

The "Reflective Participant," "(Remember)ing" and "(Remember)ance"

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The "Reflective Participant," "(Remember)ing" and "(Remember)ance": A (Syn)aesthetic Approach to the Documentation of Audience Experience

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Introduction

There is little dispute that experience is at the heart of immersive, interactive, and participative modes of performance; Gareth White,¹ Josephine Machon,² and Adam Alston³ all acknowledge that it is a central feature of the dramaturgies of immersive⁴ performance, in varying and multiple ways. Immersive theatre “is a term that has been popularised in recent years to identify a mode of practice that invites ambulating audiences into a fictive world,”⁵ and is typically “constructed out of expansive, multi-sensory environments”⁶ that “[offer] an exhilarating live experience based on the palpable interactions with a performance environments and its inhabitants.”⁷ White suggests that the access to the interior of immersive theatre has the ability to “transform the individual audience member’s experience of theatre, without reference to the re-ordering of relationships and experiences outside of it.”⁸ Similarly, forms of interactive and participative performance offer their audiences an invitation to inhabit “pregnant scenarios,”⁹ and the opportunity to commit “*acts* through the undertaking of various games and tasks.”¹⁰

Often the ludic structure of the interactive and participative forms of performance, “invites the participants to engage in ‘shallow play’ with the performers as equals in the games, tasks and rules,”¹¹ and therefore ultimately presents an invitation for the audience to forage new primary experiences, both in and through their participation. As Punchdrunk’s Felix Barret recognizes, “it’s the empowerment of the audience in the sense that they’re put at the centre of the action; they are the pivot from which everything else spins. It’s the creation of parallel theatrical universes within which audiences forget that they’re an audience, and thus their status within the work shifts.”¹²

The forms that make up the immersive, interactive and participate practices are polyphonic, vastly varied and multiple. There is no single style, genre or approach under which these performance practices might be gathered; instead, they nestle precariously— jostling underneath the broader intention that informs their various manifestations, that is, the intention to produce, “thrilling, enchanting or challenging experiences”¹³ for their audiences. Of course, one might suggest that this is the intention of all performing arts practice, but it is the (syn)aesthetic construction of something made to be inhabited, to be *lived through* and experienced, that distinguishes this type of performance work. I suggest that the fundamental feature of the experiential in those

forms is what poses complex challenges for analysis, documentation and dissemination of their production, but more importantly their *reception*. There is an ever-growing body of knowledge that seeks to address the nature of those experiential dramaturgies of immersion, but there is relatively little scholarship that explicitly approaches that endeavor from a directly reception-orientated perspective. The audience is ever-present speculatively in the discussions and analyses of immersive performance practices, but—despite their persistent presence—they are rarely confronted directly in a meaningful way. Over the course of this paper, I will present a (syn)aesthetic approach to the documentation and dissemination of the reception of immersive performance, in the hope of redressing that balance. I will proffer a rigorous and robust, practice-based research (PBR) approach to reception that will directly confront the material audience in an empirically responsible¹⁴ way.

My PBR approach to the reception of immersive performance practices amplifies the significance of the audience's role, and validates experiential approaches to understanding its nature. My research is ultimately concerned with addressing the nature of the audience's role produced by immersive dramaturgies, and understanding the experiences that such roles elicit. Essentially my research has two central objectives: firstly, to establish phenomenological methods for collecting and capturing instances of the experience of immersive dramaturgies. Secondly, I am concerned with devising empirically responsible strategies for transmitting those embodied experiences *beyond* the bodies that produced them. I have developed a new approach to reception theory focused PBR in devising the role of the "reflective participant," as well as a (syn)aesthetic approach to capturing and disseminating the experiences of the "reflective participant" that utilizes the process of hypermnesia as a PBR method. Hypermnesia is "the particularly vivid recall of events, usually with substantial detail."¹⁵ The process of affective recall in which aspects of an original primary experience can be summoned, re-acted and re-enacted is "hypermnesia." According to Machon, "put simply, the memory of previously perceived moments is [made] palpable"¹⁶ through the process of "hypermnesia." The methodology of (remember)ing and (remember)ance that I will begin to explicate shortly, employs "reflective hypermnesia" as a *critical act* for capturing and disseminating the *experience* of immersive dramaturgies.

(Remember)ing and (remember)ance are, of course, revisions of existing terms, with the strategic inclusion of parentheses to shift the ontology of the wider vernacular

usages. The ontologically strategic parentheses are employed to playfully co-opt and refocus the indexical nature of the original semantic of remembering and remembrance. Both (remember)ing and (remember)ance are an attempt to articulate the nature of the critical PBR method of inquiry that I have developed to address the documentation challenges and experiential anxieties that immersive performance practices pose for reception theory. The strategic use of parenthesis draws out and makes distinct the PBR method of “reflective hypermnesia” that informs the *act* (remember)ing, from the more pedestrian generality of simply *remembering*. I am attempting to force some distance between the cultural phenomenon of *remembrance* and the affective mode of documentation that “reflective hypermnesia” produces in the form of a (remember)ance. In this way, my revisions avoid the inevitable confusion that could arise from simply employing the existing terms within this highly particular and peculiar context of practice-based reception research. Bracketing “remember” in parentheses in both cases refocuses the semantic index to highlight the significance of the embodied-ness of the *act* that the verb indicates, and to signpost the contingent, localized and subjective dimensions of what it means to remember as a *critical act*.

In (remember)ing the parenthesis activates the significance of the recall and reminiscent *as an act*, a process that is *taken up* and *taken on*—very particularly here—as a critical research method. The inclusion of the parentheses in (remember)ance and the addition of the “e” into the term remembrance is an attempt to unhitch it from its general usage which is to describe an act of collective reverent anniversary. The Western cultural connotations and associations of the term remembrance have a direct relationship with rituals of national mourning and somber reverence. In the UK, for example, commemorations events for World War I and World War II persistently attach themselves to the word as cultural passengers. In the USA, 9/11 has firmly hitched itself to the vernacular as a powerful and tangible association. It is these connotations that I am hoping to circumvent by proffering these new terms.

Experiential Challenges and Anxieties

Before explicating the concept more fully, I will briefly explore the conditions, anxieties and challenges that have produced the contextual landscape of the development of my new PBR role and methodology. It is important to understand the fundamental impact that these contextual conditions have had upon my conceptual and practical design. Distinctions and definitions of immersive performance modes have

already been rigorously considered by Gareth White,¹⁷ Josephine Machon,¹⁸ and Adam Alston,¹⁹ hence their assertions are not in question here. Traditional, predominantly literary approaches to performance analysis are sharply problematized by the experiential dramaturgies of immersive performance practices. Scholars such as Bruce McConachie,²⁰ Elizabeth Hart,²¹ Nicola Shaughnessy,²² White, and Machon have offered studies that not only highlight the inadequacies of the literary-based tools of analysis, but have made significant developments in developing empirically responsible, critical tools that are sympathetic to the kinesthetic, corporeal and somatic ontology of immersive practices. However, despite the ground-breaking shifts in approaches to performance analysis, these approaches have predominantly been employed to draw insight into the nature of immersive dramaturgies. They privilege the production of immersion, and its makers' perspectives, as a cultural practice. Much of the research to date considers the activity, intentions and implications of the performance-makers' approach to the production of work as a cultural practice, rather than its reception. Very little work has been done yet to address a reception that moves beyond theoretical speculation on the role of the audience, or to address the nature of actual instances of experience that such dramaturgies produce in a *material* way.

The PBR approach to reception that I have developed offers a way to redress that imbalance by suggesting a practical strategy for privileging audience experience—not simply as a tool for validating the activities or intentions of the performance makers and their resulting dramaturgies, but as an approach to capturing the reception of the *experience* of the events that those dramaturgies provide; as a significant reception endeavor in its own right. However, all too often when “audiences themselves do become documenters—such as through submitting an online review, or by taking part in post-show discussions—they are often dismissed as amateurs, their responses taken less seriously than others.”²³ My intention is to provide an explanation of a method I have devised for capturing the audiences' experience of immersive dramaturgies in a way that privileges the audience's perceptions as a valuable and powerful source of insight. These insights have the potential to contribute to the developing discourse in this field, from a firmly reception-orientated perspective. If understanding the nature of immersive dramaturgies and the experiential invitations that they make is important, then it is equally as significant to understand the ways in which those invitations might be taken up, accepted and more crucially, *lived through*. It is imperative to capture the

knowledges produced by the audience that inhabit the experiences offered by immersive dramaturgies, rather than theoretical, conceptual or speculative knowledges.

I suspect that this imbalance is, in part, a pragmatic one. Performance-makers are heavily invested in the documentation of their work, because of the possible cultural currency—and legacy—that such documentation affords. More often than not it is practitioners themselves or “professional commentators who have historically controlled the formation of cultural discourse.”²⁴ This investment means that performance-makers are stakeholders and beneficiaries of scholarly activity that works to document and disseminate the significance of such practices. My approach has the possibility of “rather than privileging expert voices and rendering other audiences mute or invisible ... to map the complexity of audiences’ reactions from diverse subject positions, and to consider how people adopt certain orientations and draw on different value judgements to make sense of a performance.”²⁵ Audiences are, of course, contingent and provisional; their investment is localized and fleeting. Their stake is inevitably directly embedded in the experience in which they have chosen to participate; there is little immediate value for them to extend their investment beyond the bounds of that experience. This means that accessing *actual* audiences to engage in research activity that is *material* rather than speculative is problematic—capturing the experience of a performance is an endeavor both resource heavy, and fraught with ethical, legal and logistical challenges.

In addition to the challenges of immersion as a form, there are pressures generated by the peculiar context of practice-based activity within the academy that are distinct from those asserted by practice *per se*. The context of the academy requires that PBR be accessible and transmittable to the relevant knowledge communities beyond the originating site of the performance practice (that is always localized and fleeting). It must be acknowledged, however, that there is a growing need to be able to capture and evidence professional practice for producers, arts industry professionals and funding bodies too (if you hope to be able to continue making, presenting and supporting that practice). The development of my PBR role regarding the “reflective participant” and my methodology of (remember)ing and (remember)ance has been informed by deep-seated anxieties that to which these two different but connected contexts give rise. Firstly, the desire to ensure that the peculiarities of my own practice, or more precisely, the *experience of experiencing* my specific immersive dramaturgies, can be sympathetically captured and transmitted. Secondly, there are the pressures

exerted by the academy on PBR to ensure that the insights generated by and through the practice can indeed be accounted for, captured and disseminated in an appropriately rigorous fashion. This is a concern of PBR that becomes further exacerbated by dramaturgies that generate instances of performance both constituted and constructed out of experience. I would now like to move on to address the potential of “reflective hypermnesia” to address the anxieties, challenges and pressures that I have outlined.

The Epistemic Potential of “Hypermnesia”

As I have already established, an audience is materially embedded in the constitution of immersive dramaturgies, and those dramaturgies are constructed (syn)aesthetically to generate new primary experiences for their audiences. John Dewey helpfully distinguishes between two distinct experiential levels of experience: “primary and secondary [...] audiences do not simply experience (primary) events in the moment of an encounter. Their (secondary) experiences will necessarily linger and evolve, as audiences continue to make sense of them through time.”²⁶ According to Machon, “(syn)aesthetics (with a playful use of parentheses) encompass both a fused sensory perceptual experience and a fused sense approach to artistic practice and analysis.”²⁷ She is suggesting that (syn)aesthetic dramaturgies are so constructed that the audience is engaged in a “fusing of sense (semantic ‘meaning making’) with *sense* (feeling both sensation and emotion), [which] establishes a double-edged rendering of making-sense/*sense* and foregrounds its fused somatic/semantic nature.”²⁸ Machon locates the bodies of the audience members as a “holistic entirety-psychological, intellectual, emotional—thus prioritizing a connection of the body and mind with experience.”²⁹ The somatic/semantic fusion that Machon presents as fundamental to the (syn)aesthetic dramaturgies of immersive performance suggests that the audience engages in a “multi-sensory evaluation” to formulate their perception of their experience.

The audience is indeed “meaning making with sense feeling both sensation and emotion.”³⁰ I want to suggest that this presents a complex challenge for reception theory and presents a crisis for the documentation of such performance practices. How can one capture the audience’s experience of (syn)aesthetically constituted dramaturgies? How might one document the perception of new primary experiences produced by immersive practices, when those encounters are fundamentally located *in* the experiencing body of the audience? This is an epistemic concern with which I have been wrangling since 2006, when I began my own PBR activity. Although Machon’s work on (syn)aesthetics

was first published in 2009 and offered a highly useful set of tools and vocabulary with which to articulate the nature of experientially constructed dramaturgies, it did not fully offer a solution for me to address my own localized reception anxieties in a direct way.

Machon's contribution to the then-developing field of immersive performance is deeply significant and impactful; she offers an empirically responsible approach to the analysis of experiential forms of performance-making. By recognizing the "phenomena of fused perception as a way to discuss the interaction between the creative process and the interpretation of art made for and upon the performing body and voice,"³¹ Machon provides the critical tools for a phenomenology driven, but empirically informed, approach to performance analysis. It is an endeavor, however, that very much privileges production over reception and offers a largely speculative approach to forming insights about the nature of the audience's role and experience. Machon's study accounts for the ontology of certain dramaturgies of (syn)aesthetic practice, which is *implicitly* informed by her own personal experiences of those instances of (syn)aesthetic dramaturgies. The resulting interpretation and analysis is evidenced by her discussions with the practitioners that produced those dramaturgies, rather than just her direct experience of them. Her approach to analysis privileges the perspective of the performance-makers. Machon does not explicitly capture the process of hypermnesis that generates her perception of the experiences of those dramaturgies; instead she simply acknowledges that it plays a role in her final interpretation and analysis of those experiences—an analysis which is also tempered by her discussions with the performance makers. She acknowledges the role of her experience of those dramaturgies in the digesis, but does not offer a practical solution for documenting or disseminating it, as a valuable source of insight and knowledge in its own right.

One can never capture, document or fully disclose the (syn)aesthetic without subjecting the original experience to mediation. The originating primary experience produced in and through (syn)aesthetically constructed performance disappears, but its remains become part of the *lived experience* embodied in the participants' participating body. That experience can be *affectively* recalled and to some extent *reactivated* through the process of hypermnesis. The process of affective recall—in which aspects of the originating primary experience (of the (syn)aesthetic dramaturgy), can be summoned, re-activated and re-enacted—is termed hypermnesis. According to Machon, "put simply, the memory of previously perceived moments is [made] palpable"³² through the process of hypermnesis. She locates hypermnesis as a key

feature of (syn)aesthetic performance interpretation and analysis because “the original visceral experience remains affective in any subsequent recall”³³ and therefore any “semantic or intellectual analysis that follows is influenced by this affective state, the analysis is invested with that rich and felt quality of experience.”³⁴

I do not disagree; however, I do want to suggest that hypermnesis has potential to function as a practice-based critical tool that can be employed in ways that have value beyond simply being an implicit condition for the interpretation and analysis of dramaturgy. It offers an exciting possibility for approaching the documentation of the reception of those dramaturgies too—generating an approach to reception that is (syn)aesthetically sympathetic.

If hypermnesis is the affective recalling and reminiscence of the perception of a particular experience, then I want to suggest that it has the potential to be employed as an embodied tool for capturing and disseminating actual instances of audience’s experience, or at least the *perception* of those experiences, in such a way as to privilege the audience’s ontology rather than the dramaturgies. Rather than serving simply as a foundational condition of (syn)aesthetic performance analysis and interpretation, it can be explicitly entered into as a mode of recording, reflecting upon and interrogating actual instances of audience experience. I am suggesting that hypermnesis, when taken up as a reflective and explicitly informed critical process, has the potential to capture the perceptual act of sense/*sense*-making that these dramaturgies induce in their audiences. Furthermore, it presents the tools to create new primary source material that exposes the ways in which those instances of experience form insights, develop knowledges and ultimately produce discourse through the audience’s *perception* of them. I have spent the last decade developing practical approaches and strategies that address these fundamental concerns and anxieties. I will now draw out the epistemic logic of the (syn)aesthetic strategies that I have developed for documenting and disseminating the nature of the audience’s role. I will further explicate the details of my approach; unpacking the three central conceptual frameworks of the “reflective participant,” (remember)ing and documents of (remember)ance that constitute my (syn)aesthetic, PBR approach to immersive reception study.

It is the introduction of purposeful and scholarly reflection into the specialist practice of performance-making through the taking up of the role of the “reflective practitioner” that generates the critical methodology of praxis. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt articulate as praxis:

Praxical knowledge implies that ideas and theory are ultimately the result of practice rather than vice versa. [...] These “effects” broadly understood as “knowledge” emerge through material processes. Because such processes are (at least in part) predicated on the tacit and alternative logic or practice in time, their precise operations cannot be predetermined.³⁵

Praxis exposes and uncovers the tacit knowledges produced in and through engaging in a specialist practice (in this case, performance); uncovering knowledges that are embodied in that practice itself. Purposeful, planned and rigorous reflection-in-action shift practice *per se* into praxis, and frames it as research. I am suggesting that reflection can be employed to transform the process of hypermnesia into a *critical act*. Reflection has made the embodied knowledges of performance-making available beyond the vanishing site of live performance. I propose that taking up “reflective hypermnesia” could also lay bare the nature of the tacit experiences of immersive performance and the knowledges produced in and through the corporeality of the audience participant. Reflection is a fundamental aspect of Machon’s approach to analysis and interpretation of (syn)aesthetic dramaturgies, but it is only *implicit* in the resulting dissemination. More so, it is employed in service of explicating the nature of the dramaturgy rather than its reception. I have developed a more explicit use of “reflective hypermnesia” to produce audience-generated documents that both capture and transmit the peculiarities of instances of *actual* experiences of (syn)aesthetic dramaturgies. They are not only created to provide the foundation for further interpretation and analysis, (although they do indeed very powerfully offer this potential) but as the site of embodied knowledge in their own right. Reflectively produced hypermnesic documents have the potential to uncover the tacit knowledges produced in and through the embodied experiences of actual instances of (syn)aesthetically constructed audience experience.

The “Reflective Participant” & the Critical Act of “Reflective Hypermnesia”

The “reflective participant” is the term that I have coined to articulate the role, and it is taken up when engaging in the act of reflecting-in-participation, for the explicit purpose of (syn)aesthetic audience reception research. It is a co-opting and re-focusing of the PBR role of the reflective practitioner, developed by Donald Schön; it shares many of its ontological and epistemological qualities. When reflection-in-action is manifest, it is as experimentation and as a research method. It is through a reflective action that the action itself is interrogated, and thus, it affords the practice-based researcher an ethics of inquiry. I would further suggest that reflection-in-action is

central to the way in which the practitioner can bring rigor to their practice and can defend it as research:

Through reflection, he [the practitioner] can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice [in this case, performance] and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness, which he may allow himself to experience.³⁶

By asserting the use of reflection-in-action, the practitioner can lend new insights into practice, as well as other research questions and concerns that may underpin the PaR activity. The practitioner who chooses to take up reflective-in-action as an ethic for practical inquiry and as a research strategy is taking up the role of “reflective practitioner.” Not dissimilar to the role of the “reflective practitioner,” the “reflective participant” is the taking up of a position that is able to expose the tacit understandings that are produced by the specialist practice of being an audience participant, in order to access the insights of the embodied knowledges that such a specialist practice generates.

Before I unpack the nature of the role of the “reflective participant,” let me first offer some explanation as to my reason for locating the activities of the audience participant as a specialist practice within the context of PBR. It occurred to me, at the outset of my PhD research in 2006, that an inevitability of my research activity would be the generation of a significant body of experiences of experientially constructed performance work. This body of work would position me as a *seasoned immersive performance-goer*. My suspicions of that inevitability have indeed been proven; I have become a *seasoned immersive performance-goer* through ten years of seeking out immersive work of every possible kind. I have accumulated, in and through this research, a vast array of different experiences. The (syn)aesthetic nature of the dramaturgies I have encountered means that I have become a practiced and knowledgeable “audience participant,” accumulating a body of knowledge generated in and through my researching *body*. My role as a researcher has been implicated in and impacted upon the nature of the various experiences that the different immersive performances have generated for me.

Similarly, Alston also draws attention to the need to locate the audience at the center of approaches to analysis:

Immersive theatre describes a mode of encounter, rather than a particular theatre practice or spatial configuration; it is a term that can be applied to a range of practices in a range of contexts, so long as an audience engages with an environment that prompts the perception of immersion’s cues.³⁷

Simply put, I am suggesting that my participation over the years as an audience participant has in fact become a *specialist practice*; one that is informed by my role as a researcher and the embodied tacit knowledges produced by my significant experience of immersive performance. I am, therefore, locating my participation in (syn)aesthetically constituted performance work as an “audience participant” as a specialist practice; particularly when entered into explicitly as a method of research inquiry.

The “reflective participant” provides the opportunity to engage in reflection-in-participation, a role that has the capacity to interrogate the embodied and tacit understandings of the specialist practice of (syn)aesthetic audience participation as a research methodology. It is a role that, when taken up, can acknowledge the epistemic and ontological concerns that inform the conditions of the reflective audience participation as research, rather than just the specialist practice of audience participation *per se*. Praxis is produced by the dynamic process of the reflective practitioner, reflecting-in-action in received PBR methods; but “reflective hypermnesis,” is the result of reflection-in-action generated by the “reflective participant.” The process of recall and reminiscence has the ability to re-activate the corporeality of the original primary experience and to make it palpable, even once that original primary experience has disappeared. When this process is subject to the critical rigors of being employed as an explicit research activity, that process of recall can be laid bare. It can be employed to uncover the knowledges and insights that it generates in the moments of generating them *as* perception. If hypermnesis is reframed and entered into as an explicit research strategy in the way that I am proposing, it can generate an experiential dynamic feedback loop that impacts upon the nature of the experience in the moments that the experience is being generated. Each new instance of practice impacting upon and informing the next; it is ongoing and dynamic.

The reflection-in-participation cannot be captured directly, in the same way that praxis cannot be, because it is similarly kinesthetic, somatic, corporeal and embodied. However, the research objectives and aims provide a frame that generate the nature of the ensuing activity as a “reflective participant”; they leak into all aspects of the activity undertaken in pursuit of those research concerns. The researching body of the “reflective participant” is imbued with those aims upon entering an instance of participation—the decisions that make up and generate the ensuing experience are

irreparably informed by the specialist nature of that researching body. The research concerns are embodied in the “reflective participant’s” corporeality, the reflection-in-participation happens in and through the decisions that the researching body makes during its participation that makes up its experience; they cannot be separated. The research agenda is brought to bear *in and through* the body that lives through the experience. That experience that the “reflective participant” lives through cannot be captured directly as it is *lived through*, but “reflective hypermnesia” offers an affective and palpable way of re-activating the experience after the originating primary experience has expired. When hypermnesia is called upon as a reflective research strategy it becomes a *critical act* of re-activating that expired instance of reflective participation. Recalling it becomes a *critical act* that directly privileges the experience of the “reflective participant.”

(Remember)ing and (Remember)ance: An Act of “Reflective Hypermnesia”

I am suggesting that “reflective hypermnesia” is the process of recall and reminiscence that the “reflective participant” activates, as a critical strategy to both capture and uncover the knowledges produced by their reflection-in-participation of immersive dramaturgies. The critical act of engaging in (remember)ing can produce documents of (remember)ance. The hypermnesic act of (remember)ing not only produces the conditions that can create documents of (remember)ance which capture the re-activated originating primary experience, but the act of critical recall also contributes to the “reflective participant’s” *body/body* of knowledge. Each reflective act of recall stacks up to inform what constitutes the “reflective participant’s” specialist practice of reflective audience participation. The documents of (remember)ance generated by this act of reminiscence record and expose the epistemological dimensions of the tacit practice-based expertise; while also generating new primary reception-based primary evidence that can be further transmitted and interpreted beyond the originating context that produced it. The “reflective participant” enters participation of (syn)aesthetically constituted dramaturgies as a critical strategy for embodied knowledge acquisition. As a research strategy, the reflection-in-participation is entered within the explicit frame of a research agenda. These research concerns become an influential and impactful condition that tempers the ensuing experiences of the “reflective participant.”

The overarching research agenda becomes a factor that both informs and to some extent shapes the ensuing experience as well as the “reflective participant’s” perception of it. In the same way that not all practice is research, neither is audience participation research *per se*. Reflection-in-practice generates the rigor of praxis, transforming it into a rigorous research method—and reflection has the same rigor, generating impact upon (syn)aesthetic audience participation. It transforms the experience, its perception and ultimately its affective recall into an approach to embodied reception documentation and dissemination. The “reflective participant” activates reflection-in-participation in order to access the knowledge produced *in and through* that instance of participation. These knowledges are experienced and perceived in a way that disappears, as it is *lived through*; with the use of “reflective hypermnesia” it can be affectively reactivated beyond that original instance of reflective participation.

I am suggesting that using recall to affectively access the experience of the instance of the performance becomes a critical act because of the *reflective corporeality* that the role of “reflective participant” provides for the experiencing body. The frame of the “reflective participant” impacts upon the nature of the sense/*sense* making that is *lived through* during the instance of participation. (Remember)ing is the purposeful act of calling on the process of hypermnesia to affectively recall and reactivate the reflective experience in a way that is palpable, to capture it for the purposes of transmission. The hypermnesic act of re-living can be captured to create documents of (remember)ance. Such documents have the potential to record the perception of the “reflective participant’s” original reflection-in-participation embodied experience *affectively*.

Such documents have the possibility of uncovering the ways in which the insights and knowledges were generated, as well as the manner in which they formulated within the perception of the “reflective participant.” Documents generated through the critical act of affective reminiscing become a new primary source in their own right. They map, trace and record the *act* of affective recall and the ways in which insights became manifest in the “reflective participant’s” original perception and the ways in which that perception is subsequently impacted upon during their reactivation. (Remember)ances become a way of generating primary evidence that privileges the audience participants’ perception of their experience by offering access to it affectively. They also provide evidence that can enable possible further analysis and interpretation of the wider implications of the nature of a (syn)aesthetic audience’s ontology. They

are primary because they capture the perception of the original instance of participation from the perceiving bodies' perspective, and secondary because they can evidence and valorize the originating nature of the (syn)aesthetic dramaturgies in performance. However, they have the potential to do this in a way that privileges the embodied perception of the audience, rather than the validating perspective of the performance makers.

I have suggested that reminiscing is the critical act of reflective hypermnesic recall engaged in by a “reflective participant,” activated in order to access the nature of the original reflective perception of the instance of performance. I have also suggested that the documents that this process produces can be transmitted: that a (remember)ance is a document that captures and records that affective process of reminiscence. Like many PBR methods, they offer strategies for taking up research, but not applied or practical ways of achieving them. This is because they need to be applied in ways that meet the individual needs of the very particular research project; the same is true for the “reflective participant,” as well as the method of (remember)ing and the act of generating a (remember)ance. I have offered a theoretical exposition as to the ways in which these approaches meet the challenges and anxieties that immersive performance practices present to reception theory, but the activity of actually *doing* a (remember)ing and producing (remember)ances are open to an infinite manner of approaches in practice: approaches that need to be personal and localized.

Hypermnesic Recall: Some Practicalities and Actualities of Generating a (Remember)ing

Before you immerse yourself in the palpable and affective (remember)ing exercise coming up, there are a few aspects of the actualities that informed my approach and are an important factor of the practicalities that constituted my critical act of hypermnesic reminiscence in this instance. The extract of a (remember)ance presented here, captures an instance of my reflective participation in an event that took place almost a decade ago. It captures one of my earliest attempts at the act of (remember)ing and is one of the first documents of (remember)ing that this process generated. Many of my more recent approaches explore the potential of certain new technologies and digital innovations—sadly none of which are transmittable in print format. The offering that I make is perhaps one of the clearest examples of “reflective hypermnesis” that I can disseminate in print form. The extract that I am presenting is the result of the

confluence of three separate acts of affective recall—an accumulation and amalgamation of the process that I went through in migrating my act of critical hypermnesis into a transmittable document. There are no hard and fast rules, methods or agreed strategies for how to stimulate the process of memory recall in the scientific community, let alone in the field of performance analysis. So, my own approach to the task of activating affective reminiscence has been empirically responsible trial and error. As I have already suggested, PBR methods are pregnant constructs that require the practitioner-scholar to inhabit them in localized ways driven by the peculiarities of their own practice and their particular research concerns. Before I present the result of my own early PBR endeavour, I will first articulate some of the practicalities and actualities of the process that produced the document of (remember)ing you will shortly encounter.

The role of “reflective participant” not only injects rigor into the process of experiencing live performance, it also provides the potential conditions of motivation that makes the experience more accessible after the fact because of the impact that it has upon the process of memory formulation. Memory is not objective but productive and interactive—generated in and through the lived body. According to Alan Schefflin and Jerrold Shapiro, short term memory is formulated in stages:

1. As an event unfolds, it is perceived and laid down in the senses as a trace that is acceptable to the current ego state of the individual.
2. There is a period (measurable in microseconds) during which these sensory traces are evaluated for meaningfulness to the individual. If there is some internalized reason or motivation to retain the information, it is then processed into short-term storage.³⁸

The meaningfulness of my experience of *Love Letters Straight from Your Heart*³⁹ was established and consolidated by my taking up the role of the “reflective participant.” My experience was not accidental, coincidental nor incidental, but instead very significantly formed by and through the research role that I explicitly took up. I entered the event as a “reflective participant” which impacted upon, informed and shaped my ensuing experience, my perception of that experience and its subsequent formulation as memory. The role of “reflective participant” and the research agenda that produced it ensured the personal motivation that Schefflin and Shapiro suggest is key to retention of the experience as short-term, accessible memory.

The burning question then becomes: how can that short-term memory be accessed? I have already discussed at some length the possibilities and implications of

“reflective hypermnesia” as an act of affective recall, but I have not yet offered a practical strategy for how to approach *actually doing it*. This is partly because there are a vast number of approaches being explored in the various hard and soft science-based disciplines that range from cognitive intervention such as probes and scans, through to more esoteric approaches like hypnosis. Although working from an empirically responsible position, I am not a scientist and the strategy that I employed to generate the (remember)ing extracted below was borne out of my performance studies expertise and knowledge set. My strategy for engaging in “reflective hypermnesia” was informed by the understanding that “once in short-term storage (conscious levels of processing), the trace can be recalled for some period of time and can be transformed by analysis, coding, or personal relevance and consolidated into long-term storage—the repository of personally relevant material.”⁴⁰ In this particular instance, I wanted to invoke and capture my experience of the performance event immediately, to mitigate the inevitable slippages and erosions that time would inflict upon the ability to recall. By engaging in hypermnesic reminiscence swiftly after the event, I would mitigate the erosion of the short-term memory, but also through that process of encoding commit the perception into long-term storage.

My approach was to employ a revised version of automatic writing to record the affective hypermnesia. The technique of automatic writing is usually employed to generate unmediated new writing—I applied it to the task of capturing my immediate affective recall of the experience of the performance event I had just encountered. It was on the train from Bristol to Southampton that I made my first attempt at a document of (remember)ing. It was with wine still warming my chest and flushing my cheeks that I invoked this first act of affective reminiscence. It was with Richard’s aftershave still lingering in my nostrils that I initiated my primary hypermnesic recall. It was on a late and quiet train where I closed my eyes, pen hovering and discreetly re-activated the last couple of hours. A stream of consciousness rapidly shifted my hand across the page: my night, migrated, translated onto the page of my notebook. It was significant that I still carried the smell of the experience in my nostrils and was still very much living through the giddy effects of the wine I had consumed during the event. These sensations served as stimuli and the sensations that lingered made it easier to affectively re-experience the event because “the personal meaningfulness of stimuli increase with the number of perceptual systems involved. [...] The closer the replication of the emotional internal states and the external stimuli, the greater the subsequent recall.”⁴¹ The stimuli of the

wine and smell of Richard's aftershave made the recall more affective, but the process of automatic writing was the mode of capture, coding and, ultimately, transmission.

Maybe a week or so later, I made my second attempt at affective recall which also relied upon stimuli. The scent of Richard's aftershave had long faded, and so had the effects of the wine. So, I made a playlist of all the songs I had made a note of in my first reminiscing: *Where is Love* from Oliver; Whitney Houston, *Saving All my Love*; ABC, *The Look of Love*; Kylie, *Love at First Sight*; The Darkness, *I Believe in a Thing Called Love*; Elvis, *Can't Help Falling in Love*; Johnny Cash, *First Time Ever I Saw your Face*; Nickel Creek, *When You Come Back Down*, David Bowie, *Heroes*; Kate Bush, *Hounds of Love*; Nick Cave, *There She Goes my Beautiful World*; Soft Cell, *Tainted Love*; Supremes, *Where Did our Love Go*; Dusty Springfield, *The Look of Love*; Ketty Lester, *Love Letters*. I used these songs as stimuli to invoke my original lived experience, giving me a more sense-based opportunity to re-access the original perception stored in my short-term memory: "recall reliably improves with repeated testing, but only with certain stimuli."⁴² The music became, for me, a carrier of memory that could be used to trigger the hypermnesic recollection. Again, I utilized a familiar strategy of coding and transmitting the conversion of my affective recall into the form of written language: eyes closed and the perception of the reminiscence captured in a stream of consciousness and blue ink.

The final act of "reflective hypermnesia" came as a surprise. Over a year later, I sat at my PC with both documents of (remember)ance, the intention being to combine the two documents into a single rich transmission. To my surprise, the act of amalgamation triggered a hypermnesic state, invoking and activating my original lived experience. The two previous documents that I had produced served as stimuli that activated the original experience—which by this point had been committed to my long-term memory storage. Schefflin and Shapiro account for this when they suggest that "these memories are more likely to be affected by the interactive and productive nature of memory."⁴³ The role of the "reflective participant" generated the conditions under which the experience became stored and embedded in my memory architecture: firstly, as short-term memory, and then eventually as long-term memory. The long-term memory made up part of the "known body of knowledge"⁴⁴ that informs my position as a specialist audience member beyond the live event under discussion. Beyond my experience the (remember)ance becomes a "material memory,"⁴⁵ that "embod[ies] a part of us outside ourselves";⁴⁶ the (remember)ance is "[h]uman memory [...]"

exteriorized.”⁴⁷ The stimuli generated a mood, regenerating the original emotional state—one out of which fresh perceptions became woven into, and impacted upon the constitution of the final document of (remember)ance.

**Excerpt from my (Remember)ance of Uninvited Guest’s
*Love Letters Straight from Your Heart***

I sit at the end of the table because of being here alone—it feels a bit ignorant to sit myself in the middle and potential disrupt the possibility of couples and groups being able to be together. In a “theatre” I would have just got into the best possible viewing position if no allocated seating was designated, to maximize my experience. This, I suspected, would be different. What was the best view here?

Richard was wearing a greyish suit. Jess had a large floral printed dress and appeared to be heavily pregnant. I knew the names of the performers because I know the company’s work— I did my research. Richard was tall and reassuringly present. Jess was quiet, with a warm smile. While everyone bustled and chatted their way to their seats I wondered if Jess were actually pregnant, and I wondered if it mattered and then how safe it was for her.

I realized there were lots of couples here, and I was reminded once more that I was here alone. I felt very aware of this alone-ness here, with the lights on and faces attentively looking, seated across from each other. I also felt sad that my partner, Nigel, would not get to hear my dedication⁴⁸ for him, if they used it. A sudden hush drew my attention; there was anticipation in the air.

Richard tapped his glass as he welcomed us all to the event, then said: “today in Brazil it is the 12th June, it is boyfriend and girlfriend day, and in Korea it is November the 11th.”

He talked about all the traditions and cultural practices that are similar or comparable to our Valentine’s Day. “Dogs are getting married in China, presided over by pigs. In America, it is Hallmark day.” I smiled and thought of my Dad. He does not approve of dogs in clothes, so I doubt he would approve of dogs getting married. I was taken back to the day I stood in the kitchen, crying, whilst he shouted about all the reasons I should not put our family dog Gemma in the baby swing at the park. It turned out the lady next door had seen fit to report my dog- walking activities.

Richard continued in his gentle but assuring way, and there was frothy laughter. I smiled because I am not the laugh-out-loud sort, but I was amused. “Let’s feel the joy,

the pain, the passion,” Richard continued, “let’s just feel something ... tonight, in this room, with these people, right now.”

I glanced at the people across from me as he continued. “Make sure your glasses are full, that you are comfortable and let’s try to get some love in the room.”

The woman beside me poured herself a generous glass of wine and asked me if I would like some. I replied with, “actually could you pass me the sparkling water please? I don’t drink, and I have a cold.” As soon as I had spoken, I wished I had gone for the wine, as no-one else was drinking water, and I started to worry that the wine might help as things progress. Nevertheless, I poured myself a glass of water.

Jess put a song on [*Where is Love*, from *Oliver*] while she and Richard gazed at each other intensely.

Richard cut in with some Whitney Houston [*Saving All My Love*] ... they kept looking at each other, not breaking eye contact ... then ABC [*The Look of Love*].

It was as if they were having a battle of love songs—fighting to find the right music to express how they felt, to demonstrate their love. All the while they maintained eye contact—it was intense, seductive.

I sipped my fizzy water, enjoying all the connections that my mind was throwing up with each new track, tracing my own love stories and heartaches through the music. I watched the people opposite me as they smiled to themselves. I was trying quite hard not to sing along—I am one of those annoying people who does not really listen to music but sings along to it. I decided not to even hum, because the music would stop abruptly and with no warning, which meant any humming could get me caught out.

Some Kylie [*Love at First Sight*] and Jess was half-dancing in her seat, leaning back in her chair—again the seduction. Then the track *The Darkness* [*I Believe in a Thing Called Love*] played. This brought me back to thinking about my Dad all over again.

Richard was looking at Jess ... Elvis [*Can’t Help Falling in Love*] began to croon, and I thought about that wedding, the first time we danced ... my head on his shoulder, my hand inside his. I also thought about how my partner back home, (whom the dedication was for), would have hated this, all these strangers feeling exposed, the potential of having to make small talk; I was glad I had spared Nigel that.

Jess tapped her glass and said, “lovers in the room, lovers far away, office romances, childhood sweethearts, old flames ... the ones who got away, lost loves ...” She continued to list loves and lovers in all their guises and descriptions, then announced, “let’s drink to loves.”

I raised my glass. Then I thought, *oh shit!* Isn't it bad luck to toast with water? I decided that once my glass was empty I would need to fill it with wine. I thought how my Grandma would give me *that look* and just shake her head in disapproval, had she been there.

Jess toasted: "to loves!" and I am thinking of him, back home, at work.

Richard explained that all the dedications were written by people in this room and that we should bear that in mind.

Conclusion

My contribution to the field of reception here is two-fold: I have articulated the need for a critical approach to the *act* of experiencing live performance and developed the role of the "reflective participant" to meet that epistemic concern. I have explored the potential of hypermnesia and devised a way of employing it as tool for the critical reflection of capturing and transmitting audience experience. (Remember)ing and the documents of (remember)ance that it produces offer an embodied approach to the documentation of the experience of performance that I want to suggest has significant implications for PBR approaches and reception theory methods. But it also has the potential to contribute significantly to the developing discourse that addresses immersive performance practices. In both PBR and immersive performance scholarship the understandably necessary emphasis, has been upon understanding the various dramaturgies and approaches to the making of performance. (Remember)ing and (remember)ance offers a PBR methodology for capturing, documenting and disseminating the *experience* of experiencing performance.

In the field of PBR this is a novel but significant approach, because my research methodology proposes to afford the *act* of encountering performance the same validity and credibility that making performance has now achieved within the academy. The "reflective participant" can not only be employed as a robust PBR approach to the reception of immersive performance practices, but might also be an empirically responsible approach to explicating the nature of experience-centric events more broadly. There are many possible approaches to how one might engage in or activate "reflective hypermnesia" and just as many possibilities for how it might be captured and disseminated. I have shared just a small section of one of the approaches that I have

taken up in applying this research method, which has been a useful way of unfolding the critical thinking that informs the approach. However, I suspect that the future of this approach is firmly rooted in the potential of digital technologies. My hope is that this sharing will inspire and provoke further developments of this kind of empirically responsible approach to reception research.

¹ Gareth, White, "On Immersive Theatre," *Theatre Research International* 37, no. 3 (2012): 221-235.

² Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

³ Adam Alston, *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁴ From this point on, when I refer to immersive dramaturgies, I am doing so in a broad sense and am referring to theatre and performance practices that include the audience in a fundamental manner.

⁵ Joanna Bucknall, "Liminoid Invitations and Liminoid Acts: The Role of Ludic Strategies and Tropes in Immersive and Micro-Performance Dramaturgies," *Performance Research* 21, no. 4 (2016): 54.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Andrew Eglinton, "Reflections on a Decade Punchdrunk of Theatre," *Theatreforum* no. 37 (2010): 55.

⁸ White, 222.

⁹ Bucknall, "Liminoid Invitations and Liminoid Acts," 55.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Joanna Bucknall, "You, Hope, Her & Me: Liminoid Invitations and Liminoid Acts," *Performing Ethos* 3, no. 2 (2013): 143.

¹² Machon, *Immersive Theatres*, 159.

¹³ Alston, *Beyond Immersive Theatre*, 3.

¹⁴ By empirically responsible I am referring to approaches to analysis that are predicated upon current advances in cognitive science. I am suggesting an approach to research that is based upon priori empirical study; however, it is not directly empirical because it is based upon *borrowed* science. I am proposing approaches to criticism and analysis that respond to new insights and understandings of the ways the perception operates informed by empirical data and testing might be empirically responsible.

¹⁵ Alan W. Schefflin and Jerrold Lee Shapiro, *Trance on Trial* (New York: Guilford Press, 1989), 152.

¹⁶ Josephine Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 18.

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- ¹⁷ White, "On Immersive Theatre," 221-235.
- ¹⁸ Machon, *Immersive Theatres*, 18.
- ¹⁹ Alston, *Beyond Immersive Theatre*, 3.
- ²⁰ Bruce A. McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart. *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn* (London: Routledge, 2010).
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Nicola Shaughnessy, *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science: Body, Brain, and Being* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).
- ²³ Johann Bucknall and Kirsty Sedgman, "Documenting Audience Experience: Social Media as Lively Stratification," in *Documenting Performance the Context and Processes of Digital Curation and Archiving*, ed. Toni Saint (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2017), 121.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 120.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 23-4.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 125.
- ²⁷ Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics*, 14.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 19.
- ³¹ Caridad Svich, "(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23, no. 2 (2013): 238.
- ³² Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics*, 18.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice As Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, (London: I.B. Tauris and Co Ltd, 2007), 6.
- ³⁶ Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 61.
- ³⁷ Adam Alston, "Making Mistakes in Immersive Theatre: Spectatorship and Errant Immersion," *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English* 4, no. 1 (May 2016): 71.
- ³⁸ Schefflin and Shapiro, 152.
- ³⁹ I attended this live performance on the 15 May 2008, at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol.
- ⁴⁰ Schefflin and Shapiro, 152.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Jacquelyn Bergstein and Matthew Erdelyi, "Recognition Hypermnnesia: How to Get It," *Memory* 16, no. 7 (2008): 689.
- ⁴³ Schefflin and Shapiro, 153.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 152.

⁴⁵ Tony Gibbons and Emily Sutherland, *Integrity and Historical Research* (London: Routledge, 2012), 30.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Once I had purchased my ticket for the event, I received an e-mail asking me to send in a dedication for a loved one. I was asked to suggest a song that I would like to have played and offered the chance to submit a written dedication to go along with it, that would be used by the performers during the performance.