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This essay asks how hospitable spaces can be created for surrendering to happen within performance, and how this can create meaningful encounters for both audience and performer. The essay takes my performance work entitled *Surrender* (2020), made during the module *Bodies in Dissent*, on the ArtEz Master Theatre Practice program. *Surrender* was made in a workshop process with live artists VestAndPage as part of my artistic research into the act of surrendering. This essay will take aporia and failure as methods to open up a space for audience interaction. Throughout the essay I will refer to Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964) to expand the conversation, evidencing the hospitality that is created through her employment of surrender.

Furthermore the essay will seek to reveal if by engaging with aporia and failure, performers can create interactions with the audience that are meaningful through the considerations they provide for utopia. This allowing the urgency and potency of the act of surrendering to be revealed within performance.

From provocations offered from VestAndPage during their workshop, I made *Surrender*. As a work forming part of my research process, it is a continuation of how the act of surrendering can be employed within performance, what this enables for me as a performer and how it can take me to spaces I have not yet reached in my performance practice. This iteration of my work followed previous performances including a blindfolded dancing solo and experiments in the workshop with VestAndPage. These performances had already indicated that surrender would not be possible if I continued to work only with the skill and ability I have as a dancer. Surrendering if examining the latin definition of the word, would suggest to return or to render. Jessica Restaino in her work speaks of surrendering not as a giving up, but as a reciprocal returning which is not without the risk

of confrontation of our own mess, our searching and our own capacity for loss (2019, p47). Restaino is suggesting that surrendering is not only the act of giving something up, but equally what is gained from this. This however only happening if one can confront one's self in doing this. For me this became a process of stripping away the skill I have from dancing to find out how else and what else can emerge from this space of undoing and loss.

To engage with the act of surrendering, in my works I create specific conditions to surrender into, sometimes this involves restrictions and recently it has involved finding frameworks where I give my control to the audience to initiate specific acts. *Surrender* is a work that could be considered to have two distinct sections. In the first section I develop a spoken monologue about my fears, whilst containing myself and moving through contorted positions in a restricted box filled with crumpled pieces of paper¹. The second, involves an invitation to the spectator to pick me up and physically move me in space. It was in the development of the spoken monologue, in choosing to work with voice and text that I found an aporia within my work. I intentionally decided to distance myself from dance. In the performance, I spoke and developed a monologue that related to my current fears as a British person, I spoke about Brexit² alongside some other more personal or abstract fears³.

In working with voice and text, an aporia for me as a performer is created. The aporia lies within my lack of skill and knowledge of working in this way.

¹ The pieces of paper had my fears written on them.

² It is important here to consider these fears as they contextualise another act of surrender, in what I am surrendering from and why the exposure of these fears contribute to my interaction with the spectator. This has not been addressed directly within the context of this essay.

³ I'm scared of Brexit

I'm scared of losing my friends

I'm scared people will think I'm ignorant

I'm scared people will think it was my decision

I'm scared that some people voted for this

‘An aporia is a space of perpetual uneasiness of being pulled in opposite directions of contradictory engagements with tradition and promise in a quest for actions that open up nonpresent possibilities’ (Wang 2005, p51).

An aporia is a space of lack, of being without a means to get to where you need to go. An aporia can indicate the feeling of encountering the unknown or not knowing how to act within a situation. As a dance improviser I have transferable skills which can be applied to working with voice and text, but I do not have a level of knowledge or training that allows me to feel secure when working with these mediums. On speaking about the letting go or surrendering of human identity within the Buddhist practice De Martino states that ‘The ego truly dies the great death, which is at once the great birth or great awakening’ (1960, p167). In letting go of a practice of dancing within this process and instead allowing myself to be open to the aporia of working with voice and text, I give up the identity as a dancer that I have formed and claim in my performance practice. In giving up this identity, I give up my ego and with this my urge to be good at or succeed. By doing this I expose myself in a vulnerability of being without.

In *Cut Piece*, Yoko Ono too works with surrendering into an aporia. *Cut Piece* is a solo work where Ono sits on stage motionless and expressionless with a pair of scissors placed in front of her. She instructs the audience to cut away her clothing, and take away a piece to give to somebody else. Ono’s aporia is through lack of agency rather than her lack of skill. Ono gives her power to the spectator as she gives them permission to cut away her clothing and through this she loses agency over how the performance will materialise and what the audience may chose to do to her with that permission granted. The intention for Ono to do this relates very closely to the idea of the death of the ego that DeMartino proposes.

Ono states:

‘Traditionally, the artist’s ego is in the artist’s work. In other words, the artist must give the artist’s ego to the audience. I had always wanted to produce work without

ego in it. Instead of giving the audience what the artist chooses to give, the artist gives what the audience chooses to take' (1986).

Ono is surrendering her need to be the one that decides what the audience encounters through her performance work. In *Cut Piece*, she lets go of the control she has as a performer and surrenders to the stillness of not doing.

Through aporia, hospitality arises in *Surrender* and *Cut Piece*, which initiates the audience interaction. In the second part of my work, as I emerge out of the box, I continue to build upon the spoken monologue I have been working with in a way which becomes more exasperated. I begin to build the monologue so that it gives invitations for the audience to move me⁴, I also hold out an arm or give eye contact to give further suggestion. Hospitality in the context of performance, can be considered in how the performer welcomes the audience into the work.

Gere and Corris (2008) state that:

Hospitality involves the horizon of an event. It anticipates an encounter with the other. It assumes a level of mastery over space whilst also requiring a level of openness to receive and welcome the other. In the welcoming of this otherness it is the subjectivity that enables the host to be a host, although the guest is also to some level a host (p16).

Hospitality here speaks of particular conditions that are essential for an event or an encounter with the other to come into being. It takes the encounter with an other as the potential for an event to come, or perhaps the event that arises from the initiation of hospitality. Gere and Corris identify the two roles of host and guest, suggesting that in the context of hospitality there is always someone who has a level of ownership over the space, although what becomes of that space or encounter is impacted by the guest so much so that the guest could also be considered as a host. Through working with an aporia in *Surrender*, I created an embodiment that represented the state I had surrendered into (vulnerable, exposed, fragile, open), rather than as a dancer displaying skill and

⁴ I'm scared of being picked up
I'm scared of being moved
I'm scared you won't know how to move me
I'm scared you will think this is too precious to move

virtuosity. Within this, the surrendered state in combination with the ask for support and help, removed a traditional relationship of performer/spectator. As a performer, it took me out of the position of power and open to receive support from the spectator as I surrendered.

In remaining open to receiving the audience in my aporia, I emancipated the spectator, in that the spectator became an agent of a collective practice, where the separation between passivity and activity of traditional performer and spectator relations are abolished (Ranciere, 2009, p8-12). Through the spectator becoming active in my work, they became an equal host of the emergence of the event and what happened as they took action and responded to my invitation. A certain democracy is created in this, as performer and audience come into equal roles in the determining of the direction or actions that form the event. Rather than me telling them what they should do in order for me to surrender, they are able to offer an authentic response to the situation I am in and in response to the monologue that I am developing. This means that as a performer the interaction starts to push me beyond limits of surrendering that are known to me.

In *Cut Piece* Ono has not only emancipated the spectator, but she has switched roles entirely. In her passivity she welcomes the spectator to take complete control. In this, there is a not knowing of what the spectator will chose to do when encountering Ono, if they will chose to cut her clothing as requested and the time that Ono will remain in this situation for. The limits of Ono's surrendering are therefore also pushed as continues the allowing of whatever is encountered.

To create this hospitality requires a willingness to meet the unknown, both in relation to spectator and in the horizon of the performative event. Derrida describes the unknown in both the encounter with the 'monstrous arrivant' and the future which arrives that isn't known, expected or programmed for (1995, p387). What Derrida describes here is that by opening up this audience interaction, as performers Ono and I do not know what kind of interaction they will bring and what actions they will take. In not knowing what is to

come, there is no way of predicting how to be successful at this. The unknown therefore invites failure. In the *Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam states, 'under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world' (2011, p2). Halberstam here, offers the possibility to consider failure as a way of finding alternative ways of being in the world.

As it materialised in *Surrender*, the failure in not knowing how to be in this unknown interaction enabled different one to one relations to emerge between the spectator and I.

'Failure becomes intrinsic to creating open systems and raising searching questions: without the doubt that failure invites, any situation becomes closed and in danger of becoming dogmatic (Le Feuvre, 2010, p17)'.

Hospitality from the exposure of the vulnerability from my aporia into surrendering created the openness for audience to encounter me with this same uncertainty. The encounters that happened included different modalities of touch, some would pick up my whole body, some would support just a limb or my head, some through eye contact. These interactions offer utopian relations of coming together. Utopia can be thought of as an ideal, alternative reality to the present that is not quite here. In speaking about utopia Munoz suggests a collective "we", utopia as a consideration of what the future collective "we" and social order could and should be (2009, p20). *Surrender* opened up questions surrounding togetherness, towards how we can and are allowed to come together in society. Without the presentation of rules or structures framing the interaction, it offered a space for negotiation to happen in a democratic way. It offered a deeper way of listening to one another in order to offer support or take care. It invited ways of thinking about touch, where one takes responsibility within the encounter of another. This invites a questioning as to why these kind of relations become harder to have within society and why high levels of consent and structures are needed to control these encounters. Furthermore I suggest that as Brexit was being spoke about earlier in the work, it opens up a thinking towards what this will do and how to collectively retain some of these utopian ideas (care, connection, exchange).

Similarly in *Cut Piece*, the interaction that arises from Ono's invitation brings utopian ways of approaching the female body as it becomes more exposed and vulnerable. It gives suggestions for whether people can choose to take responsibly from Ono in this instance and how they choose to use the power she has offered them. There is a strong reference here towards the potential presence of violence towards a female body and the contemplation of that when one chooses to act. The utopian is framed here in the action of confronting the audience with the choices they make when in this situation and how they are addressing the female body as it becomes more exposed.

If aporia and failure therefore are what create the hospitable space for the emergence of these utopian relations and this as a result, is what exposes the value and importance of the act of surrendering. The employment of aporia and failure as methods to create this space of hospitality, carry a risk as to whether this will be arrived at in future iterations of the work. This brings into question whether the performer needs to consider the management of this risk in order to ensure the outcome is meaningful for both performer and audience. Anne Dufourmantelle in her work *The Ideology of Security* suggests that there is always a tension between the need to take risk and the desire to reduce risk (2011). This here suggests that although driven to see what the working with aporia or failure could offer, there is also a need to know that it will lead to an outcome that is somewhat productive for performer and spectator. It can not be assumed that in *Surrender* and *Cut Piece*, the audience will interact in a way which will always become meaningful for both performer or audience. The performer therefore has to make a decision about if some of these risks within the work need to be managed.

Within the hospitable space created there becomes a limit to how much risk can be taken before the hospitality is disrupted and therefore the audience interaction destroyed. I would suggest that in order to retain the space of hospitality and the act of surrender that this initiates for me as the performer, an awareness should be put in place towards staying within the present of this surrendering rather than trying to initiate the utopian ideas that could arise from this. Dufourmantelle continues to speak about risk in relation to insurances. She discusses that in society insurances are put in place to guarantee safety

when taking risks (2011). My suggestion to bring an awareness to the limits within the risk, act as an alternative to me pre determining instructions that could act as an insurance. To pre determine the encounter would take away all potentiality for the audience to find the utopian relations for themselves, this would not provide me with exciting possibilities to surrender into, nor would it give or reveal anything to the audience within the interaction.

It seems therefore that moving forward with this work, the only way to ensure that the underlying concepts are addressed is by remaining open and willing to take the risk and allow for failure within the interaction with the audience member. This meaning that something that I don't want to happen might happen, there may be a different outcome for the work. Instead of exposing the positives of surrender and failure, it could reveal the negative side. In thinking of the utopia in the future, the emergence of this within the present might not be unproductive for my research. It may in fact highlight the urgency to think about how and why it is essential for surrendering to be visible, and why surrendering can often be deemed as impossible.

Halberstam says:

'whilst failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life' (Halberstam, 2011, p3).

Here Halberstam states that even in the negativity there is still knowledge to be gained about how society is operating now. In *Surrender* if somebody were to move me in a violent way, or touch me inappropriately, although uncomfortable, it would force me to see if surrendering is still possible under these circumstances and so I would still learn. The presentation of this forces the audience to see this relation, potentially offering the fact that there is still work to be done to arrive at the utopian "we" and existence that is desired. It is important in this instance to not only highlight the positive interactions that exist but also the negative and invisible ones which might often get ignored.

Throughout this essay the methods of aporia and failure have been identified within *Surrender* and *Cut Piece* as key to creating hospitality for audience interaction during the process of surrendering. The disruption of the role of performer who knows, to the performer who allows themselves to be stripped of this dominant role and instead be open and willing to the encounter with the unknown invites for an engagement with the spectator that will provide the performer with further conditions to surrender into, alongside offering the spectator the opportunity to contemplate how they might come into relation with that individual. Whether the interaction is positive or negative, the presence of risk that occurs in meeting the unknown provides a valuable space to learn how to continue to surrender within the conditions that arise. This gives the opportunity for learning about how one approaches coming into relation currently and an offer for alternative and utopian possibilities to be suggested from this.

In moving forwards with my research, this essay has prompted me to ask if there is a way for performers to create a hospitable space for surrendering which does not only create or rely on physical participation from the audience. It has created questions as to whether the urgency and potency of surrender and these utopian relations which arose in this iteration could still happen without such explicit participation, but if a shared experience or dialogue with audience could still be created through other means.

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