

Recreating the live act – Ipswich Spill

Report of fieldwork at Spill Festival

Ipswich, October 2016

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Pieces mentioned

Almanac
A Beast's Tour
Beasty
Because of Hair
Cabinet of Curiosities
Hard C*ck
Hind
Hom(e)age
If We Did It Like This
The Island of Toys
Luminous
Sanctuary Rink
Scribe
Secret Signs of Ipswich
Shadowing Josephine
Spill Coffee Morning
Spill TV
Strand
Sunday Brunch
Terra Nullis
Think Tank
We Are All Stars
You see...

Main participants

Mark (Strand)
Austin
Rose
Scribe #12 (Jen)

Artists interviewed

Mark Offord
Local Foreigner
Laura Burns
Jamal Gerald
Leisa Sheldon
Howl

Introduction

This report results from research carried out at Spill Festival in Ipswich, between the 26th and the 30th of October. The research aims to critically understand the

relationship of different parts of the audience with performance art, focusing on how the fleeting encounter of the performance event is generative of various forms of affect that may outlive it.

Durational and short performance pieces operate at different temporalities, but always with prescribed limits to the encounter between audience and performers. This continuous sense of finitude feeds endless discussions about the ephemeral and affective aspects of performance art. Clearly, much of the potential of performance art realises beyond its spatial and temporal limits, especially when, as it is often the case, the encounter involves exchange of experiences, emotions, or personal stories. As *events*, performance pieces have the potential to, as the French philosopher Alain Badiou puts it, produce ruptures in *being*, and thus open opportunities for reconciling subjects with the truth.¹

The fact that much performance art doesn't usually produce perennial objects is also at odds with the common ambition of artists to produce work that outlives them. In body-based performance this contradiction becomes particularly evident as the artists' body is both the raw material – establishing the immateriality of the art object produced – and the very locus of artists' own finitude. The body is a creative resource that will by definition die with them. These temporal tensions of body-based live art are reflected in the fact that much of it involves marking the body in more or less permanent ways. But there are other ways in which live art seeks to leave traces that outlive the event and Spill produced several examples which are discussed in this report².

The open character of the discussions around the ephemeral and the perennial, the being and the eventual, the durational and the archival, the experiential and the representational in live art do not suspend the various attempts to record live acts. Nigel Thrift's non-representational theory³, and a crescent interest within sociology, anthropology and geography in emotions and in the human body, are at the centre of current live academic debates that open space for the coming together social science and live art. This report seeks to contribute to enliven those intersections, seeking to rethink and expand the possibilities of representing and extending the affect of performance art.

¹Badiou A, *Being and Event*, Continuum 2006

²Page

³Thrift N, *Non Representational Theory*, Routledge 2008

In the beginning of 20th century, Walter Benjamin spoke of the inauguration of an 'age of mechanical reproduction'⁴. By this he meant that visual art was in many ways freed from the tyranny of the original and could be copied and distributed *ad infinitum* thanks to the then new technologies of reprography. This meant that the "aura of the original" risked disappearing. In the 1970's John Berger took up Benjamin's idea to think about the dominant medium of Television. In the present age in which most people possess devices that allow mass sharing of high definition videos by a click of a finger, it is easy for performance artists and producers to be seduced by the video recording as a form of expanding the temporality and spatial constraints of the live art piece. As great as its affordances may be for artists and festivals to build narratives about their work, it is also understood that video recording of performance art is limited as a representation of the piece. Hence video is understood as a form of expression in its own right. Spill TV, and its lining up in the festival's programme as both register and piece in itself, is a critical example of the possibilities and limitations of audio-visual media. The present research project originates on the long experience of Spill TV and results from its reflexive approach to these limitations and potentials.

One of the ways in which the affect of live art is recirculated back to artists and producers is through networks of practitioners that regularly compose the audiences of festivals like these. Through the fieldwork for this research, during and after Spill (as well as in the previous Festival Tempting Failure) it became clear that artists, regulars, and practitioners consistently form the majority of the audience. What also became clear is that equally rich streams of discussion and reflection are generated by the festival amongst participants who are disconnected from those networks. This is not to say that there is a closed group that monopolises the discussions and keeps outsiders at bay. But to be sure, the in-between conversations and the formation of the feedback that influences the evolution of each body of work and the community in general is often restricted to groups of insiders. This research project paid attention to these insider circuits, but its main aim is to reach out to the voices that usually don't participate in these conversations.

Spill generated new and the less involved audiences more profusely than other similar events. Spill is a festival that clearly makes an effort to reach out of self-

⁴ Benjamin W, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction 1935

contained communities. The exploration of urban spaces and unusual buildings, the scheduling and the engagement of different groups were three axes along which audiences were expanded. This research followed those lines in order to reach out to what was generated in these encounters. By doing so, it paid attention to the borders that the festival endeavoured to transgress.

This report is divided in 4 parts. The first part presents the methods used to collect and analyse data. The second part focuses on borders and the ways they were transgressed during the festival. The next third part is concerned with actions, namely walking, talking, knowing, assembling and ending. The final part will conclude the report focusing on the lasting elements of the festival, or on how the festival itself performs in the world beyond its boundaries.

Methods

I am a social scientist and I predominately use qualitative methodologies. Thus this research is grounded in the methods and approaches of sociology, anthropology, urban studies, and cultural geography. This report is grounded in the intersections between social science and performance art. Social sciences have seen a prominence of debates around the 'affective turn', politics of affect, emotions, the body, and performativity (for example in gender studies, in economics and in Science and Technology Studies), which are also at the centre of the practice and reflection of many performance artists. Additionally, live arts have been increasingly interested in incorporating methods of social inquiry not only in the conceptualisation of pieces but also in the practice itself. This was clear in Spill, which included a considerable number of what I call "listening based" live art pieces, such as one-to-one interactive engagements. Les Back's notion of sociology as the "art of listening"⁵ opens up a wealth of possibilities for live dialogues between art and research. This project wants to explore those intersections and lines of communication.

The Methods section of this research project assumes increased importance by means of its experimental character. One of the primary objectives of "Recreating the Live Act" is to construct a methodology for capturing affect and evaluating impact that can be used in future events. In this sense we are focusing on the ways in which performance pieces outlive the spatio-temporality of the event, but also how the research project itself can generate ways of collaborating that can transcend the accounting and discussion of a particular festival.

This research project proposes that the methods and conceptual tools of social research can be a way of tapping into that world of potentiality generated by live art encounters. If performance pieces tend to explore the borders between inner and outer words, creating a space where selves problematize their bodies and social positions in public, what are the best ways for social research to understand what may emerge at these critical interfaces?

The characteristics of Spill were particularly suited for a rich multimethod approach privileging verbal accounts, but the research was equally concerned with capturing the non-verbal aspects of the performance encounter. The physicality of

⁵Back, L *The Art of Listening*, Berg 2007

communication and the various forms of performance, as well as the mobility of the research encounters, made this festival particularly suited to the deployment of an array of methods from the ethnographic toolkit, in particular, urban and multi-sited ethnography.

My immersion as researcher in a community of practice in which roles are performed in different ways was done through various means, starting with the participation in the art piece *Scribe*, as a performer, passing by several instances of observation, including spectatorship, debate, walking along, conversations, and ending with the honing of specific approaches to the invitation of research participants' accounts. What follows is a brief description of the ethnographic methods deployed.

Participant Observation

As spectator: Observing audiences' reactions and ways of being together as a member of the audience poses particular challenges, especially in pieces in which being an audience is always a learning process. In this sense it is almost impossible to dissolve in the crowd, as audiences are also performing uncertain roles. Here, the idea of ethnography as an experimental method in which observation is always participant and never neutral, defended by anthropologist Tim Ingold⁶ is very useful to understand this type of research. In order to be an observer of live arts amongst spectators one has to act and participate in the collective effort to learn how to be an audience in each of the pieces. On the other hand, the tasks of observing and recording are facilitated by the fact that notetaking and image making are common, due to the habitual presence of writers and photographers.

As performer: the piece *Scribe* provided an opportunity to pursue the research objectives whilst at the same time collaborating with a performance piece. *Scribe* is an art piece created by Fragment 31. It lasted throughout 3 days and consisted of a group of participants sitting down with various festival spectators, residents and passers-by in various public locations across Ipswich, for 20 minutes each, and recording in writing their impressions on the festival. Of course the types of interaction and the reactions elicited in this context are necessarily marked by its context, and by the approach and selection of participants, which was the responsibility of the authors. Thus the quotes from participants registered whilst

⁶Ingold, T *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* 2011

participating in this piece are identified in the form devised by the piece's author: Scribe #{participant number} (see fig. 1). More about the piece will be said below.

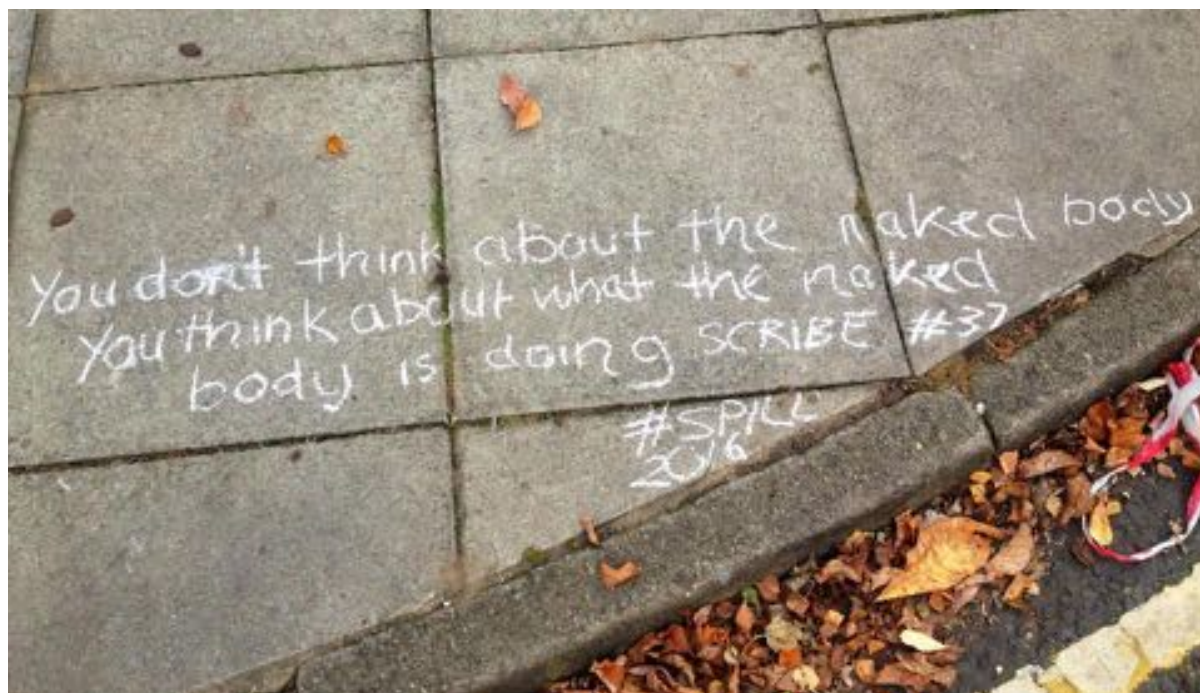


Figure 1, quote from a Scribe participant 'chalked' on a pavement of Ipswich during Spill. (photo Fragment 31)

Walking

Many of the most interesting conversations with the participants as well as relevant moments of observation of the festival's dynamics occurred in mobile moments. I stayed in a hotel with many of the artists, which turned the routes between the hotel and the Spill Dome⁷ into opportunities for parallel conversation. The dispersion of the festival throughout the city also meant that the public space and the routes between venues constructed circuits of commentary, exchange of affect, and shared articulation of meaning about performance pieces.

Furthermore, there were a few events in the programme that were themselves walks. I attended one of the city walks, where I met various local people whom I later interview during performance pieces. I also met with the author of one of the walking pieces by incidentally walking and talking with him through the city⁸. Walking was a big part of the audience and artists' experience of the festival and it was also a mode through which I attuned with its movements and emerging affects.

⁷see page 13

⁸An account of this very emotionally-charged conversation is presented on page 22.

Interviews

I recorded interviews with 20 people, and took notes of conversations with 30 others. These included participants and audiences, this report has only a selection of these conversations. The roles of the interviewees are often blurred, as amongst the participants we can include performers, producers, volunteers, researchers, and writers. Among the audiences it is important to distinguish between experienced and unexperienced audiences. Local residents constituted the majority of the non-experienced audience members.

I also conducted post-festival interviews with four people, three audience members and one artist. The aim of these interviews were to further get at those emergences of the festival which have no means of being recirculated into the art community, and therefore may otherwise be lost.

Accounting for affect through eliciting retelling

The main approach used to elicit the verbalisation of the affects of the piece was the interview. This happened in many different ways from the *voxpop* approach outside performance spaces to walking along participants in between venues. In all these cases, an important factor was the way the moment of disclosure of my role of social researcher caused a reaction in the interlocutor. Consider the following three examples of this dynamic by way illustration:

1) The Scribe interviews, performing the role/archetype of social scientist or anthropologist marked the tone of the conversations. The fact that participants were recruited by an attendant of Scribe who briefed them before they were introduced to the interviewers created specific interactions.

2) With participant Austin⁹ his disclosure of important aspects of his life happened after I said I was talking to him as part of a social research project. “Oh, since you are a social researcher I am going to tell you something very interesting that happened...”, and he disclosed a very critical event of his life which a particular performance piece made him revalue.

3) The fluid nature of the interactions in the context of the festival meant that people might start talking to me before I had the chance to explain what I was doing and ask them to record their words. In some cases, my disclosure was met with a sense of

⁹See page 17

disappointment, as they perceived the instrumental aspect of the conversation. In most cases, that didn't interrupt the conversation but obviously made the interaction move in specific ways.

These examples serve as a warning that I do not take the participants' accounts as transparent windows into mental or emotional words but rather that they are produced in particular contexts, which should be carefully considered when analysed, organised, and discussed. Making that process of production transparent is the main aim of this report and in particular this methodology section.

Telling through the words of others

In this report there is a mix of my own impressions on the festival – resulting from grids of observation that organised the research's themes and objectives – and the verbatim of what was communicated to me in various types of interviews. Some of the words were recorded in a dictaphone, others were written down live or immediately after the conversations in my note book, others still were kept as they happened in written exchanges after the festival. In all cases the text results from an attention to what people said, manifested, or did and to the temporality of the processes of dialogue with the pieces. Even though the research included formal conversations with more than 30 people, the report focuses on a selection of them, especially 4 participants in relation to whom it was possible to establish a sense of evolution in their perceptions and emotions in relation to the festival. Austin, Scribe #12 (later Jen), Rose and Linda were the most relevant in terms of providing that sense of evolution.

Anonymity

As was promised to all participants, the names of the participants have been changed. Yet, changing the name does not guarantee that the identity of the participants is protected. In a relatively small town like Ipswich and in a closely interconnected world as it is that of performance art, it is very likely that the people referred to in this report may be identified. Therefore, I made an extra effort to edit potentially problematic aspects of people's accounts as well as to, in relation to more sensitive passages, to check with them whether they would be happy with the level of disclosure. Yet ultimately it is my responsibility to take all steps necessary to

respect the explicit and tacit contracts of trust established in the research exchanges.

Analysis/write up

The method of writing up was important in terms of the temporality of the analysis and the necessary distance to process the data. There was a general sense that the festival caused very strong reactions in all participants whom I interviewed and that those effects lasted long after the festival ended. Thus it was important to allow the data and my own emotional impacts some time before producing an account that may provide the necessary reflection to the data produced in the course to the research.

The report is written in the form of ethnographic vignettes followed by analysis. Some of the vignettes are written in the first person and in the present. These refer to my voice in performance pieces and moments that I experienced. Others are written in the third person and also in the present; they refer to pieces who were retold by interviewees. Then we have the writing in the past which refers to the analytical account of what was observed and said. In this report it is important to distinguish graphically these 3 types of text. They all include quotes from participants, but the ones written in the first person of the researcher are presented in italic. This is the case with the one that follows, which opens the first substantive part of this report.

BORDERS

The Dome

It is the morning of day 2 at Spill. Scribe #23 has just sat in front of me. She is a 75-year old American artist. We share a small table and I am starting to get acquainted with the materials of Scribe – the art piece with which I am collaborating. I have no idea who she is. I know nothing about her long career in the art world and fame as performer and dominatrix, coming from the early 1980s New York scene. I have never heard of Bob Flanagan with whom she lived and worked through the last years of his life, or of the film Sick, which made their story reach wider and younger audiences. I get that she is North American, from her accent and loud voice. We talk about her arrival to Ipswich, her shopping of props for her act with Martin O'Brien. It will happen on Sunday night, she tells me. I haven't heard of Martin before either.

This conversation happens as part of the Scribe piece, directed by Leisa Sheldon. We have stamps, pieces of paper and a wooden portable desktop where we write down people's words to be collected in an archive. Scribe deployed a series of performers, embodying various archetypes (the writer, the anthropologist, the poet, the artist...) to talk to audiences, Ipswich residents, and participants of the festival. I am performing the "social scientist". Which is also what I will continue to be once I step out of this act and return the material to Leisa so that it can be used by the other Scribes. I am at Spill to conduct research on audiences' reactions to the festival's pieces. I have very little experience of performance art and, as the conversation with Scribe#23 unfolds, I am again faced with my ignorance about names that are assumed to be known in the circle of regulars. I try to make this ignorance useful for the research process, as I learn to perform my inquiring job at this festival.

The Spill Dome, where we are sheltered, is a transparent temporary structure erected for the festival in the centre of Ipswich. The daily morning debate moderated by the 'Thinker-in-Residence' Johanna Linsley has just finished. This was the first of a series of coffee mornings dedicated to various aspects of the festival's main theme – "being together". This feeds right into this research project, which is concerned with the ways in which we can capture the ability of live art to create new forms of coming together. The nearly 40 chairs lined up in front of the stage are being moved

away, and the Dome is being transformed for the upcoming children's disco. As I ask Scribe#23 about what she bought, she starts telling me details about her work. She seems surprised that I know nothing about it, so she explains naturally:

"you know, I handle Martin's genitals, and I cut him, and people think that there is something sexual in the interaction because I used to do it with Bob, and Bob was my partner. But Martin is not my sexual partner; he is my artistic partner".

As she continues to explain her piece in her loud and casual tone, I notice a few children running in and out of the space, as the DJs set up the sound system. I notice her tension when she reiterates the non-sexual nature of her relationship with her artistic partner. She emphasises, "he is a gay man, and I am mainly heterosexual" and that allows the pair of artists to "talk about the body as something other than a sexual object". The discussion is really interesting and reveals several points of tension: her need to explain this disjunction, how that comes across to the audience, and how I am struggling to make sense of it with my little experience of body based live art. All of these tensions and the possibility of them being explored in this conversation are also being subsumed by the invasive presence of the children's ears and my anxiety about their inability to be an audience to this conversation.

This initial interaction, on the morning of the first full day of festival, made it very clear that in order to account for the affects generated by a performance festival like this one would have to think about space, borders, temporality of experiences and the various types of background that audiences carry as they transpose both physical and symbolic boundaries. In a festival that happens throughout the city, making use of repurposed buildings, ruins, traditional performance venues or simply the public space itself, the name of the festival became clear. As I was later told by a mother of a 5-year-old, who by her second day of festival hadn't yet managed to see any of the "adult stuff":

"I stood outside the town hall and I could see the audience SPILLING out of the town hall and... I think it's really exciting, really, really exciting!"

So if we want to focus on what spills off the space, the interactions, the programme, and the bodies of performers and audiences, one has to identify what borders are

here being crossed, and what is the shape of the containers that are being transgressed.

The Dome was a centre for meeting, conference, storage of small items, talks, concerts, party, and children events. As a space created purposely for Spill, it was an interesting centre from which movements irradiated every morning into the urban spaces repurposed for the events of Spill. Its temporary, mobile and even precarious character was accentuated by one participant who was involved in putting up the structure. As he told me, the ground is not great and the difficulties in having health and safety approval meant that he was under a lot of stress until the last moment. The testimony of this technical worker, who feels frustrated by how the increasing bureaucratic demands of his job eat into the more attractive aspects of working for the creative industry, provided an eloquent image of the temporarily, spatial and functional borders that a festival like Spill has to deal with, whilst seeking to provide opportunities for transgression.

The boundaries of the performance space

We are in that arts centre next to the museum. On the wooden floor. The artist is in the centre surrounded by a circle of salt. Or some other coarse white powder. Then he comes to the edge and creates an opening in the circle. Then he invites someone closer. He holds hands with a member of the audience. They walk around until the opening, where the artist invites them to join him inside. The precarious ring is a symbolic border that separates but also attracts, a device that facilitates connection whilst appearing to separate. The description presented here results from the way Cy narrated the piece to me almost two weeks after Spill, in response to the question 'what pieces caused a stronger impression on you?'. This was her first choice¹⁰.

"I was really struck by the way the artist played with such interesting ideas about connectedness and separation. Made me think about how often, in order for there to be a connection between people there also needs to be some sort of division. If you put people together in one room (like say in a lift) it is very likely that people will withdraw from each other, whereas if people are divided, even if just symbolically, they will try to find ways to connect through the cracks in the walls that separate them." Cy

¹⁰ I first met Cy, near the end of the festival - see page 50

Because this was a durational piece, the dynamics of the interaction varied with the fluctuating audience. There were times when no one in the audience had seen any previous interaction, and therefore lacked a model of the 'rules' or mechanisms through which that border was crossed, or if it was meant to be crossed at all. Cy was impressed as to how the artist patiently proceeded to start anew, fabricating the situation without any words, just with minimal body language, and how each time things proceeded in different ways. Equally Cy appreciated the bareness of the performance materials, the absence of props. Just the artist's body in very rudimentary clothing and a pile of salt under some basic lighting.

"I have become very weary of performance that uses a lot of props, lots of materials that are consumed in the process without much being achieved. I now prefer when less stuff is used and wasted to make a live art piece. And in this case the fact that the border was kept by salt alone without the need of much material, contributes to the strength of the piece".

In an even more frugal piece in the same space, an artist danced naked for 4 hours, mimicking a short sequence of Josephine Baker's moves. The dance and the song were played in loop, and the audience just sit and watch. There were two sets of chairs, one behind and the other in front of the artist who danced facing the main door. The naked body facing forward created a border that made people sit preferentially in the closer set of chairs. Also the setting, albeit very minimal, reproduced a traditional border between performer and audience.

These two examples highlight a particular aspect of performance art audiences which sets them at a place where uncertain borders may generate the potential for new ways of being together. Scribe #26, for example, a young theatre manager, told me about that sense of unease that permeated his new experience as an audience of performance art. He spoke to me, on the day he arrived in Ipswich, from London, to visit a friend who convinced him to attend the festival. He enjoyed the first performances and was still grappling with the idea that it is "tricky" for audiences of these pieces, "because there are always a lot of questions about how to behave". There is awkward laughter, there is hesitation as to where to sit, stand, how to move, etc, and because this is not like theatre where the role of the audience is usually clearly defined as are, with more or less clear cues, the moments in which, and how to react (laughter, suspense, gasps). In performance art all of this is always subject

to questioning. That makes audiences look out for what others are doing as much as to the performer for indication as to what are the boundaries that are meant to be kept, crossed or moved. The rules under which people come together are questioned through the way the performance space is bordered and by whom.

Nakedness: between the skin and the audience

The piece “Shadowing Josephine” described above was only one of the various pieces involving naked or semi-naked bodies. How do audiences make sense of the naked body in performance art, which is clearly at odds with mainstream social norms of decency? Two interesting reactions were conveyed to me by inexperienced audience members. Both participants brought up nudity in response to general questions about the festival without any indication on my behalf that referred to the specific issue itself.

The first one, I heard from Austin when I met him walking the desert street by the Ipswich Museum, after the closing of the Terra Nullis piece¹¹. When I ask him about his experience of the festival he tells me he is a local resident who is finding the experience particularly positive. In particular, various one-to-one pieces made him feel comfortable enough to talk about his recently diagnosed mental illness. The reason, he explains, lies in the fact that, in various pieces that he attended, the artists were themselves willing to expose their vulnerabilities. “Some of them even perform naked! I mean, is there a more evident sign of courage to expose vulnerabilities as someone appearing naked in public?”, he told me. Here nakedness is a symbol of exposure, which conveys a sense of openness that marks the emotional structure of the festival. The removal of layers between body and audience contributes, for Austin to the availability to disclose.

The second perspective was expressed by Scribe #26, the young male London-based theatre manager presented above. He had arrived to Ipswich for the first time on the day I interviewed him. He told me he had been thinking a lot about nakedness in the first pieces he attended. He was reading a book called *Sapiens*, which led him to think about clothing as one of the evolutionary burdens we carry with us. He likes to think that artists performing naked are contributing to our slow release from this burden. He was particularly interested in observing the ways in which the performers

¹¹Other parts of this impromptu interview and another two that I did with him throughout the festival are referred to further down.

dealt with it on a human level. As for the audiences, he felt that the reactions were marked by “nervous laughter” and unease which was both motivated by the aforementioned “evolutionary burden” and the fact that they have to deal with a lot of questions as to how to behave.

In this research project I often came across a sense that naked bodies in performance art contribute to thinking about the body in a less objectified way. This was put eloquently by D in the previous fieldwork at Tempting Failure, when he said that a particular piece made him think about the body as a whole and not in the Lacanian sense as scattered objects of desire – “the pussy, or the boobs” (see report on tempting failure), and in this way could liberate it from the dominant forms of instrumental sexualisation.

But these non-sexualised approaches to performing naked bodies were also challenged in the festival. Two days after I met him for the first time, Austin told me about his reactions to the piece Hard C*ck by Robert Hesp. Here the reactions to the performance of an eroticised male body provokes disruptive reactions in a gay man grappling with mental disease. Here is a transcription of an excerpt of my conversation with him on Sunday morning:

“So for example I am a gay man and I'm 57 years old. I don't if I told you this, but in the last 12 months I've received a diagnosis, for Asperger's, which is on the autistic spectrum, and I've used therapy over the years, which has never addressed the issue and I realise now that there are certain obsessions certain things that have affected me every day of my life and I never realised that I was actually on the autistic spectrum. So it could be that some of my reactions are connected to who I am in relation to the performances. So there are obsessions.... So I went to see the thing and there he was, and of course for me it was an extremely homoerotic, he is a very beautiful young man. But in the way the tension was also in the performance about there was also a massive tension for me leading up to it. What happened in the performance? Well there he is, he is lying, a beautiful young man with just his pants on, and then of course he moved and... a lot of erm.. putting gooey something, I'm not sure what, over his body in this very erotic way and then he's displaying himself in front of the computer screen because it is linked to the whole social media issue of erm parading

yourself or making contact through social media, and you know he was very close to me at certain points, erm... and you know it was... there was a massive connection between pleasure and pain because of course he is unobtainable so there is a massive connection between pleasure and pain.”

I asked him whether he thought that he was the only person in the audience with those feelings – he replied that he felt like he was. When I insisted, Austin manifested a strong self-awareness in relation to his recent diagnosis that made him feel like his experience was somehow disconnected from everybody else’s. Thus, his imagined one-to-one connection with the performer was very strong. At some point of our interview, in the sequence of this exchange about the Hard C*ck piece and his troubled reactions, Austin said,

“I even wonder, does the performer understand the... I don’t know, the strength of the... the strength of feelings... that the audience is feeling. They are performing but do they know really, how strong?!”

I asked whether he thought the artist was trying to create this tension:

“Yes, obviously, as you go in, even the music was du dum, du dumm, it was very tension-filled. And you know.... what’s gonna happen? When is he going to remove his underwear? You know... it was tease, yes, it was a massive tease!”

In the two attitudes before nakedness in two performance pieces, Austin also reflects two different emotional atmospheres created by the artists. In the piece Hard C*ck, the explicitly erotic character has an emotional reaction that counters the openness generated by other experiences. In relation to nakedness it is also interesting to look at the testimony of Rose, who was in the festival with her 5-year-old daughter¹².

Emotional borderline.

Reception and anticipation.

An important part of Austin’s account about Hard C*ck focused on anticipation. I interviewed him on Sunday, right after he heard a description of the Sanctuary Rink piece, which would close the festival later that evening. This made him feel anxious as to whether to attend it later. And it was in that context that he highlighted the Robert Hesp’s piece mentioned above:

¹²Page 31

“I knew for example that this guy Robert Hesp was doing a performance and that he was going to be naked and there was an excitement but at the same time a massive anxiety about it. So in a way the performance started even before the actual performance. So for example I went to the symposium and I saw this guy and I thought, is that him?... and I wasn’t sure and that became quite a big thing in the following days.”

We are used to discussions about the temporal limits of the performance by inquiring what happens after it finishes. But here Austin is telling us that there is a world of affects generated before it starts. Now Austin is troubled because he overheard someone saying that the Sanctuary Rink would finish with a crucifixion. Our conversation happens during the festival’s Sunday Brunch in a very loud soundscape. He tells me,

“...something happened the moment you came in... now there is this performance, I’m trying to remember the guy’s name...yeah: Martin O’Brien... I was having breakfast and somebody here was saying they won’t be able to see the end of it. He is performing a durational 3-7, and she was mentioning, because she can’t see the whole lot, something was going to happen in it... there’s going to be S&M in it. And then she was saying, he’s literally going to be crucified! And I thought I don’t know whether I wanted to hear this, and the whole S&M, oh my god, I was literally shaking. Look! That’s how I am right now, I am literally shaking and I don’t know whether I wanted to know that because I am at a very hyper state at the moment. I told you about a lot of experiences I’ve had before today I mentioned about the Robert Hesp, that whole thing for me the performance for me started on Wednesday night – It wasn’t just the performance. And now this is happening. And now I don’t know what to do about it. What do I do?”

We know that the artists are often dealing with heightened or troubled emotions and that the piece might be their way of making public their processes of coming to terms with them. But for some members of the audience some pieces may also challenge them in critical ways, starting even before the start of the piece. And their emotional engagement as an audience may be more centred on their own processes than in the reception of the artist’s creative process. I later encountered Austin at the Sanctuary Rink piece. He was much calmer. He didn’t stay until the end, but he

conveyed a sense that the actual being in there was much less troubling than the idea of it. I got that sense from other members of the audience, whom I interviewed outside. Austin's account ended you being just an extreme manifestation of that tension between wanting to see and looking away, the resistance to dealing with difficult emotions and the value of dealing with them in shared settings.

Further down in the last part of this report I will focus on Sanctuary Rink, some of the emotional exchanges it generated, and my last encounter with Austin. For now, I want to say more about this idea of performance art as coming to terms with difficult situations in public through an example of this process of performance as a way of "coming out" in relation to disability in an emotional exchange with Mark.

Performance as 'coming to terms with'.

Mark is a middle age professional with very little previous contact with live art. I meet him on Sunday after the morning meeting at the Dome. I saw him present his piece in one of the previous days. It was going to be, he then explained, a walk in silence out of Ipswich, through wild peripheral landscapes. The leaflet says "I talk and I talk and I talk... when I'm not talking to others I am talking to myself". This he mentioned in his talk at the Dome on Friday. He also spoke about the route he was going to take and the crossing of borders between the urban and the wild, and the idea of walking in silence and observing. "Walking is a very distilled form of observation". Two two-hour walks early in the weekends. Confirming his availability to talk, he talked to me some more in the end. I told him that the ideas were really interesting but it would be hard to get people to attend these weekend morning walks in a festival like this. Now, two days later, I see Mark window-shopping near the Dome. I approach him: "so how were the walks? Did people come?", I ask. "yes, it was quite a good group." As he turns to walk away from the shop I notice he is limping. "Did you hurt yourself in the walk?", I ask unknowingly. "No. I have multiple sclerosis. This is actually part of the whole thing about the performance, which I like to call practice, of bringing this practice to the festival. It is a way of addressing this issue." As we decide to walk together to the centre of the town, Mark unfolds his walking rod and starts telling me his story. He knows about his condition for years but only very recently did the symptoms started to appear. Some days it is worse than others – "now it's particularly bad" – but generally in the last few months he has felt a steep escalation. Walking really helps, although it also hurts. In conjunction with the

physical difficulties arising from the disease, Mark has been finding it hard to learn how to perform his new persona, to express his condition to others. Although he talks a lot, as he keeps admitting, he has been refusing to talk about his physical condition. He has also resisted to even use his walking stick, which is really helpful, but forces him to admit and come to terms with the escalating limitations of his body. The piece he performed in the festival was his way of addressing this issue. "I think that the people who walked with me yesterday and today were the first ones, apart from my family and very close friends, who I talked to about my MS." It was a sort of 'coming out'. "We walked in silence for two hours and then, when we came back, we talked". Mark talks about the experience as somehow liberating but also difficult. I comment that when I heard him speak at the Dome and when I read the blurb I had no idea of his disability let alone that it was a part of the discussion. Mark explains that he didn't want to make it a centre of attraction for people to come. He wanted to avoid the element of 'freak show' or 'human zoo' that accompanies some performance pieces. He makes it clear that he is not criticising people who put their disabilities at the forefront of their pieces, but it is just something that he didn't want to do. Yet it was important for him to create that opportunity to talk. With others. Because he is always talking, but not about MS. He mostly talks about it with himself. And he thinks about it all the time. As I should expect.

By the end of our conversation I seem to see Mark's eyes slightly moist or maybe it is just mine that are about to burst into tears. He has been recounting his emotional struggle as it is happening, his thoughts flowing into words and back again grappling with the sense of making his private troubles public issues. His body is hurting and he can feel its deterioration almost in real time. He reminds me that my 'normal body' is degenerating too, although I mostly manage to avoid thinking about it. He also reminds me about all the stuff that I endeavour to conceal, all the 'walking sticks' that I fold and avoid showing to others.

We say goodbye, maybe we will see each other at the Sanctuary Rink tonight. I comment that it may be interesting for him as well, in terms of this idea of performance as coming to terms with the moving limits of your body. I will certainly see it with different eyes after talking to Mark.

I sit down at a café to write my notes. All these voices in my head, people I heard in the past criticizing much performance art as 'self-indulgent bullshit' and talking about

the 'pornographic exhibition of human suffering' won't shut up. But Mark's story brings a very convincing voice to the discussion. Understanding the importance, the pain and the courage of his process of opening up may help others also open up. I overhear someone at another table saying, "It's constantly in my head". I also have voices constantly arguing in my head. I need to write them up so that I don't suffocate in the stories I hear. I think about the one-to-one pieces in this festival. I feel the confrontation between my attempts to know and the affects of the events generated by my endeavour. I think about walking as a distilled form of observation and writing as performance.

Transgressing urban space and Pride in the city

Locals

Spill had a few other walks in its programme. 'Secret Signs of Ipswich' was the first event I attended at Spill. After a few hours collaborating with Scribe, I joined a packed group of mostly local people on a walk led by local architectural historian Boris Van Loon. As I talked with various participants I got the sense that the walk had mostly attracted local people, somewhat outsiders in relation to the rest of the festival. Yet, some of them were planning to go to various events. Others might have been tempted afterwards. The walk itself was very interesting and provided a very rich glimpse into urban history albeit from a particular form of conservational urbanism that is more concerned with architectural history and aesthetic relevance than with the social relations that buildings signal and materialise. There was only one passing reference to a political struggle over the urban development of the market area, which resulted in successful opposition to the council's plans. When I asked for details about this political confrontation, I was met with some resistance to talk about it and someone very cryptically pointed at the European Union flag on the roof the town hall. In the divisive post-Brexit climate, the meanings of this event could be interpreted in many different ways, yet the exchange signalled a point of political and urban tension which further research, or even walks or performances pieces may in future help to unpack. More to the point, the walk provided a very quick glimpse into the particular form of urban belonging that Ipswich residents share. This can be summarised as a pride in the city that is associated with: a rich architectural history; the longest continued-settlement in the UK; and a privileged location in one of the most beautiful areas of England. This pride is often associated

with a sense of self-loathing for a diminished image in the eyes of outsiders and with the loss of economic purpose after the decline of industry and shipbuilding. The walk finished within sight of the Willis building, mostly referred to as 'the glass building' or 'the Norman Foster building', which in many ways represents a forward looking idea of the city. Various people referred to it as the quickest in the UK to be listed after it was built. At least one of the participants in the walk was excited about the prospect of attending the festival piece that was scheduled to take place in the building on the following day. "I used to work in that office space for an insurance company. It is a great building and I am going to be there". the next sub-section provides an account of the Luminous and some reactions to it.

[Luminous @ the Willis building](#)

From the outside, the Willis building is a round dark glass wall that follows a curve in a central road of Ipswich. During the day, its windows only allow the view of the ground floor, which is populated by the building's pipes and machinery. During the night the lights in the upper levels show the large open plan office spaces completely empty. This gives an uncanny sense to the building as, at least at this time of year, we can never see any activity inside. I'm told that there used to be a swimming pool in the basement for the enjoyment of the people who worked in the building. It is now covered up. There is also a garden at the rooftop, I was told.

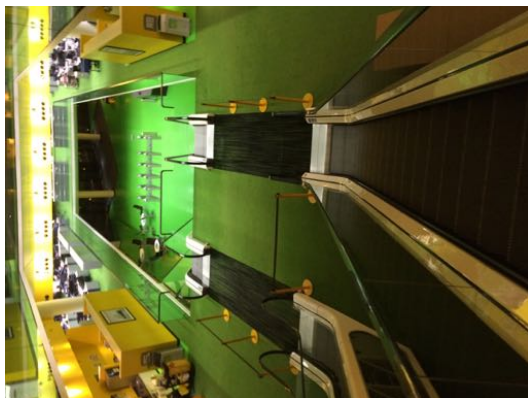


Figure 2 the entrance of the building

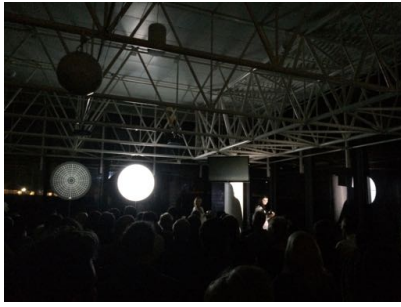


Figure 3 Luminous performance

I arrive at the building for the Friday night performance of Luminous by Mem Morrison. I am late. Can I still get in? A security guard will have to take me up. I'll have to go and ask him, the Spill person tells me. The security guard happily leads me through a wide and tall almost non-space-like, between open large office rooms full of empty desks on both sides, and up two long flights of escalator stairs. It is like a cross between airport, modern tube station, shopping mall and office space. As we get to the top floor, the security guard makes a move to lead me through, but he is interrupted by a woman dressed in a white jumpsuit like the ones used by scientists dealing with radioactive material. The security guard, dressed in black, seems disappointed that he won't get through the corridor to see what's going on. The woman tells me to find a sit anywhere amongst the audience and wait, for she is going to give me a present. I'm at a large conference room, and the lights are off. I find a seat in an empty back row behind a good dozen of very long rows of heads. Over them, I can see words and images being projected on two round screens off-centred to the right. After less than one minute the woman brings me a folded LP cover, and I understand we have gathered to listen to a music album. After a while two lines of people dressed in the same white jumpsuits walk on the sides of the audience and disappear on the right hand side. I become aware of the view beyond the dark glass walls on the right. We can see a part of the town from above with its lights and buildings. It feels like we are at the centre of a panopticon as we can see the city but the city can't see us. Yet, suddenly, lights switch on, and a rooftop space covered by artificial grass appears from nothing in between the windows and the city. As the album continues to roll, and the words and images succeed on the screen in front of us, the white clad people start dancing outside forcing the heads of the audience to turn right. At some point they dance compressed against the windows, replacing the illusion of power allowed by the audience's viewpoint with a sense of being inside a cage. The choreography follows its course until the album

comes to the end and we are led out again. I notice a couple dressed up and I approach them to confirm the impression that he works in the office. He doesn't say much except that he enjoyed the event. He is in a hurry. Come Monday he will probably be sitting at one of those desks.

Later, other people describe the piece as “flat”, and “overproduced”. I see in my notebook the word “grandiose”. At the end of the festival, another audience member tells me that it was the best piece he saw in the festival. He loved the music, the centrality of the sound and the way the space was used to aid the auditory experience. It was generally interesting to see workers, former workers, as well people who only see the building from the outside enjoying the repurposing of the space and moving through the building, and experiencing how it produces power and different routine and disruptive choreographies.

[Terra Nullis @ the museum](#)

Testimonies at the Ipswich Museum:

Michael:

“This event... this scenario makes me happy. I'm very proud of my hometown and the culture it offers.

I'm not really a museum kind of guy. I travel a lot and I never go to museums or art galleries or anything that is much static. I like movement and performance.

So this for me tonight is fantastic.

It's bringing what I see as a fairly static boring building into something vibrant. I know that I don't speak for everybody. Look at the people down here. They're clearly enjoying it. I hope more and more people come over the night.

I was here before when I was at school {there's applause and cheering in the room , making hearing the conversation difficult} over 35 years ago the last time I stepped inside this building. And I have to say from walking around the bits where there's no performance on, it's like a Tardis (Doctor Who ref). From the front it doesn't look as big. I hadn't realised that there was stuff about the ancient Egyptians here... personally I'm not interested that much but, you

know, I've got nieces and nephews with that age and I'll recommend them to come. To me it is all about bringing life to the space.

It was a bit otherworldly down here. I remembered vaguely there was a mammoth down there... {noise of music and cheering} yeah, this is how it should be!"

Andrea:

"I am local and came because I have friends who are performing here.

I've been to performance art. I'm a big fan of going but mostly fine art. I'm a consumer.

I like Leetha's. Leetha is my colleague. She has a cast of her body and she's projecting images words onto it so she's just somebody I've known for a very long time so... I was given this by my daughter, she gave it to me.

I know, the coffin is amazing, yeah. It's great. It's funny because the lady from the coffin said you got to take something and I could not find anything that I want to because I don't like things. I'm not into you know I don't want to buy, I don't want stuff, does that make sense?

When she said you can take something I felt obligated. It was like a bazar, and I don't like shopping. But I thought the dead body was really interesting and I hadn't thought it was real but I saw the... whoever's in there, I saw the cheeks moving so I am assuming, it's a live person... I can't imagine it's a dead body. It's a real person, because I saw the cheeks moving ever so slightly, so I thought that's alright. I thought it was plaster or something. But I thought it was amazing! But also being here, amongst archaeology I thought it was really... because this is almost like, erm, it's like a burial ground of stuff, think about these dead things, or it's just like a mass grave.

I used to come with my child who is 14 and he's like 6 foot 2, but when I brought him he was like 2 years old, we would come every week he would run around.

It brought back memories, all the children's areas, and there was an old seal there, and I just remembered, it was like seeing an old friend. But I just love this being at night, I've never been here at night before.

A lot of the rooms are exactly the same but there's other bits that have changed but they haven't felt that they had to jazz it up. There's a sense of respect. These stuffed animals are dead and maybe a bit creepy but I feel that we are honouring them. The other thing is that this museum tells us more about the Victorians than it does about natural history. This place has been an Ipswich institution.

I don't think this can be seen as disrespectful not at all. As I said I've never seen the museum in the dark, a lot of the art is complementary to some of the themes around death, around life, around the progression of time so for instance Leetha's piece which is the piece I was mentioning is all about her life from 1985... and I've seen her work before but I've never seen her work in that context and the way she displayed it was very nice and then there's Chris downstairs doing some poetry and the drummers came to our charity's AGM about a month ago and it is lovely to see they are in the area of the animals and it's like, totally the right place for them without being sort of silly and African, just feels like it's like the right place for them, it feels like it enhances that space.

I've just been talking to my colleague's wife and she's from Zimbabwe as is my colleague, and she was saying that she used to work for a company that serviced the cars for the safaris and she used to see all these animals in the wild and stuff like that. We were listening to the drummers and there was people dancing and it felt completely right."

Young couple of performers from London:

"I haven't been in a museum for years

I just find it strange to be inside a museum...

... remembering those things like taxidermied animals... I find it really brutal.

Freaky.

Strange to be inside a museum.

There is a sort of stark contrast between these stolen objects from around the world and then people from around the world performing against these historic objects, I find that quite confronting. And I think museums in general are quite

confronting in that way.... I don't know how it sits with me politically. You know, this is again sort of a woman lying there which is like a mannequin in a shrine and we are invited to take from that shrine and the action of taking, because we are consumers the action of taking from someone's sacred space and taking with ease and wanting to take it justified by.

I took this sign.

And I took this Sade album, such an amazing album, you know there's no real depth why I took it, it was just a consumer titillation, I gained something...

And then it makes you think of the sort raping and pillaging of other cultures, someone's lying there... and yet you do it... I'm gonna take it back

I cannot really put together a character from those objects, like it felt like the objects, you know, juxtaposed with an old grandmother, sort of I love my grandmother sort of thing.

And it's like it's a whole world, it's not that one person...

- I thought about rubbish as well because I research rubbish and that was the stuff she didn't want.

Ah yeah

The detritus"

Children-only and grown-up pieces

One important border, to which I refer at the beginning of this report, was between children and adults. Much of the programme of the festival could be rated as adult-only. Yet Spill festival includes in its programme events and activities specifically aimed at children. After my encounter in the Dome with the children coming for the afternoon disco, I became particularly interested in how this border was kept and what it meant to transgress it. So when on Friday I met Rose at the Town Hall, standing by the door with her 5-year-old daughter, I asked her for an interview. She kindly agreed to sit with me for a few minutes. Here's an excerpt of her testimony:

"I had to wait outside the town hall for my daughter's father to pick her up to take her so that I could be free for the evening... then I saw a scribe, right, and then they asked if I had some free time and I did because we were waiting for him then I missed most of the show, but I had a good friend who

talked me through most of what happened and most of it, and I saw the last bit and it was nice music, dancing and I got the vibration.

I haven't seen any adult stuff yet. I've only seen children's disco yesterday, we went to Playing-up today and we went to see Beastie.

Beastie I spied on from the window, so I just saw a little bit of it, I made a film of it and put it on fb. Because our friend was also in the show which we didn't know. so we didn't realise that there was a lot of friends volunteering and in the performances which we didn't know, so you know that's art in itself that's lovely and I really like the audience, I can see the audience I can see the audience outside the town hall, spilling out of the town hall and... I think it's really exciting, really, really exciting.

My daughter is 5.

If it's an adult performance it's an adult performance and everybody knows how to behave in a theatre and she doesn't.. if she's not interested in it she's gonna ask to go, to leave and it's going to be annoying for me, so she's gone home now and I'm free which is really nice.

But I think that the beastie she sobbed at the end of it, she says that she didn't want it to end she wanted it to go on for ever. And she told me all about it . The children went on their own, so no parents with them and I think that really worked. She told me that beastie did a wee from his elbow, and that he stood like this and lime that and she obviously really loved him and she fell in love with him and she didn't want him to go away... she was moved

This morning my daughter said, so Beastie what is it all about, where is he, who is he, and then she had read the programme and she said, er who is he, is he around the corner... dadada, all the words that were in the advert for it, is he gonna do a poo on the toilet then I thought, ah, Spill festival I've heard things, maybe he will, maybe he will do a poo on the toilet, or somewhere else. Then she drew a picture of a big poo. And I thought, maybe this Spill festival is coming into our house yeah? And she said and that is a poo and everybody does it, and that's a picture of it. And I said, but is it art? And she said, yes. Because you can look at it, and I made it. And then she drew a face on it and said it was an emoji. It's a poo emoji.

Now I'm going to try and see some adult stuff and we're going to go and see beastie again because she liked it so much and were going to see his procession.

I work with musicians. I'm really interested in, I wouldn't say race, but identity, and culture, and heritage and DNA. And peace. And music."

A few days later, Rose sent me her after-thoughts in writing. On Friday, she wrote:

"Beastie was fantastic, it was a great opportunity for my daughter to introduce her new friend to me and continue the game. We joined in with Playing Up, and the best thing about that was the ticking off of one mother who wasn't joining in, a great self-reflection on how much, or little, time and energy we spend engaging with our children in play. In the evening I was child free and saw We are all made of stars, luminous and Hard C*ck. So I had a couple of 'but is it art?' As well as lots of other conversations afterwards. I was glad to see them - I knew explicit performance art existed, but I was never an audience member before. I felt unsettled and a bit negative the next day - contaminated by the angst in the work? I think these would have been very challenging works for a local audience.

I noticed a lack of local people at the paid performances. It would have been great to have more public performance - I only saw Beastie on the street - and a few participatory performance art workshops as well as discussion groups would have been great.

She and I loved Mike Challis' Soundhide work and the burning ceremony on Sunday morning.

It felt great to be part of it - it felt like Glastonbury Festival for performance art - my house being my tent and every morning with my coffee looking in the programme. Very exciting and I did not want to miss out even when I was less than uplifted by the work I saw on Saturday night. So art is always great when it puts us in touch with ourselves, the Sunday morning work did that for me and Beastie certainly did that for her."

And then on Sunday, after I asked her specifically about the boundaries between the children and the adult stuff in Spill, rose replied:

“My daughter was not with me at the adult performances. So the very explicit nature of We are all Stars and Hard C*ck was actually fine with me. They were both disturbing not because of the nakedness but because of the concepts behind them. But the disturbance was due to my own feeling of 'am I watching art, or is this voyerism?' I went with my friend who said as she approaches from a psychological/ psychotherapy field (she is a teacher for mental health nurses) she wondered if the performances crossed a line into self-abuse. We talked a lot about the destruction of the planet (we are all stars) and the unbearable loneliness of the U.K. homosexual scene (HC). We talked about the relative newness of performance art as a genre. She said maybe it is still pre-verbal as it's so young, which would explain why there is so much fascination with bodies and bodily functions! I thought the audience was in the majority quite young too. I felt some of the issues - or ways of communicating them - were quite young too and what was lacking was a maturity of conviction. Maybe. The kids' shows were more nurturing - with elements of dream and beauteous nature instead of a hyper-real, hyper-personal and hyper-anxious display. Another friend levelled me out on Sunday when I told her about the shows I'd seen. She said some people use it as an excuse to show their bits off... I think it's more than this. Challenging boundaries, asking people to reckon with the ideas there. I get it but I wouldn't necessarily go looking for more. I think there are other ways to communicate. Explicitly: 'We are all stars', she was in a black cloth covered chair/bed/seat lying down with a microphone deep breathing and a micro camera on her body which projected onto the big screen behind her – sci-fi / David Bowie Music? A lot of colour and abstract image on the screen she used coloured water maybe oil too to create the image. An iris emerged from her vagina. Nothing was being healed though. Some florescent liquid came out of her mouth in the end she stood up - it was a bit scary - like a monster walking towards the audience and then out of the door. HC was also the same - like the artist had put their own human beauty to one side to express this disaster of modern life. It's why I don't get horror or war films. Another friend said ' well that's what you went there for, you got what you wanted' (HC) pointing out the voyeuristic aspect I guess. We had a great walk down Norwich road with Cad Taylor though, but I inadvertently became an additional tour guide as I live there too! One thing really struck me about

the festival though and that was the creativity of atmosphere all around. I wanted to be part of that. I had to go to Debenhams at one point in the weekend to return something and the banality of consumerism just hit me. I was with my daughter and up and down the escalators I repeated 'this is capitalism this is capitalism' over and over! I was making art, hoping people would just hear me subconsciously or consciously! That's the kind of effect good art has on me - the knowledge that there is more to life than the everyday and this stupid system we are all part of. Spill could make something of this – spontaneous activist art – a few workshops to see what's bugging people and then let them loose on the town!"

The city and the festival

Rose followed her last suggestion above with an offer to collaborate in setting up this project for a future edition of Spill. Events for children, like the night-time museum pieces, the piece at the 'Norman Foster building' and the urban walks had the power to attract many local people to the festival programmes. The effects of this outreach have various positive outcomes.

Firstly, they are important to make local people, who are not regular audience of cutting edge art, feel included. It is true that some participants have noted that there is a sense of strangeness between the festival and the town. Scribe #9, for example, noted that "the festival seems to have just landed here". She was in the Festival with her classmates from the 3rd year performance art degree in Leeds Beckett University. She explained that they were there to get inspiration for their final projects or as she put it "to steal ideas". Talking to me at the town hall square, she reflected on the piece "Because of Hair" in which a black artist covered with afro hair locks was interacting with the pedestrians facing at times some aggressive reactions. I heard other complaints from local people about the piece, although these views were mostly open to discussion and often started conversations. Scribe #9 noted that "this is a very white part of the country", and so this piece was potentially very provocative.

But it is also true that the Spill programme had a very rich mix of provocation and listening, statement and dialogue, integration and affirmation of difference, which contributed to the sense of a productive transgression that creates possibilities for

something new to happen. This is only possible through the inclusion of new audiences, thinkers, and producers, as much as to the openness of the festival itself to be changed by those new views. They may come both from those who interact with a more resistant or critical stance, and from those, like Rose, who discover in the festival new possibilities for applying her creative skills and political interests.

ACTIONS

Walking

We tend to think of walking as a linking action, one that simply allows us to move between the spaces where the real actions are performed. It is often easy to forget for example that walking makes a big part of many performance pieces, as the artists move across pre-defined stage-spaces or weave, by moving, the very boundaries in which action takes place across time. Think about the piece “If we did like this”, mentioned by Cy in the beginning of the previous section on the boundaries of the space, and you will have a good illustration of that. Also the piece Hom(e)age (detailed below) made a strong impact partly by making the audience walk across the space. I am also reminded of the piece Embed, performed by Helena Goldwater at Tempting Failure 2016. In this piece the artist would walk around a square of soil often increasing the range of her circles in ways that opened up the border between the action and the audience.

At Spill, walking was also, explicitly, a way of expanding art beyond the confines of its sacred spaces. Walks such as the ‘multicultural walk’, or the ‘hidden signs walk’, or ‘strand’, or the ‘beastie walk’ invoked anthropologist Tim Ingold’s idea that “through walking(...) landscapes are woven into life, and lives are woven into the landscape, in a process that is continuous and never-ending”¹³. But it was also through the scattering of the events through the city that new walking spaces of reflection were open. This was important for me in researching for this report as it was for many of the people I talked to, who retold conversations happened between venues, or various other encounters with artists in the streets of Ipswich.

By engendering walking conversations, Spill has multiplied the ways in which the festival collectively affected audiences. Again Ingold is useful to make sense of the change of perspective that this entails. He defends that “we perceive (...) not from a fixed point but along... a ‘path of observation’, a continuous itinerary of movement”, which resonates with Mark’s idea of walking as “a distilled form of observation”. Ingold again shows how this is crucial since, “if perception is... a function of movement, then what we perceive must, at least in part, depend on how we move.” In this sense, “cognition should not be set off from locomotion, along the lines of a

¹³Ingold, T. *ibid*

division between head and heels, since walking is itself a form of circumambulatory knowing”¹⁴. I will come back to the issue of knowing, which is central to this more analytical section of this report.

Talking

One of the aspects of performance art, which is usually puzzling to new spectators, is the tendency not to rely on words. Some people may even be left with the (wrong) impression that what defines body-based performance art is the absence of words. That was certainly not the case in some pieces at Spill which were built around speech, albeit in surprising ways. As examples of pieces in which the spoken word was central to the piece we have pieces as diverse as the Sanctuary Ring and Pull the Trigger.

Expectedly, this non- or supra-verbal character of live art was predominant at Spill. Most pieces worked on non-verbal forms of communication¹⁵, such as “if we did it like this”, Home(a)ge and Because of Hair. The importance and parsimonious use of words in performance can be illustrated by one of the pieces at the museum night – Terra Nullis. Not far from the Egyptian section, one performer, lying on a glass coffin surrounded by mundane personal objects, impersonated a contemporary common mummy. After we approached the coffin to look at the objects the attendant would come to us and whisper “You can touch” and “You can take one object”. From that point onwards, the interaction was completely altered as spectators would turn into consumers. Torn between turning into Black Friday bargain seekers and respecting the sacred setting, we would rummage respectfully treading slowly the fine line between the profanation allowed by the words whispered, and the restraint imposed by the presence of a supposedly dead body. The quality of the performer’s make-up and acting also meant that she was in an “uncanny valley” between similarity with a doll and with a dead human body. Yet, many refrained from asking or commenting on the doubt as to whether there was a real person in the coffin or not. If a member of the audience expressed their surprise towards the finding then the collective perception would change again by the power of words and tone.

¹⁴Tim Ingold, *ibid*

¹⁵Which allowed the very skilful and expressive sign-language interpreter of the festival to be present everywhere she was needed.

The use of words is remarkable here because most performance acts avoid them, and Spill reflected that fact. This poses a great challenge to the task of accounting for emotional reactions in verbal form. This is what I tried to do in this research and the process of translation involved in verbalising emotions is in itself a form of experiment that the method imposed on participants. This meant that many refused to talk, which was obviously respected and understood. What is important to reaffirm is that the verbal contributions generated in the course of this research are not meant to be a representation of an inner truth where the genuine emotions lurk. Rather, like a performance piece, this research project attempted to provoke particular ways of performing the affects of the pieces and the festival. Language is thus not understood as a lens into a hidden world but as a substantive reality generated at particular moments, which allows us to outline the extra-temporality of live art.

The production of verbal accounts was also what a set of pieces that made members of the audience speak, tell, talk or reveal. This group of pieces, which I call 'listening' pieces and were also refereed by participants as 'one-to-ones', display many similarities with research activities, although they represent a completely different form of 'attempt at knowing'. I will refer to them in the following section.

Knowing

"The only question that was answered was, Is it important to do this? And the answer is yes. But it was also a way of putting many other questions in highlighted context, to see what came of it, but I don't know, and I hope never to know, because otherwise I would never do it." Laura (Almanac)

A considerable part of the festival's programme was devoted to pieces which included an element of elicitation of more or less personal accounts from the audience. They invited members of the audience to perform their life stories and emotions, in forms that generated accounts not dissimilar from the data used in social research. They involved encounters of 20 to 30 minutes with individual volunteers. Four pieces are particularly relevant here.

Scribe became particularly close to the present research project's aims, because it asked for accounts about the festival itself, recorded them in a physical form, and organised the material generated in an archival form. Scribe paired the

focus on eliciting and listening with the will to record and include the materials in a collective and cumulative process of knowledge. The piles of paper with the participants' words handwritten by the Scribe volunteers to whom they talked through the 3 days of the festival, are now deposited in the Spill Think Tank archive and can be assessed by researchers, artists and general public.

Other listening-based pieces, and the one-to-one conversations they generated, were relevant to and specific of a kind of performance art that generates dialogues and invites other voices. These art pieces become thus located in some ground between research and therapy, with much potential, but also risks and limitations. "You see..." and "Almanac" were two pieces that lasted for 2 full days and prompted one-to-one conversations, eliciting personal accounts. I spoke with both artists – one during the festival, the other one week after. In both it was clear the sense of being overwhelmed by the accumulation of other people's stories and emotions which converged into them throughout two days of exchanges. And they both understood my difficulty in grappling with the idea that all these stories would not be anonymously retold, archived, confronted or analysed in any way.

'**You see...**' played with cards to talk about privilege along the lines of race, class, gender and sexuality. As I encountered people who experienced the piece, the reactions were mainly positive and spoke of liberation and insight. Austin, for example, told me about how this piece had allowed him to address his mental problems with a stranger which was something that he would never had thought possible. Jen mentioned challenging questions, such as asking her to elect a form of privilege or a preferred pronoun, and from then immersing in deep thoughts about taken-for-granted and critical positionalities. As for Jamal (the artist) he had a succession of emotional experiences which multiplied the emotional effects it had on the audience¹⁶. His experiences were very diverse, ranging from very moving encounters to a fall out with a friend who wasn't happy with what the conversation led her to say about race. As I asked Jamal, a week later, what he intended to do with what the piece generated, he took a different approach from that of Leisa Sheldon, the author of Scribe. For Jamal, there is nothing to be done with these conversations except that they will inform his future work. And much of what was to be done had already been done. The effects of those encounters were now making

¹⁶ I think we can still speak of an audience, and I will explain why.

their way to the lives that they had affected and the conversations they engendered. And that was more than sufficient from an artistic point of view.

The approach taken by Laura Burns in **Almanac** was less sociological. Her motivation was to take stones from a river in Lancashire out of their setting, and use them to 'energise' conversations in the performance context. Her general questions had to do with people's desires and life intentions, and then attempt to transfer that energy to the stones. The piece reveals a preoccupation with the materiality of what remains from the encounters, and the verbal and emotional material generated. We can also see a parallel with *Scribe*, in the sense that the stones perform the role of the materials used by scribe – both as prompts to elicit and shape particular accounts (as Jamal's cards), and as devices of recording and forms of archive.

But these one-to-one pieces raise the question of whether the boundary between artist and audience is being eroded, through co-authorship and shared performing roles. The data presented here seems to close down this question. Not only are the motivations of the pieces completely intimate to the author (the local river, the author's beliefs, the author's race and sexuality), but also the way the outcomes of the conversation are brought together are completely absorbed by the author. In methodological and ethical discussions in social sciences, we tend to think about this as an issue of power imbalance, but in this case it is not clear that the artists are in any way empowered by this imbalance. Rather they tend to feel powerless before the overwhelming character of what they end up taking in.

What is interesting about this type of performance pieces, apart from the curiosity that they sow in the student of social science, is the ways in which, they reach out to the audience's voices in the endeavour to make sense of an inner aspect of the artist's identity or philosophical problems. This leads to the construction of bridges, or walls, or flows with the audience in ways that are more or less open to mutuality, allowing the initial problem to be enlarged or changed by the contributions of the audience. In the case of **Toys** there was a sense that the performance obeyed to a more unmovable motivation. The artist played with a character of toy-story that is made in Taiwan. Rather than one to one, Howl invites 5 people at a time in a small space, surrounded by toys. The artist himself was dressed as the character from toy story and asked for participants' memories of childhood, if they noticed where the toys were made. He was making a connection between people's memories and his

own identity as a Taiwanese, questioning how his nationality was imprinted in people's memories of childhood. Again Howl uses the many interesting stories that he heard in shaping his future projects.

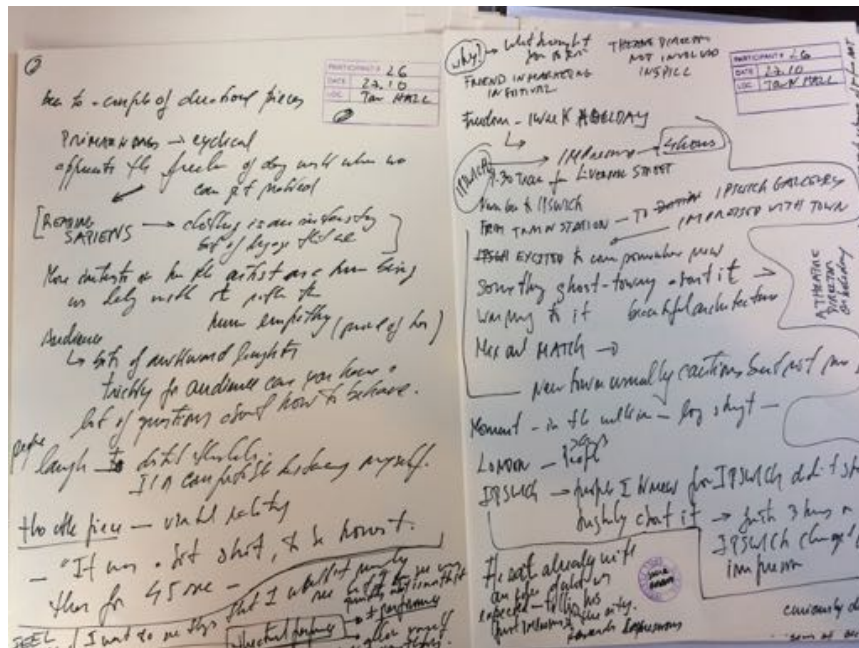


Figure 4 A sheet produced from a Scribe encounter

Assembling and dispersing

The pieces described above produced encounters temporally bounded, most of them in a fixed space or, in the case of Scribe, across the city. Other pieces assembled people across the city in different spaces. The following piece is an example of an impactful way of playing with the audience's movement across a closed space. In this sense it pushed inwards the boundaries about how to bring people together. In the process, it raised many critical social, political, and artistic questions.

The Local Foreigner

During the festival, the piece "Hom(e)Age" was mentioned to me by various unrelated participants, at different places and days, as the one that impressed them the most. For example, Claire and Joe told me when I interviewed them at the museum:

- "What did I enjoy the most? The piece at the Drum and Monkey with fish hanging from the ceiling... he created like a sound collage of a repetitive kind of vocal throat singing..."
- Yeah, it was Portuguese sea chanting from Portugal

- And he sucked the guts from the fish and spat on the wall!
- And then he started swinging with the fish across the space so the audience was like...
- Yeah really horrific
- It was really intense
- I found it really physically challenging to my body but yeah it was also really powerful the sound was really intense, filled filled... and then when he was sucking out the detritus and shit like being in it and then being confronted..."

The first account of this piece was given to me by a woman who has strong connections with performance art, as producer and writer:

"The most powerful piece was Andre's piece, with the fish. It was in an abandoned pub. There are fish heads hanging from the ceiling, it sinks, he is clapping and saying welcome", Scribe #12.

Andre is an artist who call himself "Local Foreigner".

"He is singing a line of a song, looping it, and adding an octave every time. Then he sucks the head of one fish and spits the blood on the wall! And does it again! This was a very hard-core audience and still he got very squeamish reactions!" Scribe #12.

Other people had pointed me to this performance piece, when asked to name pieces that they liked or that caused an impact on them. A young man, also a performer, explained, "I know he is Portuguese, because he was singing a line from some Portuguese fishermen music". Later, the Local Foreigner clarified: "It's not actually fishermen music", he told me in our native Portuguese. The song line was from a band that plays music from the dry inlands of Southern Portugal. But it is about departing, it is meant to evoke the sense of migrating, of having to leave. And even without people understanding the lyrics, the message was conveyed, thanks to the whole composition of the piece. That became clear in Scribe #12's thoughts on the piece:

"And then...", she announces with emphasis and suspense, "he started to swing the fish!" As the fish heads swung like pendula from the ceiling, in all directions, there was nowhere to stand in safety, "and everybody started running around, trying to find

a safe place in the middle of the stinky mess. Everyone fleeing, without any place to flee”. She continues:

“It felt like we were in a storm under the sea. It was so apt to think about the storm in which we are now! So apt to describe our basic instincts to flee, whether you are a migrant or a refugee, or whether you don’t want to face the problem that you are leaving behind.”



Figure Abandoned pub Drum and Monkey, venue of Hom(a)age

She was very impressed with the way the Local Foreigner held the audience together, how he moved, how he alternated from the welcoming messages and calls to gather next to a water sounding bowl, to swinging the hanging fish heads and dispersing the group, creating different ways of being together. Scribe#12 went further in her emotional/political identification with the piece, likening it with the “creation of this underwater chaos” that recreates “the stinky mess we are in at the moment”.

Ending

It’s Sunday afternoon. In one corner of the city, a church building is starting a new life. It is no longer a church. After years of abandonment, it has recently become an arts centre, but who could tell?

The clocks moved back this morning, and the night quickly befalls the churchyard revealing the red glow emanating from the windows and the main door. Continuous music, both calming and grave, dominated by cello and distorted guitar, interspersed by call and response mantras (“in the name of Bob you sew your penis. Keep

breeding”), makes this building sound as sacred as its architecture. Inside the church, Sheree Rose has just wrapped Martin O’Brien’s body to a column, pressing flesh against stone, after he whipped himself at his own pace, encouraged by the collective counting (whip – audience: “one!” – shaking the whip’s nails – whip – audience: “two!” – shaking the whip – “three!”...). The sado-masochistic ritual is on its way.

From the outside, this is a church like many others. In the surrounding yard, tombstones scatter around a large tree, which stirs the earth as it feeds on the humus enriched by the dead bodies. Apparently, the unevenness of the soil is a permanent geophysical feature. But we know that the ground is undulating under the force of the tree’s roots, a movement we can’t quite slow down to perceive.

The door of the church is open, attended by a lady at a table. She comes out once in a while, where she is joined by, or looks at, those who walk, stand by the door, by the tree, or sit on the low wall that surrounds the churchyard. In reply to my question about her experience of body-based live art, she explains: “Martin {O’Brien} was my lecturer, other lecturers are amongst the audience, and many of my colleagues are right there...”. She points at the tree in the middle of the churchyard surrounded by bunch of tombstones. After a silly momentary thought of a performance class so extreme that only my interlocutor survived, I step sideways to find, behind the tree, in amongst the tombstones, a group of people sitting, chatting and laughing. By the many ways this fluctuating population of by-standers dresses and acts, it is hard to think that the church is filled with regular churchgoers. But by the way some ponder, whisper, laugh nervously, talk gravely, walk in and out or away into town on their own, or thread quietly around the yard, one could be led to think that this church is hosting a wake. Even my morbid thought about my interlocutor’s university class seems to be stuff of the kind of dark comedy that entertains the sociability of wakes. At one point, I wander alone around the empty churchyard; I remind myself of childhood memories of catholic vigils, of being torn between the curiosity of going inside to look at the dead body on display and the ineffable terror of facing it. A performer standing outside the church makes that same point:

“it’s just like a ritual, a subversion of Christianity. Or maybe that’s because that is the closest idea of ritual and religion that I have. It’s a really lovely and strong tribute to Bob Flanagan. And they have a little flyer/prayer book,

because it is organised as a ritual so that every task that they do there are certain things that Sherie says and Martin says that is sort of like when you are in the church so that the priest talks and the people talk, so there's' that kind of thing so you got the prayer book and there's all the information about the piece."

In fact, this is a kind of wake. We can say that, throughout the 3 hour-piece, Sheerie, Martin, their assistants and the small crowd that surrounds them, moves with them from the wall to the bath, looks, peeks through, hides, gets in and out, responds to the vocal calls and finally turns to face the altar watching the rising of Martin's upside down body, gathered there to mourn and celebrate a dead man through a ritual exhibition of a human body. What sets this ceremony apart is that the body under focus is alive and the person being celebrated died more than 20 years ago. "I fight sickness with sickness", Martin repeats as he makes himself available to be tortured. Like Bob did.

Outside, I struggle to get words out of people. It is the end of the festival, many tell me, and it is hard to find energy to talk. There is also a sense of shock, which predominates amongst those who leave the church, permanently or momentarily. The churchyard is a special shared space of affects. The bodies speak, sometimes apparently in contradiction with the words. But I am looking for words, I'm trying to provoke them. I approach a woman who I see arriving from a toilet break. Her hands are shaking. But she talks non-chalantly about the piece. She runs a venue and has experience of hosting extreme body based live art pieces. She describes the present experience as "light". There is a humour and a poetic context, she explains, that is often absent for more crude expressions of pieces "like these". I'm the first one to use the term "like these", and we both try to work out of it means. For her, this piece can be grouped with others where there are things getting in and out of the performer's body. The skin is the space of the emotional interface. Penetrating the skin becomes a way of transgressing an otherwise impenetrable container of emotions. And the skin of the face expresses the audience's reactions in ways that are often impossible to translate into words.

Inside the church, Martin's skin has been crossed by a nailed whip, stitching thread, a dildo and water. His performing of his sick queer body afflicted by the same

disease that killed Bob, a body used to pain, learning to enjoy pain and giving it a poetic dimension.

Outside, a man and a two women sit on the wall with heavy expressions. They have just left and although they agreed to talk to me it is hard to get them to speak about their emotions. But they make an effort:

Woman 1: I really didn't want to see... so it was that reaction rather than an emotional one.

Man: It made me wonder about intervention... the point at which you should say, Can I help? Like, the bit that I saw last he was towing a canister, and oxygen tank, something like that which I imagine had been attached to his prick in some way and he was crawling down the length of the church.... it made me wonder, was it, is there an element of exploitation that goes in here, is there some sense in which the person that is agreeing, complying to this treatment is being exploited, but I think

W1: because he wanted to go and save him

M: can I give you a help?

The only experience that I can remember similar is that play "fucking shopping..." there is a character in there that is being fucked up the ass by a bottle and I remember afterwards talking about it and the question as to whether or not we were shocked came up and I felt that I wasn't shocked, and some people were outraged.

One of the things that troubles me more about the piece is precisely the performance of oppression. Even though it is communicated that there is mutual agreement and the point may be exactly to propose that masochistic actions can be empowering, I receive it as a representation of oppression, mainly because the man honoured is not the man that is suffering the pain. That coupled with the stakes of an older and more powerful woman gives it a sense of objectification and unequal power relations which I find disturbing. Yet I want to know what other people feel, and I am sure that even if I don't express them, my feelings will also influence what other people say in some way. I ask for descriptions so that feelings can be expressed. In this context description itself demands emotional labour work and inner challenging of language structures:

Woman 2: ermmm .. I'm still digesting... what was happening now? I'm not all together sure, because I couldn't really see. It was quite confusing in a way. I did move and I still didn't quite see what was going on so I don't know if there was some cutting going on or something being pushed through his penis I'm not quite sure what was going on at that point but I just wanted to leave at that point.

I really don't know what they are trying to tell me, sorry, I really don't have any words for it...

The man intervenes to contextualise and compare:

M: We've come from Hind, which we saw earlier today, and that experiencing Beirut... and that contrast between that engagement with other people's lives and this... It was a montage of narratives and images of people who were forced to leave the country erm, so that social interest as opposed to very inward looking experience that we've just seen there, forms a powerful contrast, I think.

W2: There are also, both pieces – they're hardly comparable – but there's something that's really difficult to access, feelings of displacement and separation and all the things that she expressed through those images, they are things that are not easily expressed and perhaps this pain that they are expressing here is not easily expressed, for me at least walking out is, I don't want for it to be communicated, or I don't want to be an audience for it to be communicated in that way. You know that...

M: So Bob was her partner and he died 14 years ago and then this guy... had no relationship with Bob. There's a difference between grieving and doing a performance about grief. It seems a difficult thing to do to make grief your subject rather than something that you experience deep inside.

W1: I saw a woman picking through the radiator, sort of hiding but wanting to see, and that was exactly how I was feeling. I wanted to see but I didn't want to see, and I didn't want to be there.

Austin who I interviewed early joins the conversation. He got acquainted with this group of friends earlier.

Austin: I saw one young guy being embraced by another, it was almost as if... just represented a sort of ambivalence, they needed comfort watching it. I certainly saw that erm and that was one image that struck me. And yet it was very close to the action. It was when his penis was being sewn up. I was actually quite happy to be a long way from that. So there was a thread, and before that he was pierced. But the thing about his penis being sewn up was in the program, so I knew about it. Erm...

I was in a highly emotional intense state {on account of what I had told about the performance}, you saw I was shaking {earlier in the morning} particularly when I was told that there was going to be a crucifixion in the end. Erm... I didn't know all this. I was there for an hour and a quarter. The actual being there for this time didn't actually have the impact... it was not as horrific, or the reaction to it... as when you met me at breakfast. But people I was with had to go home, and I thought it was a good time for me to come out, that's probably enough, and I don't think I am going to go back.

W: Yes, let's go! Cy {whom I mention at the beginning of this report) is in there. shall we rescue her?

W2: no maybe she doesn't want to be rescued.

I ask whether they think that these images may in some ways haunt them in future, if that's why they didn't want to see. Austin jumps in:

Austin: Exactly! Do I want those images imprinted on me? Do I want that image when I go to bed? Do I want a crucifixion image in my mind before I go to bed? And if you live on your own that's very hard because there aren't other people there to process it with it.

*I take the opportunity to come back to the question of shared reception, of being together as an audience as opposed to that solitude which Austin referred to earlier in relation to Hard C*ck. He replies,*

"Well, that's the other thing, it didn't feel like a shared experience. So there was a group of them, there was the 2 main characters, and then there was like a small group of... I would perhaps describe them as helpers, holding some of the things and kissed him before... you know, and to hand the torturing things, and it was very much about them, they were a very closed

group, and it seemed to me like a very shared experience to the group, who were part of the performers but there was no.... I certainly didn't get a good sense that it was shared with me, that I was part of it, if that makes sense."

I ask the group of friends about their impressions about other pieces in the festival, and they liven up:

W: the piece last night... it was the woman at the new Wolsey and it was Cabinet of curiosities. That was amazing! Really really powerful, and I thought that I couldn't be interested in the piece of performance art about the female body and strong feminist... but she was fantastic! It was so good. She did lots of things... she explored the body and... the idea of labia surgery and the...yeah she was really really interesting.

Yet when I talk about the piece going on inside the church they go down and the atmosphere turns heavy. Until their friend (who didn't need 'saving' after all) arrives from inside the church. She left because she couldn't see her friends for a while so decided to join them. I ask her what she thought. She replies with excitement:

Cy: I found it really emotional actually. I think it's really really beautiful! A celebration of a queer sexuality and of an alternative set of relationships. I mean I find it beautiful that he finds a way to celebrate his identity and his, you know, I just think it's very beautiful. Erm it related to vulnerability and sexuality. And that feeling of affirmation that comes from being vulnerable and being both sort of being taken care of as well in terms of understanding and touching you in that way, as communicating with that part of yourself.

I was thinking of Mapplethorpe's work. I was thinking of how it connects to a tradition of celebrating alternative sexualities erm and some of the relationships that he had. I found it very brave and very moving.

I look at her 3 friends. They have smiles on their faces, they seem relieved. They leave for a drink and I imagine that Cy's words of excitement and positive reception of the piece will continue to distil some enlivening thoughts and feelings into their previously speechless and depressed state.



Figure 5 St Clement's church, now the Ipswich Arts Centre (Photo Wikimaps)

After they leave I walk to the 'portaloo's' and back. Just outside the low wall that surrounds the churchyard, a house door opens and a couple comes out with their 2-3-year-old kid. The man sits at the wall, talking to the woman that remains under the door frame. I walk through the narrow space between them as I watch the child trotting along on the wall, towards the churchyard entrance. As the child approaches the open border between the performative space and the city, I imagine what would happen if he walked in through the door. Where would he place the image of a crowd gathering around a man being sodomized by a woman in the middle of a church? The encounter, of course doesn't happen and I see the child walking backwards to their parents who remain chatting by their door apparently far away from my mental space. I feel like asking them about their knowledge of the event in the church but I fear that my intervention might provoke their curiosity and break the fragile balance that the spatial symbolic borders seem to be doing a good job at maintaining.

At 6 o'clock, one hour before planned, an applause irrupts inside the church as the piece comes to its grand finale. The crucifixion is not a real crucifixion, but rather the re-enactment of the scene of the "suspended Christ" that Bob Flanagan performed in a 1995 video clip by industrial metal band Godflesh. Austin didn't stay to see this finale, neither did Cy and her friends. I see part of the audience spilling out of the church and assemble outside, or walk straight into town. I talk to a couple of people before going inside.

In the church, the central corridor is filled with little paper pictures of Bob spread like confetti on an overflowing stream. As someone points out to me, mixed in with that still stream, where Martin spent the last three hours offering himself to torture, are the remains of skin and blood, the material detritus of this performance. In the altar, there are drinks and food. Like a real wake, people are now eating drinking and socializing. This ending piece, with its grand finale will certainly help make the effects of this festival last much longer.

Conclusion

Performing the festival

In reference to one piece he had seen before and didn't like much, Michael, a local spectator said,

"It seemed to me to be a deconstruction of how the guy would have liked to have put a performance on and he talked through what he would have liked to have done but he couldn't do that and it ended up with... it just came across to me as a kind of, he got the commission and got near to the day and thought, I haven't got a show, oh. That's just how it came across to me."

The presence of new audiences and ongoing public reflection on the process and encounters between artists and audiences, and between the festival and the city, forces the artists to think of producing pieces that can speak to things happening outside the art world. There is a tendency for contemporary art to be self-referential and in this way alienate those who are not familiar with the codes and problems of the world in which it is produced. As important as artistic self-reflection is, Spill makes a real effort to prevent it from becoming a self-enclosed space. The very incentive to structured reflection and discussion through Think Tank and listening based pieces, fills in that role, freeing the creative processes to step out in the world.

Thus art can open up new paths and make other spaces possible. The political can be enacted through art, including body-based performance art, which focuses on ephemeral and affective encounters. But this can be done in different ways. As one participant said, referring to the piece Hom(e)age, the piece is very good at describing the "stinky mess" the world is in at the moment. Yet, she continued, we must use pieces like this to take a step forward. "I know we are in this stinky mess, but I want us to get out of it. I want us to interfere with it." When asked the question, "Who is that we/us you are referring to?", she began to outline, "Us is the art community, us is this privileged part of the world, us is the people who are not in this endless pursuit of money...", who have a responsibility to act in the world, in addition to obviously, denouncing its wrongs.

Spill opened up the possibilities for performance art to impact in the world in ways that question as much as open new ways. An important part of that endeavour will

have to be to speak across divides, and to enrol new audiences with more active roles in the creative processes. The other will be to question spaces and times, and use the urban as a resource for enlarged encounters that produce new ways of being together.

The city itself is a tangle of lines and traces, a temporary concentration of circuits, circulations, transactions, ephemeral constructions and connections. “All that is solid melts into air”, all that is erected will one day be ruin, all that is produced will eventually become waste. Yet there is an urge to know, to know oneself, to know the other, to know the place one inhabits or one crosses more or less fleetingly. Performance art, especially body-based live art, with its ephemeral yet affective nature, has the potential to at once attune with, and be disruptive of the cadence and pulse of the city.

Through the course of this research, I met with several people who were recruited through various processes or who showed interest in participating more intensely in the future into the world of performance art through the impact of Spill. One of them was Mark, who produced Strand in his first performative incursion in Spill. Another one was Austin, who discovered in performance art a way of confronting his emotions and coming out in relation to his mental issues. Another one was Rose, the music producer who offered me ideas and is willing to collaborate in a project of political engagement of local people during the next Ipswich Spill.

But the impact of Spill cannot be restricted to new audiences or recruitment of new performers. For example, one artist told me her project for spill had been rejected but she still came, mainly because of the nice letter she received from the festival director Robert Pacciti, which made her feel this was a caring art community. Another one, whom I interviewed at Sanctuary Rink, was clearly shaken by the performance albeit trying to articulate a sense of experienced hard skin. Also most experienced spectators and artists who attended Hom(e)age admitted that the piece got into their skin, made them feel something new, and therefore potentially made a new lasting impact on them. This has the potential to shift installed routines and bring new paths of progress.

Yes, some may be fed up or perhaps vacuously enticed by the endless arguments around the temporality of live art. We have all heard and talked about the many ways in which the affect of performance can be measured, accounted for, monitored,

recorded, archived, displayed. But who is this We, who are we, who is this We? And how does this We frame these discussions? Does it create a new inside of which one needs to get out of in order to effect the first urge that made the performer come out of herself or himself in the first place? What can new people bring to this discussion? what are the possibilities created by bringing people together in events that can't be televised, or registered or even researched in any satisfactory ways? What are the possibilities of transgressing borders and plugging disjoint conversations I ways that are not mediated by hierarchical structures or algorithmic whims?

By asking these questions and providing possibilities for creating new spaces of collective knowledge and reconfiguration of emotional structures Spill has contributed to make performance art perform in the world. This project's contribution is an attempt to account for the circuits of circulation of affect that are threatened to dissipate much of the energy and knowledge generated in this event.