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Letting the Truth Get in the Way of a ‘Good’ Story: Spectating Solo and Blast Theory’s *Rider Spoke*

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Abstract: This article investigates the solo spectator and her slippery exploration of participation, focusing on Blast Theory’s *Rider Spoke*. This performance work, which has taken place at a variety of UK-based and international locations from 2007 to 2014, encourages a single spectator to cycle alone through the city with a small computer attached to the handlebars, finding ‘hiding places’, recording messages in response to questions from the computer, and listening to the recordings of others who have explored the performance. This particular blend of one-to-one performance and archival awareness of other one-to-one encounters presents a complex attention to and performance of truth and truth-telling for the spectator, who for me became the ‘spectator-performer’ over the course of the piece. Focusing on the playfully antagonistic decision to explore the piece in character, and the shift in my spectatorship-performance that occurred in the encounter with another spectator-performer’s voice, the article investigates the ways in which the spectator-performer negotiates the performance in relation to variations on the truthful and the autobiographical.

Keywords: Blast Theory, *Rider Spoke*, solo spectator, spectator as character, playful antagonism, ethical encounter

Introduction

“Ok. My name is Penelope Coffinfeather. I am six feet eleven and a half inches tall. The half is important. I have cropped blond hair and my eyes are two different colours, one blue and one hazel”. I am perched on a churchyard wall, slightly out of breath. From here, I can see into the overgrown graveyard in front of the church as I speak these words to a grey square about the size of my hand, a small computer which is attached to the handlebars of a borrowed bike. I have an earbud headphone in one ear, and a tiny microphone attached to my scarf. I have

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been cycling through what appears to be the outskirts of Brighton for about five minutes, and the gentle voice in my ear has asked me to stop somewhere I like the look of, and tell her about myself.

The moment described above took place in May 2011. Retracing my steps on Google maps in 2015, I can see that I was sitting on the wall of St Leonard's Churchyard. Leaving Blast Theory's headquarters on Wellington Road I had cycled with the sea on my right, towards Brighton's centre, turning left onto Boundary Road and then right onto New Church Road, where the untended churchyard caught my eye. The grey square was a Nokia N800 tablet. The gentle voice belonged to Ju Row Farr, a core member of UK artist group Blast Theory, and one of the creators of *Rider Spoke*.

***Rider Spoke* and the 'Spectator-Performer'**

Rider Spoke was developed in 2007 as "the world's first interactive game on a bike" (Blast Theory), a collaborative project with the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham, Sony Net Services and the Fraunhofer Institute, as part of the research project IPerG ("Integrated Project on Pervasive Gaming", funded by the European Commission's IST programme) (IPerG). 'Pervasive gaming' refers to the shift from screen-based games in a private domain to games designed to be played in public (usually urban) contexts. Players are "unchained from the console and [...] interwoven with the real world", exploring a physical dimension to gaming as they play through various social, educational and / or conspiratorial contexts (Benford, Magerkurth, and Ljungstrand 54). The title of Blast Theory's contribution to this medium, *Rider Spoke*, evokes the cycling and interactivity of the piece, the past tense verb suggesting the aspect of listening to what has already been said. It also conjures up the image of a bicycle wheel, implying the physical practice of cycling that is central to the piece.

The participant cycles solo through the city, encouraged at intervals to find places to pause in various locations, to be alone, and then to speak or to listen. The bicycle's computer uses location-based technologies and Wi-Fi hotspots to track where the participant is situated. If speaking, the participant records answers to questions ranging from "Find somewhere you like, then tell me about yourself" (as outlined above), to "Tell me about how it felt the last time you held somebody's hand", or "Find a quiet place and tell me who or what makes it alright for you". Additionally, the locative aspect of the device allows the participant to find the same hiding places occupied by previous participants, and to listen to answers to the same and other questions, recorded by others in the same space in the past as she finds herself there in the present. As this introspective,

ghosting, ludic cycle game draws to a close, the participant is asked to make a promise, before riding back to Blast Theory's headquarters to return the equipment.

This article aims to investigate the solo 'spectator-performer' in this user-to-medium interactive performance framework, and to explore how solo, anonymous spectator-performer experiences such as *Rider Spoke* open up a complex network of engagements with the ways in which the spectator-performer might approach her spectatorship and / or performance, and, further, how this might be affected by the play of other anonymous, solo spectator-performers. I discuss a way of thinking about this in terms of the purposeful decision to perform spectatorship-performance in the form of a character, and to track a shift in spectatorship-performance from this use of character to the subsequent abandonment of the character, in reaction to the play of another anonymous spectator-performer. Finally, I explore the value and power of that shift in terms of a response to the ethical dilemma at the heart of spectatorship-performance.

As part of this investigation, I am examining my own spectatorship-performance of *Rider Spoke*, in order to foreground the individual element of the spectatorship at hand. Alison Oddey refers to this way of working as a form of practice-as-research, championing the figure of the 'spectator-performer-protagonist' in her writing as a way of "composing the poetics of the spectator" (Oddey 2). Deirdre Heddon, Helen Iball, and Rachel Zerihan extend this argument to embrace the spectator's participation in performance and participatory spectatorship's value for academic research and writing. Referring specifically to 'one-to-one' performances, and emphasising the relational quality of such work, they assert that "PaR [Practice-as-Research] becomes SPaR (Spectator-Participation-as-Research)" (Heddon, Iball, and Zerihan 122).

For me, Oddey's 'spectator-performer-protagonist' is an interesting way of beginning to think about the *Rider Spoke* spectator-performer, and I am borrowing partially from her nomenclature for this article. Where I depart from Oddey's full taxonomy of audience members, though, is the extent to which 'protagonist' is unhelpful in this particular context. For me, *Rider Spoke*'s poststructuralist dismissal of grand narratives and linear timeframes (at least within the piece) cannot be adequately reconciled with the implications of dominance contained in the term 'protagonist'. Rather, I refer throughout to the spectator-performer, as this piece relies simultaneously on audio and visual spectatorship on the one hand (I watch and see the landscape; I hear and listen to the messages of others), and spoken and visual performance on the other (I am seen by accidental spectators in the urban landscape, and by Blast Theory as a WiFi hotspot; I speak responses to the questions).

The Character of the Spectator

The concept of a spectator playing a character as part of a performance (or being given a character to play by performance makers) is not a new one. Marco de Marinis reminds us in “Dramaturgy of the Spectator” that in the atmosphere of what he calls “[t]he post-World War II theatre of research”, the spectator’s involvement was courted in a variety of ways (105). Crucially, as he notes, “attempts were made even to give them a role, albeit a marginal one, within the performance itself” (105). In the work of the Living Theatre and Jerzy Grotowski in the US and Poland during the 1960s, spectators were framed as, variously, the Argive army in *Antigone*, Faust’s dinner guests, or Kordian’s fellow inmates of the psychiatric institution in which the performance takes place. Contemporary examples of this in Ireland and the UK could be drawn from the work of site-specific, site-responsive and immersive companies such as ANU Productions, Punchdrunk, dreamthinkspeak, and Kate Bond and Morgan Lloyd, though the extent to which the spectator plays a character in these pieces varies significantly. As Josephine Machon itemises in a suggested list polarising ‘traditional’ and immersive theatre experiences, “[y]ou may still be you but you have become a sensitised you. Or you are aware that you have taken on a character, you are playing out a role” (55).

In the case of ANU or Bond and Lloyd’s *You Me Bum Bum Train*, characterisation is frequently thrust upon the audience member as she is plunged into a situation to which she feels she must respond within practical but very specific parameters, though with some sort of agency perhaps. A Magdalene laundry inmate needs help stepping out of a disinfectant bath in ANU’s *Laundry* (2011); a boxer asks for oil to be rubbed into his shoulders before a fight in ANU’s *Angel Meadow* (2014); an American football team requires a pre-match pep talk in Bond and Lloyd’s *You Me Bum Bum Train* (2004). For Punchdrunk or dreamthinkspeak, the spectator is perhaps a more ambiguous character, a tourist on a visit to an abandoned film set in Punchdrunk’s *The Drowned Man* (2014) or in attendance at a board-room presentation in a language she does not understand in dreamthinkspeak’s *In the Beginning Was the End* (2013). Thus, despite the potential moments of one-to-one performance in *The Drowned Man* or *In the Beginning Was the End*, the spectator’s participation seems not to function in the same way as in *Laundry*, *Angel Meadow* or *You Me Bum Bum Train*. Indeed, spectatorship with / for Punchdrunk and similar companies, as Sophie Nield has pointed out, “feels more superficial, as you are so preoccupied with staying safe / invisible / out of the way / on top of the story [...]. There is so little scope to engage in a dignified way with the staged / rehearsed activity – they need you to fulfil such a limited role” (533). Keren Zaiontz, in her perceptive discussion of the narcissism inherent in specta-

torship of immersive and ‘one-on-one’ performances, similarly asserts that “I have rarely found this experience democratic, since I am usually directed to do specific tasks or move through a performance site in specific ways” (406). De Marinis agrees with this, noting that Grotowski found his experiments with audience in *Faust*, *Kordian* and *Akropolis* ultimately “constricting and basically authoritarian [...] counter-productive [...] and further inhibiting” for spectators (106). Nield pushes this point further, gathering together reflections on immersive spectatorship from a number of theatre and performance colleagues, and assembling them into the voice of a single spectatorial figure. As she muses, helpfully drawing the singular and plural together to underline her point: “Maybe we were *always* the character named Spectator” (535; emphasis original).

Looking at the work of Blast Theory in this context, it could be suggested that the other performance companies mentioned above establish the spectator as a character *en masse*. Conversely, *Rider Spoke* seems not to attempt to frame the spectator as a specific character with particular objectives as, say, *Laundry* does (help the woman out of the bath; choose not to help the woman out of the bath), but rather gives the spectator-performer some parameters for her participation – pause (anywhere), hide (anywhere), listen; pause (anywhere), hide (anywhere), speak (anything) – and open-ended scope of content and methodology within these parameters. Thus, my decision to play a character, to inhabit another subjectivity, becomes more interesting to me in this relatively open context, and below I investigate the ways in which this decision could be connected to the solo and anonymous nature of spectatorship in *Rider Spoke*, and how my shift away from playing a character later in the piece could also be a reflection of the ethical nature of Blast Theory’s participatory offer.

Solo and Anonymous Spectatorship

The individual spectator is always spectating alone to an extent, even in the midst of the crowded theatre stalls. Helen Freshwater points the reader towards Tim Etchells’s reflections on spectators as being “together and alone” (qtd. in Freshwater 7). Indeed, in thinking and writing about spectatorship in theatre and performance studies, there has been much care taken over the past few decades to steer away from thinking about a collective audience as ‘we’ or ‘us’. As Freshwater continues, “it is important to remember that there may be several distinct, co-existing audiences to be found among the people gathered together to watch a show and that each individual within this group may choose to adopt a range of viewing positions” (9–10). So, in writing specifically about the solo spectator, i.e. the unaccompanied, solitary spectator, I remain cognisant of the

individuality – and narcissism, as Zaiontz puts it – of each solo spectator in the context of *Rider Spoke*. Oddey's discussion of the solo spectator-performer-protagonist is significant here, as she also engages with the narcissism inherent in the solo aspect of this play. In her discussion of Deborah Warner's *Angel Project* from 2000, Oddey notes that "I, the spectator, make choices all the time in these works, where to walk, who and what to interact with, where to turn my attention to; it is all about me and my relationship to the spatial landscape, the place, the potentials of autobiographical space and my own 'willingness to be silent'" (206).

This kind of description blurs and extends slightly in the case of *Rider Spoke*. Firstly, there is the added element of cycling solo, in my case through Brighton and Hove. A numbers of critics who spectated-performed the piece in London noted their reluctance to cycle in the city, or their lack of competence on a bike. As Gabriella Giannachi points out in a discussion of the piece with its makers, "I'm terrible on bicycles! I don't drive, I don't know the road rules, and I don't live in London. So, I had no idea where I was going. I didn't exactly feel liberated but rather in difficulty, negotiating the traffic and even dealing with a policeman telling me what to do" (in Lavender et al.). Leo Benedictus, for the *Guardian*, who participated in a pre-release test of *Rider Spoke* in the same year, similarly notes that "I have to sign a form [...] approving such falsehoods as 'I know, understand and will comply with the road traffic laws under the Road Traffic Act 1988' and absolving Blast Theory from legal responsibility for any death I may experience" (2007). Towards the end of *Theatre and Everyday Life*, Alan Read muses about the space between safety and danger from which theatre historically appears (214), but this may not have been exactly what he had in mind.

Secondly, the particular demands of the piece begin to acquire a doubling of space and presence for the solo spectator-performer. My visual spectatorship of the landscape around me is mirrored by my aural spectatorship of the voices of others. I am in the same space, in asynchronous time, to the community of the other, hidden, solo spectator-performers. I am also in a completely different space to Ju Row Farr's solo voice, which probably falls into the dampened atmosphere of a recording studio back on Wellington Road, a few years ago. This doubling (or even tripling) reflects my solo spectatorship back at me, revealing a loop of spectator-performers spectating-performing with, to and for other spectator-performers, who then spectate-perform for yet other spectator-performers, and so on. Thus, each iteration of *Rider Spoke* is endogenous and cyclical to and for the solo spectator-performer, generating material and re-presenting it from within. I discuss below the way in which the endogeneity of the piece impacted on my own spectatorship-performance. Before that, I investigate the spectatorial anonymity of the piece, and the ways in which the solo and anonymous natures of this

spectating-performing can create a sense of what I am beginning to think about as a playful antagonism within its frame.

The *Rider Spoke* solo spectator-performer is anonymous in a variety of ways. To the unassuming Brightonian (and thanks to the invention of hands-free kits for mobile phones), I appear to be a cyclist taking a phone call, leaning against a churchyard wall. The only way in which I am not anonymous is if I see another *Rider Spoke*-er and they see me. As Benedictus notes when this happens to him, “we politely ignore each other” (2007). Anonymity in immersive performance spectatorship is appealing, even within the confines of building-based work – though possibly not for performers, as Nicholas Ridout’s vivid discussion of the actor’s predicament on stage describes, looking out at “people but not the kind of people I recognise right now” (*Stage Fright* 65).

Punchdrunk, for instance, explore anonymity through the spectatorial wearing of masks. In their work, the mask fulfils several purposes at the same time. Firstly, on a technical level, it helps to differentiate the spectators from the performers. Secondly, it is disinhibiting, freeing, and extends the spectator’s ability to explore and interact with the environment and the performers – to “become the event”, as Machon would have it (28; emphasis original). Thirdly, in my experience of watching spectators at *The Drowned Man* or *The Masque of the Red Death* (2007–8), it releases a significant capacity for focused pursuit of a storyline or a character, as spectators hurl themselves through the site, tracking particular performers with zeal. The function of anonymity in *Rider Spoke* is also multifarious, though it appears to have no technical purpose at all. It is not important to Brighton (as a site) that it knows who I am, or that it does not. As mentioned above, Blast Theory can work out where the bike is using a series of interconnected Wi-Fi hotspots, one of which I activate every time I pause and either search for recordings or speak a response to a question. Interestingly, much like Punchdrunk’s work with masks, the anonymity contained in *Rider Spoke*’s discreet headphone, very standard bike and helmet, and unknown (to me) city does create a sense of freedom when I am speaking. As I have already showed, this freedom allows me to construct any kind of reality I might want to, to inhabit another subjectivity, and equally, as I will explore below, allows me to adapt and change what I am doing as a spectator-performer.

As well as a sense of freedom, the anonymous and solo natures of my spectatorship-performance engender the opportunity to engage with the anxiety associated with audience participation when faced with the open first question of *Rider Spoke*, what Gareth White refers to as a state of being “crippled with indecision [...] unable to contribute anything [the participant] would reflect on as worthwhile or a good representation of themselves” (181). As White continues, “[t]he complexity of the audience-performer role is a threat as well as an opportunity for learning and

deep experience" (181). The *Rider Spoke* spectator-performer is not strictly an audience participant in White's sense of the term, as she arrives at the event as a participant, and so is well past the point of 'invitation' around which his monograph on the subject revolves. However, the apprehension associated with contributing to *Rider Spoke* seems, for me, to be clearly related to his discussion.

Playful Antagonism within the Frame

The result of this indecision, anxiety or apprehension relates directly to the opening anecdote of this article. Faced with the cliché and yet somehow impossible request to talk about myself, I placed my identity at a remove and focused on a constructed Other, a character. I have been trying to think about this decision in terms of a kind of 'playful antagonism', though one that remains within the frame set out by the piece. Playful antagonism is explored to some extent in relation to the psychology of teasing, though the latter's diverse definitions, contexts and outcomes make explication slippery here. Related to this, though, is the notion of 'off-record behaviour' or 'off-record markers', the ways in which we signal that we are teasing. As Dacher Keltner and others put it in a critical analysis of teasing, "[w]hereas on-record communication and action is direct, relevant, honest, and to be taken literally, off-record markers violate these rules with a variety of tactics, such as exaggeration or understatement, that suggest that nonliteral interpretations of the act are possible" (232). This, for me, links to my construction of a character in *Rider Spoke*, the 'off-record marker' appearing in the form of my staying within the frame – though with no-one to signal to that the playful antagonism is not to be taken literally, but instead in the spirit of play, which Keltner and others suggest is crucial to its reading by the other as an off-record marker. Returning to *Rider Spoke*, more than a few critics mention the words 'honesty' and 'confession' in relation to the recorded messages created, and Rosemary Klich in particular articulates the way in which the piece "trigger[s] memories and evoke[s] forgotten voices, and the anonymous sharing of these experiences is surprisingly intimate" (423). Blast Theory mention the phrase "personal stories" (or versions of this) nine times in the course of their 2011 study of the piece (Chamberlain et al.), and the idea of soliciting intimate narratives emerges as its central aim. Thus, deviation from the desired state of *Rider Spoke* spectator-performer combined with staying within the 'rules' of the 'game' suggests that in the creation of a character I am teasing, playfully antagonising the frame of the piece. Significantly for me, this play was what led to a surprising shift in spectatorship-performance and the rupturing of the spectator-performer approach I had taken initially.

In her discussion of Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, Claire Bishop turns to the concept of antagonism in order to discuss the kinds of relations being produced in art and why they might be being produced in the first place. In an effort to quantify and qualify the relationships supposedly at the heart of a relational aesthetic, antagonism emerges for Bishop (following Ernst Laclau and Chantal Mouffe) as a strategy in the avoidance of what she calls "the imposed consensus of authoritarian order" (66). For Bishop, antagonism is a useful way of interrogating relational aesthetics. As she notes, "the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests, since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as a whole and of community as immanent togetherness" (67). As White puts it in his analysis of Bishop's position, "interactive work must be allowed to clash with those that it invites to participate" (19), and this is where a link to my experience of playing with the frame of *Rider Spoke* can perhaps be forged.

However, I invoke the notion of play in my exploration of antagonism, as my experience of *Rider Spoke* tended to antagonise very much within the parameters of the piece, as already mentioned. I noted the discomfort and unease I felt when initially required to talk about myself, or to answer questions that probed beneath the surface, which suggests an antagonistic response. However, my response (to make up a character) appeared to be a playful form of antagonism that remained within the confines of the piece designed by Blast Theory. I still recorded answers to questions, and travelled and stopped my bike as the voice in my ear suggested, exploring the piece in the expected way.

Errant Immersion vs. Playful Antagonism

In his article on dreamthinkspeak's 2013 piece *In the Beginning Was the End* in the present volume, Adam Alston refers to 'errant immersion' in relation to the idea of the spectator straying from the correct or accepted path of the immersive performance. Specifically, he discusses his own errant immersion in terms of accidentally wandering into a room that was supposed to be off limits to spectators but had been left unlocked. While exploring this room, he was observing and consuming the experience as if it was part of the piece he was attending, having been given no reason to assume otherwise, and drawing on his previous spectatorial experiences of immersive theatre in order to explore the site. In a way, the concept of the 'errant immersive spectator' approaches my own exploration of playful antagonism, both during *Rider Spoke* and in the course of this article. However, I would venture that the errancy at hand for Alston is, as the definition of the word would suggest, more about "straying from the proper course or place" than it is

about a purposeful decision made by the spectator (Oxford English Dictionary). Where the errant spectator stumbles accidentally into errant immersion, the playful antagonist makes a purposeful decision to tease the frame of the piece, in this case through the creation of a character. However, as I now go on to explore, the fluidity of spectatorship-participation in the context of *Rider Spoke* encouraged shifts and transformations, underlining more firmly the play at the heart of Blast Theory's game.

Being a 'Good' Spectator?

At the end of one spoken message, I press 'Look for others' on the computer's tiny screen. After a few seconds, I am listening to a woman's voice. She seems to be talking about fear and who makes it alright for her. She is speaking about her husband and how she cannot imagine her life without him, but it is her voice, her breathing really, that seizes and holds my attention. In the wake of the piece, I connect this to what Roland Barthes says about the 'grain' of someone's voice in song being a quality beyond tonality or timbre. In his words, this 'grain' represents "the very friction between the music and something else, which something else is the particular language [...] a practical reflection [...] on the language" (185). He notes that the grain is "the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs", and that he will judge a performance "according to the image of the body (the figure) given me" (188). When I examine this in relation to *Rider Spoke* and consider my audio-spectating on the virtual sound-stage, I can trace a doubling of the presence of the voice I am hearing. Alongside the words being spoken through the earbud, I understand what Charlotte Gruber says about "the paradox of our simultaneous presence in both virtual and actual space" (197). The grain of this voice, in Barthes's terms, generates the image of the body I am given in relation to it. I can see and hear the voice of this woman. I am deep in Hove suburbia by this stage, in the miniscule Davis Park just off St Helier's Avenue, and she is there too. Equally, neither of us is there.

I am listening to a catch in this woman's in-breath as she deepens her reflection and tries to talk about her world without the person who makes it alright for her. Breath, catch, speak. Breath, catch, speak. This catch, and the unevenness of the voice that results, creates a change in my own spectatorship-performance. It seems that there is another kind of catch, too, hidden deep in *Rider Spoke*, which ultimately resists the playful antagonism, or teasing within the frame, that I explored at the beginning of the piece. My initial spectatorship-performance is ruptured when coming into contact with the decisions made by another spectator-performer, at the moment of encountering the Other's specta-

torship-performance. I can consider this rupture as similar to the other kinds of breaks we might experience in our spectating – a break in acting or in *mise-en-scène*, the kind of rupture that occurs accidentally, on purpose, or in some combination of the two, calling attention to the frame of spectatorship and the theatrical machine. In the same way that Richard Foreman flashes bright lights or plays with perspective, in the way that Christopher Brett Bailey hurtles through stories and styles at breakneck speed, in the way that a baby sits, crawls, laughs, cries on stage in a Romeo Castellucci piece. In each of these ways, but also in none of them, my playfully antagonistic spectatorship-performance is ruptured, and I change tack, utterly, completing the piece as Karen, not as Penelope Coffinfeather.

Additionally, I suggest that the grain encountered in the voice of the other spectator-performer engenders an awareness of some of the ethical concerns of participatory performance – that, contrary to Blast Theory's desire to collect intimate stories, or reports of spectators' moments of confession or revelation, *how* I might spectate or participate in *Rider Spoke* is more significant than the detail of the content I contribute to the "replay archive" (Giannachi et al. 354). This is played out to an extent in the title of this article. The aphorism, "Never let the truth get in the way of a good story", recalled my decision to create a character at the start of *Rider Spoke* to tell a story and ignore any sense of the confessional. Thus, the shift in my spectatorship-performance as outlined above is arguably towards being a 'good' spectator-performer in terms of Blast Theory's aims for the piece's affect. Of course, this also implies that a 'good' story is somehow operating on a binary from a 'not good' story, or a 'bad' one. Or that telling the 'good' or 'right' story is somehow the portal to the ethical dimension suggested by *Rider Spoke*. For me, the ethics at play in the piece instead revolve around a sense of how to move through it and engage with it. This in its turn implies that participation is 'for' someone or something, which seems key. Considering Emmanuel Levinas's sense of the face of the Other and our responsibility for the Other in the moment of encounter (96), the Other in this context appears on the one hand as a squat, grey piece of plastic. However, it is clear from the piece that the Other is also the community of voices in asynchronous time that emerge from the earbud at various moments. Thus, I am flooded with the externalised thoughts of many other Others, and my ethical responsibility to them, in a different time and space, becomes part of this puzzle and part of the shift in my spectatorship-performance.

In discussing Bertolt Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, Ridout suggests that "[t]he practice of theatre becomes a collective labour of political and ethical exploration" (*Theatre & Ethics* 48), and that Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, in its articulation of the 'spect-actor', is similarly centred on collectivity and shared ethics. As Ridout continues, "what matters [in this kind of work], ethically and politically, is what

is done with theatre itself rather than what the theatre is about" (49), i.e. that the form is the thing, not just (or only) the content. If this is thought through in relation to *Rider Spoke*, it is possible to consider that what matters in this context, ethically speaking, are the relationships the piece establishes – between me and Ju Row Farr's voice, between me and the voices of other spectator-performers, between me and Brighton – and the modifications of these relationships that take place, rather than the content of what is said (though, as we have seen, the way in which the content was said was significant). In essence, the shift in my spectatorship-performance could be said to signify an increased awareness of the ethical relationship to the other voice, the voice of the Other.

Rider Spoke can thus be read as an ethical encounter, and potentially as a blueprint for how relationships between people might be. The initial, anxious, obfuscating exploration of the encounter giving way to a dialogue of openness and trust can certainly be read in the light of Levinas's philosophy (though I remain cognisant of the problems inherent in applying his thinking to art and the realm of the aesthetic).¹ However, Blast Theory's methodology for this is based less on a didactic instruction to me about how I might act or how I might participate, and allows me to reach this conclusion myself. Thus, the 'good' story I am telling by the piece's conclusion activates my ability to provide a response, my 'response-ability' in Hans-Thies Lehmann's terms (184–85).

The rupture in my spectatorship-performance arises from a moment when the solo and anonymous capacities within which the piece appears to be situated open up. This way of spectating-performing, and the shift explored above, raises for me many additional questions. The move from playfully antagonising within the frame to responding with honesty and confession, as it seems the piece would have me do, remains confusing in parts. Did the other spectator model 'good' behaviour for me, to which I then earnestly applied myself? Am I just interpreting the other spectator-performer's approach as 'more honest', and is that true or accurate? Perhaps my anxiety or indecision about the demands of spectating-performing were released by the efforts of another spectator-performer, partially collapsing easy assumptions about the solo or anonymous nature of the piece.

However, it is worth noting that this kind of conversation is more explicitly played out in the company's latest piece, an app for the iPhone and iPad called *Karen* (2015), where the titular character is a fictional life coach who interacts with the participant over a number of days, moving further and further away from

¹ This is more fully explored by Ridout (*Theatre & Ethics*, 53–69) and by Clare Wallace ("Playing with Proximity").

anything that might be related to the work of a life coach, in a way deliberately designed to unsettle and to provoke questions about how much information we share, how we choose to tell the truth, or whether we tell the truth at all. Perhaps Penelope Coffinfeather and her ilk in fact correspond to the complex network of modes of engagement offered by pieces such as *Rider Spoke*, even as the playful storytelling is queried by other ways of playing the game.

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Bionote

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