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EMBODYING THE EERIE: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EERIE AS A DRAMATURGICAL

CONCEPT IN PROCESSES OF DIRECTING DEVISED PERFORMANCE

MARY ELIZABETH STEADMAN

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Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the Bath Spa University Ethics Panel (application reference: 12021MS "This Is The Land") on November 25th 2021, and previously in May 2018. Should you have any concerns regarding ethical matters relating to this study, please contact the Research Support Office at Bath Spa University (researchsupportoffice@bathspa.ac.uk). All participants provided written informed consent prior to enrolment in the study and for any associated datasets to be utilised as presented within this thesis. Selected datasets created during this research are openly available from BathSPAdata with links within the thesis. The whole underlying dataset is available on request from the author, M. E Steadman. These datasets are not publicly available due to restrictions [e.g. they contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants].

Abstract

The Strange Geometry of Time, *Dwelling*, and *This Is The Land* were three productions that formed the practice-based elements of a study exploring the Eerie as a dramaturgical concept in devised performance practice, through an emergent process that does not determine an outcome but extends dramaturgy beyond the known and knowable. The first of three devised performances, *The Strange Geometry of Time,* was presented at the University Theatre, Bath Spa University, in June 2018, before touring to the "Dreams Before Dawn Festival" in Paris in July 2018 and returning to the University Theatre, Bath Spa, in November 2018. *Dwelling,* a site-specific intermedial performance, was presented at The Anglican Chapel, Arnos Vale Cemetery, Bristol, in October 2019. *This is The Land* was presented at The Rondo Theatre in Bath in 2022 and toured to the RITU festival in Liège that same year. It was also presented at The Anglican Chapel, Arnos Vale Cemetery, Bristol, in 2022, and The Network Theatre, part of the VAULT Festival, in London, in 2023. The productions were developed by a professional company, engaging public audiences in theatres and non-theatre sites in the South West, London, and Europe.

The devising and directing practices are informed by a range of theoretical studies that consider theatre and performance from philosophical, historical, and theoretical perspectives. Central to the project is Mark Fisher's theoretical analysis of the Eerie, which provides a lens through which to explore the dramaturgy of the eerie in practice and contributes to an embodied knowledge of the eerie in performance practice. Alice Rayner's (2006) study of theatre as a memorial practice provides a lens through which to examine the materiality of the theatrical elements as eerie material doubles. Joslin McKinney's (2015) consideration of the agency of objects in the context of scenography and her analysis of the 'agential object' informs the agency of the materiality of objects, the performer's interactions with objects, and how objects interact as performative agents.

Performance theory is brought into dialogue with theories of spectrality and hauntology, acknowledging Derrida (1994). It draws on Fisher's tradition of hauntology (2014), which Coverley (2020) expands upon, to explore hauntological time in performance. Fisher's concept of the eerie presence or absence of the past, as ghosts of the 'no longer' and ghosts

of the future, 'not yet,' and 'lost futures' (Fisher, 2014), frames the dramaturgy of time and space. The conceptualisation of time informs the dramaturgy of time and space in relation to abandoned sites, places, and landscapes, which are constructed through what Lehmann (2006) defines as visual dramaturgy.

Chapter 1 introduces these methods of practice and explores how the agential object interacts with the performers, drawing on Fisher's concept of the eerie outside and non-human agencies, which connect with theories of spectrality and hauntology. The chapter explores how the dramaturgy of the eerie materiality of stage objects and costumes expands the concept of agency in performance. Chapter 2 extends Fisher's ideas of the 'outside' to a site-specific intermedial process; the methodology is informed by Fisher's observations of the eeriness of abandoned sites and connects with spectrality theory's spatialisation of ghosts and hauntings. Heholt's (2016) 'affect of place' and Irwin's (2007) 'intangible presences' inform the ensemble's improvisations of place in eerie sites. Rayner's theory informs how the performance memorialises the spectral past as a site of unforgetting. Chapter 3 examines Fisher's observations of the eerie liminality of absence and presence as they inform performative ways of projecting ghostly figures and sound technologies in imagined landscapes. Macfarlane's observations of the resurgence of the eerie in the contemporary moment inform the ensemble's improvisations of landscapes, as well as the directorial choices that reference eerie folk culture as spectral presences in the landscape. Lehmann's postdramatic theory offers an analysis of visual dramaturgy, which underpins the compositional techniques that defocalise theatrical elements through an assemblage of components. The nonlinear composition resists narrativising and a sequential progression of time to generate an eerie theatricality of the 'outside'; a site beyond the knowable.

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Introduction

The investigation offers an expanded perspective on devising processes in postdramatic performance, employing a practice-based methodology within the context of devised performance practice. Throughout the study, I explore my role as a director within a research context that addresses research questions through the creative processes of working with an ensemble of professional performers. In the first project, *The Strange Geometry of Time,* my role was director and performer; when I refer to 'performers', I include myself and one other performer, Leeza Jessie. I will also refer to the musician Helen Roberts, who was involved in this project. In the two subsequent projects, *Dwelling* and *This Is The Land,* my role was that of director, working with a professional ensemble of five performers, including Samuel De La Torre, Alice Buckley, Zov Vélez, Leeza Jessie, and Xavier De Santos, whom I refer to individually and collectively as "the ensemble". I will refer to musicians Helen Roberts and John Baggott for their involvement in these two projects. The three productions were presented by my theatre company, Red Room Productions (now renamed Dust Ensemble), in both theatre and non-theatre venues, as well as at festivals, over a five-year period between 2018 and 2023.

The embodied interdisciplinary practice foregrounds the performer's body in somatic practices, emphasising kinesthetic, proprioceptive, and intuitive responses through the body relating to subconscious processes. The practice develops performative processes and techniques through an improvisatory approach, framed through the eerie as a dramaturgical concept, and contextualised through the theoretical framework of postdramatic theatre. Theatre scholar and writer Hans-Thies Lehmann first theorised this performance practice and scholarly discourse in *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006). Lehmann contextualises innovations in theatrical form since the 1960s as a cultural response to changes from a literary text-based culture to a multimedia-based culture of images. Lehmann articulates how rapid developments in multimedia technology have impacted text-based dramatic dramaturgy, contextualising the shifts from dramaturgy as representation and centralisation of dramatic texts to a proliferation of new dramaturgies that expand theatre and performance practices. Lehmann develops a critical language with which to articulate non-representational

post-dramatic forms, within which Lehmann defines the term visual dramaturgy as a 'scenic composition, by a visual, not text-oriented dramaturgy' (2006, p.146), centralising theatre's visual elements and the performer's presence over text and character. The visual does not exclude text; Lehmann explains that 'visual dramaturgy here does not mean an exclusively visually organised dramaturgy but rather one that is not subordinated to the text, and therefore can freely develop its logic' (2006, p.96).

In this context, visual dramaturgy draws on movement, imagery, text, visual and sound technologies as key performative elements composed through juxtapositions, which disrupt the progression of sequential time and narrativising events. The fragmented forms are framed through hauntology's disruption of progressive time and a concept of broken time that unsettles the unities of time and space. Hauntological time disturbs temporality, with the spectral presence of the past appearing as ghostly figures that haunt the theatrical space; these are insubstantial projections of repetitions and doubles that haunt specific locales.

The Eerie 'Outside' as a Performative Site

The focus for each project is informed and underpinned by theories of the eerie by the activist, writer, and cultural theorist Mark Fisher (1968-2017) in his final book, *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016), where Fisher surveys the eerie through a range of cultural forms from film, literature and music. Fisher's insightful analysis of the eerie offers a unique perspective of Freud's uncanny by separating the uncanny into two modes: the Weird and the Eerie. Fisher stipulates that the difference between the concept of the uncanny and the eerie is 'Freud's predilection for the *unheimlich* is commensurate with a compulsion to a certain critique, which operates by always processing the outside through the gaps and impasses of the inside' (2016, p.10). Fisher's theory of the eerie makes 'the opposite move' (2016, p.10); the eerie processes the inside from the perspective of the outside. Fisher argues that the eerie is 'fundamentally tied up with questions of agency' (2016, p.11), defined as a sourceless, pervasive force that works in and through our lives. The eerie offers a perspective that extends concepts of agency from the known and familiar to the unknown and the unknowable, the mysterious and the strange.

In each project, the initial improvisatory processes direct the performer towards an eerie impulse that expands their performance beyond the realistic towards exploring the eerie. The performer cultivates a performative state, defined as an open state of being that extends the individual performer's consciousness beyond the known and familiar, opening them to an eerie impulse. This term is examined in more depth in Chapter Three, in the context of devising the performance, *This Is The Land*, where it is defined as performing without a context or a known outcome. The processes are grounded in theatre's material elements, with the performers' bodies, objects, space, and technologies as eerie materialities that operate within an eerie 'outside'.

Fisher's concept of the 'outside' is an eerie atemporal site that expands normative limits of human perception beyond the logical and rational. Fisher states, 'the allure that the weird and the eerie possess{...}is a fascination for the outside, for that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience' (2016, p.8). The eerie processes the inside, the subject, from the perspective of the outside, challenging subject-centred perspectives of agency. Fisher asserts, 'There is no inside except as a folding of the outside; the mirror cracks, I am other, and I always was' (2016, p.12). The concept of the outside decentralises human agency and anthropocentric narratives, which Fisher asserts gives 'access to the forces which govern mundane reality but which are normally obscured, just as it can give access to spaces beyond mundane reality altogether' (2016, p.13).

The methodology of decentring human agency explores a dramaturgy of space as a spatial and temporal concept of Fisher's 'outside', with the material elements of theatrical objects enfolded within it, which affects the performative ways the ensemble interacts with objects and each other, and how the objects interact and act upon the performers. The term 'performative' refers to how non-human elements—objects, costumes, space, and technologies—interact with the performers, and examines their performative effects within this context. I acknowledge the different versions of the concept, and within the context of performance theory, the performative relates to the quality of being performative. To act and perform actions, in the context of this study, the performative qualities of the performer's body, objects, technologies, and space do something; they are performing specific actions

that signify meaning, and they act upon and effect changes in the theatrical space.

The Agency of the Spectral Past and Lost Future

The study examines how a perspective of the eerie can alter perceptions of the materiality of theatre's objects, performers' bodies, space and technologies in exploring the agency of the non-human and beyond the human. The premise is that the eerie expands the normative limits of perception beyond the mundane and known aspects of reality to encompass the intangible, spectral, and unknown forces, bringing the eerie into dialogue with theories of spectrality, hauntology, and performance theory.

The theory of hauntology, first introduced into poststructuralist discourse by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (1994), defines an instability of the human subject. Derrida's highly politicised philosophy proceeds from the premise that the atemporal spectre of Marxism continues to haunt the present moment, disrupting temporality and the progression of time through the spectral effect of the past as it lives on. Derrida first coined the term "Hauntology" as a pun on "ontology" and "haunt" to articulate how the nature of the human subject is always already haunted by its past, specifically the ghosts of the spectral past that haunt the present. The theory of hauntology is a critical tool, with the ghost figure serving as a conceptual metaphor, examining how spectral traces of past political events and ideologies return to haunt the present as a hauntological crisis of the time. Fisher's online blog *K-Punk* (2004-2016), published in the volume *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher* (2018), examines debates and discourses about cultural forms and media in the 21st century. Fisher expands upon Derrida's spectrality and hauntology discourse in the early millennium, which saw the emergence of spectrality theories within the field of Spectrality Studies, arising in response to Derrida's *Specters of Marx*.

Hauntology employs the figure of the ghost as a lens to examine the cultural and social effects of the past that haunt the present, creating, as Fisher describes, a 'cultural impasse'.a nostalgic and melancholic longing for the artistic forms of the past, as a form of retro-culture

(2014). Fisher analyses the concept of hauntology in the context of Derrida's deconstruction, which Fisher contests as 'a pious cult of indeterminacy' but argues that hauntology 'explicitly brings into play the question of time in a way that had not been the case with the trace and différence' (2014, p.18). Hauntology focuses on the crisis of time, which cannot progress, haunted by the spectral presence of forces and agencies that stall time and render the present not present; as hauntological time. Fisher argues that the present is haunted by the past and 'lost futures' (2014, p.27), the futures promised by twentieth-century enlightenment that failed (2014), which Fisher elucidates as 'the *not yet* of the futures that popular modernism trained us to expect, but which never materialised' (2014, p.27). Hauntology addresses that which pervades the present as insistent, eerie presences of virtual forces that are felt and manifest in cultural artefacts and forms. The act of haunting is a powerful affective force, which Fisher argues, 'Haunting, then, can be construed as failed mourning. It is about refusing to give up the ghost or - and this can sometimes amount to the same thing - the refusal of the ghost to give up on us' (2014, p.22).

In an article for the New Statesman, 'The ghosts of our lives: From communism to dubstep, our politics and culture have been haunted by the spectres of futures that never came to pass' (2019), Tom Whyman references Derrida and Fisher in his discussion of hauntology. Whyman argues that hauntology is a critical tool for analysing how the spectral past addresses what has been and is going wrong in the present. Perceiving the past through an awareness and understanding of its spectral repetition and lost possibilities can be a powerful perspective, which Whyman asserts 'is not primarily about nostalgia; it is about imagination. Any progressive politics worthy of the name is founded on our ability to imagine a world better than the one we presently have' (2019).

Merlin Coverley's theoretical, literary, and political study *Hauntology: Ghosts of Futures Past* (2020) is a recent contribution to the field, acknowledging Derrida's highly politicised philosophical analysis of the agency of the spectral, where Derrida first introduces the concept of hauntology. Coverley asserts, 'for Derrida, the return and repetition of the past in the present are manifested through the figure of the revenant, that which returns each time as if it were the first' (2020, pp.10-11). Coverley frames his analysis through Fisher's expanded

theory of hauntological time, with 'two opposing currents intrinsic to hauntology: the *no longer* and the *not yet*' (2020, p.11 original italics). Coverley's analysis of specific historical moments is framed through Fisher's concept of 'broken time' and 'lost futures'(2014) as 'unfulfilled promise of that which never came to pass but may yet do so' (Coverley, 2020, p.11). Coverley contributes to the discussion of hauntology's nonlinear concept of time, and asserts that it 'presents challenges to our belief in an unbroken progression of linear time' (2020, p.11), through his reference to the term 'dyschronia', which defines time as multiple simultaneous temporalities of the past coexisting within the present.

Theatre historian Kara Reilly's intriguing article, 'A Medium to History: Notes on the Phenomenology of Dyschronia in the Lyric Theatre' (2022), offers a phenomenological analysis of hauntological experiences in places marked by the traces of their spectral past. Reilly uses the term 'dyschronia' to refer to a temporal experience of time that is not linear. Instead, it is the 'awareness that multiple moments of history coexist in a single space' (2022, p.109). The stratification of time in spaces, as they are layered with various coexistences of the past, Reilly asserts 'all spaces can be read through the phenomenology of dyschronia; any space holds specters, or resonances of the past' (2022, p.122), which connect with Fisher's speculation of the eerie as agencies of the spectral past felt in specific sites. These theoretical ideas frame the practical explorations of actual and imagined places as haunted sites and how haunting affects an experience of time, resulting in dyschronia.

The methodology explores concepts of spectral forces of the past and of lost futures in relation to place. The notion of time, experienced as a dyschronia, informs the initial approaches to the dramaturgy of time, which explores the coexistence of multiple temporalities in a given place. The eeriness of the place provides a framework for a performative exploration of the eerie, with the first project conceptualising 'place' as haunted rooms, drawing from the personal stories of ghosts and haunting from my childhood. The stories instigated the improvisatory processes and a dramaturgy of eerie rooms in the performance of *The Strange Geometry of Time* (2018). In the second project, the ensemble's improvisations of place respond to an actual place: Poltimore House, in Devon, UK, through a methodology of exploring the eeriness of an abandoned site, which entailed filming in the

location, providing the foundation for an intermedial dramaturgy of eerie sites in the performance of *Dwelling* (2019). In the final project, the ensemble's improvisations of landscapes explore a dramaturgy of eerie landscapes and Folk Horror of the British Isles, in *This Is The Land* (2022/23).

The emergent improvisatory processes enabled the ensemble to engage in a creative exploration of an 'eerie impulse', which arises as a response to what is tangible in places and extends beyond the tangible through a playful exploration of the intangible. In this context, the intangible refers to the spectral, eerie agencies and forces that lie beneath the surface of their encounter with place: ghosts, desires, longings, memories, and sensations. The agencies do not fully reveal themselves and have a sourceless quality that arises without known or knowable outcomes and the specificity of a given context. The directorial process observes the ensemble's improvisatory scores to single out an eerie impulse, which is defined as a sourceless quality not contextualised within a realistic frame of reference. The direction focuses on catching and singling out an impulse and directing the ensemble or individual performer to stay with it and pursue it further. The directorial process shapes the impulses by further mining them within a visual composition that assembles and reassembles performative elements, providing opportunities to make creative correspondences between the different aspects. The process of 'mining' reveals layers of meaning.

The methodology of improvising place through reinhabiting eerie haunted places, actual or imagined, brings theatre into dialogue with spectrality and the spectral presence of ghostly figures and haunting. Hauntology conceptualises ghosts and haunting primarily as temporal phenomena, offering a fascinating perspective on time as a hauntological phenomenon. However, Roger Luckhurst observes in his critique of the 'Spectral Turn' that the temporalisation of haunting has had the effect of universalising ghosts to such an extent that they are no longer spatial phenomena (Luckhurst, 2002). Cultural theorists Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren address this imbalance within spectrality studies in their edited collection *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture* (2010). Peeren and Blanco state that they seek to 'redress the balance between the temporal and spatial phenomenon of haunting by situating ghostly appearances in time and space, in line with

Roger Luckhurst's critique of the spectral turn in cultural criticism as 'symptomatically blind to its generative loci' (2010, p.xi).

The conceptualisation of ghosts and haunting as spatial phenomena in Spectrality Studies Luckhurst (2002), Blanco and Peeren (2010, 2013), Cultural Studies and Hauntology, Fisher (2014, 2016, 2018), Coverley (2020), have led to recent developments and dialogues in Spectrality Studies and Landscape Studies (Macfarlane, 2015). Nature writer and landscape theorist Robert Macfarlane's article for the Guardian, 'The Eeriness of the English Countryside' (2015), written one year before Fisher's *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016), observes the dialogue between spectrality and landscape studies that has led to a resurgence of the eerie in cultural forms, which he discusses through the term 'The English Eerie'.

The concept of landscapes and places as haunted sites connects hauntology and the eerie with recent performance theory and theatre, which can also be viewed as a haunted site. Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage* (2003) opens with a discussion of playwright Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts,* which Carlson notes, 'Ibsen's title for the play was *Gengangere*' (2003, p.1), which translates into French as *Revenants*. The haunted stage is a site of return and repetition, which Carlson examines through the lens of memory. Carlson's theory of theatre as a 'memory machine' examines memory as a dynamic process, with the spectator's memory haunting the reception process. Carlson's insightful contribution to the study of theatre and ghosts asserts that 'everything in the theatre is haunted, the bodies, the material utilised, the language, the space itself, is now and always has been haunted' (2003, p.15), which brings theatre into dialogue with ghosts and hauntology primarily through an analysis of dramatic form.

Carlson's theory is most salient in articulating postmodernist aesthetics through an analysis of the American theatre company The Wooster Group, whose work Carlson states engages with 'the complexity and centrality of recycling' (2003, p.168). Carlson's argument for the haunted stage is discussed in the context of postmodernist theory as a reception process that engages with citation, quotation and repetition in a self-conscious interplay of intertextuality, characteristic of postmodernist aesthetics in theatre and performance. Carlson's application of

the term 'ghosting', which references Blau (1992), is applied to The Wooster Group's process of ghosting previous productions of classical texts, notably their production of *HAMLET*, which ghosts the film *Hamlet,* with the role of the character Hamlet played by Richard Burton (1962). The ghosting effect of doubling and repeating the original generates an eerie effect, where the performer appears to be ghosting the actor Richard Burton. At the same time, the actor seems to be channelling the performer's spirit. The ghosting of previous texts, as Blau observed in his definition of ghosting, is a methodology that decenters the actor, as the text itself haunts the actor, causing them to think and act through their performance.

Carlson's concept of the haunted stage, of memory as an active component of theatre reception, asserts that 'all theatre, I will argue, is a cultural activity deeply involved with memory and haunted by repetition' (2003, p.11). This is particularly resonant with the processes that draw on memory about place and landscape, where these intangible experiences are felt as an 'affect of place' (Heholt, 2016). The project *Dwelling* explores the memorial function of theatrical objects framed through Rayner's 'memorial double'. The object doubles an absence of presence, making present an absence, and gives shape to loss (Rayner, 2006). The project's references and layers draw on memories as an intangible presence felt as an affective force. The nonlinear structures of framing and reframing the past in an intermedial space explore multiple temporalities through repetition, doubling, and ghosting. Bodies and texts are doubled and repeated as projections of ghostly figures in an intermedial space that evokes memory and loss, which invite the spectator's spectral memories into an immersive memorial site.

Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin's *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance and Modernity* (2016) contributes to this dialogue between spectrality and theatre through a range of essays that survey theatre's haunted materiality, its haunted historical sites, spectrality in acting processes, and the figures of ghosts and ghostly aesthetics in modern plays. Recent performance theory offers a nuanced examination of the materiality of the stage, linking Fisher's concept of the eerie to performance practice. Alice Rayner's *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatr*e (2006) examines theatre as a haunted practice through the critical frameworks of phenomenology, psychoanalysis and spectrality. Rayner's study offers

a unique perspective on the materiality of the stage, proposing that ghosts as spectral absence become present in and through theatre's materiality (Rayner, 2006).

Eerie Materialities

Rayner's theory of the haunted stage provides a framework for examining how theatre and performance can summon the spectral or ghostly through their theatrical materiality: stage objects, texts, technologies, and the performer's body. Rayner's argument that theatre's material elements become memorial doubles to the dead, the 'ghost is not so much an essence of theatre as it is an inhabitant of all its elements' (2006, p.xv), which is manifest both in and through theatre's materiality. The assertion of theatre as a ghostly memorial practice challenges dualistic thinking; Rayner argues 'a refusal in the deep sense of theatre to consent to the idea that the invisible, immaterial, or abstract forces are illusions, that the spirit of the dead is imaginary, or that the division between spirit and matter is absolute' (2006, p.xi). The blurring of normative boundaries of material and immaterial allows one to access and imagine worlds beyond the known world; Rayner argues, 'if theatre is to *live* and do its work then it needs to be an 'encounter' with ghosts, as without this presence of ghosts, without hauntings the theatre is a dead place, unanimated and closed off to the possibility of other worlds beyond' (2006, p.xii).

Each project explores the theatrical space as an eerie site of emergence, with ghostly agencies felt and perceived in and through theatre's eerie materiality. Rayner's unique contribution to the discussion of ghostly materiality, in which Rayner refers to the works of the avant-garde artist and director Tadeusz Kantor and the modernist playwright Samuel Beckett. In a thought-provoking study of theatre as haunted by the presence of the past in and through its materiality, Rayner discusses Kantor's work *The Dead Class* (1975) in the context of his manifesto 'Theatre of the Dead', with specific reference to Kantor's articulation of 'The Poor Object', as Kantor's defines it as 'marked by time, worn out by the fact of being used' (Kantor quoted in Rayner, 2006, p.94). Rayner's analysis of the tactile and sensory effect of Kantor's objects on stage argues that the Poor Object is a memorial double in Kantor's Theatre of the Dead, which 'took on the affective sorrow of change and disintegration on their surfaces and textures{...}which did not enter the hypothetical sphere

of dramatic form but maintained the real-time of mortality and corporality' (2006, p.96). Kantor's Poor Object doubles and memorialises the past, making it tactile and present through its textures; a spectral, absent presence of the dead is felt as a tangible presence in and through its materiality, serving as a memorial double to the dead.

Reflections on Practice

Chapter One focuses on decentering methodologies that expand agency beyond human agency to investigate the eerie materiality of objects in the performance of *The Strange Geometry of Time.* Joslin McKinney's concept of 'agential object' (2015) frames the performers' interactions with costumes and theatrical objects as they instigate and effect change in the figures on stage and other objects. Rayner's conceptualisation of the theatrical object as a 'memorial double' informs the processes and techniques developed through the performer's interactions with objects. Rayner's analysis of the materiality of theatrical objects stimulates an embodied exploration of ghosts as agential presences in things, which extends the performance choices beyond representational ideas of ghosts to explorations of ghostly eerie materiality. Through connecting Joslin McKinney's concept of the 'agential object' and Fisher's agency of the outside, these theories frame the creative process as it moves towards practical explorations of the performative ways the performers engage with notions of agency central to the eerie.

The improvisations of place situate the performers in an affective relationship with space and objects, extending their performance choices through engagement with space as architectural in spatially oriented improvisatory scores. The workshop strategies engage the performers in exploring ghostly figures inspired by artworks, specifically the photographs of the late photographer Francesca Woodman. The images in Woodman's photographs stimulate ideas for the improvisational scores: ghostly figures enter and exit the space, disappearing to the edges and circumventing the boundaries of spectral rooms. The naming of these workshop practices defines the performance space as an eerie site, explored through the performers' improvisational scores of spectral rooms and ghostly figures, which lead to further scores involving agential objects and costumes.

The interplay between the performers, objects, and costumes instigates changes in the performance of ghostly figures and other objects on stage. The materiality of the eerie object extends to the lighting technology, which affects change in the space, figures, and objects. Lighting technology shifts from a theatrical to a filmic aspect, illuminating and projecting ghostly figures in the theatrical space. The approach to the lighting explores a visual concept of absence and presence, presenting ghostly figures as they appear in and disappear from a space or void. The lighting contributes to the idea of the eerie figures as indeterminate and insubstantial presences, which are defined through dramaturgical principles as fragments of ghostly forms haunting ephemeral rooms. The figures as projections are contextualised through the theatrical framework of the space as a site of eerie agencies; the rooms and ghostly figures are virtual agencies or forces of a spectral past that haunt the site.

Chapter Two explores the eeriness of place through a methodology of reinhabiting Poltimore House, a derelict mansion in Devon, which served as the location for the filming of five short films. The films formed the basis for an intermedial, site-specific dramaturgy in *Dwelling,* a performance presented in the Anglican Chapel in Arnos Vale Cemetery, Bristol. Fisher's concept of the eerie instigated the filming process at the derelict site, as the eerie is often associated with abandoned places. These sites imbue the ghostly presence of an unseen and sourceless agency. The eerie is constituted by the interplay of absence and presence, which inspires the filming process as it explores a visual concept of unseen and sourceless agencies beyond the camera's frame: eerie presences of absence. The project explores the idea of ghosts and haunting as spatial phenomena that inhabit a specific locale; Ruth Heholt and Niamh Downing's theorisation of haunted landscapes informs the methodology of reinhabiting the site. The ensemble's embodied responses to the site are framed through Heholt's concept of the 'affect of place' (Heholt and Downing, 2016), which Heholt contextualises through the late author Vernon Lee's idea of place as haunting and haunted.

Merlin Coverley's *Hauntology: Ghosts of Futures Past* (2020) examines how the past haunts the present, focusing on specific historical periods where a fascination with the uncanny is prevalent. Coverley observes that specific eras are more haunted by the past. In

relation to the Victorian era, Coverley examines the figure of the ghost as a revenant through an analysis of Vernon Lee's *Hauntings* (1890), observing that 'the time that Lee evokes is not the recent past that preoccupies hauntology, but rather the distant past of mythological time' (2020, p.50). Lee conceives hauntings as the presence of mythical time in the present, which is 'experienced through feeling and suggestion rather than reason' (Coverley, 2020, p.51). These ideas underpin and inform the workshop strategies with the ensemble on-site, offering a tangible site of immersion for their improvisations of place, which attune to the materiality of both the tangible and intangible aspects of place. The site is conceived of as haunted and haunting, within which the presence of the past is felt as, Coverley asserts, 'existing alongside us, just beneath the surface and can be accessed by those attuned to its presence' (2020, p.50).

Theatre practitioner Mike Pearson's *Site-Specific Performance* (2010) provides a theoretical and practical analysis of theatre and performance, informing the site-specific approach to the eerie as an affective presence in derelict sites. Pearson's concept of fact and fabrication (Pearson, 2010) underpins the response to the site's historical functions as they interpenetrate with the felt, bodily-sensorial experience of the site's eerie materiality as an affect of place. Kathleen Irwin's (2007) theory of site-specific performance extends the notion of a site's tangible materiality to the affective force of its more intangible presence, as the presence of absence that is felt through the traces of a site's materiality. The tangible and intangible presence of absence connects with the eerie in the site-specific dramaturgy of the abandoned site, with its intangible sourceless presence of absence. Rayner's theory of theatre as a memorial practice informs a process of framing and reframing the films with live elements in the chapel site; in this context, the memorial site contributes to transforming the performance by lending its meaning.

Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt's edited collection of essays, *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* (2006), examines how the incorporation of technologies and media into theatre and performance affects perceptions of performance. Kattenbelt observes how 'abstract forms of theatre explore time, through 'montage' (collage) in order to break through the unity and the singularity of time, space and action' (2006, p.35). Specifically relating to

the questions of time in intermedial performance is Sigrid Merx's analysis of time representations in an intermedial performance *Proust 1:Swann's Wa*y, directed by the Flemish director Guy Cassiers (2004), which informs a technique of framing and reframing mediated and live performance elements within intermedial space that operate in mutual influence within a site. The intermedial space collapses dualisms of past and present, absence and presence, and the ensemble's performance of liminal ghostly figures as live projections blur the division between the living and nonliving.

Chapter Three examines the eerie in landscape in *This Is the Land,* a performance presented in Bath, Bristol, and Belgium in 2022, and at the Vault Festival in London in 2023. The project brings theatre into dialogue with landscape studies, spectrality, and the concept of the eerie. It focuses on the resurgence of the eerie in recent cultural media, particularly in Paul Wright's film *Arcadia* (2017), contextualised through Robert Macfarlane's analysis of the eerie within landscape studies. The resurgence of the eerie impacted the dramaturgical processes for *This is the Land*. Using the notion of 'mining', a strategy of uncovering the eerie beneath-the-surface layers of imagined landscapes of the British Isles. The ensemble's improvisations of the landscape took each performer, and as an ensemble, through a performative experience of the familiar landscape towards what is unknown and eerie.

The ensemble explored and embodied indeterminate figures without context by mining an eerie impulse, defining an impulse without context or known outcome. The dramaturgy of materiality, which encompasses the performers' bodies, objects, technologies, and space, focuses on eerie materialities that are both agential and performative, specifically technologies that summon ghostly figures. The performative, eerie, agential objects of microphones and vocal-looping devices dislocate the performer's vocalities from their source, conveying a sense of multiple, sourceless agencies. Rayner's analysis of Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* (1949), in a chapter entitled 'All the Dead Voices', where Rayner asserts that Beckett's theatrical language and the rhythms and cadences of his texts are a testament to theatre's materiality as a memorial double to the dead. Rayner argues that Beckett's textual language gives voice to the spectral presence of the dead, with 'unvoiced words sift into mind from the vast memories of the dead, as Beckett describes them: faint

rustles from all the words that remain unheard, unremembered' (2006, p.57). The dead voices heard in Beckett's text, the pauses and cadences of the language materialise the immaterial, doubling the voices of those unremembered: the dead. These ideas inform the dramaturgy of technology as a performative agency with an affective force that summons, captures, amplifies, and reiterates a landscape's voices, generating an eerie vocality that summons spectral pasts through and in the vocality itself.

The ghostly figures in *This Is The Land* are rooted in the rural landscape's folk traditions and embody a landscape that expands beyond anthropocentrism towards narratives of elements, animals, and mythical figures that transform between the human, non-human, and beyond-human. The processes and techniques examine the agency of the eerie as a spectral presence that haunts places and landscapes, revealing something beneath the surface. By exploring the eerie presence of the spectral past, its ghostly figures materialise through and in the materiality of theatre's performative elements: objects, performers' bodies, spaces, texts, and technologies.

The improvisatory methods facilitate the ensemble's creativity, which informs their performance choices as the ensemble's response deepens through their improvisations of landscapes. The devising process explores the technique of mining performative elements to discover creative connections and layers through a dramaturgy that reveals the unknown and what persists as an eerie presence of absence in these places. The theatrical space is framed as a Thin Place, which is conceptualised as a site of emergent spectral figures. The eerie theatricality helps the ensemble understand their performance within a symbolic context.

The eerie serves as a site of emergence, facilitating the development of performative techniques that include shape-shifting, performing indeterminate states, projecting figures enfolded in eerie landscapes, eerie materialities of sound technology and vocal looping, and objects and technologies as eerie agencies. Landscapes are composed through montage techniques, juxtaposing fragments of imagery, text, and sound that are selected, assembled, and reassembled. The fragments derived from initial improvisations are placed within the context of each landscape composition, relating to a specific season within the overall

performance structure. The incomplete forms disrupt a linear progression of time, generating an unsettling experience of temporality that challenges the tendency towards narrativity and normative perceptions of time and space, which adhere to Fisher's notion of an eerie atemporal outside.

Chapter 1

Embodying Eerie Haunted Houses of Childhood: Eerie Materialities and Agential Objects in *The Strange Geometry of Time*

The investigation of the eerie in theatre-making addresses the concept of theatre as a haunted practice and as a site to summon ghosts. I examine the eerie materiality of the stage through improvisatory processes that centralise the body, movement, objects, and space, making these elements vital components. The interdisciplinary practice is contextualised within postdramatic theatre and situated at the interface between dance and theatre. The creative process adheres to postdramatic visual dramaturgy, which explores cinematographic principles of montage that do not cohere through traditional dramatic logic or linear narrative. The fragmented form explores a hauntological 'crisis of time' with multiple coexistent temporalities resisting linear progressions of time. The highly visual performance style and aesthetic draw on artworks from installation and photography that stimulate improvisatory processes. The artworks address the subject of the eerie in their conceptual concerns and themes that inform the visual and aesthetic choices. My role as director and performer, working with a professional performer, Leeza Jessie and musician Helen Roberts, meeting twice a week over six months, culminating in the performance of *The Strange Geometry of Time*, which premiered in Bath and toured at the 'Dreams Before Dawn Festival' in Paris in 2018.

This chapter will examine how the lens of the eerie offers an expanded view of devising practices through a reflexive practical exploration of imagining beyond the known. The focus on notions of Fisher's 'Outside' as a site of non-human and beyond-human agency informs the exploratory workshop processes and performance techniques developed through an embodied dramaturgy of the eeriness of place. The project's investigation of the eerie materiality of theatrical objects, bodies, costumes, and light, as they are agential alongside the performers, is framed through theoretical frameworks of the eerie, hauntology, spectrality, and performance theory. These lenses assist in articulating the concepts explored in the workshop strategies, improvisatory processes, and dramaturgy towards the performance, *The*

Strange Geometry of Time. The reflections on the processes and performance demonstrate how the eerie informs the performer's performance choices and the directorial processes, decisions and dramaturgy.

Framed through Fisher's philosophical analysis (2016) of the eerie 'Outside', the project explores the concept of the performance space as an eerie site of the Outside. Fisher's questioning of agency extends beyond human agency to the non-human and beyond the human, informing the dramaturgy of materiality and the eeriness of objects, bodies, and costumes. The decentering methodology examines the performer's embodiment of ghostly figures as agencies within the eerie site, and the performance techniques developed by interacting with the eerie agencies of space, objects, costumes, and lighting technologies.

The chapter proceeds to reflect on the practice, focusing on the emergent improvisatory process, where performers improvise in haunted rooms, framed through Rayner's (2006) phenomenological analysis of the materiality of theatrical elements. Rayner's theory informs the dramaturgy of materiality in an embodied investigation of the collapsed dualisms of the material and immaterial, as well as absence and presence. The materiality of the stage objects and costumes serves as doubles for spectral pasts and lost futures, as absent presences that work their way through and into the eerie materiality.

The reflections on the workshop strategies and naming of practices are framed through theories of the eerie, drawing extensively on Fisher's analysis (2016). Cattien and Stopford's (2022) concept of the eerie as a subject/object 'drift' informs these practical explorations of an eerie 'drift' through costumes and objects. McKinney's phenomenological scenographic analysis of 'agential objects' underpins the performer's sensory-perceptual approach to interacting with objects, perceiving objects as 'capable' of acting and interacting independently from the performer (McKinney, 2015). These ideas underpin an analysis of emergent performance techniques, directorial methods, and dramaturgy by examining the performative ways in which objects and costumes act upon and affect change in the performers, as well as in other objects and the theatrical space (McKinney, 2015). The reflection advances the defining and naming of practices, which include the performer's

embodiment of 'ghostly figures' as liminal spectral presences of absence, and the 'eerie materiality' of the non-human; objects and technologies as 'agential objects' (McKinney, 2015), conceptualised as 'unsettling things'.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of the concepts of presence and absence, central to the eerie. It focuses on using lighting technology as a performative element that renders spectral absence present through the filmic aspects of illumination and projection. The lighting performs alongside the other theatrical elements, contributing to an eerie aesthetic of doubling and repetition. The projections of liminal, ghostly figures, alongside the non-human figures of objects and costumes, decenter the agency of the human to present an eerie theatricality.

Contextualised through the framework of the late writer and cultural theorist Mark Fisher (1968-2017) in his seminal book *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016). Fisher expands Freud's theory of the uncanny (The Uncanny, 1919) in his analysis of the eerie in its aesthetic, existential, and affective modes in film, literature and music. Fisher defines the eerie as constituted 'by something where there should be nothing; a failure of absence, and nothing where there should be something; a failure of presence' (2016, pp.61-62). Fisher's structure of the eerie informs the theatre-making process, which explores eerie materialities that blur the dualisms of absence and presence through ghost-like figures. The ghost, in a figurative sense, exists (or does not exist) as a liminal figure, situated between life and death, past and present, existence and non-existence; the spectral agency of the past that haunts the present and the lost future that never came to pass (Fisher, 2014).

The ghosts appear in the theatrical space as a haunted site, framed through Fisher's concept of the eerie that is 'fundamentally to do with the outside, and here we can understand the outside in a straightforwardly empirical as well as a more abstract transcendental sense' (2016, p.11). Fisher speculates on the allure of the eerie as 'a fascination for the outside, for that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience' (2016, p.8). Fisher's assertion that a perspective of the eerie offers 'this release from the mundane, this escape from what is ordinarily taken for reality, which goes some way to account for the peculiar

appeal the eerie possesses' (2016, p.13). The outside expands consciousness to what lies beyond the known and the knowable, incites imagination, and poses questions about the kinds of agencies and forces that operate in the realm of the outside.

Fisher states 'the eerie is fundamentally tied up with questions of agency' (2016, p.11), with the decentering of the agency of the human subject posing existential questions. The agency of the metaphysical, which Fisher connects to Capital, and 'forces that govern capitalist society' (2016, p. 11), raises questions about the virtual, unseen agencies that permeate our lives. The metaphysical agency of the eerie extends beyond social structures to encompass more intangible notions of agency, which Fisher speculates as 'the broader question of the agency of the immaterial and the inanimate: the agency of minerals and landscape' (2016, p.11) and to 'fate, who or what is the entity that has woven fate?' (2016, p.12). The decentering methodology informs an investigation of agencies and forces beyond the human through an embodiment of the eerie. As an eerie site, the outside expands the creative process beyond the realistic by developing processes and techniques that explore theatre's eerie materiality. Fisher's questioning of agency provokes and inspires imagination through emergent improvisatory processes and performative methods, which bring the eerie into dialogue with spectrality and hauntology.

The ghostly figures and hauntings are spatial phenomena that haunt the theatrical space through the theatre's materiality, encompassing space, objects, technologies, and the performers' bodies. Recent performance theory offers complex explorations of theatre's materiality that connect Fisher's notions of the eerie to performance practice. The ghostly materiality of theatre, as discussed by performance theorist Alice Rayner in her seminal book *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomenon of Theatre* (2006), represents a unique theorisation of theatre and ghosts, drawing on the critical frameworks of psychoanalysis and phenomenology to examine theatre as a memorial practice. Rayner's study articulates theatre's 'doubling' effect as a ghostly presence of the past within theatre's reality; the ghosts, as the presence of the past, work their way 'in and through' theatre's materiality (2006, p.xii). Rayner's unique analysis is most salient in her discussion of stage objects as doubles, specifically her analysis of the 'empty chair', which Rayner defines as the uncanny

object. Rayner frames her analysis through a phenomenology of the empty chair, perceived as a place of rest and ease, 'halfway between reclining and standing' (2006, p.110). It holds the body shape of someone who once sat upon it or may return; the empty chairs contain the presence of an absence and loss. The doubleness of the empty chair, as it is both a tangible object and a non-thing, collapses the dualisms of material and immaterial; the eerie agency of ghostly figures on stage expands presence and absence beyond the tangible to give presence to the intangible.

Rayner's analysis of the playwright Eugene Ionesco's play *The Chairs* (1952) and neo-avant-garde artist and director Tadeusz Kantor's performance *Today is My Birthday* (1990) conceptualises the empty chair as a memorial double. Rayner argues that the empty chair shapes the presence of an absence; this doubling effect of theatre presents a memorial double to the dead. The memorial double reinstates an interrelation between the living and the dead, which Rayner argues enlivens theatre: 'if theatre is to *live* and do its work then it needs to be an 'encounter' with ghosts{...}without hauntings the theatre is a dead place, unanimated and closed off to the possibility of other worlds beyond' (2006, p.xii). Theatre's eerie materiality gives life to the presence of the past, a ghostly doubling that provides access for the dead to return and haunt the living. The ghost and haunting are not representative, but following Rayner's critique that 'the ghost itself is not a thing', if we go beyond the idea that a ghost is a 'thing', it is beyond representation as it 'works in things' (2006, p.xii). The ideas of worlds beyond the known, of underworlds and upper-worlds, the realms of the living and the dead, are reinstated in theatre, enlivening theatre practice.

Fisher's concept of the agency of the eerie and Rayner's theorisation of the materiality of theatrical objects informed and underpinned the early stages of the process, which engaged an embodied exploration of the materiality of objects, costumes and space through a highly visual dramaturgy, drawing on images from artworks that were resonant with the themes and concepts of the eerie. Through preparatory research into the work of the late photographer Francesca Woodman's 'House' series, Woodman's photographs were a stimulus and source of inspiration for the improvisations of haunted rooms, as they depict theatrical vignettes of female figures entwined in the architecture of empty rooms. The blurring of the boundaries

between the figures' bodies and their environment suggests the presence of ghostly agencies beyond human agency. The ghostly figures hover between presence and absence, in an interplay between the material and immaterial that transcends normative limits of space and time. Woodman's images connect with Fisher's concept of an eerie 'outside' as an atemporal eerie site of ghostly figures enfolded within a surreal dimension, expanding normative perceptual limits of time and space.

Dramaturgy of Eerie Rooms

In the early stages of the creative process, the performers' improvisations of rooms entailed working with a selection of photographs from Woodman's 'House' series as a stimulus for their scores. These were situated in the space with the performers, laid on the floor and pinned to the walls. One of the workshop strategies involved having the performers engage with the photographs in their improvisations of haunted rooms through a series of spatially oriented, movement-based scores. They were named 'haunting scores' and explored hauntological themes of spectral female figures as revenants that return to haunt rooms, which are imagined as spectral sites that coexist with the performance space.

The improvisatory processes explore this other spatial dimension, with the performer's scores of entering and exiting spectral rooms and appearing and disappearing as ghostly female figures that interact with the space's architecture. The figures circumvent the room's periphery, appearing and cutting across diagonals to disappear as ghostly figures, hovering at the borders of the space. The entrances and exits provide a spatial topography for the performers, with the idea that the figures break through the physical constraints of the architecture to move through imaginary walls, doors, and windows. The performance space becomes a portal to different dimensions of space and time, with the temporalisation of space as a dyschronia; time is non-linear, and the rooms serve as a site of multiple coexistent pasts that haunt.

The improvisation presented the performers with tasks open to multiple options for individual response, such as imagining beyond the possible toward the impossible. The

performers reflected on their responses, and their observations focused on their interactions with the space and its architecture. The reflexive praxis led to directing further improvisation scores to progress the initial ideas, which shifted the focus to the ghostly figures haunting the rooms. The performers explore the figure's relationship with the architecture by embodying the shape of a figure in the photographs and situating them at five different points in the room. The scores instructed the performers to move between the five points in the room, accompanied by questions about how to transition from one point to another. What occurs at each of the five focal points? Is this a vocal or physical response, or both? Examine the figure's spatial response to the room's architecture. The scores evoked memories told as stories, associative images, and actions related to everyday tasks performed in the rooms, such as folding clothes, moving up and down stairs, and along corridors. The memories blurred with stories of hauntings, adding an eerie quality to the tasks as the performers explored ways to go beyond mundane gestures to create eerie, ghostly figures. The haunting scores generated a sense of unease as they did not follow a linear logic; the ghostly figures momentarily appeared from another time to vanish without narrative or context.

   The scores brought an awareness of the performative qualities of enacting the ghostly figures. Steadman reflected on their changeable state that hovers between presence and absence, provoking more responses that led to further explorations. The scores explored questions: How do the figures blend with the rooms? Where does the room begin, and where does it end? Where does the figure start and end? The performers attuned their senses and attention outward into the rehearsal space, engaging in a reciprocal relationality between their bodies and the architecture: its corners, edges, and the in-between spaces between the walls and floor, to explore sensorial and perceptual states of being at the edges and boundaries of the space. How do your figure and the space interconnect? Is your figure appearing or disappearing? What does the space desire of your figure? What kind of figure is the space, and what does it desire? How does it feel to be a figure hovering between states of being?

   Each performer responded differently to these questions through a combination of movement, gestures, imagery, and stories related to memories of actual experiences in

haunted houses and fictional stories of hauntings from their childhood. Jessie's responses related to memories of dresses she was forbidden to wear, which haunted her. Steadman's responses were of memories of hauntings related to dresses and rooms; one of which was of a mysterious red dress, which was hung up one night on a wardrobe door, only to be found dripping wet in the morning; another of a haunting by a ghostly figure folding up clothes in a bedroom.

The initial stage of the creative process was exploratory, allowing ideas to take form through an emergent process of performing the haunting scores, which are refined through the spatial dramaturgy of applying the following principles: the space is indeterminate, and its borders do not have fixed, determining boundaries. The ghostly figures enter and exit through its edges, perceived as mutable borders of rooms. The figures cut across space along diagonals and circumvent rooms at the edges. The figures do not adhere to normative physical laws, as they are imagined to be ghostly presences that move through the edges of space. The walls of the rooms are both inhibited and are to be pushed up against. The doors and windows are portals to spaces beyond the room. These spatial principles of the dramaturgy established the performative qualities of the ghostly figures and their eerie materiality, which led to considerations of how time operated in space. The figures inhabit the same room, but not at the same time. The figures appear, disappear, and reappear without consolidating the context of their actions; they haunt. The term 'figure' does not delineate character; without context, they are indeterminate and haunt rooms without explanation for their haunting; they just are.

The dramaturgy of the haunted rooms and ghostly figures led to further observations of the performative ways the performers connected with the theatrical space as a site of the 'outside' (Fisher, 2016). In this context, the 'outside' frames the theatrical elements as a site of abandoned rooms from childhood haunted by the agencies of spectral figures and absent presences. The figures are not representative but embody intangible memories, desires, sensations, and longings associated with the spectral experience of transgenerational memory. The female figures are hauntological presences, spectral effects of past social and cultural elements that return to haunt the spectral rooms.

Performing Eerie Agential Objects

In the devising stage of the process, the focus shifted to the materiality of the element of space as an 'outside', and the performer's bodies as they enacted the ghostly figures, which extended to the theatrical objects. Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy's *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things* (2014) theorises theatrical objects through the critical framework of New Materialism, which focuses on everyday objects as materials that activate theatrical space. Schweitzer and Zerdy argue that the performative object is 'challenging narrow anthropocentric narratives' (2014, p.2) and offering a new perspective to subject-centred dramaturgy.

The materiality of objects presents a challenge to narratives that centralise human agency; scholars Jana Cattien and Robert Stopford, in their study *Eerie Deformations and Fascinations* (2022) propose that an object-centred perspective presents the uncanniness of objects, that 'eeriness is threaded into the object world' (2022, p.117) and from this point of view a subject-centred perspective 'falls apart in our experience of the Eerie' (2022, p.119). The eerie agency of the object emerges through what Cattien and Stopford define as a subject/object 'drift', which arises from the uncertainty surrounding the form of an object, generating a sense of an existential 'drift'. As it becomes indeterminate, this 'drift' surrounding form adheres to the idea that the object is no longer 'out there' as something observed—an unsettling agency that is difficult to source, an eerie materiality.

The eerie materiality of objects, explored through the improvisatory scores of 'drift' and 'agitating objects,' entailed the performers interacting with clothes as eerie objects or subjects, which collapses dualisms to generate unease and existential drift in their interactions with the clothes' eerie materiality. These interactions become tactile and more tangible through the performer's interactions with objects, thereby activating the agency of the objects. An example is demonstrated through Jessie's improvisational score, which explored a spatial topography, with clothes folded up and laid in straight rows on the floor. Jessie moved the clothes along straight lines, following directions to change pace and direction, and fold and unfold them. Jessie's heightened gestural language was achieved by

applying physical efforts, pace and tension to their manipulation of the clothes, a technique of handling objects named 'agitating' and 'activating' the clothes, as they are imagined as spectral presences lying dormant on the floor.

The improvisation established a performative way of working with the clothes, as if they were everyday objects. The mundane activity of folding and unfolding, which Jessie performs at the performance's opening (See Appendix A, *The Strange Geometry of Time*), asserts the figure's role and is initially subject-centred. The premise established then reverses, with Jessie imagining the clothes as remnants of a spectral presence, ghostly presences, and affective forces that begin to assert an eerie agency, activating and acting upon the figures to decentre their agency. Jessie touches and manipulates the clothes; her tactile and precise movement enhances the clothes' textural and haptic presence. The quality of touch and manipulation of the clothes was performative as it presented spectral absence as palpable, which provoked a different response in each performer. Jessie's response led to her making performance choices of interacting with dresses and coats as eerie agencies that affect change in her body, with the clothes becoming an active performative participant on stage through their tactile manipulation, which led to Jessie's figure being physically overwhelmed by the dress' agency as it affected a change by hijacking the figure's body (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Production photograph of 'The Strange Geometry of Time' (Steadman, 2018). Performers Mary Steadman and Leeza Jessie, eerie agential objects, hijack the figure's body.

The increased confrontation and threatening presence of the dresses in the theatrical space is evident in the image of the pink floral dress (See Appendix A - *The Strange Geometry of Time*). The dress presents itself as 'dressing' the figure of the woman played by Jessie as it hovers above them, a performative technique that imbues the dress with a sourceless agency. Jessie explores an interaction with the dress through the idea of the figure and dress merging to hijack the figure's body, which is extended as another figure that forcibly removes the dress. The figures then attempt to reassert their agency by taping the dress to the back wall (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Production photograph of 'The Strange Geometry of Time' (Steadman, 2018), performers Mary Steadman and Leeza Jessie, tame the eerie materiality of the pink floral dress.

The clothes and objects are conceived as 'agential objects', following Joslin McKinney's concept within the field of scenography. McKinney discusses the work of Tadeusz Kantor, specifically the performance *The Dead Class* (1975) and argues that Kantor's concept of the 'bio-object' raises the question, 'Are these objects operating independently, or are they actually reliant on human agency?' (2015, p.5). McKinney observes that the uncanny object in Kantor's performance "is made to impose a physical and palpable impact on the performer and effect some kind of agential change" (2015, p.7). McKinney observes that a 'problem with attributing agency to objects in these examples is that the term object tends to implicate the artist-maker and lead us back to the idea of an active human agent exerting their intention on passive material'(2015, p.8). The agential object in Kantor's theatre relates to the idea that the materials are a force in space. McKinney states that objects 'make a difference, produce effects, and alter the course of events' (Bennett quoted by McKinney 2015, p.8). McKinney's analysis of Kantor's objects and concept of the agential object aligns with these processes

and techniques of working with clothes and objects, as well as Fisher's agency of the non-human and beyond the human. The object's materiality as an agential object influenced the processes, with the object perceived as an active participant and a force in the space. The process is framed through McKinney's term 'active participants' (2015, p.8), which foregrounds the performativity of the object and attunes to the idea of an object's agency to effect change.

To demonstrate the object's agency to affect change by an example of how clothes present agency in the space, with dresses and coats suspended from the ceiling, inspired by the images of the visual artist Christian Boltanski in his installation *No Man's Land* (2010). In her blog, Marissa Ambruzzini discusses Boltanski's installation, which explores the theme of death. Ambruzzini states that 'clothes are simply a placeholder for real human beings who lived real lives' (2015), with the mountain of clothes conceptualised as emotional and physical placeholders for the absent presences of those who once lived. Boltanski's concept of a placeholder for the dead connects with Rayner's objects as 'memorial doubles', with the clothes becoming absent presences that double an absence. The use of clothes and images derived from them was inspired by ghost stories from my childhood, which featured a recurring image of a haunting red dress. These ideas surrounding objects evolved through the rehearsal process to the use of multiple dresses, dress patterns, a piano stool with ghostly figures, and the repetition of ghostly figures traversing the space and vanishing. Further questions were posed: What do the clothes desire? What kinds of figures are the clothes, and what are their desires?

The techniques were instilled progressively through the devising process, with more questions about the objects' agency directing each performer's choices differently: What do the objects insist upon the figures? What are the objects' desires, and how do these affect the figures? The interactions with the dresses inspired different responses and performance choices. Jessie's apprehensive responses instigated Steadman's reaction to the agential dresses, which was to gaffer-tape the dresses to a wall. Steadman presented the dress's desires as needing to be restrained by the tape, which provoked Jessie's response to the unsettling image. These performance choices created a dynamic between the performers on

stage as they continued interacting with the clothes and each other, presenting the objects as unsettling presences of absence. The image of the gaffer-taped dress was a recurring motif throughout the performance, featuring various textures of dresses that related to the corporeal presence or absence of multiple ghosts as agencies inhabiting the theatrical space alongside the figures in an eerie 'outside'.

The concept of the agential object and de-centring techniques provoked questions of agency and presence throughout the devising process, raising questions about who and what had agency and impacting the performers' performance choices and the creative decisions regarding dramaturgy and direction. The performer's understanding of the objects' eerie materiality enabled them to explore their performative agency as they acted upon the figures and effected changes in them. The objects are 'reconstituted' through what McKinney defines as their 'agentive capacities' (2015, p.8), instigating and affecting change in the performer's choices as they interact with objects. The gradual embodiment of the eerie as a sourceless agency attuned the performers to make performance choices that extended beyond surface-level ideas about the eerie, releasing deeper impulses that expanded creative responses to the materiality of space and objects.

Establishing the layers of performance was necessary, as the performers had an agency to make performative choices. Their performance of figures that gradually succumbed to the agency of the dresses, and their desires as they became increasingly insistent and challenging. These ideas of the agency of the non-human presented challenges for the performers, which at times provoked fear; however, these were contained within the context of the performance and the figures being performed. To make this distinction, it was necessary to explore the eerie as it deals with unknown and mysterious forces. To provoke ideas about the figures felt through the clothes' affective agency and explore their agency further, Steadman would ask questions in rehearsal: Who did they belong to? What kind of person wore this?

The questioning technique inspired imaginative responses to the affective force of each dress, as Steadman held up the costumes to her body and asked the questions of "Whose is

this?", "Where did this one come from?" and "Does anyone know who this one belongs to?", agitate the dress's agency as an unseen presence. The questioning was a performative technique that estranged the clothes, which Steadman applied throughout the performance, demonstrated by an example of a pink floral dress on the floor (See Appendix A - *The Strange Geometry of Time*). The dress is brought into focus by a figure played by Jessie, who asks the question, "What's that?" a technique that Steadman applied to the blue coat, which she repeated as she stepped forward in the space, splaying the coat out to present it to the audience. The questions were extended from "What's this?" to "Whose is this?" "Where did that come from?" implies that the coats could appear and disappear, were not what they seemed, and present an unknown, sourceless agency that remains undetected. The questions remained unanswered but were repeated continually to disturb the object's ontology - the objects are not passive or situated as to be observed by the subject - but they became active performative agencies with the figures in theatrical space. Through the techniques of handling the dresses and coats, holding them up to the figures' bodies, and wearing them in ways that seemed as if they wore the figures, the clothes presented an eerie subject/object 'drift' (Cattien and Stopford, 2022).

The performative ways in which the object affects changes in the figures and other objects through estrangement techniques are demonstrated through an example with the fan. The fan, initially operated by Steadman as a figure on stage, establishes a direct human connection with the object, which, later on, when operated offstage by a technician, creates the impression that it operates independently of human intervention. The fan's performative function was to disturb and unsettle the clothes, and the cloth's patterns blew across the stage. The blue coat suspended from the ceiling began to sway. This performative technique, where agential objects interact, presents the object as an agent that alters our perceptions; as agents, the objects initiate and change the course of events in the theatrical space. In this instance, the fans could move and affect change in other materials on stage, such as the dresses and paper clothes patterns, which moved in the space alongside the performers. The energetic force of the objects interacting and moving in response to each other generates an eerie effect, as evident in Figure 1.2, which conveys an interrelational flow between the material elements as forces on stage that interact with the figure (Jessie) and one another.

Figure 1.2 Production photography of 'The Strange Geometry of Time' (Steadman, 2018) performer Leeza Jessie. The objects are activated, and a dynamic flow exists between them.

The object's eerie materiality as an agential object was disturbed through 'agitating' and 'activating' it; it becomes an active participant in a material flow between the eerie material elements. Ingold observes this concept of the forces of materials as he defines 'the forces and flows of materials' (Ingold quoted in McKinney, 2015, p.8). To demonstrate the materiality of the clothes as a force of energy, an example of the children's dresses flew across the stage on an invisible wire (Figure 1.3). The technique of manipulating clothes and exploring how they performed seemingly without intervention with the fans led to a wire suspended across the front of the stage, with small children's dresses flown across it on coat hangers. The ghostly dresses pulled the focus onstage from the protagonist, a figure Steadman performed, defined as the haunted Mother figure; the children's clothes are flown across the stage to create an illusion of moving of their own accord, defying gravity as small ghostly figures. The vocal text that follows the image is performed by Jessie, portraying multiple children's voices demanding attention from the mother, and the mother's response, that she had done

"her best," adds to their agency as they impact the mother figure. The figure collapses in response to the children's insistent demands, becoming ghostly agencies that unsettle and disturb; they are then flown across to become the protagonists in the Mother's story (See Appendix A - *The Strange Geometry of Time)*.

Figure 1.3 Production photograph The Strange Geometry of Time (Steadman, 2018) The agential objects perform ghostly Children.

Dramaturgy of Light - Absence and Presence

The eerie, as that beyond the known and knowable, lent itself to creating strange and mysterious worlds that encompass otherworlds and worlds that are other. In the devising stage of the process, the compositions explored an assemblage of fragments of figures conceived as hauntings that disrupted the progressive flow of time. The performance explored how ghosts and haunting are both spatial and temporal phenomena; the dresses that occupy the space from the beginning of the performance haunt the theatrical space, lying in wait to be activated by the figures that return. The figures of the two women, whom Jessie

and Steadman performed, were also ghosts haunted by others —the ghosts of generations, as transgenerational hauntings in the virtual rooms projected into the space by the light. The haunted house was a concept that framed the scenic composition of different rooms, with the performance of a series of vignettes clustered around one dress - the pink floral dress worn by a figure who had been in an accident - the performance, a puzzle to find out what had occurred as the two central figures return to a site of hauntings of spectral childhood.

The ghostly figures appear and disappear through the performative application of light, framed as a locale of haunted rooms inhabited by ghostly female figures. These occur through the use of light to illuminate and project the figures in the space as presences of absence. The figures arise from space, which Rayner's conceptualisation of theatrical space as an empty site of appearances and disappearances that originates from the dark and empty space, which 'only the ghost light illuminates the fact that an unknown past and unknown others haunt the space' (2006, p.62). Rayner's analysis informs how the light (and dark) of the theatrical space appears to make the figures appear as 'virtual bodies, ghostlike apparitions that haunt the stage in an indeterminate sense as neither presence nor absence but as a projection that - lacks physical substance but is nevertheless present' (2006, p.156).

The dramaturgy of light evolved from the concept of light in theatre into film, utilising light as both projection and illumination, which projected figures and objects onto the theatre's walls as two-dimensional images. The performative effect of the lighting explores the concept of ghostly figures haunting the site, which, following Rayner's analysis, are haunting the stage in an 'indeterminate sense', which is neither present nor absent but a projection. The performance text refers to their lack of physical substance, in which Steadman spoke about ghosts "just vanishing". These ideas draw on Rayner's concept of light, explored through the performative ways in which light affects changes in the figures, making them appear and disappear through a cinematographic use of sudden light blackouts and dissolves that frame the figures as projections in space (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4 Production photograph 'The Strange Geometry of Time' (Steadman, 2018) performers Mary Steadman and Leeza Jessie. Ghostly figures appear as projections in the space.

The lighting in Woodman's photography stimulated and inspired the lighting design, with stark vectors of light and windows projected through gobos. The performers explored techniques for working with light that presented them as a house's topography, delineated by corridors, stairs, and rooms, utilising these vectors and gobos. The light mapped the space, framing the figures within it, which would emerge from the darkness at the edges and illuminate as they moved in and through the space. The light's materiality affected a change in the figures and other objects in the space, as demonstrated by the example of clothes suspended in pools of light, which presented eerie presences of absence. The appearance of the figures takes on an insubstantial, filmic quality as they emerge as live projections in the space, as demonstrated by an example of a ghostly figure seated on a piano stool covered in a cloth, serving as a shroud (See Appendix A - *The Strange Geometry of Time*). The image of

one figure doubles through another figure lying prone on the floor; both speak of 'changing' form as their ghostly form is insubstantial and transforms into other states and forms before disappearing (Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5 Production photograph 'The Strange Geometry of Time' (Steadman, 2018), performers Mary Steadman and Leeza Jessie. The transitory figures change form.

In conclusion, *The Strange Geometry of Time's eerie* aesthetic arises from the sense that 'things' are not what they seem. The embodied performance of the eerie outside developed through an emergent process of performing improvisatory scores that decentred human agency in exploring the unknown in a dramaturgy of eerie materialities. The strategies applied in the workshops enabled the performers to expand their imagination beyond what is known, examining the agency of place, objects, and costumes in their improvisations of haunting and haunted rooms. The space became a haunted site, grounded in the performer's memories and stories, which enabled them to move beyond the mundane and into the eerie and the strange, coexistent realms. The layering of time in place as a dyschronia, achieved through the appearance and disappearance of ghostly figures, is facilitated by the

performative ways in which the costumes enact and act upon the performers, space, and other objects. Their eerie materiality, enhanced by the suspension of costumes, and conceived of as absent presences of the past, placeholders for the dead that remain suspended or 'agitated' and 'activated' by the figures. The objects and costumes are agential 'unsettling things', suggesting the presence of agency beyond human agency—an unseen, sourceless agency that agitates and activates the costumes and objects.

The visual dramaturgy developed through an emergent dramaturgy of space defined by the topography of entering and exiting an eerie site, with the lighting projecting windows as portals to and from another world beyond, which appear and disappear in the performance space. The lighting design's scenographic function places the ghostly figures within an ephemeral world that draws on hauntology's concept of time as repetition and doubling, and space as a palimpsest layered with multiple coexistent times. The lighting illuminates and projects to convey an indeterminacy of the body's materiality, with ghostly figures that appear/disappear as insubstantial forms projected in the theatrical space, The project's focus on the dramaturgy of materials as agential, led to strategies of performing objects and ghostly figures as non-representational, by a filmic aspect as 'projections' in space summoned through the agential objects, costumes and light.

The cinematographic quality of light and montage techniques contribute to a filmic aesthetic that frames the ghostly figures in space, making them appear as spectral projections of absence and presence, embodying multiple pasts and lost futures. The framing strategy is examined further in the subsequent project, which set out to film in an actual place and continued to explore framing and reframing as a method of presenting multiple coexistent dimensions of time in one place. The project's focus on the eeriness of an abandoned site examines both the tangible and intangible presence of absence in place, which remain as residual traces and marks of the spectral presence of the past, manifesting as memories, desires, sensations, longings, and losses. The materiality of an abandoned site, as a site that is both haunted and haunting, is explored through the concepts of presence and absence, as agencies that are felt in and through the materiality of the place in a site-specific intermedial dramaturgy of the performance *Dwelling*.

Chapter 2

Embodying Abandoned Sites: The 'affect of place' in a Site-specific Intermedial Dramaturgy of the Eerie in *Dwelling*

The project explored the eeriness of abandoned places by reinhabiting Poltimore House, a derelict mansion in Devon. The creative process involved working with an ensemble of five professional performers, filming on-site for four days, with sole access enabling an immersive and site-responsive improvisatory process. The footage was edited into five short films, forming the basis of the dramaturgy for the intermedial live performance *Dwelling* in the Anglican Chapel, Arnos Vale Cemetery, Bristol, in 2019. The site was central to investigating the eeriness of abandoned sites and the notions of absence and presence concerning place, which follows Fisher's framework of the eerie. Fisher defines the eerie through two distinct modes: 'something where there should be nothing{...}the failure of absence' and 'nothing where there should be something{...}the failure of presence' (2016, pp.61-62).

This chapter will examine Fisher's (2016) concept of the virtual as an absence of presence and a presence of absence in eerie, abandoned sites, by reflecting on the filming of the ensemble's improvisations of place in a derelict site. Reflections on the embodied improvisatory processes of attuning to a place are informed by Heholt's concept of the 'affect of place' (2016) and Irwin's (2007) notion of the tangible and intangible 'affects' of place in a site-specific context. The strategies of attuning to the 'tangible' and 'intangible' marks and traces of the site's past, along with the director's responses to the site, inform a dramaturgy of the house's materiality as a haunted and haunting site (Heholt, 2016). The framework of the eerie assists in articulating the filming strategies, naming of practices, and the dramaturgy of place as agential in the site-specific intermedial performance *Dwelling*.

Reflecting on the filming process draws on Hopper's (2017) concept of an 'unseen watcher', as it informs the performative ways in which the director situates themselves and the camera in relation to the site and the ghostly figures. The filming techniques explore the

concept of an unseen watcher as a sourceless agency that is felt as an eerie presence of absence beyond the filmic frame, providing examples from the ensemble's improvisations on site and from the films. Throughout the chapter, defining and naming these strategies and techniques helps articulate the practical explorations, including the framing and reframing of agency within and beyond the filmic frame. These are then further examined through examples of the process, as evident in the films' editing processes, which explore a visual concept of absence and presence in haunted and haunting sites.

Alongside the visual dramaturgy, the chapter proceeds to examine a sound concept that is inspired by Fisher's (2016) analysis of the film the *The Stone Tape* (1972), as it addresses an eerie hauntological temporality, through the concept of layers of the past stored as sounds within the stone of eerie sites. Reflecting on the dramaturgy of sound in the context of the soundtrack for each film, and the vocal-looping of texts and song in the live performance *Dwelling,* which repeats and layers multiple voices of disembodied spectral presence of absence. By exploring sound as a performative medium that mediates memory and desires between the two sites, the chapter examines how the chapel site functions as a memorial site for the spectral presence of the house to be released. Framed through Rayner's (2006) analysis of theatre as a memorial practice, the practice explores how the house's intangible memories, desires, and longings materialise in the ghostly figures, sounds, and texts as doubles in the chapel site.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of how time is presented in the intermedial space, informed by Chapple and Kattenbelt's (2006) analysis of intermedial theatre. The techniques of framing and reframing images through video projection convey complex, non-linear narrative structures, which layer different times—the multiple temporalities of the house's past, the present of the performance, explored through the figures of Mourners mediating across time and space, and the audience's present. The chapter continues to examine these ideas through Merx's (2006) study of representations of time in intermedial performance, exploring the different 'worlds' presented on stage as these coalesce in the intermedial space. The reflections on the live performance examine how time becomes hauntological through layering, repetition, and doubling of spectral memories, experiences and feelings. The

chapter concludes with an analysis of intermedial dramaturgy, which spatialises time to disrupt unities of time and space in performance, presenting a disjunction of time and space that collapses dualisms of past and present, presence and absence, and haunting and haunted.

The theoretical frameworks underpinned and informed the filming and editing processes, which explored a visual concept of the eerie, focusing on the interplay between presence and absence. The site is envisioned as an eerie, haunted site of absent presence, following Fisher's speculation on the eerie 'as it pertains to ruins or other abandoned structures' (2016, p.62). The mysterious affective force of the eerie provokes a fascination with ruins, which, as Fisher states, prompts the question, 'What happened to produce these ruins, this disappearance? What kind of agency is acting there? Is there an agent at all?' (2016, p.11). Fisher's premise is that not all abandoned ruins are eerie; however, some sites have a palpable absence of presence that raises concerns about what might have previously inhabited the site. The eeriness of haunted sites attunes to the idea that the past remains an eerie presence with agency; Fisher observes that 'behind all manifestations of the eerie, the central enigma at its core is the problem of agency' (2016, p.63). Poltimore House has an eerie atmosphere that becomes evident through its materiality. Its history's layers remain in its derelict architecture. It is a site of haunting absent presences that generate eerie unease, a palpable presence of absence.

Recent studies in spectral theory provide a critical framework for investigating ghosts and hauntings as a spatial phenomenon within site-specific dramaturgy (Luckhurst, 2002), Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren (2010), Heholt and Downing (2016), Lee (2019), Luckhurst and Morin (2016). Ruth Heholt and Niamh Downing's (2016) recent contributions to spectrality studies bring spectrality and haunting into dialogue with landscape studies and the hauntings of place, arguing that haunting is a sensorial, bodily experience, as the affect of place. In an immersive approach to the site, the ensemble sought to explore the place's 'affect' through their response to the site's materiality, traces, and marks. The site-specific process draws on Pearson's (2010) analysis of site-specific processes and performance, particularly Pearson's reference to the work of Kathleen Irwin (2007), whose focus on the affective, tangible, and intangible presence of absence as traces of the past resonates with the concept of the eerie.

The absence in the abandoned site extends beyond what is known and knowable to encompass the eerie in 'other' intangible worlds and otherworldly figures.

Heholt and Downing's *Haunted Landscapes: Supernature and the Environment (Place, Memory, Affect)* (2016), an edited collection of essays surveying literature and film through critical frameworks: spectral, affective and spatial. Heholt and Downing acknowledge an association between haunting and ghostly landscapes as places of absence, memory, and nostalgia, emphasising the temporal aspect of ghosts and hauntings. Heholt argues that haunting is first and foremost a sensorial bodily experience that occurs as a felt response to the affect of place and that 'perhaps paradoxically, given the immaterial nature of ghosts, there is no haunting without a material presence or bodily experience of it. And in particular, if that which haunts is unseen. It must be *felt'* (2016, p.5).

Heholt references the work of the late writer Vernon Lee (1856-1935), in particular Lee's essay 'Faustus and Helena: Notes of the Supernatural in Art' (1880), which provides a conceptual context for Heholt's analysis of the effect of ghosts and hauntings of place as felt sensorial-bodily experience. Heholt argues that for Lee, 'the ghost is the landscape; there is no separation between the ghost and place. Lee believes that these places invade our consciousness, affecting our very being (2016, p.2). Heholt expounds on Lee's argument, proposing that the 'ghost-of-place' or 'Genius Loci' not only inhabits a place but, as Lee argues, 'the genius of place lurks there, or more strictly, *he is it'* (Lee quoted in Heholt and Downing 2016, p.2 original emphasis). By drawing attention to the affective force of haunted places, Heholt argues that 'there can be no landscape without haunting. The spirit of the place *is* the place, and we have a bodily response to it; it affects us in the moment' (2016, p.2). To attend to the affective force of an eerie place and landscape is to become immersed within it; we feel its 'affect', the presence of ghosts felt and experienced, haunting places. Heholt argues that an effect of place extends 'the body's immersion in the world; beyond consciousness, beyond, sometimes, even recognised emotion' (2016, p.3). The affective force of place connects with Fisher's eerie outside, which is beyond recognisable perception, cognition and experience, and assists in my investigation of eerie materialities of place within the context of site-specific intermedial performance.

The theoretical framework of spectrality situates ghosts and haunting as spatial phenomena in the haunted place, offering an expanded view of devised site-specific theatre and performance. Mike Pearson observes the multiple definitions of site-specific performance: 'I avoid defining a type, be it site-determined, site-oriented, site referenced, site conscious, site-responsive, site related' (2010, p.1). Following Pearson's broad definition of site-specific, the performance practices in non-theatre sites are considered site-specific, acknowledging how performing within the site transforms processes and impacts the dramaturgy, as the site has a transformative effect on the performance.

Pearson (2010) surveys a broad range of practices and theoretical approaches; one particularly relevant is Kathleen Irwin's (2007) work. Irwin recognises the former functions of a site, its history and community, its social functions, and how a site presents the possibility of an absent presence of its materiality (Pearson, 2010, p.10). Irwin argues that 'the material traces evoke worlds that are intangible and unlocatable: worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect and insight' (Irwin quoted in Pearson, 2010, p.10). Irwin's expansive view of the materiality of a site extends to how sites can unsettle and disturb, 'where physical traces of the building's past operate metaphorically to render absent present and function to introduce the spectator to other worlds' (Irwin quoted in Pearson, 2010, p.10). Heholt's concept of the 'affect of place' and Irwin's intangible materialities of the site provide a complex theory of place as sites of presence and absence, felt as an affect of place, which expands consciousness of place beyond the tangible towards intangible and eerie materialities.

Attuning to the Tangible and Intangible Materiality of the Site

In the early stages of the creative process, the ensemble engaged in an immersive improvisatory process that responded to Poltimore House's eerie materiality. Fisher's concept of agency of place informed and prompted questions that inspired an approach to the site and the ensemble's improvisations of place: What is the eerie agency, or agency *in* and *of* the house? Is there an agency? How can the site's affective forces and agencies, as the absence of presence, manifest in performative ways? The questions were directed to the ensemble,

affecting their experiential and affective response to the site.

Irwin's (2007) site-specific approach instigated and grounded the ensemble's process, acknowledging the site's history through a tour provided by the Poltimore trustee, which informed the ensemble about the site's past functions. It had once been home to a wealthy family, then served as a boarding school for boys, and finally operated as a maternity hospital until it was nearly destroyed by fire. The palimpsest of the site's history as absent presence is evident in the marks and traces of its materiality; on the ground floor were the traces of an operating theatre where babies had been born, which had a potent eerie affect to the extent that this influenced the choice not to film in that particular room. On the first floor were the derelict bedrooms of the boarding school, which had then functioned as hospital rooms. Although they were inaccessible, they were visible from the courtyard below. The past functions of the house influenced the directorial choices, which were not to document the history but to evoke the presence of its past as an absent presence —an eerie, spectral agency.

The reflective process entailed articulating the initial sensations, perceptions, intuitions and subconscious processes that raised an awareness of the site's eerie affect. Due to time constraints of working in the house, which was cold and had only natural light, the ensemble's initial performative response through improvisation took place off-site in the studio. Inspired by the initial reactions to the house and emergent themes, the ensemble improvised movement-based scores, with the option to incorporate vocal texts, objects, and costumes. Pearson defines a process of working responsively to a site as 'an interpenetration of the found and the fabricated' (2010, p.5). In this context, the 'found' was the site's historical functions, which interpenetrated with what is 'fabricated', that which is felt, perceived and intuited, which stimulated creative and imaginative responses from the ensemble and director as 'fabricated' responses. The term 'fabrication' invites invention and imagination and a release of creativity that is not bound to the documentary but is an encounter between the site and the imagination that arises in and through the site's materiality as it extends to the existent and non-existent, natural and otherworldly, and the tangible and intangible that holds tension.

The development of performative material navigated this interpenetration of fact and fabrication, with my response to the facts of the sites material traces: rows of derelict bedrooms that could be seen from the courtyard but were out of reach, physical marks of children's heights measured on door frames, broken tiles in an operating theatre with a solid metal door that shuts it from the rest of the house, and the multiple names painted on the library wall. The fabrication arises through sensory and intuitive processes: a sense of confinement in the courtyard, as it is covered in scaffolding that encloses the house completely, effectively closing it off from the outside world, creating a liminal inside/outside space at the centre of the house.

The directorial process was responsive to the tangible and intangible materialities embodied in the site's material traces, from which the 'affect' of the intangible arose as memories, desires, and longings. As an affective force, the site inspired an intuitive, creative process, with emergent themes of childhood and motherhood informing the directorial choices. These decisions led to the selection of specific objects and costumes, including dresses, boots, Victorian children's nightclothes, housecoats, and men's suits, for the improvisations. The director posed questions to instigate the ensemble's process and stimulate creativity: What figures are absent but should be present? What figures and objects are present but should be absent? What remains or returns as a presence of absence? The questions provided prompts for the direction of the ensemble's improvisation of place through movement, text, objects, and costumes, which encouraged multiple options for individual responses, shaping the direction for individual performers to create improvised movement scores.

On returning to the house, the ensemble performed their improvisation scores in areas of the house of their choice, with the direction to become aware of their initial impulses and to remain open and responsive to the reciprocal affective feel of the site, giving attention and awareness of their sensory, intuitive and imaginative response to the site's traces of its past. The process led to heightened awareness and attunement to the site's physical traces: marks on its walls, broken windows, crumbling walls, empty doorways, remains of curtains and shutters, writing on its walls, peeling wallpaper and paint, boarded-up windows and scaffold

poles, and uneven floors. The visceral and sensory effects of the site's materiality impacted consciousness, which in turn attuned to an awareness of the site that led beyond consciousness to intuitive processes related to subconscious levels.

The early stages of the creative process steered away from narrativising and towards performing the presence of ghostly figures on the site as they are felt and experienced as absent presences. The site provides the context for the ensemble's improvisations of mysterious figures, conceptualised through Heholt's notion of ghosts and haunting as an affective force, a 'genius loci' that is both *within* and *of* the house. To demonstrate this aspect of the process through an example of the Library improvisation, it was a striking visual location, with one of its red walls covered in names painted in white, presenting a material trace of its past as an eerie materiality (Figure 2). Vélez chose the library for their improvisation of place, which evoked a response to explore the intangible presence of memory and loss. The anonymous names on the wall's surface marked an absence of presence, explored as a visual concept, with the direction to Vélez to perform a ghostly figure along the wall's surface and trace their fingers over the names in a gesture of retracing. The gestural language gave shape to absence as it conveyed 'nothing where there should be something'; a failure of presence' (Fisher, 2016). The absence of those whose traces remain on the wall presents an outline of an absence that evokes loss. Vélez explored the figure's movement quality as a 'moth', not literally, but embodying an image of a moth moving along the wall's surface. The direction for Vélez was to explore dynamics and effort qualities, as well as their sensorial associations: flutter across the wall, hover towards the window's light, and tremble various parts of their body, including hands and fingers. The physical intentions and imagery helped Vélez embody the fragility of the ghostly figure and evoke an intangible world of memory and loss.

In the film *The Library* (see Appendix A - *Dwelling* Films: *The Library*), Vélez performs alongside another figure, played by De Santos, who, in reflection on the ghostly figures, discusses his response to the site as an angelic figure that operates in another dimension. De Santos's figure contrasts with Vélez's, whose figure is confined to the room, looking for a way out. The angelic figure responds by retracing the wall with pampas grass as wings and

quills to release the other figure. This dynamic relationship between the two performers as they perform a range of figures was explored further in the dramaturgy of the live performance *Dwelling*, with De Santos' figure releasing Vélez's figures into the chapel site (See Appendix A - *Dwelling* performance). The example contextualises the multiple responses of each performer in their embodiment of the spirit of place, which felt like an affective force in and of the site. The lightness of De Santos's approach contrasts with Vélez in this instance. This lightness of the eerie, which contrasts with its more disturbing effect, was advanced in the ensemble's improvisations of childlike figures in the courtyard.
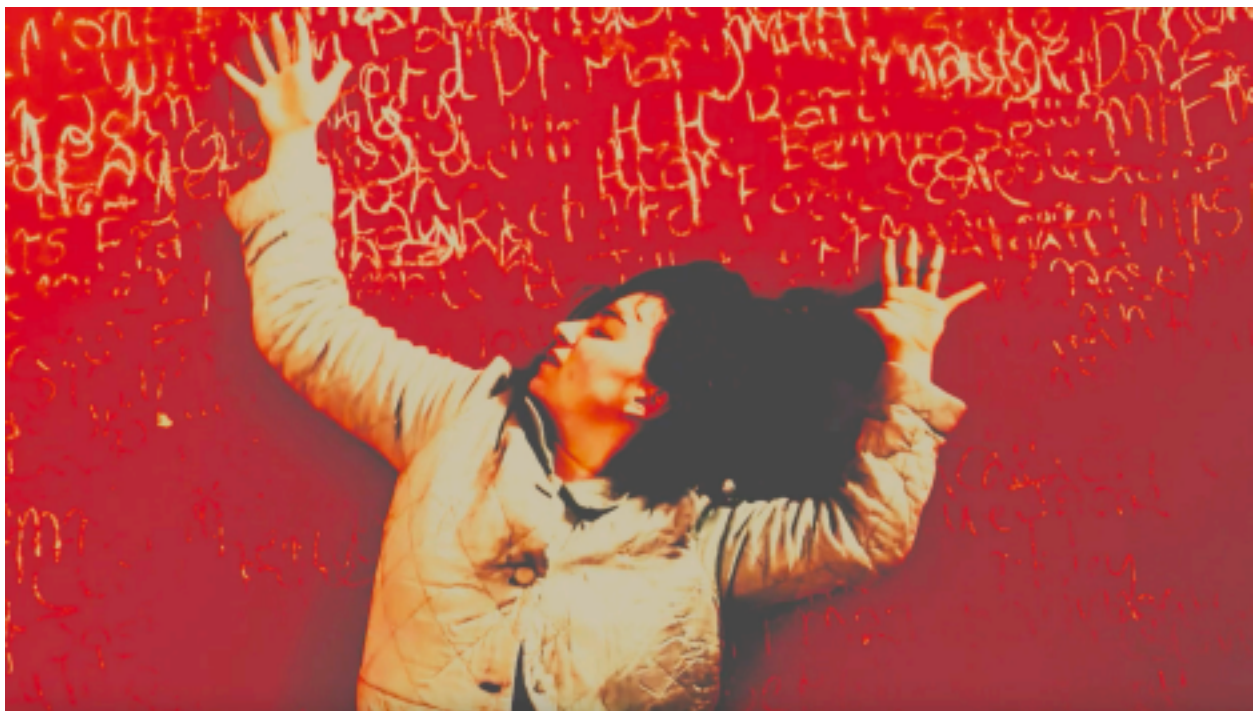
Figure 2. Film footage 'Dwelling' (Steadman, 2019), performer Zov Veléz against the red wall of the library

Performing the 'Unseen Watcher' - Virtual Agencies Beyond the Filmic Frame

The process engaged the ensemble's imaginative capacity, which extended their performance choices through the studio's improvisatory work and allowed them to return to improvising on-site for filming. Initially, the filming was conducted by a professional camera operator, who set up shots in advance. After the first day, it became evident that this approach to

filming would be counterproductive to an improvisatory process, and the director took on the role of camera operator as a performative one. The process, informed by Lee's 'Genius Loci', influenced the experimentation with the camera in performative ways to capture the ensemble's ghostly figures, conceptualised as being *within* and *of* the site. The camera operator created a hidden presence of the site outside the film frame, conceptualised as the ghostly presence of the house itself. The technique of positioning the operator outside the film frame as an absent presence is observed and felt by the figures within the film frame.

Inspired by writer and podcaster Justin Hopper in his analysis of haunted landscapes and ruins, where Hopper discusses the idea of an unseen agency in eerie landscapes and places (2017). Hopper defines the eeriness of sites through the term 'wish't place', which Hopper elucidates as a site that 'has an eerie feel, where one senses the gaze of an unseen other' (2017, p.128). A 'wish't place' Hopper explains 'meaning not just hushed, as in quiet and ghostly, but implying something unseen is also here; a place that is watching' (2017, p.128). Hopper's concept of an 'unseen watcher' inspired the performative ways of operating the camera and the filming techniques that developed in response to the site. The filming provided creative opportunities for exploring the objects as agential objects, with shots set up to obscure or hide human intervention outside the frame, presenting an impression of objects moving without intervention.

The absence of human intervention and agency raises the idea that undetected agencies operate outside the frame, thereby affecting the actions within it. An example of this technique of filming as an 'unseen watcher' is demonstrated in the montage at the opening of the *Dining Room* (See Appendix A- *Dwelling* Films - *The Dining Room*), which conveys an eerie agency as an absent presence outside the film frame. The montage presents an unseen source or 'unseen watcher' that bears witness to the ghostly haunting objects. The soundtrack accompanying the sequence of images comprises sounds recorded from within the house and a voice speaking a foreign language, amplified and distorted by singer Helen Roberts to create non-diegetic sounds and vocals. The juxtaposition of sound with the image of the child's dress beating against the wall (Figure 2.1), which echoes the mothlike figure in *The Library*, presents the sense of a sourceless agency defined as 'beyond the frame'. The agency

is located explicitly but is sourceless; it is both *within* and *outside* the site, outside the normative limits of perception and usual frames of reference. The unseen 'beyond the frame' generates a sense of the eerie, as there is a presence of agency, the origins and identity are not revealed, but rather intimated through the sequence.

Figure 2.1 Film Footage 'Dwelling' (Steadman, 2019) The eerie dress in the opening montage of the Dining Room

The camera techniques developed through an investigative approach to the performative ways of making the absence of the site present through ghostly figures and objects. Through obscuring the source of agency, the films present the presence of an eerie ghostliness *in* and *through* objects, which is an absence of presence beyond the film frame. Fisher articulates this eeriness of objects through what he discusses as 'an entity to which we don't normally ascribe, it possesses a deliberative agency' (2016, p.65). Fisher draws on the example of the birds' behaviour in Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Birds* (1963), as they behave in ways that affect events with an agency they wouldn't usually have. The deliberative agency of the site of the house affects events that wouldn't usually occur and are not accounted for, a concept

explored in each film, which was most evident in this image of objects filmed acting independently of any intervention. The technique excludes the source of agency, making it uncertain whether the dress is agential or if there is something outside the film frame. The dress 'possesses a deliberative agency' (Fisher, 2016) that it would not usually possess. The agency ascribed to objects and the presence of something unseen beyond the frame, both *within* and *of* the house, suggests an agency beyond the frame to convey an affective force and deliberative agency of the house itself.

The filming technique facilitates a viewing process through the camera lens that imagines the presence of unseen agencies beyond the film frame, generating an eerie effect. With the source remaining indeterminate, the context becomes uncertain. The technique extended to filming the ensemble, which imagines an absent presence of the house operating out of view and beyond the film frame. The house was attributed to an agency that influences the figures enfolded within it, as demonstrated through an example from filming *The Children of the Courtyard* (see Appendix A - *Dwelling* Films - *The Children of the Courtyard*). The courtyard was a liminal space right at the centre of the house, surrounded by corridors and doorways; its topography inspired my direction for the ensemble's improvisation of place, with instructions to 'enter and exit the courtyard as childlike figures, with the doorways as portals that lead to places beyond the film frame'. The liminal spaces surrounding the courtyard provided a place where ghostly, childlike figures appear and disappear. The camera was positioned in the courtyard to catch the figures as they appeared and disappeared from the frame, then shifted to film the negative space of doorways from which figures appeared and the negative space without the figures in the frame. The technique of filming the ghostly figure in the frame and the presence of an agency outside the frame presents the idea of the presence of absence, 'something where there should be nothing' (Fisher, 2016, p.61).

The absence and presence of the eerie provided a visual concept that informed the ensemble's performance of a durational, task-based improvisation of place as they improvised children's games, entering and exiting the courtyard. The improvisation was filmed for an entire afternoon to facilitate an immersive experience responsive to the subtle changes in light, sound, and temperature. The improvisatory process facilitates immersing the

camera in the site with the ensemble, focusing on the relationship between the ghostly figures and the 'unseen watcher' of the camera. The intimacy between the camera, which situated an unseen watcher in the space alongside the figures, was enhanced by my immersion in the space, as the camera followed the action from various vantage points. The camera's perspective became a ghostly agent alongside the childlike figures, which bore witness to their games.

The process explored performative ways of becoming detached from the ensemble, as the 'unseen watcher' with the camera observing the child-like figures from a distance and outside the film frame. The distance generated an unsettling presence. The direction for the ensemble to focus on a specific spatial point: looking upwards at a focal point of a lampshade swinging on the first floor and imagining that there is a presence there of something unseen, a presence of absence that is felt outside and beyond the courtyard, affecting their actions. The image of childlike figures looking up at something beyond the frame is a recurring visual motif throughout *The Children of the Courtyard*. The visual concept of absence of presence is conveyed through the presence of an unseen watcher somewhere beyond the frame. It subtly draws attention to the presence of absence as an eerie sourceless agency (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Film footage 'Dwelling' (Steadman, 2019) performers Leeza Jessie, Samuel De La Torre, and Xavier De Santos perform the children in the courtyard noticing an 'unseen watcher'

The role of the camera operator/director developed techniques that followed this principle of agencies beyond the frame, providing a spatial dramaturgy and visual concept for editing, with shots of ghostly figures appearing beyond the frame as 'something where there should be nothing' (2016, p.61). The initial shot in each film emphasises the space as a void out of which figures appear, an example with the childlike figures running through a doorway in the film *The Children in the Courtyard* and the opening of *The Hallway* (See Appendix A - *Dwelling* Films - *The Hallway*), where an empty pew occupied by a childlike figure (Vélez) who gradually appears. The film's exploration of a failure of absence is evident in an example from the beginning of *The Children of the Courtyard,* with an indiscernible childlike figure (Vélez) playing the game of 'now you see me, now you don't'.

The editing techniques explore how the figures are enfolded within the site and appear *within* and as part *of* the haunted site. A method that extends this visual concept to all the films is demonstrated through an example from *The Hallway (See Appendix A - Dwelling Films - The Hallway*), where a childlike figure (Vélez) emerges from a fireplace and gradually appears in close-up within the frame. The concept of ghostly figures enfolded in the site and the site as 'genius loci' signifies a presence of absence both *in* and of the house. The eerie, sourceless agencies remain undetected and indeterminate, as demonstrated here through an example from the opening montage in *The Bathroom* (See Appendix A - *Dwelling* Film - *The Bathroom)*. The camera pans through the corridors, walls, and doors towards a space beyond the film frame. The soundtrack accompanying the sequences features loud distortions of non-diegetic sound that convey a sourceless agency; the presence of an absence moves through the house.

The eerie does not reveal its source, as horror does; it generates a sourceless unease that is detected and remains indeterminate. The eerie effect is an experience of a strange 'eerie calm', which Fisher observes 'has to do with detachment from the urgencies of the everyday'

(2016, p. 13), which 'releases us from the mundane' (2016, p.13). The long shots of *The Children of the Courtyard* linger on the childlike figures as they stand very still, looking upward, and convey a sense of time suspended. The stillness contrasts with quick edits and tracking shots of the figures moving through the courtyard, playing games, and the close-ups of their bodies, holding hands, hugging and becoming separated. The shot's dynamic highlights the stillness as it detaches from the everyday, a release from the mundane, with the strange and eerie long shot of the figures and balloons appearing in the shot. The shots convey an elasticity concerning time and space, which is contracted and then stretched into time sequences that become dream-like and detach from the mundane, as Fisher states, 'giving access to spaces beyond mundane reality altogether' (2016, p.13).

Framing and Re-framing - Memorialising the Spectral Past in the Site of the Chapel

The films provided a basis for the dramaturgy of an intermedial performance, which combined the pre-recorded films with live performance and sound technology. Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt's theorisation of intermedial theatre practice, *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* (2006), provides a theoretical and practical framework that interrogates the interrelation of live and media elements in performance. The article by Sigrid Merx examines representations of time in the performance *Proust 1: Swann's Way* by the Flemish theatre director Guy Cassiers. Merx observes how the performance 'assesses the way time and memory are staged through video technology and demonstrates how the representation of memory calls for an intermedial approach' (Merx in Chapple and Kattenbelt, 2006, p.67). Merx states that 'using video projection quite literally means creating a 'new frame' within a theatrical frame (2006, p.71). Merx's use of the term 'frame' and 'reframing' was useful in delineating the different kinds of frames that operate within an intermedial space and how frames, once placed in an intermedial space, interact with each other in what Merx terms 'a mutual influence' (2006, p.71). Merx observes that although the media maintain their ontology in the theatrical performance and framing, the boundaries between the media become blurred; 'here is a space of intermediality where the media remediate each other' (2006, p. 77). What is particularly relevant to *Dwelling* was how the use of framing and reframing of imagery within film projections and live performance was how 'the intermedial

relationship between video and theatre can open up new dimensions of time' (Merx in Chapple and Kattenbelt, 2006, p.70).

In *Dwelling* (see Appendix A: *Dwelling* performance), the boundaries between the mediated, prerecorded footage and live elements in the intermedial space presented opportunities to orchestrate each medium's distinctive temporal and spatial aspects. The audience was positioned in a fixed location to view the films and live elements, with mediated images that broke the boundaries of the film frame serving as live, performative elements. Although in a fixed position, Merx states that 'the audience can relate to the images shown differently. This flexibility of time and space enables more complex narrative structures' (2006, p.71). The mixing of different media extended the house's action into the chapel, with the narrative of the house in the films doubled in the live-action, which spills out beyond the media frame to reframe the narrative and transform its meaning.

The films were projected onto the chapel walls and played at intervals; between each film, the live performance reiterated sequences and imagery from the previous film as a live projection. In this context, the ghostly figures are reframed as they appear to haunt the site of the chapel beyond the film frame, which makes the boundaries of space and time more fluid. The hauntological time is enhanced through the coalescing of past and present in the images from the film that are repeatedly enacted live; the time of the past disjoints the present, which Merx observes 'the most important result of the interaction between live video and the physical present actor is the exciting connection that can be established between the past and the present' (Merx in Chapple and Kattenbelt, 2006, p.78).

The theatrical frame of the performance serves as a memorial to the house's ghosts within the chapel, where the ensemble's performance of 'Hired Mourners' mediates between the different times and spaces of Poltimore and the chapel. The ensemble performed in various modes: to recreate the ghostly figures of the house that have spilt out of the film frame, and to undertake the task-based performance of the Hired Mourners, who exist in the present time and mediate between different times and spaces. The performance modes present different worlds that were operating through the various media: the world of the house, of the past and

intangible presence of loss and memory, the figures of the house who break beyond the frame of the house as ghostly figures, released from their past, the world of the chapel, as the site of remembrance and memorial, and the world of the performance and the audience in the here and now of the chapel. The 'Hired Mourners' performative role mediates between these worlds, creating tension and dynamics between the different worlds on stage.

Eerie Dramaturgy of Sound

During the editing process, a soundtrack was created for each film, exploring the sound concept as a recording of the site's past, etched into its architecture and emanating from the stone of its walls. The idea inspired by Fisher's discussion of Nigel Kneale's *The Stone Tape* (1972)*,* written for the BBC, Fisher's analysis focuses on the concept of how the past is recorded in the materiality of the place, 'Kneale's thesis is that hauntings and ghosts are particularly intense phenomena that are recorded by matter, by the stone of the room' (2016, p.87). The sound is not vibrational, but instead records voices stored within the stone walls of a building, which preserve its past.

Fisher expounds on storing the spectral past as sound in his analysis of Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining* (1980), adapted from Stephen King's novel *of* the same name (1977). Fisher analyses *The Shining* as it addresses themes of patriarchal and colonial violence stored and unleashed through the paternal lineage in the Overlook Hotel. The hauntological spectres of the hotel's past are released as horrific and violent atrocities, which can be heard and seen by the protagonist as they haunt his psyche. Fisher observes that *The Shining* is a 'massive version of the room in the *Stone Tape'* (2016, p.112) with 'violence, atrocity and misery that has happened in the building is stored up' (2016, p.112). Fisher asks questions about the agency at work in Kubrick's film; 'Who or what is the house?" and "What does it want?. Although the project *Dwelling* does not directly address themes of colonialism and its hauntology, it seeks to rectify past wrongs through the notion of the spectral presence of what has been forgotten or unacknowledged. The unmourned within the context of *Dwelling* are the lost childhoods and motherhoods that haunt the house. The analysis of sound as 'stored up' inspired the editing and sound techniques in the films and subsequently in the live

performance.

The editing concept in *Dwelling* imagines the house as an agency that remains an enigma, exploring a sound idea of its spectral past, which stores sounds and voices in its stone walls. The ghostly sound projections are juxtaposed with the actual sounds of the house, such as crows, metal doors, footsteps on the courtyard's stones, and the wind blowing through the windows. In addition, the female voice was added to explore the sensation of the feminine aspect of the site that I had felt in my initial responses, with songs, voices, piano, and cello presenting the ghostly presence of an absence. The soundtracks for each film, created in collaboration with musician Helen Roberts, were recorded off-site and incorporated during the editing process. An example of the soundtrack in *The Hallway* combines the sounds of the pews with the crows and singing, accompanying a close-up of a childlike figure that emerges from the fabric of the site's architecture, evoked by the female voice, which is imagined as the sound stored in the house along with the ghostly child.

In the live intermedial performance, Jessie plays Chief Mourner, advancing the sound concept further through vocal-looping technology, which drew on texts transcribed from the ensemble's early improvisations and shaped and refined them to distil their themes of loss and absence. The texts are fractured images of memories and experiences centred on childhood, motherhood, and confinement, presented through the layering and repetition of the vocal-looping device. The sound concepts discussed with Jessie were conveyed through vocalisations of songs and spoken texts with multiple tones of voice, generating an effect of various 'voices hovering' in the intermedial space of the chapel. The voices were of absent presences, ghostly figures from the house's past, in combination with the Chief Mourner's voice, which revealed these experiences and the presence of figures at the site of the chapel. Jessie delivers the text as if the content were unknown to them, creating an unfolding, revelatory experience in the moment of performance that summons ghostly figures from the shadows of the chapel. The images of the films projected live onstage, accompanied by vocal looping, enabled the vocalist, Jessie, to explore layers and fragments, repeating them in a non-sequential 'layering and looping of text'. These were juxtaposed with the live movement projected onstage to add context and bolster their meaning.

The texts are projections of eerie, disembodied voices in the chapel, juxtaposed with spectral voices stored in the house, and accompanied by live visual projections. They recount childhood experiences centred on themes of longing, loss, and absence. The absence or presence of past materialised through the ghostly figures, vocalities, space, and objects memorialised in the chapel. Rayner's theorisation of theatre as a haunted practice memorialising the past examines how the presence of loss haunts theatre and that the theatre is a memorial site of 'unforgetting a presence of something absent' (Rayner, 2006, p.xvi). Rayner argues that 'ghosts arise not from the *idea* of the double but from the perceptible presence of an absence that the double outlines and gives shape to' (2006, p.xxii). *Dwelling* embodies the ghostly presence of the spectral past, which is 'unforgotten' in the live presence of the performer's bodies in the chapel as they give shape to absence, ghostly figures and voices that emanate from its walls. The chapel is an active, performative agent providing context and meaning, transforming the performance into a memorial. The presence of the spectral past is palpable as it haunts the site, releasing ghostly figures into a memorial space, an act of mourning for the unmourned and those forgotten.

The intermedial space reframes the past as an eerie presence of absence, as demonstrated by the final image of *Dwelling*, where the ghostly child figure, performed by Vélez, crosses the stage with De Santos and plays with a balloon. The figure appears in the films and reappears in the chapel, only to disappear; however, its balloon remains on the ceiling. The presence of the balloon follows the ghostly figure's disappearance, presenting an eerie absence of presence, 'nothing where there should be something' (Fisher, 2016, pp.61-62). The image embodies the eerie forces that operate beyond the frame as sourceless, inexplicable, and mysterious forces and agencies. The questions remain: Where are the figures now? What is present? What absent presence is beyond the frame?

The performative elements explored in *Dwelling*, which extended to the use of technology in films and sound technology, offered creative opportunities to explore the spectral agency of place. The development of the projections of the previous project, *The Strange Geometry of Time,* into the projection of the films extended to live projections as repetitions and

doubles of the ghosts of one site in another, which, as Fisher observes, 'R*eptition* and *doubling* - themselves an uncanny pair which double and repeat each other - seem to be at the heart of the phenomena which Freud identifies' (2016, p.9). The house's ghosts are then projected onto the chapel site, with the ensemble performing these live projections as if the house ghosts were present in the live performance. This effect on time and space collapses the boundaries of past and present, conveying ghosts as insubstantial projections through imagery and sound. The looping effect repeats and detaches the vocal from its source to convey multiple voices in the space, which hover as voices above the figures, transcending the body's materiality and collapsing the dualisms of material and immaterial.

In conclusion, the project examined an embodied approach to dramaturgies of the eerie through *Dwelling's* site-specific immersive process, enabling the ensemble and director to attune to the felt experience as an 'affect of place'. The processes explored intuiting and imagining the tangible and intangible affective forces of place through Pearson's articulation of the 'fact' and 'fabrication' process in response to the site. The impact of the material and immaterial traces, as spectral residue in sites of the eerie, was embodied through the performer's performance of ghostly figures, distinguished from characters as they appear without a given context.

The project explored directorial techniques, including efforts, tensions, and imagery, to assist performers in embodying the ghostly figures as sourceless agencies both within and of the house. The project expanded the notion of the 'agency' of place, with the house also serving as a haunting figure, evoking an 'unseen watcher', examined through a filming technique that explores the sourcelessness of agency as a presence of absence, remaining undetected and beyond the filmic frame. The project developed strategies for directing the ensemble's performance of scores, which enabled a naming of these practices: 'entering and exiting the filmic frame', and 'the house as a 'deliberative agency' which is situated 'beyond the frame', an agency that acted upon the ghostly figures as an affective force.

The project's development of intermedial processes and techniques enabled explorations of strategies for layering time in the films, through filming and editing techniques, live

performance, and intermedial devices of framing and reframing. These strategies explore a temporal experience characterised by dyschronia, with multiple temporalities generating a fluid experience of time and space. The past coexists with the present, achieved through the ghosting and doubling of live projections and vocal-looping techniques, which present the presence of 'multiple voices as absent presences'. The project explored performative ways of working with the site as agential, advancing the notion of the agency of the virtual as it exists in abandoned sites, the chapel, and the audience's immersive experience of the spectral in the intermedial space.

The subsequent project, *This Is the Land*, advances the performativity of sound technologies as they summon the ghostly presences within and of the landscape. The project explores the premise that multiple voices and sounds of the land erupt beneath the landscape as spectral presences, which are 'caught' using microphones and amplified through techniques such as doubling, layering, and repetition to generate a spectral musicality of the landscape. The methods of working with sound technology and vocal looping techniques extend beyond the human voice to catching the sounds of objects.

The project builds upon the concepts of film projection from the previous project, employing abstraction techniques to apply filmic principles and embody ghostly figures that explore the 'drift' of eerie materialities, thereby blurring the distinctions between object and subject. These concepts apply to manipulating objects and costumes as they enact ghostly figures to advance the performative ways of presenting the non-human and beyond-human agencies of the eerie. The final project explores these questions of agency in eerie landscapes, evoking what has been hidden or buried beneath the surface of places and revealing their spectral presence.

Chapter 3

Performing Eerie Landscapes: The Eerie Just Beneath The Surface in *This Is The Land*

Investigating the eerie as a dramaturgical concept enables the exploration of theatrical space as a site of agency that extends beyond human agency to encompass the non-human and the more-than-human. Embodied approaches to devising theatre interrogate the eerie through the theatre's materiality of theatrical elements, which extend to sound technology as a performative agent alongside the performers. The processes and techniques used to create the performance, *This Is The Land,* extended imaginative capacities beyond the known towards the unknown, offering an expanded view within the field of devised theatre and performance.

This chapter will examine the processes, techniques, and dramaturgy of embodying the eeriness of landscapes, informed by the current debates in landscape studies and culture, which have seen a resurgence of the eerie. Hauntology has become a lens for theorising how the past haunts landscapes, and there has been a return to folk and the 'old ways' (Macfarlane, 2016) to address the contemporary crisis and fear surrounding the environment, as evident in the reinvigoration of Folk Horror. The project draws on the eerie in current cultural forms, particularly the film *Arcadia* (2017), which inspires processes, techniques and the dramaturgy of the eeriness of landscapes of the British Isles.

The project advances improvisatory processes in response to place within an emergent dramaturgy of the eerie, which focuses on the performer's impulse in a directorial process that explores an 'eerie impulse' and methods of 'mining' impulse to uncover the eerie that lies beneath the surface. In this context of landscapes, the focus on the ensemble's improvisations of place examines how the performer can move beyond mundane gestures, movement, and texts to expand imagination beyond the limits of the known.

Framing devices define theatrical space as a 'Thin Place' (Hopper and Overall, 2021), examining how the spectral past accesses the present and the development of performance techniques and naming practices as 'Shape-Shifting' between 'Ghostly Figures' and modes of performance. The project seeks to expand imaginative responses by identifying 'Ghostly.

Figures are beyond human and non-human entities, abstracted to resist characterisation and context. Fisher's (2016) analysis of eerie subjectivity informs the processes and techniques of abstraction that blur the distinction between subject and object, destabilising subject-centred ontologies, as hauntology concerns the instability of the subject (Derrida, 1994). The exploration of indeterminacy and liminal ontologies is advanced through the performative agencies and qualities of non-human things, objects, and sound technologies that perform as 'dowsing' objects to 'catch' and amplify the ghostly.

The chapter examines Lehmann's (2006) analysis of 'Landscape Theatre', which frames and informs the compositional processes that resist narrativisation by refusing sequential, progressive temporalities, presenting multiple coexisting temporalities within a non-hierarchical structure. The defocalisation of elements through a visual dramaturgy examines how these juxtapositions of visual and sonic elements convey meanings, creating a multi-layered dramaturgy of correspondences. Lehmann's (2006) analysis of choral effects frames an exploration of sound technologies that present multiple layers of disembodied voices of landscapes, which seek not to represent but to present the British Isles as a landscape that is not 'sceptred but 'spectred' (Macfarlane, 2015).

Fisher's insightful speculation on the eerie informs an emergent, embodied process of performing eerie landscapes; Fisher states that the eerie 'clings to certain physical spaces or landscapes' (2016, p.61). The project focuses on the eeriness of the landscape as a stimulus. It draws upon current debates within landscape culture, which have seen a resurgence of interest in the eerie. Robert Macfarlane acknowledges this revival of interest in landscape in his article 'The Eeriness of the British Countryside' (2015), which surveys the eerie primarily in literature, music, art, and film. Macfarlane asserts that 'the contemporary artistic response to the eerie has nothing to do with hokeypokey supernaturalism - it's a cultural and political response to contemporary crises and fears' (2015). The dramaturgy of *This Is The Land* engages with themes of the British countryside as a site of uncontested histories and unsettled pasts.

Macfarlane's article draws attention to a current revival of Folk Horror and ghost stories

that address themes of the eeriness of the British landscape, which relates to the influence of the writer M.R. James. James' ghost stories originate from a perspective of the English landscape, as 'English Eerie', which Macfarlane states 'is constituted by uncanny forces{...}which invokes the pastoral - the green dream of tranquillity and social order - and traumatises it' (2015). An online interview with writer Bob Fischer (2022) and Steve Marshall, curator of the art exhibition *"Unsettling Landscape*s: *The Art of the Eerie"* (2021), discusses James' considerable influence on artists and contemporary artworks. These artworks convey the eerie as a malevolent presence or absence in the landscape, a sourceless agency as a trace of spectral pasts that haunt the landscape. Marshall states that the eerie is 'still running under the surface, and it doesn't take much to disturb it' (2022). The eeriness of latent forces and agencies is evident in the artworks, which Marshall states, 'draw on that idea too, it doesn't take much to bring these things back to life' (2022).

In his forward to the exhibition catalogue *Unsettling Landscapes: The Art of the Eerie* (Macfarlane, Marshall and Clarke, 2021), Macfarlane refers to Fisher's articulation of the eerie as a sourceless agency, arguing that 'this sourcelessness distinguishes the eerie from the horrific and is also the reason that eerie art deals often with glimpses, tremors and forms of failed detection or observation' (Macfarlane, Marshall and Clarke, 2021, p.9). The eerie is constituted by absence of presence, with undetected agencies or forces in landscapes that extend normative limits of human perception, which Macfarlane argues 'displaces the human subject; it is concerned more with an intrusion from the outside in - an external presence or agency that will not readily be accounted for by the conventions of perception or rationalism' (Macfarlane, Marshall and Clarke, 2021, p.9).

The reinvigoration of the eerie in landscape culture engages with the British landscape, which is imagined as a mysterious site of hauntings from unsettled pasts. Filmmaker and director Paul Wright explores these themes in his documentary/experimental Folk-Horror film *Arcadia* (2017), around the time of its release, when Macfarlane wrote about the eerie and Folk-Horror revival. *Arcadia's* montages derive from archived footage of documentaries, public information films, and sourced films from the 1970s, sourced from the British Film Institute's archives. In his review of the film for the Guardian, writer and critic Peter

Bradshaw describes *Arcadia* as 'a rhapsody montage of archive clips compiled into a mysterious extended hallucination' (2018). Bradshaw states that the effect of its fragments and layers creates this hallucinatory effect, which, as a non-narrative work, is fascinating{...}with startling and compelling juxtapositions' (2018). The soundtrack is composed by musicians and composers Adrian Utley and Will Gregory. It integrates original music, sound, folk songs, and fragmented vocals and voices, which Bradshaw observes provides context for the images and 'bolsters their meaning and form' (2018). *Arcadia* reveals the countryside as a traumatised site of eerie forces and agencies that lie just beneath its surface. The final images of ghostly figures emerging from graves encapsulate the film's creative process, as Wright discusses with filmmaker Adam Scovell in an interview with John Pilgrim. Wright reflects on his creative process as one of revealing "hidden truths," which were both "the beautiful and horrific, picturesque and disturbing, along with the feeling that different truths were emerging, like ghosts from the past, was integral to the film from the start" (2018).

In the early stages of the creative process, *Arcadia's* theme of the eerie and its montage of images and sounds provided inspiration and a constant reference point for directing the ensemble's improvisations of landscapes. The improvisatory process explored an impulse towards the eerie and the unknown, uncovering eerie performative elements, including images, texts, songs, dances, and ghostly figures. The figures are abstract, ghostly projections of the spectral past that resonate within the rural landscape of the British Isles—the fragmented forms of figures, texts, songs, and sounds in landscapes as a hauntological spectral presence. The eeriness of landscapes revealed through mining beneath the material's surface led to the discovery of an impulse towards the eerie. The eerie erupts as a hallucinatory projection of the past summoned through the performative agency of sound technologies, including microphones and vocal-looping devices, which catch and amplify spectral presence in the theatrical space.

The intention was to create a theatrical montage of images and texts that draw on the concept of eerie landscapes and a sourcelessness of agency, disturbing the pastoral and tranquil image of the countryside. The workshop strategies draw on folk dances, stories,

songs, documentary and fictional events, as well as traditional and seasonal rituals, to inform and develop the theatrical language. Folk elements provide a foundation for improvisatory processes that centralise the body in an embodiment of landscape. Music and sound technology played a crucial role in amplifying and looping the vocals and integrating them with an original pre-recorded folk and dance music soundtrack, in collaboration with composer John Baggott and songwriter Leeza Jessie.

The processes of abstracting figures, inspired by the visual artist John Caple, whose artworks are rooted in folk imagery and an eerie landscape aesthetic, his paintings address themes of re-enchantment of rural landscapes and collective generational memories that reside in the landscape as a presence of the past animating the land. The figures in Caple's paintings present an eerie indeterminacy, an effect that arises from blurring facial features and the figure's eyes, which are often screened by hats and shadows. The abstracted figures embody an eerie stillness and timeless quality; they appear in the rural landscapes as eerie ancestral ghosts. The effect has a dreamlike quality, enhanced by Caple's colour palette, its shades of white, blue, and black, and the qualities of light that illuminate the space around the figures as they seem to float in a strange luminous aura of light.

The concept of the eerie landscape and the ghostly figures of landscape in *Arcadia* and Caple's work inspired a visual dramaturgy, contextualised through Lehmann's analysis of visual dramaturgy (2006). Lehmann addresses the influence of the early avant-garde theatre practices on the development of postdramatic theatre practice and discusses the impact of poet and playwright Gertrude Stein's concept of 'Landscape Theatre' on the development of postdramatic dramaturgy. Lehmann argues that 'the prehistory of postdramatic theatre includes conceptions of thinking about theatre rather like a landscape (Stein)' (2006, p.62), which acknowledges Stein's influence on the avant-garde experimentation and innovation with the theatrical form that extended beyond dramatic to innovations in visual dramaturgy.

Lehmann refers to early pioneers of postdramatic theatre, Tadeusz Kantor's 'Theatre of Objects' and Robert Wilson's 'Theatre of Images' as originators of these innovations in theatre and performance, with their artistic works prioritising the image in non-hierarchical

compositions and non-narrative visual dramaturgy. Lehmann articulates Stein's concept of Landscape Theatre within the context of postdramatic dramaturgy, with changes in plot-based narrative structures giving way to concepts of composition and non-hierarchical structures of theatrical elements. Lehmann argues, 'It is often tempting to describe the stagings of the new theatre as landscapes, this is rather to do with traits anticipated by Stein - a *defocalization* and equal status for all parts' (2006, p.63). The de-focalisation of formal elements in postdramatic form foregrounds image, movement, light, objects, and sound equally in dramaturgy that does not centralise text, character, and narrative, as in dramatic theatre.

In the early stages of the process, the ensemble explored an embodiment of landscape through both their tangible experiences and the more intangible experiences of memory, desire, and sensation. The eeriness of the landscape was intrinsic to the improvisatory processes and techniques, which guided the ensemble through a state of knowing towards the unknown. The structure of the improvisational scores through the seasonal cycle (spring, summer, autumn and winter), with each of the seasons imagined as a landscape to explore folk traditions deeply rooted in seasonal cycles, such as cultural and social festivals associated with each season, its traditions, stories, dances, images and songs.

Eerie Impulse - Performing Beyond the Limits of the Known

The ensemble's improvisations of landscapes allowed them to explore multiple options in their response, with their openness and creative flow leading them towards an open state of being in performance. The 'eerie impulse' emerges from an open state of being that does not focus on an outcome or specific context, which is revealed through the director's observation and prompting of the ensemble's improvisations. The process facilitated the performers' exploration of an eerie impulse that arises from their open state. The process initially presented its challenges, requiring each performer to relinquish the need to know an outcome or context, as the direction shifted away from improvising scenes and consolidating their improvisation in narrative or familiar contexts, which blocked their eerie impulse. The direction to hone in on their impulse, amplify it, and mine its depth, refined and shaped the

impulse as a ghostly figure, gesture, image and text. The emergent process guided the ensemble's performance in an open state, leading them to a lightness in their approach and embodiment of the eerie, and a release of creativity and spontaneity that enhanced their performance choices.

The improvisatory process presented its directorial challenges, with the approach holding the tension between directing and expanding upon an impulse whilst continuing to encourage the ensemble or individual performer's creative flow. It was necessary to remain open and responsive to the ensemble, stimulating and inspiring creativity whilst honing an eerie impulse to encourage more in-depth exploration. Holding this tension in balance would depend on defining the direction by mining an impulse and delving deeper to cut through superficial responses and explore the underlying layers. The method facilitated the exploration and discovery of layers, connections, and associations, which led to the emergence of eerie figures, images, and texts not determined by a given context. The eerie indeterminacy of the ghostly figures is not that of characters in a narrative context, but rather abstracted forms rooted in eerie landscapes that exist outside of linear temporality.

The concept of the mysterious and spectral in landscape informed the direction in subtle ways through references to landscapes as a metaphor for hidden forces, buried pasts and agencies that animate landscape. The early stages established the process of improvising landscapes, which-was grounded in discussions that engaged the ensemble in themes, stories and experiences associated with the seasons. The process provided the ensemble with tangible starting points to guide their improvisation; for example, the initial discussions for improvising the spring landscape encompassed cultural rituals specific to rural folk traditions in the British Isles, such as May Queens, Maypole dancing, and the Celtic festival of Beltane.

The discussions sparked stories and experiences about spring and the metaphors associated with it as a season of resurgence and reawakening, the land emerging from winter's sleep. The strategy of using a musical soundtrack as a sensorial palette for the performer's improvisations of landscapes evokes sensations, feelings, and imaginative responses to landscapes rooted in Folk traditions, contemporary dance music, and the music

of musician PJ Harvey, specifically her album *Let England Shake* (2011). The discussions provided the ensemble with tangible starting points for their improvisation. Also, directing them to intangible themes, they would explore multiple options for their response through movement and text. Vélez's physical response to the theme of a reawakening of the land is demonstrated in an example of improvisation of the spring landscape Vélez's eerie impulse was to move with a gesture of jerking and shaking isolated parts of their body. Observing and responding to Vélez's response, and directing this by honing in on their movement vocabulary, allows them to explore tremors in isolated parts of their body with the intention of reawakening. This process of mining the impulse entailed that Vélez stay with and pursue the eerie impulse, which was guided by imagery to assist them in their exploration and hone their intuition.

The process initially directed Vélez towards kinesthetic exploration, focusing on the sensory and energetic qualities of movement and an embodied physicalisation of emotional states. Imagery drawn from the natural environment, its elements and forces, prompting them to imagine their surge of movement as a force pushing up from the ground, heightened by their kinesthetic sense of a tremor surging from an isolated gesture to radiate through their body. The focus was on directing Vélez's tempos and efforts, radiating the tremors through the body to another isolated gesture, and refining their movement vocabulary through the intention that arises from a surge or force outside, propelling their body. The balance for Vélez was maintaining a connection to the eerie impulse and being open to mining and directing the impulse to discover its layers. The performers' explorations provided them with more performance choices in creating eerie figures of the landscape, thereby eliminating the need for context or narrative.

Through the emergent creative process, the focus on expanding the dramaturgical principles saw the performers performing ghostly figures reawakened in landscapes, the image was refined in the context of seasons, the imagery of the reawakening figure is extended by directing all the performers to perform the image as a collective group of eerie figures moving as if by an invisible resurgent force of the landscape. The original soundtrack composed by Baggott accompanied their dance, and they were not dancing to the music,

representing a specific dance style, or characterising the figures in the context of a rave or dance scene. Instead, they focused on their physicality and movement qualities through efforts, tensions and postures without determining a context. The image near the beginning of the performance, "*This Is The Land*," where ghostly figures awaken through a connection to forces associated with spring's resurgence (See Appendix A - "*This Is The Land*").

Working with each season, beginning with the known and familiar, defines a familiar landscape that extends beyond the known to the eerie. The ensemble's improvisations explore forces and agencies of a mysterious 'outside' which enfolds the ghostly figures. In this context, the outside is defined as the eerie rural landscape, drawing on Macfarlane's concept of the 'English Eerie', and the British Isles as a 'spectred not sceptred isle' (2015). The figures are enfolded in what Fisher describes as 'rhythms, pulsations and patternings of non-human forces' (2016, p.11), embodiments of agencies and forces of the outside, both of and within the outside. The exploration of landscape encompasses various aspects, including elemental, geological, meteorological, and kinetic. The ensemble was engaged in discussions about the weather, temperatures, atmospheres, and the elements associated with the different seasons. The ensemble's haptic sense of the landscape, how it felt kinesthetically as a body memory of touching landscapes, was related to the elemental and physical forces of the landscape.

The summer season exemplifies this process of embodying the landscape's forces and elemental qualities, which was developed through initial discussions that focused on individual stories, memories, and experiences of the summer landscape. The improvisation concentrates on the particular performer's kinetic sensations associated with the feel of the seaside landscape, the sea, and their memories of holidays and days out at the seaside. The improvisation score involves telling stories about the summer, sharing personal memories and experiences of the seaside, and relaying these through the microphones. The holiday is a release from the everyday, and the sea is an elemental force that conveys the metaphorical human experience of expansion and freedom. The individual performers' stories evolved into movement and text-based improvisations of landscape, guided by themes of freedom and surrender to the elemental forces.

The method of performing the landscape as memories led the ensemble from the familiar towards an eerie impulse, demonstrated by an example of Jessie's movement response. The impulse arose from a text, "All the seas", which Jessie sang into the microphone and looped through the loop pedal (See Appendix A - *This is The Land)*. Jessie then moved into the space with an impulse, driven by the momentum of their head swinging, honing the kinetic quality, momentum, and dynamics: throwing, catching, rising, falling, and moving with the head's weight. De Santos joined in with the impulse and was directed to loosen their hair, joined by Vélez, who added to the image by moving with their hair loosened. Vélez and De Santos moved with vitality and abandonment (Figure 3), associating the image with the rhythms and forces of the sea, caught in its ebb and flow. Through the process of progressing from familiar memories, the ensemble began to let go of narrative and explore eerie impulses related to intangible sensations and desires. The process expanded the ensemble's performance choices beyond the familiar to an embodiment of figures, intangible forces, and the rhythms of the landscape, and away from text as a story to text as a summoning of the landscape.

Figure 3. Rehearsal photograph 'This Is The Land' (Steadman, 2022/3) performers Zov Veléz and Xavier De Santos. They abandon their weight to the head and loosen their hair to feel a sense of freedom and abandon to the ebb and flow rhythm of the sea.

Thin Place - Encountering Ghosts in Theatrical Space

A strategy for the ensemble to perform the figures without context was to introduce them to a spatial technique that guided them in embodying the eerie in their performance. Theatrical space is a site of ghostly figures appearing and disappearing in a 'thin place'. The concept of the thin place is discussed by writer and producer Justin Hopper in the podcast *Uncanny Landscapes* (2021), in an interview with novelist Sonia Overall. Overall states that "a thin place is where the membrane between Heaven and Earth (in Christian theology) becomes thinner, so you can almost see through" (2021). The thin place is a portal between the present and the past, which, as Overall states, "draws attention to the relationship between what has happened in a place and its ability to open up realms or through to the past, which is where I think hauntings come in{...} a place that is allowing access to other worlds, but also allowing the past to access us" (2021). The otherworldliness of the thin place aligns with Fisher's (2016) definition of the eerie 'outside' as an external site that transcends the limits of logical perception of space and time. In the thin place, as with the 'outside', time is experienced as atemporal and non-linear. The thin place is a realm where the past and the dead can access the living. The theatrical space is a thin place, an atemporal site of ghostly figures that appear as multiple, coexistent layers of non-specific pasts, haunting eerie presences that erupt from the liminal site of a thin place.

The early stage of the creative process established this technique to perform within a thin place; as a spatial technique, it grounded the ensemble within a world. An improvisational strategy, 'Pause, Repeat, Go,' was introduced to develop a non-sequential progression of time and direct the ensemble away from narrative and narrativising. This strategy fragmented the sequential flow of impulses and resisted context. The movement and writing exercise was a warm-up or pre-expressive exercise to attune the ensemble to their kinesthetic sensations and proprioceptive awareness of feeling and impulse. Music accompanied the exercise, selected from Folk music, dance music, and the soundtrack to *Arcadia*.

The ensemble was directed in a movement and writing improvisation with the instructions "Pause, Repeat, Go." During the "Pause", the ensemble was directed to stop and "Repeat" a

movement phrase or one movement/gesture, if writing, to repeat a phrase, word, or letter. The "Repeat" lasts for twenty seconds to one minute, emphasising the need for precision in the instruction to "Repeat" and sharpening physical focus. On reflection, Buckley observed that they delved into a more profound sense of presence in their body during the "Pause", which heightened their presence in the moment. In the instruction "Go", the ensemble shifted to follow another impulse, and it became evident that the "Pause, Repeat" counteracted the impulse towards narrative. Initially, the exercise felt counterintuitive to creative flow, but through practice, it was evident that resistance in the "Pause, Repeat" deepened impulses. The exercise encouraged the ensemble to explore eerie impulses without needing to determine an outcome and supported them in the subsequent stage of the creative process.

The ensemble's embodiment of the exercise guided them throughout the devising process, with the form of the performance that began to take shape and was refined through the structure of the seasons. The fragmented form of the landscapes required the ensemble to shift performance modes and stay present during each shift. The pre-expressive exercise facilitated this process, as it was a technique to apply and deepen presence, enabling them to explore spontaneity as they drew on the exercise in the devising process to explore more performance choices in their interactions as ghostly figures with sound technology and objects.

The embodiment of this technique is evident in this example, as seen in the ensemble's improvisation of the winter landscape. Through an initial stage of discussing familiar aspects of the winter season, including cultural, social, and religious rituals and traditions, the ensemble shared stories and identified personal rituals and traditions. The technique provided a foundation for their improvisation based on the theme of Christmas Day, with movement and text-based scores developing around carols, Christmas songs, sitting around a table for Christmas dinner, uninvited guests, family feuds, decorating rooms and trees. The ensemble improvised with movement, text, song, sound technology, music, and objects (fake snow, decorative angel wings, tinsel, a table, a ladder and chairs), with the instruction to "Pause, Repeat, Go", prompting a shift from the more familiar Christmas traditions towards the unfamiliar and eerie.

The improvisation released a more profound impulse within this context of the winter landscape, demonstrating the process of mining an impulse through this example of Jessie's response. Jessie screened their face with Christmas angel wings during the improvisation. Their choice introduced an eerie impulse, shifting the context from a chaotic 'Christmas scene' to something unknown yet rooted in the season and landscape of Winter. To capture the impulse, Jessie was prompted to continue screening their face with the angel wings and to speak an improvised text about angels into a microphone. De La Torre was prompted to offer resistance by interrupting, questioning, and attempting to remove the microphone from Jessie. Jessie was to pursue the impulse to speak of angels and delve deeper into this impulse, following the direction to "Pause, Repeat, Go," and resist interruptions from De La Torre, which further deepened their impulse. Jessie's impulse led them to speak, "I don't need angels," an eerie impulse that had been arrived at through prompting and mining layers to reach a more profound one, which led her out from the known into the eerie. Jessie opened to an impulse beyond the limits of the familiar and the known, and the traditional narrative of Christmas; the eerie impulse reached beyond the mundane. On reflection, Jessie discussed how this process had cut through layers to reveal something more profound in their response—an embodied experience of the landscape that expanded beyond social and cultural traditions to something more in the realm of the ancient and mythical. Their text is shaped and refined, with an example demonstrated at the end of the performance (See Appendix A: *This Is The Land*), where a figure lies on the floor, speaks into the microphone, and then stands to sing the song (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Rehearsal photograph 'This Is The Land' (Steadman, 2022/3) performer Leeza Jessie summoned by the microphone to appear from the Thin Place.

The devising stage entailed assembling the ensemble's performance of the everyday and mythic through compositions of landscapes. The fragmented forms of images, texts, and music were performed through a shapeshifting technique, and their understanding of the world on stage was conveyed through figures emerging from a thin place. The ensemble refined their method of shape-shifting between figures as they understood this within the context of the theatrical space as a thin place, which is evident in Jessie's reflection on their performance technique. During the winter season, Jessie's direction was to lie on the floor and speak the text into a microphone, lying next to them, while they quietly spoke their text into the microphone as they emerged from underneath the ash to stand up (Figure 3.2). Jessie reflected on their shape-shifting technique, which involved transforming from one figure lying beneath the ash to a figure emerging gradually, as they spoke the text into the microphone. Jessie's understanding of a transitory state is indeterminate; as one figure disappears, another emerges as if from a thin place.

Figure 3.2 Rehearsal photograph 'This Is The Land' (Steadman, 2022/3) performer Leeza Jessie emerges from a Thin Place.

The devising process involved mapping the performative elements onto large pieces of paper by taping A3-sized sheets to the wall and designing columns across the paper that listed the performative aspects of imagery, figures, music, sound, technology, and objects. These provided visual reference points for discussions and a visual map to navigate the fragments of elements the ensemble would shape-shift between. The mapping facilitated a directorial process, with each map corresponding to the composition of a season as a scenic landscape. The process assembles and reassembles performative elements to explore the juxtaposition of imagery, texts, and music, and to discover the connections between these elements that bolster meaning.

The ensemble performed the maps, a technical process that structures a first draft of the

performance, much like a sketch. The mapping method was challenging for the ensemble, as they navigated between the performance elements and modes without establishing a clear context or through-line. These modes are characterised by performing indeterminate, ghostly figures, engaging in performative tasks, and inhabiting open, indeterminate states of being. The technique of shape-shifting, which I described as shifting between different modes and figures, supported the ensemble's performance, enabling them to be grounded in their performance as they shifted modes and performative states.

The devising process refined each fragment through a compositional method, structured as a cyclical structure through the four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter, which developed after the performance at the Rondo, with the reworking of sections after the initial performance providing opportunities to mine preexistent performative material, to look for connections that reveal correspondences and layers. The fragments of performance material are 'ingredients' for composition, a term coined from Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's *Viewpoints: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints* (2014), where Bogart discusses applying the Viewpoint techniques in practice in the compositional process. The ensemble's improvisations with pre-existent structures explore the ingredients as separate components of the initial score; each ingredient was named to define its components. The ensemble improvised with various performative ingredients to discover connections between them and reveal layers of meaning, bolstered by the application of new texts, vocal looping, and pre-recorded music.

Composition of Eerie Landscapes - Resistance Narratives

The compositional process demonstrates an example of an improvisation score that explores the ingredients of the Autumn section, reworked after the performance at the Rondo (See Appendix A: *This Is The Land* - Rehearsal run-through before the Anglican Chapel). The Autumn season explored themes of resistance from a range of perspectives: a dramaturgical perspective of how the ensemble performs the figures of resistance, resistance to singular narratives of the land, to sequential narrative and progressive sequences of time; figures resist destructive social and cultural systems that relate to the land; figures are hunted down on the

land and persecuted. The discussions with the ensemble focused on artistic and folk rituals and traditions associated with Autumn, Bonfire Night, and the figure of Guy Fawkes, as well as discussions of travellers as 'lawbreakers' and 'trespassers' of the land. The metaphor of Fox Hunting and the fox figure, which De Santos explores in his solo entitled 'The Hunt', conveys ideas of land and ownership, as well as themes of belonging and displacement in both people and animals. The ensemble continually contributes to the process, with De Santos defining the qualities of the atmosphere by the element of fire, which relates to bonfires and the Autumnal colours of the landscape.

These multi-perspectival themes of resistance provided a stimulus for the improvisational score of landscape, drawn from the previous version of Autumn's ingredients as a list: The Gun Duo, The Furtive Escape, The Foxhunt, The Game of Refusing To Join In, The Singling Out Game, The Story of the death of "The One", The Priest's story of a Gathering, Caileen Dances, Applauding Caileen, the Priest Collapses. The ensemble explored performative resistance in their approach to improvisation from various perspectives, including resistance to one another and resistance to a narrative flow. Resistance dances explored a vocabulary of "stamping down" and "rising," and physical games between the performers offered physical resistance. With references to *Arcadia,* the improvisation encapsulated the anarchic spirit at the essence of the land through a quick-firing dynamic. The improvisation brought more coherence to the dramaturgy of an eerie landscape of resistance and expanded its themes to the Autumn landscape with more fluidity. The ensemble gained depth in their embodiment of techniques and confidence in their performance of the fragmented shape-shifting form as it facilitated a release of creativity and spontaneity in their shifts between the performative elements and modes of performance.

The following examples demonstrate how the improvisatory approach to composition embodies two different aspects of the eerie. One aspect is its eerie stillness or suspension of time; another is a force or agency that disrupts temporality and breaks through the mundane. The first aspect demonstrated in the Autumn section (See Appendix A - *This Is The Land-*Rehearsal run-through before the Anglican Chapel), which sees the ensemble sit on a row of chairs to face the audience, a moment of eerie stillness that leads to a slow vocal-looping of

Jessie's text, which begins, "It was a cold dark night". The stillness of the imagery, juxtaposed with the text, summons a mysterious place, illuminated by the "moonlight" and featuring a lone figure, without specifying what, where, or whom. The suggestion of an eeriness of place and the presence of someone or something is anticipated but never revealed, a palpable presence of absence; Fisher's 'nothing where there should be something' (2016, p. 61), which generates a visceral sensation of unease that arises from this perception of the eerie. The eeriness arises from a suspension of time in stillness, and the seated figures encapsulate Caple's figures; they present indeterminate folk figures that embody an eerie aura of spectral pasts, which become momentarily present as an absence.

In contrast, the second example (See Appendix A - *This Is The Land* - Rehearsal run-through before the Anglican Chapel) encapsulates the eerie to unsettling effect, which has to do with the disorientating effect of the eerie, with the performative elements assembled to then gradually break down, with causal relationships becoming progressively uncertain. The eerie presence of absent agencies acting upon and affecting the performative aspects, including its technology, figures, objects, and sound. The eerie arises from the perception of presence, something where there should be nothing, which occurs when a figure named the 'Priest', played by Jessie, applauds the girl 'Caileen', played by Buckley, addressing the audience about events that have taken place, which are both humorous and disturbing. The Priest figure then begins to collapse, and the other figures offset the Priest's actions as they attempt to catch the collapsing body, catching their voice in the microphone and looping their vocals through the looping device. The figure collapses, and their voice breaks down but continues to be recorded and repeated; stuttered words break into sounds. The effect of the sounds and vocals comes apart from the figure and continues, amplified through the loop pedal; the Priest transforms into an eerie presence, the presence of an unknown agency. The figure then collapses completely and is dragged away by De Santos; what remains of the figure is 'nothing where there should be something; a failure of presence' (Fisher, 2016).

The scene generates uncertainty surrounding the ontological status of the priest and their agency, with questions arising: What is at work here? What or who are they? Were they always this? Are they alive or dead? Were they alive before this happened? What has

occurred for this to happen, and what has become of them? The sourcelessness of agency acting in this moment generates sensations of uncertainty and unease; the agency originates from a source beyond the figure, yet it makes itself present within the figure. The chaotic montage of elements differs from the previous example of the eerie. It is not an eerie stillness, but rather an uncertainty about the presence of one of the figures and the subsequent effect of the collapsed figure's absence. The figure is somewhere between life and death. The eerie aspect arises from this sense of the presence of an absence, where there should be a presence.

Abstracted Figures and Dis-located Vocalities

The strangeness of the eerie raises existential questions, which Fisher asserts 'the eerie poses the most fundamental metaphysical questions one could pose, questions to do with existence and non-existence{...}The unseeing eyes of the dead, the bewildered eyes of the amnesiac - these provoke a sense of the eerie' (2016, p.12). Fisher draws on the examples of mannequins and automatons, which connect to Sigmund Freud's observations in his essay "*The Uncanny"* (1919), in which Freud draws attention to the strangeness of the eyes in evoking the feeling of the uncanny, specifically the unseeing eyes of a doll. The figures become eerie through the effect of screening their eyes and facial expressions, which provoke an estranging impact that raises uncertainty surrounding the existence or non-existence of presence and absence. The ideas are connected to Fisher's notions of the eerie, as they concern metaphysical existence and non-existence, and collapse dualisms with ghostly figures hovering in the liminal space between life and death.

The performer's facial features are obscured by their hair, sunglasses, hats, and costume, which cover parts of the body. An example, demonstrated in the performance's opening, emerged through an improvisation where the ensemble's exploration of costumes screened their bodies, and the costumes obscured their characteristics (See Appendix A: *This Is The Land*). The screening of the performers' bodies, all wearing identical costumes and arranged near one another in the space, with their backs to the viewer, aimed to focus attention on the screened part of the body and abstract the figure. The choreography focused on unison

stepping in a circular motion, accompanied by an even, rhythmic tempo, as the figures floated or hovered indeterminately in space. The ensemble's neutral state of tension is reflected in their screening of facial expressivity, accentuating a neutral tension in movement qualities to present abstract figures. The ritualised repetitive choreography was underscored by the sound of a drone, presenting a "summoning" from a sourceless void that shapes their timeless, undulating circular step.

The ensemble's direction was to suspend the need for a specific context for these figures, as the intention was to present them as ghostly, abstracted forms. Caple's figures inspired the ensemble's performance to move toward abstraction and indeterminacy. The choice to screen the body led to the technique of working with costumes to create abstract figures and present them as ghostlike visual projections, as demonstrated through an example from the summer section, where the figure in black stands on a chair, played by Vélez. A sunhat screens the figure's facial features. They appear silhouetted in the dark, wearing a black dress that looms above the other figures on stage, suddenly emerging as a projection in space (Figure 3.3)

Figure 3.3 Rehearsal photograph of 'This Is The Land' (Steadman, 2022/23) performer Zov Veléz. The hat screens the figure's face to abstract the features, remove characteristics, and abstract the figure.

The figure presents an eerie indeterminacy that was enhanced through the direction to Vélez to deliver their text in the third-person future tense, a technique that presents the figure as bearing witness to their experience as it occurred at another time. The figure's voice is captured through the microphone, while their face remains obscured, emphasising their vocality as separate from the figure's body. The combination of the screening technique through the costume affected how the image and the delivery of text estranged the figure, presenting a mysterious, eerie figure that hovers in space.

The flow of time is disjointed, as the figure's haunting from the past still speaks about

something that has not yet occurred, anticipating what will happen, which has an estranging effect that suspends them in an atemporal, haunting time. Through a combination of performative elements — namely, the costume's screening effect, the text's delivery through the microphone's 'radio' effect, and the use of the third-person future tense — the effect is one of eerie uncertainty surrounding their presence. The image collapses dualisms as the figure is both present but, at the same time, strangely absent. The screening of the figure and other figures' facial features in the summer affects the perception of the voice; with the voices caught by the microphone, they become dislocated from their source.

In his analysis of postdramatic theatre, Lehmann parallels the postdramatic forms and the Greek chorus, specifically how the Choral device has an estranging effect on the spectator. The often masked figures of the chorus speak a non-dialogic text; the impact of the mask screens individual features that estrange the voice, as Lehmann argues, 'when watching individual speakers, one experiences intensity that the sound belongs to the individual face. By contrast, listening to someone wearing a mask{...}the voice appears strangely detached, separated from the self' (2006, p.130). The choral approach to speaking or song emphasises the sound of the voice as it is detached from the individual speaker; Lehmann argues that it 'raises a voice in whose sound waves the individual voice does not disappear entirely, but it no longer participates in its unadulterated peculiarity, instead becoming a sonic element in a new choral voice that has uncannily taken on a life of its own' (2006, p.129). The vocality of the choral voice emphasises the sonic. It generates an eerie effect with the voice detached from the individual, which Lehmann states, 'the voice, estranged from the individual body hovers above the whole chorus like an independent entity: a ghostly voice belonging to a kind of liminal body (2006, p.130).

The choral effects in the summer scene generated a liminal voice that 'hovers above' the ensemble as a ghostly voice estranged from an individual performer's body. The emergent processes explored and advanced these ideas through the different versions of the performance. In the first performance version, the ensemble wore hats that obscured their facial features as they shared memories of the seaside into the microphones. (See Appendix A - *This Is The Land*- Rehearsal run-through before the Anglican Chapel). When the

performers removed their hats, the figure stopped talking and looked upwards as if to hear voices hovering above. The memories overlapped as their voices became detached from one individual speaker and floated above them as a collective, ghostly, liminal voice (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4 Performance photograph of 'This Is The Land' (Steadman, 2022/23), the Rondo Theatre, performers Alice Buckley, Zov Vélez, Samuel de La Torre, Xavier De Santos, and Leeza Jessie. The figures tell stories of the seaside, and their voices hover above as liminal choral voices.

The spring continued this exploration of the ghostly, liminal voice through its choral effects, as demonstrated in a moment where an individual figure's voice, played by Jessie, became a collective voice. The impact of one of the figures speaking "in the eye" is repeated and looped through the vocal-loop pedal; the figure then begins to sing the same line while their face, screened by their hat and joined by two other figures, Buckley and De La Torre, sings while wearing identical hats. The hats screen their facial features to an eerie effect, revealing the sources of their voice; their liminal, ghostly voice is strangely detached. The figures are conduits for voices detached from an individual body or source, an effect explored by Jessie

as she studied vocal looping techniques that layer different voices and phrases to create an eerie effect of multiple voices speaking from a space beyond the speaker.

The eerie sourcelessness of the vocality, explored through sound technology and developed through these performance techniques, was integral to the technology's performative role. The technology operated within a theatrical frame that defined the theatrical space as a site of spectral presence, framing the technology in a performative role to capture, amplify, loop and layer the texts, songs and sounds. The conceptualisation of sound technology's materiality as an 'agential object' confers agency to seek, capture, and amplify the figures and sounds of objects; the technology's agency mediates the other elements on stage, with the spectral figures and objects as absent presences becoming present through its mediating effect.

Eerie Materiality of Sound Technology

The eerie materiality of the technology, including microphones, loop pedals, and other objects such as coats, fans, and chairs, emerged through improvisations with these objects. An example of how the ensemble interacted with the chairs and other objects is to direct them not to push or pull the chair, but to imagine that the object was pushing or pulling them. The stimulus from *Arcadia* was an image of a man with dowsing rods, which begin to move and act of their own accord when they detect water. The ensemble imagined the chairs as dowsing and being conducted to different points in the space, much like dowsing rods detect water, drawing the chair towards something absent. The technique presents the chair as an eerie materiality that acts independently and of its own will, an agential object that affects changes in space and the figures. Guided by the chair's intentions in the space, imagining it as an agency that does not reveal itself but brings about changes in the space. The technique expanded the ensemble's imaginative faculties beyond what was possible, enabling them to envision the impossible and unleash creativity and spontaneity through their interactions with the objects.

The spring improvisation of landscape demonstrates how De La Torre's role as conductor

emerged through the process, a defining performance choice that shaped the dramaturgy of the technology. The 'dowsing' technique was applied to the microphones, which led De La Torre, as conductor, to seek out a sound. Jessie made a sound eerily reminiscent of a cry, and De La Torre responded with a question, "What is that?" which raised doubts about the source of the sound. The question generated uncertainty surrounding the source of the sound, with De La Torre being directed to follow the microphone to 'catch' the figure's presence. To emphasise the eerie sourcelessness of the sound, Jessie, who 'cried out', performed the cry and then reacted to this sound as if they were unsure if it had arisen from the figure's body.

Jessie gestured with her hands, hovering over the surface of her body as if estranged from her own body and the source of her voice. As a ghostly figure, Jessie continued to speak a text "Round and round", and De La Torre followed her with the microphone's eerie materiality as an agent to catch and amplify the figure, which can only become present if the microphone catches them (See Appendix A - *This Is The Land*). The technique enabled the ensemble to perform the indeterminate figures, with their presence mediated by technology as agential objects. The eerie sourcelessness of the object's agency applied to the microphone, De La Torre and the ensemble then applied to the use of the other objects and amplified and looped to present them as eerie forces, which is evident in an example of the use of the fans in the winter section and the microphone following the chairs in the summer section.

The microphones and loop pedal become performatives that summon ghosts. They detect, amplify and loop their presence as voices and sounds in the space where there should be nothing, an example of Fisher's failure of absence (Fisher, 2016). The performativity of the technology asserts agency, with repetitions of sound through the looping device conveying a haunting voice. The looping effect dislocates sound from its source, allowing it to float freely in space and generate ghostly presences of voices. It summons a landscape of voices and sounds, as well as the visual projection of the figures into the space. The summoning through the vocal looping device is defined as the scenographic projection of a virtual landscape, demonstrated through this example from the summer that developed through improvisation with Jessie imagining the 'waves' of the sea in space; Jessie asked, "Did we say we would do

a bit about the waves here?" and was directed to include this text in the performance to emphasise the theatrical space as an imaginary site filled with projections. Jessie continued to describe different kinds of waves in the space, offset with the ensemble reacting to the illusion of waves (See Appendix A - *This Is The Land*).

The spectrality of the landscape created through the vocal looping projected into the space, which progressed through layering the sea imagery, is demonstrated through the example of the text "All the trees and all the seas". Jessie summons the images of the landscape through the microphone, which captures and layers imagery as a projection through the vocal loop. The loop's projection of the landscape continued whilst Jessie shifted from their performative role of summoning the landscape to a mode of performance where they performed a virtual figure projected into the landscape. The projection appears scenographically as a virtual landscape presenting spectral figures summoned by the vocal looping techniques, which project the imagery of the landscape as an expansive site of sensation. Vélez and De Santos moved, shifting weight through the momentum of the head, ebbing and flowing, embodying the rhythms of the landscape; they both loosened their hair to portray the landscape, with their hair conjuring the image of the landscape, its seaweed and grass (See Appendix A - *This Is The Land*).

In conclusion, the project advanced the concept of performing eerie projections. This technique evolved through dramaturgy, with ghostly figures appearing in landscapes and reappearing elsewhere with each change of season. The projection of ghostly figures summoned through the performative sound technologies made the landscapes appear, with mysterious figures erupting as if they were beneath the landscapes. The concept of the hauntological landscape, which encompasses the spectral traces of the past, highlights the performative ways in which time operates as a dyschronia, with multiple spectral pasts haunting the landscape. The project enabled an in-depth exploration of workshop strategies that focused on the dramaturgy of time, to examine how to resist narrativising thorugh the development of exercise and naming practices such as "Pause, Repeat Go", 'Eerie impulse', and 'Mining' the eerie impulse to develop strategies that are resistant to narrative and dramatic scenes.

The mining process enhances the performers' open state of being in their performance, as they embody the eerie impulse with increased spontaneity and creativity. They can perform without outcome and let go of context, allowing them to 'shape-shift' between figures and modes of performance. The project developed the ensemble's ability to create eerie light and relinquish logical and rational meaning, evoking eerie worlds that defy logic, adhering to worlds on stage that transcend the human and an eerie theatricality. The eerie theatricality in *This Is The Land* presents fleeting presences of absence, creating a hallucinatory effect. Fisher defines this as 'negative hallucination', where one imagines something is present that is not; the ghostly remainder of presence continues to haunt after the figure has gone.

The direction of the ensemble's movement and imagery contributes to the hallucinatory effect, with the performers directed to perform figures as filmic 'projections' in the spectral site. The workshop strategies for abstracting figures were assisted by drawing on artworks that evoked an eerie abstraction and applying 'screening' techniques that masked facial features and abstracted the figures. The project refined how figures appear in landscapes by assembling fragments that emerged from the improvisational scores, and expanded upon further mining of the material that forms the basis for the composition of fragments, thereby discovering more fluidity. At this stage, it was helpful to name the fragments as a list of 'ingredients,' following Bogart, as this facilitated the ensemble's improvisations with the different ingredients, allowing them to discover the correspondences of meaning between them.

The project refined the dramaturgy of the eerie as different temporalities were layered throughout this compositional process, achieved through a non-hierarchical assembling and reassembling of imagery and text via juxtapositions, to present fragmented landscapes. The dramaturgy of sound technologies summons the landscapes and voices that emerge within them, juxtaposed with 'projections' of ghostly figures as fragments of tangible and intangible presences, which are momentarily captured by the microphone and looping device, fading or dissolving. The conjuring of the ghostly figures extended the concept of the figure to the

non-human, with objects sounding and having agency. The techniques of sounding objects and looping sounds created a sense of beyond-human sounds that become detached from their source and float as eerie presences, independent of their origin. The eerie abstractions of sound and movement projections, as well as the expansion of figures beyond humans through the performance of mythical, animal, and elemental characters, extended the performance beyond the known to the unknown, creating a site of the eerie.

Conclusion

The study aimed to expand the understanding of devised theatre and performance through its processes, methods, and performative techniques of evoking the eerie. Each project addressed the eerie as a dramaturgical concept in devising postdramatic theatre through their respective explorations of the eeriness of place and landscape. Fisher's theorisation of the eerie, specifically his idea of the 'outside', provided a methodology for exploring performative ways of decentring the human subject in performance. The theatrical space has an eerie 'outside' that enfolds the theatrical elements and offers a framework for an embodied exploration of performative processes that extend beyond the human and encompass the non-human and more-than-human realms. The transmission of new embodied knowledge is evident in the performances of *The Strange Geometry of Time* (2018), *Dwelling* (2019), and *This is The Land* (2022/3).

The eerie is brought into a dialogue with hauntology, spectrality and performance to pose questions about reality by revealing spectral forces and agencies that pervade reality, which remain hidden or unseen. The ghostly figures in each performance are spectral presences of the past and lost futures, haunting the theatrical space. They are conceived as discarded or forgotten, unheard figures from the margins. However, the context of their circumstances remains hidden; the eerie's oblique perspective intimates presence rather than revealing itself. Hauntologies of past cultural and social effects haunt as virtual presences, suppressed forces return as ghostly remnants of unacknowledged and overlooked pasts. Cultural theorist Avery Gordon discusses how the spectral past haunts social imagination in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and Sociological Imagination* (2008), specifically her analysis concerning writer Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved,* which conveys how the spectres of colonialism as spectral presence and affective forces return and repeat the past as haunting ghosts. Avery's ideas and theories inform these processes, with the ghostly figures of place emerging as presences of suppressed forces and agencies.

The Strange Geometry of Time conveys women in haunted rooms, which, as performer Jessie observed, seemed 'to hit up against walls'; in *Dwelling,* the children of the derelict

house convey a haunted childhood that subtly references the Magdalene Laundries, *Dwelling*'s central theme of an eerie childhood, references mothers and motherhood as an absence of presence (at the time of making *Dwelling,* the investigations into the mother and baby home in Tuam, Ireland, were bringing the spectral past to the surface). It is not about this situation, but the process acknowledges these intuited, persistent, and insistent agencies and forces of spectral pasts. The process allows for the spectral agency of the past to influence *Dwelling's* themes in oblique ways. The openness to the eerie, what remains in abandoned sites, is an open state that draws in the spectral in a process that connects with Avery's 'social imaginary', with the spectres of the past intersecting across cultures and societies, race, colonialism, gender and class.

This Is The Land imagines spectres of the landscapes of the British Isles as those who seek a way out through returning to something fundamental about our relationship with the land; they are Macfarlane's unsettled and displaced, whose spectrality is a remainder and reminder of uncontested histories concerning land, ownership, and indeterminacy. The ghosts appear as projections without context because the causes that explain their circumstances remain undetected; they are seemingly indeterminate presences that appear as an act of haunting in an atemporal site of the outside.

Fisher's concept of the eerie outside, with its presence of absence, agencies, and forces, is connected to Rayner's theory of the materiality of theatrical elements, which gives presence to absence. The materiality of the theatrical objects, performers' bodies, and costumes are 'memorial doubles', the absent presences of the past. Rayner argues, 'Ghosts animate our connections with the dead, producing a visible, material and affective relationship to the abstract terms of time and repetition, sameness and difference, absence and presence' (2006, p.xiii). The ensemble is attuned to the affective force of places and their eerie materialities and imagined eerie sites, with the figure of the ghost creating this 'visible, material and affective' relationship with time, the past, and the absence of presences that have been overlooked or forgotten.

The process stimulated the ensemble to perceive beyond the known, visible, and tangible,

to imagine outside their normative limits of perception, and feel the presence of place as it is animated and agential. The eerie provides a perspective that allows us to extend ourselves beyond the known to the unknown, push beyond established limits and the need to know, and explore a creative process that releases creativity. The focus was on the intangible within the tangible, the invisible within the visible, which animates the inanimate. The particular focus on the exterior - and how this affects the interiority - blurs the dualities of outside and inside, as well as subject and object, and the enfolded relationship develops a mutually interconnected relationality.

The focus was on place as eerie sites, animated by both forces and agencies, with eerie materialities possessing performative agency to act upon and effect change in the performers and other materials. The performative elements that emerged through this process were affected by forces in the theatrical space, which became an animated site of ghostly figures that returned from the past and 'lost futures' (Fisher, 2014) to haunt the stage. Central to the practice is the liminal figure of the ghost, defined as an unseen or undetected force that becomes momentarily present, a haunting absence of presence or a presence of absence. The ghostly figures, mysterious objects, and technologies give shape to an absence, spectral pasts, and lost futures that are forgotten or overlooked. The past is activated through performative agential objects, which are released from mundane functions and acquire deliberative agency that they don't usually possess (Fisher, 2016) as agential affective forces.

In *The Strange Geometry of Time,* the eerie aesthetic unsettles and disturbs, with insubstantial 'ghostly figures entering and exiting' through portals projected into the space, appearing and disappearing within a liminal site of haunted rooms through the performative effect of the light. The light, as windows, thresholds, and portals, illuminates the presence of absence; the ghostly figures, which include objects and costumes, whose uncertain ontology collapses the boundaries between presence and absence. The light highlights the ghostly figures as 'projections', which appear and disappear, entering and exiting the frame of the haunted rooms. The figures appear without context; they exist outside of linear time, which is achieved through the fragmentary form and the 'framing' of the figures through a cinematographic aesthetic, where they move in and out of the frame, appearing as

'projections' within it.

The 'haunting scores' are constructed through movement, image, text, and objects, exploring the collapsed dualisms of materiality and immateriality, as well as subject and object, with the agency of materiality focused through McKinney's concept of the agential object. The performers interact with the dresses and clothes as tactile remnants of the past, which are 'agitated' and 'activated', and become 'unsettling things' that give shape to absent presence. The ghosts appear in and through the materiality of the performers' bodies, objects, and technology, interacting with the performers and other objects as agencies that affect events in the theatrical space. The spectral presence of the past is particularly evident in *The Strange Geometry of Time,* where time is fractured through the fragmented framing of layers of time, creating a dyschronia—multiple coexistent dimensions of time as hauntological in the haunted site.

In *Dwelling,* the ensemble is attuned to the eeriness of an actual site and their embodiment of presence of absence, developed through their openness to the 'affect of place' (Heholt, 2016) as a performative state of being in their improvisations of place. The site-specific dramaturgy advanced the site's concept as eerie outside in the creative process, unlocking the layers of the site's past as a tangible and intangible presence of affective spectral agencies. The performers embody what is 'tangible' in the site and the 'intangible forces' as sensations, desires, longings and memories, through their improvisations of place; the derelict mansion. The idea of the film frame capturing the ghostly presence of figures and a sense of agency 'beyond the frame' was a performative technique that advances the eerie aesthetic of an undetectable source. With film images reframed as 'live projections', the idea of ghostly figures enfolded within one site within another is advanced through performance techniques named 'performing beyond the frame'. The figures from the house are projected through the film media into the chapel site, and, again, live 'projections' spill beyond the frame into an intermedial space. The live projections in the chapel had the effect of spatialising time by the different temporalities of each site and the media technologies intersecting in intermedial space. The method of 'framing' and 'reframing' also had the effect of temporalising space, with the temporality of one site merging with the time of the

performance to create multiple coexistent temporalities.

The methods and techniques of working within a site-specific context provided opportunities to expand devising processes that explore the eerie as an aesthetic experience. *Dwelling* advanced this eerie aesthetic from the previous project through the locale and spatialisation of the spectral in the sites. The eerie materiality of the house is advanced through naming the site as a 'wish't place, with the house presenting the concept of a presence of absence; a failure of absence (Fisher 2016) acting upon and interacting with the ghostly figures. These ideas are explored through the eerie materiality of sound, with the sounds of the house embedded in its architecture, generating a soundtrack of 'eerie vocalities' that extend to the live performance.

The techniques of vocal looping and naming of the practices as 'eerie vocalities' and 'dis-located voices' as 'unsituated agencies' that resonate in the chapel site, advance the idea of the embodiment of the eerie. The vocal-looping techniques provided opportunities to record and manipulate sound as an additional layer in the performance, detaching the vocal from the speaker. The eerie 'vocals hovering' in the intermedial space generated disembodied, ghostly voices that seem to hover above the performers. The repetition of phrases and words conjures up the eerie past as a fragmented experience that spills into the intermedial space as the house's soundtrack releases into the chapel.

The chapel became a memorial site through 'framing and reframing,' where the imagery of one site is reframed live in another, with the ensemble ghosting their performance in the films through doubling and repetition. The memories, sensations, desires and losses of the house enter through the walls and of the chapel site, as it is a site of unforgetting, and the intermedial space collapses dualisms of past and present, living and dead, as normative perceptual limits of time and space become indeterminate. The eerie aesthetic of fragments of imagery and vocals, centred around spectral childhood themes, which are not determined within a context but facilitate an engagement with the audience's associative responses and spectral memories.

Following on from the previous project, the subsequent performance, *This Is The Land,* explored the eerie interdeterminacy through abstracted, ghostly figures inspired by the film *Arcadia* and the visual artworks of John Caple. The emergent process of devising required the ensemble to be open to intuitive and subconscious processes grounded in the concept of the spectral landscape. The structure of the seasons in landscapes instigated the ensemble's improvisations of landscape, moving from mundane and familiar to extending towards their performance of eerie agencies beyond the known. Performing the agency of elements, ghosts from the past and lost futures, folk figures, animals and mythical figures as spectral presences in and of the land. The director attunes to a state of openness, and the ensemble's response to improvisations of place becomes an eerie impulse that is mined and shaped into a figure or text.

The figures are abstracted by 'screening' facial features to present them as liminal and indeterminate, collapsing the subject-object dualisms. The projections of figures extend to non-human, mythical, and beyond-human entities within the landscape as the performer shifts between different figures and modes of performance. The indeterminacy of ontology surrounding the ghostly figures generates a sense of unease, and there is uncertainty surrounding presence and absence, as well as the agency at work.

The eerie, fragmented form of figures appearing in a mediated space has a hallucinatory effect, with the juxtapositions of imagery and sound offsetting each other in the composition of scenic landscapes as projections. The concept of eerie, 'ghostly projections' arising within the landscape was extended to sound technology and vocal looping as performatives 'summoning' and 'catching' spectral figures and 'amplifying' presence and absence through vocal looping techniques. The 'dis-located sounds and vocals' present a 'negative hallucination', nothing where there should be something (Fisher, 2016), as the sounds and vocals hover above the figures to generate the perception of an absence; of something unseen that remains undetectable.

The spectral presence in landscapes saw the ensemble performing an eerie transformation of figures summoned from a Thin Place, an open portal to the past and the dead, which

accessed the theatrical space as ghostly figures appeared. The site facilitates the ensemble's exploration of theatrical space beyond known reality and their transformation through different performative states and modes. It employs a 'shape-shifting' technique that extends to the space and objects, giving them access to embody realities beyond the human. The ensemble's performance of eerie, ghostly figures and 'shape-shifting states', which are grounded in everyday reality, is anchored by the changing seasons of the landscape, providing a foundation for their embodiment of the eeriness of the landscape.

Through their improvisations of landscapes, the ensemble developed an 'openness to the unknown' as a performative state of being, facilitating their discoveries of an 'eerie impulse', defined as one without context or outcome. The performer's state of being is an open state of being developed through processes that attune them to the affective forces of the 'outside', as a Thin Place, enabling them to perform 'indeterminate states' rooted in the eerie landscape context. The performative state enables the release of creativity in the performer's choices and increased spontaneity in their performance. The theatrical space as an eerie outside enfolds the ensemble's performance and leads to each performer engaging differently in an embodiment of the eerie. The ensemble's openness to the 'eerie impulse' is 'mined' to release the eerie beneath their surface, with the emergent improvisatory process allowing for personal responses and performance choices, which are observed and expanded through prompting that 'mines' for depth of response.

The outcome—the performance—is not predetermined but is discovered and arises from a response to the eeriness of the place. The sites in each project - haunted rooms of childhood, an actual derelict house, and the landscape of the British Isles provided fertile ground and a context to search beneath its surface for the performance, which arises from an attunement between the ensemble and the director that works in mutual influence, along with the sense of place, which grounds the performer's improvisation and performance scores and draw on music, films, artworks, and texts to guide the ensemble towards an embodiment of the eerie. The artworks inspired visual ideas that led to an aesthetic of the eerie, which becomes apparent through the processes, techniques, and performative elements that convey an eerie theatricality. The music was an essential component in creating a sensory and emotional

soundtrack, with each performance drawing on a musical palette that combined live music, sound, and song with pre-recorded tracks to create a textured sound that resonated with the sense of place.

Performing the eerie is not to rationalise or over-determine the subject of the mysterious but to develop an aesthetic as an affective sense of unease that destabilises subject-centred realities. The propensity for devised performance to explore the eerie as a concept within dramaturgy offers a fresh perspective that does not narrativise but intimates past events; it does not historicise but presents the past as a virtual presence projected into theatrical space. The invitation to the spectator is to enter an intimate space of experience, tangible and intangible, with complex narrative structures that engage with themes of unsettlement and displacement.

'Egress' - The Eerie as an Exit to Imagine Beyond

The devised work engages with the eerie, unsettling effect to create an 'egress' opening space, allowing the imagination to envision what is not seen or said. The term "egress," first introduced by Fisher (2016), is expounded upon by Matt Colquhoun, writer and former student of Mark Fisher. Colquhoun's book, *Egress: On Mourning, Melancholy, and Mark Fisher* (2020), is a tribute to Fisher's work. Colquhoun expands upon Fisher's term 'egress', as he defines it as 'exit' or finding a way out ''To engage with this Openness is perhaps to "egress" - a word used in used in Mark Fisher's final book, *The Weird and the Eerie,* to describe the latent acts of exit central to the weird fictions he wrote so passionately about and so frequently' (2020, p.9). Colquhoun discusses how Fisher's analysis suggests that the cultural forms of weird and eerie fiction, films, and music convey:

> *Things are not what they seem*. This is true of haunted houses as it is life under capitalism. Mark's response was to implore us to ask ourselves: "Who or what is it that cannot or will not explain what it is doing or why it is doing it?" "Who or what has something to hide? Who or what has the most to gain by doing so?' (2020, p.10).

The 'outside' in the context of this project is a way of finding an exit from the forces that limit and mitigate against imagining beyond the known; it is a turn to the eerie, which has seen a rise in recent artworks and cultural forms, that raises questions of agency; who or what has agency? What agencies are haunting from the past or lost futures? How do we feel about the effect of these agencies? Who or what is causing things to happen, and why do they not reveal or explain what they do?

Inspired by the recent resurgence of the eerie in the arts and Robert Macfarlane's analysis (2015), which he expands upon in an interview with filmmaker and writer Adam Scovell (2016), Macfarlane discusses the reasoning behind the resurgence of the eerie as a contemporary response to the global environmental crisis. Macfarlane discusses the modern epoch, known as the "Anthropocene Age," which affects our collective unconscious and consciousness. Macfarlane states, 'This seems to have unsettled, in all sorts of ways, old thinking about landscape. And out of that, unsettlement has arisen in many of these "new-old" forms of cultural work' (2016). What is of particular interest is Macfarlane's observation about the new forms of media and multimedia that are coming about through what he terms assemblage-thinking:

> which is to say about the ways ecologies are formed, not hierarchically, not with a single human beings or makers at their summit, but in which we are networked with all sorts of other agents that might not have been previously thought of stones, stone, creatures, and so forth' (2016).

Eerie Assemblage - Composition through Networks of Creative Connectivity

Postdramatic theatre's de-focalisation of space is less about revealing the theatrical and more about how the theatrical is de-dramatised through fragmentation. To screen the bodies was to abstract them and create something indeterminate in form, not contextualised in a narrative but in a narrative of place—the sourceless effect of technology and collective ghostly voices that transcend the speaker as ghostly effects. The dramaturgy of partial structures rather than whole patterns adheres to a unified whole, but not in sequence—the status of elements in

space is equal. The dramaturgy of the eerie, as it developed through each project, proceeds through a process that relates to Macfarlane's concept of 'assemblage-thinking', whereby emergent processes create an ecology of collaboration and interconnectivity in performance-making.

The networked approach to the different performance levels operates through a devising process that structures performative elements through a non-hierarchical scenic composition. The assemblage of performative elements through the mapping method connects these horizontally through juxtaposition in time and space. The improvisations of these fragments aimed to discover connective networks between them that are resistant to linear sequencing. The performative elements assembled into the montage structures of the seasonal landscapes emerged from an eerie impulse, without context or outcome, to discover the context through the interrelation of the elements within the composition of the landscape.

The performative elements act upon and interact with each other in an interconnected network; this interplay generates a creative, transformational process involving objects, technologies, and figures. Figures transform from humans to animals, mythical figures, and elemental beings in a network of interwoven connections within the landscapes. Objects perform without revealing their agency as eerie agential objects that affect change in the theatrical space. The technologies summon, capture, project and affect change through their agential capacity to amplify presence and absence. The eerie does not then determine but implies contexts and meanings which are not devoid of meaning. However, this is not explicit but implicit as it is woven through the content and form to construct an eerie aesthetic integral to the dramaturgy.

The interconnectivity of the performative elements creates an eerie theatricality that intimates and offers an indeterminate perspective, allowing for openness to make connections and associations that arise through mining the seams in a horizontal direction. The compositional process extends to the layer of preparation and improvisation through an approach that operates at the pre-expressive level, encouraging connections through kinesthesia and energetic responsiveness. The ensemble was encouraged to explore their

openness to one another and the impulses exchanged in their mutual interconnectivity. The approach was foundational for the ensemble's explorations and discovery of eerie impulses, leading to a non-hierarchical, performative approach in their work. The process creates an ecology of collaboration based on a network of impulses grounded in the individual performer's body that extend to the ensemble in mutual influence.

In the context of these process of making performance through the lens of the eerie, which connects Fisher's notion of 'egress', which offers a process that brings into consciousness what might be hidden from view to provide a 'way out' from dominant hegemonies; Fisher asserts as Capital, with Macfarlane's ecology. Macfarlane's interconnectivity of networks offers a perspective that extends beyond the normative limits of what is known, allowing for an openness to the eerie, which is the agency of the non-human and more-than-human. The decentralisation process does not eliminate human agency; rather, it places it aside by prioritising the non-human and beyond the human at the centre.

It is not either/or but a perspective that offers a release from anthropocentrism, through which there is a release of creativity, imagination, and spontaneity in devising processes as an invitation to imagine beyond the known. In their performance of the eerie, the ensemble's explorations of an open creative state reveal effects that permeate our lives and offer an egress—a way out to imagine differently and to explore different possibilities. Beyond rationalising and knowing, the eerie creates an imaginative egress, within which what arises is not overdetermined but is an opening to feel the spectral effects of the past and future as tangible and intangible experiences.

Animating Other Worlds and Worlds that are Other

The eerie serves as an opening to engage with the immaterial and affective forces that extend beyond anthropocentrism and intersect with theories of New Materialism and landscape culture, thereby creating an eerie materialism of place. The eerie expands beyond the human subject's limits to different ways of thinking about agency—the agency of the land and the natural world, opening up to what is unknown, to mysteries and the inexplicable. The eerie

extends imagination to embrace the unknown and unknowable, asking questions of existence and non-existence, life and death, and the known as it extends to the unknowable. Returning to Fisher, the eerie poses metaphysical questions, inviting us to imagine worlds and realities beyond our knowledge, to dreaming and mythical dimensions of reality.

Imagining other worlds and worlds that are other is the work of theatre and performance, which does not ignore the real and known but seeks to extend beyond and through the mundane to different kinds of realities and existence. Fisher asserts the eerie 'can give us access to the forces which govern mundane reality but which are normally obscured, just as it can give us access to spaces beyond mundane reality altogether' (2016, p.13) that are sourced in the eerie 'outside'. Colquhoun expounded Fisher's speculation of the eerie, referring to 'The "outside" here refers to a mode of radical exteriority - philosophically understood as that which is beyond the scope of human perception, experience and intuition' (2020, p.10) Fisher, whose writing about the eerie speculates on the eeriness of Capitalism as a force that permeates our lives, the eerie can also be radical and resistant to the virtual systems of control.

The force of the eerie empowers the force to live, which erupts from just beneath the surface as a way out of what Colquhoun follows on from Fisher's term 'egress' - a way out from the cultural impasses of the 21st century. This is an activist approach to theatre-making. Colquhoun observes how Fisher focuses these ideas as 'he adapts the concept to include the supernatural, ethereal and otherworldly explicitly, to invoke a more entrenched and historical association with Marcuse's Great Refusal and the emancipatory potential found within the *other-worldly* as it appears in so much fiction' (2020, p.37).

The projects have led to an expansion in the devising process. They offer a way out of the limitations of normative thinking, allowing imagination to extend to worlds beyond the known. This can inspire an innovative approach to engaging with the materiality of the theatrical elements. Performance practice embodies ecologies in performance-making that embrace the unknown and unknowable, with the eerie offering an alternative perspective on how we experience the world through performance.

In landscape culture, this perspective offers a way of seeing what is hidden from view, buried beneath the surface, and attending to the spectral, yet often unacknowledged, ownerships and displacements of people. The eerie also opens to the enchanted perception of the landscape as it extends human agency to agencies of mystery. The mysterious can reveal hidden truths and offer fresh perspectives, allowing us to experience the world beyond the human. If theatre is to connect us to other worlds and underworlds, the processes, methods, and techniques have been motivated by the concept of theatrical space as an animated and animating site. Returning to Rayner, who quotes Robert Pogue Harrison's *The Dominion of the Dead*, provides a reason for being open to other worlds.

> If a house, a building, or a city is not palpably haunted in its architectural features - if the earth's historicity and containment of the dead do not pervade its articulated forms and constitutive matter - then the house, the building or city is dead to the world/ Dead to the World means cut off from the earth and closed off from its underworlds. For that is one of the ironies of our life worlds: they received their animation from the ones that underlie them (Pogue Harrison quoted in Rayner, 2006, p.xiii).

The questions of life beyond death, the mysterious and unknown, and the connections between the living and the dead have often been addressed in religions and theology. Clare Hind and Gary Winters' insightful study, *Embodying the Dead: Writing, Playing, Performing* (2020), explores the role of death and the dead in the context of performance practice and the artistic work of 'Gary and Clare'. The discussion of rituals and performance for the dead is fascinating in terms of how we deal with the 'afterlife' and the mysterious, which Hind and Winters observe 'spiritual beliefs in the afterlife enble us (human beings) to imagine ourselves and those who have gone before us differently because we place significant meaning on death and the dead (2020, p.11). The purpose of death rituals and celebrations enable us to connect with the dead, to mystery and otherworlds beyond the known world, which Hind and Winters assert 'rituals and celebrations that mark the returning of the dead offer ways of connecting to an afterlife or rather an imaginary world' (2020, p.11). Our capacity to imagine worlds that are mysterious and other has diminished as Hind and Winters state believing in the mysterious is is not as favoured as it once was' (2020, p.11), and yet the

desire to open to mystery, the unknown and imagining beyond the knowable remains a fundamental aspect of our existence. Hind and Winters argue 'performance, as ritual, renews faith' in what feels (imperative to us as artists) good to live a fuller, positive life where pltual of performance as it enables play and imagination, which 'it could be argued that through play we can find ways of dealing with what is hard to accept - the end of things' (2020, p.12).

As the artistic practice extends beyond the known to imagine and create 'new mythologies' (2020, p. 12), with these ideas extending to a project beyond the scope of this study, the practice continues to explore the concepts of the eerie and how the spectral dead return. The current project, *Goat Song,* begins with the premise that this world is animated by other worlds and underworlds, drawing inspiration from the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Through the progression of vocals and musicality in the previous projects, *Goat Song* combines live music and song with an atmospheric soundtrack. The performers embody gestures that evoke feelings and a human quality that the audience recognises and connects with, as well as the eeriness that extends beyond the human in the figure of 'death' and their performance of figures of the non-human, such as musical instruments. *Goat Song* poses questions about the eeriness of place, as a site of disconnection between otherworlds, and the need for connection to the past and the dead to reanimate the world.

The eerie, the unknown and death have always haunted the stage, and in *Goat Song,* the figure of Death walks right on to it, as a chaotic and unrelenting force; dancing a 'danse macabre' with the figure of Eurydice, arriving at her wake to lead her to the underworld. The band, a group of Orpheus figures, are Shamans whose journey is to cross between the worlds of the living and the dead, guided by music, to retrieve something lost and restore it to the world. The light humour of the 'town' contrasts with the mystery of the 'underworld'. The project continues to explore the mysterious unknown, dealing directly with themes of death, ghostly figures and the afterlife, as Hind and Winter observe the 'shift in religious to cultural means that we (as performance makers) are tasked with the responsibility of how death and the dead are represented' (2020, p.12). The practice interrogates these complex themes pertinent to our times, using the eerie as a lens to explore the complexity of life, death, and the eerie agency of the non-human and beyond-human.

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3. Film

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4. Music

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List of Appendices

Appendix A - Documentation of the performances and films

1. *The Strange Geometry of Time* - Documentation of performance at University Theatre, Bath Spa University, in Bath, November 2018
   https://youtu.be/BZkCYVMwDsc

2. *Dwelling* - Documentation of performance at The Anglican Chapel, Arnos Vale Cemetery, in Bristol, October 2019
   https://youtu.be/wdyjphOheOg

3. *Dwelling* - Films in the performance
   Bathroom - https://youtu.be/vXIimTBmio0
   Dining Room https://youtu.be/_slObrtIA5I
   Hallway - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEGotf5yFq0 *Library* - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qcoPz-JYl0
   The Children of the Courtyard - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liLZEWleotY*4.*

4. *This Is the Land* - Documentation of performance in dress rehearsal before the Anglican Chapel, Bristol, in November 2022
    https://youtu.be/0NEr6L1_BBw

5. *This Is The Land* - Documentation of performance at The Network Theatre, Vault Festival, London, in February 2023 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cr0jZ27dPR0