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Strange Duets: On the Genealogy and Efficacy of One-to-One

Performance

A meeting with a woman dressed as an Orthodox Jewish man, an occasion in which a man washes, anoints and then kisses your feet, an opportunity to watch as a naked woman cradles a dead pig, an invitation to dance with a blindfolded woman on a small patch of grass in a perspex box, an experience in which a man dressed as a Centurion reveals to you his mirrored glory hole, an interaction over a manicure that triggers questions of intimacy, presence and decay...¹

One-to-one performance is an encounter designed for an audience of one. The plethora of terms used to describe the ‘other’ in one-to-one performance speaks to the multifarious relationships that can exist between a performer and a solo spectator. Observer, attendant, participant, co-participant, visitor-participant, active-participant, spectator-participant, audience-participant, passenger, punter, co-creator, audient or viewer are just some of the words used to describe the range of modes of engagement invited, suggesting the nuanced variation – or, sometimes, the gulf between artists’ approaches and multiple possibilities offered by this constructed encounter between one and an other. Despite its seemingly introspective composition, one-to-one performance can, I contend, offer a rich portal for examining the sociopolitical culture of contemporary society. This article addresses the dearth of scholarship in the field and pursues two interdependent objectives: I propose a genealogy of contemporary one-to-

¹ These short descriptions are of recent one-to-one performances. In the order I’ve summarised them, they are: Oreet Ashery’s *Say Cheese* (2001-2003); Adrian Howells’ *Foot Washing for the Sole* (2008-2011); Kira O’Reilly’s *Inthewrongplaceness* (2009); Julie Tolentino’s *A True Story About Two People* (2005-); Dominic Johnson’s *Mystical Glory Hole* (2008); and Sam Rose’s *Between One and Another: A Place of Encounter* (2006-2007).

one work from historical roots in 1960s and 1970s avant-garde experimentation; and I identify three prominent themes - Cathartic, Socio-spatial and Explicit - across what might be termed the 'golden age' of one-to-one performance (2001-2011). The proliferation of one-to-ones in this post-Millennium period was deemed a 'craze'² by theatre reviewer Brian Logan and a 'trend' by one-to-one artists Tania El-Khoury and Deborah Pearson.³ This time of intense experimentation and burgeoning fascination with the form manifested what I perceive to be a turning point during which one-to-one work became absorbed into fringe theatre practice and contemporary performance. Following this period, one-to-one performance has continued to grow, its scope, reach and diversity developing from within its newly established status as a recognisable mode of performer-spectator engagement. The two lines of enquiry at the core of this study are bound by discourse that reveals the unique capacity of one-to-one performances to facilitate remarkable social encounters.

The basis of the form's cultural politics lies in how the one-to-one structure facilitates a shift in the formal performer-spectator relationship that can – sometimes rather radically – re-infect the audience's role into one which receives, responds to and to varying degrees restores their part in the shared exchange. With this move comes an opportunity to shift one's position (sometimes literally), into a relationship with a relative stranger. In ascribing the term 'strange' to my examination of the 'duets' that constitute one-to-one performance, I draw attention to the sense of being with someone we might perceive to be a stranger, by asking how it feels to be in close proximity to someone other than those imbedded in the fabric of our familiar relations, our adopted communities or social groups. The potential of the one-to-one includes the way the

² Brian Logan 'For Your Eyes Only: The Latest Theatrical Craze Features a Single Performer with a Single Audience Member', *The Independent*, 13 June 2010.

³ Tania El-Khoury and Deborah Pearson, 'Two Live Artists in the Theatre', *Performance Research*, 20.4 (2015): 122-126 (124).

encounter enables connection, engagement and exploration of the solo spectator. It is – and has to be – that through relationships with ‘the personal’ one’s politics are stirred, employed and reckoned with. Placing encounters with strangers at its centre enables this article’s social and political thrusts.

Allowing embodied reflections to contemporary one-to-one performance to figure within my analysis is an integral and strategic decision with a twofold imperative: it registers and values the affective impact of this kind of experiential work; and urges peers to stop resisting this under-examined area of theatre and performance scholarship simply because it necessitates disclosing our subjective responses. In her recent study on difficulty in contemporary art and performance, Jennifer Doyle describes a distinction – and a curiosity — I share when she declares: ‘the artists that interest me turn to emotion, feelings and affect as a means not of narcissistic escape but of social engagement’.⁴ As a form that makes us responsible for attending to the work, invites us to tend to the sustenance of the event, and makes us invest in the contract of exchange, the risk of insular introspection that generates individualism is here diminished by my assertion that one-to-one works – certainly the ones I profile here – invite enlightened, empathic and humanising contact.

In contemporary cultural practices, the viewer or spectator’s relationship to works of art and performance is frequently actively solicited; as relational aesthetics innovator Nicolas Bourriaud claims ‘art is a state of encounter’.⁵ Since the turn of the millennium there has been a proliferation of performance and artworks requiring spectators’ participation – in some form or another – in order to realise a piece’s potential. The trend to make it one-to-one has been especially nurtured by European

⁴ Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press, 2013), xi.

⁵ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* [English Language Version] (Les Presses du Réel, 1998), 18.

artists (including British ones), practitioners and theatre makers since the turn of the millennium. Artists have chosen to appropriate the form not for form's sake but because a one-to-one relation is called for by the concept, intention and opportunities of their work of art. Since 2000, numerous practitioners have experimented with – and thousands of audience members have experienced – the opportunities afforded by this strange duet (described by one writer as 'little hothouses for affective possibility'), testing the scope, range and limits of this close encounter.⁶

Identifying possible origins of this beguiling – and, for some, controversial – performance form is part of this article's aim, based upon research into the lineages and histories of live art, visual art and theatre practices. Explicit play with and challenge to traditional means of spectator interaction was popular in movements like Fluxus in the 1960s and thrived then and in the 1970s amongst the intersecting worlds of performance art, body art and experimental performance. Notwithstanding the impossibility of identifying the first one-to-one, I identify US artist Barbara T. Smith's 1973 performance *Feed Me* as one of the earliest documented performances specifically designed for one audience-participant at a time. Drawing on an interview with veteran practitioner Marilyn Arsem, in which she shared with me her reflections on her first experience as an audience-participant in a one-to-one performance – in Ron Wallace's *On the Emerald Necklace* (1984) – I argue that avant-garde experimentation in performance and art some 50 years ago laid fertile ground for aesthetic, conceptual and cultural political changes in shifting performer/spectator interactivity, which is still being explored today, in works made for one by contemporary art, theatre and performance practitioners.

⁶ Debra Levine 'Julie Tolentino Wood: Queer Pleasures', http://hemi.nyu.edu/journal/4_1/artist_presentation/jt_eng/ (accessed 14 July 2018).

In the writing that follows, one “historical” performance of isolated performer/spectator engagement from 1974-1990 is profiled alongside a small selection of contemporary one-to-one works (performed between 2001-2011) to speak to the issues of the conceptual framework I develop. Together, these performances serve as exemplars of the three thematic frameworks I propose as prominent models of one-to-one engagement, broadly categorized as: Cathartic, Socio-Spatial and Explicit. The purpose of these models is to identify significant issues galvanised in an especially rich period of growth and development of the form - propelled by the turn of the millennium - and by so doing, redirect and frame scholarship and spectatorship in the field.

Cathartic experiences emerging from one-to-one performance works are predicated on something being shared between performer and spectator, a disclosure, a revelation, a sense of exchange. Such typically cathartic experiences, frequently felt to be purifying, transformative or therapeutic, are often promised – though arguably rarely delivered – in one-to-one performance.⁷ Attention here, is given instead to instances of one-to-one that arouse atypical catharsis, igniting a renewed sense of concern for familial (whether social, collective or human) relationships. Theatre, by its nature, is a social event and whilst one presumption of one-to-one performance is that it shirks this opportunity in favour of an intimate, some assume narcissistic interaction sealed off from the outside world, the socio-spatial framework contains propositions that explicitly challenge this view by profiling one-to-one performance that is actively positioned amongst the theatre of everyday life. Examining one-to-one works that intervene in social, non-theatrical, everyday spaces, I ask how the form offers opportunities to re-engage with a more

⁷ Elsewhere I have examined the therapeutic qualities of one-to-one performances by Adrian Howells and Random Scream. See my ‘La Petite Mort: Erotic Encounters in One to One Performance’ in *Eroticism and Death in Theatre and Performance*, ed. Karoline Gritzner (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2010), 202-223.

ethical interconnectedness. Practitioners who are concerned with exploring the ‘intercourse’ of one-to-one performance are examined through an explicit framework of study.⁸ I borrow this term from London-based Italian performance artist Franko B who used it whilst discussing his understanding of the one-to-one interaction between artist and audience, stressing the significance of ‘serious intimacy’ between both parties.⁹ The presence of intimacy and the felt authenticity of exchange, trust and connection in selected works of one-to-one will be explored as I contextualise, analyse and assess the efficacy of explicit one-to-one performance works.

My archaeological dig through the discursive formation of one-to-one practice posits precedents, tests theories and puts forward provocations for analysing the social and cultural efficacy of one-to-one work. The three key themes are proposed on the basis of traditional research methods and direct experience of more than one hundred one-to-one performances encountered from the perspective of audience-participant over 18 years. As such, this article suggests a critical way of seeing one-to-one performance that draws attention to the practice, proposes a genealogy of the form, and argues for its particular potency for cultivating efficacious moments of social engagement.

We all want to be seen and we all want to be heard

When Marilyn Arsem said at a Performance Studies international conference in 2010

‘We all want to be seen and we all want to be heard’, she was talking in the context of

⁸ Franko B in Rachel Zerihan, ‘Explicating Intercourse: Excerpts from a Dialogue on One to One Performance with Franko B’ in *One to One Performance: A Study Room Guide*, (Live Art Development Agency: 2009), 10-14 (11), www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study_Room/Guides/Rachel_Zerihan.html (accessed 12 June 2018). The guide includes a collection of seventeen interviews with leading and emergent international practitioners who make one-to-one performances, including Franko B, Oreet Ashery, Adrian Howells, Dominic Johnson, Leena Kela, Sam Rose, Davis Freeman and Michael Pinchbeck.

⁹ Ibid.

her experiencing performance designed for an audience of one in the United States in the early 1980s, and her subsequent decision to make works for one person at a time.¹⁰ Arsem's established approach to performance-making is threefold: her work is frequently durational in nature, made in response to the site and contains minimal actions and materials. Her first work for one person at a time was *Thirteen Actions in Yellow* in 1988 and was aligned with these tenets: Arsem's 'viewer' was invited to sit on a bench in Boston Common (a central park) and experience what she called 'a 360 degree' set of engagements with 13 yellow things Arsem had curated (the smell of lemons, music that referenced yellow, and more), so much so that 'all the activity in the park became part of the piece'.¹¹ Since that time encounters for one remains a distinct and persistent strand in her work, with around 20 made to date.

Speaking with Arsem further substantiated my theory that although one-to-one performance appeared to erupt with the turn of the millennium, the conceptual, aesthetic and political undercurrents had been steadily intensifying since the 1960s. Allan Kaprow's cumulative collection *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* – which includes writings that theorise the experimental art practices of the 60s, 70s and early 80s – proffer ideas that appear to root much contemporary one-to-one work, as I seek to make visible in my analysis of Arsem's work that follows.¹² Aesthetic and conceptual qualities Kaprow identifies such as art/life relationality, issues of construction and authenticity, and spontaneity and chance arguably underpin Arsem's work, bleeding into the contemporary, through approaches that foreground the ethos of anti-capitalist,

¹⁰ Marilyn Arsem, unpublished presentation, 'Defining "Public": Performing for Intimate Audiences', annual conference for Performance Studies international #16: Performing Publics, Toronto, Canada, June 9-13, 2010.

¹¹ Marilyn Arsem, *The Performance Art of Marilyn Arsem* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts/Boston Publications, 2016), 64.

¹² Allan Kaprow, 'The Real Experiment (1983)' in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 201-18.

anti-consumerist practice.

Reflecting on experimental art and performance work in the 1960s, Kaprow theorises ‘lifelike art’ as a key outcome. This provocation is critical to my proposal as it articulates specific anti-illusional and anti-mimetic qualities of experimental innovation I am identifying as still pertinent in contemporary one-to-one practice. In summarising eight qualities of lifelike art, Kaprow’s penultimate point states: ‘Lifelike art did not merely label life as art. It was continuous with that life, inflecting, probing, testing, and even suffering it, but always *attentively*’.¹³ Arsem acknowledged this quality to her work, outlining the task she sets herself: ‘So that question of how to frame a moment that might happen any other time but frame it in a way that allows you to pay attention differently and to contemplate it and the implications’.¹⁴ Acknowledging the crucial place of an attentive circuit of exchange in her dialectic one-to-one practice, in such works as *Innehalten (Be Still)* (2003), *Waiting and Waiting* (2012) and *Disintegration* (2015), Arsem designs for her isolated spectator an interactive space and an ethos of invited collaboration – ‘it’s about not being interested in spectacle and not being interested in delivering knowledge as if I know more than the audience or the public’. Her rejection of the notion of the artist as superior or all-knowing is underpinned by the esteem with which she values her audience-participant’s contribution to the development of the piece. Arsem is ‘much more interested in a kind of work that’s – I would say – conversational and that uses materials, actions, contexts that I obviously shape and select in some way from an aesthetic perspective but still are more or less anchored in everyday life, in the real world’. The flow of the conversation, the ‘depth’ of exchange, the direction of the discussion (whether verbal, material, experiential) are

¹³ Ibid., 206, my emphasis.

¹⁴ Marilyn Arsem, Skype interview with the author, 21 May 2018. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Arsem are from this interview.

all elements Arsem attempts to make democratic in order to produce a ‘shared experience and a shared reading of the content’. Arsem’s disinterestedness in spectacle in favour of a communal zone in which she is ‘really listening and/or attending to’ her audience-participant returns us to Kaprow’s identification of attentive engagement. From the Latin *attendere*, meaning ‘to stretch toward, give heed to’, *attending to* shares the root of ‘attention’, underscoring a critical opportunity afforded by (and, arguably requested by) some practitioners in making work for an audience of one.¹⁵ A kind of engagement seldom available in technology-saturated twenty-first century Western living, to be listened to means being heard; to be seen means being present; to be moved means being human.

Kaprow’s writing underscores Arsem’s creation of *attentive conversations* and anchors the importance of spontaneity within these framed exchanges:

Lifelike art’s message is sent on a feedback loop: from the artist to us (including machines, animals, nature) and around again to the artist. You can’t ‘talk back’ to, and thus change, an artlike artwork; but conversation is the very means of lifelike art, which is always changing.¹⁶

When Franko B reflected on his decision to make work for one person at a time (firstly with *Aktion 398* in 1999), he referenced this kind of opportunity: ‘I liked using one-to-one to isolate the person so the person could be freer’.¹⁷ The sense of the spectator’s influence and extent to which it is invited can be seen to form a significant trajectory in works of one-to-one performance and, by proxy, a rich area for analysis and

¹⁵ *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v ‘attend (v.)’, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/attend> (accessed 15 June 2018).

¹⁶ Kaprow, ‘The Real Experiment’, 204.

¹⁷ Franko B in Zerihan, ‘Explicating Intercourse’, 13.

exploration. In Oreet Ashery's one-to-one performance *Say Cheese* (2003), Ashery offered a 'meeting' with her Orthodox Jewish alter-ego 'Marcus Fisher', she created a framework for a 'lifelike' encounter that the spectator takes significant responsibility for maintaining, considering, interpreting, and developing. This opportunity to influence can be substantial, as Ashery reflects: 'what was particularly special to me about the audience in *Say Cheese* is that they made Marcus be. They literally animated him, projected upon him, gave him history, narratives, context, they created who he was'.¹⁸ The responsibilities that come with the freedom Franko B and Ashery bestow upon their audience-participants can feel liberating, enthralling, awkward, challenging, intimidating. The range of responses to these constructed confrontations is read here as productive and illuminating. As Doyle asserts: 'This is where emotion makes things harder, more difficult, and more interesting. Such works speak to the complexity of feelings themselves, to their sociality, and to the fluidity of the self's boundaries'.¹⁹ Notwithstanding – or perhaps because of – the fact that '[a]ctual participation in a work of art courts anarchy', as Jeff Kelley put it, I draw attention to numerous conversations contemporary one-to-ones are staging that embody Kaprow's ideas, as manifestations of a practice that might be considered to balance on the precarious slash between art/life. As such, one-to-one performances playfully and skillfully address issues of construction and authenticity: performances for one that are open to spontaneity and chance through their openness to collaboration and various degrees of involvement artists invite from their potential participant, and combinations of all these conditions.²⁰

Feed Me

¹⁸ Oreet Ashery in *One to One Performance: A Study Room Guide*, 15-18 (16).

¹⁹ Doyle, *Hold it Against Me*, 73.

²⁰ Jeff Kelley, 'Introduction', *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, xi-xxvi (xviii).

During our interview, Arsem explained that five years before her first experience as a solo spectator, she had read about the form in *The Drama Review*. In ‘The Audience of One’ by Trudy Scott I find what appears to be the first published account of an audience’s experience of a one-to-one when Scott writes about her encounter with Jamie Leo’s 1976 performance *Bye Bye Blacksheep*, a ‘mindfilm’ that situated the sole ‘observer’ firmly on the sofa to witness an actor in ‘rehearsal’.²¹ The narrative falls heavily around an imagined Scott, sitting alone, as she watches Mark come home, make some phone calls, take a bath, then hang himself.

I have argued elsewhere that Chris Burden’s *Locker Piece* (April 1971) could be considered one of the first one-to-one performances, yet I now seek to dislodge this claim.²² In confining himself, without food or drink, to a locker two by two by three feet for five days, Burden established an environment that his audience *read as* encouraging their communication with him in a secure and outwardly intimate space, yet Burden himself had not intended any kind of dialogical relationship with his audience; rather, it was their reading of the space and situation that, they felt, invited their/that engagement. Thus Burden’s unbidden engagements with his audience were in strong contrast to his peer Barbara T. Smith’s clear invitation to one ‘participant’ at a time in her performance entitled *Feed Me* (1973), presented two years later.²³

The first published reference to ‘one to one’ (no hyphens) in relation to performance practice comes from Tom Marioni, the curator of *All Night Sculptures* in

²¹ Trudy Scott, ‘The Audience of One’, *The Drama Review* 23.4 (1979): 49-54 (51).

²² See Rachel Zerihan, ‘Intimate Inter-actions: Returning to the Body in One to One Performance’, *Body, Space & Technology Journal*, 6.1 (2006): 1-16.

²³ In an unpublished e-mail exchange with Barbara T. Smith about this work, she explained ‘I thought of the person who came in as a participant’ (12 August 2018).

the context of which *Feed Me* was presented.²⁴ Writing about Smith's performance in *Vision* magazine in 1975 Marioni states: 'It was a one to one relationship with the participants'.²⁵ Explicitly engaging with one person at a time, in *Feed Me* Smith invited visitors to interact with her in a space she constructed in the women's toilet at the Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco for the sunset to sunrise event. Upon entering, each of Smith's 15 or so audience members found her naked, surrounded by various items she had chosen, with which to facilitate sensual connections. In the corner was a tape machine that played the artist's voice on a loop, saying 'feed me, feed me'. As Kristine Stiles described the performance:

Her private boudoir-like space was fitted with a mattress, incense, flowers, body oils, wine, perfume, shawls, and music, tea, books, marijuana, a heater to warm the area, and participants were invited to 'feed' her and themselves in an exchange of 'conversation and affection'.²⁶

Denounced by feminists who felt her performance endorsed passivity and glorified victimisation, Smith rejected their attack. Jennie Klein adds that 'Smith's use of her unclothed body was strategic, designed to interrupt the traditional voyeuristic relationship between desiring male and desired passive female'.²⁷ In her own words Smith explains:

I was pissed off that I was so naive when I got divorced that I had no idea about

²⁴ Tom Marioni, 'Out Front', *Vision* 1 (Spring 1975), 8-11 (11).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Kristine Stiles, 'Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions' in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979*, ed. by Paul Schimmel (Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1998), 227-329 (255).

²⁷ Jennie Klein, 'Feeding the Body: The Work of Barbara Smith', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 21.1 (1999): 24-35 (31).

how men behaved, and I was always being hustled. I didn't know how to handle it. This piece was about my controlling the room, and the audience had to ask me if I wanted a cup of tea or water or a massage, or to make love, or whatever it was, and I could say yes or no. So it was my going to the place where the problem was, and turning it around.²⁸

The notion of a circuit ignited for reciprocal exchange between one and other returns me to Arsem's reflection that her one-to-one work 'feeds me as much as it feeds the other person'. With this in mind, through the thematic frameworks that follow my writing addresses, where possible, the intentions and experiences of practitioner *and* spectator.

Empathetic Orientations in One-to-One Performance: A Cathartic Model of Engagement

Contemporary one-to-one performance is rife with instances that invite or enable something to be shared between performer or spectator: a disclosure, a revelation, a sense of exchange. Such work might also seem pre-emptively weighted against practice which has been consciously oriented on the potential of a real, authentic encounter, often in resistance to an increasingly alienating, mediatised culture. It is important to acknowledge the force of desire for such constructed connections, not only amongst the work's anticipated liberal art audiences but also in the millions of potential participants feeling socially isolated as they navigate their way through this country's prolonged

²⁸ Barbara T Smith in Suzanne Lacy and Jennifer Flores Sternad 'Voices, Variations and Deviations: from the LACE archive of Southern California performance art' in *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California*, ed. Peggy Phelan (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 61-114 (88).

state of austerity, in particular in the current mental health crisis.²⁹ There are numerous examples of one-to-one works that use this constructed engagement to facilitate what could be argued as a typically cathartic response: a purgative, emotional cleansing marked by a ritual that affords a sense of transformation. I could write here about Juliet Ellis's invitation, for example, to 'think of a moment when you wanted to cry but didn't', a request that precedes your entrance to a room where Ellis grates an onion to satisfy that pent-up desire (*Silent Sermon*, 2006); Davis Freeman's highly evocative solo movement piece, intensified and complicated by the fact he wears a mask bearing a photographic reproduction of his lone audience's face (*Reflection*, 2004); Mitch and Parry's opportunity to write one's anger onto a plate from a Welsh dresser, then smash it (*Anger Management Olympics at Gay Shame* 2008); or Martina Von Holn's construction of a confessional booth, inviting the opportunity to confess something in exchange for an offering from Von Holn (*Seal of Confession*, 2006-2009). The late Adrian Howells mastered the art of therapeutic performance in a one-to-one setting, fuelled by his desire to enable what he tongue-in-cheekily called 'a global catharsis'.³⁰ Practitioners who strive to facilitate this kind of therapeutic encounter for their other 'succeed' – in large part – dependent upon their skill and expertise in managing a guided but dialectical exchange. An invitation to confess, to exchange, to share something fulfils an inherently human desire perhaps sought all the more in recent times

²⁹ The UK government's austerity programme - which started in 2008 to reduce the government budget deficit and the role of the welfare state - had a significant impact on many people's mental health, not least through increased depression because of rising unemployment, cuts to public services and reductions in disability support. In an article for *The Guardian* in 2017 it was reported that 80% of NHS Mental Health Trust bosses feared they could not provide timely, high-quality care to the growing numbers seeking help. See Denis Campbell, 'NHS bosses warn of mental health crisis with long waits for treatment', 7 July 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/07/nhs-bosses-warn-of-mental-health-crisis-with-long-waits-for-treatment> (accessed 5 November 2018).

³⁰ Adrian Howells, interview with The British Council, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7btf8Tdg_s (accessed 15 June 2018).

since technological interfaces are pervasive and, arguably, interrupt our instinctual human desire for live contact. A *pas de deux* on the psychic stage, such experiences are frequently promised but – I would argue – rarely delivered in contemporary one-to-one performance.³¹ One-to-one works that incontrovertibly offer a purifying or purgative cathartic experience form the basis of a much broader study into the demand for, shape of and politics of promising absolution. My analysis here is concerned instead with tracing a lineage of one-to-one performance that resonates with a quality of atypical catharsis, serving not only to examine difficult or uncomfortable responses to one-to-one work but also to open up thinking on catharsis in more complex ways.

Kira O'Reilly's 2005 performance *Untitled Action: NRLA, The Arches* – made 'when words are failing me,' as the artist put it – will now be set beside another work by Burden, *Back to You* (1974), ostensibly his first deliberate work for a solo spectator.³² I propose that these works, some forty years apart, not only invite a similar sort of formal, aesthetic and structural engagement, but also, in reading their significance through a humanist account of empathy, I reveal their shared affinity with a lesser-known quality of catharsis: its ability to ignite a renewed sense of responsibility for others.

An Ethical Catharsis

Untitled Action: NRLA, The Arches was presented by O'Reilly at the National Review of Live Art (The Arches, Glasgow), an annual programme of international live art, installation and video artworks that was produced by New Moves International (1979-2010). As I began to enter the performance space, a small white room, my gaze became fixed on O'Reilly's bare back, scored, marked, and slightly bloody. Looking ahead I

³¹ Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 59.

³² Kira O'Reilly, in discussion with the author, 3 November 2004.

saw a reflection of myself still half inside the door. A huge television screen faced us, relaying the live video feed of O'Reilly sitting on a white towel-covered chair beside an empty seat, mirroring our image back to us. Seated beside her O'Reilly did her best to put me at ease with vocal reassurances, making our shared psychic stage as secure and comfortable as it could be. The reason for her uber-supportive stance was to allow me to consider accepting the invitation given to me in a sealed envelope as I had sat outside the room, waiting 'my turn'. If I wanted, I could make the *one short cut* on her body that the invitation clearly instructed. 'Some people want to make the mark, others use plasters', O'Reilly said. I knew that I did not want to cover up a wound. I said I wanted to soothe them. I gently laid my fingers over the various openings. The tenderness I felt juxtaposed against the constructed scene - the surveillance did not dilute or dissipate tension; it felt magnified. After we negotiated this exchange she asked if I would hold her in a stylized pietà pose as we both looked at the mirror image of our scene together.

In choosing to reflect on my experience with O'Reilly, I am trying – paradoxically – to apply an authoritative framework to a piece informed precisely by O'Reilly's desire to 'make things about things that I didn't have words for ... like language failed me ... or words are failing me'.³³ The social contract at stake in *Untitled Action* was, for me, so ambiguous, so difficult, so intriguing, so personal, so much, so little, that I did not know what I was being asked to be responsible for, much less consent to. I felt the stasis of this crisis and became fixed at the site of the wound.

In 1974 Chris Burden presented *Back to You* in New York. He states:

Dressed only in pants, I was lying on a table inside a freight elevator with the door closed. Next to me on the table was a small dish of 5/8" steel push pins.

³³ Ibid.

Liza Béar requested a volunteer from the audience, and he was escorted to the elevator. As the door opened, a camera framing me from the waist up was turned on, and the audience viewed this scene on several monitors placed near the elevator. As the elevator went to the basement and returned, Liza told the audience that a sign in the elevator instructed the volunteer to ‘Please push pins into my body.’ The volunteer stuck 4 pins into my stomach and 1 pin into my foot during the elevator trip. When the elevator returned to the floor, the door opened, the volunteer stepped out, and the camera was turned off. The elevator returned to the basement.³⁴

Back to You appears to thrive on unsettling the spectator from the outset. In an interview with Liza Béar, Burden said "To me the guts of the piece was the energy level between me and the volunteer in the elevator."³⁵ Asking for an unknowing volunteer, Burden has them situated in an enclosed space, presented with a passive body and clear request to wound. A third eye – in the form of a camera frame – foregrounds the impact of the pin-pushing and magnifies the infliction to the wider audience. *Untitled Action* is comparatively private through a nuanced sense of intimacy. The use of the live feed reflects our encounter *back to us*: O’Reilly is not passive but the agent for negotiating the invitation she has given me time to think about and the *pietà* closes the interaction with affection, or compassion perhaps. Differences notwithstanding, both works use acutely constructed spaces in which arguably demanding but unquestionably ineffaceable actions are invited, then magnified and projected; this similarity reflects an

³⁴ Chris Burden, *Back to You* <http://www.zwirnerandwirth.com/exhibitions/2004/0904Burden/backtoyou.html> (accessed 18 June 2018).

³⁵ Chris Burden, ‘Chris Burden....*Back to You*’ Interview with Liza Béar, *Avalanche Newspaper*, 9 (May 1974): 12-13 (12)
Jennie Klein, ‘Feeding the Body: The Work of Barbara Smith’, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 21.1 (1999): 24-35 (31).

oscillating concern with Kaprow's authentic/construction duality, helpfully considered here through an atypical cathartic framework.

Elaine Scarry and Kathy O'Dell have written about how pain is shared, and how in witnessing live acts we are complicit with both the agent of violence and the person suffering in pain.³⁶ Describing a specific performative act of wounding, Amelia Jones suggests that, 'as private as it may seem,' the action 'etches itself into our skin, our heart, our sense of self; the wound opens us to social responsibility.'³⁷ She goes on to argue that 'certain kinds of live art presented in certain contexts cross over into activism through particular acts of wounding which can prick or move the spectator into a relation of embodied attachment and emotional connection.'³⁸ While catharsis is not a stated concern of her paper, Jones's questioning of how 'acts of wounding' might move spectators to make emotional and political attachments to the subject in performance shares common ground with scholarship that engages with the attachment-making possibilities catharsis might offer.

In an expansion on the notion of an ethical catharsis, Elizabeth Belfiore suggests that beyond, or rather before, corporeal pain was used to invoke fear or terror, Aristotle understood that 'tragic fear is not merely *phobos*, fear of physical pain, but ... also has much in common with 'social' fears, the shame emotions ... [for] tragic emotion is best aroused by the shameful actions that violate *philia* relationships.'³⁹ Translated from the

³⁶ See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art & the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998)

³⁷ Amelia Jones, 'Performing the Wounded Body: A New Theory of Political Agency in the Visual Arts', paper presented at Quorum, Department of Drama, Queen Mary University of London, 2007.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Elisabeth Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 339.

Ancient Greek as "brotherly love/friendship", in foregrounding the assault of *philia* Belfiore articulates the vital yet often overlooked attribute of catharsis that this article, in part, seeks to resurrect: catharsis was meant to draw spectators' attention towards sustaining and improving our sense of familial relationships or bonds of kinship.

Revisiting the ancient concept of catharsis allows us to reconsider the one-to-one performance form both in terms of its theatrical roots and, through my resurgence of the significance of *philia*, its less familiar ethical intent. Notwithstanding the particular humanist account of empathy I see deployed in these works, and the implications of this on spectatorial response, read through Jones and Belfiore we can see how Burden and O'Reilly variously used one-to-one invitations to wound to enable social and ethical attachment and an embodied connection. Whilst Burden's impetus in the United States in 1974 – in the midst of the Vietnam War – could be read through Kathy O'Dell's theory that celebrated performance artists were enacting extreme physical metaphors as manifestations of a contractual negotiation that 'might bring balance to the war-induced instability they were experiencing', O'Reilly's invitation in the United Kingdom in 2005 came amid her explorations into the materiality of skin.⁴⁰ No records of spectator response to Burden's work exist but in considering my response to O'Reilly, the shudder of fear I felt moved me from considering myself to considering our relation, and shifted me from my place to our shared space. As Bourriaud writes, '[e]ach particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations, and so on and so forth, ad infinitum.'⁴¹ One-to-one works that exhibit experiences of ethical catharsis may make us uncomfortable, but in that jolt we might reconsider, realign and reevaluate

⁴⁰ O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin*, 75.

⁴¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 22.

our place in our relationships, families, communities and societies more widely.

One-to-One in the Public Sphere: A Socio-Spatial Model of Engagement

Examining one-to-one works that intervene in social, non-theatrical, everyday spaces, I look here at how conditions of the public sphere inform and are affected by one-to-one performance, asking how the form enables a deeper interconnectedness to human relations through engagements in cityscape, urban and outside environments. First, I consider Ron Wallace's aesthetic, formal and topological approach to making his scarcely examined 1984 work *On the Emerald Necklace*. I then think through my responses – as solo spectator – to Rosana Cade's subtly subversive one-to-one performance *Walking: Holding* (since 2011). Other outside work for one person that could be examined in this framework include Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* (1969) in which he randomly selected and then stalked passersby in New York until they entered a building; Fiona Templeton's *You: The City* (1988) that entailed a solo spectator interacting with a range of characters on a narrative originally laid out in Manhattan; Marilyn Arsem's *Red in Woods* (1991-1993), in which she invited a lone spectator into snow-covered woods to follow a route of material traces derived from the famous Brothers Grimm fairy tale; Michael Pinchbeck's *Sit With Me For a Moment and Remember* (2012-15) in which the spectator sits on a bench in a public space and listens to a recording; or, in a sense, Deirdre Heddon's *40 Walks* project, for which Heddon invited 40 people to take her on a walk of their choice.

Ron Wallace's *On the Emerald Necklace* was a site-specific 'walking

performance' that took place in Boston, USA in 1984.⁴² *On the Emerald Necklace* consisted of the artist leading one participant at a time 'through the series of linearly connected parks designed by the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted in the late 19th century'.⁴³ Wallace explains: 'The Emerald Necklace includes the Boston Common, the Back Bay Fens, the Muddy River, Olmsted Park, Jamaica Park, the Arborway, the Arnold Arboretum, and Franklin Park. Each walk is attended by a single person, by appointment only, and will cover the entire distance of fifteen miles.'⁴⁴ Taking place around 35 times, Wallace's *On the Emerald Necklace* might be described as a labour of love. Having invested a year of his life researching the biology, botany and geography of the parks, Wallace studied Olmsted's plans, read all the minutes of the park board meetings (almost a century's worth), learned about the flora and fauna and took part in the organisation that supported the park. Taking copies of Olmsted's blueprints with him, Wallace (Arsem remembered of her first one-to-one encounter) answered any questions and 'adjusted the work to suit the interests of the single person with whom [he was] walking those 15 miles'.⁴⁵ Arsem's experience of *On the Emerald Necklace*, shared here through its considerable impact on her performance practice, also reinforces the value and significance of first-person accounts of one-to-one works, without which I could not communicate its potential efficacy or worth:

It made me understand that engaging in *deep* research, no matter how many years it might take, gave the work its depth, its value. I felt throughout the day that there was more to learn, more to discuss [...]. I realized that a work could

⁴² Ron Wallace, *MOBIUS Newsletter*, Vol 2(2), Oct/Nov 1984, np.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Marilyn Arsem unpublished written reflection on *The Emerald Necklace* shared with the author.

be the direct experience of learning, about looking and discovering more about the world around us, and that it was possible to do that with an audience. This is the most significant thing that I learned from you, and is something that I remind myself each and every time I make a new performance.⁴⁶

In her reflection, Arsem foregrounds key qualities of one-to-one performance: attentiveness, dialogue, sharing. As Ron's wife Gloria Wallace writes of his performance: 'He didn't want to direct the participant but, rather, to *interrelate* with them, so that each walk was a unique, bonded perceptual experience'.⁴⁷ *On the Emerald Necklace* is an important work in this proposed genealogy of one-to-one performance not only due to its early position in the form's history but also, significantly, in its manifestation of aesthetic, political and social potentials of one-to-one in a formative sense.

Rosana Cade's *Walking: Holding* is also predicated on the interrelationship between 'performer' and 'spectator' as well as foregrounding the critical issues of liveness and witnessing by situating, as she does, her roaming duets in the urban city landscape. Originally made in 2011, the piece has now been presented over 30 times in cities across the UK and internationally. Critically acclaimed, this work 'is a subtle, experiential performance that involves one audience member at a time walking through a town or city holding hands with a range of different people on a carefully designed route'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Gloria Wallace, 'Seeing Olmsted's Genius Through a Singular Walk', *Emerald Necklace Conservancy: Connecting People and Parks Through Preservation, Restoration, Education, Accessibility, Advocacy and Sustainability* (Annual Report 2015), 2, my emphasis, <http://docplayer.net/63321454-Connecting-people-and-parks.html> (accessed 02 June 2018).

⁴⁸ Rosana Cade, Artist's Website, page on *Walking: Holding*, <https://rosanacade.wixsite.com/performance/walking-holding> (accessed 11 June 2018).

A simple yet powerful experiential piece about difference, *Walking: Holding* calls for the other to become ‘an active-participant in the live event’.⁴⁹ Simultaneously intimate, through the act of holding hands, and exposing, through the public display of that transient togetherness, the position invites contemplation and consideration of our desires and fears, preconceptions and politics through the opportunity to inhabit – albeit briefly – the role of partner to a stranger, moreover someone who may appear quite different from ourselves. As we encounter the work, we discover that it is the construction and perception of difference that is really being unpicked and so with it our views, beliefs and prejudices.

Cade’s practice is ‘rooted in queer feminist discourse’ and *Walking: Holding* explicitly ascribes to that set of political commitments.⁵⁰ In an interview about the piece, Cade explains that it was ‘made [...] because I found that as a gay person I sometimes felt uncomfortable holding hands with my partner in public [and] certainly other gay people that I’ve spoke[n] to felt the same.’⁵¹ As the first person the active-participant meets, Cade greets and literally welcomes you into the lifelike work. She asks if and how you like to hold hands then invites you to walk with her for a while, holding hands in the way she used to with her ex-girlfriend of four years, Rosie.

I took part in *Walking: Holding* as an audience-participant in Edinburgh in August 2013. Initially, I felt a little conspicuous on our weekday wander around the quiet Leith streets. My second or third exchange was with a trans person and as we walked hand in hand I could sense and see people were watching. During our conversation my partner told me about an incident whereby a customer in a local supermarket had complained to the manager about seeing them holding hands with

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Walking: Holding* film <https://vimeo.com/63681676> (accessed 11 June 2018).

someone who had been walking through the previous day. I was asked whether I wanted to enter the supermarket in which that had happened. Yes, I said, and we did.

Of the 80,000 hate crimes committed in 2016-17 (many more went unreported), racist and religious hate crime made up 85%, homophobic, biphobic and transphobic hate crimes 13% and disability hate crimes 7%.⁵² In an article for the BBC News in July 2018, one headline asserts that ‘two-thirds of LGBT people avoid holding hands in public, for fear of negative reactions’.⁵³ That a small group of cisgender women hijacked London’s Gay Pride in 2018 to demonstrate their anti-trans rhetoric reveals prejudice even from within the LGBTQ+ community.

We must have only been inside the supermarket for a minute or so but it felt like a personal protest of a higher political order. Inside my hand-holder had recounted a little of the incident of abuse. ‘But I have to walk back alone’, you’d said. I felt relieved to be out of there. But you have to walk back alone, I thought. A hard tap on my shoulder. A word, a call, beckon and I turn to see a manic grin. My hand fixes hard to my partner’s as my adrenalin pumps through our digits. I’m thinking, we’re together, I’m claiming a naive but felt sense of solidarity. My body is braced to defend but the young man now facing me has softened his smile as he offers out his hand; in an instant I register his interruption as my next hand-holder. Relief, sadness and confusion collide. Something guttural happens and like a small child I burst into tears. At the messy edges of myself I reflect on Doyle’s dictum which I read as comfort:

Experience here is not an unquestioned zone of personal truth to which one

⁵² UK Hate Crime statistics <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hate-crime-statistics> (accessed 11 June 2018).

⁵³ BBC News ‘‘Gay conversion therapy’ to be banned as part of LGBT equality plan’, July 3 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44686374> (accessed July 3 2018).

retreats but a site of becoming, of subject formation – it is an ongoing process that produces the conditions of possibility for recognition, understanding, and difference.⁵⁴

The conditions Cade produces are deceptively simple. As we walk and talk (or not) something is shared; as our palms meet and digits intertwine multiple narratives are formed; as our perambulatory rhythm melds – or clashes – our constructed duet is fleetingly displayed, cursorily witnessed, momentarily noted then formed again. Positions shift swiftly as terra firma grounds then perhaps unsettles aspects of ourselves; as Judith Butler explains, ‘[g]ender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.’⁵⁵ Heightened attentive reception is immediately felt through spontaneous, improvised lifelike coupling, producing, as it does, an improved understanding of difference and similarity in kinship and public affection. The mechanics of its making are complex and the different experiences one has can be hard, but they demand our attention; as Jen Harvie argues through Claire Bishop’s writing on ‘relational antagonism’, ‘[t]he artwork emphasizes social differences and dissonances not to endorse or celebrate them, but to recognize and acknowledge rather than disavow them, and effectively to cite their inequalities as motivating grounds for social interrogation and possible change.’⁵⁶ With *Walking: Holding*, Cade has constructed a vital and critical political work: its intimate activism stirs from within.

⁵⁴ Doyle, *Hold it Against Me*, 146.

⁵⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 179.

⁵⁶ Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 8.

Intercourse in One-to-One Performance: An Explicit Model of Engagement

I could tell you about sheepishly watching Angela Bartram French kiss a model of her own tongue, erect and protruding from a gallery wall (*Tonguing*, 2006); or my hazy recollections from being blindfolded, pinned down and tickled by Nicole Blackman (*The Courtesan's Tales*, since 2003); or being in bed with Sam Rose (*A Bed of Roses*, 2009); or having my inner arm licked by Jiva Parthipan (*LICK*, 2007); or peep-hole spying on Leena Kela's horny Goldilocks (*Goldilocks Peep Show*, 2007); or suckling at Samantha Sweeting's simulated lactating nipples (*La Nourrice, Come Drink From Me My Darling*, 2009). Indeed, constructions containing explicit encounters in one-to-one performance is a prominent and grounded framework with a constellation of examples from which to choose.

In this section my writing profiles artists who, in recent years have used an explicit one-to-one engagement to disclose, subvert or critique an assumption, prejudice or myth about sex or sexuality and I provide a comparative account of two feminist performance works that, I argue, use one-to-one intercourse to speak back to dominant ideologies. The “historical” case study re-examined as a one-to-one performance in this part of the enquiry is Annie Sprinkle's *Public Cervix Announcement* (1990) which is here set beside Canadian performance artist Jess Dobkin's piece *Fee for Service* (2006).

Now understood as a key feminist work of second-wave feminism, Annie Sprinkle's *Public Cervix Announcement* invited individual audience members, one at a time, to crouch down between her legs and – using a flashlight – peer through the speculum she had inserted into her vagina and see her cervix, thus demystifying the female body and challenging the objectifying male gaze. Set within a group audience event, these opportunities for one-to-one engagement focus and distill the spectator's

sense of solo-experience. Returning us to the Latin root of the term *explicit* (explicare), meaning ‘unfold, unravel, explain’,⁵⁷ Sprinkle says on her website:

One reason why I show my cervix is to assure the misinformed, who seem to be primarily of the male population, that neither the vagina nor the cervix contains any teeth. Maybe you’ll calm down and get a grip. Lots of folks, both women and men, know very little about female anatomy and so are ashamed and/or afraid of the cervix. That’s sad, so I do my best to lift that veil of ignorance. I adore my cervix. I am proud of her in every way, and am happy to put her on display.⁵⁸

As well as inviting individual audience members to engage in an action that educates, reveals and celebrates the female body, Sprinkle’s statement above also points to its efficacy in challenging misogyny by rebutting a patriarchal myth analysed - and sustained - in Freudian psychoanalysis, that of *vagina dentata*. The Canadian performance artist Jess Dobkin made a piece of one-to-one performance in 2006 entitled *Fee for Service* which explicitly ridiculed the idea of *vagina dentata*, whilst critiquing the concept of one-to-one as labour in a service industry, specifically as a kind of sex work.⁵⁹

Fee for Service consists of a flirtatious encounter predicated on Dobkin’s invitation to an audience-participant to exchange money for a seemingly intimate,

⁵⁷ *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v ‘explicit (adj.)’, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/explicit> (accessed 15 July 2018).

⁵⁸ Annie Sprinkle’s website, *Public Cervix Announcement*, <http://anniesprinkle.org/a-public-cervix-announcement/> (accessed 21 June 2018).

⁵⁹ For more on sex work and labour in one-to-one performance, see Alison Matthews ‘The Libido-maker’s Apprentice: Working the Window’s Proscenium’, *Performing Ethos Journal* 3.2 (2014), Special Issue on Ethics in One-to-One Performance, 119-135.

terrifically witty myth-buster. A highly theatrical environment ‘lit in bordello reds’ and underscored with sexy music, your interaction lifts you out of the crowd’s hubbub as a costumed assistant offers to exchange your entry fee for a new, unsharpened pencil.⁶⁰ ‘Would you like to make an appointment to see the Vagina Dentata?’ the assistant asks, before you enter a partially screened area where Dobkin has been performing a shadow puppet show where a woman dances erotically with a large pencil.⁶¹ Dobkin warmly negotiates with me how the act will happen – will she insert the pencil, will I, or will we do it together? She then ‘ask[s] the person to help lift my dress to reveal my costumed vagina, adorned with added fake fur and pointy white clay teeth.’⁶² Peeling back Dobkin’s skirt to insert a new, unsharpened pencil into her merkin-covered vagina, the teeth of an electric sharpener that has been secreted inside her actual vagina grip down and busily work to form a sharp pencil point. The queer feminism of Dobkin’s action instigates a critically robust scenario with a political imperative. Dobkin takes a hateful myth in which the symbolic violence of the ‘dangerous’ vagina is used as a proxy for the real violence of misogyny. Undercut with an implicit allusion to sex work, Dobkin’s environmental and embodied aesthetic is disarmingly charming. Our particular response to the whirring and buzzing was shared smiles and wide eyes, cementing the exuberance of a delightfully playful and acutely unerring face-to-face encounter. Whilst I revel in the wonder of our inter-experience, like all one-to-one exchanges, its uniqueness in terms of critical reception resides in its spectator-specificity and the breadth and depth of responses such work engenders. Whatever the range of our respective responses, the work ends with the same simple offering, ‘[t]he participant keeps the sharpened pencil,

⁶⁰ Jess Dobkin, ‘Fee for Service’, *Performing Ethos Journal* 3.2 (2014), Special Issue on Ethics in One-to-One Performance, 203-206 (2013).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

a souvenir of the encounter, of play, of transgression, of what we accomplished together.’⁶³

A humorous parody that demystifies and eloquently challenges misogyny by parodying the fear of the vagina dentata, Dobkin’s comical one-to-one has the feared gnashing teeth come alive to gnaw down on the participant’s pencil, standing in for the fearful penis. Where Sprinkle reflects after *Public Cervix Announcement* ‘I want to show you that there are no teeth in there,’ Dobkin devises a one-to-one engagement for her other that literally inserts both parties and a pencil/penis into an act of ridicule before biting down, chewing up and spitting it out.⁶⁴ Both women frame the encounters as theatricalized constructions but use explicit content to pierce illusionistic pleasantries and remind us of real-life sexism and misogyny; Dobkin invites you to interact with a ludicrous parody whereas Sprinkle uses her anatomy to demystify and educate. Seriously intimate, these performances erotically explicate how sex is riven with acts of power by engaging us, one at a time, in acts of verbal and quasi-sexual intercourse.

Conclusion: Mapping Terrain

Writing in the *Guardian* in 2011, Charlotte Higgins reproduces David Greig claim that the one-to-one performance mode is ‘decadent’ in ‘austere times’, in contrast to the more democratic potential of theatre events for large audiences; Higgins paraphrases him to suggest that ‘plays made for theatres have an almost infinitely extendable audience and have a potential for economies of scale that simply don’t work in the one-

⁶³ Ibid., 203-4.

⁶⁴ Sprinkle, <http://anniesprinkle.org/a-public-cervix-announcement/> (accessed 21 June 2018).

on-one context; it's like readymade clothes as opposed to couture.'⁶⁵ Greig's limited view is later countered by Higgins however, who, drawing on the work of Adrian Howells, suggests that what Greig perceives as elitism is, in fact, an appeal for deeper, more substantial experiences. Stephen Greer also disputes Greig's claim, stating, 'mechanisms of limited supply do not run counter to the ontology of performance but strongly complement popular and scholarly beliefs about what gives theatre its unique value'.⁶⁶ Greig segregates the one-to-one, marking it out as an elitist and decadent form, but the context is, as I have revealed here, historically and contemporarily anti-capitalist and the quality it most augments is a most everyday experience - 'ordinary intimacy' as Simon Casson (who has profiled one-to-ones in Duckie's *Gay Shame* since 1996) reminds us. Further, in her astute critique of one-to-one performance read through labour and economics, Greig's accusation is anticipated by Saini Manninen's suggestion that the short duration inherent in the form 'present[s] a problem for this economy that is rooted in assumptions about the necessary or correct time frames of performance'.⁶⁷ If one-to-one performance can cultivate an environment of connectivity, reciprocity and engagement, a stimulating and engaging interaction of transient couture, can we not accept its challenge to assumed conditions of performance and encourage more people – not less – the opportunity to experience it?

While further interrogative and rigorous analysis into the efficacy of one-to-one works is called for, my central account of the diverse and instrumental social function of

⁶⁵ Charlotte Higgins, 'Is Intimate Theatre "decadent"?', *Guardian*, 9 August 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/charlottehigginsblog/2011/aug/09/edinburghfestival-edinburgh> (accessed 10 August 2015).

⁶⁶ Stephen Greer, 'What Money Can't Buy: The Economies of Adrian Howells' in *It's All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells*, ed. by Deirdre Heddon and Dominic Johnson (London and Bristol: Live Art Development Agency and Intellect, 2016), 260-277 (267).

⁶⁷ Saini Manninen 'On Consuming Encounters: Short Duration and the Material Conditions of Performance', *Performance Research*, 17.5 (2012), 92-97.

one-to-one performance in part speaks back to Jen Harvie's concern to articulate a significant risk of participatory artwork: 'Might they sometimes offer a spectacle of communication and social engagement rather more than a qualitatively and sustainably rich and even critical engagement?'⁶⁸ In its commitment to foregrounding the opportunities for collaborative interactions, in this article I have sought to demonstrate that the case studies profiled herein are far from spectacles of merely surface exchange. The processes and intents of these artists show one-to-one performances that thrive on the possibilities offered by the slash between art/life: such work is "lifelike" and thereby ingrained in and responsive to the network of political, sexual, racial, economic discourses of twenty-first-century living; and it is deeply researched, socially democratic, experiential, work that is conceptually, ethically, challenging, educational, playful, and deeply affective. Crucially, I argue that one-to-one performance – a form that ignites identification, demands attention and functions through a heightened close relation between active participants – cultivates a different kind of audience engagement predicated on alterity but distinctive in its provision of a sense of solidarity (or 'accelerated friendship/relationship' as Adrian Howells termed it) with a stranger.⁶⁹ Through a heightened level of attentiveness such encounters might make us open to conditions of change and possibility in ways performances for collective audiences cannot. The implications of this different kind of audience reception is charged through embodied experience, intensified through the event's relative immediacy, heightened through the spectator's response-ability, and impacted upon by the weight of their choice: as such it marks an innovative turn in performance analysis and spectator

⁶⁸ Harvie, *Fair Play*, 3.

⁶⁹ Adrian Howells, 'The Burning Question #3: What's It Like Washing Feet Every Day?', *Fest*, 16 August, 2009, <http://fest.theskinny.co.uk/article/96651-the-burning-question-adrian-howells> (accessed 1 September 2018).

scholarship.⁷⁰

Further studies into the value of one-to-one as a socially democratic art practice and ethical issues in this terrain are urgently called for. In his commitment to developing his one-to-one practice with organisations that advocate and support disabled people, Adrian Howells demonstrated how efficacious the form could be in broader participatory art contexts such as applied theatre settings.⁷¹ The one-to-one performance form potentially offers richly affective experiences and for those who manage mental illness or physical disability this might be especially valuable because it enables an artistic encounter in which every single spectator-participant is attended to in contingent terms. When these attentive conversations reflect the participant's contribution as important – vital for anyone feeling isolated, dysphoric or unheard – the gifting experience of the one-to-one performance construction can provide a little relief, solace and perhaps agency to reconnect to human relationships.⁷²

The last 20 years or so has seen fundamental and groundbreaking

⁷⁰ My use of the term 'response-ability' refers to Hans-Thies Lehmann's claim that theatre, unlike other media, can preserve the connection between sending and receiving signs via what he terms: '[a] *politics of perception*, which could at the same time be called an *aesthetic of responsibility* (or *response-ability*). Instead of the deceptively comforting duality of here and there, inside and outside, it can move the *mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images* into the centre and thus make visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception. Such an experience would be not only aesthetic but therein at the same time ethico-political. See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 185-186. Emphasis in original.

⁷¹ On one-to-one performance and applied theatre, see Caoimhe McAvinchey's analysis of one-to-one practice in 'Coming of Age: Arts Practice with Older People in Private and Domestic Spaces', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 18:4 (2013): 359-373; and on the value of one-to-one performance in a production by *Passages* theatre group, see Bridie Moore, "'It Did Get Rid of the 'These People are Old People' Thing in My Brain": Challenging the Otherness of Old Age Through One-to-One Performance', *Arts Praxis* 5.2 (2018): 185-201.

⁷² Following the publication of Heddon and Johnson's book *It's All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells*, there also appears to be a ripple of interest in discourses of care - care for the practitioner as well as the spectator - that reverberate through events such as *The Art of Care-full Practice* symposium which took place in March 2017 and the recently co-edited *Scottish Journal of Performance* special issue on 'The Art of Care' (June 2018).

experimentation with the relationship between ‘performer/s’ and ‘spectator/s’ and just as there has been a burgeoning in publications on immersive theatre and participatory art, this writing has argued for the place and originality of one-to-one theatre within this theatre history and calls for more analysis and writing on the subject. Citing the *Guardian*’s former theatre critic Lyn Gardner, Helen Iball states:

[W]hen audience participation is employed as an integral component of a performance, it ‘signals to the audience that its presence matters’ and, if audience presence ‘really does matter, it changes the contract between artists and audiences’.⁷³

Like Wallace carrying Olmsted’s blueprints, Cade designing her carefully constructed route and Howells’ statement that ‘the practitioner has the map’, there is now a vital and exciting call for more practitioners, spectators, participants, active-participants, spectator-participants, co-participants, audience-participants, passengers, punters, co-creators, viewers, audients, collaborators, theorists, and writers of recent and long-since past works to collectively contribute to navigating, analysing, reflecting on and documenting the critical and affective terrain of one-to-one performance.⁷⁴

⁷³ Helen Iball ‘Towards an Ethics of Intimate Audience’, *Performing Ethos*, 3:1 (2012), 41-57, (52-53).

⁷⁴ Adrian Howells in Iball, ‘Towards an Ethics of Intimate Audience’, 45.