

## Two Aberystwyths.

In a 3 yr funded research project, Challenging concepts of liquid place through performing practices in community contexts, I'm working with 3 community arts companies, Half Moon Young People's Theatre, London and their urban youth, Oldham Theatre Workshop with migrants near Manchester and Cyrff Ystwyth, Aberystwyth, Wales, a community performance company. Different locations, different participant profiles yet sharing what might be called in the language of ethics, 'vulnerability'.

The abstract indicates talk of OTW – but the project is delayed and there is little to say. I turn instead to Cyrff Ystwyth, a disabled and non-disabled community dance performance company of around 15 participants - depending upon the year. Co-investigators working on this project are Mike Pearson and Margaret Ames at Aberystwyth University. Margaret has run Cyrff Ystwyth or its predecessor for 25 years. I'm fortunate enough to be researching the work but all that is interesting arises from *her* artistic practice and that of the participants. A year-long practice-as research piece was completed under two weeks ago.

This is a tale of two performance communities, however, perhaps unconnected, but suggesting enduring effect, positive or otherwise, lies in the excess and density of the process of performance. Or, relocating a phrase from Peter Exkersall this morning, where a space has been occupied by affect and emotions in artistic practice.

[Step to the right] I've just arrived in Aberystwyth standing in a shared bedroom in Carpenter Hall, a seafront hall of residence, one August in the 1970s. It's the first time I'm 'properly' away from home. I'm nervous. At 15, I'm the youngest on a week long 'adult' drama course with the Drama Association of Wales. It took weeks of persuading parents to let me be here.

[Step to the left] Eight months ago, I step onto a balcony of Belgrave House, a pleasant enough hotel on the seafront at Aberystwyth. I look down the promenade nostalgically at Carpenter Hall. It's morning. Last night, I met Cyrff Ystwyth for the first time, watching them rehearse in the university's drama space. They seemed intrigued to have another observer and, perhaps, unsettled. I was struck at how the learning disabled choreographer, Adrian Jones, communicated simple words like 'capel' which were turned into dance moves.

Jean Luc Nancy implies that community is 'inoperable' because community presupposes it is human-made, constructed by or effected by humans. According to Nancy, this makes the term inoperative because a human is always already communing. 'Being with' equates to 'being'. He compares this to atoms saying that it is impossible 'to make a world with single atoms' and that there has to be 'an inclining from one toward the other' (*Ibid*: 3). So, too, with humans: existence is, in fact, co-existence. Just as this negates community as a humanly contrived 'production', however, it does not mean, for Nancy, that there is an organic, fused one-ness that is community instead. As Shane Phelan says of Nancy's point: 'Being-in-common means being with others, but being with others is the opposite of "being common". Being common is the continual denial of community in favour of oneness.' (Phelan, 1984: 84). Nancy rejects such oneness. He points to the perils of 'in' within the phrase 'being in common', however. He argues that it assumes the sharing of us, the piecemeal breaking up of pieces of us to be given to others. He says '[E]xistence *is* only being partitioned and shared' [This is Nancy but cited from later in the edited collection in Abeele's introduction xi]

[Step to the right] On the 1970s' drama course, I learn of a practitioner called Jersey Gretow, Grostof, gretequesky [shake shoulders as if I don't really know who this is]

from Paul Burge. A kindly Donald MacKechnie from Scotland's Pitlochry Theatre reassures me that I needn't worry: Ian McKellen certainly isn't gay. We use something they call "improv" for devising a piece about a women's factory strike in Norfolk. I tell my parents on the phone 'It was just amazing'.

[Step left] Four weeks ago I'm standing next to Mike Pearson in torrential rain outside a disused chapel in a tiny Welsh village with film camera batteries dead and barely able to scribble thoughts on sodden paper. The Cyrff Ystwyth company battle stoically with foggy rain, traversing gravestones and pews with Pina Bausch-like synchronicity. Adrian appears excited to be performing in his own village at his own chapel.

[Step centre] Does 'being-in-common' satisfy? Is that enough for constant interrogation of and desire for community perhaps the need for a 'warm circle' as Richard Sennett calls it? If we're puzzling over performance communities, aren't we talking about something more 'felt' than being-in common? Vered Amit and Nigel Rapport offer a positive modelling of our ability to be members of several consociations (Amit and Rapport 2002: 5) A performance community may be one of many, then, but not, perhaps, ordinary. Noel Dyke extends this: 'That ... relationships may be restricted in range and episodic or even ephemeral in duration (*sic*) does not, however, mean that they are lightly felt or inconsequential.' (2002: 107) And for Linda Singer, responding to Nancy, community becomes 'a call or appeal to a collective *praxis* where we are all implicated emotionally and psychically as well as intellectually.' (Abeelee – 1991)

(Step right) I'm just back home, frantic, on the phone, my suitcase open in front of me. I'm crying. The cleaner at Carpenter Hall that I'm speaking to says all the rubbish has gone. No, she doesn't remember seeing in my bedroom bin my accidentally discarded three full rolls of camera film, yet to be developed, but admits she probably wouldn't have noticed them. I feel as if my life has ended. No memories of the week to come. No *punctum* (although a but young for Barthes). It hadn't ended. My life. I went back the following year – very few of the same people were there - and a year later went to Exeter University to study Drama and English carrying with me the force of that week's communing through performance.

(Step left) Two weeks ago, Cyrff Ystwyth performed 'Capel: the Lights are On' in and outside Bronant Chapel. Contrary to my research expectations – and hopes - of performing place, this is disruptive for some. One learning disabled performer withdraws, severely discomfited by hailstones and rain. Others select not to lie on wet tarmac. Yet the weather facilitates a complicity, an invisible accord between audience and performer, as we breathe out admiration for besuited performers braving the, surely unholy, Welsh weather. In the pub afterwards, I am firmly told by one learning disabled, wheelchair user that 'The thing is, we're professional artists. We go on when it rains.'

These are disconnected performance communities, decades apart, with little, perhaps, in common beyond a Welsh town where they were forged. **I** reconnect them, of course, and they form a conversation of community, performance and place in my memory. I bring the past into that present. When my husband arrived to see Cyrff Ystwyth's work, his first visit to Aberystwyth, I introduced him quickly to – the promenade and Carpenter Hall, so much a part of my communing in that town. Both performance communities concern being-in-common for periods of time – [point] one week; once a week for 25 years. Dyck suggests: 'relationships of community may be relatively narrowly circumscribed in time and space and decidedly partial or situational in content, and yet highly salient as means of affiliation.' Both examples (and I can only refer to this year's Cyrff Ystwyth performance) had periods of the intense excess that many of us ascribe to performance work although for some of

the learning disabled folk, . These are people with an array of difference except they are—in-common once a week and for an annual performance.

Nancy's rejection of historical formations of community as either indebtedness or immanent one-ness is shared by others but with although they might differentiate between humanity as always already sharing oneself with others and periods beyond the always already, periods of more prolonged and affective communality. Appealing are

Van den Abeele, G. (1991) 'Introduction' in The Miami Theory Collective (eds) *Community at Loose Ends* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Coward, M.	2005 'Editor's Introduction' <i>Journal for Cultural Research. Special Issue: Being-with: Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community</i> , pp. 2-12. Also, <a href="http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/pdf/14797585_si.pdf">http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/pdf/14797585_si.pdf</a>
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First bit of Dyke: relationships of community may be relatively narrowly circumscribed in time and space and decidedly partial or situational in content, and yet highly salient as means of affiliation.

including the everyday - a 'sense of more collective fellowship through mundane daily opportunities for consociation, circumstances variously of work, leisure, being neighbours, education and more.