Womanhood & the Body:

An investigation of experience, community, and reclamation, through Practice as Research.

Laura WALKER

Submitted: September 2022

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the Highlands and Islands for the degree of MRes in Creative Practice.

Abstract:

This thesis interrogates two central arguments in relation to Feminism, through Practice as Research (PaR). Firstly, I propose a return to the body in Feminist theory as a way of reclaiming it from the violence of society and its participants – specifically from the societal violence of negative 'body image' and the physical violence of sexual assault and male-body bias. Secondly, I question the notion of a 'shared experience' of womanhood, investigating the ethics of this sentiment – which implies that universality undermines complex and crucial intersectionality – in contrast to the evidence that, for some women, this shared experience is part of the experience of womanhood.

The PaR element of this research includes reflections on performer journals and audience responses to a devised work-in-progress performance. The performance was devised using physical theatres to explore the themes of womanhood. The creative themes were derived from field research, in the form of a survey, which asked women to reflect on their relationship with their body.

I entered this research asking what physical theatres can offer Feminist narratives onstage but, as I began to explore phenomenology, my research evolved into a question of what it is to *experience* womanhood. Through an organic process of discovery, the research led to a return to a Feminism that considers the body as a central aspect of women's experiences, and a reclamation of the body by women. This thesis will evaluate the theoretical and practical research elements, and analyse what they offer to this line of inquiry.

Contents

Acknowledgements & Declaration

Introduction 1

Literary Review 5

Chapter One 12

Practice as Research, Feminsm, and Phenomenology; theoretical discourses

Chapter Two 19

Devising and Physical Theatres; towards a practical philosophy

Chapter Three 24

Case Study: within the context of a phenomenological Feminism

Conclusion 29

Reference List & Bibliography 33

Acknowledgements

To the dozens of the women who have participated in this research:

I have been surprised and moved by your grace, generosity, and vulnerability. Whether as performance participants, survey respondents, audience members, or critical friends, the depth and nuance sustained in my investigations would not have been possible without your insights and support.

Also, specifically, to Dr Lesley Mickel, Dr Andrew Jennings, and Ruby Worth for their supervisory support and mentorship; thank you.

Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Signature:

Date: 30.08.2022

Introduction

This thesis uses Practice as Research (PaR) to interrogate two central arguments in relation to Feminism. Firstly, I propose a return to the body in Feminist theory as a way of reclaiming it from the violence of society and its participants – specifically from the societal violence of negative 'body image' and the physical violence of sexual assault and male-body bias. Secondly, I question the notion of a 'shared experience' of womanhood, investigating the ethics of this sentiment – which implies that universality undermines complex and crucial intersectionality – in contrast to the evidence that, for some women, this shared experience is part of the experience of womanhood. This thesis will evaluate the theoretical and practical research elements, and analyse what they offer to this line of inquiry. There are many layers to the research; feeding into this project are discussions around Practice as Research (PaR), Feminism and performance, phenomenology, and physical theatres. In this introduction I will offer an overview of the project, including my rationale and methodology, and will establish the concerns around which my research orbits.

This project uses a multi-layered approach to PaR, which I will explain later in the introduction, meaning that the theoretical and practical elements of this creative research are closely linked and perform a kind of symbiosis. Broad theoretical research provides the basis for this thesis but my interrogation of these theories was often redirected by the outcome of the practical investigation. I describe the theoretical background to the practice in Chapter One. Survey responses from fifty-two women were also an important line of inquiry; the survey report became a creative resource in itself and the responses proposed challenges to the theory. The practice consisted of five women performers (only four of whom participated in a live work-in-progress event) and myself as director/facilitator exploring the creative themes through the physical body; an approach that combined the performers' personal experiences with the wider research and survey responses. There were four themes with which we approached the PaR, which I will discuss further in Chapter Two, but the theme that was taken forward for creative and physical exploration was 'my body doesn't belong to me', or '*my* body' as the final work-in-progress performance was titled. This theme and its creative output consider a reclamation of the body from the societal and physical forces that lay claim to women's bodies, such as the pressure to look and behave a certain way, and the physical violence that most women will encounter in their lives. I talk more on this in Chapter Three alongside an analysis of how the audience

response to the work-in-progress and the performers' journals respond to the research question.

'Womanhood and the body' as a theme for research was born from the Sarah Everard protests in 2021 – following Everard's kidnap, rape, and murder – and from conversations around wellbeing and body image that were being hosted by YoungScot in their *#AyeFeel Like Talking* campaign. Both incidents made clear that women's bodies are the primary vehicles through which women are oppressed and objectified. Following the Sarah Everard protest in London, which was found by the High Court to have been illegally mishandled by police (Grierson, 2022), *Reclaim the Streets* activist, Anna Birley, comments on the outrage felt by many as women were asked to 'take extra care and avoid going out after dark'. This attitude held by police – that women should face restrictions and punishment for the violent acts of men against them – echoes the Yorkshire Ripper murders in the 1970's and the Ipswich murders in 2006 (Bindel, 2006) where women were expected to take responsibility for the crimes enacted upon them. The *#AyeFeel Like Talking* campaign offered a different perspective about the harms of society on women's bodies. This campaign hosted a series of video conversations with organisations on issues that mattered to young people; one video featured the Young Women's Movement[1] (YWCA) who referenced research that they had done in 2019 regarding body-image. Social media and Instagram were heavily referenced in their video and the report, 'with 64% of young women saying Instagram influenced the way they felt about their body' (p.16) but there are other troubling issues in the report, with one respondent saying they started dieting at the age of 10 (p. 13), and that 'most young women had taken up exercise (79%) or dieted (69%) to change their bodies' (p.27). I will discuss the results of my own survey more in Chapter Two, but these themes of sexual and systemic violence present in the Sarah Everard protests, and societal pressure for the body to look a certain way, were both themes that emerged in my own survey research. These concerns remained a theme in the performance as the survey respondents and performers identified these acts, pressures, and expectations as a source of disconnection from the body.

Regarding phenomenology, I felt that this philosophical approach was the most appropriate analytical framework through which to investigate a theme and style which was so concerned with the physical form. In *Theory/Theatre*, Fortier explains how

[1] YWCA, originally the Young Women's Christian Association states on their website that: 'In Scotland, we have rebranded to The Young Women's Movement to emphasise that we are a secular movement (i.e. we are open to women of all faiths and none.'

sensitive the central concerns of phenomenology are to theatre by analysing the sensorial reception of the experience (2016:29). This approach to phenomenology is one of many and in Chapter One I will describe in depth where my practice sits within the myriad of phenomenologies.

My methodology and approach are considered in detail in Chapter Two, but first I will introduce one of the main concerns of my research: Practice-As-Research (PaR). PaR is a widely contested field. It covers an exceptionally broad range of approaches, styles, practitioners, and areas of research; the vastness of which is amplified by the same lack of specificity and conflict in the term 'performance'. Although some academics may disagree, performance has been used to define ritual and religious practice, pedagogy, and Feminism and gender studies, among other areas, including the more traditional staged drama-based performance. In search of clarity, researchers have attempted to stratify the discipline with the resulting plethora of acronyms to define the various approaches to PaR. *Performance As Research* (Arlander, et al., 2018) offers ARP (artistic research in practice), PBR (performance-based-research), PLR (performance-led-research) and PAR (performance as research) among others. I initiated my early research by reading about the different approaches to PaR and discovered that my approach did not fit comfortably in any of them. There are a few reasons for this academic discomfort and this will be discussed in more depth in Chapter One.

Supporting my PaR are two other modes of research: firstly, the academic reading which elevates my PaR by building a complex theoretical understanding of the forces that are shaping the practical elements (in this case, Feminist theory, phenomenology, PaR itself, and physical theatres). Secondly, I carried out field research in the form of a survey to gather responses from women about their experience of womanhood, a second survey to gather audience responses to the final performance, and I asked the performers to keep reflective journals. The first survey provided the performers with stimuli and themes to work with during the devising process as it was important to me that the work be as representative as possible, but the responses also unexpectedly talked both to my research and my rationale because of the themes of universality – that women hold a shared universal experience of womanhood – and body image that emerged. The second survey offered an opportunity to analyse the audience response to the performance and to evaluate the efficacy of using physical theatres as an approach. The performer journals allowed me to determine whether the process had any impact on the performers, and to analyse

whether working with physical theatres and themes of the body would affect or provoke reflection upon the performers' relationships with their own bodies. In Chapter Two, I will interrogate the method and process of my practice with a consideration of what it has to offer these themes of violence, community and embodiment.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I will be offering an overview of the reading that informed my research. The four key areas of research are: PaR, phenomenology, Feminism, and creative practice (which include the devising process and physical theatre forms). Here, I will identify and evaluate some of the writing that has already been done in my chosen fields of study.

Practice as Research

The editors in *Practice-Led Research, Research Led Practice in the Creative Arts* state that they intend to 'discuss logical, theoretical, practical and political issues surrounding creative practice' and 'to propose models and methodologies for the relationship between creative practice and research' (2009: p.9). In fact much of their introduction makes an argument for dialogic work between research and practice, which is continued and explored by *Performance As Research* (Arlander, et al., 2018) published almost ten years later.

The book by Arlander *et al.* is a collection of essays and introductions which explore numerous questions, challenges, breakthroughs, case studies, connections, concerns, and proposals in the realm of PaR. At first, I read broadly on the topic, but I came to realise that my interest lay with essays that navigate the tensions between the various acronyms that sit alongside PaR. Understanding the different approaches to PaR has helped me to articulate my own practice and its place in these discussions. My reading generally supported my decision to enter into an open-ended research process with a tightly intertwined theory/practice approach. Essays in *Performance as Research* often use the terms: 'ephemeral', 'tacit' and 'unknowing', to argue (respectively): the immediacy of the process; the things that are impossible to articulate without experience and which cannot be translated into academic writing; and the importance of PaR to be open to new directions, questions and provocations. By using a devising process to create the performance and a survey of women's experiences as a stimulus, the project lends itself to a state of unknowing and discovery unrestricted by predetermined outcomes.

The essays in *Performance as Research* also offered some questions and challenges: understanding my own approach to research/practice, and a consideration of the audience in knowledge-production. Firstly, Joanna Bucknall's 'The Daisy Chain Model' (pp.50-74) introduced different models for reflective practice and offered a new

model that responds to Bucknall's own difficulty in placing her practice within the tensions of PaR terminology. This model maps the various shifts in focus that occur during a dialogic theory/practice approach. Secondly, Valentina Signore in 'A New Rhetoric' (pp. 84-104) states:

> The PAR sessions do not just communicate already produced and "definitive" knowledge [...] but rather engage the audience in the process of producing knowledge by creating conditions to keep such processes open and productive (p.91)

This approach to involving the audience in 'producing knowledge' is important in the final stage of research, which gathers audience responses to the production. Offering a work-in-progress performance to the audience will be beneficial to this knowledge production as it makes clear that the work is incomplete and, therefore, open to being shaped by the audience. I will evaluate this further in Chapter Three.

Phenomenology

Theatre and Phenomenology (Johnston, 2017) is a remarkably accessible text that offers an introduction to the theory**.** The first chapter of the book describes a history of phenomenology and the different approaches to this philosophy of being. Unfortunately, despite an awareness that Merleau-Ponty is more commonly referenced in theatre and performance phenomenologies, Johnston uses Heidegger's phenomenology to navigate a phenomenological discussion about Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud. Merleau-Ponty is a phenomenologist whose philosophy emphasises bodily experience. This emphasis has led to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach being widely adopted by academics in theatre.

This book was a useful tool in cultivating an understanding of the different phenomenologies; helping me identify Merleau-Ponty as the best source for my own phenomenology. However, due to its purpose as an introductory text for phenomenology and performance theory, as with *Theatre and Feminism*, Johnston focuses on Stanislavski, Brecht, and Artaud exclusively. This is likely in the service of accessibility as these practitioners are featured vastly throughout drama education. There is, however, a brief acknowledgement of the phenomenology of devising:

> If there is no text, as in a devised or improvised performance, then the actor has no choice but to start with Dasein [human experience] while integrating other creative sources. (p.187)

Here, Johnston implies that there is something inherently phenomenological about the devising process as the performer draws first and primarily from experience to shape the entire theatrical event (whereas, in a more traditional approach to theatre, the script provides an influence in the first instance, which the performer uses their experience to interpret / direct).

I undertook further research into Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to better understand his approach; Johnston introduces the reader to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology using the following description:

> He uses the remarkable phrase 'the flesh of the world' to describe this bodily encounter with its environment and sees our own body as akin to the heart of an organism, breathing life into it and forming part of a delicate system. (p.36)

This 'delicate system' is parallel to the ontological and epistemological interaction that occurs during PaR. It also chimes with Butler's arguments regarding intersectionality (which I explore further in Chapter One) as it clearly describes a system in which one person's experience is imprinted upon the world while being shaped by it. If this is true, it is unlikely that any one experience could be the same as another. Unfortunately, Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* is primarily male-centric; in his chapter on the body as a sexed being, he exclusively represents the sexed being as 'Man'. He also considers the vulnerability of exposing the body to another and how in the act of offering up the body as an object to the perception of another, one risks becoming an object or slave to the other (p.170). It is unclear whether Merleau-Ponty uses 'Man' as a general reference to all humans and their sexuality or whether he is referring exclusively to men or male experience. Regardless, at best this is a minimising, at worst, an omission, of women's sexual and embodied experience. Another example of where this experience is missed is earlier in the chapter where Merleau-Ponty explains the layered experience of feeling. He explains that pleasure or pain is experienced first as a basic primal response to stimuli but that our understanding or interpretation of this pain or pleasure response is shaped by our societal education. Considering the inequalities, traumas and oppressions that are enacted upon and through women's bodies, Merleau-Ponty excludes the nuance of women's embodied experience. While this is not a criticism of the writer as it is a symptom of the attitudes of the time, this omission is part of a broader issue where women's bodies are erased from academia (I will explore this more in Chapter One).

Feminism

My academic journey with Feminism began with the reading of *Theatre & Feminism* (Solga, 2016) and *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (Estés, 2008). I read these books simultaneously, so that reading through Estés' fables and Jungian archetypes as a way to reconnect to our creative or spiritual selves collided with Solga's theoretical examination of Feminism in western theatres. Solga explores Brecht, Chekov, and Stanislavski through the writings of other Feminist theatre-makers and academics as well as identifying moments, individuals, and movements that have shaped arguments in theatre and Feminism. As with *Theatre and Phenomenology,* I felt the absence of physical theatres or other avant-garde styles in this discussion was an oversight; this absence was especially striking after my reading *Women Who Run With the Wolves,* which often returns to images of the body and embodiment as tools to enrich our lives and creativity. Originally, my proposal was a comparison of a language- and movement-based performance to examine what each style had to offer to a Feminist story but as I began to identify the theme of 'womanhood and the body' and to relate this to phenomenology, it became clear that (for this project) what was needed was a focus on the ontology of performance, physical theatre and Feminism. This research became a study of: what it is to be a woman in a woman's body; what it means to explore these ideas through devised performance and the body; and what it is to experience this performance in the presence of other women's bodies.

Judith Butler is a well-cited and prolific author on the themes of Feminism and gender theory. *Gender Trouble* (2007), first published in 1990, is rooted in intersectional Feminism and queer theory. Butler states in her preface, written for its republication in 1999, that:

> G*ender Trouble* sought to uncover the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gender is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions. The text also sought to undermine any and all efforts to delegitimate any minority gendered or sexual practices. (p.viii)

Butler draws from poststructuralism and postmodernism to make some of her arguments, specifically on the deconstruction of gender. *Bodies that Matter* (2011) addresses some of the contradictions of *Gender Trouble* and explores further the ways in which 'heterosexual hegemony' has shaped our social and political landscape. In this text, Butler draws more heavily on poststructuralism and pits the philosophy against materialism to formulate an argument towards not only the deconstruction of gender, but the deconstruction of sex and the body. My struggle with this text in particular is that the reliance on poststructuralism

means that the body and sex are approached as theoretical entities that can be deconstructed. They are therefore discussed as largely theoretical phenomena, which abstracts them from the actual physical phenomena that we experience day-to-day. In Chapter One, I will extend this discussion.

To complement the reading on Butler, I also referred to *Volatile Bodies* by Elizabeth Grosz. This text draws on some phenomenological approaches; in the opening paragraph, Grosz problematises the traditional western assumption that the mind and body can be considered separate (1994, p.3). She expands on this idea later in her introduction, explaining that the mind, being associated with man, and the body, being associated with woman, means that women and their experiences are often passed over in philosophy, which concerns itself with qualities of the mind and, therefore, man (p.4). This provokes a question of whether an embodied phenomenology could be considered a Feminist philosophy owing to its return to the body as the primary point of analysis in our experience of being.

Creative Practice

Everybody is a Body (Studd and Cox, 2020) is written to propose a movement lifestyle for both the practitioner and the layperson. It covers, in-depth, the practical philosophy of the Laban-Bartenieff Movement System (LBMS). In the authors' words, *Everybody is a Body* is meant to 'provide a satisfying entry into movement as a whole person/world experience for every reader' (p. xii). LBMS is a movement practice which asks the reader/mover to think about the whole body. LBMS asks for dynamic movement which is a way of moving with full-body awareness; meaning that you are less likely to become injured, and can move with a more complex and rich movement vocabulary. LBMS is a foundational approach to movement in this research; I will discuss its impact on the research and its relevance to the other physical theatres in Chapter Two.

Frantic Assembly is a contemporary performance company who straddle the border between contemporary dance and physical theatre. In their publication *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre* (2014), the directors, Graham and Hoggett, refuse to label their practice. The book is a largely practical introduction to their work; even the essays are remarkably accessible and focus mostly on the practical devising, rehearsing, and producing, of the performances. There is no discussion about practical philosophies or even any socio-political reasoning for the work as it has become. The creative process is rooted in aesthetic and sensation rather than logic and theory. While the book does offer

some insight into the trials and tribulations of devising with physical theatres, the writers do not engage with discussion about the social or political context of their work, nor whether it lies in the realm of physical theatre or contemporary dance. While this disengagement with the wider performance landscape means that the approach is easily adopted by a range of practitioners, it misses important nuances in its definition as a performance practice. In Chapter Three I will offer a proposal of the relevancy of Frantic Assembly techniques/approaches to this research.

My research into Butoh centred on two primary texts. The first was *Butoh: Cradling Empty Space*. This book, published in 2020 '[offers] a much-needed female perspective on the art form' (Vangeline, p.x). It also adopts a phenomenological approach to disseminating Butoh practice, explaining that a philosophy centring embodiment is well-suited to an art form that is interested in 'genuine embodiment' (p.xxix). This text mostly offered an insight into the practice and a valuable understanding of how to bring this into the rehearsal room, I also found Vangeline's Feminist perspective to be insightful and important to our exploration of the physical theatre form. She describes the patriarchal codification of the form as it migrates through the west, stating that:

> In this game of conscious cultural projections, women often get the shorter end of the stick. While the [male] Sankai Juku dancer, for example, often appears regal, priest-like or monk-like to European or North American audiences, his female equivalent – the Japanese butoh dancer – very easily slips into "witch" territory. The priest is reassuring; the witch is frightening. In our two-thousand-year-old patriarchal history, priests have endured, while witches have been burned at the stake. (p.xlii)

She also explains that the sexism in Butoh is not exclusively in its representation. Male Butoh dancers are more likely to be successful in their craft, despite that there are now more women practitioners than men. This is due to a preference of the white-painted, semi-naked male body that was fetishised in Butoh's early interactions with France and other European countries. Further, she recounts a culture of violence against women in Butoh teachings, where male teachers would take advantage of their female students with the promise of personal tutorship and professional advancement. This attitude, she states, then influenced the male students to adopt predatory attitudes towards their female peers. Finally, she describes situations in workshops where male teachers would use violence as a way to evoke submission but where women were often partnered with men, it would generally be the woman who would experience this submission;

> Instead of giving women an equal seat at the table, as some teachers claim, these types of practices perpetuate the status quo. Still, some teachers continue to pat themselves on the back for pairing men and women together in violent exercises and even go so far as to proclaim themselves champions of equality, while their students are on their way to the hospital due to broken bones (and likely psychological damage). (p.166)

Practice Guide of Butoh Revolution by Rhizome Lee (2020) was a supplementary read which offered exercises in the form of 'walks' and 'bodies'; shapes and movement vocabularies which I can use in the devising of the performance. In *Butoh: Cradling Empty Space*, Vangeline mentions that 'the founders of Butoh spoke in the language of poets, describing their work in allegories and metaphors,' (2020, p.ix) which I found to be true of Rhizome Lee's *Practice Guide.*

Finally, *Devising Performance* by Heddon and Milling (2015) functions as an overview of the development and practice of devising theatre throughout history to build a framework for interrogating contemporary praxes. The book is written in response to what its writers consider to be a lack of academic discussion of the form. In the first page, Heddon and Milling suggest: 'Perhaps it is precisely because devising *is* [sic.] so prevalent, so present, that critical enquiry has been so sparse', meaning that devising is emergent and is being practiced across the world with a great variety of approaches and applications. The text provides an important chronology of devising's emergence and growth.

Chapter One

This chapter offers a focused insight into the theories that underpin the project. The realms of PaR, Feminism, and phenomenology are vast so it is crucial to situate my practice within these discourses. My practice also concerns arguments around physical theatre and the devising process, but this will be covered in Chapter Two. Each theoretical framework (PaR, Feminism, and phenomenology) challenges the project and my practice in unique ways. In my discussion on PaR, I will explore the contentions around terminology and the dichotomy of practice/research; regarding Feminism, I will consider the ethics of universal experience and the everywoman; and I will describe the particular phenomenologies that have shaped my approach to practice and analysis. In many ways, these three theories interact and so I will attempt to conclude this chapter with a holistic observation of their relevancies to one another and how the positioning of my project within these discussions defines the philosophy of my practice.

PaR Challenges

PaR is an evolving discipline, so there are still discussions around what PaR is (as well as the other acronyms associated with creative industries research) and what its values may be. In *Practice-Led-Research, Research Led Practice in the Creative Arts,* the editors explain that:

> practice-led research and its affiliates (practice-based research, practice as research) are employed to make two arguments about practice which are often overlapping and interlinked: firstly, as just indicated, that creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs; secondly, to suggest that creative practice – the training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and all the processes they engage in when they are making art – can lead to specialised insights which can then be generalised and written up as research. (Smith and Dean, 2009: p.5)

This description of the agency of PaR argues that it can offer research insights that may not be found from other, more traditional, modes of study due to the 'specialised knowledge' possessed by practitioners. In the same book, Smith and Dean construct an argument for a combined approach to PaR: Practice-Led-Research (where practice is the main focus for the research output) and Research-Led-Practice (where research is applied to practical scenarios). This opens up space for many different approaches to PaR and in the collection of essays and introductions published as *Performance As Research* this openness and diversity becomes apparent (Arlander *et al.,* 2018). The essays featured in *Performance As*

Research vary from interactive and digital performance to the performativity of lecture and research presentation, to theorising phenomenologically about the dialogic nature of the observer and the observed in PaR. Due to this diversity of practice, it is crucial that I situate my project clearly within this discourse.

There are many acronyms that allude to their unique practice/ or performance/ research relationships; a few examples are: PAR (performance as research), PLR (performance-led-research), PBR (performance-based-research), and ARP (artistic research in practice). ARP is proposed in the first introduction to *Performance As Research* as a catch-all term for the many acronyms in the volume. My discomfort with ARP is that it is purposefully indefinite as a way to group its various disciplinary offshoots; therefore, it avoids making allusions to any particular directional relationship between practice and research. Other acronyms, such as PLR and PBR, imply a dichotomy in which one thing is acting upon another. My research, however, is dialogic – the reading informs the practice, which informs the reading – which, in this context, would appear like: Research-Based Practice-Led Performance-As-Research, as the practice (i.e. the methodology, and creative process) is firmly based in research and the research output is not solely concerned with the performance, but is also concerned with the process and the research that informed it. RBPLPAR is an unpleasant acronym, so I have opted for PaR. A final and crucial distinction in the acronym is in choosing PaR (practice) over PAR (performance); part of my research output is a performance, which is in itself a prompt for an analysis of audience reception, but my theory and practice are tightly interlinked, and without hierarchy.

One of the other key challenges of using PaR as an approach to research is in the documentation where tacit or 'praxical' knowledge (Smith and Dean, p.6) may be lost or altered. Joanna Bucknall describes tacit knowledge as: 'knowledge that cannot be expressed outside of the material practice conditions that produced it', which is pervasive in PaR discourse (Arlander et al, p. 53). There are two sides to this: on one side, it implies that there are certain kinds of understanding, or knowledge, that can only be accessed through practice or experience, which in turn means that practice or participation is a gateway to understanding. This is certainly true in my research, which is concerned with embodiment; there are theoretical perspectives on embodiment, some of which I will be discussing in this chapter, but embodiment is fundamentally experienced, which can only be truly understood through experience (or practice). The other side to this tacit knowledge is that, by its nature, it is difficult to extract from the process and examine. In *Practice-*

Led-Research, they identify this 'praxical knowledge' as an asset to PaR – a unique approach to research – but they don't interrogate the challenges of extracting or translating this 'praxical knowledge' into documentation and miss that the ephemeral and emergent quality of that knowledge may be distorted or lost entirely. I acknowledge that a significant obstacle to my documentation in Chapter Three is in translating the phenomenon of experience, and my own tacit approach to working, from the experience to the written word and I will do my best to identify where this is impossible or where fundamental knowledge is lost or changed through the translation.

The Trouble of the Everywoman

Before I embark on my discussion of this project's Feminism, I think I should offer the disclaimer that my research was open to all experiences of womanhood. The survey produced responses from fifty-two women, the majority of whom are young women, mostly or all white, generally straight and cisgender. The survey did reach a range of women, some of whom are disabled, queer and/or genderqueer. These responses have all been treated equally and have formed the material that was taken into the rehearsal room as stimuli. The performers, however, were all white, cisgender women between the ages twenty-three and fifty. As such, it is important that the performance element is seen for what it is; a devised performance by women who are in female sexed bodies. Therefore, while I believe that womanhood is a matter of identity, I will be exploring arguments around the deconstruction of gender and the deconstruction of sex equally.

My research has also encountered ethical concerns around the theme of womanhood by trying to navigate the difficult ground between the individual and the universal. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues against the universality of womanhood as it bypasses the nuance of intersectionality (2007). The experience of womanhood will be different to a straight black woman than it would be to a queer white woman; disability, ethnicity, religion, geography, education, and so on, will determine our experience of womanhood. This is not the extent to the argument, however, as there are a number of responses to my first survey that allude to the universality of womanhood, one respondent specifically states: 'It's hard to separate my body from the collective female experience. I think that shared narrative is one of the most impactful parts of being a woman'. So, while there is an ethical issue with accepting all women as sharing in a universal womanhood, there are shared experiences that contribute to this sense of community (though, of course, the respondents only represent a handful of perspectives). Furthermore, from my own

observations, women gravitate towards other women in multi-gendered groups, or at least towards those who share similar 'feminine' qualities, though it is impossible to say whether this is due to our socialisation, feelings of safety, or some other phenomenon – this sentiment was echoed by one of the performers, which I will discuss further in Chapter Three.

While this project is open to womanhood as an experience and identity, I will briefly cover arguments relating to sex to explore further the issues with the everywoman. In *Bodies that Matter,* Butler argues that materiality – in this case, the undeniability of the sexed body – is not irreducible, and that just as gender is understood to be construction, so should sex be (2011: p.4). I agree with Butler's inference that to deconstruct "sex" is to undermine that which differentiates "man" from "woman" and therefore removes the power of the patriarchal system. However, this ignores the chemical, hormonal, and anatomical differences between male, female, and intersex bodies. The deconstruction of sex implies that there is no tangible difference between sexes but these physical differences are bound to contribute to different experiences of being in the world. The deconstruction of sex implies that all differences in experience are social/societal. I believe that, while we can theorise a new approach to gender or sex that undermines these differences, it is not possible to know where the anatomical differences of sex end and the social, historical or political differences of gender begin. We live in a society (at least in the UK) where we have to live these differences, whether biological or imposed upon us by society and in the ephemerality of lived experience, deconstructing sex holds little significance. What I am concerned with, and what this project is interested in, is what it is to be in a woman's body now, what it means to experience embodiment, and what this offers to Feminism and Feminist performance.

There is more to this argument. In the UK, women have been objectified throughout our 'two-thousand-year-old patriarchal history' (Vangeline, 2020: p.xlii). We are fighting millennia of oppression and objectification. If we argue that the body is a medium upon which culture is enacted, then there are at least one thousand years of scars that have shaped these theoretical abstracted bodies. And if we are to consider the body 'as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed' (Butler, 1990: p.2) then women's bodies are inscribed with the trauma of witch trials, domestic violence and the

absence of consent in sex and pregnancy[2]. Women's bodies are also valuable ways of understanding the effects of the patriarchy; for example, women are more likely to die in a car accident than a man because of male-centric engineering and safety measures (cars and their safety features are built for the average man) (Perez, 2019) and are thirty-two percent more likely to die after surgery performed by a male surgeon than a female surgeon due to centuries of male-centric medicine (Campbell, 2022). Women's bodies, because they are biologically different are chronically misunderstood, misdiagnosed and mistreated by our patriarchal society so to deconstruct sex and theorise sexless, bodiless beings is an insult to the documentable, quantifiable trauma that is still being experienced by women and their bodies. Furthermore, that the performers in this project selected the theme of '*my* body' to carry forward for the work-in-progress is also telling that these bodily experiences, traumas, and disconnections are important parts of the experience of womanhood.

Nonetheless, sex is not the *only* experience of womanhood. To view womanhood as exclusively relating to female-sexed bodies would bypass other intersectional experiences, specifically those of queer and genderqueer women. I believe in moving towards a society where your sex does not predetermine your behaviours, expectations, career opportunities or chances of surviving a car accident, but to think overly abstractly about sex contradicts Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble* about the universality of women. Deconstructing sex only moves towards a universality of bodies. Traditionally this attitude towards universal bodies has been harmfully male-centric and has led to the disproportionate deaths and injury of women.

Phenomenological Links

Phenomenology is woven throughout these discussions: in PaR, phenomenology surfaces in discussions of ephemerality and tacit knowledge where the crucial aspect of the experience is experience itself; and in my argument against poststructuralist Feminism, phenomenology returns the discussion to experience as opposed to theoretical deconstruction. Throughout all of my research are the echoes of phenomenologies and most striking is the rejection of the Cartesian mind/body duality, which is reiterated by Grosz (1994: p.3), Butler (2007: p.17), and has ripples throughout discussions of PaR in their struggle with the dichotomy of practice (body) and research (mind), of ontology and

[2] Butler does argue against this statement, and towards an abstraction of the body. Butler argues that the body itself is a construct which can and should be deconstructed as with ideas of gender and sex.

epistemology. In fact, in Arlander's essay: 'Agential cuts and performance as research' (Arlander, et.al, 2018), she references a move towards a blended approach that combines ontological and epistemological entries into PaR. This rejection of the mind/ body duality is also a factor in the physical theatres and my approach to devising, which I will expand upon in Chapter Two. In this section, I will explain further where the phenomenological links are in my approach to PaR and Feminism while establishing where my work is situated within theories of phenomenology.

Among the many approaches to phenomenology as a theory of being is Maurice Merleau-Ponty's, which considers how we experience the body and the world through the body; offering a theory of being in which the body is central and encompassing[3] . In *Theatre and Phenomenology*, Johnston's introduction to Merleau Ponty's phenomenology, describing the 'flesh of the world' comments on the way in which our body receives our environment and simultaneously imprints upon it. This idea resonates with Arlander's essay, where she describes the relationship between the researcher and the subject to be much harder to separate than we generally consider. Like Merleau-Ponty, Arlander believes that the observer and the observed shape one another. This is especially prevalent in performance practices where the experiences of the practitioner/researcher are a core part of the creative process. To expand: the practitioner/researcher brings their own experience into the creative project; this experience inevitably shapes the direction of the artistic exploration that it produces; through this artistic exploration, questions are raised, other's experiences are drawn in, the practitioner/researcher discovers something new; all of these discoveries and diversions then add to the experience of the practitioner/researcher, which then continues to reshape the direction of the project, and so on.

This analogy also supports Butler's stance on intersectional Feminism. If each body is experiencing the world and projecting its experience back into its environment, then there is no true universal experience to be shared. Furthermore, Johnston goes on to describe how the human experience is defined by its historical context (p.45); that the experiences of a person from the 1800s, from the 1950s, or from right now, will all be dramatically different, even if their experiences were made compatible in terms of their various intersectionalities. This will not only be true for the historical context but also the

[3] Unfortunately, due to the scope and focus of this thesis, and complexity or diversity of the approaches to phenomenology, I am not here able to offer a comprehensive overview of their variety. I would however recommend *Theatre and Performance* as a starting point for those who are interested in an understanding of the philosophy, its interpretations, and its potential applications or resonance to performance.

various cultural contexts that shape our everyday and are shaped by our experience of them (whether this culture be in our ethnicity, gender, preferred sports team, religion, or use of social media). Each of these contexts in culture and history shape the individuality of our experience.

For women, much of this experience is shaped through or determined by our bodies. For my survey, I concluded the questionnaire with a multiple-choice question: what other areas of your life do you feel affect / are affected by your body or your relationship with your body? The options included: various relationships, hobbies and interests, religion, occupation, and creativity (among others) and every option was selected by more than one respondent. With this in mind, I return to my criticism of the masculine emphasis in Merleau-Ponty's writing.

Through the theoretical layers applied to this PaR, I will consider whether this project offers a Feminist phenomenology through its musing on the experience of womanhood. I will even venture to say that phenomenology has the potential to be read as an inherently Feminist philosophy in its rejection of the metaphysical distinction between mind and body (Johnston, 2017: p.38). This rejection is critical to the writings of Butler and Grosz, of whom the latter introduces her book, *Volatile Bodies,* with a statement about the problem of the mind/body divide in Western philosophy. She explains that mind and body are not held in equal consideration, and that through their dichotomy they are inevitably placed in a hierarchy where 'mind' rises above 'body' and 'body' is defined by its absence of the qualities offered by 'mind'. She then expands this dichotomisation to other pairs: 'reason and passion, sense and sensibility, outside and inside, self and other […]' (1994, p.3). This could easily be applied to: research and practice, epistemology and ontology, male and female, and Grosz argues that where Western philosophy fails from a Feminist perspective is in its tendency to meander into the conceptual where femininity is shunned through philosophy's 'usually implicit coding of femininity with the unreason associated with the body' (p.4). My grounding in phenomenology as a philosophy for this research favours the experiences of the body and deposes the metaphysical.

Chapter Two

Building on the connections that I have established in Chapter One, this chapter will analyse the practical elements of the project, specifically the process of devising and the physical theatres which underpin the practice. The dialogic approach that I have described above has produced a strong connection between the theoretical and practical elements of this work. Hence, the Feminist and phenomenological discussions are also prevalent in the practice. In the section on devising, I will describe my approach and follow this with an analysis of the connections with phenomenology and feminism; I will then introduce the physical theatres that have shaped the PaR and their relationship to the theory.

Devising

This research and its thesis was formed largely through the discoveries made within the rehearsal room; the theoretical argument towards a phenomenological Feminism simultaneously shaped and was shaped by the creative decision to explore the ways in which women's bodies don't belong to them. This theme emerged from the survey research, in which women stated that their bodies were not their own and that men and society lay claim to them, controlling women's bodies through non-consensual physical contact, and societal beauty and behavioural standards respectively.

A basic overview of the creative process is as follows:

1. A survey report was generated, collating the responses of 52 women on questions relating to their relationships with their bodies. The report gives a basic overview of the demographic of its respondents, describes the responses question-by-question, offers my reflections on the responses, and a selection of themes for creative exploration.
2. Five women performers were recruited to undertake a devising process, beginning with personal physical explorations of the creative themes outlined in the survey.
3. Once the performers had the chance to explore the themes from a personal perspective, we discussed the final theme for the performance.
4. From there, we integrated the physical theatre practices and built a narrative in relation to the theme, the physical explorations, and the discussions that were produced in the rehearsal room.

5. This summited in a work-in-progress performance, following which audience responses were gathered.

Beginning with the performers' personal explorations of the themes was paramount to the investigation overall and was influenced by my reading in phenomenology and PaR. It was important that the performers were able to root themselves in the theme and understand their personal connections to the creative stimuli before they were limited by the physical theatre practices, by character work, or by narrative. This ensured that the work itself came from the experience of womanhood first. Incidentally, this process is tightly parallel to the practice of Butoh due to the emphasis on personal introspection and experience.

Traditional dramatic approaches to performance creation place the playscript at the forefront of the process, restricting performers to the world as defined by the playwright or vision of the director. When embarking upon a devising process, the end product is entirely unknown. As an approach to performance research, because the process is centred on exploration and discovery, devising becomes a powerful tool. Heron and Kershaw in *Performance as Research* comment that '[PAR can] be very research-rich, because you're not sure what kind of behaviour or what kind of result will come out of a process that is so radically open-ended.' (Arlander, et al., 2018: pp.28-29). Furthermore, in *Theatre and Phenomenology,* Johnston exclusively builds his investigation of performance as a phenomenological endeavour on well-cited practitioners: Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud who are primarily *drama* practitioners (in that their practice relies on text-based performance). However, he does allude to the further, and perhaps enhanced, relevance of devising work in his conclusion (2017: p.187). This offers a convincing rationale in the use of devising processes to navigate phenomenological lines of enquiry, such as: what is it to experience womanhood? Likewise, in *Through the Body,* Dymphna Callery states that physical theatres and the devising practice are tools for reconnecting the mind and body, theory and practice (2001: p.vii) which is a recurring motif throughout my research in general but is particularly felt in the phenomenological rejection of Cartesian mind/body duality. The relevance of these discussions to the practical output of the work will be explored in Chapter Three.

Physical Theatres

The three forms of physical theatre that have underpinned the practical element of this research are LBMS, Butoh and Frantic Assembly.

Firstly, LBMS is a movement philosophy and a practice which promotes connectivity with the self, parts of the self to the whole, and the whole to the wider world (Studd and Cox, 2020: xii). This practical philosophy has links to phenomenology and the discussions around PaR most obviously in its disregard of mind/body duality. Early on in the book *Everybody is a Body,* (Studd & Cox, 2020) it is stated explicitly that '***experience is embodied*** [sic.]' (p.15). From this perspective, experience is not an intellectual one, but occurs within and through the body, aligning with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, which is grounded in physical bodily experience. Furthermore, researchers in PaR dissemination often use the terms 'epistemology' and 'ontology' side-by-side, implying that, in the context of PaR, these were not mutually exclusive terms but dialogical in nature. Epistemology (relating to knowledge) and ontology (relating to being) are engaged in an uncomfortable dance, just as with research and practice or mind and body. This echoes with my approach to practice where the theory and the practical are layered and constantly influencing one another.

Secondly, in Vangeline's introduction to *Butoh: Cradling Empty Space,* Vangeline explains that many practitioners across the world work with Butoh, now an internationally recognised art form. At its core, Butoh is a phenomenological practice; Vangeline references Butoh founder, Hijikata Tatsumi, stating that 'Butoh is existence'; she then goes on to explain that: 'human life is a multi-faceted phenomenon'; explaining that, biologically, we are a 'complex organism'; that we have awareness of our experience; that we have the ability to perceive others and to understand that we are perceived by them; that throughout our lives these bodies, experiences and perceptions change; and that we belong to, and that our experience is contextualised by, our historical and cultural environment (2020, p.1). This emphasis on experience, particularly one that originates in the body, chimes with the other elements of my research. The practice overall is founded upon bodily experience, characterised by terms such as: 'genuine embodiment' (p.xxix) and 'bodied consciousness' (p.61). Vangeline also states that: 'In this embodying process, mind and body are not distinct entities, but integrated and interactive' (p.61), echoing with the myriad of writers referenced in this thesis who argue in the same vein.

Butoh also shares philosophical ideology with LBMS, where Studd and Cox state:

> The benefits of becoming conscious of the Wholeness of your moving self can be transformative. You can gain greater insight about who you are from how you move. Our movement results from our genetic predispositions, our cultural heritage, individual family dynamics, daily activities, the choices we make and much more. (2020, xxi)

A similar philosophy in Butoh suggests that our DNA carries memories which determine the ways in which we move, reflecting the sentiment in LBMS that a connection to 'genetic predispositions' and 'cultural heritage' can be cultivated through movement (Vangeline, 2020: p.62).

An exploration of womanhood through Butoh also resonates with other parts of the practice. Vangeline describes in her introduction that:

> Butoh is the dance of duality; life and death, light and darkness, consciousness and unconsciousness. Yet, at its core … butoh transcends this dichotomy and is also the dance of passage and transition. (p.xlii)

They also describe that one of the ways in which Butoh can be harnessed as a transformative practice is through a reconnection to the body (p.176). These ideas of 'passage and transition' and reconnecting with the body talk directly to the Feminist theme being explored in this research; a transition of reconnecting to and reclaiming the body in defiance of the ways in which society and other bodies lay claim to its possession. Further, in their chapter framing Butoh within the context of gender studies and violence, Vangeline describes a culture of sexual harassment and male-centric practice which objectifies women and denies them the opportunities for success. She describes male teachers who prey on women students and a patriarchal fetishisation of male Butoh performers in the practice's dissemination in the western world (pp.168-169). There is a broader rationale of practicing Butoh through a devising process which promotes the creative experience and contribution of the women participants which brings Butoh back to women's bodies as we simultaneously devise a performance about reclaiming the body from men and society. There is perhaps even more to this relationship between the practice and a Feminist narrative; where Butoh believes in a connection to one's heritage through its practice. I wonder if there is an opportunity for tuning in to the other women in our past who have experienced these injustices and objectifications, codified in our DNA and our movement.

Finally, Frantic Assembly techniques have been a useful tool in developing choreography, as explained previously, they have deliberately avoided contextualising their practice historically, culturally or philosophically, preferring instead to focus on a strong aesthetic, interesting physical character relationships, and energetic productions. Unlike

Butoh, which is characterised by the poetic and metaphorical dissemination by its masters, Frantic Assembly are direct about their processes and exercises and don't pontificate on their practice. What Frantic Assembly's dissemination does offer is an insight into the devising process, echoing the importance of the open-minded exploration which is championed in PaR. In their handbook: *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre,* they state that in the devising process,

> '[making mistakes] is less about pre-thought ideas proving to be wrong and more about the essential practice of being truly receptive to ideas and influences that occur around the rehearsal period' (Graham and Hoggett: 2014, p.22).

In their practice, Frantic Assembly celebrate the surprises and challenges of the devising process, approaching their work with a key sense of unknowing and reflexivity. Like the act of listening to the body, which might offer new insights into one's movement; being receptive and listening to the work that is unfolding in the rehearsal room allows the space to be more open to creative development and, in this case, better facilitates the dialogue between practice and theory as there are no 'pre-thought' ideas inhibiting the exchange.

This project is strongly linked across and throughout the practical and theoretical research. Without a layered and dialogic approach, this nuanced relationship would not have emerged. The focus of experience is key to the exploration of womanhood through physical theatres as phenomenological approaches to practice and theory emerge throughout the research. What remains is a consideration of what this means in practice and how this responds to the exploration of our bodily experience as women.

Chapter Three

This chapter considers: the public survey responses about womanhood and the body, audience survey responses to the performance, and the performer journals (reflections on the devising process). Here, I will dissect the practical work and suggest what it might say in face of the research demonstrated thus far. There are three core elements of the practical research which talk to the theory; the concept of community and shared experience, body image and objectification, and the body in the context of violence.

Womanhood as Shared Experience

Shared experience has been a concern of the research throughout. As I discuss in Chapter One, this is an ethical concern due to the tendency towards sentiments of universality. Nonetheless, shared experience is a common thread throughout the responses of the public, audience, and performers. In the Womanhood and the Body Survey, the 'shared narrative' described by one respondent is a sentiment echoed by a handful of others, with many more offering responses that refer to 'women' in general terms, implying a shared experience. This is particularly interesting considering that all fifty-two responses are vastly different, and only sharing a few themes. This sentiment of universality resurfaces in the audience responses to the performance with four of the five audience members referencing shared experiences:

- One respondent states that women have a shared experience of feeling trapped in our bodies.
- One respondent references shared experience in the context of the flocking sequence, and observes that the threat of physical and other oppressive violence is experienced by many women.
- One respondent references a 'collective struggle' of holding onto painful experiences and learning to let go.
- One respondent references the lack of autonomy over women's [generally] bodies.

Shared experience is also referenced alongside individuality in all three reports. In the Womanhood and the Body survey, the diversity of responses is paired with the reference to shared experiences; in the performer journals, all of the performers describe a joy or preference of working in ensemble and participating in group warm-ups despite the

difference in their approaches; and in the audience survey, the inference of universality is paired with strikingly different reception of the piece.

In the performer journals, the participants state that the ensemble practice offers focus, connectivity, energy, and other benefits, and often gravitated towards group exploration. As the director, some of the most challenging work was in investigating moments of violence as the explorative movement-based improvisations always naturally evolved into gentle/joyful play, evoking themes of togetherness, nurturing, and community. Furthermore, at every opportunity during group improvisations, the performers would gravitate towards collective play and interaction, despite provocations to see the differences and to explore the possibility of threat or competition.

I have emerged from this research wondering what prompts this deep feeling of connectivity and tendency towards community, despite our strong sense of individuality and references to competition and threat. One of the performers observes that the flocking exercise, '[speaks] to wider themes, for me it celebrated our individuality as part of a shared experience', which was also the interpretation made by an audience member. This idea directly contradicts Butler's concerns of a universality which undermines intersectionality as these two women see universality and individuality as two parts of a whole. Another performer summarises her reflective journal with an observation that speaks to this tension:

> Beginning this practice, I didn't really interrogate my own thoughts of my womanhood all that much. I often found that it got in the way of other aspects of my identity (my queerness) or my life in general (career, interactions with strangers). I'm grateful this time allowed me to question and reconcile elements of my identity and my womanhood.
>
> I no longer feel like my womanhood works against me – it's just a neutral fact about myself. But I've found joy in that neutrality and will work more personally to build on what I've learned here.

This performer explains how she felt that, through her participation in the project, she has managed to reconcile her identity as queer and her identity as a woman. This is a strong advocation for a shared experience of womanhood that is able to sit within or around our other identities, such as our queerness or otherwise, our occupations and hobbies, or our racial and ethnic identities. It would also be contrary to a holistic view of our experiences and identities to ignore the fact that many women do identify with a shared experience of womanhood. There is more to explore here, but I will leave these provocations for the Conclusion as they do not sit within the parameters of this research.

Body Image and Objectification

Like community and shared experience, body image is a theme that has left its mark on every aspect of this research. It is one of the most common themes of the Womanhood and the Body Survey: 67% of survey respondents discuss elements of their appearance as an impact on their relationship with their body; 27% reference body image (or similar terms) specifically. In the audience survey, three of five respondents identified with one of the performer's opening movements of clawing and rubbing at her body, and isolating individual body parts to prod and squeeze in frustration. The respondents describe physical responses such as goosebumps, perceived drop in body temperature, holding their breath, and crying, to this moment. These are powerful physical responses, and are reflected in their reasoning, which is largely emotive, one performer offering: 'I too wish I could scrub parts of my body away'. This troublingly negative association which women have with the way their body looks is reflected in the YWCA survey referenced in my Introduction. I return to this survey to highlight that this theme is not specific to my research, it is a widespread and well-documented issue.

The performer's opening moments are also framed within the theme of '*my* body'; the movement she chose emerged from discussions that 'body image' implies a disconnect from the body because it is as a way of viewing our body as an object and ignoring the phenomenological experience of being in the world as bodies. This implies that, by citing 'body image' as a disconnect, a reconnection and reclamation of the body would be a relationship which doesn't objectify the body, but acknowledges the body as the root of our experience and interaction with the world. Furthermore, I suggest that movement practices are a way of stimulating this reconnection, as stated by two of the performers in their journals:

> [Performer 1] I feel like I got the opportunity to get to know the other participants better and just connect to myself, others and the world better.
>
> [Performer 3] Rewarding to have one audience member reflect on emotional response to my opening sequence of clawing at my body. It now feels silly almost? Gained an appreciation for myself and how far I've come.

Performer 3 implies that, through the devising process, she identifies less with the specific image of clawing and rubbing at the body and Performer 1 references a general sense of reconnection to the self. Interestingly, Performer 1's comment is also within the context of outdoor rehearsals, which all of the performers felt a specific joy, connectedness, and 'zen'

during and after. Due to the universal heightened sense of self, community and focus identified in the outdoor sessions, I believe there is more to explore here, which I will also return to in the Conclusion.

The Body and Violence

Violence in regards to womanhood takes many forms. The most obvious is the sexual violence which women endure every day and is highlighted by events such as the Sarah Everard protests. According to UNWomen,

> Globally, an estimated 736 million women—almost one in three—have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life (30 per cent of women aged 15 and older) (citing WHO, 2021)

According to this statistic from the World Health Organisation, from a working group carried out on behalf of the United Nations, approximately one third of all women have experienced sexual violence. I also argue that male-centric medicine and male-body bias which increases the mortality rate of women in surgery, on the roads, and in the workforce, is also an act of violence as these lives could have been spared if our patriarchal society didn't prioritise the health and wellbeing of men. Furthermore, current legislative changes in America regarding women's right to abortion promoted the outright banning of abortions in a number of states (Brockes, 2022). This is a problem across the globe as only approximately 30% of all countries have no restrictions on women's access to abortions (Word Population Review, 2022). This too is an act of violence against women, forcing pregnant women to undergo severe physical changes to their body, massive amounts of pain, potentially emotional trauma, and, in some countries, death, because it is illegal for them to abort their foetus.

Sexual harassment, the fear of violence, and objectification are themes that emerged in the Womanhood and the Body Survey, which have a place in my theoretical research alongside the misogynistic history of Butoh, and which resurface in the performance. When exploring '*my* body' as a theme, it was important to all of us in the rehearsal room that harassment featured in the performance as this was something we all had experience of in different ways. The audience understood this with three of the five respondents in the survey identifying moments of violence as key moments in their experience of the show.

That the theme of violence is so prevalent in the practical research reinforces my argument against postmodern Feminism's deconstruction of the body. Perhaps in a future where women are not subject to the same violence, objectifications and oppressions, a deconstruction of the body will have its time; now is not that time. In the light of America decreasing access to abortions, only a couple of years following the death of Sarah Everard, with 30% of women having experienced sexual violence, being 17% more likely to die in a car accident, and 32% more likely to die after surgery by a male as opposed to a female surgeon, the statistics are against us and our bodies. It is vital that Feminism returns to the body to concede to our oppressions and acknowledge the violence that is enacted upon us every day and across the world.

Conclusion

This research argues towards a return to the body. This is because being in the world at its core is a phenomenological bodily experience, and the experience of womanhood in relation to the body is often of violence and objectification. The performance element of the research offered a reclamation, a way of taking our bodies back from the society and individuals which objectify and abuse them. To return to the body offers reconciliation for the many of us who look at our own bodies through the same lens, punishing ourselves and our bodies for not looking the way that society expects. This research moves towards an inhabiting of our bodies, rather than an observation of them. In this conclusion I will firstly return to questions posed throughout this thesis and evaluate the relevance of PaR, Feminism, phenomenology and physical theatres to this line of inquiry. I will then summarise how these elements respond to the original research question.

Evaluation of theoretical and practical elements

What is most striking about this research as PaR is that PaR shares many of the same concerns as Feminism, phenomenology and physical theatres. The key concern that tie these approaches together is: a rejection of dualities and an approach to experience, movement, and research that is holistic and not dualistic. In my initial description of the discussions in PaR, I identified: my approach to PaR, the position of the audience in knowledge-production, and the translation of praxical knowledge in the recording of the research. Firstly, I have evidenced how a dialogic approach to PaR is beneficial to nuanced practice and research with the practice and theory communicating and shaping one another throughout. Secondly, the relationship between the research, performer and audience requires much more exploration. The limited response to the performance is not substantial enough to generate useful insights into the benefits of hosting a work-in-progress performance. There is also more research to be done in terms of the difference between the audience reception and the performer experience of the performance. However, that the audience interpreted some of the core themes correctly and that their responses strongly echoed the research is an indication of the efficacy of the research approach. Thirdly, due to the nature of the fieldwork carried out for this research, much of the experiential knowledge has been retained. What I mean here is that the performer journals and audience responses are exclusively in relation to their own experiences. In this research, the individual participants translate their own experiences, using their own language, and the emphasis on experience above output means that the knowledge that might have been lost

(of the performer experience if it had been a more performance-centred project, or the audience response if the survey had focused on logical interpretation) has been recorded. The knowledge that can't be recovered is the actual phenomenological experience of being in the audience or rehearsal room, as this experience will have had a lasting impact on the participants which couldn't be measured without further and more complex study. Further, although the performers have described how their experiences have been shaped by the project, this experience will not be the same for the reader of the thesis.

Regarding Feminism and phenomenology, I will discuss the research's response to the core Feminist concerns in the next section, but here I will answer to my proposal in Chapter One that this project could produce a Feminist phenomenology. I now suggest that what this research offers is a phenomenological Feminism – a Feminism rooted in the bodily experience of being in the world which has a holistic perspective of universality and individuality. This phenomenological Feminism accepts that experience is undeniably individual, celebrates our intersectionalities, but doesn't reject the notion of shared experiences and community in identity as we, through our bodies influence and are influenced by the environment and culture around us.

There is more study to be undertaken on the impact of LBMS, Butoh and Frantic Assembly on this Feminist inquiry. LBMS doesn't feature in the reflections of any of the performers, but is a foundational practice in the embodied improvisations that I established at the beginning of the rehearsal process. I would like to explore further how a holistic approach to movement might foster a reconnection to and reclamation of the body. Frantic Assembly was, as anticipated, a useful tool for choreography. It helped the performers explore violence in a way that was safe and consensual in the rehearsal space. I don't believe that the practice offers anything more to the project on a philosophical level, but it remains an important practice of mine as a facilitator/director. As with LBMS, I believe that Butoh has much more to offer this line of inquiry through further investigation but it is difficult to unpick the relevancy of this specific practice to the performers from their experience of the project as a whole. In future, more targeted research on Butoh and LBMS as practices that can foster reclamation and healing in and with the body would be desired. One observation that I wish to return to here is that one performer describes in her reflections:

> What I continue to find is that moving my body in certain ways or envisaging scenarios can unlock a strong response which I otherwise struggle to muster. For example, from Laura's invitation I found a sequence of movements from a time where I nurtured a friend at uni.

The connection between movement and memory which is identified here chimes with the practice of Butoh. In the discussion of Butoh practice throughout this thesis, I have referred to a philosophy which suggests that, through deep listening to the body and meditation, Butoh practitioners can connect to memory though ancestral lines due to the genetic memory embedded in our DNA. In future iterations of this research, I would explore this further, specifically regarding the theme of connection and universality.

What is it to experience womanhood?

This thesis raises ethical questions about the universality of the shared experience of womanhood, proposing that it limits our experiences to codify womanhood in such a way that implies a shared narrative, and that 'womanhood' excludes the more nuanced and intersectional experience of women. This was felt by one of our performers who did feel that, before the devising process, her womanhood 'got in the way' of other parts of her identity; but, through the devising process, she was able to reconcile these different elements of her identity. Furthermore, despite these important provocations, we do have a tendency as women to read our experience in others, we have a deep desire to connect, play and share, which emerged repeatedly in the devising process. We commonly reference our shared experience. In the face of poignant and valuable criticisms of this narrative, we still feel connected. I propose that womanhood is a multitude of many shared experiences – whether that be periods, a higher statistical chance of dying on the road, motherhood and nurture, wanting to scrub parts of our bodies away, sexual assault, or the joy of applying a face mask. Perhaps not every individual assigned female at birth will identify with womanhood, and some of us will only identify with parts of it. A shared experience of womanhood doesn't have to be reduced to an everywoman and can be a celebration of our intersectionality.

In Chapter Three I identify two themes I would talk more of in the Conclusion; the phenomena of a shared experience between women, and that of an enhanced sense of connectivity during outdoor rehearsals. One of the performers in her journal offers:

> I wonder if [this sense of community] has something to do with us perpetually feeling the need to rebel against patriarchal structures, or if it is our own engrained [sic], learned behaviour? Safety in numbers? It's far more tangible a connection than males seem to experience. What other sections of society feel this way, if any?

And I wonder the same; potential further research might interrogate the community tendency further, and explore this sentiment in other groups, such as people who identify as men, transgender, and non-binary. I believe that men are often left out of the conversation in regards to reconnecting to the body and identity. Some of the respondents of the Womanhood and the Body survey also acknowledge that men have less education in self-care, and fewer options in fashion. I would be interested in exploring the relationship men have towards their bodies more.

Regarding outdoor rehearsals, there was a strong sense of connection to others and the self, deep listening, meditation, and focus that emerged from the outdoor sessions. That all participants, myself included, felt the same way is indicative of a broader experience. I think there are more parallels to be drawn between our return to the body and return to nature, nurturing ourselves and nurturing the environment, and I believe that there is more to be explored in how our sense of community feeds into this renegotiation of the self, the body and the natural world.

I would like to close with this comment from Performer 1 which demonstrates the experience of these colliding elements of the research: 'I like that connectivity seems to be the thing that grounds us and allows for us to rebuild that connection to the body – allows for reclamation'.

References

Books

Arlander, A., Barton, B., Dreyer-Lude, M., and Spatz, B. (eds). 2018. *Performance as Research.* Routledge: Oxon.Butler, J. 2006. *Gender Trouble.* Routledge Classics: Oxon.

Butler, J. 2011. *Bodies that Matter*. Routledge Classics: London.

Callery, D. 2014. *Through the Body.* Nick Hern Books Ltd: London.

Estés, C.P. 2008. *Women Who Run With the Wolves.* 2nd ed. Rider:London.

Fortier, M. 2016. *Theory/Theatre.* 4th ed. Routledge: New York.

Graham, S., and Hoggett, S. 2014. *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre.* 2nd ed. Routledge: Oxon.

Grosz, E. 1994. *Volatile Bodies.* Indiana University Press: Bloomington.

Heddon, D., and Milling, J. 2016. *Devising Theatre.* 2nd ed. Palgrave: Hampshire.

Johnston, D. 2017. *Theatre and Phenomenology.* Palgrave: London.

Lee, R. 2020. *PRACTICE GUIDE of Butoh Revolution.* 4th ed. Life Resonance Publishing: [no place]

Merleau-Ponty, M. 2014. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Landes, D. A. Routledge: Oxon.

Smith, H., and Dean, R. T. (eds). 2014. *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts.* Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh.

Solga, K. 2016. *Theatre & Feminism.* Red Globe Press: London.

Studd. K., and Cox, L. 2020. *Everybody is a Body.* 2nd ed. Outskirts Press: Denver.

Vangeline. 2020. *Butoh | Cradling Empty Space.* New York Butoh Institute: New York.

Online Articles

Bindel, J. 2006. Terror on Our Streets. *The Guardian*. [Online] 13th December. [Accessed 29th August 2022] Available from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/dec/13/suffolkmurders.gender>

Birley, A. 2022. The police banned our vigil for Sarah Everard and that was illegal – how can women trust them?. *The Guardian.* [Online] 11th March. [Accessed 29th August

2022]. Available from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/11/police-vigil-sarah-everard-women-court-met>

Brockes, E. 2022. The brutal US abortion ruling is a potential death sentence for all pregnant women. *The Guardian.* [Online]. 8th July. [Accessed 29th August 2022] Available from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jul/08/brutal-us-abortion-ruling-potential-death-sentence-pregnant-women>

Grierson, J. 2022. Met police breached rights of organisers of Sarah Everard vigil, court rules. *The Guardian*. [Online]. 11th March. [Accessed 29th August 2022]. Available from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/11/met-police-breached-rights-of-organisers-of-sarah-everard-vigil-court-rules>

YWCA Scotland. 2019. *The Status of Young Women in Scotland.* [Online]. [Accessed 18.02.22] Available from <https://www.ywcascotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SYWS19_digital_high-1.pdf>

Websites

2022 World Population Review. 2022. *Countries Where Abortion Is Illegal 2022.* [Online]. [Accessed 29th August 2022]. Available from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-where-abortion-is-illegal>

YWCA Scotland. *Our Story - YWCA Scotland | The Young Women's Movement.* [Online]. [Accessed 29th August 2022] Available from <https://www.ywcascotland.org/about-us/ywca-story/>

Bibliography

Bleeker, M., Sherman, J. F., Nedelkpoulou, E. (eds). 2018. Routledge: New York.

Conroy, C. 2010. *Theatre & the Body.* Red Globe Press:London.

Govan, E., Nicholson, H., Normington, K. 2007. *Making a Performance.* Routledge: Oxon.

Hurley, E. 2010. *Theatre & Feeling.* Red Globe Press: London.

Jeffers, J. (2016) The British History Podcast. [Podcast]. June 2013. [Accessed 6th June 2022] Available from <https://www.thebritishhistorypodcast.com>

Orti, P. 2014. *Your Handy Companion to Devising and Physical Theatre.* 2nd ed. Paperplay: Singapore.

Phelan, P. 1993. *Unmarked | The Politics of Performance.* Routledge: Oxon.

Shepherd, S. and Wallis, M. 2004. *Drama/Theatre/Performance.* Routledge: New York.