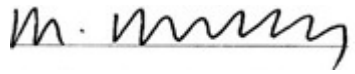


**Becoming Public(s):
Practising the Public
Programme in the
Contemporary Art
Institution**

**Marianne Mulvey
PhD
Royal College of Art
2020**

Declaration

The work presented in this thesis is my own

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Mulvey", written over a horizontal line.

11 December 2020

Signed

Date

Marianne Mulvey

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* * *

During my final year (2020) I completed this thesis in a tiny home office in Tottenham, North London. There was a global pandemic and everything shut down. The activity at the centre of my study – public programming – immediately ceased. Togetherness, in all its forms, had to evolve. I hope to have said something here to support this transition.

My final thanks goes to all the awkward situations I have found myself in.

For Paddy and Amelia

Abstract: Becoming Public(s): Practising the Public Programme in the Contemporary Art Institution

From the informational to the informal, the practical to the performative, what a contemporary art institution's public programme includes is seemingly limitless. Despite the increasing visibility of this practice, it remains side-lined in institutions and discourse. Yet, I argue it offers a unique vantage point from which to explore publicness, as it is produced by the art museum and its extended spaces – the contemporary art institution, art school and performance festival – in a manner distinct from exhibition making and other forms of the curatorial. I ask in this thesis: *what can the space of the public programme tell us about what it means to become public in the contemporary art institution?*

It is my contention that publicness is both spatially *and* temporally constructed; we must observe and quantify the feelings, responses, actions of ourselves and others to truly understand it. Through a combination of queer theory, theatre and performance studies, I attend more fully to the sensuous, affective and felt dimensions of publicness, and trouble the abstract, singular public found in the construction 'public programme'. Challenging pervasive spatial metaphors of publicness that curatorial discourses often have recourse to, I then argue for an alternative understanding of publicness as an emergent *becoming*.

My understanding of 'becoming public(s)' emerges from the art museum and how it has been tied to publicness in rather uncomfortable ways, alongside close readings of specific moments during events I have programmed or attended that left me feeling uncomfortable, awkward, or uncertain how to respond. My findings are taken back into practice in a series called *That Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers* (2018–19). Inviting participants to share moments of discomfort in their double role as programmer and audience, I analyse anecdotes shared to answer my final research question: *what could reframing publicness as a process of becoming do to our understanding of the public programme in the contemporary art institution?* This thesis argues for embracing the discomfort around publicness as a way to rethink the space of the public programme in ways that no longer take *becoming public* for granted.

Presentation Conventions

All citations in this thesis follow the Harvard referencing system. Where text has been cited or summarised from the same source and page number over several sentences, an intext reference appears at the end of the relevant section. Where text has been cited from an online source, the intext reference will be (*name* date). Where text has been cited from a webpage and no date appears, usually in the case of organisations, the intext reference will be '(*name of organisation/person* n.d.)'. Where text has been cited from an online book with no page numbers, the intext reference will include the chapter and/or section number.

Titles of events, performances and artworks are italicised, with the date in the first instance of citation, and the artist's name where relevant.

All quotations, from text or direct speech, are in single inverted commas. Quotations within quotations are given double inverted commas.

I used two methods of recording speech: digital recordings of interviews, that I transcribed and kept on file for reference; hand-written notes in research workshops, where I took down short, verbatim quotations of direct speech as well as made observations, which are kept on file for reference. Quotations from interview material and written notes on direct speech in the workshops will either be referenced in the text, or have the name of the person quoted in parentheses and the year. Everyone quoted has given their consent, but for full anonymity, all interviewees, attendees to workshops and informal conversation partners whom I have quoted have been given pseudonyms and there is no direct reference to their place of work in the thesis.

Where areas of discourse are referred to for the first time, they appear in lower case and in single inverted commas, such as 'the curatorial' and 'the educational turn'.

British spellings are used throughout, except in quotations from published texts wherein Americanised spellings are used. In these cases, the text is quoted verbatim.

I use the present participle 'practising' when referring to the rehearsing and performing of the practice of public programming. When using 'putting into practice', I refer to both the practice of public programming, and the activity of practising – rehearsing or performing something.

I outline and refer to the development of the museum as foundational to my object of study. But I use the terms 'museum', 'art museum' and 'contemporary art institution' interchangeably throughout, to trace the practice and development of public programming across all kinds of art organisation, unless I am referring to a specific, named place.

I use 'the public' to denote the singular. I use 'publics' to denote the plural. I use 'public(s)' to speak about both the singular and the plural, holding onto both notions at the same time. However, it is important to say that these notions are often blurred.

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Prologue – A Public Programme in Five Acts

Please be aware that tonight's performance involves blocks of ice suspended from the ceiling. Be wary of melt water and falling ice.

Heeding this warning, we arrange ourselves around the darkened theatre space and listen to the delicate clang of melt water droplets hitting a cascade of cymbals. A woman sits at a desk, softly reading into a microphone, splashing her bare feet into bowls of water. Next she stands beneath a suspended harp, pulling invisible threads attached to its strings, eliciting their vibration. Later she disappears behind a projection screen to play with plants and their shadows. As each of these movements unfolds, blocks of melting ice drip, drip, drip onto cymbals.

++++++

Undressed and wrapped in a towel, I am given a cup of sweet birch cordial and told to shower before entering the sauna. The sauna healer places soothing wet leaves on my forehead and tickles the soles of my feet, before caressing my whole body with branches. The strokes vary in intensity until I feel sharp tingles on my arms, thighs and sides of my trunk. When she opens the sauna door, letting light and cool air in, I hear a Finnish folk song sung in low tones, and have the strong sensation of a forest awaiting me outside.

+++++

'Choose a one. Keep your eye on this one at all times. Now, get as close to your one as possible.' Each of us quickly identifies someone, and in hot pursuit we form a tight circle whirling around itself. 'Now chose a two. Get as far away from your two as you can.' The group disperses, spreading into the farthest edges of the large room. 'Find your one and your two, make an equilateral triangle between you.' Off we scurry, but no sooner has the group settled, when our entire system breaks down and renews again its searching movement. Gradually, I understand our game as a metaphor for an ecosystem, smiling at its simplicity.

++++

During the feedback session someone seems eager to demonstrate extensive knowledge of how empathy dissolves subject positions, and can be felt across the species divide. Another asks whether empathy can be arrived at, or is only ever in process? Someone else says it works *because* we don't understand it intellectually. Might empathy be the best tool against the relentless productivity demanded by neoliberal capitalism?

++++

In the black-box theatre on Saturday night, a three-piece, high energy feminist punk band are giving us everything they've got. Wearing blue lipstick and oversized tabard costumes, the trio's raw vocals are soundtracked by drums and keyboard. There aren't enough of us to match their energy, and the audience splits into three groups – some dance like crazy; others shuffle shyly; children dart about in between, staying up well past their bedtime.

(Mulvey 2019)

++++

What brings these diverse, strange sounding or intimate activities together? They were all part of *Edge Effects*, a four-day public programme happening in and around Glasgow's Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) in July 2017.¹ Opening with Áine O'Dwyer's sound performance installation *Down at Beasty Rock* (2017), *Edge*

¹ *Edge Effects* was curated by the Scottish Sculpture Workshop (SSW), an art organisation based in the village of Lumsden, Aberdeenshire (SSW n.d.). The programme brought SSW's participation in *Frontiers in Retreat* (2015–18), an EU-funded collaboration project around questions of art and ecology, to a much wider public than their immediate and rural locality. I was commissioned by SSW to write a critical review of *Edge Effects*, published on their website in 2019. The five vignettes that appear in this prologue are extracts edited and adapted from my text. They are also indicative of the development in form and purpose of the public programme over the last fifteen years across contemporary art institutions large and small. This example at the CCA aligns with programming happening across national, middle-sized and small institutions like Tate, Serpentine Gallery and Arts Admin to name three London-based institutions.

Effects also included: a traditional Finnish ‘whisking’ session at Glasgow’s Victorian Arlington Baths Club, from sauna healers Mari Keski-Korsu and Maaria Alén; Mele Broomes’ *Movement Workshop* that mixed games, core strength and hip opening exercises with African diasporic social dance; a discussion on how empathy might reconnect us with our ecosystems, hosted by Interfaces for Empathy; Charismatic Megafauna’s Saturday-night gig.² Despite their differing modes and scales of engagement, it is possible to bracket these five distinct experiences together.

From the informational to the informal, from the practical to the performative, what the public programme of a contemporary art institution can now include is seemingly limitless; but at its heart, a public programme is about coming together to experience something. Yet despite the variety, vibrancy, and increasing visibility of the public programme, it receives relatively little scholarly attention and remains side-lined in practice and discourse. As a producer of publicness distinct from exhibition-making and other forms of the curatorial, this thesis argues for taking the public programme seriously as a unique vantage point from which to explore publicness in the contemporary art museum and its extended spaces.

² Besides these activities, a temporary library with a collection of books and reading lists was set up in the CCA Clubroom.

Introduction – Public Problems

During my seven years as Assistant Curator (2009–15), and later Curator, Public Programmes (2015–16) at Tate, London, I encountered many small and large challenges. Some cropped up time and again, particularly in the auditorium spaces at Tate Britain and Tate Modern most often used for holding large-scale public events.³ These included misspellings on holding slides, ticket machines and PowerPoint presentations failing, and members of the audience asking whether the roaming microphone was ‘on’ (it was) when asking a question. I began to see these recurring quirks as part of Tate’s Public Programme, developing a level of familiarity and ease with them. Other things like a speaker falling off stage, or the stage itself being inaccessible to wheelchair users (in Tate Britain’s auditorium), were, in the case of the former, surprising, and of the latter, deeply problematic and indicative of wider structural problems. Big or small, such things were nonetheless stressful, awkward and embarrassing to deal with *in the moment* as a public programmer.

A more curious problem occurred outside the museum. Whenever someone asked what my job entailed, I described different forms the ‘programme’ might take, spending little time explaining ‘public’, as if its referent was self-evident.⁴ But ‘public’ does not just denote; it connotes. As an adjective it suggests that something is designated for use by ‘everyone’; like ‘public convenience’, ‘public transport’, or ‘public right of way’. It is often mobilised by institutions to imply openness and accessibility, particularly when next to the word ‘programme’. In a similar manner, *the public* describes a mass, abstract group or generality, that ‘everyone’ is notionally part of. Perhaps because these assumptions of accessibility, mass inclusion and participation seemed obvious (which is in itself problematic), I didn’t reference them when explaining how the term ‘public’ connects with ‘programme’. Or perhaps I didn’t have the language to talk about ‘public’. At least, not yet.

³ For clarity, I use capitals to refer to actual job titles, departments and teams, and lower case to speak about the public programme and other related work in general.

⁴ I use single quotation marks to introduce ‘public programme’, ‘public’ and ‘the public’ in this section, because they are abstract entities, but they also have material qualities and effects. Once they are sufficiently introduced as concepts and things, I refer to them without quotation marks.

How might these unexpected or seemingly intractable ‘problems’ that repeatedly crop up in the practice of public programming, be connected to the difficulty in articulating and accounting for what being public, and part of a public, means? This thesis takes the space and practice of ‘public programming’ as it manifests in the art museum and its extended spaces of culture and knowledge production – the contemporary art institution, gallery, art school, and performance festival – as a unique vantage point to ask: what does it mean to effectively and affectively become part of a public there? I argue that it is precisely the small and larger unplanned or unwanted moments that tell us the most about this. These instances may feel funny, awkward, embarrassing, hopeful, intimate or upsetting. Yet, as I unfold below, much of the literature accounting for this significant, but under-theorised area of curatorial practice, is unwilling to describe or detail the messiness of the publicness it produces. Scholar and curator Mick Wilson even publicly called attention to the need to ‘get specific’ about what happens in the discursive and performative events of a public programme during a lecture in 2018. In answer to this call, and my own observations of gaps in the literature, I carry out an unflinching exploration of my role in, and feelings about, moments when it felt curious, unsettling or difficult to be public, and part of one, during a selection of events I have programmed and/or attended. I also include stories from other public programmers that are both common and unique to anyone working with publics in such spaces.

In what follows then, I describe the practical and theoretical methodologies used to probe this specificity gap, and unfold my main argument. Namely, that it is through a deep investigation of the peripheral, awkward, uncertain moments of programming that we might articulate public as an emergent process of becoming, of relations between people that unfold over time, rather than a fixed space and state that we simply step in and out of. What this realigned notion of publicness as *in becoming* might mean for public programming practice is really the import of the thesis. I follow this with a chapter summary and conclude with why such a re-framing, through the process I describe, is necessary and can be generative.

Practice-led Approaches to Materialising Publics

Alongside theoretical interventions into the existing literature, mapped after this Introduction, I do three things to depart from what has already been said around the public programme and answer my central research questions:

- 1) I use myself as primary locus of publicness; I draw on autoethnography and action research to reflect on my positions, actions and feelings as a public programmer *and* audience member in writing;
- 2) Via a specific body of curatorial practice, I hold workshops and conversations with other programmers, producing further material to analyse and theorise from;
- 3) These also 'put into practice' my theory that attending to the periphery of the event teaches us more about what it means to become public(s) as a process.

I expand the approaches of point one, before moving through points two and three together, though all three are intertwined. The concerns of this research emerge from my experience of a specific curatorial practice in the art museum, though the events and experiences I discuss do not all issue from its matrix. Each example is, however, indicative of programming that has been ascendant within it: the participatory performance, the summer school, the curatorially-reflexive symposium, the reading group, and the workshop. This is because the issues of the public programme in the contemporary art institution are necessarily expansive, moving us beyond its specificity into other spaces and practices of cultural production. This move also demonstrates the need and value of bringing theatre and performance studies to bear on public programming, to understand it more fully and probe the reluctance identified in the literature (mapped below) to get specific about what happens within it.

Observing publicness as a process through the programmer's perspective, I go beyond the surveyed literature that mainly offers perspectives on format, participation, disruption, dissensus, social practices from a safe, critical distance in line with the professional case study (Bishop 2004, 2012, Rogoff 2010). I move away from turning experience into theoretical material to be applied generally, or carrying out audience evaluation. These methods tend to reinforce the notion that a public is

a separate entity from the institution. Instead, I acknowledge that, as Andrea Fraser writes, '[e]very time we speak of the "institution" as other than "us" we disavow our role in the creation and perpetuation of its conditions [...] the institution of art is internalized, embodied, and performed by individuals' (2005 p.283). This means that when working with my own experiences, or those of other programmers through the workshops and conversations introduced below, I am working with them *as audience to their own programmes*. These peers and colleagues might have roles and responsibilities within an institution, but are also part of the public produced by it. In my writing and practice, therefore, I propose a third way between the distanced curator/theorist and the researcher who talks to 'audiences' about their experiences.

Starting from my experiences as a public programmer at Tate and my attendance at other kinds of events, I account for several moments that, for me at least, disrupted the smoothness of the 'event'.⁵ From these moments I produce a detailed understanding of the publicness that emerged, without shying away from messy specificity. My use of the term 'disruptive moment' refers to something unexpected or unplanned happening during the process of the kinds of events routinely produced through public programming. Emily Pringle and Jennifer Dewitt have also described certain Tate Learning practices that 'engineer' 'disruptive moments' to 'allow the learner to develop new understandings about art' (2014). My analysis of performance practices also refers to situations designed to disrupt and unsettle. My point is not to distinguish, but use the potential of disruptive moments – often minor, even queer, because of their uncategorisable status as neither success or failure – that become significant through the process of telling, discussing and writing. These are sought and investigated by me as a researcher because, prior to this research, they had already impacted my reflective practice as a public programmer. Through the approaches I take, such impact may be traced materially and affectively.

⁵ I use speech marks here to acknowledge that, like the public programme itself, the event is not an easily agreed upon thing. For example, the 'event' in Erin Manning's theorising (discussed later) is rather more philosophically conceived as 'according to a Whiteheadian concept of the actual occasion [...] the coming-into-being of indeterminacy where potentiality passes into realization' (Manning 2016 p.2). The public programme may be conceived of as an 'event-based' curatorial practice, and I aim to keep both conceptual and material meanings of 'the event' at play, but will not always refer to it in speech marks.

The series of workshops developed as part of this research, called *That Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers* (2018–19), was conceived of as a para-professional space for programmers to share and discuss moments of ‘becoming public’ from their own experience, and designed to go beyond data gathering or group interviewing that might produce material purely for my research. Between October 2018 and July 2019, I held three workshops with groups of eight to sixteen participants, with each workshop advertised to a particular group, or individuals from my own peer network, via email invitation. Prior to attending, participants were sent a provocation to think of two moments – one as a programmer, one as an audience member – where it felt like the ‘smoothness of the event’ had been disrupted by something unexpected happening. After introducing my research and the workshop’s aims, they were invited to choose one example to tell to a partner, followed by a simple group conversation about what they had discussed in pairs. None of the workshops were audio recorded; instead, I wrote immediate notes and detailed observations afterwards. This decision was consciously made to create a space where participants felt comfortable speaking about topics and feelings not permissible in other professional contexts. In addition, rather than harvesting tales of discomfort and uncertainty for my own research purposes and data-gathering, I aimed to create a reflexive space that could be of mutual benefit. I also held several one-to-one, reflective conversations afterwards with participants and would-be participants.⁶ With permission, these were digitally recorded and transcribed. I either quote directly from notes and transcriptions, or paraphrase what was said; but to allow participants anonymity I use pseudonyms, and do not name their workplaces. Chapter Four reflects more deeply on what these unrecorded workshops afforded, but they are drawn on at particular points throughout the thesis.

The workshops and conversations ‘put into practice’ approaches from the written thesis by bringing collective awareness to disruptive moments issuing from practice, and creating their own mini-moments of ‘becoming public’.⁷ Undoing the fixed demarcations of institution, programmer, artist, participant and public, these gatherings moved us between different normative positions, rather than re-enacting

⁶ There were several who could not attend but were eager to discuss my provocation.

⁷ This experimental methodology draws on action research and reflexive practice carried out at Tate where I tested, refined and reflected on ideas directly through programming.

them, which often occurs in a 'straight' interview process. Designed to parallel spaces of professional development and practice-sharing, these workshops were never about 'best practice'. Neither were they about sharing 'worst practice'. Instead they created space to unpick what a group of professionals themselves understood by 'public' as it connects to 'programme', in whatever institution or mode of practising they were engaged. In their review of autoethnographic practice, its qualities and challenges, Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner (2011) state that asking: "How useful is the story?" and "To what uses might the story be put?" really lies at its heart (2011 p.282). If the workshops held as part of this research aimed to create a useful space for programmers, this thesis aims to unpack unusual and useful stories about becoming public for a wider network of curators, programmers and scholars engaged in multiple practices of producing publics, and their institutions.

The workshops and conversations involved colleagues from my time at Tate; the 2018–19 cohort of artists from Open School East and its staff; and a miscellaneous group drawn from my, and an existing, professional network. I publicised them through direct invitations, and the channels of partner institutions. Drawing on professional and peer networks in this way, some participants were known to me and also count as friends. Ellis, Adams and Bochner note that the 'relational ethics' of autoethnographic work are often 'heightened' because this work is not done in isolation. It happens in and through dense social networks that include family, friends and colleagues, and inevitably 'implicate[s] others in our work' (2011 p.281). The workshops and conversations exploited the gap between the professional and the anecdotal running through the colleague/friend dynamic. It also introduced personal and professional risk, undoing the presumed distinction between the 'objective' ideal of the distanced researcher and the subjective reality of being a programmer among (known and unknown) others.

Due to the sometimes awkward, sometimes intimate nature of the topics under discussion in this thesis, which expands the felt texture of publicness, my research has, at times, turned out to be quasi-therapeutic. In the workshops, openly sharing my own examples of disruptive moments and admitting uncertain feelings about them elicited the most honest and interesting responses from my peers. This was not

always easy; as Ellis, Adams and Bochner astutely point out, autoethnographic practice is often criticised by social science ‘proper’ for being ‘insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical, and too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic’ (2011 p.283). Not enough on the one hand then, and too much on the other. This ‘too’ was initially a concern for my writing and practice-led approaches, reflecting a more pervasive uncertainty about what is ‘too much’ and ‘not enough’ permeating the problem of publicness. It certainly emerged through the workshops where, for example, we explored how the propriety of publicness may be threatened by an unpredictable public becoming ‘too emotional’ and ‘over sharing’. Rather than shying away from this excess, I argue it is exactly what needs exploring – to fully realise the potential of the public programme to offer something valuable to our understanding of publicness as a process of becoming.

What emerged through the excavation of my and others’ disruptive moments is written through an autoethnographic approach. In keeping with the ethnographic tenet that ‘the social’ is ‘not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning’ (Geertz 1973 p.5), I acknowledge that personal experience informs the relationship between me as ‘researcher’ and what, or who, is ‘researched’, guiding my interpretation.⁸ My approach is particularly inspired by Jack Halberstam’s conception of queer failure (2011), underpinned by a ‘low theory’ that resides in ‘popular places, in the small, the inconsequential, the antimonumental, the micro, the irrelevant’. My methodology of gathering and sorting through stories from the periphery is emboldened by Halberstam’s ‘low theory’, which is propelled by ‘chasing small projects, micropolitics, hunches, whims, fancies’ (p.21). My research works on a similarly diminutive but granular scale, assembling ‘eccentric texts and examples’ in a way that emboldens others to speak about what most often ‘flies below the radar’ of institutional and personal scrutiny (p.16).⁹ Secondly, Halberstam writes that ‘[r]eally imaginative ethnographies [...] depend upon an unknowing relation to the other. To begin an ethnographic project with a goal, with an object of research and a set of presumptions, is already to stymie the

⁸ In the same passage Geertz also says that ‘man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun’, which feels fitting to the workshops and conversations (1973 p.5).

⁹ Indeed, the practice of public programming itself is often acknowledged amongst practitioners to fly below the radar, especially in large institutions.

process of discovery' (p.12). Such an 'imaginative [auto]ethnography' speaks to the practice of workshops and conversations described in Chapter Four, and indeed the entire thesis as a process generated and marked by a series of hunches. Indeed, my hunch that attending to the overlooked, awkward and uncomfortable parts of the public programme could reveal what is at stake within it, is really where this project began.

Theoretical Approaches for Materialising Publics

The existing literature, mapped below, variously renders the apparatus of the museum, curating and the participatory encounter visible and critically available. However, the specific ways in which becoming public within institutional spaces manifests itself remains relatively unscrutinised. Consequently, this literature tends towards the idea of delivering for a general, idealised public that art institutions both invoke, and are predicated on. Even the pluralising of publics segments them into neat groupings to be marketed to and extracted from, rather than embracing – or celebrating – their embodiment, contradictions and contingency. These literatures move from conviviality to antagonism, knowledge production to dissensus and transformation, yet each position reduces publicness to some kind of singularity. As suggested above and discussed in more detail below, resistance to getting specific about the messy contingency of becoming public could be about distancing ourselves from failure and implication. This limits thinking about what is at stake in such moments, and how they might re-construct our staid understanding of publics and publicness. The politics of this thesis is found in disturbing and disrupting the idealised notions of publics that are drawn on, and sometimes instrumentalised, by the art museum and its extended spaces.

The main theoretical bodies I draw on to probe the gaps and problems issuing from the Literature Review are theatre and performance studies, queer and feminist theory, which often interact. However, I argue they have not been combined in any substantive way to interact with material from museum studies, the curatorial, new institutionalism, educational turn and discourses on participation and community. Though these areas suggest, even turn to the performative, queer or the situational (feminist) in their singularity, what happens when we combine them to make these

links explicit? For example, if queer criticality challenges and breaks down normative identity categories, could it break up the normative, monolithic construction of 'the public' to re-think how publics are produced performatively, even queerly? It is also through queer, feminist theorists such as Halberstam (2011) and Sara Ahmed (2004, 2006) and theatre scholars like Nicholas Ridout (2006) that we find examples of where getting specific takes us. Applying these more embodied approaches to the disruptive moments I describe enables a nuanced understanding of publicness, moving it beyond an abstract state, or static space that we step in and out of.

Summary of Methodological Approaches

My project emerges from how the art museum has been tied, in rather uncomfortable ways, to normative, idealised notions of 'public space' and publicness. It understands publicness as a function of the art museum, not simply a given. Taking public and private as overlapping across bodies and architectures (Warner 2005), together with Allen's suggestion to understand public as more a question of 'when' over a condition of 'where' (2015 p.178), I take a specific place – the contemporary art institution – and a specific practice – the public programme – to unpack publicness as an emergent and contingent process of *becoming*. I do this through a close reading of small and large 'public problems' I encountered as public programmer and audience member, described at the outset and re-framed as 'disruptive moments'. I do this because the public is an abstract notion, which, as my Literature Review details, leaves it open to instrumentalisation. Indeed the experience of publicness itself often precarious, particularly for certain bodies for whom the right to appear publicly does not come easily, as Judith Butler (2015) has suggested.

In order to interrogate, challenge and resist this abstractness, this research looks to a specific practice that I have been professionally invested in for over seven years, that like publicness, has no fixed definition. A public programme might be called education, learning or engagement and may fall between several departments and agendas, including curatorial or marketing. It can take overlapping forms from the discursive, to the participatory, experiential or convivial, and can even be presented as entertainment. For the purposes of this thesis, it can generally be understood to open a temporary space of face to face gathering and reflection on an institution's

main or core programme of exhibitions and displays. But this also explains why my examples range from participatory performances at a city-wide festival and during a panel discussion at a conference; the reading group as curatorial intervention in an independent gallery and studio complex; the lecture at curatorial summer school in a European art school; the avant garde performance at a national museum 'late'. Examples retold from workshop attendees are similarly diverse, but all are indicative of the range of forms that a contemporary public programme might include, and variety of contexts in which it takes places. Lastly, my inclusion of examples from contemporary performance practice is particularly pertinent to my observation that theoretical material from this field presents many of the challenges, and therefore have something valuable to say about what is at stake in programmed moments of face to face gathering.

In taking this practice, and the professional demarcation of public programmer, seriously, I claim it is a specific and valuable form of curatorial practice, rather than a mere aspect or adjunct to the exhibition, as it generally appears in the literature. As I also map in my Literature Review below, the specificity of this practice and what it really has to offer, has been missed. My research addresses this gap. But I do so in an unexpected manner – not by surveying and holding up examples of best practice to showcase public programming as an exemplary curatorial form. Rather, I undertake a close, autoethnographic reading of small and larger disruptive, unsettling or unexpected moments from my professional practice as a public programmer, and my experiences as audience to such programmes, to understand what is at stake in this process of becoming public, and further, what this practice of public programming is *really* capable of.

Since this research comes out of my own embodied experience of a specific curatorial practice – public programming in the museum and contemporary art institution. My research paradigm, or rationale for carrying out this study in the way that I did, is bringing embodied experience(s) to bear on our understanding of publicness, eschewing its here-to-fore abstractness to develop a more tangible relation to it. I do this through a consistently autoethnographic and / or embodied approach: unpacking my own examples of disruptive moments; developing and sharing an anecdotal practice with other public programmers to work with theirs;

bringing queer, feminist and situated theoretical approaches together with performance and theatre studies to address the problems and gaps mapped in the literature accounting for the public programme, thereby emphasising the felt dimensions and messy reality of becoming public(s). This thesis demonstrates that is only by teasing out the affective registers of experience that we can ever challenge the ideal, abstract notion of 'public' assumed and invoked by art institutions, and institutions more broadly.

Operating para-professionally, these workshops challenged the normative divisions set up by much of the literature between professional/audience, and the classic theorisations and disciplinary boundaries that stem from this. Consciously muddying the distinction between programmer, researcher and audience in my own autoethnographic writing practice, reinforces the idea that we are not separate from the institution we operate in, nor the publics we produce. This approach was mirrored through my use of a familiar format of the public programme – the workshop – to put into practice my model of paying attention to the periphery. It also created a situation where everyone present arrived with the professional demarcation of public programmer and became audience to each other, their own programmes, and co-researcher with me.

The criteria for selecting the examples I explore, and the methods used to arrive at the conclusions I draw from them, follow this practice-led, embodied approach. Firstly, the activities and situations from which these examples issue range from performances to lectures and other more recognisable public programme events. As suggested by my Prologue and detailed above, this demonstrates how expansive the public programme has become, and as such a range of practices must be considered to understand how it produces relations beyond official, dominant forms of sanctioned publicness. The examples of disruptive moments drawn from my own anecdotal archive of organising and attending events, and several stories emerging from the workshops, were selected via two criteria. Firstly, the heightened state of feeling *at the time*, and the tenacity with which they have stuck in my memory. Secondly, their uncertain categorisation and potential therefore for multiple retellings and readings. For example, the fact that I have never known quite what to make of a strong sense of shame during a participatory performance about race and

community, is what first drew me to write about it in depth and rich texture in Chapter Three. Suffice to say that all examples from my own experience, and those shared during the workshops that I selected to retell, all happened *in public*, in the temporal and spatial presence of others. Those selected from the workshops and conversations were chosen largely for how they rendered an ‘outside’ of what we might consider permissible or possible within our current working definitions of publicness from programmers themselves, or made the invisible boundaries of public ‘space’ (a notion I am not entirely doing away with, as discussed in Chapter Four) visible.

I unpack these examples without fixing their meaning, suspending their anecdotal status and avoiding turning them into ‘case studies’ as such. Rather I use theoretical resources that explore minor, periphery, and – in particular relation to the workshop practice – anecdotal and performative modes of speech and their productivity to arrive at my conclusions. Indeed, Gavin Butt’s writing (2005) on gossip’s role as a performative informational practice that produces a different, but equally important kind of art-historical knowledge, has been instructive in developing my approach to both the writing, and the workshop practice detailed below. Given that my work entails a centring of peripheral phenomena, Manning’s writing on the value of the ‘minor gesture’ is key. She writes that ‘the minor’ both ‘exceeds the limits of the event’ and makes the event’s limits felt, and thereby ‘punctually reorients experience’ (Manning 2016 p.2). My conception of events is, on the surface at least, more literal – programmed forms of gathering in contemporary art institutions engaging both specific, and less defined publics. However, Manning’s recognition that a focus on the minor materialises the event’s limits informs my approach to writing about my experiences, as well as understanding what emerged through the workshops and conversations I held.

The conclusions that I arrive at through these examples contribute to new knowledge in the specific field of public programming, but this research also impacts curatorial discourses through its specific focus, as well as challenging discourses on the public sphere in its reframing of publicness as a temporal process of becoming. My main outcome is a specific methodology of paying attention to the periphery of events and making this an anecdotal practice by sharing it with a professional peer group

through the series *That Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers*. I called this a para-professional space because it was not about show-casing best practice, or debriefing about worst practice in order to improve it. My centring of the anecdote *within* practice eschews this unhelpful binary to suggest a third way of considering what it is we are doing when we are producing publics. In doing so it addresses both public programmers *and* their institutions, where I hope it can be of most use.

Chapter Synopsis

In the next section, a Literature Review introduces my own practice-informed context for this work; outlines the critical contexts hailing from several overlapping literatures that account for the public programme; suggests their problems, gaps and opportunities for this thesis' intervention. Building on this theoretical basis, and to cast the assumptions around publicness that attend the public programme into doubt, Chapter One begins my analysis of 'disruptive moments' with a piece of programming undertaken in 2011 that continues to provoke a sense of unease in me. I look back – not to get critical distance, but to re-inhabit an uncertainty that as a professional, I might ordinarily detach myself from. This approach is taken throughout the chapters, as I write from the various subject positions of public programmer, audience member, workshop facilitator and conversation partner.

Chapter One – That Awkward Stage

Through a detailed analysis of Aaron Williamson's performance *Collapsing Lecture* that I curated for *Late at Tate Britain: Diffusions* in 2011, I propose the public programme as a 'stage' where the art institution's 'awkward' relationship to its publics is played out. After Muñoz (2013), I take this stage to be both a physical platform and temporal phase, which reveals the process of the institution instituting itself as well as our becoming public(s) within it. Unpacking the *Collapsing Lecture*'s catalogue of 'queer failures', after Halberstam (2011), reveals how staff, performer and public are implicated in the scene of publicness, but feel and respond differently to it, becoming public in a variety of ways through it. From this I unfold the key

aspects for understanding publicness as a process of becoming, or how we become public(s) in the contemporary art institution, addressed in the remaining chapters.

Chapter Two – Paying Attention: Economics, Ethics, Embodiment

In this chapter I examine how one of Warner's keys claims – that 'a public is constituted through mere attention' (2005 p.87) – comes to bear on two common spaces created by the public programme: the summer school and the reading. How are these spaces 'held' by the event's protagonists – the speakers, performers, or facilitators – and the multiple 'actors' (human and non-human) in the room: audiences, participants, institutional staff, furniture and technical equipment? Not only are they all vulnerable to the failures of Chapter One, but I unpack how 'paying attention' is both an economic and a public relation, extending my analysis with other examples of programming and contemporary art practice. I then suggest how a shift in attention from what is produced, to who and what is producing our attention, opens the potential to explore and value the difference we inhabit when coming into publicness with others via the public programme.

Chapter Three – Performing Responsibility: Temporary Communities and Performance Art

This chapter picks up the thread of responsibility introduced in Chapter One, and suggested in Chapter Two, since we cannot respond to that which we have not first attended. This chapter explores becoming public via two participatory performances that challenged the notion of a passive audience and made claims for a temporary community and group formation. Analysing my complex, ambiguous feelings about what I participated in, this chapter thinks through what it means to be responsible for each other and the spectacle, and how these two things are sometimes at odds. Are such situations that are constructed *and* contingent a mirror of our present neoliberal condition where everyone is responsible for their own success and failure? If so, what are the limits of our capacity to respond? How does the body of this researcher and the histories and presents she is implicated in come to bear on this? What does it mean to participate ambivalently in community?

Chapter Four – Practice Makes Public

In the role of public programmer, emotional meets professional labour *in public*. This chapter tests a central proposition of the thesis – the public programme as ‘awkward stage’ – through an emergent practice extending the written research. *That Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers* (2018–19) was a series that ‘put into practice’ the shift in attention suggested by Chapter Two, inviting public programmers to collectively pay attention to the periphery of events they have programmed or attended. Participants shared and unpacked their own ‘disruptive moments’ as anecdotes that might otherwise be overlooked, for what they might tell us about publicness as a process of becoming. Creating a collective anecdotal practice, we were able to rethink the personal, professional and social demarcations that construct the public programmer, and the public to be programmed. Lastly, to explore the potential of a para-professional space for examining the uncertain parts of practice.

Introduction Conclusion

This research is not an historical or contemporary review of public programming practice, though it could lead to one. What emerges instead is how we may use the space it affords to unpack facets of publicness, which could come to matter in ways we cannot yet quantify. As I write this, during the summer of 2020, the ascendance of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement calls on white people to pay attention to the reality of Black lives, to realise that they are implicated in white supremacy, and must become actively anti-racist in order to dismantle it. In times like these art institutions make many promises,¹⁰ which the public programme is frequently used to implement or make visible, often through discussion-based events. At best, public programming becomes the instrument of commitment to systemic change; at worst, a spectacle of it. One of the most urgent shifts in public programming to emerge in the four years since I began this research is away from the desire to create ‘safe spaces’ towards the creation of ‘brave spaces’ (Arao and Clemens 2013, Palfrey

¹⁰ As seen in the proliferation of statements issued by national and smaller scale art institutions in support of BLM over the summer of 2020, and indeed their critique (Greenberger 2020).

2017).¹¹ The need to unpick what becoming public feels like in all its uncomfortableness, is part of this essential work. Because what is too often left unsaid, or unexplored, is *how* such moments of publicness are produced by institutions. This means we cannot yet understand, nor move beyond the assumptions made about the very experience of becoming public there. This thesis offers to peel back the layers of production and get specific about this process. Because the public programme is used by contemporary art institutions to promise so much, this research works towards realising its potential, as a space where all the affective realities of becoming public can be not just felt, but explored. Where we can collectively and reflexively pay attention to how people may appear, be heard, respond to, or resist what is happening, and re-form publicness in any given moment.

¹¹ In part as a response to BLM's demands, and in part in recognition of the fact that there is no such thing as a 'safe space'. This has come up in several informal discussions with colleagues, and also described by Arao and Clemens (2013), and further discussed in Chapter Three.

Literature Review

Working Knowledge

This thesis is informed in great part by my experience of working within the Public Programmes team at Tate Britain and Tate Modern from 2009 until 2016.¹² Additionally, as this research has come about through a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership with Tate, with the mandate to critically investigate the public programme in the contemporary art institution, I have drawn a lot from my time there.¹³ My knowledge of public programming extends across a range of predominantly Anglo-European museums and contemporary art institutions. My understanding of the 'public programme' is as a set of event-based opportunities for 'the public' to engage with the art, ideas and range of different practitioners, most often organised in relation to an institution's exhibition and/or collection display programme. An institution's public programme may be named as such or come under a range of other titles such as 'learning', 'education' or 'public engagement'. Tate's Public Programme (named as such) is aimed at adults,¹⁴ and includes a ticketed programme of talks, symposia, tours, practical and discussion-based workshops and evening courses, as well as performances and film screenings.¹⁵ Two additional strands under Tate's Public Programme umbrella are the Access Programme for adults with physical or sensory disabilities, and the Community Programme that supports local groups to visit to the museum.¹⁶ As such, recent forms of public programming at Tate and elsewhere, encompass different formats that range in tone from the academic to the playful and convivial.

¹² I left the role to begin this research in 2016.

¹³ As a result, this thesis has been developed in dialogue with colleagues from Tate's Public Programme and the wider Learning and Research Department.

¹⁴ As distinct from audiences that Young People's Programme, Early Years and Families, Schools and Teachers teams cater to.

¹⁵ This programming overlaps at times with the Live, Film and other programming developed by the Curatorial Department, or, is produced collaboratively with them.

¹⁶ This particular configuration was formed after a review of the Learning and Education Departments at all four Tate sites that began in 2011. One outcome of this review, entitled 'Transforming Tate Learning' and documented in an online resource of the same name (2014), was the merger of Tate Modern's Learning Department with the Education and Interpretation Department at Tate Britain, creating the cross-site Learning Department, which became Tate Learning and Research Department after a further review in 2019. The outcome of the first review meant that explicit income-generating activities and 'free' (institutionally funded) programmes were brought together, something which, at first, sat awkwardly with some members of the newly formed Public Programmes.

Broadly speaking, the public programme in the contemporary art institution operates in relation to the artistic programme, adjunctive to the primary activity of exhibition-making. When there is a dedicated role or team it sits, not always distinct from, but variously in or between curatorial, education and even marketing departments.¹⁷ This may highlight the promiscuity of the practice in larger institutions, whereas in smaller organisations, public programming is often something curatorial staff take on as part of their role.¹⁸ Over the last twenty years and particularly in the last ten, through socially engaged, performative, discursive and digital practices, the public programme has become foregrounded as the site and conduit for new agglomerations and kinds of art production. Though not exclusive to art museums, the proliferation of 'late' events across UK museums since the early 2000s opened a space for event-based art and programming that crossed participation, knowledge production and performance. As playful, performative and noisy programming took over the museum – galleries, foyers, cafes, learning and even back of house spaces – so called 'Lates culture' (Stockman 2018) expanded possibilities for engagement beyond traditional formats like ticketed talks (though these are almost always included).¹⁹ My prologue described the variety in formats, spaces and content of public programming now, all of which makes it a difficult, but interesting, practice to delineate and study, with its own set of problems and opportunities.

Such ontological slipperiness in institutional practice is also mirrored in where and how aspects of the public programme appear across a variety of discourses and

¹⁷ Despite the dedicated remit of Tate's Public Programme team, sitting within the wider Learning and Research Department, a recent internal review showed Curatorial and Marketing Departments, alongside different commercial sites like Tate Shops, Bars and Restaurants, to all be generating public programmes. This unpublished internal Tate document was carried out by Madeleine Keep in 2019, the then Convenor, Public Programmes.

¹⁸ The 'About' page of The Showroom's website and 'Staff' page of Chisenhale Gallery show no named or designated public programme, education or learning staff (The Showroom n.d. Chisenhale Gallery n.d.).

¹⁹ The Serpentine Gallery's twenty-four-hour *Marathon* events began in 2006, as a way to animate their annual architectural pavilion commissions. A year later their Park Nights programme expanded the gallery's repertoire of contemporary art production (Serpentine n.d.). Building on these developments, Tate Exchange opened in 2016 as a physical space and programme at Tate Modern and Tate Liverpool, this time with a directly participatory remit: 'for everyone to debate and reflect upon contemporary topics and ideas, get actively involved, think through doing, and make a difference' (Tate n.d.), making such programming visible as a daytime, fluid, durational and 'drop-in' activity not requiring tickets.

literatures. The intersections between departments I described above point to the interstitial place of the public programme and, therefore, the intersecting literatures that speak to this uncertain delineation. Particularly in exhibition studies, the public programme is hierarchically bound to the exhibition as an under-theorised, under-archived and altogether more slippery cultural object than the more orderly, bounded exhibition.²⁰ Having offered my own professional perspective, below I map the discourses and literatures that account for elements of the public programme through museum and exhibition studies, the curatorial, educational turn and new institutionalism. While most do not directly address it *as such*, these discourses account for a space that might be described as ‘the public programme’, framing it in terms of disruption, expansion, performativity, inclusivity and an opening of knowledge production to wider publics. They also draw attention to, or critique, a number of key terms used within contemporary art institutions and public programming practice, such as ‘community’ and ‘participation’. Is participating in something and/or forming a community the positive experience and virtuous goal that it is purported to be? What are the possible political and institutional agendas behind the desire for fuller ‘public’ participation, and what are the effects of such agendas? Lastly, I encounter the problem of the illusive and elusive ‘public’ itself. In practice, and in most literature concerning museum and gallery audiences, the public is an ideal group of people, desired and addressed, but also abstract and often absent. In what follows I establish the normative assumptions that the delineation ‘public programme’ is built on, and how these different issues take shape. I build my own rationale for why it could benefit from, and holds the potential for, a more thorough critical analysis than has previously emerged from the literatures I map, based on the gaps and problems identified therein.

Museum and Exhibition Studies

This thesis issues from the art museum and how it has been tied to publicness in rather uncomfortable ways. Emerging from the display of private collections of rare objects – frequently looted from other countries and cultures (Schoenberger 2020) –

²⁰ This is exemplified by the fact that, to my knowledge, there has not been a book-length study examining the role and function and potential of the public programme, despite an increase of curatorial and scholarly interest in it, as demonstrated by Alex Hodby’s PhD thesis (2017).

to a privileged few, in the nineteenth-century the museum opened its doors to a 'general public' (Bennett 1995, p.59). Embedded in providing exclusive access to private property, the museum's relationship to publicness is ostensibly about the movement of private wealth into public hands, as benevolent social improvement (Duncan 2013, Candlin 2010). Shifting from a notion of public good in the late twentieth-century, the museum becomes a hybridised space of commercial and social reproduction. Yet it maintains a special, and problematic, relationship with privacy: the twenty-first-century museum is routinely used to wash clean corporate and private wealth, protecting the interests of private persons (Cuno 2004), through capital projects, blockbuster exhibitions, public programming and benevolent 'out-reach' for marginalised publics. Not only have privacy and private interests always been enmeshed in a notion of the museum as public good, but the exclusivity of this exceptional 'public' space has been hidden under a veil of universality, openness and accessibility that it connotes.

Museum studies helps us to conceptualise this exceptional space in other ways. Carol Duncan describes art museums as 'ritual structures' where visitors perform ritualised gestures leading to a transformative experience moving them beyond normative ideas and ideals (1995 pp.1–2 and pp.12–13). Drawing attention to the power of the museum to produce subjectivities, Duncan contributed to a challenge, in the 1980s and 90s, to the dominant model of the museum as the keeper (curator) of rational knowledge, bringing the experience of an embodied spectator who walks those spaces into view. However, as Duncan acknowledges, the transformational ritual of the museum is best performed by those who fit into the representational regime of its collection (pp.8–9). As such, it is a powerful technology to reinforce subjectivity in relation to normative ideas of gender, sexuality, race and nationhood, as much as it may challenge and transform them. This is further explored as a 'crisis of representation' by Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh (2013). I return to their research addressing Tate Britain's 'problem' of 'missing audiences'/'non-attenders' (p.4), often classified as 'minority' in a dominant white, heteronormative culture, because it is crucial to the development of the public programme as a necessary space of address.

Tony Bennett explains how the 'civilised subject' is produced through the parallel development of the penitentiary system and the museum, with complex mechanisms of display and surveillance (1995 pp.59–86). Bennett argues the museum creates a looking subject that understands itself as *looked at*, by interiorising its panopticon gaze. As technology of surveillance, the museum sets up a powerful connection between seeing and knowing, producing a looping consciousness and self-regulation in the looking subject who (p.63), allowing us to consider it a specific technology of publicness. Today the kinds of publicness the museum produces are not only based around looking, as different forms of public programming, marketing and commercial activities demonstrate. But Bennett also allows us to think beyond an individual looking subject, to consider how the museum produces a 'general public – witnesses whose presence was [...] essential to the museum's display of power' (Bennett 1995 p.59).

Departing from a literature that, despite Bennett, largely speaks to the museum's role in the production of individual subject positions, Simon Sheikh introduces temporary exhibition-making's 'production of a public'. As the producer of 'the "new" bourgeois subject of reason', the temporary exhibition employs specific modes of address to produce a public as 'an imaginary endeavor with real effects' (2017 pp.175–8). Describing and accounting for these 'real effects' becomes important if we are to move away from the public as an abstraction, towards a specific materialisation.

The Curatorial

In the 1990s an accelerated discourse on curating emerged through its professionalisation and entrance into higher education, along with international symposia, meetings of curators and the curatorial anthologies they produced (O'Neill 2007 p.14).²¹ A more recent offshoot of this discourse is 'the curatorial' – a critical, theoretical field, moving beyond curating as practice, which Maria Lind positions as a mediating function 'performed' across a variety of fields (2012). Jean-Paul Martinon writes that 'the curatorial disrupts knowledge in order to invent knowledge' (2013

²¹ Paul O'Neill has heavily contributed to the professionalisation and discourse of curating through his curatorial, educational and editorial work, producing several of these anthologies, also mentioned in this Literature Review.

p.30), and in a similar move, Rogoff states it is at best ‘when it is attempting to enact the *event of knowledge* rather than to illustrate [...] knowledges’ (2013 p.46). Elsewhere, Bridget Crone describes the curatorial as inclusive of all kinds of ‘para activities’ that, we might otherwise describe under the umbrella of the public programme. For Crone, the curatorial is a ‘moment of encounter or staging’ where something is ‘made visible’. But though it is ‘intrinsically performative’, it is not theatrical (Crone 2013 p.209). How could such expansion into performativity and *event-ness* help our understanding of the space and possibilities of the public programme? If we understand the public programme as a performative encounter, we can also allow consider its ‘staged-ness’, and attendant failures, as constitutive of it. Instead of disavowing the theatrical, I argue for embracing it with literature from theatre and performance studies, to better understand how the public programme performs and produces publicness. In addition, the movement and expansion of ‘the curatorial’ moves us beyond spatial, architectural metaphors of public space, to imagine a more temporal, embodied process.

Public Art as Process

Paul O’Neill has recently explored his thoughts on ‘durational public art’ and ‘the concept of “attentiveness”’ as a way of positing our current condition as ‘post-participatory’ through several talks (for example at CCA, Glasgow 2018). Miwon Kwon tracks the move from site-specific, to community-specific public art, pioneered by Suzanne Lacy (and others) drawing on Lacy’s definition of “New genre public art,” [...] [as] a “democratic” model of communication based on participation and collaboration of audience members in the production of a work of art’ (Kwon 2002). Lacy’s term describes public art as practised, rather than placed, favouring ‘temporary rather than permanent projects that engage their audience, [...] as active participants in the conceptualization and production of process-oriented, politically conscious community events or programs’ (Kwon 2002 p.6). This shift in ‘public art’ towards ephemeral practice and active participation also describes many of the kinds of activities in a public programme – such as workshops, co-produced art and performance – and emphasises increased investment in programming that is

processual in nature.²² This move prompts a shift in considering publicness, as political scientist Danielle Allen suggests, ‘in terms of “flows” first, and “spaces” only secondarily’ (2015 p.178). This, in turn, becomes important to my investigation of publicness as a process, over and above a fixed space or state.

The Educational Turn

‘The educational turn’, a move away from object-based towards time-bound, process-based forms of art and knowledge production that often mirror pedagogic formats, is suggested by Susan Kelly to operate in parallel with the curatorial. Happening across the university and art school, temporary exhibitions, and of course museum and gallery education departments, Kelly argues that the former rarely acknowledged, or interacted with the latter, despite their ‘fascinating radical roots in feminist politics and radical pedagogy’ (2013 p.138). For Irit Rogoff, ‘the notion of conversation’ brought about by the educational turn ‘has been the most significant shift’, though she points out the risk of aestheticising educational formats at the expense of what is produced (2010 p.43). However, if we can define ‘access’ as ‘the ability to formulate one’s own questions as opposed to those that are posed to you’, such discursive programming might begin to account for marginalised bodies normatively excluded by the institution (p.41).

Moving to museum and gallery education, Felicity Allen (2009) unpacks a complex understanding of roles, positions and identifications within museum and gallery education.²³ She writes that:

[c]onventionally, museum curators identify with the “self” of the artist, while gallery educators are situated as identifying with the “other” of the visitor [...] at Tate Britain, we regularly involve people – “visitors” – to take on the role of

²² Putting aside, for now, the ensuing arguments concerning participation and agency, The Showroom’s *Communal Knowledge*, running since 2010, provides one example of this shift. It is an ongoing ‘programme of collaborative projects’ where ‘local and international artists and designers’ work with local residents and groups to build ‘an accumulative shared body of knowledge’ (The Showroom n.d.).

²³ At the time of writing Allen was Head of Education and Interpretation at Tate Britain, and draws on her institutional experience

artist or curator so that they, too, can play around, challenge and take authority (Allen 2009 p.2).

This excerpt brings in another word for ‘audience’ or ‘public’ not often used in the literature,²⁴ but by centring her analysis on the ‘visitor’, Allen shows how a particular kind of hosting affords a fluidity of roles and possibilities. Such a focus brings the public programme towards the curatorial, what Martinon calls a ‘space of concern for the other’. Martinon suggests curating fails at this, because it is concerned with ‘the exhibition, the artist, the curator and above all for the objects on display *and then* for the other or the audience’ (2013 p.27). The realignment of ‘the curatorial’ towards the otherness of the public has greatly informed my practice, and this research.²⁵ Indeed, how we operate within this ‘space of concern’ and still manage to ‘other’ the public, is important to my discussion in later chapters.

New Institutionalism

‘New institutionalism’ of the 1990s and early 2000s rethought ‘curatorial, art educational and administrative practices’ of middle-sized contemporary art institutions, following ‘new museology’ that emerged from reflexive museum critique of ‘hegemonial western, nationalist and patriarchal narratives and constructs’ to ‘demand for a radical examination of the[ir] social role’ in the 1980s (Flückiger and Kolb 2013).²⁶ Speaking to the traditional ‘disparities’ created by ‘[e]ducation, learning and public programmes [...] [being] seen as secondary to, or servicing, exhibitions’, Sally Tallant presents the ‘new institution’ as an opportunity to place ‘equal emphasis’ on all aspects of production, including ‘archives, reading rooms, residency schemes, talks and events as well as exhibitions’ (2010 p.187). More recently, Alistair Hudson extended this remit to include all activities the institution is used for,

²⁴ Nor was ‘visitor’ much part of my vocabulary as a public programmer, and later researcher. Partly because my erstwhile job title already acknowledged its role in the production of publics, but also because at Tate the Visitor Experience Department is separate from, but works closely with, Curatorial and Learning Departments. Partly because this research operates on the periphery of museum and gallery education studies, though it has great import for these areas.

²⁵ Indeed, at Tate my role was primarily focused on the experience of audiences, in contrast to the primacy of the curator-artist relationship of the Curatorial team.

²⁶ The term was first used by art critic Jonas Ekeberg to describe the practices of middle-sized contemporary art institutions in Northern Europe in this period (Flückiger and Kolb 2013).

including shopping, eating and using the toilets (Hudson 2015).²⁷ Considering uses and interactions beyond the informational and transactional, John Byrne (et al.) has asked '[w]hat would happen if museums put relationships at the centre of their operations?' (2018 p.11). These approaches may allow a notional flattening, though may still be aspirational. However, they make the public programme more visible, when it is repeatedly overlooked elsewhere.²⁸ But, as Gabriel Flückiger and Lucie Kolb have summarised, new institutionalism's 'key actors were theorists, curators and artists who discussed their own institutional practice', and while some hoped to create a 'politicized public or counter-public' (2013), they largely failed to reach beyond 'a relatively small, invited knowledge community' (Farquharson 2013). This leaves the positions of curator, artist and visitor unchallenged, and hierarchical relations between intra-institutional practices largely intact. Going back to museum studies and the educational turn, we find the same notion made more explicit. Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh describe the '[r]elatively marginal position' occupied by the education department at Tate Britain (2013 p.63). While O'Neill and Wilson acknowledge the public programme has long been 'peripheral to the exhibition, operating in a secondary role'; however, they do propose that discursive activities have now undergone a kind of 'curatorialisation' making them 'the main event' (2010 pp.12–13).

Both new institutionalism and the educational turn invoke the 'transformative potential' of art (Tallant 2010 p.191), as an aspiration of experimental programming and even institutions themselves (Vidokle 2010 p.149, Farquharson 2006). O'Neill and Wilson describe the emergent subjectivities of 'these radically open transactions of do-it-yourself learning' as rejecting 'a normative production of the "good" subject' (2010 p.18). Grant Kester remarks that the 'the language of disruption or estrangement is emblematic' in 'curators, educational programmers, and gallery directors [...] expressing their desire for "disrupting notions of subject"' begging the question where the desire 'to "challenge" viewers... [and] provide them with "difficult experiences"' comes from and what might it reveal about institutional expectations of

²⁷ Speaking as former Director, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA).

²⁸ For example, in her essay *Radical Museology: or, What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?* Claire Bishop's brief analysis of Reina Sofia's education programme makes clear that it is supporting the radical programme of an art institution, without being considered *the* radical programme itself (Bishop 2013 p.9).

publics? (p.13). Shifting the function of art institutions from a model of producing the 'good' or 'civilised subject' introduced and critiqued by museum studies, to disrupting and challenging what these categories even mean. The emphasis on disruption and its transformative potential is also useful for my research, which centres peripheral distractions and disruptions to the public programme. However, there is still a received notion of such programming affecting change, frequently evoked in positive terms. It is implied that such moments will be productive – but productive of what? Taking these literatures together, a concern for an 'authentic' educative experience seems at stake (that a curator is uniquely placed to facilitate): is one participating *and* learning, being challenged *and* transformed? Or is it merely a spectacular relationship to an aestheticised version of the educational? A similar concern is addressed by Jacques Rancière (2009) where he diagnoses the problem of spectatorship in theatre as an unresolved anxiety over the gap between passive viewing and active participation, discussed below in relation to notions of 'community' that it is often connected to.

Participation and Community

The intersubjective nature of public programming and attendance cannot be separated from notions of 'participation' and 'community' emerging from philosophy, performance and theatre studies and their relationship to the political. This literature accounts for areas of the public programme approaching socially engaged, participatory art practices. Following Owen Kelly's notion of cultural democracy (1984), Emily Pringle writes that late 1960s' community arts in the UK developed 'the notion of empowerment through participation in a creative process, a dislike of cultural hierarchies [...] and a belief in the creative potential of all sections of society' (2011 p.1). Creative collaboration between artists and communities where process is prized over outcome is still a common strategy of this kind of practice, with the worthy aim of increasing agency in participants.

Indeed, international histories of community arts are the forerunners of the contemporary art practices Nicolas Bourriaud famously coined as 'relational' (2002), where social interactions are materialised as art. His largely celebratory reading of the conviviality produced through participatory artworks like Rirkrit Tiravanija's

shared meals has, however, been widely criticised. As a riposte to the cosiness of Bourriaud, Claire Bishop (2004) provides a counter-narrative of relational practices that antagonise social interactions and highlight social inequalities in democratic society. Expanding her argument (2012), she points to the limits of socially engaged and participatory art practice when critique relies on moral judgements over aesthetic appreciation. Additionally, Bishop summarises the agendas for participation as: 'the desire to create an active subject [...] empowered [...] to determine their own social and political reality', the desire to cede 'authorial control' in favour of 'egalitarian and democratic' collective art making, and the desire for a 'restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning' (2006 p.12). The latter she sees as brought about through 'a perceived crisis in community and collective responsibility' (p.12). For Bishop, the active/passive binary is so 'riddled with presuppositions about looking and knowing, watching and acting, appearances and reality' that it ends up dividing 'a population into those with capacity on one side, and those with incapacity on the other' becoming 'an allegory of inequality' (Bishop 2006 p.16).²⁹ Similarly sceptical about the desires for, and possibilities of participation, Jen Harvie asks whether art and performance practices that claim to offer it ever provide more than 'a spectacle of communication and social engagement' and a dangerous 'distraction from the social inequalities they claim to critique' (Harvie 2013 p.3). She also points to the potential for these practices to be instrumentalised by producers of 'neo-liberal governmentality' (pp.3–4).

Moving to another highly contested term often aligned with the public programme, both practically and conceptually – community – theatre scholar Miranda Joseph questions its celebratory invocation of collective identity and agency in contemporary society (Joseph 2002 pp.xxx-xxxi). Grant Kester references Jean-Luc Nancy's writing on community to show how it has been 'compromised' by 'twentieth-century totalitarianism', and its fictitious 'mass identity' rendered unthinkable by post-structuralist denial of a coherent self (Kester 2004 p.154). Kwon similarly argues that 'community [has been deployed] as a coherent and unified social formation' to serve 'exclusionary and authoritarian purposes'. In fact, Kwon writes that just like 'the

²⁹ Bishop summarises Rancière's argument of the active/passive binary, which he connects to the agendas and desires for participation in contemporary art and theatre.

concept of the “public sphere,” the community may be seen as a phantom’ (Kwon 2002 p.7). However, Nancy doesn’t do away with community entirely. He suggests how it *might* be reclaimed and redefined as ‘without essence’, ‘the community that is neither “people” nor “nation”, neither “destiny” nor “generic humanity,”’ (Nancy 1991 pp.xxxix-xl). Taken together then, this literature questions what it might mean to participate under the troublesome notions of community that are often invoked and claimed by socially engaged art and theatre practices – especially, I would add, when under the auspices of the art institution, as part of a public programme.

The Bourgeois Public Sphere

The phantom Kwon refers to builds on philosopher Jürgen Habermas’ influential concept of the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ (1989). As Nancy Fraser summarises and critiques, Habermas described the development in eighteenth-century bourgeois society of a ‘discursive arena in which “private persons” deliberated about “public matters”’ (1990 p.70), that is, issues of societal importance. These discussions were held away from state influence or control, but crucially became ‘a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state’ and were ‘distinct from the official-economy [...] of market relations’ (p.57). Importantly, this discursive arena had the power to challenge the state and contribute to societal change through rational debate. However, far from being an open space, it was created by and for an emergent middle-class elite from which women were generally excluded.

The German word Habermas uses, *Öffentlichkeit*, has been translated as ‘public sphere’ and its root, *Öffentlich*, translates as ‘open’ in English. The bourgeois public sphere was both a notional ‘public space’ and distributed across actual places like coffee houses, private homes and salons where people met and discussed common affairs. It was fuelled and furthered by new forms of publishing, such as newspapers that, as Sven Lütticken has noted, were essentially private, commercial enterprises (2018). Indeed, as Lütticken has pointed out, for Fraser ‘[t]here are several different senses of privacy and publicity in play’ in the notion of ‘public sphere’. She lists these as ‘1) state-related; 2) accessible to everyone; 3) of concern to everyone; and 4) pertaining to a common good or shared interest.’ In addition, ‘[e]ach of these

corresponds to a contrasting sense of “privacy” [...] hovering just below the surface here: 5) pertaining to private property in a market economy; and 6) pertaining to intimate domestic or personal life, including sexual life’ (pp.70–71). Michael Warner goes further to highlight the heteronormative assumptions the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere is built on: ‘[it] consists of private persons whose identity is formed in the privacy of the conjugal domestic family and who enter into rational-critical debate around matters common to all by bracketing their embodiment and status. Counterpublics of sexuality and gender, on the other hand, are scenes of association and identity that transform the private lives they mediate’ (2005 p. 57). Much of the literature drawn together for this review tends towards ‘bracketing [...] embodiment’, though we are often aware of the ‘status’ of who is writing: eminent art critics, theorists, historians and curators. Is it possible to rethink publicness through particular moments when we cannot escape our embodiment, and speak from other roles or subject positions – such as audience member or public programmer themselves? Might we learn from ‘counterpublics of sexuality and gender’ to better make use of our embodied knowledge in these roles? I return to these questions later through an extended discussion of the key aspects that emerge from Warner’s understanding of publicness, and how I propose putting them into practice.

As well as critiquing these normative denominations of public and private at work in the Habermasian public sphere, feminist scholars have troubled the idealistic notion of ‘competence’ required to speak there. Mary Field Belenky and co-authors have shown that such competence, or access, is ‘produced by forms of material and social power’ that are not available to all. They argue instead for recognising the situatedness of the subject in discursive interaction (summarised in Kester 2004 p.112). The notional consensus issuing from ‘rational debate’ in the Habermasian model has also received critique: Jorinde Seijdel remarks that, ‘the public sphere and publicness is no longer based on models of harmony in which consensus predominates’ (2008 p.4). Seijdel cites Jacques Rancière’s ‘dissensus’ and Chantal Mouffe’s ‘agonism’ as equally influential in emphasising ‘the political dimension of public space and its fragmentation into different spaces, audiences and spheres... [where] forms of conflict, dissensus, differences of opinion or “agonism” are in fact constructive’ (2008 p.4). For Mouffe agonistic pluralism differs from a traditional, Habermasian concept of liberal democracy ‘as a negotiation among interests’ where

people 'leave aside their particular interests and think as rational beings' with the aim of reaching consensus. Instead, freedom relies on allowing 'the possibility that conflict may appear and [...] provid[ing] an arena where differences can be confronted' (Mouffe in Castle 1998). In addition, Mary Louise Pratt's term 'contact zone' that refers to 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power' (Pratt 1991 p.34), has been influential in radical pedagogies and museum studies to rethink the dynamics in the classroom and museum (Fischer and Reckitt 2015). The move in theory and practice from speaking about 'the public' at large to different 'publics' recognises this pluralist reality, exemplified by the relaunch of the Finnish curatorial agency Checkpoint Helsinki into PUBLICS, under the direction of Paul O'Neill in 2017. Such revisions are not just a question of plurality however, but equality of access. These approaches expose the limitations of publicness, community and participation in art and institutional practices, especially when thought in terms of unification and consensus. Applied to the public programme in particular they might help us break up an abstract, monolithic public to be 'programmed', rupturing fantasies of consensus, but multiplying the kinds of communing possible.

Biennialisation

In recent years, the rise of temporary contemporary art institutions in the form of international biennials, triennials and quinquennials, alongside annual, explicitly commercial art fairs, have significantly shifted the landscape and visibility of the public programme. Shwetal A. Patel uses the term 'biennialisation' to describe 'the often dialectical tension between redemptive world-making and bland homogeneity' in many of these events (2020). Helping to counteract this, the biennial's public programme signifies meaningful engagement with a particular locality, especially if we are to consider the sustained activity of, for example, Liverpool Biennial's work in

poorer areas of the city like Toxteth or Everton (Liverpool Biennial n.d.).³⁰ Polly Staple's curatorship of *Frieze Projects* (2003–05) (Gronlund and Staple 2006), paved the way for public programming, comprising talks, screenings and performances, to become a fixture of the contemporary art fair.³¹ More recently, philosopher, curator and transgender activist Paul B. Preciado's public programme *Parliament of Bodies* for *documenta 14* (*documenta* 2017) considered the stakes of publicness for non-normative bodies and experiences, becoming an important benchmark for public programming within the temporary institution (Preciado and Sari 2017). In all these forms, an increasing visibility of public programming, under the curatorship of lauded contemporary thinkers and celebrity curators, highlights the growing significance of this practice, as well as impacting practice in more permanent institutions.³²

The Neoliberal Institution

'Biennialisation' could be considered another facet of the neoliberal institution. The museum is often referred to as a 'public space', building on the Habermasian ideal and its attendant problems. This prompts another consideration of how publicness and the museum – and by extension today's contemporary art institution – have been tied together in complex, uncomfortable ways. If the nineteenth-century liberal institution was orientated towards a 'public good', the twenty-first-century neoliberal institution conceives of a public in terms of marketing segmentation and opportunity for commercial growth. Concerning both museum studies and new institutionalism, this shift is nested within a broader social context where neoliberalism has become the dominant governing ideology. For geographer David Harvey, neoliberal capitalism or neoliberalism, initially emerged as an activist political economic theory promoting the idea that 'human well-being can best be advanced by liberating

³⁰ Programming under Education Curator Polly Brannan included permanent commissions such as Mohamed Bourouissa's *Resilience Garden* (2018) and Koo Jeong A x Wheelscape's *Evertro* (2015), a glow-in-the-dark skate park in Liverpool's Everton Park. In providing collaboratively produced, long-term engagements, such projects might help redress the problematic art tourism of 'biennialisation'. Though characterised in largely positive terms as a regenerative tool (Franklin 2018), art tourism often felt by local residents to be a brief invasion of the art world elite that can bring problematic aspects of regeneration (Angotti 2012, Bolton 2013).

³¹ The art fair's public programme works more with art's immediate constituents – artists, curators, dealers, critics – than a broad public, partly due to prohibitively high ticket prices.

³² The anthology *How Institutions Think: Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse* (O'Neill et al. 2017) charts how traditional institutions kept up with more temporary, contemporary formats.

individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework, characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (2005 p.2). In practice, as Ben Walters describes, the 'privatisation of public utilities and services, reduced financial regulation and lower, less redistributive taxation' since 1979 under successive UK governments, has significantly impacted society and its cultural production, generating 'the celebration of individualism, entrepreneurialism, competition, risk, resilience, flexibility and consumption and the demonisation of collectivity, collaboration and activities that do not generate economic capital' (2020 pp.36–37). Anthony Davies described the effects and responses of state-funded cultural institutions 'set to work by capital in ever more "innovative" (read: commercialised) ways' as surfacing 'a host of contradictions and antagonisms'. Davies concluded that some embraced 'the liberating capacity of new revenue streams linked to consultancy, outsourcing, business incubation and enterprise activities'. Others sought 'more tactical models of engagement, looking to new constituencies and standards of practice' (Davies 2007). All of which suggests the public programme is an important tool for the neoliberal institution.

Today, the compromised politics of the neoliberal art institution mean that the experience of publicness it promotes is betwixt and between: do we accept its complete neoliberalisation as part of the experience, or do we try and wrest back from it some moment(s) of public good? Grant Kester (2012) has analysed how New Labour's 'arguments in support of public art funding were increasingly framed in terms of art's efficacy in transforming individuals from "marginal" populations (the homeless, long-term unemployed, "at risk" youth) into productive citizens'. Kester links the productive potential of these renewed subjects to the value entrepreneurial artists offer to the overall economy where 'artistic production deserves public support because it will lift the UK out of recession' (2012 p.15).³³ In a similar vein, Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh remind us that following the then Prime Minister Tony Blair's famous 'education, education, education' speech in 1996, museum and education departments were 'invested [...] with a whole new import' and charged with both delivering 'policy objectives' and 'lever[ing] funding from other public-sector funding

³³ These arguments were based on *Creative Britain* (1998) by Chris Smith, the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. Kester shows the irony in those whose personal notions of value may extend beyond the financial, becoming fiscally valuable, even vital, to the country's economy.

agencies as evidence of social inclusion and public value.’ However, rather than giving education a more prominent place in the museum, New Labour’s spotlight ‘paradoxically instrumentalised it further as a service department to offset policy agendas’ (Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh 2013 p.62). These literatures, alongside Jen Harvie’s work (2013), place the public programme doubly at risk of instrumentalisation. It can be thought of as both an out-sourced service provision of, for example, education, community support and therapeutic care *and* a generator of new income streams. Unlocking lucrative sources of private funding and generating vital social capital, the public programme boosts the financial well-being of the institution while simultaneously being drastically underfunded and marginalised within it (Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh 2013 p.63). These literatures recognise how the public programme is both *of value*, fiscally and socially, and *devalued*.

If we are able to reclaim some public good from the neoliberal art institution, what is the quality of this experience? Nina Möntmann writes that the, ‘pressure [on art institutions] to attract a mass public and to deliver a visitors’ count to both sponsors and politicians’ is simultaneously, ‘contradicted by the need to produce new publics’ (Möntmann 2008 p.17). Under what Möntmann calls the ‘corporate turn’, relationships between institutional actors and publics are experienced by ‘many curators and directors’ as ‘fragile and awkward’ (p.19).³⁴ But aside from wincing at such awkwardness, how might dwelling on particular moments of discomfort be generative? Burton, Jackson and Willsdon also use awkwardness to characterise the way in which ‘public engagement’ for museums ‘mixes political practices of community organizing with marketable practices of aesthetic service,’ which they diagnose as ‘uncomfortable’ but ‘sometimes productive’ (2016 xvii). Not only this, but the fallen position of museum-as-public-good, built on nation-building and subject formation, is most recently underlined by urgent calls to decolonise it (Aitkins et al. 2015 Schoenberger 2020).³⁵ If the liberal subject of Western hegemonic

³⁴ My working knowledge echoes Möntmann: in Tate’s Public Programme, and indeed the wider Learning and Research Department, the clash between institutional agendas of inclusivity and income generation were at times a point of contention.

³⁵ Collaborations across the museum and the academy such as the seminar series *Decolonising British Art: Decentering, Resituating and Reviewing Artworks and Collections* (2020) show how the public programme is frequently utilised to demonstrate commitment to this work. The series is an initiative of the University of the Arts London’s Decolonising Arts Institute, inviting members of the British Art Network and supported by Tate and Paul Mellon Centre. It is delivered in partnership with

universalism enshrined in the notion of a public is no more attractive than the consumer subject projected by the neoliberal institution, then the question is, what kind of notion of public *is* desirable, or even possible?

Problem Public(s)

Despite the shift from liberal to neoliberal institution, its notion of ‘the public’ still relies on a particular nineteenth-century formation of a mass, abstract entity out there ready to be engaged with and/or dismissed. Contemporary politics also problematically draws on, or claims to act on behalf of a singular, normative public.³⁶ I argue that a lack of understanding, or feeling, for this public is partly what led to the Leave result of the Brexit referendum in 2016. I propose that a similar lack in art institutions is equally pernicious.

But in many ways the art institution is now plagued by a *plural* idea of publics: the missing, disengaged public, the uneducated, misinformed or unruly public, the culturally elite and exclusive public, not to mention its further fracturing into particular ‘communities’ branded ‘minority’ (read: non-normative, non-dominant) to be addressed and/or targeted. Thomas Crow (1985) makes way for thinking this plurality by mapping early figurations of the multiple publics attending the eighteenth-century Paris Salon, discussed below. Public programming in relation to, and alongside, museum and gallery education is now not simply a marginal or complimentary activity to the main business of preserving and displaying culture or producing knowledge. It is a powerful tool with which to both overcome and rethink the art institution’s problematic relationship to all of these publics, fulfil its responsibilities towards them, and leverage sought after and lucrative funding opportunities. Trusts and foundations such as Paul Hamlyn Foundation and corporations such as Bloomberg and Unilever have long been major sponsors of the arts, muddying the ‘comfortable old distinctions between public and private’ (Wu

MIMA, Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT), Institute of International Visual Art (Iniva) and three major national collections Arts Council (ACC), British Council (BC) and Government Art Collection (GAC).

³⁶ When I began this research, the phrase ‘the people have spoken’ was used by both Leave and Remain campaigners to justify or admonish ‘the British public’ for their ‘decision’ to leave the European Union in 2016.

2003).³⁷ These sponsorship relationships come with specific criteria for engagement that the public programme is often utilised to meet.³⁸

The problem of an amorphous, mass public presumed to be participating in these programmes,³⁹ is superseded by a public that is elsewhere or missing entirely. Felicity Allen writes about a Tate partnership with The National Museum of Damascus, that ‘displayed antiquities to a public who mostly did not come’, undefinable because it refused the museum’s invitation (2009 p.5). Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh addressed the problem of the ‘elusive public’, asking, ‘What is the contemporary British public and how does it become visible to the art museum?’ Research revealed, ‘the problematic surrounding the representational role of audience, acting as a stand-in term, a “place holder”, for this public’. They also argue for, ‘visitor, audience and public [to be] disentangled’ and introduce the problematic of ‘visitors acting as consumers’ (2013 p.8).⁴⁰ Jan Verwoert controversially suggests doing away with any obligation to address a public, thereby resisting its instrumentalisation for ‘strategic product placement through target group marketing’ (Verwoert 2008 p.67). While there might be some advantage to his approach, it seems a rather thinly veiled attempt to absolve responsibility of speaking to anyone other than an already informed audience, recalling new institutionalism’s failure.

³⁷ Until recently oil companies like BP and Shell have regularly (and increasingly controversially) sponsored exhibitions and public programming in national cultural institutions. BP has sponsored the British Museum since 1996 (Available from: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/support-us/supporter-case-studies/bp>). Tate ended its 26-year-long sponsorship relationship with BP in 2017 (Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/11/bp-to-end-tate-sponsorship-climate-protests>). Southbank Centre and British Film Institute (BFI) have been supported by Shell since 2006 with sponsorship coming to an end in 2020 (Available from: [the-guardian.com/business/2020/mar/09/oil-shell-end-relationship-bfi-southbank-centre-british-film-institute-climate-crisis](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/mar/09/oil-shell-end-relationship-bfi-southbank-centre-british-film-institute-climate-crisis)). Lastly, the Design Museum’s problematic relationship with an arms trading company has been called into question (Charlesworth 2018).

³⁸ For example, Tate Britain’s *BP Saturdays* (2008–12) series of festival-style day-long events led by Public Programmes, Early Years and Families, and Young People’s Programme that ran at Tate Britain.

³⁹ Such as *BP Saturdays*.

⁴⁰ This research was based on the *Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture* research project (2007–10).

‘Publics are queer creatures’

Verwoert’s dismissal is also indicative of the difficulty in grasping the substance and essence of any public. Warner also acknowledges their slipperiness: ‘[p]ublics are queer creatures. You cannot point to them, count them, or look them in the eye’ (2005 p.7) In doing so, he gestures towards certain kinds of embodiment that can extend an understanding of publicness beyond the ‘rational-critical debate’ proposed by the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere. As Thomas Crow has shown, observers and critics of the eighteenth-century Paris Salon did not shy away from describing its public in sensuous, if derisive, terms. Writing in 1777 *Pidansat do Mairobert* conjures this striking scene of the atmosphere and intermingling of opposites in the Salon:

[...] you cannot catch your breath before being plunged into an abyss of heat and a whirlpool of dust. Air so pestilential and impregnated with the exhalations of so many unhealthy persons should in the end produce either lightning or plague. Finally you are deafened by a continuous noise like that of the crashing waves in an angry sea. But here nevertheless is a thing to delight the eye of an Englishman: the mixing, men and women together, of all the orders and all the ranks of the state [...] Here the Savoyard odd-job man rubs shoulders with the great noble in his *cordon bleu*; the fishwife trades her perfumes with those of a lady of quality, making the latter resort to holding her nose to combat the strong odor of cheap brandy drifting her way; the rough artisan, guided only by natural feeling, comes out with a just observation, at which an inept wit nearby bursts out laughing only because of the comical accent in which it was expressed; while an artist hiding in the crowd unravels the meaning of it all and turns it to his profit’ (Mairobert in Crow 1985 p.4).

Smell and breath are pungent metaphors in Mairobert’s observation, signalling a burgeoning fear of contamination in the rarefied space of the eighteenth-century Paris Salon. Indeed, contamination and unruliness have been recurrent themes for the museum’s public (Candlin 2008 p.279). Mairobert is also concerned with the competing affective and intellectual responses to the artwork on view. He does not simply satirise the clash of cultures and classes, but as Crow observes, insists ‘on an

undifferentiated whole while attending in detail exclusively to heterogeneity, to the particular and the private', exemplifying the inherent contradiction that 'the "public" is both everywhere and nowhere in particular' (Crow 1985 p.4). In the Salon, as we see in today's museum and its extended spaces, private interests and commercial profit were not disentangled from the activity and presence of unpredictable, lively and multiple publics.

Salon artist and critic Charles Coypel emphasised the point in a different manner: 'this place can offer twenty publics of different tone and character in the course of a single day: a simple public at certain times, a prejudiced public, a flighty public, an envious public, a public slavish to fashion [...] a final counting of these publics would lead to infinity' (Coypel in Crow 1985 p.10). Focussing on 'tone and character' rather than individualising details, Coypel employs novel, but general characterisations to discredit an unpredictable public opinion that could threaten his position as artist. Coypel's assessment is so on point it could be contemporary; describing, for example, the publics at a contemporary museum's late-night event. As an eighteenth-century perspective however, it demonstrates how notions of publics have become narrower, rather than broader, over the last two centuries. What seems like a flippant account from Coypel takes on a queerer angle when read alongside Warner's earlier assertion. Instead of a singular, general public, both Coypel and Warner playfully evoke the slippery nature of *publics* – that are plural, infinite, and resist categorisation – which is what makes them queer.

The word 'queer' has a long, complex history. Since the early nineteenth-century it has been used to abuse and shame bodies that did not conform to what Adrienne Rich termed 'compulsory heterosexuality' (1980), or traditional binary gender norms. It has been reclaimed and actively used as a self-identification by queer theorists and activists since the 1990s (Walters 2020 pp.19–20). As David Halperin writes, the power of queer identity is that it 'need not be grounded in any positive truth or in any stable reality [...] Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant [...] a positionality vis à vis the normative' (1995 p.62).⁴¹ My

⁴¹ 'Unlike gay identity [...] rooted in the positive fact of homosexual object-choice' (Halperin 1995 p.62). However, Halperin also notes that the radical unspecificity of queer leaves it problematically

use of queer in this thesis does not deny or bracket the connection to a lived experience of homosexuality and gender non-conformity. Rather, following Halperin and Warner et al, I wish to suggest how the '[un]stable reality' of queerness might pose possibilities for *publics* as a useful deviation from 'the public': a mass, abstract and normative grouping belonging to, and claimed by, a dominant heteronormative culture. In doing so, I appeal to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's description of queer as 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically'. Sedgwick suggests queer has other resonances and possibilities for opening up 'race, ethnicity' and other 'identity-fracturing discourses' (1994 pp. 8–9). Similarly, José Esteban Muñoz uses Nancy's notion of 'being singular plural' to address 'the way in which the singularity that marks a singular existence is always conterminously plural'. It is my hope that a conscious, and careful application of queer to 'the public' opens up the possibilities for particularity and difference within and between entities, which are also 'always relational to other singularities' (Muñoz 2009 pp.10–11). With these understandings, how might 'queer' be mobilised to expand possibilities but also, to describe an 'undifferentiated whole while attending in detail exclusively to heterogeneity, to the particular and the private' (Crow 1985 p.4) within the public and publics? How might a more sensuous, affective mode of attending to publicness see queerness as belonging to publics in their *becoming*, rather than already being or belonging to any particular type of public?

Intimate Relations

Despite their slipperiness and resistance to categorisation, Warner offers ways of grasping their coming into being. Perhaps most importantly, to begin with, publics are not simply always already out there ready to be engaged with. They exist only 'by virtue of their imagining', are *produced* through an address (2005 pp.7–8) and through the 'mere' fact of someone paying attention (p.87). It is these things that,

'available for appropriation by those who do not experience the unique political disabilities and forms of social disqualification from which lesbians and gay men routinely suffer' (p.65).

among other key factors, allow the possibility for strangers to enter into dialogue with one another about something they share in common (pp.10–11).

Warner also debunks the stricter demarcations of public and private Hannah Arendt described (1958), demonstrating their continual overlap across our bodies, home, leisure and workplaces. Though socially defined and constructed, public and private are not merely abstract categories but physical, somatic realities.⁴² As Warner writes, '[t]he word "public" also records this bodily association: it derives from the Latin *poplicus*, for people, but evolved to *publicus* in connection with *pubes*, in the sense of adult men, linking public membership with pubic maturity' (original emphasis). 'Pubes' may now be a crude reference to pubic hair, but as Warner also points out, 'privates' is another euphemistic name for the genitals, and 'the privy' an old word for 'toilet'. Mapped across the body, public and private are the vectors through which we understand our own 'self-hood', gender and sexuality, and I add, our interpersonal relationships (Warner 2005 pp.23–24). And so, the transitioning between private and public is in many ways intimately connected to bodily processes, and other bodies. Unlike puberty, however, publicness is not only a developmental phase, but a transition returned to on almost a daily basis.

As well as the sexual, desiring body, the link between pubic maturity and public membership recalls an occupational hazard for the public programmer: mixing up the words 'pubic' and 'public' in an email, document to be published or presentation.⁴³ Mistakenly alluding to the private, the sexual, when you are in public, performs a violation of these norms (Warner 2005 p.23), which I suggest is also tangled up with sexual maturity brokering publicity. If coming into adulthood is partly coming to terms with one's own visibility and participation in a wider community beyond the familial unit, among other things, this is inescapably an embodied experience. I suggest that when we are public – whether we make ourselves public or are *made* public by something or someone else – we are reminded what this feels like. We might sense

⁴² It is only through language and training in social norms, of personal hygiene for example, that we come to think of what is private and what is public as 'natural' (Warner 2005 p.23–24).

⁴³ This is a mishap I've fretted over many times, particularly on this research journey. It was returning to the scene of the darkened auditorium, heart thumping as I waited for my presentation to appear and imagining the words 'Pubic Programme' writ large across the screen, when I first wondered whether such a slippage might be more than just an anxiety-inducing anecdote?

a hyper-awareness of our physical body: how it takes up space, how our voice sounds, and worry about the impression such our presence is making on others.⁴⁴

If the adolescent body coming into a sexual maturity – a temporal, bodily process – brokers a public relation with others, then we can begin to see how publicness might not just be about the space we inhabit, or the words that we use there, in the Habermasian construction of the bourgeois public sphere. This fleshy, bodily reality of puberty to publicness reminds us that how we appear, and feel about such appearance, is just as important. If we can understand the experience of publicness as necessarily uncertain, the public programme might become an intimate form of relating that doesn't escape embarrassment or awkwardness.⁴⁵ In fact, as we shall see, it may be seen to embrace these feelings, and certainly to produce them. Inspired by Crow's mapping, and Warner's nuanced account, I am calling for specific, processual, embodied understandings of publicness, as they are produced by the public programme of the museum and contemporary art institutions.

Getting Specific

Why hasn't this already happened in the thorough way that I am proposing? Is there a problem with, or a fear of, *getting specific* about this process? From the conviviality of Bourriaud, to the avant-garde antagonism of Bishop or knowledge production of 'the curatorial' and 'educational turn', each position reduces publicness to a singular possibility. Even the pluralising of publics draws on idealised notions, foreclosing on

⁴⁴ Ron Mueck's *Ghost* (1998) seems to encapsulate this experience of self-consciousness: a sculpture of a teenage girl over two metres tall, dressed in a bathing costume, leaning awkwardly against the wall with down-cast eyes. As Tate Collection's summary text suggests, the sculpture's large scale reflects teenage anxiety at being 'the subject of others' attention' (Martin 2015). Susanna Greeves similarly writes that 'Ghost is the embodiment of teenage self-consciousness, the projection of a stage at which our bodies become suddenly large and strange and acutely embarrassing to us' (Greeves and Wiggins 2003 p.59).

⁴⁵ Incidentally Tate's Public Programme sometimes appears uncertain about its own remit and audience, especially when overlapping with large-scale peer-led events organised by the Young People's Programme that regularly attract an audience over the specific age-group of 15–25 they are aimed at. It is almost as if the institution is unsure about how audiences transition from young people into adults, and how to respond. This might be true of peer-led youth programming at the other institutions that were involved in the Tate-led five-year research project Circuit: Firstsite, Colchester; MOSTYN, Llandudno; Nottingham Contemporary; The Whitworth, Manchester; and Wysing Arts Centre and Kettle's Yard, Cambridgeshire (Tate n.d.).

a more complex understanding of what is at stake within these spaces. It seems that the distanced critic is still in place.⁴⁶ The danger in naming the public programme as *such*, is that it creates another object of distanced critical analysis, rather than getting any closer to the messy crossing of private and public that such programming entails. Not only this, could an increased focus on, and definition of, public programming – resulting from research like mine – risk losing what makes it such an interesting space? While I recognise these problems, I believe the promise of embodiment in some of the literature reviewed points towards a more affective analysis, as taken up by Jennifer Fischer and Helena Reckitt account for ‘the feeling of exhibitions’ (2015 p.361). Such an approach expands not only our understanding, but the possibilities for both practice and discourse around the public programme.

Perhaps another problem with accessing the specificity I call for is the possibility of failure and implication it opens up, something I suggest performance and theatre studies may liberate us from. Nicholas Ridout (2006) has theorised the failures of theatre – that it is ‘uncomfortable, compromised, boring, conventional, bourgeois, overpriced and unsatisfactory most of the time’ – as constitutive of it (p.3). These failures are not only intrinsic to the experience, but worth attending to ‘as a fruitful area of theoretical and political enquiry’ that might otherwise be missed (p.7). Since the ‘events, encounters and phenomena’ in Ridout’s study are almost routine, like ‘experiences of being scared, embarrassed or overcome with giggles’, he risks ‘being thought stupid, banal, literal minded, or worse: unprofessional’ by colleagues and peers. However, scholarly interest in what ‘the non-professional theatre-goer might take an interest in’ probes what Ridout sees as a significant gap in theatre studies (Ridout 2006 pp.14–15). My project also examines the failures, awkwardness and disruptions to the smoothness of the public programme – at the risk of my own professional standing – which I similarly argue are constitutive of the practice. Moreover, these are the moments when we are able to understand – perhaps only ever fleetingly – the stakes of being in, and becoming part of, a public. The fact that I

⁴⁶ For example, Irit Rogoff summarises the public programming of *Academy*, a collaborative research project between Goldsmiths, University of London and Van Abbemuseum that asked ‘What can we learn from the museum?’, into several neat paragraphs outlining the questions that emerged from each sub-team on the project (Rogoff 2010). With no details about what happened in the process that was surprising, unsettling or even uncertain, we are simply given to understand the programme as productive of useful knowledge.

asked peers and colleagues to join me in discussions about the disruptions and discomforts of our professional practice only increases the risk that Ridout names, which I unfold in more detail below.

There are other, grander failures at stake in the museum, which are also constitutive of it, and have already been addressed by scholarship. Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh have already called out the failure of museums using ‘racial and minority ethnic categories [...] as a means of targeting specific groups to improve diversity statistics in museum attendance’ showing how in fact they ‘fail to change core museum attendance demographics’ (2013 pp.4–5). Much ‘ticketed’ public programming largely attracts the white, middle-class and liberal audience the museum is already predicated on, which in itself limits the radical, idealised forms of communing heralded by the literature. But this does not mean that I am calling for a detailed understanding of who makes up this public via more audience research. Rather, I call for an examination of the feelings generated in these spaces, because the ‘queasiness’ and ‘ambivalence’ Ridout finds in the theatre, mirrors the feelings that often came up for me as a public programmer. Not only are these harder to define or write about, but the discourses that hold transformative ‘dissensus’ in high regard, gesture towards, but do not adequately describe specific experiences of it. This limits what might otherwise be said about more minor feelings of discomfort and unease. I align my approach with studies like Jemma Desai’s (2020), that unfolds from her uncomfortable feelings as a ‘cultural worker embodied in difference’ working within majority white arts organisations and systems. Desai also writes from the professional demarcations of writer, curator and public programmer.

Ridout draws attention to something else that clarifies why, despite Desai’s important work, this approach is not more widespread in his close reading of Michael Fried’s disgust at theatricality of ‘literalist’ (better known as minimalist) art of Donald Judd, Robert Morris and others that: ‘forces the spectator to acknowledge... “the beholder’s *body*”’. Ridout suggests Fried’s italicisation draws on a prevalent notion that our, or another’s body is ‘the last thing we might expect to find engaged in the aesthetic encounter’ (2006 p.8). Fried’s suspicion of theatricality was highly

influential for art criticism and theory eschewing any connection with theatre.⁴⁷ Rather than complete aversion, there is still a lingering discomfort with theatricality in today's art world, as Catherine Wood and Jérôme Bel have discussed (2014). But for Ridout, in the actual theatre 'the encounter with another person, in the dark, in the absence of communication' is fruitful because it is also 'an encounter with the self, and thus the occasion for all sorts of anxieties [...] to discuss under headings such as narcissism, embarrassment or shame' (pp.8–9).

While a public programme is not generally presented as theatre, it can be theatrical in both subtle and striking ways. Our participation in it means we are no longer disembodied eyes roving the gallery, but a *body*, with processes, feelings and responses. I look at public programming through the lens of theatre and performance studies and practice, therefore, to open up what these ritualised public gatherings in spaces of culture can tell us about becoming public as a *process*, and as Ridout encourages us to think about, an encounter with the self, as well as others. I argue that, rather than an incidental inconvenience to be overlooked in the name of a greater goal (criticality, objective knowledge, larger visitor numbers) an awareness of one's own body and feelings in co-presence with others, is exactly what the public programme offers. It is in such moments that we get an opportunity to ask, who am I amongst these others? What is my role and responsibility here?

Opportunities and Theoretical Approaches for Materialising Publics

This thesis looks at an under-theorised, but specific curatorial practice with a mandate to address and question the 'problem' of the public as it is found in the twenty-first-century art institution. I have found that the overlapping discourses surrounding the public programme rarely address the affective complexities of public situations generated within it. My research addresses these gaps in scholarship, alongside the public programme's marginal position in relation to exhibitionary and display practices and histories. My writing and curatorial practice mobilise it as a unique opportunity to understand what it means to be *and* become part of a public in

⁴⁷ As Jonas Barish charts in his book *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981), a resistance to the theatrical where it appears in literature, art and culture more broadly is nothing new

today's neoliberal art institution. This requires a reflexive research methodology comprising theoretical, autoethnographic, critical reflection on practice and practice-led enquiry. Addressing the opportunities for intervention issuing from the Literature Review, these methodologies also suggest ways of unpicking the complex affective relations involved in specific moments of publicity issuing from mine, and others', practices and experiences.

Firstly, the idea of a mass abstract public out there waiting to be engaged with still dominates much museum and public programming practice. Attempts have been made to address abstractness through revisions of the Habermasian public sphere, but in practice, public programming is often tasked with materialising a 'general' public for the institution. Also prevalent is a 'missing' public (Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh 2013), previously termed 'hard to reach' by many museums and cultural organisations.⁴⁸ Such groups are catered for – or 'targeted' – through 'community' or 'youth' programming, subsections of a more generic 'public programme' that is notionally open to all. The report 'How can we engage more young people in arts and culture?' (Asif et al 2019) suggests strategies that cultural organisations may use to secure funding, drawing on a 'cultural deficit' model that has been heavily critiqued (Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh 2013, Hylton 2007), but persists in policy. Through these efforts we encounter complex notions of value: economic, social, institutional and personal. We also run into the problematics of the 'awkward' relations between institutions and their addresses to generic, or segmented publics that they are trying hard to 'reach'.

Bringing Warner (2005) to exhibition studies, Sheikh proposes that imagining and producing such counterpublics through exhibition-making may, 'entail a reversal of existing spaces into other identities and practices, a queering of space...' (Sheikh 2007 p.182). Building on this, I open up the literature mapped with queer and performance theory and practices to move away from spatial models and normative, fixed identity formations of a singular public. This allows for a more nuanced and

⁴⁸ Jessica Symons outlines the difficulties of this once prevalent term and its mobilisation by cultural institutions and local governments in her journal article, 'We're not hard-to-reach, they are!' Integrating local priorities in urban research in Northern England: An experimental method' (2017)

lively (literally, more alive) understanding of contemporary publics. This theoretical move is partly inspired by Crow's mapping of social commenters and art critics of the eighteenth-century Salon in Paris that captured its atmosphere in sensual terms, as well as segmenting the public by occupation and social class. Through them we gain a sense of how an art-viewing public was produced and judged by the then Parisian art world. As discussed above, we also get to know the vivid, burgeoning fear of the contaminating crowd, which later invades the art museum. Has such a public of 'types' ceased to exist, or are there other reasons why we cannot name and identify the public who is wanted, and not wanted (by Verwoert and perhaps others), within the space of the art institution? How might a recourse to more sensual and embodied notions of publics and how they inhabit the institution open up a richer, more radical understanding of what it means to become public there?

Contemporary curatorial discourse and practice may now revolve around *publics*, often without accounting for the move from singular to plural. Burton, Jackson and Willsdon employ Leo Steinberg's definition of the public 'not as a group of people but as a function' explaining that their 'utilization of the plural, "publics," [...] emphasizes that a "public" should never be understood monolithically' (2016 p.xxv). They also consider the polyvalent nature of the word public with the nouns it often qualifies: 'sphere', 'space' and 'sector' that signals how '[f]rom one perspective publicness is about freedom, but from another, it is the embodiment of constraint' (p.xv–xvi). Eschewing the dangers of a constraining and monolithic understanding then, I also avoid the marketing segmentation logic of the neoliberal institution, to consider how specific moments of publicness are produced – rather than pinning down who is producing or produced by them. Following their and Steinberg's approach, and alongside Sheikh's assertion that exhibitions produce publics as an 'imaginary endeavor[s] with real effects', I attempt to examine these 'real effects' in an embodied and situated way. Donna Haraway (1998) used the term 'situated knowledges' to reveal pure scientific objectivity as a myth and acknowledge the positionality of the speaking subject in all kinds of research. Thus, my position as public programmer and audience member runs throughout this thesis. The identity markers of able-bodied, cis-gendered, straight, middle-class, white woman are also important for me acknowledge too, as they intersect in ways that give me a certain, often privileged, experience of the world and my professional field. Though I also

suggest we can extend our understanding beyond these rather fixed demarcations, if we choose. This moves us from generic forms of address producing ‘the public’ to be ‘programmed’ towards specific and plural materialisations of ‘publics’. As O’Neill and others have already shown, much of the discourse around curating, and indeed the public programme, is produced *through* it and similarly my work draws on, and contributes to, this growing field of theory and practice.

Next, though practical and theoretical concerns around performance and performativity appear in the literature on the curatorial especially, an explicit engagement with performance practice and scholarship is not readily taken up. This is a missed opportunity I aim to remedy. Work that examines the stakes within moments of performance can help unpick relations between institutional actors and publics – the programmers and the programmed – in relation to already complex terms like community and participation and newly reconsidered notions of response and responsibility.

In addition, queer and feminist approaches to emotions such as Sara Ahmed (2004, 2006) together with Sianne Ngai’s study of negative affect (2007), which centres on ‘unprestigious’, less dramatic feelings, move us towards a radically embodied notion of what is happening in certain moments of publicity, and the emotional labour involved in producing them. I suggest that Muñoz’s literal and metaphorical discussion of queerness as an awkward ‘stage’ in development (2009), can help to open up the ‘inherent performativity’ of public programming, and how uncomfortable relationships between institutions and their publics are ‘staged’ through it. Up until now, I believe it to be true that, as Crow writes: ‘[a] public appears, with a shape and a will, via the various claims made to represent it; and when sufficient numbers of an audience come to believe in one or other of these representations, the public can become an important art-historical actor’ (Crow 1985 p.5). But, as I argue throughout this thesis, it is an unruly actor continually testing what it might mean to be in, and become part of, a public. The theoretical and practical approaches I use serve to show the public not as a predetermined entity, but rather materialised *in any given moment*.

Lastly, literature stemming from the educational turn and new institutionalism points to a fetish for disruption and dissensus that is sometimes problematically linked to transformation, which may obscure the complexity of affective responses and relations between people. If the aestheticisation of pedagogical modes via the educational turn rarely paid heed to the ‘fascinating radical roots in feminist politics and radical pedagogy’ of museum and gallery education departments (Kelly 2013 p.138), I add that the complex labour involved in producing these spaces of publicness, hasn’t been attended to widely enough.⁴⁹ From my experience, and the literature hailing from new institutionalism, this may be because public programming and education departments still occupy the periphery of an institution’s core programme. Instead of recuperating public programming from margin to centre, through an autoethnographic and practice-led approach, I follow Erin Manning (2016) to consider what paying attention to the periphery of the ‘main event’ may afford.

The attempts made to complicate positivist notions of community and participation and move beyond the passive viewing versus active participation binary (Bishop 2004, 2006, 2012, Rancière 2009) still privilege the ‘disinterested’ critic, a position complimented by the ‘disembodied eye’ roving the museum. Both positions have been debunked by the affective turn in contemporary art theory, inspired by Brian Massumi (2015) and others, with some scholars acknowledging a more embodied understanding of the experience of being in the museum (Fischer and Reckitt 2015), and others framing it in terms of subject production (Duncan 1995, Bennett 1995). But the space opened up by the public programme involves being in the museum *and* gathering together, present to one another. Traditional modes of viewing, or audiencing, in the strictest sense, still privilege looking and/or listening. With recent interdisciplinary scholarship on attention, I rethink models of ‘attendance’ to include the interaction of other senses and subjects. From this Literature Review, and the gaps I propose to open up summarised above, emerge my central research questions. *What can the space of the public programme tell us about what it means to become public in the contemporary art institution? What could reframing*

⁴⁹ Though we may find it explored in, for example, the Feminist Duration Reading Group’s assessment of its methodologies (Reckitt ed. 2019), discussed in Chapter Two.

publicness as a process of becoming do to our understanding of the public programme there? The following chapters unfold my findings in relation to these questions, and others that emerge through the process of research.

Chapter One – That Awkward Stage

Nina Möntmann blames the ‘corporate turn’ – the competing pressures on the institution of being both a public good and a commercial enterprise, of attracting both ‘a mass public’ and diversifying itself to include ‘new publics’ – for creating an ‘undeniably awkward’ relationship between the contemporary art institution and its public(s) (Möntmann 2008 p.17). In this chapter I draw on experiences from my time as Assistant Curator, Public Programmes at Tate to explore these uneasy relations. As Möntmann suggests, the proliferation of positions that the contemporary, neoliberal institution (described in my Introduction) creates – visitor, viewer/audience, participant, consumer, stakeholder – can conflict to produce an uncertain, awkward publicness. José Esteban Muñoz (2009) describes the queer stage as both a theatrical structure on which to perform possible queer selves, and a temporal phase of development. In this chapter I conceptualise the public programme as an *awkward stage*, in both structural and temporal senses, across which uneasy relations between institutions and their publics are played out. Through this motif I focus on an extraordinary, but indicative, example: Aaron Williamson’s *Collapsing Lecture* (2009–11), a performance I curated as part of *Late at Tate Britain: Diffusions* (2011). In its unfaltering commitment to collapse and lengthy duration, this lecture performance was experienced by audience and Tate staff alike as extremely awkward. As well as recounting what happened, I evoke my transitioning emotional states in witnessing what I had planned, with Williamson and the technical team, to unfold as a spectacular failure and describe various unexpected responses to it.

If this research highlights the public programme of the contemporary art institution as a unique space to understand publicness as a process of becoming, then our relation to that setting needs unpacking. This example, alongside others, is used to unpick our attachments to the contemporary art institution and what it means to become public there, expanding upon Möntmann’s assessment of the fragility and awkwardness of relations between institutions and their publics under the ‘corporate turn’. The public programme – often the only part of the institution labelled ‘public’ – is tasked with producing face-to-face public encounters in relation, or addition to its

‘core’ programme of exhibitions and displays.⁵⁰ These encounters are not always as smooth nor convivial as we might hope. From professional experience, I understand them to be tangled in a complex web of transactional exchanges, desires, fulfilments and disappointments and have observed many times how misaligned expectations may lead to discomfort.⁵¹ In this chapter I unpick and nuance both the effects and affects that materialise from these misalignments, what they reveal about our attachments to the contemporary art institution, and the kinds of publicness that emerge through them.

Thus, a central problem of this chapter is how we think of, and relate to institutions. ‘Institution’ describes a set of practices or relationships between bodies and things that have a particular organising function in society and culture. As Pascal Gielen writes ‘[o]n the one hand the institution refers to concrete organizations of people, buildings and things. On the other hand the concept of the institution is extended to the whole system of values, norms and customs considered significant in a society’. That it is also ‘primarily experienced as an external reality and objectivity’ means it has become ‘one of the most examined subjects in sociology’ (Gielen 2006 p.5). However, externality is not absolute; the word can also designate a person particularly associated with a place: ‘she was an *institution* in the theatre’ (Merriam-Webster, original emphasis). The idiom neatly embodies a contradiction: no single person makes an institution by themselves, but institutions are quite often conceptualised as a singular *body*. During the first in of a series of workshops I led as part of *That Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers* (2018–19) with Tate’s Public Programme team, some colleagues expressed feeling a split consciousness of ‘embodying the institution’ at the same time as ‘being themselves’

⁵⁰ The most recently advertised job description for Public Programmes (October 2019), describes the aim of the Assistant Curator role as: ‘to inspire new ways of learning with art, and specifically with Tate’s collection, for all our audiences [...] working with artists and partners to develop and produce a programme of activities, resources and events at Tate Modern and Tate Britain that have enjoyment at their heart and reflect the diversity of artistic and cultural practices, and the communities we are a part of [...] The Public Programmes team offers a wide range of income-generating and free events for diverse local, national and international adult audiences. These include talks, courses, workshops, tours, symposia and special projects on modern and contemporary art and visual culture.’

⁵¹ One example of misaligned expectations between institutions and publics commonly occurring through public programming is when promotional copy generates expectations that are not met by the actual event, something I experienced many times.

during public events.⁵² This chapter explores the queasiness of individual and collective relations to institutions during ‘an unanticipated turn of events’, to quote the copy describing *Collapsing Lecture* (Tate Britain 2011).

As my Literature Review highlights, discourses on theatre and performance already have a rich focus on audience experience. This is somewhat lacking from discourses on contemporary art and institutions; even more absent is the perspective of the programmer as audience to their own work. I suggest this matters because with the distanced critic, or the professional case study, we are often left unsure about what actually happened *in the room*. However, rather than carrying out audience research, I take up the role of programmer and audience to provide an unflinchingly honest account of my ambivalent feelings about what happened during *Collapsing Lecture*. I also include insights and observations from: another staff member playing an integral role in the performance; direct responses gathered on the night; an account from an audience member obtained more recently. In this chapter, and entire thesis I address the specificity gap by centring my experience as both programmer, and part of the multiple publics produced through my programming.

I also model another approach taken throughout the thesis: an explicit engagement with performance practice and scholarship, and queer theory, to examine the stakes within moments of performance, *as part of the* public programme. I do this to unpick relations between institutional actors and publics – the programmers and the programmed. Drawing on a history of artists’ performative experiments with the lecture format, often aligned with institutional critique (Milder 2010), my description of *Collapsing Lecture* at Tate Britain (2011) also brings together many concerns discussed in the Literature Review. By (re)performing a traditional public programming format – the artist’s talk – it (re)presents the problem of spectacularising education, as foregrounded in, and critiqued by, the educational turn (Rogoff 2010). Secondly, if the curatorial can be thought of as ‘all that takes

⁵² I delve into the workshop practice more fully in Chapter Four, but draw on this particular workshop in this chapter. For anonymity I use pseudonyms when summarising and directly quoting what was shared during this unrecorded workshop. I also use pseudonyms to quote and summarise material from a separate recorded conversation with a former colleague, and an email conversation with an audience member about her experience of *Collapsing Lecture*.

place on the stage' of the exhibition (Martinon and Rogoff 2013 p.ix), I consider how the 'staged-ness' of the public programme might be constitutive, rather than a by-product. This brings the technologies of the institution designed to focus attention on the artist as producer of knowledge, normally concealed or ignored, into view. Lastly, Claire Bishop's suggestion (2004) that performances that 'antagonise' social relations might be more valuable than those romanticising the convivial is applicable here. In the guise of an artist's talk, *Collapsing Lecture* did not initially present itself as a classic piece of participatory performance. However, it antagonistically brought up questions around civic and institutional responsibility for myself, as institutional programmer and, from what I observed, the audience as institutional public. Unpacking these, alongside two stories derived from the aforementioned workshop, the institution and the public come into view – not as impenetrable or abstract monoliths, but as relations between the fleshy, feeling bodies in the room, the technologies of the institution, and the expectations of safety and support projected onto it. Introducing the attendant notions of personal and professional responsibility, also explored later in this thesis, I show how these awkward but embodied relations reveal the contemporary art institution not as a fixed site, and 'the public' not as an abstract group always already there, but forming in relation to one another and what is taking place.

Failure as Performance Art

'Why aren't you *helping* him?' a woman in the audience swivelled round in her seat and stage-whispered to my Tate colleague, a look of questioning horror on her face. She was anxiously referring to that evening's speaker, the artist Aaron Williamson, who was having exaggerated difficulty with his PowerPoint presentation, without any apparent institutional assistance. Following an overly long, pompous and dryly delivered introduction from said colleague, Williamson, who we were informed was running late, had eventually burst through the auditorium doors offering loud apologies and dragging a suitcase clattering down the steps toward the stage. After hurriedly and haphazardly emptying its contents and plugging his laptop in at the lectern, he was now struggling to get his presentation to show up on the large screen. As a patient audience watched him navigate the cursor agonisingly slowly around his messy desktop, error messages kept popping up to thwart his progress. It

was now about twenty-five minutes in, the lecture hadn't really started, and no one from Tate Britain appeared to be offering help.

Titled *A Language in Search of its Meta-language* in the printed programme for the event, in consultation with Williamson, I wrote a small piece of copy for what was really *Collapsing Lecture*, as follows:

In this lecture performance artist Aaron Williamson shares his wide-ranging practice and ideas on how an unanticipated turn of events can unexpectedly become alien, confusing or awkward (Tate Britain 2011).

With only a small hint about what it might include, before the lecture performance even began, expectations of institutional perfectionism were subtly undercut by two small mistakes on the holding slide that read 'Aaron Williamson: A Language in Serch of It's Metalanguage'. After an excruciatingly slow start, the performance gradually ratcheted up as all manner of mistakes, glitches, silences and faults erupted. Gratuitous lateness notwithstanding, Williamson peppered his act with a catalogue of speaker incompetencies: fiddling with notes, losing his place and sending sheets of paper flying across the stage, wandering away from the microphone, giving way to an attack of nerves and a bout of coughing, spilling his water everywhere. Despite these mini-disasters, over the next hour or so Williamson was left almost entirely to his own devices, aside from the fruitless intervention of one Audio Visual (AV) technician. Sauntering nonchalantly to the lectern, he fiddled silently with a cable, shrugged, and returned to the AV booth at the back of the auditorium.

Soldiering on against all odds, this farce was eventually drawn to close by a strangely poignant moment where Williamson paused in the middle of his sentence as he crossed the stage. Frozen mid-stride, it was as if he were trapped in a daydream or asleep on his feet. Wondering what on earth could happen next, everyone held their breath. After what seemed like several minutes someone took the initiative to begin a tentative applause. After gradually gaining momentum, the pitter patter of uneasy clapping signalled the end of a 90-minute ordeal. Finally, an exhausted audience filed out of the auditorium. A friend told me the four people

sitting in front of her didn't seem to have a clue what was happening throughout. I caught sight of my sister and asked her with a tense grin what she thought? She simply replied: 'I hated it'.

Williamson's lecture performance was part of a programme of performance, film, talks and music that I had curated called *Late at Tate Britain: Diffusions*, my first large-scale event since taking up the role of Assistant Curator, Adult Programmes in 2009. I had heard about *Collapsing Lecture* through a friend who had recounted the catalogue of mistakes – lateness, technical faults, nerves and general incompetence – she had witnessed as a Goldsmiths student when Williamson had been invited to speak there. Describing the tense atmosphere and general hilarity that ensued when everyone 'got it', I was intrigued. Feeling familiar enough with the conventions and formats of the institution to mess around with them a bit, the context of a *Late at Tate* (as it is commonly known) seemed the perfect setting for *Collapsing Lecture*. Begun at Tate Britain in 2000, this now familiar museum format, in which event lighting, alcohol, music and activities like performance, film screenings, workshops and talks come together, attracts a higher proportion of younger visitors to the galleries.

When I invited him to discuss the idea, Williamson explained how the performance was developed through several specific speaking invitations between 2009–11. It was seeded many years earlier through Williamson's experiences as a D/deaf student sitting through art school lectures.⁵³ Without proper sign language provision, Williamson was simply expected to lip-read and glean what he could. These experiences ended up providing rich material for what was to become *Collapsing Lecture*. In an article detailing its development, Williamson writes:

to counter the boredom I would spend the hours observing peripheral distractions such as the lecturers' body language, attitudes and interactions with their lecturing apparatus. Above all, I watched closely for those moments when the objective of the lecture – to educate and inform – was disrupted or

⁵³ According to the charity Sign Health, deaf with a small 'd' refers to people who lose their hearing and learn British Sign Language as secondary to spoken English. Deaf with a capital 'D' refers to people born without hearing, whose first language is generally British Sign Language. D/deaf may be used to refer to people and their culture that blend the two.

stymied by intrusions, technical breakdowns, or simply by a loss of nerve [...] the lecturers' performing of 'knowing' – was often predicated upon essentially transparent forms and methods of address that, sooner or later, like any over-inflated edifice, are inclined to fall apart (Williamson 2017).

Tuning into other kinds of information circulating around the main event of the art school lecture, Williamson began to weave together the leaky meta-performances of 'performing knowing', and their inevitable failures. The things we usually try to ignore during such events – the speaker's nerves, presentation ticks, technical hiccups and delays – became the main event of his lecture *performance*. He not only mined his own experience, but canvassed friends and colleagues for theirs. The vignette ending the performance I have described came from an account of 'a Conference Lecturer [...] so acutely jetlagged, he literally fell asleep on his feet midway through and had to be startled awake' (Williamson 2017).

A week prior to this particular iteration of *Collapsing Lecture*, Williamson visited Tate Britain's auditorium with me to quiz the AV technicians about everything that could go wrong there. The Head of the AV beamed with delight at permission to manufacture a litany of mistakes that would usually cause professional embarrassment and inevitable tension between technical and programming staff. On the night, watching Williamson riff off the auditorium's possibilities for failure like a proficient jazz musician felt like an odd bonding experience between our two teams. United not only by being 'in on the joke', but also by watching the disaster unfold from the AV booth, we were effectively shielded from the intensity of the auditorium. Becoming aware of the army of Tate staff watching from behind the glass screen, several audience members threw indignant glares our way.

As the performance concluded, I wanted to feel a sense of relief from the tension that had eventually begun building in the AV booth as steadily as inside the auditorium. Throughout the performance my feelings had fluctuated between childlike glee at the unfolding slapstick rubbishing the professionalism of the institution and an underlying anxiety around whether or not the audience were 'getting it'. Furthermore, how exactly might they feel when they did – shocked, amused, angry? But that relief never came. To my memory only one or two people

had walked out during the performance, though I suspect many more had wanted to. I was later informed by the colleague who had introduced Williamson that a woman got up and left halfway through, 'visibly upset'. Was this the one who had anxiously asked, 'why aren't you *helping* him?' I will never be sure. I'll also never know whether she was consumed by anger at the institution for not helping the poor, struggling artist, or ashamed and aggrieved for having her empathy mocked when she finally did 'get it'. What I do know is that an uncomfortable sense of regret began to bloom in my chest, dulling my mischievous enjoyment, alongside a sense of my own bewildered responsibility.

The Lecture Performance as Genre

The lecture performance, or performance lecture, has moved from avant-garde, radical gesture to become a distinctive, programmable form of performance that can fill a whole evening or populate a festival.⁵⁴ I will not attempt a comprehensive history or genealogy of this now distinctive genre of performance, but it could include John Cage's part-score, part-script *Lecture on Nothing* (1949); Joseph Beuys *Information Action* (1972), described as a lecture by the artist and a performance by the then Tate Gallery (Westerman 2016); Andrea Fraser's infamous *Official Welcome* (2003) parodying the 'thank you' speech, which saw her stripping naked and ending up in tears; choreographer Jerome Bel's performed history of his own work *The last performance (a lecture)* (2004); Mark Leckey's Turner Prize-winning *Cinema in the Round* (2006–08); Sharon Hayes' *Love Addresses* (2007–08) delivered on street corners with a microphone; Guillermo Gomez-Pena's *Performance As Reverse Anthropology – A Lecture* (2003) presented at the British Museum; Hito Steyerl's performance lectures extending her writing and film practice into live, institutional contexts: *I Dreamed a Dream (Part 1)* (2013) and *The Secret Museum* (2014) commissioned by, and performed at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; and *Rabih Mroué: An Evening of Performance Lectures* (2018) showcasing three of the eponymous artist and theatre maker's distinctive lectures delivered sitting at a simple black desk, at The Showroom.

⁵⁴ For example, Hayward Gallery's *An Evening of Off-the-Wall Artist's Lectures* (2007). Patricia Milder (2010) gives an overview of the performance lectures at *Performa 09* (2009), New York's annual performance festival, demonstrating the dominance of the form ten years ago.

Rather than giving a potted history, I cite a list indicating the development and characteristics of the genre, albeit an overwhelmingly white, male and able-bodied line up. This could be indicative of how the genre draws on traditional forms of patriarchal address, though has been challenged by a younger generation of artists and theatre makers.⁵⁵ Within the well-worn performance lecture format, some artists (I use the term expansively as the genre crosses art and theatre) choose to parody authorial, academic knowledge production; others utilise it to express ideas and artistic research in a more experimental and expansive fashion. Most of the performance lectures listed above were advertised *as such*, foregrounding their experimental approach to presentation and knowledge production, but undercutting some of their disruptive potential. The performance lecture might not be the radical, disruptive gesture it once was, but is usefully and liberally adapted to more experimental, performative presentations of artistic research and ideas.⁵⁶ *Collapsing Lecture* was also billed as a lecture performance, under the title: *A Language in Search of its Meta-language*, but didn't manage to communicate anything that remotely counted as knowledge. However, that wasn't necessarily what made it so disturbing, as I shall unfold in more detail below.

Smoothness

Looking back on my time at Tate, *Collapsing Lecture* foregrounds many of the contradictions inherent in becoming part of a contemporary art institution's public. I put the experience to one side at the time,⁵⁷ but in reviving my memories of what happened, several issues come into focus that link to wider concerns of this research. For example, the anxious attachments and expectations of publics to institutions, and institutions to publics, and their misalignment. I already suggested that misaligned expectations materialised through the public programme might reveal both the institution and the public as *in becoming* in relation to each other,

⁵⁵ Such as Season Butler's *Happiness Forgets* (2015–16); Ivy Monteiro's *A performance lecture on queer spirituality and Afrofuturism* (2019); Martin O'Brien's *Until the Last Breath is Breathed* (2020), performed in the very same Tate Britain auditorium as *Collapsing Lecture*.

⁵⁶ It could even be said to have become a staple of the contemporary artist's repertoire.

⁵⁷ Indeed, unless they receive written complaints the uncomfortable responses that *Collapsing Lecture* received often go unnoticed by the institution and are quite quickly forgotten.

rather than monolithic entities always already there. But my work with Williamson also drew attention to the conventions I worked under and the unpredictability of the public(s) I was working with.

Sociologist Pascal Gielen has defined the role that museums play in the art world as a global institution, that are:

expected to be well-oiled organizations and to simultaneously take on the role of the 'guardian' and 'facilitator' of specific artistic values and practices. This might sound pompous, but it is an accepted idea in sociology that cultural practices keep in step with a powerful societal hierarchization of values and norms (Gielen 2006 p.5).

While the institution of art may be broadly expressed across a variety of forms, and embodied by multiple practices and relationships between people, as Andrea Fraser has described (2005 pp.278–83), the museum still acts as an important role model for other organisations and is expected to run smoothly. In my experience, this expectation is quite often up to the public programming team to uphold through a certain kind of 'slickness' of event delivery.

When I started my job as Assistant Curator of Adult Programmes, Tate Britain in 2009 I was trained on the administrative systems and introduced in minute detail to the order of set-up for an auditorium event.⁵⁸ This precision extended to guidelines on shepherding the audience who, as Assistant Curators, it was our job to corral.⁵⁹ When the Adult Programme team at Tate Britain merged with the Public Programme Team at Tate Modern, I learnt the specificity of set up for Tate Modern's Starr

⁵⁸ This included: designing the event holding slide; uploading speaker PowerPoints with the AV technicians; displaying paper signage about the event front and back of house; setting out individual water bottles and glasses for each speaker; a complex arrangement of reserved signs and roped-off rows designed to guide the incoming audience towards the front; discretionary use of timing signs to indicate speakers had '5 minutes', '1 minute' or must simply 'FINISH' (something I never quite mastered).

⁵⁹ When it came to 'mic running' I was carefully instructed as to the intricacies of eye contact, hand and body gestures designed to assist the speaker or chair shaping the question-and-answer session from the stage – rather than being led by particularly animated members of the audience. In this specific role, experience was the best teacher and, as I found out, anticipation, timing and diplomacy were key.

auditorium.⁶⁰ When time allowed, the Curator and Assistant Curator would reflect on the previous night's proceedings to find room for improvement in set-up systems and event management. However, subtle shifts in practice were often down to the individual and within the ritualised set-up and running of events in the different auditoria, various embodied practices proliferated.

This was especially true with regard to the formality of welcoming the audience and speakers through the practice of introductions. These had a set template, but varied from person to person. Customarily beginning with 'Good evening everyone, and welcome to Tate Britain', an intervening section introduced practical information about the event, safety features of the auditorium, reminders to the audience to switch off mobile phones and wait for the microphone before asking a question. Then came a list a speaker's publications and most important exhibitions, roles or achievements – nuggets of information that aimed to create an aura of importance, but which I often selected for ease of reading aloud. Nevertheless, it was easy to rush through the introduction and find my breathing out of sync with my words. This problem was often accompanied by a wavering voice, a cause of sharp embarrassment. As host, I understood my role to be about providing an official welcome, making sure the event ran smoothly, holding it together if it did not, and drawing it comfortably to a close. I was also aware that my introduction was generally considered the least important part of any event, so what did I have to be nervous about? I eventually learned that communing with the audience – engaging eye contact – was the key to holding my nerve and confidently setting the tone for what followed.

Holding Space

My curious nervousness with auditorium introductions not only resonates with Alexia's experience of delivering her overly long welcome to *Collapsing Lecture*, but says something about the requirements and responsibilities of holding public events in general. The specific practices I describe are often overlooked, but are in fact integral to what is commonly known in therapeutic discourse as 'holding space' (The

⁶⁰ As part of the aforementioned Transforming Tate Learning Review in 2011.

Gender & Sexuality Therapy Centre 2020). This term has become part of the vocabulary of many museum and gallery learning professionals (Turvey 2016), as well as artistic, curatorial and critical practices more broadly.⁶¹ Conveying the *feeling* of carrying out these practices matters to my research because they are learned and embodied through doing, and as described, some of them had an effect on my body. In addition, these practices of holding space are largely a set of immaterial gestures that are generally only sensed as a comfortable feeling, and an uncomfortable one when they are absent. More than just the ability to carry out certain tasks, holding space requires sensitivity and attunement to the total situation. Over time I learned to hold spaces at Tate according to certain institutional conventions and norms. These practices may be largely invisible to an audience, but the work of a public programmer usually only becomes visible when they give an introduction, instructions about tea and toilet breaks, or remedy something that goes wrong. If they are incomplete or missing however, their absence is usually felt as a general sense of disorganisation, a lack of direction or disorientation, or as mentioned above, discomfort. Yet, as I also learned, holding any event relied not merely on carrying out tasks in a certain order, but on timing, social etiquette, empathy and the ability to remain both calm and responsive as the event unfolded.

Alongside running in a 'well-oiled' fashion, institutions come with other expectations, not least a duty to tend to the needs of those within them. One of the most disturbing things about the *Collapsing Lecture* was the lack of attempts by the institution to remedy the collapse, or draw it to a close.⁶² Soon after giving her intentionally lengthy, pompous introduction, Alexia left the auditorium. Having been instructed *not* to respond by the artist himself, unbeknown to the audience, she was performing her role perfectly. But the mounting tension and persistent stares from audience

⁶¹ *Holding Space* (2017–18) was 'a one-year programme of research and support for eight UK-based artists' (The Showroom n.d.), used as a case study in Alberta Whittle's expansive reading of 'the hold' through 'an intersectional queer theory lens' to make visible forms of curatorial support for 'black, People of Colour (PoC) and Queer Trans Intersex People of Colour (QTIPoC) artist-curators' (Whittle 2020).

⁶² After my rigorous training I began noticing how timing lags lead to an anxious sense of not being held when attending events elsewhere. This is because holding space is as much about setting the tone as it is about drawing things to a close. Thus, another disorientating aspect of *Collapsing Lecture* was that there was no clear end in sight.

members imploring her to help him, meant that holding space for Williamson became harder as the performance wore on.

An important touchstone for gallery and museum educators (Turvey 2016) is paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's notion of the 'good enough mother' who creates a 'holding environment' for her child that extends outwards from the primary caregiver's body: 'the mother's arms, the parental relationship, the home, the family including cousins and near relations, the school, the locality with its police stations, the county with its laws' (Winnicott 1984 p.310). Leanne Turvey, Convenor, Schools and Teachers at Tate, draws on Penny Wilson's description of her practice that incorporates Winnicott's 'holding environment' (2016 p.35). In Wilson's playwork practice, the 'good enough mother' cannot meet all the needs of the child, but 'adapts the parameters of the holding environment' to their changing needs, creating a flexible space that is 'safe and allows for exploration' (Wilson 2009 p.28). In her role at Tate, Turvey draws on both playwork and psychoanalysis to extend the notion of the 'holding environment' into the art gallery or museum as an 'indeterminate space' for learning about the self through art and play (2016 pp.35–6). The kind of auditorium-based event that *Collapsing Lecture* subverted, created and bounded by the practices described above, is rather more restrictive than the flexible holding environment created in the galleries by Schools and Teachers colleagues. However, ultimately what binds together these different formats and learning spaces is that, as Winnicott suggests above, the responsibility for 'holding' them is not solely located in one person, but it extends outwards from a central 'care giver'. Therefore, we may extend the gesture of 'holding' to all the people in the room, and beyond – to the architecture, furniture and apparatus of the auditorium, and museum itself. All play a role in creating a holding environment, within which learning and exploration can unfold. Challenge and exploration are facilitated by flexible parameters, but when someone or something is not playing their part, the holding environment can begin to feel unsafe. In the case of the *Collapsing Lecture*, many people and things were not playing their expected part, and the unease was palpable, even for those who were in on it.

I am not suggesting that people entering an institution come with conscious demands about what they expect to happen there. More that, in line with what

Patricia Falguières writes, institutions are '[p]erceived from the angle of *silent restraint*... [and their] effects [...] are felt without prior requirements of conceptualization or consciousness' (2017 p.28). Just as the labour of holding space is invisible, expectations of being held by an institution remain largely unconscious – until moments of un-holding start to appear. Ben Cranfield (2014) has shown how a psychoanalytic understanding of play – or as Winnicott preferred 'playing' – as facilitated by the 'good enough mother' and 'holding environment' has shaped the contemporary art institution and museum. If the museum's holding environment creates a safe space for playing with art and ideas, then the good enough 'mother' (playworker, education curator or public programmer) is vital because 'she' doesn't crush creativity by holding too tightly. However, if 'she' holds too loosely, creative exploration is also crushed by a lack of support. Going back to Gielen, I suggest that if moments of uncertainty in the auditorium are not remedied, they may precisely be 'felt' as a 'silent restraint' on the audience. This might lead to a desire to intervene and re-shape the holding environment, without knowing exactly how. As guided by the artist, my expectations of the audience were that they would cope with the uncertainty of his performance. But despite the programme copy announcing a 'lecture performance', many seemed to be expecting a lecture, and it only gradually dawned on (some of) them that the farce they were witnessing was the 'lecture performance' they signed up for. Here my, and by extension, the institution's expectations of its public, were misaligned with the mixed feelings about, and understandings of, the lecture as a performance that emerged in the room.

Hold Ups

As previously explained, *Collapsing Lecture* draws on Williamson's experiences of boredom and fatigue during art school lectures where no sign language interpretation was provided. From previous work together, I was used to Williamson lip-reading with our occasional use of a notebook if things became complicated. Though I understood *Collapsing Lecture* as emerging from Williamson's experience of D/deafness, and lack of support in lecture settings, prior experience perhaps coloured my expectation of others' responses to the performance. Did the audience's reaction to Williamson's perceived plight not only have to do with their expectations of holding, but their (mis)understanding of his D/deafness?

As the misspelt title 'A Language in Serch of It's Metalanguage' on the holding slide suggested, there were several languages simultaneously at play in the lecture performance. The dominant language was spoken English, which didn't get anyone very far; the language of institutional convention was turned on its head; coded interactions with technical, material apparatus faltered too. At some point Williamson turned to a flip chart attempting to draw a diagram, gesturing emphatically towards it with his pen – another language that fell flat. Then there was his meta-conversation with sign language interpreter Chloe.⁶³ Her sulky responses to his frustration thickened the tension around professional responsibility. In addition, despite acting as a theatrical 'aside', the BSL conversation staged an unusual exclusionary experience for the majority of the able-bodied audience – that of being unable to hear a conversation going on in front of them – unless there were other British Sign Language (BSL) speakers in the room. As such, all these languages failed to communicate the knowledge promised. Or rather, it was only through a patchwork of the collective linguistic failures that some semblance of a message appeared. Even then, its reception could not be guaranteed. So, how might the artist's D/deafness and his play with languages have affected the audience's response to the lecture performance in ways that I did not anticipate? And how did D/deafness *per se* disrupt the liberal institution's notion of its 'general public' as able-bodied?

The role D/deafness plays in the performance and its reception was touched on in my conversation with Alexia. We discussed what Williamson's intention of the *Collapsing Lecture* might have been:

to make you think about the moments in your life when you feel uncomfortable? [...] That was exacerbated because he's D/deaf and so [...] I assumed he was playing with [...] when you're on the

⁶³ During the latter stages of this research, Williamson told me via email about a William Pope.L lecture at Tate Modern during *Live Culture* (2003), a four-day programme of performances and talks produced in collaboration with the Live Art Development Agency. The public programming team had provided Williamson with two BSL interpreters, but Pope.L spoke 'in a completely unrecognisable language which turned out to be... Klingon! [The interpreters] sat on stage completely baffled and laughing nervously!' (Williamson 2020).

[...] edge of intervening in a really awkward situation and you just don't know which way to go [...] and asking yourself all of those questions [...] why am I reticent to intervene? (Alexia 2018).

Referencing Williamson's ability to play, Alexia highlights something not afforded to the audience, some of whom were even upset by what was going on. This could be said to replicate a mode of curating that privileges the primacy of the artist/curator relationship, discussed in my Literature Review. If the institution only 'cares' about the artist's ability to 'play' then the public is missing from the equation. As Alexia also suggested, Williamson aroused the audience's empathy, and perhaps even their pity. His D/deafness might have exacerbated their awkwardness at his failure to communicate, and their not being able to understand him. Some might have even felt guilty about this. Most of the audience was not known to Williamson, and were unaware that his D/deafness is not ostensibly a barrier to communication with non-BSL signers, because he lip-reads and speaks clearly. The catalogue of mishaps he faced could have happened to anyone, but did the audience feel doubly bad watching a D/deaf person failing to make themselves understood?

As suggested in my Literature Review, we might be betwixt and between the liberal and the neoliberal art institution, but Alexia's comment suggests that the museum still attracts a notionally liberal audience. Even though they witnessed him struggling, might this liberal audience have felt uncomfortable intervening in a lecture by a D/deaf artist? Could their expectations have become a kind of double-bind, or form of self-policing? A recent testimony gathered via email from a curator called Maree, who had also worked with Williamson before, would seem to support this idea. Though informed of what would happen, she hadn't known how 'brilliantly excruciating' it would be. Maree described a 'mix of emotions in the room' that included 'discomfort, polite tolerance, nervous giggling, outrage that the technical aspect wasn't working'. She remembers 'feeling uncomfortable at other's discomfort for Aaron, but appreciating [that] the over zealousness to try and "save" him comes from not considering it might be deliberate. Or that disability can do satire' (Maree 2020). Would a similar performance work within other institutional settings, ones with different class and political dynamics? Perhaps the lecture performance plays on notions of political correctness around disability, eventually encouraging an audience

to laugh at their own meekness at the end – but only when, and if, they have fully understood it to be a ‘performance’. All of this still relies on prior knowledge of the genre of lecture performance described earlier on this chapter. As I witnessed, and Maree testified, a handful of audience members never quite reached that point: ‘I think a couple of people walked out, one person shouted out to “help him”, but if you stayed till the end it came together’ (Maree 2020). In that case, does the performance ultimately succeed in failing so perfectly *because* Williamson is D/deaf, and his presence disrupts the liberal audience’s expectations of how an institution should care for him?

Alison Kafer (2013) traces the affinities between feminist, queer and crip theories and her lived experience of disability. Her discussion of normative ableist culture that casts differently-abled bodies as deviant and in need of cure is useful for unpacking Maree’s observations. Kafer calls this the ‘*curative imaginary*, an understanding of disability that not only expects and assumes intervention [...] but cannot imagine or comprehend anything other’ (p.27, original emphasis). Tate staff were ‘in’ on the knowledge that the advertised lecture was actually a performance, and explicitly instructed by the artist not to intervene. Despite being described in the printed programme for the event as a ‘lecture performance’ that would explore how an ‘unanticipated turn of events can unexpectedly become alien, confusing or awkward’, the audience were clearly not prepared for just how awkward things would become when the institution failed to perform its curative intervention. As indicated through my description of routine event management at Tate Britain, my usual role would precisely be curative if anything went awry. I was so focussed on not intervening however, that perhaps I did not pay enough attention to the points at which a ‘curative imaginary’ emerged in the audience. I actively ignored the urgent looks in Alexia’s direction, the walkouts and pleas for help, the woman who appeared visibly upset, the person who took responsibility for drawing the performance to a close by beginning the applause. But for Maree, this was in itself to be applauded:

[a] lot of performance lectures stay in the suspense mode of “appreciation”. As in “Ah we get this. A lecture yet not a lecture”. The *Collapsing Lecture* took this to another level – in terms of the range of emotions and misreadings (Maree 2020).

I had not understood this at the time, much less anticipated it. But assessing the role D/deafness played in the performance is key to understanding how it disrupted not only the audience's expectations of the institution, but the institution's (liberal) understanding of its general public. Kafer's notion of 'crip time' is another key concept that pushes further the disruptive potential of disability within the performance. She aligns crip time with 'queer time', which, as Elizabeth Freeman (2010) also argues, understands temporal and sexual dissonance to be intertwined. Kafer explains that both crip and queer time function outside of a normative, linear understanding of progression and productivity: '[f]uturity has often been framed in curative terms, a time frame that casts disabled people (as) out of time, or as obstacles to the arc of progress' (2013 p.28). For Kafer, both crip and queer time are read as deviant by normative society for their non-normative relationship to time and (re)productivity.

Though not an expressed part of the lecture, or indeed the performance as such, Williamson's D/deafness could certainly have been perceived as an obstacle, or frustration, to normative linear progression and productivity. Frustration is multivalent here – it is both an obstacle blocking the way *and* a feeling that circulates. If, as Adam Phillips has written, obstacles reveal the object of our desire (1993), then the many obstacles frustrating the normative, linear path of knowledge production that evening might be said to reveal the collective desire for clarity of communication – for communing, even – that was never fulfilled. I felt this myself, and picked it up anecdotally from audience members I spoke to afterwards. The seed was sown by the inordinately long introduction, expressly there to cover the fact that Williamson was (intentionally) running late. As Kafer writes, 'the temporal orientation of "crip time"' is often 'an essential component of disability culture and community [...] a wry reference to the disability-related events that always seem to start late or to the disabled people who never seem to arrive anywhere on time' (p.26). Williamson's D/deafness was not mentioned by Alexia, nor directly referred to by the artist himself, but when he eventually arrived, loudly apologising for his lateness, his speech was unmistakably that of a D/deaf person. The side conversations with sign language interpreter Chloe also became more prominent as the lecture descended into chaos, amplifying its farcical nature and the obstacles to communing with the audience.

Indeed, both the lecture and the performance – if they may be split as such – unfold more or less in accordance with Kafer’s definition of crip time. Rather than being productive according to a normative knowledge-transfer model, the lecture is intensely frustrating because, over the course of an hour, *nothing* that feels like knowledge is communicated. That is not to say that nothing is produced. According to Kafer we need to think of ‘the flexibility of crip time as being not only an accommodation to those who need “more” time but also [...] a challenge to normative and normalizing expectations of pace and scheduling’ (p.27). One of the ways we might – tentatively – read the performance as productive is that it evokes an extreme sense of this ‘flexibility’ for the audience. They might not recognise it as such, but since *Collapsing Lecture* itself makes no ‘sense’ – and could even be described as *nonsense* – these accumulating failures become the only thing to follow. Together with the stretching of time, the mounting frustrations and failures exceed even Kafer’s description of crip time’s ‘challenge’. But with them, Williamson offers something outside of normative desires and expectations for the artist’s talk to ‘make sense’: the collapsing gestures of ‘performing-knowing’ perversely became the only consumable content.

Awkwardness

Alexia described the audience to *Collapsing Lecture* as suspended on the ‘edge of intervening in a really awkward situation’, which is confirmed by Maree’s testimony of her discomfort at others’ discomfort, from the auditorium itself (full to its capacity of 190 seats). Indeed, such elongated awkwardness might best be described as a suspension of (normative) time. After Kafer, I suggest this suspension is facilitated by the intervention of crip time. But what does it mean to sit alongside others in a packed auditorium for over an hour with such awkwardness?

It seems self-evident that awkwardness is first and foremost a feeling. But as Adam Kotsko (2010) describes, it is a curiously nebulous one, which is inherently social. Awkwardness is a feeling that circulates between people creating ‘a weird kind of social bond’ (p.9). Whomever or whatever the cause, what it reveals is a thinning of the social order governing a given situation: ‘[a]wkwardness shows us that [...] [we]

have no built-in norms: the norms that we develop help us to “get by,” [...] awkwardness is what prompts us to set up social norms in the first place – and what prompts us to transform them’ (p.16). Put simply, awkwardness reveals that there might be another way of doing things, by exposing the precariousness of the structures we build to mitigate it arising in the first place. In addition, it’s appearance reveals how these structures work for some and not others. Those who don’t know, or aren’t able to follow, the rules governing a certain situation, are at risk of disrupting them and becoming the cause of awkwardness.

What Alexia described comes closer to Kotsko’s designation of ‘*radical awkwardness*’ (original emphasis), which he calls ‘the panic brought about by the lack of any norm’ as opposed to ‘everyday awkwardness [...] the violation of a relatively strong norm’ (p.17). This was set up by the advertised lecture performance ‘violating a relatively strong norm’ of the institution’s understanding of its public as able-bodied, which aligns with who the ‘general ticketed’ public programme of most art institutions is assumed to be for. In the liberal institution anyone who deviates from the norm is provided for with a special programme. For example, Tate’s Public Programme encompasses Access and Community Programmes, yet despite collaborations with colleagues working across these strands, such categorising usually prevents particular audiences from mixing. Therefore, ‘A Language in Search of its Meta-language’ was already an exception to standard practice, because it presented a D/deaf artist to a general public without advertising it as a special BSL event as part of Tate’s Access Programme. Separating audiences into groups serves another function within the liberal institution – to assuage any awkwardness around able-bodied privilege for this general public. But this event included a BSL interpreter to accommodate a D/deaf public *within* the general public.

And what of the artist himself? Was he the victim of many mishaps, or just as incompetent as the staff? Who was to blame for all the things that went wrong that evening? This may be illuminated by the following passage where Kotsko describes the ‘awkward person’:

there are people for whom awkwardness is a kind of perverse skill [...] We are only able to identify someone as awkward, however, because the person

does something that is inappropriate for a given context. Most often, these violations do not involve an official written law – instead, the grace that's in question is the skilful navigation of the mostly unspoken norms of a community. Severely awkward individuals are those who have a particular difficulty relating to their social context (Kotsko 2010 pp. 6–7).

In one sense Williamson is what Kotsko characterises as the awkward person – the one most obviously 'to blame' for the awkward situation. He embodies awkwardness through his doomed interactions with his lecturing apparatus and stuttering failure to articulate anything. But the *Collapsing Lecture* is also set apart from what Kotsko is describing above, because it is not merely a social situation. It is a staged, public event that has a different kind of script. So the awkwardness is perhaps not so much about Williamson's 'difficulty relating to [...] social context', which might suggest an informal situation, but rather his difficulty delivering a scripted, public performance. Or, was his performance of awkwardness a peculiar kind of perfection? In which case, can we locate the source of awkwardness in the audience for their lack of 'appreciation', which Maree suggested ordinarily attends the lecture performance?

Kotsko's analysis of television performances by Ricky Gervais in *The Office* (2001–03) and Larry David in *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000–ongoing) later does away with the opposition between social grace and awkwardness, describing them as a 'kind of grace – [...] that allows us to break down and admit that we are finally nothing more or less than human beings' (p.89). If we take a standard dictionary definition of grace as 'smoothness and elegance of movement' and 'attractively polite manner of behaving' (Oxford English Dictionary 2005), this notion also links to the invisible labour of public programming, a lot of which is orientated around creating a feeling of smoothness. To have this smoothness repeatedly disrupted very quickly becomes disturbing. Yet, if we can think of Williamson's performance as graceful in any way, this moment came when he appeared to fall asleep on his feet. After an hour of mishaps and blunders building an exhausting tension, I distinctly remember this moment as unexpectedly moving. Appearing to forget himself entirely, Williamson's brief pause brought a surprising frailty to the stage. It was swiftly punctured by the sound of gradual clapping that brought the extended awkwardness to an end. Having told me he would go on until it felt finished, Williamson had finally pushed the

suspension of convention and institutional structure to the limit. As well as drawing the performance to a close, the applause restored the norms of the auditorium.

In the first of a series of online seminars for Open School East (2020), Matthew de Kersaint Giraudeau has offered some thoughts about applause that are useful in grasping the import of this moment:

clapping together designates the co-clappers as an audience. An audience is always clapping for something. But what are we clapping for? [...] Clapping is a performative act and like all performatives, it gathers its meaning from its circumstances. [...] Clapping is a way to show appreciation for an event that has finished [...] It is also [...] a sign that we are no longer going to direct our attention towards the performance [...] Clapping is not language, but it does something to language (de Kersaint Giraudeau 2020).

If, as Kotsko suggests, awkwardness creates a 'weird kind of social bond' then the release of clapping may also allow a group of uncertain individuals to reconstitute themselves as an audience proper – the only role available in the entire scenario of *Collapsing Lecture* to be normatively carried out. As de Kersaint Giraudeau highlights, there are a host of reasons why we are clapping, all of them social, but exceeding language or definitive explanation. Did the clapping that drew *Collapsing Lecture* to a close signal the welcome end of awkwardness and the beginning of appreciation, or simply the exhaustion of attention? Was it the only way for the audience to adequately, as a group, hold space for the artist – and the institution – and make it all OK in the end? Silence would perhaps have constituted a new and different form of publicness, even more awkward than what had gone before, designating the entire thing a resounding failure. As it was, the normalising function of clapping might just have saved *Collapsing Lecture* from total collapse.

That Awkward Stage

In *Collapsing Lecture* Williamson both under- and over-performs, bringing his fallibility and vulnerability to the fore. Apparently committed to doing something pointless, he disrupts the figure of the expert, the one who has useful knowledge to

impart. Such commitment is both humorous *and* frustrating. Queer theorist Jack Halberstam says of the critical productivity of failure:

[w]e can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities (2011 p.88).

Could the abject failures of Williamson's performance actually be exploited as a productive 'form of critique', allowing us to see the workings of the institution and the textures of a public coming into being, as the 'alternatives [...] embedded' in their dominant logics? For me, Kotsko's analysis of awkwardness and Halberstam's work on failure both reveal an emergent consciousness that things might be done otherwise – that other futures are thinkable. This fleeting positivity connects to José Esteban Muñoz's evocative description of the queer stage as both a phase of development:

the way in which worried parents deal with wild queer children, how they sometimes protect themselves from the fact of queerness by making it a "stage," a developmental hiccup, a moment of misalignment that will, hopefully, correct itself (Muñoz 2009 p.98).

Later Muñoz describes the queer stage as a space to practice other possible selves on, or 'imagine a self [...] in the process of becoming' (2009 p.100). But, like crip time, the queer stage is only possible because heteronormative temporality casts queers as out of time. Muñoz's description of the 'wild queer child' is a reminder that teenage years are referred to as an 'awkward phase', recalling Michael Warner's connection between 'pubic' and 'public' (2005), discussed in my introduction. Muñoz's use of language to denote the frustrations to normative progression – the 'stalling' and 'hiccupping' of queer becoming – provide a compelling parallel to the glitchy interactions with the lecturing apparatus that Williamson performed. I also connect the 'moment of misalignment', which parents hope will be corrected, to the kinds of mismatched expectations described between the institution and its publics,

which can lead to a sense of things missing the mark, falling short, or taking an unexpected turn. And yet, Muñoz's queer stage is also one of hope – a space to understand himself as a processual being. Might, then, we find some redemptive hope in the public programme as an awkward stage?

Awkward Stages and their Retelling

It is perhaps no surprise that I decided to name my series of workshops after Muñoz. In Chapter Four I go into detail about the process and practice of these workshops and what they produced, but two stories arising from the first in the series of *That Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers* (2018–19) with Tate's Public Programmes team speak precisely about the awkwardness of disability meeting able-bodied privilege during a public event.

Mark spoke about attending an audio-described theatre production at the Bridge Theatre with a blind friend. For this special evening during the play's run, a downloadable mobile phone application was available so blind and visually impaired people could listen to a live narration of the action on stage, at the same time as hearing the actors delivering their lines. Becoming aware that 'extra content' was available during the interval, some sighted audience members also downloaded and logged into the application to consume it. As a result, during the second act the application crashed due to the higher than expected level of user traffic and caused a ripple of disturbance. Several members of the audience began fiddling with their phones all of a sudden, screens lighting up their faces as they whispered to their companions. Mark described how in response to the extra noise and flashing screens 'the sighted public began "tutting", audibly frustrated at their theatre experience being ruined by the people who cannot see' (Mark 2018).

Mark's assessment of the situation was that in their greed to consume all the things on offer at the theatre the 'over-privileged' able-bodied public ruined it for the 'under-privileged' disabled public. As he pointed out, the latter are only ever afforded a semblance of the theatre experience the privileged, able-bodied enjoy. However, it was the disruption caused by the blind people concerned with their mobile phones that made the visible and audible disruption to the sacred theatre experience. Mark

explained that this put the under-privileged people in the position of ‘ruining it’ for the over-privileged, as if their disability meant that they didn’t know how, or weren’t able, to adhere to the rules of the space. Following Kotsko’s definition, the blind people were blamed for ‘violating the norms’ of the theatre. Not only for ruining the spectacle for those who could ‘see’, but arguably for disturbing the very logic of the space – which, like the gallery, privileges the visible, the spectacular. What remained invisible until the very end of the performance, however – when theatre staff made an announcement revealing what had happened – is that, in fact, the over-privileged had ruined it for the under-privileged *and* themselves by accessing content that they neither needed, nor were the intended public for.

In this story, the workings of privilege in relation to the visible and in relation to audiences are both layered and complex, something that will be drawn out further in Chapter Three. As described in more detail in Chapter Four, the quotations I draw on from these workshops come from written notes I made, where I took down verbatim what people said. In Mark’s words, this incident ‘showed how those with privilege consistently take more privilege, and this creates an “us and them” situation’ (Mark 2018). As will be explored more fully in Chapter Two, it is also an example of the ‘vulnerability’ of the spectacle, easily disrupted and derailed by the audience gathered to watch it (Mulvey 1989 p.4). The application was designed to allow blind and partially sighted visitors to be accommodated into the visual regime of the theatre, without sighted visitors noticing their presence, or becoming aware of their own privilege in being able to see everything that was going on. Though not expressly part of the theatre performance, Mark’s story sets up how the unexpected awareness of disability and able-bodied-ness disrupted its smoothness in ways that could neither be reconciled nor accounted for in the moment. The source of frustration to the normative production of the event may be different, but the outcome is perhaps similar to *Collapsing Lecture*.

Flexi-time

The disruption to normative notions of public that these kinds of mixed audience groups create for the institution is also another altering to normative time, that Kafer might describe as ‘crip time’. ‘Audio-described’ or ‘relaxed’ performances often

provide a space for audiences with different abilities and needs to mix. The latter welcomes people with autism or Tourette's and their carers, or mothers and babies – those deemed by the institution as liable to make inappropriate noise, need softer lighting, space to lie down, rest or breastfeed (Underwood 2020). These activities and responses – making noise, lying down, eating – are not normatively appropriate in the cultural institution where you are expected to pay respectful, quiet attention to the spectacle or display. Far from an everyday practice, relaxed performances are more standardly practiced in theatres and cinemas, but often take place during the day. A further assumption becomes visible here around the time of day during which normative and non-normative publics may choose to, or are able, to access culture.

Late at Tate Britain emerged as a way to broaden access to the art museum for a wider public, by extending opening hours until 10pm on the first Friday of each month. This extension is purported to be a chance for those working during the day to see the exhibitions and collection galleries 'after hours' at a time that was quieter than the busy weekend, as well as for those on lower incomes to gain entry to exhibitions at half-price. *Late at Tate Britain* also introduced a 'programme' to the extension of opening hours – including music, talks, performances and film screenings – alongside bars serving alcohol within galleries. It became a regular 'event' with a fairly loyal following who would show up, often without paying particular attention to what was going on.⁶⁴

This strategy of extending opening hours to broaden access has quite significant implications for widening the art museum's 'general' public. One genesis of the contemporary *Late at Tate Britain* is undoubtedly the successful petition for the introduction of gas lights in museums in the 1800s to aid the extension of opening hours by working-class would-be visitors. In 1865, Lord Ebury presented the wishes of 'the Early Closing Association, and of Working Men of Islington, for the Opening of Public Museums [...] three evenings in the week between the hours of seven and ten o'clock' (UK Parliament 1865), and it was upheld. Before then, museums had only

⁶⁴ To date, there has been no report or scholarly study on this particular programme at Tate Britain that I may draw on. Therefore, I write this brief history from my extensive working knowledge of the programme, which includes conversations with Adrian Shaw, Curator, Young People's Programme, who initiated *Late at Tate Britain* in 2000 in his previous role as Information Assistant.

been lit by natural light. The introduction of gas light enabled people to attend museums in the evening after work (Kriegel 2007). Recognising perhaps the ‘public good’ denied them, this new public of the museum drew attention to a major obstacle blocking their more frequent access, and petitioned Parliament to remove it. The Victoria and Albert Museum proudly announces the precedent it set in being the first national museum to extend its opening hours with gaslight in a blog commending the then director Henry Cole for his ‘innovation’ (Smith 2013). There is no mention of the petition, but the museum was another early adopter of ‘lates’ programming in the early 2000s (Stockman 2016).

As the petition showed, shifting attention away from the museum’s content to its structural and temporal conditions and how they blocked access, opened up who the art museum’s general public might encompass. If the normative time of the museum assumes a particular class and age of people – from the middle-class student to the affluent senior citizen – then late openings increase may access, both to those who cannot visit during the day, but also to those for whom the coded behaviour of ‘quiet contemplation’ is also a social barrier. Museum ‘lates’ are also undeniably a sign of the liberal institution becoming neoliberal. Culture24’s report *A Culture of Lates* (Stockman 2018) has shown how programming across the sector does attract a more diverse public than the usual daytime demographic.⁶⁵ However, this report is explicitly interested in museums increasing access to unusual demographics for the contribution ‘a culture of lates’ can make to the ‘night time economy’. Culture24’s unashamedly neoliberal logic asserts that extended opening hours, mixed with alcohol and programming, leads to increased profits for museums, and diversifying ‘the offer’ of any given city’s wider night-time economy.⁶⁶ This report cannot demonstrate that lighting, programming and alcohol make a significant dent in the barriers preventing certain groups from visiting museums, and unfortunately there is little scholarship in the area of museum late events. But it does bring us back to the

⁶⁵ Culture24 describes itself as a charity ‘supporting arts and heritage organisations to connect meaningfully with audiences’. It also provides consultancy and ‘strategic advice and practical support to museums, galleries and other cultural organisations’ and is therefore heavily invested in promoting ‘museum lates’ (Culture24 n.d.). While this does not discredit their research findings, it has been created for a specific agenda of encouraging a new cultural market.

⁶⁶ The report praises Sheffield’s Business Improvement District for ‘funding a series of Museum Lates’ as ‘a strong example of culture and retail working together to extend productive trading hours and diversify the night-time economy’ (Stockman 2018 p.24).

issue the gas light petition raises: how a temporal and structural adjustment in the material conditions of the museum can both affect its ambience and the perception of who it is for.

One of the most significant changes *Late at Tate Britain* makes to the *feeling* of being in the galleries is, in fact, through its lighting. With overhead lighting tracks dimmed, or switched off altogether in the main hub spaces – around the bars, musical acts and DJs – coloured lights are positioned to shoot light up the walls and diffuse it on the vaulted ceilings. A softer more relaxed atmosphere is evoked and the museum experience is orientated less around the art on the walls (which is less visible), and more around new kinds of social relations that are now possible – particularly flirtatious ones. This sense of a lighter, social atmosphere eschewing the museum's daytime seriousness is the main reasons I chose *Late at Tate Britain* as an appropriate context for *Collapsing Lecture*. However, I hadn't taken into account how the rather staid architecture of the auditorium upheld the museum's daytime rigour, despite the temporary relaxation of rules elsewhere. This only made it *more* appropriate for Williamson's intentions. Nevertheless, my assumption was that the kind of audience who shows up on a Friday evening for more relaxed art viewing would be the kind of audience who would 'get', even enjoy, his performance.

Not only was I proved wrong, but *Collapsing Lecture* can be taken as a microcosm of what is happening more broadly. The logic of *Late at Tate Britain*, where a different kind of consumer experience rubs up against the institution's normative, educative function, is one effect of the 'corporate turn' promoted by Culture24's report and described by Nina Möntmann. This long-running, monthly programme (since 2000) neatly exemplifies the competing pressures on the contemporary, neoliberal art institution of being both a public good *and* a commercial enterprise, of attracting both 'a mass public' and diversifying itself to include 'new publics' (Möntmann 2008 p.17). However, a shift in atmosphere does not necessarily shift the expectations of curative intervention that a public brings to an institution, revealing what *A Culture of Lates* glosses over: there is still a conflict between a desire for the convivial (Bourriaud 2002), avant-garde antagonism of challenging programming (Bishop 2004, 2012) and the instructional, edifying role of the museum that the public puts its 'trust' in (Cuno 2004). I suggest this conflict underpins the competing positions that

the neoliberal institution under the corporate turn creates: the roles of consumer, stakeholder, audience, citizen, visitor, participant, learner are variously taken up by this public with uncertainty, producing a publicness that is undeniably awkward. Just as de Kersaint Giraudeau encourages us to pause and ask ‘why are we clapping?’, I suspect many of those at *Collapsing Lecture* were asking themselves the same question. If they weren’t learning anything, were they simply being mocked? Was it the stuffy art museum that was being sent up, or the blind faith the public puts in it to educate and improve them?

The questions of access that Williamson's performance and his D/deafness posed only extended the awkwardness of the corporate turn. It surprised a general public usually shielded from recognising their privilege, showing up the ableist assumptions of participation that moments of publicness like the conventional artist’s talk are normatively and comfortably shrouded in. These ableist assumptions are not only embedded in our social structures, but our architectural ones: as mentioned in my introduction, Tate Britain’s inaccessible stage still prevents disabled artists from presenting there.⁶⁷ In *Collapsing Lecture* however, my discomfort also had to do with my role as enjoyable content creator under the corporate turn, clashing with the more avant-garde end of the educational turn – of ‘disrupting’ and ‘transforming’ the audience’s assumptions of the ‘curative’ institution.⁶⁸

Just Doing my Job

The uncertainty of such contradictions leads back to the specificity of the role of public programmer, and the impossibility of resolving them. Mark’s second example was an event he organised for blind and visually impaired visitors in Tate Britain’s garden. As part of the activity, the group were encouraged to touch the plants and smell them. Mark remembered with horror how one participant leant forward and touched a nettle, immediately leaping back yelling ‘I’ve been stung!’ He described feeling horribly guilty at not having protected this person from the shock and unexpected pain of being stung, something that he as a sighted person could have

⁶⁷ As hinted at earlier, I found this an irresolvable contradiction of putting on public programmes there.

⁶⁸ Which is still, in fact, in keeping with the traditional, liberal notion of the museum as edifying public good.

anticipated. As another colleague pointed out, ‘the public have their own agency and can make their own decisions’. But this did not assuage Mark’s sense of responsibility for what had happened; his personal feeling of guilt could not be easily separated or explained away by such professional detachment. Perhaps because it might be rather awkward to admit a sense of guilt *about* his sightedness as much as a professional guilt at failing to provide the curative intervention expected of the institution, which, in this case, he embodied.

The latter vignette raises a number of questions: who is responsible for what? What are the limits of the institution’s responsibility? When do the public take responsibility for their own actions, assumptions and responses? Where does the person end and the institution begin – and how does it feel to walk this line? These questions are more fully fleshed out in Chapter Four, but the feeling of walking this line came up in a number of the workshops and conversations, referred to as a ‘split’ sense of ‘embodying the institution’: representing its values and brand, while retaining a critical stance and personal approach (Workshop September 2018). Being both professionally and personally accountable is not easy, particularly when these things are not in alignment.

In our conversation about her involvement in the *Collapsing Lecture* Alexia also touched on the impossibility of professional and personal alignment, from the perspective of role-playing. The Tate staff members involved in the performance that evening were asked by Williamson to play an extremely unhelpful version of themselves in their institutional role. I asked how she felt about this?

Oh my God I was horrified, absolutely horrified! I can’t believe I agreed to do it [...] especially because this is a room full of my people [...] other museum people, other professionals, and I have to go up and be really bad (Alexia 2018).

The difficulty playing her assigned role in the performance, in front of colleagues from her professional field, came up several times. It reminded her of taking part in another performative intervention that also happened during a different *Late at Tate Britain*. Along with ten others (some staff, some friends of the artist), Alexia was

asked to wear a Tate invigilator uniform. The group were instructed to gather in doorways bordering galleries, appearing to lazily 'hang out' in them. Whenever a member of the public wanted to move through the doorway and asked what they were doing, the invigilators would separate in different directions, collecting at another threshold. Though not at the level of publicity that introducing Williamson exposed her to, she described a similar experience of excruciating embarrassment at having to do 'a bad job', the cause of real anxiety. Alexia described her part in Williamson's performance as 'career suicide', and he also considered 'sabotaging professional reputation' in his own reflections on *Collapsing Lecture* (2017).

This additional performance remembered by Alexia, though challenging in similar ways to *Collapsing Lecture*, is not an anomaly. Both performances draw on a history of artist interventions critiquing institutional conventions. For example, Andrea Fraser's live tours of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in character as Jane Castleton, the overzealous museum docent, later reproduced for her film *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989). Fraser's film *Little Frank and his Carp* (2001) documents the artist making an unannounced, unsanctioned intervention in the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. In a now infamous performance of the 'visitor' relation to the museum, Fraser listens to the audio guide's authoritative male voice, and takes his directions to explore the museum's architecture literally. Rubbing herself sensually against its smooth walls, the shock and surprise of staff and other visitors is captured by hidden cameras. Though she critiques the uncritical nature in which certain conventions and roles are carried out, she also relies on their complicity.⁶⁹ Similarly *Collapsing Lecture* needed to rope others in: unacknowledged staff and unknowing audience members.⁷⁰ Both Fraser and Williamson make the function of certain positions within the apparatus of the museum visible through parody or subversion.

⁶⁹ Fraser's institutional critique has been acquired by museum collections including Tate's, becoming part of the canon and institution of contemporary art. Incidentally, she has more recently distanced herself from these early works, over concerns that rather than critiquing the institution, they end up mocking an unsuspecting audience.

⁷⁰ Though a collaborative effort, especially on behalf of Alexia, the AV technicians and myself as curator, the performance was of course very much Williamson's work. But given that the nature of the lecture as performance must not be revealed, Tate staff were asked to play themselves, albeit an extremely incompetent, unhelpful version. We were neither credited anywhere, publicly thanked afterwards, nor paid additionally.

However, *Collapsing Lecture* left both staff and audience unsure as to whether any spectacle was available for enjoyment at all.

The difficulty in reconciling this is suggested by Alexia, who felt compromised at performing her disengagement with the artist, and disinterest toward the audience:

some people in the audience were getting quite animated, we were given very strict instructions not to respond at all which is obviously counter intuitive to every instinct that you have [...] I do remember thinking: this is unbearable (Alexia 2018).

Despite knowing the artist was not actually in need of her help, Alexia's lack of response was directly at odds with the kind of attentiveness institutional staff, especially those explicitly tasked with working publicly, are expected to exude. Helen Charman (2005), charts the professionalisation of the museum's education curator, describing various shifts that took place after the 1960s. Exhibition designers employed to consider how visitors would experience an exhibition, and education services repositioned to address the needs of a broader public than school children showed the museum placing greater emphasis on the experience of its visiting public. Responsibility for the collection remained with the museum curator, whereas the visitor's experience was meted out to education department colleagues, which is now what distinguishes them professionally:

[r]esponsibility, especially in relation to the public, can be recast as a form of duty of care which embraces not just the intellectual experience of our visitors, but also cares for their emotional and physical well-being whilst at the museum (Charman 2005).

Naturally this 'duty of care' extends to programme contributors too, of which Williamson was one. But for *Collapsing Lecture* to succeed in failing so catastrophically, it was imperative that everyone working at Tate played their part in failing to live up to such expectations and exuding a care/less attitude.

As the curator of this performance, which was part of an entire *Late at Tate Britain*, I sidestepped taking an explicitly public role in it by asking Alexia to give the introduction. However, I didn't escape being roped into a cameo role in another faux artist's talk by Liu Ding during *Tate Tanks: Fifteen Weeks of Art in Action* (2012).⁷¹ My small part was to rigorously announce the time left at three five-minute intervals. My minimal 'script' was in no way out of the ordinary, except that my timekeeping was rather overzealous. Though a minor intervention, I had to play it believably in front of colleagues and acquaintances from my professional field, at my place of work. Embarrassed at having to over-perform my usual self, I resented not having the chance to explain I had been playing a role, especially when an audience member told me he had thought me 'really pernickety'. Like Alexia, I accepted this cameo as part of my job, resigned to the fact that somebody had to do it.

All of these performances play on infringements to the implicit, micro-contractual agreements between the public and the institution that are made every day. Playing a distortion of the professional role *and* oneself in the workplace, where one normatively desires to come across as both capable and competent, is just one. But these examples are also part of the requirements of the contemporary art institution to maintain and uphold an avant-garde legacy that expects their publics to keep apace. Claire Bishop (2004, 2012) explicitly names this as 'antagonism', revealing the irresolvable tension between the (arguably laudable) intentions of socially-engaged practice – to encourage participation and empower audiences – and artworks that intend to destabilise, disrupt or even prevent audiences from carrying out their role as they know it. What Bishop's critique doesn't account for is the fall-out from these situations and who is responsible for picking up the pieces or providing a more detailed understanding of what happened. If informational material produced around a performance cannot account for it, audiences may simply be expected to return, bewildered and a little disgruntled, to their daily lives. Perhaps because of the imperative to uphold this legacy of challenge, I couldn't acknowledge the guilt I felt that a member of the audience had left *Collapsing Lecture*, 'visibly upset'. Relying on the artist's accounts of other audience responses, I expected that, however gradually, everyone would eventually 'get it'. I hoped some might even enjoy the

⁷¹ The inaugural programme of these new museum spaces for live work.

awkwardness; as Maree confirmed, this anticipation was not completely out of kilter. But according to Charman I was not entirely in sync with my professional responsibility of care for the emotional and intellectual well-being of the audience either.

Perhaps what all of this points to is the institution's perennial problem with its unpredictable, unruly publics. Hilary Floe (2014) describes the unexpected 'over-participation' of the public in three exhibitions designed to encourage visitors to physically engage with artwork on display. While the article revolves around the liberating possibilities of play in the museum and contemporary art gallery, the three case studies where visitors were invited into physical contact with artwork seem to suggest how proscribed that interaction was. The unexpected reactions of the public were only registered when, as Floe cites, 'everything was getting smashed' and the institutions – Tate Gallery, Institute of Contemporary Arts and Museum of Modern Art Oxford – had either to close exhibits early, or rethink the implications of their invitation. Floe's analysis shows that even (or especially) when institutions invite a mode of interaction other than looking, certain normative expectations of who the public is and how it will behave remain in place. But, as my extended analysis of *Collapsing Lecture* shows, failure can mean very different things for the artist, institution and audience. If we take these failed interactions together, what can they tell us about our attachments to the contemporary art institution and what it means to become public there?

Conclusion – *Collapsing Lecture*, Becoming Public(s)

In this first chapter I have described at length Aaron Williamson's *Collapsing Lecture* as performed at Tate Britain to expound the potential I see in paying attention to unexpected or disruptive moments when they arise within public programming. I look at them in detail for what they reveal about publicness as a temporal, emergent process rather than a given space, or fixed state that we step in and out of. Much of what I described revolved around awkwardness, which I used, firstly, to address what Möntmann designates as the 'awkward' relations between art institutions and their publics. Through this lens we see the neoliberal art museum coming into view, both out of, and in conflict with, the values of its liberal parent. These values were

challenged by the *Late at Tate Britain* format colliding with *Collapsing Lecture*, and extended using notions of crip and queer time (Kafer 2013, Freeman 2010, Muñoz 2009), as both flexible and productive according to non-normative logics. They helped me demonstrate how Williamson's glitchy interactions with the neoliberal institution and D/deafness disrupted its traditional, liberal perceptions of general public, and that public's understanding of itself. Focussing on my uncomfortable feelings as programmer, also observed in other responses to the performance lecture, further undid received notions of the monolithic, unfeeling institution and the compliant, abstract general public it relies on.

In keeping with Bishop (2004, 2012), I tried not to evaluate *Collapsing Lecture* with moral judgements; rather, to examine what the different responses to it tell us about publicness in the contemporary art institution. I also showed how my complex and competing feelings *in the moment* of experiencing it – exhilaration, amusement, uncertainty and guilt – rubbed up against one another, to texture the experience of public programmer becoming audience to her own programme, forming a new understanding of her relation to the professional. In later chapters I mine more of these moments for how they reveal publicness as an emergent process, and not simply an ideal, easy or given function of the art museum. Some of the awkwardness I describe arose from the competing ways publics are interpellated and expected to relate to the contemporary art institution. From the art aficionado wanting intellectual stimulation, to the consumer wanting to be entertained, to the disabled visitor with particular access needs, to the participant in an experimental performance wondering what this all means. Some of these are idealised roles, all of them are reductive, and, at the same time, necessary to hold in mind. Rather than being fixed positions, they are reminiscent of Coypel's 'twenty publics of different tone and character' referenced in my Introduction (Coypel in Crow 1995 p.10). After Muñoz (2009), with *Collapsing Lecture* I have conceptualised the public programme as an 'awkward stage', across which these roles and relations are played out. The failures and possibilities of these awkward moments will be returned to throughout the thesis.

Three facets come out of this extraordinary example that, I argue, are integral to understanding publicness as it is produced by the public programme of the contemporary art institution. In the following chapters I look at publicness through the

intersecting lenses of attention/distraction, responsibility/community and the professional/personal *in practice*. As described above, to create *Collapsing Lecture* Williamson employed a strategy of shifting his attention to the micro-gestures of ‘performing-knowing’ during his art school lecture. This led me to a consideration of the micro-gestures of response and ‘performing-caring’ that, in different ways, institutional staff and the audience were prevented from, or failed at, carrying out. Shifting attention away from the proper ‘content’, towards the technologies and structures designed to focus it, demonstrated how integral holding space and attentive care are to the public programme.⁷² I explore the link between a shift in attention and practices of care more deeply in Chapter Two.

Having described the labour that goes into holding spaces and ensuring the smooth running of a public programme event, I also portrayed what it might mean for things to ‘go wrong’ when expectations of ‘curative intervention’ (Kafer 2013) are overturned. In a sense, this vague sounding notion is oddly specific, in that we know it when we see it, or more accurately, feel it. But as Muñoz notes, referring to J. L. Austin’s theory of performative speech acts, ‘going wrong’ is not necessarily antithetical to ‘going right’: ‘failure or infelicity [...] is built into the speech act [...] even though we know in advance that felicity of language falters, it is nonetheless essential’ (Muñoz 2009 pp.8–9). Could the faltering of *Collapsing Lecture*, the glitches, mistakes and the failed attempts to communicate and care all be part of the process of publicness? That we must go wrong to go right, is not only an uncomfortable notion; I argue it is integral to each space created through the public programme. But rather than accept it, I suggest we wrestle with this idea, and therefore I return to it throughout the thesis.

In this first chapter I have been writing of ‘the public’ and ‘the institution’, as separate but overlapping entities, describing some of the inbuilt expectations each has of the other. However, I also align with Fraser’s refusal to speak of the institution as separate from ourselves, because, as she asserts, it is ‘internalized, embodied, and

⁷² This attempt to understand the centrality of holding and attentive care is also central to recent attempts to rethink the function and responsibility of cultural institutions and art practice itself, such as Evan Ifekoya’s *Reimagining Care* (2020) for the Black Cultural Archives, and Linda Brothwell’s ongoing series *Acts of Care* (since 2013).

performed by individuals' (Fraser 2005 p.283). Similarly, Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson take up Mary Douglas' 'theory of institutions being a social construct' to show that 'however critically we imagine ourselves to be thinking – we are already implicated in an instituent process, and are formed, or even confined, by our experience of institutions' (2017 p.21). What I have described here, and draw on throughout the thesis, are, I suggest, not only awkward or uncomfortable, but 'instituent' moments. The feelings of split subjectivity that come up for programmers during them are precisely when we understand ourselves as having, in Fraser's words, 'internalized, embodied, and performed' the institution.

Going deep into the awkwardness of instituent moments within *Collapsing Lecture* at Tate Britain, and briefly into other examples of performed institutional critique, allowed me to introduce the different facets of the role public programmers perform. In particular, how care, responsibility and guilt are all intertwined by an emergent notion of 'the professional', examined in greater depth in Chapter Four. Perhaps what came across most clearly during Williamson's performance, was the public's attachment to the 'curative intervention'. This can of course be tied to the etymology of curator, coming from the Latin word *curare*, to care. If the public expects to be taken care of by an institution, this job has often fallen to the educational and public programme departments as those that most care about deepening and expanding visitor experience through explicitly public, face-to-face forms of engagement. But what happens when these members of staff, and others, appear not to care? The discomfort in the auditorium that evening might reveal an attachment to the paternal museum as caregiver. But as Fraser points out, if we *are* the institution, doesn't this put responsibility back onto the public? If so, then we find ourselves in the perfect neoliberal institution, explored further in Chapter Three. In this chapter responsibility and its cousin 'response-ability' are rendered through the participatory performances of Jamal Harewood and Ann Liv Young, which challenge the notion of a passive audience. I write about them from the position of a distinctly uneasy audience member, unravelling my ambivalent feelings toward becoming part of the 'temporary community' that both artists purport their work creates. Chapter Four departs from the entanglements of responsibility and community to further develop the notion of holding space for publicness introduced above. It reflects on my research practice carried out through workshops and conversations with other public programmers to

gather and unpack their awkward moments of publicness. With this material I ask what kinds of labour are at work in programming publics, and how do we know when they are emerging?

What cannot be escaped in this chapter, and indeed the whole thesis, is the importance of presence – being there and being present within the moments of public becoming I choose to work with.⁷³ I look at these fraught moments of co-presence through the lens of theatre and performance studies, in addition to queer and feminist theory. As previously outlined, this is because much of the literature around the public programme appears fearful of getting specific for the failure it can connote, and what it might make embarrassingly present – the self. But if we are serious about understanding publicness, and deepening and improving our relationship to it within the contemporary art institution, I suggest taking the (personal and professional) failures of public programming, as ‘not anomalous, but somehow [...] constitutive’ (Ridout 2006 p.3). In line with Halberstam (2011), I also argue that the critical potential of these failures calls for exploration. Indeed, it is my contention that publicness is only revealed for the process that it is through the awkward, disruptive, even transformative moments that, as programmers or audiences, we might more readily dismiss. An interrogation of the specific, nitty-gritty of intimate relating that goes on through contemporary public programming practice, has therefore been made present to the attendees of my workshops, and is presented to the readers of this thesis. I do this in the hope that putting these scenes of writing and research *into practice*, has something to say about, and does something to, becoming public(s) in the contemporary art institution.

⁷³ Indeed, this thesis is only possible because I was ‘there’, and asked others to tell me what it was like when they were.

Chapter Two – Paying Attention: Economics, Ethics, Embodiment

Attention is not something that is completely directed by a subject within this museum, but something that emerges from the event, from what is happening. It is activated by the specificities and directions of what happens (Arlandis 2018 p.71).

One of Michael Warner's key claims about the formation of publics is that they are 'constituted through *mere* attention' (2005 p.87, my emphasis). Whether the readership of a newspaper, weekly viewers of a Saturday night TV show or followers of a niche musical genre, membership of all of these groups depends on noticing a mode of address as addressed to *you*, both in particular and in general. The power of this address is that it forms a public, in which it is possible to feel called on both individually and as part of an unknown community.⁷⁴ Yet an address has no power at all if we don't attend to it. What, then, might be revealed about 'becoming public(s)' if we pay more than 'mere' attention to this facet of publicness, if it becomes the *particular* focus of an entire chapter? In doing so, I argue it is not minor or incidental to moments of publicness. Rather, it is integral. In this chapter, I draw attention to an experiential, processual understanding of becoming public(s) by asking: what does it mean to pay such attention *together* through the many and various formats offered by the public programme?

If the museum is a technology of attention, the public programme is part of that technology, which focuses attention in a particular way by employing time-bound, collective forms of engagement. The value of the public programme is often predicated on the notion that co-presence and shared attention are important experiences, as opposed to the more private and distributed attentional logic of exhibition and collection galleries. Yet, as suggested by Arlandis above, and as Aaron Williamson's *Collapsing Lecture* at Tate Britain (2011) demonstrated, attention (in the museum) emerges from what is happening, and cannot necessarily be contained. How, then, does attention connect us with others (or not) in these temporary spaces of togetherness, and what are the implications of such

⁷⁴ Warner (2005) has written on the strangeness of this in detail.

connection? Lastly, what happens when we don't pay attention, when we 'look away' (Rogoff 2005), stop listening and allow ourselves to become distracted by something else?

Inspired by Williamson's methodology of paying attention to 'peripheral distractions' (2017), the museum's technologies of attention and their failure, this chapter follows the different attentional threads of the public programme. Through everyday usage, as well as in the literature on it, attention is largely configured in economic terms: as a payment, or exchange of engagement for information. This links us back to the awkwardness of the corporate turn suggested by Möntmann (2008), explored in the previous chapter. A major source of tension in the contemporary art institution is the liberal notion of a public good clashing with the neoliberal, transactional space of consumerist desire that it has become. But the common conceptualisation of attention as payment props up what can be a rather crude reading of attention that commonly appears in the literature around media consumption, otherwise known as the 'attention economy' (Davenport and Beck 2001). Other facets, such as its agential, ethical and erotic implications, are just as important, yet commonly receive less attention. I address this gap via specific moments of publicness produced by the public programme, to nuance our understanding of attention. This leads to thinking about responsiveness, responsibility and response-ability in Chapter Three.

After introducing the idealised forms of attention that the museum and public programme are predicated on, I briefly map the literature on attention from different fields, to consider attention outside of an active/passive binary and a notion of payment. Then, rather than a studious commitment and dedication, Gavin Butt has asked how a 'flirtatious' or 'non-serious' approach might be generative (2006 pp.187–192)? A flirtatious mode of attention moves us away from the universal, liberal looking subject, towards a more specific, embodied engagement. Perhaps because paying something a *particular* attention is not only about caring, but also about an arousal of interest, opening up the possibility of being both 'tuned in' and 'turned on'. To look at, listen to or feel something with a new kind of effort, desire and will to understand and articulate it differently. And so, acknowledging the hovering presence of an attentional erotics, I attempt to disrupt its normative, transactional function within programmed moments of publicness and information exchange.

Shifting attention from a given focus towards the technologies and labour processes producing and shaping it, and the various distractions interrupting it, allows attention to be reconfigured as a complex field of desiring moments stretching us in different directions. I then consider what it might be to *queer* attention through the public programme, and later in the chapter, entertain a sustained focus on several moments of distraction (or re-attunement of attention) during moments of public programming to consider what such a shift from the centre to the periphery of a public situation can produce. I do this to show how moving away from a notion of payment, towards a more embodied understanding of an attentional field, allows a more thorough understanding of publicness as an emergent process. I suggest that attention is not only underpinning the spectacular and participatory aspects of a public programme, but its flickering embodiment mirrors the processual nature of becoming public(s), shifting our notion of publicness away from a static entity or fixed space.

Attention and The Museum

If attention is integral to certain forms of publicness, then it is important to look at how it is drawn and enacted within the museum. Indeed, it could be argued that the museum has always been a technology of attention: of attracting, directing and sustaining the attention of multiple publics. Deciding which objects are worthy of attending to and how, quiet contemplation and studious reverence have long been accepted forms of comportment there. As a result, the museum is a powerful space of 'civilised' subject production (Duncan 1995). In an inversion of the Foucauldian panopticon, the looking subject produced by the museum, also understands themselves to be looked at (Bennett 1995). The self-conscious way in which we attend in the museum, then, creates a particular kind of attentive subject. Taking this idea further, Adam Phillips gives a bird's eye view of the social importance of attentional control:

[t]he bringing-up and educating of children, whatever their culture or class, initiates them into regimes of attention; it tells them, in no uncertain terms, what is worthy of their attention, and how it should be paid, as well as what kind of attention they should be wanting, and how they should go about

getting it (neither distraction nor showing off is taught in schools). All religions, moralities, arts, sciences, politics and therapies organise and promote certain kinds of attention; in their different ways they tell us where to look and who to listen to; they tell us what about ourselves we should value and be valued for: what about ourselves we should take an interest in, and what we should take rather less interest in than we do (Phillips 2019 Chapter 1 Section 1).

Demonstrating the far reaching regime and discipline of attention, Phillips shows how we become compliantly attentive subjects, whether inside the museum, school, place of worship or elsewhere. Specifying the crucial role of upbringing and education, Phillips recalls Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus'. According to Bourdieu, class and culture inscribe certain ideas and responses, allowing us to decode and operate well in certain situations, and not so well in others. The elusive notion of 'taste' is also developed through habitus. So the act of looking in the museum is far from neutral – it is 'classed', and, in Bourdieu's words, 'classifies the classifier' (1984 p.6). These ideas effected a shift in thinking about how well audiences orientate themselves, or not, in museums.

Claire Bishop (2018) re-reads the notion of subject production in the museum through the lens of attention.⁷⁵ Tracing the rise and impact of the dance exhibition, she argues that museum and gallery attention practices are both interrupted and augmented by digital technologies. For Bishop, these exhibitions almost exclusively present choreographic practices that incorporate a digital logic into their looping performances. Whereas dance performances are traditionally set within a static theatre space at a fixed time (usually evening) with entrance permitted only with a ticket, performances in a dance exhibition are expanded to take place throughout the working day or weekend. Unlike ticketed performances, they do not ask to be looked at 100% of the time, and may be entered and left at any point (Bishop 2018 p.29). One of her main arguments is that this new form of exhibitionary practice is at odds with how the classic white cube gallery and black box theatre, as 'purportedly neutral

⁷⁵ Indeed, it is a popular turn for contemporary art theorists and curators alike: *Attention* was the title and theme of the city-wide exhibition and public programme for *Glasgow International* (2020).

frames', have absorbed and focussed our attention to 'construct' us as 'viewing subjects':

[b]oth are founded on long-established, unspoken behavioural conventions: [...] disruptions tend to be auditory rather than optical – coughing, rustling, eating, talking too loud. Both discipline and shape a bourgeois model of the subject that monitors his/her neighbors for indications of nonconformist behaviour (Bishop 2018 pp.30–31).

Whilst our attention is shaped by structural conventions of the white cube or black box, we are also involved in policing and maintaining the attention of those around us. As Bishop notes, such policing is deeply invested in 'bourgeois' subject production, and I would add, maintaining the ideal form of attention that these spaces construct. Awareness of our surroundings, vigilance for distractions and interruptions are therefore part of the embodied experience of attending.

The exhibiting practice Bishop describes interrupts how certain spaces of cultural production have traditionally manipulated our attention, but it also reflects the shift in contemporary attentional practices taking place within them through an increasing engagement with digital technology. Contemporary cultural experiences are always already mediated by digital devices, whether these are physically present or not. Yet, rather than demonising technology for its role in a pervasive attentional drift, Bishop suggests we might embrace the opportunities new practices of attending offer to critique and rework the traditional spaces of 'hierarchized attention' and bourgeois subject production that museums and other cultural spaces construct (pp.36–39).

Both the ideal and the digitally inflected modes of attending Bishop describes are common to the moments of public programming I unpack in this chapter. The public programme is a further technology of attention in the museum, picking out specific objects, practices and ideas that should be paid *particular* attention, and creating time-bound events for communal focus. The event spaces routinely used by the public programme are generally hybridised: neither white cube, black box, classroom, studio, nor theatre but borrowing, to a greater or lesser degree, from each. These are set within or alongside more traditionally defined spaces for the

contemplation of art objects. Additionally, new institutionalism's critique of the structural organisation of public art institutions, including, though not limited to, how they orchestrate attention, creates a kind of attentional anxiety at the heart of the institution. It now needs to pay, and draw, attention to its operating structures as much as what it 'shows'. The public programme is frequently the site of this kind of reflexive practice, creating space *in* the museum to reflect *on* it.⁷⁶

If the pervasive power of the attention economy sees attention as our most valuable commodity, the public programme's emphasis on presence and experience provides a unique space for capitalising on this. Indeed, to survive in an increasingly noisy cultural and precarious fiscal landscape, innovative forms of live exhibitionary and public programming are key to securing our attention: now more than ever, the museum needs publics to *attend*. Yves Citton has even predicted that soon 'we will be able to request payment for giving our attention to a cultural good instead of having to pay for the right to access it' (2017 p.8). Museums were once happy with a mono-directional, didactic dynamic with almost empty galleries catering to an elite public of art professionals and connoisseurs. Now, as discussed in the Literature Review and Chapter One, the pressure to commercialise this relationship, increase and diversify publics to secure funding streams, has produced an undeniable awkwardness (Möntmann 2008). As previously reflected on, one response is the rise of museum 'lates' – evening events, combining informative and entertaining content.⁷⁷ In contrast to more linear formats, festival-style concurrent programming entices younger, more 'diverse' audiences, experimenting with and exploiting the potential of plural *attentions* to open new revenue streams (Stockman 2016).

We are not meant to pay attention to any of the ways in which museums seek to grab it, from the macro to the micro; certainly not the technologies and actors that shape our attention on the public programme: presentation equipment, institutional staff guiding and directing the 'content'. The collective labour that goes into

⁷⁶ Such as Tate Modern's long-running series of courses *Towards Tomorrow's Museum* (2012–18), *Inside Today's Museum* (2012–17) and *The Museum, Past, Present, Future* (2018–20) developed in collaboration with Kings College London.

⁷⁷ These events began in the early 2000s at London museums like Victoria and Albert and Tate Britain, and have become almost globally ubiquitous. *Nuit Blanche*, a yearly night-long arts festival happening in many cities across Europe, and *Art Night* in London are other iterations of this concept.

producing *this* publicness is predicated on making sure the right kind of attention is 'paid' (Phillips 2019). But what if public programming actually pays attention to the mechanisms by which payment is ordered and collected? What if understanding this became the task of the public programme?

Seeking Attention – A Literature Review

Before outlining my observations of these mechanisms, I briefly map the diverse literature on this growing area of interest. Since attention manages the sensations we experience to tune into only what we need to focus on and 'make sense of the world around us', cognitive science treats attention as a neurological function determining 'how we actively process specific information in our environment' (Cherry 2020). Studies from psychology focus on attention as a neurological *and* social phenomenon of 'joint attention', discussed in more detail below (Citton 2017). For around twenty years, the 'attention economy' has found application and analysis in business and management studies (Davenport and Beck 2001). In popular culture and healthcare, attention to wellbeing is reframed as 'mindfulness', a widely taught practice honing our ability to focus on the present moment for the sake of mental and emotional health, but also 'attentional control' (Andridge et al. 2020).

To challenge the rather individuated senses – looking, listening – and singular functions – information gain, self-mastery – in which attention is normatively and overwhelmingly described, I turn to literature stemming from theatre and performance studies and philosophy. George Home-Cook presents an opportunity to think both 'inter-sensorially' and 'inter-subjectively' (Home-Cook 2015 pp.1–6). Writing about instances of aural disruption in the theatre, he also introduces the kinds of interactions at play during an 'act' of attention (p.1), that privileges corporeal presence. Citton uses intersubjectivity to explain how 'joint attention' is developed when a baby follows the attention of its primary caregivers, opening the possibility of collective attendance in all kinds of spaces, from the classroom to the theatre and sports arena (2017 pp.18–19). I would add the museum to this list, as well as the different kinds of spaces created by the public programme. Citton introduces the ethical considerations of a 'quality of attention rooted in *care* – which is to say the attentive consideration of the vulnerability of the other, of our solidarity and our

responsibility towards them' (2017 p.18, original emphasis). This becomes especially important in my later discussion of a very particular kind of public programme: the reading group. But for now, it leads us towards the primacy of Emmanuel Levinas' ethical relation to the other, where '[t]he approach to the face is the most basic mode of responsibility'. The inherent vulnerability of the other's face reminds us that 'the self cannot survive by itself alone' (Levinas in Butler 2015 p.78). For Levinas this encounter is a visual one, whereas in this chapter I consider acts of attending in an expanded, more corporeal sense. The discussion of attention as a relation *between* subjects – we cannot respond to something or someone unless we have paid attention – leads to an exploration of responsibility in the following chapter.

This chapter also deals with scenarios of joint attention in moments of public programming and their attendant problems and opportunities. These are, of course, considered against the backdrop of the 'attention economy'. Though not my primary focus, it is important to touch on this phenomenon, not least because this widely used phrase draws on the transactional and monetary logic of 'paying attention' referred to in this chapter's title. Business analysts Thomas Davenport and John Beck predicted how valuable attention was likely to become: '[i]n the future, many goods and services will be given away for free in exchange for a few seconds or minutes of the user's attention' (2001 p.213). Matthew Crawford warns that '[a]ttention is a resource – a person has only so much of it' (2015 p.11); however, the attention economy shows no sign of slowing down. Though we might think of it as a condition of contemporary neoliberal capitalism, Citton reminds us that the exchange of attention for information that can turn a profit is actually an ancient practice (2017 p.12).⁷⁸ The attention economy also refers to the fact that attention has become one of our most precious commodities – something that advertisers, brands, all scales of media outlets, cultural producers and venues all want a piece of. Though we also stand to gain, as mentioned above, the museum needs our physical and virtual attendance. The latter produces value in the form of clicks, likes, comments, posts and reposts. Such transactions, however mundane, fuel the attention economy and further the museum's reach by expanding its (potential) attendees.

⁷⁸ At the risk of making a hackneyed a connection, the infamous first line of Marc Antony's speech 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears' (Shakespeare *Julius Caesar* 3.2. 73), testifies that the attention economy is nothing new.

Guy Debord (1967) anticipated today's attention economy. Decrying the way capitalism is structured and maintained through 'spectacle' – an endless proliferation of images mediating all social relations – Debord was deeply sceptical of what the capitalist spectacle sets up: 'what appears is good, what is good appears' (Debord 1967 p.4). Though foundational to the attention economy, I go beyond Debord's emphasis on the spectacle's visuality and our complicit passivity. Later, Laura Mulvey's account (1989) of a Women's Liberation protest provides an opportunity to rethink spectacle in terms of vulnerability, allowing an understanding of the public programme in terms of both spectacle *and* vulnerability.

Most of the literature tends to conceptualise attention in terms of looking *or* listening. Sound and aurality are ever growing fields, yet the politics, pleasures and affects of 'the gaze' is the largely dominant form of understanding our interaction with 'visual' culture, as Debord demonstrated. This is why, alongside Citton's analysis (2017) of where we direct our 'looks', and who with, Home-Cook and Jean-Luc Nancy's attendance to the aural dimensions of attention are an important addition to the literature drawn together in this chapter. Both consider the act of listening in kinaesthetic terms: a 'stretching' of the ear, an effort or straining *towards* something (Nancy 2007 p.4, Home-Cook 2015 pp.2–4). In addition, as an 'inter-sensorial' phenomenon (Home-Cook 2015) attention is a synthesis of sensory information and, from the psychology and cognitive science literature, both a clarification and intensification of sensory information (Pashler 1998 p.2). At the same time, 'unattended stimuli' are still perceived and registered by the body's nervous system, however small the reaction (p. 4).

It could be said that attention is promiscuous: as a phenomenon and a topic, it touches many different areas. Moving between subjects, senses and objects, attention connects them without any expectation of lasting commitment. Cruising (for sex) as a promiscuous reading of one's surroundings, a queer form of paying attention to minor gestures, has been suggested by José Esteban Muñoz (2009) and others. Roland Barthes connects cruising as 'erotic quest' to reading as 'the quest [for] texts' (1985 p.231). Noticing what is 'at tension' (O'Neill 2018), where *intention* lies, when my attention is tuning in, where it is tending towards and what it is turned

on by has been particularly important to this research. And, as Carl Stumpf notes, there is a 'pleasure in noticing' all of this (paraphrased in Citton 2017 p.93). Indeed, as Phillips' shows, attempts to control our attention will always ultimately fail, because: '[w]e never quite know what people will make of what they are given; or how their minds will drift while they are paying attention' (2019 Chapter 1 Section 1). This will be demonstrated by the examples of public programming discussed below. As discussed in Chapter One, *inattention* in a public situation can become uncomfortable. But Phillips and these more promiscuous readings lead me to dwell a little longer on what happens when we get distracted or look away.

Irit Rogoff (2005) considers 'looking away' as an alternative mode of participation in spaces of art and culture, other than those already proscribed by institutions, suggesting how we how might employ it as a strategy. For Rogoff 'we' is not a singular identity-based belonging, but signifies 'momentary shared mutualities' that come 'fleetingly' into being whenever 'we negotiate a problem, a mood, a textual or cultural encounter, a moment of recognition' (2005 p.123). Elsewhere, Kathleen Stewart suggests a 'weirdly floating "we"' comes into being through different perspectives on a specific event (2007 p.27). Describing responses to the announcement of a road accident at a diner in a small American town, she observes a fragile unity coming into being and 'charging the social with lines of potential' (p.11). Stewart describes a series of shimmering vignettes like this one, to elaborate her theory of 'ordinary affects' as 'varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences' (2007 p.1). Though different in character, Stewart's 'we' is also temporarily produced by a collective shift in attention. I return to thinking through experience as a series of 'ordinary affects', and the temporal collectivity produced in Chapter Four.

The readings mentioned above sharpened focus on my methodological approach clarifying *why* I am drawn to investigating moments of disruption, awkwardness or unexpected happenings that interrupt the 'smooth' running of public programme events. Secondly, how, in paying particular attention to them, these moments help us understand the process of 'becoming public' as an embodied one. This is vital to grasp, if a more nuanced and situational understanding of publics is to be wrested

from an outmoded universalising notion of the public as absent bodies to be 'engaged' by the museum. I find affinity between this practice and the seductive, resonant way Stewart describes 'ordinary affects'. Their 'surging capacities to affect and to be affected' and their ability to 'catch people up in something that feels like *something*' appeals to my way of gathering and opening up specific moments of public programming (2007 pp.1–2). The things I am looking for are, for the most part, not hugely 'out of the ordinary' situations or experiences, but are what Stewart calls:

things that happen [...] in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds (Stewart 2007 pp.1–2).

What I attempt to capture are precisely the ordinary, but sometimes intense feelings of becoming public(s). Partly because in these moments we feel ourselves inescapably connected to others. Stewart highlights how forms of attending, attaching and acting are not only multiple, but are intricately linked to the experience of being 'caught up' in 'something that feels like *something*' with others. Forms of attending are in fact forms of relating.

Acts of Attention

The interconnection of attention and agency links to the long-standing debate about active participation versus passive spectatorship in philosophy, theatre and performance studies (Bishop 2006, Debord 1967, Harvie 2013, Rancière 2009). This is not a binary I wish to uphold, but it could be said that attention plays a starring role in it. Laura Mulvey's short account (1989) of her participation in the Women's Liberation protest during the *Miss World* (1970) beauty pageant draws on the active/passive binary to emphasise the power of their action against the spectacle. Described as 'a blow against passivity, not only [...] of the girls on the stage but the passivity that we all felt in ourselves', she also acknowledges the violence of their protest (Mulvey 1989 p.3). The spectre of unwanted but inevitable 'attention' it will accrue is also introduced: 'interrupting a carefully ordered spectacle, [and] drawing

attention to ourselves, [we were] inviting the hostility of thousands of people'. In an effort to minimise it, she recognises that her fear of becoming the object of the gaze and vitriol of others is part of 'our conditioning as women, and our acceptance of bourgeois norms of correct behaviour' (Mulvey 1989 pp.3–4). There follows a vivid account of her and accomplice Sally's attempts to fit in immediately before the protest, concealing last-minute planning with dramatised reactions:

Sally's and my conversation fluctuated wildly between frantically whispered consultations and mutual encouragement, and overly-loud comments about the show, the judges, the girls, anything 'ordinary' and unsuspecting. We tried our best to laugh at Bob Hope's jokes, in a pathetic attempt to feel one with the audience at last (Mulvey 1989 p.4).

Later, when the agreed moment for action came, Mulvey realised 'how ludicrously accessible the stage was' (p.4) and that 'a handful of people can disrupt it and cause chaos in a seemingly impenetrable organisation' (p.5). With these detailed glimpses moments before their protest erupted, Mulvey demonstrates that what constructs a spectacle is also what makes it 'vulnerable'. Describing her overly theatrical attempts to fit in, Mulvey demonstrates the subtle but important labour an audience performs to hold a spectacle: their efforts at quiet concentration, gasping, laughing, clapping, and judging all of these moments accordingly, all play their part. This labour might be summed up as giving and showing attention, which is what constitutes 'paying attention'. Perhaps not quite what Mulvey intended, but we learn from this vignette that attention, and its active demonstration, undergirds the public situation. For is there even a spectacle if no one pays attention?

Naturally the *Miss World* audience are not all paying attention in the same way, and the individual nature of attentional practices is discussed in more detail later. However, this short and evocative account highlights a charged dynamic between the fear of 'drawing attention' and the necessary performativity of 'paying attention' in a public situation. Mulvey's observations and reflections seem to suggest something more active *is* happening, yet she sides with the traditional critique of spectatorship, saying that the spectacle: 'isn't prepared for anything other than passive spectators' to bolster her prior statement about its vulnerability (p.5). What actually becomes

apparent is that spectatorship and activism are not binary opposites, but different modes of attention.

Mulvey also demonstrates what constitutes 'ideal' attention in the theatre space: a collective focus on, and a demonstrative, performed engagement with, what is happening on stage. Home-Cook's analysis (2015) suggests that our 'attendance' in the theatre is more than simply being present: '[T]heatregoing, necessarily entails action, enaction, and, most of all, *movement*' that carries with it 'a collective, as well as an individual, sense of commitment, discipline and responsibility' (2015 p.1, original emphasis). With a lengthy analysis of an audience's declarative sounds, Home-Cook focuses on 'acts of attending' that Mulvey also noted, but dismissed her as 'pathetic'.⁷⁹ Does she mean that her attempts to act 'attentive' and 'engaged' were pathetic? Or is she referring to those around her as pathetic because they were taken in by, and uncritical of, the *Miss World* spectacle? Importantly, these 'pathetic attempts' imply that there is something about feeling 'at one with the audience' that creates, or sustains, the spectacle. However, Mulvey's derision of passive viewing is still a popular critique: André Lepecki makes a moralising distinction between '[the] spectator to the more political and ethical figure of the witness, an actor-storyteller who takes responsibility for the work by transmitting [...] it to future audiences' (Lepecki in Bishop 2018 p.36). For Lepecki at least, watching without critically engaging is tantamount to shirking one's social responsibility, an idea returned to in Chapter Three.

What holds the theatrical spectacle may be similar to what holds spaces of public programming that follow in this analysis, though they are not the same experience. An auditorium-based public programme event and a theatrical production in a standard black-box theatre both demand co-presence and attention policing, though this is more vehement in the theatre. There are specific technologies producing attention: stage, lighting, screen, microphones and amplification. In an auditorium-based public programme event these can have a lighter touch – particularly as there is often more light, especially during question-and-answer sessions. People come

⁷⁹ An audience of theatregoers engages in all manner of coded behaviours, making certain noises (pre-show chatter, rustling programmes, laughter, applause) that 'publicly declare their presence' and 'intersubjective act of attending' (Home-Cook 2015 p.1).

and go more readily during a public programme event too, whereas movement is more strictly controlled in the theatre. It might seem strange therefore to preface my examples from a lecture theatre and a reading group with a story about a theatrical spectacle and its disruption. Yet, each situation is underpinned by an *ideal* form of attention; as such, vulnerability to fluctuating concentration or whole-sale distraction, is integral to their publicness.

Relations of Care

Before moving to my examples, both Mulvey and Home-Cook acknowledge, in different ways, the intersubjective nature of attending and its demonstration. Citton elaborates on why joint attention matters: when it is directed and focused collaboratively, empathetic responses allow subtle shifts and changes in direction to occur, highlighting the ethical and socially engaged dimensions of attention, because ultimately joint attention carries a quality of care (2017 pp.18–19, pp.85–6 and pp.104–13).⁸⁰ Though not the most popular frame of reference, we can also think of the museum in terms of care. As previously cited, the word ‘curator’ comes from the Latin root *curare*, denoting the primary function of museum curators: to care for artwork in the collection (Schubert 2009). At Tate this work is carried out by the Collection Care department, allowing curators to concern themselves with exhibition- and display-making. If the museum is a technology of attention then, it is also a technology of care: guiding and shaping what its publics should and should not care about, and deciding which objects should and should not be cared for. Practices and relations of care in the museum have another genealogy. Felicity Allen (2008) describes the prominent role feminist art practices played in developing museum and gallery education, since the 1970s, and the integral work women as activists, mothers and caregivers did to carve out space for children and adults to play and experiment with meaning and materials (p.5).

Drawing on this genealogy, John Byrne describes a move from the museum as cultural edifice full of objects, to a network of relations and practices that centres the

⁸⁰ Also resonant in the etymological relation of attention to *tendance*: ‘watchful care’ (Merriam-Webster 2020) Available from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tendance> [Accessed 4 April 2020].

visitor as ‘a member of the constituent body’ rather than a ‘passive’ recipient of knowledge (Byrne et al. 2018 p.11). Passive reception versus an engaged constituency is still at issue in this model, but the links made between attending, relating and caring are perhaps of more interest here. These are evident in Alberto Altés Arlandis’ contribution: ‘[i]nhabiting this constituent museum requires attention and care [...] It is a practice of exposure, vulnerability, fragility’ (2018 p.71). Though not as prominent as notions of ritual (Duncan 1995) or surveillance (Bennett 1995), Byrne et al. show how important such practices of relating and caring are (we might think of structured play and experimentation) to shaping today’s museum and gallery, recalling Chapter One’s discussion of the ‘good enough mother’ (Winnicott 1984). Education and public programmes – live practices that privilege presence and collective engagement – are often the conduit for these relations of care, yet conversely constitute some of the least visible practices of the museum.

Billed as a ‘space for everyone to make, play, talk, and reflect and to discover new perspectives on life, through art’ (Tate 2016), Tate Exchange is a large open space and programme aimed at addressing this problem around visibility.⁸¹ It is just one example of the recent proliferation of programmes and art practices presented at contemporary art institutions revolving around, devoted to and/or structured by relations of care, and their review in discourse (Archev 2017). As Curator, Public Programmes in Tate Exchange’s inaugural year, I worked with Guerrilla Girls to develop *Complaints Department Operated by Guerrilla Girls* (2016). Though not explicitly about care, this week-long project drew on institutional models of complaint handling, a wry comment perhaps on the pretence of caring about what users, customers or visitors think, that such practices perform for the institution. Instead of anonymous collection, bureaucratic processing and response, however, they offered ‘encouragement’ and a variety of materials with which visitors could write or draw a complaint, addressed to anyone or any institution, and post it on one of the moveable screens. The Guerrilla Girls also operated several ‘office hours’ where visitors could ‘share thoughts and complaints with them face to face’, and invited

⁸¹ It was initially conceived to provide Learning and Research (the umbrella department that covers Early Years and Families, Schools and Teachers, Young People’s Programmes, and Public Programmes at Tate) with a permanent, visible and physical space in Tate Modern. Programming was initially shared with a network of ‘Associates’ external to Tate, who now enjoy the lion’s share.

collaborators to host thematic discussions. Their simple invitation to ‘post complaints about art, culture, politics, the environment, or any other issue they care about’, is indicative of their practice of drawing attention to what *they* care about: the disproportional representation of women artists and artists of colour in museum collections compared with their white, male counterparts.⁸² Guerrilla Girls’ provocative approach zeros in on the gaps and omissions in the artistic canon that, as museum and gallery publics, we are not meant to pay attention to, and the ways in which what we do and don’t care about is orchestrated by these institutions.

‘At tension’

Returning to the quotation opening this chapter, Arlandis reminds us that we are not always in control of how our attention is directed: it is *emergent* (2018 p.71), not unlike the process of becoming public(s) I describe in this thesis. Moving from the art museum to the art school, I introduce a small moment during a lecture by the curator and theorist Paul O’Neill that was part of week-long curatorial summer school focusing on social art practices at a European art school I attended in 2018.⁸³ The ‘summer school’ or ‘curriculum’ format, inviting practitioners to speak about their practice to other professionals, is frequently adopted and adapted by museums, contemporary art institutions and itinerant organisations such as biennales and festivals.⁸⁴ Producing reflexive attention on practice, the practitioner presents their examples within a canon of professional practice. Moving beyond the academic conference, this model has become a dominant form of paying attention to a variety of art, curatorial, knowledge production and institutional practices, though it still belongs largely to the academy and art institution. Publications accompanying these

⁸² As a collective of anonymous artists who only appear in public wearing their statement gorilla masks, Guerrilla Girls came to more public attention via a series of posters distributed around New York in the late 1980s. Perhaps their most famous poster bears the question, ‘Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?’ alongside a naked reclining figure of a woman wearing a gorilla mask.

⁸³ In the following analysis the school remains anonymous.

⁸⁴ Examples include CAMPUS at Nottingham Contemporary (a nine-month independent study programme, 2019–20), Syllabus (a six-month independent study programme collaboratively produced by Wysing Arts Centre, Eastside Projects, Iniva, Spike Island and Studio Voltaire taking place since 2014), Anthropocene Curriculum (a series of week-long educational events exploring knowledge co-production taking place since 2013), and Tate Intensive (a week-long programme exploring contemporary museum practice for global practitioners). In addition, The Whitney Independent Study Program could be said to have developed this intimate relationship between the seminar/course, the art institution and the development of curatorial and critical discourse around the institution.

programmes, or critiquing them, lend further clout to such ‘schooling’ within and around the regular structures of exhibition and display. All of these approaches are ostensibly about using a rather traditional educative format to open art spaces to a broader public, though this isn’t always the result. With no formal entry requirements, the summer school I attended was ostensibly open to anyone, and formed part of the art academy’s public programme. However, it naturally attracted a specialist audience: a mix of curators, artists and students of both disciplines, as well as a few more unusual routes in.

In recent years, O’Neill’s discursive and publishing practice has played a major role in bringing the curatorial and its attendant structures into focus.⁸⁵ He began his lecture by stating a desire to try something different from the standard presentation of curatorial practice. Explaining that looking, the most regulated form of attention in the museum, sometimes ‘gets in the way’, he invited us, during a section of more personal prose, to close our eyes and make ourselves comfortable. Finding this a more restful way to engage with a more lyrical tone in the lecture, listening with my eyes closed proved fairly pleasurable at first. As O’Neill began to describe the breakdown of a love relationship, it felt more comfortable not to be looking directly towards him. But after a while, I started to wonder when I should open my eyes again. Eventually, sensing the text moving back into theoretical territory, I blinked and sat up straighter in my chair, returning to my usual listening posture. When I later asked O’Neill about his strategy, explaining my enjoyment of this more relaxed mode of paying attention but omitting my worry about when I should start looking again, O’Neill responded: ‘where there is attention, things are also “at tension”’. I found this rang true with my slight discomfort with the two kinds of theorising going on in his presentation: the curatorial and the personal. O’Neill then suggested that attention is sometimes about comfort and sometimes about discomfort. It may also be about surprise: when something or someone ‘grabs’ or ‘catches’ our attention, diverting it from what we were engaged with.

⁸⁵ Not least through the public programme at Bard College, where he was previously Director of the Graduate Program, Center for Curatorial Studies (2013–17), and now as co-director of PUBLICS, Helsinki (since 2017), the radial endpoint of his discussions of the curatorial, as referenced in my thesis introduction.

The wider acknowledgment that ‘looking gets in the way’, is part of the move to overcome of the primacy of the visual in cultural and educational spaces. This has been problematised from feminist and post-colonial and neo-Marxist perspectives (Pollock 1988), and challenged by more ‘radical’ forms of public programming foregrounding other modes of engagement. We might also characterise these tensions as the interplay between attention and what is commonly considered its other: distraction. However, as Matt Bevis has noted, ‘attention is not the opposite of distraction. We have to sublimate our distraction to our attention’ (2017). Phillips similarly suggests that attention ‘is [in fact] made possible by inattention’. In addition, ‘if acculturation is among other things the organising of attention, or the organising of desire as the organising of attention, then there is a tension [...] between what we are supposed to attend to, and what we find ourselves wanting to attend to’ (2017). The public programming moments described below also demonstrate that institutions may direct attention, but cannot control it. Frequently the idealised, moralised mode of full, undivided attention is ‘at tension’ with the reality that people pay attention through technological devices, doodling, daydreaming or chatting to a friend.

The problem of the museum’s multiple, inattentive publics has been explored by Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh (2013), with the public programme often tasked with identifying and addressing publics that are ‘missing’. However, as their research shows, not only can attention not be directed, but the problem of ‘missing’ audiences is not always a lack of attention, but an attentiveness *elsewhere*. The resources and work museums put into ‘targeting’ and developing new audiences assumes that if only the right messaging is created, the ‘missing’ can be made to pay attention to the museum’s offer. However, this assumes that they do not already have objects of attention, or will find something worthy of attending to in the museum – which, in the case of colonial collections, may be a very problematic assumption (Dewdney 2008 pp.21–22).

Queering Attention

As so many scholars writing on attention have pointed out, it is overwhelmingly described as a monetary transaction. In the same lecture quoted above, Phillips elaborates:

‘we are likely and prone in a culture of money, to liken attention to money, and so to be thinking of investments and returns, profits and loss, gains and draw-backs. And by the same token [...] to wonder what attention might be like, if it was not like paying’ (Phillips 2017).

We know that, as an experience and as a payment, attention is not only a studious kind of listening or watching. In the shift from liberal to neoliberal institution, the museum has moved from centralising this idealised ‘quiet contemplation’ and castigating inattention as a moral lack, to understanding the public’s attention as a distributed resource to be captured for financial gain and statistical survival. These models understand attention as something possessed and given, rather than created in each and every attentive encounter. But, as suggested above, paying attention to something or someone can also be performing a special kind of interest, beyond the familiar transactions of the informational, familial, professional or ‘Platonic’ social exchanges. With Phillips’s suggestion of attention as an ‘organising of desire’, and Butt’s encouragement to take a flirtatious sideways glance at a ‘serious’ object of study (2006), I suggest that if attention is not a transaction, it could be a form of attraction.

What happens when a normative technology of attention such as the museum needs to attract the attention of particular non-normative, non-dominant publics? The commodification of attention within the art economy is of course part of a wider marketisation of culture, where audiences are segmented into particular groups and marketed towards. Since the neoliberal art institution is bound to the attention economy, it needs more people to attend outside of a general public; exhibition and public programming focusing on, or representing non-white and/or queer bodies and experiences often sees its publics in terms of identitarian groups whose attention can be captured and monetised. This might be even more profitable than attracting the attention of a general public, especially when we think of ‘the pink pound’.⁸⁶ Like

⁸⁶ This familiar phrase used to define ‘the spending power of gay men and lesbians, or as an increasingly lucrative target market’ may have been coined in the 1980s, but as queer scholar Justin Bengry notes, queer consumers have been targeted by mainstream markets ‘from at least the late 19th century’ (2018).

many museums during 2017, Tate Britain celebrated fifty years since the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality with the exhibition *Queer British Art 1861–1967*, and a substantial public programme, including the one-day festival *Queer and Now* (Tate Britain 2017), presented in conjunction with, and opening, the two-week *Pride in London* festival. Such festival-style, spectacular programming, aimed at particular non-normative or non-dominant identities, is also pulled off *through* their spectacularisation, befitting the attention-grabbing tactics museums must now engage in. The way in which voguing – a stylised dance form created by black and Latino LGBTQ communities (Wolde-Michael n.d.) – has been brought into the museum (a non-traditional space for dance *per se*, particularly this style) via specific public programming moments provides just one example.⁸⁷

Given that we are acculturated to pay attention in specific ways, to the ‘right’ things (Phillips 2017), such programming can demonstrate that a museum cares about parts of society it has previously overlooked and under-represented (and in spite of such programming, continues to do so). I do not suggest that *Queer and Now* was cynical or inauthentic. From my experience as the event’s producer, the programming team was in part representative of the publics it aimed to attract and serve, and worked with colleagues across the museum to instil queer values more permanently.⁸⁸ However, the many and tense conversations with artists, collectives and community organisations throughout the process attested to the suspicion with which approaches from major institutions that don’t ordinarily pay them attention are often received. Since national museums play a powerful role in reproducing social norms, such programming cannot be divorced entirely from the wider context of increased ‘pink washing’ of banks and consumer brands large and small, especially prominent during *Pride in London* in recent years (Vasques 2019).

Shifting attention from queer publics *per se*, how might a sideways focus on the technologies the museum employs also constitute a queering of attention? For Butt to ‘flirt’ with the serious can be ‘*queer* form of commitment, and of being serious’

⁸⁷ Indeed, during *Queer and Now* (2017) a voguing workshop with Jay Jay Revlon, host, DJ and voguer playing a key role in London’s scene, within the largest historic gallery at Tate Britain, was a highlight.

⁸⁸ Through, for example, gender-inclusive language training for all public-facing staff, provided by the organisation Gendered Intelligence.

(Butt 2007 p.94). Aaron Williamson's mode of attending to art school lectures might also be evoked in rather more queer and flirtatious terms, too. After all, it led to a particularly anarchic cultural expression, the *Collapsing Lecture*, that could not really be described as a lecture *or* performance, success *or* failure. If we take queer to be 'a positionality vis à vis the normative' (Halperin 1995 p.62) that resists categorisation, then the outcome was decidedly so. There are several ways to analyse what Williamson was doing when he was noticing and gathering these minor-failures of 'performing-knowing' as material for *Collapsing Lecture*. Following Butt, one could say he was 'queerly' attending. One could also say he was *distracted* by the peripheral information happening around, and intersecting with, the main event. Or that he was *distracting himself* from boredom in art school lectures by finding a new occupation for his attention.

Joshua Cohen (2018) demonstrates how a traditional understanding of distraction in its 'strictest sense' is quite at odds with our contemporary notion: '[T]o be *distracted* means to be perplexed, confused, bewildered; a *distracted* person is out of touch with the person they used to be; a person "beside themselves."' Following traditional usages of the word that saw Puritans 'denouncing the women at Salem as having been "Distract'd" into witchcraft [and] George III [...] censuring "the *distracted* colonies" on the brink of independence', Cohen proposes how the word itself 'suggest[s] some degree of deviation from a communal standard – some loss of a fundamental collective *traction*, which must immediately be regained.' To be labelled 'distracted' suggested not only losing control of your attention, but also your moral compass. Cohen compares these rather serious, moralistic understandings of distraction with today's digital evolution: '[w]e click away, but then we return, but then we click away again. We toggle perpetually between our guilt and guilty pleasures' (Cohen 2018 Section 1).

In both traditional and contemporary usages, then, distraction carries a sense of deviation from the path we ought to be following. It hardly needs pointing out, but the associations between queerness and deviance have been inscribed in the term 'queer' since the nineteenth-century, when the word was both a painful slur used to abuse and defame *and* a term LGBT people used to refer to themselves (Tate 2017). If distraction is what pulls us off the straight and narrow path of attention, then we

might also think of it as a problem of orientation, or dis-orientation. Sara Ahmed (2006) provides the opportunity to think queerness as spatialised, through the dual notions of orientation and deviation. 'In the case of sexual orientation, it is not simply that we have it', in fact, Ahmed says, we 'become straight' by following particular paths, turning away from 'objects' (or distractions) that might 'take us off this line'. In turning away from the paths and objects given by heterosexual culture '[t]he queer subject [...] is made socially present as a deviant' (Ahmed 2006 p.21). However, she also notes how the term 'desire lines' is used by landscape architects and urban planners 'to describe unofficial paths [...] that show everyday comings and goings, where people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow' (pp.19–20). If deviations leave impressions that create another path, once we focus on the technologies of attention that direct our looks and spatialise desire, and notice when they fail, a different attentional landscape may emerge.

Peripheral Attunements

I return to Williamson's distracted, deviant and queer methodology to recall the different modes of attention at play during another morning lecture at the summer school mentioned above, by the director of a small UK arts organisation. My extended discussion of the following example employs Arlandis' proposition that we do not, in fact, direct our attention, but neither is it entirely directed by external forces. Rather, it is contingent and directional, depending on 'what happens' (Arlandis 2018 p.71). I anonymise all the actors in this particular example, using the designations 'speaker', 'director' and 'technician' instead of given names, in order to speak about it more fully.⁸⁹

The lecture followed a very standard format: an introduction by the art school's director, the speaker's presentation from the lectern illustrated with a PowerPoint presentation, and a question-and-answer session at the end. While expressing his intention to present some exemplary social practices that worked curatorially, the

⁸⁹ Indeed, this is also a way of drawing attention to the functional positions in the construction of attention. Like Foucault's idea of the author function, where the author is designated a function of discourse, rather than its creator (1969). We might also recall here that Leo Steinberg designated the public as a function, rather than a real group of people *per se*, as introduced in my Literature Review (Burton, Jackson and Willsdon 2016).

speaker largely focused on artist collective WochenKlausur.⁹⁰ Not immediately engaged by his presentation, my eyes wandered around the lecture theatre, noticing the different ways others appeared to be engaging (or not). All around me people were variously writing notes, browsing the Internet, sending messages, doing their hair or whispering to the person next to them. Our bodies were largely facing the same way, but attention was certainly not collectively and continuously focused towards the front of the room. Rather, it was diffused and dispersed around it. In addition to these minor distractions, a technical fault meant the projection screen behind the speaker was flickering from the start. He agreed with the director not to advance beyond his first slide until it had been fixed. The attempts of institutional staff to remedy this problem now provided the main source of distraction, but also presented me with a parallel 'desire line' to follow.

Tuning into different modes of attending, I pulled out my phone and tried to record them surreptitiously through photography and filming. As I became more engaged in this side task, the attempts to fix the projector developed into a mini silent comedy. I began anticipating something interesting or significant happening as the director and technician were busying themselves with cables and connectors. Thus, engaged in both the lecture and the gathering of this extraneous data, I reflected on how fluid and flickering – even promiscuous – my and others' attention seemed to be. As the hour wore on, the wavering interest and focus of my fellow audience members contrasted rather comically with the protracted attempts by the staff to tend to these technical needs. It seemed that once the flickering screen had been identified as a serious impediment, they could not rest until it had been resolved. Gradually it emerged that not only were their efforts fruitless, they were also excessive because the slides (like so many presentations) were not exactly essential to the narrative.

The lecture theatre had doors to enter and exit on the right-hand side of the staging area. Another door on the left, behind the lectern, appeared to lead to an equipment cupboard. At some point during the charade, a new technician appeared from the cupboard, silently unplugged a cable, plugged it in again and exited the way he had entered. The inexplicable appearance of a new character from an unexpected place

⁹⁰ I name this group because it becomes important to discussing their work later.

had a very comic effect. Titters of laughter rippled through the audience, recognising the gentle slapstick unfolding beside the speaker's rather serious appraisal of Wochenklausur's work. Eventually, picking up a handheld microphone to close the lecture, the director began by apologising 'for the technical faults' – but he was interrupted by the microphone cutting in and out. This time we laughed without restraint, and so did he, bashfully. The flickering audio now provided the distraction and a moment for tension release. Our collective laughter seemed to both acknowledge the institution's failed attempt at a 'curative intervention' (Kafer 2013), and comically underline that they really needn't have bothered. I had begun to see these attempts to fix the screen as 'performing-attention', recalling Williamson's 'performing-knowing' (2017). The laughter affirmed that I wasn't the only one to notice the meta-performance of fixing the flickering screen had proved a greater distraction than the perceived problem. Like the applause at the end of *Collapsing Lecture* at Tate Britain (2011) it was also a demonstration of our collective attendance, despite all of the diffusion and distraction.

These are, of course, common occurrences that might seem banal or overly dramatised when described at length. However, during this hour, I certainly felt 'caught up in something that felt like *something*' (Stewart 2007). Interested, amused and alert, by tuning into the minor happenings surrounding the main event, I took greater than usual 'pleasure in noticing' (Stumpf in Citton 2017). Following these distractions felt enjoyably deviant too. It felt as if some people (the director and technicians) were *over* performing their attentive care, while others weren't really present at all, revealing the different efforts required to maintain normative attentional situations. In fact, Stewart's 'weirdly floating "we"' seems to capture the atmosphere in the theatre, a kind of togetherness that was not entirely fixed or focused. Sigmund Freud's approach to listening to what his patient was saying during analysis as 'evenly-suspended attention' is also useful. Hugely influential in the development of psychoanalysis, the analyst must 'withhold all conscious influences from his capacity to attend [...] simply listen, and not bother whether he is keeping anything in mind' (Freud 1912 pp.111–12), letting new associations emerge, rather than selecting familiar patterns. For Citton, 'free-floating attention' (as it is also known) is not incongruous in situations of 'joint attention'. In fact, it makes possible a kind of 'detachment' necessary to evolve from a 'situation of associative vigilance,

[that] only brings about a transfer of information', to a more liberated mode of co-attending that can 'discover forms, properties and potentialities [...] not previously available to [...] individuals in the group.' Far from being derailed, joint attention is, in fact, liberated by free-floating attention or a distraction (Citton 2017 p.119), opening up the potential productivity of both. Deviation from ideal and idealised modes of attention – particularly digital distraction – has been, and still often is, coded as immoral (Phillips 2019, Cohen 2018, Bishop 2018). But, just as free-floating attention is part of joint attention, distraction is another facet of attention too.

Towards an (In)attention Ecology

Returning to the content of the lecture, what was *given* to my attention, the speaker introduced us to a series of projects by the group WochenKlausur. With a core of eight members, the group includes a revolving cast of around fifty other artist collaborators brought in to collaborate on specific projects. WochenKlausur may be translated in English as 'weeks of enclosure', and when working on a project, each member of the team dedicates themselves entirely to the task at hand, and ceases all other kinds of work.⁹¹ Such a working structure provides a rather interesting analogy of the potential of joint attention and its quality of care (Citton 2017), because as we shall see, by looking away from other commitments, the group brings focus to social issues that are otherwise overlooked. In 1992 the group were invited by Vienna's Secession to make an exhibition, and instead created their inaugural project *Medical Care for Homeless People* (1993). According to their website, rather than use the budget to create something inside the building, WochenKlausur decided to address an issue presenting itself on the public square immediately in front of it. Karlsplatz was a common meeting place for the city's homeless population, whom the group learned were routinely refused healthcare by doctors' surgeries 'with the argument "go wash yourself first"', despite being insured under Austria's medical system. To address the issue, the group 'set up a mobile clinic for providing basic medical treatment' by purchasing a van with donations from numerous funders, and

⁹¹ According to their website, the German word *Klausur* relates to English words 'enclosure, seclusion, cloister' (WochenKlausur n.d.)

securing further funding for medical professionals to operate the clinic from the city council (WochenKlausur n.d.).⁹²

Many of WochenKlausur's projects have been discussed in terms of 'conversation' and the 'dialogic' (Kester 2004), but I'd like to suggest an expanded notion of attention as another lens through which to consider their work. An invitation from an art institution – gallery, museum or biennale – provokes research by the group into the local area. Such an approach was employed by the Centre for Possible Studies (2009–16), operating from the Serpentine Gallery's Edgware Road Project. Run by Janna Graham and Amal Khalaf with others, the Centre hosted long-term residencies with international artists and groups working to produce knowledge about the area, its people, practices and histories through 'encounters: between artists, local people, university researchers and workers, those moving to, from and along the Edgware Road' (Centre for Possible Studies n.d.). Aligning with the curatorial as a 'moment of encounter' (Crone 2013 p.209) or 'event of knowledge' (Rogoff 2013 p.46), the process and output of the Centre's work was primarily discussion- and event-based: closed meetings between residency artists and groups, and a public programme that shared the results of such collaborations.⁹³ Although issuing from different starting points, the Centre for Possible Studies (an independent branch of a contemporary art institution) and WochenKlausur (an artist group invited by contemporary art institutions), have both employed a forensic approach to noticing what is happening on the very doorstep of specific places as the impetus to begin work there.

WochenKlausur in particular look for social issues not being addressed by local authorities, or worse, actively overlooked. An intervention that offers some form of 'solution' is created by the group, often pulling in funding from many and various public and private sources. Some projects involve creating private spaces to house conversations and providing mediators between various actors to often leading to a

⁹² Many of WochenKlausur's projects, which exclusively respond to social issues in whatever location they are invited to, are sustained long after the project itself has finished. After several years of funding from Vienna's city council, the mobile unit was taken over by relief organisation Caritas (WochenKlausur n.d.).

⁹³ Such as the Migrants Resource Centre, Implicated Theatre and a local group of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers (Centre for Possible Studies n.d.).

collaborative resolution. Most, if not all, of these projects are not publicly accessible in the sense of a general public (and its attendant normative assumptions outlined in Chapter One), who are not invited to view or take part in them. Yet, the sites of these conversations are often rather provocatively made present. Through the placement of brightly coloured 'attention seeking' structures for these 'conversation pieces' (Kester 2004) in prominent places, *WochenKlausur* arouse public curiosity and awareness, without facilitating access to them. For example, a bright pink tourist boat on Lake Zurich, as in *Shelter for Drug-Addicted Women*, Shedhalle, Zurich (1994) or a purpose-built pink shed in the middle of a public square for *Implementation of an Intermediate Social Work*, as part of *Documenta 13*, Kassel (2012). The conversations staged may be private and generally inaccessible, but the structures in which they are held often have a striking public presence, around which gossip and speculation circulates. All of the issues *WochenKlausur* address are hiding in plain sight, but their method is to draw attention to what makes us feel uncomfortable: social issues dangerously unattended, such as healthcare provision for homeless people or housing for drug-addicted female sex workers. Challenging the museum's traditional attentional model that draws attention within, *WochenKlausur*'s projects disperse it across several sealed, semi-private spaces. This parallels the shift mentioned above from liberal to the neoliberal institution: the move away from an idealised form of focused and committed attention, towards an understanding of the public's attention as always already distracted and distributed across a wide field – the public realm.

Maria Eichorn's action *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours* (2016) at Chisenhale Gallery provides an interesting and recent counterpoint to *WochenKlausur*'s drawing of attention away from the institution to the public space of the square and its 'problems'. Forcing the gallery to close for five weeks, yet keeping the staff on full pay and asking them not to work, Eichorn exposed how the institution ordinarily operates under a neoliberal capitalist logic of over-production, under which leisure time is understood as consumption time, since all time must be productive. Chisenhale Gallery's then Director, Polly Staple described it as 'both a gift and a burden' that drew on a history of labour withdrawal to suggest the 'possibility of suspending the capitalist logic of exchange by [...] making a life without wage labour imaginable' (Staple 2016 p.6). But by interrupting a largely working-class history of

waging financial precarity against oppressive labour conditions, Eichorn's 'work' also highlights who can participate in it.⁹⁴ It could be argued that ceasing the activity of cultural workers, who, are overwhelming from middle-class, traditionally more affluent backgrounds and can afford to embark on a career in the arts (McRobbie 2016), draws attention in an unintended direction.

One result of the inaccessibility of these projects is how they then exist. If they cannot be directly participated in, then they must be imagined. This is largely made possible through publications and public programming.⁹⁵ As pointed out by the speaker describing WochenKlausur's projects, these works often circulate as narrative: in various forms of writing and critique, spoken presentations and more informal forms of oral transmission such as art-world gossip, which I return to in Chapter Four. Indeed, this aspect became particularly problematic in the way *Medical Care for Homeless People* (1993) was evoked by the speaker himself. At the same time as lauding WochenKlausur's project for providing healthcare to homeless people, the speaker admitted the same exclusionary views that routinely disallow their access to it, saying 'they are dirty and smelly, and there are children present'. He added that the sterile environment of the doctor's surgery was similar to the white cube gallery, necessitating the van operating outside these clinical spaces. Perhaps this comment simply proves that modernist spaces of publicity are civilising in quite particular ways (Duncan 2013), and reminds us of the centrality habitus (Bourdieu 1984).

Nevertheless, his seeming acquiescence to the reasons homeless people are excluded from doctors' surgeries and art galleries sat uneasily with me. Another of the summer school speakers during the question-and-answer session suggested that real problem might be better identified as how society deals with cleanliness and dirt. Mary Douglas states that 'dirt' is only recognisable as such through 'a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system' (Douglas 1966 p.36). The questioner suggested that in providing homeless people with access to state

⁹⁴ As a post-conceptual action, we cannot call it an 'object' nor an 'exhibition'.

⁹⁵ For example, *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours* was 'launched' with a one-day symposium on 23 April 2016 opening up its themes before the gallery closed down.

healthcare out of sight – on an itinerant mobile unit with no fixed location – the project had, unwittingly or otherwise, reinforced the social exclusion of those without homes, jobs and access to washing facilities. The social majority who cannot countenance sharing space with a homeless person may thus continue ignoring their presence and needs. The reasons given for homeless people's prevention from accessing public services marked them as excluded from the liberal notion of general public and reinforced the modernist purity of the art space and its need for protection.⁹⁶ At the same time, Vienna's homeless population became part of the neoliberal institution in so far as they were the particular public targeted by WochenKlausur's work. I am not advocating for spectacularising them by offering healthcare within the gallery.⁹⁷ However, I seek to draw attention to how the project, and its representation, might have reproduced the kinds of exclusions this group faced, and still face today. As previously introduced, Claire Bishop (2006) and Jen Harvie (2013) have suggested, social art practices can antagonise and even exacerbate the social inequalities they claim to critique. WochenKlausur's redistribution of attention away from the contemporary art institution and its usual publics might even be read as a distraction from wider structural problems of inaccessibility.

Shifting attention to the periphery, is what I suggest has been modelled by WochenKlausur's approach to researching and performing their projects. Becoming distracted by the choreography of 'performing-care' going on around the lecture, I began to question how it is that we find out what we should and shouldn't care about. The actions of the director and technicians seemed to suggest I should have cared about the presentation. But distracted by them, I drew a parallel to the way WochenKlausur work around the edges of what is given to attention, to seek out

⁹⁶ The misrecognition of the powerful systems of cleanliness and order that the doctor's surgery and contemporary art gallery also echoed the fear of unruly and contaminating publics endangering the eighteenth-century Paris Salon. As mapped and described by Thomas Crow and featured in my introduction, the unruly public threatened to engulf this rarefied space with their body odour, uncouth manners, speech and facile opinions (1995).

⁹⁷ Santiago Sierra has similarly drawn attention to social issues that are hiding in plain sight by bringing certain people into the contemporary art gallery, and paying them to do, or consent to, certain actions. The film *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People* (2000) in Tate's collection documents an action at El Gallo Arte Contemporáneo in Salamanca, Spain in December 2000, where the artist hired four sex workers, working locally and addicted to heroin, for their consent to sit in a row and have their backs tattooed with a line, for the price of a shot (Manchester 2006).

what isn't being attended to. Taking their joint attention to the periphery, without making the subject(s) of their focus fully accessible to a general public, WochenKlausur's strategy is reminiscent of Édouard Glissant's defence of opacity (1990).⁹⁸ Campaigning for the right to not be fully understood or captured by Western thought, which, as Glissant writes, is based on the 'requirement for transparency' (1990 pp.189–90), he shows the violence inherent in reducing the Other to something understandable, and therefore acceptable. I suggest a similar move is being made by WochenKlausur, and yet, as pointed out by the questioner, the conspicuousness yet inaccessibility of their projects also risks making a double exclusion. In Chapter Four I examine the notion that any public is predicated on an outside, describing the workshop situations where peripheral phenomena became focus, without reducing them to total transparency.

Yves Citton provides an insightful, experiential account of wandering the centre of Avignon, France during its yearly summertime theatre festival that may conclude my detour and extended focus on WochenKlausur. As part of a wider bid to reframe the 'attention economy' as an 'attention ecology', he speaks to the looping negotiation and interrelation of attention and inattention that, naturally,

intertwine all the time. If I am not attentive to the presence of the beggar, I will not give him a coin – this is a defence mechanism that most of us have developed to keep our guilt to a minimum. And likewise, artists do not live on attention alone [...] Cultural goods are *also* material goods, and [...] value creation strongly depends on the way in which we distribute our attention (Citton 2017 p.1).

Moving away from abstraction towards embodiment, Citton encapsulates the complex ethics of 'paying attention' (which may or may not include an actual monetary transaction), drawing our attention to the intimate and rather awkward relations between giving and receiving it. Though it might seem a banal point, inequality is everywhere we look, and with this vignette Citton reminds us that

⁹⁸ This work has found much currency in contemporary art world discussion since it was drawn on by Okwui Enwezor's edition of the *Venice Biennale*, 2015 and has also been frequently referenced by curator Hans Ulrich Obrist.

withholding attention is one way to fend off guilt about whatever privilege or intersecting privileges we may carry: disposable income, class, able-bodiedness, whiteness, cis-genderedness, and so on. Choosing not to attend to the differences between us – not meeting the eye of the homeless person asking you for money – keeps privilege(s) intact. If practising in-attention, decidedly looking away or sideways, minimises guilt and keeps spare change in your pocket, Citton suggests our attentive decisions are economic *and* emotional. In addition, value – cultural, fiscal, personal – is created by what we pay attention to, as much as what our attention is directed towards, or drawn by. Citton encourages us to think about attention in two ways: a ‘resource’ that neoliberal capitalism is simultaneously demanding and suggesting that we ‘manage’ better to gain a ‘competitive’ edge; a relation to others that could improve life (Citton 2017 p.x). Within the wider paradigm of socially engaged art practice, where the work of WochenKlausur certainly sits, is the moral imperative of giving attention to things that are worthy of it. Guerrilla Girls, and many others besides, demonstrate with their work what we should pay attention to, and care about. But WochenKlausur add another layer: how do we attend to the way in which our attention is drawn? One strategy might be to use opacity: the conspicuous structures set up in public spaces provide access to vital services, or the setting for publicised, yet closed conversations. Their strategy draws attention to what is hiding in plain sight: the exclusion of particular people from public welfare and health services. In WochenKlausur’s projects the ethical dimensions of attention are frequently ‘at tension’ with the embodied conflict of looking away to stave off guilt, or looking directly at, and engaging with social problems.

Re-reading the Reading Group

This chapter asks how the different threads of attention, inattention and distraction are all at work in moments of public becoming. Following these threads may highlight the tense relations between who is and isn't included within them, whom do we look towards and whom do we turn away from. Taking up Citton’s ‘attention ecology’, I turn to an ascendent form of public programming, the reading group, to think through who and what is being attended to in this more intimate setting with a very simple activity at its heart – reading and discussing a text. One that, unlike WochenKlausur’s dialogic projects, or Eichorn’s closed gallery, I had open access to.

During the summer of 2018, I attended a session of the Feminist Duration Reading Group (FDRG) that has been meeting since 2015 to read, as the website explains, ‘under-appreciated feminist texts from outside the Anglo-American feminist tradition’. The FDRG takes a format predicated on de-hierarchised, peer-to-peer learning, outside of the academy.⁹⁹ With roots in 1970s consciousness raising groups of the Women’s Liberation Movement, where listening was as much a priority as speaking (Farinati and Firth 2017 p.5), the reading group is most commonly practised in academic settings as a way for students to co-construct knowledge about a text, or other cultural object, rather than have it explained by a teacher. Within the public programme of a museum or gallery, the reading group is a high-quality and low-resource format. It produces an intimate space where everyone is a participant, but all it really needs are photocopies of a text and a circle of chairs. The reading group is therefore readily used to plug gaps in the institution, highlighting once more the use of public programming to readdress the occlusions inherent in the institution’s liberal formation of a general public.¹⁰⁰

Moving itinerantly around spaces outside those of hierarchised institutions, FDRG extends the feminist critique of the gaze (Pollock 1988) by prioritising gathering, reading and discussing together as productive of knowledge. Eschewing the powerful connection between looking and knowing more common to the museum and the academy, it also challenges existing regimes of attention that we might find there. Within the canons of feminist and curatorial theory and practice, FDGR pulls collective focus on writing and theorising from non-Western perspectives that are not widely read. Asking what has been overlooked and under-attended to, FDGR draws attention to texts outside of the canon of white feminism and, in this way, it is not simply a reading group, but a curatorial intervention. Finally, the reading group

⁹⁹ Initiated by curator Helena Reckitt, the group has been hosted for a number of years by SPACE, a studio complex and gallery in Hackney, London as well as meeting in non-institutional spaces such as homes and community centres. It also travels to other UK-based organisations, including South London Gallery and De Le Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea and is invited to run sessions internationally (FDGR n.d.).

¹⁰⁰ Examples include *The Women of Colour Index Reading Group* invited to explore the Panchayat Special Collection in Tate’s Library and Archive through a set of readings, openly discussed with the public (2018); the format was taken to the extreme by *Das Kapital Oratorio*, a daily dramatised reading of Karl Marx’s infamous text (1867) at *Venice Biennale* in 2015, directed by Isaac Julian who conceived it with Okwui Enwezor and Mark Nash (La Biennale Di Venezia 2015).

format itself draws on attentiveness as a lived, embodied experience: without collective focus or joint attention, it simply doesn't work.

Taking place at the same time as the England vs Colombia *World Cup* match in July 2018, the session I attended was, at times, quite severely disrupted by a host of different sounds, articulations, needs, intentions and digital interventions. With so many competing demands, concentrating on the task at hand – the collective reading and discussion of a text – became difficult. Instead, I decided to take notes on what was distracting me, listening with an 'evenly-suspended attention' (Freud 1912) to what everything that was 'exerting a pull' (Stewart 2007) on my attentional resources. My focus here is not on the text we read, but my experience of trying and failing to attend to it. Recounting specific moments of this experience, I also map how FDRG pays attention to its own multiple forms of attentiveness alive in the moment of reading and discussing together.

Upon walking in, I was offered a drink and some snacks that were laid out on a table in the foyer and made to feel welcome. I introduced myself to a few people, grabbed a handful of things to eat, one of the few printed copies of the text, and went into the adjacent gallery space to sit on a rather uncomfortable plastic folding chair. Feeling a little shy, but also fairly relaxed, I settled down and observed people as they came in. The group was around twenty or so. Each of us was asked to introduce ourselves and why we had come. A few people, like myself, had only visited once before, some had been recommended by friends, others were loyal contributors or organisers of the group. I noted that amongst our number were two men, a mother and her baby. Whereas the majority of the group was white European, English was not the first language of everyone in the room.

The text for that session was *White Women Listen! Black Feminisms and the Boundaries of Sisterhood* by Hazel V. Carby (1982). In it, Carby calls on white feminists to listen to the intersecting oppressions of gender, race, and class that women of colour face. One of the tenets of this reading group is that texts are always read together, out loud and discussed 'as we go along'. This means they are not always finished, but that no one feels at a disadvantage for not reading in advance. It also brings a certain focus to the room immediately. However, one of the first things I

noted was that although the text is made available via email or on the group's website prior to meeting, only a few copies were available in the room. Some had diligently brought their own and rummaged in bags to find their copy, or moved closer to a neighbour to share theirs. But the beginning of the session was taken up with people logging into email accounts to download the file onto laptops or mobile phones, which later proved rather difficult to read aloud from.

As we began to read and discuss, the second notable distraction to announce itself was the baby, whose constant chatter had several effects. It was harder to make yourself heard when reading or contributing, to hear others speak, or concentrate on the discussion. Very soon the baby proved near impossible to ignore because it was wide awake, mobile and disarmingly keen to join the conversation throughout the entire two hours. It was fed intermittently, and towards the end, passed around the circle to be bounced on laps, soothed, entertained and cooed over. At no point did it sleep or stop chattering. About forty-five minutes in, an older woman arrived and announced that she had forgotten her hearing aids. She requested everyone increase their volume, putting a further strain, in my opinion, on the group to make themselves heard.

In what I have already described a few things appear to be 'at tension'. Firstly, the difficulties of reading aloud with unequal access to the text, in competition with the voluble contributions from the youngest member of our group, a difficulty heightened by the demand to 'speak up'. But these meta-events of the session culminated in an interruption from outside, a distraction which could not be ignored. This particular iteration of the reading group coincided with one of the most dramatic matches of the *World Cup* (2018), which, as I later learned, went to extra time and ended with a penalty shoot-out. As both match and reading group progressed, the football drama became harder to ignore with cheers and yells from local pubs, private homes and balconies penetrating the reading group whenever a goal was scored, missed or other pivotal moments occurred. It later transpired that several people had been following on their phones, including one of the two men present, just as the person next to me was making a point about what we'd been reading. As the conversation turned entirely to score updates, I sensed her frustration at waiting until some semblance of focus had returned before attempting to reiterate it.

I couldn't help noticing the paralleling and convergence of these two participatory activities, with very differently orientated publics. The traction of *trying* to listen and make oneself heard, of *trying* to concentrate and ignore several different *distractions* all clamouring for our attention was almost palpable. This sense of traction hints again at what happens when we reframe attention, and distraction, into competing and differing desire lines, and how the constant parsing of attention creates particular intricacies and intimacies. Perhaps the football match was the easiest and most voluble distraction for the group to acknowledge through collective laughter.¹⁰¹ But this example also seems to parallel a constant concern of museums and other contemporary art spaces: what is the relationship between the programmed activity happening within, and the world outside? Should the space of the public programme be a sanctuary for specialised attention, or should it porously engage with the concerns of wider publics? How might two very differently oriented publics occupy adjacent, or the same, space and time?¹⁰²

Returning to the room and the reading group, from the outset, the relative inaccessibility of the text piqued my interest. Whether part of the structure or not, it forced the group to improvise, get together and share resources. It might seem an obvious point, but attending such a group one would assume that inclusivity is a top priority: that everyone there should have equal access to the text and be able to hear what is being said about it. This is backed up by the group's principles that state 'The FDGR welcomes feminists of all genders and generations' (Antonioli 2019 p.14). But the tensions around hearing and making oneself heard prompted me to think about whose access is prioritised in spaces like these, because, as we read, I noticed several people less comfortable reading aloud and contributing to the discussion.

¹⁰¹ It would be hard not to point out the irony that one of the only two men at this feminist reading group had been surreptitiously following the football match the whole time, though this was not acknowledged in the same manner. It struck me as comic, but also called into question: what do men do with the access that they have to feminist spaces?

¹⁰² An example of the very real risk involved in actualising these concerns, was the march by the English Defence League that its organisers planned to pass by Tate Britain on the day of *Queer and Now* festival in 2017. Deciding that the march could threaten the integrity and even the safety of the event, stronger security measures were put in place by the gallery.

Voicing Vulnerability

In a collectively authored text, various members reflect on what collective reading brings to the experience of FDGR (Reckitt et al. 2019). Attending to vulnerability emerges as one of the most distinctive and crucial facets of FDGR's process, fleshed out in these three excerpts:

it's a privilege to feel part of something that [...] does not demand a high-functioning normative set of behaviours, just being together, reading aloud, mostly listening, and contributing at times (Revell in Reckitt et al. 2019 p.144).

I find it meaningful to read aloud while people listen. It seems like a little thing, but it is rare that women's voices are heard so attentively and with care (Paiola in Reckitt et al. 2019 p.145).

Not needing to prepare in advance means that this group feels accessible and open. It is such a pleasure to take the time to listen, to attend to a text with care, and a contrast to so much else in life that is fast and fleeting (Gibbs in Reckitt et al. 2019 p.146).

For these group members at least, FDGR offers a haven for its own ideal form of attention. From the above excerpts, this could be defined as slowing down, taking time, care and attending to women's voices *in particular*. As Revell elaborates, the simple format foregrounds practices of reading and listening, making possible a special kind of attunement to difference 'that is not about explicit declaration' (Revell in Reckitt et al. 2019 p.156). We might say that due to the various ways people read, their own struggles with the text, or refusal to read at all, reading aloud is, in essence, a practising of difference, or even a practice of differencing. Each variation makes its mark on those gathered:

we hear immediately each other's vulnerabilities, pleasures, dislikes and so on; who might struggle more with English as a second or third language, with reading itself, with being weary, excited, bored, confused, each body inevitably produces difference in the text (Revell in Reckitt et al. 2019 p.156).

I would push this further: not only does each body produce the text differently, but the act of reading aloud produces each body *as different*, whether or not such variations are attended to by the rest of the group. Given that for some, tuning into these is an important part of the FDRG experience and set up, I wondered how the request to speak (or read) louder may have been registered by the rest of the group that night. Could it have felt like an imposition by shyer members of the group? Those who have quiet voices, dyslexia or insecurity about what they are reading. Those for whom English is not their first language. With these considerations, for whom are we making the space more accessible by speaking up? Must we speak up for the comfort of someone else, forgoing our own? In this moment, whose access is a priority?

I will not answer all of these questions, but, at the risk of over-analysing something so fleeting, I argue that it is precisely *in* such moments of attunement that difference and sameness are 'at tension'. I propose that tuning in to the needs and desires of others in this way is a kind of 'listening in' to the information a voice betrays about a body. I chose this term because of its illicit implications, for example, 'listening in' to a conversation in which you are not participating, even 'eavesdropping'. Taking a standard dictionary definition, to 'listen in' is '1: to tune in to or monitor a broadcast; 2: to listen to a conversation without participating in it *especially*: eavesdrop' (Merriam-Webster 2020). I suggest that, through a conscious practice of 'listening in', we come to notice subtle differences in ability, need, weariness, emotion, enthusiasm, divided attention or disinterest that might be uncomfortable to speak about or acknowledge. On this occasion, because they distracted me from the text, the things I noticed were precisely a kind of listening or tuning in, while tuning out from the text we shared in common.

This leads back to the most uncomfortable distraction to acknowledge *as such* in this context: the innocent chatter of the baby. It would seem to go without saying that any feminist group would welcome a mother and baby. And yet, since the baby talked at the same volume and pitch as everyone else, it proved extremely difficult to hear, or make oneself heard, above its contributions. At times I sensed a frustration at this, despite the best intentions of everyone gathered under a feminist spirit of equality of

access. Indeed, writing about these distractions has at times felt uncomfortable – especially because it is not my intention to denigrate the space created by the FDRG, which I found incredibly welcoming, rigorous and productive. Neither do I suggest that the group lacks awareness of what is produced in this durational, cumulative process of reading. A lot of time and energy is spent reflecting on it, leading to wider discursive programmes, presentations and individual and collective writing on the group by its members.¹⁰³ However, in re-reading the reading group against the grain, paying particular attention to what seemed to be getting in the way of the task at hand, I found the kinds of tensions inherent in any purportedly public, accessible space. The thread running through this experience was not only the interplay between outside and inside, attention and distraction. Such a focus could also lead us to consider or question again: who has access to this space, whose access to this space is privileged, and whose is under prioritised or even left out? It might seem an ideal kind of access that works for everyone is generally wanted by such spaces – but is this ever possible?

What I have been trying to describe thus far is a tension between the ideal form of the (feminist) reading group, and my experience of it. Here it makes sense to turn to Jacques Rancière's retelling of the story of an eighteenth-century French school master (1987). As the story goes, Joseph Jacotot taught in Belgium without any knowledge of Flemish, simply by giving students a text to read in dual translation. Having spent time with the *Telemachus*, teaching themselves French through a word-for-word comparison with the Flemish translation, Jacotot asked them to explain their thoughts about it *in French* and was impressed with the sophistication of their response. According to Rancière, Jacotot's 'method' positioned the text as an object around which everyone can gather with equality of intelligence, if they are only encouraged and given space to do so. This is an ideal that the reading group format promotes, particularly the FDRG. Here, both reading and discussing is part of the session, and participants are encouraged to read and respond *in the moment*, leaving prior knowledge outside of the circle as much as possible. Rancière's retelling suggests that everyone can come to the same text with an equality of intelligence. He is also interested in how someone can teach themselves, and

¹⁰³ See, for example, the 'Writings' section of the FDRG website.

someone else, something about which they know nothing. As a form, then, the reading group enacts a de-hierarchised model of learning, where everyone reads the same text (and, in the case of FDGR, at the same time), arriving at it with an equality of intelligence and understanding. Ostensibly, the ideal that the reading group strives towards is Rancièrian: by gathering around something we share in common, we can share our own understanding of it, with equality of intelligence. While I applaud this ideal, in reality the Jacotot story reads like a fairy tale because it misses a vital ingredient: for everyone to share something in common with an equality of intelligence, they must first feel themselves to be equal.

One of Rancière's key messages is that equality cannot be claimed, but must be *practised* in order to be verified (Ross 1991 pp.xxi–xxii). The kinds of spaces under discussion in this thesis, often either implicitly or explicitly, claim to be open, safe and accessible, sometimes simply by virtue of being part of a public programme. If the organisation or institution creating the space sets the tone, it becomes the responsibility of anyone taking part to sustain it. An interesting parallel to the notion of practising of equality came via the intervention from the woman who'd forgotten her hearing aids, also during this session of FDGR. Wherever Carvey had written 'they' or referred to directly to white feminists in her text, this reader decided to say 'we' or 'us'. With the assumption that others would be in agreeance, perhaps she was trying to emphasise the urgency of all the white feminists *present in the moment of reading* to attend to the points Carvey was making, across the gap of almost forty years since publication. Changing the words of the text as she was reading clearly seemed appropriate to her. However, my interpretation of this intervention was that she assumed the role of speaking, or reading for everyone, taking our silent attentiveness for permission. Rather than feeling united by, or part of this 'we' (which ostensibly I was, being white, a woman, a feminist), I immediately wondered how everyone else felt about being included, or not. Did her 'we' include the men in the room? Did it include the minority of reading group participants there who were not white? Even if the intervention was intended to be unilaterally inclusive, did these individuals themselves feel included, excluded, or like me, a bit awkward about it? In addition, changing the pronouns in the portion of text she read was not always easy because sometimes she made mistakes. There even appeared to be the author's own occasional slippage between 'we' and 'I', 'us' and 'them' when speaking of Black

feminists. This led to the reader, and by her implication many of 'us', making misidentifications with Black feminists, which I assume was not the intention at all.

This particular moment of reading was fraught with a well-intentioned tension. As listener and reading group participant, I felt conflicted about her live editing, leading me to attend more closely to what I was being asked to identify with. The reader's intervention could be read as a Rancièrian attempt to abolish distance between writer and readers, between text and bodies, to practice equality. But, did it achieve equality, or not? And how might this even be verified? Despite being well-intentioned, I felt the 'we' and 'they' very much 'at tension'. Are these moments of togetherness necessarily a practice of equality? Might they be better rethought as a practising of difference?

Conclusion

This chapter extends Warner's claim that publics are produced through 'mere attention' (2005), to think about the different but simultaneous modalities of attention that produce publics and moments of publicness. If the museum is a technology of attention, then the public programme, as part of that technology, focuses attention in a particular way: through time-bound, collective forms of engagement. As laid out in the Introduction and Chapter One, it also normatively serves the neoliberal institution, variously addressing a liberal general public or seeking to attract neoliberal *publics* (and sometimes both at once). If we are all part of segmented publics to be marketed to and extracted from, what does this say about our agency, as attentive subjects? Debord (1967) and Mulvey (1989) might suggest that such programming only leaves room for passive spectatorship, but I argue that this is not necessarily the case. The de-financialisation of attention, and its reframing as a field of multi-directional desiring moments, opens it up to being inhabited and practised, rather than directed and controlled.

This is important because the ideal 'regimes' of attention (Phillips 2019) the museum and contemporary art institution are predicated on, say nothing about the complex embodied, emotional reality of both attending and looking away and even seek to

banish distraction and inattention. A lack of focused attention, or being prone to distraction, are still pathologised and medicated,¹⁰⁴ approaches reaffirmed in spaces of education and cultural engagement where ‘distraction is often presented as a weakness of character [...] attention, by contrast, connotes agency and self-determination’ (Bishop 2018 p.38). For, if we are not attending, then what are we doing? According to a normative definition, we are being derailed, pulled off course, deviating from what we ought to attend to (Cohen 2018, Phillips 2019). Bishop’s focus on dance exhibitions and choreographic practices that incorporate a digital logic within their structure, demonstrates that today more than ever, when we are present we are also distracted.¹⁰⁵ But rather than being a negative development of technological advancement, she positions flickering engagement as innate to the structure of attending anything suggesting the ‘mental drift’ we experience makes space for creative and critical thinking (Bishop 2018 p.39).

In many ways, my detailed accounts of mental drift and derailment in the lecture theatre and reading group are conventional, banal even. However, my action of filming, photographing and note taking to capture the diffusion of attention made me alive to the different ways in which attention underpins public situations. Fleshing out multiple, embodied forms of attention, and attending to their economic and ethical dimensions led me from studious concentration to joint attention, to promiscuous, diffuse and queer forms of attention, to relations of care, distraction and looking away. Ultimately, I found that all forms of attentive comportment are present in the various formats deployed within the public programme. These are inhabited, parsed out and moved between moment to moment. I assert, therefore, that we need to pay attention to attention; in doing so we find that it is produced *by* and *in* difference, through changing modes of desire and distraction.

¹⁰⁴ For example, children with behavioural symptoms of ‘inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness’ diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder have such behaviour ‘managed’ with prescription drugs (NHS 2020). So, too, over-attending can be diagnosed as anxiety or depression, and similarly medicated.

¹⁰⁵ We might also see this in the constant checking of phones during public programme events. Rather than policing this, however, many institutions put dispersed attention to work by encouraging attendees to comment online about what they are experiencing during the event itself.

Kathleen Stewart's shimmering vignettes (2007) suggested the promiscuous potential of attention, and its capacity to connect us to others in rather uncertain ways. This disrupts the normative function of informational exchange and brings attention into view as a more complex field of desiring moments, evoked as a hovering erotics of attention. The turning and tending of the ear (Home-Cook 2015 Nancy 2007), allows for a consideration of the orientating function of attention for the whole body, linking to Ahmed's queer phenomenology of orientation (2006). The promiscuity of queerly attending, demonstrated by Williamson's *Collapsing Lecture*, not fully committing, like my fellow lecture attendees, or flirting with the pleasure in noticing, are all part of this desiring field. Indeed, as Phillips has asked: 'what would attention be like if it were not like paying?' (2019). It *could* be like desiring, or, as exemplified by Feminist Duration Reading Group experience, it could be a kind of 'listening in', a tuning into and practising of difference, rather than a claim for equality. We might then think about the public programme as a space to rethink attention rather than direct and control it, and by extension, publicness. I also suggest that the *queering* of attention might be a way to find some agency within the neoliberal institution. Either through the distraction discussed above, or paying attention to that which is not directly given to our attention.

Guerrilla Girls, WochenKlausur and Maria Eichorn further demonstrate the fruitfulness of re-thinking what is given to attention by the museum and contemporary art institution, and re-distributing our attention, thereby suggesting what we could and maybe *should* care about. Indeed, the formation of activist group Liberate Tate during an art and activism workshop as part of Tate Modern's public programme is just one example of what happens when the public programme becomes the space to attend to the museum's attentional management. When art activist group The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination was invited to run a workshop on art, civil disobedience and the museum's role in climate change in 2010, according to the Liberate Tate's website: 'they were told by curators that they could not take any action against Tate and its sponsors', a mandate 'policed by the curators' (Liberate Tate n.d.). In what is now an infamous story, workshop participants created a performative action against British Petroleum (BP) sponsorship in the museum. Several participants subsequently banded together to

create the new activist network Liberate Tate. Their stated aim was ending Tate's reliance on oil sponsorship by 2012 through a series of targeted performance actions in and around the museum. In 2015, BP announced the end of its twenty-six-year sponsorship agreement with Tate. In an article for *Art Monthly* narrating the events of the workshop, John Jordan of The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination describes it as 'pedagogic success beyond anything we could ever have imagined' (Jordan 2010). With the above example, and indeed all the examples in the chapter, the passive spectator/active participant binary is shown to represent only the notion of *ideal* attention, and the moralistic lens with which distraction is also treated. The genesis of Liberate Tate out of a workshop on Tate Modern's public programme only reiterates Phillips' point that, ultimately, all regimes of attention fail to control the publics they are directed at (2019). Attentional agency is possible within the neoliberal institution, despite its careful management.

Focusing on an intimate, yet dominant form of public programming practice – the reading group – gave me a different experience of attentional management, failure and potential. As a form it may aim to create a community of readers and explicators operating on an equal plane. However, my FDRG experience showed this to be an ideal, since capacities to either attend or participate are never evenly divided. Though we might have an equality of intelligence, we are far from coming to a text with an equality of access. We are not disembodied heads coming together around a text, but bodies with different abilities, needs and desires. In any group coming together there may be hungry babies to feed, football scores to follow, shyness to overcome, different capabilities of reading out loud, hearing and listening. All of these claims pull us away from, or intersect with, the text. Rancière's ideal of equality of intelligence (1987/1991), therefore, is shown to rely on the liberal notion of a general public. As discussed in Chapter One, this liberal notion does not acknowledge the differing abilities, capacities and lived experiences of individual bodies. Neither can it account for unearned privilege, and the differences in how people perceive themselves or are perceived by others. The Habermasian public sphere has equally been heavily critiqued as an ideal, unreal model where 'all subjects are presumed to be equal and equally able to participate in rational-critical debate without being prejudiced by self-interest' (Kwon 2002). Nevertheless, the idea

that someone who knows nothing can teach something to someone else, purely by virtue of coming around a cultural object shared 'in common', is a cornerstone of gallery education and public programming, reframed as 'co-constructed' and peer learning (Pringle 2009). However laudable this ideal is, it still obscures actual experiences of attending or gathering around that object. But, if a broad understanding of attention is integral to the forms of publicness the public programme generates, how might it be drawn to create or discern moments of commonality? If attention is a collective act of intersubjective engagement, when we are attending together, are we in accord or discord? In the next chapter, I consider how attending *with difference* allows us to come together as ideal communities, or not, and how fraught these moments of becoming public(s) can be. Finally, how fraughtness itself might be meaningfully attended to through an exploration of how we respond, and become responsible to one another in these spaces.

Chapter Three – Performing Responsibility: Temporary Communities and Performance Art

Community is almost always invoked as an unequivocal good, an indicator of a high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging. One does one's volunteer work in and for "the community." Communities are frequently said to emerge in times of crisis or tragedy, when people imagine themselves bound together by a common grief or joined through some extraordinary effort. Among leftists and feminists, community has connoted cherished ideals of cooperation, equality, and communion (Joseph 2002 p.vii).

The ideal underpinning the reading group – that we may come together as equals around something shared in common – leaves us with a desirable, but rather difficult notion of community in relation to the public programme. If we all attend differently, then these differences need attending to – not in order to overcome them, but rather to sustain them in relation to one another. There is a possibility that understanding our inability to attend in the same way, and come to something as equals, might allow us to come together as a community – of difference. However, as the epigraph from Miranda Joseph suggests, the ideal community is often imagined to emerge through a common experience, or plight, suggesting that there is something inherently good about this coming together. As such, community is often invoked as a hopeful signifier of togetherness, belonging and collaboration, by all kinds of governing and public institutions, including the museum. The public programme becomes the place to construct, mediate and sustain these relationships to the museum's communities. Practice has shifted somewhat from talking about 'communities' towards 'publics', as the aforementioned rebrand of Checkpoint Helsinki to PUBLICS in 2017, under the directorship of Paul O'Neill, demonstrates. However, community still puts the friendliness into public, and is widely used to frame and imagine positive relations between museums, art institutions and their localities. To challenge these notions, I draw on my experiences of two rather unfriendly participatory performances by Jamal Harewood and Ann Liv Young. These performances invoked the notion of a 'temporary community', but unsettled its dominant positivity, calling the collective responsibility it connotes into question.

As summarised in my Literature Review, today's institutionalised community practices draw on Owen Kelly's notion of cultural democracy (Kelly 1984), and the community arts scene of the late 1960s that developed 'empowerment through participation in a creative process' (Pringle 2011 p.1). Practices of community within the museum and contemporary art institution also stand in relation to Nicolas Bourriaud's coinage 'relational aesthetics' (2002) naming practices that materialise social interactions, rather than objects, as art, and Claire Bishop's contestation of their assumed conviviality (2004, 2012). Bishop's counterargument of social practices that antagonise social relations, draws on Jacques Rancière's diagnosis of the problem of spectatorship in theatre as an unresolved anxiety over the gap between passive viewing and active participation (2009). What all this suggests is that the museum's incorporation and use of social practices to engage their local communities reveals an anxiousness over their active participation; for if we are not actively engaged (paying attention to what the museum wants us to attend to), what are we doing?

Marijke Steedman (ed. 2012) reviews the social and political role of the gallery to consider reasons for the proliferation of programming in relation to immediate social contexts. Community is now used across the arts as a short-hand for benevolent engagement with marginalised publics: people designated as either local *and* socially disadvantaged, or lacking the cultural capital to attend a public museum or gallery of their own accord, as discussed in more detail below. During my time working on Tate's Public Programme, the Community Programme came under the same umbrella.¹⁰⁶ Adult groups identified as needing extra support to use the museum's collections or exhibitions, are offered workshops with a specialist artist educator, and sometimes longer-term projects producing a showcase or one-off event for wider audiences. *The World is Flooding* (2014) with artist Oreet Ashery is one example where participants from Write to Life, UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration

¹⁰⁶ The Community Curators worked separately to (but sometimes in collaboration with) another Tate department called Community and Regeneration Partnerships, who run the programme Tate Local. While also interested in locality, the Community strand of the Public Programme (that I was most in contact with, being in the same team) focused on groups brought together through common interest or experiences, as Joseph suggests above. These included various mental health service user groups and art groups working with learning disabled adults such as Intoart and Corali, and Write to Life, a group of creative writers supported by refugee charity Freedom from Torture.

Group (UKLGIG) and Portugal Prints collaborated with Ashery over several months to create a public performance in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall (Ashery 2014).

Despite the laudable aims, processes and outcomes of these kinds of partnerships between cultural organisations, artists and specific community groups, in her book *Against a Romance of Community* (2002) Joseph argues that community and communal production is already 'imbricated in capitalism' (p.ix), causing a rethink of its appearance in the museum. Such programmes might be free to participate in, but they are also used to leverage significant funds from government, trusts and foundations, and corporate sponsors by diversifying the museum's audience. In the UK, community became a key funding mechanism for museums and arts organisations since New Labour, a period of Labour Party government under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown from 1997 until 2010 (Belfiore 2020). This might seem beneficial, but also relates to the way it has been both instrumentalised, and used to 'other' and set apart certain groups of people from the liberal notion of a general public. Thus members and non-members alike may speak of the Black community, the D/deaf community, the queer community and so on. While acknowledged as an important part of identity formation, such naming allows non-members to call 'community leaders' and whole communities themselves to take responsibility for the actions of individual members, a power routinely wielded at the level of government and in the media.¹⁰⁷

To challenge these multiple meanings and uses of community, especially in relation to the public programme, in this chapter I turn my attention to the uneasy feelings about participating in Jamal Harewood's solo performance *The Privileged* (2014) at *SPILL Festival of Performance (SPILL)* in Ipswich, 2014. On his website Harewood describes himself as a 'live artist who creates temporary communities' and *The Privileged* is advertised as 'an audience-led participatory performance that uses the excitement of a polar bear encounter to explore race, identity and the community' (Harewood n.d.). I interweave a contrasting encounter with Sherry, a character of the

¹⁰⁷ Reni Eddo-Lodge summarises the furore surrounding MP Diane Abbott's comments on Twitter about the British media's 'laziness' in speaking of the Black 'community' after the trial, conviction and sentencing of Gary Dobson and David Norris for the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 2012 (Eddo-Lodge 2017/18 pp.93–4).

performance artist Ann Liv Young, delivering her trademark *Sherapy* (since 2009) during a panel discussion at the *Performance Studies International 18 (Psi #18)* conference, Leeds in 2012. Though content and method are different, both Young and Harewood make similar claims for temporary group or community formation within their audiences. During and after taking part in both performances, I wrestled with what becoming part of a ‘temporary community’ might mean.

Turning to theory and philosophy, community has been broken down under ‘Foucauldian theories of the subject as an unstable effect of discourse rather than an authentic origin of identity’ (Joseph 2002 p.xxv). If there is no unity in the subject, how can there be unity in community? Jean-Luc Nancy has greatly influenced our understanding of community in art and curatorial discourses: Grant Kester draws on Nancy to discuss social art practices that show community ‘compromised’ by ‘twentieth-century totalitarianism’ and its fictitious ‘mass identity’, and rendered unthinkable by the poststructuralist denial of a coherent self (Kester 2004 p.154). Dispensing with belonging to predetermined geographically or identity-based groups, Giorgio Agamben also calls for a ‘whatever’ community always in the process of becoming (1993). Considering these perspectives on the near impossibility of community, I test Harewood’s claim through a detailed account of my conflicting feelings about belonging during his performance. But if, like Agamben suggests, we focus on community’s emergence, rather than pre-existence, we might see how the responsibilities it connotes are key to describing publicness as a process of becoming.

This chapter expands the kinds of disruptive moments analysed in this thesis in several ways. Firstly, the discomfort I experienced happened by design, aligning with the practices Bishop outlines, where antagonism and agonism are privileged over conviviality. Nevertheless, I didn’t know how I was going to respond (or not). With these examples I explore how an audience’s responsibility is engaged through setting them up to participate in, uphold or react against what makes them extremely uncomfortable. As indicated, I set these claims for temporary community formation against the dominant, positive reading of community that Joseph explores (2002). I do this because, as outlined above, the public programme, particularly discursive events and those explicitly labelled as part of the Community Programme, draws on

this positivity to suggest a particular kind of collectivity that demands certain responses. Furthermore, what is often claimed for the public programme in the contemporary art institution, is the creation of ‘safe’ spaces for a ‘community’ to come together, be present and engage in issues of social import or justice. An example issuing from Tate is the collaboration between the Community Programme, Community and Regeneration department and external partner Delfina Foundation on artist Ahmet Öğüt’s year-long residency. This residency generated *Silent University* (2012): a ‘knowledge exchange platform [...] with group participants that have had a variety of asylum, migrant, and refugee experiences’ (Tate 2012) that has been extended and hosted internationally.¹⁰⁸ The aforementioned Centre for Possible Studies used similar models of longer-term engagement in collaborative and creative processes between different local groups and communities.¹⁰⁹ Within such practices the notion of public is doubled back on itself, as specific communities or groups are identified, worked with intensively, ostensibly *in private*, and then something, often performance-based, is made public.

These longer-term projects provide some context for the participatory performances under discussion in this chapter, and the claims Harewood and Young make for forming temporary communities. The other side of this is how participatory performance has become an important part of the contemporary art institution’s public programme, as a way of extending the range of experiences on offer beyond more traditional discursive formats, but also feedback into them.¹¹⁰ The inclusion of live art and social practices within discursive frameworks has become fairly standard

¹⁰⁸ Including at The Showroom, London (2012); Tensta konsthall and ABF Stockholm (2013), Stadtkuratorin Hamburg in partnership with W3 – Werkstatt für internationale Kultur und Politik e.V., Hamburg (2014); *Impulse Theater Festival* in co-production with Ringlokschuppen Ruhr and Urbane Künste Ruhr, Mülheim (2015); *Spring Sessions*, Amman, Jordan and Athens (2015); and a new branch was set to open in Copenhagen, 2019 (*Silent University* n.d.).

¹⁰⁹ During 2015–16, the Centre’s ongoing work with the group Implicated Theatre engaged English and Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers and their students from migrant communities through a combination of language development and ideas from Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, a form of community-based theatre practised for social change, developed during the 1950s and 60s (Centre for Possible Studies 2016).

¹¹⁰ At Tate, this practice has developed through series like *Late at Tate Britain* (since 2000), festival formats like *Queer and Now* (since 2017) also at Tate Britain, and through the performative symposia that framed *The Tanks: Fifteen Weeks of Art in Action* (2012) at Tate Modern. The latter three gatherings *Inside/Outside: Materialising the Social*, *Performance Year Zero: A Living History* and *Playing in the Shadows* lasted one or two days and included paper presentations, screenings and participatory performances, both announced and unannounced (Tate 2012).

public programming practice.¹¹¹ As previously mentioned, I encountered Ann Liv Young's work during a conference, where one classic paper presentation and two performances were followed by a discussion at the end. *The Privileged* was also staged as part of Vivid Project's Black Hole Club in 2017.¹¹² I argue that the uncomfortable nature of the participatory performances under discussion in this chapter are crucial to our understanding of the development of the public programme as a specific curatorial practice; not only because they readily appear as an extended or experimental mode of engagement and learning in a variety of contemporary art institutions, but because they model many of the potential issues facing it. How do we come together around something, as equals, or not? How are our different abilities of attending and responding accounted for, or not? What kinds of attachments and desires do we bring to the institution (of whatever size), and how are these modulated through the experience of participating? What does my capacity to attend and respond say about my individual role and responsibility in such moments of fraught, collective public becoming?

As exemplified by Harewood and Young's participatory performances that are designed to unsettle and antagonise, moments of public becoming are never simple; they often entail an ambivalence about belonging to a group. I suggest this needs attending to if we are to fully understand the connotations of invoking, what Joseph calls community's 'cherished ideals of cooperation, equality, and communion' (Joseph 2002 p.vii). I unpack in detail my feelings about belonging to, and acting as part of a temporary community in these performances. This makes way for considering less extreme, but nonetheless fraught moments of public becoming created by the public programme, where we are called to critically engage with, respond to, or react against injustice.

Since we cannot respond to that which we have not first paid attention, this chapter develops out of my discussion of ideal and actual modes of attention, to discuss the

¹¹¹ As the more recent *CAMPUS Fugitive: The Unexpected Beautiful Phrase* (2019) at Nottingham Contemporary demonstrates. Curated by students from the Curating Contemporary Art MA, Royal College of Art, this day-long event took the format of a symposium with several live performances happening in and around the auditorium.

¹¹² Black Hole Club is a professional development and peer-learning programme for Birmingham and Midlands-based artists.

kinds of public programming spaces that are desirable. The preceding chapter considered attention in the public programme as beyond an economic model of informational exchange, situating it within a fluid, multi-directional desiring field. Once we have begun paying attention to *how* it is produced and distributed by the technologies of the institution, difference within the attentional field can be considered outside of a normative model of widening accessibility. This allows for more subtlety when thinking about frustration, vulnerability, ability, distraction, how equal we feel ourselves to be, or not, and the kinds of responses that are permissible and possible.

My analysis of *The Privileged* and *Sherapy* sheds light on the modulation between response-ability and responsibility in several particularly tense moments. The current political moment prompted me to analyse more thoroughly my own subjectivity in *The Privileged*, which I participated in six years prior to the final revisions of this thesis.¹¹³ My unpacking of a disturbing scene of white supremacy created during the latter includes some deep excavations of my own whiteness, privilege and fragility. I seek to understand how these shaped my orientation and (in)action in this performance, bound me to the other white people there in uncomfortable ways, and made me deeply ambivalent about being part of any community the performance created, temporary or otherwise. I bring this level of detail to draw particular attention to the interplay of privilege and responsibility in these performances and ask: given the limitations necessitated by the dramatic spectacle, what are the possibilities for a real or imagined temporary community to act? Is it really down to individual choice? And what is the possibility and potential of refusal? These questions are germane to the kinds of spaces created by the public programme but are also relevant to the way we live our lives, both privately and publicly. This is because neoliberal capitalism perpetuates both the fantasy of the individual *and* the community, in order to make us responsible for our own success or failure, and accountable for others. The disruptive moments explored in this chapter are where this impossible bind

¹¹³ The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests prompted Harewood to make full documentation of *The Privileged* (2014) that I attended at *SPILL 2014* available on his website, which he contextualised thus: 'With all that's going on in the world, Jamal has decided to release a full version of his first performance *The Privileged* (2014) – a piece that explores ideas of race, identity, and community [...] As conversation is important, especially now, a forum has been created for those that wish to discuss their thoughts and feelings on the work' (Harewood 2020).

becomes visible, and I suggest that creating a space to reflect on this bind becomes another purpose of public programming.

Community and the Museum

Joseph draws on her work with Theatre Rhinoceros in 1980s San Francisco, a company that prided itself on representing the city's 'gay and lesbian community', to explore the 'persistence and pervasiveness' of community. She shows how it is both used to speak about, and taken up by, various groups as a term of belonging. However, far from an ideal form of social relation, Joseph argues that 'community – the Romanticized "other" of modernity – [...] is deployed to shore [...] up and facilitate the flow of capital'. Rather than taking place outside of market relations, 'our cultural, our communal practices are generative for capitalism' (pp.xxxii–xxxiii), and the fantasy of fellow feeling community conjures is really no more than the homogenising drive of a 'disciplining and exclusionary' logic (p.viii). If neoliberalism has reshaped notions of community, Joseph argues that it is impossible to have an idea of community beyond capitalism. A history of alternative models would suggest it might be possible to think about community beyond market relations, even if only temporarily.¹¹⁴ Rather than accepting that community is or isn't possible beyond a capitalist logic of consumption and production, in this chapter I focus on what Joseph really calls my attention to: 'the social processes in which they [communities] are constituted and that they help to constitute' (p.viii).

If community has a complex relation to neoliberal capitalism and government, it has an equally complicated relation to the museum and contemporary art institution. Community programmes are often set in motion before a new global art museum or contemporary art gallery opens, to garner the trust and buy-in of neighbouring residents and businesses, whose landscape and prosperity will often be irrevocably changed by the gentrification process following its opening (Miles 2015).¹¹⁵ Alison

¹¹⁴ From the seventeenth-century Diggers, to the nineteenth-century Paris Commune and the twenty-first-century Occupy Movement (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2016 2020).

¹¹⁵ An example already cited is the Regeneration and Community Partnerships team formed at Tate Modern's inception as a bridge between the 'local community' and the mega-museum that fundamentally changed the landscape of Southwark, once London's poorest borough, after it opened in 2000.

Rooke (2013) reflects on many of the issues pertaining to this relationship, presenting her findings from a workshop bringing together different stakeholders in community practices across the arts.¹¹⁶ Rooke outlines the ‘mixed motivations’ of arts organisations and institutions working with communities at the outset, which include the ‘need to enhance the traditional demographics of gallery audiences through “education” “community” or “local” programming’ and ‘an agenda of social justice’. This work is broadly characterised by ‘artists working together with, or as part of, communities in critical and creative responses to the processes and effects of regeneration and gentrification’ (Rooke 2013 p.2). From this perspective, we can already see the instrumentalisation of the relationship between the museum, or contemporary art institution, and its communities. Sometimes they are sought out and engaged by the museum for different reasons. Tate’s Curatorial team has, at times, needed to recruit quite specific groups for participatory projects in the prominent Tanks or Turbine Hall spaces, at the behest of a high-profile artist.¹¹⁷ To Community Programme colleagues, these approaches have sometimes felt like the need to ‘source’ an authentic ‘community group’ to participate in a ‘proper’ artwork by a big-name artist, without an ongoing concern for the kinds of work regularly happening on these programmes. Yet, it has also been the start of some tense and fruitful interdepartmental conversations.

Such intra-institutional tensions are richly reflected in Rooke’s report when participants ‘noted that institutions often position this [community] “pedagogical” work as external to the main work of curation’ (p.4). Such attitudes can result, perhaps unsurprisingly, in ‘[t]he work of gallery education and “local” departments of larger galleries and arts institutions aimed at increasing cultural “inclusivity” through “art education”, “community” or “local” programming’ being shown to be ‘socially and symbolically creat[ing] an impression of more diversity than actually exists while maintaining institutional status quo’ (p.4). Moreover, ‘such “diversity” work participates in and reproduces the hierarchies of institutions which allow racism and

¹¹⁶ Rooke identifies these as ‘artists, commissioners, researchers, educationalists and practitioners from community development’ in her report on the workshop *Curating Community? The Relational and Agonistic Value of Participatory Arts in Superdiverse Localities* (Rooke 2013 p.2).

¹¹⁷ For example, for Suzanne Lacy’s *Silver Action* (2013), groups of older women who had been involved in activism and protest in the UK between the 1950s and 1980s were wanted, leading to conversations reflecting on the nature and intention of such engagement with colleagues who worked more regularly with these groups.

inequalities to be overlooked' (p.5). Interestingly, participants also commented that 'local community' is often short-hand for 'working class community' (p.4). As Rooke's workshop participants also found, the othering implications of community often used by art organisations and commissioning agencies are an equally powerful tool of oppression:

working class, migrant and ethnic "others" [...] are frequently invoked when discussing "community arts" and "community engagement" but are rarely present in arts institutional conversations about the relationship between galleries and communities (Rooke 2013 p.5).

I do not aim to discredit these programmes; I believe in their social justice agendas, and highly respect programmers whose work and skill-set is frequently overlooked by the institutions they work for, and by curatorial discourse. My aim is to draw attention, following Joseph, to the way in which community is invoked and drawn on by the museum and its extended spaces. I do this to set up a comparison with its deployment by the performances I discuss later, and ask how community might be rethought in relation to the demands of becoming public within and without institutional settings.

An Encounter with 'the Arctic's whitest apex predator'

At midday on Saturday 31 October 2014 a group of forty people gathered in the hub venue of *SPILL 2014* – Ipswich's old police station – were led downstairs to a dirty basement strewn with food packaging and chicken bones, where a circle of chairs had been arranged. We were the audience eagerly, somewhat nervously, awaiting Jamal Harewood's *The Privileged* to begin. Inside the circle, a large figure dressed in a cheap and grubby polar bear costume appeared to be sleeping. On several chairs lay envelopes: I chose to sit on one with an envelope marked '5', somewhat excited by what this might mean. When everyone was seated, the person with envelope '1' opened it and began reading. She announced that we'd entered the Arctic polar bear's enclosure and were 'privileged to be spending time with this rare animal'. Would we like to know more about polar bears, or proceed with the performance? After a short deliberation, the group elected to know more, and were instructed to

read the contents of envelope '2'. Among other facts, we learned the polar bear's name was Cuddles and he was 'the Arctic's whitest apex predator', whose thick white fur covers black skin, allowing it to absorb warmth from the sun. The reader told us we must now nominate another 'encounter member' to wake him; someone duly volunteered and poked the bear tentatively. Cuddles began to stir – so far, so good. We then heard that he might be a little grumpy on being woken up, but not to worry, because he was really a friendly bear that would greet everyone in turn. Titters of nervous laughter broke out as Cuddles began nudging, pawing and sniffing his way around the circle, giving way to shock for some as he lurched onto their laps with a force shoving them back suddenly in their chairs.

As the performance wore on the audience were asked to nominate further 'encounter members' to carry out tasks and were called on to make decisions as a group, volunteer individually or work in small teams of two or three. Each of these interactions allowed us to, '[b]e one of the privileged few to say they have pet, played with, and fed a polar bear as if you were one of the Arctic keepers', in keeping with Harewood's description of the work on his website. With this greeting ritual complete, we were invited to play Cuddles' favourite game 'Predator and Prey' and advised that it was prudent to let him win at least twice. With some excitement we elected the leader of the game and began playing, which proved energising and fun. Next, the bear's costume had to come off, which revealed the naked body of the performer: a tall and muscular Black man with long dreadlocks. The woman elected to perform this task was rather shy about touching his bare skin; when her attempts to peel the costume off, which he resisted, became too awkward to watch, others came to her assistance.

Later came feeding time; two encounter members were asked to retrieve buckets of fried chicken and a bowl of water from the corridor. Cuddles must now be instructed to eat the food, and another woman volunteered to take this task – perhaps thinking (as I did) that it sounded relatively simple – surely, he would now be hungry? Standing in front of him though not meeting his height by several inches, she began calmly commanding: 'Eat. Eat. Eat!'. As he stared back defiantly, her high, thin voice became increasingly desperate. Feeling rather uneasy by now, I felt a creeping sense of shame at her failure and contemplated offering her my help. However, not

knowing how this would be possible without amplifying and prolonging the disturbing racial dynamic of this scene, I stayed in my seat. After several excruciating minutes, Cuddles sat down solemnly and began tearing at the chicken hungrily. In a tight silence we watched a naked Black man crouching on a dirty floor eating greasy fried chicken from a bucket. The performance appeared to have lost any lightheartedness or humour with which it began, the racist stereotypes we all participated in creating having reached their culmination. But if this was painful to watch, Harewood had more in store: the next envelope told us that Cuddles' food must be rationed. Advised to take care removing it in case he became aggressive, it eventually took three men to wrest the food from the snarling bear-man, one of them jumping on his back to bring him down. During this latest task, a woman in the audience had begun to cry quietly and suddenly embraced him. Whether this was in solidarity with his plight, or an additional attempt at control in aid of fellow encounter members was initially unclear. When she returned to her seat audibly sobbing, those immediately next to her offered comfort. Despite this puzzling outburst of emotion – that at first seemed too theatrical to be genuine – she did not leave the circle. Later I wondered: was she personally involved with the artist? Or so affected by the scene that she chose to make comforting physical contact? Was she a 'plant'?

Responsibility and Response-ability

The Privileged is a complex work that asks audiences to examine their complicity in structural racism and white supremacy. With several tense climaxes that left me distinctly uncomfortable about what I had been part of, and had allowed to happen in front of me, I left the room feeling stunned and exhilarated by the experience. Despite understanding what the performance was about, what struck me the most was how it held space for so many different responses. Coming to write about it some years later, I read the performance through the notion of 'response-ability', a hyphenated word bringing emphasis to the 'response' and 'ability' of responsibility. It was first introduced to me during a performance lecture by the artist Daniel Oliver hosted by The Bad Vibes Club in 2016, who drew on the appearance of this new term in the work of theatre and performance scholars Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) and Rachel Zerihan (2006). For Oliver, the notion of response-ability acknowledges that the capacity and possibility to respond in a participatory performance will vary

from person to person. In his experience, individual response-abilities sometimes exceed the implicit boundaries of participatory performance work and are not always accounted for by the curation, and critique, of participatory performance practices, or indeed the artists that create them. As I hope to remedy with my extended analysis, the formation of complex projects into critical case-studies often only alludes to the dynamics at play.¹¹⁸ Oliver explained that his own work leaves space for varied responses, which can result in a shared awkwardness and uncertainty as to what should happen next for everyone. This approach draws on Oliver's experience of living with dyspraxia – a neurological condition affecting movement and coordination skills – where he has learned to deal with the social awkwardness that comes with not always responding appropriately or doing things in the right order. Another inspiration for this approach is the neurodiversity movement, that re-positions bipolar, autism, dyspraxia and other neurological conditions as variations on 'normal' brain function that are generative of diverse forms of self-expression, rather than casting them as pathologies or disorders in need of a cure. Oliver sees the awkwardness produced in his performances when not knowing which way to turn (in line with Kotsko's analysis discussed in Chapter One) as a kind of productive third way between the convivial inclusion of Bourriaud (2002) and the antagonistic alienation of Bishop (2004). For Oliver, the awkwardness we experience in the situations he sets up can open up a space for something unexpected or off-script to happen.

Oliver's analysis and usage of response-ability is built on its brief appearances in theatre and performance studies, where it is still relatively under-theorised. However, the term readily crops up in other fields such as self-help, psychotherapy and business coaching. In my research I found a coaching company called Response Ability, with the strapline 'Propelling People Potential' (Response Ability 2020), and many definitions offered by business coaches and psychotherapists. For example, management consultant and business coach Fred Kofman defines response-ability as 'your ability to respond to a situation'. Unlike Oliver, Kofman frames it as individual 'choice', because, he writes, 'your responses are not determined by

¹¹⁸ Examples where these are given more space include the evaluative research of Elaine Speight (2019) and Cara Courage (2017) around 'place-making' practices in urban environments, where art and creative processes are used by artists and local communities to create a sense of place.

external circumstances or instinct. They depend on external factors and inner drives, but you always have a choice. As a human being, you are an autonomous (from the Greek, “self-ruling”) being. And the more conscious you are of your autonomy, the more unconditioned your responses will be’ (Kofman n.d.). Though recognising that ‘external circumstances’ play a role in our responses to situations, Kofman’s emphasis is very much on aligning response-ability with individual, conscious ‘choice’ and ‘autonomy’. The implication is that such awareness builds our muscle to make more ‘unconditioned’, authentic and empowered responses.

It’s interesting to note that when spoken out loud it can be difficult to differentiate between responsibility and its corollary ‘response-ability’. The power of the hyphenated mutation lies precisely in this slippage, bringing about a shift in sense that is catchy and appealing, yet anchored in familiar concepts of seriousness, maturity and morality. Psychotherapist Tina Tessina writes on her website:

Often, people react to the idea of responsibility [...] as though an angry parent were standing over you saying, “Who’s responsible for this mess?” [...] Adult responsibility [...] is really response-ability; that is, the ability to respond to life. Rather than placing blame, this way of thinking acknowledges personal power. Response-ability is the capacity to choose [...] Response-ability is remembering to be in charge (Tessina n.d.).

Like Kofman, Tessina shows that ‘response-ability’ brings a particular awareness to our capacity to respond in a given situation, recognising the choices we have. As the therapists, self-help and business gurus suggest, it is also about *taking* responsibility for our decisions and actions. Ultimately, it is about being ‘in charge’ and control, forming a more resilient, self-reliant and accountable subject. In this way, response-ability forms a corollary with the attention economy: various situations and possible responses vie for our attention all the time. It is up to us to assume responsibility for our ability to both attend *and* respond, or not.

The wider, social implications for these understandings of responsibility and response-ability take on a murkier quality in the age of neoliberal capitalism, or neoliberalism. Under this political and economic ideology, free markets and

privatisation are encouraged to flourish, government intervention in business is discouraged and public spending is reduced to free up the circulation of capital and maximise profit. Neoliberalism turns public services into private markets where it is claimed competition will attain higher quality provision for service users, or clients. Favouring the enterprising individual – the entrepreneur – the accretion of vast individual wealth under neoliberalism is possible only for a small few, and crucially, impossible for the vast majority. George Monbiot calls neoliberalism the economic policy that dare not speak its name, because not only is the term now overwhelmingly used pejoratively, but its pervasive power lies in it being a nameless force (Monbiot 2016).

Judith Butler shows how under neoliberalism responsibility loses its nuance between self and other, becoming a paradox forcing marginal peoples to live in ‘induced forms of precarity’ (Butler 2015 p.11):

each of us is only responsible for ourselves, and not for others, and that responsibility is first and foremost a responsibility to become economically self-sufficient under conditions where self-sufficiency is structurally undermined. Those who cannot afford to pay for health care constitute but one version of a population deemed disposable (Butler 2015 p.25).

If individuals are ultimately responsible for themselves, those that fail are not only beyond the help of wider society, but can be blamed for their helplessness. Neoliberal capitalism’s strategic deployment of responsibility does not end with the individual; it also relies on, and instrumentalises, our hopeful belief in community. In the UK, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron’s flagship policy of his first office (2010–15) was the ‘Big Society’, which proposed to empower local governments and communities by devolving state power and responsibility. A document issued by the Cabinet Office outlined a programme of policies in support of the Big Society, stating:

[w]e want society – the families, networks, neighbourhoods and communities that form the fabric of so much of our everyday lives – to be [...] given more

power and take more responsibility [...] [so that] we achieve fairness and opportunity for all (Cabinet Office 2010).

It was widely recognised as a thinly-veiled excuse for reducing government spending, rolling back state-funded public services and the distinctly unfair use of what Dave Prentis, General Secretary of Unison, called ‘volunteers as a cut-price alternative’ (2010). Cameron’s Big Society enjoyed little success and disappeared off the political agenda fairly soon, but the notion of devolved responsibility and collective culpability is still very much alive. More recently, the post-Brexit referendum rhetoric of 2016–18 that included the oft-repeated phrase ‘the people have spoken’ was an arguably more successful mantra. Designed by the political right and echoed by the left, the phrase instrumentalised a ‘general public’ of ‘the people’ to call a community of British voters into being. Whether or not they voted for Brexit, or even voted at all, this imagined community was made collectively responsible for the consequences of a referendum, which many favouring the ‘remain’ campaign argue was based on falsehood and whipped up anti-immigrant sentiment.

This harsh brand of collective responsibility-taking, which proliferated through the self-governing rhetoric explicit in self-help, business management and psychotherapeutic discourses around response-ability, puts us in charge of our responses, successes and failures meaning that individuals *and* communities may be blamed for their failure and, ultimately, their social exclusion. Of course, it is widely acknowledged that without failure, neoliberalism cannot flourish. Jen Harvie (2013) writes that the effect of neoliberal ideology is to ‘aggressively promote individualism and entrepreneurialism and pour scorn on anyone unfortunate enough to need to draw on the safety net of welfare support’ (p.2). Furthermore, in the essential relationship between neoliberalism and inequality, the latter is generated not as an ‘unfortunate by-product’ but as a necessary condition: ‘[f]or neoliberalism to thrive, competition must be cultivated, so social inequality must be too’ (Harvie 2013 p.81).

In these conditions Harvie is skeptical as to whether participatory art and performance can really produce the ‘fellow feeling’ that may sustain ‘people’s shared

exercise of power' and keep neoliberalism's 'unreserved self-interest' in 'check' (p.2). Instead she suggests that social practices 'contribute to neoliberal governmentality' by exacerbating 'inequalities more than they diminish them [...] effectively limiting how much agency they actually divest to their audiences' (pp.3–4). In addition, when audiences are expected to complete the work of art through their participation, this sets up a parallel with the precarity of the flexible labour market and the rise of the 'prosumer', who, consciously or unconsciously, becomes involved in producing what she consumes. According to Harvie, the potential cost of such 'audience-led' (to use Harewood's term) art and performance, is not only the displacement of skilled workers who might otherwise be employed, but also the fact that this low or unpaid work permeates the prosumer's leisure time, emotional and social life (pp.52–53). Such a parallel also recognises that these audiences are not simply volunteering their (emotional and physical) labour; they are also paying for the privilege.

Off-script?

In contrast with the approaches from coaching and psychotherapy, Oliver's use of response-ability acknowledges that different people have varying capacities of response, that aren't always under their control or choice. For Oliver, response-ability is only partly consciously directed, and he creates situations that make space and give permission for a diversity of responses, rather than asking, or empowering, audiences to take responsibility for their part in a situation. However, Harvie's understanding of the relationship between responsibility and neoliberalism, read through participatory art and performance, questions whether any agency is actually divested in audiences at all. She also raises the spectre of the prosumer, who is not fully aware of the implications of her involvement in producing the culture she also consumes. So how do participatory performances make us feel like we do have a choice, or agency, within them?

Moving from the macro to the micro, performance scholar Rachel Zerihan writes about response-ability in the intimate scene of Keira O'Reilly's *Untitled Action for Bomb Shelter* (2003). In the iteration Zerihan participated in, the one-to-one performance took place in a room containing a large mirror and a television with live feed that looped the action of the room back on itself. Before entering the room,

Zerihan was handed a written invitation to make a small cut on the artist's skin with a scalpel. When in the presence of O'Reilly, Zerihan was confused and nervous, but realised that she wanted neither to make a mark, nor cover up another's with the plasters that are also provided. Instead she finds another mode of response than the options on offer, gently placing her hand on some of the fresh wounds. The artist responds in return with tender approval: "What you're doing is lovely" she said. I didn't know what I was doing' (Zerihan 2006 p.8).

Responsible for placing herself in this risky predicament, when presented with the opportunity to play her part in the performance, Zerihan does something apparently off-script. At the same time as feeling impotent and not in full cognitive grasp of her response to the situation – 'I didn't know what I was doing' – Zerihan instinctively does what feels appropriate, in accordance with an ethics of responsibility towards the artist as another person whom she wishes neither to physically harm, nor offend via a refusal to participate in their performance. Not burdened by the fear of having to perform the right action in front of other audience members, perhaps the possibilities of response are multiplied by the intimacy of the scene? From the description of her thought process, though, it's clear Zerihan is still concerned with doing the right thing by the artist. But in this intimate exchange, the possibility of refusing the invitation to cut, or place a plaster on, O'Reilly's skin seems just as viable as accepting it, or doing something else. What Zerihan reflects on is a tender moment between two people, without a fourth wall; and yet this is still a performance and not a real exchange. Or is it? For me, Zerihan rather uncritically elevates her sense of response-ability here, because although she appears to have found a unique response to the artist's offer, in one-to-one performance often what feels intuitive and special might well be a common iteration. What is interesting to take forward is how the intimacy of the situation appears to magnify both the options and compulsion to do the right thing in line with the artist's intentions. Despite Harvie's critique of participatory performances as often more limiting than empowering, Zerihan feels there is room for another response, other than what is offered to, or expected of her, because it was met with tender approval by the artist. But what other responses might have been possible – what if Zerihan had refused to do anything at all? How does the uncomfortable reminder from Harvie that she has paid

for the privilege of volunteering her attentive and emotional labour affect what we are led to believe is an intimate, tender and authentic exchange?

In it Together

If what feels like response-ability could be a false assumption of conscious choice and troubles the agency in this scene, then it also affects how we might think about the actions of Harewood's 'temporary community'. Despite a mounting unease at the increasingly disturbing scenes created through the instructions we carried out, I was sure that each new task would be undertaken by someone. Could it be that *The Privileged* enabled (and relied on) individual response-abilities? Was there a shared sense of responsibility to carry out the work asked of us, no matter how difficult, because of some kind of communal solidarity? Or simply a common commitment to the institutional conventions of being a good audience that goes along with the demands of the performance, holding on to the knowledge that they are not acting in 'real' life?

Hans-Thies Lehmann writes about the disturbing disconnect between images that are produced by the media and their affective reception, and what theatre might offer to remedy this:

[t]heatre can respond to this only with [...] 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 (Lehmann 2006 pp.185–86).

Suggesting the mutual implication and complicity of actors and spectators in the production of images, Lehmann disturbs the relative comfort and safety of sitting in the audience. His 'aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)' means that an audience is, in fact, making a scene as they watch it. Offering a new angle on the prohibitive dynamics of the 'fourth wall' in theatre, if what is being portrayed offends us or goes against our values, this suggests that we should do something to stop or

change it. If we don't, then the sense of shame and guilt for doing nothing can really be felt, and not so easily dismissed.

If, as posed earlier in this chapter, under neoliberal capitalism, the ultimate value of any community is that it is responsible for, and accountable to, itself, what kind of community creates scene after scene of racial stereotyping and white supremacy, while feeling deep unease with it? The root of my unease at watching my fellow encounter member, a clothed white woman, commanding Harewood, a naked Black man, to eat, was certainly a sense of shame and guilt. I felt that the disturbing, dehumanising racial dynamic set up between Harewood and the audience member, was perpetuated by her commitment to completing it. But it was also perpetuated by my (our?) inaction. Underlying my desire to put a stop to it, was something more disturbing and harder to admit even to myself: a sympathetic shame at her failure to make him eat. Realising that my sympathies ought to lie with Cuddles – or Harewood, as he now unmistakably was without his bear skin – I struggled with some shame about my shame. While I felt complicit in perpetuating an appalling scene of white supremacy by passively watching it unfold in front of me, the longer I watched, the more responsible I felt for prolonging *her* public humiliation at failing to make him eat through my inaction.

Lyn Gardner (2014) has written about theatre and performance works, including *The Privileged*, where audiences are offered more responsibility than usual to make decisions that drive the action forward. She describes mixed feelings about being placed in situations that test her moral compass, and that can result in audiences enduring in public what they might condemn in private, for the sake of the performance and the performers. Participating in National Theatre Wales's *Bordergame* (2014), in which she and other audience members were cast as refugees travelling from Bristol to Newport, who are refused entry to the 'Autonomous Republic of Cymru for having false identity papers', Gardner writes:

The possibility of trying to organise a rebellion, rise up against the border guards and break free crossed my mind. There was very little to stop us. But I also worried that, in doing so, we'd be disrupting the performance. How would

the actors respond? Was the show fluid and flexible enough to embrace such an audience response? (Gardner 2014).

The ethics of response-ability here turns on whether or not the work is structured to withstand an unforeseen reaction from its audience, which plays no small part in the action. Later on, however, Gardner reveals that her concern for how the actors might handle an 'uprising' is actually concealing her fear of making a spectacle out of her over-identification with the issues at stake in the performance:

in a public situation the urge to do the right thing, conform and not make a spectacle of ourselves remains strong. If that weren't the case... traditional theatre would be plagued by continuous walkouts. Instead, people slip away quietly at the interval – from a desire not to draw attention to themselves as much as respect for the actors (Gardner 2012).

In this excerpt from Gardner, there is a tension between understanding the theatre space to be a microcosm of our private/public worlds, in which we should act in accordance with our ethical position, and an understanding of ourselves as part of an audience who are responsible for helping realise the potential of the theatrical piece, which is outside of the usual terrain of public life. This bind is part of the meta-rules of temporary community participation that Gardner is already very aware of, yet it still presents a dilemma. On this particular occasion, Gardner's desire to conform with what's expected of her, in front of her fellow audience members and the actors in the play, overrode her discomfort with the 'image' she was jointly responsible for making. What she highlights is that conforming to the rules of the theatre space in general, and of particular participatory performances that extend or create new rules, is often portrayed as wanting to 'do the right thing'; but it is also about preserving your public image. Not 'showing yourself up' as the uneducated person who doesn't realise that this is only 'pretend', or the overly emotional person, who puts their feelings in a situation above their rational assessment. Or both, like the person who fled *Collapsing Lecture* visibly upset. And yet, the limitations that Gardner describes, which I also felt in *The Privileged*, were not so for everyone else, particularly the woman who cried and embraced Harewood in what appeared to be a show of solidarity with him. The feeling of having the cultural/social capital to act in

accordance with your own desires, seemingly 'off-script' within these situations, might be compared to those who feel themselves equal enough to participate in the reading group discussed in the previous chapter.

Like Gardner, my desire to do the right thing was partly what curtailed my 'responsibility' and kept me silently watching: I was part of a dramatic spectacle and my primary responsibility was towards Harewood as an artist, to go along with the instructions that furthered the narrative of his performance, however uncomfortable they might be. Not only that, I had a responsibility to comply with the rules of theatrical performance, not to ruin it for my fellow audience members. Following Lehmann, though, my discomfort suggested I should have intervened to bring this scene somehow to a close. But what would that have revealed: an over-identification with the deplorable racial dynamic that I take to be *real*, rather than constructed? Is not wanting to show yourself up in front of the majority, and wishing to act in accordance with its rules, what makes the audiences to *The Privileged* a temporary community? Or, is it that the difficulty of the tasks that produces the crisis out of which, Joseph suggests, community is widely thought to emerge: 'when people imagine themselves bound together [...] through some extraordinary effort' (Joseph 2002 p.vii)? Perhaps our sense of being in it together, in a disturbing, difficult situation, made us want to help each other out and feel part of something greater than ourselves. The question that is hardest to answer: What was it that bound me to the woman commanding Harewood to eat, that made me want to help *her*? Was it that she was an audience member, like me? Or was it because she was white, like me?

In *Sherapy*

It could be that all of these aspects of communal audiencing created an uncomfortable sense of community for me. Like Harewood, the artist Ann Liv Young has also theorised how people respond to her performance work, as individuals and collectives. Young's work also *works* her audience, manipulating them and deliberately creating an uncomfortable space, which left me with similarly mixed feelings about what I had participated in. Coming to performance and theatre through a dance training, where she was 'taught to ignore the audience' (Young in

Earnest 2014), Young now takes a forensic approach, noticing and involving them in her work, most notably as her character Sherry. In her *Sherapy* performances (since 2009), Young appears as the trashy Southern-belle alter-ego Sherry, dishing out questions and analysis to her audience as a radical and aggressive form of therapy – hence the play on words in the work’s title. Not knowing anything about Young’s work, I witnessed a rampant *Sherapy* session when I attended the panel discussion *Self-gratifiers: feminist appropriations in the performances of Narcissister and Ann Liv Young* during *PSi #18* in Leeds, 2012. After a performance by Narcissister and a more traditional paper presentation, Sherry appeared dressed in a blonde wig, heels and a tight pink dress. Before addressing her audience, she took the mic and ensured that it was turned up full volume. What followed was, without doubt, my most traumatic and hated performance art experience yet, not least because I felt ill-informed about the nature of encounter the audience would be subjected to. The conference programme described the panel discussion that included two performances as ‘combining live performance with critical presentations’ (*PSi #18* 2012), without mentioning the discomfort that might ensue.¹¹⁹ Searching for promotional material about Young’s work online, I similarly found no informative copy about the content of her performances, but did come across frequent references in interviews with Young herself about shocked venue curators and upset audiences.

Sherry began introducing us to her tacky, brash persona by singing a pop song and telling anecdotes from her childhood growing up in North Carolina and I was lulled into a false sense of security that this might be a funny performance. It wasn’t long, however, before she began targeting individuals in the audience, starting with a woman in the front row whom she asked a series of probing questions around her masturbation habits. Later to a man seated in the middle next to the aisle she enquired: ‘Are you gay? You seem gay. Have ever you had sex with a man?’ I was already shocked at the intimacy of what seemed (at best) irresponsible questioning, at worst bullying, when she ended this particular interaction with, ‘Have you ever

¹¹⁹ The full copy read: ‘Narcissister and Ann Liv Young juxtapose the degraded object (tacked-on merkins, ill-fitting ball gowns) with strategic nudity and bodily abjection (faeces, perspiration, urine) in performances of self-pleasure. Joined by Narcissister and Ann Liv Young themselves, and combining live performance with critical presentations, this panel asks, what are the politics of a feminist economy of self-gratification?’ (Performance Studies International 18 2012)

been abused?’ Sitting in stunned silence, feeling appalled and ashamed for those who’d already been subjected to *Sherapy*, I was genuinely afraid of becoming the next target and aware that I was blushing visibly. It seemed almost inevitable then that her analysis eventually came my way. ‘You! The blonde in the back row. Who are you?’ She left a short pause, in which I failed to respond. Next she fired, ‘What do you want to be?’ and with my cheeks burning hot, I managed to mumble something indistinct about being a curator or writer, admitting pathetically that I don’t really know yet. ‘You don’t even know who you are! What’s wrong with you? How do you expect to get anywhere?’

Perhaps I should have been grateful at being arbitrarily spared the humiliation of disclosing my sexual preferences and experiences. But I couldn’t feel anything except acute shame and hurt at having my lack of self-knowledge and confidence so ruthlessly exposed. Internally raging, I wanted desperately to walk out in protest, but I was too afraid to make any kind of movement that would attract her attention and bile again. When the performance was over, Sherry took off her wig and Ann Liv Young joined the other panelists for a discussion. In response to questions about what happened during *Sherapy*, I felt Young answered as aggressively as Sherry might have done: revved up by her performance she didn’t seem in the mood to discuss it critically. Locked into my own seething state of heightened emotion I assumed everyone hated *Sherapy* as much as I did. A friend sitting next to me also seemed uneasy, but she had managed to utter that if Sherry were to share something about herself, it might help others open up too. Considering my abject failure to protest at what was happening, I felt the bravery of her offering. But I don’t think Sherry heard, or else didn’t want to acknowledge it. Later we discussed our mutual unease at the ‘performance’ we were subjected to, and I felt a little comforted that others must have disliked it as much as I had.

However, much to my surprise, during a seminar the following day a different friend publicly praised Young for her performance. ‘You silenced everyone!’ he said, ‘that never happens. It was brilliant!’ The realisation that he had enjoyed *Sherapy* and found something redemptive or useful about it was, at first, too painful to comprehend. Not wanting to credit the performance with any proper consideration or scholarly attention before now, initially I even struggled to write about it in this thesis.

I approach it now, firstly to unpick how reaching the limits of my response-ability in *Sherapy* – of being ‘silenced’ – was linked to my assumption that everyone felt the same fear and anger as me. Sara Ahmed (2004) uses a similar mistaken assumption of there being a ‘shared feeling in the room’ to discuss the complex ways in which emotions circulate. Against theories of affective contagion, Ahmed says that emotions may move between subjects, but are not passed from one to another like property where the emotion has the same quality for each owner. She writes that during tense experiences of togetherness:

[s]hared feelings are at stake, and seem to surround us, like a thickness in the air [...] But these feelings not only *heighten tension*, they are also *in tension* [...] we don’t necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling [...] shared feelings are not about feeling the same feeling (Ahmed 2004 pp.10–11).

Could it have been that my friend felt fear of Sherry and was rather thrilled by it, whereas my relationship to fear that afternoon had a deeply shameful quality? Coming to terms with my mistaken assumption of a shared feeling in the audience, I realise my uncritical rejection of *Sherapy* was also a way to invalidate and dismiss a rather traumatic experience, painting it as her desire to bully others in the guise of ‘performance art’. Attempting a more nuanced exploration of my emotional reaction some years later prompted me to find out more about the differing ways other audiences and individuals have responded to *Sherapy*. In a co-authored paper about her performance at the *World Psychiatric Association Congress* in 2014, I found an intriguing analysis by Young herself on the formation of temporary groups and alliances within her audiences:

One coping tool for the audience is to band together as a group [...] [and] treat Sherry as a threat. Individuals within the group will challenge Sherry and try to minimise her by highlighting her otherness – for example [...] You don’t have formal training, so you are not qualified to talk about therapy, etc. These bold individuals try to use specifics of the group to discredit Sherry, and in doing so, offer Sherry a platform to build her status [...] Then new groups form in the room – those supporting and engaged with Sherry, and a small group of

holdouts from the original anti-outsider group (Spiess, Strecker and Young 2015).

These astute observations show a certain fluidity between individual and collective responses in her audiences: groups form in opposition to Sherry and support of one another, crucially, led by certain 'bold individuals' who decide to challenge, or support her. Young's own descriptions of the fraught exchanges between Sherry and the other artists booked to perform before her, members of the audience, ill-informed organisers shocked by what happens, frequently refer to their authenticity: 'The curator just kept saying afterward "I didn't expect it to be *real*"' (Young in Earnest 2014). In an interview with Young, Jarrett Earnest (2014) alludes to the slippery boundary between Sherry and Young, performance and reality: 'People just think that Sherry is you. How do you see the differences between Sherry as a character and you as a person?' Though Young describes Sherry as 'loosely based on my mother' who mandated a culture of silence about what happened at home, she insists on being very different. In fact, Young wishes she was more like Sherry, who asks and says the things she cannot: '[w]hen I'm Sherry I can undo [my politeness]' (Young in Earnest 2014).

Young describes a variety of responses to her work, that include verbal attacks and even physical violence. But despite their extremity, she explains why she always wins the battle: "Sherry is indestructible. Her show cannot be ruined. There's this idea in theatre that... people have to like the performance. And Sherry's just like, "Fuck all of you. This is my show"' (Young in Katz 2011). Young's reference to 'theatre' is pertinent because her practice hovers between theatre, performance art, dance (Young's original training) and by her definition, therapy. However, theatre being one of the more conventional disciplines she is involved with, she notes that people bring certain expectations to it, one of them being to be entertained – 'people like to have a performance'. But Young's work does not adhere to disciplinary boundaries: she is invited by dance, theatre and performance venues and festivals, as well as contemporary art institutions such as MoMA PS1 (2010). She is equally unconcerned with playing by the rules of any of these spaces. In her flouting of the rules, her relinquishing of structure and control, I argue that she exercises an even greater hold over what happens. The sense that the show cannot be broken –

indeed that it might not even be a show – might be enabling of more varied responses than *The Privileged*, which, though unpredictable, was structured to progress through certain scenes towards an end designed by the artist. However, through informal conversations with peers, reviews and Harewood's own accounts I also learned of all manner of heated discussions, flat refusals to participate, accusations of racism and even physical fights breaking out.

However different their approach, both Harewood and Young demonstrate their privilege as artists: to work their audiences and, certainly in the performances under discussion, make their audiences work for them. Andrew Haydon's review tells how 'things got interesting' when 'our discussion *became* the content' (Haydon 2015). Alice Saville underlines this, writing that '[e]very performance of *The Privileged* is totally different: with full audience compliance, it could be done in half an hour, but most dissolve into heated group discussions or stand-offs or walk-outs' (Saville 2017). Indeed, the way that audiences are put to work, to volunteer for tasks, stand up for themselves or support one another, troubles the line between performance and reality in these works that surprises even the artists themselves. In one interview, Harewood remembers a performance where his audience were 'following the instructions quite blindly' until 'one woman kind of jumped in front of me, arms out, and shouted "just stop, guys". She stopped it all and said "it's a human, and it's always been a human. We shouldn't be doing this." [...] And that action still sticks with me' (Harewood in Grace 2017). In another interview, Saville references a striking moment she witnessed when an audience member, who was also a performance maker, refused to comply, which led to a fruitful collaboration with Harewood on his next performance *Word* (Saville 2017). Like Young's assessment of her own work, Haydon writes of *The Privileged* that these occurrences prove that 'the piece itself doesn't get broken by people suddenly refusing the instructions [...] The way that the audience is situated by the title as *the privileged* [...] ensures that whatever we do can be interpreted through that – not inaccurate – prism' (Haydon 2017).

The Responsibility of Privilege, The Privilege of Response-ability

The Privileged asks audiences to consider their role in perpetuating racist stereotypes, violence and social structures: will they blindly do what is asked of them and dehumanise Harewood by removing his polar bear costume, forcing him to eat fried chicken and then taking this food away? Or will they refuse, walk out, discuss it or do something else? In other words, how will they use their privilege?

In the interview with Earnest, Young insists that, however they use it, they must do something. Recounting a story of attending a performance by Rebecca Patek during a stint at the *American Realness* festival, Young says that, since she was in between her own *Sherapy* performances, she went in costume. Patek's piece was a contemporary dance performance about rape and HIV, which began with one of the performers handing out slips of paper asking for audience feedback. Presumably this feedback was meant to come in written form at the end of the show, but unable to contain her contempt for the work, Young as Sherry stood up and yelled hers out loud during the performance:

I [...] walked across the stage [...] and said, "This is crazy. This show sucks. I have a question for you: Have you actually been raped?" [...] finally [she] said, "You clearly have rape issues." I just said, "Yes I do. I hope everyone here has rape issues." [...] Everyone was just silent. Then Sherry looked at the audience and said, "Look at you guys, you're white, you're young, you're Williamsburg hipsters, you're probably all her friends and you are perpetuating bad art – this is a waste of time. You don't need to make this: you need Sherapy and I'll be at my table all night," and I left (Young in Earnest 2014).

Exemplifying Lehmann's 'aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)', Young insists that audiences are duty bound to react authentically to theatre and performance: 'it is a privilege and a responsibility to be an audience member and I will not be [...] complacent [...] Deep in my heart I felt what she was doing was wrong, and when you feel that you have to speak up' (Young in Earnest 2014). However the slippage between 'I' and 'Sherry' all over this passage appears to be the crucial factor in enabling Young to respond as bravely and ferociously as she did

to something she felt 'deep in [her] heart' was 'wrong'. As Young previously stated, she doesn't play by the rules of any of these spaces, but she does acknowledge that 'it takes [for some audiences] a minute to adjust [to Sherry] and figure out how to feel' (Young in Earnest 2014). Does her 'indestructible show' leave room for more, or less capacities for response? As audience members in the theatre, we usually inhabit a role that permits silent 'enjoyment' (or endurance) of a performance until points where collective laughter, clapping, and other noises are collectively judged permissible (either when the performance elicits them, or at moments such as the interval or end of the performance). As discussed in Chapter Two, making coded noises in the right places are essential to signalling to other audience members and the performers that we are paying attention (Home-Cook 2015). Such coded noises, referring back to Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1984), also signal that we have the cultural capital to understand and adhere to the rules of this cultural venue in the first place. Dialogue with performers 'on stage' when you are in the audience rarely happens, unless specifically solicited. As such, 'speaking up' when you feel something is wrong isn't perhaps as easy as Young professes, and as Gardner highlighted above, can easily backfire. Public programmes, like the panel discussion I attended where Young was performing, have similar rules to the theatre, though these are ostensibly more relaxed. Dialogue between those 'on stage' and those in the audience is usually permitted during a discrete question-and-answer session. Given the lighted room of the lecture theatre that I encountered Sherry in, and the fact that she was roaming around directly engaging with individuals, her performance as part of a panel discussion, at first glance, invited a more active dialogue throughout. Calling for audiences to recognise their privilege, Young demonstrates that it comes with responsibility. What she doesn't seem to reflect on is that her rather extreme response-ability in Patek's performance might not be an example of using audience privilege responsibly.

Emboldened by wearing the mask of her character Sherry infamous for her outrageous and offensive outbursts, undoubtedly one performance acts on another. Though she claimed to be 'in between shows', Young also leaves with the parting invitation to the audience to join her at her 'table' where she would be 'all night'. One definition of privilege is having 'special rights or advantages that most people do not have' and 'the opportunity to do something that makes you feel proud' (Hornby 2005

p.1200). Rather than her privilege as an audience member, could it in fact be Young's privilege as an artist that emboldens her to speak out? Privileged information is also that which is 'known only to few people and legally protected so that it does not have to be made public' (pp.1200–01). Sharing the Latin root 'priv-' with many other adjectives and nouns, privilege is very close to 'privity', incidentally, an old English word for toilet, and of course 'private'. To be 'privity to' something is to be 'allowed to know something secret' with the example of the Privy Council being the 'group of people who advise the king on political affairs' (p.1201), who were originally those special individuals admissible to the king's 'toilet', or private quarters. These additional nuances show how privilege connotes favourable intimacy, bordering on privacy, and exclusive access for a 'privileged few'. Given the Patek incident is not the only example of Young publicly critiquing another artist's work as her character Sherry (Squibb 2010), is she, in fact, demonstrating her powerful entitlement, and favourable intimacy, as an artist?

Harewood's conferral of special status on his audiences, and how they chose to use it, highlights a different nuance of privilege. When taken full advantage of, privilege might have remarkable and terrifying consequences, as discussed in the story above, yet its acquisition is often unremarkable: In *The Privileged*, it is conferred through the simple act of purchasing a ticket to a performance. Discussions on white and male privilege since the 1980s have sought to uncover the workings of what Peggy McIntosh called 'unearned advantage' and 'conferred dominance' (1988). McIntosh detailed her observations of male privilege in academia, and her own daily experiences of white privilege as a middle-class American woman. The list sheds light on the oppressive systems of privilege and disadvantage in operation that remain influential to discussions around race and class today.

Despite these ongoing discussions, it is still hard for many white people to acknowledge what McIntosh calls their 'unearned advantage'. McIntosh acknowledges how the idea of privilege can be 'misleading' since '[w]e usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned, or conferred by birth or luck. [...] [It] carries the connotation of being something everyone must want.' Anger and indignation commonly springs from the fact that, as mentioned above, privilege refers to 'special rights or advantages' or the 'opportunity to do something that

makes you feel proud.’ How can something that brings advantage and pride belong, for example, to a white working-class person who feels themselves to be at a disadvantage, economically and socially? Looking at the negative effects of unearned privilege makes it less desirable. As McIntosh writes, ‘privilege simply confers dominance, gives permission to control, because of one’s race or sex. The kind of privilege that gives license to some people to be, at best, thoughtless and, at worst, murderous should not continue to be referred to as a desirable attribute’ (p.6). Negative and unwanted emotional states such as guilt and shame are also likely to come when reflecting on the fact that Black and Brown people might have worked harder in their education or career than a white person. But the ultimate privilege of white privilege is the ability to shrug off these emotions and continue without addressing or changing anything.

Tracing my own relationship to white privilege brings up a childhood experience with similar feelings of shame and complicity, which I faced watching Harwood being commanded to eat. Called to the front of the classroom in my primary school alongside my cousin, who is of mixed white British and Iranian heritage, our teacher first asked me, then my cousin, to count to twenty. When I succeeded and he failed, the teacher asked why his younger cousin could count all the way to twenty and he could not? I felt angry and hurt that my ability was used to discredit and shame someone I loved. Without being able to name it as racism, I remember the unfairness of this negative treatment. It aligned with the many other ways we, as children, were made to feel that his mixed heritage and darker skin colour counted against him, both at school and in the home we shared. I also recall feeling acute shame at my acquiescence to counting in front of an audience of our classmates; my pride at succeeding, which was subsequently used to mark his inability; my standing still and silent while the teacher praised me and shamed him. In this moment, white privilege made me feel anything but proud, and yet it was also an ordinary experience of my specialness.

McIntosh famously described white privilege as ‘an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious’ (p.1). Despite my early awareness of racism at home and at school, my white privilege is not something I have reflected much on until more

recently. Tracing its operation in Harewood's performance, then, begins before the moment I walked into *The Privileged*. My membership of a performance-literate cultural elite initially gained me access to the polar bear's enclosure. Familiarity with this art form and the capacity to confidently decode it afforded me the confidence and curiosity to buy that ticket in the first place. Going further back, my white, middle-class background, though not financially rich, gave me access to cultural and educational experiences on which I built my career in the arts, where my whiteness and non-descript English accent has certainly opened doors for me. In addition, I have no physical or learning disability that prevents me from participating fully in this particular performance, if I want to. Tracing the operation of my privilege and other forms of skin differencing that bound me to other members of my 'community' *within* the performance entails a deeper, thicker analysis.

Whiteness

Skin is a loaded metaphor in *The Privileged*. Before we have entered the work, the promotional shots of Harewood stripped to the waist with just the polar bear head covering his face reveal his Blackness. The content of the second envelope read aloud informs us that we are to meet the Arctic's apex predator, whose dazzling white fur covers black skin. As Cuddles greets us, we glimpse a patch of Harewood's naked skin peeking through a large hole at the seat of the cheap polar bear costume. The audience member who volunteered to remove his white fur did so extremely tentatively, shying away from touching Harewood's skin as far as possible. In casting himself as an animal crawling on all fours, tasking the audience with taking away his clothing, feeding him, denying his food and not speaking throughout, Harewood plays with many dehumanising anti-Black stereotypes through the objectifying lens of primitivism. This now unfashionable term allowed white artists, critics and cultural consumers to appraise, and desire, Black artists and their work from the early twentieth-century onwards. As an art historical term, it was used to 'describe the fascination of early modern European artists with what was then called primitive art – including tribal art from Africa, the South Pacific and Indonesia, as well as prehistoric and very early European art, and European folk art' (Tate n.d.). But it had much further reaching implications for the white enjoyment of Black music, performance and social life than the mere 'fascination' with art objects. Drawing on Hal Foster's

explanation of 'the underlying dynamics of primitivism', art historian James Smalls has written that:

[o]n the one hand, there is an explicit desire to break down the cultural oppositions of European and "primitive" culture and nature, as well as the psychic oppositions held to underlie them: active and passive, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual. On the other hand, there is an insistence on maintaining these oppositions. These conflicts of desire occur because the primitivist seeks both to be "opened up to difference" (i.e., racial, sexual, social, cultural) and to be "fixed in opposition" to the other so as to have mastery over it' (Smalls 1998 p.88).

Through this prism, Harewood plays most potently with the Black male body as *image*, and a very loaded one at that. An abiding image of *The Privileged* for me is a tall, muscular and naked Black man standing squarely in front of the much shorter and slimmer, clothed white woman, defying her instruction to 'eat!' Identifying with the white woman standing in front of Harewood, I felt intimidated by his imposing, defiant presence *as if I was her*. Despite the disturbing scene unfolding, I imagined struggling with my fear of him, coupled with the desire to look at his unclothed body. While the four reviewers of *The Privileged* I reference here (all white, three of them women) talk about structural racism in the work, none refer to how white supremacy has constructed the Black male body through the binary lens of primitivism, as both desirable *and* threatening, to white womanhood in particular. It may be painful to admit, but watching them standing so close, I felt both unnerved and excited by their proximity. Perhaps most shamefully, I felt angry with Harewood for putting her – me – in that position. Because that would mean I was subjecting him to something the other reviewers do not mention: my white gaze.

Psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon seminally theorised his experiences of skin difference in Europe, where his encounters with white people and their imagination 'sealed' him 'into that crushing objecthood' of being the Black other (Fanon 1986 p.109). Fanon's writing on the white gaze, through which he began to see himself, has been highly influential for articulating and generating discourse around a phenomenon that constructs Blackness in relation to a white

standard, with far reaching implications for racialised bodies and their production. Malik Pitchford (2020) demonstrates how it demands what Black artists (of all genres) produce be consumable, understandable and relatable to white people. This is routinely exemplified when white audiences feel entitled to sing the lyrics of their favourite Black artists at concerts, refusing to omit any of the racial slurs. But as suggested by Smalls' reading of primitivism, the white gaze has other desires. Investigating the sexual objectification of Black bodies, Afua Hirsch's explorative critique of swingers' clubs and events centred around white hetero-sexual couples that want to have sex with Black men, shows the white gaze is bound to a primitivism that constructs the Black male body, in particular, as hypersexual and supremely physically endowed (Hirsch 2018). Rebecca Edwards has chronicled how such hyper-sexualisation was used by white southern politicians in early twentieth-century America to construct white women as 'angels' vulnerable to Black men's aggressive sexuality, justifying white supremacist agendas (1997 p.140).

That white women learned to use the power conferred on them is perhaps not surprising. White women's fragility has, in 2020, come under the spotlight through several mobile phone recordings of its weaponisation circulating the internet. These include Christian Cooper's video of Amy Cooper (no relation) threatening to call the police and tell them there was an 'African-American man threatening my life' after he requested she keep her dog on a leash in the bird-watching area of New York's Central Park. Such examples of white woman fragility have been critiqued and chronicled by journalists, writers, and rapidly circulating memes such as the 'Karen' archetype that satirises a middle-aged, middle-class white American woman who exercises her power to 'call the cops' (Lewis 2020). While humour has played a part in this critique, Charles M. Blow writes of his rage at 'white women weaponizing racial anxiety' (Blow 2020).

While semi-aware and uncomfortable about my white gaze during *The Privileged*, I didn't fully understand its connection to white woman fragility. Nevertheless, the intricate histories of how Black bodies must be differently orientated to, and towards, white bodies as a matter of survival (Nielsen 2011 Section 2) was very much alive in the moment I perceived Harewood 'squaring up' to the white woman as both intimidating and exciting. Harewood's stance in this scene is also unusual. As trauma

specialist Resmaa Menakem has outlined, in most social situations ‘[Black bodies] genuflect to white comfort, because we know, when white people get nervous, people lose their jobs, [...] people get hung from trees’ (2020). Perhaps the feeling I could not admit at the time was, in fact, anger towards Harewood, for putting this white woman in a humiliating, highly racially charged and threatening scenario. I could not have understood, much less written this at the time, but I was even angry at Harewood for forcing an awareness of my white gaze that constructed him as both dangerous and desirable. I also didn’t want to feel my whiteness binding me to others in uncomfortable ways. If it was the fact of our white woman fragility held in common, more than our common audience membership that made me want to come to her aid then maybe this was the temporary community I was really part of. And what if it was named *as such*? Would individual members of the white community, as suggested in my introduction, become accountable for the words and actions of other community members?

Of course *The Privileged* does not play to exclusively white audiences, and this is part of its power. However, Harewood does find their responses more predictable, whereas, “[w]ith a black person, there’s very mixed reactions. At *SPILL* festival, one guy just like sat back and said “I get what you’re trying to do, you don’t need to do it anymore.” Then another black person the same day saw that, but decided it wasn’t enough to sit back, he wanted to make me stop the performance” (Harewood in Saville 2017). Haydon (2017) and Grace (2017) both note that the greatest privilege of all might be to refuse to participate, to leave the room and avoid implication in what is going on. But, as the artist himself states, you won’t be stopping anything, unless you can convince thirty-nine other people to follow you (Harewood in Grace 2017). Could carrying out the tasks, and feeling conflicted about it, be where the learning is? Could understanding oneself to be part of a community, while feeling deeply ambivalent about it, be where agency actually lies?

Theatre as Ideal Community

As well as drawing on the various discourses circulating around community, Harewood’s work revisits an ongoing criticism of theatre. It is either reproducing the gap between action and passive spectatorship, or producing the ideal community.

However, Rancière (2009) explains that this perceived problem with spectatorship in the theatre is, in fact, constitutive of it. Lehmann's call for spectators and actors to be mutually accountable for the production of images in the theatre has concerned philosophers, critics and playwrights since Plato wishing to activate or find some intentional agency in the distance between actors and spectators (p.3). But theatre *relies* on the presence of passive spectators, who wait to be shown things. Therefore, 'to be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act' (p.2). Rancière references Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud's attempts to reduce the distance between action and passive spectatorship, to activate, implicate and involve spectators in the spectacle (p.8). However, he fundamentally questions the assumptions about spectatorship and theatre that these moves are predicated on. There is a 'network of presuppositions... equivalences between theatrical audience and community, gaze and passivity, exteriority and separation, mediation and simulacrum; oppositions between the collective and the individual, the image and the living reality, activity and passivity, self-ownership and alienation' (p.7). Implied by this network is the idea that by abolishing the distance between passivity and activity – through active participation of the audience in the spectacle – theatre can become a kind of ideal community. One that is responsive and, by implication perhaps, responsible. Rancière even finds this idea inscribed in an invitation for a speaking engagement:

the Sommerakademie that welcomed me put it like this: "theatre remains the only place where the audience confronts itself as a collective" [...] It signifies that "theatre" is an exemplary community form. It involves an idea of community as self-presence, in contrast to the distance of representation (Rancière 2009 p.6).

What allows the community to recognise itself is 'self-presence', a kind of publicity where gathered individuals see themselves as coming together for a common purpose or shared experience. The community is present to itself in that it can see itself, recognising that a different kind of communing happens in the theatre than other spaces of entertainment such as the cinema. Here, too, attempts have been made to rethink the experience of watching films in the cinema as a mutable experience of collectivity. Julian Hanich (2010) describes an oscillation between an

individual and collective experience marked by noises such as coughs or incongruent laughing. At such moments, we are made aware that we are watching with others, who either share our affective responses, or remind us that they are experiencing the film differently from us. In this sense, you become an individual through being in public. But when we knit 'self-presence' to attempts to overcome distance through participation, what we have is a drive towards finding collective agency in spectacular situations, that, at the same time, 'emancipates' the individual. Rancière writes that '[s]ince German Romanticism, thinking about theatre has been associated with this idea of the living community... the community as a way of occupying a place and a time, as the body in action as opposed to a mere apparatus of laws' (Rancière 2009 p.6). According to this logic, then, theatre as ideal community is also the path to individual emancipation. We might call this self-sovereignty: the responsible and response-able subject. The exponential rise of participation in theatre and performance could be working towards this end, drawing on the set of equivalences and oppositions that Rancière describes.

However, rather than trying to abolish the distance and passivity of spectatorship in theatre Rancière argues that spectating is, in fact, an activity, and the gap it produces is a necessary one of equality. Rather than seeing a need for breaking down distance and difference, the theatre allows us to be, paradoxically, 'apart' and 'together' in a 'community of sense' (Rancière 2009 pp.57–59). This chimes with Nancy's reading of community as 'being-*in*-common' a 'strange being-the-one-with-the-other' (Nancy 1991 p.xxxix) without a pre-existing set of definitions and exclusions. As Rancière shows, the gap is as necessary to theatre as the traditional pedagogical model where the teacher is always one step ahead of the pupil: 'he can only reduce the distance [between ignorance and knowledge] on condition that he constantly re-creates it' (Rancière 2009 p.8). More than this, any attempt to emancipate the spectator such as forms of pedagogy that eradicate distance only to recreate it through the exercise of the inequality, do not empower the spectator with any more agency than if they'd been left in their seats. For Rancière, such a distance between actors and spectators in theatre holds: 'the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect' (p.15). In this gap that is equally shared, not created in hierarchy of the one who knows and the

one who is yet to know, Rancière finds the potential for something not designed or designated by either artist/actor or spectator to occur. It is also where spectators are actively working on their understanding of the relationship between fiction and reality, as both individuals and a collective, and learning from it.

Myriad ways to participate now proliferate across all forms of spectacular entertainment – from TV talent shows inviting viewers to decide the fate of contestants, to immersive theatre companies such as Punchdrunk casting audiences as authors of their own unique experience. What might the proliferation of participation in these spectacular structures signify? In her introduction to the anthology *Participation* (2006), Claire Bishop revisits Rancière to argue that ‘the binary of active/passive always ends up dividing a population into those with capacity on one side, and those with incapacity on the other. As such, it is an allegory of inequality’ (Bishop 2006 p.16). As already drawn on, Harvie has also asked whether participatory art practices offer anything more than ‘a dangerous “distraction” from the social inequalities they claim to critique’ (Harvie 2013 p.3). There is also a wider sense that participation, belonging to and contributing to a community, might ameliorate our sense of disempowerment within political structures, but without actually doing anything about it. I would argue that Rancière, Bishop and Harvie’s critical awareness of the anxiety surrounding the ‘passive optical relationship’ (Rancière 2009 p.3) has to do with the neoliberal imperative towards constant, visible productivity: ‘the idea that art has to provide us with more than a spectacle, more than something devoted to the delight of passive spectators, because it has to work for a society where everybody should be active’ (Rancière 2009 p.63).

Conclusion – The Ambivalence and Intimacy of Belonging

Community finds its way into every corner of our social lives as a placeholder for an ideal kind of social belonging. The special place it holds in our hearts (because deep down, most of us want to belong *somewhere*), means that community may be invoked and instrumentalised by institutions such as the museum, school, places of worship, and overarching all of these, the state, leading Joseph to suggest that community cannot be disentangled from capitalism (2002). Because being part of *The Privileged* and *Sherapy* felt anything but good, I used my uneasy feelings about

participating in these performances to challenge the dominant positivity of community and show how the claims made by artists and contemporary art institutions of different scales, converge individualism and personal accountability together with powerful notions of belonging and collective responsibility. Looking in detail at these ‘response-ability’ activating forms of participatory performance, refusing participation and implication in unpleasant, oppressive or violent social structures is shown to be the ultimate privilege.

I have also undertaken an excavation of my own whiteness in relation to my experience of *The Privileged*, and its role in creating community where I didn’t want to see it. As Robin DiAngelo has suggested, the myth of individualism that upholds white supremacy (2018), also prevents the imagination of a white community that may be held accountable for the racism it perpetrates and perpetuates. If neoliberal capitalism relies on the strategic deployment of individuality, it also counts on our belief in community and social belonging, not only so that it can profit from its production, but because communities, like individuals, can be made responsible for their own social inclusion or exclusion. Powerful systems of oppression – white supremacy, structural racism, hetero-normativity, ableism, neoliberal capitalism – are not only interconnected, but rely on the implementation of individualism, community and responsibility to create a fantasy of safety and equal opportunity for some, that, in fact, relies on the inequality and oppression of others. If the recent ascendance of the Black Lives Matter movement has called on white people to realise their complicity in white supremacy and work towards dismantling it through being actively anti-racist, this chapter speaks to the need for unpicking how particularly fraught moments of publicness are navigated in order to support this work.

It was not my intention to appraise *The Privileged* or *Sherapy* in this chapter, rather to examine what both experiences afford. My mistaken assumption around shared feelings in *Sherapy* speaks to the oscillation between individual ego and the collective intentionality invoked by being part of the ‘we’ of Young’s audience. Any such invocation of community in these performances, therefore, turns away from a celebratory model, towards a togetherness that acknowledges complexity and potential ambivalence about belonging. Such ambivalence may or may not be

voiced, but it doesn't mean you are not participating. In fact, Joseph describes her position as researcher at Rhinoceros Theatre with a similar ambiguousness:

[m]y position [...] allowed me to remain silent in moments of conflict and to remain present even when I was uncomfortable with the choices made by the staff and board. However, my notes often reveal my unvoiced feelings, trailing off during heated discussions in which, though silent, I was deeply involved (Joseph 2002 p.x).

The pervasive sense of discomfort and unease I felt in Harewood and Young's performances, though punctuated by some notable surges of negative feelings like fear, anger and shame, belongs to what Sianne Ngai terms 'minor negative feelings' like 'envy, anxiety, paranoia, irritation' in the book *Ugly Feelings* (2005 p.2). Ngai's practice of mining 'ambivalent situations of suspended agency' (p.1), is helpful to think alongside the experiences in this chapter. Describing such negative feelings as 'explicitly amoral and *noncathartic*' Ngai highlights their persistence saying they are 'defined by a flatness or ongoingness... [and have] a remarkable capacity for duration' (pp.6–7). The nagging persistence of uncomfortable feelings indicates our critical ego at work, and their layering produces a critical awareness of their appearance as we feel them. My double sense of shame during *The Privileged* certainly chimes with what Ngai writes about the production of an 'unpleasurable feeling *about* the feeling' and their capacity for 'ironic distance' (pp.9–10). I suggest that the ironising capacity of ugly feelings might be thought of as a non-normative, but equally productive mode of operating in the gap between spectating and participating that Rancière and others have critiqued. This is because, when encountering violence in the theatre – whether we understand it as actual or fictional – we are experiencing these ugly feelings in the presence of others. Julian Hanich suggests that through certain ruptures in the experience of public viewing we become aware that our thoughts and feelings might be different from those around us (2010 p.12).¹²⁰ Like my shame about shame, or my assumption of shared feelings

¹²⁰ Hanich quotes the philosopher Hans Bernhard Schmid: “[i]t seems that in everyday life, we experience only very few of our conscious states as *our personal conscious states*. In fact, it seems that we take our conscious states to be our own only where we have reason to think that our

in *Sherapy* that showed themselves to be false, these experiences are jarring because they are happening *in public*, but also because they unsettle any easy assumption about our place within a public.

I have suggested that Young's forceful use of her privilege as an audience member to speak against and discredit Patek, might actually have been the favourable intimacy of one artist speaking to another, however acrimonious. In a postscript to his interview with Young, Earnest writes about her public humiliation of Patek at *American Realness* festival, insisting that Young 'is forcing a certain type of accountability, which I believe in, even though it is done through tactics I abhor [...] What is shocking is that no one stood up to defend Patek; blaming [the curator] Pryor is an empty accusation that only aims to dismiss the audience members' individual obligations as human beings. It reveals a deeply internalized desire for the ultimate safety of an institution while purporting to "admire" transgression' (Earnest 2015). The latter insight recalls the public's attachments to care, safety and the 'curative intervention' of the paternal, liberal institution explored in Chapter One. Earnest suggests that the safety often demanded of institutions is, in fact, masking our own individual agency and accountability for creating and maintaining the kinds of spaces we want to be part of. However, as Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich identified, belonging to a community is an inherently ambivalent experience that calls for the individual to '[adapt] to the "objective realities" of his society', for the avoidance of the 'unpleasure' that speaking out against them will bring (1975 pp.245–46). If, like Gardner who regretted passively watching Young reduce a fellow audience member to tears (2012), these performances create communities we might feel ambivalent about taking part in, they also raise important questions about the desire for institutions to provide safe spaces in which to discuss the issues they raise.

Sarah Schulman (2017) writes that safe spaces often come at 'the expense of other people'. She cautions that '[t]he concept of "safe space" can also be a projection in the present based on dangers that occurred in the past [...] It is used by the dominant to defend against the discomfort of hearing other people's realities, to

conscious states might be different from anyone [else]'s" (Schmid in Hanich 2010 p.12, original emphasis).

repress nuance, ignore multiple experiences, and reject the inherent human right to be heard' (p.154). This circles us back around to the fallacy of comfort and accessibility of spaces for everyone that has been proliferated by the museum and its extended spaces until rather recently. Indeed, one of the most urgent questions around public programming to have emerged in the four years since I began this research is around whether or not a 'safe space' is ever possible, or even desired. Practice has shifted from claiming 'this is a safe space' at the beginning of some discussions, to stating clearly that it is *not*, towards the aim of creating 'brave spaces', influenced by developments in educational discourse and practice (Palfrey 2017, Arao and Clemens 2013). As Arao and Clemens have argued through a review of their pedagogical work on social justice, the term 'safe space' often serves to conflate safety and comfort, which 'may arise in part from the defensive tendency to discount, deflect, or retreat from a challenge' (2013 p.135). Indeed, what feels like safety for one person, might feel risky or dangerous for another, especially in conversations around race. One reason for this is that the oppressions and inequalities that exist in any mixed group of people coming together for a conversation will not simply be erased by a claim for 'safety'. Moreover, as Resmaa Menakem has said, most spaces are organised and orientated around 'white comfort' (Menakem in Tippet 2020), and we may add to this able-bodied, cis-gendered and heteronormative comfort. The creation of truly safe and accountable spaces, then, might in fact begin by feeling like an unsafe or uncomfortable space for the white, able-bodied, cis-gendered, heterosexual people in the room. Might they be better articulated as 'brave'? And how might we perform responsibility and response-ability in the creation of 'brave' spaces to counter and deconstruct white supremacy and other oppressive systems? Might this necessarily involve de-privileging those who usually have the most ability to respond, and reorientating responsibility in the institution towards accountability? I return to these questions in the following chapter, and my thesis conclusion.

In this chapter I have unpacked my experiences of two performances that felt radically *unsafe*, highlighting my privilege and responsibility as an audience member, and a white woman. I do this to test their claim for temporary community formation and extrapolate the implications for brave spaces within public programming. I argue that in these participatory performances our intimate thoughts, feelings and attitudes

about what it really means to live collectively are made, sometimes shamefully, present to us. If we can reflect on these, they can inform how we become accountable for the spaces we create elsewhere. If, as Harewood and Young seem to suggest, audiencing is a community membership bestowing an intimate privilege that comes with certain responsibilities, what is at stake in these performances are the conventions and intimacies of a critical public life. When and how does individual critical thought become articulated as a public speech act of disgust that calls others to witness and form 'a community of the disgusted'? (Ahmed 2004 pp.82–101). When does it slide into passive tolerance, and how can we be watchful of this? With this chapter, I suggest that the wrangling of individual and collective critical agency is at its most agonising and most useful, perhaps, when understood as part of what it means to become public. This, I would argue, is precisely the value of these performances and their disturbing twist on theatre as an ideal community.

Chapter Four – Practice Makes Public

My research emerges from how the museum and contemporary art institution have been tied to publicness in uncomfortable ways, to address the problem of an abstract, ideal or ‘missing’ public emerging from the literature, and worried about in practice. In addition, this public is not a singular, monolithic entity, but rather plural *publics*, despite being addressed as one through the public programme. These publics are in many ways exactly what the public programme – a specific kind of curatorial, museum and educational practice – has emerged to address, manifest and serve. There are other related reasons for its emergence; namely, to address problems of attention, gaps and failures of the institution. And yet, as indicated, the public programme will ultimately fail to adequately address or overcome these problems. This is because these abstract, ideal and missing publics *themselves* emerge from a certain set of assumptions issuing from how the museum and contemporary art institutions have historically been tied to publicness. I am not trying to find out who this public really is, and offer ways to materialise it, rather to understand the exclusionary assumptions this ideal, abstract public is built upon.

As outlined in my Introduction, the liberal notion of the museum as public good has always been intricately tied to private interest, which complicates a notion of public service. This begs the question: Does the neoliberal museum serve the public, or do the public provide a service, or function, for the museum? Unfolding from Chapter One, liberal assumptions around openness, accessibility and inclusivity of ‘everyone’ sometimes obscure the misaligned expectations of care and attention between institutions and their publics, producing some of the awkwardness Möntmann described (2008 p.19) and Aaron Williamson’s *Collapsing Lecture* at Tate Britain revealed (2011). Liberal assumptions of a general public must now be rethought alongside the variations in attending opened by the neoliberal attention economy. I described attention as a multi-directional desiring field encompassing inattention and distraction in Chapter Two, which, in turn, expands capacities for response and response-ability to something held in common, as discussed in Chapter Three. This opens the possibility to imagine a community that emerges and operates in difference, rather than sameness, through specific moments of public programming. In all of these chapters, I describe the *emergence* of these issues: misaligned

expectations, attention and responsibility to support my argument that the public is not always already there and publicness is not a given, but a process we may observe *in becoming* through the disruptive moments I choose to focus on. I do this to establish the public programme as a valuable space to observe this process of becoming public(s) in the contemporary art institution, and, in turn, to consider what reframing publicness as a process of becoming could do to our future use of it.

The series *That Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers* (2018–19) extends a central proposition of this thesis: the public programme as a ‘stage’ across which the ‘awkward relations’ between the art institution and its public(s) are played out. In this chapter, I discuss my experiments with naming the public programme as an awkward stage, and putting into practice a shift: specifically, making the event’s peripheral occurrences – the manifestations of awkwardness, discomfort, uncertainty – central to discussions with other public programmers. I also test a key question of Chapter Two: what happens when we *pay attention differently*? Rather than focusing only on end products through traditional evaluative models, or professionalism through case-study sharing that models best practice, employing a more promiscuous, multi-directional attention to that which is ordinarily in-attended, could shift dominant ideas of what the public programme produces, how, and what its very purpose is. I do this because, as my research highlights, the public programme is a field and curatorial practice under-served both theoretically and professionally; it needs more space and time dedicated to it. The emphasis of this para-professional space, then, was on exploring, rather than improving practice, and finding out what happens when those elements ordinarily parsed out of it are put back in and made central to the practice itself.

In this chapter I consider what it means to put those elements back into practice through the creation of a dedicated space for anecdotal sharing. For example, participants in to my workshops and conversations were able to trace the impact of disruptive moments to reflect on normative demarcations like programmer, participant, public and institution, and so on. We also reflected on what is tacitly known: that through the practice of producing public(s), the boundaries and demarcations of public space(s) and publicness become more tangible. Through the re-telling and unpacking of moments that have disrupted the smoothness of our

events, we began to see, or rather feel, ‘public’ as a process of becoming rather than a given space, or static state that we step in and out of. It is worth noting here that the ubiquity of spatial metaphor in social research has been reviewed (Silber 1995 pp.323–355), and it is no less popular in the arts and humanities. Though I have been trying to underline the relevance of moving from architectural, static notions of ‘public space’ towards a more fluid notion of ‘public time’ (Allen 2015, O’Neill 2018, Kwon 2002), I inevitably fall back on a spatial vocabulary when describing these stories and their implications. Through doing the workshops I learned that becoming public(s) has to do with spatial *and* temporal processes that cannot really be separated. The questions driving these workshops and conversations were: What do we notice about the moments when the smoothness of the event is disrupted? What does our pleasurable or painful consideration of these moments tell us about what is at stake in this process of becoming public(s)? The question driving this chapter, and the entire thesis, then becomes: When we make the periphery the main event, what happens to the practice of public programming? I will share some of the stories that arose and reflect on what was produced through the process of discussing them later on. Before delving into what happened, I introduce where these workshops began and the methodology developed through them.

Awkward Beginnings

Sara Ahmed’s simple proposition that for certain things to come into the foreground, other things must be relegated to the background is instructional for thinking through the peripheral, overlooked parts of practice. She examples the white male philosopher, whose masculinity frequently disappears ‘under the sign of the universal’ doesn’t need to do a whole lot of ‘backgrounding’ in order to begin his work (Ahmed 2006 p.34). By contrast the female philosopher must set a whole host of assumptions, objects, people and their needs aside in order to begin writing.¹²¹ Even then she is frequently ‘pulled away by the background to engage with it’ (Ahmed 2006 pp.30–31). I draw a parallel with, as described in Chapter One, the

¹²¹ Ahmed references Edmund Husserl, whose phenomenological exploration, may begin with a consideration of what is directly in front of him: the desk that supports his writing. She also asks us to consider how certain roles are raced and classed too, which requires other kinds of back-grounding.

public programmer's work, a great deal of which happens behind the scenes – in 'private' – to make the 'public' moment happen.

Though I am not gendering the role of the public programmer in this research, from my working knowledge it is an overwhelmingly female profession, especially where it interacts with families, communities and those with specific access needs. The particularities of exactly who does the work of holding spaces is not covered by this research, but what is important to draw from Ahmed is how the background work of public programming remains largely invisible, since it is done before, during and after the event takes place. However, it is frequently *during* an event that one is pulled away to engage with background activities – guest-list management, speakers' PowerPoints, agitated ticket-holders – in order to make the foreground, the public part of the event, appear as smooth as possible. Bringing our focus to the periphery, the workshops and conversations allowed an exploration of what is usually relegated to the background. As one workshop attendee wrote to me afterwards: 'I actually think more work needs to be done around the private side, to make the public side really valuable' (Helena 2019). I return to this in more detail later, as it marks how infrequently personal feelings and intersubjective relations are allowed into professional spaces. Indeed, as Ahmed also asks: 'Why call the personal a digression? Why is it that the personal so often enters writing as if we are being led astray from a proper course?' (Ahmed 2006 p.22). My invitation to programmers to discuss their work experiences foregrounded 'the personal', not as an improper deviation, but as a useful place to begin theorising the practice of public programming.

What Ahmed calls to attention is how personal stories and anecdotes frequently cross boundaries of appropriateness that separate us in more public situations. But the empathic and public-forming capacity of a personal story shared and retold is one of its most intriguing aspects. Consciousness raising practices have long relied on storytelling and listening to share experiences, connect and organise (Farinati and Firth 2017 p.5). The anecdote's currency and relevance to public life is demonstrated in the mainstream media by the popularity of the TV chat-show and branded formats such as TED Talks. Perhaps even more relevant to the practice under discussion in this chapter is the proliferation of viral story sharing through

hashtags such as #MeToo. Put simply, one story leads to another and soon multiple threads accumulate allowing larger themes and patterns emerge, and an infinite nuancing of experience.

Both online and in spaces of physical presence, the proliferation of anecdotal story sharing blurs the boundaries between public and private, somewhat anticipated by Lauren Berlant (1998), who, like Michael Warner (2005), warned against strictly distinguishing between public and private life. Berlant saw such a distinction as a fantasy perpetuated, and at the same time revealed, by our varied attachments to intimacy (pp.282–3). Drawing on the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere as a ‘development of critical publicness [that] depended on the expansion of class-mixed semiformal institutions like the salon and the cafe, circulating print media, and industrial capitalism’, Berlant writes that ‘collective intimacy’ became a ‘social ideal’. Emphasising the triangulation between publicness, intimacy and criticality Berlant shows how ‘[p]ersons were to be prepared for their critical social function in [...] the intimate spheres of domesticity, where they would learn (say, from novels and newspapers) to experience their internal lives theatrically, as though oriented towards an audience’ (Berlant 1998 p.284). Without the bourgeois public sphere being developed in this way, ‘the public’s role as critic could not be established’ (p.283). These observations about the interlinkage of intimacy with critical public life came at the end of the 1990s, but are extremely relevant to this thesis, in particular, what the workshops and conversations generated. Since many of us curate the story of our lives as if ‘oriented towards an audience’, we may be too wrapped up in the effects and possibilities of digital publicity to remember how print media, the salon, café (and I would add, the theatre) set the stage for the radical public intimacy often claimed for the present.

Against this background, my proposal for what became *The Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers* (2018–19) detailed a hypothetical invitation to public programmers from different organisations to share memories of moments where ‘things went wrong’ during public programme events they had either organised or been audience to. Presented during a supervision in 2017, the idea initiated a lively discussion, roaming around several singular moments my supervisors had experienced as programmers themselves, as well as more general

occupational hazards and common occurrences.¹²² As we considered both ordinary and extraordinary professional experiences of public programming, I observed a kind of camaraderie building, as well as enjoyment. Sharing the cringy pain of these stories with others who could relate, both professionally and personally, was oddly pleasurable, and important insights were also gleaned from the process. Despite our relative comfort with radical public intimacy online, mentioned above, the anecdotes shared in this initial discussion underlined normative fears, anxieties and assumptions around what is thought to be private or internal erupting in spaces of physical proximity and publicness. Despite a mutual interest in what the invitation opened up, there was a degree of anxiety over whether other professionals want to share moments of under-performing or failing at one's role?¹²³ It was decided that workshop participants could risk harming their public reputation, especially if their contributions were written up and were attributable, and I agreed to rethink my proposal.

However, the urgency of this first foray into awkward moments of public programming persisted. Half a year later, in October 2018, I gave my first research presentation to Tate's Public Programme team during their Away Day and invited them to discuss moments that had disrupted the smoothness of an event they had either programmed or attended. The immediate buzz of chatter in the room generated by the partner conversations signalled that, despite some of the stories being complex, difficult, even embarrassing to recount, sharing them was strangely enjoyable and productive. Reflecting that both the supervisory and first workshop discussions had a momentum that felt productive to pursue, I formalised the process as part of my research holding two further workshops and a number of conversations.

¹²² Recurrent moments such as when a member of the audience takes the handheld microphone during the question-and-answer session and asks, 'is this on?' while tapping and waving it around, looking for the 'on' button. Or refuses the microphone entirely, insisting 'my voice is loud enough'.

¹²³ This was also suggested by Alexia and Williamson in Chapter One. Though of course the context was different, being a series of staged failures, there was always the potential of *Collapsing Lecture* being taken for real.

Approaches in Practice

This practice began by unpicking my own awkward or disruptive moments with theoretical sources that explore minor, periphery, anecdotal and performative modes of speech and their productivity. The move to practice and action research in this chapter develops in response to the more 'conventional' critical analysis of the previous chapters. It also responds to issues emerging from them, putting into practice a shift in attention and testing the potential of a well-worn public programming format – the workshop – for producing a community of difference. The practice developed through doing the workshops and conversations themselves, and this section interweaves approaches to practice and writing about them, since the method itself was set up in my Introduction. As also referenced there, Erin Manning's writing on the value of the 'minor gesture' that 'exceeds the limits of the event' *and* makes the event's limits felt, and thereby 'punctually reorients experience' (2016 p.2) has been instructional in developing this practice. In the workshops and conversations, we unpacked the eventfulness of events, paying particular attention to their fullness: the excess usually overlooked. Outside of the normative categorisations of success or failure, our peripheral focus allowed another understanding of the 'limits' of the event to emerge – what it can and cannot hold. We were then able to consider how their exorbitant details might delineate the edges of publics themselves. Lastly our peripheral focus allowed a 'reorientation' of our position as programmers, as professionals, inter-institutional colleagues, and audiences to our own programmes.

Though never explicitly asked to, most participants retold the stories discussed in pairs in the group discussion and several recurring themes emerged, which are discussed below. At times the process of story sharing, begun in pairs and opened out to a small group, bordered on what might otherwise be called 'professional gossiping'. Indeed, as previously introduced, Gavin Butt's writing on gossip's role as a performative informational practice that produces a different, but equally important kind of art historical knowledge (2005), has been instructive in developing this methodology of practice and writing. As the workshops developed, the way in which these stories allowed a collective reflection on practice became as important as their content. A feeling of connectedness was perhaps made more possible without the

foregrounding of a recording device. Recording would have produced verifiable research material, but it was a shift in practice I wanted to capture through an embodied and observed experience. That said, I did record some reflective conversations afterward, and others with some would-be workshop participants. I was therefore privy to extra stories that also form part of this analysis.

The risk involved in re-telling someone else's story requires a sensitivity to possible interpretations; this is why some stories are transcribed exactly as told or retold to me. I try to stay true to speech because I am interested in *how* someone told something: the difficulty of discussing delicate topics with a professional peer are reflected in faltering speech patterns that dance around a tricky topic, over-explain it, or where laughter punctuates the narrative. Some stories from the workshops I retell (again, with permission) from memory, assisted by my notes, and these do not follow a straight path. Tim Ingold (2007), describes story-telling as just one of the many line-making practices humans do: 'walking, weaving, observing, singing, story-telling, drawing and writing [...] all proceed along lines of one kind or another' (p.1). In many ways the stories told in the workshops and conversations, and written about here, were materialising the visible and invisible lines bounding the kinds of 'public space(s)' that were under discussion. These stories tended to revolve around breaches of these lines, or boundaries, which is of course what revealed them as such. Ingold's observations on the assumptions about the shape of lines, or how they proceed, are also useful to consider here:

I wondered what it means to go straight to the point. On the whole, this is not something we do, either in everyday life or in ordinary discourse. We are drawn to certain topics, and meander around them, but by the time we reach them they seem to have disappeared [...] How came it, then, that the line that is properly *linear* is assumed to be straight? (Ingold 2007 pp.3–4).

Whereas my initial proposal was to bring public programmers together to discuss 'what went wrong', this shifted towards the term 'disruptive moment' to encompass the unexpected, uncertain or awkward but equally the funny and joyful occurrences that exceeded what had been planned, or was expected to happen, as part of a public programme event. On the one hand these workshops and conversations

invited participants to interpret my invitation to discuss disruptive moments widely. On the other, to share experiences that were oddly specific. Naturally there were instances of participants asking if what they contributed was 'what I wanted'? Others, where someone expressed relief at finding the right space to explore a strange experience they'd never known quite what to make of. However, rather than progressing to a point, or proving a theory, what I wanted was precisely to 'meander' around 'certain topics' that were difficult to talk about in other professional fora. To find out what would happen to our understandings of public(s) and public space(s) if we roamed around the edges of things that seemed unusual, unexpected or uncomfortable.

As outlined in my Introduction, these meanderings on the periphery are written about through an auto-ethnographic lens. In carrying out this research I drew on professional and peer networks, though everyone in the second workshop at Open School East, Margate, and half of the final workshop at Tate Britain were people I did not know, invited through an existing network of public programmers organised by Historic England. As Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner point out, because auto-ethnographic practices work with participants that 'begin as or become friends through the research process' they are not simply 'mined for data' (2011 p.281). In this way, the research method transgressed usual rules of distance that normally apply in social research projects. In line with an auto-ethnographic approach that takes into account relationships, I didn't set this practice up as 'field research' or call the conversations 'interviews', but aimed for the workshops and conversations to be of mutual benefit. This approach opened further transgressions of conventional research practice, in addition to the transgressions in public programming practice we were exploring. Finally, bringing private recollections into a shared public, or semi-private space, might also be considered a transgression. The potential for anecdotes to connect speaker and listener meant a convivial and vulnerable space was generated quite quickly. As one participant reflected, 'it felt like we had become a little team by the end' (Miranda 2019), and I was often surprised how willing workshop participants were to share their stories candidly. This felt

particularly generous given how discussions often revolved around that uncomfortable point where the personal meets professional.¹²⁴

The Workshop

My choice of the workshop format is tied to its deployment as a research methodology across many fields and popularity as a dominant form of public programming (discussed below). The term originates as a descriptor of 'a small establishment where manufacturing or handicrafts are carried on' (Merriam-Webster n.d.). The verb 'to workshop' takes this primary meaning to imply a process of working *through* something with others. However, the workshop has come to mean a 'brief' and 'intensive' educational format 'for a relatively small group of people' focusing 'on techniques and skills in a particular field' (Merriam-Webster n.d.). In their article 'Workshops as a Research Methodology' (2017) Rikke Ørngreen and Karin Levinsen describe the discursive or performative workshop as 'an arrangement whereby a group of people learn, acquire new knowledge, perform creative problem-solving, or innovate in relation to a domain-specific issue' (2017 p.71). Jen Tarr, Elena Gonzalez-Polledo and Flora Cornish (2017) review the efficacy of the arts workshop (largely theatre-based) as a research method in different fields, including health and pedagogy. Their examples found the workshop to be a 'creative and inclusive space' where participants feel 'safe' to 'question authority', build 'a sense of solidarity' and produce 'new forms of relating and communicating' (p.39).

As a popular mode of public programming, the workshop is similarly used as a space to learn and try out new skills, be they practical or theoretical. But, like the reading group, it may also stand in for, or cover up, certain representational gaps in the contemporary art institution. Workshops, like those introduced in Chapter Three designed for specific 'communities', may be targeted at audiences not reached through the generality assumed in more broadcast models of exhibition and public programming. The workshop is presumed to be less elitist and more accessible than event models such as the academic conference, talk or panel discussion. Given the

¹²⁴ As outline in my Introduction, in order to represent contributions carefully and respectfully, every direct and indirect reference to what was said in a workshop or conversation is included with expressed permission. I use pseudonyms and do not give full job titles or the names of institutions.

workshop appears ubiquitously across a range of institutions, it is surprising that little published research explores the format with public programming.¹²⁵ Since it is not only didactic, but premised on the notion of equal participation, the workshop is also a popular format of the curatorial in its shift towards 'event of knowledge' (Rogoff 2013) and away from (re)presentational curating.¹²⁶ Again, like the reading group, it is an opportunity for group learning or co-production that has collective resonance, and does not have an audience in any conventional sense. This affords privacy to discussions since if everyone participates (to a greater or lesser degree), each shows or shares something of themselves. This aspect is particularly relevant to the ongoing concerns over passive spectatorship previously mentioned (Bishop 2006, 2012, Rancière 2009). It also means that though participants may be unknown at the outset, through the workshop's ritualised processes – a round of introductions, pair and small group work, breaks for refreshments and plenary discussions – strangers have the possibility to become intimates. This was integral to the workshops I ran, as was the opportunity to discuss the mechanics of public programming with a group with specific knowledge, which also allowed for a more sophisticated conversation to emerge.

Given the importance of group learning and co-production foregrounded by the workshop, a notion of 'group dynamics' might be said to hover around this form of practice as it appears on the public programme, if not underpinning it. Attributed to Kurt Lewin (1948), the scientific study group formation and behaviour is foundational for group therapy and other modes of collaborative working across different fields. In my experience, the group dynamic of a workshop is structured by a facilitator as well as by what is offered, whether that is an individual transformative experience, or coming together as a group to make something. Where the edges of the contained, but co-produced, space are, what is and isn't possible for the group to hold, will be

¹²⁵ Recent examples include *Contemporary Art Boot Camp* at Whitechapel Gallery a series of workshops for young people (Whitechapel Gallery n.d.); *Art:Work* a series of 'creative interdisciplinary lab' workshops in Tate Exchange, Tate Modern (Tate 2017); *Art Rebels Workshop* at Turner Contemporary, a series of weekend activities for families (Turner Contemporary n.d.); *Contemporary Drawing Workshop*, a week-long course at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London (UAL n.d.); *Teacher workshops: ways into contemporary art – talking and making* a series at the Royal Academy (Royal Academy n.d.). These examples are perhaps indicative of how the workshop retains a formally educational purpose, despite its ubiquity.

¹²⁶ A good example of this is the perennial *Bergen Assembly* in Norway.

developed through the workshop itself. This relates back to issues stemming from my analysis of the attentional field at the Feminist Duration Reading Group and the group's own reflections on its on-going practice (Reckitt et al. 2019), and was indeed something I noticed as developing through pair conversations and plenary discussions.

Lastly, another way to describe what happened would be 'talking shop'. This phrase can describe an inability to stop talking about work in a social situation, or it can be an invitation to break out of the social and talk about work for a while, perhaps to forge a new partnership. Public programmers might be forgiven for 'talking shop' because the role stages the self in a way many other jobs do not. But it also has a fluidity to it: a public programmer is sometimes organiser, sometimes host, sometimes audience. The space produced via the workshops and conversations provided public programmers with an opportunity to discuss all these roles, in the ways 'talking shop' implies: informally, socially and para-professionally.

A Useful Space for Useful Stories

In a recorded conversation with Emma, a public programme coordinator at a university, she remembered the difficulty of adequately reflecting on events she produced when working at an art museum:

I think we shied away from critiquing ourselves individually because of the scrutiny we were under from the rest of the organisation [...] and we felt very vulnerable to really draw attention to ourselves [...] and the weirdness of programming (Emma 2019).

Finding the space to talk openly about programming continues to be at issue in her current role, where evaluative discussions are explicitly objective. Reflecting on this, it struck me that the visibility of public programming makes it, as she later said, rather an 'insecure' practice. Despite the public programme rarely being the focus, or core of any institution, the language of vulnerability came up many times during these discussions in connection to the nature of live spaces, their contingency and the 'scrutiny' programmers were under.

The 'weirdness of programming' or the 'you never really know what's going to happen' quality of the unpredictable public seemed to shadow each event for Emma, something I return to later. There was also a contradiction between the need to plan, advertise and promise that something will go a certain way, and the inevitable eventfulness of the event. For me this connected to what was different and valuable about the space created through my workshops and conversations. An email from Helena, a curator of public programmes for a national heritage organisation, reflected on the experience of sharing emotions that are intimately connected with a notion of being 'public', but are hard to talk about in other professional spaces.

It was refreshing to know that other public programmers and curators feel embarrassed or stressed or uncomfortable sometimes, and it isn't all plain sailing! I definitely went away thinking about process versus outcome – about all the times when, despite putting on a successful end result, the process by which I got there wasn't done inclusively or collaboratively, and the relationships weren't always upheld. I actually think more work needs to be done around the private side, to make the public side really valuable. I'd be really interested in attending another session like this, as sometimes at bigger networking events it's difficult to be as candid or open as smaller roundtables (Helena 2019).

This email covers the same territory as Emma's first comment about the pressure to reflect objectively, so as not to make oneself accountable for anything that went awry during an event. It also speaks to another comment Emma made about the particular skill of holding and assimilating so much 'information' on the background of the event, contributors and audiences attending, while maintaining a calm exterior. Likewise, it seemed useful for Helena to hear other programmers talk about their more interior, vulnerable feelings – anxieties, difficulties or uncertainties – since other kinds of professional spaces do not permit a 'candid' account of the less desirable outcomes or ambiguous feelings. This is despite a lot of learning and education practitioners championing the value of 'not knowing', which appears in the literature (Fisher and Fortnum 2013) and is explicitly encouraged in the Learning Department at Tate (Daly, Turvey and Walton 2017).

Indeed, not knowing what to make of something, how to feel, or what to do in response, seemed to be a key characteristic of anecdotes brought into the workshops. Rebecca Fortum's work on a particular sensibility that artists bring to the making process, whereby they 'learn to live with this precarious sense [of] not knowing what it is we are making' is useful here. As a private space to work things out, the artist's studio supports this 'not knowing' what will emerge as a result of their experiments, so that a '*knowing* not knowing' (my emphasis) becomes a creative working strategy (Fortnum 2008).

In the semi-private space of these workshops, the discussion format was simply scaffolded to support not knowing about an anecdote or experience under discussion. Interpretations were naturally made but conclusions were staved off in favour of staying with, or sustaining, uncertainty. Given this, the practice of sharing anecdotes also involved a vulnerability and generosity mirrored in Turvey and Walton's approach that encourages artists running workshops with schools at Tate to put 'not knowing' into practice in the art museum. They write that '[a]rtists allowing vulnerability or fallibility to be present in the process of looking at art in the company of others are acting with generosity [...] There is an additional value in this approach in how it reflects the making process, holding and allowing [...] uncertainty' (Daly, Turvey and Walton 2017 p.17).

The unresolved quality of the experiences I gained as a public programmer similarly drives this research, and it has not always been easy to share these reflections with others. On the other hand, the peers I have presented to often related to feelings of uncertainty or ambiguity – for example, about not knowing whether something they organised was a 'good' event, or not. Helena's comment that during 'bigger networking events it's difficult to be more candid and open' speaks to this, and the fact that rarely are these kinds of professional spaces an investigation of practice that can speak to 'the weirdness of programming'. Indeed, Helena's reflection that 'more work should be done on the private side, to make the public side more valuable' is itself an ambiguous comment to unpack. The workshop discussions often revolved around precisely how porous and interwoven the public and private sides of public programming are; so what does she mean by 'more work'? Does she

advocate for more reflection on the public *in* private spaces? Or on the private and contradictory feelings that coexist when one is 'in public'? The looping nature of these concerns were very much part of the process of these workshops and conversations, and the stories that emerged.

Becoming the Anecdote

What has been tested throughout this practice is the power of the anecdote as a place from which to begin theorising. Jane Gallop (2002) draws attention to the fact that we theorise from anecdotes all the time through conversations with friends, families, colleagues and others by sharing stories from our lives and interpreting them. Perhaps because such anecdotal theorising is an everyday practice, it is often overlooked as a serious mode of research. Indeed, anecdotal evidence or information is widely held to be untrustworthy because it emerges from personal narrative, rather than 'proven facts' or 'hard evidence' derived from scientific modes of research and data capture. As Gallop writes, '[t]o dismiss something as "merely anecdotal" is to dismiss it as a relatively rare and marginal case.' However, for Gallop and others (including Jacques Derrida and James Fineman), the anecdote is an 'exorbitant opening', and as such, a very fruitful method of theorising. 'Anecdotal theory would base its theorizing on exorbitant models [...] Exorbitant is associated with 'the excessive, romantic, perverse, unreasonable and queer [...] from the Latin, "ex-," out of, and "orbita," route or orbit.' (Gallop 2002 p.7) According to the dictionary definition, an exorbitance is both a deviation and an excess (Merriam-Webster n.d.) and, as such, appears to have no place in formal, professional fora.

The stories I tell below are all tied to the notion of the 'exorbitant'. Before we get to them, it is worth pointing out that as anecdotes about peripheral occurrences, they might be considered both *not enough* to include in scholarly research, and *too much* to mention in normative professional spaces. At the beginning of this research, I was often asked what 'case studies' I would be working with. It should be clear by now that rather than case studies of particular programmes, I chose to work with anecdotes about public programming itself. As discussed in Chapter Two, this mode of research is about paying attention differently and valuing the minor, the periphery, the uncategorisable. I framed the stories that emerged through the workshops and

conversations as anecdotes because they are not the official narrative that would ordinarily be told in a normative professional space, such as a debrief or network meeting. Therefore, the space created to share anecdotes not discussable elsewhere, operated in parallel to the kinds of professional spaces that already exist. In making the anecdote the focus of discussions, it could also be said that the 'exorbitant' – the deviant, the excessive, the queer and the periphery – became central too.

What this does, or rather *undoes* in relation to the public programmer in the contemporary art institution, is prioritise a kind of knowledge implicit in practicing this work not often formally shared with colleagues or indeed publicly. In September 2019, I was invited by a national art museum as external consultant on a festival programme. During a post-event reflection meeting between myself and two programme managers working on access and family programmes, the importance of sharing anecdotal evidence emerged. Unprompted by me, they began discussing how small stories from the event had circulated internally, almost like rumour. We discussed how the stories and their circulation might provide a more interesting way of evaluating the programme's reach and impact, beyond standard audience research. They emphasised the importance of anecdotal evidence saying that 'sometimes this is all programmers have to hold on to.' For them, anecdotes not only provide context, but communicate subtlety and nuance in a way that more formal methods like evaluation forms cannot. But as previously mentioned, the power of the anecdote also lies in transgressing boundaries. These programmers reflected on how useful anecdotes of verbal feedback from participants, as well as their own observations, were in providing both overview and detail at departmental and interdepartmental meetings. They also explained that asking participants directly for written feedback can intimidate them into either writing something 'official' they think the museum wants to read, like an effusive missive about a transformative experience, or complaining about something like refreshment provision. As this research shows, both effusive missives and complaints are indeed worthy of consideration; the value of the anecdote, here, lies in what might be called its 'performed' nature. Inviting participants into a conversation about their experience, or observing a conversation between participants during an event, often provides information that a written comment cannot capture. These insights highlight the use-

value of collecting and sharing anecdotes to the practice of public programming, particularly the verbal transmission of feedback from public to institution, and between programmers themselves.

As suggested in the meeting above, anecdotes are also useful because they may demonstrate a detail or make a wider point, with subtlety and nuance. The anecdote is not the official narrative, but a 'short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident' (Merriam-Webster n.d.), linking it back to Manning's 'minor gesture' (2016). To speak of anecdotes, or *in* anecdotes, then, is to be brief and entertaining and is also a form of relating. In fact, the sharing of anecdotes involves not just entertainment or information, but intimacy and risk. This is fitting because the word is derived from the seventeenth-century French word for "secret or private stories" and 'from the Greek *anekdota*, "things unpublished"'. From these early origins, anecdote had associations with 'gossip' and the "revelation of secrets," which later 'decayed in English to "brief, amusing story"' (Online Etymology Dictionary n.d.).

Throughout the workshops and conversations, it struck me that the stories shared between professionals could also be a form of gossiping. The stock phrase 'idle gossip' suggests it is antithetical to labour and productivity, but this is misleading. From Butt we learn that the circulation of gossip in any professional field is as much part of the production of that community as more sanctioned and authorised forms of discourse (Butt 2005 p.1). Importantly, it is also a 'performed' informational form that exists in the voicing, or the telling of something from one person to another – in the 'intersubjective'. Though we can think of gossip as circulating in printed form and online through reviews, social media posts and comments, it is commonly associated with 'body-to-body transmission' (pp.18–19). As such, it is mostly deemed an unreliable form of evidence, information or truth, subject to distortion in its performed circulation. Gossip, therefore, is not a basis for a robust public judgement. As discussed above, anecdote is subject to similar judgements, but is an equally valuable informational source. Though seemingly excessive to the professional, which purports to be built upon the verifiable case study, following Butt I would argue that the anecdote is just as intrinsic to the formation of professional discourses and communities as gossip is to (art) history.

Though anecdotes may be dismissed as ‘beside the point’, their use-value often lies in ‘making a point’ that cannot be said or demonstrated otherwise. The recorded conversation with Emma began her reflection that during conversations with colleagues about events ‘some things become the anecdote that you tell, and then other things you just don’t really talk about again.’ I asked, ‘What does something becoming the anecdote do?’ and she answered by telling me a story about the first event she worked on after her internship at the museum finished. At a conference exploring a specific neurological condition and its potential as an empathetic model for engaging with art, a number of vulnerable adults were participating in the panels and the audience.¹²⁷ As Emma explained: ‘several people participating had [the condition] and were therefore very exposed to the emotions and feelings of other people around them’. However, ‘it was all fairly standard though in terms of a conference’ with no special considerations made for physical needs of the kinds of people the event might draw. It was during the question-and-answer session of the final panel that this ‘oversight’ became clear, as Emma recounted in detail:

There was one guy in the centre who had a kind of tatty, erm, looked home-knitted jumper, erm, erratic hair, an older gentleman, and [he was given] the mic as the last question of the day. And he said: “So I’ve been living in a [...] psycho-symbiotic relationship with my mother for the past twenty-five years, until she died in a car crash.” [Pause]. Right, I mean what do you do with that [?] [Laughter] He clearly [...] had been experiencing [...] a very extreme response to whatever she was going through, erm [...] And there was just this absolute silence [...] for what felt like ages [...] And then the chair [of the panel discussion] finally said [in a grave tone]: “I’m sorry to hear about your mother. [In a brighter tone] Well, thank you everyone and we look forward to seeing you tomorrow for the second part of the conference.” [Laughter]. And it was just the most insane thing to happen! [Laughter]. And then he came back the next day, and we saw him eating a bag of iceberg lettuce in the [break] [...] That does become an anecdote, but also this example of: you just don’t know

¹²⁷ As defined by the Department of Health, a vulnerable adult is a person over eighteen unable to take care of themselves due to mental or other disability, age or illness (Department of Health 2000 pp.8–9).

what people are gonna say in the moment [...] Something I notice [...] reflecting on that [situation] now we're talking about it: they [the chair and panellists] just weren't prepared. [Laughter] [...] working with the public you really don't know what you're gonna get. And there is a duty of care there (Emma 2019).

My retelling of this anecdote is written as faithfully to the verbal record as possible, marking the points where Emma paused, changed her tone of voice and laughed. This mode of writing from speech – transcription, rather than summary – not only highlights how the anecdote was told during our conversation, but also the work it does. The story was unusual, intriguing and entertaining, and made one major point among several others. As I see it, the main point was that 'working with the public you really don't know what you're gonna get.' The public is unpredictable, and yet Emma also suggested, due to the content of the conference, there was a higher number of vulnerable adults in attendance than usual. Later we discussed the danger of a 'general' public programme as being that the people who come are not 'general' at all – they are often quite particular to the content and contributors of the event – a community of interest. She reflected that some access and community practices (that she had extensive experience of) such as having a quiet space for resting, could be really usefully employed for public programmes 'in general'. Secondly, those invited to hold these spaces as chairs or speakers don't always have the flexibility and grace to respond to the unpredictable public – another overlooked and undervalued skill. But as the meta-data of Emma's anecdote gives away, in this particular case, there was perhaps no appropriate response, yet there was 'a duty of care'.

Having worked with Emma, I know her to be a good storyteller and was looking forward to our conversation. Indeed, the time she spent describing this man, before delivering what he said, in a deadpan way, had quite a comic effect. The details of this small vignette are what made it a striking, amusing and useful anecdote in our conversation. True to Gallop's formulation of the exorbitant anecdote, it is both diverting (or *deviant*) and excessive, especially in written form. However, there is, of course, a difficulty with writing this story, of rendering a private conversation between intimates in words to be read by unknown others. It could be an uncomfortable read:

descriptions of the man's 'erratic hair', 'home-knitted jumper' and his unconventional lettuce lunch all painted him as an outsider, with possible mental health issues. I intuited that these descriptions were given to indicate the risk of giving him the closing question. But here we come up against one of the problems of programming in public institutions: isn't a 'public event' (and aren't the people hosting it) supposed to welcome all kinds of diverse voices and experiences? However, the descriptions of his appearance and actions outside of the question-and-answer scenario attempt to make clear that not only what the man said, but he himself, was deemed outside of, or somehow incongruous to, this 'public' environment. However, rather than focusing on how the story reflects the teller professionally, it might be more useful to think about what the vignette shows up about the kinds of public spaces and situations set up by large and small institutions. By virtue of their appearance as part of a 'public programme' of a public museum, it is assumed that these spaces are accessible and open to all, but often have very proscribed rules of engagement.

The anecdote rested on the point that the public is unpredictable, but that there is still a 'duty of care' and a responsibility to respond appropriately. However, this is a paradox, because in many ways there is no appropriate response to such a personal declaration, which also made no demand to be answered. I recalled something an arts producer from Melbourne had told me about a recent phenomenon she noticed at public programme events at museums and galleries in Australia. During the question-and-answer session of discussions on contentious issues such as race and indigenous sovereignty, organisers are increasingly stating that they welcome 'questions only, no comments'. This could partly be due to the unpredictable nature of the public, but as it was told to me, is more to do with the predictable regularity of white supremacist views being platformed during question-and-answer sessions. Our short conversation about this strategy for minimising the risk of such comments, revolved around its inefficacy. Un-inviting 'comments' appears to give programmers and facilitators an opportunity to shut-down potentially offensive speech. Yet we also agreed that anyone wishing to speak at length or say something provocative, racist or offensive will often do so regardless, drawing on the standard right-wing response to 'political correctness', to claim their right to 'free speech'. This small anecdote pointed again to a fear of the unpredictable public, revealing the complex and implicit rules of engagement that these spaces routinely employ.

Exorbitant Bodies

Other anecdotes around exorbitant individuals and unpredictable publics arose through the final workshop held at Tate Britain in July 2019. While making initial observations afterwards with my colleague Miranda, she commented that a lot of examples revolved around ‘what happens when emotions breach how we think a public space should function.’ I noted this down verbatim, and during our later recorded conversation reflecting on the workshop she returned to this point:

how [do] we understand the parameters of what is public and what is private, and what should be kept public and what should be kept private? And also how [do] our expectations of public space inform how we feel we should hold a space, so do we feel we have to keep certain kinds of behaviour outside the room? Or do we feel that we have to kind of encourage certain kinds of behaviour inside the room, and certain kinds of feelings and emotions?
(Miranda 2019).

To draw on the first half of Miranda’s reflection, perhaps what made the man Emma described so extraordinary was his comment that breached the boundaries of that particular public with something so acutely personal. Or was it his manner of dressing and behaving that marked him as ‘outsider’? Or a combination of these things? Still, the notion of someone on the periphery, outside of even a ‘general public’ seems counter intuitive to the construction of this mass group of people that can include ‘everyone’.

Another story raised this same problem of the public programme, retold to me by Miranda during our reflective recorded conversation after the workshop she participated in. In a one-to-one conversation with Carol, producer at a literature-based art organisation, Miranda learned about an incident that occurred during an intimate poetry reading at Carol’s workplace. Carol had begun with a description of her workplace and its location on a rather ‘public thoroughfare with windows’ onto the street in London. The event was disturbed when ‘a member of the public started knocking on the window and interrupted the intimacy of the space.’ The first reaction from Carol, and what she observed in the room, was a feeling of irritation over the

knocking 'ruining the moment'. However, the incident – and its retelling to Miranda – prompted Carol 'to think about how there were three dynamics: how the speakers would feel, how the audience would feel, and how the audience were functioning. And then also this idea of the outside world being the public. So that being a moment where [...] their ideas of public broke down.' Despite the transparency of both the outside world to the event inside, and vice versa, it was this rupture that prompted the question: What public is the art organisation serving? Is the world on the other side of the glass 'the public'? Is the public inside the event a different kind of public, or the same? This was intriguing since Carol's contributions to the roundtable discussion expressed frustration with her organisation's ethos to encourage 'freedom of expression' for everyone. This liberal position is very much part of a conception of an ideal general public – at odds with a living, embodied, differentiated public. She questioned how genuinely this can be supported when, as noted earlier, 'multiple privileges and oppressions' are at play in every situation, demonstrating awareness that 'the public' is not a homogenous group.

Miranda continued with Carol's description of the person knocking at the window, and what happened next.

It became clear that this person banging on the window was perhaps a rough sleeper who was quite distressed and maybe had been using drugs or something. So one of the people from the organisation went outside, spoke to them and walked with them a little bit, and saw if they needed any help or if they knew where they were going [...] [Carol] had to kind of redefine their idea of what public they felt they were serving, and who was inside and outside of that public that they felt they'd engaged in the event, and then a public who they hadn't engaged in the event, but who also kind of did engage in this way. The expectations we have on how people should behave [...] and also the element of care that you have to your speakers to make them feel comfortable, to your audience to make them feel comfortable and safe, but also to that person who's not involved in any way and kind of orbits the event and then interacts in this way that's kind of a breach of how you expect that interaction to happen (Miranda 2019).

Miranda described the moment as a 'jolt' and I picked up on Carol's split sense of responsibility – of who or what should be prioritised in response to the disruptive moment. I suggested that there might have been a recalibration of the idea of the public or publics that the arts centre is serving, or responsible for including. Does 'the public' include everyone, or is there an outside to this group that is only ever notionally included? Drawing on experience, I added that at such moments you are forced to reckon with who or what should be prioritised by suggesting 'there's myself: how do I feel about this? There's the audience who are there, there's the contributors or the speakers [...] of course those things all intertwine, and then there's the institution.' Miranda then reflected on the 'institutional drives to diversify and widen participation. In a way that is kind of a consideration of people who aren't in the room, [...] are on the outside and who you want to engage.' It didn't sound like the participation of the person who knocked on the window was a desired engagement. But it did force a consideration – or recalibration – of *who* the organisation's public might feasibly include.

That 'the public' is abstract enough to include absolutely everyone is, of course, a fallacy that makes it function. 'The public' always has an outside, hence the existence or necessity of 'counterpublics' of race, class, gender, sexuality, sub-cultural interests and so on that Warner describes (2005). If then, following Leo Steinberg (in Burton, Jackson and Willsdon 2016 p.xxv), all these publics have a function, then the function of the public called into being via the public programme of any institution serves to demonstrate its accessibility and openness to anyone. But it is moments like those described in the last two anecdotes that reveal a different reality. Some bodies disrupt or complicate this illusion, which is why they might be read as awkward, at odds, or indeed exorbitant. Indeed, Miranda's phrase 'that person who's not involved in any way and kind of orbits the event' was interesting given Gallop's description of exorbitant as "'ex-," out of, and "orbita," route or orbit' (Gallop 2002 p.7).

The last two stories helped me think about who falls outside of even a 'general public', why, and how they disrupt the coherence or smooth running of a public event. Describing itself as 'an institution-in-becoming and without constitution' that is 'against the transformation of bodies into a mass, against the transformation of the

public into a marketing target' (documenta 14 n.d.), Paul B. Preciado's *Parliament of Bodies* (2016–17) exemplified a public programme imagining a space for bodies normally excluded from the possibility of full public appearance: queer, trans, black, migrant, neurodivergent, differently-abled. It also operated in the space left open by the failure of formal and identity politics to ensure this possibility (Preciado and Sagri 2017). Judith Butler (2015) describes how the 'plural and performative right to appear' is often assumed to belong to everyone (p.11). However, she asks us to reconsider 'the restrictive ways "the public sphere" has been uncritically posited by those who assume full access and rights of appearance on the designated platform' (p.8). Perhaps exorbitant bodies are disruptive *precisely* because they are an uncomfortable reminder that the right to appear is not evenly distributed?

In addition to their material and architectural limits, the spaces generated through public programming are bounded by time and specific codes of behaviour that make such appearance difficult, troubling or simply impossible for some bodies. As touched on in Chapter Three, some codes adhere to entering and exiting, others are about where one locates oneself according to one's role, pays attention and participates. Though programmers might recognise how habitus (Bourdieu 1984) constructs an institution familiar and comfortable for some, and deeply unwelcoming for others, the problem of these codes and barriers repeatedly came up in our discussions. A story from the second workshop at Open School East in Margate in June 2019 underlined the illusion of openness that many art and cultural institutions wish – often with the best intentions – to uphold. The plenary discussion of this workshop revolved around expectations of how a public will behave, and how these are often intertwined with a vague, but rather rigid notion, of an event 'going well'. Janet, a theatre director and arts programmer, related to this notion of unconscious, but nevertheless quite fixed intentions about how something should go through a story from her experience of co-directing a small theatre in a poor area of Margate. The venue, run out of a converted Victorian coach house, had ambitious aims of becoming a hub of arts and culture for the local community. Claiming to be 'one of the smallest theatres in the world', pictures of the interior on the website show a tiny black box theatre with room for eight red velvet seats per row. Once considered the up-market alternative to the populist sea-front, the theatre resides in a part of town noticeably run-down and home to several migrant communities. Due to its historic

buildings, cheap rents and property prices, it is unsurprisingly popular with creative and cultural workers from more expensive parts of the country, overwhelmingly 'DFLs' – a colloquial acronym describing people 'Down From London', either for the day, or more permanently. Not wanting to be part of the rapid gentrification of the area without giving something back, from its inception, Janet explained how important it was for the theatre to be an open and inviting space for local residents, not just for 'Margate newbies who would get it'.

For one particular performance with an LGBTQ+ performance collective, she received a call on her mobile phone (also the box office number) from a long-term local resident who was making her very first visit to the theatre to celebrate her sixtieth birthday. When the woman arrived with her daughter, she was visibly excited and seemed under the influence of a substance other than alcohol. As the performance got underway, she couldn't contain her excitement and kept getting on stage to try and kiss the performers. Throughout what sounded like an uncomfortable watch, Janet described a similar experience of the three-way split that Carol spoke about. Firstly, she felt responsible for the artists whom she had programmed and were dealing very professionally with this rather unusual, and uninvited, audience participation. She didn't want to compromise the experience for the rest of the audience by allowing these frequent interventions to continue, but at the same time she wanted this woman's first visit to the theatre to be a positive experience.

I was impressed with the candid sharing of this story, because as Janet admitted, it exposed and tested the limits of her desire for the theatre to be open and accessible to everyone, particularly members of the local community. As discussed in Chapter Three, however, contemporary art institutions frequently use 'local community' to refer to working-class people living nearby whom they must engage, often for reasons outside of the benevolent desire Janet expressed. What wasn't directly said in this example, but spoke loudly through Janet's discomfort, was her desire to unite two kinds of 'locals' – Margate's existing working-class community and the recently arrived DFLs, assumed to be more culturally literate – and how this tension played out in the moment as a culture clash. Janet's dilemma could be articulated as: What do you do when faced with someone who does not know 'the rules' of the theatre?

And by the same token, why should everyone be expected to know what to do there? Despite Janet's anxiety over her responsibility, the excessive response-ability of this new theatre visitor was in fact managed by the performers, and could even have formed part of the enjoyment of the rest of the audience.

Breaching the Boundaries

Accessing and understanding the rules of spaces came up across the conversations and workshops, pertaining not only to what you do and in what order, but what parts of the self are appropriate to bring in. As previously noted, the kinds of public events we were talking about are not only bounded by physical structures such as furniture and walls, but temporal limitations and behavioural codes. Indeed, as Miranda pointed out, many of the workshop stories revolved around a breaching of these boundaries of what we think a public event can legitimately hold. What gives these invisible boundaries their power? Ingold's description of 'ghost lines' – the marking of geographical borders on the landscape with objects that trace an imaginary line – may be useful here. He recalls time spent herding reindeer near the border between Finland and Russia: '[t]he border was marked [...] in no other way save the occasional post. Had I attempted to cross it however, I would have been shot at from one of the many observation towers on the Soviet side' (Ingold 2007 p.50). Taking Ingold's notion of an imaginary line that has real effects, together with Bachelard's notion that space is socially constructed through specific human actions and interactions in a particular place (Bachelard 1964), we may think of public events and the temporary spaces they create as criss-crossed with such 'ghost lines'. These lines often follow the architectural or furniture layout, but all are 'imaginary' with real effects: they become visible or tangible only when breached.

Despite the claims of new institutionalism and the desire amongst small and large art institutions alike to create different kinds of public spaces for multiple, diverse publics to engage, they are often no less codified than other more traditional spaces. We are still bound by a certain understanding of what it means to enter into a rarefied and privileged space of publicness. When people don't share the same understanding (or habitus), they are very quickly excluded. This exclusion may not simply be physical 'outing', it could be enacted socially or intellectually. The first-time theatre visitor's

excitement for the performance appeared to be too much when it tipped over into physical contact, and was therefore an example of a dual breaching. According to Janet's retelling of the story, the amorous response exceeded what it is appropriate to show of the self in the theatre, even during a queer cabaret performance. Not only were the kisses and hugs foisted on performers non-consensual, these interventions also breached the invisible boundary between audience and performers commonly referred to as the 'fourth wall', and the rule that audiences never access the stage without an invitation.

A particularly striking example of the breaching of these architectural, emotional, temporal *and* physical boundaries, and the more subtle social exclusion that ensues, came via email. Inspired by my invitation, but not able to make the actual workshop, James had written up his most profound experience of a 'disruptive moment' during his time as public programme curator in a national art museum, along with two examples from other workplaces. With permission, I shared his email as part of my third workshop introduction. The main story was about an auditorium-based event in the art museum. Structured as a classic presentation leading to a conversation between a photographer and one of the art museum's curators, followed by a question-and-answer session, it was scheduled to last one and a half hours. During the presentation James noticed 'a woman started quite uncontrollably crying at the back of the auditorium and after a while it was impossible to ignore.' The rest of James' email I will quote at length:

[The photographer] addressed her and after a few moments recognised her as the younger sister of [a subject of one of the photographs] whom she hadn't seen since a toddler 30+ years ago. She ran up the side of the auditorium and they hugged and cried for a long time, with other people clapping, others crying and it was quite the most amazing moment I've seen during a talk.

The problem I've always struggled with when I think back to this is what then? It felt like everything that the talk could or should achieve had been done. But we were only twenty minutes in. The woman still couldn't stop crying and wanted to talk to [the photographer]. [She] was clearly quite shaken and had

to compose herself to continue. The woman agreed to leave which felt odd. And all the while [the curator] didn't have a clue what to do and if anything was fairly insensitive to the whole thing. The event sort of limped on but needlessly. I should have called it quits but the show must go on. It's simultaneously the best and potentially my most awkward moment in an event (James 2019).

It was clear that this unexpected turn of events had marked a profound moment in James' work experience. He seemed to have been both moved and unsettled by it, and his 'what then?' question indicates he still didn't know what to make of it. Aside from exemplifying the kinds of anecdotes I was interested in, my reading of James' email during the workshop introduction had another resonance. It was later referenced by participants during a roundtable discussion about the rules of public spaces, and what happens when strong emotions are expressed. Miranda had shared an experience of a discussion where one of the panel had begun crying and, in lieu of the chair or other panellists responding, was offered a tissue by a member of the audience. This led to what felt like a very unfiltered response from someone else referencing James' email: 'some people just don't know how to behave in public'. Another suggested that the person who 'cried uncontrollably' should have taken their emotional response outside the auditorium, or saved it for the comfort and privacy of their own home. In the workshop, there was a clear preference for the person who was crying to remove themselves, which is actually what happened: '[t]he woman agreed to leave which felt odd'. James doesn't state whether she was asked to leave, or did so of her own accord, but it is clear that an exclusion of some sort had taken place.

While no one used the word 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate', the notion of 'manners' seemed implicit in this short workshop interlude. After all, manners are a social structure that ensure we don't have to reinvent the rules of engagement each time. But does this imply that in this particular public situation, grief, as an emotional object, is a burden to others? I also wondered if this reaction would have been quite so bluntly put if James had been present to tell the story himself. For him it had been a kind of pinnacle that 'achieved' more than the rest of the event could, which 'limped on but needlessly'. Yet he also admits ambiguous feelings: on the one hand it was

‘quite the most amazing moment I’ve seen during a talk’ and, on the other, ‘potentially my most awkward moment in an event’. As a rather exuberant moment that clearly resisted categorisation as success or failure, and certainly bent the strict rules of engagement governing this auditorium-based event, it presents us with another example of public (mis)behaviour could be called queer. Despite not knowing how to respond, or how to feel about it now, James was also distinctly aware of his responsibility as public programmer, since the exhibition curator ‘didn’t have a clue what to do and if anything was fairly insensitive to the whole thing’. But he was also aware of his powerlessness: ‘I should have called it quits but the show must go on’. It seems evident here that the rules of the space, particularly those that govern the event’s duration, prevented him from stopping it.

The saying ‘the show must go on’ is thought to have originated in the nineteenth-century circus, to describe moments when ‘an animal got loose or a performer was injured, [and] the ringmaster and the band tried to keep things going so that the crowd would not panic’ (Rogers 1985 p.280). It migrated into theatre and is now broadly used to denote sticking to plan, persevering with something against all the odds for the greater good of ‘the show’. Here again the rules of the space are not only made explicit, but define the direction of what happens next. The person who cried and made others feel awkward, is made to feel awkward themselves and leaves the auditorium; the event continues. This throwaway, but explicit link between public programming and theatre, where the rules are stricter and more proscribed, is interesting to consider. Firstly, because it chimes with the multiple references to theatre and performance studies throughout this thesis, including several performances described at length. Secondly, because it links back to the unruly first-time patron of Janet’s example and the professional response of the performers who kept the ‘show’ ‘on’ despite her unusual advances. I make these connections despite the literature reviewed in my Introduction explicitly shying away from any association with the theatrical, artificial or performed. This could be because the public programme classically prioritises presence, discussion, learning, process and authenticity. But with these references and examples I acknowledge and push further its inherent performativity and theatricality, demonstrating the importance in taking a wide-angle view on the kinds of public(s) and spaces created through this mode of curatorial practice.

The event James writes about wasn't ostensibly a 'show' but an 'in conversation' between a photographer and a curator. But the rawness of emotion expressed by both the audience member and the photographer demonstrated its realness *and* its theatricality. For some, it was poignant; for others, it was *too* showy. I use the term realness in conjunction with theatrical, show and showy because it is multivalent. Realness can be used to describe an impressive quality of likeness to reality especially in drag and ball culture. In other scenarios it can denote the hyper-presence of reality. However, I argue that James' comment 'the show must go on' also speaks to the public programme event as a 'general performance', following Hito Steyerl (2019). In it she describes the contemporary art world's obsession with 'the endless production of seemingly singular events, the serial churning out of novelty and immediacy'. Yet despite this seemingly unquenchable thirst for the singular, the novel and the immediate – the hyper-real – Steyerl writes that 'the happening of the event is also a general performance'. Such realness occurring during what was otherwise a very standard event was also an unexpected novelty that made it 'singular'. The eruption of tears and subsequent reunion between the photographer and audience member performed the kind of intimacy ordinarily reserved either for privacy, or a sanctioned moment of public grieving such as the funeral. Incidentally, it was photographs of a funeral during the presentation that appears to have triggered the emotion of the audience member.

How can we come to terms with this rare moment of intimacy interrupting a general performance of the standard 'in conversation' event? For two of the workshop participants reflecting on James' story, the moment was indeed a show of emotion that did not belong in public. This brought in another point: How do we feel about emotions being expressed in public – how much is *too much*? It was clear that some might notionally allow space for more extreme feelings in their own programming, whereas others felt disquieted, even offended by the idea of it. To bring back an idea from Ahmed discussed in the previous chapter, an emotional object may be present in the room, but not everyone has the same relationship to it. The idea that someone deeply affected should only cry in private struck me as rather puritanical. On the other hand, those that feel uncomfortable about crying in public might feel it is a burden they are not equipped to deal with. For me, the response to James' story

highlighted one of the things this practice of sharing ‘disruptive moments’ of public programming can put into the practice: it can make visible the bounded notions of what a public space or event ‘can legitimately hold’, to use Miranda’s term.

It also brings us back to the strict demarcations of public and private that Hannah Arendt described in her book *The Human Condition* (1958). Arendt analysed Classical models of public and private to make sense of the modern world. Firstly, she distinguishes the private, domestic sphere where the labour of sustaining the body was carried out by women and household slaves in ancient Greece, from the public sphere, where men appeared to speak, act and could achieve excellence. Secondly, she describes the ‘human world’ as produced by the things that we make, which people have, and use, in common. Arendt refers to physical objects like tables that ‘gather [...] [us] together [...] relate and separate’ us (1958/1998 p.53), as making this ‘human world’ tangible. This notion can, of course, be extended to think about how intangible objects like concepts, ideas and images might gather, relate and separate us. In fact, this might very adeptly model what happened in James’ auditorium-based event. The private (feminised) labour of the body – grieving – erupting in the (masculine) public sphere was a breach too far for some attendees to my workshop. Such an ostensibly sexist reading might feel a little jarring today; however, Warner has also shown how such gendered notions of public and private still persist (2005).

The temporal lines of this story are perhaps the most slippery to grasp. The incident rendered the restrictive temporal boundary of the event itself present as an imposition: James felt the conversation had already ‘achieved everything that it could’. But his desire to draw it to a close collided with the durational expectation set by the conventions of the institutional event, where the audience had paid a ticket for an event that elapses over a certain duration, and so it ‘limped on.’ The emotional outburst happened in the present, but was related to a past event – the funeral of a family member – and a (perhaps forgotten) acquaintance with the photographer. The photograph of a dead loved one triggered a shock of fresh grief for the relative in the audience, which was both ‘in time’ with the slide show but strangely ‘out of time’ with the event. To link back to the theme of the previous section, the incident was exorbitant in that it was characterised by an emotional excess. But also because it

transgressed the boundary that normatively separates 'performer' and audience member, broken by their embrace.

Contamination

In each of the stories above someone is locked out of participating, or seen to be participating in improper ways. If the museum's fear of contaminating publics still haunts contemporary art institutions of all kinds, then ideal ways of participating inevitably structure the public programme. We have seen this fear of contamination forming when the Paris Salon opened its doors to the masses as documented by contemporary critics who described their curious and infectious bodies and behaviours, mapped by Thomas Crow (1985). Contemporary museum studies also addresses the 'unruly and badly behaved public' (Candlin 2008 p.279) that has dedicated '[a]n enormous amount of labour and resources [...] to ensure that visitors make rational responses' and, as Fiona Candlin concludes, '[i]t is easy to interpret the construction of the rational museum in terms of exclusion' (pp.290–91). The protagonists of all these stories seem to contaminate the ideal public space, by being, or doing, something out of place with its conventions, or even out of time, if we think of the example from James.

A final story from a public programmer in a heritage museum highlights this most succinctly. Eliza, who attended the last workshop at Tate Britain, was my conversation partner. She set the scene by describing the pre-event atmosphere of the grand nineteenth-century reception room within a listed building that houses the museum. Because of tight restrictions of what can be brought into, and done, in this listed building, everyone entering must place their mobile phone and other valuables into a clear plastic bag. The event was taking place on an exceptionally hot day, and the room, like the rest of the museum, was not air conditioned. The event was sold out and the packed room was already pungent with the smell of perspiring bodies. Just before the talk was about to begin, someone in the audience began frantically rifling through her handbag. Pulling out the museum issued plastic bag, she promptly emptied it and vomited inside.

Despite the description leading up to this point, I wasn't expecting this to be the outcome of the story. The dilemma this caused for Eliza was also described with careful detail. As the public programmer hosting the event, she was responsible for the well-being of the audience and had a duty of care to the sick woman. However, the woman refused Eliza's offer to sit in a cooler place where she may drink some water, insisting that she didn't want to miss the talk. Eliza explained her surprise that someone who had just vomited in public, sitting in close proximity to others, wouldn't want to leave the room out of embarrassment. Her concern for the woman's neighbours, who couldn't help but notice the smell, and might feel nauseous themselves, heightened Eliza's anxiety and her own embarrassment. She mentioned to me a couple of times that she didn't know whether she should 'forcibly eject' this woman from the event, or respect her wishes to stay seated. However, insisting on staying put, she even refused to let go of the plastic bag 'in case she needed it again'. As a public programmer, Eliza felt bound by her duty of care to the physical and emotional well-being of the sick person (Charman 2005), but also to the others around her who might *become* sick. She was doubly embarrassed (blushing as she told the story) on behalf of the woman, who didn't seem to feel any shame herself, and for having to deal with this unwanted bodily event happening right before the event she was hosting had started. The right thing to do in such a scenario remains unclear. Yet this story very clearly brings us back to the contaminating publics visiting the nineteenth-century Paris Salon, in particular, Pidansat de Mairobert's 1777 writings about '[a]ir so pestilential and impregnated with the exhalations of so many unhealthy persons' (Miarobert in Crow 1985 p.4). Eliza's story also reminds us that, as Mary Douglas famously described it, 'dirt' is only rendered visible through 'a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order' (1966 p.36). Vomiting in the toilet would have been matter in place, but just as importantly, it would have been done *in private*.

Tying this together with the other stories, the more complex point to make about them is the double ostracisation of the individual. Their personage and behaviour mark them as outside the particular public they are trying to access. But they also become the exemplary outsider who stands in for the unpredictable, unruly public that contaminates the ideal public space, either by bringing the outside in, or bringing the internal out into the open.

Practice Makes Public

The stories I recounted here largely spoke to three themes that I can paraphrase as: any notional public relies on an outside; the boundaries of public spaces become visible only when breached; the public is always unpredictable. All have implications for rethinking the kinds of spaces we, as a group of people working with various different public(s) and space(s), throughout the workshops, are engaged in creating. And by further implication, for rethinking the practice of public programming and what it can do. Putting a focus on the peripheral into practice through the workshops and conversations, we also played with the idea of 'putting something into practice'. By bringing the anecdotal into focus, making peripheral phenomena central to our conversations, we were literally inserting something *into* the practice as well as practising something: a new way of paying attention.

This was only possible through an expanded notion of what practice is. Eileen Daly, Leanne Turvey and Alice Walton (2017) describe artistic practice in terms that sit well alongside what was developed through the workshops and conversations. For them, an artist's practice goes 'beyond what might be exhibited or made public' including 'methods for collating ideas, their references, the paraphernalia of the studio, writings, questions, curiosities, uncertainties, the frayed edges, workings out and wrong turns [...] what they are reading and noting down or noticing, who they are talking to or with, is all part of their practice' (p.16). To think expansively about public programming practice is also to acknowledge how the 'frayed edges, workings out and wrong turns' have as much a part to play as 'what might be exhibited or made public.' I cannot claim to have invented an anecdotal practice – the sharing of minor stories around events – because it happens throughout the institutional settings we discussed. However, the workshops and conversations were about making the anecdotal *central* to practice. Though certainly not a usual professional space, neither was the workshop entirely subversive. I call it para-professional space, because it operated alongside others, like the network meeting or professional development workshop. However, without the expressed aim of either forging new partnerships or improving practice, these workshops offered an opportunity to think together about the nature of creating public space(s) and becoming public(s). In so

doing, it traversed the line between professional and personal without becoming un- or anti-professional.

These workshops might even be seen as a *queering* of the professional, by foregrounding the informal, anecdotal 'edges' of a public practice. Inviting professionals to relate 'the antimemorial, the micro, the irrelevant' (Halberstam 2011 p.21), that which either escapes notice, or is not wanted as part of the official narrative of the event, was sideways to the usual model of professional networking and improving practice, at the very least. In addition, instead of presenting best practice and things that made us proud, we focused on experiences of uncertainty and moments not easily categorised into success or failure. The stories we discussed turned on moments of uncertainty and confusion instead, taking the 'too much' as that which exceeds the scene of publicness or professionalism. These were often unresolved and, though I have drawn my own conclusions here, what we learned from them was never fixed. Indeed, the resistance of anecdotes themselves to categorisation could be what makes this practice of centring them a queer one if, following Warner, we take queer as a 'resistance to regimes of the normal' (1993 p.xxvii).

But the power of anecdote is not only as a place to begin theorising (Gallop 2002), but also to begin formulating a normative ethics. Through the culture of anecdotal sharing online, such normative ethics formed through anecdotal practices can lead to policing ever more nuanced patterns of behaviour. The term 'micro-aggression' is only thinkable because of the sharing of small, personal experiences that have exposed systemic, everyday racist and sexist behaviours. The possibility of defining one's personal experience and declaring its relevance to the lives of others is also the possibility to generalise. Micro-aggressions are now publicly discussable, especially in online fora. Yet they are also routinely dismissed and denied in sites of physical presence, in part due to their unverifiable anecdotal status issuing from personal experience (Sue 2010). The anecdote, then, not only transgresses boundaries by putting the private into the public, but also attempts a normative ethics through the possibility to connect, to relate and to generalise. This can be positive or negative, and I am not adjudicating this process here. Rather, I draw on it to show the work anecdote does in the practising of public(s). The possibility to speak of

micro-aggressions is also the possibility to ‘call’ them ‘out’ and to form a public discourse around them.

So, what work did putting the anecdote into practice do in this para-professional space? Using Butt’s assessment of how gossip is the underpinning of any professional community, but also queers its professionalism (as inversion of its forms), the workshops and conversations showed how anecdotal practice is as integral to public programming practice as more sanctioned forms of reflexive discourse and practice – such as the case study, policy document or evaluation form – to create a kind of ‘private public’ of public programmers. Indeed, the looping layers of a private public of public programmers coming together to discuss the public in private, also refers back to Helena’s earlier point about ‘more work should be done on the private side, to make the public side more valuable’. The work of putting into practice the anecdote through these workshops and conversations, was to allow a counter-narrative to the strict, Arendtian notions of public and private that commonly persist, despite thinkers like Warner demonstrating their interconnectedness. Anecdotal practice is also a way to resist a generalised management style of governing subtle (and potentially transformative) processes, and their complete marketisation. As noted by the two programmers who described their experiences during a debrief meeting with me, attendees to their events are so often asked to account for themselves via a questionnaire, ticking boxes that ‘capture’ them and render their data and opinions countable, reproducible, representable. But the unrecorded conversation and unwritten observation retold to colleagues via anecdotal practice is an alternative informational source that yields far more subtlety and nuance about what happened during an event or programme.

Conclusion

What happens when public programmers come together and discuss the parts of practice not usually spoken about? This chapter mapped the usefulness of attending closely to the eventfulness of the public programme, via the ‘fullness’ of the event – the excess it produces, ordinarily left out of its formal appraisal. Can such an attentional shift help us materialise public as a process of becoming, rather than an

abstract group or static space, to tell another story about the museum's relation to publicness?

If the possibility of communing with strangers is a public's key ingredient, in addition to attention (Warner 2005), these workshops brought together people both known and unknown to each other and myself, meaning they were neither fully public nor wholly private spaces. Applying a Warnerian reading, I suggest they were generative of a 'counterpublic' of public programmers engaged in both 'practising' public(s), and proposing how a staid, normative notion of publicness in both the liberal and neoliberal museum and contemporary art institution might be enacted otherwise. The title of this chapter, 'Practice Makes Public', is, of course, a reworking of the common idiom 'practise makes perfect' – commonly used as an encouragement to keep trying, because it is only through doing that anyone learns and refines. My application of Warner, who takes a social, temporal model of public(s) formation, demonstrates how the practice of public programming is a practising (or rehearsing) of the possibility of public(s) and public space-making. Crucially, as I hope to have shown through this thesis, the process is never perfect, and neither is it ever completed. What putting this shift of attention into practice revealed is that when we are public programming, we are practising public(s). But, what is it that is wanted to be made perfect through this practice? A perfectly open and accessible space, a public that includes everyone? If this is what we are practising for, as the workshops and conversations discussed show, it is not yet here.

What the stories throughout this chapter did show, is that the spaces created by the public programme are not as accessible and open as they purport to be. Practising this attentional shift through anecdotal sharing, the shortcomings and boundaries of public spaces became visible, especially when breached by private emotions or internal bodily functions. It is often shown to be the case that certain people or groups are excluded, and the public programme frequently fails to be the ideal, equitable space for public becoming that is promised. This was sometimes because 'multiple privileges and oppressions are always in play' (Carol 2019), and, as outlined in Chapter Two, equality might be desired but is not necessarily a feeling shared by everyone. However, when the liberal fallacy of public openness is revealed to be illusory, things start to feel queasy. This either requires the emotional

labour of acknowledgement, or an uncomfortable ignoring of the facts. Another illusory assumption challenged by the third workshop was that not everyone has the same motivation for being there. However, as one participant pointed out: 'people attend events for all kinds of reasons – to have their views challenged or their personal boundaries tested, or to have them confirmed'. We neither come to such events for the same reasons, nor have equal access to contribute to them. Each story seemed to attest that, although we might desire openness and accessibility, any public called into being via a public programme is predicated on a notion of exclusion, despite the ethical underpinnings and values it is expected to uphold.

So, if the public programme fails to be the ideal space of public becoming it is purported to be, what does it do? If, as Halberstam has written, failure can be 'a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique' (2011 p.88), I argue the value of the public programme lies in rehearsing of the possibility of an accessible space, to rethink what a public space *could* be, what is needed. More than this, if failure can also be recognised as a practice itself, we might 'exploit the unpredictability' of the public to uncover the already 'embedded' 'alternatives' (p.88). This leaves us able to understand publicness as produced in and through a constant negotiation of the not quite enough, and the too much – of who and what is exorbitant. Though the stories were not ostensibly *about* exclusion, failure or awkwardness as such, all were couched in an idea of professional best practice contaminated by uncertainty. Might even the failure to be fully professional be the resistance that Halberstam suggests?

Almost all the examples I dwell on in this chapter dealt with a breaching of what can be contained or legitimately held by the event. Thus, they reveal something much more profound about the nature of publicness than the events themselves ever set out to achieve. Each was experienced as a singular or 'stand-out' moment, though following Ahmed (2004), people will have related and responded to them differently. My hunch for doing this work, outlined in the Introduction, was that when we pay attention to the periphery, we might see publicness in the process of becoming. This means that we are no longer talking about a fixed space or state, but a mutable, intersubjective process. If publicness is a felt, contingent process, then talking about uncertain feelings, particularly those ordinarily harder to express, becomes essential.

For me, this demonstrates the use-value of the space created through *That Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers* (2018–19), and acknowledges the important part feelings play in becoming public(s). Classic formations of publicness, as laid out in my Literature Review, rely on notions of speaking and acting according to certain established codes in particular places. But communication is also a form of relation, inextricably linked to an affective dimension: we cannot leave feelings out of the equation if we want to form more nuanced and truly accessible ways of becoming public(s). I will discuss these ideas in more detail in my overall thesis conclusion, but suffice to say feelings, particularly uncertain ones, were an important part of each and every workshop and conversation.

Lastly, recalling the final discussion of Chapter Three, safe spaces and their impossibility also came up in the workshops and conversations. Those working with publics are always at the live end of thinking through these problems, inconsistencies and conflicts, and I learned that several colleagues now use the phrase ‘this is not a safe space’ to open some of their programmes. This subtle shift has of course taken place through the iteration – or general performance – of public programming, as an active response to the fraught moments of publicness produced. If public programming seeks to achieve the impossible – an accessible space of equal participation – then there might be something in the *promise* of public becoming that is still worth practising. If the space(s) created by public programming across a range of institutions are consciously rehearsing towards an ideal public space, and recognising when, how and why they fail, then this might help us practice them better.

Thesis Conclusion – Public Potentials

This thesis issues from the art museum's uncomfortable ties to publicness. If the museum emerged from the movement of private wealth into public hands (Duncan 2013, Candlin 2010), today's 'corporate turn' renders relations between contemporary art institutions and their publics 'fragile and awkward' (Möntmann 2008 p.19). Some of this discomfort has been addressed by museum studies and new museology that emphasise the powerful social and political role of museums, acknowledging that their relationship to their public(s) needed to be re-thought. Reviewing new museology's methods and impact, Max Ross describes how in the 1970s '[p]olitical and economic pressures forced [museum] professionals to shift their attention from their collections towards visitors' (2004 p.84). With this thesis, I propose subsequent attentional shifts. Firstly, a shift towards one of the museum's key technologies for producing attention – the public programme. Then a further shift towards what is ordinarily unattended, or causing distraction there. This allows a final shift away from spatial notions of publicness, towards processual, sensual and temporal understandings of public(s) as in becoming, rather than always already there. This may break up, even queer, the here-to-fore monolithic and ideal public. Distributing our attention in this way across several planes can help us rethink the museum and contemporary art institution's problematic relations to publics in new and unusual ways.

With these shifts in mind, the public programme becomes a unique space to question assumptions often made about institutional publicness and the kinds of bodies that are able to appear (Butler 2015) as part of a 'general public'. Despite reforms pointing out its assumed openness, but actual exclusivity (Fraser 1990), my Literature Review identified that there is still an over-reliance on spatial, architectural metaphors derived from a 'bourgeois public sphere' (Habermas 1989). But my own experiences of publicness in the art museum led me to question these spatial constructions and the assumptions of accessibility and equality that the word 'public' – as it connects with 'programme' – connotes. Additionally, the museum as ideal public space calls upon an ideal public, which is largely abstract and monolithic (Burton, Jackson and Willson 2016). Even where publics are pluralised, they are

still constructed as ideal, distinct groupings of people that may be marketed to, and extracted from.

It is my contention that 'public' is both spatially *and* temporally constructed, happening through specific moments of embodied relation in particular situations and spaces. To understand it as such we must explore the felt, embodied and intersubjective dimensions of publicness, that the discourses reviewed at times suggested, but did not fully acknowledge. Most often I found key actors in the discourse reluctant to get specific about what actually happens during live programming, remaining at the level of case study or theorised example (such as Rogoff 2010). These circulate as forms of conventional public and professional discourse – as lectures, articles or books. I suggest that this is about distancing ourselves – whether as audiences, critics, artists or programmers – from failure or implication in fraught moments of publicness. However, the recourse to spatial models of publicness combined with shying away from the specific felt dimensions of becoming public(s) keeps them singular, othered, and largely unaccounted for in relation to practice. Thus, they are harder to relate to *in practice*. By helping us understand how it is produced and what is at stake, the attentional shifts I suggest can shape practice towards the creation of more meaningful spaces of publicness in the museum and contemporary art institution.

I chose to address the messy contingency of becoming public(s) through an unflinching account of some 'public problems' thrown up by my own experience of the public programme, moments that left me feeling uncomfortable, awkward, or uncertain about how to respond. I used the term 'disruptive moments' to describe them (Dewitt and Pringle 2014), because they changed the course of the event they occurred within, or my thinking about it. Some disruptive moments were slight and internally registered, others a series of notable distractions, or more singular occurrences that opened an awkward space where different responses were possible.

My examples are complemented by stories from other public programmers, gathered through the workshops and conversations that formed *That Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers* (2018–19). Here a popular form of public

programming – the workshop – was employed to create a third, para-professional space, hovering between public and private. We explored publicness as an emergent process triggered by moments when, for example, the boundaries of a public event are breached by an exorbitant act or an outside(r), causing uncertain feelings about how to respond, and what we are part of. The differing roles of programmer and audience were inhabited and experienced as a challenge to the normative modes of production, attention and extraction of both the liberal and the neoliberal institution. The culmination of these workshops formed a key point of this research: recognising the public programme as a space of normative production that, through shifts in attention, could be queered to become a space where that normative production and its underpinning structural inequalities are encountered and explored. Understanding public(s) as in becoming, rather than always already there, is emphasised in relation to a possibility to create spaces where such becomingness is not just at issue, but is *the* issue to be effectively and affectively explored.

It is important to reiterate that I did not do traditional audience research to figure out *who* makes up the public that attends public programmes in contemporary art institutions. Neither was I reviewing contemporary public programming practice, though I suggest this as one direction the research could lead, using these new coordinates for understanding and appraising them. Rather, I have put forward an account of what the process of becoming public feels like, using the public programme as a unique space to observe this temporal, intersubjective process and myself as the primary locus of understanding it. With each chapter themed around a central concern and set of examples, the entire thesis asks and answers how this might transform our framing of public programming within the contemporary art institution.

What is Happening Now?

We are not simply public, or part of one, only because we step into a museum auditorium, or, as is more common in 2020, log onto an online event. As I concluded this research, the Covid-19 global pandemic ground the world to a halt. My research took on a different valence as many of us slid awkwardly into living life largely at

home. Local and national ‘lock downs’ transformed our experience of togetherness, shifting it from physical proximity to virtual gatherings facilitated through video conferencing platforms. Amidst the chaos of the virus, the reality of Britain’s unequal society was brought into sharp relief as it killed People of Colour and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds in much larger numbers than white, middle-class and affluent populations. Against these unliveable conditions, the reality of police brutality and anti-Black violence in America erupted in multiple uprisings and protests responding to the murder of George Floyd. The summer of 2020 marked a huge upsurge in the action and support of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement globally. The UK’s own history of police violence against Black bodies was once again vociferously declared *enough*, through multiple protests of varying scales nationwide.¹²⁸ Some of these led to statues of slave-traders and colonialists being toppled,¹²⁹ triggering multiple petitions to parliament around how Britain’s colonial past should be taught in schools,¹³⁰ and discussions about what to do with its public monuments.¹³¹

Amongst all of this cultural institutions large and small tried to hold onto their publics as best they could, creating online content, and holding conversations around how the complexities of the moment might be reckoned with.¹³² Most acutely, the public programme became a testing ground for the solidarity with BLM that many national

¹²⁸ Black Lives Matter protests were accompanied by a backlash of counter-protests from groups on the far-right, including a gathering that turned violent against police in central London for the expressed purpose of ‘statue protection’ around monuments such as the Cenotaph on Whitehall (Cambell 2020).

¹²⁹ Most notably, the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol (BBC 2020).

¹³⁰ See <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/326254> for the rejected petition *Introduce the Slave Trade and colonial history in the National Curriculum*, and list of similar petitions (Petition Parliament 2020)

¹³¹ These ranged across forms of mass and social media, from television broadcast news <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-52996627> (BBC 2020) to newspaper opinion pieces by public historians (Olusoga 2020) and debates started by individuals.

¹³² For example, Iniva’s workshop *Exploring Identity: Experiences of Self & the Other – legacies of lockdown* Georgina Obaye Evans (Iniva 2020); and Lisson Gallery’s panel *John Akomfrah in conversation with Tina Campt, Ekow Eshun, Saidiya Hartman*, which ‘examined the legacy of John Akomfrah’s early films, such as *Signs of Empire* and *Handsworth Songs*, in the context of ongoing Black Lives Matter protests, the destruction of colonial monuments and the structures of institutional racism’ (Lisson Gallery 2020). Lisson Gallery is a commercial contemporary art gallery with a public programme. This nuance of practice – public programming by ‘private’ (commercial) galleries is not something I cover in this research. However, that it is fast becoming a staple of the commercial gallery’s repertoire (see also David Roberts Foundation n.d.) demonstrates the importance and value of this mode of curatorial practice. Public programming in commercial galleries could certainly form part a wider review of the nature and scope of contemporary public programming practice across the arts sector, which, I suggest, is one way to extend this research.

cultural institutions professed through hastily produced statements on their commitment to anti-racism.¹³³ Take, for instance, the online conference titled *Curating, Care and Community* (2020) programmed by the Early Career Curators Group (ECCG), supported by Tate and Paul Mellon Centre.¹³⁴ The event seemed inspired by a curatorial shift away ‘from caring for objects and collections to producing and managing social networks, collective energies and professional relationships’ (Reckitt 2016 p.6).¹³⁵ During opening remarks, the ECCG contextualised their event by referring to BLM protests, and explained how a series of panels with art world professionals would explore different notions of care and community within curatorial practice. Organised by a group of white curators, the event included several People of Colour, which included an external facilitator acting as ‘host’.¹³⁶ Yet it became quite clear that, despite their opening remarks, the group had failed to invite any Black contributors. This was directly addressed in the afternoon session when several participants asked why and how this had happened, especially in a moment when, as one participant framed it, ‘white people finally decided that Black Lives Matter’? How was this possible, with the privilege that a year-long professional development programme brings: time and money for personal research, an event budget and mentor support at their disposal?

Silences. Swallows. Stuttering. Organisers visibly and audibly struggled to account for why their research and decision-making process had excluded Black curators, researchers or artists. Someone had forgotten to mute their microphone and was overheard telling someone else in disbelief: ‘It’s really kicking off right now!’ An embarrassing leakage perhaps, but also an indication of the variation in feeling about the unfolding situation. More importantly, it demonstrated how, though notionally gathered by a common interest, we were very much a community operating in

¹³³ These were equally swiftly critiqued: see Greenberger (2020) for an overview of these national institutions and the criticism that their BLM statements received.

¹³⁴ This group of 14 early-career arts professionals is selected and supported by the British Art Network (BAN), that is co-convened by Tate and Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. The event was advertised on Tate’s website and ticketing website Eventbrite.

¹³⁵ As well as an ongoing concern for the Feminist Duration Reading Group that Reckitt co-organises, the event copy stated: ‘*Curating, Care and Community* will explore the increasingly urgent matter of how we care for ourselves, our colleagues, our collaborators and our audiences through our work in the arts, within and beyond institutions’ (Tate 2020).

¹³⁶ Though I name the group and organisations involved in this event, I keep individuals names anonymous in this research because of sensitivity to their potential unease at being implicated in what happened.

difference, affecting personal response-ability to, and responsibility for, what was happening. The host issued a prompt reminder to ensure microphones were muted unless someone wished to speak, and another awkward silence followed. After an attempt to resume proceedings through restarting the afternoon panel, it soon became clear that the event could not continue as planned. The space was turned over entirely to questions about the lack of Black inclusion, and attempts by ECCG, Tate and Paul Mellon Centre representatives to answer them.

Above everything I have discussed in this thesis, this was not simply an extremely awkward moment, it was an excruciating and powerful reckoning. As the 'chat' function of the platform was steadily filling up with questions, messages of solidarity, others of frustration about the disruption, and expressions of counter-frustration, I became painfully aware of my lack of participation, yet my own complicity in what was unfolding. I also felt strangely exposed in remaining a silent witness to the painfully inadequate repetition of the white organisers' apologies. Not knowing what I could usefully add, nor wanting to appear as another guilty white face, or turn away from what was happening, I turned my camera off but stayed present.

From Emergency to Emergence

I do not wish to perpetrate more harm or extraction by bringing this extremely fraught situation into my conclusion. As was rightly pointed out by one participant, practices of care are deeply politicised and cannot be separated from racialised bodies, who, often without state or institutional support, care for one another's well-being in radical ways. I include it to argue, along similar lines to Alberto Altés Arlandis' (2019 p.71) description of attention in the museum that publicness is not a given or directed thing, but emerges through what happens, and the multiple responses to it. This type of occurrence, including the pain that surrounded and exuded from it, *is* the emergence of publicness that demands *more* of our time and attention. Neither do I wish to detract from the labour and energy put into events such as these, especially at a time when we are both dependent on, and learning how to use, very specific kinds of technologies. However, this deeply uncomfortable, but necessary moment reveals once again the challenge facing institutions that produce publics without necessarily being prepared for their embodied reality. My research suggests that the

ideal public(s) many institutions predicate their activities upon are largely fictional, and involve all kinds of implicit and explicit rules around arrival, form and behaviour. The examples I focused on in this thesis aimed to show that, in their fleshy reality, publics 'are [indeed] queer creatures' (Warner 2005 p.7), and highly unpredictable. In addition, as Laura Mulvey (1989) has highlighted, the 'spectacle is vulnerable', and can be disrupted by a handful of unruly actors. But my research proposes that programmers make such vulnerability a priority, and become accountable to the differing experiences of publicness that are created.

The global pandemic of 2020 has shown all kinds of cultural venues across the arts struggling to hold on to their audiences. Once again, the public programme becomes the site and conduit to keep this relationship going, in the hope that it will sustain the institution beyond this global health and economic crisis. The result of participating via video conferencing platforms from homes, local coffee shops, or other spaces means that (I have noticed) some of the reserve and politeness expected of participation in institutional settings has been replaced with the accelerated discursiveness of Twitter and other social media platforms. Despite the technology used, the event mentioned above employed a traditional broadcast conference format, with little room for discussion despite its promise.¹³⁷ The question of scale alone (the event drew some 150 participants) only emphasised the triangulation of exposure, togetherness and responsibility that forced a particularly intense and complex moment of publicness to emerge. Additionally, the traditional broadcast model that the organisers employed left them rather unprepared for the exposure of their failures involving representation, imagination and empathy in this very specific socio-political climate. In many ways what happened could not be mitigated. I do not even suggest that it should have been, given that majority white cultural institutions have sadly taken too long getting to grips with anti-racist practices and none of these critiques are bringing new information to light. And yet my research suggests that paying attention to the technologies employed to produce our attention in these spaces, the scale at which they are put to work, might have mitigated some of the

¹³⁷ The event copy suggested that 'BAN members and the wider curatorial community are invited to share experiences and ideas in a supportive, reflective environment [...] There will be opportunities for questions throughout and participation will be encouraged through polls and Google Jamboard' (Tate 2020).

harm felt by those asking questions about Black inclusion, and indeed those held to account, who were not left unaffected.

Turning attention to the particular and relatively new technology of attention employed for this event, then, shows how it both facilitated the most major distraction – the written comments running parallel to speaker presentations – and produced a counterpublic within the public moment. With little time left for an ‘open’ question-and-answer session after the presentations, the prominence and significance of the chat function speedily escalated, used out of necessity by those who felt outside of the public *intentionally* produced by the event. It soon became the only possible space for asking difficult questions that re-framed, problematised and, importantly, destabilised what was being said and who was saying it. The chat was also an important space for this counterpublic to *gain* traction, eventually de-railing the entire conference proceedings to force the white organisers to account (though they could not) for their failure at an inclusive, caring curatorial practice. What became clear was, indeed, how this form of coming together did not pay attention to the ‘multiple privileges and oppressions at play’ mentioned in Chapter Four, nor how these were being reproduced.

In her timely and insightful study, curator and writer Jemma Desai (2020), herself a ‘cultural worker embodied in difference’, draws on her own experiences in various professional roles and settings. She uses her discomfort to unpack the ways in which diversity policies uphold whiteness in cultural institutions, keeping out the very people they claim to welcome in. In this passage Desai writes about the importance of calling out institutions via online platforms:

critiques that circulate online can be framed as ‘call outs’ rather than ‘call ins’. A ‘call out’ in its simplest sense is to criticize something or someone and ask for the critique to be addressed or responded to. They can be seen as loud, vocal missiles hurled at the institution. Such ‘call outs’ appear to be all powerful, the institutions, whose reputations are a key part of their ‘public relations’ appear ‘vulnerable’ to them. However, call outs are also often ‘calls *in*’ one of a limited ways to communicate, to be heard by an impenetrable

institution. By calling *out*, you ask for a way *in* (Desai 2020, original emphasis).

Outlining the motivations and mechanics of private individuals calling out public institutions online, Desai's description of the dynamic movement between private conversation and public discourse exposes how the capital of public reputation may be levied against the institution, but also used as a way in. The event I described above also happened online, but via live presentations delivered to the camera from individual home workstations, broadcast to an audience also watching at home. However, I suggest that the 'call out' I describe had a significant impact because of the hybridity of the space in which it happened. When 'storms' explode on the social media platform Twitter, we may not observe their affective registration on the bodies of individuals *in real time*, as was possible during this event. But it also appears to have had significantly more *effect* on the institutions called to account. Subsequent emails from the British Art Network to conference participants pledged to review recruitment and selection practices for the following year's ECCG, as well as make resources available for healing and consultation with Black and other People of Colour negatively affected by the event. Whether or not these gestures will happen, in the fullness of their promise, or serve those negatively affected by the event, cannot yet be assessed, nor would it be my place to do so. If we are really interested in producing publics, we must also be interested in *how* those publics are produced, and what can happen when they emerge and take shape.¹³⁸

Another thread of this research is that the public programme produces much that is unaccounted for within standard forms of evaluation and knowledge production, or discourse around them. My research looked at the richness of anecdotal, para-professional sharing of things that perhaps should not have happened, were not wanted, or were not planned as part of the event. Shifting our attention to what and who is producing it, and how, can have major effects, such as the initiation of Liberate Tate during an activist workshop at Tate Modern discussed in Chapter Two, whose actions eventually led to the cessation of a longstanding sponsorship

¹³⁸ In line with their theme, ECCG did appear to think through the physical comfort of those participating. But this was delivered largely via an extensive list of suggestions for using the video conferencing platform, emailed to participants in advance.

relationship between BP and Tate. Attentional shifts do not always lead to such radical outcomes, but my research also shows the micro-politics in paying attention to the subtle, exorbitant details of these public productions. Consideration of the extraneous details during these workshops and conversations held as part of *That Awkward Stage: Private Workshops for Public Programmers* (2018–19) also led to a nuanced understanding of what and who is outside of the specific notion of public (re)produced by the public programme.

However, this research is not aimed at the reductive notion that simply widening access leads to happier, more compliant publics and convivial moments of publicness. Rather, I am asking us to think about, and then challenge, the ideal public and forms of publicness the museum and its extended spaces are predicated on *when* we are creating these events. My research also shows how these ideal notions work with a dominant positivity that Miranda Joseph says are perpetuated by practices and discourses of community in contemporary society (2002). This was particularly true in my critical analysis of Jamal Harewood's *The Privileged* (2014) where I identified my greatest discomfort in feeling community with another white woman who volunteered for the task of commanding Harewood to eat. A community that I felt deeply ambivalent about being part of, but could not and cannot necessarily escape. This seemed to come full circle in the moment of reckoning for the institution during the ECCG's online conference. Here, my belonging to a white community lambasted for its exclusionary anti-Black practices, left me feeling conspicuously associated with their painfully apologising, despite not having been part of the event's organisation, and desperate to absent myself. Staying present to one another in an uncomfortable situation risks implication, but again this is when our publicness emerges, whether we expose ourselves with words or actions, or not. This conception of publicness may feel similar to agonistic pluralism, as defined by Chantal Mouffe (2013). But it differs in the sense that it emerges not only through the respectful maintenance of conflicting positions that are externalised, but also in the competing desires and internal conflicts that are felt but not vocalised.

This event also picked up how, as a technology of attention at the art institution's disposal and behest, the public programme is readily used by another one-way transmission model. The didacticism of broadcast models can easily be subverted by

counterpublics speaking back to institutions. Programmers in this research spoke of their discomfort in moments when they had to embody the institution, hold onto their personal values, and respond humanely to what is happening. Without the professionalism and distinction of roles and responsibilities, such programmes would not be possible. Yet as one curator who often works with marginalised groups informally suggested, we cannot truly hold spaces of emergent publicness *unless* we are *unprofessional*. The people I have met who do this work are deeply committed to an ethical practice, which is purported to be about professional accountability. Yet the moments when things break down often require a more personal accountability. The para-professional space I created found that holding any space involves understanding your personal relation to an immediate and emergent public – and inseparability from it – over and above the abstractions of the institution and its ideal public. I also heard this in the wavering voices of the ECCG conference organisers, struggling to keep their emotions – fear? shame? guilt? anger? – under control as they responded to the questions about the lack of Black speakers. While certain members accounted for their personal failures, their colleagues responsible for shepherding them appeared to speak more from, and for, their institutions. Yet, everyone’s voice shook.

Conclusion – (Re)making Time and Space for Becoming Public(s)

This final example highlights the problematic nature of impenetrable whiteness in cultural institutions, as both a structural and more immediate problem. But rather than assessing institutions against their anti-racist claims, what is more broadly at issue in this thesis is publicness as a fixed space or state, undergirded by a dangerously flattening universalism. My central research question is, If the public programme is a unique space to understand publicness as a process of becoming, what might this do to our understanding and use of this space? I include this example not only because it draws together all the ideas discussed in the thesis, but also to emphasise the necessity and potential of the public programme as a space to attend to its own assumptions and elisions. In addition, to show how such spaces might be repurposed to raise and work through (even workshop) the difficult realities of producing and becoming public(s) in an inequitable world. The questions my research asks about getting specific and becoming responsible for the kinds of

publicness we are producing are both its purpose, and its subtlety. Through the attentional shifts I propose, we notice how frequently an awkward and problematic whiteness shows up in such spaces. But at other times ableism, heteronormativity, neurotypicality, an intersection of all these, and other problems arise.

I do not simply suggest that all events include a meta-moment of unpacking what we felt about everything that just happened. Rather, I have suggested how other models of thinking publicness – such as the unstable reality of queerness – might pose new possibilities for *publics* outside of a neoliberal marketing segmentation logic.

Following Michael Warner (2005), Charles Coypel and Pidansat do Mairobert Mairobert in Thomas Crow (1995), I demonstrate the potential for queering the monolithic public to think about publicness as a sensuous becoming for all kinds of bodies, rather than a fixed or given state for certain bodies that have the privilege of appearing in public without thinking about it (Butler 2015). The rich potential of an embodied approach – the (teenage) awkwardness of appearing – allows me to call our attention to fleeting, yet important, feelings or desires such as wanting to turn my camera off. We may wish to forget our physicality in these moments, because it embarrasses us. But as Nicholas Ridout reminds us, a theatrical ‘encounter with the self’ can usefully become ‘the occasion for all sorts of anxieties’ to be discussed (2006 pp.8–9). The self-consciousness of publicness is not an embarrassing weakness to turn away from, but an occasion to explore the problematic assumptions involved in ideal notions of public(s) and publicness. When we understand becoming public as something uneasy and at times very fraught, we can recognise that the ‘plural and performative right to appear’ is not evenly distributed (Butler 2015 p.11).

The issues and incidents I focused on were important when I started this research, and, as with the most recent example, simply keep coming up. With mounting pressures on art institutions to account for not only who they work with publicly, but also who makes up their staff, it is clear that we cannot continue thinking about the publics they produce nor the practice of public programming in the same way either. Understanding publics as emergent, rather than already pre-existing entities that we

may address, or, more problematically, extract from,¹³⁹ this thesis aligns itself with the kinds of public programming that considers the stakes of appearance for non-normative bodies like Paul B. Preciado's *Parliament of Bodies* for *documenta 14* (*documenta* 2017), with specific needs and desires such as Live Art Development Agency's ongoing *DIY* programme of 'professional development projects by artists for artists' (Live Art Development Agency 2020). Such programmes and spaces could even be extended to empower publics to reflect on their own publicness within them.

I have also suggested that public programmers need more space, time and support to address how their practice produces publics and publicness, allowing moments ordinarily pushed aside to be the ones that direct practice, instead of just unsettling it. My contribution to knowledge is therefore specific: to shape practice towards the creation of more meaningful spaces of publicness. This research has been carried out with, and for, a specific set of practitioners in mind – public programmers like myself, operating in museums and contemporary art institutions large and small. Of course, I don't simply identify myself under this professional denomination; my personal identifications – as a cis-gendered, white, able-bodied, middle-class woman and potential audience member – have also been brought to the research. As others before have done with the role of gallery or artist educator (Allen 2008), through the journey of this thesis, it has been important to own public programming as a specific curatorial practice and skillset, which is of unique value as much as it is amorphous, promiscuous, undefined and really rather queer at times. Feedback from workshop participants told me that the practice I created is both challenging and valuable to theirs. This gives me confidence that my research and this practice could be expanded collaboratively and nationally to produce a new knowledge network about public programming, even a new kind of accountability. A more extensive para-professional network could continue, among other things, to explore how practitioners of public programming are also publics in relation to their practice. What might it mean to practice the public programme by attending to becoming publics rather than practising towards a given public? How can current practice develop in

¹³⁹ Extraction is not readily spoken about, yet one of the workshop participants admitted to feelings of discomfort around working in short-form ways with marginalised and vulnerable adults.

this direction? If produced in partnership with organisations invested in public programming, and combined with the concerns of this research, a collaborative review and fuller mapping of contemporary public programming practice might be possible, which, as stated in my Introduction, has not been the aim or scope of this particular study. Lastly, I argue that the continued value and relevance of public programming lies in its 'general performance' or rehearsal of the *possibility* of an accessible, inclusive and accountable brave space (Arao and Clemens 2013). Through this research, I hope to contribute both to a more sophisticated understanding of what this is, and put something valuable back into the practice itself.

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