Audience agency in participatory performance: A methodology for examining aesthetic experience

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Abstract:

Participatory performance enables audiences to make changes and contribute to the work, which means that their experience and responses become part of the aesthetic of the performance. This creates a particular live experience that needs more investigation in order to better understand the way participation works. This paper will set out and evaluate an audience research methodology developed specifically for participatory performance as an aesthetic form, to complement the audience research done on applied participatory practices, which tends to focus on instrumental outcomes. The methodology focuses on the experience of the participant as an aesthetic element of the performance and consists of three parts: participant observation during the performance, audience responses after the performance and a memory study. By examining the aesthetic experience of the participants we can gain a better understanding of participatory performance as a genre. This paper will discuss the first experiment of the methodology with a case study focusing on agency in *I Wish I Was Lonely* by Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe.

Keywords: participation, performance, interaction, agency, audience research, methodology, experience, interpretative phenomenological analysis

Although still too rarely explored, audience research in theatre and performance is experiencing renewed interest; particularly by theatres keen to discover what makes their audiences attend. Audience research projects in the last decade include: Reason (2004, 2006a, 2006b), examining the experience of liveness through qualitative participant-based research; Stevens, Glass, Schubert, Chen and Winskel, who have developed 'new methods to measure psychological responses – cognitive, emotional and affective – to live

performance of contemporary dance' (2007, p155); Reason and Reynolds (2010), using a range of qualitative approaches to examine the audience experience of dance performance; Lockyer and Myers (2011), focusing on live stand-up comedy audiences; and Iball (2012), working with participants and practitioners to explore ethics in intimate and one-on-one performance through a practice-based research methodology. These projects represent a range of approaches to audience research aiming to better understand the experience of audiences, but none examine the particular live experience of *participatory performance*, which this paper seeks to address.

Participatory Performance

This paper, and the methodology it describes, focuses on the aesthetic experience of participation. Participatory performance is defined here as a form where the audience is able to affect material changes in the work in a way that goes beyond the inherent interactivity in all live performance described by the autopoietic feedback loop (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). Participatory performance offers a level of agency through the opportunity to creatively contribute to the work, meaning that the 'experience of making choices – whether they lead directly to desired outcomes or not – or of having choice taken away, makes up one part of the aesthetics of participation' (White, 2013, p64). Although audience experience is central to all forms of live performance, it is a crucial aesthetic component of participatory work, as the responses and actions of the participants become part of the fabric of the show. This means that understanding the aesthetic experience of the participant is vital to understanding participation as a genre of performance.

A distinction should be made between participatory processes and outcomes. Performances with a participatory *process* involve the participants in the creation of the work and tend to reside within the socially engaged or applied sphere. Here, audience research tends to focus on the instrumental outcomes of the work and examines the impact of the experience on participants, something particularly visible in research that explores applied participatory practices.[1] Such studies range from applied theatre projects trying to change perceptions (see Dalrymple, 2006; Synder-Young, 2011; Gallagher and Wessels, 2013) to community projects which aim to improve social inclusion, community empowerment and the personal development of the participants (see Matarasso, 1997; Vuyk, Poelman, Cerovecki and van Erven, 2010). While such a focus might be appropriate to the nature of those projects, it does overlook participation as an aesthetic form. In contrast, performances that offer participation in the *outcome* are constructed by the artist, but need the audience to execute the work fully. Here, participants respond with individual behaviour whilst the performance as a whole remains within the original parameters established by the artist.

Audience involvement in the outcome of a work is the focus here. This exists along a spectrum of forms and approaches that offer a range of levels of agency and various ways to contribute to the work. Different types of audience involvement include interaction (where the work contains clearly defined moments for the audience to contribute within),

participation (when the audience's participation is central to the work and determines the outcome of it), co-creation (when the audience are involved in creating some of the parameters of the artwork), and co-execution (where the audience help execute the work in the way the artist has envisioned).[2]

These forms of participation all contain three central aesthetic aspects: 1) the interpersonal relationship between the performer and the audience, or between participants; 2) the physical, embodied experience of the participant; and 3) the creative contribution the participants make to the final performance. This paper proposes an audience research methodology aimed specifically at exploring the aesthetic experience of participants in terms of these three central elements and evaluates the first test of this method. While the methodology can be adapted to examine different aesthetic aspects of participation, the primary focus in the case study here is on agency as a central concern in the experience of participatory performance.[3]

Agency is a complicated notion, discussed in more depth later, and impacts on both the experience of the participant and the performance itself, as the audience's responses become part of it. However, this does provoke some basic questions. Is the agency on offer completely genuine? Can a work really offer agency to a participant? How important is a sense of agency in how audiences respond to the experience? Participatory performance is well placed to examine the limitations of agency, as by explicitly placing the audience's agency within the framework of a performance it invites us to consider how our everyday decisions are also made within determining structures and systems. This paper considers the opportunities for agency presented to audiences during a particular participatory performance, in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between agency and participation.

This article uses *I Wish I Was Lonely* (*IWIWL*) by Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe as a case study.[4] *IWIWL* is a participatory performance that explores our relationship to our mobile phones – 'the new gods in our pockets' (Thorpe and Walker 2013) – and examines issues surrounding contactability and loneliness. In the performance the audience are asked to leave their phones on and are encouraged to answer them if they ring as well as to use them in any way they want. Before entering the space the audience is asked to write down their mobile numbers on a piece of paper, which are then distributed by the performers.[5] The performance text is interspersed with invitations to participate; for instance at the start of the show the participants are asked to leave another audience member a voicemail explaining why they need their mobile phone. The physical act of leaving an unknown person a voicemail becomes part of the aesthetic experience of the work, with participants' embodied responses being layered on top of the cognitive activity involved in deciding what message to leave.

The other two aesthetic aspects of participation are also clearly present in *IWIWL*, where a text message sent to another participant is in turn read out loud by the performers, becoming an explicit contribution to the performance text. The interpersonal relationship between the artist and audience, and between individual participants, is developed

throughout the work to the point where the final instruction to sit for two minutes maintaining eye contact with a stranger without speaking, and then agreeing to meet them at some point in the future, is possible for the participants to acquiesce to.

In all these three instances the participant's actions (and their agency) directly impact on the performance; meaning that a better understanding of the participant's experience is vital to understanding how the performance operates. This article will first explore the methodological influences of this approach to audience research, and set out the stages of the process, before discussing the way it has been applied to *IWIWL*. The first experiment of the methodology is explored, including analysis of audience responses, followed by suggestions for future improvements.

Methodologies

The audience research methodology described here uses a mixed-method approach, combining phenomenological and cognitive psychology with research methods focusing on openness and creativity. The methodology consists of three parts: 1) observing participant behaviour during the performance; 2) gathering audience responses directly afterwards; and 3) conducting a longitudinal memory study over six months. The methodology brings together a discussion of performance analysis, audience behaviour, and participant experiences and memories to enable a more coherent understanding of how participation works as an aesthetic process and experience. This combination of methods allows for comparisons to be made, for instance, between the agency on offer in a particular element of the performance and the experience of that moment as articulated by participants. It also facilitates the examination of how that part of the performance is remembered over a period of six months by the audience.

The methodology is inspired by participatory action research (PAR), particularly its approach to different forms of knowledge. PAR emphasises 'a socially constructed reality within which multiple interpretations of a single phenomenon are possible by both researchers and participants' (Kind, Pain and Kesby, 2007, p13). This perspective allows for different types of knowledge generation through a variety of methodologies,[6] and focuses on 'collaborative knowledge production and knowledges performed intersubjectively in and through research processes' (*ibid*, p28-9). The PAR approach to knowledge generation is appropriate to research into participatory performance where the audience are likely to leave with multiple interpretations of the work and where it is imperative that researchers avoid exerting their own analysis onto the participants. My interest here is not in evaluating instrumental outcomes of applied performance practices and so other aspects of PAR – such as the focus on political action and the input of research participants into the design of the study – are less appropriate. Involvement in the design of the study, a common facet in PAR, is also highly impractical when researching public, commercial performances. However, the research does offer a choice in the ways participants are able to provide responses to the work and thereby engages with diverse forms of knowledge communication. The methodology aims to arrive at a coherent understanding of participatory performance by

working *with* the audience, creating a research method that reflects the participatory nature of the performance.[7]

Being receptive to the participant is also important to phenomenological psychology. The methodology uses elements of an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research approach which 'is concerned with human lived experience, and posits that experience can be understood via an examination of the meanings which people impress upon it' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p34). IPA combines a phenomenological perspective of embodied, situated experience with a hermeneutic approach, encouraging awareness that experience is necessarily already interpreted when expressed and in IPA is then interpreted again by the researcher. Although understanding an experience, which involves a complex lived process, is necessarily idiosyncratic, IPA focuses on the attempt to make meaning out of the experience through interpretation. Thus, 'because IPA has a model of the person as a sense-making creature, the meaning which is bestowed by the participant on experience, as it becomes an experience, can be said to represent the experience itself' (*ibid*, p33). The focus is on the articulation of the experience, as this provides insight into the experience of the 'original' moment. However, it is important not to conflate the two: the act of reflection and articulation develops the 'original' experience in order to ascribe meaning to it.[8] It must be acknowledged, however, that asking participants to articulate their experience is inescapably to reduce a multi-modal and affective experience into language unable to fully represent the complex nature of that experience, a general limitation to which IPA is sensitive.

The emphasis on better understanding experience through the examination of subsequent articulation makes IPA a useful methodology for participatory performance, where the experience of the participant becomes an aesthetic part of the work. IPA also strives to create a balanced account, which draws out commonalities of a particular experience whilst maintaining the complexity of, and contradictions between, the experiences of different individuals; making it a suitable methodology for exploring aesthetic experience. Although the wide range of experiences makes it impossible to arrive at a definitive answer about what it means to take part in participatory performance, from idiosyncratic accounts we can nonetheless learn more about how participants make sense of their participatory experience in ways that have a wider application beyond the individual.

Audience Research Methodology for Participatory Performance

The methodology is designed to be adaptable to a range of audience research focuses, particularly into aspects relating to the three distinct aesthetic elements of participatory performance mentioned above: interpersonal relationship, embodied engagement and creative contribution. It is also adjustable to the logistics of the participatory performance being investigated. This section will set out the audience research methodology discussed, including the three stages, the approach to selecting research participants and any logistical

challenges that come with this approach, before the next section elucidates how the methodology has been applied to the case study of *IWIWL*.

The methodology uses a combination of methods in order to investigate audience experience on a number of different levels. Using multiple approaches to gather information is common within PAR, whilst in cognitive psychology the combination of observation and interviews is often used to enable comparisons between objective events and experiential accounts. IPA is usually based on semi-structured interviews, which are subsequently analysed through a systematic, qualitative analysis, but can also include participant observation. The first stage of the methodology is observation of the audience, conducted with use of a coding framework designed to locate the significant aesthetic moments and behaviour within the work. This also provides a method of analysing the structure of the performance, including the invitations to participate and the audience members' physical actions in response, to which the experiential accounts of participants can be compared. The coding framework details brief descriptions of behaviour (including actions, verbal contributions and body language), determining the type of behaviour on a scale, noting the duration of the interaction and is qualitatively analysed. The coding framework can be used either during a live performance or on a video recording and should be completed at least twice in a full study in order to establish a representation of the range of behaviours during the performance.

Audience responses are collected directly after each live performance in the second stage of the method. Inspired by PAR and IPA approaches, the methodology includes three ways for participants to share their experience:

1. A questionnaire, asking things such as which moments were the most meaningful.
2. A creative response based on the aesthetic of the performance, such as repeating an activity from the show and/or revisiting the original space. By echoing the invitations from the performance, this strategy aims to bring back something of the embodied experience.
3. Individual interviews, in order to get a more detailed understanding of the experience and how particular moments felt for the participant. The interviews use IPA-style questions and analysis.

The combination of these approaches aims to gather a wide range of responses, from the maximum number of participants, by asking complementary questions in different ways. This gives audience members a choice of the way(s) in which they feel best able to explain their experience and provides a method for ascertaining the most significant aspects of the performance. The third stage of the methodology is a memory study, conducted using a modified version of the post-show questionnaire, which is sent out to the participants at one, three and six months after the show.

The research participants for this methodology are self-selecting, an approach that is compatible with IPA, which selects participants 'on the basis that they can grant us access to a particular perspective on the studied phenomena. That is, they "represent" a perspective, rather than a population' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p49). Despite presenting certain challenges, this methodology captures the responses of participants who have independently decided to attend the performance. The value of this approach is that these people are more likely to represent the 'natural' audience for that particular work. Researching participants in public performances is central to the methodology, although it does present certain challenges as the research environment cannot be 'controlled'. This makes it harder to draw comparisons between different performances of the same show. It also presents logistical issues in terms of the amount of time participants are likely to have available (which is why, for instance, the interviews are kept to fifteen to twenty minutes instead of the more usual IPA length of forty-five to sixty minutes). It is also important to integrate the observational coding into the performance, in order to not disrupt it or influence participants' responses. This requires collaboration with the artist(s), beyond permission for the research to take place after the performance, in order to ensure the observation and audience research are successfully integrated into the work.

Researching Agency in Audiences of *I Wish I Was Lonely*

The case study in this article focuses on the first experiment with the methodology, which was adapted to examine agency in *IWIWL* by Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe. Audience responses were gathered on 24 May, 2014, after the 3pm performance at The Island, Bristol, programmed as part of Mayfest. Participants were informed of the research before they went into the space and seven of the twenty-one audience members took part in the research (see **Table 1** below).[9] The structure of *IWIWL* makes it impossible to both observe the performance and ask participants to take part in the research subsequently,[10] so the coding was performed on a recording of an Edinburgh performance, which took place in August 2013. While this was pragmatically necessary here, for other participatory performances it would be preferable to observe and conduct audience research on the same shows. At the time of writing, the memory questionnaire has been sent out once, a month after the performance, and has had four responses (see **Table 1** below).

This case study focuses on the research question: What opportunities for agency does participation create, and how are these experienced? Before moving on to discuss the materials used and the responses to the research, it is therefore useful to briefly outline what is meant here by agency. Agency is a complicated notion, inherently linked to our embodied experience of action and our perception of ourselves, so a clear definition is vital. In participatory performance, agency can be said to derive from three aspects: the intentional aspect, the bodily sensation, and the reflective attribution (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, p166). Agency is based in perception, which locates it inside our individual experience of the world. This means that offering someone agency, such as within a participatory performance, does not automatically translate into them perceiving agency. As Hallett

(2011) explains, the timing between the intention and the result is crucial and if this timing is off then the subject may not perceive agency, even though they caused the event. This means that the artists' intention to offer agency to the participant is secondary to the experience of the participant, as their perception of agency is what makes it meaningful.

Agency is concerned with intention and choice, so for a participant to have agency they should intentionally perform an action (however small) that causes something to happen or change within the performance as a result. However, this definition of agency within participatory performance is open to manipulation, as the relation between the participant's *perception* of their intentional action and the result could be faked; for example, if the work is set up to look like it is offering a genuine decision to the participant, but the outcome is pre-planned. Participatory performance also offers a particular kind of agency to the participant, located in their ability to decide how to engage with the work: from the initial decision to take part to choices made throughout the duration of the work, where the participant decides how to respond to any invitations.

The coding framework for *IWIWL* uses the above definition of agency and is completed in response to every invitation from the artists in the performance; as well as any instance of audience behaviour that displays agency, whether or not this is in direct response to an invitation (see **Appendix 1**). The observational coding records: 1) the invitation or request, 2) the type of agency displayed by the participant, 3) a description of the behaviour and its outcome, 4) the duration of the behaviour, and 5) whether any participants refused or subverted the invitation. The framework separates implicit and explicit invitations and defines three forms of agency in order to enable a distinction to be made, although it is acknowledged that interactive and proactive agency exist on a spectrum:[11]

- Reactive: e.g. answering a question, either verbally or physically; reacting to a trigger or command; or responding to a request such as placing your phone in a circle on the floor.
- Interactive: completing a task that involves mutual activity, such as sending a text message to be read out, or engaging in a two-way conversation.
- Proactive: displaying self-initiated behaviour, such as leaving the space or initiating verbal or physical communication.

Coding agency in this way becomes a method for analysing the type of participation offered by the work.

The audience research in *IWIWL* centred on the participant's experience of agency, asking questions such as: Do you feel like you made a change in the work? Which of the moments of participation was the most meaningful to you? Did you feel manipulated at any point? In what moment did it feel like your choice made the most impact? (see **Appendix 2**). Some questions, such as whether the participant felt manipulated, were purposefully only asked in the interviews, as this allowed for longer answers and follow-up questions to gain a

better understanding of such experiences. The memory study examines how the experience of agency changes over time and consists of a follow-up questionnaire asking: Which moments of the performance stand out to you right now? What do you remember about these moments? Which moment of your interaction was the most meaningful to you? How do you feel about your relationship with your phone? The audience responses provide an insight into the experience of agency within the performance and help establish the meaningful moments for the participants. Within *IWIWL*, which has both participatory and non-participatory moments, the memory questionnaire also examines whether the interactive moments are more likely to be remembered as meaningful, enabling a better understanding of participation as an aesthetic process and experience.

Table 1: Audience responses to the different methods of data-gathering

	Questionnaire	Phone-based responses	Interview	Memory questionnaire
Respondent 1	Yes	Voicemail and text message	Yes	Yes
Respondent 2	Yes	Voicemail and text message	Yes	–
Respondent 3	Yes	Voicemail and text message	Yes	–
Respondent 4	Yes	–	Yes[12]	Yes
Respondent 5	Yes	Voicemail and text message	–	Yes
Respondent 6	Yes	Voicemail and text message	–	Yes
Respondent 7	Yes	Text message	–	–

Audience Responses: Experiences of Agency

The observational coding indicates that *IWIWL* contains six instances of reactive agency, six moments of interactive agency (although this number varies for each performance, depending on how many people's phones ring throughout the show), and no occurrences of proactive agency. Most of the invitations to participate are explicit, with clear instructions, and the moment that provides the clearest opportunity for (interactive) agency is when the audience members are asked to send a text message to another participant in the room. The audience is instructed to finish the sentence 'I will only call you if…' and the performers read out the texts as they arrive to form one of the poems in the performance. Four out of the five participants who responded by leaving a voicemail cited this moment as the one

where they felt they had the most impact. In contrast, the moment when audience members are asked to leave another participant a voicemail in the performance was not mentioned as especially meaningful by anyone. In theory, the voicemail is significant because the messages that are left extend beyond the performance's duration. Despite this, it appears as if the direct impact of writing a text message, which is read out shortly afterwards, feels more significant to the participants. As one respondent explains: 'I think it was really personal for everyone to get their chance, and it was empowering I guess, to be given that freedom' (Respondent 3: Interview).

The experience of agency varied between participants, from a feeling of freedom in the ability to create part of the performance text, as expressed above, to a limited sense of agency: 'the only agency I really felt I had apart from that original choice of whether to come at all, [and] where to sit, was really only the power of saying no' (Respondent 1: Interview). This participant also states that the audience 'give over the creative agency to them [the artists], for the piece to work' but that this was not an uncomfortable situation: 'I don't think I had much agency and it felt OK' (Respondent 1: Interview). However, another respondent was positive about the agency and freedom present within the work, such as when sending the text message: 'It felt nice, it felt umm… it felt like I made a difference, and… that it wasn't just them doing a show for themselves, it was about us as well' (Respondent 2: Interview). This shows that agency was interpreted in different ways, from the ability to contribute to the work to 'freedom to think and freedom to reflect' (Respondent 4: Interview), as well as in relation to power. One participant reflected that

> we, as an audience we had, we had power, because we had opinions and we also were in the centre, we were on the stage, and they were off the stage in a way […] there were times when it felt like the audience was leading. (Respondent 4: Interview)

This power could be interpreted as the ability to make an impact on, or contribution to, the performance; which is central to the definition of agency used here.

The experience of agency centres on an intentional act from a participant causing something to happen or change within the work, which the observational coding suggests is possible at several points. For instance, the sending of the text message, which was seen as a way to impact on the performance, with one participant describing it as a 'tool': 'you could have anything read out in this performance and it would become part of that performance, and it would become part of something that everyone has witnessed' (Respondent 3: Interview). Another respondent felt that the text message made a difference to the work as 'you could have written anything […] and they went around and they read all the texts out' (Respondent 2: Interview). A third participant was more sceptical about the possibility to significantly influence the performance: 'the truth is probably not at all, because they're experienced performers and they will just get it back on track, but I suppose… er, you narcissistically delude yourself into thinking that you brought something' (Respondent 1:

Interview). Feeling like you've contributed something to the work is evidently important, as the participant later remarks: 'funny that actually when you know it's a performance they've done before, maybe the meaningful ones [moments] are the ones that you know they haven't made up' (Respondent 1: Interview). The importance of contributing to the experience appears to be more significant than the feeling of complete agency, as the same participant also suggested it was a worthwhile trade-off to give up some 'creative agency' in order to have a satisfying experience and a successful performance (as quoted above). This illustrates the experience of agency of engagement, where for the participant it is rewarding to express their agency within the structure of the work rather than pushing for proactive agency, which may disrupt the performance. When asked if they would do anything differently, one respondent said 'I think I'd write a different text message, I don't know what it'd be but it'd be a bit more… dramatic [laughs]' (Respondent 2: interview), which suggests that the impact of the action is significant for the participant.

Many of the responses indicate how a perception of having impacted on the performance produces a sense of agency amongst participants. This might suggest that it would be these participatory moments that would be remembered afterwards as particularly meaningful. However, the answers from the questionnaires indicate that this is not so clear-cut. When asked to write down the moments that stand out directly after the performance, eight of the moments listed involve some level of interaction compared to six that describe sections of the performance text. In comparison, the responses from the memory questionnaire uncovered only three remembered moments that contain some level of interaction, compared with eight that do not. The moments that stick most strongly in the memory are largely related to images and emotions that are raised by the work, which resonated for a personal reason.

When asked which was the most meaningful participatory moment, participants were most likely to talk about the sharing of two minutes of silent eye contact with another audience member. This was mentioned four times on the questionnaires as a meaningful moment and three times as the most meaningful interaction. The memory questionnaires also show the significance of this moment, where the eye contact was stated three out of four times as the most memorable interaction. The observational coding is consistent with this finding, showing this to be the interaction with the highest stakes as it involves direct interpersonal contact with an unknown audience member, an action that is potentially uncomfortable. The interview responses correspond to this, with one participant describing it as 'relaxing, calming, strange, in a way, um, but it, it was, it was… a beautiful moment, I guess, something that's... I think I won't forget for a while' (Respondent 3: Interview). All four interviewees agree on the meaningful nature of the moment, and its challenge to the audience, with one describing it as 'very awkward' (Respondent 2: Interview). All also remark upon the necessity for the audience to be willing, for instance, that as 'they'd won me over and built it up to that point I was willing to do it and enjoyed it' (Respondent 1: Interview) and that 'it was extraordinary that everyone complied' (Respondent 4:

Interview), which illustrates the importance of the relationship between the performers and participants.

The interpersonal relationship between artist and audience is integral to the success of a participatory performance and consists of a type of manipulation of the audience (I am using the term manipulation here to highlight the artists' skilful managing of the audience's participation and not to suggest an unscrupulous influencing of others). It is therefore necessary to consider the way the artists approach the audience, the way invitations are framed, and how the tasks build throughout the work. Creating and developing a relationship with the audience is an important skill shown by the artists, which includes the ability to manipulate the audience into responding in a way that fits within the frame of the performance. In *IWIWL* this resulted in a disposition on the part of the audience to take part in the work, as one participant explains: 'you need a degree of like, just willingness to be with them, as performers, and they were, like, they were nice, they were good - they seemed friendly people who were very witty and fun' (Respondent 1: Interview). Respondents described the relationship as 'that sense of connection with the audience […] it built up a good atmosphere in the audience' (Respondent 4: Interview), and: 'it was very friendly, and that… you weren't forced to do anything, so if you didn't want to then you didn't have to' (Respondent 2: Interview). The relationship meant that the experience of participation was not one of feeling manipulated: 'manipulated is too strong a word; I felt encouraged, nudged, I was sort of, you know, instructed, umm, cajoled, maybe, but that's too strong. Not manipulated' (Respondent 1: Interview). The relationship between artists and audience, and any manipulation involved, creates a situation where it is difficult to refuse an invitation, with the willingness of the audience being developed throughout the show.

The final instruction of the show suggests that the participants, who have just spent two minutes engaged in silent eye contact, could set a future meeting but to keep it without exchanging phone numbers. Interestingly, this is the only instruction that is made as something that participants *could* do, a change from earlier requests. Yet despite this, the relationship created throughout the work meant that many participants felt a duty to comply. One participant relates sitting in the work and thinking 'that's a bit awkward. I don't want to meet this person, I don't know this person', but that they 'didn't want to let them [the artists] down […] because I wanted to please them' (Respondent 4: Interview). The other participant suggested that they did not have to meet up, which provided relief for the respondent, who described their initial response as due to a 'sort of loyalty factor' (Respondent 4: Interview). Another respondent also recounted feeling uncertain about agreeing to meet up with another audience member, stating that it felt 'a little bit scary' (Respondent 2: Interview), which caused the participant to suggest meeting up in Bristol city centre, when with a group of people, rather than alone or near home. This shows another aspect of agency in participatory performance, where the participant is able to decide how to engage with the work and how to respond to instructions.

None of the interviewees reported contemplating refusing any of the requests. As one participant explains: 'I didn't really think anything of it, yeah I just thought, yeah I'll put my phone in this circle, it wasn't - no reason to challenge it I guess. Until he stepped on that other phone [laughs]' (Respondent 3: Interview). Another respondent described not feeling like dissenting because 'I think what I was being asked to do felt interesting' and states that 'nobody looked like they were really going to subvert it, or kick out' (Respondent 1: Interview). Despite this, several respondents related an interaction during the performance between one of the artists and a young audience member who had not put their phone in the circle in the middle of the floor when everyone else had done so; the only (known) moment of refusal within the performance. Although many of the respondents talk about the incident (three of the interviewees discuss it and it was mentioned as a meaningful moment on three of the memory questionnaires), none of them consider that this refusal might be a resistance to the work itself. Instead, they see it simply as funny, or remark that it was 'interesting to see how attached and how strongly she feels about her mobile' (Respondent 4: Interview). This could indicate that the relationship developed between performers and most audience members was sufficiently powerful not to consider that other people might respond negatively to the feeling of being manipulated. The participants' responses show a complicated balance in *IWIWL* between the offer of agency, manipulation, willingness and the wish to impact on the work; showing the importance of a nuanced understanding of agency in participatory performance.

Conclusion

A third of the audience took part in the first stage of research, perhaps showing a continuation of the willingness to participate created in the performance. The first test of the coding has been on a video, so I could observe several individuals in the same performance, highlighting that it is hard to see body language on performance documentation (for instance, when the participants are asked to place their phone in the circle on the floor it is impossible to see on the video whether anyone hesitates or refuses). Coding live performance limits the number of people able to be observed, which is why at least two shows should be studied for each performance. The different modes of feedback enabled some participants with little time to take part, as well as getting a wider set of responses, whilst the interviews collected more detail of participants' experiences. Some improvements could be made in asking further follow-up questions during the interviews in order to get more detailed responses. One future challenge will be how to adapt the creative response format for other performances. For *IWIWL*, using a mobile phone to gather responses is in keeping with the aesthetic participatory structures of the work, but other shows may not have an aspect that operates in a similar manner. This needs to be considered for the methodology to be adaptable and one potential alternative would be revisiting significant activities as part of examining why they were meaningful.

The memory study has been distributed once so far and from these responses it is clear that it could be improved by including a quantitative measure and taking place over a

shorter time period. Ensuring an adequate number of responses is a common challenge with memory studies and presents a particular issue when the starting number of participants is already modest. Only one of the participants returned the questionnaire after a month, and three more responded to a reminder one week later. However, after reviewing the interview that took place ten days after the performance it is clear that after this period of time there is already an interesting shift in what is remembered and forgotten. The new memory study will therefore be sent out two weeks, one month and three months after the performance. It is also apparent that the questionnaire could include a more nuanced way of responding to some of the experiential aspects of the work. The revised questionnaire will therefore include a set of statements with a scale on which the participant indicates their response (see **Appendix 3**). This format will help gauge, for instance, the strength of any feelings of agency during the performance and how these change over time.

Reflecting on the research process as a whole, the agency of the research participant offers an interesting parallel to the level of agency on offer in participatory performance. Both take place within a clear pre-existing framework and it is difficult to show pro-active agency within the system. Pro-active acts of agency may disrupt the work, such as walking out, or subvert the situation, with an unexpected or surprising response to the work outside of the predetermined structure of the performance. Arguably, only an act of pro-active agency is a truly 'free' expression of agency but this may be less meaningful in the context of the work than an action taken within the structure of the performance. This opens up some relevant questions around agency in participation: What is genuine participation? How can I make an impact? How free is the choice I have in this situation? The audience research has also allowed a more nuanced understanding of how agency becomes an aesthetic experience as the feeling of making an impact on the work combines with seeing how your contribution changes the show. The manipulation of agency becomes aesthetic in this moment because the artist has carefully considered how to frame the agency of the participant, through the invitation, in order to create a particular experience. The aesthetics of participation are intertwined with agency, from the interpersonal relationship that establishes the level of agency on offer, the embodied experience of your own physical actions, and the particular form of agency represented by the ability to contribute creatively to the work. This audience research methodology is beginning to explore these aspects of the participatory experience, which in turn enables a better understanding of the aesthetics of participatory performance.

Examining the audience experience of participation is therefore essential for a better understanding of participatory performance as an aesthetic form. The case study of *IWIWL* has illustrated how the methodology put forward here allows insight into the participant's experience of agency, creating a nuanced understanding of the interplay of manipulation, freedom, willingness, the ability to make an impact, and the importance of interpersonal relationships between the artists and the audience, as well as between individual audience members. This first experiment also shows how intertwined the concept of agency is with participatory performance and how participation plays with what agency can mean. The

methodology has the potential to allow deeper insight into participatory performance by exploring how participants make sense of the aesthetic experience on offer in this type of work.

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Appendix 1: Coding measures for observation of agency

A framework to be completed for each invitation from the artists (or the work) or an instance of behaviour that displays agency.

Invitation:
The artists, performers, or something within the performance invites a response or an action from the participant. Depending on the performance, invitations from performers and invitations from the environment may be separately coded.

1. Implicit (e.g. extending a hand towards a participant to ask them to stand up)
2. Explicit (e.g. a direct question or verbal request for action)

Display of agency:
A display of behaviour from the participant that shows an intentional decision or choice, either in response to a request or initiated by the participant themselves.

1. Reactive (e.g. answering a question, either verbally or physically; reacting to a trigger or command; or responding to a request such as placing your phone in a circle on the floor)
2. Interactive (e.g. completing a task which involves mutual activity, such as sending a text message to be read out; or engaging in a 2-way conversation)
3. Proactive (displaying self-initiated behaviour, such as leaving the space or initiating verbal or physical communication)

Description: provide a brief description of the behaviour observed (e.g. left a voicemail).

Duration: time of agentic behaviour in seconds.

Result / consequence: provide a brief description of the outcome of the behaviour (e.g. text message sent got read out by performer and so became part of the performance text).

Refusal / subversion: Note how many, if any, participants in the group refused or subverted the invitation by the artist (e.g. 1 participant refused to place phone in the circle on the floor).

Other notes: Any further information, responses or details about the situation (e.g. the context of the situation, the body language of the participant, or the response of the rest of the audience to the participant).

Agency Coding Framework

Performance:

Date:

Live / recording:

Participant:

	Implicit		Explicit	
Invitation / request				
	Reactive	Interactive		Proactive
Display of agency				
Description				
Duration (in seconds)				
Result / consequence				
Refusal / subversion				
Other notes				

Appendix 2: *I Wish I Was Lonely* audience research materials

The audience research materials used directly after the performance for the case study.

Questionnaire

Name:

Date of completion:

Mobile phone number:

Your phone number is only used to identify any responses to questions made via text or voicemail, and will not be used for anything else.

How often do you attend participatory performance?

Which moments of the performance stand out to you right now?

Which moment of your interaction was the most meaningful to you?

How do you feel about your relationship with your phone?

Creative materials
Participants were given two slips of paper, each with one of these instructions on. The instructions directly echo the performance text.

Please open a blank text message and add [my mobile number] as the recipient. In the body of the message type 'The decision I took in the performance that seemed most significant is...'. Please complete it however you want.

Please put [my mobile number] into your phone and be ready to call it. Let it go to voicemail, and leave a message. Say 'Hello, my name is...' and tell the person about the moment in the performance when you felt like your choice made the most impact on the performance.

Interview questions
Key questions:
- How did your sense of agency change through the work?
- Do you feel like you made a change in the work?
- If you could do it again, is there anything you would do differently?
- Which of the moments of participation was the most meaningful to you?
- Did you feel manipulated at any point?

Prompts for more depth: what was that like – how did that feel – what did you think?

Follow up, if time:
- How did you feel about the invitation to take part?
- Were there any other ways you wanted to interact with the work which weren't invited?
- How do you feel about your interactions within the performance?
- Did you feel any pressure?
- Did you consider not taking part?
- How did you feel about the choices of how to take part?

Appendix 3: *I Wish I Was Lonely* questionnaire development

These are the statements added to complete the questionnaire for *I Wish I Was Lonely.*

Please highlight the appropriate number to indicate your feelings about the following statements:
I felt a strong sense of agency during the performance (i.e. the ability to make free choices)

Strongly disagree   1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7   Strongly agree

I made a significant contribution to the work
Strongly disagree   1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7   Strongly agree

I did not feel that other participants made a significant contribution to the work
Strongly disagree   1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7   Strongly agree

I felt that the interactive moments in the work were the most meaningful
Strongly disagree   1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7   Strongly agree

I did not enjoy being able to make choices in the performance
Strongly disagree   1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7   Strongly agree

I considered refusing one (or more) of the requests from the performers
Strongly disagree   1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7   Strongly agree

I felt a strong bond with (an)other participant(s)
Strongly disagree   1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7   Strongly agree

I felt a strong relationship with the performers
Strongly disagree   1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7   Strongly agree

Notes:

[1] This emphasis has the effect of focusing on participation as a direct route to impact with further research into the social impact of the arts to support such claims (see Newman, Curtis and Stephens, 2003, Arts Council England, 2014, and the current Cultural Value research project by Belfiore at Warwick University). This approach to audience research also disregards the value of better understanding the experience of participatory performance in aesthetic terms.

[2] Another common term around participation is 'immersive', which refers to a type of affective environment that envelops the audience member who enters it. This may be combined with participation but not all immersive performances offer a form of participation.

[3] At the time of writing, the methodology is under continued development and being implemented as part of my PhD research.

[4] The performance is produced by Ric Watts and premiered in Edinburgh on the 16th of August 2013.

[5] Those without a mobile phone write 'no mobile' and are invited to deliver any messages in person.

[6] Some of the common PAR methods include: surveys, participant observation, learning by doing, dialogue, political action, group work and discussions, interviewing, mapping, storytelling, community art and media, and diagramming.

[7] As in the performance itself, whilst participants influence the outcome of the research, the parameters and structure have been predetermined by the researcher.

[8] See Reason (2010) for a more in depth consideration of the relationship between experience and articulation within audience research.

[9] All research participants were also asked to read and sign an informed consent form and their responses are anonymised in this paper.

[10] The performance ends with two minutes of eye contact in pairs and a conversation with the possibility of agreeing to meet up. The audience then leave in their own time. This was discussed with the artists and it was agreed that if I left the space quickly to conduct the audience research then this would impact negatively on the experience of at least one participant.

[11] The three categories of agency have been inspired by Ockelford's Sounds of Intent project to classify different responses to music. For more information see: http://soundsofintent.org/about-soi

[12] This interview took place over the phone, ten days after the performance, due to the availability of the participant. The other three interviews took place directly after the show.