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Nic Fryer

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Memories of the future of drama education: attempt structures, minor gestures and Forced Entertainment

Nic Fryer 

University of Middlesex, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This article suggests that Erin Manning's notion of 'the minor gesture' can emerge from what Tim Etchells, artistic director of Forced Entertainment, describes as 'attempt structures', where performers engage with a set of performance rules in a range of ways. It does this through discussion of both the work of Forced Entertainment and Impact Theatre Cooperative. It further suggests that drama, theatre and performance pedagogy might draw on these ideas to develop a creative process which generates what Manning calls 'memories of the future'.

KEYWORDS

Erin Manning; Forced Entertainment; future of drama education; minor gesture; attempt structures

Some memories

Memories from my own experience over the last 30 years. Teaching 16-year-olds in a school in the UK in 1997. A structure set up where there are captors and captives. No talking, with music providing a stimulus to action. Some still images are gradually adjusted, with one performer at a time moving to remake and alter the image. I try changing the rules so that students can move more frequently and form teams. A student who has been adopting submissive postures takes up a different position in relation to her captor, and gains an ally with another student. They look down at their captor who is now in a chair. The tables have turned. In this small moment there is a temporary status reversal where the possibility of challenging power is realised. This moment passes as the captor then stands up and retakes his place as the male in charge.

Small Change's *Long Wave*, a show I directed in 2002. Set music triggers the performers to undertake pre-planned routines, but between the pre-planned routines are gaps which the performers have to fill. There is a moment where Paula cries out as Dom pulls her onto the floor, a spontaneous moment between the routines creating surprise and exposing the vulnerability underlying what has previously been a performance of confidence and certainty. The moment passes as she dusts herself down and gets up again.

Another moment. One of the first undergraduate practical projects after the pandemic in 2020. Students have chosen to have a bed of rubbish on stage, which they draw from to play and attempt to communicate with each other. One of them strings together

CONTACT Nic Fryer  n.fryer@mdx.ac.uk

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facemasks and holds them above their head in celebration as if it's bunting at a fair. In this moment these masks, that have previously symbolised to me illness and lack of social contact, are reconfigured to make something that signifies collective celebration. They then come apart and the next prop is investigated.

Minor gestures, minor attempts

These moments have stayed with me, and feel like moments I want to stake a claim for when I think about drama education. They feel like moments which emerged from the process being played out in the performance space that articulated something not yet understandable, something to be worked out in the future. However, they were not signalled as significant; they were peripheral moments within a longer improvisation, operating amongst a number of other moments where it would be hard to isolate one over another. Someone else watching might not remember them. Whilst some of these moments contained echoes of things that I recognised, or took on a significance for me, they were not reducible to a singular significance. They contained spontaneous elements that neither I nor the performers planned.

As such, they echo Erin Manning's notion of the 'minor gesture' which 'claim[s] not space as such, but space-of-variation' (2016, 2). They emerge briefly but disavow any significance as they are quickly moved on from, part of a larger picture. Manning distinguishes such minor gestures from major gestures which 'can easily be recognised, such as getting on the bus' (19). She also suggests such actions occur to the subject as an act of 'volition' (19). However, no gestures, or movements, are fully volitional acts: Manning states

movement-moved is never twice the same: it is always altered by the ecologies that create this singular field of relation, and that influence how it will unfold this time. Volitional movement understood as movement belonging to the subject and fully directed by the subject is, therefore, impossible. (19)

Whilst all moments, for Manning, are influenced by what she calls 'the event-based improvisation that is part of all our daily choreographies' (21), it is the minor gesture rather than the major that knows its temporary status: it does not claim anything for itself, or comment with a specific intention.

By using both 'improvisation' and 'choreographies', Manning clarifies that gestures are simultaneously spontaneous and iterative. However, unlike major gestures, minor gestures recognise their dual nature. Her language is, of course, noticeably theatrical. And indeed, for her minor gestures often occur in art: 'While it can comment, and art often does in important and unique ways, it has to create a site of encounter that makes the cultural field tremulous, opening it to its minor gestures' (71). Art which invites an encounter that celebrates the 'tremulous', the vibration of something which may never be clearly articulated fully, provides a lens through which minor gestures can be viewed as such. It frames them as contingent and as containing ambiguity. Art can allow minor gestures to be 'more-than' a conscious act of interpreting and instead, to use her word, be a 'composing' (162). Such a composing invites a creative response to the gesture from its spectator-perceiver. In this composing, Manning argues, art creates '[a] memory of the future because this more-than cannot quite be captured, cannot be held in the presentness of experience' (50). The spectator holds it in their mind from the past as they try to imagine a context not yet experienced in which it might make sense.

In this article I will suggest that in minor gestures such as those I describe above, theatre can evoke 'memories of the future'. I will argue that Manning's notion and the sorts of moments I describe can be glimpsed in performances from the 1990s, the decade *Research in Drama Education (RiDE)* started. Specifically, I will discuss how Impact Theatre Cooperative's *The Carrier Frequency* and the work of Forced Entertainment, particularly *Club of No Regrets* (1993), embody what Tim Etchells, Forced Entertainment's Artistic Director, calls 'attempt structures' (1991, 2024). These attempt structures foreground structural approaches in rehearsal or performance where performers continuously 'attempt' possibilities within a boundaried structure, much like Manning's 'improvisation that is part of all our daily choreographies'. As I look back 30ish years and *RiDE* looks forward 30 years, I propose drama educators and their students may learn much from these structures which enable performers and spectators to explore different ways of attempting something, and that in these attempts 'minor gestures' can emerge that gesture towards the future.

Futures in the past and present

I'm trying to remember other examples of minor gestures in performance work that could not be fully comprehended. Moments that have stayed with me through the years. Moments that live with me still, that continue to evoke my curiosity, that I still haven't fully made sense of. Moving out of the present for a while. Back to the last century. I remember watching *The Carrier Frequency*, originally made by Impact Theatre Company in 1984 and restaged by the theatre company Stan's Cafe in 1999. Made before *RiDE*



Figure 1. Stan's Cafe's 1999 restaging of *The Carrier Frequency*. Credit: Ed Dimsdale.

existed. I was too young for the original but Stan's Cafe's restaging is powerfully etched into my memory (Figure 1). I thrilled at the frantic physicality as the performers repeatedly doused themselves in water for no clear reason I could identify but which seemed to link to some sort of ritual to cleanse themselves in a future post-apocalyptic world. I remember the performers repeatedly slapping their wet hair onto a table at the centre of the stage like some sort of attempt at a magic spell, a violent desire to make something happen in the future. I saw two women repeatedly see-sawing a man from head to toe on the water drenched table, washing his feet and then pulling his head back, as if engaged in some childlike attempt to bring him to life or to activate him in some way; to change the future. The energy and physicality of these moments within the repetitions, and the utter commitment the performers had to them, thrilled me. I can only say 'as if' or 'which seemed to' about these repetitions. I don't know exactly what they meant. But they appeared as significant to me in that moment. The performers were clearly attempting something through these repeated actions, these gestures.

To bring this back into my mind when preparing for this article I watched blurry VHS tapes of the original I was too young for, thanks to Stan's Cafe. I watched these recordings from the past to get as close as I can to a performance that I never saw live but which evoke memories for me of a performance made later, a performance which was itself based on memories of the original performance. Performances within performances, memories within memories. They impacted me as I watched them, in a memory of the future of the original performance; their vitality speaks to me about the power of witnessing performers repeatedly attempting to do something in their own unique way. And they impact me now, as I think about watching the recording. It is still with me. When I watched the live performance in 1999, I would not possibly have anticipated writing this, 26 years later and 41 years after its original performance. Yet, as Manning puts it, how the artistic experience 'connects to what will come to be is how it becomes what it is' (2016, 49). Its power lurked not only in its present but in its future. It existed not just in its end point of performance but as part of a larger process, functioning as a 'conduit toward new modes of existence' (46). I have held it in mind because the artwork activated something in me. This intuitive response, according to Manning, is 'the relational movement through which the present begins to coexist with its futurity, with the quality or manner of the not-yet that lurks at the edges of experience' (47), something I was trying to make sense of but couldn't quite grasp. I was activated through my fascination with the attempts being made on stage, attempts which I could not wholly comprehend and which never offered a kind of 'closure', never completed, but which nonetheless evoked my curiosity. Their transitory nature refuted a 'major' meaning, existing as they did within an incomplete process of minor iterations.

The influence of Impact's work, particularly *The Carrier Frequency*, on the British performance company Forced Entertainment, particularly in relation to their pre-2001 work, has been frequently acknowledged (Etchells 1991; Etchells 1999a, 19, 58; Etchells 1999b; MacDonald 2023). In 1991, Tim Etchells, Artistic Director of Forced Entertainment, said that *The Carrier Frequency* has.

got something that within Forced Entertainment we've taken to calling an attempt structure. That is to say it concerns a group of performers or perhaps characters who try to do something; they try to create order [...] Whether they succeed or not is another matter, the important thing to us has always been the trying. (1991, 2).

This move away from ‘succeeding’ means that the ‘trying’ functions ‘as a means to an end, an exploration, rather than as a means to a dramatic affect’ (Etchells 2024). The trying, or the attempt to create order, doesn’t have to be about the energy or the determination of *The Carrier Frequency*. It’s about the patience to commit to something, to try to explore different versions of an action, to see if it is possible to find the best way of doing something. Like in Forced Entertainment’s own *Club of No Regrets* (1993), where a kind of ‘director’, Helen X, calls out a series of seemingly disconnected scenes that two ‘performers’ and two ‘stagehands’ have to repeatedly enact on cue to a point of exhaustion. An attempt structure emerges where the scenes are ‘tried’ in a range of ways: different scripts are thrust into the performers’ hands by the ‘stagehands’ who also offer a range of props to accompany the scenes, as well as variously pelting the performers with water, talcum powder and fake blood to enhance the scene’s supposed effectiveness. As the scenes are repeated, not only are the props changed but the performers attempt different ways of saying their lines and enacting their actions. The same ‘choreographies’, to invoke Manning’s quotation from earlier, are ‘improvised’ in a range of ways. Small ‘minor’ gestures emerge from the differences between these repetitions, such as (for me) a rolling of Clare’s head during the ‘Drug Trip’ scene. However, a more significant shift occurs where the performers Rob and Claire ignore the instructions and props, and come together into an embrace for about 13 minutes (Figure 2). How can I read this embrace, then and now? The original text describes it as a ‘sheltering’ (Forced Entertainment 1993, 12), a revised version of the text describes it as a ‘giv[ing] up’ (Etchells 1999a, 175), but the word that comes to my mind (as I watch it again on a screen) is refusal. Refusing the future that the stagehands had set for them; perhaps willing a



Figure 2. Robin Arthur and Claire Marshall embrace in Forced Entertainment’s *Club of No Regrets*, 1993. Credit: Hugo Glendinning.

respite from a challenging present. Whatever, whether sheltering, giving up or refusing, the performers are still active, trying to find the best position of connection with each other amongst the chaos. During this time, they occasionally move their heads, look at each other, move their hands as if trying to find the most comfortable position. Despite the significant shift into the embrace, it is these minor moments I find myself remembering. How can I read these shifts, these minor gestures? They are charged. The performers are, like the more manic performers in *The Carrier Frequency*, attempting something. And this attempt does not only occur in whatever fictional context I might construct to make sense of what I am seeing. It is also a physical response to the exhaustion of repeatedly performing these scenes, of being battered by water and talcum powder, and of finally giving up the scenes to physically engage with their fellow performer.

I'm attempting too as I write, attempting to make sense of this section of the performance as I write about it. I'm not sure what tense to use. It plays in my memory in different iterations. Its ambiguity means it eludes me. I couldn't quite hold it 'in the presentness of experience', as Manning puts it (2016, 50), then or now. I'm attempting a way of talking about it, but it slips from my memory, a fleeting articulation of a possibility that resists ossifying into concrete meaning. It reminds me of the moments I describe from my own experience at the beginning of this article. In all these cases it felt as if the strange game being played in the fictional structure of the theatrical frame had allowed a specifically theatrical version of Manning's minor gesture to be created, something that was not easily definable but was nonetheless gesturing in a minor way to how things might be in the future. Something from the past, but something echoing into the present and calling to the future.

Playful attempts at the game

Etchells (2024) says that the company first started using the term 'attempt structures' in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He suggests that what characterised an attempt structure in their work then was that

the figures onstage repeat particular scenes or materials as part of an investigation or attempt to understand-or-transform-them-by-doing, and that there is some kind of process of consideration or reflection implied [...] figures onstage [return] to specific scenes or actions as a kind of self-directed investigation - repeating things in order to understand, solve, or otherwise get to the bottom of them.

The spectator's focus becomes the performer returning to the scene or action, their trying and their investment, rather than whether they achieve a particular goal. There is a focus on exploring the activity being undertaken as an end in itself. This focus on action also means that a conventional notion of psychological motivation is of secondary interest: it is notable that Etchells uses the term 'figures' rather than the term 'character' or even 'performer', emphasising the focus on action, rather than psychological motivation.

What becomes important, then, are the rules of the attempt structure which allow these iterations to emerge, or, to quote the title of a Forced Entertainment photographic project from 2000, *The Rules of the Game*. The performers/figures work within the rules of the game, at least for a while, so that the limitations of the attempt structure are engaged with. For example, there appears to be no option in either of the examples from *Club of No Regrets* mentioned above for the performers to walk off stage. There also appears to be no option for speech other than the generic scripts that are thrust into their hands to read.

Nonetheless, as with any game there is some agency: Etchells (2024) suggests '[T]he limits and frames are what make their choices legible, which in turn is what makes the piece legible'. The choices that are made within the boundaries of the game become a source of curiosity, not necessarily in psychological terms but in terms of the outcome of that choice and how it will impact the figure presented. The idea of both games and playfulness within those games in Forced Entertainment's work is discussed by Etchells in his article 'Play On: Collaboration and Process' (1999a, 50–70). It is clear that Etchells' use of the word 'play' is not only aligned with Huizinga's description of play as 'a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life' (1955, 39), but also with how play within the game echoes and reflects on what the figures want or need: he states 'you play with what scares you and you play with what you need' (1999a, 66). Indeed, the choice of the word 'attempting' over 'play' in the term 'attempt structure' suggests that any 'play' in these 'games' matters: it is trying to achieve something. Whilst attempting within the game is often playful, it is also often taken seriously, even when it is a childish fight for attention such as occurs in *First Night* (2001). The significance of the attempting, of the playing, is foregrounded in a line from Etchells' article (1999a, 70) and which formed the title of Judith Helmer and Florian Malzacher's book on the company, *Not Even a Game Anymore* (2004). The game or structure is engaged with and functions as a space to explore, but is not 'just' a game.

Writing about play in Forced Entertainment's work, Andrew Quick discusses how it 'is portrayed as a pursuit that 'worries' at the borders of the sensible, causing players to be thrown into new and unknown territories, places where previous systems of understanding are no longer useful in assessing where players are, or how far they have gone' (2004, 144–145). Play is, by definition, distinct from everyday reality, but the players develop understanding as they continue to play, learning different possibilities and potential approaches to the rules. The game can be used as a safe way of finding out what is possible, what is allowed, how far the rules can bend.

In fact, the rules can not only bend but be changed. As Quick suggests, 'Play points to the future, to the making of a new rule: one that might be more just, one that will, of course, be broken as a result of an encounter in another game' (2004, 165). In both *The Carrier Frequency* and *Club of No Regrets*, the rules of the game/structure, and the way in which performers interact with them, slowly and sometimes imperceptibly change during it. Even in more recent Forced Entertainment works where attempts within the structure of the game have suggested less choice or volition – as Etchells put it, where the structure is 'a thing in which they are trapped rather than an investigation which they have initiated' (2024) – new elements become introduced to what seems like a highly limited set of rules. For example, in *Under Bright Light* (2022) where the 'figures' involved in moving furniture and (mostly) cardboard boxes show little interest in changing the rules of the structure, there is a moment where the performers begin to throw rather than place the cardboard boxes they carry around the space. This moment hardly represents a huge shift in the rules, but so tight is the structure and the rules presented that this moment made me gasp when I first saw it. Things never quite stay still, they never complete.

Moments of thinking and witnessing

As the rules shift, and the spectator sees the performer engaging with the rules of the game, the performance returns the figures on stage and the spectator to the reality of

the moment, seeing what the impact of the new choices or new rules are. Whilst such moments may not occur as a psychologically informed decision but rather a choice in the moment, and thus not necessarily important for the figure themselves, they are key for the spectator as they notice the shift in approach and the effect it creates. They bring the spectator back to the moment: as Etchells puts it: 'Edges of the game – where it comes back to the real. Back to blank facts. The material. What is, here. Now.' (Etchells 1999a, 70).

Another way in which this is often materialised in Forced Entertainment's work is through the opportunity for the performers to step out of the attempting for a moment. Etchells (2024) discusses the importance of this:

In all of those [early] pieces [such as *Club of No Regrets*] there's a sense of the performers pausing renditions or repetitions, as if they might (in the gaps) be considering the weight or meaning of what they have done also (sometimes) a sense that they watch each other's renditions of things, considering them, weighing them ... again as part of a process of trying to understand.

Whilst various attempts are made, the performer is able to show their working out, show their thinking. These themselves function as minor gestures which break the structure for a minute and offer a vision of something else. Such moments, Quick argues, also 'create the space and time for contemplation and the practice of judgement' for the spectator (2004, 146), and he notes Etchells' description of these moments as 'strange' (Etchells 1999a, 57–58), linking this to Brecht's ideas of defamiliarising what is familiar (Quick 2004, 146). For me some of the most memorable moments of watching *Club of No Regrets* were when I was watching thinking occurring, such as when the 'narrator' Helen X draws chalk circles on the floor only to erase them, considering the purpose of what she is doing or perhaps questioning it. This very apparent randomness of this moment made me want to interrogate its minor quality then, and the curiosity it evoked has stayed with me. I felt/feel that I had/have agency in making sense of this experience, but furthermore that the unfamiliarity of the gesture means that a response was and still is required of me: what do you make of this? Similarly, when I am watching Robin and Clare's decision to embrace rather than perform the scenes in the example above, I tried/am trying to fill the gaps, to consider the reasons behind the choice to stop.

Quick suggests that '[t]he stops and 'making strange' affect the performer *and* spectator, since both are caught in the activity of witnessing, whereby existing sets of criteria are insufficient to render the experience completely intelligible' (2004, 146). The notion of 'witnessing' in theatrical spectatorship is discussed by many writers including Etchells (see for example Ridout 2009; Phelan 2007). Broadly speaking, they cohere around a sense that the spectator is invited to watch in a way which requires an ethical response. For example, when discussing Chris Burden's performance *Shoot* (1971), where Burden was really shot in the arm and had to go to hospital, Etchells describes the viewers of this as not being an audience of a performance but a witness of an event: 'to witness an event is to be present at it in some fundamentally ethical way, to feel the weight and one's own place in them even if that place is simply, for the moment, as an onlooker' (1999a, 17). In terms of *Club of No Regrets*, this means, to repeat the quotation from above, where the game 'comes back to the real. Back to blank facts. The material. What is, here. Now.' (Etchells 1999a, 70). It means watching the person, watching their minor attempts,

watching their duress, watching them stop these attempts to consider how they feel about the structures those attempts occur in, and this in turn catalysing a reflection from the witness on the experience of watching them. This is a shared experience, even if the figures/performers do not acknowledge the audience (although they sometimes do). The title of Annemarie Matzke's article about Forced Entertainment 'Performing Games' (2004) perceptively illustrates the importance of the performance element of the games played by Forced Entertainment performers. This is not just about the figures/performers playing the game in itself, this is a crafted performative exploration for an audience. Even in works with an improvised element such as *12am and Looking Down* (1993) or *Quizoola!* (1996), the audience is witnessing a performance of the performers playing, where the choosing in the moment, improvising in performance, is often done with an awareness of the witnessing spectator. This witnessing of a world as constant invention and as a series of minor gestures in turn gestures to the contingency of an incomplete world in which the future can be written in various ways.

The improvised gesture

Although most of Forced Entertainment's performed work is not improvised, even when it gives the appearance of being so, the material is often developed through improvisation:

Improvisations (they finally got used to the word) were long and relatively unstructured. The mood would be, well, 'see what happens ...'. But after days of this the discoveries (or antics) of the week would be scrutinised. The video-tapes of improvisations would be played back and discussed, and a process of interrogating the material might begin. (Etchells 1999a, 52).

The importance of recording and watching back these improvisations allows the iterations within the attempt structures of rehearsal to feed into the emerging vocabulary of the performance piece, valuing the attempts within the journey to an end point of performance. The performances thus bear a trace of the process of improvisation: traces of their initial attempting, traces through their reproduction, and traces through a discussion and interrogation of them. The process of attempting is valued and given weight. The minor gestures which emerged through attempt structures are remembered, interrogated and restaged – but not assimilated into an economy of determined meaning.

This idea of working with a pre-existing physical vocabulary is reflected in the director of Stan's Cafe James Yarker's discussion of the re-staging of *The Carrier Frequency*. He outlines how the initial stage of 'each doppelganger performer notating the moves of their 'original' [on videotape,] trying to figure out, from the grainy black and white static, what their expressions and intentions were' moved to where 'the doppelgangers had to take ownership of their actions, imitation had to end, it had to be our show now' (Yarker 2012). The initial process of learning the rules, the moves, values the gestures as they form the vocabulary of the show. As they are repeated, re-enacted, restaged, represented, the performers begin to make new sense of what they are doing. They function as a means of exploration in themselves. He says, in terms reminiscent of the concept of attempt structure 'The people we see on stage are clutching at fragments of that shattered text, trying to put them together again, trying to make them cohere, much as we had with our grainy VHS' (Yarker 2012). What is notable here is that Yarker is not claiming that they will succeed in creating something that will cohere. There is no desire to smooth

over the cracks between the physical phonemes that make up this physical language. Indeed, to do so might damage the contradictory and multifaceted nature of the artwork. Rather, in the process of valuing the gestural fragments in themselves the performer can work within the rules – or perhaps more accurately, play within the rules – as they collectively recreate, and allow the spectator to witness that playful ‘clutching at fragments of that shattered text’ within the game of the performance.

Such a valuing of the working on gestural fragments allows the past to create something new as part of a collective experience with both other performers and other spectators. Discussing the work of Goat Island, another performance company who made much of their work in the 1990s, Stephen Bottoms suggests that in the development of the work ‘appropriated fragments’ that made up their work were ‘treated less as fragments (deconstructed originals) than as constituent components in a new structure, a new ecology of interconnected points’ (in Bottoms and Goulish 2007, 63). And discussing her work at SenseLab, a ‘laboratory for thought in motion’ (Manning 2016, 125), Erin Manning outlines a similar approach:

Our approach involves a kind of structured improvisation that builds on an acute form of listening to the unfolding of a process in real-time. Having established what we call enabling constraints, having prepared the threshold, having created the conditions for a coming-together in the mode of affirmation, we then explore how the event facilitates the creation of what Guattari calls “a group-subject,” an ecological subjectivity in-formed by the event. (197)

The importance of ‘enabling constraints’ here echoes the model of attempt structures which I have outlined above, and as with Bottoms’ description of Goat Island allows a collective experience of discovery. It is also intriguing to note that both Bottoms and Manning discuss a notion of an ‘ecology’ being created from the interconnection of the disparate elements that make up the emergent artwork. Thus, the artwork is not just an entity which exists in the present, but is rather ‘the intuitive potential to activate the future in the specious present’ (Manning 2016, 47) as the participants – performers and spectators – engage with and develop it in their own way.

Process and education

In their own way, through their own process. Manning discusses the value of art as being its existence as ‘way’, a journey that values the attempting embedded in the creation and witnessing of an art work, rather than an end product. She says

[t]o speak of a “way” is to dwell on the process itself, on its manner of becoming. [...] Art as way is not yet about an object, about a form, or a content. It is still on its way (2016, 47).

Manning sees art’s ability to evoke a range of minor gestures that remain incomplete, part of a journey based on moments experienced and contemplated. In artworks such as *Club of No Regrets* and *The Carrier Frequency* these gestures come together in an artistic assemblage, but they also contain traces of the process of the past. They become a crafted document which does not present something homogenous and complete, but rather celebrates and values the multifarious attempts played out within the game of the attempt structure in the present, including those which might be said to ‘fail’.¹

Tyson E. Lewis similarly discusses the importance of ‘stumbling’ in education, a ‘kind of failed gesture’ which reflects the process of both losing and finding one’s footing (2012,

101). This stumbling is, he says, ‘a kind of *spontaneous improvisation* of a script that is written precisely at the moment of its interruption’ (101, original emphasis). The theatrical language employed here, as with Manning, is notable, and is linked by Lewis to the importance of curiosity: ‘curiosity ignites our will to theatre’ (104). Theatre is employed by Lewis as a metaphor for the possibility of education to evoke ‘our will to play roles that are not assigned to us and, in turn, explore the possibilities for new subjectivations derived from the appearance of the anomalous detail’ (104). This suggests education as a potential process of (theatrical) exploration, perhaps of attempting, through the minor gestures of ‘anomalous detail’; a place in which the discovery and experience of gestures and roles not assigned to us can occur. It is a space for attempting what else might be.

Lewis’ ‘stumbling’ and Manning’s ‘way’ reflect the ‘long and relatively unstructured’ improvisations of Forced Entertainment’s process (Etchells 1999a, 52). This open-ended and lengthy process of creative exploration stands at odds with any notion of art as finite object. Instead, ‘[t]he practice shifts from seeing the object as endpoint to exploring how to prolong the art of time in the event such that new forms of collaboration can be engendered’ (Manning 2016, 55). Stimulating such an approach in drama education stands in contrast to the instrumental approach so prevalent in contemporary classrooms and studios. It suggests a different kind of value that might not be able to be planned for in advance, but which depends on what happens in the room on a specific day with specific students. Stumbling, attempting; developing attempt structures to play in, allowing students to try out and witness minor gestures which sit outside easily visible, supposedly objective criteria. Enjoying the process, the way. Developing a playful space where students can use their creativity and curiosity to explore, invent, play, fail, persist, give up, try again.

The notion of curiosity is also present in an imaginary student outlined by Manning in *The Minor Gesture*:

She studies. She learns for learning’s sake. She learns beyond credit. She learns to forget. She learns by heart, beyond the page. She takes the risk of knowing differently. She cannot pay because she will never have stopped studying, will never have stopped inventing what it means to study (2016, 214).

This imaginary student learns, stumbles, invents, forgets: she *attempts*. Curiosity ignites the possibility for the experience of these attempts, as spectator or performer, and each unique attempt suggests a way of doing differently. Through thinking curiously, an awareness of other possibilities is realised. And this curiosity can never be wholly satisfied. The attempt structures never complete. She gains as she falls into debt, challenging an approach to education being measured out in parcelled chunks of quantifiable value. She savours the process, and has no desire to find its end point. She recognises its endless potential for growth.

RiDE has, throughout its 30 year history, attested to all sorts of values and uses of drama, theatre and performance: political, personal, social, communitarian, health, consciousness raising, to name a few. I have tried to argue in this article that Manning and the notion of attempt structures point us towards the value of a process which activates a wide range of future possibilities in the present; possibilities that live in the memory as possibilities for the future. This interestingly echoes some of the underlying principles of the discipline of Futures Studies, where the plural – Futures – is key. As Gidley says, ‘Once

we know there is not one predictable future [...] we are freer to imagine alternative futures and work towards creating the futures we prefer – for self and humanity' (2017, 136–137). Similarly Masini, a key writer in Futures Studies, describes the creative capacity of developing visions. These visions are informed by, but not limited by, the past and the present – and they can activate futures:

Visions spring from the capacity to recognize the seeds of change that lie in the past and the present; moreover, visions make it possible to create a future that is different from the present although its seeds are in the present. In a sense, visions capture the changes that are already latent in the present and posit these as the future reality. (2006, 1163).

As drama educators, this suggests the importance of developing the intuitive curiosity that activates visions for the future. Drawing on what has been, but speculating about what might be. Being attentive to what is happening in the now, but considering other possibilities. Attempting a different idea. Attempting something else. These attempts are not all that can be. There are always more to come. Imagining what could be. What's next? Imagining again. Creating more memories, memories that stay alive. Memories of fear. Memories of hope. Memories of the future. What's next?

Note

1. For a fascinating application of notions of failure to Forced Entertainment's work, see Bailes, Sara Jane. 2011. *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge.

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ORCID

Nic Fryer  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7060-9290>

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