

Encounters:

A Critical Analysis of Complicité's *The Encounter* (2015) and Tania El Khoury's *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016), With Particular Consideration of the Effect of Audio Technology On Fischer-Lichte's idea of The Autopoietic Feedback Loop and Rodosthenous' 'Voyeuristic' and Rancière's' 'Emancipated' Categorisation of Audience Spectatorship.

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Contents

Page Number

2 - Acknowledgements

3 - Introduction - Encounters: Bodily Co-Presence in Space

5 - Chapter One - *The Encounter* (2015)

Part One: Does the use of technology and the lack of physical proximity between audience and performer in *The Encounter* (2015) shift its audience into Rodosthenous' 'Voyeuristic' or Rancière's 'Emancipated' view of audience spectatorship?

Part Two: Does the use of technology and the lack of physical proximity between audience and performer in *The Encounter* (2015) destabilise Fischer-Lichte's 'Autopoietic Feedback Loop'?

16 - Chapter Two - *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016)

Part One: Does the use of technology and physical contact in *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016) situate the audience member as a 'Voyeuristic' or 'Emancipated' spectator?

Part Two: Does the use of technology and physical contact in *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016) destabilise the 'Autopoietic Feedback Loop'?

24 - Conclusion - Emancipation Through Sound and Distance

26 - Bibliography

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Introduction

Encounters: Bodily Co-presence in space.

In the opening paragraph to Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*, he describes the bare minimum that is required to make a piece of performance engaging; 'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaging.' (Brook, 1968: 9). This perspective suggests that there are only two things required to enable performance. The performer, and someone else who watches, the spectator. Unlike the cinema or television, the theatre is an artistic medium that relies entirely on this subject-object relationship, that of the performer (the object) and the viewing of that performer by a spectator (the subject). Over the years many practitioners working in the theatrical arts have attempted to remove one or both of these elements from the performance event, Augusto Boal, Bertold Brecht, and Heiner Goebbels¹ to name but a few. But for Caroline Heim, the author of *Audience as Performer* notes that the encounter between the audience and the performer is 'The core of all theatre [...] the encounter of the actors with the audience. The actors with each other, the audience members with each other' (Heim, 2015: 3). Similarly, Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman describes an encounter as 'one given set of individuals' in the 'continuous presence of another set of individuals' (Heim, 2015: 3). When audiences come together in the bodily co-presence of the performer, an encounter occurs one that is the very substance of a performance.

This essay will explore this encounter, how it occurs, and the relation of technology between audience and performer in the act of performance. It will do this through examining two contexts: the first is an exploration and comparison of two modes of audience spectatorship, 'Voyeuristic Spectatorship' as discussed by Dr George Rodosthenous in *Theatre as Voyeurism*, and 'Emancipated Spectatorship' as explored in Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*. The second will explore Erika Fisher-Lichte's

¹ See Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy* (1995), and *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics* (1998), Brecht's *The Modern Theatre Is the Epic Theatre* (1930), and *Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect* (1951).

concept of the autopoietic feedback loop as explored in *The Transformative Power of Theatre*.

Chapter One: Part One will examine Complicité's *The Encounter* (2015) and how the effect of binaural sound within the performance emancipates or fails to emancipate its audience by further exploration of Bertold Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* in relation to audio technology and how this affects a modern technologically inclined audience. As well as how audio technology affects the audience's sense of disbelief and this alters the audience/performer relationship. Chapter One: Part Two, will further explore *The Encounter* and how the use of binaural sound affects the autopoietic feedback loop by further exploring of Michal Goldhaber and Jonathan Crary's concept of the attention economy, Philip Auslander's ideas on the collapsing difference between live and mediated events, as well as the effect of audience members spectating other audience members.

Chapter Two: Part One will examine Tania El Khoury's *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016) and how the use of physical contact emancipates or fails to emancipate its audience by further exploring the contrasts between exhibitionism and voyeurism in relation to physical touch, as well as isolation and personal space, and the tensions these two positions cause when performed together. It will also explore community created in performance and how this effects emancipation. Chapter Two: Part Two will further explore *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* by exploring the tonality of live and pre-recorded audio and how this effects bodily co-presence and the autopoietic feedback loop. It will also examine the performativity of performers who are visible and those who are not.

The arguments presented in both Chapter One and Chapter Two will aim to explore whether technology promotes or abolishes the emancipation of an audience, and whether technology is or is not capable of 'de-materializing and disembod[y]ing' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 100) the physical presence of the performer and therefore capable of weakening the autopoietic feedback loop. As well as the effect that physical proximity in relation to audio technology has on both of the contexts that comprise this study and exploration of performer/audience encounters.

Chapter One: *The Encounter* (2015)

Part One

Does the use of technology and the lack of physical proximity between audience and performer in *The Encounter* (2015) shift its audience into Rodosthenous' 'Voyeuristic' or Rancière's 'Emancipated' view of audience spectatorship?

Since they were founded in 1983 Theatre de Complicité, have been pioneers in the field of creating performance driven by technology. Over the course of their thirty-four-year career, they have developed over thirty productions and co-productions that have blended physical and technological theatre performance together. *The Encounter* (2015), a performance adapted by Complicité from Petru Popescu's novel *Amazon Beaming*, recounts the tale of National Geographic photographer Loren McIntyre's 1971 journey to the source of the Amazon River in the Andes. The production premiered at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2015.²

The first sound an audience member is likely to hear when entering the performance space of Complicité's *The Encounter*, is the voice of a woman asking them to test the headphones that they have been provided. The performance utilises binaural sound: sound recorded through two microphones in order to create a three-dimensional sound sensation, one that requires headphones to experience. The use of headphones in the performance could have a number of implications for the spectator. For some, the use of headphones might have a distancing effect, removing them from the false reality of the performance work, especially if they are used to more conventional forms of theatre consumption, such as traditional proscenium performances that utilise the distancing effect of the fourth wall. The distancing of an audience from the performance work was recognised most significantly by the influential twentieth-century theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht. Brecht coined the term *Verfremdungseffekt* to described the alienation of 'an event or a character [by] first of all stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them' (Brooker, 1994: 191).

² I watched the performance at The Edinburgh International Festival on 19/08/2015. Quotations of the shows text were taken from the Live Stream of *The Encounter* that was available from the 01/03/16 - 08/03/16 on Complicité's YouTube Channel.

It could be argued that the use of headphones has the potential to actuate Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, by disturbing the bodily co-presence of the subject-object relationship, that, according to Fischer-Lichte, 'enables and constitutes performance' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 32). Yet, with a more contemporary audience, it is possible that the technology used in the performance would have little to no effect due to the way in which these contemporary audiences interact with technology in their 'everyday lives' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 54). As Rodosthenous states, modern people 'are bombarded by a stream of misleading images modelled by the media' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 54). Therefore, the spectator becomes accustomed to the mediatization of screens that create a 'mirror of hypnotic allusions [that] forms our way of seeing as spectators.' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 54). In short, the spectator is accustomed to communication via technology.

For many years there has been a cry for a form of spectatorship that coincides with a more technological consuming audience, Heim suggests that 'tweet seats' among other kinds of innervations such as the use of headphones in *The Encounter* 'certainly promote this' (Heim, 2015: 65). If modern audiences are used to the effects of technology, then the *Verfremdungseffekt* may in fact not distance an audience at all, but connect them. Rodosthenous, suggests that 'With an increased application of pervasive mobile technologies into performance experiences, [...] the relationship between the seemingly distant observer and the theatrical event has become unstable.' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 72-3). Audiences have become 'very self-aware', as to when they 'have become an audience/voyeur of a dramatic performance but [they] are able to suspend this conscious thought and allow [them]selves to temporarily believe that what [they] are witnessing is a real-life drama' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 11). Spectators' ability to suspend their disbelief even in the face of alienating techniques and technologies has grown as audiences have started to become accustomed to the techniques directly developed from Brecht and his *Verfremdungseffekt*, and the increase in technology as part of their everyday life.

Simon McBurney, performer of *The Encounter*, comments on the pervasiveness of technology in the modern world. As the performance begins he takes a photograph of the audience on his smartphone as a form of evidence to prove to his six-year-old daughter that he does, in fact, work in the theatre. He goes on

to explain that 'There are more photographs here on this thing [the phone] of my children, then there are of all of my childhood and my adolescence combined' (Complicité, 2015). His aim here is to form a juxtaposition between modern technological life and the secluded nature of the Mayoruna people that feature in the show's narrative, it also unintentionally highlights the changing nature of society's reliance on technology, further supporting the need for the union of technology and other performance elements in the theatre. This need is heavily advocated by, and catered to, by *The Encounter* by not only its use of headphones, but by including other technological elements such as the use of a teleprompter at the back of the auditorium, to assist McBurney with the sheer amount of spoken text the show uses.

The show's use of binaural sound directly connects a contemporary technologically inclined audience with a method of viewership that connects an audience and performer through technology. Early in the performance, McBurney discusses the technology used in the performance, in particular, the Neumann KU 100 Dummy Head: two microphones capable of recording three-dimensional binaural sound. The KU 100 is stationed on stage, wired directly to the headphones used by the audience. At one point McBurney showcases this technology by asking the audience to close their eyes as he approaches the KU 100. He whispers into its right microphone, and each audience member hears his whisper in their right ear. The effect of this performance method is that the listener's ear grows hot under the apparent presence of someone whispering into it. By using binaural sound in this way, the performance attempts to remove the distance that divides McBurney and the spectator. McBurney explains this idea by saying 'I feel there is a very powerful relationship between empathy and proximity'. If empathy is taken to mean the connection that links audience and performer, the core of the subject-object relationship, then McBurney is suggesting that distance affects the clarity of the connection. Because of McBurney's distance to the audience, the effect of this connection is lessened. Soon afterwards he attempts to close this distance by asking the audience to place on their headphones as, in his words, he 'would like to get closer to you now.' (Complicité, 2015). This suggests that the effect of distance on the subject-object relationship can be mitigated by technology. He goes on to reinforce this position as he takes a 'walk across this 2.6 pounds of electrified paté that we call our brain' (Complicité, 2015). His voice appears to move from one side of the audiences' head to

the other. Through technology, McBurney attempts to get closer to the spectator than mere proximity would allow, he materialises behind the eyes of the viewer, feeling as if he is sat 'in the seat of our consciousness' (Complicité, 2015).

The use of headphones in performance is traditionally a way to isolate audience members. The way in which the production and McBurney utilise them to interact with the audience also has the effect of isolating audience members, not from the performer, however, but from each other. This effect of isolation seems to stand as a deliberate attempt to put each audience member in the shoes of the protagonist Lauren McIntyre, who gets cut off from civilisation. As 'the majority of theatre-goers attend the theatre whether with someone else or with a group.' (Heim, 2015: 114) this type of isolation can be incredibly effective, as demonstrated in later moments of the show when the ears become almost overwhelmed with layers of sound. However, this is not a performance that is linked solely to the aural. McBurney's presence on stage is as vital to the understanding of his aural performance as it is to a more conventional theatre show. For example, the perceptual phenomenon of the McGurk effect demonstrates close links between hearing and vision in speech perception, (Nath and Beauchamp, 2012: 781-7).³ That being said, the magic of *The Encounter* relies upon the interplay between what the audience hear and what they see, and sometimes, how these two sensory inputs directly contradict each other, such as the moment McBurney breathes into a microphone in front of the audience, yet they feel his presence behind them.

The way in which *The Encounter* is performed strips away its artifice as a 'real event'. The fourth wall is broken by McBurney's direct address as well as the presentation of Foley studio techniques that in more traditional theatre shows are presented off stage. Presenting the technology in this way, allows the audience to understand how it works, whilst simultaneously breaking apart any sense of the real allowing the audience to see the show, as a false representation of the real. By directly engaging with the audience through headphones on a seemingly one to one experience, the performance is created by the mind, as a

³ First explored in a paper by Harry McGurk and John MacDonald entitled *Hearing Lips and Seeing Voices*. The process dubs over a video replacing the sound of a spoken phoneme with another. Watching the lips move differently to the sound of the phoneme that is heard, actually creates in the mind a third phoneme.

result of the oscillation between what is seen and what is heard.⁴ This allows the audience to apply their sense of disbelief even in the face of such false representation. Therefore, the performance seems to work in reverse to human beings' natural process of removing the represented image, to reveal the real. As Rodosthenous asserts, 'The realistic image is a contradiction in itself, since its mission is to represent something that we customarily see as real. So, to enable the viewer to conceive reality, each acquired image must be crushed.' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 55-6).

However, Brecht may have argued that despite modern audiences' aptitude for technological viewership, the audience is still inhibited, in the sense that they do not actively engage in the work to become emancipated spectators, but, instead, they remain passive Voyeurs.

'They scarcely communicate with each other; their relations are those of a lot of sleepers. [...] True, their eyes are open, but they stare rather than see, just as they listen rather than hear. They look at the stage as if in a trance. [...] Seeing and hearing are activities, and can be pleasant ones, but these people seem relieved of activity and like men to whom something is being done' (Brecht, 2015: 187-8).

On the other hand, Ranci re would argue that it is the distancing of the audience from one another, caused by the performances use of headphones, that allows them to break free from the shackles of Voyeurism. If the audience is made to watch, not from the anonymity of voyeurism but the attentive viewership of the emancipated spectator, they become distanced from the homogenous group of 'audience' and instead, become individual spectators, a group of attentive individuals, rather than a mass of passive eyes.⁵ As Ranci re would put it, 'S par s on est ensemble' (Apart we are together) (Ranci re and Elliott, 2011: 51). The isolation caused by headphone use breeds a form of audience minority. Ranci re defines emancipation as 'emergence from a state of minority' (Ranci re and Elliott, 2011: 42). It is from this sense of minority that the audience becomes emancipated, much in the way *The Encounter's* protagonist, Loren McIntyre is secluded from society. It is his voice materialising in the head of the spectator, telling the story of his own emancipation, clashing with the visual of McBurney's performance, that emancipates the audience. McIntyre's voice materialises as a powerful tool in creating understanding and an open discourse between

⁴ Much like McGurk and MacDonald's third phoneme.

⁵ The notion of attention will be explored further in Chapter One: Part Two.

McBurney and the audience members. Although the words that are exchanged are one sided, from McBurney to each audience member, there is significant evidence to suggest that some form of unspoken communication is taking place. For example, the bodies of those in attendance are not slumped as in front of the television, but taut and attentive, receptive to the voice of McBurney as McIntyre, in contrast to Brecht's above statement. This receptiveness leads to an unspoken conversation between the audience and the performer, a transfer of energy that only seems possible in the bodily co-presence of the subject-object relationship. If we consider the use of technology in *The Encounter* as emancipating its audience, then how does this technology affect the subject-object relationship? The next section of this essay will attempt to answer this question.

Chapter One: *The Encounter* (2015)

Part Two

Does the use of technology and the lack of physical proximity between audience and performer in *The Encounter* destabilise Fischer-Lichte's 'autopoietic feedback loop'?

In the opening of *The Empty Space* Brook discusses the relation between the bodily co-presence of the performer and spectator in the act of watching, as theatre becomes more embroiled in the technological world, how does the presence of technology affect this relationship, and how the audience view performance? Fischer-Lichte states that 'While presence brings forth the human body in its materiality, as energetic body and living organism, technical and electronic media create the impression of human presence by de-materializing and disembodimenting it.' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 100). If this is the case, then to what extent does the presence of electronic technology in *The Encounter* (2015) de-materialise or disembody McBurney's physical presence? More specifically, how does this de-materialisation affect the subject-object relationship between McBurney and the audience?

The subject-object relationship has been described in various ways since the first recorded history of public performance. For instance, 'for much of the nineteenth century "electricity" was used as a theatrical metaphor for the actor's enchantment and even seduction of audiences [...] the highly charged air of the theatre was created through reciprocity between audience and actors.' (Heim, 2015: 29). As Fisher-Lichte would argue, it is this reciprocity between performer and audience that creates the autopoietic feedback loop: a self-sustaining system of performance rhythms that is created and maintained by the performer and audience in the act of performance and spectatorship (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 165). If the autopoietic feedback loop is created and maintained in the 'bodily co-presence of actors and spectators' (Fisher-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 32) then to what extent does the use of headphones disrupt or destabilise the bodily co-presence of McBurney and the audience, and effect the autopoietic feedback loop? Unlike Tania El Khoury's *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016)⁶ where the performer is hidden, McBurney is clearly visible on stage.

⁶ *As Far As My Fingertips Will Take Me* will be introduced and analysed in Chapter Two.

Thus there is no questioning of McBurney's physical presence, only that of the level of attention his presence is given due to the nature of the headphones. Therefore, it could be said that if 'Spectators do not distribute their attention equally over all that appears in the space but merely follow that which aids the understanding of the plot or character development.' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 165). Then through the use of headphones, McBurney gains more control over the audience's focus.

Theorists Michael H. Goldhaber and Jonathan Crary would categorise the gaining of audience focus as the 'attention economy' (Goldhaber 1997; Crary 2001). In a simple metaphor, the attention economy grants a certain worth to an object or action, the higher the value of this action the more likely someone is to watch or view it. An explosion, for example, has more attentive potential than a whisper. Because of the way in which the theatre space amplifies everyday actions, the attention economy of the theatre is different to the world at large. In *Physics of the Media*, Walter Seitter describes attention as a 'relatively strong inclination of the consciousness towards an object or issue of any kind' (Seitter 2002: 171). In watching a performance, the spectator has free reign over where they look, if a particular image is displeasing, or line of text poorly delivered, the audience is free to turn away. With *The Encounter's* use of headphones, the ability to disengage from the performance is limited due to it being directly infused into one's ears, directly wired into 'the seat of our consciousness' (Complicité, 2015). Therefore, the only way to step out of the show is to remove the headphones.

When watching *The Encounter*, I removed my headphones on multiple occasions to see how the technological effects explored by McBurney and the sound team, that of the voice altering software that lowered his pitch into the deep tones' of Loren McIntyre's American accent, affected the audience. Any audience shares an understanding of the 'mutual knowledge that they are being watched' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 31). In various moments during the performance, my visual experience wanted to include the audience members, from whom I had been isolated. Heim echoes this experience, 'I found that audience members watch each other because they "like to see how they respond, [they] like to see what they smile at, who they applaud, what's funny for them..."' (Heim, 2015: 2).

If audiences are as 'self-aware' as Rodosthenous says, that they can 'allow [themselves] to temporarily believe that what we are witnessing is a real-life drama,' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 11). Then it is also possible for audiences to tune in and out of a performance as they so wish. My sense of disbelief faltered in the wake of the sheer impressiveness of the technology used. Yet, in the loss of my belief in the narrative, I was still enchanted by McBurney's performance. I felt the 'electricity' of the oft-quoted nineteenth-century metaphor.

'The atmosphere inside a theatre has been interpreted and described as highly infectious. The actors perform passionate actions on stage, the spectators perceive and are infected by them: they, too, begin to feel passionate. Through the act of perception, the infection is transferred from the actor's present body to the spectator's present body. Both theatre-enthusiasts and theatre critics agree that this transmission is possible only through the presentness of actors, spectators, and events. (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 94)

The passionate actions of McBurney still affected me even as I pulled off my headphones and possibly more-so because of it. From a firsthand account, the strength of the autopoietic feedback loop was not affected by the presence of technology, but increased by its presence, or its temporary removal. Philip Auslander in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* remarks that the 'distinction we may have supposed there to be between live and mediatized events is collapsing because live events are becoming more and more identical with mediatized ones' (Auslander 1999: 32). Auslander's statement is truer for *The Encounter* than most theatre performances, as it was made available as a live stream on YouTube. When viewing through the lens of the live stream rather than the live performances, it is all the more common for an audience to pause the event and remove their headphones. What separates this action from its live counterpart is the bodily co-presence of the performer, which is absent from the live stream. By removing my headphones during the live event, I lost interest momentarily in the narrative of the performance. Fischer-Lichte claims that this is not as uncommon as one would have first thought, as any viewing of a theatre event 'permanently oscillate[s] between reality and fiction.' Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 115).

A spectator's role according to Heim is to give 'feedback to the actors onstage. This is not a conscious choice but it occurs because theatre is a live encounter between two troupes.' (Heim, 2015: 24). Through my engagement with the technology of *The Encounter*, my feedback in particular and those of the

spectators around me, although probably unnoticed by McBurney, was no less present. Spectator reactions, much like my own, are impossible to account for beforehand as they are 'Neither fully autonomous nor fully determined by others, everyone experiences themselves as involved and responsible for a situation nobody single-handedly created. Herein lies a fundamental component of aesthetic experience that enables the Autopoiesis of the feedback loop.' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 165).

These types of reactions allow the feedback loop to become self-sufficient, living off the moment when the audience respond, rather than in a pre-determined script of assumed reactions. Therefore, an argument could be made that technology would affect the 'neither fully autonomous nor fully determined' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 165) reactions of the audience. The focus on Aural spectatorship may remove potential audience feedback reactions as Dr Stephen Di Benedetto suggests in *The Senses in Performance*; 'if we are encouraged to use the full range of our sense perception, we become active participants rather than passive, isolated viewers detached from the artistic experience. (Di Benedetto in Banes and Lepecki, 2007: 133). However, my reaction seems to counter this argument, sound itself appears, at least in *The Encounter*, to be enough to create deep audience feedback reactions when combined with the bodily co-presence of the performer. As Lichte states 'When a sound resounds in the listener's chests, inflicting physical pain or stimulating goose-bumps, they no longer hear it as something entering their ears from outside but feel it from within as a physical process creating oceanic sensations.' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 119)

Moreover, through the removal of the headphones the world created by McBurney and the technical team becomes even more apparent, as in that moment the spectator steps away from the narrative and sees the performance as its constructed parts, yet these parts have the appearance of magic. As an audience member I felt transformed, a sensation that is echoed by Lichte; 'When the ordinary becomes conspicuous, when dichotomies collapse and things turn into their opposites, the spectators perceive the world as "enchanted". Through this enchantment the spectators are transformed.' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 180). In this enchanted state, I returned my headphones to my ears and was more attentive and engaged than I had been before I removed them. In other words, my presence in creating the

autopoietic feedback loop was not diminished but strengthened. I felt it 'from within' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 119)

Chapter Two: *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016)

Part One

Does the use of technology and physical contact in *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016) situate the audience member as a 'Voyeuristic' or 'Emancipated' spectator?

Tania El Khoury's *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me*⁷ (2016) is a one on one performance devised with and performed by Basel Zaraa, commissioned for "On the Move" LIFT 2016 in partnership with Royal Court Theatre. The piece focuses on a 'conversation through a gallery wall between an audience member and a refugee' (*Taniaelkhoury.com*, 2017). The performance seats audience members besides a stark white wall that houses a large circular hole of approximately ten centimetres in width, enough space to accommodate an arm and a large series of printed words, translating the story the audience member hears. 'Hello. My name is Basel. I'm sitting on the other side of the wall. Please, place your left hand in the wall in front of you.' (*As Far As My Fingertips Take Me*, 2016, El Khoury). Zaraa's words, unlike McBurney's are not spoken aloud but are pre-recorded, heard through the ears of the audience member via headphones as they place their exposed arm through the hole in the wall; 'This is me, touching your arm.' (*As Far As My Fingertips Take Me*, 2016, El Khoury). It is at this point the soundscape begins, a music-infused sound collage that tells the story of Zaraa's very real journey from Palestine to the United Kingdom.

Unlike *The Encounter* where an argument for Voyeurism can be made, through the viewing of a passive audience, *As Far As My Fingertips Will Take Me* does so by the hidden presence of Zaraa. Through his invitation to human contact, he pushes the performance is pushed into an exhibitionistic rather than voyeuristic sphere, as Rodosthenous's suggests 'Exhibitionism implies welcoming the gaze' in this case touch, 'while voyeurism does not need that extra element of additional performativity.' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 16). Exhibitionism and Voyeurism, as words, originate from the realms of sex and sexuality, but these ideas examined under the theatrical lens by theorists such as Rodosthenous subvert this view of voyeurism

⁷ I have not seen this performance first hand, information about the performance was gained from interviewing Emma Gannon a fellow student at The University of Chichester who assisted El Khoury on the performance at London's Mosaic Rooms on 16/02/17. Interview taken from 04/04/17 - 16/04/17.

as a solely sexual gaze, into an act of theatrical viewership. William O'Donohue in *Sexual Deviance: Theory, Assessment, and Treatment* state that voyeurs, and in this particular case, theatrical voyeurs 'seek no contact with the observed individual' (Laws and O'Donohue, 2008: 297). Therefore, the question then becomes if the audience is unaware of the proximity of the performer and audience in *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* beforehand, can they still be seen as theatrical voyeurs. Jessica Chalmers and Una Chaudhuri state in their article *Sniff Art* for The Drama Review, voyeurism requires 'recognition without participation' (Chalmers and Chaudhuri, 2004). However, if the spectator is unaware of the physical proximity and therefore not seeking physical contact from the outset, then it is the combination of the 'touch and sound' (*Taniaelkhoury.com*, 2017) which transforms the audience member from a voyeuristic to an emancipated spectator. It is a process that happens at the moment of physical touch, rather than prior to the audience member taking their seat.

The isolation that is present in the audience member, as the soul viewer of this performance, is intended not to emancipate the spectator, but stand as a by-product of this forced isolation when combined with the physical touch of Zaraa. Instead, the isolation of the audience member seeks to cast them as a witness to the story of Zaraa. Rodosthenous suggests that 'Watching a play without being seen by others for a lot of people would be much less fun. Therefore, the assumption that the audience is nothing more than a witness does not seem to stand the test.' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 31). El Khoury sought to remove the audience's own spectator, other members of the audience. With this isolation in place, the spectator becomes sole witness to the events of the narrative. This witnessing is experienced not through the eyes, however, but through the ears and on the skin. It is the sensation of Zaraa's pen across the skin that marks the greatest difference between *The Encounter* and *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me*, that of the proximity between the performer and audience.

Through the physical contact of Zaraa's pen on the spectator's arm, Zaraa begins an invasion of personal space. Leslie Hill and Helen Paris in *Performing Proximities* paraphrase, the notable Swiss biologist Heni Hediger's description of personal space, a term he uses 'for the normal spacing patterns that members of a like species maintain between themselves' (Hill and Paris, 2014: 6). Therefore, by letting Zaraa through

the 'invisible bubble' (Hill and Paris, 2014: 6), the audience member is emancipated further. In a similar way, *The Encounter* isolates its audience with the use of headphones to create that which is 'Séparés on est ensemble' (Apart we are together) (Ranciére and Elliott, 2011: 51), as explained at the end of Chapter One: Part Two. *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* performs the same action with its use of headphones, not separating the audience from one another, as the show does this by its structure as a one-on-one experience. but separating them from the performer. This isolation is not total, the physical proximity of Zaraa to the audience breaks this isolation somewhat by being 'the very tension between the apart and the together.' (Ranciére and Elliott, 2011: 78). Ranciére goes on to explain that this tension and oscillation between apart and together features in 'works that try to explore the tension between the two terms, either by questioning the ways in which the community is tentatively produced or by exploring the potential of community entailed in separation itself.' (Ranciére and Elliott, 2011: 78)

As Far As My Fingertips Take Me is a performance that explores the notions of community, it's forgetting; it's destruction and the boundaries that define it. It does this by not only telling the narrative of the performance but by transcribing the story on the audience members arm, etching one community into the mind and onto the skin of another. By the joining of two people in physical contact, it creates, momentarily, a new community. It is from the community that individuality spawns, much like how in *The Encounter*, the spectator only becomes emancipated when they seed from the audience and become an individual. As French philosopher Émile Durkheim states in *The Rules of Sociological Method*; 'Collective life is not born from individual life, but it is, on the contrary, the second which is born from the first. It is on this condition alone that [...] personal individuality [...] has been able to be formed and enlarged without disintegrating society' (Durkheim and Lukes, 2014: 279). From within this new community, that of Zaraa and the emancipated audience member, the full weight of the narrative can be transferred. As Lyn Gardner of the Guardian commented on her viewing of the show, 'His tale doesn't just touch me in a fleeting way – as the many stories and images reported in the newspapers do – it goes further. It marks me.' (Gardner, 2017). In a similar way, McBurney, performer of *The Encounter*, adopts a voice that appears in the audiences' consciousness through the use of binaural sound. The visceral effect of Zaraa's story leaves the audience

marked and changed, to utilise Fischer-Lichte's statement, it leaves the audience 'enchanted'. It is from this state of enchantment that the feedback loop becomes autopoietic, self-sustaining. This is further explored in the next section.

Chapter Two: *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016)

Part Two

Does the use of technology and physical contact in *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016) destabilise the 'Autopoietic Feedback Loop'?

As Far As My Fingertips Take Me differs directly from *The Encounter*, in that it's audio, the spine of the performance narrative is pre-recorded, unlike *The Encounter's* live performance. The way both pieces use audio have the potential to affect the audience as Fischer-Lichte states 'Tonality carries a strong affective potential.' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 120), yet the tonality of both shows is irrevocably affected by their liveness. McBurney's presentation of the tale of Loren Macintyre is changeable, responsive to the audience's responses, while Zaraa's performance is the same, unchanging in the face of audience response. If the feedback loop is based on the mutual reciprocity of audience and performer, then how does this one-sided audio communication effect the feedback loop? As previously discussed in Chapter One: Part One, The McGurk effect dictates that both the aural and the visual are required for a total understanding of a spoken action. Theatre follows this same rule 'Theatre is constituted not just through sight (*theatron*) but always through sound (*auditotium*). It is a visual and an aural space' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 120). The lack of a visual performance from Zaraa is not as keenly felt as one would assume. Due to the content of Zaraa's narrative, Zaraa's visual presence is not missed, the stark white wall performs in his stead, performing boundaries, walls, and borders. But his lack of visual presence is made up for by his physical touch that combined with the distancing effect of the audio, creates 'a sense of both feeling a part of' and 'apart from' (Hill and Paris, 2014: 109)

These elements, the visual and physical presence of the performer, the liveness of the audio and it's responsive tonality, all have the potential to affect the audience through the feedback loop. Fischer-Lichte explains 'that no matter whether and how a performance told a story, it is the bodily presence of the actors that affects them and sets the autopoietic feedback loop in motion. Therein lies the constitutive moment of performances.' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 74). Therefore, it is not just through 'sight (*theatron*)' and

‘sound (audiotium)’ but primarily through the bodily co-presence of the audience and Zaraa as well as the audience and McBurney, that affects the feedback loop.

If the autopoietic feedback loop is created in the bodily-co presence between performer and audience, sight and sound, then to what extent does the physical proximity of Zaraa and the audience inform the loop? Fischer-Lichte describes this physical contact as ‘an attempt to destabilize the binary relationship between reality and fiction, public, and intimate, which offered a chance to move beyond established spheres of communication and into new experimental realms.’ (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 63). By breaking into these new experimental realms, those of the personal and intimate El Khoury creates a performance that speaks to the audience too much greater extent than that of *The Encounter*’s distant performer.

Live performance is experienced in the present, and is noted for its capacity to change; ‘Performance does not consist of fixed, transferable, and material artifacts; it is fleeting, transient, and exists only in the present. It is made up of the continuous becoming and passing of the autopoietic feedback loop.’ (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 75). With its capacity for change, there is never a single version of a performance as it is ‘irrevocably lost once it is over; it can never be repeated in the exact same way.’ (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008:75). Even with the advent of recorded media in theatre, such as *The Encounter*’s live stream, ‘all attempts to record it aurally or visually are bound to fail and only highlight the unbridgeable chasm between the performance and a fixed, reproducible artifact.’ (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 75). Furthermore, live performance is constituted by its liveness, it is the bodily co-presence of audience and performer that creates the autopoietic feedback loop and the very act of theatre itself.

The liveness and physical contact show in *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* explicitly changes how the audience and performer recollect the performance both physiologically, through the senses and emotionally. Hill and Paris describe that from a performer’s perspective larger shows, such as *The Encounter*, ‘go by in a bit of a blur, leaving us with only general impressions of the experiences from one performance to the next.’ (Hill and Paris, 2014: 16). However, performers who perform in the ‘Intimate Space (<1.5 feet)’ (Hill and Paris, 2014: 10) are more able to ‘retain very clear memories of the audience members, how they

reacted, what they looked like, what they laughed at and when they looked thoughtful, and so we also remember ourselves and what we were doing in those moments more distinctly. (Hill and Paris, 2014: 16). The proximity of the performer directly changes the parts of the brain that are used when recollecting the performance. 'Episodic memory is remembering an event that actually happened to you; [...] procedural memory is memory of skills and procedure that one has learned, like playing a musical instrument.' This statement suggests that audience's and performers 'experience theatre performances as 'procedural' and intimate performances as 'episodic'. (Hill and Paris, 2014: 16). Performances such as *The Encounter* are recalled in 'procedural memory' in contrast to intimate performances like *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* that are recalled in 'episodic memory'. This shows that the proximity of the performer to the audience is intrinsically linked with how that performance is remembered, and thusly how its effects resonate once the performance is over.

Performances in the intimate sphere create a stronger feedback loop than those in the 'Public Space (12-25 feet)' or 'Social Space (4-12)' (Hill and Paris, (2014: 10). This is due to the breaking down of the 'invisible bubble' (Hill and Paris, 2014: 6) which allows the audience member to give of oneself more freely, creating a link between the audience and performer, a sense of 'Communitas. A shared experience has been established and they have developed a sense of closeness.' (Hill and Paris, 2014:59).

It is the question of memory that makes performance so difficult to make definable Fischer-Lichte shows that:

'At no point is it possible for the spectators to regard a performance in its entirety - like a picture - and to relate the individual theatrical elements they are perceiving to this whole. Similarly, they cannot skip or reread pages. Whether they attend a performance once or multiple times, they may only draw connections between each newly emerging element and the previous, remembered ones. Since every single performance of any given production constitutes itself newly and differently through its autopoietic feedback loop, spectators can never attend the exact same performance twice.' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 155)

Therefore, each night of a performance is different from the last, what remains constant is the element of Communitas, the continual reciprocity between performer and audience that constitutes the feedback loop. That being said whatever effect Zaraq's lack of visual presence and pre-recorded audio might

have upon the feedback loop is mitigated by his physical touch. This physical gesture spans, in an instant, the gulf the divides audience and performer more acutely than the use of binaural sound within *The Encounter*.

Conclusion

Emancipation Through Sound and Distance.

The Encounter (2015) and *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* (2016) appear at first glance to be performances that align their audiences to a Voyeuristic view of audience spectatorship, as explored in Rodosthenous *Theatre As Voyeurism*, but on further examination both of these performances use audio technology to assist in the emancipation their audience. *The Encounter* isolates its audience from each other in order to create a sense of minority from which the audience becomes emancipated, when McBurney bridges the gulf between performer and audience with binaural sound. This is achievable because of a modern audiences' affinity with technology as a part of their 'everyday lives' (Rodosthenous, 2015: 54), that allows them to not be distanced from McBurney by its use but drawn into a state of reciprocity. This reciprocity is at odd's with Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, because of the audience's sense of disbelief and how technology affects it. Binaural sound also heightens the attention economy of McBurney's actions on stage, creating a stronger connection between audience and performer that sustains the autopoietic feedback loop in the face of such distancing techniques. This is further strengthened by the continual collapse of the differentiation of live and mediated performance events as showcased by *The Encounter's* live stream.

The use of audio in *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* in contrast also isolates its audience, but not to emancipate it, yet when it is combined with the physical touch of the performer, it creates a tension between these two states: isolation and community, the constant oscillation of which causes emancipation. This is aided by how the performance explores its themes through its staging. The presence of the wall that creates a voyeuristic perspective is at odds with the physical contact of the performer that creates an emancipated perspective. It is the use of physical touch that mitigates against the distancing effect of pre-recorded audio, that without the physical contact, would position the audience member as a voyeur and adversely affect the feedback loop, unlike *The Encounter's* live audio that through its responsive tonality emancipated and enforces the autopoietic feedback loop.

Ultimately then, from the aspects examined in this study, *As Far As My Fingertips Take me* suggest an alternative position to Brooks earlier statement that the audience watching a simple action by a performer, 'is all that is needed to make an act of theatre engaging' (Brook, 1972: 11). It seems that it is not the act the of watching that makes an act of theatre engaging but the physical proximity of the performer and the audience, this is what separates the theatre from non-live visual art forms such as the television or the cinema. All that matters, according to Fisher-Lichte 'is the fact that something occurs and that what occurs affects, if to varying degrees and in different ways, everyone involved.' (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 36). Moreover, it is the act of affecting that creates the feedback loop, and *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me* despite its dividing wall, and use of headphones that can potentially isolate the audience, the feedback loop lives. It lives in Zaraa's touch, transcribing his story upon the skin of the audience, and they, in turn, respond, by allowing his touch. Loren McIntyre's storey is also transcribed not on the flesh but from within the mind of the audience. By listening to these stories, and feeling them within oneself, becoming marked by their words, the audience becomes enchanted. From this state of enchantment, the audience gives of itself, returning to the performer, an invisible yet tangible energy. In this joint act of giving and receiving, the audience and performer create a sense of reciprocity. It is this from the 'reciprocity between audience and actors' that 'the highly charged air of the theatre' (Heim, 2015: 48-9), allowing the autopoietic feedback loop, and by extension, the act of theatre, to live.

(Word Count: 7672)

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