

The 'Not Knowns': memory, narrative and applied theatre.

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## **Abstract**

This is an attempt to articulate and explore the relationship between the science of memory and the applied theatre project, The Not Knowns. The project was a collaboration between theatre practitioners and a psychologist who worked together with a group of young people known, problematically, as the 'not knowns' throughout 2014. For applied theatre practitioners, notions of veracity are crucial, if complex, and go far beyond the practice of 'giving voice' to marginalised groups and people. Applied Theatre projects which work with participant autobiographies take on the responsibility of articulating the perspective as one of many possible truths, observing conventions which sustain a truth-claim, but leaving this open for questioning. In this essay, the project collaborators examine the implications of the notion of memory as adaptable and malleable, as a factor in stasis or change, and as a story that may and must be re-told and re-remembered in an act of self-sustaining performativity

## **Introduction**

This essay is part of an interdisciplinary conversation on the subject of memory, drama and narrative. One of the challenges, but also the telos of much interdisciplinary work is the search for the question that enables us to work together. This interdisciplinary conversation evolves around a theatre project and a play, and the role of an experimental psychologist in helping arts practitioners to understand their work.

A challenge for this piece of writing, framed by the conversations of this journal, is what we can leave out, what groundwork can be taken as read, and which details can be, for the present purposes, ignored to allow us to commit one strand of thinking to paper. It may be that the balance will feel slightly wrong to readers in all disciplines, but the conversation, and what we remember of the conversation, is what seems important to share.

This, then, is an essay about an extended interdisciplinary conversation on knowledge and memory, framed by methodologies of theatre making and participation. The process leads us to argue that the specific form of the dramatic text is a useable and effective 'third object' through which individuals can meet on terms of equality, as the notion of the book is used in Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*: "the

book...placed between two minds sums up the ideal community inscribed in the materiality of things. The book *is* the equality of intelligence” (1991: 38). This object placed *between minds* in our project is a play, through which a number of individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds can develop and agree on strategies for collectively adapting autobiographical memories. As a group of three researchers we were initially provoked by the administrative label applied to groups of young people in our city: the ‘not-knowns.’ We were immediately immersed into a series of thoughts about objects and subjects of knowledge, self-knowledge and the condition of being not-known. Our conversations were framed always by scepticism about the status of knowing scholar. In order to draw in creative partners to our conversation, we decided to make a theatre project. The theatre project had several contexts and stages and so it enabled us to have conversations across a range of different practices and experiences. We explored these ideas alongside a range of participants who were our creative partners over a full year.

Throughout the process of writing this article, we have encountered difficulties in applying the term ‘research’ to our inquiry because of the differences between the knowledges developed and the relative interpellative effect on the different stakeholders in the research. Our concerns with research and power are framed by Jacques Rancière’s analysis, primarily in *The Philosopher and His Poor* and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Rancière’s political target is the conservatism of radical writers like Marx and Bourdieu, philosophers and theorists who imagine and philosophise on the emancipation of the poor and whose work relies utterly on an ontological distinction between the philosopher and the poor person whom he wishes to emancipate. The notion of liberation is founded on this distinction, and at every theoretical turn the goal of equality recedes into the distance as the poor are further revealed to be too poorly educated, too tired or *too poor* to turn the emancipatory philosophy into reality. In 2015, O’Connor and Anderson framed for us *post hoc* a number of our concerns in a way that directly challenges all of us who read and write in research journals. They claim, in their book *Applied Theatre: Research*, that “research has a long tradition not only of being self-serving, but also being destructive and complicit with agendas, causing considerable harm to the ‘recipients’ of the research.” (2015: 5) With these warnings in mind, the ways in which conversation unfolds between stakeholders, experts, artists, participants, trainers,

academics, actors, subjects and objects, etc., seem to be a crucial outcome and focus of the research, and not just its context. This essay is a reflection on the research; it is a contribution to interdisciplinary stakeholder-focused research; it is not itself more than part of an outcome with a specific and theorised set of addressees in mind. The challenges of communication and knowledge in interdisciplinary work are synecdochal for our engagement with stakeholders and collaborators across the project: what is knowledge? What is authority? What is outcome? are questions that we answered in different ways across the year-long project.

### **Memory and truth**

Whether artist or scientists, we agree on the need to be careful and attentive with all articulations of memory and testimony, so let's start by looking at this. Despite work done over many years to question the paradigm, some art works are structured around the process of 'giving voice' to marginalised people. The power structures implied in this dynamic are open to analysis. A different way of expressing an almost identical idea is that theatre arts may act as proxy, mediating the unmediated thoughts and experiences of others and offering pleasure in this process. The audience finds within it a significance that lies beyond the specificity of the circumstances. Some theatre work earns the adjective 'applied' by seeking direct engagement of either the marginalised or the participatory, bringing these to the fore as objects and purposes of the art work. This might be seen to cut through aestheticising tendencies. The frame 'applied' focusses much critical attention on the various acts and modes of participation. For example, whereas the process of theatrical acting is recognised as ideological, conventional, institutional and stylised, there is something else to which theatre practitioners and documentary makers have access, and that something is valued. It is the claim of truth, based on a personal perspective and on a contiguity between experience and art. Works that carry this truth-claim have conventions that enable them to straddle ethics and aesthetics in a specifically legible way. This distinction between art-convention and truth-convention deserves some scrutiny.

There are artistic conventions that signify veracity, sincerity and authenticity. For example, the use of paralinguistic elements of speech — the ums and the ers, the hesitations and repetitions, the ungrammatical stops and starts of speech — can signify authenticity, verisimilitude. The conventions of truthfulness change and are, more or less, accepted as representational and communicational conventions in society at large. In a discussion of documentary theatre, Janelle Reinelt talks of dissonance between “post-modernism’s radical deconstruction of representational transparency” and the practice of formal ‘scrupulosity’ and hyper-reality (2009:14). For playwrights working with testimony and autobiography, the tension between the aestheticising conventions of theatrical discourse and the formal scrupulosity of ethical representation form a productive dynamic that may be said to nudge both discursive and aesthetic practices into other formal relationships.

Theatre projects which work with participant autobiographies take on the responsibility of articulating the perspective as a truth. ‘Tell me a story. Tell me what happened. Tell me how it felt/seemed/looked to you. What are your experiences? How did you feel?’ All these questions are to be addressed directly with the other; the practitioner is in conversation with the participant. In theatre projects that use autobiography, the telling becomes the document, and this documentary perspective may appear to carry with it – formally – a claim of truth. The site of theatre is one which privileges testimony. Representation has an ethical framework and theatre offers a set of conventions for perceiving work simultaneously as aesthetic and as ethical work. As part of this ethical dimension of reception, the term ‘theatre’ also lends a formal structure and institutional accreditation through which to ascribe value to devalued or undervalued modes of living or articulations of selfhood. The authors of this essay do not disagree with the principle of valuing this, and we have all spent time working in this mode. However, our understanding of memory does not support the mode in which we initially started to work. This is an essay written as a reflection on a conversation and a project, but it is also an essay on the concept of memory and veracity in theatre discourses, and some possible consequences of pondering this concept for theatre aesthetics.

### **Interdisciplinary authors**

Mazzoni is a psychologist with a particular interest in the science of memory and her work provides the background of memory science which we used to shape and to understand the project at all stages. Before the start of the project, the playwright Dickenson started to talk to Mazzoni about the memory science behind characters' experiences and accounts of memory in her play *That Berlin Moment* (2014). Dickenson based the central plot of that play on an event of memory loss. Through this piece of writing, a dialogue developed in which scientist and playwright evolved an articulation of notions of truth and memory as being constructed, performative and adaptable. Mazzoni's work articulates the importance to the individual of the malleability of memory and the active rewriting of memory with each recollection. Conroy's engagement started after the *That Berlin Moment* project, and at the inception of the *Not Knowns* project. She became interested in the implied relativism of the position Dickenson and Mazzoni had developed, and in the implications for the creative expressions of identity in autobiographical applied drama work. Conroy has been thinking about the articulation of selfhood and identity in performance, and this theoretical and playwriting work seemed to interestingly problematise this area and to challenge the theoretical paradigms in which she had previously worked.

### **Context**

Hull is a city in the North East of England and is a former fishing port. It was bombed very significantly in WW2, and some say that it has never fully recovered. Reconstruction slowed to a stop as the fishing industry declined, and although there are some signs of regeneration, it is fair to say that the City is economically depressed. There are families who have been without work through several generations. As colleagues in this journal and elsewhere have noted, neoliberal discourses have made unemployment appear to be an individual pathology, and not an economic or social problem. There are small numbers of young people in Hull who are not only NEET (not in education, employment or training), but who are also known by officialdom, problematically, as the 'not-knowns'. The 'not-knowns' are people who are not on any register of government. They are not employed, do not attend school or college, do not sign on for

benefits and don't register to vote and invariably do not have a permanent recorded address. In the UK, welfare payments are only available to people over 16 if they are in full time education, work or training. There is a point where they are at school and under 16, then a point where the support structures of welfare and education simply lose the individuals as they pass the threshold of childhood and mandatory education. Given the interesting question of what it means for a city to 'know' or not to 'know' its own citizens, we were keen to find a way of working with young people who were at risk of simply disappearing from the City's structures, and of hearing the young people's perspectives on their situation. It probably goes without saying that the physical risk to young people without any visible means of financial support or education is extremely high. The shared aim of the City Council training agencies and arts officers was to mitigate this risk by opening support structures to the young people in a way that was acceptable to the young people themselves. Parallel with the arts work, council staff worked intensively with individuals on education, housing and substance misuse issues.

### **The project and its participants**

The project is called *The Not Knowns*. Its aim was to develop our understanding of memory and veracity, and over eighteen months, to engage with a range of others outside academia to whom these issues were also crucial. The points of engagement included conversations between the three authors, the negotiation of the authorship of a film and two plays, a touring professional production and workshop of one play, a participatory performance by a group of young people, and evaluation of the project. Throughout these stages we searched for ways in which memory science challenges the ways we thought about autobiographical performance, and how we might think about memory as social, formal and in need of narrative support.

Over the whole project we worked with over fifty young people via two organisations, Hull Training and IGEN. Each organisation aims to engage individual young people and to encourage them to work with them on key skills of literacy and numeracy and basic IT skills. They do this by engaging them in courses on working in retail and similar

occupations. We worked with small groups of young people who had expressed an interest in doing some art work. We met every week for two hours for a period of twenty weeks. Participation in the arts activity was voluntary and alternative activities were available for anybody who didn't want to engage in the arts work for any reason. Attendance varied from session to session. We introduced Dickenson as a playwright and Conroy as a director and university lecturer. We also worked with an arts worker from the City Council Arts Department, who wanted to try to build the groups' participation into a sustained engagement with the City's Youth Arts provision after the project was complete. Mazzoni's role was to engage in reflective conversation with Dickenson and Conroy at set moments of the project, as well as supplying structured reading in memory science for them and for other project colleagues.

The project ran for the whole of 2014 and sought to bring together interdisciplinary influences involving playwriting, autobiography and the science of memory. Initially we worked in creative arts sessions to engage the groups in a process of exploring their ideas about identity, autobiography and memory. After an uneven start, we abandoned the frame of autobiography. This was for several reasons: firstly, it carried with it for the participants the suspicion of overbearing 'personal development' discourses and these were too familiar from a whole school career of such interventions; secondly, it placed on individuals a pressure to tolerate scrutiny and interest which seemed to be simply unbearable; thirdly, it was thought to be uninteresting by the participants themselves. Instead, we brought the mechanics and aesthetics of theatre production to the fore and explained that Dickenson was interested in writing a play about the experience of young people in Hull. We asked for their help and tried a number of ways of generating material, ranging from visual arts processes to interviewing each other, and finally (and most successfully) the process of scripting a play using an approach based very loosely on playback techniques, in which the young people scripted scenarios and characters and coached a group of young professional actors through the process of writing the start of a play. The immediate accessibility of these techniques was striking. Although inexperienced in any form of scripting or dramatising, the participants immediately understood and could use the contingencies of the fictional frame to pour their creative and causal

ideas into the group-authored play. They were concerned with the development of a believable narrative, but also with the creation of a play that developed emotional arcs for the characters through the structuring of scenes, action and dialogue.

Throughout the workshops, Dickenson watched and responded to the evolving play, and brought short scripts into subsequent sessions. Actors and young people worked together on these, with a range of inputs about the verisimilitude of characters and the plausibility of the scenarios and events. At this point a wealth of autobiographical detail was produced as evidence to support the characters' world views, and we worked with the young people to adapt the memories they offered to fit the characters they had created. We worked together to think about audience and what they would understand about the lives and memories of the characters, and how we could make the audience understand the reasons for characters' actions. We thought about the ways that different narratives could be made from the same events and we explored the issue of characters who had very different memories about the same events, as well as exploring the boundaries we wanted to observe between fiction and autobiography. Throughout we were drawing upon the memory science work of Mazzoni, but also drawing heavily on the participants' ideas of causality, memory and character identity. Finally, Dickenson went away to write a play and to work through in conversation with Mazzoni and Conroy the implications of the young people's workshop process.

### **Performances**

Following a process of writing and rehearsal, a 45-minute play was produced by a professional independent theatre company, Parkbench Poets. It was accompanied by a participatory workshop. It was shown first to the groups of young people who had created the characters and scenarios, and we talked about the play in detail. Several of the young people came to see the play multiple times as it toured the local area, particularly when the audience was likely to include people they knew - former teachers, for example. For most of the young people we worked with, this was the first piece of live theatre they had seen. Members of the audience for the performances included the next cohort of school leavers at risk of becoming 'not-known' as well as siblings and cousins of the participant group.

Following the performance, in September 2014, we worked with this next cohort of school leavers and the actors to script and create a play, *Down the Dog*, about identity and memory. In this final process, once the basic scenarios and plot were developed from the predicaments of the characters in *The Not-Knowns*, the professional actors stepped out of the process and the young people continued to devise and rehearse their play. The play was performed by the young people themselves to an invited audience, including actors from the first part of the process, at the University of Hull in December 2014. As a follow-on, the young people were invited and encouraged to continue their engagements in theatre-making via one of two projects run continuously by the City Arts Department. A small number pursued this and one enrolled on a full time Further Education programme in Performing Arts.

### **A psychological view of memory for a theatre project**

One of the interdisciplinary choices we have made in this piece of writing is to presume the acceptance of the science of Mazzoni's conclusions and not to argue through the memory science. A paper on memory science, psychology and performance would be a separate, although valuable, part of this project and for this we would frame the project in different terms. The experimental psychology work of Mazzoni is available to read in its own right and a published source is indicated where relevant. We have chosen not to gloss, introduce or argue Mazzoni's conclusions, but to cite the work upon which we based our conversation. We have also chosen not to frame this work within the humanities discipline of memory studies, as this creates a false frame for the interdisciplinary conversation that actually took place.

The point where theatre making touches upon Mazzoni's memory research is in the area of autobiographical memory. In one of many studies on the malleability of memory, Elizabeth Loftus offers a concise account of this term, explaining that autobiographical memory is, as the term suggests, the process of recollecting complex memories of people, scenes, events with which we have interacted in the past. The process of remembering phone numbers or the words for things is not included in this idea. Autobi-

ographical memory is part of the individual's story of themselves. Crucially, it is sometimes shared socially, often retold in different contexts and it relates in various ways to the perception of self and selfhood (Loftus 2002, 47)

### **Memory as an object of investigation**

Every person thinks of memory using metaphor. Memory as an object of study is precisely metaphor, without which it cannot be grasped as an entity. Standards of correctness for memory lie outside the individual, with notions of consistency, repeatability, second party agreement and plausibility being ways of assessing the accuracy of memory. Repetition of memory secures it for the individual, but the context of repetition changes and colours the memory itself. Objects such as photographs can add depth and detail to a memory. The vividness, the detail and the feeling-state of a memory are accessed through language, with very little qualitative difference from descriptions of scenes in fiction. The process of recollecting is not a process of accessing stored pictures or files, but is more a process of narrative construction. (Mazzoni et al. 1999, 49) External perceptions of form must play an important part in structuring the recollection for presentation in language. One puts memories together based on fragments, facts, but also on narrative and formal recollections. One might say that drama, or structures of narrative, event and character, is already in use to express and structure memories.

Mazzoni's experimental work indicates that autobiographical memory is not only unreliable, in documentary terms, but also that it is reconstructed or reimagined at every recollection. Remembering is an active process and autobiographical memories are created when they are called to mind. (Mazzoni, Scoboria and Harvey 2010, 1339) To say that a memory is 'false' is to misunderstand memory; the individual uses memory for all sorts of purposes, and memory is changeable and adaptable. Autobiographical memory can make a difference to the ambitions, goals and personal happiness of the individual. The way that memory is used can be changed, adapted and manipulated by external stimulus, and also changes according to the way the individual is disposed (or is coached) to regard their autobiography. (Mazzoni and Memon 2003, 186). Satisfaction in and engagement in the process of devising coherent characters can be seen to reflect Mazzoni's suggestion that a sense of completeness and coherence, rather than

happiness is the goal for the individual when considering memories. Coherence and consistency are qualitative frames for writing fictional characters and autobiographical memories. Mazzoni has found that autobiographical memories are attempts to create coherent narratives; any gaps in the narratives may be filled with creatively imagined details. Creative imagination may permanently transform the autobiographical memory. (Mazzoni and Memon 2003, 188)

Speculatively building a bridge between cultural narratives and autobiographical memory, we wondered what is the relationship between fragmented life stories and a fragmented sense of self. It seems possible that the fragmentation of identity and autobiographical narrative such as happens in migration or relocation for work, long-term unemployment, enforced career change, etc. may be dealt with in two ways. Firstly, culturally, by the creation of rich narrative frames through which to structure and understand the sense of self as a coherent subject through time in different circumstances. Secondly, where these rich narratives do not serve the realities of fractured or discontinuous narratives, the individual must engage in an individualised process of narrative creation in order to complete the "person self". The formal qualities and the accessibility of cultural narratives have a direct and demonstrable effect on the sense of self of the individual. As the project started to develop, we were very wary of using the term 'The not-knowns', although this became the title of the play and the name of the project. The 'not-knowns' seemed to underline an omniscient perspective which is problematic because it is both the focus of representation and a way of concealing the ideological structure of notions of representation and visibility. Obviously, the young people were not 'not-known' to their near communities or their friends. In the context of a shared research project about memory and narrative 'knowing' and 'not-knowing' became a useful way of interrogating perspective and analysis, both within the diegesis and in autobiographical memories.

In conversation about the *Not Knowns* project, Mazzoni commented that experiments have shown that mainly, when looking back on their lives, people think of the past with pleasure and affection. Difficulties and sadness are resolved in narrative

terms, recognised as sad or difficult, but as a part of a rich series of experiences. The inability to do this may be thought of as a form of depression, not an individually pathologised depression, but a formal, social struggle to see the nuance and variety of a series of life events, and of seeing the self as a passive entity to which 'things happen'. Mazzoni characterises this as "seeing the past in black and white" and of thinking of single uncontrollable events as direct causes of present unhappiness.

### **Mimesis and playwriting**

Starting from a situation where standing in a circle or saying one's name was mortifying, the participants very rapidly became motivated by the tools of acting and devising. Interestingly, they had ideas about 'proper' theatre - mimetic action involving acting, actors and character - a story that began and ended and which presented a problem. Accepting these values and working within them, developing the skills in scripting and devising as a group was straightforward. The presence of the near-peer professional actors (aged 21 to the young people's 17 - 18) gave them the confidence to engage in the scripting and also the acting of scenarios and sequences, and we spent a session devising a play in which the action could go anywhere. We also played with ideas of parallel action, issues of who knows what, ideas of causality and memory, and also with the sense of what seemed to the group to be a satisfying narrative structure. The first 'play' produced in this way involved a love triangle - a middle class boy (who they created with gleeful comic detail) is two-timing his girlfriend... Although the play involved a series of misdemeanours by the boyfriend character, every scenario involved him being taught 'a bit of a lesson'. Whilst the boy was initially constructed as a class antagonist, the participants invested him with motivational detail and gradually came to treat him with care and kindness. The restraint of the crafted narrative was extraordinary. As facilitators, we tried to make it possible to take the action anywhere, to explore the extremities of 'what might happen', and yet the group remained committed to mild embarrassment for the boy and friendship between the love rival girls as the only possible outcome for the play. Mazzoni found this interesting, especially when this pattern was repeated in further devising processes. She pointed out the uses that one makes of

familiar or known narrative - exploring the unfamiliar and the unknown is potentially disruptive to the fabric of the social world one inhabits.

### **Crisis and canonicity**

Following some initial work on character names, ages and scenarios in the initial workshops with the young people, Dickenson wrote a series of fragments of scenes using the characters she was given, but crafting them into moments of crisis for the character. She supplied the middle sequence of the scene, it was rehearsed and performed by the actors, and then scenario was developed from there, with the young participants supplying the events and memories that had led to this point, and the events that followed the scripted point. Other characters and motivations were supplied by the young people, as well as sequences of memories that were given for the characters to draw upon. In this way, the theories of narrative causality held by the young people were expressed in the narrative.

The main characters were JJ, an 18-year-old man and his 16-year-old sister Lola. One of these scenes was about a crisis point for Lola. She has been sent a letter telling her about the options that are available to her at the end of her compulsory education. This is a standard letter that all children in the UK receive. No state support is available to young people who are not in training, education or employment. Further study or training appeals to Lola, and she doesn't want to go into the dubious subterranean world in which her older brother JJ makes his living.

JJ: What's the letter?

LOLA: Did you get one?

JJ: One what?

Lola hands JJ the letter. He reads.

'Dear parent slash carer'. - Well, they've left the building.

LOLA: C'mon Jamie.

JJ: She here?

LOLA: No.

JJ: When you last see 'em?

LOLA: --

JJ: When?

LOLA: Earlier. Saw him earlier.

JJ: I saw 'em at the bus stop.  
LOLA: Both of 'em?  
JJ: Yeh. Didn't notice me. Invisible man me, well invisible. To them anyway.  
LOLA: Surprised they didn't notice the smell.  
JJ: Oh my days you is smart you! (Continues reading.) 'Do you know that all young people who leave school this year' - What? You sixteen?  
LOLA: Course.  
JJ: When?  
LOLA: When you didn't give me a present.  
JJ: Eh, I distinctly remember giving you a...  
LOLA: See!  
JJ: Anyways. (Reading again.) 'You are now required by the law of this land to, party in a mate's house for like, ever and ever, yep, be a party animal babe! Like your cool bro. Signed David Cameron. PM.'  
LOLA: What? You - (Looks at letter. Reads.) 'participate in a form of accredited learning.'  
JJ: Such as blah, blah, blah, blah -  
LOLA: 'College apprenticeships or other training.' Other training?  
JJ: Yeh, like I said, blah, blah, blah, blah. You got any chocolate?  
  
JJ drums with sticks intermittently through the rest of the scene for punctuation.  
LOLA: So I got to choose.  
JJ: Don't bother. (Looks for chocolate.)  
LOLA: But it says I got to choose.  
JJ: I didn't.  
LOLA: Did.  
JJ: Didn't.  
LOLA: Did. Of sorts.  
JJ: When?  
LOLA: When you went on that course.  
JJ: Did I?  
LOLA: You got the bus.  
JJ: Oh my days, I did! Soon stopped that.  
LOLA: You kept missing it.  
JJ: No. Just, it was -  
LOLA: Yeh, you did.  
JJ: On purpose, Yeh.  
They kept telling me, do this, do that.  
LOLA: So?  
JJ: Anyways. S'borning.  
LOLA is looking at her phone.

The relationship between the siblings is close and supportive, but JJ's life is chaotic and his memory is becoming unreliable. He loses days when out at parties, and he

spends his time climbing tall city buildings in order to be recorded on security cameras. He seeks fame via Youtube and is terrified of being forgotten. JJ and Lola, characters devised by the young people, were liked by the young audiences of the play, many of whom addressed the actors in-role at the end of the performance with pieces of advice drawn from their own experience. In creating the character of JJ, the young people decided that there had been a moment when he 'went off the rails'. The moment was the point when their mother married their stepfather, Shaun. Other memories included the idea that JJ's school teachers disliked his whole year cohort and so did not arrange for a year photograph.

In one of our conversations, we analysed the notion of the canonical memory. This is structurally important for the individual as it offers a clear and easily recollected set of ideas condensed into a single moment or event. The memory is supported by the existence in culture of a strong and recognisable structure and identity for that moment. A wedding, an interview, a moment of humiliation; such events are reflected and represented in culture and fictional forms and which have conventions and a structuring influence upon narratives. The cultural conventions and cultural legibility of the event profoundly affect the way the memory is used as they have an extrinsic structure that offers interpretation and coherence.

In drama terms, the canonical memories are causal because, in writing the play we might say that this event causes that outcome. In the jointly-created fiction, the predicament of JJ seems to him to emerge from the canonical memory of his mother's wedding. All that is bad in life is condensed into that figure and that event. Further detail adds colour - a choice to stop attending a 'stupid' training course, an opportunity to earn money in the unofficial economy, loss of memory and time caused (implicitly) by substance misuse. Separating what JJ thinks he remembers from what else is available for him to remember is a difficult process, and underlines the malleability of memory. Mazzoni used this as an example of 'remembering in black and white', of creating memories of events so overwhelming that they overshadow the details of remembered autobiography. In the face of these events, we are cast as helpless and as victims of the event. No alternative exists to this monolith. In fact, Mazzoni suggested, it is the 'little things'

that offer the nuance and detail of pleasurable and sustaining autobiographical memory and resistance to the depressive 'black and white' monolith of the canonical memory. This phrase, 'the little things' became a running theme in Dickenson's play, with points of resistance being found in social sharing of memories of 'the little things' between JJ and Lola as well as other characters.

### **Narrative, causality and memory**

Mazzoni talked about ideas of repetition and condensation in memory – the reduction of multiple and complex social factors to single events. She sees these as ways of protecting and sustaining identity, especially the shared group identity of the 'not knowns' who are pathologised by education and social services, but who use this identity as a way of creating a core of stable social identity. The repetition of paradigmatic moments are ways of using memory to account for the self and to remain stable in the self. A stable identity is not always a positive thing if the individual sees themselves as 'a problem' or 'incapable'. The issue is not straightforwardly about representation, nor is it about representing the telling of the narrative in the form that it is initially presented. The project and the conversation prompted us to think about how form and the mastery of narrative structures are crucial skills for the individual, (whether they are engaged in an arts project or not!) to promote the development of complexity and diversity of memory, exploring memories and future actions in a narratively satisfying way. We also discussed the issue of whether it was possible for drama workshops to reinforce the problems encountered by individuals stuck in a narrative of incapability. Mazzoni thinks that it is very possible, that some notions of autobiographical memory create a problematic set of paradigmatic (and to some extent fictional, or at least conventional) structures that can entrench the individual in a problematic social dynamic. Enriching the understanding of narrative seems to be important on all sorts of levels. The form of the play can be a rich and complex structure in which possibilities are explored in parallel or which add detail and dialogue and the possibility of intervention. We are looking for processes that resist the sorts of condensation that lead to the overwhelming monolith of memory or of single events as overwhelmingly causal. Mazzoni's work indicates that

this form of overwhelming causality based on canonical memories may be a trap that reduces choice and impairs the capacity to effect change. The simple causality of "X happened so inevitably Y happened" needs to give way to "X happened, but so did A and B and C." The implications of this are profound.

The attractiveness of the form of the play to the young people was undoubtedly helpful at all stages of the project. We speculate that the validated cultural form of the play is accessible and useable, and that use of the form can adapt to need and increasing skill. Dogmatic aesthetic or conventional notions of theatre form had to be firmly rejected. The form of the play has a high level of social esteem, but was also a convention owned and shared by the young people, wherever their ideas about 'the play' come from. The process of watching *The Not-Knowns* and then writing and making *Down the Dog* demonstrated an appropriation and use of the form of the play and clear evidence of the ability to analyse and manipulate narratives to find parallel and competing accounts of events.

"What really happened?" is a question that characters can ask, but which the audience has to puzzle out. There isn't a final answer to the question when dealing with characters' memories. In fiction, truth is part of a theoretical and formal edifice that demands the following of rules of consistency, agreement, plausibility, much like autobiographical memory. Samuel Beckett's irritation with actors when they wanted to know about the extra-textual lives of his characters is a way of understanding that Vladimir and Estragon are not available to know in their off-stage worlds. Quite unlike the world of documentary or verbatim theatre, dramatic theatre plays with puzzles about causality. Finding that the pieces fit together in a number of ways is a satisfying part of watching narrative theatre. Mazzoni claims that memory does this too. The question of what is the 'truth' of the encounter or the event is never told to us. We are forced to live with the fact that the ultimate truth of the memory can't be constructed and can't finally be known. Is it more likely that we believe people we like? Of course! But is this a reflection of truth? No! The idea of truth of autobiographical memory is a moral judgement, and the play, *The Not-Knowns* offers the idea that these notions are created in memory for specific purposes.

LOLA: I wanna do things. Something.

JJ: I do things, oh man, do I do things! Me an' some mates, new mates right - soon -

they'll remember things I do.

LOLA: You don't remember half of them.

JJ: Eh. Only forget some.

LOLA: No point if you don't remember.

I want to remember, be remembered. But it says I gotta choose.

JJ: Man, if you don't want to do that stuff, don't.

LOLA: But it says!

JJ: I bet school set it up.

LOLA: They just wanted us gone.

JJ: Oh my days, they so wanted me gone. Didn't even give us a year photo. They 'forgot'.

LOLA: They didn't forget the photo this year. They just 'forgot' my class.

JJ: Getting picky in their forgetting, well forget them. I don't remember one good teacher, not one.

LOLA: Gemma heard a teacher say we were going to become the next 'not knowns.'

JJ: Not what?

LOLA: 'Not knowns'. They had cups of tea, talking. Standing talking, in the sun, outside. When he wasn't looking Gemma spat in his tea. Said -

GEMMA TEXT: He'd know that alright! X (Very smiley face)

JJ: But why? Why you?

LOLA: They remember you. Think I'm like you.

JJ: But, you're so not!

LOLA: (Getting upset.) I know! I tried but they just...

JJ: (Wants to comfort her but...) Yeh, they just... Man, they just... Oh my days man,

I told 'em I won't do just 'anything' - that's what they want - just 'anything'. Tick box, get lost. Forgot you - forgot what? No way, I said, No way! Do what I want me.

They'll remember me for that. Do what I want. An' you do what you want. Forget them for a start, bunch of -

LOLA: But it says I gotta choose, or no benefits.

JJ: So? He'd just nick it.

The play maximises the number of encounters through which narrative is created. This is important because the process of telling a story is an encounter with a truth or rather with a perspective that carries a truth. It is a truth because it is a perspective we do not know. It might also cast the speaker in a specific social role. For Mazzoni, the canonical memory may serve to cast the rememberer as the victim of an event

which s/he finds overwhelming and in which s/he has no control. Victims have no obligations and have a clearly understood role in narrative terms. Relating, telling and sharing all change the encounter as they reinscribe the memory for a new audience. Telling stories changes the speaker, the listener and the story itself.

Lola's stepfather, Shaun offers her an 'unofficial' job as a deliverer of something unspecified. In an attempt to allay her fears, Shaun tries to exchange memories of a moment in the park. He remembers fun and buying ice cream. Lola doesn't remember. He remembers her wearing a pink dress, and that JJ was being an idiot:

LOLA

Pink dress?

SHAUN

Really sunny, and at the park I'd be pushing you on the swing, or roundabout. And you'd be squealing with delight and, and smiling and looking at me, shyly like, and. I'd get you an ice cream or a lolly. You really liked lollies, like rockets, remember? And there was that song we'd sing. Oh, what was it? You loved that song. (Hums) Remember?

LOLA

I don't -

SHAUN

Yeh, you do, it goes um (Hums a bit of tune.)

LOLA

--

SHAUN

And him, he would spin the swing not swing in it, spin it or nick your ice cream, or stick his face in -

LOLA

When was this?

SHAUN

(Hums a song)That was it. You remember. At the park on the -

LOLA

When was this?

SHAUN

Well if you won't remember.

LOLA

When was this?

SHAUN

Look, take whatever gets you money or you're out on your ear. (p29-31)

It is obvious that Lola doesn't remember the events in the way that Shaun wants her to, and also that she will not adapt her memories to his. In response to this, Shaun becomes aggressive and unhelpful. The play's turning point comes when this memory is revisited by Lola and JJ. The siblings recall their corresponding memories of the park in a moment of sharing that leads them towards using their memories to move forward. Faced with Shaun's non-believed memory of her as a child in the park, Lola finds the confidence to reject Shaun's offer of a job running 'errands' for a gang:

LOLA

I never liked pink.

SHAUN

Eh?

LOLA

Wasn't ever a 'pink' girl.

JJ

Pink?

LOLA

Never had a pink dress.

JJ

Yellow. You loved yellow.

SHAUN

Pink dress, yellow dress? What's it matter?

JJ

Yellow shorts. Never a dress.

LOLA

I remember see. But, I don't remember your story. And 'cos I remember my story, I'm saying, no, thank you. I think. (p58-59)

### Truth and memory

Mazzoni's experimental work points towards the fact that the individual remembers as an act of synthesis, not an act of recollection. The components that are synthesised are likely to change with time, to incorporate more recent knowledge or experience. Detail may arise (or be introduced) that cannot and could not be a part of the memory at the time. The process of 'noticing' or recollecting new details is not a process

of discovery but a process of making. Although she doesn't use the word herself, Mazzoni's model of memory is that of a performative facility. It is infinitely adaptable and adaptive, it serves us in the present and is also highly susceptible to volition. Autobiographical memories exist when we remember them. Otherwise, they do not exist. We make choices about what we remember in order to sustain and fortify our sense of selves. That is not to say that memory is always voluntary, however, a greater awareness of the adaptability of memory may well contribute to a developing sense of agency and control for the individual. In this context, the document or the shared memory is an interpellative artefact. It positions us and renders into narrative our subjectivity in a collective, socialised way. It offers evidence which must be accommodated into our sense of self. The document changes the memory because it must be retrospectively introjected into the remembering individual, becoming a constituting element of that individual's sense of themselves as coherent and consistent, an entity through time. The play was accompanied by an interactive forty five minute workshop in which the unknown dimensions and the small details of character and narrative were explored. In our conversation before the writing of the play, Mazzoni suggested that the revelation of alternative or parallel sequences could offer life strategies for the individual audience member and workshop participant to explore alternatives to the canonical and the 'black and white' event. This became a central part of the design of the workshop.

The idea of family is at stake in the play *The Not Knowns*. Shaun offers a memory as evidence of his fatherly care. Lola rejects this, offering a different memory. In the final moments of the play, JJ and Lola form a shared moment and perform the recollection of memory. In the present, it is important for both of them to reiterate the shared memories, which means they must be created over and over again. This memory is referred to several times in the play in order to demonstrate the different and even contradictory ways in which a single event can be recalled by different people. They also share a memory of Shaun in a park. The overlapping speech (indicated in the written text by a forward slash) shows how exactly their memories of the incident coincide, creating a shared memory of 'little things' that further negates Shaun's false memories of their trip to the park:

JJ (Pause.) He took us to the park once. He messed up everything.

LOLA

Yeh. I remember.

LOLA

Instead of pushing the swings / he twisted them.

JJ

/He twisted them.

JJ

Messed with the ice cream/ pushing your nose in it.

LOLA

/Pushing your nose in it. Thought he was hilarious.

JJ

Yeh, hilarious. Remember?

LOLA

Yeh.(Beat.) It's good you remember.

JJ

Good we remember. (Beat.) You are smart. (p62)

Lola is brave enough to resist Shaun's memory, but we don't necessarily see that Shaun knows that he is lying. Shaun will not move away from his memories because he believes they make him complete, and he claims that both Lola and JJ are 'idiots' for not remembering in the same way as he does. JJ's detailed remembering of Lola's favourite colour and favourite pair of shorts increases her confidence in her rejection of Shaun. The process of telling and sharing the stories is part of the process of remembering and is also part of the process of creating and sustaining identity and social connection. Whether the memories are in any sense 'accurate' matters very much less than the fact that they are shared. The narrative sharing is memory in action.

### **Conclusion: performative memory and repetition**

The experience of developing this project in parallel with a series of interdisciplinary conversations enabled us to directly engage in the points of connection between psychology research, theatre practice and creative writing. Mazzoni's role of mentoring and challenging the project, offering analyses of the experiences of the project made us think in new ways about the notion of memory as an object of applied theatre practice. Questions of narrative and causality brought the concerns of autobiographical participatory arts work and dramatic fictional plays together in an explicit and accessible way. To

further pursue the notion of memory and metaphor, we could suppose that memory is more theatrical than filmic. The process of deviating from an agreed common version is not just likely, it is inevitable. Each iteration is thought to be both repetition and an original moment. It does mean that these recollections can possibly be exclusionary and also repressive. Our standard is not accuracy, or expressivity; it is about a process of sharing and agreeing a truth without necessarily having recourse to a standard of correctness, or to an external perspective of what 'really' happened. The play itself is a staging post in the process and is written as a puzzle. It is only half the experience. The other half involves a process of investigating the different interests and experiences produced by and productive of the characters. This is done through a facilitated drama workshop. It is impossible to see this script as a finished version. The process of listening to the story as an articulation of a perspective and then thinking about whether it is a helpful story or not is a really difficult thing to do in the context of autobiographical theatre and performance. To do so would be to indicate that we somehow doubt these young people's stories, which we do not. Our process involved a process of co-authoring and fiction writing, with the narrative and characters devised and manipulated by the young people. They encoded a process where the different characters create stories to explain their own positions. The pre-existing form of storytelling patient and evil agent is one that might be (and is) critiqued by the young people themselves. To engage in the story of either play as an articulation of creative fiction writing is to think about narrative and perspective as something to analyse, something we can all do, and something that exists apart from all our specific experiences, to communicate and mediate between our differences. In our view, the incursion of the fiction and the narrative into the centre of the conversation gave us a place to explore and model the implications of multiple perspectives. We would repeat and advocate the critical use of playwriting practices as a malleable mode of collective and aesthetic exploration of memory.

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