that characterise and constitute contemporary society.

Davis’ articulation of the repertoire draws attention to the essential interrelation between practice, context and social or political value, neatly framing the need for continual reassessment of the interface between models of political practice and the framework of the present. In the context of Battersea in 2015, the restaging of Littlewood’s model is fraught with complications that associate what is being said and enacted by the project with fields of productivity and value that are conventionally positioned outside of leftist models of political activity as, alongside the ostensibly progressive rhetoric of the practitioners, capitalist discourses compromised the project's function as a political force by both laying claim to the outcomes of its activities and limiting the scale and duration of the practice. Within this context, what is required, is not necessarily a new model of practice. Indeed, as Davis illustrates, the ways in which we practice and the meanings made possible through practice are always realised in relation to a pre-existing body of knowledge. Rather, what the effort to mobilise the Create Course as a form of progressive political activity reveals is the extent to which the circumstances of the present operate, inherently and unavoidably, as an interlocutor of the past, and an imperative to recognise that theatre’s political voice is contingent, not only on the material and financial resources with which a project might be delivered, but also on the forms of agency and activity that are allowed to emerge within that environment. What is required, in these terms, is an attention, not to the rhetoric with which practice is described,
Conclusion

“[The Fun Palace] is a twentieth-century plaything: like a soap bubble, bright with colour, but not meant to last. Like us. Like our art”
(Littlewood 1995: 750)

There are, as I have outlined, challenges associated with the return to historic forms of agency and political expression that relate, particularly, to the ways in which the circumstances of the present alter the values and resonances of the past as they are revisited and re-performed. As Schneider’s discussion suggests, however, it is in this uncertainty, too, that new, unforeseen dynamics of influence and interaction might emerge to reflexively inform how we think about and perform the present. As she writes, in the context of reenactment, the dynamics of time are not linear but, rather, reflect a praxis of ‘inter(in)animation’ in which “then and now punctuate each other” (2011: 2) to give rise to unexpected and unpredictable social, cultural and epistemological phenomena. In the context of the Create Course, the environment in which the project took place compromised the practitioners’ intention to restage the socialist model of political practice that sat at the heart of Littlewood’s plans for the Fun Palace. The participants’ interaction with the course as a way of renegotiating the conditions of their own lives, however, illustrates an alternative interpretation of the project’s function and the socio-political dynamics of the interaction between the ‘then’ of Littlewood’s practice and the ‘now’ of Battersea in 2015. What emerged in this context is not the collective opposition of Littlewood's model, nor the model of cultural production that most succinctly mirrors the evaluative frameworks of the project's financial partners. Instead, the particular ways in which the participants’ actions frame and represent the course reveal highly individuated practices of utopianism, disruption and self-
realisation that could be seen to redirect the broad aspirations of Littlewood’s model to serve
in the intricate discourse of praxis and interrelational becoming that might be associated with
the home and social life.

Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawn argues that capitalism emerged as the foundational
principle of contemporary social life, “not by the wholesale destruction of all that it had
inherited from the old society, but by selectively adapting the heritage of the past to its own
use” (1995: 16). To this extent, the restaging of a repertoire that is indivisibly iterative of past
times constitutes, too, the revisiting of relationships and ideological thresholds that have
since become incorporated within a neoliberal paradigm of order and production. This is not
a fault of the repertoire, but an indivisible characteristic of life under capital. What is at stake
in these moments, and what must be taken into account by practitioners who aim to leverage
theatre as a device with which to precipitate social change, is the way in which power is
exercised and articulated within a neoliberal domain and whether the revisiting of landmarks
of thought and practice that have, in the intervening years, become submerged within the
langue of capital might also be associated with fields of influence or production that relate to
a different rationale.

The participants’ interest in mobilising creative practice as a productive influence
within the context of their own lives could be linked back to the “common sense” (Türken et
al 2016: 32) individualism of neoliberal society and, within this framework, be seen to
promote rather than complicate the intricate layering of social and economic interests that
characterise contemporary capitalism. As theatre scholar Jenny Hughes notes, however, the
intimacy with which the interests and machinations of capital are mapped on to our daily
lives means that economic and social labour and, by inference, conservatism and political
liberalism, can no longer be imagined as distinct, irresolvable territories. Rather, as she
argues, they must be thought of together. Drawing on work by Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt
(2008), Hughes notes: “[t]he invitation to think these together asks that we think of social
theatre as releasing a series of affects and effects that work with and against the critical and
creative intentions of practitioners and socioeconomic contexts of their work” (2017-a: 3).
What appears in this paradigm is not theatre as progressive or regressive, liberatory or
oppressive, but theatre that inherently and indivisibly gives voice to influences that could,
themselves, be constituted as both. Within this context, the forms of agency illustrated by the
participants of the Create Course are not aligned with or contained by a particular ideological
or political framework, but articulate a potential that has not yet been given a name or, more
specifically, exists at the intersection between fields of productivity, ideology and politics.
In making this distinction, I do not wish to discount those aspects of the participants’ work that clearly, if not intentionally, modeled capitalist values and practices. Rather, Hughes’ invitation to acknowledge and think through the plurality of agency and production in a neoliberal context suggests that within the apparent failure of the Create Course to articulate Littlewood’s ambitions, and the incursion of economic and administrative interests into the ideological framework of the project, there remains the potential for forms of practice and organisation that exceed or subvert these constraints. The isolated instances of social and creative innovation represented by the participants’ practices cannot convincingly be allied with the communitarian redistribution of common resources that I earlier associated with the community as political praxis. Nevertheless, as an articulation of possible difference, their work within the course might be associated with progressive currency through the lens of the ‘common self’. Elaborating on the intersection between social and economic interests under neoliberalism, Hughes identifies the common self as a category of self expression that is constituted and articulated, not through the individuated pursuit of economic goals, but through collaborative and contingent praxis with others, in reference to conditions and resources that are also in common. As considered in the previous chapter, the common self can be seen to “inhabit the same space and time” (2017-a: 79) as the neoliberal subject. It is not, in these terms, distinct from the forces and machinations of capital, but can be understood as the capacity for the self to operate as site of disruption and redistribution within and in relation to that context.

In the context of the Create Course, participants’ actions clearly foreground principles of being and relation that might also be described as communitarian or, at the very least, collaborative. In articulating their hopes for a better future through the infrastructures of their families, group members can be seen to posit the self as a public concern, contingently related, not simply on the repetition of established cultural roles or the accumulation of ‘human capital’ (Feher 2009), but on the influence and interests of others. This is not a complete subversion of the characteristics that establish creativity as a necessary constituent of the neoliberal economy, nor the economic drives that inform contemporary capitalism as a subjective condition. Nevertheless, the turn away from the broad activism promoted by the course could be seen to invoke a politicised relationship to other people or, as Hardt and Negri would write, to other “bodies in struggle” (2009: 61). The creative selves expressed by participants not only require family members to support their understanding and expression, but to acknowledge in themselves an interdependence with others that alludes to the social
and political resource of the common. In this way, the participants’ performative articulation of the course’s politics might be seen as a re-reading of the imperative to ‘be more creative’ that avoids the unnecessary dichotomy of left and right wing interests to mobilise the common self as a force for change.

What perhaps remains of this analysis as a criticism of the Create Course specifically is the apparent exteriority or exclusion of the participant’s most significant political actions from the infrastructure of the course itself. In the previous chapter, I examined what I suggest are the felicitous dynamics of community’s political constitution. As I wrote there, in reference to Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) and Andrea Zevnik (2016), the political values associated with community are determined, not by the intention or ideological basis of a particular project but, rather, by “the conditions of possibility” (Zevnik 2016: 1) in relation to which those who constitute the community encounter one another and articulate the significance of their being together. The differentiation, therefore, between forms of agency as they were posited by the project’s interest in the framework of the Fun Palace and as they were articulated by participants is a significant one, as it appears to illustrate a disparity between commons or communitarian potential as it was manifest within the group and the capacity of the project to accommodate or give voice to that potential.

For Littlewood, the decision not to establish a Fun Palace was ultimately a political one. As she makes clear in her autobiography, although she never found the institutional and financial support necessary to realise her Fun Palace on the banks of the Thames, there were numerous opportunities for her to develop her ideas with other partners, in other cities (1995: 714/741). The reason, ultimately, that the Fun Palace was never realised was because Littlewood herself realised that, within the context of London in the 1960s, it wasn’t possible for her to create a version of a Fun Palace that was capable of expressing all that she hoped for it. Whilst there is, perhaps, a romantic inflection to Littlewood’s unwillingness to compromise on her cultural and political vision, however, in pointing out contradictions between the aspirations of the Create Course and the realities of its practice I do not intend to imply that the artists involved should have made a similar decision. As Hughes’ entreaty to think social and economic influence together suggests, in contemporary contexts, political action of any kind is interlaced with the interests and priorities of capital in ways that are hard, if not impossible, to mitigate for or avoid. Rather, what Hughes’ argument suggests is, perhaps, a less righteous form of political discourse that acknowledges the interpenetration of interests, agendas, politics and productivity that is characteristic of social context and practice.
under neoliberalism. With Hughes' perspective in mind, what interrupts the Create Course’s relationship to a broader framework of progressive interests is not the influence of institutional and economic oversight specifically, or economically derived forms of self-understanding and self-expression, but, rather, the absence of a mechanism from within the project with which to confront, disturb or redirect these influences.

I earlier described the participants’ performative articulation of the project's politics as a series of strategic improvisations that took place beyond the interests and oversight of the project’s cultural and economic partners. Just as I have associated community’s political significance with processes of self-determination that are inherent to the performative articulation of community itself, so I suggest that for the Create Course to operate successfully as a critique or disruption of contemporary capitalism it is necessary for the uncertain discourse of the participant’s performative articulation of themselves to be foregrounded within the structure and process of the project. This ambition is, of course, challenged by instrumentalist policies that associate cultural practice with predetermined outcomes and a funding culture that privileges repeatable, predictable forms of cultural production. Nevertheless, I suggest that a quality of structural malleability is a necessary prerequisite to practice that aims to implicate social context as a form of political action, in terms outlined by Paolo Virno in the introduction to this study. In response, therefore, to the question of ‘what might be done differently next time?’, I would suggest that a pragmatic engagement with the conditions of the present might be expressed, not in Littlewood’s terms as an uncompromising commitment to methodological or ideological purity, but in more nuanced and malleable terms that acknowledge the political significance of becoming, in individual and collective terms, as a process that invites, too, a redistribution or reconfiguration of the common as it is conventionally discoursed and politicised. It is this perspective that I take up and develop in the following chapter.
Chapter 4:

**Everybody's House – neighbourliness and socio-spatial discourse in Glas(s) Performance's Albert Drive**

![Image](image.jpg)

**Fig. 5: Howkins 2013**

With *Everybody's House*, what felt so interesting about that was that it was literally a transparent place where you could sit and talk. It didn’t exist before, it didn’t really exist after, and it was open - there was no door, you could come straight in.

Vivianne Hullin, Volunteer Coordinator on *Albert Drive*

There is a transparent house on a tarmac street. This is *Everybody’s House* and it sits on Albert Drive in 2013 as an open invitation to the population of Pollokshields in Glasgow to come in for a cup of tea. It is just big enough for six people to sit inside it comfortably, three on each side looking towards each other, and also accommodate a small table in the middle on which there is a full tea set: teapot, six cups, six saucers, milk and sugar. There are no doors that can be closed. There are no curtains that can be drawn. The metal framework that supports it, that gives it form and makes the space, is, inevitably, visible. The house is both enclosed and exposed, an almost arbitrary gesture towards a demarcation of space. The way
in which the house is built means that the environment of Albert Drive continuously intrudes on the interior space of the house: the pavement, symbolic as it is of journeys rather than arrival, is brought inside; the noise of cars and pedestrians passing on the street cannot be separated from the deliberate sounds of conversation inside the house; and, when it’s cold on the street it’s cold in the house as well. It is, in many ways, a contradiction of a house. There is no water, no privacy, no heating. There are no doors. It performs almost none of the exclusionary or protective functions that we might assume a house to provide, and yet, it is in this failure to satisfy our assumptions of what a house is meant to be that we are encouraged to consider what it is that this house might be doing.

_Everybody’s House_ was one element of the large-scale, multidisciplinary art project _Albert Drive_ that was produced by Glasgow based performance company Glas(s) Performance and ran from October 2011 to July 2013. Designed as a response to the question ‘Who is my neighbour?’, _Albert Drive_ artists utilised a range of performance based creative initiatives to encourage families, businesses, community groups and individuals resident in the Pollokshields area of Glasgow to explore their relationships to the people and places around them. As part of this effort, _Everybody’s House_ spent several months moving between different locations up and down Albert Drive, the 1.6 mile road that stretches in an arc from the eastern to the southwestern extremities of Pollokshields. Once in place, the house was staffed by members of the project’s core creative team who welcomed the public in for tea and a chat. The interior of the house - artists, seats, table, tea, conversation - became a public invitation, an inversion that saw private practice re-presented as public spectacle. The name of the project was written on a sign that traveled with the house wherever it went and simultaneously operated as a title, invitation and declaration that this was, in fact, ‘everybody’s house’. It is in these terms that this project constitutes a gesture towards community, not as a differentiated field of interests, identities or values, but as a communitarian ethic that might be enacted by and in relation to anyone. The deliberately inclusive framework of the house and the linguistic doubling of the project’s title invite a notion of social praxis framed, not around commonalities of identity, culture or experience, but, rather, the common principle of material context. What is evoked, therefore, in the transient, temporary environment of the house is a question about the relationship between materiality and social process, and the potential for space itself to reflexively inform the socio-cultural landscapes it frames, alludes to or reveals.

Social geographer Doreen Massey offers an outline for the social and political resonances that might be associated with this field. As she notes: “[t]here is an idea with such
a long and illustrious history that it has come to acquire the status of unquestioned nostrum: this is the idea that there is an association between the spatial and the fixation of meaning” (2010 [2005]: 20). As authors such as Jen Harvie (2005), Sally Mackey (in Hughes and Nicholson 2016), Mike Pearson and Micheal Shanks (in Cochrane and Russel 2014), and Miwon Kwon (2004) make clear, we see this paradigm translated to theatre through the notion of site as a material context framed and imagined in terms of socio-cultural coherence and, similarly, through the notion of community as a socio-relational construct delineated and demarcated by physical context. Pearson and Shanks make this paradigm particularly clear in their consideration of an archaeological praxis between performance and site, in which the performative interaction with the material landscape is seen, too, as a gestic reanimation of the socio-temporal past (in Cochrane and Russel 2014: 199). Whether, however, site is understood as an archaeological layering of social pasts, a “discursively determined” epistemological terrain (Kwon 2004: 26), or as a palimpsestic archive of cultural narrative and social memory (Harvie 2005: 49, Mackey in Hughes and Nicholson 2016: 107), we see the spatial mobilised within the conceptual and methodological framework of theatre as a technique with which to visualise and interact with an otherwise intangible realm of social, cultural and political phenomena.

In the context of community theatre specifically, this technique could be traced back to the early years of the alternative theatre movement which, as Kershaw identified, were marked by the movement of artists from urban centres out towards populations in rural or less developed urban settings (1994: 142). Within this context, the spatial could be associated with a political as well as cultural resonance as a way of mapping the socialist interests of the alternative theatre movement onto the material context of Britain itself. Whilst, as I noted in chapter two, the association between rural contexts and socialist interests was not ubiquitous during these years, and is perhaps better articulated as an interest in populations that were marginalised from or in relation to the hegemony of socio-cultural convention, the correlation between the spatial and the political remains a prevalent conceit within the practice and discussion of theatre with communities. Nicholson draws attention to an ongoing interest in location as an analogy for socio-political discourse, noting that the material environment plays a central role in “narratives of identity, and how people feel about where they live, where they feel they belong and their daily social interactions” (2005:84), whilst a funding driven interest in economically, socially or culturally ‘deprived’ participants similarly positions theatre’s potential outcomes in relation to a materialist understanding of social context, considered in the introduction in relation to statistical communities.
As Massey argues too, however, an assumed equivalence between the spatial and the socio-cultural could also be associated with economically defined narratives of space and place that seek to contextualise life within a consistent logical and interrelational paradigm. As she notes, the advent of global capital has brought with it an imperative to articulate diverse forms of social, cultural and political practice in ways that can be seen as equivalent and exchangeable. It is in these terms that Massey suggests the mapping of social practice onto material space can be seen as a way of containing the diverse potential of relational activity within a consistent relational plane which can, in turn, be contained within a singular narrative of capitalist progression (2010: 5). Interrogating the concept of multiculturalism, Bauman adds to this discussion, suggesting that a policy of indifference to the societal implications of global mobility and migration has led to the institution of new categories of social order in which ethnically, culturally or socially distinct groups live next to one another in socially innate equilibrium. As he writes, “when mutual tolerance is coupled with indifference, communal cultures may live alongside each other, but they seldom talk to one another” (2003: 135). This new societal paradigm is designed, as he argues, as both a reflection and continuation of capitalist values as isolated groups coalesce into discrete market contexts untroubled by the unpredictable possibilities of social relation.

What is evoked, therefore, in Everybody’s House’s framing of the localised intersection between space and social practice is a notion of praxis that might work against these agendas to, instead, draw attention to the possibilities and implications of people actively sharing space together. In contrast to the neoliberal mobilisation of space and spatial narratives as a strategy with which to link a global population within a coherent trajectory of capitalist progression (Massey 2010: 4-5), while introducing logics of value and relation that disincentivise cross-social or cross-cultural communication (Bauman 2003: 135), Everybody’s House might be seen as an invitation to consider and explore the implications, complications and possibilities of people sharing space together. To refer back to the previous chapter and Paolo Virno’s assertion that political action is consigned to exteriority (2004: 50), where, in the context of the Create Course, the necessarily public dynamics of political discourse took place around the periphery of the project’s delivery - in the participant’s homes, in the time after or before their weekly workshops - here Everybody’s House might be seen to introduce exteriority to Albert Drive, as both a street and a project, and in so doing initiate a discourse that is inherently political but is not yet associated with resolution or meaning.
As a differentiation from the previous case study, and to mark out its contribution towards a broader consideration of the intersection between community, praxis and politics, what is significant about *Everybody’s House* is precisely its interest in social practice as process rather than product. Just as Virno suggests that contemporary capitalism controls the political potential of social practice by incorporating its public expression within the labour and realisation of the capitalist paradigm (2004: 51), so I am interested in the extent to which the explicitly communitarian ethic framed by the project’s title might support new strategies of public discourse that exceed or subvert these constraints.

*Albert Drive*, as a whole, was established as an investigation into neighborliness and sought to evoke a relationship between the formalised cultural activity of the project and what, by way of differentiation, I will describe as the autochthonous socio-spatial environment of Pollokshields, in which cultural representation reflected and extended localised discourses of place and relation. As Laiqa, a resident-participant, noted in an interview for this research when asked to describe her experience of the project:

I just got to meet so many different people. People I’d passed on the street and I got to know them more, and I just thought, once I’d got a taste of that I didn’t want to let it go. So I just kept coming back every Monday. And then when I found out about the show I thought: ‘Well, now that I know everyone’s story, and everyone knows my story, why not share it with the rest of the community so they get to know about what great people they walk past every day?’ (Laiqa 2015)

In this chapter I will consider, first, the ways in which Glas(s) Performance sought to mobilise culture as a way of making public socio-spatial discourses that might otherwise be concealed or separated from one another, and the social and political resonances that might be associated with this task. Secondly, within this framework, *Everybody’s House* is unique as a project that sought not to amplify or reveal discourses as they already existed, but, rather, to create an environment in which new discourses of place and relation might be articulated and explored. In the second section, therefore, I consider the implications of this model, and the ways in which the intersection between space, culture and social practice framed by *Everybody’s House* might productively inform discourses relating to site and social engagement and, specifically, the forms of affect and agency that might be associated with the interaction between performance and communitarianism.

This research is informed by a series of interviews I conducted during 2014 with the majority of the *Albert Drive* artistic and administrative team, and a number of Pollokshields’
residents who participated in the project’s activities. It is supported by a documentary by filmmaker Abigail Howkins which was filmed alongside the delivery of the project, an evaluation report conducted by Brian Grogans and Rosemary James, of Glasgow Life and Glasgow Arts respectively, on behalf of the project’s commissioning partner Tramway, and my attendance at the Albert Drive exhibition and event weekend that took place at Tramway on the 6th and 7th of July, 2013. It is also informed by my own experiences of working with Glas(s) Performance on a number of occasions as an undergraduate on the Contemporary Performance Practice programme at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and having been taught by both of the company’s artistic directors - Tashi Gore and Jess Thorpe - in class based and workshop settings. In contrast to my other two case studies, I was not able to observe this project in action, and it is the information above that I draw on to inform a sense of what took place. As a final hermeneutic layer, I also lived in Pollokshields, within a few streets of Albert Drive, for a year between 2008 and 2009, and have revisited the area frequently since that time. These experiences inform my understanding of the context of Pollokshields and the activities and people that inform the social, spatial and cultural topography of Albert Drive.

Context

In order to frame a discussion about the relationship between the project and the context of Albert Drive, it is first necessary to establish what is meant by the term Albert Drive, and the particular characteristics that are associated with it in the context of this chapter. In the first instance, Albert Drive refers to a physical location: legible in maps, and implicated within the history and development of Pollokshields and Glasgow. Pollokshields itself is a district within Glasgow that sits just below the River Clyde, the dividing line that distinguishes the city centre from Glasgow’s ‘Southside’. During my interviews for this research I spoke to Frank, an enthusiastic amateur historian who participated in the project and has been resident on Albert Drive for over 50 years. He explained that the Drive was established by the Stirling-Maxwells in the 1800s to serve the large houses that they had allowed to be built on the land of the Pollok estate, their ancestral home which, in the form of Pollok Country Park, continues to mark the southern-most end of the Drive and Pollokshields itself. Frank was kind enough to take me on a tour of Albert Drive and, as he pointed out, since development began at the south-western end of the Drive, a walk along the length of the Drive is also a
walk through the history of the area. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, the
landowners developed Pollokshields into a garden suburb, allowing smaller, more affordable
housing to be built and, as a result, the architecture changes as you walk from one end of the
Drive to the other: from grand houses with expansive lawns and ostentatious turrets,
separated from the road by high sandstone walls, to more modest townhouses with individual
driveways which, as you reach the second half of the Drive, give way to handsome, semi-
detached houses on shared grounds, most of which have now been separated into flats and,
finally, as you reach the easternmost third of the Drive, three and four story tenement
buildings. These were originally built to house the staff necessary to serve the large houses
on the southern half of the Drive and, with business occupying the ground floors, continue to
provide the district’s main shopping area.

As the southwestern end of the Drive is almost completely residential, the road here is
mostly used to get to and from the houses. There are not many pedestrians on this stretch of
the road but, if you were to walk along it, you would pass quiet gardens, parked cars and well
developed trees. There is little to see that reveals much of the people who live here, and, as
per the Stirling-Maxwell’s original design, the landscape is divided into separate residencies
with no communal space beyond the street itself. As Frank, who lives at this end of the Drive,
noted: “My nearest neighbour, two doors down, is over the hill. That tends to isolate you. I
may know a couple of people further down, but it’s a distance, because of the big houses
themselves” (2015). In contrast, the eastern end of the Drive is rarely deserted. The warm
blond sandstone of the tenement buildings - stained by weather and pollution, pocked by the
erosion of rain, frost and the wind - provides the backdrop to the public life of the Drive. The
morning begins with a rush to get children to school, ensuring the pavements are busy and
the street congested with cars. As the morning passes, the chaos of the school run gives way
to shoppers going for their daily groceries. Located within a block of one another, the Spice
Garden fruit and vegetable shop, the pharmacy and the local Londis are particular focal
points during this time, but journeys are also made to the bank and Eurofoods Asian Grocery
positioned further west and uphill. These are quiet times, and whilst you will rarely see the
street empty, it is uncommon to see more than a handful of people out at the same time and
journeys made are short and deliberate. As the afternoon wears on, young people beyond
high school age gather a block east of the pharmacy, around the Halal Kebab House and The
Chicken Hut, and, as the schools come out for the day, the street is at its busiest. With
vehicles parked along both sides of the Drive, cars move slowly to avoid one another. Drivers
will stop briefly to shout a message to someone they know, or pull up to the shops for
something to take home. Families escort young children home from one of the three primary schools in the area, whilst older children walk with their friends - quickly in the rain, which is often, and with less urgency when the weather is clear. Due to the legacy of Pollokshields’ history as a ‘dry’ district there are no pubs on Albert Drive and in the evening, with the shops closed, activities centre around restaurants and kebab houses as people go out to eat and socialise.

In an article that coincided with the *Albert Drive* event weekend, The Scotsman referred to Albert Drive as “Scotland’s most ethnically diverse street” (Ramaswamy 2013). Whilst, in the spirit of *Albert Drive* itself, the article relies on anecdotal reports from Albert Drive residents, and the assertion may not in fact be literally true, it is the case that Pollokshields has one of the largest immigrant populations in Glasgow with the 2011 census showing that as much as 25% of the population are from Pakistani ethnic backgrounds, with close to 57% of the population as a whole identifying as non-white (Ashe and Kelly 2014). The context of Albert Drive is, to this extent, informed by a complex layering of social and cultural influences. Alongside a Church of Scotland that has stood for over a hundred years, Albert Drive is also home to a mosque, the Al-Huda Islamic Center for Women, and Scotland’s first purpose built Sikh temple. The signs of several businesses on the Drive are written in Urdu as well as English, while many shops, such as Khoobsurat Fabric, Shandar Sweets and Pan house, and the Halal Butchers, are run by first or second generation immigrant families and cater for specifically Asian markets. The cultural significance of these gestures should not be overlooked for whilst Frank’s interest in history invokes an intimate relationship between the area and Glasgow’s past, for Laiqa, a young woman from a Pakistani ethnic background, the Drive exercises a much more direct and pragmatic influence. As she noted during an interview for this research: “See when I was younger, I thought Pollokshields was all Asian people, I thought it was just an Asian place to live” (Laiqa 2015).

Within the context of Albert Drive there exists, therefore, a tension that is perhaps most usefully described as hermeneutic. Commenting on site-specific performance in the U.K., Harvie characterises site as a ‘mnemonic trigger’ (2005: 42). As she argues, as physical context becomes incorporated into the patterns and practices through which individuals and communities live their lives, site takes on a symbolic dynamic as a representation of the values and experiences of the people who live within it. The role of site, in this context, is not only to symbolise local social and cultural values, but to contribute towards a localised sense of identity and belonging by reminding people of those values. Harvie’s analysis, however,
focuses on examples, such as the decline of Wales’ industrial heritage or the exploitation of the Scottish Highlands by aristocrats and landowners, in which site is associated with a singular, over-arching symbolic value that contextualises and informs the identity of the population equally, contributing towards what Harvie describes as a ‘national community’ (ibid.: 41). In the context of Albert Drive, however, the street’s role within distinct discourses of identity and belonging draws attention to the inconsistencies and complexities of both community and nationhood in this context. Rather than mirror a landscape of consistent social and cultural values, the ways in which the physical context of Albert Drive is interpreted and understood reflects the variety of people and communities that live within it. Albert Drive is not an ‘Asian place’, but neither is it simply a remnant of Glasgow’s past within which Asian people live. Rather, it is part of a complex ecology of identity and belonging that implicates the physical context of the street within contrasting frameworks of relation, cultural memory and social value that complicate the notion of Albert Drive as a singular location. As a site with or within which artists might work, therefore, Albert Drive is characterised by a diverse range of social and cultural positions that do not easily distill into a singular interpretation of local character or identity. Instead, they invoke a sense of Albert Drive as a heterogeneous landscape that is seen, understood and traversed in different ways.

Albert Drive - The Quiet Politics of Neighbourliness

It is the combination of these various dynamics that provided the context in which Albert Drive itself took place. There were several stages and strands to Albert Drive, which make establishing a clear start point difficult, however, creative engagement in Pollokshields began in October 2011 with a three month pilot project led by Glas(s) Performance and delivered with second year students from the Contemporary Performance Practice programme at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS). This activity formed the basis of Glas(s) Performance’s discussions with Tramway, an art space and venue located at the eastern-most end of Albert Drive, and supported their joint funding application to Creative Scotland in 2012. After receiving funding, creative activity was recommenced by a much larger creative team in October 2012, including commissioned artists, ‘creative volunteers’, and RCS students, now employed by the project, and culminated in an event weekend in July 2013. Beyond the focal point of the event weekend, each element of artistic practice operated within its own time frame, in relation to the artist’s practice and in response to the sections of
the community they aimed to work with. Six ‘artists-in-residence’ - performance artist Nic Green, film maker Basharat Khan, visual artist Shauna McMullan, choreographer Janice Parker, photographer Arpita Shah, and architects Andrew McAvoy, James McAvoy and Ann G. Nisbet of Edo Architecture - were commissioned to produce work for Albert Drive, while Glas(s) Performance worked with nineteen Pollokshields residents to devise a performance that was shown on Tramway’s main stage during the event weekend. These practices were complimented by ‘Action on the Drive’, a range of smaller scale opportunities for participation, communication and creativity that ran for the duration of the project and included: Letters to Our Neighbours, a series of workshops and discussions delivered by Gore, Thorpe and other associates of Glas(s) Performance that went into schools and community groups and invited people to write a personal letter to a neighbour they hadn’t met; ‘Albert Drive Neighbourhood Watch’ which consisted of eight, uniformed artists who traveled up and down the Drive on razor scooters, talking to people, gathering and sharing news about the street, and giving out awards in recognition of “the wealth of simple, generous actions taking place everyday upon Albert Drive” (Sam Phillips in Howkins 2013); and, led by designer and close Glas(s) Performance collaborator Rachel O'Neill, a series of badges and posters that declared, in English and Urdu “I’m on Albert Drive” and were displayed in the windows of houses, flats and shop fronts, and worn by participants and supporters, for the duration of the project.

Fig. 6: Howkins 2013  Fig. 7: Howkins 2013

Led by co-artistic directors Tashi Gore and Jess Thorpe, Glas(s) Performance have been making work since 2004. Described by the company as “socially engaged performance
practice that collaborates with real people” (Glas(s) Performance n.d.), Glas(s) Performance have presented work in football stadiums, swimming pools, town halls, theatre spaces and street corners, working with anywhere between two and three-hundred contributors and performers, always with an interest in how people see and understand themselves, and what brings them together. Works such as *Life Long* (2009), in which a couple who had been married for 52 years shared memories of their life together; *Hand Me Down* (2010), in which ten women from the same family shared the stage to talk about what was ‘passed down’ between different generations and what these legacies meant to their family; and, with their young performance company Junction 25, *From Where I’m Standing* (2008), in which members of Junction 25 and their parents worked together to create a show that explored the ‘real dynamics of family life’, demonstrate a long-standing interest in the relationship between performance, the self, and the self in relation to others. As Thorpe notes, *Albert Drive* is clearly situated within this lineage:

In the past we’ve been really interested in human relationships and have worked with families, couples, groups of sisters, teenagers and their parents, and then we were really interested in: what’s the next biggest relationship that we have as human beings? Which is when we arrived at the idea of neighbour. (Howkins 2013)

As Thorpe's quote indicates, in the first instance, neighbourliness can be seen as a continuation of the company’s creatively defined interest in the cultural and aesthetic value of human connection, echoing work by companies such as Rimini Protokoll, Germany and Quarantine, England, each of whom make similar claims about incorporating the circumstances and experiences of ‘real’ people within the cultural fabric of their work. In these terms, neighbourliness acts as a conceptual lens, designed to incorporate otherwise discrete socio-cultural environments, experiences and knowledges within a unified discourse relating to Pollokshields or, specifically, Albert Drive, as the precursor to the cultural text of *Albert Drive* itself.

As Thorpe notes, however, the company’s interest in the figure of the neighbour constitutes, also, a critique of the social dynamics of contemporary life. As she observes:

As a society it seems that we spend less and less time with our neighbours. Perhaps that’s because our lives are so busy. Perhaps that’s because there are more computer screens and mobile phones, and things that prevent us from having actual human connections but, certainly, we realised that we didn’t know that much about the people that we lived alongside so it felt like exploring
neighbour was an important theme (Howkins 2013).

In this context, the neighbour is a politicised figure, mobilised, not simply as a creative device, but as an ameliorative response to an absence of human connection that is both observed in the ways in which people interact with the material environment and, as Thorpe’s statement illustrates, experienced in affective or phenomenological terms. At the time of planning and delivering the project, Gore and Thorpe had lived in Pollokshields for a number of years, within a few streets of Albert Drive and, in these terms, their interest in neighbourliness operates as a much more specific and personalised intervention within the social, spatial and political discourses that informed their own experiences of daily life.

With this in mind, the function of the neighbour is not only conceptual, methodological or aesthetic, but practical, as a device with which Albert Drive and Pollokshields residents might materially alter the context and environment in which they live. The neighbour, however, doesn’t function as a set of observable, repeatable behaviours that might be redeployed as a solution to social problems. Rather, as a figure that is constituted on the basis of a mutual and indivisible exposure to others, its most notable and constitutive dynamic is one of plurality. In this sense, it might usefully be described as the vernacular equivalent of Jean-Luc Nancy’s theorisation of ‘community’, as considered in chapter two. As he writes, community might be understood, not as the material expression of communal relations, or as a delineation of place, context or ideology but, rather, as a quality of indivisible exposure to others that he identifies as an immanent characteristic of being itself (1991: xxxix). It is this condition that he also associates with the notion of ‘being-in-common’, to suggest that the expression and experience of our being is always undertaken through and in relation to others, and in the fact of that interactivity, rather than some order of logic or organisation that transcends those bonds. Where, however, for Nancy, community’s ‘inoperative’ characteristics ensure that it can never be fully expressed within the representational and relational framework of society, Albert Drive’s mobilisation of the neighbour invokes a nexus of interrelationality and social practice that seems to propose a quality of living socially that is exposed to and articulated through the influence, interests and actions of others. Whilst it is Nancy’s assertion that community itself is essentially dissimilar from the interrelational strategies through which it might be realised as social context, the neighbour suggests a performative approach that is also, if not equally, exposed to the relational characteristics of being-in-common.

The political significance of neighbourliness as it is implicated in and facilitated by Albert Drive might, therefore, be read in relation to cultural geographer Ash Amin’s
conception of the stranger. Amin argues that the global dynamics of contemporary life have given rise to highly specialised techniques for mapping, interpreting and navigating social space. As he writes: “modern Western societies consist of so many spatial provenances, from the local and national to the virtual, postcolonial and transnational, that there can be no certainty of the whereabouts of the givens of historic community” (2012: 1). In these terms, and in the absence of a coherent trajectory of inclusion, belonging and relational order, he argues that being, belonging and identity are reflexively constituted on the basis of the mobile figure of the stranger, who represents, at all times, those characteristics that are seen as external and unnecessary to your own social world.

What Amin terms a “society of strangers” (ibid.: 2) constitutes an isolationist paradigm in which social relations, and the dynamics of experience, affect and productivity associated with them, are constituted and imagined in relation to an ever decreasing field of practices and people. On one hand, this could be seen as a continuation of Bauman’s critique of multiculturalism as the influence and interests of global capital are seen to directly inform the characteristics of society and social practice, but it could be seen too as a discourse on modern ontology, as the strategies through which we understand and articulate ourselves become increasingly isolated from the material circumstances in which we live, and the people we live next to. Thorpe’s statement helps illustrate this dynamic, outlining a context in which the population of Pollokshields is socially divided, not because of material barriers or a deliberate delineation of social or cultural difference, but because they operate as a strangers to one another. As Laiqa observed when asked why she decided to get involved in Albert Drive, “All I really saw everyday was my friends at school or like extended family or my family, and I just thought: ‘I don’t know anyone where I stay’” (2015).

Within this context, the inherently relational figure of the neighbour could be seen as an intervention that invites a reorientation of social obligation around fields of relation, agency and productivity as they are framed and facilitated by material space. In Amin’s argument, the stranger operates as an expression of otherness that appears everywhere, at all times, and in so doing stands as a metaphor for the insidious dynamics of contemporary epistemologies that transform the social landscape into a never ending series of exclusionary territories. It is in this sense that Amin posits the stranger as an articulation and appropriation of the commons, as the lens through which the social dynamics of human life are turned towards the constitution of private discourses of relation, value and logic. It is in this respect that we might consider the neighbour as the inverse of the stranger as a figure that, similarly, might be found or positioned in any context, but invites a consideration of a different kind of
public or, more specifically, a different quality of relation that relies on the redistribution of the common around interrelational praxes located in shared time and space. In these terms, where the stranger draws attention to division and differentiation, the neighbour illustrates the potentiality of inclusion and collaboration.

The intention to mobilise the neighbour as a political as well as cultural figure could be seen in the structure of the project itself. Commenting in an interview for this research, O’Neill describes her contribution to *Albert Drive* as a ‘visual dialogue’ that helped to extend the influence of the project in Pollokshields (O’Neill 2015). The signs and badges she designed were worn and displayed by participants from all areas of the project and Pollokshields itself, to contribute towards a discourse of participation and solidarity that intentionally overlooked boundaries of cultural and social division as they might otherwise be inscribed within the social topography of the area. Through this and various other creative strategies that sought to create a public representation of interests, experiences and identities that might otherwise remain concealed, the project explicitly invited discussion about what it might mean to live on and belong to Albert Drive when as many people as possible were acknowledged and visible. Centred around the figure of the neighbour and the question of neighbourliness, therefore, *Albert Drive* reflects a layering of social and political interests in which cultural practice is seen to articulate an ostensibly political invitation to reconsider or reframe discourses of relation, division and belonging as they apply to and inform the material context of Pollokshields.

In an interview for this research, choreographer Janice Parker described *Albert Drive* as ‘quietly political’ (Parker 2015). When asked to elaborate on what she meant, Parker explained that she understood her practice and the project as a whole to be of political significance, but that it wasn’t designed to contribute towards narratives of change as they are understood or articulated by the political left, or to directly oppose the interests of the political right. Instead, ‘quiet’ politics might be allied with Nancy’s discussion as a category of political expression that is not designed to be ‘operative’, to the extent that it does not rely on rearticulation and amplification through discourses of politics and value as they already exist, or as they inform and map out social order more generally. Rather, it alludes to a form of vernacular politics that exists and is expressed in specific and deliberate relation to the context and experiences of those involved.

In her project, *The Living Room Dances*, Parker visited people in their home to talk about dance practices they enjoyed, but never shared publicly. There were three elements to Parker’s process: visiting people in their homes; a shared meeting for everyone who had
decided to contribute their stories and experiences; and a public display at the event weekend that included descriptions of the dances, a soundtrack of the music people danced to, and photographs that captured something of the atmosphere of the project - feet in motion on a worn living-room carpet; the blurred image of a body propelling itself across the room; bare feet on a polished wooden floor tracing out the steps of a remembered dance. As Parker explained, her intention was to create public discourse, not out of the dances themselves, which remained private, but out of the knowledge that people throughout Pollokshields shared the commonality of private dancing. As a political gesture, therefore, Parker’s project explicitly foregrounds the notion and nature of the common: of what is shared and what is concealed and, by inference, what the conventions that govern the articulation and organisation of space within Pollokshields expose as public discourse or enclose within private economies of experience and value. Without demanding anything of her participants beyond an interest in sharing a dance, Parker’s quiet politics invite a consideration of our complicity and participation within discourses of social, spatial and political order that inform the context and constraints of everyday life, and our capacity to listen to, think or perform those conventions differently.

It is this register of political discourse that is most clearly highlighted by the figure of the neighbour. Whilst it might be possible for neighbourliness to express itself in the form of a mass mobilisation against or for a particular cause, or as a protest against a specific issue, in the context of Albert Drive it most succinctly operates as an invitation to articulate and understand the political dimensions of social life through and in relation to others. The subheading to the event weekend - ‘Introducing You to Your Neighbour’ - highlights this understanding, positing the project, not as an effort to impact or reshape Pollokshields directly, but as preparation for the possible rearticulation of place and social context in the future. The political gesture articulated by the neighbour is not, therefore, the politicised ‘event’ of being-in-common, described in similar terms by Nancy (1991: xl) and Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009: 59) as the performative manifestation of innate communitarianism. Rather, it might be seen as its precursor: as a technique of knowing others beyond the principles and limitations of privatisation that posits individuals in networked relationship with one another as agents of futures, contexts and experiences that have not yet been realised.

This perspective might be identified at various stages throughout the project. For Parker, the political resonance of her work was not simply that private stories were made public, but that the cultural form of the work represented the people she worked with in ways
that articulated, not only their interests, but the ways in which they wanted to be represented by their interests in relation to the public forum of Pollokshields more generally. In more general terms, Vivienne Hullin, who worked as volunteer coordinator and project support for the duration of the project, noted that Glas(s) Performance’s intention was to deliver a project that reflected the context and community of Albert Drive by “constantly learning and developing and responding” (2015). In practice, this intention was expressed as an effort to mobilise cultural practice as strategy with which to instigate and inform new dynamics of discourse and understanding about the constitution and characteristics of Pollokshields and the people who lived there. The artists who were commissioned to work on Albert Drive were only brought in after an extended period of research towards the end of 2012 during which Glas(s) Performance identified and visited “all the existing community groups in Pollokshields” (ibid.), and the intention, in each case, was not to transform the work or interests of the people they engaged with into cultural text, but, rather, for the artists to use their cultural expertise to tell the public story of otherwise private practices. This intention is evident in Parker’s work but also in Shah’s project, Purdah - The Sacred Cloth, in which she worked with women who practiced head covering as part of their faith to produce a series of portraits accompanied by commentary that explored and explained their relationship to the practice, or in Green’s Vivarium, in which she worked with gardeners at the New Victoria Gardens, a concealed allotment adjacent to Albert Drive, to produce an audio tour that explored the intersection between social and ecological life within the framework of the allotments. Whilst in each instance artists’ engagement with community groups gave rise to distinct cultural outputs, framed by the notion of neighbourliness that pervaded the project and, more explicitly, by the orchestrated collectivism of the event weekend, each of these projects might be read in relation to a broad political ambition to introduce to Pollokshields the social and epistemological resources with which to examine and express the politics of their lives together differently.

I am interested in Everybody’s House, therefore, as both the clearest expression of Albert Drive’s intersection with discourses of relation, value and productivity that might be understood as political, and as a development towards that field of praxis and productivity outlined by Hardt and Negri as altermodernity (2009: 102-118). As Hardt and Negri explain, altermodernity represents the localised expression of political potential between individuals and beyond the interests of formal political regimes. They associate this realm with the performative disruption of otherwise entrenched economies that work to incorporate the common in the constitution of exploitative formations of social order and production, and it
is from this perspective that I suggest altermodernity might usefully be understood in necessary and supplementary relation to community’s capacity to represent and articulate a different politics. What I aim to trace, therefore, through a consideration of *Everybody’s House* in the following sections is not simply its function as an expression of Parker’s quiet politics and the intersection between spatial and political practice, but the extent to which these strategies of political action might be mapped on to the discussion developed in chapter one, as a liberation or reorientation of praxis to support the constitution of relational domains that are in some ways distinct or protected from the interests and labour of capitalist production.

**Everybody’s House**

They had, like, a portable house. It was just, like, a glass house, and it was taken to different parts of Albert Drive. And it was literally just: “Guys, come in and have a tea”. There’d be someone new in that glass house everyday. They went out in the rain, or when it was sunny, and they had karaoke and god knows what else. […] Older people met younger people that they would never have met. People of different age groups met, different cultures, different backgrounds, different religions, and different nationalities for that matter. They all got together in this one tiny, cramped house and had tea together. And it was just something as simple as tea and a chat and you could talk about whatever you wanted.

Laiqa, Albert Drive resident and project participant (2015)

*Everybody’s House* was a collaboration between Glas(s) Performance and Edo Architecture. Set on wheels and light and mobile enough to be guided along the uneven pavements of Albert Drive by only two people, the structure was designed, not to distance those inside from the street, but to temporarily augment the street by creating a space and context that was both differentiated from and linked to the external environment of the Drive. As designer Andrew McAvoy noted of the house’s relationship to the area, the intention was not to obscure or subvert the context of Albert Drive, but to “drop something gentle into that frame” (in Howkins 2013). In reference to Pollokshields’ industrial heritage, the house was hand fabricated out of aluminium poles by some of the last practicing metalworkers in the area, the Reeves brothers in neighbouring Dalmarnock, while the shape of the structure was designed
to echo the strong lines of the Georgian and Victorian architecture that characterise the Drive. The acrylic glass covering not only helped ensure the structure was light enough to be mobile, but helped frame the house’s relationship to the contemporary environment of the Drive. As McAvoy notes, *Everybody’s House* was designed to reflect the built environment of the Drive, but not to repeat it (McAvoy n.d.). Rather, the acrylic glass marks a subtle differentiation in context that McAvoy compares to a vivarium: an enclosure that protects and sustains a unique ecological environment. From an architectural perspective, therefore, the house was designed, not to create a specific effect or influence the environment of Albert Drive in its own right, but to provide a context within which Glas(s) Performance could deliver their practice.

As a practice, *Everybody’s House* echoes one of Glas(s) Performance’s first works, *Tea for Two* (2005), in which Gore and Thorpe took a mobile tea party around the town of Farnham in south-east England, setting up in public spaces such as car parks, train stations and along-side pathways to offer tea and home-made cake to anyone interested in having a chat. As they note of this project: “We sat in the sunshine and the rain and waited. […] There was no agenda” (Glas(s) Performance no date-c). *Everybody’s House* was infused with a similar ethic and rather than use the house as a device with which to introduce new information into the context of the Drive, or pursue a specific artistic discipline, its primary role was as a platform for conversation. As part of ‘Action on the Drive’, every day between January, 2013 and the event weekend in July, members of Glas(s) Performance would wheel the house from its storage at Tramway, at the easternmost end of Pollokshields, to a different location on Albert Drive and open it for tea and conversation. As Hullin noted of those months:

> Post - you know, that January time - there was lots of stuff happening, but it felt dark and it felt hard and people didn’t want to come out of their houses and then it kind of picked up again as the seasons changed and people kind of loosen up, and they’re out on the street and they’re more open to things. (Hullin 2015)

The people occupying the house on behalf of the project changed regularly, but included members of Glas(s) Performance, *Albert Drive* artists, and a number of ‘creative volunteers’ who were recruited in early 2013 to shadow or work with the commissioned artists, and to provide support for the project in various other capacities. Whilst some events that took place at the house, such as live music and karaoke, were arranged by Glas(s) Performance and encouraged a reiteration of particular, prescribed modes of cultural participation, the time that *Everybody’s House* spent on the Drive was largely unstructured. The primary role of people
in the house was simply to greet residents and encourage conversation, and the ways in which residents engaged with and made use of the structure and the space of the project remained flexible.

This is not to say, however, that the house might not also be associated with a strategic or, even, political dynamic. As performance theorist Cathy Turner suggests, we cannot “separate the meaning of buildings from their habitation” (2015: 2). Turner characterises architecture as an ‘activation’ of space that frames the potential for utility and creativity within the physical environment and, in the context of her writing, allies this dynamic with dramaturgical practice. Both dramaturgy and architecture, she suggests, “organise structures in space and time” (ibid.) and, in this way, might be seen as metaphors for one another. Considered from this perspective, the function of the house was not simply to provide an environment in which to sit and talk, but to activate the space within the house so as to invoke discontinuity in the context of the Drive. Or, to quote Turner, “to allow or ‘activate’ an alternative or transgressive space in dialectical relationship to the established possibilities” (ibid.: 4). Though the house was designed as a ‘gentle’ intervention, it nevertheless provided a necessary differentiation that separated the activity of the project from the context of Albert Drive and, in so doing, raised the implications of the house’s intervention within the material and social space of Pollokshields as a question yet to be answered.

In response to Massey’s earlier assertion that space and meaning are conventionally and almost incontrovertibly intertwined, Everybody's House might be seen as a context in which this principle is deliberately brought into question. As Hullin (2015) and Gore (in Provan 2013) observe, the house was conceived as a response to what they describe as the ‘coded’ environment of the Drive, with the implicit invitation of the project’s title and the literal mobility of the house itself designed to circumvent socio-cultural barriers that might restrict or inhibit access to other contexts within Pollokshields. As Gore noted of the project: “We find there’s a lot of places where you meet on the Drive but usually they are part of a specific organisation or company, this is us trying to provide a place for different people to meet and talk” (ibid.).

For Massey, the differentiation between coded and uncoded contexts might be understood as a distinction between the representational and the interactional dynamics of space. As she suggests, we might think of the association between space and representation - the constitution of space as symbolic of particular categories of culture, value or experience - as a strategy that instates a correlation between space and the material environment and, in so
doing, removes space of its essential dynamism (2010: 23). As Massey argues, the association between space and representation is constitutive, too, of discourses of power - whether cultural, governmental or economic - that aim to lay claim, both, to how the world is understood and, through this rubric, to the social world as it is produced by people in performative interaction with one another. There is perhaps, therefore, a useful parallel between Massey’s conception of the relationship between space and representation and Virno’s theorisation of praxis and poiesis, as both might be seen to describe the enclosure of an innately political social relation within discourses of power, organisation and productivity that supersede and exploit its outcomes. In the context of Albert Drive, Glas(s) Performance’s interest in using the material structure of Everybody’s House to subvert or exceed discourses of understanding, behaviour and history that constitute Pollokshields as coded might also be understood as a turn away from the politics and influence of representation and towards a relational paradigm in which both space and meaning are posited as contested and unfinished. As Massey writes: “In this open interactional space there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for not all potential connections have to be established), relations which may or may not be accomplished” (ibid.: 11).

What is at stake in the context of Everybody’s House, might usefully be understood through the lens of what anthropologist Setha Low describes as the ‘spatialization of culture’. Spatialization, as she writes, reflects both a critical perspective that sees socio-cultural process mapped on to and represented by the material environment, but also a generative quality of inscription and becoming whereby the material and the socio-cultural mutually inform and constitute one another (2016: 7). From this perspective, spatialized culture is seen to reflect the localised expression of history, social context and cultural identity, but also, and in this case significantly, the role of forces such as urban planning, societal convention, economic status and privatisation in describing the ways in which localised interpersonal activity can be expressed and represented, and the forms of agency and productivity that might be associated with those fields. In framing an environment that is in some ways contained by and yet set apart from Pollokshields as social, cultural and political context, however, Everybody’s House might be seen to disrupt praxes of spatialization as they operate in relation to that environment. It provides what Low would describe as a ‘spatial field’ that is yet to be implicated within narratives of place, productivity or cultural value and, in this way, invokes a notion of space as process and possibility, as opposed to contextual and
incontrovertible.

It is in these terms too that *Everybody’s House* might be linked back to the figure of the neighbour as a political gesture, as a context in which the condition of indivisible interrelationality proposed by that term is associated with structural significance as the basis for new forms of discourse and production within the house itself. What is revealed in the house’s ‘activation’ of space is a quality of mutual exposure to others that might also be allied with Turner’s understanding of dramaturgical praxis as the collaborative exploration of form, knowledge and meaning (2010: 151). In my introductory chapter, I associated this form of praxis with a quality of collaborative becoming that I described in terms of community. Whilst I do not intend to distance Everybody’s House from discourses of activity and production that might also be understood in terms of community, however, the material frame of the house and the language with which Glas(s) Performance describe its effects suggest a necessary differentiation between socially constituted politics as they might be associated with the project and those that Turner associates with dramaturgy as political practice. As Turner writes, dramaturgy’s political significance might be understood in interventionist terms, as a strategy with which otherwise private or partisan environments are reclaimed or reconstituted as ‘public’ spaces. In this argument, however, we can see repeated the same collapse of social and material space that Massey associates with representation, epistemological stasis, and the enclosure of political potential (2010: 20).

Without wishing to discard the value of dramaturgical praxis as an articulation of the performative structure of community, I am interested, not in the potential for social practice to re-codify material space, but in whether the activation of space that is somehow uncoded might be seen to support practices of relation and productive potential beyond the hegemony of representation. What is of interest, therefore, as an illustration of the project’s politics, and as a contribution towards this thesis more generally, is the degree to which *Everybody’s House* might be seen to facilitate the performative expression of Massey’s open, interactional space, and the possible intersection between this environment and discourses of order, understanding and experience that conventionally inform residents’ relationship to Pollokshields and each other.

**The Political Dynamics of an Absent Community**
Albert Drive seems like such a small place, but you go through it meeting loads of different people, yet you don’t know them [...]. Because of everything else the whole world just got bigger and everyone forgot about the person next to them.

(Laiqa 2015)

As theatre scholar Judith Ackroyd observes, the political dynamics of theatre practices gathered together under the rubric of applied theatre but which might, in other contexts, be described as socially-engaged or community theatre, are not inherent to the practices themselves, but emerge out of an intentionality that positions theatre’s social, aesthetic and political potential in relation to specific fields of value and interest (2000: 1). In these terms, the productive and political potential of theatre cannot be objectively determined but, rather, is reflexively informed by the contexts in which the practice takes place, and the ways in which the value of theatre is perceived in relation to those environments. In the context of Albert Drive and Everybody's House, the field of social and political relations that might be associated with the project are usefully illustrated by Laiqa and Michelle, who both lived in Pollokshields at the time of the research and took part in various elements of Albert Drive, including devising the performance, volunteering, and visiting or hosting Everybody's House. As they both noted, their interest in Albert Drive stemmed from an experience of isolation or exclusion from the community that they imagined to exist within Pollokshields. As Laiqa observed:

Where I stay on Albert Drive, it just seems like it’s all shops [...]. It just seems like all you have is takeaways and more takeaways, and then I thought, like, just down the road from me there’s this huge community. (Laiqa 2015)

Michelle noted, similarly:

Where I live […] there isn’t a community. […] I’m on Woodrow road, which is just before you hit Nithsdale road, so it’s all the way along and then just before you go up over the hill. There’s not a sense of community there at all. (Michelle 2015)

For both, therefore, their interest in the project might be linked to Gore and Thorpe’s interest in neighbourliness as a shared inquiry, and the suggestion that the cultural practice of the project might map on to discourses of space and relation within Pollokshields itself. As Michelle explained:

Community to me is really about the people that live close to me and it’s about knowing people to stop and speak to in the street. You know, when you’re really
trying to get somewhere, but you’re like: ‘Oh, hello there’, and chat. It’s about doing things for the people, with the people that you live with. (2015)

The potential value of the project is informed, therefore, by an imagining of community as, both, a social interior articulated and delimited by interpersonal connections as they might be expressed in material space, and a phenomenological domain constituted in relation to the affective and immaterial dimensions of those relationships. It echoes, in these respects, Helen Nicholson’s description of a community constituted on the basis of “empathetic identification” (2005: 94) as a powerful nexus for experiences of identity and belonging, and positions the project as a conduit through which isolated residents might enter into a network of socio-relational inclusion. This understanding of the project’s social function maps on to discussions that I had with other residents, such as Frank, and Alison, Rene and Paul who contributed towards the performance, each of whom also identified a lack of connection with the broader social context of Pollokshields as a reason for their interest in the project, framing their involvement as a layered practice of socio-cultural participation in which they drew on cultural practice as a way of articulating their interests and experiences to the broader audience of Pollokshields and, in so doing, began to enact the community they hoped to be a part of.

Considered together, however, Michelle and Laiqa’s comments begin to ask questions about the nature of Pollokshields as a social territory, and, specifically, how the notion of community might be said to relate to or exist within this environment. As Frank noted during our interview, there is a historical division between the ends of the Drive rooted in the classist conceptualisation of a “quality area and a non-quality area” (2015), that, to this day, helps constitute different ends of the Drive as culturally distinct from one another. This division is also illustrated in the material context of the Drive itself with a single pavement crossing the Drive at almost the exact mid-point, separating the road into two equal sections. Michelle lives on the western end of Albert Drive, in one of the grand Victorian town houses that has since been converted into separate flats, while Laiqa lives at the eastern end, close to the main shopping area. What is notable about their statements, therefore, is that they are commenting, respectively, on the area in which the other lives. Situated within their own experiences of social isolation, Laiqa and Michelle were essentially looking towards one another imagining that the community they aspired to be a part of was located in the other half of the Drive, just beyond their social horizons. Despite the expertise in their own social realities that supported Laiqa and Michelle’s assertions, their contradictory interpretations of Pollokshields’ social topography illustrates confusion about where or whether the community
they hoped to be part of could actually be said to exist.

Within this context, Everybody’s House might be seen, not as a lens through which extant narratives of inclusion and belonging might be made apparent and accessible to a broader section of the public but, rather, as a framework for imagining possibilities of social relation that do not yet exist. As Massey notes, thinking space in social, rather than material, terms, helps to differentiate between socio-spatial relations as they are already instated and the ways in which relational potential might be leveraged to produce change (2010: 11). As she writes, conceptual frameworks that recognise and help reveal the heterogeneity of social context “force into imagination a fuller recognition of the simultaneous coexistence of others with their own trajectories and their own stories to tell” (ibid.). The function of Everybody’s House, in these terms, is not simply as a performative environment in which the relational potential of strangers might be momentarily resolved in time and space, but as a frame that associates people with one another and, in so doing, foregrounds the processual dynamics through which the social environment is constructed. It is this differentiation between space as representation and space as potential that Massey associates with the radical potential of social practice, suggesting that “[f]or the future to be open, space must be open too” (ibid.: 12). The question posed by residents’ participation in Everybody’s House is not, therefore, the conceptually and politically problematic effort to return to an imagined sense of community as protection from the ‘harsh realities’ of the present (Bauman 2006), but whether the contingencies of the present might be differently mobilised to produce a version of communitarian shelter and experience within and in relation to those realities.

The house operates, in this way, not as a rehearsal for cultural or relational formations that are already associated with forms of agency or productivity within the extant framework of Pollokshields, but as a dramaturgical prism through which the possibilities of social practice might be imagined, revised and reconsidered. As both Laiqa and Michelle noted in my interviews with them, there are various material traces through which the effects of the house might be understood. Laiqa described a shift in her social environment, noting that after meeting people in the context of the house she felt more able to have conversations with them outwith the context of the project, while Michelle associated her participation in the house and her role in the project more broadly with a more informed understanding of Pollokshields as social context that supported her decision to set up an annual arts festival in the area. However, whilst these outcomes are undoubtedly significant in personal terms, in the context of my discussion more broadly, they might also be understood as the inverse of Nancy’s community, as the operationalisation of the social and relational potential framed by
the house to service discourses of order and understanding as they are embedded within the
social landscape framed and contained by the material context of Pollokshields. Whilst this is
a register of affect that both Laiqa and Michelle explicitly framed as beneficial, and its
contribution towards their experience of and relationship to the context in which they lived
should not be overlooked, it nevertheless enacts the same enclosure of relational potential
that Nancy associates with the absence of community as a subjective, ontological or
relational condition.

What is of interest, therefore, as a contribution towards a critical consideration of
community’s relationship to political discourse, is not the outcomes that Laiqa and Michelle
identify as the positive contribution of their participation in the project, but the radical
openness of social, spatial and political convention that allowed them to occur, and the
possibility that this form of discourse might be protected and maintained. Read in relation to
Laiqa and Michelle’s articulation of an absent community, the house can be seen, not as a
device with which their vision of community was ultimately realised, but as a paradigm of
relation in which, in reference to Massey, they were able to recognise in themselves and
others the immanent possibilities of their association with one another. It is this dynamic that
I identify as community in the context of Albert Drive and Everybody’s House, as a principle
of relation that foregrounds and relies on a paradigm of collectivist engagement that
constitutes, both, a subversion of the socio-spatial domain of Pollokshields as it already
exists, and a technique with which to reconfigure the future of that domain. I would suggest,
therefore, that it is in the absence of its formal or spatialized expression that community
comes to the fore as a political force, and it is this characteristic that I hope to examine
further in the following, final section.

One Man and His Dog

Framed as a site of potential or processual activity in which the people involved were
constantly changing, it is, inevitably, difficult to examine the specificities of what happened
in the house itself. Additionally, as I have suggested, it is in their immaterial, non-
representational dynamics that the forms of social and relational practice supported by the
house might be understood to be at their most powerfully political or, perhaps more
accurately, to articulate their most powerful and expansive sense of political potential. As
Hardt and Negri observe in their description of altermodernity, however, considered as a
response to discourses of order, logic and power which are, themselves, materially inscribed within the social body of the population, political action is, itself, necessarily material (2009: 104). As they argue, in a context in which neoliberal interests might be seen to prescribe order, motivation and form to all aspects of personal and interpersonal practice through the management and distribution of the common, altermodernity is contingent on strategies of ‘rupture and transformation’ through which the common might be reconstituted to reflect alternate forms of social and political expression. From this perspective, altermodernity, and political action in general, could be understood as a performative expression of difference in circumstantial and specific relation to power as it is articulated in time and space. In these terms, a consideration of the political dynamics of Everybody’s House requires discussion beyond the notion of interrelational potential, to consider the intersection between the activated, open space of the house and the landscape of social and political values framed by the material context of Albert Drive. In making this move, I do not intend to return the immaterial aspects of Everybody’s House to a discourse of representation directly but, rather, to illustrate some aspect of how the heterogeneous dynamics of social space framed by the house might be seen to inform material gestures of social and political action, as part of a broader consideration of the possible intersection between political process, representation and theatre.

To inform this discussion, I will introduce a story that I was told several times by people involved in Albert Drive as an illustration of the project’s capacity to extend beyond the parameters that might conventionally be associated with cultural practice, and intersect with the constitution and context of Pollokshields itself. This is not a story about the dramaturgical phenomena that took place within the house itself but, rather, a consideration of the types of agency mobilised by this framework, and the ways in which these might reflexively be seen to elaborate on the constitution and expression of community and politics within or as a result of the house. When I began this research, it wasn’t my intention to focus specifically on Everybody’s House, and the questions I asked referred to Albert Drive as a whole. One of the factors that drew me to focus on Everybody’s House was the frequency with which it appeared in people’s recollections of the project and, in particular, the recurrent use of Everybody’s House as a way of narrativising or explaining the productive relationship between Albert Drive and the social environment in which it took place. Within this context, everyone I talked to told a story relating to a Pollokshields resident, Bob, and his dog, Jock. Because of the nature of the project, participant information was not recorded and I didn’t have the opportunity to meet Bob personally. Rather, the version of the story here is an
amalgamation of these tellings drawn, mainly, from conversations with Gore, Thorpe, Michelle and Laiqa.

When I asked Michelle what, on reflection, she felt that Albert Drive had achieved, she noted that it ‘gave people friendship, at that basic level, somebody to talk to’. As she explained:

I’m thinking of one particular man, Bob, who used to come every time we were out with the house. He walked with a wheeled tripod to help him walk, and he had a wee dog, Jock, and, you know, he came every day and talked to us. (2015)

As with the majority of the encounters that took place within Everybody’s House, these meetings would have consisted of tea and conversation, although Bob eventually began to bring biscuits to the house to share with other visitors. Bob struggled to walk far without a break, and the house became a welcome respite on his route down the Drive. The implications of Bob’s visits to the house, however, extended beyond the encounter itself as the project, and residents associated with it, became aware of Bob - concerned when he wasn’t seen for a few days, welcoming when he visited somewhere new. Knowing that he liked to be outside, but found it hard to walk for long without rest, Bob was eventually given a key to the local allotments, as Michelle noted, “[e]ven though he doesn’t have an allotment, but it meant in the summer he could sit there, and go to the loo, and give Jock some water” (2015). It is, in particular, this development that was used to illustrate the project’s social potential. The allotments are generally only accessible to members, and the project’s role in opening up this cloistered and otherwise private environment to a more socially orientated field of relations was an important element of the narratives with which both Glas(s) Performance and other participants described the local effects of the project.

As performance scholar Nicola Shaughnessy notes, in the context of performance practices that do not seek to produce material, reproducible outcomes, “the artefact is performative” (2012: 201). In these terms, the mechanisms through which socially-engaged theatre influences political discourse are not distinct from the actions of participants but, rather, emerge from them as the public manifestation of the project’s epistemological and social effects. As Shaughnessy writes, therefore, Bob and Jock’s journey from his top floor flat, down several blocks of Albert Drive, up the short length of Glenapp Street, and through the gate at the New Victoria Gardens allotments is not peripheral or subsequent to the project’s impact but, rather, might be considered constitutive of its political voice. As considered in the previous chapter, the neoliberal environment presents particular challenges for a model of change and agency imagined in this way, implicating theatre practice within
socio-economic frameworks that serve to appropriate the political dynamics of participation and social practice. Political theorist Andreja Zevnik, gives particularly clear voice to this process, arguing, in terms that might also be aligned with Hardt and Negri’s consideration of subjectivity (2009: x), that “the conditions which predetermine the existence of the political subject […] will inevitably ‘return’ acts of resistance to their starting place” (2016: 2). This perspective, and its implications for the political potential of social practice, might also be read in relation to Massey’s analyses of the political effects of representation. As she writes, in contrast to the open, interactional dynamics inherent to social space, a correlation between space, materiality and meaning might also be seen as a strategy of knowing and making the world that arrests potentiality as it is associated with space to, instead, invoke material space as a template for particular, prescribed modes of behaviour, understanding and activity (2010: 7-8). The challenge facing contemporary practice that aims to mobilise participants as a progressive, political voice is not, therefore, that theatre no longer functions as a forum in which to imagine or prefigure change, but that the ways in which capital has structured the broader context of society means that change cannot be convincingly or sustainably modeled outwith the context of rehearsal.

It is this challenge that is foregrounded in Glas(s) Performance’s speculative articulation of the neighbour as a solution to experiences of isolation and exclusion ostensibly embedded in the real world context of Pollokshields, and that the performative artefact of Bob’s journeys to and from the allotments will hopefully help illuminate. As Massey writes, “over and over we tame the spatial into the textual and the conceptual; into representation” (2010: 20), and it is possible to observe the continuation of this process in the repeated attempts by people involved in Everybody’s House to articulate the social and political effects of the project through the narrative of Bob’s journey, and to ally that narrative with phenomena most clearly identified and expressed in material space. If we draw, however, on Massey’s discussion as a lens with which to both identify and look beyond this paradigm, we can recognise in Bob’s actions a sense of self, agency and mobility that is not completely contained within or articulated by the logics and constraints of representation. Whilst there is an extent to which Bob’s journeys must be understood as a rewriting of Pollokshields’ spatial code, in terms that begin to coalesce into meaning rather than potentiality, his access to the allotments similarly depends on the performative translation of forms of neighbourly subjectivity, interrelationality and co-presence first encountered in the house to the more expansive and politically resolved context of Pollokshields. It is in this translation, therefore, that I suggest the political potential of Everybody’s House is given its fullest expression, and
most directly invites us to consider a critical framework for political action beyond the representational, meaningful and symbolic.

In discussing the productive or political potential of Everybody’s House, Hullin draws attention to the role of conversation as the interface through which people involved in the project encountered one another. As she notes, “sometimes you were sitting there and there would be the strangest group of people sitting together having a conversation, people who would never sit together and have a conversation, and all of these things sparking off each other” (2015). Considered through the lens of Everybody’s House as a context somehow apart from the coded environment of Albert Drive, these conversations can be associated with two registers of affect. In the first instance, they might be read in relation to Turner’s conception of dramaturgy, as strategies of social and epistemological composition that worked to resolve the absence or suspension of meaning caused by the house’s intervention within Pollokshields. Continually enacted as the social composition of the house changed, conversation in these terms might be seen as the performative expression of Massey’s open, interactional space, as an allusion to the many possible interactions, trajectories and relationships framed by the context of the house.

Beyond this however, and in terms that relate more directly to my interest in the neighbour as the project’s primary political gesture, the conversations framed and facilitated by the house might also be read in relation to Low’s conception of ‘embodied space’. As Low argues, whilst space is commonly understood as a public realm, constituted and enacted in praxis with a collective in terms that are legible within the framework of the material environment, the individual might also be understood to embody multiple resonances of socio-spatial awareness, only some of which are made apparent through the medium of public discourse. In her analysis, she draws particular attention to the Moore Street Market in Brooklyn to suggest that the embodied space of migrant shop owners, originally from a range of disparate South American countries including Puerto Rico, Columbia and Ecuador, might be seen to operate constructively to rearticulate otherwise foreign discourses relating to culture, identity and social practice within the concrete walls of a market building in New York City (2014: 35-36). In these terms, as she argues, the body itself could be seen to constitute a ‘spatial field’ (ibid.: 35) that operates in both sympathetic and antagonistic relationship to convention or consensus as it is mapped out in material space. As she writes in a later publication on the same topic: “Embodied space addresses both the experiential and material aspects of the body in space as well as the merging of body-space as a location that can communicate, transform and contest existing social structures” (2016: 101). Whilst, as
she notes, this conceptual framework instates the body as a site for oppressive narratives relating to the social manifestation of issues such as gender, race and class, it posits, too, the individual as the interlocutor of their own social sphere and, fundamentally, as the arbiter of their own social potential. Gore and Hullin’s consideration of coded space might be seen to ally embodiment with the constitution of public territories of socio-spatial value. Low’s positioning of the body as a nexus for the reception and production of space, however, introduces a productive sense of malleability. If, as she suggests, consistencies of space and social value emerge from the body, then the ways in which space is organised and understood - and the forms of agency and self-realisation associated with it - are subject to change as the epistemological, emotional, cultural and political resonances of space are embodied differently.

With this in mind, conversations that took place as part of Everybody’s House might be seen, not simply as strategies through which the social and political uncertainty framed by the house was resolved, but as a quality of interactivity that relates back to and informs an embodied sense of Pollokshields and what it might be understood to contain, represent or articulate. Specifically, in the context of Everybody’s House, they could be seen to invoke a spatial paradigm modeled around qualities of exposure and interrelationality that I earlier associated with the neighbour, to invite a reframing of social discourse as a practice that directly engages with the uncertain and potentially disruptive influence and interests of others. As Low suggests, in terms that might be seen to elaborate on Massey’s conception of space as inherently heterogeneous, it is the discrepancy between space as it is embodied and as it is conventionally organised and expressed that “creates space as a potentiality” (2014: 35) and associates the social articulation of space with political significance. In the context of Everybody’s House, we might, in turn, elaborate on Low’s contention to suggest that it is the discrepancy between different embodiments of the same material space that proposes neighbourliness as a political practice. It is from this perspective, also, that performative expression, posited by Hardt and Negri as a necessary constituent of political action, might be associated with a truly heterogeneous dynamic as an expression, not of a newly conceived, discursively arranged, territory of order and politics, but of the flux and uncertainty of communitarian discourse.

What I suggest is illustrated by Bob’s journeys to and from the allotments, therefore, is not only the formal reconstitution of the social landscape that Low might ally with spatialization and Massey with representation, but a more malleable and politically potent implementation of neighbourliness as a social paradigm. Beyond the materialist elision of
space and meaning, what is invoked by the intersection between Bob’s sense of space and the context of the New Victoria Gardens is a performative encounter with gardeners and other users of the allotments that relies on a sympathetic understanding of space as similarly open to innovation, reconstitution and the interests of others. The forms of agency that might be associated with Bob’s activities are not the declamatory, operational politics of oppositionalism and resistance but, rather, strategies of being with and knowing others that turn the commons of social practice, material space, shared time and performativity towards the politically significant articulation of space as “always in the process of being made” (Massey 2010: 9). In contrast to the meaningful interpretation of the project’s effects, in relation to which interactions in the house are associated with material, measurable adjustments in the socio-cultural context of Pollokshields, it is the embodiment and performative articulation of neighbourliness beyond the infrastructure of the project that might most closely be associated with the constitutive influence of community, as a strategy through which the uncertain consequences of our being-in-common are allowed their most direct and unmediated expression. In making this assertion, I do not intend to overlook the implications of Low’s suggestion that embodied space is, itself, always contested and open to influences which might be understood as regressive, hegemonic, or in other ways problematic. Nevertheless, framed in this way, Bob’s relationship to the project highlights a mechanism of political activity that is not fully contained within materialist discourses of space and relation most commonly associated with the practice and influence of theatre, and begins to make room for thinking about a new intersection between theatre and community in which theatre’s political voice is contingently related to the becoming of community, and the conditions, practices, resources and possibilities that inform its performative articulation.

Conclusion

The particular intersection between politics and social practice framed by Bob’s journeys is, of course, fragile. It relies on a network of sympathetic interests, and on a collective articulation of neighbourliness beyond the infrastructure of Albert Drive that I have not been able to confirm is ongoing. More specifically, the ways in which his story was communicated to me appear to represent the politics and benefits of neighbourliness from one perspective, advancing logic that, as Massey might suggest, denies others implicated in Bob's expression of himself their own trajectories through time and space in order to privilege the meaningful
narration of his relationship to the project. Nevertheless, I suggest that his story begins to illustrate some of the performative strategies and political outcomes that might be associated with community as a relational principle, and through which community might be imagined as a source of disruption and alterity in relation to the capitalist infrastructure of the neoliberal present. As Hardt and Negri make clear, while social practice might be seen as a strategy with which the common is shaped to reflect the values, infrastructure and interests of contemporary capitalism, it is, fundamentally, the governance and production of subjectivity that underwrites the continuation of this paradigm (2009: x). Whilst Bob’s story does not, therefore, represent the mass, public expression of communitarian discourse, it might nevertheless be associated with new forms of subjective experience and expression which, to follow Hardt and Negri, might also be understood as the basis for the performative disruption of the neoliberal domain.

As Hardt and Negri suggest, for altermodernity to be realised as a true departure from the hegemonic infrastructure of contemporary capitalism and, equally, from notions of escape or refuge imagined in supplementary relation to its logics, we are required to uncover performative strategies that allow for the articulation of alternative regimes of relation, discourse and production beyond the politically and ideologically restrictive principles of opposition and resistance (2009: 103). It is in these terms that we might consider Bob as an illustration of the politics of Everybody’s House, not as an emblem of a discursive or intellectual struggle over the meaning associated with Pollokshields, but as an agent whose relationally informed sense of self and subjectivity facilitated new forms of mobility, interaction and productivity within Pollokshields and continually reintroduced to that context a notion of neighbourly politics. Whilst what emerges from this context is perhaps not obviously transgressive, it could nevertheless be interpreted as a response to Amin’s society of strangers or Bauman’s framing of multiculturalism, as a way of articulating social practice that disturbs discourses of isolationism and privatisation as they are mapped on to the context of the Drive.

Considered in relation to the thesis overall, the forms of communitarian politics evident and expressed through the context of Everybody’s House might be understood as a progression from the relationally constituted politics of the Create Course in the sense that they are structurally essential to the delivery of the project. While, in the context of the Create Course, the most clear expression of the project’s political influence arose through the participants’ improvisatory re appropriation of resources made available by the project for other purposes, namely the reenactment of Littlewood’s Fun Palace, here, the project was
given form and purpose through the constitutive influence of participants and their interaction with one another.

More specifically, this might be understood as a differentiation in representational frameworks in terms that I have previously associated with the felicitous community. Where the Create Course, perhaps accidentally, created conditions that were sympathetic to social practice and agency as they are posited by contemporary capitalism and, in this way, could be seen to have supported the reiteration of forms of subjectivity and self-expression that complement, as Türken et al. observe, the ‘common sense’ values of neoliberal society (2016: 32), Everybody’s House provided a structure that relied on strategies of relation, self expression and productivity that are essentially dissimilar to the social technologies through which neoliberalism is advanced. From this perspective, whilst the version of communitarian discourse realised by Everybody’s House is, equally, dependent on the project as a framework through which social practice is associated with form and political significance, it might nevertheless be associated with forms of praxis more closely associated with the performative and political dynamics of community itself.

In these terms, Everybody’s House might be seen to illustrate an intersection between community and social practice that circumvents some of the problematics raised by Nancy. It appears to allow for forms of socially constituted expression and interactivity without requiring them to coalesce into rigid and repeatable form and, in this way, might be seen to demonstrate an ongoing relationship to the innate potentiality Nancy associates with being-in-common. Just as Nancy argues that community is “what takes place always through others and for others” (1991: 15) so the activities of people in the house, and the subjectivities produced as a result of these interactions, might be read as part of a collaborative renegotiation of social space in relation to and in some ways for other residents. Despite this, however, the project might be seen to stop short of an expression of community itself as political praxis, as considered in chapter one. While, as I have suggested, a contingent relationship between the content of the project and the actions and interests of participants helped to ensure that its politics are essentially related to ways of knowing and interacting with others that might also be understood in relation to community, there is no mechanism within the project itself with which to leverage, or allow the performatively articulated community to leverage itself, as a political force. Whilst, therefore, Everybody's House might be seen to implicate community as the basis for a politically significant reorientation of praxis, as theorised by Virno (2004: 50-51), this mechanism does not yet give way to a new surplus structure which, in its actions and constitution, might be described or understood as
community as political form. This is, of course, beyond the scope of this project’s intentions, but it is this move too that I associate with the notion of community as political praxis and suggest is central to a more practical and progressive imagining of theatre’s relationship to social practice. It is this irresolution, therefore, between community as praxis and community as political praxis, and the social and cultural structures that might be seen to support such a transition, that I take forward into the following, final stage of this discussion.
Chapter 5:

Vulnerable Practice - the ontology and politics of Melodramatics’ *Seeing Red*

We just wanted to show, really, that although [domestic abuse] happens to a lot of people, there's a way to get through it and build and get past it as well. Show people that there's a life after that.

Kelly, member of Melodramatics drama group (Octagon Theatre Bolton 2015)

Melodramatics is the name of a group of around six women who live on the New Bury estate in Bolton and meet for two hours every Thursday lunch time for the primary purpose of making theatre together. I had the opportunity to meet the group and observe their practice between February and September, 2015, and Kelly is commenting here on *Seeing Red*, the play they devised during these months and performed at the Octagon Theatre Bolton on the 22nd and 23rd of September that year. *Seeing Red* tells the story of a young mother who is gradually isolated and controlled by her abusive partner, and is based on the group members own experiences as victims of domestic abuse. As the group mentioned during my first meeting with them, the decision to make a play that focused on the issue of domestic abuse was motivated, not only by their own experiences, but by the number of women that they knew within Farnworth, the area of Bolton in which New Bury is located, that were at risk of abuse, or were already trapped in abusive relationships. They noted that one of the main factors that had made it difficult for them to seek help when they were experiencing abuse in their own lives was a sense of disempowerment or embarrassment which they associated with a lack of understanding and discussion about abuse in the communities in which they lived. It is in relation to these experiences that the group conceived of the play as a way of creating or adding to conversation within Farnworth in an effort to establish a context in which there was not only better understanding about abuse in general, but fewer barriers for individuals in need of support. Helen Nicholson gives academic voice to this intention when she observes, “[m]aking drama is always part of wider social and cultural processes in which existing knowledge is transferred and adapted” (2010: 147-48). In common with Kelly and Melodramatics, Nicholson correlates theatre’s value with its capacity to inform epistemic processes that lie outside or beyond the practice of theatre itself, inviting a correlation between the localised gestures, practices and relationships that constitute theatre practice and
the socio-political language of society itself.

As well as articulating an interest in the play’s external or public value, however, Kelly’s comments draw attention to a less tangible measure of theatre’s effect. The play that the group devised was designed to raise awareness of abuse and abusive behaviour and, as such, follows a narrative that the group considered typical of abusive relationships. *Seeing Red* focuses on the relationship between ‘Lyndsey’ and ‘Phil’. It begins with the first signs of Phil’s controlling behaviour - monitoring where Lyndsey is and what she’s doing, controlling her spending - and ends in the aftermath of Phil’s first violent outburst. Each performance was followed by a question and answer session with the performers and representatives from social services, and, in order to help stimulate discussion, Lyndsey’s response to Phil’s attack was left deliberately unresolved. The narrative turn, therefore, that Kelly identifies when she notes that group wanted to show their audience that there is life after abuse does not occur in the play itself. It is, instead, the group that most clearly demonstrates this transition, and Kelly’s comments are most usefully understood as a reference, not to the play, but to the women’s representation of themselves, as themselves, on stage. In this context, the nominally fictive construct of the play is reframed as a non-fictional demonstration of the members’ lives ‘after’ abuse, as they articulate their autonomy in the present by commenting on the very experiences that had previously caused them harm. Though this narrative, too, could be incorporated within the representational or epistemic language of the performance, it alludes to an alternate paradigm of relation in which the practice of making and performing the play also interacts with the praxes through which the women constitute themselves in the present in relation to their pasts, the practice of theatre and the others in the group. Making theatre, in these terms, is not only a making of social or cultural texts for reception and interpretation, but a making of the self in collaboration with others.

Kelly’s statement could, therefore, be seen to elide representational and ontological effect, positioning the outcomes of Melodramatics’ work at the intersection between the two. It is the implications of this nexus and, in particular, the introduction of ontology to a consideration of community theatre’s political potential that is the focus of this chapter. The ontological dynamics of theatre and performance are, of course, not a unique area of study. Publications by Philip Auslander (1999) and Peggy Phelan (2006 [1993]) have exercised particular influence over thinking in this area since the turn of the century and, as Mock (2000: 7) observes, could be seen to reflect opposing sides of a debate about the relationship between ontology and performance. Both Phelan and Auslander position performance in relation to a capitalist context that is understood to privilege the representational and the
reproducible over the ‘liveness’ of the performative moment. As Phelan notes: “[t]he pressures brought to bear on performance to succumb to the laws of the reproductive economy are enormous. For only rarely in this culture is the ‘now’ to which performance addresses its deepest questions valued” (2006: 146). For Phelan, a capitalist economy that privileges repetition and exchange value suppresses the ontological dynamics of performance by creating a surfeit of information that supersedes and recontextualises the experience and condition of being (ibid.: 148), undermining the otherwise natural correlation between performance, the live encounter and the self. Auslander, in contrast, argues that the endemic influence of a capitalist logic that equates social practice with commercial value constitutes the articulation of self as, itself, a commodity, compromising the extent to which the public performance of self could be considered “ontologically pristine” (1997: 45). Despite their differences, both authors posit the self, and the possible interaction between theatre and ontology, as essentially distinct from capitalist infused economies of representation and reproduction that are seen to characterise twenty-first century society. Within this framework, the ontological dynamics of performance are either perpetually interrupted by the appropriative influence of the ‘reproductive economy’ (Phelan), or contained within economies of value and exchange that suppress the self as an authentic ontological gesture (Auslander) but, in either case, are seen to be diminished, if not totally compromised, as a site for the experience and manifestation of the self.

These perspectives might be seen to extend discussion established in previous chapters. As Phelan observes, “In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of ‘presence.’ But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else - dance, movement, sound, character, ‘art.’” (2006: 150). As she suggests, in becoming culturally legible, the performer, as a distinct, politicised body, is displaced by their operative value within a discourse of meaning and interpretation over which they have no direct control. As Phelan argues, the performer is not simply associated with these resonances but, rather, is made equivalent to them, and there are parallels, therefore, between Phelan’s consideration of the appropriative influence of the capitalist controlled reproductive economy, and Jean-Luc Nancy’s consideration of the intersection between community and society, as a partisan system of representation, order and production. As Nancy writes, “it is the work that the community does not do and that it is not that forms community” (1991: xxxix), and both could be seen to consider the actuality of self, social relation and political presence as fundamentally distinct from the logical, interpretive, economic or productive frameworks in relation to which they
are articulated publicly. Just I have suggested in relation to Nancy’s discussion, that we, as scholars and performance makers interested in the political potential of social practice, are required to consider the felicitious relationship between community and existent systems of representation and order, so, following Phelan, we might say the political dynamics of the self are felicitously related to the articulation of community as a distinct and differentiated field of political expression.

Kelly’s statement draws attention to this possibility. Despite both authors’ interest in separating the true articulation of the self and social presence from discourses of order, functionality and representation as they exist and are expressed publicly, in material space, Kelly’s description helps outline the possibility of an alternative paradigm, in which theatre’s relational dynamics operate as a discrete mode of productive behaviour within and alongside the influences identified by Auslander, Phelan and Nancy. Within this context, the ontological dynamics of performance are not displaced in favour of theatre’s cultural value but, instead, emerge beside or within activities geared toward the construction of plays and performance as an independent field of productive activity. In relation to the arc of this thesis more broadly, therefore, Kelly’s statement might be understood in relation to what I have earlier described as community’s troubling constitution, or Jenny Hughes’ articulation of the ‘common self’ (2017-b: 79), as an indication of a form of potentiality that exists within and is articulated through structures that support capitalist order and reproduction, and yet alludes to areas of relationality and production that exceed those constraints. Within this framework, ontology provides a vocabulary with which to expand discussion of theatre’s influence to include categories of encounter, productivity and exchange that are fundamentally immaterial or which, in their material expression, are transformed into a different category of discourse or currency, but might nevertheless be seen to inform the political value and significance of theatre practice. Just as, in the previous chapter, I suggested that Everybody’s House might be understood as a structure that supported the felicitous articulation of particular, neighbourly forms of self expression and productivity, here I am interested in how a consideration of theatre’s ontological dynamics might inform a broader sense of theatre’s structural influence, and the ways in which theatre practice might be made available to support the constitution of differently political dramaturgies of relation, self-expression and collective becoming.

This interpretation of theatre’s relationship to politics and social practice could be allied with Nicholson’s recent interest in the ontological dynamics of applied theatre (in Hughes and Nicholson 2016: 251). As she notes, applied theatre might be seen to invoke various forms of socially constituted agency that includes those that operate within the
epistemic or representational framework of socio-cultural discourse, but also incorporates modes of affective, sensorial and embodied relation that refer to and occur within the contingent space and time of the practice. These constitute, as Nicholson argues, a collaborative ontological framework she terms a ‘relational ontology’ in which, “the affective and temporal qualities of lived experience might become politically effective” (ibid: 252). It is this expanded sense of theatre’s intersection with political process that I aim to trace through this chapter, and posit as the culmination of my interest in community as political praxis. What follows is a discussion of Melodramatics’ practice that considers, first, the intersection between their work and discourses of value, knowledge making and exchange as they already exist and that might also be seen to arrest the radical potential of social practice by associating their work together with predetermined logics and outcomes; and, secondly, a consideration of those aspects of their practice that might be positioned beyond this rubric, as an illustration of what Nancy might describe as the ‘inoperative’ dynamics of political process, and the foundation of a politicised articulation of their community together.

**Context**

It’s all to do with the community […] the more groups that Bolton at Home run, it’s got to make a better life for the estate, for the people that live around. Where there’s poverty, where there’s not a lot going on, it brings a bit of joy, I think, to people’s lives […]. I’m a pensioner and I’m on my own, I enjoy going to my drama group, I belong to the card group, I belong to the Not-Shop, and we’re hoping to open a food bank. You know, all these things, it’s just reaching out to your neighbourhood and your community and getting them involved. It makes a better life for your children and your environment.

Christine, member of the Melodramatics drama group (Hughes 2015-a)

The community centre in which Melodramatics rehearse is positioned on the corner of George Street and Moorside Avenue in New Bury, a largely residential area of Bolton. To the left, there is a post office and corner shop that attract a modest but steady flow of customers. To the right is the length of George Street: a short road of red brick, two-story, semi-detached houses, punctuated by the occasional chip shop or disused industrial building. The centre itself, set back from the road behind a waist-high, black metal fence, is one of Bolton at
Home's Urban Care and Neighborhood (UCAN) Centres. Bolton at Home (BAH) are a social housing charity, who own and manage around 18,000 homes in Bolton and their six dedicated UCAN centres are designed as drop in centres for their tenants, providing access to training and support in subjects ranging from IT and personal finance to health, family relationships and personal wellbeing. As part of BAH’s interest in supporting ‘sustainable neighbourhoods’, the centres also serve as a public resource, providing space and support for community led meetings and activities, and as a venue for organisations to run projects with local tenants. The drama group itself reflects BAH’s longstanding commitment to supporting the cultural and creative lives of their tenants. Under the ‘Percent for Art’ initiative, BAH have, since 1997, directed one percent of their annual expenditure towards arts and cultural opportunities for the people who live in their properties. Though there are comparable examples in the United States and Ireland, the scheme is unique amongst housing providers in the UK and, in its first ten years, supported 152 creative projects in the area - including craft groups, photography, public installations, sculpture, film and theatre - that in some way contributed towards the overall aim of social regeneration and the practice of ‘place-making’ in Bolton’s communities (Churchill 2010: 2). Since 2013, BAH have also formalised their relationship with the Octagon, Bolton’s main, publicly subsidised theatre, giving £20,000 annually to subsidise the cost of theatre trips for their tenants. Locally, these activities have resulted in a series of formal and informal partnerships between artists, BAH, the Octagon and residents. To facilitate creative activity, BAH have a team of four Arts Officers who work with locals to develop projects and encourage cultural participation, often making use of UCAN centres as an interface between Percent for Art and local communities, while, informally, theatre trips are facilitated by Octagon staff who encourage after show discussions with tenants, or bring touring actors out to local centres to talk about their work or lead workshops. As Arts Officer, Dawn Yates-Obe noted in an interview for this research, the formal financial partnership between BAH and the Octagon emerged out of a long-standing working relationship between the two institutions, both of whom articulate an interest in working with and supporting Bolton’s communities, and the UCAN centres can, from this perspective, be seen as sites of exchange that implicate social, cultural and economic interests in a common discourse of value, informed by local interests, and the experiences and needs of BAH tenants.

However, as Dawn Yates-Obe notes, the organisation’s commitment to providing cultural opportunities for their tenants is not purely philanthropic. Rather, it is born out of a
belief that the social and cultural wellbeing of the people that BAH houses is directly related to their viability as tenants who are required to pay rent, take care of their property and show consideration for others in the area. As she observes in an interview undertaken for a parallel research project, led by Jenny Hughes: “to support [a] person to be happier and healthier, and more active and productive, makes them a better tenant for us. So, you know, it makes sense for us as a business as well” (Hughes 2015-c). As a social housing provider, BAH are particularly vulnerable to economic reforms undertaken by the current Conservative government, such as those precipitated by the Welfare Reform Act 2012, designed to reduce public expenditure by minimising the scale of the welfare state. In their 2016-21 strategy document, *Our Plan*, BAH acknowledge these challenges and identify the UCAN centres as sites that provide the organisation with an enduring opportunity to work with tenants to improve their skills, health and personal circumstances and, in so doing, increase their chances of finding and keeping employment (2016: 8). BAH’s investment in the education and wellbeing of their tenants is, in this way, formally connected to the organisation’s financial viability, and we can consider the activities that take place in their UCAN centres as explicitly or implicitly designed to model behaviours that are seen to be socially responsible and economically productive. The UCAN centres themselves, therefore, frame a complex intersection of social and economic interests, in which cultural practice is brought into relation with profitability, and the social enterprise of tenants is overlaid with the strategic interests of their landlords.

The group that became Melodramatics began in 2014 as part of an effort by staff at the newly opened centre to establish a women’s group in the area. After a series of taster sessions that covered crafts, music and song writing, puppet making and creative writing, the group decided that they wanted to focus their efforts on writing and drama. *Seeing Red* was Melodramatics’ second project, after a soap opera that was written and performed by the group and filmed in a local shop. As Yates-Obe noted, it was during filming for this project that the group began developing ideas for what would become *Seeing Red*: “When they were making the film, they soon realized that there’s quite a lot of time waiting around. You know, if you’re not in that scene, there’s quite a lot of down time, so they just started to write” (Hughes 2015-c). Reflecting on the decline of tenant associations and other forms of community organisation, Bolton at Home chief executive Jon Lord suggests that, from an institutional perspective, the value of arts provision is its capacity to “[bring] people out of their front doors” (Hughes 2015-d), and encourage tenants to meet and communicate with
one another and with Bolton at Home. As he notes: “the arts activity isn’t some peripheral activity that we do, it’s actually something core. We need to engage people in the community […] in what we do” (ibid.). Though Lord’s interests are shaded with an instrumentalist or even corporate interpretation of art’s value, his commitment to the long-term benefits of cultural participation nevertheless associates Melodramatics’ activities with a degree of protection and creative freedom which, along with the commitment of Bolton at Home staff, including Dawn, and Lisa O’Neill-Rogan, who facilitated Melodramatics’ sessions and was in post as associate director and head of Learning and Participation at the Bolton Octagon at the time of this study, allows the group flexibility to adapt and respond to the changing circumstances of their members over time.

Though they were, nominally and deliberately, a drama group, during the time I spent with Melodramatics, the space and time of their practice was also used to support a wide range of activities that are not related to the deliberate practice of making theatre. These included a Christmas savings club, the organisation of two Ann Summers parties and a raffle, the planning of a ‘Not-Shop’ swap shop which was set up to redistribute clothing, toys and food within the community, and attentive practices personal and emotional support between members. Beyond the practice of theatre, and the personal and community value of Seeing Red, members of the group describe Melodramatics as “a kind of a counseling session” (Octagon Theatre Bolton 2015), as a way of getting to know the area and the community, and a space to “meet new people, make new friends, have a laugh” (ibid.). Within the already complicated interlacing of institutional and social interests framed by the material context of the UCAN centre, therefore, we can see the group itself as a malleable and multifaceted resource that supported the translation of personal experience into a play designed for public performance, but also, clearly and deliberately maps onto and influences the social, economic and cultural contingencies that characterise the lives of its members, independent of the group’s interest in creative practice.

Within this context, Seeing Red, illustrates a field of practice in which multiple intentions - social and institutional, local and national, cultural and economic - inform and overlap one another. The contingent relationship between Melodramatics’ practice and the economic interests of BAH could be interpreted as an allegory for the incursion of economic interests into the field of theatre and social life more generally, while the relational dynamics of their work could be seen as a form of resistance, in which economic and material resources provided by BAH were turned to serve socio-relational praxes that overlook
institutional models of social and economic productivity. Considered together, however, these apparently diametric readings are further complicated by the fact that the group’s activities were facilitated by staff from BAH and received support from O’Neill Rogan as a result of partnerships developed by the housing association, and that, as a result, their practices were also, explicitly and implicitly, sanctioned and informed by the institution that houses their work.

In response, the conversation that I advance here is not divided between economic and social analysis, but, rather, a loose differentiation between material and immaterial praxis in an effort to interrogate both how economic and social interests might productively interrelate in the context of Melodramatics’ practice to produce a play that exercised social and political value within Farnworth, as targeted by the group members, and within the discourses of value articulated by BAH through the framework of the UCAN centres; and, secondly, how their work could be seen to outline a field of practice and productivity that resists the hegemonies of capital and cultural representation to posit the ontological dynamics of theatre as a site of important political potential and, more specifically, as means of redistributing cultural, material and economic resources to support the constitution of a new commons.

What follows, therefore, are two analytical strands that could usefully be separated into the epistemological and the ontic, as articulated by Thompson (2004). I will consider, first, the ways in which the group’s work functioned in ancillary relation to existent processes of knowledge making and, in these terms, interacted with and affected the context of Farnworth and Bolton in ways that were both planned by the group and prefigured by narratives that contextualise the epistemic, affective and social value of theatre. Secondly, and in line with Thompson’s differentiation, I will consider how their practice might be seen, not as a cultural enquiry, but as a mode of being in the world (ibid: 159) that, in its doing, asks questions of the lived environment of the participants as it is mapped on to the time, space and activities of the project itself. I will consider the ways in which the group could be said to constitute a discrete, interdependent field of socially informed ontological relation, and the types of collective and individual agency that might be associated with this context. Considered together, these fields of influence and relation are intended to provide a broad representation of Melodramatics’ practice that links the communitarian framing of space and social practice considered in the previous chapter with the reflexive pragmatism of the Create Course participants to frame a model of practice that both sits within and satisfies a
neoliberal imperative that frames socio-cultural discourse as productive, utilitarian and legible, whilst facilitating and protecting socio-relational praxes that exceed these constraints and, in so doing, allude to new territories of critical and political discourse.

Common Ground - The Material Community

As the public outcome of their work, Seeing Red was designed to highlight the early behavioural signs that might indicate a partner’s abusive tendencies, to illustrate how these behaviours might escalate, and examine how the victim’s experiences relate to her relationships with family and friends. To achieve this, the group chose to create a narrative that followed a trajectory that they considered typical of abusive relationships with ‘Lyndsey’, the protagonist, and ‘Phil’, the abuser, acting as representatives of the women’s experiences. We first see Lyndsey at a party with friends. While everyone else at the party is having fun, drinking and playing games, Lyndsey is removed from the action, checking her phone to see if Phil has tried to contact her, concerned that people might take pictures of her doing something Phil wouldn’t approve of. Over the course of the play, Phil’s controlling behaviour isolates Lyndsey from her friends and family, gradually eroding her self-confidence and autonomy until she is almost entirely dependent on Phil. Eventually, as Phil’s behaviour escalates, it becomes impossible for Lyndsey to protect herself by acceding to his demands and the play ends in the aftermath of Phil’s first physical attack on Lyndsey, as she is poised to decide whether to leave her home and look for protection from the police and social services, or believe his apologies and stay in the relationship.

Writing of the history of theatre in community and educational contexts, Nicholson describes drama as, in essence, “a synthesis of memory and invention” (2010: 147). Drawing on Joseph Roach’s notion of ‘kinesthetic imagination’ (1996: 27), Nicholson positions drama as a restaging of the histories of the self and the body, and allies theatre’s cultural function with that of the archive: an actualisation of the cultural present through the selective remembrance of the past. As Nicholson posits, therefore, the dramatic re-presentation of past events and experiences exhibit a political dynamic beyond their aesthetic or communicative function as a strategic attempt to inform public discourses as they constitute the social, cultural and political dynamics of the present.

It is in this spirit that Melodramatics performed Seeing Red. As Melodramatics’
member, Lyndsey, notes: “Obviously, we're trying to put out a message to people” (Octagon Theatre Bolton 2015). From the early stages of the play’s development, the performance was discussed as an opportunity to stimulate conversation about abuse, not simply within Farnworth, but in Bolton generally. The group discussed using ticket sales to support women’s refuges in the area and, as the play took form, decided to invite local domestic violence agencies, the domestic violence police response unit, and representatives from BAH to extend the epistemic influence of the play by mapping their articulation of their own experiences on to institutionally framed discussions and conceptualisations of abuse. Commenting on the role of the play as a contribution to conversations around abuse, Kelly notes:

People don't necessarily take people seriously or listen to them when they're being abused or notice that it's abuse unless they've got physical marks, but there's a lot more to it. And the emotional and the mental abuse, like: a bruise will fade in a matter of weeks, but those emotional and mental scars, it takes a lot longer to get over. I think that's the main thing about abuse, you know, it's not just a punch or a slap, it's all the mental and physical stuff behind it. So I feel we needed to get that right to show the build up to physical abuse and to show what people go through. (Poor Theatres 2015)

As Kelly illustrates, the play functions, in this context, as a pragmatic interjection into attitudes, experiences and misunderstandings that the group observed in the world around them. In relation to an audience of friends, family and Bolton residents from the same social backgrounds as the women themselves, the play could be seen as a device with which Melodramatics aimed to address a disparity between their experiences and how they had been interpreted by the people closest to them by informing the ways in which abuse is discussed and understood in the communities they are part of. While, in relation to the organisations they had invited to attend, the performance could be seen both as an opportunity to link people in the audience experiencing abuse, or people known to people in the audience, with local resources, and to inform institutional awareness to include a more nuanced understanding of the affective and interpersonal dynamics of abuse. Each of the performances was followed by a post-show discussion that gave the audience the opportunity to ask the cast about their experiences, or learn more about the support available for people experiencing abuse, and Seeing Red could be seen as a performative delineation of a discursive field, in which the women drew on their experiences to frame a forum for a broader and more public consideration of abuse that extended beyond the specificity of their
pasts.

In her address for *Rediscovering the Radical - Theatre and Social Change*, held at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts in 2016, keynote speaker Jan Cohen-Cruz associated theatre’s ‘radical’ potential with a capacity for theatre practice to establish new discursive or epistemic territories in which otherwise disparate fields of knowledge, experience or activity can sit alongside and inform one another, framed by a “shared vision or concern” (Collective Encounters: 2016-b). Cohen-Cruz describes these territories as a ‘common ground’ in which diverse skills and practices can be brought to bear on a shared project to achieve aims that would not be possible were the partners acting on their own. By adapting their performance to serve as a public forum, Melodramatics drew particular attention to the relationship between their work and the audiences they had invited to see it, illuminating a temporary nexus between the stories they told and a shared discursive field that implicated the diverse groups within their audience in a common field of epistemic negotiation. Commenting on her experience of the performance, Christine reflected:

> I was very nervous, frightened that I wasn't going to get it right on the night and what sort reaction we was going to get from the audience. But I was overtaken - overwhelmed - by the reaction at the end of it, you know, when we finished it, and the response we got from the audience as well. It was brilliant. It just seemed that we'd actually put over what we wanted to get to the public. It seemed like they really understood what we were doing. (Hughes 2015-a)

As a contribution towards localised processes of knowledge making, *Seeing Red* was undoubtedly successful. It achieved its initial aims by providing a clear and accurate portrayal of the complex dynamics of abuse, and brought the subject to the attention of local residents, police and local government. The influence of *Seeing Red* has also been extended, with the play restaged at the Octagon to coincide with the UN backed initiative, *16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence*, and the cast reprising their roles for an audio version of the play that is publicly available on the Bolton at Home website. Additionally, Cohen-Cruz associates common ground with communicative phenomena beyond those clearly mapped out in material space - affective relations, sympathetic action, empathetic learning - and it is relevant, also, to consider these material outcomes as an indication of the play’s relationship to a more expansive and less tangible field of influence.

As Nicholson’s comments highlight, however, to emerge as public discourse, the women’s stories must be communicated through the filter of the cultural present, coerced, however sensitively, into linguistic and epistemological forms of common communicative
value. Cohen-Cruz’ articulation of common ground could, from this perspective, also be interpreted as a delineation of collaborative orthodoxy, as its constitution as a nexus of communication and agency requires the forms of expression that take place within this environment to demonstrate communal value - to transfer with equivalency from one field of practice or experience to another. Considered from this perspective, ‘common ground’ is not common, as understood by Antonio Hardt and Michael Negri and considered earlier in this thesis, but rather, a privatisation of the common that associates social activity with specific, delineated fields of value and operation that reflexively delimit the ways in which the potential of social relations is articulated and resolved. This observation is not intended to diminish what was achieved by Melodramatics in relation to this environment but, rather, to illustrate the factors that limit the political potential of theatre and social practice when measured in exclusive relation to a paradigm of meaning and representation.

As Thompson observes: “stories cannot be separated from how they constitute and reconstitute the tellers and the listeners” (2004: 156). The stories that are told both about theatre and through theatre, constitute the subjects of those stories in social and political relation that informs not only how they are known and valued, but also how they know and value themselves. They are of ontological concern. Legibility, in this instance, is equivalent to a category of being - a way of both actualising and defining the self and its parameters. In my time at the UCAN centre, observing the Melodramatics talk, make tea, offer advice, rehearse and devise their play, I was struck by the range of activities that they undertook routinely - with commitment, care and attention - that are not given voice by the rubric of theatre. This is, I would argue, not because they don’t belong to or contribute towards the practice of theatre, but because the language that has come to define theatre doesn’t easily provide a vocabulary with which to articulate their importance. These are processes that contributed towards the making of the play, but they also exceeded it and contextualised it in a generative discourse of communality that is not represented in a characterisation of the play as ‘place-making’, representational, or socially responsible. These labels are either preemptive or retrospective, constituting the practice of theatre as a subsidiary to modes of understanding and being that are already embedded in the world. In this sense, they acknowledge, in theatre, a capacity to produce and inform subjective experiences of relation and obligation, but overlook theatre itself as a praxis of becoming in which negotiations of self and relation are made public. Thompson draws attention to this distinction as a differentiation between forms of engagement that he describes as epistemic and ontic respectively. As he suggests, epistemic participation tends to be privileged in social theatre
practice because of an assumed relationship with change making processes. This is theatre that trains, corrects, instructs and supports, and tends, by design, to correlate with other knowledge making and world ordering agendas. Ontic participation, in contrast, would be:

[W]here participants place themselves and their stories at the center of a lived experience. In this kind of workshop, there would not be a pulling back. People would do, react, and experience rather than receive, study, and reflect. (2004: 156)

It is, as Thompson argues, a pre-epistemic participation that foregrounds the non-representational dynamics of being and, significantly, of being with and in relation to others.

In the context of Melodramatics, some of this potential was articulated through the legible framework of Seeing Red, but it emerged, also, within improvised economies of care, collaboration, communication and support that are only peripherally related to narratives, both personal and cultural, as they characterise the activity of play-making. Though O’Neill-Rogan facilitated the sessions and offered Melodramatics creative guidance, she did not separate the process of making theatre from the interpersonal qualities of being together: making deliberate room for the women’s personal lives; for infrequent attendance; for young children when childcare couldn’t be arranged; for the sharing and discussion of issues relating to friends, partners and family. The process of making the play, therefore, came out of an environment that was significantly informed by the women’s individual circumstances and, indivisibly, mapped on to the contexts, influences and experiences that informed their lives outwith the framework of a drama group. In contrast to an industrialised model of productivity in which culture is valued in relation to the production of exchangeable goods, or an epistemic model in which activities are assigned value based on their relationship to existent modes of being and interaction, Melodramatics’ practice constituted a space of doing, in which cognisant, legible values were, in some ways, surplus to the practice of being in relation to one another. It is in this willingness to prioritise the contingent, unpredictable dynamics of being together that I argue Melodramatics opened up spaces of ontic relationality that framed their work together as a politicised form of collectivist organisation and disrupted economies of value and productivity as they were represented by the context of the UCAN centre as an extension of BAH.
Gaston Bachelard, in his meditation on the emotional and phenomenological constitution of space, invites his reader to consider space, not as a material reality, but as a performative relationship between the observer and the objective reality of material space (1994 [1964]: 1). Though writing several decades before Setha Low and Doreen Massey, whose arguments were considered in the previous chapter, what he adds to their articulation of space as a socially determined network of relational potential is a consideration of space as a fundamentally self-referential construct that reflects and underwrites our own sense of being in the world. While this reading could be mapped on to Low’s consideration of space as embodied and, in this way, enacted as a reflection of systems of value and understanding which are, fundamentally, articulated at the level of the individual (2016: 101), or Massey’s description of space as a ‘dynamic simultaneity’ (2010 [2005]: 55) from which we collaboratively actualise our social environments, Bachelard’s reading relates, more specifically, to a phenomenological discourse of relation that constitutes space as an experiential domain, articulated and activated through the material interface of the body. As Bachelard suggests, in the context of his spatial paradigm, “the cultural past doesn't count” (ibid.: i). Space does not possess an objective, verifiable dynamic but, rather, exists and occurs as individualised phenomena, perceived by those who encounter it in relation to their own histories of experience. It is from this perspective that Bachelard characterises the praxis between the material environment and the observer as poetics: the significance of space is not inherent, but unfolds in the imagination. This praxis, as Bachelard suggests, constitutes not an unfolding of meaning, but an unfolding of self, as the material environment invokes an ontological process that not only reminds us of past-times, but causes us to encounter and contend with their experiential and affective resonances within the context of the present. Space, as Bachelard characterises it, is deeply personal.

The model of space advanced by Bachelard is not, therefore, constructivist, in the sense that it is not inherently public but, rather, relates to an interior topography that is encountered and made knowable in the performative interaction between the self and the material world. Low describes social constructivism as a critical lens that assumes “space and place are abstractions – not a set of physical properties” (2016: 76) that are made both manifest and visible through behaviour, activities and interrelational praxes that coalesce into terrains of social and epistemological discourse. As an analogy for the potential of social relations, it reflects both a way of understanding the mechanics of the social world, and confining the social world to a realm of influence and potential legible in material space. Bachelard, in contrast, posits space as an immaterial and individualised phenomena which is,
in turn, implicated in a collective or public discourse at the performative intersection between the self and others. As Low observes, social constructivism emerged as a strategy with which to correlate the lived environment with social value and, in the context of a study that focuses on the interrelational praxis between six women, situated within a building which is, itself, reflective and constitutive of various narratives of social, cultural and economic value, remains a valuable lens through which to consider the outcomes of their practice together. I do not, therefore, intend to privilege Bachelard’s spatial paradigm over those I have already considered in this study. Rather, I want to draw attention to the ways in which a correlation between the spatial and the ontological might expand the field of influence and relation associated with the social constitution of space. In these terms, the public constitution of space reflects not only a form of social actualisation, informed and delimited by the interrelational framework of the present, but a strategy through which as yet unrealised dynamics of the self might be introduced to that environment. It is in this way that the process of spatialization, which is to say the collaborative constitution of a shared socio-epistemological environment, might also be associated with the pre-epistemic context of ontic participation to frame a field of relation and productivity that exceeds, as Low writes, “the political economy of the built environment” (ibid.: 26). Appended to Low’s articulation of space as a social construct, Bachelard’s paradigm could be seen to expand the field of productivity and relation that might be associated with the constitution of space to include registers of affect which, though they might inform social relations and the epistemic values they embody and articulate, can never fully be realised within the material domain and, in these terms, suggest a position from which to challenge or disturb convention as it is mapped on to the material environment.

It is within this framework that I would like to locate the UCAN centre on George Street in Bolton. Though Bachelard posits a paradigm in which the physical dimensions of space are largely subordinate to the ontological praxes they support, he acknowledges too the formative influence of the material environment on the self that emerges within and in relation to it. This influence is twofold. In the first, physical space provides a device with which to reflexively inform the phenomenological, experiential and social constitution of the self. Bachelard associates this influence with the dynamics of shelter or protection. As he suggests, “whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter: we shall see the imagination build ‘walls’ of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection” (1994: 5). For Bachelard, this protection is illusionary, not because it does not exist, but because it emerges as the intersection between site and imagination, as the poet...
invokes the material as an ontological domain. Considered, therefore, as a deliberate act of dwelling or occupation, space becomes partisan and proactive: reiterating those affective and experiential aspects that we choose to incorporate within its poetics, and excluding or subordinating aspects of our lives and selves that we would prefer to be separated from. Considered in relation to Paolo Virno’s articulation of refuge as a retreat or protection from the domain of capitalist production, there is perhaps an important distinction to be made here, for where Virno argues that refuge is unrealisable, at least in part, because the social mechanisms through which we might protect ourselves have been co-opted by capitalist interests (2004: 33), for Bachelard, space provides shelter precisely because it represents a mode of being and production that is pre-epistemic and, to this extent, before discourses of order and organisation as they apply to the material world. Whilst the experience and expression of the self can never be completely differentiated from strategies of discourse and representation as they are expressed and managed publicly, Bachelard’s conception of space’s protective function could, in these terms, be seen to refer to the kind of ontological negotiation that Phelan suggests is erased by capitalism’s preoccupation with representation and exchange.

Secondly, and of particular relevance to the relationship between ontology and theatre, the material environment implicates otherwise discrete discourses of self-realisation in a common plane of relation and influence. In this context, though we cannot inhabit the same ontological space, the spaces we articulate for ourselves are informed by commonalities that underwrite the public dimensions of spatial, temporal and cultural context. To introduce the UCAN centre into this domain, therefore, is to recognise: first, a generic association between the material and the ontological that implicates the centre in the evocation and articulation of the ontological present for those who occupy it; second, to associate the decision of individual members to incorporate the site within the routines of their social lives with a dynamic of shelter that protects particular experiences of becoming at the exclusion of others; and, third, to acknowledge a specific praxis between the social, cultural and economic conditions manifest within the context of the UCAN centre and the ways in which the self is expressed and experienced within that environment.

It is from this perspective that I am interested in the environment of the UCAN centre, not simply as a context in which the practical activities of play making took place, but as a process through which the group negotiated and established the social, relational and affective parameters of their work together as a response to or reaction against their lives and experiences outwith the group. Within this context, the UCAN centre takes on a strategic
significance as a collaboratively constituted social and ontological differentiation with which members were able to protect practices, relationships and experiences that associated the group with particular, contingent qualities of being and relation that sit alongside the practice of making theatre but reflect, also, a distinct field of productive activity. In the context of the time the group spent developing *Seeing Red*, this field could be traced through a range of activities that explicitly reframed the value of time and space within the context of their practice, such as the organisation of events such as raffles, clothes swaps, nights out and parties; the malleable priorities that allowed the sessions to operate as a combination of cultural practice, support group, childcare and social gathering; their long-term relationship to O’Neill-Rogan who, as both a trained mediator and trusted confidant, was often asked for advice relating to family conflicts and other personal issues; or, as I will focus on here, the making and drinking of tea.

Writing of the role of tea within a symbolic vernacular of lesbian identity, scholar on race, gender and sexuality, Amber Musser, positions tea as a symbol of semiotic and performative potential. As she suggests, as a common presence in social practice, tea is “not necessarily significant” (2015: 24) as a symbol in itself, but, positioned in relation to the socio-cultural contingencies of context and other signifying elements, can represent a powerful communicative nexus that both projects meaning and reflexively informs the socio-affective interior of the group involved in making tea. Commenting on what she describes as a paucity of significations that relate, particularly, to a discourse of lesbian identity Musser presents tea as an example of symbolic consolidation, in which diverse and individualised experiences are orientated around and articulated through commonplace activities. In the absence of a common discursive territory through which to negotiate and express identity and relation, the reflexive appropriation of everyday activities can, she argues, take on political significance as a technique with which to establish an ‘intimate public’, or, a communal experience of inclusion and interiority on the basis of a shared politics of understanding and recognition. In these terms, the function of tea extends beyond its role as social convention to act, within a knowing public, as a placeholder for interrelational practices, aesthetics of behaviour and shared values that underwrite the experience and articulation of forms of collective identity that are not otherwise recognised or supported. From this perspective, the making of tea, and other seemingly incidental activities, could be positioned in praxis with Bachelard’s spatial paradigm as a strategy with which Melodramatics negotiated the implications and constitution of the space that they occupied together.

In the context of Melodramatics’ practice, tea was made at the beginning of every
session. Those who had arrived early would wait for the majority of the group to arrive. Someone would take the initiative and offer to make tea. Members of the group who attended most frequently - Christine, Lyndsey, Kelly, Linda and Gill - were familiar with each other’s preferences, but new arrivals were welcomed with the questions: ‘How much milk?’, ‘How much sugar?’ After the kettle had boiled, a second member of the group would offer to help, and the tea would be made, brought through from the kitchen, and drunk. Throughout the eight months I spent with the group, and regardless of who was there, the progress that needed to be made on the play, or the circumstances of the women’s personal lives, this process was repeated, marking the start of their practice together.

In the context of her discussion, Musser positions tea as a mobile symbol of lesbian identity, reflexively invested with meaning dependent on context and usage. Within this context, its value is not fixed, but is associated with dynamics of sensuality, shared identity, eroticism, domesticity, even whiteness, depending on how context and usage activate it as a signifier (2015: 27-30). The symbolic value of the practice within the context of Melodramatics is, therefore, determined, not only by its recurrence, but by the particular concerns that are evoked in its usage. Positioned at the beginning of each session, it could, in the first instance, be associated with a differentiation from time and context as they apply outside the centre, to the particular social and ontological environment framed and precipitated by the group’s work together. Bachelard, himself, draws particular attention to the differentiation between interior and exterior in the constitution of space as an ontological or phenomenological domain. Commenting, particularly, on the symbolic function of the threshold, Bachelard associates the dialectic of interiority and exteriority with an exclusionary logic which, though represented by the material perimeter of the building, is internalised and enacted conceptually, metaphorically and ontologically. As he writes, “[o]utside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything” (1995: 211). The division, therefore, between outside and inside could be equated with a differentiation between states of being and relation that are implicitly opposed to one another and, as a practice positioned at the threshold between these domains, making tea could, similarly, be seen as a performative gesture that marks entrance into the group’s own, particular, socio-spatial order.

Secondly, the routine included both the making and the drinking of tea and, in this way, framed time within the context of Melodramatics’ practice that was not directed towards a specific purpose. Rather, it was made use of as a space in which to share and discuss
interests, some of which, such as the community clothes swap or Ann Summers parties mentioned above, could be associated with a mode of collaboration or productivity that easily maps on to material space, whilst others, such as issues related to family and relationships, were personal, often urgent, and invoked a correlation between otherwise private crises and the intimate public of the group. The time allocated to these activities contracted or expanded as necessary and, in this way, created an open ended space of transition that both moved towards the practice of theatre, as the ultimate goal of the group’s meeting, whilst allowing personal experience to linger and inform the constitution and experience of that practice. This effect was apparent in both representational and relational terms. In the first, experiences discussed over tea were often incorporated into the narrative of the play, occasionally repeated word for word. Relationally, issues brought up during tea informed the dynamic of the group thereafter, as members affected by a particular concern or issue were allowed different levels of commitment or engagement with the practice and with other members of the group, dependent on their needs. In this way, making tea could be allied with a 'beating of the bounds' that marked out and established particular social, relational and affective consistencies that informed the interiority of the group, whilst also acknowledging the ways in which “individual sensation and experience” (Musser 2015: 25) in the interim required the constitution of the group as a responsive, intimate, communality to adapt or change.

As a practice, making tea does not invoke a broad public. Rather, it draws attention to the specificities of both social and spatial context to invite or formalise a praxis between people that is, in a literal and metaphorical sense, intimate. It refers directly to the people in the room, while framing, also, the differentiation between the self as “a dispersed being” (Bachelard 1994: 7) and the self in contingent relation to others. It is from this perspective that I would argue that what emerges in the making of tea is the public manifestation of Bachelard’s shelter, as the women in the group explain, through various means, what they want to be included within the social and ontological framework of the group on a particular day, and what, instead, they want to be excluded. As I will consider, these differentiations are not always associated with a distancing from challenging personal circumstances for though tea served as a space for the women to catch up with one another - sharing stories of nights out, trips away, tv shows they had enjoyed - in many cases members would arrive ready to talk about difficult personal issues such as confrontations with their partners, challenges they were facing raising their children or, in one case, the cancellation of a wedding and the breakdown of a relationship. Rather than constitute the shelter of their practice as a benign
environment, differentiated from challenging personal circumstances, these conversations allude to a different dynamic in which specific experiences were included within the framework of the shelter in a deliberate effort to reframe how they are understood and temper their influence over the women’s sense and experience of self more generally. These dynamics refer to localised ecologies of care, understanding and support that are not reflected in an epistemic narration of the group’s practice, but are, nevertheless, essential to an understanding of the project’s value for the people who were part of it.

The practice of making tea brings attention to this phenomena but it is not, as I will demonstrate, limited to this activity. Rather, making tea helped establish the foundations of a shelter that sat within the material and institutional environment of the UCAN centre to provide the context within which the group’s practice took place. Constituted through a range of practices that foregrounded the intersection between ontological and interpersonal activity, Melodramatics’ shelter provided a common point of reference that helped return activities which, nominally, referred to the practice of making theatre, to the constitution of the group itself as a discrete site of collaborative becoming.

**Vulnerable Politics - ontology as relational praxis**

Despite his focus on the ontological dynamics of space, Bachelard’s paradigm could be associated with a privileging of the body. As he notes, the phenomenological and ontological characteristics of space are contingent, not on poesis itself, but, rather, on a quality of poetic imagination that is invoked by the relationship between the self and the material environment. He considers, in particular, the figure of the house to suggest that: “if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer” (1994: 6). The body is in this way positioned at the centre of an ontological domain which, though it exceeds the material contingencies of site, nevertheless continually refers back to the body as the seat of the imaginative praxes in relation to which the house is constituted as a poetic domain. Considered in this way, Bachelard’s shelter might be seen as a response to Hardt and Negri’s articulation of contemporary capitalism as a regime of property that relies on the sublation of bodies and the needs, experiences and forms of production that emerge in relation to them (2009: 35). Where Hardt and Negri describe a social response to neoliberal domination as a ‘biopolitical event’ that emerges from “the production of affects and languages through social cooperation.
and the interaction of bodies and desires” (ibid.: 58), shelter might be understood as the forum within which such an event might take place, or its significance, constitution and articulation negotiated. As Hardt and Negri observe, as a rupture of capitalism’s material and subjective constitution, the political event simultaneously resonates in both “anthropological and ontological terrain” (ibid.: 59), and the notion of shelter is perhaps most usefully understood, not as a purely conceptual domain, but as a politically significant nexus of social and ontological praxes, framed and facilitated by the relational contingencies of material space.

This reading of Melodramatics’ practice at the intersection between ontology and political potential could be seen to map on to Nicholson’s consideration of ‘relational ontology’ as a conceptual position from which to rethink not only theatre’s social and affective potential, but our understanding of the technologies with which theatre might address and pursue social change. As she suggests, in a context in which “the arts are often harnessed to neoliberal ideas of self-care” (in Hughes and Nicholson 2016: 251), and the nature of power itself has transformed from institutionalised disciplinarianism to implicit mechanisms of biopolitical control and influence, social constructivist models of change that seek to facilitate a critical reevaluation of power and authority as it is already embedded within the social world are no longer viable. Within this context, Nicholson positions the ontological dynamics of relational practice as a way of rethinking theatre’s political function, not as an effort to mobilise against forces of oppression, but as a technique with which to facilitate a ‘re-imagining’ of the social, cultural and relational parameters of everyday life so as to facilitate modes of becoming and relation that exceed or subvert convention as it relates to social and spatial context. This is possible, as Nicholson argues, because an interest in ontology signals a break from a lineage of thought and practice that associates political change with the re-organisation or re-inscription of material phenomena, or with discourses of meaning, order and representation mapped out in material space, and, instead, in terms that might be allied with Massey’s conception of ‘open, interactional’ space as considered in the previous chapter, “acknowledges that life is constantly improvised and constantly in flux” (ibid.: 254).

As I have previously observed, while Hardt and Negri suggest that the constitution of a paradigm of political relation beyond the restrictive dialectic of opposition and resistance relies on the collective manifestation of what they describe as ‘alternative forms of life’ (2009: 58), they do not specifically identify the technologies through which such a
project might be advanced. In their consideration of altermodernity, they allude to some characteristics that might be seen to indicate politically valuable forms of alterity, such as qualities of innovation and creativity that constitute the common as freely and continually available for recirculation and reconstitution into new forms, values and practices (2009: 112), and a multiplicity of subjective positions that are seen to form the basis for the production of a more general collectivist subjectivity (ibid.: 111), but these arguments are generally traced in theoretical rather than practical terms. Nicholson’s discussion, therefore, might be seen to open up space for thinking through the practicalities of Hardt and Negri’s proposition and, in particular, the material circumstances in relation to which theatre might relate to or facilitate forms of ontological praxis that situate the self and the collective as a localised collaborative project.

It is in relation to these processes that I suggest theatre might come into closest contact with discourses of collaborative becoming that might also be associated with community as political praxis, and it is this nexus of activity that I suggest Melodramatics leveraged to articulate themselves as a political force. Before examining this aspect of their practice, however, it is relevant to consider in more detail the implications of associating forms of interrelationality that Nancy, for instance, might position as pre-representational or pre-epistemic, with the material interface of the body and forms of influence or control that might apply particularly to a notion of political activity predicated on embodiment and co-presence in material terms. As political philosophers Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers and Susan Dodds suggest, the nexus between ontology and the body could be seen to expose models of political agency constituted in these terms to specific qualities of hegemonic influence and ontological risk (2014). Drawing particularly on the work of Judith Butler (2004; 2009), they suggest that the indivisible relationship between the self and the corporeal situates the self in contingent relation to influences that are the result of embodiment, such as hunger, illness and thirst; exercised upon the body, such as neglect, exploitation and political violence; or received through the body, such as emotional trauma, social affect and interdependence (2014: 1, 4). Describing these conditions in terms of ‘vulnerability’, the authors argue that embodiment associates the human condition with a quality of indivisible exposure that makes the self, at all times, subject to influences that are both beyond our control and constituent of broader processes of oppression or exploitation. Whilst this perspective does not in itself problematise the notion that theatre’s political agency might emerge through a nexus of social and ontological processes, the authors draw particular
attention to vulnerability as a dynamic force, suggesting that whilst it could be seen, in the first instance, as a ubiquitous characteristic of the human condition, the ways in which it is expressed and experienced, and the ways in which it facilitates or constrains individual articulations of self, agency and relational potential, are highly and specifically circumstantial. Articulating these concerns through what they describe as a taxonomy of vulnerability (ibid.: 7), Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds suggest that the political dynamics of ontological expression are situationally contingent, dependent on the source, cause, influence and intensity of vulnerability itself. Within this context, the social and political resonances of relational ontology must be considered, not only in relation to the intentions and interests of the people directly involved in the practice, but as a subordinate aspect of broader socio-political discourses that also influence and are articulated through the framework of the self.

These arguments problematise the extent to which notions of relational ontology might be seen as socially progressive or, even, relationally defined, and could be mapped on to Melodramatics’ practice in a number of ways. As a lens with which to analyse the influences and consequences of vulnerability, Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds elaborate on what they describe as the ‘inherent’ characteristic of human vulnerability to describe ‘situational’ vulnerability as a circumstantial quality of exposure that emerges as a result of external forces or interests (2014: 7). They draw particular attention to natural disaster as an illustration of situational vulnerability, but the terminology might equally be applied to environments constituted in social, cultural or political terms that give rise to particular forms of risk, uncertainty or instability. Melodramatics, for instance, were established by BAH which instates, at the outset, a degree of situational vulnerability as the resources they use to support their practice are controlled and managed by an institution whose interests and objectives supersede their own. In these terms, the capacity for the group to attend to the social and political constitution of their collaborative becoming is disproportionately exposed to the influence of BAH, who could decide to take away their space, remove their institutional support, or repurpose the group to serve a different facet of the organisation’s strategic aims.

As a continuation of this relationship, the group might also be understood as exposed to the vulnerability of the institution itself. As a social housing charity operating in a context of decreasing public spending and substantial welfare reforms, BAH are, themselves, exposed to heightened levels of economic vulnerability which could be seen to inform the social and political resonances of the group’s interaction with one another. In their 2016-21
strategy document, *Our Plan*, BAH summarise these vulnerabilities as: “risk of increased rent arrears and bad debt as a result of the range of welfare benefit reforms” (2016: 20) and associate their financial stability with an efficient programme of ‘rent recovery and void management’ - ensuring that unpaid rent is collected and empty properties filled with paying tenants. As I have noted, the organisation explicitly identifies the training and activities available through the UCAN centres as part of their economic strategy, as an opportunity to encourage tenants to model socially and economically responsible behaviour. In the context of Melodramatics, this relationship was made explicit by frequent interruptions by BAH employees who used the group’s regular meetings as an opportunity to engage with their tenants. Members were encouraged to participate in savings schemes, such as Hoot Credit Union’s *Christmas Saver*, that promote financial responsibility, sign up to skills workshops offered by the organisation as an aid to employment, and take part in formalised modes of socio-civic participation such as building puppets with other BAH residents for the Manchester Day Parade. Whilst, in the first instance, these interventions could be seen to attend to the wellbeing of BAH tenants by encouraging higher levels of economic and social independence, considered within the framework of situational vulnerability, they could be seen, too, as a strategy with which BAH utilised their institutional structure to transfer vulnerabilities that are a consequence of national economic policy onto their tenants. Within this framework, the particular ways in which BAH are exposed to vulnerability could be seen to reflexively determine the types of activities, interests and relational practices that are pursued within the context of the UCAN centre and, subsequently, the ways in which Melodramatics’, themselves, represent and articulate socio-political value.

As Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds make clear in their discussion, these concerns could be seen as illustrative of social context and the “ontological condition of human life” (2014: 3) more broadly, and while the ways in which I have traced their effects here are intentionally specific to the context in which Melodramatics worked, similar concerns could be seen to apply to practice in any context with any degree of institutional, financial or political oversight. If we accept vulnerability as constitutively related to being, self-expression and agency, as Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds suggest, then a discourse of political activity beyond the broad oppositionalism of left- and right-wing politics must, inevitably, contend with the qualities of exposure and influence highlighted in their discussion. Framing the interface between ontology and social practice as a site of political potential, therefore, requires a deliberate and careful interest in the conditions that inform and
direct relational becoming and, in particular, strategies for protecting or differentiating this process from the multiple other influences that coerce the self into particular, partisan forms.

It is this dynamic that I feel is not fully expressed in Nicholson’s articulation of relational ontology. As she writes in conclusion, relational ontology, “brings together the ephemeral, the technological, the environmental and the material, and in ways that extend beyond binary thought [...] taking affect beyond interpersonal relationships and into a more expansive ecology of matter, flows, assemblages and bodies” (in Hughes and Nicholson 2016: 266). Whilst I agree, in essence, with Nicholson’s assertion that a consideration of the intersection between ontology and theatre usefully expands conceptions of theatre’s affective and political dimensions, the transition traced here is perhaps made uncritically, in ways that echo Nicolas Ridout’s discussion of the ‘good community’ (2013: 25), and an ideological position that assumes socially constituted discourse, practice and productivity are essentially beneficial to a progressive political agenda. In the context of the intersection between theatre and ontology specifically, the mobilisation of social practice in this way might be seen to acknowledge the vulnerable characteristics that posit the self and social agency as constitutively related to the interests and influences of others, but stops short of acknowledging the broader complications posed by vulnerability as an ontological condition. What is of interest, therefore, in Melodramatics’ practice, and what I hope to examine through the figure of the shelter, is an apparent capacity to protect categories of becoming, vulnerability and political expression from the forces outlined above, in ways that allowed the group to articulate themselves as a site of difference or alterity in relation, both, to the broad discourse of neoliberal production, and the circumstantial influences that contextualised their practice.

**Vulnerable Practice - immateriality and political action**

As Bachelard observes, the values embedded in the notion of shelter are not generic but, rather, emerge out of the particular ways in which those who constitute the shelter understand and enact its value. As he writes, “the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to [their] shelter” (1994: 5). In the context of Melodramatics, the limits and possibilities of the space they negotiated and established together were usefully summarised by Gill during a conversation about why the group had decided to make *Seeing Red*. As she noted, while
abuse is an isolating and lonely experience, it can quickly become normalised. Within this context, ‘it’s people from the outside what comes in and has a gander’ that reveal behaviours and experiences that have become familiar as potentially dangerous, manipulative or controlling, and makes space for a reconsideration of how people involved in abusive relationships understand their relationship to their partner, the environment of their home lives, and themselves. In the context of the conversation, Gill is commenting on what she saw as the potential impact of *Seeing Red* within Farnworth, and the possibility that the performance of the play might encourage local residents to reflect on their own experiences differently. However, her observation might equally apply to the group itself, as an illustration of a quality of mutual, willing exposure to one another, and I link Gill’s assertion back to the quote from Kelly with which I opened this chapter, and a form of productive activity that straddles both ontological and political registers of influence and outcome to facilitate the group’s collective articulation of themselves ‘after’ abuse.

Commenting on the relationship between social context and vulnerability, Dodds examines vulnerability through the lens of dependency. In the context of her argument, she positions dependence as the counterpoint to the “idealized conception of the liberal person as an independent, autonomous agent” (2014: 181), to suggest that we are always and inevitably dependent on others whose actions, interests and influence direct our own practices of self-realisation and expression. As she describes it, dependency is determined, not by deliberate, legible acts of oppression or subjugation, but by an absence of autonomy that is remedied only through the support of another, empowered, person, or by the intervention of systemic supports such as welfare or social services (in Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds 2014: 182). It is in these terms that Dodds positions dependency as a discourse of control that reproduces economies of privilege and inequality by ensuring that the agency and actions of individuals - the ways in which they navigate the world and articulate themselves in relation to it - are inherently vulnerable to the influence and interests of others who are already empowered. This discourse, too, might be traced on to the context of the UCAN centre and the contingent relationship between Melodramatics’ practice and the interests of those within BAH who are institutionally and socially empowered.

I suggest, however, that Gill’s statement might be seen as a response to Dodds’ assertion, as an indication of dependency’s proactive, progressive potential. For Dodds, dependence is disempowering because it instates a paradigm in which agency is subject to the intervention and support of another person. As she writes, “[t]o be dependent is to be in
circumstances in which one must rely on the care of other individuals to access, provide or secure (one or more of) one’s needs” (2014: 183). Gill’s assertion, however, suggests an adjacent paradigm of relation in which the dependent characteristics of care are internalised within the group, to establish an environment in which they might be seen as mutually responsible for securing and attending to one another's needs. Whilst, within this context, they remain subject to the influence of external interests in terms outlined by Dodds, a paradigm of mutual inter-dependence could be seen, too, to establish the group as an distinct field of agency and potential.

Considered from Gill's perspective, the quality of indivisible exposure posited by Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds could be seen, not to compromise the integrity and autonomy of the group, but to act as a resource with which they were able to, both: establish themselves as a context in which notions of self and the contingent agency of self-expression were subject to the constructive influence of others; and to mobilise values negotiated and articulated through this environment within or against the institutional and political context of the centre in which they worked. In these terms, the nexus between interrelational and ontological activity framed by Melodramatics’ practice might be linked back to considerations of community’s performative and political dynamics first considered in chapter one, and to allude to strategies of political activity that might also be seen to elaborate on Hardt and Negri’s notion of ‘event’ as a socially constituted rupture of existing regimes of order and consistency (2009: 53). It is the constitution and articulation of this agency that I posit as an example of community as political praxis and trace in this final section. Before continuing, however, it should be noted that as some of the details included here relate to the women’s own histories of abuse and, as I will argue, served a specific purpose in relation to Melodramatics’ articulation of themselves as a discrete territory of social and ontological negotiation, as opposed to their public facing practice, I have decided to anonymise some of the stories included here.

In the context of Melodramatics’ practice, there is one exercise in particular that illustrates the interaction between the group and the institutional framework of the UCAN centre, and the ways in which their discrete reimaginings of self and relation could be said to exercise a broader social or political influence. When I first began to observe the group’s practice at the beginning of 2015, they had been working on the play for two or three months. They had a clear sense of what they wanted to achieve with the play, and the types of events that would take place within it, but they had not worked out who the characters should be, or
how they should relate to one another within the play's narrative. To support this aspect of the play's development, O'Neill-Rogan asked Matt, a playwright, to come along to a few sessions and facilitate the group through some writing exercises designed to help develop character. On his first visit, Matt introduced a bag of objects and asked each member to pick one. The group were asked to make the object the basis of a short piece of writing about a character that might appear in the play, considering, in particular, the story that the object might be part of. As Matt noted, the purpose of the exercise was to help develop a sense of who the characters in the play were and what their life might be like outside the constraints of the narrative to help inform an understanding of how they might act within the context of the play itself.

However, although Matt made the purpose of the exercise clear and, specifically, the intention to develop fictional characters for the purpose of developing the play, it became clear as we went around the table and each member shared their work that all of the women had chosen to write, directly or indirectly, about their own experiences. In these tellings, the function of the exercise as a way of elaborating on or enriching an understanding of character remained, but the fictive element of the narratives were entirely dismissed. One member had chosen a small metal model of the Eiffel Tower. As she noted when she shared her story, she picked the model because her first husband had proposed to her under the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The relationship had been abusive, and, as she explained, her husband had been a destructive presence in her life for the duration of their ten year marriage. After a number of years away from the area, he had recently returned to Farnworth and was trying to persuade her to let him move back in with her. As she stated at the end of her story, ‘I do not want to go back’. Another member, similarly, chose an envelope as an illustration of her relationship with her daughter. As she noted when she shared her story, she had always wanted to tell her daughter how much she loved her, but had never felt able to say it to her directly. She explained that she selected the envelope because she knew it was important for her daughter to understand that she cared about her, and thought that she might be able to express these feelings in writing.

Other stories around the table followed a similar pattern. Rather than use the prompts, as had been intended, as inspiration for an imagined narrative, members engaged with the exercise as a way of examining the conditions of their own lives in the context of the present, and introducing those considerations to the rest of the group. In recognition of the pressing and, sometimes, painful resonances of the stories that were shared, and regardless of
Matt’s efforts to refocus the exercise, the group made space after each story to respond, share other related experiences and give advice. Without it having been discussed, the women recognised the implicit value of the exercise as a strategy with which to negotiate the constitution of their shelter together, and, rather than allow the practice to be subsumed within an epistemic paradigm, used the exercise as a platform with which to reinforce the group’s relationship to an ethics of care and mutual responsibility.

Matt’s intention for the exercise could be aligned with an epistemic mode of participation as a strategy with which to translate member’s individual histories of experience into a public narrative. By reflexively laying claim to this mechanism, however, the women told the story, instead, of their relationship to one another. From this perspective, the value of the exercise was not the legible outcomes it produced in terms of the stories the women told but, rather, the reflexive interaction between those outcomes and the group itself as framework that facilitates and supports particular, contingent qualities and experiences of being. In these terms, whilst, with the exception of the second story above, the group’s discussions related to the issue of abuse and, more specifically, the women's own experiences of having been abused, the performative gesture of their work together was, rather, to remain un-abused: to be in the present with the other women in the room, differentiated from experiences that are - by a matter years, days or hours - in the past. This is not, therefore, a performance of the self that negates or ignores the realities of abuse as they exist for the people in the room, but, rather the mobilisation of interdependent qualities of social and ontological relationality to underwrite a powerful assertion that experiences of abuse do not constitute the self.

Secondly, the ways in which the group engaged with and mobilised Matt’s exercise could be seen also to underwrite new forms of agentic potential that cross over into environments outwith the specific framework of the group itself. As the conversations stimulated by the exercise were coming to a close, the group member who had shared the story of her engagement interrupted to say that she had added something else to her story. She explained that she still had the wedding ring from the marriage and that it had served as a constant reminder of a damaging relationship. She stated that she had decided to sell the ring to pay for a flight, and that her plan was to fly to Paris alone and leave the now empty ring box in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower. Whether or not she actually fulfills this plan, it is clear that, positioned in relation to the group’s reframing of the exercise as a continuation of their own, immanent discourses of relation and becoming, the exercise had not only provided a
mechanism with which to introduce otherwise private experiences to the negotiated public of the group, but, at a time in her life when she felt particularly vulnerable to the influence of an abusive partner, imagine new ways of interacting with and influencing the conditions of her own life. The woman in the second example, similarly, discussed the story she wrote during the exercise as a rehearsal for a letter she intended to write to her daughter, and explicitly linked the format of the exercise with the context of her own life, explaining that she has a card from her daughter that she always carries with her and that she plans to use it as a prompt to begin writing her own letter.

In these examples, we can see the qualities of self expression allowed and supported by the group’s interdependence give rise to forms of agency or, at least, new ways of thinking the self and the self in relation to others, that layer on to socio-relational discourses that inform and constitute their lives more generally. In this way, though a paradigm of interdependence suggests a quality of interiority which is, in turn, enforced by the notional construct of the shelter and the material framework of the centre, it could be seen, too, as a seat of social and ontological imagination that underwrites new ways of interacting with or being in the world as a reflection and extension of its internal politics. This dynamic is illustrated in these examples, which arose through the recognisable framework of a theatre exercise, but could also be mapped on to activities undertaken by the group that are only peripherally related to the practice of making a play. Efforts to establish a swap shop to help redistribute food and clothes within the area, or the group’s interest in the using the performance of Seeing Red as a platform for a public discussion about abuse could, similarly, be seen as a continuation of discourses of care, interrelation and mutual responsibility first posited within the group’s own socio-relational interior.

To return to a consideration of Melodramatics’ practice as a continuation of my interest in community and, in part, as a response to the ongoing influence of the paradigm of the good community within notions of relationally constituted discourse and agency, what emerges in these instances is not the generic figuration of community as an articulation of progressive politics, or as an institutionally or economically determined social body. It is not designed to be ‘operative’ in terms criticised by Nancy or earlier associated with the notion of economic or political work. Rather, their practice together might be seen to posit an interdependent form of relational praxis which, though it might be associated with legible effects beyond the relational context of the group, continually refers back to the group as a discourse of social and ontological relation.
As Nancy argues, in the translation from innate relationality to the representational framework of society, it is precisely the immanent characteristic of ‘being-in-common’ that is erased or displaced from practices of social formation, relation and production that might subsequently be identified or mobilised as community. As he writes: “The community that becomes a single thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader ...) necessarily loses the in of being-in-common. Or, it loses the with or the together that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being of togetherness” (1991: xxxix). Hardt and Negri signal a similar assertion in their interest in the intersection between embodiment and radical or subversive subjectivities, to suggest that what is removed from social discourse under neoliberalism is the capacity for people to act together to mobilise and redistribute the common in specific relation to needs and experiences that arise out of their embodiment. In foregrounding inter-dependence as a strategy of relation and becoming, therefore, Melodramatics might be seen to articulate a model of collaborative praxis that exceeds itself as a subsidiary to narratives of organisation and value as they apply to the context of the UCAN centre, and the economically derived principles of the neoliberal condition more broadly, to, instead operate independently both within and beyond these constraints. In these terms, though the circumstances of the group’s practice are informed by agencies, interests and authorities that supersede and contextualise their work, their constitution as community - the constitution of their interrelationality, its characteristics and outcomes - is entirely self-determined. It is this differentiation that I suggest is essential to an understanding of community as a site of political discourse, and the distinction between social practice as it is implicated in the practice of theatre and as it operates to support and reproduce the constitution of neoliberal interests.

**Conclusion**

For Hardt and Negri, what constitutes the altermodern as a category of political discourse beyond the oppositional principles of the antimodern, or the complicit rearticulation of capitalist modernity, is a move from resistance to alterity that they associate with the principle and praxis of “social becoming” (2009: 105). Framing alterity as a rupture in socio-political convention as it is proposed by neoliberal capitalism, they suggest that the possibility of altermodernity is not only subject to social technologies of production and redistribution, but a collectively orientated subjectivity that might associate those qualities of
becoming with discourses of value, order and potentiality that exceed the constraints and logic of capitalist discourse. As referenced in the opening chapter of this thesis, capitalist subjectivity is, similarly, seen as a fundamental challenge to theatre’s progressive ambitions with authors such as Jen Harvie (2013), Miranda Joseph (2002) and Dani Snyder-Young (2013) suggesting that the ontological and social conditions of neoliberal society might be seen to redirect theatre’s radical ambitions to serve discourses of order, value and productivity that reflexively advance capitalist interests. What I propose, therefore, as Melodramatics’ most valuable contribution to a consideration of theatre’s relationship to the political dynamics of social practice, are the ways in which their practice together might be seen to outline the notion of shelter as a nexus of social and ontological interests from which new subjective positions might be encountered, taken up and mobilised.

I opened this chapter with a quote designed to help frame the intersection between ontology and social practice that I saw as unique to Melodramatics’ practice and central to an understanding of its political effects. Associating the outcomes of their practice together with the constitution and articulation of selves that are somehow beyond or after abuse, however, introduces a sense of instrumentality to their work which, while it might be seen, from an epistemic perspective, to make their work meaningful, also invokes a notion of resolution that is essentially dissimilar to the characteristics of community and shelter as I understand them. As Bachelard notes in his description of shelter, its function is not to encourage social, political and ontological discourse to coalesce into a coherent, repeatable structure, but, rather, to ‘protect the dreamer’ (1995: 6). In as much as it describes a structural development, therefore, the shelter might be seen to posit processes of imagination, reconfiguration and becoming as perpetually unresolved. These characteristics might be read in relation to several areas of discussion that I have developed throughout this thesis: as a continuation of Massey’s conception of space as “unfinished and always becoming” (2010: 59), as associating the common with a radical malleability that Hardt and Negri associate with altermodernity, or, to reference Cathy Turner’s conception of dramaturgy and my interest in her ideas as an articulation of community, as a context of socio-political negotiation “always emerging” (2010: 151) in relation to itself. In any case, however, and with respect to the personal significance of the differentiation illustrated in Kelly’s statement, the shelter might be understood in constitutive relation to discourses of social, spatial and ontological imagining that are in some ways always beyond economies of meaning and representation that Phelan, Nancy, Hardt and Negri and others correlate with the hegemonic influence of neoliberal capitalism.

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It is in these terms that I suggest Bachelard’s shelter might be associated with politically significant re-formation of subjectivity. In the first instance, it posits a state of relation in which the constitution of the self is contingently related to the interests and influence of others. This reading, however, might also be linked back to Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds’ concerns and an articulation of a politically regressive vulnerability. What distinguishes the shelter, therefore, from the broader principle of ontological vulnerability, is the notion of delineation embedded in its material and conceptual dynamics. Just as Bachelard writes that the differentiation between interior and exterior might be allied with a dialectics of yes and no “which decides everything” (1995: 211), so the proposition of an interior in material, social or ontological terms, privileges the interests and influences of some at the deliberate and strategic exclusion of others. It is the particular intersection between interiority and ontology framed by the notion of the shelter and demonstrated in Melodramatics’ practice that I associate with the production of new, collectivist subjectivities, and posit as the resource that allowed the group to reflexively appropriate the cultural dynamics of play-making, the everyday practice of making tea, and myriad other formal and informal practices, to serve in their constitution as a discrete network of communal becoming.

To map this paradigm onto a discourse of theatre practice more generally, we might suggest that what is invoked at the intersection between theatre and community is not the broad imperative to liberate or mobilise community as political work or, to reference the legacy of alternative theatre, the politically partisan ‘regeneration’ of community (Kershaw 1992: 60). Rather, it is a much more specific and localised attention to the resources and opportunities through which a possible community might articulate and shelter themselves. In the context of Melodramatics’ practice, the strategies through which they expressed themselves as community were structurally and indivisibly dependent on the organisational infrastructure of BAH, the material context of the UCAN centre and the cultural expertise of O’Neill-Rogan and the Bolton Octagon. In these terms, the constitution and articulation of Melodramatics’ community is not specifically dependent on theatre’s cultural or representational dynamics. Rather, it relies, instead, on the capacity for theatre practice to release these resources, even temporarily, from their obligation to broader discourses of productivity and value in ways that frame the possibility, rather than the certainty, of alternate forms of relation, becoming and politics. As I have argued at other points in this thesis, it is no longer practical to imagine strategies of social becoming, relational practice or cultural production that are not, in some ways, “contaminated” (Hardt and Negri 2009: ix) by the...
influence and imperatives of capitalist labour. It is in this sense of possibility, therefore, that I suggest there remains space for the communitarian dynamics of being-in-common to exercise a constitutive influence over the form and politics of social practice, and to give political voice to the uncertain, generative framework of community.
Chapter 6:

Conclusion - common community, felicitous politics

Community, Possibility and Politics

In the introduction to this thesis, I framed community as a troubling concept, suggesting that it might be positioned at the intersection between communitarian and capitalist values. In these terms, as I argued, the political dynamics of theatre practice that aims work with or in social contexts is not certain but, rather, should be seen as subject to the particular ways in which community is understood and made manifest in relation to theatre. In response, I have followed the idea of community as political praxis throughout this study. My intention has been to posit community as a self-determining framework of relations, values and discourses, caught in the performative and ontological flux of becoming, and to consider the ways in which the dynamics of social praxis understood in these terms might be seen to relate to or emerge within the context of theatre. In broad terms, therefore, the trajectory through the three case study projects considered here could be understood as a gradual politicisation of community itself, where the dispersed agencies evident in the context of the Create Course give way to the more deliberately collectivist practice of Everybody’s House and, finally, the remobilisation of communitarian discourse against infrastructures of social and institutional control evident in the context of Melodramatics. As I noted in my description of community’s troubling dynamics, I am interested in community, not as a response to capitalist politics specifically but, rather, as a context in which the elision of the social world within capitalist discourses of order, productivity and control is made, even temporarily, uncertain. In suggesting, therefore, that the arc of this study might be understood in terms of the increasing politicisation of community, I do not mean that community as it was expressed by Melodramatics is more political because it is more definitively opposed to the logics and constitution of capitalism, but that their practice and relationship together frames, most fully, the capacity for community to operate as a site of possibility in which the logics, interests and values of any ideological or political regime are potentially subject to reconsideration, rearticulation and change. It is this possibility that I identify as central to the idea of community as political praxis and trace here as a conclusion to this study.

In reference to the theoretical perspectives I have drawn on to support this discussion, the trajectory outlined above might be read in two ways. In the first, and in reference to Paolo
Virno from whom I borrowed the notion of praxis as socially constituted political action, it could be seen as a development from praxis to poiesis. As he suggests, in reference to the capitalist construct that he describes as post-Fordist modernity, while praxis might be understood as a quality of political relation inherent to social practice and context - as he writes, a framing of “the possible and the unforeseen” (2004: 50) - poiesis represents the subjective condition that reframes these discourses as labour in service of an overarching political or organisational regime. As I have noted at various points in this study, considered from this perspective, the possibility of a socially constituted politics is contingently related to the liberation of praxis from capitalist logics of labour and productivity that seek to enclose and direct the political potential of social practice. It is in respect to this framework that I suggest we might consider the differentiation between the projects included in this study as a transition from praxis to poiesis, as the individuated expression of relational politics evident in the Create Course gives way to collaborative communitarian discourse that might be allied with the reconstitution of political labour and the structures and processes it is seen to support. In reference, therefore, to Nicolas Ridout’s theorisation of freedom as praxis beyond the productive imperative of capitalist labour (2013: 17), we might consider community as it is expressed in relation to Melodramatics’ practice, not as community beyond work specifically, but as an ‘unworking’ that is achieved through the strategic introduction of interests, priorities and values that disturb discourses of labour and production as they are embedded within neoliberal society and the context of the UCAN centre specifically.

Secondly, we might consider this study as a transition from the antimodern to the altermodern. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest in their theorisation of these subjects, antimodern agencies take up notions of oppositionalism or resistance as political strategies and might, for this reason, be understood in subordinate or even complementary relation to mechanisms of order and production that constitute capitalist modernity (2009: 101). It is in relation to the circular logic of oppression and resistance that they posit altermodernity as a practice and subjective position that ruptures the logics and power relations of contemporary capital through the constitution of autonomous, interdependent social structures. Where, therefore, the Create Course’s interest in drawing on Littlewood’s Fun Palace as political practice might be seen to frame the notion of community in ways that align with antimodernity, as an opposition to capitalist interests embedded in cultural discourse and a class-based hierarchy, Everybody’s House might be understood as a step towards forms of autonomous social production that were given fullest voice in the context of Melodramatics and the UCAN centre. Indeed, in the context of Melodramatics’ practice
specifically, it is arguably the group’s complicit relationship with otherwise capitalist interests as they were articulated through the institutional framework of BAH, and as antimodern practice might seek to work against, confront or oppose, that allowed them to realise themselves as a discrete context of social becoming and political expression.

Throughout this discussion I have drawn on the perspectives of Virno and Hardt and Negri as important illustrations of the context and conditions of contemporary capital and, more significantly, the potential for new forms of political expression that might remain even as social instinct, practice and productivity are mobilised on behalf of economic interests. As has been addressed, they pursue different narratives of capitalist oppression, with Virno providing the metaphysical counterpart to Hardt and Negri’s more anthropologically informed analysis. What they have in common, however, and perhaps the final trajectory that might be applied to this study, is a preoccupation with subjectivity as the seat of capitalist power and, consequently, an understanding that the subversion, disruption or reconfiguration of capitalist subjectivity is a necessary counterpart to the possibility of change. This transition, too, might be mapped on to the three case studies included here: as a move from the explicitly socialist subjectivity promoted by the Create Course, and criticised by Hardt and Negri as a reiteration of capitalism’s privatising influence (2009: ix); to the communitarian form of subjectivity evident in Everybody’s House that I described as ‘neighbourly’ but might, more generally, be seen to refer to the embodiment of social context as open and unfinished; and, finally, towards the localised nexus of social and ontological interests framed by Melodramatics’ practice that might be seen to take as its subject the constitution and revision of subjectivity for those who took part. In these terms, whilst community as political praxis might, materially, be expressed and evidenced through the creative, radical or subversive reconfiguration of social context and social practice, these dynamics are contingent on an ulterior capacity for community to facilitate the reimagining or reconstitution of subjective positions in service of a strategically communitarian sense and economy of self-expression. It is these two dynamics that I suggest are central to community’s political value in general and, more specifically, should be privileged and pursued through the practice of theatre in social contexts.

Common Community, Felicitous Politics

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The discussion outlined above might also be seen to draw attention to the second significant proposition framed by this thesis, that community, as it is made legible through social practice in material space, is indivisibly subject to discourses of representation, order and communication that exceed and, in this way, subvert the interrelational instinct to be and act together that might be seen as the ontological and political preserve of community. I supported this position with Jean-Luc Nancy’s suggestion that for community to be of itself it must also be inoperative, which is to say, not correlated with function, value or representation within the politically partisan discourses that give public form to society (1991). This perspective might also be traced through the work of Doreen Massey and her conviction that the social, cultural and political discourses embedded in and represented by the material expression of space are fundamentally dissimilar to the innate potentiality of social life (2010: 7-8). Either perspective might be seen to support the assertion that theatre’s contribution towards progressive change is best expressed through a relationship to community as open, interactional and unresolved, but they might each also be seen to raise significant questions about the strategies through which such a project might be achieved, and whether it is, in essence, possible to articulate an open, interactional community within a framework of social, cultural and political values that immediately and irrevocably arrest the potentiality of self and social relation within discourses of order and productivity as they already exist.

It is for these reasons that here, in conclusion, I return to the idea of the felicitous community. Where my consideration of community as praxis and political praxis throughout this study has tended to privilege an attention to the processes and resources through which community might articulate or express itself, a return to the felicitous dynamics of community is intended to invite a more detailed consideration of the extent to which theatre might be positioned in service of these processes. If, as I have noted, it not possible to imagine an essential correlation between social forms of practice, representation and production and the pre-epistemological, pre-poietic state of relation that Nancy correlates with community and others in this study with the innate politics of the human condition (Hardt and Negri 2009; Virno 2004), then theatre’s relationship to social practice is foregrounded as a necessary resource with which to interact with or intervene in these discourses and through which community might be expressed as a political force.

Scholars from within the field of socially-engaged theatre, such as Jen Harvie (2013) and Dani Snyder-Young (2013), as well as academics from political philosophy and cultural studies such as Miranda Joseph (2002) and Zygmunt Bauman (2006), have responded to the
rise of biopolitical forms of capitalist influence by disassociating collectivist social practice
from a progressive field of influence and politics. For instance, in a turn echoed in Harvie’s
critique of cultural participation as economic labour (2013: 26-60), Joseph positions
community in supplementary relationship to capitalism, as a site of social practice and
knowledge making that appears to offer an alternative to capitalism while, in actuality,
“balancing and humanizing it, even, in fact, enabling it” (2002: 1). As I examined in chapter
one, considered together these narratives could be seen to posit a world in which practices
that privilege social values or aim to articulate a politics orientated around an ethics of
progressive communitarianism are fundamentally compromised. As Joseph notes in the
conclusion to her own monograph on the political potential of community:

I opened this book with the hope that it might clear a space for creative thinking
about the constitution of collective action, that it might contribute to movements for
social change. Between that opening and this conclusion, I have told what might be
taken to be a very depressing story, one that might seem to close off spaces of
activism by implicating community, so often the imagined basis for activism, in
capitalism. (Joseph 2002: 171)

I remain, however, drawn to the relationship between theatre and community as a
valuable seat of political expression, not because I disagree with the above commentary, but
as a response to the number of projects that I have encountered, as both a researcher and
audience member, that engage with the context of contemporary neoliberalism in ways that
seem to unsettle or resist efforts to enclose the social and, thereby, political dimensions of
theatre in this way. Three such projects have been considered in this study. These are projects
operating in tension with the precarities of project limited funding, an evidence based funding
paradigm and limited material resources, engaging with participants who are, similarly,
subject to various circumstantial and occurrent vulnerabilities as a result of capitalist
influence. Within and in relation to this context, however, they illustrate creative, ambitious,
politicised methodologies that acknowledge commercial, economic or measurable registers of
efficacy and value, whilst creating spaces for forms of participation and productivity that
appear, in different ways and to varying degrees, to exceed and subvert these constraints.
Whilst, therefore, I am sympathetic to Harvie and Joseph’s arguments, and recognise their
authority as an articulation of the anti-social characteristics of capitalist society, the projects
included here encourage a more complicated reading of the relationship between community
and theatre and, in particular, the ways in which specific formations of communitarian praxis
might make a positive contribution towards a progressive political project.
As I have described it, the felicitous community emerges as a response and in relation to the environment in which it takes place. Whilst, in the first instance, this can be seen as a challenge to an ideological commitment to community as an expression and representation of communitarian ethics, it might be seen, too, as an invitation to think critically about how processes of liberation, resistance and collective organisation might appear and relate to the uniquely ‘fluid’ (Bauman 2000: 2) context of contemporary global culture. It is in these terms that I posit the contingent characteristics of the felicitous community as a lens that not only helps reveal the uncertainties associated with collective social practice in a neoliberal context, but might also be used to uncover circumstantial moments of participation, interrelationality and productivity that exist within practices contained and compromised by a neoliberal economy but might yet allude to alternate paradigms of communitarian productivity. Where, therefore, in my initial description of the felicitous community, I urged caution by suggesting that the community that emerges in relation to theatre is not necessarily the community that we would like to imagine but, rather, the community that is allowed, here I am interested in the ways in which the projects considered in this study might be seen to have allowed for forms of practice and productivity that could also be described as community.

If, as considered in chapter two, the mobilisation of community and social practice as work might be linked back to the institution and articulation of capitalism as a “social relation” (Hardt and Negri 2009: ix), then it is in the spaces beyond or between the interrelational and material implications of this relation that the progressive dynamics of the felicitous community become apparent. In the context of the Create Course, for instance, there are multiple claims being made about the community the participants relate to, the forms in which it should be expressed, and the ways in which their activities might be framed as productive and valuable. In the first instance, and in relation to the creative team’s interest in restaging forms of socio-political activity first articulated by Littlewood through the model of the Fun Palace, participants are framed and conceptualised as a socialist or working-class community, designed to embody and advance a collective opposition against inequality and social injustice as it is embedded in a discourse of cultural value. Secondly, and in relation to the interests of Battersea Arts Centre and the Royal Society of Arts, who provided funding for the project, participants served a role as a symbolic representation of the community of Battersea, associating their work with registers of social impact legible to the project’s institutional and economic partners, but which might also be seen to contain and disempower the relational potential of the group’s work as a collective. Within this context, the participants’ mobilisation of creative practice as a way of interacting with and developing the
socio-relational contexts of their own lives might be seen, not simply as an inadvertent or incidental outcome of the project’s broader aims but, to return to my interest in Nicola Shaughnessy’s articulation of the performative artefact of socially-engaged performance (2012: 201), as the performative expression of the project’s political voice. Considered in relation to the felicitous dynamics of community and political expression, the participants’ engagement with the course might be seen to reveal avenues of possibility and political uncertainty that remained, even as the delivery of the course became ever more strongly contextualised by interests and influences that might be described as neoliberal. This is not the realisation of community as an articulation of the group’s collective politics, but a targeted form of relational activism that emerges within and in response to opportunities framed by the project but not already mapped out by external interests.

In slightly broader terms, the differentiation in social and material space framed and enacted by *Everybody’s House* might also support an understating of felicitous politics beyond the influence and imperatives of capitalism’s social relation. As I noted in chapter four, *Everybody’s House* might be understood as an intervention in capitalist discourses which, as Massey argues (2010: 5-6), correlate space with materiality and meaning. I would re-assert, however that what emerges in the seemingly ‘uncoded’ context of a plexi-glass house on a Glasgow street should not be cast as the alternative to capitalist forms of organisation and production solely on the basis of its differentiation from hegemonic influence as it is mapped out and represented within the material context of Pollokshields. As Low’s articulation of embodied space makes clear (2016: 101), whilst the divisive characteristics of economic, cultural and social practice might find a corollary in the material environment, topographies of oppression, division and inequality are also embodied and enacted personally and inter-personally. What I have described as embodied forms of neighbourly relationality, therefore, might be understood, not as a response against discourses of spatialization as they apply to the material context of Albert Drive specifically, but as the outcome of the project’s role in releasing discourses of social organisation and relation from an operative function within that paradigm. In these terms, neighbourliness, as it was posited by Glas(s) Performance, only emerges as a social and political reality once the infrastructures that support the continuation of capital’s social relation have been disrupted or removed. As an articulation of community’s felicitous dynamics more generally, therefore, we might position *Everybody’s House* alongside Create Course participants’ interest in the personal dynamics of creative practice and Melodramatics’ commitment to an interdependent relational paradigm, as strategies that interrupt the embedded and embodied logics of
capitalist convention within these contexts so as to make space for socially-constituted practices of improvisation and interrelational production.

It is in these terms, too, that I suggest the second narrative that might be told about the felicitous community in response to the projects studied here relates to the common. As noted in chapter two, Hardt and Negri position the common as the social and material resources through which we constitute and order the perceptible world (2009: viii) and, as such, the site of contemporary political struggle as logical, political or epistemological regimes seek to enclose these resources in private systems of value, relation and productivity. Just as, therefore, Hardt and Negri suggest that the constitution of altermodernity depends on the liberation and rearticulation of the common, so theatre’s relationship to forms of social practice, subjective relation and ontological negotiation that might be understood as political is dependent on theatre's role as a strategy with which to interrupt the enclosure and rearticulation of the common as capitalist discourse.

In the first instance, this reading of the value of the common to theatre and, subsequently, to the groups who are involved in or implicated in the practice of theatre, could be allied with Jenny Hughes’ assertion that “[t]he social work of theatre, and theatre as a social work, creates theatricalisations of the social world that provide a resilient means of interrupting the smooth processing of commons resources into capital” (2015: 80). As Hughes writes, the social dynamics of theatre practice might be seen as a means with which to interrupt or reconfigure the performative characteristics of neoliberal influence to underwrite the constitution of new iterations of self and social practice. The relationship between felicitous articulations of community and forms of resistance and redistribution understood in this way is evident in the examples above, perhaps particularly in the context of the Create Course in which the participants drew on the resource of the course as a strategy with which to cultivate personally valuable practices of self-understanding and self-expression that disturbed, both, the project’s relationship to instrumentalist discourses of cultural value, and the continuation of personal circumstances that the participants identified as restrictive or oppressive.

The politics of the felicitous community might also, however, be seen to frame and interact with the notion of the common in a different way. Melodramatics’ articulation of communitarian praxis, for instance, could be seen to implicate the common from two perspectives. In the first, in an echo of the reading above, the politics associated with and enacted through their interrelational praxis could be framed as a form of redistribution, as they drew on their interest in and exposure to one another to appropriate and repurpose
resources made available through the cultural framework of theatre practice and the economic and institutional framework of the UCAN centre in which they met and rehearsed. Though it is perhaps an obvious distinction, however, the forms in which they articulated, embodied and understood their community were, similarly and conversely, drawn from and delimited by those aspects of the common that they shared together. Citing Marxist-historian Peter Linebough (2014), Hughes describes the common as resources ‘belonging equally to more than one’ (2015: 77). In the first instance, this is a politicised distinction, designed to assert equal rights to resources that have been unjustly privatised and, in this way, address global discourses of capitalist production and value. In framing the notion of ‘belonging’, however, Linebough’s assertion might also be seen to suggest a parallel or inverse perspective in which the global dynamics of commons discourse frame and implicate particular, localised publics. If, as Hardt and Negri suggest, the common provides the resource through which we articulate the politics of our relationships with one another, then the political dynamics of social practice are positioned in specific, indivisible relationship to those aspects of the common to which a particular group of people has equal access, over which they have rights, and in relation to which they might be able to express their relationship together. Within this context, the common wealth is no longer a generic conceptual framework that includes within its scope all aspects of the material and social world, but the material, relational and ontological infrastructure within and in relation to which circumstantial articulations of self and interrelationality are made possible and apparent.

It is from this perspective that I ally the political potential of the felicitous community, not with a discourse of left- and right-wing politics, but rather, with the notion of the common as the resource through which community’s political value might be understood and realised. As addressed in chapter two, both Hardt and Negri and Nancy associate the political potential of social practice with the characteristics of the event. For Hardt and Negri, this is, in part, to contrast the political dynamics of relational practice with the consistencies of order and power that characterise the global neoliberal regime, but also to indicate an essential relationship between political expression and the performative, interrelational activity of bodies in shared time and space (2009: 59-63). Nancy, in similar terms, describes the political potential of social practice as the “event of being-in-common” (1991: xli) to suggest that social practice is political when it is able to express and embody something of the interrelational potential that he associates with community as a pre-representational state of being and relation. From either perspective, however, the social, political or ontological
values associated with and expressed through interrelational discourse between people are indivisibly linked to the circumstances in relation to which such discourses take place, and the resources that are circumstantially and equally available to all those involved. My consideration of Melodramatics’ interdependent vulnerability perhaps makes this paradigm particularly apparent, but we can also observe in their relationships to one another a contingent relationship to the subject of abuse, the representational strategies of theatre practice, the material environment of the UCAN centre, and shared social experiences beyond the framework of their practice. Each of these might be seen to inform the ‘internal politics of recognition’ that Amber Musser describes as an “intimate public” (2015: 24), and to have reflexively determined the political constitution of their work together. Without addressing them individually, each of the projects considered in this study could be considered from this perspective, not as a mode of cultural production, but as a technique with which artists positioned specific aspects, qualities or categories of the common in common relationship to the participants with which they worked. Whilst this is perhaps not the unmediated interrelational potential that Nancy associates with being-in-common, it might, nevertheless, be understood as a discourse in commonality, in which the political dynamics of social life are, at least temporarily, associated with a broader spectrum of possibility.

It is in these terms that I suggest that the practical, performative articulation of community is, in turn, associated with a felicitous politics, as community's political voice is informed and delimited by those aspects of the common that are implicated within its constitution. In considering the characteristics of community as a social and political formation, therefore, I hope to frame theatre’s productive or political potential in ways that are not confined to the subsequent actions of the participants, the representational or cultural function of the work that is made, or the transformative or beneficiary effects for the participants. Rather, these affects or outcomes are positioned as subsequent to those aspects, dynamics and articulations of the common that are invoked and framed by the practice of theatre, and to which participants are all equally exposed. As I have suggested, an attention to the common is not enough to ensure that the forms of social and political expression that emerge in and are facilitated by theatre are not also resonant of capitalist interests and values. This is, as I have outlined elsewhere, an indivisible characteristic of life under capital. However, it is perhaps through a consideration of theatre as the social and ontological remobilisation of the common that the discourses articulated through it might bear the closest resemblance to the radical departure from capitalist logic that Hardt and Negri describe as
altermodernity, or the reconfiguration of political labour that might be seen to support the performative articulation of community as political praxis.

Closing Thoughts

I hope with this study that I've outlined some of the opportunities and limitations that might be associated with the intersection between theatre and community. Specifically, I hope that the notion of a felicitous community and felicitous politics helps make a case and provide vocabulary for an ethics of practice articulated through a localised interpretation of hegemony, common, politics and agency. I recognise, too, however, that there are limitations to this study. As framed in my introduction, I was drawn to this research as a response to and reaction against the economic conditions of funding in Britain and, specifically, the instrumentalist or utilitarian consequences of an evidence based funding paradigm. Whilst the projects studied here provide robust examples of practitioners and participants working within the structures and restrictions of these systems to produce extraordinary results, I have not directly addressed the interface between these practices, and the models of affect and agency associated with them, and the broader economic framework of cultural practice in Britain. Specifically, drawing attention to issues of contingency, specificity and circumstance presents a challenge to a funding paradigm preoccupied with repeatable models of cultural delivery and reporting structures designed to implicate observable, quantifiable phenomena in a nation wide discourse of cultural value. There have been recent moves by major institutions such as AHRC (2016) and the University of Warwick (2015), as well as within the Arts Council itself in the form of their 'Creative Case for Diversity', to transition from a deficit based model of cultural delivery to a more expansive conception of participation, production and value, and it would be productive to consider in more detail how the ideas outlined here might map on to these conversations.

Secondly, I have positioned the notion of felicitous community as a response to models of socio-political agency based on an oppositional relationship to hegemonic interests and, in particular, as a challenge to a repertoire of practice founded on a socialist politics of change and progress. In the absence or disavowal, however, of a socialist ethics of practice, it is necessary to consider how socially and ideologically isolated moments of liberation and reconstitution founded on a logic of the common might relate or amount to a broader and more sustainable discourse of change. Or, conversely, whether a notion of political
expression as biopolitical event offers a challenge to the ways in which change is understood
and narrativised within the context of theatre scholarship. It is with this in mind that the
theoretical aspects of this discussion might be enriched by the work of authors such as Alain
who, from different perspectives, frame circumstantial moments of collective assemblage as a
potentially productive form of rupture or disassociation from logical, social and political
hegemonies.

Finally, I began this research, at least in part, as a response to my own experiences
as a practitioner and, in particular, what I saw as the politically ambiguous characteristics of
socially-engaged theatre in a capitalist context. I have been privileged throughout this study
to have had the opportunity to observe and, at times, participate in practice that is not only
skillful, thoughtful and attentive, but deeply felt, affectively engaged and intimately
responsive. It is in these insights into the live relationship between practice and participants
that I have been the most surprised and learnt the most about the ways in which theatre might
productively interrelate with the contingencies of social, cultural and material context. The
research put forward in these pages could be seen as a response to and elaboration on these
experiences and, in turn, I am interested in the ways in which the felicitous community might
be reframed as a model of practice, and how the performative articulation of the ideas traced
throughout this study might inform, extend or problematise my findings.

Commenting on the differentiation between what he describes as 'bare life', and life
as a social being, political philosopher Giorgio Agamben suggests that politics, as a praxis of
collective organisation, emerges not out of life itself, but from language as the principle
through which we perceive and position ourselves in relation to one another (1998: 8). Regimes of politics could be seen, in these terms, as regimes of language that are made
manifest as cultural, interrelational and ontological reality when implicated in the
performative context of the social world. Nancy draws attention to a similar paradigm when
he observes the contrast between the quality of indivisible communion that he associates with
community and communism as the 'literary' regime that gives this inflection towards one
another its imperfect corollary in political thought and practice (1991: 26). Read in relation to
these ideas, this study could be seen as a response to and reaction against the linguistic
regime of socialism, and the ways in which this discursive field is manifest and mobilised
within the framework of theatre. As a response, however, to this environment, the theoretical
discussion put forward here is only half complete - a politics without expression. It is with
this in mind that if I were to take this research forward it would be the ways in which theatre
practice might invoke and mobilise the ideas, terminology and contexts considered here that I would hope to attend to next.
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Appendices:

Appendix A:

Workshop outline for Create Course
Session 1
4th June 2015: 10 – 1pm & 2-5pm

Aims:

To welcome new people, make them feel relaxed and have fun
Enable the team and all participants to get to know each other
To introduce participants to the course
Create a safe space
Get people to start exploring their own creativity in a low-key easy access way

Plan:

8.30 am Set up room clear all furniture away except for 35 chairs in a circle

9.45am Participants arrive and tea/coffee

10am- 10.25am Welcome and tea and coffee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brief introduction to the team</th>
<th>Led by Naomi and Liz</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to what the course is.</td>
<td>Naomi: Explain what the course is and why we are doing it. Give practical details (i.e. it’s an 8 week course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice-breaker / evaluation</td>
<td>Liz: Get everyone on their feet. Everyone is given 5 sticky dots numbered 1 – 5. Liz reads 5 statements about creativity. I consider myself to be a very creative person I have lots of opportunities to be a creative person in my life I do not face any barriers which prevent me from being creative in my life I have lots of support from people around me which helps me to be creative I am often creative with other people Participants go and stand along a line (and place their dot on the paper) depending on whether they agree or disagree with each statement. Liz facilitates a discussion to gauge their feelings towards their own creativity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.25- 10.55am Small Group Sessions led by facilitators

Partner work: In pairs participants are asked to find out three things
to know each other (10 mins) from their partner and report back to the group: How long have they lived in Battersea? What is their favourite food? What are they passionate about?

Split your group in to three teams to explore everyday creativity (10 mins) Each team is given a different area of life (they can chose) Work Family Holiday They are given 5 mins to discuss in their group how they are creative in those different areas of their life. Each small team feeds back to their wider group - facilitator prompts where needed. (5 mins)

What is Creativity? discussion (10 mins) Facilitator hosts a conversation… (and makes notes) The conversation might include: What is creativity? What does it mean to you? Who do you think is creative? Can anyone be creative? Are you creative? If so, when? When are you not creative? What are the conditions for creativity?

10.55 – 11.10 Video

Watch the Matthew Taylor RSA Video on Creativity Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZgipuFGb_8 Naomi: Play the video. Naomi: Asks people to watch it again and make some notes on what they think of it / any questions they might have.

11.10 – 11.30 Small Group Sessions led by Facilitators on the video

Small Group Discussion on Video led by facilitator Facilitators ask questions and prompts as well as writing notes What did you think? What is creativity? Who are the people who have ideas / who can be creative? What are the myths (lone genius etc) What are the barriers stopping people from being creative?

(Can facilitators have some of their own questions up your sleeve too)
### 11.30 – 12pm Small Group Session led by Facilitators – making a collage

| Small Group Exercise led by facilitator (11.30 – 11.50am) | Naomi and Liz will arrange around the room a collection of postcards, images and statements.  
  
  Liz Lead: Each group is asked to put together a collage which they can use to explain to the whole group their conversation they had in their small group about creativity.  
  
  Groups are asked to go around the room and person selects a postcards and / or statement which speak to them about an aspect of creativity they have thought about that day.  
  
  They arrange a collage on a piece of paper which will help them explain to the others their responses to creativity.  
  
  One by one each group will use their collage to explain to the wider group their feelings and ideas about creativity and what it means to them. |
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole group activity (11.50 – 12.15)</td>
<td>Liz Lead: One by one each group will use their collage to explain to the wider group their feelings and ideas about creativity and what it means to them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.15 – 12.30pm Whole group Feedback in a circle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole group feedback in a circle</th>
<th>Naomi: We go around the circle and ask everyone to say one thing about who they felt today’s session went</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework task</td>
<td>Naomi: Ask everyone to try and notice something that they do which is creative – write this down, take a photo of the moment or bring a list and share with your group next week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.30 – 1pm Food!