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POINTS AND PRACTICES

Capel: the lights are on. A conversation ...

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ABSTRACT

This article is a record of conversations held between Margaret Ames and Mike Pearson during the creation and performance of a site-specific theatre project made by Cyrff Ystwyth and directed by Ames. Cyrff Ystwyth are a company of people with and without learning disabilities. The performance, *Capel: The Lights Are On*, was made by Adrian Jones, a company member with learning disabilities and was his response to research questions that formed the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded enquiry; 'Challenging Concepts of "Liquid" Place through Performing Practices in Community Contexts'.

KEYWORDS

Disability; place; rural wales

On 13–15 June 2012, Aberystwyth-based physical theatre company Cyrff Ystwyth presented *Capel: The Lights Are On* in a disused chapel in the village of Bronant as a contribution to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded research project 'Challenging Concepts of "Liquid" Place through Performing Practices in Community Contexts'. Principal Investigator: Professor Sally Mackey, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Co-Investigators: Margaret Ames (director of Cyrff Ystwyth) and Professor Mike Pearson, both Aberystwyth University.

The research questions that were the focus of the enquiry were:

What can practical intervention tell us about how abstract concepts such as place, community, dislocation and belonging, as theorised by contemporary academics, map onto the 'real life' experiences of vulnerable social groups?

Can one or more models of performance practices help to remedy feelings of 'dislocation' among community participants?

How might such models be evaluated, disseminated and made fully accessible to community theatre organisations?

In this paper, Ames (MA) and Pearson (MP) describe and discuss the creation and staging of *Capel: The Lights Are On* in the context of Welsh rural communities in a text reworked and amended from weekly conversations held between October 2011 and June 2012. The focus of the discussion roams between concept and experience of place and the working process and practice of Cyrff Ystwyth. Due to the extended period over which these conversations took place verb tenses change as the authors discuss possibilities and ways forward for the work in progress rather than analyse a completed event. The

exigencies of working with colleagues who have no training are outside contemporary art practices, and in particular, the process of working with colleagues with learning or intellectual disability is discussed. However, rather than position this work within a pedagogic or therapeutic context, the conversations emphasise the company agenda of resistance to such tropes and instead focus on the labour of live theatre.

1. Research enquiry: concept

MA: The theme for *Capel: The Lights Are On* emerged some time before we began the funded research project. Cyrff Ystwyth member Adrian Jones had been consistent and insistent on saying this phrase as we drove to and from rehearsals during the later period of the previous production *Psychedelia* (2011). As we travelled together, he would pay close attention to the three chapels en route and also halls and schools where meetings are held. If there were lights on and cars outside he would comment: 'Lights are on ... Yes bois [boys], look – Capel the lights are on!' If not, he would also pass comment on this. It took a while before I eventually realised that he was actually telling me that he wanted to make this the theme of our next piece of work. A family member of another performer made an astute comment – 'The question is, why would the lights be off?' and this sealed the relevance of the idea for me and its potential to address the research questions. To understand this, we need to consider the cultural and historical significance of 'chapel' – the buildings and the social/religious function of non-conformism and its impact on Wales. So, Adrian took the lead on this project, once again offering his observations on his home and culture, though dealing with the detail rather than overarching impressions.

2. Research context and vehicle: place and the company

MA: The members of Cyrff Ystwyth who undertook to be participants in the research by creating the performance with Adrian and myself articulated various understandings and awareness of place, home and belonging, as well as of dislocation. Some expressed extremely particular formulations. When I asked what people thought about home, one long-term member made it clear that the county – Ceredigion – was his home. When asked to explain further, he began with constituents of his everyday that had not occurred to me as principle signifiers of life here – 'Lori bins' [refuse collectors], road works, and recycling were his contributions. Others talked about the distances we have to travel to connect with each other – cars, parking and road accidents. I formed a mental picture of Ceredigion as a network, a capillary system of narrow dangerous roads, the life-blood of our place being ourselves. One reality of living in a rural environment: the need for mobility. Ours is a community spread over a large area that requires transport to connect us, and the maintenance of those systems. Lived experience as systems of connectivity ...

MP: 'Place' as networks of nodes and journeys as much as foundational locales ... Networks of support; of care; of collective and extended endeavour in a geographically marginal environment ...

MA: But vulnerable. Cyrff Ystwyth mirrors the uncertainties of rural communities, strong and resilient yet always at risk. We celebrate each person who comes through the door – it is proof of our existence and to my mind reflects aspects of what it is to live in Welsh-speaking communities in Ceredigion. There are all sorts of individuals, and they are key to that kind of exponential notion of what it is to be a group somehow surviving together, with all the anxieties that this brings.

3. Place: Welsh concepts

- MA: Within Wales there are very clear functional concepts of what place is: understandings that are nuanced in the language as well as in the body of experience.
- MP: But the signifiers of place that emerged early in the work on *Capel* were surprising, prosaic and essentially material – particular aspects of Adrian's daily life that constitute a kind of cosmos for him. And somehow he offers sideways glimpses of his world that you translate into theatrical matter.
- The word *cynefin* [habitat] might offer the most appropriate description of what we are dealing with here: it suggests a concatenation of animate and inanimate things; of buildings, people, animals, ghosts, washing machines, light switches, cars and any other particularities that emerge within a lived experience – of dwelling, of natural and man-made.
- MA: Additional to this concept and informing Welsh culture and language is the notion of *y pethe*. Literally translated as 'the things', it can encompass a wide variety of activity and experience whilst being selective and exclusive – that is, there are some 'things' that cannot be included as part of this definitive term of 'Welshness'. The chapel however is definitely one of *y pethe*, as are the hymns, the idea of the Christmas Tea [subsequently a section in *Capel*], funerals, and communal gatherings. Perhaps in *Capel* Cyrff Ystwyth successfully added cars, roads and machines to this list, as phenomena of the direct lived experience of being a member of a widely dispersed community.
- MP: Given its composition – with members of different physical and cognitive abilities – the work and nature of Cyrff Ystwyth is likely to destabilise and call into question received academic understandings of place. For those with physical disabilities, what is it to lack volitional mobility and yet to be constantly moved around? For those with learning disabilities, how is 'home' constructed for them in the various places they inhabit?
- MA: Any common ground that we imagine about our understandings of those concepts of location, place, society even are thrown in the air.

4. Cyrff Ystwyth: etymology

- MP: What's in a name?
- MA: Continuing this theme of Welsh concepts is the significance of naming and place. The names of houses, farms, fields, areas, neighbourhoods and people are both prosaic and poetic. They signal identity and connection between the animate and inanimate. I recently realised that I do not know the surnames of my neighbours but instead know them by their first names and the name of their farm/house. In this way, we are not signified by individual or family names so much as the place we temporarily reside. Cyrff Ystwyth was named by the mother of a former member, in the late 1980s. We had made our first large-scale performance and I met with her afterwards. She told me that we needed a name. *Cyrff* (trans. *Bodies*); *Ystwyth* is a play on words denoting both the area of the Ystwyth valley – hence Aberystwyth, the mouth of the Ystwyth – and the other meaning of the word in English, 'flexible' or 'bendy'. At once, we are identified with an area and with a bodily experience of movement. We are emplaced in the movement of geography signalled by the winding River Ystwyth and also the notion of flexibility, which does not necessarily pertain to physical agility, more than a sense of bending physical performance into new shapes. We are emplaced by our name, in the same way that I am emplaced in my home by being called after the name of my house – not a number but a description.

5. Cyrff Ystwyth: as place

- MA: On several occasions people referred to Cyrff Ystwyth as being a 'place of home' in the terms of Adrian's response to the themes, 'family as home'. As early as the second session, we had a discussion about his family. I asked: 'Who else is in your family?' And he started to list the names of the company members. So then I asked him if he felt that Cyrff Ystwyth is a family and he said: 'Oh yes!' This is an embodied home, this is a group, a location where people find themselves, that is born over time. You get to know that this is how this member of the family group behaves.
- MP: Cyrff Ystwyth as a community, a place: constructed through a series of relationships between people over a very long time, that require commitment and work and that include families, carers, drivers ... And there are ways of 'going on' in that community that one has to learn and that one can't really stand outside of. What the company does in its work will always be a manifestation of that identity, whatever the subject. So, even if it is difficult to identify a symbology of place that everybody can subscribe to, the collective *doing* is itself a manifestation of a particular placial experience.
- MA: You once referred to Cyrff Ystwyth as it embraces different bodies, languages, experiences and imaginaries as a *heterotopia* where – after Foucault – all the other places can be 'represented, contested and inverted'. Or maybe a *utopia* where what we want to happen – politically, socially, culturally – might happen.

6. Cyrff Ystwyth: history and traditions

- MA: Cyrff Ystwyth has been making performances since 1988. However when the work became the focus of my research in Aberystwyth University, we altered our procedures. Since 2004, it has been devised by colleagues with learning disabilities. The themes and concerns of the work come from these self-nominating authors and are not shaped by me or a member without learning disabilities; and the themes selected and the choreographies arising always come as a surprise.
- MP: In Cyrff Ystwyth's signature style – apparent in performances such as *Brighton Beach* (2009), and particularly *Work* (2010) – what grounds the choreography is the presence of projected imagery within the scenography. However abstracted or repetitive the movement becomes, it is grounded in relation to very precise images of a very precise location. Another aspect is those ingrained practices that are barely acknowledged as distinctive – that are the company's routines. For instance, in 'flocking' everybody gives a slightly different interpretation of the choreographic instruction or imperative: the group adheres but each individual stays individual whilst the action is multiplied but not regimented.
- MA: And there is something potentially powerful in that.
- MP: Yes, I wonder whether Adrian is aware of Aberystwyth's murmuration of starlings?
- MA: Very much so. Adrian knows the countryside; it is part of his concept of place. If you look at his material from *Seagulls* (2005), it's not the mime of a bird, it's an embodiment, a 'bird-ishness'. It was the same in *Work*. Others are more aware of buildings and machinery.

7. Cyrff Ystwyth: routines

- MA: Since the late 1980s, I have been driving out to Bronant to collect Adrian for Cyrff Ystwyth sessions in Aberystwyth and then back again, before returning to my own home. There is no one else who can provide transport for him. This is a short, taxing but frequently productive journey. It is here that he often offers ideas for choreography. He gestures; he offers up remarks on what he is seeing and thinking. Single words

accompanied by a gesture become raw material in rehearsal. The combination of, and commitment to, such sources and to particular practices and routines – the *habitus* of Cyrff Ystwyth – is what constitutes the company's devising process. Without them, I fear that my weekly role would be pedagogical and overly directorial, and this for me is politically problematic. So, the routines of the company are critical to its autonomy, its relevance and the work that emerges.

- MP: Cyrff Ystwyth has a long tradition of practice and so there are collective understandings about offering proposals, about appropriate levels of participation and about acceptable behaviour. These are particularly apparent when new members don't quite understand the conventions, and in the ways subsequently in which they take them on. What might appear as a common sense way of going on is in fact something with a considerable history of development.

8. Cyrff Ystwyth: Practice 1

- MP: As director, you remain ultra-sensitive to what is happening in rehearsal: taking the merest hint – that not everybody would have noticed or been aware of – and developing it into potential for action. Then you are able to take that action and change it into something, not necessarily more complex, but something that might have been choreographically more challenging had you asked people to do something arising from an abstract idea. The other thing you do is translate for Adrian: you can immediately identify the kind of choreographic moment that he's suggesting. What you then do perhaps is refine it, in order for it to be transferable to everybody. You are very attentive, able to identify the intention even if it has not been articulated fully. You clarify it, but then that clarification gets bounced back to Adrian, such that he may have to continue an action that he might not otherwise have continued. And that is provocative and demanding.
- MA: Yes, that's exactly the process. I think of it in terms of making it legible: it's articulated, it's open for other people. But there is a context. Before new members join, I have talked to them individually and stressed that Cyrff Ystwyth is about work: 'If you're coming just expecting to have a good time, then you should not come. You come ready to work, or don't come.' That's the ground that's established.

9. Cyrff Ystwyth: Practice 2

- MA: In rehearsal, there were some variations coming in to the composition of one sequence which I didn't correct because I could discern a unity of purpose that allows such variabilities in individual expression. The intention towards the full action is there, but actually performers are finding it hard to keep up. There are mis-firings and that's fine; and there are deliberate moments of stepping out and that's fine. There is a fluidity of engagement, particularly in 'flocking'. Somebody starts doing an action at the wrong moment but it is still coherent, so there is a fluid flow through the flock.
- MP: Like the Portsmouth Sinfonia: if one person is playing the true note you perceive everything else as a sonic cloud around it, rather than as mistakes or discord. That kind of mis-fire often creates startling, organic moments of performance.

10. Cyrff Ystwyth: Practice 3

- MA: I ask members to be attentive to Adrian's movements – that's him, starting his choreographic process. Whilst everybody knows this, others can immediately get carried away

– ‘This is how I do it’. I want them to understand that he is setting precise choreographic material and that we need to observe this. But there is a difference between the observation and how everybody performs that move. If I see that each individual body is working with a close focus, then the variations are deeply interesting; but if someone is just approximating, they are disconnected and I have a problem with that. I’m not looking for exactly the same thing but I am looking for close attention; this is how *this* body does *that* body’s movements.

MP: So in simple terms: ‘We’re all going to look at Adrian’s proposal and try and understand that and try to shape that.’ At times, you were engaged in a translation process but there were other times when it was him alone and everybody was trying to identify what precisely was being offered.

MA: When I say ‘We follow everything Adrian does’ I mean it, but you must negotiate your own body and physical ability around that. I have to restrain myself from intervening and trying to shape it too early because then it would not be his work.

MP: But then, your ability to perceive within a set of actions which may or may not be intentional and still embrace them as building blocks is where the uniqueness of your relationship lies.

MA: I think everybody perceives them. What we do is name them, so in that they are transferable. Naming makes them evident.

MP: Given the particular abilities of Cyrff Ystwyth, a choreography will never be repeated in the same manner; the company does not possess that sort of collective memory.

MA: It becomes the task of each individual.

MP: And members copy and emulate and repeat or take bits from others and personally remodel them. But together, in this moment, leading to a real vitality; that this is happening here, now, in this moment ...

11. Cyrff Ystwyth: Practice 4

MA: There are small moments of temporal hiatus, of hesitation, of ‘thought on the surface’. For some members their dancing is very smooth – all the decision processes merge into the action. They are concurrent; there is no disjuncture. There is also a beauty in the breaks when Adrian dances, a loss ...

MP: Cyrff Ystwyth as a provisional community that in its inclusion of this body and that body without distinction reflects the wider community.

MA: I know Adrian is not seeing in the normative sense what it is to stage a work – the dramaturgy. His knowledge is intuitive; I feel it as well as see it. I could actually ask Adrian for staging suggestions but his decisions would be random and I would probably change them for the sake of the work. So, I’m making directorial offerings *from* his material. He remains the author but I’m starting to mould it, which in a sense everybody is as they translate it into their own physicalities.

MP: The naming of sequences seems a fundamental procedure. You give it a name – the ‘Babi Gwydion’ [Baby Gwydion] sequence – and then whatever the individual interpretation of that is, the name is the mnemonic for action. The company’s approach is to develop a grammar, the articulation and voicing of which is an individual concern.

12. Capel: Sources 1

MA: We began with a drawing by Adrian of Capel Bronant. I had the university print room make up a large book with blank pages and the smaller personal notebooks. Another member then drew another chapel in response. These drawings set the scene and the

intention. But we have to be specific; we cannot change things. We take something that has emerged and start to work with it; it says something to you, you read it and it talks. You have a conversation with it, but you don't change it into something else.

MP: This will eventually become a theatrical utterance. But Adrian and others do not engage in extended verbal discourse. They offer instead images and actions and discrete observations and thoughts that are clarified and refined into symbol and metaphor ...

MA: On our weekly journeys, Adrian makes a clear decision to articulate through his body, what he means verbally. He will often offer something in the car, and sometimes in the room but not frequently because there are too many people there.

MP: Working with the named sections then seems essential: As one member remarked: 'What are we going to call this then because only then will I know it? Give me the words!'

MA: And sometimes confusing in a section such as 'Candles' where the action bears no relation to candles!

MP: Yes, it was stretching over – as if to light the candles ...
As the work progresses, family is a strong motif, for which 'Babi Gwydion' seems to be an entrée.

MA: More than just families, babies.

MP: So family, whether based on stereotypes or not – babies, milk, Mam. Then chapel – hymn books, bell ringing, organ playing, umbrellas. Images of community fairly readily identifiable but always filtered through Cyrrff Ystwyth's aesthetic preferences and style.

13. *Capel: Sources 2*

MP: Rather more unexpected is the presence of the Ghost – its origins and its use as source material ...

MA: It is related personally to Adrian, and it has been there ever since I've known him: there are recurrent, scary moves. And its origins relate to chapels. Chapels and churches are places where there are ghosts. Several weeks ago, one member talked about his late brother; another about the cemetery where her taxi drivers are buried. Later we discussed all-too-common local traffic accidents. Adrian will sometimes say 'He's gone' or 'She's gone now' and it might be that somebody has left the group, or that they have died. That's why I maintain that death is always somewhere in his work. Recently he took the large book and immediately drew a picture of the ghost. I wanted to follow it through – there is something there and it suggests choreographic material.

MP: But it was another member who first said: 'Ghost in the curtain' and Adrian repeated that. So there was something real and uncanny in the room as opposed to an abstract notion.

MA: Yes, I'd already mentioned the ghost right at the beginning of the session because Adrian mentioned it before everybody had arrived. He had said something like: 'There's a ghost in here'. And I replied: 'That's theatres for you'.

MP: From the initial proposals and sections you then work towards formalizing what is going on.

MA: Adrian cannot always remember his own material and if people are following him and then he's changing it, they become lost. In the 'flock', I wanted to split them up, but I didn't want to stop the trajectory.

MP: At other times, in practical terms, Adrian shows work that is formalized by others who become custodians of it. But then a situation can arise where there is an agreed and fixed sequence that Adrian begins riffing off the top of it. And that can cause problems for the group – to know who they are following.

14. Capel: Concept 1

- MA: Adrian has suggested a new section in the car: his bedroom. He said that he's got books in his room and that he's an Elvis fan. He talked about drawing the curtains and he said: 'Music, listen to music'. I asked him what he listens to and he said: 'Elvis'. 'Oh great, are you an Elvis fan?' He said: 'Yes I am!' So from that moment I knew that we'd use that at some point. I was thinking after I'd dropped him off, that for me, the kind of perceptions of place, location, mobility and all these strange things about books and ghosts is pretty much how I perceive place too. That's where the research theme is.
- MP: What you and Cyrff Ystwyth do is work with the smallest facets, ephemera even of everyday life.
- MA: Is this not our experience of the world anyway? It is layers and layers of ephemera and detail that become bodily habit and reflex, that constitute the present horizon – our 'here-and-now'.
- MP: The danger here is to make the condition of learning-disabled members exceptional, to define them and their experience as a topic of research.
- MA: How they define themselves as a group is very particular. How they define themselves as individuals is another thing.
- MP: One could say that what's going on in the room is absolutely extraordinary and unique ... But put simply, this is what the company does and it's what you've done for so long. It results from certain ambitions, expectations and routines, from a quasi-professional practice rather than being an instrument of social inclusion.
- MA: This is how things are.

15. Capel: Concept 2

- MP: One entirely unexpected section is danced to the music of the Bueno Vista Social Club. From a phase in which pairs mirrored each other's movements and then changed partners, it went into free form from which emerged some very eccentric Latino dancing.
- MA: I wanted to allow that place to be unthreateningly sexual, not erotic – but the play, the showing off; 'Let's get the handbags out and dance around them.' I didn't know how far it was going to go. It was very much for my benefit and about how we can acknowledge adult material within a safe environment. Then I started thinking that I have to continue this. I remembered that I had that track and I know the words are about celebrating the sexuality of someone's appearance and it's joyous. Then I stepped out because I wanted Adrian to take charge again, he needed to take his work back from me.
- MP: That was an important transition. You built a degree of communality, a certain kind of energy, a momentum that members were eager to follow. That led to Adrian beginning really detailed work with extraordinary concentration. He did look really passionate, engaged like a flamenco dancer. Because members were working independently in different speeds and dynamics, some people were doing quite broad things, some people quite small things, it did look to me like ... Well there's performance for you.
- MA: But the venue is of crucial importance – in order to manage what the material might be – the dramaturgy.
- MP: Does the site give it a kind of coherence?

16. Bronant Chapel: architecture

- MA: The site is difficult – presenting problems for moving between areas. I have an idea about how to do that but how to inhabit spaces and the duration of sections is unresolved.

- MP: I can imagine the work in the space, but there are mixed feelings in the company. When you described Bronant and securing the chapel, there was a certain amount of excitement but also a certain apprehension.
- Bronant Chapel is set back from the main road through the village; it has been deserted and not used for several years. It is a large and imposing nineteenth century building. The graveyard extends from the front down to the road and also right around the building. To the left is the new vestry in the small car park. There are iron gates that open to a raised area outside the front doors. Inside, the chapel has the traditional arrangement of a large bank of pews in the centre with two smaller side blocks. The narrow aisles lead to a small flat area in front of the semi circle of benches which forms the *sedd fawr* (trans. big seat). At the pinnacle of this arrangement is the pulpit, high above everything else with access to its small enclosure via curved stairs on either side. These stairs were unstable as was the pulpit and required shoring up with scaffold from underneath the structure. Wheelchair access was very tight and in the case of the great seat and pulpit, impossible.]

17. Bronant Chapel: challenges

- MA: The graveyard has potential for a couple of different stagings; inside, the audience will have to use the centre block of pews. The side blocks will be roped off because of safety concerns. Cyrff Ystwyth are here in the conventional performative place – at the front and in and around the *sedd fawr* and pulpit. Outside, it is more complicated.
- MP: Cyrff Ystwyth's performances may have various levels of abstraction but we often read them in relation to projections of very precise places and natural and man-made phenomena, I wonder how that works in the chapel?
- MA: There is the potential for a bare and *butoh* (esque) physicality within that context. It isn't possible to appreciate that outside the chapel, hence the necessity to rehearse in there.
- MP: There are at least three locales there and perhaps more – a very different configuration of scenes when you've got the graveyard and the front, and the steps ...
- MA: And the car park by the vestry
- MP: As well as the interior.
- MA: I'm seeing it as a kind of passage. You come in from the pavement and there's a meeting point, a transition through to the graveyard and then up on to the little terrace and then into the chapel; then a reverse journey. The audience end up in the public house opposite. It's not promenade but there's a natural procession into the body of the chapel. There's an invitation and a farewell.

18. Chapel: rehearsals on site

- MP: First, there was a process of envisioning. Members imagining the work achieved in the studio in relation to the site, working out what might go where. Two decisions are somewhat surprising: first, to do a good deal of the work outside; secondly, the degree to which the company might split during the performance.
- MA: Uppermost is my concern that our wheelchair user will not be able to manage the terrain. It's going to be very difficult for him and I'm picking up his anxiety. He's distressed that he will become disabled by the site and disenfranchised from the work he's making. But there is another thing: I feel as if I might be censoring something but I cannot put the 'Sexy Cuban Dancing' section inside the chapel, or 'Elvis'.
- MP: But I can imagine them in the car park.

- MA: Exactly. So, there is a need for the performance to be distributed around the site. And it is complicated. It's a place full of presence, or expectation. It is owned, it is worked at, even though the chapel is no longer used. The graves have fresh flowers on them. It is charged, and to deal with that I feel the need to open it out, not to close it in any way. There is something about the way we distribute ourselves that doesn't assert another set of (artistic) demands on top of the site – that keeps people fluid. Awareness of the textures is really important. And the flocking that happens in the chapel mirrors the assembly of both (former) congregation and (present) audience.
- MP: In *Capel*, complex notions of place are directly related to understandings of locatedness at the tightest level – of *home*. The sequences may not in themselves be immediately particularly symbolically legible but here they are in a context that contributes other kinds of information, not only about the past but also about the future, about loss and decay and also resilience. What is revealed by seeing this particular group of people really exposed – to weather and environment – in that place?
- MA: Cyrff Ystwyth's usual 'place of appearance' is a black box studio which is clean and clear: 'Look at these people, they are working a poetics of identity'. But here company and place in concert reveal complex, ambiguous, awkward questions – both communal and individual – about attachment, about dwelling, about belonging.
- MP: And the work opens and recovers a place that may have fallen out of everyday perception that in its state of ruination has become an absence or gap in the fabric ...
- MA: It goes right back to the beginning: 'The question is, why would the lights be off?' The point of the lights being on is that it is a sign of the function of the chapel; not as a meeting place but what the meetings signify. There is no difference between a raffle and a religious service, and the idea of activating a dead chapel at the heart of the village – through performance – is really important.
- MP: The lights are on ... again
- MA: Yes that means there's action, there's activity, there's a life ...
- MP: And there will be a portion of the audience who come because they're going to get in to the chapel, performance facilitating access ... once more.

19. *Capel*: responses of performers

- MA: Everybody is really on task ...
- MP: On task? For me that sums up the attitude at play in Cyrff Ystwyth and in your relationship with the company: 'What we do here is work'. It makes neither dispensations nor compensations, but neither does it pretend that the life experiences of members are in any ways similar either to each other or to those watching. Indeed some of the gaps are unbridgeable, but it is that which makes the work so interesting. And here we need to be strong enough to talk about difficult things, without 'othering' others, or turning them into research subjects.
- MA: There are all sorts of notions about the greater good. But I don't appear with something to try out on someone else with the intention of doing them good. I don't think I chose to work with disabled people. I am puzzled to this day about how that happened. It's never been a consideration because, with Adrian, I chose to work with an artist who put himself forward. Another disabled member I chose to work with as a performer. With others, I chose to work with them because they wanted to do something through performance. I am aware that I'm responsible for a company that is doing something in the world and I have to keep that going. The company is 'integrated': it is not doing something *about* integration. *These* people have decided to do *this*.
- MP: And in the decision to make site work for the first time with Cyrff Ystwyth there are considerable issues – personal, collective and logistic: of preparedness, of concentration, of endurance; of transport, accommodation, catering.

- MA: I was aware of a duty of care, broadly speaking, but I knew when I was watching that the performers were fine. I could see everybody taking responsibility for themselves and having an authority over the work.
- MP: We were aware that here were performers undergoing something on our behalf. There is an authority about the company's work that removes all questions of disability within performance.

20. *Capel*: addressing research questions 1

- MP: The very decision to consider place with *Cyrff Ystwyth* seems to me to be a proposition that directly addresses – and challenges – the research questions. As opposed to expecting the participants to be verbally discursive about the issues, the research questions are embedded within the performance design, enshrined in the brief and in the concept. After the completion of the performance, the success of the methodology is then assessed in relation to the stated ambitions.
- MA: Adrian does nothing other *than* integrate questions of place, location, identity, home, and that's one of the reasons he makes work. He integrates those things *in* performance.
- MP: The decision to invite Adrian to direct the project is an informed decision. It poses serious questions about place because of the nature of who Adrian is. It is not about coming up with a set of abstractions about location and place and expecting people – *Cyrff Ystwyth* members, academic audiences – to be able to understand and appreciate them immediately. It's about being embedded and about what questions are being asked and by whom. The responses emerge as the one thing this group of people could conceivably do together. I cannot see how, in *Cyrff Ystwyth*, keeping our eye on research questions thinking: 'We've gone too far down the road and we have to come back and remind the group of the questions.' What we've done here is the conceptual work up-front and half of that was to decide to work with *Cyrff Ystwyth* in the first place. So our assessment is to consider how the company has performed those understandings of place, as opposed to how they've described it; how they built it in to performance, as opposed to what their feelings about those things might be.
- MA: Adrian is working from something that all of us would recognise. It's not that we're dislocated but rather that the culture is leaving us. The dislocation is being done by changes in the lived environment, itself a series of practices and beliefs. That is what is leaving people, and there is nothing to take its place. What you're left with is a spectre; you're left with a thing that is neither dead nor alive, neither present nor absent and that is Adrian doubling himself as a ghost.¹ (Referring to Derrida's *Spectre of Marx*). Adrian Jones offers these specificities of what it is to feel yourself *being dislocated*.
- MP: If it was you or me improvising, we might be going back to things we know – from our performance experience. But here there may be iterations, spectral iterations, of a Welsh historical body if you like – and we always get into trouble when we talk about that – but the trope of non-conformism in the 19th century was that it created Wales in its own image. A history that ghosts into the choreographic choices, but altered, anew ...
- MA: A series of knowledges, experiences, things that are worked out, adaptations, affordances that can be activated ...
- MP: And that activation comes through theatre. So what might be a very banal image – like rocking a baby which you might even expect to see in a nativity play – takes on a very different guise. It's taken into choreography that then changes its nature by particular articulations like repetition. The gesture is repeated far beyond its mimetic moment.

- MA: It's repeated again and again ... by other bodies.
- MP: That repetition in Cyrff Ystwyth's work is never about similarity, it's always about dissimilarity. It's an approximation that allows one to see gesture in a range of different ways.
- MA: None of those things are asked for: they are brought into the room by the person who decides to do it this way or that way. It's not that he does it 'like this' because he's disabled; well of course, he does it like that because that's who he is, because he's working on it.
- MP: Sometimes it requires catching the merest kind of impulse or gesture that the others will take on. There is that range of gestural moments that I think we can identify as historical. Then comes a level of abstraction.
- MA: So gestural moments as manifestations of embodied historicity, reveal relationships to place, location and dislocation. The performance is the map of 'real life' that responds to academic concepts. As the cultural and dance theorist Carrie Noland² argues, gesture and embodiment produce agency, and culture is embodied and produced through physicality.

21. *Capel*: addressing the research questions 2

- MP: *Capel* recovered or rearticulated a set of attitudes to site and rural communities in Welsh theatre. And the nature of Cyrff Ystwyth enables something to happen that would not have had all those resonances – about dwelling, about resilience, about being members of and representatives for a community – in the hands of a professional company doing site work at Bronant chapel.
- MA: Those individuals really mattered in revealing or opening the place. They were representative of the way the work exists beyond the people who actually come to see it. Members are highly invested – personally and in their relationships. This is about longevity and it is the glue that holds groups together. I think that the mix of physicality, focus and bodies alerts an audience to something specific about where they are; alerts us maybe to ourselves in relation to that place. If you have a relation already, you're doubly alert: you have access to additional layers of meaning and resonances. Everybody is coming in at different places; people will arrive to it at different depths.
- MP: What is significant is that little of that will be revealed through questioning company members and their audiences – about responses, about feelings. To ask them what the meaning or intention was is not the point. What the performers do is carry out what they intended to do. That's why the audience is won almost immediately. We're all in it together because these performers are working really hard in this bad weather and we as watchers are trying to deal with it too and we're trying to make things happen together.
- MA: As someone commented: 'This is how it is, this is how we live'.
- MP: Given the location and the thematic, the fact that at any one moment one member might be doing one action and everybody else doing something else really worked because it was like rapture. There were all these tiny raptures ... There were momentary phrases of improvisational elaboration which were startling – his walk with the umbrella was one.
- MA: How do we read and understand this work as coming from a place of difference, and how do we understand that he is an artist and that he makes things that exist in the world with this company, with its own characteristics?
- MP: The company absolutely reflects the nature of community and ways of living in rural Wales. Disability is part of everyday and in communities like this why would it be

anything else, a separation? It's a collective of people with differing perceptions and abilities brought together to do something.

MA: Living in a rural community is always a collective and there are those who will not join in but are right at the heart of everything. They will be included because people are 'reading' them, bringing them in.

MP: If one person is standing still and everybody's doing the thing, it's still part of that signature somehow.

MP: But it might also be the aesthetic event, in its aestheticism. Of course, it is the performance that's important to us, but actually its being made manifest has all kinds of effects and affects which are a part of alleviating the danger of falling out of community. In the final section of *Capel*, there is one unexpected rupture after another. At the beginning of the performance, there's a kind of 'going with' – in the fit between place and look and dramaturgy. But this later breaks: for 'Sexy Cuban Dancing' and 'Elvis' shatter the sort of mimetic or reproductive aesthetic that we might assume these costumed, chapel-going figures represent. That is where it becomes art. It's not just a re-playing of something in the community. And Cyrff Ystwyth has carte blanche to do that, outside constraints of either funding or good taste or conventional practice. Always of and for a community but with viewpoints that make us look afresh at our own situation.

MA: It's our freedom.

MP: That is why Cyrff Ystwyth continues alternative traditions of performance making in Wales that seem equally at risk. And that is a real thrill, that all kinds of things suddenly seem possible again.

Notes

1. Derrida (1994). For an elaboration on this idea see Ames (2013).
2. Noland (2009).

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