

## Abstract

In this article, I examine my practice-as-research pieces *What The Money Meant* and *SERVUS!* in terms of how their design and delivery make visible those labour and exchange relations characteristic of late capitalism. After a brief introduction, I take the reader through theoretical debates around service work's proliferation and existing arguments about its relationship to performance, as well as Chantal Mouffe's (2013) argument for the 'agonistic' potential of aesthetic activity. I move on to argue that *SERVUS!* provides an example of how the one-to-one performance form can both reveal reification in action and rupture or speak back to its enactment, via techniques including explicit payment, over-enunciation or 'flourish' and what I term affective dissonance. I then demonstrate how *What The Money Meant* extends these techniques by applying them across a specific scenographic design and participatory structure. *What The Money Meant* invites audience members to communicate with the performer by tipping, which I argue might be seen as a dramaturgical tactic of audience participation. I conclude by arguing that the performance of service, especially that which plays upon the one-to-one structure, can work 'agonistically' by both revealing the precarity of late capitalist labour and subverting its delivery.

## Introduction, or Menu

In this article, I will examine my practice-as-research pieces *What The Money Meant* and *SERVUS!* in terms of how their design and delivery make visible those labour and exchange relations characteristic of late capitalism. Both pieces use performance as a fertile testing ground for exploring the ways in which late capitalism's characteristics are embedded within the daily practice of purchasing and providing services. The first piece, *SERVUS!*<sup>1</sup> is a one-to-one performance that invites a single audience member to dictate his or her level of participation via an *à la carte* menu pricing structure. I argue that *SERVUS!* demonstrates how the one-to-one performance form can both reveal reification in action and rupture or speak to its enactment, via techniques including explicit payment, over-enunciation or 'flourish' and what I term 'affective dissonance'. I move on to demonstrate how the second piece, *What The Money Meant*,<sup>2</sup> elaborates upon the techniques used in *SERVUS*, specifically in its scenographic design

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<sup>1</sup> The piece has traveled to venues including Arnolfini (Bristol, 2012), ArtsAdmin/Toynbee Studios (London, 2013), Performance Studies International conference 2012 (Leeds), Live at LICA (Lancaster, 2014), and the Universität der Künste (Berlin, 2014). It was redeveloped with Lancaster participants through a Strategic Insight Programme grant in 2014, which permitted me to collaborate with Lancaster arts organisation LEAP as led by Leo Burtin

<sup>2</sup> The piece was developed at Aberystwyth University, and shown at SITE 1/SAFLE 1 Festival (Aberystwyth Arts Centre, 2014) and Chelsea Theatre (London, 2014)

and multiple levels of audience participation, including tipping, which I argue might be more widely explored as a dramaturgical tactic. I conclude by arguing that the performance of service, especially that which plays upon the one-to-one structure, can work 'agonistically' by both revealing the precarity of late capitalist labour and subverting its delivery. As such, my argument can be seen as responding to recent scholarship on neoliberalism's reverberations into theatre-making and spectatorship, speaking back from a performer's standpoint to both Nicholas Ridout (2006; 2013) and Jen Harvie's survey in *Fair Play* (2013).

I write to the reader from a bifurcated employment status, with one foot in the working world of academia (through a fractional post) and one foot in the nebulous world of freelance art practice. Both positions often require me to take on certain characteristics of the service worker as universities and arts organisations are increasingly neoliberalised. The former carries certain expectations of latent security and institutional support (as well as pay grade), while the latter is often equated with the geographic and temporal privileges of flexible and project-oriented work, but both situations place demands on the worker that are only increasing. I also carry an embodied history of working in the service industry, mainly in restaurants and cafés in the UK and US. These experiences lead me to understand precarity not only as a contemporary economic trend, but as a phenomenological experience. In the spirit of homage to the restaurant industry and to make its parallels more explicit, I have structured this article as if it were a purchased meal.

## **Aperitif**

To whet your appetite, I would like to define some key terms and existing arguments which might assist you in deciphering and enjoying your experience of what follows.

While I have already referred to late capitalism in general, I will occasionally employ the term 'post-Fordism'. I define post-Fordism as the shift in relations of global labour, production and consumption since the 1970s, which can be characterised by a move towards specialisation, I.T.- and cognitive-driven labour, market deregulation and a flexible workforce (see Jessop 1992; Harvey in McDowell 2009). Post-Fordism is often defined by its chronological relation to Fordism's trade unionism and assembly lines; however, this article will focus on the former's affective consequences on the worker – specifically those of precarity, consumer privilege, and the mobilisation of emotional faculties for economic gain.

Post-Fordism's proliferation has led to a global increase in the demand and provision of service. Service work now dominates UK employment statistically and first-world economies in general. Linda McDowell (2009) suggests that a higher percentage of both men and women

now work in the service sector than ever worked in manufacturing, and that the sector employs three out of four workers in Western Europe, Australasia and North America. McDowell defines service work by two key characteristics: the co-presence of worker and consumer, and a framed temporality during which 'the service provided is used up at the time of the exchange' (1, 8, 29-30). Consumer services – retail, bar and restaurant work – depend 'on the production of an empathetic emotional exchange by embodied workers, drawing on "people skills" in close and often intimate encounters between workers and clients' (35). While the practice-as-research pieces discussed here share McDowell's focus on co-presence (of spectator and performer) and bounded temporality, their form and content interrogate how singularly intimate such service encounters can actually be.

However successfully a consumer service is performed, it always requires the worker's affective labour to be implemented. I use Michael Hardt's (1999) understanding of affective labour here, which he defines as a subset of the larger post-Fordist trend towards immaterial labour. Affective labour

is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion – even a sense of connectedness or community. *What is essential to it, its in-person aspect, is really the creation and manipulation of affects.* (1999, 96, emphasis added)

Hardt's use of the phrase 'creation and manipulation' alludes to the increase in performativity found across consumer services. Chantal Mouffe even goes so far as to make the explicit suggestion that labour's increased mobilisation of 'perception, language, memory and feelings...appropriates the special characteristics of the performing artist' (2013, 86). The best service workers are the best actors – those most capable of suppressing or channeling their subjectivities for their roles' demands.

These performance skills are concrete examples of capitalism's ability to impact upon intersubjective relations. The classic Marxist term for this is 'reification', which Anita Chari (after Lukács) defines as 'the ways in which individuals in capitalist society fail to recognise that the economy is constituted by human practices, even as it appears to be an autonomous and self-perpetuating dynamic...[a] disengaged, spectatorial form of subjectivity' (2010, 589). Both *SERVUS!* and *What The Money Meant* purposely situate the audience-participant as explicit consumer in order to emphasise the moments through which reification becomes normalised - when spectator-consumers begin to treat performer-workers as if they were things.

Reification leads to the subjugation of the service worker's rights and increased precarity across the workforce. As more people work, more services that were previously incorporated into domestic life (cooking, cleaning, care, sexual relations) are being shunted into the

market as services. Hence, though more of us are working and buying others' work, our relationship to this work is increasingly mediated through agencies, contracts, part-time rosters, zero-hour contracts and other symptoms of casualisation. This is partly due to deregulation – a key tenet of neoliberalism and one factor that was recently debated as part of the EU Referendum:

Shifting global employment trends have gone hand-in-hand with liberalization, featuring an easing of restrictions on internal and external trade and deregulation of labour protection, which has enabled unprecedented growth in contract labour and opportunities for subcontracting. (Howcroft and Richardson 2010, 2)

Guy Standing suggests that these workers are now a 'precariat'. The precariat shares none of the proletariat's historical trade unions and lateral rights; instead, it is dominated by different 'relations of production': often temporary, flexible, and with casualised contracts (Standing 2014, 10). Hidden within precarious work can be all sorts of hidden tasks – preparation for which workers are not remunerated, time spent performing administrative and training tasks for which they are not recognised. Many are educated beyond their job's demands. Very few receive any concomitant benefits such as pensions, holiday leave or medical care (for those in the USA, this last factor is crucial).

How might theatre and performance studies form a specific criticism of these economic conditions and their affective impact? I will use examples from both pieces to argue that the deliberate performance of service creates a space for enacting and subverting or 'speaking back to' late capitalist labour relations *simultaneously*. To do this, I employ Mouffe's vision of an 'agonistic approach' to critical art, which 'consists in making visible what the dominant consensus seeks to obscure and obliterate' by refusing to reconcile conflicting ideas and instead making space for them to coexist (2013, 87, 92-3). Mouffe suggests that artistic practices can do this by providing 'spaces for resistance that undermine the social imaginary necessary for capitalist reproduction', but only insofar as they constitute 'agonistic interventions' into the dominant hegemonic order (88). My argument is that the performance of service in a theatrical setting can resemble 'agonistic intervention' by interweaving carefully choreographed moments of interruption into its dramaturgical fabric, moments that illuminate the conflicts that ghost any exchange of money for labour.

## Hors D'Oeuvres:

### Surplus Manners, Affective Dissonance and Just Plain Faking It in *SERVUS!*

'Servus' is a common Bavarian greeting spoken between friends and strangers alike, comparable to 'ciao' in Italy. It shares etymological roots with 'service' and 'serf', but most literally its etymology draws from the Latin word for 'slave', and can be understood as an abbreviated version of the phrase 'I am at your service'. With its title echoing both the flippancy of this greeting and its underlying power dynamic, *SERVUS!* employs the dramaturgical logic of consumer services: the customer is encouraged to think of the service as a tailor-made experience designed for their desires alone. To begin, the customer-participant interacts with the performer via a printed menu of options that suggests that 'the more you spend, the more you get' (see **Fig.s 1 and 2**). This menu invites customers to 'Hear' (listen to a 9:54 audio soundtrack made of service workers' interviews) for 50 pence/cents, 'Feel' (have their shoes shined with traditional cobbler tools) for 50 pence/cents, 'Both' for 75 pence/cents, and - for an extra 25 pence/cents, to 'See' (meet the performer's eyes for the duration of the experience). Regardless of their individual choices, customers are invited to sit in a chair while I kneel at their feet, and - if they choose eye contact - are informed that they have paid for me to make eye contact with them, but they are not obligated to reciprocate. This last reminder underscores their privilege as the consumers, and suggests that although and indeed *because* they are paying for access to my (the performer's) body, they are not obligated to return the favour.

While *SERVUS!* is built around logics of payment, it goes beyond this menu to explore the metaphor of service work as performance and performance as surplus. Shoe-shining carries an implicit power relationship, crystallised within the traditional structure of a customer sitting in an ornate chair, often reading a paper or directing attention elsewhere, while the worker kneels and works industriously at his or her feet. The act of shining shoes is also indefinitely *surplus*; shoes do not need to be shined. Certain customers displayed shame at the appearance of their feet, or scoffed at the idea of me spending almost ten minutes on their footwear. One woman wore tiny, delicate sandals, and I spent her allotted time meticulously brushing and polishing the fragile leather straps - obeying the capital logic of performing the task to its completion while also pointing to the absurd extravagance of the task. This is resistance by over-enunciation: pointing to the action's excessive nature whilst fulfilling its demands.

A friend once recounted to me a time when she called a locksmith to retrieve her keys, which she'd mistakenly locked in her car. The locksmith was extremely professional and re-

trieved the keys in less than a minute. Her surprise, however, was that she resented his efficiency: because a locksmith is paid by the task, the time it takes to achieve the task is rendered irrelevant. However, because of her preconceived desire for something *more*, something *beyond the task at hand* - a desire comparable to that for a shoe-shine - she was left disappointed at the lack of performance, the lack of surplus or demonstrative labour around the task. She wanted the show, and the show was nowhere to be found.

The subtext around choice, of course, is an oppressive presence despite the pretense of open participation, and many customers hemmed and hawed at this responsibility. These first moments of trepidation draw into focus the constant pressure, as a consumer-at-large and (increasingly) as an audience member, to articulate one's choices. Stalls or upper balcony? Private interaction with performer or distanced voyeur? Contemporary attitudes towards immersive performance<sup>3</sup> implicitly dare customer-participants to choose the most extreme version of any given piece - in *SERVUS!*'s case, to Hear/See/Feel. Looking into the worker's eyes for the shoeshine's duration builds on participatory logics of purchasing intimacy or access to a performer's inner world. Ridout has discussed direct eye contact as a form of mutual embarrassment and pleasure in the theatre that disrupts the expectation of a one-sided spectatorship and reveals its economic underpinnings:

in the theatre of capitalism, the reverse gaze must always acknowledge, however tacitly, an intimate economic relation: I paid to have this man look at me, and he is paid to look. Our intimacy is always already alienated. It is a difficult intimacy. (2006, 80)

While the menu's purchasing power encourages reification by itemising the performer's labour through price points, the eye contact's duration unspools this reification in action, forcing both customer and performer to bear witness to the absurd nature of such abstraction.

About his own experience of a returned gaze from a performer, Ridout admits:

I feel obliged as a responsible and professional theatre-goer to comply with the contract I am being offered. Look for look is the deal...I have to return the gaze and hold it for as long as is required. The whole edifice of theatrical representation collapses and it's my fault for setting it up in the first place.... (87)

Guilt often arises in these moments of 'difficult intimacy', and customers struggle to respond, though many find a way. One man stood up from his chair and sat down on the floor across from me midway through the performance. He explained afterwards that once he'd recognised the tacit power relationship set up by the performance, he wanted to take actions towards changing it. His choice led to a discussion after the performance about how he'd felt it necessary to immediately act against complicity in the shoe-shine's power narrative, especially once he realised that the soundtrack's content surrounded the service worker's experi-

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<sup>3</sup> See various discussions around 'immersive' UK companies such as Punchdrunk and Brighton's Dreamthinkspeak, as well as more theoretical arguments around immersion and participation in performance, especially Machon (2011).

ence of alienation. We sat on the floor and discussed these implications and his resistance towards them. Another customer took off his headphones and stared at me upon the performance's completion. 'I can't tell if you're faking it,' he said. In the stark fluorescence of the Arnolfini's white walls, I contemplated how to respond to this man's legitimate suspicion. In some ways, I felt relieved - at least *someone* here has grasped that the performance transaction cannot, in fact, 'go through'. At least - for this customer - the juxtaposition of intimate gesture, payment and alienation has worked to displace and confuse the normal ease of service transactions mimicked by the performance. Returning to Hardt's definition of affective labour as involving 'the creation and manipulation' of feelings, these customers' reactions bear witness to the dark side of such post-Fordist manipulation, and speak back to it.

Every gesture, in this situation, becomes a question about how far capital can reach. When the performer stares into my eyes, does she really mean it? Or is he faking it? Did she do that because she actually cares? Or will I pay for that (literally) later? How much does my money buy, and how far does this transaction penetrate the recesses of the performer's subjectivity? Although these questions might suggest desire as concern, not capital, the interesting realisation is in how capital manipulates desire and vice versa. Capital employs choreographies of desire for its own accrual, but - perhaps more unexpectedly - *desire implements capital as a stand-in*, sometimes to punctuate a crescendo of well-rehearsed frisson. The most expensive option is the one that promises the most complete proximity, even collapse, between performer and customer, but the exchange itself never mimetically renders what it promises from a distance (or on paper). The exchange *fails* - and as a result, (re)actions around it pay homage to our expectations of its reificatory abilities.

In order to facilitate this well-choreographed failure, I must both respect or point to the 'feeling rules' of the scenario and fall short of them as a performer. In her 1983 study of flight attendants, Arlie Hochschild refers to 'feeling rules' as that which 'set out what is owed in gestures of exchange between people' (76). Feeling rules 'are what guide emotion work by establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges' (56). Hochschild's interest lies specifically in the ways in which employees are encouraged to streamline and hone their own emotional labour in order to exploit customers' sensibilities, but also how these employees subtly resist corporate directives by refusing to completely occupy the company standard for affective labour. This doubled work smacks of Mouffe's 'agonistics' - the subtlety of quotidian resistance, snuck in (perhaps) small glances, extended bathroom breaks, or simply the refusal to conceal one's own subjectivity beneath the corporate shellac, *while also* doing just enough to avoid managerial watchdogs. How can the one-to-

one performer do something similar, by simultaneously obeying her expected 'feeling rules' and working to reveal the two-way exploitation contained within this expectation?

During a dress rehearsal for the Arnolfini performance, my assistant and I prepared set phrases and choreographies that nodded towards 'feeling rules', assisted in part by test audience members with retail experience. These testers provided us with gestural details and phrases from their own work experience: taking the customer's coat, saying phrases such as 'Was everything all right for you today?' and 'I'm going to be taking care of you today' that they had been trained to dispense by management in previous retail workplaces. This training points to the omnipresence of managerial curation also touched upon by Hochschild: the post-Fordist service worker should *make invisible* the monetary nature of the relationship between customer and worker by manipulating her language and personal demeanour, while carefully amplifying these elements enough to be noticed as something beyond the normal call of duty (hence reflecting positively on the worker and - by metonymic extension - the managing company). In the performance context of *SERVUS!*, a refusal to make money invisible becomes a strategy of resistance. The menu's required commitment of knowing *exactly* what you're paying for, of breaking the reificatory fetish down into minutiae, disrupts the exchange and requires both performer and audience member to consider what is in fact being bought and sold. The divine mystery of transubstantiation disappears, and money turns out only to buy a very practised series of acts. Then, by sensing and calling out (albeit through vague exclamation) manipulative undercurrents beneath the performer's gaze and speaking up about them, the customer-participant acknowledges his or her previous complicity in reification, and resistance to continuing as a voiceless participant.

Over-enunciation can become a form of resistance – the flourish as container for radical excess. The flourish goes beyond the mere performance of an action; it builds a theatrical façade *around* the action in order to better situate the customer/audience member. The flourish might be the act of performing absurdly extraneous efforts - such as my ten minutes shining the leather sandals, each motion over-played to not just perform the action but to 'act' its labour where none was due. The flourish might be the sycophancy involved in taking a customer's coat and hanging it up beside our Arnolfini market stall station - a gesture that enacts hospitality even as it 'shows the show' of its calculated artifice. There is a scorn present in these excessive actions, a clenched-teeth grin that I allowed myself to channel as a performer; indeed, after shining countless pairs of shoes and forcing myself to be overly polite, this grimace came naturally. The one-to-one performer you visit at that festival is still a worker, and her work takes its own emotional toll even when that work is about work's emotional toll.



These types of flourish might even be seen as an agonistic gesture *qua* Mouffe - permitting hospitality to coexist with its shadow, and 'making visible' both dynamics. The flourish reveals the double-sided nature of surplus affective labour. If I shine shoes *without flourish*, completing the task without fully embodying or exceeding it - the audience member might feel cheated, like my friend by her locksmith. But when I purposefully inserts these flourishes into the dramaturgical fabric of the piece - furrowing my brow as I add polish, 'showing the show' of pouring my 'self' into the sustained eye contact - my audience grows suspicious. Surely she's not *really* enjoying herself? Surely the mimetic gap hasn't closed itself so completely that *acting* and *action* become one? Through these small flourishes, the complete transaction (and by extension, mimesis itself) is revealed as an impossible *telos*. As a performer, I go through waves of effort - desperate attempts at 'doing my best' - interspersed with moments of refusing to invest myself in the performative actions. The encounter succumbs to a rupture of representation, whether we intend it to or not.

When this representational rupture occurs, how does it *feel*? What are its constituent affects, for example? Audience-participants often finished *SERVUS!* by commenting on the strangeness and disorientation of their experience, but precisely what does this disorientation or rupture *do*? Here, I find Josette Féral's definition of 'presence effects' to be useful. The 'presence effect' originates in the 'dissociation between eye and ear, vision and hearing', an effect that reveals itself as mimetic apparatus even as it establishes its verisimilitude via sensory stimuli (2012, 35, 40). For Féral, the effect works to make the audience-participant aware of his or her own perceptual processes. By creating a juxtaposition between the illusion provided by the piece and one's immediate reality, a 'presence effect' achieves a sort of mirrored rupture in which juxtaposition occurs, even as it reveals itself as artifice. When tracking dissociation through a piece such as *SERVUS*, we see that the customer is invited - through the dramaturgical logic of the purchase - to choose her own path, but this path inevitably proves uncomfortable, as the juxtaposition of audio soundtrack, shoe-shine and eye contact unfolds. The piece cultivates unease, then ruptures any representational bubble by abruptly finishing with the performer asking 'Was everything all right for you today?' and demanding payment. Payment occurs at the end of the piece in order to shunt the customer out of the auditory and sensory world of the performance into the abrupt - even violent - resolution required in the moment of payment. Ideally, this resolution never successfully occurs, leaving a sense of what I call 'affective dissonance' in its wake.

Using the overt financial transaction as a dramaturgical tactic allows us to witness the ways in which affective labour is concealed or abstracted inside the money-form *and* disturb

this reification in action – and as such it creates a space for agonistic intervention. The one-to-one form’s increasing context within festival and arts venue circuits makes it especially resonant with these issues; one-to-one performers are often asked to be flexible to space and time demands and repeat short intense experiences over a long festival run in order to maximise value for money. After touring *SERVUS!* to a variety of venues, I wondered: what is that flexibility’s opposite? How can I put demands on a space instead of it putting demands on me as a worker-performer? If I were to design, install and create a scenographic framework within which to play with these affects, what would it look like?

### **Entrée:**

#### **Agonistic Design, Coercive Participation, and Gratuities in *What The Money Meant***

I began designing this new piece as a performer with very little design experience. My sketches, what would become the blueprints for a series of wooden booths,<sup>4</sup> emerged from a desire to create spaces that heighten the agonistic audience-performer dynamics that I began to discover in *SERVUS!*. The piece’s narrative follows a waitress who enters into a Faustian bargain with a lecherous customer trying to test the bounds of what money will buy. The installation itself incorporates two levels of audience: three ‘VIP’ audience members who interact with the performer directly in and around three wooden booths, and a larger audience of 60+ who witness the performance via live CCTV transmissions and radio mic amplification. The ‘Fine Dining Booth’ was sumptuous and comfortable, with damask wallpaper, red carpet, mood lighting and wine at the ready as I (as the performer) spoke to the VIP across a dining table. The ‘Confessional Booth’ cast the performer as a red-lit confessor speaking to the VIP through Perspex and an ecclesiastical grate. The ‘Rotating Peep Show’ booth, meanwhile, put all three VIPs into relation with each other as the singing performer rotated herself on a platform to face each of them in turn. Each space puts the VIP in a specific, manipulated relationship to the performer. The larger questions driving this piece, then, were how one-to-one encounters might be staged across space and time to explore the ethics of paying for consumer service work, and how scenography can help to represent and ‘make visible’ the ruptures within capital relations that I began to see in *SERVUS!*.

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<sup>4</sup> For this, I am indebted to Simon Banham’s ability to interpret and translate my ideas into legible blueprints, and Aberystwyth University’s TFTS department, specifically all of the technical staff including Rebecca Mitchell, Stephen Griffiths, Chris Stewart, Jill Rolfe and the subcontracted but never underestimated genius of Nick.

The piece shows the service worker at turns delighted and uneasy with her status as walking, talking cog in a larger, profit-making apparatus. She manipulates her language to create emotional reactions in the three VIP audience-participants, but occasionally proves resistant by speaking back to or diverting an easy exchange – navigating the ‘feeling rules’ we saw before. The three VIPs are shepherded between each of the three booths in turn by a Hostess figure who acts as a performative invigilator (see **Fig.s 3 and 4**). VIP audience members, by contrast, are invited to directly interact with and tip the performer throughout the performance, via American dollars they've received in exchange for equivalent pounds at the door. They are served drinks and breadsticks throughout the performance, which they are led to believe are free - until, at the show's conclusion, the Hostess/invigilator reveals that she has been keeping track of each morsel, and provides itemised bills to each VIP while begging on her knees (see **Fig. 5** for a view of the installation in action at Chelsea Theatre).

Triangulation informs dramaturgy here: there are three VIP audience members, three viewing hatches into the Rotating Peep-Show Booth, and three booths in total. Both the dramaturgy and the subject matter of *What The Money Meant* extend René Girard's theory of triangular desire (1996), which explores the ways in which the presence of another desiring presence can heighten one's desire for an object – in this case, the performer. The restaurant waitress must perform a ‘special’ relationship to her customer's table while also maintaining keen awareness of third parties' needs. In order to succeed and be remunerated accordingly by gratuity and wage, she must negotiate this constant pull between customised, single-vector attention and the centrifugal buzz of the larger restaurant – a microcosm for the precarious flexibility of post-Fordism at large. In *What The Money Meant's* design, I wanted to explore how spectatorial co-presence might amplify difficult affects, including jealousy. Not only must the ‘regular’ audience member on the outskirts be made aware of his/her experience as partial, but the dramaturgy pits each VIP against each other: ‘A’ is always aware that B and C will get a different experience. In one situation, a bidding war took place across the Rotating Peep-Show Booth, with VIPs throwing dollars one after the other. Other VIPs relayed their experience of waiting for access to the performer, of being jealous of the others' individual (and different) experiences while also being aware of this jealousy as manufactured. Despite ‘paying in’ to the VIP experience, these VIPs have only partial access to others' one-to-one encounters, and many of their actions are made visible to the ‘regular’ spectators thanks to the CCTV-fed monitors.

At certain key moments in the piece, however, it is the 60+ who are targeted with jealousy. Although the performance is amplified and broadcasted, this access is occasionally compromised through choreographed actions that mimic the smaller and more subtle interruptions of *SERVUS!*. The 60+ only ever see the performer's face inside each booth, never the VIP's. At one point, the 60+ are reminded of their compromised access when the Hostess turns off the LCD monitors and my mic goes silent. This occurs at a crucial point in the narrative when I undress for a single VIP and communicate with him or her via signs, instructing him/her to keep this experience a secret. These larger moments constitute over-enunciation in a more extended and theatrical manner, making all audience-participants aware of the idea that paying a higher price for VIP access buys a significantly more privileged experience,<sup>5</sup> but that even within the realm of privilege, there are inequities.

Interruption can be staged even more deviously in an installation of this nature, such as when I acknowledged the CCTV by looking directly at it (and by extension, the 60+). These abrupt glances signal meta-theatrical awareness of the show's structural apparatus, while also breaking any semblance of booth-bound privacy with the VIP there with me. In these moments, I demonstrate that I know the 'feeling rules' but I am breaking them in an act of resistance. Sometimes, I sense that the VIP is hunting out the seams in my demeanour even before I show them. As theatre spectators, we often anticipate cracks in the representational veneer, even as we hope that our cynicism will be proven wrong. While on a workshop supported by the Live Art Development Agency in 2013, I attended a lap-dancing club in Birmingham with a group of female performance artists. Our task was simply to choose a dancer and pay for a dance with twenty pounds provided by the workshop leaders. Reflecting on their experience of the dance, many participants described a moment in which disbelief was suspended, when a hope arose that *maybe my dance is special. Maybe the dancer is giving me the special performance, the longer dance, the kiss behind a curtain of hair*. The much-touted liveness of the intimate performance experience always carries this ghost of possibility - that maybe this time will be the outlier, not the rule. Maybe, just maybe, the worker will really be herself this time.

I perform in ways that exploit this doubled desire for the perfect worker (whose selfhood you can't see) and the fractured façade. It is exhausting, and I vacillate between enjoying my prowess and feeling engulfed by the monstrous game I've created. Certain sections of the text deliberately draw the audience in through seductive modes of speech before abruptly

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<sup>5</sup> Before booking, audience members are required to state their preference for either VIP access (which they are told involves direct contact with the performer) or larger-audience access. VIPs are then told to bring 1.88 in exact change, which they exchange for 3 USD at the door (its approximate equivalent at the dates of performance).

pushing them away with dismissive gestures, remarks, or demands for money – the interruption at work, time and again. These moments of harsh juxtaposition startle the VIP out of trusting the service script and reveal the agonistic subtext playing out beneath the audience-performer relationship, which - in this case - is explicitly charged by the financial play of tipping.

After all, it's only fair that the VIPs be able to resist the piece's structure too. Theatre-makers are increasingly curious about how best to navigate the boundaries between aesthetic control and invited participation. In the run-up to their Toynbee Studios event *An Evening of Power Play* in October 2013, artists Tattenbaum/deluca described this fascination with the terms of participation:

We are interested in many of the discussions going on in the arts, and in popular culture, about audience participation, agency, 'customisation culture'...

Despite (or perhaps because of) this we feel that, as consumers, there is a high expectation that our cultural experiences will be well facilitated. That we will be given an appropriate number of options + appropriate set boundaries + appropriate directive/facilitative/supportive environments in order to best achieve our own participatory potential. (2013)

Creating 'appropriate set boundaries' in *What The Money Meant* means giving instructions ('Could you just hold that for me?') while occasionally inviting interaction ('[gesturing to the wad of dollar bills] "How does that feel?"). These moments invite genuine responses but can also invite vocal resistance or the refusal to act – participation's radical negative.

VIPs have been encouraged to tip as they go, and tipping plays in the realm of surplus (despite social and employment pressures to make gratuity function as wage, especially in the United States). Excess can be rewarded directly in a way that goes beyond *SERVUS's* machinations. At the show's beginning, VIPs are asked to exchange home currency for three American dollars (a trick used by casinos that forces clients to participate in its economy by exchanging money for vouchers, chips or other equivalents). The new American currency is *other*, but the provision of a mere three units puts absurd emphasis onto each flimsy, dirty bill. Because VIPs are instructed to 'tip throughout the evening' by the Hostess but are only given three dollars with which to do so, each tipping gesture is amplified. Extras – the surplus flourish in the form of the aside or wink - are rewardable by tips, but this attention to surplus distracts the VIPs from the concrete and itemised labour being performed to make their experience more palatable. The champagne glass begins to be refilled without asking; another breadstick awaits the one being eaten. The show demands that the VIPs forget the concrete, calcified labour right under their noses – the actual meat and potatoes of being served. They've tipped me with my songs and jokes and stories, while assuming that the basic provisions of food, drink and hospitality are free. This assumption and its subsequent embarrassment - sustained in silence until

all debts are paid or shamed in the process - are staged as the show's finale and watched by the larger audience on its perimeter.

This coercion – the manipulation of affects again – often leads to moments of audience resistance that go beyond the gentler responses to *SERVUS!*. One VIP forgot to bring exact change to the performance, and hence was not given his dollars at the door for tipping. He seemed embarrassed. Despite this fact, his VIP role as 'C' put him on the receiving end of my scripted request for tips at a certain point in the piece's narrative:

**Performer:** ...I accept the money. I accept the money. I accept the money. [*Hinting to C for a tip. If C doesn't get the hint, the Performer asks directly for a tip, then takes the proffered dollar bill and throws it to the side.*]

At this point, if a tip isn't immediately proffered, I tend to look into the VIP's eyes and whisper, 'This is where you tip me' - a comment meant to elicit discomfort. When I said as much to this particular VIP, he looked guilty and finally said loudly, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I don't have anything!' This reaction constitutes a moment of agonistic eruption created by a certain dramaturgical strategy; this participant realises the artificial parameters set up by the show itself and knows his behaviour's status within the show as not-real. He knows that the show employs a playful attitude towards currency and transaction. Yet he still feels compelled to exclaim, erupt, strain against the dramaturgy's efforts to cast him as a 'bad tipper'. He knows that he is merely playing a role - indeed, my scripted request for a tip reveals the planned and manipulative nature of this interaction - and that if he had tipped, the gesture would have been merely symbolic, performed as it was through a foreign currency in the playful framework of a show. And yet he erupts.

Another audience member seemed to interpret my awkward silence at the end of the show (when I ask each VIP 'was everything all right for you?' and wait for him or her to answer) as another implied tip request, and made it clear that he refused to tip in that moment. However, once back in sight of the rest of the audience, this VIP subsequently insisted upon paying everyone's 'food and drink' bill (itself an absurd, handwritten document). Again, he knew the action was artificial, and he did it anyways. He felt comfortable resisting my suggestion of a tip, but still obeyed the 'feeling rules' by playing the munificent bill-payer. The tacit implication here is that while the itemised bill is obviously given within the context of a theatrical encounter and as such is 'not real', a refusal to remunerate would negate the narrative's overarching pressure to pay properly for services received. Though these gestures are small - indeed, perhaps *because* they are small and work on a one-to-one relation - the piece's content urges audience members to muse on small acts' participation in a wider economic playing field.

## Conclusion, or Dessert

I would love to sweeten your departure, but to do so would trivialise my purposes. Take my last offering as a darker chocolate, a savoury pleasure that lingers.

I have demonstrated that the performance of service, both in one-to-one contexts and larger participatory frameworks, can work agonistically according to Mouffe's definition. In small-scale performances such as *SERVUS!*, techniques including a direct menu of price points, gestures over-enunciation or 'flourish', and affective dissonance can both make reification visible and problematise its occurrence. The one-to-one performance form is an especially useful lens into (and unfortunately, often an example of) the demands of post-Fordism, and my interactions with *SERVUS!* audience members suggest a latent unease with consumer service and its affective demands. Larger-scale performance installations such as *What The Money Meant* invites these affects to be played out and complicated across space and time through spectatorial co-presence, heightened interruptions, and participation through tipping. I would like to argue that as theatre and performance makers and scholars, we continue to develop the ways in which spectatorial and scenographic structures might be designed more effectively to promote uneasy relations, and invite audience members to speak back to the financial and dramaturgical structures into which a piece positions them. Doing this will permit us to think through and envision strategies of resistance towards late capitalist labour relations more effectively.

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