

# The Dirt

by Marianne Tuckman



Submitted to Swansea University in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Degree programme Creative Writing MPhil


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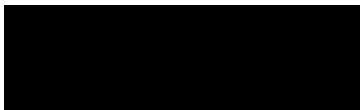
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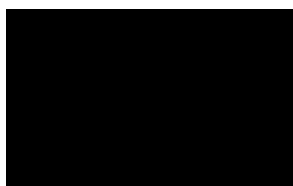
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This summary sheet should be completed after you have read the accompanying notes.

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Full title of Thesis:

**The Dirt**

### **Abstract**

With the mission to make words sweat, this MPHIL encompasses the writing of a metaphoric text for an hour-long solo performance in which physicality and movement are crucial elements, and an academic essay on the practice and challenges involved in the communication of text in embodied live performance. In this context, how does the

material of words relate to the body in movement? How can the differences between the two be identified in order for performers and performance makers to use them to their expressive and communicative potential? These questions were explored through active research consisting of practical time spent in the studio (working alone or with colleagues), facilitating workshops in professional, vocational and participative contexts, the development of the solo *The Dirt*, creative writing and academic research and writing. The project has exposed areas of apparent contradiction in the artistic approaches expressed in words on the one hand and movement on the other. Rather than thinking of 'dance' or 'movement' therefore I prefer to research and then present states of physicality which run parallel to the text. This produces both resonances and dissonances and has the effect of making the text more expressive when it is experienced alongside the physicality of performing bodies. *The Dirt*, a one-woman-show, uses these explorations of form to ask '[In the context of the climate emergency] is it still OK to have children?' Physicality is what carries the cumulative narrative structure and underpins its communication through language. *The Dirt*, encompassing the perspectives of multiple characters and voices, bounces between the literal and the surreal, observations from my everyday life in Berlin (drawing particularly on the experience of working as a babysitter and as a neighbour to the feminist-anarchist squat Liebig<sup>34</sup>), and abstract dreamlike material.

### **Note to examiner**

Videos of The Dirt can be accessed here:

Full performance: <https://youtu.be/wJDfvVGH-M0>

Trailer: [https://youtu.be/IdD\\_V40AkrM](https://youtu.be/IdD_V40AkrM)

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# The Dirt

By Marianne Tuckman

## Synopsis

A woman's home has mysteriously become very dirty. Filthy in fact.

Terrified, she calls her cleaner, a punk about to be evicted, to come round and help, but despite all their efforts, the house just gets dirtier and dirtier...

Tomorrow, she had planned to have children and play with them.

She wonders if this will be possible.

## Acknowledgements

Well, you know what they say... A solo is never a solo and it takes a village to raise a pineapple. I would like to thank the following people who made The Dirt possible:

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- Marcelo Schmittner for understanding, for making worlds together
- Prof. D. J. Britton for his nurturing encouragement, and for being an intermediary between myself and established thought, inviting me to engage with convention on my own terms
- The Creative Writing Department at Swansea University for their warm welcome, openness and challenging feedback

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## Notes from the author

All of the voice recordings (with which her live voice interacts) are from the performer. In the case of other performers interpreting future versions of *The Dirt*, new recordings of their voices would have to be made.

The performance space is occupied by one performer, two pineapples and a ladder.

The performer bounces between the following characters: The Woman, The Punk and The Husband.

The pineapples represent the children, Baby Gustav and The-three-year-old.

In terms of the genders of the characters:

The Woman is a cis-woman, The Husband is a cis-man and The Punk is ambiguous and open to the interpretation of the performer.

The pronoun 'she' is used to refer to myself, the original performer, but for future versions of the piece, I am open to *The Dirt* being performed by people of any gender.

## Scene 1

Two upright pineapples lean against each other in an otherwise empty performance space. The one on the left side is smaller than the one to its right. The bigger pineapple sits inside a clear plastic bag from which its leaves protrude.

The performer walks into the performance space carrying a ladder. She opens it and stands the ladder upright in an upside-down V shape. The two pineapples are close to the front left of the ladder. She steps back from the ladder and does whatever she needs to prepare herself (e.g. takes a breath, adjusts her hair, clothes) before stepping underneath the ladder and transforming sharply into **The Woman**.

She assumes a position with her right arm lifted to a 90 degree angle. Her left hand is on her hip. She imagines that the audience are her guests and looks at them with an expression that oscillates between amusement and shyness. She goes through a process of searching for suitable positions in which to speak from. During this time micro movements pass through her face as she rehearses what to say to her guests. She is self-conscious and it is important to her that the audience know that she is aware when she does something ridiculous.

She peers up at her right hand and, with a little giggle, takes it down, her fingers dripping like melting candle tapers, tentatively resting her elbows on the rope at the back of the ladder. Perhaps speaking to the guests in a more relaxed, nonchalant position would be a good

*idea? This makes a surprising creaking sound which startles her, but she soon sees the funny side. Her arms move into a waving position and she begins talking.*

*During the delivery of the text the performer has the option to take pauses and to find new positions to speak from, as described above. Sometimes she can also speak in an uninterrupted stream of words ignoring spaces between sentences or phrases until she runs out of breath.*

*As the first monologue continues, her pleasure in introducing herself overtakes the self-consciousness and giggles punctuate her speech.*

**Hi, I live in a house (gesture to the ladder) with my family (gesture to the pineapples). We all have the same genes apart from my husband and I, we're not related but he also has very good genes. He participates regularly in over-45 athletics and has won sooo many medals. We keep them hanging up on a nail outside the bathroom. Feel free to have a look through them if you would like to later. I hammered the nail into the wall myself.**

**I like to keep the house clean and tidy. But I don't do all of the work alone, oh no, a girl from Helping Cleaning Agency comes in once per week. She has punk hair and multiple ear piercings, plus an eyebrow piercing plus a tongue piercing. I personally don't have any facial piercings, nor do I have tattoos, neither does my husband even though he was born in 1965. He's a bit older (word is said, slower, and more pronounced, the mouth makes a round 'O' shape for the sound to gently and deliberately plop out of) than me. The punk gives the whole place a deep clean every Thursday morning but I must say I do do, I do do, I must say I do do my own fair share of work; I**

wipe the kitchen surfaces down, I scrub the taps, I de-limescale the inside of our kettle, I clean the windows, I clean our mirrors, I disinfect my phone multiple times per day because I read on the internet that if you don't do that you run a risk of getting kind of imperfections on your cheek yuh, yuh, but arguably, most importantly, I clean my children. (*Gesturing to the pineapples*) Yuh Yuh. I say to my three-year-old 'get in the shower' and I hose her down from top to bottom (*head mimics the direction of the words for the following list- which is delivered quite fast and accelerates, bottom to top, tip to toe, toe to tip, elbow to elbow, one time anticlockwise (head moves playfully and quickly in a circle), one time clockwise (repeats, in opposite direction) and then I chuck (sharp 'chuck' movement with the head), and then I give a little sprinkle (echo in the performer's body of the light phonetics of the word), and then a massage (said heavily, resonating in the pelvis) of cold, filtered water on her- just to be sure. I say to my little - my liddle - liddle (The performer gets stuck on these words, perhaps because of how excited she is by this point, like a pleasure glitch, repeating it multiple times before being able to continue) Baby Gustav. I say to Baby Gustav, 'Get in the sink' and then I just pop him in the sink because you know he's just a baby. 'I say there you are, you're in the sink', yuh, yuh (*delighted, cascading, fizzy water laugh*) and I then I let him soak for a while, a good while. And then I give him a scrub. Easy. The only thing I find hard to get rid of when cleaning the surfaces of my house, myself and my children are the blonde hairs. Boy! (shouted at a very high volume, startles herself) **Blonde** (word BLONDE is accented in the following sentences) **hairs on our corner sofa. Blonde hairs on my skin. Blonde hairs on the inside of***

our pullovers. Blonde hairs on my children. Blonde hairs on the stairs. I mean, can you imagine. Blonde hairs everywhere. Ha ha (pre-recording of the performer's voice hiccuping the word BLONDE and HAIRS plays through the speakers. The performer's live voice interacts with the recording. The staccato words are impulses for the performer's movements and stream of giggles. An interplay between BLONDE, HAIRS, sharpelbow to belly-button movements, laughter, and **The Woman's** hand gestures begins. A cloud of sound rains through the speaker and we enter our first dance section. This begins under the ladder, developing to lead the performer to exit, ducking underneath the rope. She blows kisses to **Baby Gustav** and **The-three-year-old** and continues dancing near to the ladder. She takes off her coat and transforms into **The Punk**.

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## Scene 2

*(The performer walks backwards, in a grounded gait, connecting with the image of heavy testes between her legs, exaggerating the swing movement of shoulders in cross lateral relationship to the hips. The performer leans on the wall at the back of the space and pours herself a tea cup of red wine. She squints at the audience, a soft smile behind her eyes. She is warm, chatty, flirtatious and uses a confidential tone of voice. Maybe she imagines that the audience are her date and she is introducing herself to them. **The Punk's** tone of voice is low, relaxed and she speaks slowly (think stoner with a cockney accent).*

**Can you believe The Woman wanted to throw these away! I was like "do you mind if I keep them?" She was like "Sure, but sure but they're a bit chipped..."** *(She mimics the Woman's voice and hand gestures)*

**But yeah, I live in a house with 56 humans and a gang of dogs, cats and some rats. Yeah, yeah. Shandy, whose room's next to mine, always bangs on our wall, and shouts** *(strong turn to the left initiated by the hips, ending with the arms high over the head).*

**"Wow! There goes another big brown fluffy slipper"** *(Shouted with high alarm. Arms slide down the wall)*

**But yeah** *(recovers, continues in previous relaxed tone of voice), we all share the same shower apart from some people who don't bother and the dogs who get wet in the rain. Lucky bitches.*

**But yeah, we do all of the work around the house ourselves, DIY is how we keep things cosy. You know what**

I mean. Also the fact that it's a cis-men free zone, I guess that's the thing that really makes the difference. It was in this house that I learned how much I love to hammer stuff into walls. Actually I hammered a nail in for The Woman today, just outside her bathroom. Geriatric medals or something. I don't remember what she said.

But yeah, (*advances towards the audience. Hips are engaged in a micro dance from side to side.*) I am enthusiastic with the old DIY. I put up some shelves the other day.

I don't know how it is for you guys recently, but us lot at home, we've been watching a lot more films lately, right. So I was like "Now is the time!" and everyone was like "Now is the time for what?" I was "Now is the time, to put up a shelf in the living room for the projector". So I did it right. A nice long, big shelf, so it really spreads out over the wall behind the sofa, exactly at eye level, perfect for watching films. But do you know what people said to me. They were like "Oooh, but where, where are you we going to... rest our heads?" (*skull moves, searching, voice is high, mimicking.*)

I was like I dunno. What a question. But I didn't let that deter me. After that I put up a shelf for the tea. Really nice and high up. But do you know what people said? Well I'll tell you what they didn't say. They didn't say "Ooh, thank you" or "Wow, how did you manage to put that shelf up, it's so high" (*high-pitched voice and exploratory skull movements*). They said "How are we going to reach. The Tea."

So I said don't even worry about it. I'm going to build you a ladder. So that's next on my to-do list.

*(Pause. Stares intensely at the audience.)*

**But I know what you're wondering. You're wondering where I learned to clean so well. Listen. I grew up in The Suburbs.**

**The Streets were silent by SIX P.M.**

*(Smashes the tea cup and then sweeps up the pieces. She savours the sound. A repeated, drawn-out electronic note is played through the speaker.)*

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### Scene 3

#### ***The Phone Call***

The ladder has been rotated so it is facing the audience at a slightly different angle. The performer, now interpreting **The Woman**, goes to stand underneath the ladder with The Phone prop held to her ear. She has a nervous pent-up energy, her eyes surveying the ladder in disbelief. She is, however, trying to keep herself under control. When she greets **The Husband** on the phone, she tries to speak with a calm and cheerful tone of voice, although there is a quivering crack of panic at the end of some words and phrases. She continues to survey her surroundings with a very concerned expression, flinching every so often, feeling as if her own skin was covered in a sticky substance. Throughout the scene the performer varies the way she holds The Phone in her hands.

**Hi darling, hi, hi, so you're on your way home from the airport?** (pause listens to his response, let's out a sigh of disappointment) **Oh dear darling, oh dear. Remember we're going to play with the children tomorrow. Don't forget to be back. I do hope you'll be on your way soon, terrible all this hanging about** (said slowly, allowing the syllables to reluctantly quiver through the mouth).

(Pause as she listens to him ask 'was there anything else in particular that you were calling about?')

**Well yes darling there was...**

(Closed eyes, quickly drawing strength)

**I wanted to warn you actually, before you arrive home, to prepare you...**

No, no they're fine, they're fine (pointing to the pineapples).

No it's the house. It's a bit of a mess.

I mean putting it mildly. It's really a disaster.

It's filthy darling, it's filthy. (Squealing, she ducks out of the ladder running to its left side.)

Well yes, I have cleaned it, I did think of that (little exasperated laugh), multiple times, the girl even came round, you know The Punk, I called her, yes she does have a phone, just not a smart phone, they don't you know, they don't want to be tracked (said in a Hermione-Granger,<sup>1</sup> 'know-it-all' tone of voice)... but anyway I said it was an emergency I said can you come round this afternoon, today being Monday as you know and not Thursday morning at all when she usually comes, she gave her usual deep clean (words exaggerated, "clean" ringing in the pelvis) treatment but before she'd even put on her boots (word sensuously savoured, each time the word 'boot' appears she gives it the same quality of attention) on darling, you know those boots, before she'd even put on those boots, before she'd even closed the door (savouring the latter vowel sounds), it was filthy (emphasis on the word filthy) dirty again darling yu... yu... yu... yu...yucky, yucky (hyperventilating breaths, near sobs).... One second (turns away from the phone and makes a disgusting sound clearing her throat, as if it were full of dust) Oh no everything darling: (list reeled off quite quickly) the kitchen surfaces, the taps, the inside of the kettle, the windows, the mirrors, my phone screen actually (pulls her face away from the phone and speaks

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<sup>1</sup> *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001). Directed by Columbus, C. [feature film] Warner Bros

through speaker, wiping her cheeks), **our children, my skin, our children, everything is covered in this layer of sticky ... dirty, dusty, erghh** (guttural moaning sound, initiates backwards run to the other side of the ladder, holding the edge of the phone to her ear, with a frustrated, exasperated look in her eyes).

**What? What? What? You want a metaphor? Er OK, one second.**

(Brings phone down, hands on hips, looks thoughtful)

**Daddy says he wants a metaphor** (said to the pineapples, calmer tone of voice). **Ok just a min, let me think... OK OK, I've got it darling, I've got it.**

*(Walks to the other side of the ladder and leans her back on the steps holding The Phone an arm's length away from her face, as if she's switched to video call.)*

***It's like the street is inside, it's like I can't close the door*** (dramatically delivered).

**No, no yuh,yuh, I did that, I ordered a new hooooover** (a ridiculously long time spent on the "oooo") **I ordered a new hooooover on Amazon and with our perfect prime membership, it arrived within the hour, the rate at which I'm getting through hoovers at the moment, you have to see it to believe it, it arrived within the hour, and I cleaned the house from top to bottom but by the time I'd reached the bloody top the bloody bottom was dirty again** (*gesticulating to the levels of the ladder stairs*). **I'm** (voice breaks on the 'I' vowel sound, starts crying that crescendos through the following text) **going to have to call in sick to work... It can't be good for me to breathe this in, I've developed a cough, little baby Gustav has developed a cough too and our three-year-old is complaining of a tickling sensation at the back of their throat** (really crying now),

Uh, hu, uh, uh, no, yes you're right. (Deep breaths through the mouth, calms down.)

Darling, do you think you could say that again and I'll just I'll just lie down.

(Suddenly falls to the floor.)

No, no that's good. That's really good yeah. That's really helpful.

(Sensual excitement gradually grows throughout the following text. Her eyes are closed. She has been transported to a lovely memory by **The Husband's** words).

You know what I miss, in times like this darling, you know what I miss I miss being in New York darling (sits up, sliding the arm across the floor). We had such fun walking (savour)... buying (savour)... Breathing (savour)..., drinking iced coffee in plastic cups with paper straws. Yuh, yuh (excitement has grown to a giggle). Do you remember, do you remember darling, she was like "I'm going to give you three" (attempts a New York accent) she gave us three because she said the paper ones just d-d-d-isintegrate before you reach the bottom of the drink unless you drink real fast. Do you remember? Do you remember darling? That was lovely.

But anyway it's all different now (opens eyes, looks terrified, lets out a little freaked-out scream, energy is high) darling, it's all changed since you've gone (turns quickly around herself twice), I will have to hang up soon my mouth is full, it's hard to speak when your mouth is full (quick breaths, as if there's a hot potato in her mouth), totally full, of dust. I've developed this cough, a headache, and it's difficult to speak using such obvious words. It's so obvious why this happened, it

would make a terribly boring predictive text.

(Brings the phone to her ear to listen to **The Husband's** voice)

**Darling!** (exasperated runs to underneath a speaker) **even the air is full of shitty music. Listen!** (Holds the phone up to the speaker. Looks directly at the audience, following the rhythm of the music with winces, a sassy facial expression of frustration, disbelief and mild pain). **Well-known songs played badly with minimal talent, they're even playing this in the streets, it's all changed since you've gone, rapidly, if you were here, you would understand.**

(Loud volume of street sounds intervene. The Woman reacts with a movement research/ searching movement in which the 'north' and 'south' poles, or axes of the body (top of head, pelvic floor) shift, always in relationship to each other, very fast, as if being propelled by an irresistible outside force. When these sounds subside, she begins talking again. This interrupts the text four times. The last time is the longest.)

(Pause) **No darling...! they play the music even louder on public holidays...**

(Climbs the ladder holding the pineapples above her head, surveying the mess from above).

**I think we've been cursed, you know I'm not superstitious. I believe in science, you know that darling, I got 3 As in my GCSE science, I told you that darling, I told you, about the bunsen burners, do you remember darling? But I can't help thinking that we're damned darling, we're damned, we're wading up shit creek,**

we're literally up to our necks in excrement, and the liquid is rising, slowly but surely, oh God, oh God, how it smells!

Black out

No darling, I don't think that the canoe and the paddles that we have in the cellar are enough to get us out of this one. Darling.

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## Scene 4

### ***Entre chien et loup***

*(The lights come up to reveal **The Woman** draped over the top of the ladder.*

*This is a movement section. A pause from words.*

*Here, **The Woman** dreams, falling in and out of sleep. The audio begins with a recording of the performer's voice saying "Follow the Nap Ministry on Instagram. It's good to nap. It's good to take pauses".*

*The French phrase "entre chien et loup", between the dog and the wolf, referring to twilight, the magic hour, inspires the atmosphere.*

*She goes between two states: relaxed, sleepiness and frightened alertness (like a small, defensive dog).*

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## Scene 5

### *Baby Gustav*



*(The lights fade up, slowly revealing the performer's face, which appears to be bodiless, floating, with the two pineapples on either side. A sonic residue of the previous scene washes over the image. Her eyes are closed and her lips softly hint at a smile. For this scene the performer interprets a more ambiguous character. She is neither **The Woman**, **The Punk**, nor **The Husband**, but rather, a dream-like apparition who communicates the main themes of the piece in a blurry, poetic style. The text is delivered musically.*

*Her eyes open slowly and she smiles. It is as if the sun is warming the performer's face. She is relaxed.*

**Go on holiday, go somewhere warm & sandy where the locals are wrinkled selling leather and powers and spicy and aphrodisiac and djellaba, pointy hoods and key rings and poofs and apricots and apricots and his dog is called Rita she's 17 and God says no cots and cats jump on your lap if you're lucky you're on holiday**

*(Peers at the two pineapples, first one, then the other.)*



Have children (*grin*), don't have children (*looks annoyed, accelerates through the following text*) and get stressed, wear your carbon hanging behind you as if it were a history, a pendant around your neck, silver, good price for you, the shape and weight of an albatross (*pause, looks thoughtful*) how big is that, get out of yourself (*shakes off the imaginary albatross, like a donkey nodding a fly away*), it's natural to have a little Baby Gustav he will grow up and go to school and get thirsty, he will drink water from plastic bottles (*confiding tone, lower volume, nods to someone in the audience*), that's his girlfriend, she prefers it sparkling, thinks they are on holiday.

Go on holiday, it's nice to relax.

(*Closes eyes, really enjoys the process of counting*)

1234 12345 12346 1238000 12241008 this is the lovely part, you have to learn it (*almost singing*), you have to learn it, the currency (*almost sung*), remember to breathe and connect the rate of exchange made of lavender to his house, (*accelerates until the excitement reaches a crescendo*) a real (*with emphasis*) local disappearing before our eyes, take a picture (*hysterically screamed*), don't take a picture (*whispered, horrified, continues with the disapproving 'I told you so' tone of voice*), be conscious, be here, be thankful, thank you, it's important.

Don't wear his socks that could be rude in his culture (*whispered, furious, eyes popping out*).

Well that's not a very good holiday destination (*angry, tight-lipped*) not now, it's a shame, a flying carpet would be a great souvenir, for Grandpa Gustav,

(pauses, looks thoughtful, concerned.)

**Have you ever heard him laugh?**

*(Shake the thought off, delivers the following text without looking back, just keeps going)*

It's good to relax, it's better to work standing, be careful, remember to pack those yellow tablets, the ones that dissolve in water and fizz. Be careful your bellies are very sensitive and not accustomed to such modesty, it's good to be open, but in private in this climate, the chambermaids on holiday can be cute and you can buy such bags *(gutsy voice)* but remember to haggle, you are a stupid tourist but not that stupid *(starts giggling)* not that stupid *(giggles)*, it's good to go on holiday, it's good to relax somewhere warm but not in August, God no that would be dreadful.

*(Eyes close, soft smile returns.)*

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## Scene 6

*Sudden change to bright, white illumination. The performer is now interpreting a documentary presenter (think John Berger in 'Ways of Seeing'<sup>2</sup>). She is serious about what she is communicating and there is a sense of urgency. The people need to know!*

In the 18th Century, pineapples were the ultimate status symbol. One pineapple would be sold for today's equivalent of \$8,000. In fact, the fruit was so desirable that people would often rent a pineapple for a night to show off to fellow revellers. First and foremost, pineapples were used as decoration, only eaten when they started to rot.

As you can imagine, gardeners were desperate to grow them in Northern Europe and developed hot-as-hell glasshouses for the purpose. These were dangerous stinky places. And it is most likely that humanure, yes that's human excrement, was used as a desperate attempt to encourage the fruits to flourish.

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<sup>2</sup> Episode 1-4 (1972). *Ways of Seeing*, BBC 2, London, UK first broadcast 8-29 January.

## Scene 7

The Performer gradually becomes **The Punk**, who is babysitting the children. She picks up the pineapples and talks to them in a thoughtful, problem-solving tone of voice.

### The Punk:

I reckon your mum is going to be on the phone for a while longer... (*Frowns, as she thinks what to do*) ... How about we play that game? You know, the one we played a little while ago. Would you be up for it? OH... great! Nice one! Alright, so let's swap roles alright. So, this time, Baby Gustav, you're going to be the interviewer, alright, and I'll be the interviewee, so you can ask me, like, whatever questions you want, is that cool? Yeah, nice, and The- Three-Year-Old, you're going to be the audience. That's a very important job. You've got to cheer, and do all that kind of stuff, alright. OK, nice one. I love this game. (*Leaves the performance space, walking behind the curtain, body is hidden but her voice continues to be heard*) Let's go. I'm going to go and come back... OK... Are you ready for me? OK... Here we go... (*Chat show jingle and recording clapping plays, Baby Gustav is revealed, sitting bolt upright on a red leather stool. The Punk cheekily draws back the curtains tapping Baby Gustav on the shoulder on both the right and left side, The Punk looks at the audience, mimes "thank you, that's enough", shy but pleased with the applause. She sits down, squinting, holding back a smile, scratching the back of her neck, looking between Baby Gustav and the audience. (For a reference look at Eminem interview on Friday Night*

with Jonathan Ross)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Friday Night With Jonathan Ross, BBC One, 12 May 2009.

## Scene 8

### *The Chat Show*

#### Baby Gustav:

*(His voice is pre-recorded, high pitched, child-like, not fluent, every syllable is pronounced de-li-beer-at-ely):*

Sooo, it's sooo nice to have you here with us. Thank you for coming for a chat.

#### The Punk:

Honestly, like I've always been a fan of this show, so the pleasure is all mine.

#### Baby Gustav:

What are your happiest memories from living at The Squat?

#### The Punk:

Oo... wow... let me think, A big pile of things...

But yeah, I'd have to go with last Christmas, we did a kind of heteronormative family role play.

We all chose characters from a normal family. I went as an uncle with a trash 80s wife. And my friend.. went as an Austrian father wearing those traditional Austrian garms... What are they called? Do you remember Gustav?

#### Baby Gustav:

Lederhosen?

#### The Punk:

Yeah, yeah exactly. Good vocab, ey.

Baby Gustav:

Hmmm. Aaah.

The Punk:

(little laugh) Yeah so, she came

Baby Gustav:

Hmmmm

The Punk:

And so, she/he had four daughters. Four daughters (holds up four fingers and looks at audience) And one of them came out as a lesbian during Christmas dinner.

That was funny.

Baby Gustav:

And do you feel at home there?

The Punk:

Of that's a hard question. Wow.

Baby Gustav:

Take your time.

The Punk:

Well, thank you, that's very generous of you.

Well you know what like...

Baby Gustav:

Hmmm

The Punk:

In some ways, definitely. The Squat is full of people including myself searching for a family that is somehow missing. I've met many very very special people there and now I have my chosen family. And that's really cool.

Baby Gustav:

Hmmmm

The Punk:

Yeah but

Baby Gustav:

Naww...

The Punk:

But for the past two years since the eviction notice...

Baby Gustav:

Not so cosy

The Punk:

Yeah yeah exactly...I've told you about it, haven't I. The Squat has been a construction site pretty much. We've been building barricades to prepare for the eviction since last summer. Filling staircases with concrete. Blocking up the windows.

Baby Gustav:

Not so cosy



The Punk:

No, not so cosy. Also, there's the uncertainty. The constant threat of eviction. And also, with the eviction comes this sense of insecurity... Like oooh are we gonna stay are we not...

And also, I'm not going to lie to you, I wouldn't lie to you Gustav.

Baby Gustav:

Hmmm.

The Punk:

It is really dirty.

Baby Gustav:

Not so cosy.

The Punk:

Yeah yeah, it's not like your house. Your house is pretty clean. Bit too clean actually.

Baby Gustav:

Nawww...

The Punk:

You'll decide your own way as you get older... How clean or not clean or not clean you want your place. But yeah, the thing is our place is dirty and sometimes you get home from work cleaning houses or looking after you guys and I just wanna eat something and I've got to find a corner, clean the corner and it just gets a bit long. And, also then there are the rats. Some people have pet rats. And

that's really cute. I know The Three Year Old would like a pet rat. Wouldn't you. But there are also rat rats. Pest rats.

Baby Gustav:

Huuuuuh!(in a tone of horror).

The Punk:

Actually, the other day I had this nightmare that I was in a coma, and when I woke up from the coma there was a rat on my chest.

Baby Gustav:

Huuuuuh!

The Punk:

About this size.

Baby Gustav:

Huuuuuh!

The Punk:

So, I was in a coma

(The performer picks the pineapple up and shows it to the audience. She lies on the floor and lays the pineapple horizontally across her chest).

Baby Gustav:

Not so cosy.

The Punk:

And when I woke up from the coma there was a rat on my

chest. About this size.

**Baby Gustav:**

**Huuuuuh!**

*Lying on the floor with her head raised looking from end to end of the pineapple, the performer gets stuck in this awkward position. She looks at the audience for longer than is comfortable. The performer retracts herself from **The Punk** character, becoming closer and closer to herself as a person who recognises the absurdity of the situation. She is now interpreting 'herself' and she needs a break.*

**Performer:**

**Wait um.. can I just... Can I just have a little minute? (To the crew) Is that alright guys? Do you know when you just need a little minute? I think we're doing really good.**

*(She stands up and walks towards the backstage)* **I think we're about two thirds of the way through. I just... I just need a little break. Don't log out... Of the stream. (To the audience) We'll be back... I just need a little second.**

*(The performer goes through the backstage area, to the toilet, locking the door behind her. After a short pause, the audience hears the sound of the toilet flushing. The performer comes out of the cubicle with her head and hair sopping wet.)*

**Technician:**

**Marianne (or name of the performer), did you just flush your head down the toilet?**

**Performer:**

**No, why would I do that?**

(Returns to the performance space. We are made aware of the backstage areas and the crew.)

**Performer:**

**Alright, I'm just going to rotate the ladder.** (Turns the ladder so that it is facing a different angle) **Quite a lot... just to show that her house is really drastically different now.**

-----

## Scene 9

*(The performer is now interpreting **The Woman**. Picking up two pineapples, she places one in front of the ladder and holds the other, a screaming baby, in her arms, rocking them, desperately trying to calm them down. She places the phone to her ears and nervously waits for **The Husband** to answer. The scene is disrupted by loud, invasive, sonic interventions.*

**Hi darling, where are you now? What???** I mean can't you tell them who you are or something? **Darling..** I can't deal with this alone anymore. I need back up. **Shhh** *(to **Baby Gustav**, who she rocks, this movement continuing, in an awkward syncopated dialogue with her speech).* **At this rate I don't think tomorrow will be possible. I'll have to tell the children we won't be able to play with them after all. Shhh** *(to **Baby Gustav**)*

**What??** No, no, no the punk's here. Right. Now. We're spending a lot of time together now. She's doing her absolute best. But yeah, her deep-clean *(words exaggerated, "clean" ringing in the pelvis)* **treatment isn't even scratching the surface anymore. I'm really not darling.** *(Sarcastic laugh, increases volume of her voice over the sound, staggers backwards to the other side of the ladder, changes position of the phone to camera mode, stares directly into the screen).* **Look at my face. Look. At. My. Face.** *(Falls forward, maintaining the fixed stare on the phone screen.)* **Take the high street, just as an example, it's no longer outside.** *(Falls sideways)* **Groups of teenagers are gathered in our bedroom sharing take-aways.** *(Continues staring at the phone, turns it around in relation to her head)* **They're sat on our bed, sprawled about as if it were a patch of grass, using our sheets to**

wipe their mouths clean. (*Falls sideways*) There are scabs of ketchup and mayonnaise all over our pillow cases.

(*Brings phone to audio mode, speaks into it.*) The punk said. (*Takes a calming breath.*) The punk said. The punk said that 60 degrees would sort it and if it doesn't, and if it doesn't and if it doesn't - (*the following is said very fast without pausing for breath*) could she take the sheets home because she doesn't mind about the stains and finds them really soft.

(*Yelled*) And seeing as you're not there darling, I said that would be fine!

(*Puts phone to her ear, getting more and more furious, looking at the audience saying "what on earth is he saying" with her facial expressions, puts Baby Gustav down and arranges the pineapples, upright, leaning against each other.*)

What? What? (*staggers backwards, runs around the back of the ladder*) No. No. No. No. No. No. No. Look and listen. OK. Look and listen.

The bathtub is full (*falls forward*) of dead leaves, plastic bags (*falls forwards*), electronic waste and Superdrug's own-brand aftershave (*falls to the floor, maintaining the fixed relationship of phone to face, she begins rolling to the back of the stage*). The sides of the tub are stained with chewing gum, footprints, drawn out shadows and... (*said very quietly, sadly, tenderly. This tone of voice continues*) and memories and memories darling. No. No. Stop talking. Stop talking and listen. Listen. The punk's doing her best, but it's not helping our predicament. I think we're being punished. I can tell from the stench. Tomorrow. It's not going to be possible. (*Stares at a fixed point in front of her, very*

*emotionally stirred up) I'll have to tell the children that we won't be able to play with them after all. We'll have to cancel. (Draws the weight of her body to standing and exits performance space, keeping her stare on this fixed point in front of her, dragging her feet behind her.)*

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## Scene 10

### *Is it still OK to have children?*

*(The speakers play a pre-recorded audio collage combining voices and sound. Below is a transcript of the text.*

*While the audio plays, the image on stage is of the two upright pineapples, one halfway inside a plastic bag, the other naked, leaning against each other silently.)*

Colour code :

Voice 1

Voice 2

Voice 3

---

Wouldn't it be an act of defiance to have a bunch of smart decent children

I'm sorry can't happen. I say, the system is full. We can't take anymore. We can't take anymore. Our country is full. Our area is full. The sector is full. We can't take anymore. Sorry can't happen. So, turn around, that's the way it is.

We just met, and it's a little early for me to be giving you advice. I think you should have children. You seem like a nice person

I'm sorry can't happen.

Anzu rent the sky with his talons,



...the flood came forth.

Its power came upon the peoples like a battle,  
one person did not see another,  
they could not recognise each other in the  
catastrophe.

Come on humanity, we've got two options, we're either  
going to commit some kind of species suicide or at  
least we're going to unite unite unite unite and at  
least try to manage the collapse that's predicted in  
a sensible and rational way.

You should have children they solve a lot of  
problems. You seem like a nice person

Let her snatch the baby from the lap who bore it.  
Yeah and establish high priestesses and priestesses,  
let them be taboo and so note and so cut down  
childbirth.

But you look into their faces and it's pure emotion,  
pure joy, pure grief, I'm sorry can't happen. Pure  
excitement can't happen. Pure jealousy pure confusion  
pure anger I'm sorry love pure I'm sorry can't  
happen. Indifference nothing is covered up eating the  
cake with

cake in their face their face covered in cake

This is how adults make love

I'm sorry can't happen.

We feel too afraid to have kids because we feel that we are heading to civilisation breakdown as a result as a result of the environmental crisis and the political political inertia that is dealing with this.

-----

## Scene 11

*(Performer is now interpreting **The Husband**. During this scene he is exercising and doing the following movements: jogging, press ups, squatting and jogging again. The phone rings. **The Husband** rolls his eyes, irritated at being disturbed. Reluctantly he attaches his wireless headset and **The Woman's** irate, panicking, breathless voice plays out through the speakers. Either he looks directly at the audience, imagining them to be his mates or his attention goes inwards, absorbed in the physical activity. Initially he finds his wife's emotional turmoil amusing but this soon turns to fury. His anger is translated into the physical effort he puts into the action of jogging. The facial expressions are ugly.*

*During the phone call the sound of a fast electronic beat crescendos. By the end of the scene it is loud and dominating.*

### The Husband:

Hi, I'm the husband.

(Phone rings)

Below is a transcript of the pre-recorded voice of **The Woman**.

Anyway, she just left. She just left. She just left but before she even put her boots on darling, you remember, those boots, you know she found them on the street darling, real Doctor Martins, yes, yes, I know darling, but anyway just as she was leaving, she told me I wouldn't be lonely anymore, because she'd met two rats upstairs. Rats! Rats! Rats!

Rats from The Outside darling. Street Rats, with with  
with feet like embryo hands. Baby pink. Little baby pink  
hands. Tiny little hands. Little pink. Tiny hands.

She said, you know, the punk, have you never wondered why  
I have a rat tattooed on my chest?

And then she ripped her top off and showed me.

-----

## Scene 11

### ***The Nightmare***

*The performer transforms quickly into **The Punk**. She looks directly at the audience, sliding her top over her head. Her gaze is deadly, sulky, sexy. This is the climax. She means business. Reference: This is England, dir. Shane Meadows, 2007.*

*The ladder is suspended from the ceiling, hanging upside-down.*

*The performer moves from her guts and pelvic floor. The north and south pole of her body are in constant dialogue, sometimes this is dislocated, sometimes in harmony. She references moments of the piece: e.g. the different characters particularly **The Woman's** hand gestures and **The Punk's** direct gaze at the audience. This is the performer's last opportunity to both digest what has happened and to express herself physically. She opens herself to the emergency. To the tragedy. To the climax. She mourns the eviction of **The Punk** and the death of **Baby Gustav** and **The Three Year Old**. She tenderly caresses her softness. Her mouth. Her belly.*

*The audio sound track includes the following extracts of text:*

**At 7 o'clock the officers came with the bailiff. The emergency services gained access to the first floor of the four-story building via scaffolding and a ladder. With crowbars, power cutters and chainsaws they penetrated the building in which residents had barricaded**

themselves inside.

It's like the street is inside. It's like I can't close  
the door.

-----

## Scene 12

*The performer, panting and red-faced, approaches the pineapples. She cradles one and reads them the following letter. It is said simply. There is no need to act now.*

What I would have loved most  
is tucking you up  
in a nest made of soft, assembled things

and shouting

“Come on! We’re late!”

up the stairs only to find you sat on your bed  
methodically apologising to all the pairs of socks that  
you wouldn’t be able to wear that day and would have to  
stay at home in the drawer.

You’d be so conflicted as to what was the best thing to  
do,

I’d coax you down by suggesting a compromise: Perhaps you  
could lay them out by the window. Then at least they can  
sunbathe while you’re at school.

I discovered the world again through witnessing your  
amazement.

A spoon! A spoon! Dog. Duck. Bus. Sky. Blue. Why? Why?  
Mum, why??

Night time would terrify you.

Mama ! Donde se fue el sol? Where’s the sun gone?

It happens every night darling, don’t worry. He’ll be  
back again tomorrow. I promise.

But, could I promise that 30 years into the future?

I would tell you about the seasons from my childhood.  
In summer it's hot. In autumn the leaves fall and on  
bonfire night you've got to wrap up warm. In winter it's  
cold & bare and everything comes alive again in spring.  
Fairy-tale stuff.

The view from our window is changing too quickly for me  
to find the words to describe it to you and so I will say  
hello and goodbye at the same time.  
With a body only slightly ravaged by grief.

*The performer puts the pineapple down and exits the  
stage.*

**THE END.**



## **Communicating text in embodied live performance.**

*-how to make words sweat-*

### **Exegesis**

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- Futurists, Dadaists and Defamiliarization

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- The Materialisation of Language / Vocal Resonators
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- Everyday life as a Template
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### **Introduction**

When I began this MPhil project in September 2018, my aim, simply expressed, was to develop a poetic script for a one-hour solo performance in which my training as a dancer would enable me to integrate movement-based story telling. I wanted to create a performance in which words and physicality would work together to create an enhanced artistic experience. At the same time, I was fascinated by theoretical questions raised by this merging of art forms.

The process of research and development which followed combined practical studio work with a contextual consideration of the works of others in the field. The primary outcome of my research and practice development is the performance piece entitled *The Dirt*, which received funding from Arts Council England to support a rehearsal period in preparation for a tour in Spring 2023. The development process culminated in a preview performance at C.L.A.Y (Centre for Live Arts Yorkshire) on 22 April 2022.

*The Dirt* is underpinned in this MPhil submission by an exegesis essay that examines the broader issues which emerged as I was developing the performance. As the project took shape, there was a continuing dialogue between my own practice and the questions of contextual theory which the work was raising.

At the beginning of my process I set out the following questions which I wanted to explore through my own practice:

- 1) In the context of live performance, how does the materiality of words relate to the body in movement?
- 2) How can the differences and synchronicities between words and physical expression be identified in order for performers to use them to their full expressive and communicative potential?
- 3) How might words be assimilated into the body and pass through it to be expressed physically?
- 4) What practical tools might prepare a physical performer to embody the spoken word?
- 5) Which poetic structures might best be translated and embodied in physical performances?

Throughout the development of *The Dirt*, whilst some of these questions remained central to the project, other aspects of my original approach changed direction or were narrowed down and articulated with greater precision. For example, one year into the project, the vocabulary of my exploration became better defined. In discussing the work with my supervisor and colleagues I found that the use of terms such as ‘poetry’ and ‘dance’ led to genre expectations and limitations. Consequently, ‘text’ emerged as a more appropriate term than ‘poetry’ and it became clear that the terms ‘physicality’, ‘movement’, ‘embodied live performance’ and ‘choreographed physical states’ served the project more effectively than ‘dance’.

Thus, as the performance and its theoretical underpinning took shape I was able to reassess and redefine my aims. These are summarised below.

- 1) To create a metaphoric text for an hour-long solo performance in which physicality and movement are crucial elements, accompanied by an essay examining the practice and challenges involved in the communication of text in embodied live performance.
- 2) To explore through experimentation how texts produced by different writing methods might be used in my own performances, focussing on creating voices and situations with a relationship between the everyday and the absurd.

The challenges outlined in (1) were shaped by contrasts in the performance manifestation between words and reality and physical expression and verbal language. Through work-in-progress presentations I was increasingly aware that audience reception often reflected binary divisions. People might say ‘I’m more of word person’ or ‘I’m a physical person’. This led to difficulties in (2) at arriving at a synthesis between the two mediums. Although there have been many moments during the project when my provocation ‘making words sweat’ was fulfilled, there were other times when it was not.

The writing methods I experimented with included automatic / surrealist writing, devised dialogue based on interviews, rhythmic and sonic repetition, the cut-up technique (text collage), and fictional first-person monologue.

The revised theoretical questions raised by development of *The Dirt* and addressed in the exegesis essay include:

- 1) How does the material of words relate to the body in movement?
- 2) How can the differences between the two be identified in order for performers and performance makers to use them to their expressive and communicative potential?
- 3) What practical tools, in terms of installing ways of approaching text and movement in pedagogical contexts and the immediate pre-performance warm-up, may prepare a performer to embody the spoken word?

### **Voice, Text and Body Relationships**

In the following paragraphs I will explore voice, text and body relationships which I have divided into three categories: text to body, body to text and body and text in parallel. I will first attempt to describe the differing 'ways of being' manifested by text and body.

Steven Connor describes the opposition between drama and writing as 'the opposition between the living, the embodied, the concrete on one hand, and the abstract, the symbolic and intangible on the other'.<sup>4</sup> Arthur Coleman Danto writes of the 'essential contrast between language and reality'.<sup>5</sup> The suggestion here is that physical performance – the body – is real and concrete, whereas writing is a cerebral activity and is, by nature, abstract and intangible. This distinction goes some way to explain the difficulty I encountered in *The Dirt* in attempting to synthesise the two. As pointed out in the Introduction (above) some audience members are inclined to place themselves on one side of this divide, some on the other.

Connor describes a word as 'available at any time for communication of a

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<sup>4</sup> Connor, S (1998). *Samuel Beckett, Repetition, Theory and Text*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell

<sup>5</sup> Danto, A.C (1981). *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, reprint edition, Canada, Harvard University Press

meaning, in the absence of what it names- though it also communicates the fact of that absence<sup>6</sup>. According to Connor, words themselves, whether written or spoken, do not have any intrinsic meaning, but rather 'in the absence of what it names<sup>7</sup>' language can be seen as *a* conductor of meaning. The representative function of words means that existentially they have no weight, but rather each word offers a specific type and quality of charged space. In contrast, regardless of what the body says or does, it has its own weight, its own relationship to the present and ultimately contains its own reality. A giggling body has a physical presence. The word 'giggle' in itself, when separated from the context of the effect it has on its surroundings, does not.

### **Text to Body Relationships**

The views of Connor and Danto illustrate how difficult it is to synthesise text and movement, but experimentation in the development of *The Dirt* suggests it is sometimes possible. Towards the end of the first scene, the performer gets stuck on the phrase 'blonde hairs'. The performer's voice repeats the phrase in a playfully percussive rhythm, supported by the phonetic exploration of the highly contrasting words (with the full, grounded, complete 'blonde' on the one hand and the light, airy 'hairs' on the other). A recording of the performer's voice begins to interact with the live voice. After a time, the latter quietens and the recorded voice, edited into a sound score by composer Marcelo Schmittner, continues. This vocal activity is, in this instance, synthesized and in harmony with the performer's physicality.

Here, the body is the site for call-and-response resonance. The word 'blonde' manifests itself physically by a dropping of the rib cage, calling to the 'hairs' which answer its grounding counterpart by rising up and out through the elbows and eye gaze. With the repetition, the semantic properties of the phrase begin to take second place over how it sounds musically and how it feels in the body.

During a seminar "Space and Words" in which I participated in 2015, Billie Hanne commented: 'The words disappear, they hang in the air but then they go. The

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<sup>6</sup> Connor, Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Connor, Ibid

body is solid, it sticks around.’<sup>8</sup> In this scene from *The Dirt*, however, rather than disappearing, I would argue that the words undergo a **text to body** transfer. The words may not have weight in themselves but because of the sound/movement interaction, their presence in the body becomes a physical, digested reality; through using the phrase ‘blonde hairs’ in way that is removed from its use in everyday life, audiences of *The Dirt* are invited to experience the words differently.

Note that the use of disembodied sound technology and its interplay with live voice, text and body relationships is an important aspect of this scene. I will address sound technology more generally in a following section.

### **Futurists, Dadaists and Defamiliarization**

I will now cover how this practice can be put into the context of past and contemporary performance art makers and physical theatre artists. Firstly, I will focus on the Futurists and the Dadaists. In following chapters I will discuss pioneers of physical theatre including Étienne Decroux (1898-1991) and Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1991) and the Argentinian choreographer and performer Lisi Estarás (born in 1971, former dancer with les ballets C de la B and founder of company Monkeymind), with whom I will tour *The Dirt* as a double bill with her solo *#THISISBEAUTY* in 2023.

The defamiliarizing of the words “blonde” and “hairs” in *The Dirt* builds on the work of the many writers of the 20th and 21st centuries who have attempted to rip words from their everyday contexts so that readers and audiences can encounter them in a new light. This challenges the notion that the functional role of verbal and written language in normal daily communication means that words are intrinsically rational.

My work on *The Dirt* suggests that the approach taken by the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century language experimentalists, the Futurists and Dadaists, may offer some freedoms to those of us attempting to combine words and movement – to make words sweat.

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<sup>8</sup> Hanne, B and Hamilton, J (2015). *Space and Words*, London, Chisenhale Dance Space

The founder of the Dadaist movement, Hugo Ball (1876-1944), positioned his predecessor, the Futurist Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944), as the originator of the will to bring words into freedom by extracting them from grammatical sentence structures. In Marinetti's words this 'nourished the emancipated big-city vocables with light and air and gave them back their warmth, emotion and original untroubled freedom'.<sup>9</sup>

Rose Lee Goldberg (born: 1947) sometimes described as the mother of present-day performance art, positions theatre director Vladimir Mayakovsky's (1893-1930) Russian Futurist opera production *Victory over the Sun*<sup>10</sup> (1913) as a 'break away from the traditional use of words.'<sup>11</sup> The fragmented, nonlinear text was written by Aleksei Kruchenykh and utilised the method ZAUM (often translated as "beyonsensical" or "transrational") that he invented with fellow poet Velimir Khlebnikov. ZAUM texts are composed by focussing on nonsensical units of sound and rhythm and avoiding logic to create the conditions for new, unexpected meanings to emerge.

The Dadaist movement saw society's conventional use of words as synonymous with the bourgeois ideals which had led to the First World War. Dadaists pilloried the figure of "the poet" as a representation of the stale, insincere art forms who served a society they regarded as rotten. In his 1916 Dada Manifesto, Hugo Ball told his Zurich audience: 'And yourselves, honoured poets, who are always writing with words and never writing the word itself, always writing around the actual point.' Ball spoke of his desire 'to dispense with conventional language, no less, and to have done with it.'<sup>12</sup>

The Dadaists ran soirees in Cabaret Voltaire and it was here that Ball first performed his sound poems, or verses without words. Goldberg describes Ball as being concerned with 'the absolute primacy of the word in language'.<sup>13</sup> She describes the

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<sup>9</sup> Goldberg, R (2009). *Performance Art, From Futurism to the Present*, London, Thames and Hudson Ltd

<sup>10</sup> Kruchonykin, A (1913). [Live performance] *Victory over the Sun*, Lunar Park, Saint Petersburg: 3.12.1913

<sup>11</sup> Goldberg, Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ball, H, *Dada Manifesto*, (14.07.1916). *Dada Soirée*, Zurich

<sup>13</sup> Goldberg, Ibid

Dadaist approach to language as showing 'how articulated language comes into being'<sup>14</sup>.

Ball himself said: *'I let the vowels fool around. I let the vowels quite simply occur, as a cat meows'*.<sup>15</sup> Though the practice I developed during the creation of *The Dirt* does not entirely follow the total commitment to abstraction and absurdism of either the Futurists or the Dadaists, I did find the licence they gave me to use language for its sound-power, rather than its literal meaning, very helpful in bridging the void between words and movement. I was particularly inspired by the musicality I found in the sound poem below, recited by Ball at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916:

*'gadgi beri bima*

*glandridi lauli lonni cadori*

*gadjama bim beri glassala*

*glandridi glassala tuffm I zimbrabim*

*blassa galassasa tuffm I zimbrabim'*<sup>16</sup>

Encouraged by my reading of these early language experimentalists, while working on the physical aspects of *The Dirt* I began to develop a movement vocabulary which might be used to reflect upon text. I say "reflect upon" because I did not want to be bound by movement which merely illustrated text. Avoiding illustrating is a defining feature of the physical theatre genre (I will go into more detail about how this genre has influenced and relates to *The Dirt* later on in this chapter), as can be seen in the work of Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), Russian theatre director, actor and theatrical producer whose work provided an important launchpad for the development of physical theatre in the decades that followed Dadaism. Meyerhold's acting methods represented a departure from the cerebral approach of the times, focussing instead on expressing emotions physically. His belief was that the role of the actor was not to

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<sup>14</sup> Goldberg, Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ball, Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ball, H (1916). *Gadji Beri Bima*. Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich: 23.06.1916



illustrate text, but rather, through their movements and physicality, to underline new relationships between words and in indeed to reveal the essence of these relationships and what they reveal.<sup>17</sup>

Drawing from this research, I have underlined some of my own examples for possible text-body relationships below. As Eugenio Barba writes of Meyerhold's research into the connection between words and gestures, mine too came from observations made in my day-to-day life.<sup>18</sup> For example, the first example came about as a result of my working with women seeking asylum in Leeds.

Words	Possible physical reflection
Your asylum case has been rejected	Blood drains from head, body feels weak and empty
You're a waste of space	Muscles tense, spine crouches
He's in love with someone else	Organs get heavier, slide and drop
I want you	Sexual organs open
Come here and fight me like a man!	Blood pumps, temperature rises, heart beat accelerates
Buffalo mozzarella	Mouth waters

These reflections might be used to demonstrate the physical effect that words have on our bodies. Again, personal observation played its part in my process. On one sad occasion, I went to the funeral of a friend of mine from university. From the moment that his mother heard the words communicating her son's tragic death, her body started to shake and did not stop for days. This had a profound effect on my perception of how language can prompt a physical reaction.

### **Body to Text Relationships**

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<sup>17</sup> Barba E and Savarese N (2012). 'El arte secreto del actor'. *Diccionario de antropología teatral*, Bilbao: Editorial Artezblai

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

## *The Materialisation of Language / Vocal Resonators*

*The voice is an extension of the body. The body is the visible part of the voice*<sup>19</sup>

Torgeir Wethal, Odin Teatret

During my work on *The Dirt*, exploring *body to text* relationships, looking at the relationship from a body-led perspective, I found that the human voice remained the most direct communicative channel. I became increasingly interested in the embodied vocal practice of our bodily ‘resonating chambers’ (particularly chest, abdomen, mouth, cranium) in which the body holds, transmits, influences and transforms words into the vitality of verbal expression.

Many vocal training practices incorporate the image of locating resonating chambers in the body and imagining that it is from here, instead of the vocal cords sitting at the top of the airways and attached within the larynx, that the voice originates.<sup>20</sup> Resonating chambers are central to the methods developed by artists such as the Polish theatre director and theorist Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1991) and his student, the Italian author and theatre director Eugenio Barba (born in 1936, founder of Odin Teatret)<sup>21</sup>, both of whom heavily influenced the trajectory of the development of physical theatre, the genre that Rod Dixon (artistic director of Red Ladder and one of the artistic mentors of *The Dirt*) argues best describes the piece. Contemporary practitioners of embodied vocal practices continue to use this image and I have personally experienced it in workshops from facilitators including Jamie McCarthy<sup>22</sup> (London based musician and composer who has works extensively with contemporary dancers), Billie Hanne (whose work I have mentioned at the beginning of this section), and with the two vocal coaches I worked with to support the development of the

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<sup>19</sup> Vocal Training at Odin Teatret, Wethal, Odin Teatret Film. Version restored in 2012 in collaboration with Centro Teatro Ateneo of “La Sapienza” University of Rome, 1972.

<sup>20</sup> Laurel Irene and David Harris created the revolutionary educational organization with the aim of taking contemporary research on the voice and translating it into directly applicable information for vocal practitioners. They argue that due to the fact that the voice is an instrument we cannot see, instructors have had to rely purely on sensation and metaphor to communicate to students how to habilitate sound. Their website is in part a mythology buster. (Harris and Harris).

Irene, L and Harris, D, VOICE SCIENCE WORKS, Available at : <https://www.voicescienceworks.org/>. Accessed on 23.09.21.

<sup>21</sup> Vocaal Training at Odin Teatret, Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ensemble Improvisation in Performance Workshop with Neat Timothy, facilitated by Seke Chimutengwende, Rick Nodine, and Jamie McCarthy, TripSpace, London. 31.10-4.11, 2016.

characters' voices in *The Dirt*: Fernanda Nome (actor and vocal coach based in Santiago, Chile) and Claire-Marie Seddon (musical theatre artist and vocal coach based in Leeds, UK).

Another way that I deepened my research into the embodied vocal practice, subsequently applied to *The Dirt*, was by facilitating workshops. In the context of making a solo piece, these collective experiences were a particularly important element of my practice as research. Below is an extract from my journal which describes a workshop I led at the Middle Floor, Leeds entitled 'The Interplay between Voice, Physicality and Text', which focussed on vocal resonators.

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It was a very positive, confidence inspiring experience. Rather than being underprepared to lead a workshop, which is how I felt in the days leading up to it, facilitating the sessions demonstrated to me that I have reached a point in this research project where I have interesting things to share and, crucially, the tools with which to communicate them.

Below is the description used to advertise the workshop:

### **The Interplay between voice, text and physicality**

*The workshops will be a playful way for participants to connect themselves with their voices through the body. I hope to share the potential for physicality and fun in voice and text work.*

*The workshop begins actively to release tension in the body, preparing us for a gentle, somatic vocal warm-up.*

*What follows is a research project on vocal resonators (locating the voice in specific parts of the body) leading into a physical movement exploration.*

*This develops into a solo improvisation led by a series of layered instructions challenging coordination and movement habits in which the voice and text (located in different resonating chambers) will be introduced as a parallel line.*

*The workshop is underpinned by the idea that the movement and the voice each follow their own logic, intersecting sometimes, dislocated in others but always independent and able to return to their own trip.*

*We'll also play a bunch of text games to get our imaginations and associations flowing and reactive.*

In genuine expression, one begins conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what the emotion is. From this helplessness and oppressed condition, she extricates herself by doing something we call expressing herself. This activity has something to do with the thing we call language.'<sup>23</sup>

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Some of the things above were covered but I also delved into other material.

Here is a record of the content covered in the three workshops:

Theme: Where do words come from? What happens before you speak? In text for performance this is undoubtedly just as important as what word. Read R.G Collingwood quotation to the group.

1. Knot: Form a circle and hold hands. Now, without letting go of your neighbours' hands, go under and over each other, twisting, turning and stepping in order to transform the circle into a tight tangle. Now, look into your neighbours' eyes and say in your head (not out loud) all the things you see or feel. For example: blue, green, black eyelashes, tired, mascara, party, girl, confident, jealous. The idea is to use what is actually there in front of you as material to arrive at poetic associations.
  
2. Fitness warm up. Unleash tension in the body through athletic movement by:  
Running
  - Passing through burpees

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<sup>23</sup> Collingwood, R.G (2014). *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*, R. Eldrige, Cambridge University Press

- Twists
  - Pulling or pulling in partners
3. Partners on opposite sides of the studio.
    - Run and stop, face to face with your partner. Swap roles.
    - Repeat, finding a way to the floor together and then back up. Swap roles.
    - Repeat with one doing the task 'Look into my eyes and tell me what you see'. Swap roles.
    - One does 'Look into my eyes and tell me what you see', while the other takes this person on a walk through the space, going through different levels. Swap roles.
  4. Continue working in partners. One lies on their back. The other uses their hands to help bring their partners breathing to specific points in the body. Firstly, in the stomach, feel this area expanding like a balloon on the inhale and shrivelling on the exhale. Then around the rib cage. Then the head. Swap roles.
  5. Each person lies in constructive rest and begins with a small vibrating sound. Use your fingertips to explore where the vibrations manifest. Try the throat, the collar bones, the pelvis, the ribs and the skull.
  6. Gather in a circle. Try resonating the voice in the belly, then the chest, then the skull.
  7. Warming up the connection between the tongue and the front side of the body. Imagine you are wearing a huge bib. You have a second tongue shape running down the whole front side of your body. Repeat the following sequence of movements searching for the coordination and the initiator to each action.
    - Imagine the dark place, far back in your throat. Before your tongue. Stick your tongue out from this place.
    - When it is fully stuck out, the body is in table top position. The belly is soft.

- The neck is soft and not extended, rather the natural curve is maintained.
- Begin the journey back up to standing by drawing the tongue back in, beginning from the back of the tongue.
8. Massage the jaw. Do tongue gymnastics by drawing circles round the top and bottom of your lips. Draw 5 points from the front of the roof of your mouth to the back. Repeat 5 times.
  9. Click with your tongue. Listening to the echo resonating and using this information, arrive at the next click.
  10. Word association through the vocal resonators. Stand in a circle. Place your hands on the ribs of the person in front of you. Say a word. Pass this word backwards in the circle so the person who follows uses the information received through the hands to say their next word. Repeat with hands on different body parts e.g. pelvis or head. Notice the different character, moods and feelings that come from originating each word in the distinct body parts. Continue the exercise, now saying longer strings of words and, if it flows, let this develop into a more developed text improvisation.
  11. Disguise your voice. One person in the group faces the wall. The others are behind her and have to shout a phrase for example: 'Manchester United are alright really', while disguising their voice. The person with their back to the group has to try to guess who it was.
  12. Cool down with voice. Massage inspired by one I have experienced in Gaga classes (a movement improvisation technique founded by Israeli dancer Ohad Naharin in 2003). Divide into pairs. One stands, the other massages them, using the voice if available. Then hit the standing partner other with the palms of the hands using their voice to release their partner of any remaining tension. Finally stripe lines of energy through your partner's body beginning at the head and

ending at the feet. Repeat three times. Swap roles.

In the section entitled 'Resonators' from the chapter 'Actors Training 1959-1962'<sup>24</sup>, Grotowski acknowledges that, depending on the technique of the actor and the subsequent control they have over their body, the potential places for the voice to resonate are almost infinite. For him resonators are not only used for heightened expressivity (a theme in this MPHIL), but also for the long-term safety of the actor's voice. He goes on to describe some of these in more detail including the chest and the cranium, the resonators I chose to originate the voice of The Woman in *The Dirt*. Following Grotowski's technique, when using resonating in the cranium, I manifested the sensation that the mouth was located there. In contrast, The Punk's voice resonated in their pelvis, an area of the body which I also emphasised (and at times exaggerated) in their pedestrian movements. In the penultimate scene (The Nightmare) The Punk's weighted connection to their pelvis drove and grounded the embodiment of the emotional culmination of the piece. The pelvis can thus be described as the expressive centre of The Punk in voice sections, voice and movement sections and movement sections.

*The performer walks backwards, in a grounded gait, connecting with the image of heavy testes between her legs, exaggerating the swing movement of shoulders in cross lateral relationship to the hips... The Punk's tone of voice is low, relaxed, resonating in the pelvis. She speaks slowly (think stoner with a cockney accent). (Scene 2)*

Vocal resonators also served to add variety of shade to the vocal pitches and qualities of the characters, who would speak outside of their habitual ranges for increased expressive and musical effect as seen in the following extract:

and then I chuck (sharp 'chuck' movement with the head), and then I give a little sprinkle (echo in the performer's body of the light phonetics of the word), and then a massage (said heavily, resonating in the pelvis) (Scene 1)

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<sup>24</sup> Grotowski, J (1970). *Hacia un teatro pobre*, Argentina, Buenos Aires, Siglo Veintiuno

When performing for live audiences I noticed that using the resonators at the more extreme sides of the spectrum (cranium and pelvis) accentuated clownish aspects of the character had the effect of inciting laughter among the spectators.

### **Artaud, Beckett, Barthe and DV8**

Putting the ambitions of this MPHIL project into a broader artistic context gave me further confidence in the direction I was taking in my search for a voice which would make a partnership of body and text.

Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) challenged the assumption that preserving the pre-existing script should be a main priority of the director. Instead, Artaud sought to disrupt narratives, searching for extreme expressivity through experimenting with unusual ways of using language, targeting its potential for physical shock. He stood for a materialisation of language, words that found their origin in things you can touch. This could be regarded as a *body to text* relationship, the body will be, as outlined in the introduction to this section, used as a term to represent reality, and, in this case materiality. Artaud argued that in order for words to be considered physical, they needed to be reunited with their active, plastic, respiratory source: experience. In Jaques Derrida's formulation, Artaud forbade 'that his speech be spirited away [soufflé] from his body'<sup>25</sup>. Artaud claimed that the result would be a heightened expressivity through direct communication with the audience, transmitted with and through physical experience. Artaud sought to 'sought to use theatre to transcend writing, to break through the language in order to touch life'.<sup>26</sup>

In developing *The Dirt*, I set myself the provocation 'make words sweat'. Exploring Artaud's theories pushed me further from linear narrative into and into a more theatrical and presentational approach. I was excited, too, by the realisation that Samuel Beckett's transition from writing primarily for the page to the stage could be seen as a wish for the origin of his language to be rooted in the vitality of bodies rather

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<sup>25</sup> Thiher, A (1984). Jacques Derrida's Reading of Artaud: "La Parole soufflée" and "La Clôture de la représentation" Reading of Artaud, *La Parole Soufflée*, *The French Review*, [Vol. 57, No. 4](#)

<sup>26</sup> Artaud, A (1958). *The Theatre and Its Double*, New York: Grove Press



than 'coming out of the dark'<sup>27</sup>. Similarly,

I was impressed by Robin Lyndenberg's eloquent passage in which he describes the mission of Roland Barthes' (1915-1980), the French philosopher, literary theorist and writer, known to have contributed greatly to the development of semiotics, structuralism and post-structuralism, to find a language 'lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throats, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language.'<sup>28</sup>

Another *body-to-text* relationship that I explored draws from a more expanded approach to the idea of 'body', which I describe in this case as the presence of what comes before the word. As discussed in the previous section in relationship to a workshop I facilitated with the overarching questions: what happens before you speak? Where do words come from? In terms of addressing the area of interest set out in the introduction: preparing a performer to embody the spoken word, I would say this is undoubtedly central to my methods.

Richard Eldridge, the North American philosopher, writes:

In genuine expression, one begins conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what the emotion is. From this helplessness and oppressed condition, she extricates herself by doing something we call expressing herself. This activity has something to do with the thing we call language.<sup>29</sup>

The very process of articulation, of finding the word to express yourself (regardless of whether or not this word exists) and translating this into movement is for me an area of utmost interest choreographically. This will be addressed in more detail in 'Future practitioner reflexivity'. Also relevant to this topic is the presence of the unconscious in the development of movement and textual language which I cover in the section

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<sup>27</sup> Connor, S (1998). *Samuel Beckett, Repetition, Theory and Text*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell

<sup>28</sup> Lyndenberg, R (1947). *Word Cultures :Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs' Fiction*, United States of America, University of Illinois Press

<sup>29</sup> Eldridge, R (2014). *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

below.

While developing *The Dirt* I was particularly inspired by the dance film *Strange Fish* made by the iconic physical theatre company DV8 in 1992, UK.<sup>30</sup> In this film, movement originates from the pedestrian body and it is here that the dancers return to, lingering in quotidian positions between phrases. When the bodies are in motion, the intention behind each movement is precise as a word and although this is neither verbal, nor mime, it ceases to be abstract. Artaud argues that

there can be no complete theatre which does not add to our fully known feelings the expression of states of mind belonging to the half-conscious realm, which the suggestion of gestures will always express more adequately than the precise localized meaning of words.<sup>31</sup>

What exactly this movement language communicates could not be translated into words without transforming them into something else and essential parts being lost, hence why it is danced rather than spoken. In fact, I would say that this is an example of the expression of the non-verbal language that Artaud argued the absolute need for in which ‘concrete gestures must have an efficacy strong enough to make us forget the very necessity of speech’<sup>32</sup>. The Argentinian choreographer Lisi Estarás whose work I will cover in the following section, puts it this way: ‘when words are not enough to communicate the body takes over’.<sup>33</sup> It’s the authenticity of emotional detail behind each intention for movement and the way the dancers make this inside-to-outside process visible that makes the physical language so expressive and an example of what Eldridge describes as ‘genuine expression’.<sup>34</sup>

In *The Dirt*, I was determined to give space for this exploration in movement-based scenes such as Scene 4: *Entre chien et loup* in which the physical state supports the performer who is on the brink of saying something which she never quite arrives to. This also grounded the attention to gestural and pedestrian physicalities in text-

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<sup>30</sup> Strange Fish (1992), [Online]. Adapted for the screen by Lloyd Newson and David Hinton, Dance Videos. Available at: <https://www.dv8.co.uk/media-portal> Accessed on 10.02.2019

<sup>31</sup> Artaud, A (1958), *The Theatre and Its Double*, New York, Grove Press.

<sup>32</sup> Artaud, A (1958), *The Theatre and Its Double*, New York, Grove Press.

<sup>33</sup> Estarás, L (2021) *talk me through*. Available at : <https://b12.space/landing-page-en.html> - Accessed on 17.09.21. is

<sup>34</sup> Eldridge, R (2014). *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

based scenes (such as Scene 2 when The Punk is introduced) which sets up spaces to speak into.

### **Body and text in parallel / dissonances: Estaràs, Adler, Authentic Movement**

As mentioned in the introduction, the contrasts in the performance manifestation between words and reality and physical expression and verbal language have at times represented challenges when trying to arrive at a synthesis between the two mediums. There are other examples, however, as outlined in the following paragraphs in reference to the work of Lisi Estaràs, when these dissonances, contradictions and even paradoxes were exciting coordinates for creation during the process of making *The Dirt*.

In live performance, a body in motion tends to communicate abstract content that each member of the audience will interpret quite differently. Although the existence of the vehicle that communicates the content (the body) cannot be negated, the expressive material produced is far more ambiguous. In contrast, text, and in particular the individual building blocks composed of words, is a more concrete medium, tending, in terms of meaning, to direct audiences to similar places. If we hear the word 'apple' we are directed to a specific area of understanding because of a shared representational code. Speaking in general terms, text is not an abstract medium. Although 'natural' tendencies can be overridden as is the case of Samuel Beckett's work. In a letter to Axel Kaun he described his belief that the ultimate aspiration for a writer was to destroy everyday uses of language, sandpapering words down to show what they reveal, be that something or nothing.<sup>35</sup> Particularly Beckett's later works such as 'Not I' represent an attempt to use language in abstract ways.

Decroux, speaking from the perspective of a mime actor, believes that the only way for text and movement to work well together is for one to be poor (using just what is necessary, efficient, controlled) and for the other to be rich (rich, full of variety, disorderly). So, in his opinion, if the text is rich, the mime should be poor and if the mime is rich then the text should be poor.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, when I started the project I

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<sup>35</sup> Beckett, S, Overbeck, L. S, Fehsenfeld, M. D Eds. (2009). *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 1, 1929-1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>36</sup> Barba E and Savarese N (2012). 'El arte secreto del actor'. *Diccionario de antropología teatral*,

identified strongly with Lost Dog Dance Theatre's approach to making work, described by artistic director Ben Duke as: 'We begin with an idea and we continue to wrestle with it - to say (only) what needs to be said and dance the rest'<sup>37</sup>. As the MPHIL developed, however, I became more interested in seeking ways to heighten the expressivity of both mediums, not always, but at times, simultaneously. This is possible as seen in the work of Estaràs, a choreographer and dance artist based in Belgium very much concerned with the place of words in dance who has been one of my most immediate and inspiring influences in the development of *The Dirt*.<sup>38</sup> Her signature use of words, movements, gestures, facial expressions and physical states develop in parallel with one another (often in the form of textual lists layered with forms of physical expressions),<sup>39</sup> opens up the quality of poetic and absurd space that I aspired for in *The Dirt*.

In July 2021, I participated in a seminar she gave ('talk me through.'<sup>40</sup>). It consisted of long improvisations with dancing and talking (some lasting two hours) in which we sustained a performative state that could change whenever we had the impulse to change it. Tasks to generate verbal texts included reciting lists, describing what we imagined the other performers to be thinking, and relating what was happening in the scene to the audience. For me, these explorations were a manifestation of what Robin Lyndenberg (b. 1947), writes of the experimental writer William Burroughs (of whose work, in particular the relationship to the cut-up technique, I will go in to more detail in the following section) when she describes the embodied voice as 'a juxtaposition of what's happening outside and what you're thinking of it 'in order for 'the reality behind the words... to be revealed by the action which often contradicts that literal meaning'<sup>41</sup>.

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Bilbao: Editorial Artezblai,

<sup>37</sup> Available at: <https://www.lostdogdance.co.uk> Accessed on 17.09.21

<sup>38</sup> Estaràs, L (2022). Lisi Estaras, Sharing: #THISISBEAUTY. Available at: <https://www.tanzhaus-zuerich.ch/en/events/sharing-thisisbeauty/27480>. Accessed on 3.11.2022

<sup>39</sup> As seen very clearly in #THISISBEAUTY, Estaràs, L (21.04.2022). [Live performance] #THISISBEAUTY, KC Nona, Mechelen, Belgium

<sup>40</sup> Estaràs, L (2021). 'talk me through' seminar, B12 festival, Eden Studios, Berlin.

<sup>41</sup> Connor, S (1998). Samuel Beckett, Repetition, Theory and Text, Oxford: Basil Blackwell

This method, rather than resisting or demanding words to ‘behave’, surrenders to the very nature of how the imagination generates text. It is vital to recognise and in turn celebrate the differences between physicality and text in terms of how they relate to and occupy time, space and meaning. This gives the agency for creators to use the identity and character of each medium to its advantage and to fulfil its expressive potential. Asking the body in movement to obey the same logic as verbal language is futile (and vice versa), and only leads to a diluted, tamer version of physical and verbal expression. This principle is true for any type of successful collaboration whether that be between media or individuals, as dance artists Igor and Moreno told me in an interview:

**Marianne:** How do you make a partnership work in the studio?

**Moreno:** Not compromising! A collaboration isn’t about finding a meeting point. It’s about reaching a third unimagined place that goes above and beyond.”<sup>42</sup>

In what she describes as ‘the polluted mind’, Estarás is particularly interested in the potential for busyness and absurdity in this process.<sup>43</sup> We were encouraged to accentuate the mind’s tendency to switch abruptly between different topics. Words are ethereal and the mind, unlike the body, is independent from laws of physics. The body has a wholly different rhythm, engaging directly with reality at all times. The source of expressive potential in the body in motion, which in the case of Estarás’ work searches for extremes, lies deep in the centre of the here and now. This combination allowed both mediums to fully express themselves and produces an authentic relationship between physicality and text.

Inspired by the urgency of Estarás’ work, during early rehearsals of *The Dirt* while I was researching potential relationships between text and movement, I played with the following tasks in which the body and text are in parallel, using text-collages (discussed in greater detail in section below):

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<sup>42</sup> Northernisms, the Northern School of Contemporary Dance blog, 2014 Tuckman, M (2014). Igor and Moreno visit NSCD, Northernisms. Available at: <https://nscdstudentblog.wordpress.com/2014/07/15/igor-and-moreno-visit-nscd/>. Accessed on 8.08.2021.

<sup>43</sup> Estaràs, L (2021). ‘talk me through’ seminar, B12 festival, Eden Studios, Berlin.

*\*The body gives the voice the urgent desire to speak*

*\*The body stops the voice speaking and goes off on a chatter of its own*

*\*The body makes the voice laugh – through a washing machine inside the pelvis.*

In the studio I continued physically exploring the first two tasks, layering them with Scene 3 text and the sound score composed by Marcelo Schmittner. In this scene The Woman is on a phone call with The Husband (whose voice we do not hear), trying to communicate the increasingly disgusting situation that is developing in the house.

Oh no everything darling: (list reeled off quite quickly) the kitchen surfaces, the taps ,the inside of the kettle ,the windows, the mirrors, my phone screen actually (pulls her face away from the phone and speaks through speaker, wiping her cheeks), our children, my skin, everything is covered in this layer of sticky... dirty, dusty, erghh (guttural moaning sound) (Scene 3, *The Phone Call*)

Towards the end of the scene and as we begin to reach the climax, a loud volume of street sounds, a sonic metaphor for contamination (representing the climate emergency - a key theme of the performance about which I will go into more detail in following sections) that is seeping into her house, intervenes into The Woman's monologue, provoking an immediate reaction in her body which is taken over by the sound, leaving no space for her voice or her words. This can be put into the context of physical theatre as an example of 'involuntary movement', a device used to give the impression that the performer is moved by outside forces such as God.

Below is an extract from the stage directions in Scene 3, *The Phone Call*:

(Reacts with a movement research in which the 'north' and 'south' poles, or axes of the body (top of head, pelvic floor) are moved, always in relationship to each other, very fast, as if being moved by an irresistible outside force. When these sounds subside, she begins talking again. This interrupts the text four times. The last one is the longest.)

As mentioned in the section above, one of the ways I built a context around the practical development of *The Dirt* was by facilitating workshops parallel to the practical development of the piece. Drawing on Estarás' seminar, I held spaces that embraced the contradictory nature of movement and words. One of these occasions was during a workshop that I facilitated with first year students at Northern School of Contemporary Dance, a conservatoire offering vocational dance training in Leeds, UK during the summer term of 2021, in which I chose, in contrast to Estarás, to use writing rather than talking as a way for the students to access their flow of textual thoughts. I proposed to explore a practice in which we would alternate between movement improvisations and automatic writing. Central to this approach to physicality was the concept of Authentic Movement, the discipline founded by the North American dance movement therapist Janet Adler that gives space for the embodiment of unconscious material, asking the mover to 'listen inwardly for the occurrence of impulse towards movement'<sup>44</sup> I invited the students to locate a place in the body or a sensation that called their attention, allowing this to intensify (or glow) on an inhale and to follow the impulse through movement on an exhale. This exploration was the seed from which duet and group movement improvisations developed into. For the automatic writing I emphasised that it did not need to make sense, or even to be legal as (no-one was going to read it!), that the important thing was the action of writing rather than what was being said. In between moving, the students grabbed their notebooks or phones and scribbled or typed furiously. This was the first time that most of the students had been exposed to this practice and the large majority of the group really engaged with the task. An atmosphere in the studio was charged with focus. One of the students said that it was the first time he'd truly connected to a movement improvisation task, as he was able to get all his verbal thoughts (or as Estarás puts it: 'the polluted mind'<sup>45</sup>) which often distract him, out onto the page and return to moving clear headed. Other students noted that they were surprised by what they wrote, digesting or articulating elements of their physical experiences that they were not consciously aware of. They were able to use this as input and sources for further embodied research when they returned to moving.

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<sup>44</sup> Adler, J (1996). 'The collective body', *American Journal of Dance Therapy* Volume 18, 81–94,

<sup>45</sup> Adler, Ibid

When the students spoke of 'digestion', this resonated with my own experience of drawing from authentic movement during the creative process of *The Dirt*. I used it to frame the movement research for Scene 4 (The Nap Ministry) as well as the writing/moving alternating practice described above and below. The Nap Ministry is a movement-based scene which embodies the notion of disturbed sleep. *The Dirt* (representative of climate change), that is accumulating in The Woman's house and body is affecting her inner world, pre-empting the emotional cumulative climax in the penultimate Nightmare Scene

'It's like the street is inside, it's like I can't close the door' *Scene 3, The Phone Call*

As Adler writes of a participant 'opening toward remembering, re-entering, re-living' *the* memory of her mother's touch, I drew from my own childhood experience of being burgled as I slept.<sup>46</sup> As what I imagine is a consequence, I have always been a very light sleeper. To develop the movement for the scene, I entered into a state of remembering-with-my-body that night when I was seven years old. What came out of this was a series of physical states combining waking suddenly because of an imagined outside disruption, slipping back into sleep and soothing myself.

Authentic movement as mentioned above and the practice of alternating between writing and moving, in which textual and embodied expression have an osmotic relationship, helped me to uncover unconscious material which was influential in the development of the piece. One extract of automatic writing represented a turning point in the script as seen in following extract of my journal.

14 July 2019

Santiago Airport, Chile

As soon as I clean the house it gets filthy dirty again. Immediately!

I miss being in New York we had such fun walking buying breathing drinking ice coffee in plastic cups with paper straws. She gave us three because the paper ones disintegrate before you reach the bottom of the drink unless you drink real fast.

I ordered a new hoover on Amazon and it arrived the next day, I cleaned the house from top to bottom I had to call in sick to work... it can't be good for me to breath this in, I developed a cough,

I started at the bottom and by the time I'd reached the top the bottom was dirty

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<sup>46</sup> Adler, J (1996). The collective body, *American Journal of Dance Therapy* Volume 18, 81–94



again even the air is full of shitty music they play it in the streets and even louder on public holidays...

The moving/writing practice undoubtedly contributed to the absurd identity of key images and atmospheres in *The Dirt*. Additionally, it was also a useful thing to do in moments when I felt blocked, both physically and mentally.

There were however students who were reluctant to engage with the task. This returns to one of the challenges I outlined in the introduction: people define themselves as 'more of a word person' or 'more of physical person'. As one would be likely to expect, the latter applies to many dancers. Negative experiences with words in educational contexts (for example) where the expectation to adhere to a rigid set of logical expectations can mean that those who describe themselves as 'more of a physical person' have accumulated frustration towards text and a reluctance to combine the practice of moving with writing. In these cases, one session (as was the time available with the students at the Norther School of Contemporary Dance is usually not enough to address this.)

I would describe the above relationships as body and text in parallel. This relationship is grounded by recognising and using the contrasting natures between the two entities. In the first example (Scene 3), body and text have a more independent relationship from each other than in the other categories mentioned earlier. The identity of this relationship involves a clearly delineated boundary between the two elements. In contrast the second example (alternating authentic movement with automatic writing), body and text had a fluid, osmotic relationship. Most strikingly these types of 'body text relationships' have the effect of heightening the performers expressivity, releasing accumulated tensions during creative processes and offers opportunities to digest and uncover unconscious material.

### **Burroughs and the Cut-up Technique**

A further influence I encountered in my search for textual techniques which would partner movement and physical images in the performative space usefully in the *The Dirt* was the cut-up technique developed by the American novelist and artist William Burroughs (1914-97), one of the the most significant figures within the Beat movement.

Whereas the Dadaist Hugo Ball rejected established words which were part of extinct languages, preferring to invent their own sound patterns, Burroughs developed a non-linear style in which existing words and phrases were cut up and reassembled. Burroughs observed 'The writer does not yet know what words are. He deals only with abstractions from the source points of words'<sup>47</sup>. It was the desire 'to get into tactile communication with his medium'<sup>48</sup> which led him to develop the cut-up technique (also known as the text collage), a method which became a seminal part of the writing practice of future authors, notably Kathy Acker. This demonstrates a physical approach to writing that resonated with me, and my experiments with the technique were pivotal in this MPHIL research project.

*The Dirt* draws from the technique extensively. First, I would describe the approach I took to structuring as collaged. I chose to use a non-linear, cumulative structure in which I assembled individual sections, multiple characters and voices, and mediums that stemmed from the central themes (contamination, motherhood, the way that climate change affects us emotionally, covered in more depth in a later section) in a way that resonated with me as an author.

The text-collage or cut-up technique was also applied directly through the composition of cut-ups that I wrote as part of this MPHIL research project.(this could work better as an appendix at the end, or you could delete it)<sup>49</sup> This prepared me for

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<sup>47</sup> Lyndenberg, R (1947). *Word Cultures :Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs' Fiction*, United States of America, University of Illinois Press

<sup>48</sup> Lyndenberg, Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Extract from journal entry: 18 January 2019

'Below in bold is the text collage I composed entitled '**I don't condone her attackers whatsoever**' performed at Acud Macht Neu, as part of performance First to Blink (2019), by Noi Ansamble\*

**I don't condone her attackers whatsoever, sickness swimming in a state of 4 o'clock darkness, dreaming of white hairs coming from a stranger. I find the way he exists in his body disgusting //**

**What happened to # Grace Milane was a tragedy. Other solo backpackers will be missing**

**In the context of a traditional patriarchal system like Berlin, Manheim and Vienna, (who's voice is this?) when I went to the toilets again to check myself present as the empty hole which must be filled**

**she asked me "bist du ein papa"**

**phallus or as the pregnant body of the text to be**

**Meanwhile this is 2019 I am still young flesh (even when my hair is greasy)**

composing the more complex cut-up, 'Is it still OK to have children' included as an audio extract in the live stream performance of *The Dirt*. Burroughs describes his process for creating text collages as follows:

I place a page of one text folded down the middle on a page of another text (my own or someone else's)- The composite text is read across half from one text and half from the other-- The resulting material is edited, re-arranged, and deleted as in any other form of composition<sup>50</sup>

Below is another extract from my journal which quotes from Kathy Acker to describe my own approach, which, although inspired by Burroughs is purposely different:

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I chose instead to use multiple texts and would cut into sentences and spread them on the floor and see if combinations would jump out at me. Sometimes I would radically edit or add words and phrases in response to the arrangement of texts. 'This flexible approach to technique is one that runs through my artistic practice and personal life; for me methods are studied in order to be accessed as launch pads rather than to be emulated exactly. It also makes sense to make personal adjustments to a technique made nearly 70 years ago so that it serves the particular needs of communication for our times. In addition, I felt that seeing as William Burroughs was, in my eyes, disinterested in feminism

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**The waxer is going to see everything so stop the car ask the car ask the girl with washed hair**

**(whose voice is this\*) Entschuldigung warum spielst du mit deine gynecologist, these technicians washing their lips and the döner out of their teeth**

**Mensch! My ex-girlfriend was a ballet dancer was between 15-30 minutes. You'll be Japanese, 19 years old, I cheated on her on a table covered in clean paper or vegetarian BBQS he explained wherever he wanted to**

**this is 2019 Most waxings occur in private rooms with hysterical screaming. This is normal This is 2019, please remove everything.**

When performing the text I used a playful approach to the voices drawing from the "Who's voice is this?" concept I'd been inspired by in Burrough's work.

My intention was to perform the text collage with a variety of voices each with a different personality. Sometimes these voices would be connected by smooth transitions, at other times there would be a sharp cut e.g. Mensch!

To connect these fragments, I used an assured, conventional and trustworthy tone of voice. I would say these kinds of grounding methods offer the crucial tension needed to make nonsense interesting.

\*First to Blink (2019), by Noi Ansamble\*, Acud Macht Neu, Berlin: 18.01.2019.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, L (1963) *The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America*, Corinth Books, New York.

(developed women characters never appear in his writing, casting women as The Sex Enemy in Western Lands), my feeling was that I could use his method for my own means, for my own feminist uses.' Note that Kathy Acker also used the cut-up technique extensively. This could be an avenue for further research.

This text collage was composed using sources including Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), an interview between birth strike founder Blythe Pepino and Tucks Carlon Tucker Carlson Tonight,<sup>51</sup> the Mesopotamian account of the Great Flood, a speech by Donald Trump<sup>52</sup> and an internet chatroom entitled 'What is more selfish having kids or not having kids?'<sup>53</sup> With David Britton's assistance I re-drafted the piece into the format of triologue which I then performed and recorded. The identities of the three characters were shaped partly by their vocal resonators (discussed in depth above), so although this was a recording, the presence of the body, as the originator of the sound, is absolutely present. As mentioned above, a central interest and challenge that I set myself in the context of a solo work was establishing a multiplicity of characters and voices. The three voices developed for 'Is it still OK to have children?' are described below:

- 1) Feminine, flirtatious, motherly, chest resonator, honey texture, British Standard English.
- 2) Broken computer taking its last breath, singing the words, cranium resonator, soft North American accent.
- 3) Nasal, gossipy, throat resonator, cockney London accent.

During the process of making *The Dirt*, I experimented with different relationships between the body in the performative space (including physical states, movements and images) together with the text-collage. One notable occasion (not least because it marked the introduction of the pineapple into the project!) was a movement study I shared alongside a verbal presentation at the Arts and Humanities Postgraduate Conference at Swansea University in September 2019.

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<sup>51</sup> *Tonight*, (2019), Fox News, 13 March.

<sup>52</sup> President Trump participates in a roundtable on immigration and border security (2019), ABC News, 5th April, Calexico, California. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ABCNewsLive/videos/pres-trump-participates-in-a-roundtable-on-immigration-and-border-security/286884422203462/> Accessed on 9.04.2019

<sup>53</sup> (2017), Quora Digest, 11 December 2017. Available at: <https://www.quora.com/What-is-more-selfish-having-kids-or-not-having-kids> Accessed on: 10.04.2019

The audio track begins with a quotation from my own writing in which I argue the case for having children: 'To hold a baby in your arms, nuzzle in, smelling sweetness or shit without anything added, this intimacy'. The audience heard this while I stood in front of them holding a pineapple in my arms as if it were a baby. The text collage continued in parallel to the movement, at moments they held their own separate logic at moments the movement directly referred or was affected by the audio.

In the live-stream version of *The Dirt*, I chose to use a still image of the two pineapples leaning against each other while the text-collage audio played. This offered a physical, visual anchor for the words in the audio to land, inviting the audience to listen more closely than they would if there was movement in the performative space. The words from the 'Is it still OK to have children?' audio settled in the bodies of the pineapples which at this point, we clearly understand as being the children. The image becomes a place to mediate on the content of the piece. Interestingly in this 'body and text in parallel relationship', the text moved, and the bodies were still.

In retrospect I see that discovering the cut-up technique was a turning point in the creative process of *The Dirt* and my identity as a writer and choreographer/director (which I discuss in later section 'Further practitioner reflexivity'). The collage structure serves the communication of one of my main artistic aims, as seen in *The Dirt*, of communicating from macro to micro: how global issues such as climate change affect us emotionally in our most intimate spaces. Like a cut-up, our emotional worlds (expressed in *The Dirt* through movement and text) do not follow a linear narrative, neither do they make a hierarchy of what is important based on logical distinctions; in this structure, text from internet chat rooms, overheard conversations and classic literature can be assembled together. If it feels relevant, it is. Through using a collaged approach in the overall structure of *The Dirt* as applying the technique directly in individual scenes, I feel able to express this.

### **Use of Sound and Technology**

Earlier in this thesis I made mention of the use of sound and technology. In the trial production, light design and video helped create the universe of *The Dirt* but the use of recorded sound and its interplay between text, voice and movement was undoubtedly the most significant technical contributor to the performance.

To create this ‘third voice’ in *The Dirt* (as mentioned in section above, multiplicity of voices was one of my main aesthetic interests), audio recordings of the voices were manipulated into a musical composition by Marcelo Schmittner using techniques of overlap, pitch changers, delay and repetition. In response to the climate emergency theme, he also chose to add recordings of gasping breaths and waves crashing.

Audio techniques were used to lift words from the page, heightening their expressivity and their potential impact in performance. The collaboration with Schmittner was consistent throughout the creative process and his input was crucial to the emerging product.

Conceptually I decided that all the vocal recordings would be my own. This idea came from reading the experimental novel *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* by the North American novelist David Markson (1927-2010) early in the research phase.<sup>54</sup> It tells of a woman who believes herself to be the only person left on earth. I wanted to offer the potential reading of *The Woman*, in the context of the climate emergency, as the last human on earth and her voice, therefore the only one left. Moments in which the live performer interacts with her recorded voice are particularly rich, accentuating the loneliness and absurdity of the situation.

Although all of the voices are from the same source, using sound technology offers a variety of tones and registers. This proved particularly valuable in giving variety to a solo performance. These further vocal colours either support or counter the material that the live performer is making. The most absurd and comedic moment is Scene 7 (*The Chat Show*) in which the pineapple Baby Gustav is given a voice in which to interview *The Punk* through the use of sound/technology. Giving a voice to inanimate objects and therefore a physicality has become an extension of my interest in the embodiment of sound. I am continuing to explore in future works and will briefly cover this in the later section ‘Further practitioner reflexivity’.

### **Key Themes of the Performance**

The key narrative concern of the piece was to explore how the climate emergency

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<sup>54</sup> Markson, D (2012). *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*. Dalkey Archive Press, Dublin.

affects our emotional inner worlds. This was expressed through the metaphor of a woman's home becoming mysteriously very dirty. I ask how our dreams of the future, (symbolised by two pineapple children: Baby Gustav and The-Three-Year-Old) are affected when an intimate space become contaminated by climate change. This idea was also explored through the parallel metaphor of the squat (The Punk's home) that was threatened with the eviction.

Everyone has a relationship with the idea of having a baby. On this premise, anybody could be the audience and anybody the performer, as Jacques Rancière's puts it: 'Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor is the spectator of the same story.'<sup>55</sup> I hope that this and the use of metaphors reduces the global political subject matter of the piece, that of grieving the loss of a future due to climate change, into something tangible, every day and relatable, something that, through empathy, can be felt.

Apropos, Peter Brook's views on theatre given in an interview with D.J.Britton and published in the collected essays *Peter Brook and the Mahabharata* are relevant to mention.<sup>56</sup> The conversation can be condensed to the following: At its best, theatre is a continuous journey to and from the popular (recognisable and rooted in everyday humanity) and the special (poetic, philosophical, ideological, spiritual etc). Stay too long in the popular and theatre becomes banal; stay too long in the special and it becomes pretentious and self-regarding. The popular is driven by incident. The special aspires to the transcendent.

### **Everyday Life as a Template**

The narrative of *The Dirt* developed using everyday life as a template and a place in which to ground the absurdity and to reduce global themes to something relatable. I drew from experiences from my own personal life, observations from my immediate surroundings and the aural imitation of voices from friends and neighbours (note that multiplicity of voices is a key aesthetic interest). Working as a babysitter for a well-off

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<sup>55</sup> Rancière, J (2009), *The Emancipated Spectator*, London and New York, Verso, p.? you could name the translator too.

<sup>56</sup> [Williams, D. \(Ed.\)](#)(1991). *Peter Brook and the Mahabharata*, Routledge.

family in Berlin revealed itself as a fantastic opportunity to devise the characters of The Husband, Little Baby Gustav and The-Three-Year-Old. This experience was useful in the way it provided details, for example [The Husband] who ‘is a little bit older’ than [The Woman] and participates regularly in over 45 athletic sports, keeping his medals hanging on a nail just outside the bathroom.

At the time of writing the script, I lived opposite to Liebig<sup>34</sup>, a feminist, anarchist, queer squat that was evicted in October 2020. On their website they describe themselves as follows:

‘In the house live around 40 people from all over the world, with different backgrounds and (a-) gender identities. Also, a lot of dogs, cats and some rats.’<sup>57</sup>

Ivan, a friend of mine, lived there, supporting himself by working as a cleaner for Helping Cleaning Agency. I became fascinated with the idea of a punk living in an extremely dirty house working as a cleaner (essentially removing dirt) from bourgeois property around the city. The interview that I conducted with him in November 2020 forms the basis for Scene 7 (*The Chat Show*) in which Baby Gustav interviews The Punk. I filled in other details about the punk from my own experience living in a former squat in Berlin, where I currently live. For this culture DIY is integral, but the punk, like myself, lacks talent (but not enthusiasm) in this area. We also share one shower:

We all share the same shower apart from some people who don’t bother and the dogs that get wet in the rain. Lucky bitches. (Scene 2)

The above methods allowed me to underpin the balance between the ordinary and the special, combining metaphors into a bigger statement about climate change and white western middle-class privilege.

### **Embodiment of Contamination**

I will now go cover the way one of the key themes mentioned above was embodied.

In the above section ‘Body and text in parallel / dissonances’ I discussed the physicality in Scene 3 (The Phone Call) which is an example of the embodiment of one

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<sup>57</sup> Liebig<sup>34</sup>, The House, Available at: <http://liebig34.blogspot.de/the-house/>, Accessed on: 22.09.2021



of the key themes in *The Dirt*: contamination. The movement research for this began in July 2019 when I spent one week being mentored by choreographer Viviana Iasparra in her studio in Buenos Aires. Here, my focus was to experiment with different approaches to developing a physicality and movement language for The Woman, at this point the only character. I was interested in seeing how the theme of contamination and climate change could be present in embodied explorations in which the body stood as a metaphor for the planet. I was developing a physicality that dissolved between familiar gesture (e.g. hands in pockets, arms crossed, finding comfort by touching in between breasts) into movement (abstract). I spent a particularly long time researching the comforting and familiar ‘crossed-arms’ position. These and other gestural positions came to represent home. Choreographically I developed a series of physical states to contaminate these positions. Viviana offered me the provocation that in order for the body to react and transform the material into something real, rather than imagining, it can be more effective to put the physical form into genuinely uncomfortable situations. I exhale and do not inhale until I gasp, and it is this that triggers the transition into the next movement. During this process I imagined the audience were my guests and my face was always on the point of saying something to welcome them, often passing between smiles.

The crossed arms movement exploration was not actually included in the final version of *The Dirt* but, in a reduced way, I did draw from and develop the facial expressions and controlled breathing patterns applying this to the delivery of the text (body to text relationship) in the beginning monologue as seen in the stage directions below:

She assumes a position with her right arm lifted to a 90-degree angle. Her left hand is on her hip. She imagines that the audience are her guests and looks at them with an expression that oscillates between amusement and shyness. She goes through a process of searching for suitable positions in which to speak from. During this time micro movements pass through her face as she rehearses what to say to her guests.

[...]

During the delivery of the text the performer has the option to take pauses and to find new positions to speak from, as described above. Sometimes she can also speak in an uninterrupted stream of words

ignoring spaces between sentences or phrases until she runs out of breath.

Using the practical research described above, The Woman's physicality was rooted in the embodiment of contamination, escalating as the layers of metaphorical dirt intensify. This is seen in her relationship to objects (e.g. the way she touches the ladder and gives her weight very lightly to surfaces) and the uncomfortable relationship she has with her skin (expressed through wriggling movements where she almost tries to escape from her own skin). The Punk, in contrast, is relaxed in their skin and gives their weight easily to surfaces (e.g. the wall in Scene 2).

### **Next Steps for the Work / Practitioner Reflexivity**

The MPHIL project represents a foundation of research that I intend to continue exploring in future projects. In terms of form, the relationship between text and embodied live performance lies at the core of my artistic interests. At the point of writing, and as seen in *The Dirt*'s movement language, I would describe my aesthetic approach to choreography as similar to Meg Stuart's when she wrote in a letter to the visual artist Ann Hamilton 'I have always thought of choreography as studies of the human figure or statements about physical presence - as opposed to simply a series of movement as such.'<sup>58</sup> Through the experience of the MPHIL and other projects that I was involved with during the time frame, I explored how the interests I had in terms of form could be utilised to communicate political content from a phenomenological perspective. In the future I will pursue searching for ways that the combination of text and choreographed physical states can be applied in order to communicate stories that I find urgent and important to tell.

Thinking laterally about the implications of the MPHIL project led me to the realisation that conversation, or 'chat' is at the core of what drives me to make work and sustain my artistic practice. I became aware of this through the experience of co-delivering and designing a choreography module at Northern School of Contemporary Dance with Anna Williams, in which students made site-specific pieces for the festival

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<sup>58</sup> Stuart, M (2010), *Are We Here Yet?*, Dijon, Les presses du réel

About Chapeltown - *dance stories inspired by where we are*. I facilitated a creative process in which the students researched our diverse and urban environment using the three key elements of my practice: moving, writing and chatting, in this case, with our neighbours.

The recognition about the importance of conversation (for which listening is a requisite), in my work zooms out and relates, in broader and more plastic terms, to the presence of multiple voices and perspectives in *The Dirt*. I am planning to tour *The Dirt* in 2023 and in order to do this I received Arts Council funding to support a final research and development phase. This included a series of workshops which I facilitated with a psychotherapist. In the sessions we opened a space for people who are unsure whether to have children because of the climate emergency as well as climate activist groups (Camden Friends of the Earth, Lambeth Friends of the Earth, NSCD Student Union Climate Activist Group). The workshops drew from the social dreaming matrix to explore the following questions through guided conversations and group associative poems:

How does climate anxiety affect our relationship to potential parenthood?

How has the climate emergency changed how we imagine our futures/ our vision of the future?

How does the question ‘is it still OK to have children?’ make itself present in our dreams?

These workshops were very useful for my artistic research and represent an exciting opportunity to engage in conversations with a broad range of people. Adding their voices to the research process ultimately means that *The Dirt* encompasses a broad range of perspectives, giving the project more resonance for more people. It also highlighted a dissonant body-text relationship, as articulated by Dr. Alan Bilton in a conversation we had reflecting on the workshops, in the attitude richer countries have to the climate emergency: our words do not manifest into the actions that the physical reality is calling for.

What I intend to do now is to apply the methodology I developed during the MPHIL to tackle wider and more complex issues. This relates not only to the conceptual content of pieces of work but, just as importantly, to the process of making. The project I am currently working in collaboration with Isadora Oyarzún has the

working title: 'Finding a language: the effect of racialisation in intimate relationships'. The project deals with sensitive subject matter and is ambitious in terms of scale. Through a participative project, we are searching for a text and movement language that expresses people's personal experiences of communicating a racialised experience to a loved one. This vocabulary would form the basis of the choreography with a strong focus on duets that would be performed by a cast of people (between 6-8) with relevant life experiences. The project uses bio-drama, a performance genre based on a person's actual life experience, as a resource. Building on my existing research into body-text relationships, this endeavour will explore and criticize the process of articulation, especially interesting when working with a topic that is so difficult to talk about. The very process of articulation, the process of finding the word to express yourself (regardless of whether or not this word exists) and translating this into movement is for me an area of utmost interest choreographically.

Like *The Dirt*, 'Finding a language' also uses collaged (rather than linear) approach to narrative. As a maker interested in expressing how global issues affect us emotionally in our most intimate moments, this is my chosen resource.

Something else that I discovered in the making of *The Dirt*, was the pleasure I take from the text-body relationship of giving voices to inanimate objects. In January 2022 I began a collaboration with Berlin-based sound designer Francisco Petrucci and we made the performance entitled 'Abandonment!' that we shared at Liebig12, Berlin on 18 and 19 February 2022. Here we recomposed everyday material consisting of recordings of voices from friends and neighbours that played this through portable speakers inside objects that we had found in the street including Christmas trees, sea shells, blankets and bins. The result was a humorous performance of scavenged poetry. I'm looking forward to continuing exploring this device in future projects. Below is the invitation text:

'In a place without people there is a city.

a cold wind lifts a whistle from a rock

and abandoned objects in the street speak

of mothers, consequences, heartbreak, wild camping, what-Berlin-used-to-be, and

torn meniscuses. they offer advice, words of warning, tips for good health, lessons in

magic (for free!), and a true story that really did happen to a friend of a friend at hermannplatz...’

This work in progress is an attempt at recomposing ‘everydays’ in a new context, look-hearing for poems in the making... We welcome you to join the first sharing of this project!’

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## **Conclusion**

In two ways, this MPhil project has explored concepts which might, on the surface, appear contradictory but which, through a process of organic growth, have shown that dissonances, contradictions and even paradoxes can be exciting coordinates for artistic creation.

The two areas of apparent contradiction are the differing artistic approaches expressed in words and movement and the often abrasive relationship between theory and practice. Perhaps the most significant outcome from the project is its demonstration that through the cumulative development of a performance blueprint theory, practice (and in this case words and movement) can have a combined expressive power greater than their individual parts.

The MPHIL process represents the foundation of research that I will continue exploring in different manifestations for the rest of my life. Notably, it has opened up many questions relating to the relationship between artistic theory and practice. It strikes me that the obligation to justify artistic action through academic thought and conventions must be avoided. In order for theory to serve the practice of making art it cannot be discourse for the sake of discourse. I see the potential for the relationship between theory and practice to be mutually symbiotic if we recognise, in the words of my friend Francisco Petrucci, that at the root of it all is experience. Now is the source of everything. This is a premise that makes me excited to continue academic research.

In terms of the relationship between words and movement I’m left with a lingering question: Once we name something with words, what do we leave behind? I’m left with a strong desire to explore the quality of this space through poetry and

choreographed physical states.

I will close this thesis with my artistic statement from July 2021, expressing where I have arrived at the end of the MPHIL project:

*Marianne is a choreographer, deviser, performer, facilitator, and writer based between Berlin and the UK. She is studying an MPHIL in Creative Writing (Swansea University), focussing on the relationship between text and embodied live performance.*

*Her mission: to make words sweat.*

*Her method: to love through conversation.*

*The communication of stories is what motivates Marianne to make work that combines humour, poetic metaphors, guttural dancing, and chat. As a choreographer, she aims to initiate, organise and hold spaces for dance and talk conversations between diverse groups of people.*

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