Performance Research 4.4: On Theatricality: Notes Towards a Theatre of Assemblages

The Politics of Assembly

The venue is an old town hall in Shoreditch, London, lately given over to theatrical productions. There, in an assembly room, I attend a performance of SUMMIT (2018) by Andy Smith. Act One: Past Tense is set 'one thousand years in the future'; Act Two: Future Tense, is set in about 2013; Act Three: Present Tense is set now. The text is further divided into three languages: English; Malay; British Sign Language. The play describes 'A meeting that happens in order to talk about how some things that are going wrong might get sorted out' (4). The text consists of reiterations and elaborations of its own premise: there is 'a need for action, or at least a need to think about how a situation might be improved' (4). At the summit, something happens, the failure of an infrastructure, which gives a moment of pause: 'What happens at the summit isn't big or dramatic. But it is sudden and it is unexpected' (*ibid*.).

In Passionate Amateurs (2015), Nicholas Ridout refers to Hannah Arendt's conception of the 'space of appearance' as the emergence of a 'polis'. He writes that the 'transitory constitution from the exchange of human speech and action seems to suggest a theatrical event' (16), in the 'organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together' (ibid.). Arendt defines the space of appearance as a place 'where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men [sic] exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly' (Arendt 1958: 198).

    In Persons and Things (2015) Roberto Esposito observes: 'No other principle is so deeply rooted in our perception and in our moral conscience as the conviction that we are not things — because things are the opposite of persons' (1). Whilst this principle 'appears almost naturally obvious' Esposito argues, it is 'actually the outcome of a long disciplining process that ran though ancient and modern history, molding them in its course' (ibid.). In rethinking the politics of assembly, we become explicitly concerned with the ground on which we stand.

    To continue, we must acknowledge that Arendt's distinction between humans and 'other living or inanimate things' provides a point of contention for Judith Butler in Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly (2015): 'I push against Hannah Arendt even as I draw upon her resources to clarify my own position' (75). Butler suggests that Arendt 'surely had both the Greek polis and the Roman forum in mind when she claimed that all

political action requires "the space of appearance"' (73). For Arendt, 'alliance produces its own location', whilst for Butler, such a view 'forgets or refuses that action is always supported and that it is invariably bodily, even … in its virtual forms' (73). Assemblies comprise 'bodies in their plurality' laying claim to the public. Moreover, assemblies — of whatever kind, 'find and produce the public through seizing and reconfiguring the matter of material environments' (71). 'Material supports' Butler continues, 'are not only part of the action' but also 'what is being fought about' (ibid.). She asserts: 'we will need to consider more closely the bodily dimension of action, what the body requires, and what the body can do' (73). If Arendt is a point of departure for Butler, so, too, is Spinoza, for: 'We never know in advance what a body can do. We never know how we're organised and how the modes of existence are enveloped in somebody' (Deleuze 1992: 217). Butler refers to Spinoza to consider 'bodies in their plurality' but also the 'conditions according to which a body can do anything at all' (2015: 223-4).

SUMMIT allows us to consider the theatre as a cultural location in which material conditions become apparent. The action takes place 'somewhere like this' — 'in a room like this' (7); a room in a building where architecture and social infrastructure cohere. It happens to 'some people like us — who tonight will be played by all of us here' (8). Similar substitutions recur throughout Smith's body of work: one body for another, one gathering for another, one place for another. The sudden and unexpected thing that happens at the Summit its this: 'The lights go out' (7). The structure of the performance is defined by a series of blackouts, or 'Interplays'. In the story of the summit, many of the people who had gathered 'thought it was the end. Or very near the end' (19). 'But it wasn't. It was not the end. Not even near it' (20). It was 'the actually the beginning' (ibid.).

I locate the particular affect of the play in the sentiment that a thousand years in the future some people like us will gather in a room like this one. SUMMIT offers little elevation, the present is not a promontory; it affords no vantage: the lights go out. These brief moments of relative darkness foreground the material conditions of the theatrical event. At the close, the actors propose a further substitution:

> We are going to take control / We are going to meet these challenges head-on. We are going to lead everyone through these turbulent times / We are going to regroup and rebuild and transform. We want you to trust us. We are going to do this for you (72-3).

In moments of darkness, I sense the contingencies of the present: the architecture, the infrastructure, the interrelations of neoliberal capitalism which make this theatrical experience both possible and necessary: the space of appearances is never 'fully separable from questions of infrastructure and architecture' which 'not only condition of the action, but take part in the making of the space of politics' (127). It is notable that in his Afterword: What Can Theatre Do? Smith cites Audre Lorde. He argues that what the theatre offers is a:

> quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams towards survival and change, first made into language and then onto a more tangible action (Lorde 2017: 8, in Smith 2018: 76).

An Aesthetics of Assemblage

In Vibrant Matter (2010), Jane Bennett describes a blackout affecting large regions of North America in 2003. She refers to this event in order to develop 'a theory of distributive agency' (21). The blackout was rendered by a journalist for the *International Herald Tribune* in rather poetic terms: 'the grid's heart fluttered' its workings 'complicated beyond full understanding, even by experts', an organism of a kind 'which lives and occasionally dies by its own mysterious rules' (25). Bennett counsels that: 'a careful course of anthropomorphization' reveals vitality of lively things, even whilst it resists full translation and exceeds [our] comprehensive grasp (122). Part of this anthropomorphic operation arguably consists in the attribution of agency to nonhuman bodies, or 'actants'. The term describes 'sources of action' either 'human or nonhuman' or: 'that which has efficacy, can *do* things' (viii).

In Making (2013) Tim Ingold all but dismisses Bennett as 'spellbound by the grammar of agency' and unable 'to bring herself to renounce it' (2013: 96), noting her admission: 'No one really knows what human agency is, or what humans are doing when they are said to perform as agents'. 'In the face of every analysis', she continues, 'human agency remains something of a mystery' (ibid.). Ingold thus contends: 'if our aim, like Bennett's, is to counter human exceptionalism' then why 'credit human beings with agency in the first place?' (2013: 96), for 'should we not remove the wool from over our own eyes' rather than 'wrap the rest of the world up in it? (ibid.).

My response is to consider the operation Bennett is performing as foremost an aesthetic one: she describes the distinction between life and matter in Jacques Rancière's

terms as a 'partition of the sensible' (Bennett 2010: vii). For Rancière, 'politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it' but also, 'who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time' (Rancière 2005: 13). Rancière describes the emergence of politics from an aesthetic operation: 'the stage, which is simultaneously a locus of public activity and the exhibition-space for "fantasies", disturbs the clear partition of identities, activities, and spaces' (ibid).

Bennett thus speaks directly to the 'great divide' between humans and nonhumans, persons and things, described by Esposito as the foundation of law, philosophy and politics. Politics is announced in the phrase "we, the people" an enunciation with a 'performative character' (146), requiring, of course, 'a mouth and a throat — the breath of bodies close enough to hear what the other says and to see what everyone can see' 154-7)

Bennett's philosophical method becomes an aesthetic practice which 'turn[s] the figures of "life" and "matter" around and around, worrying them until they start to seem strange' (vii). This 'estrangement' creates a space in which 'a vital materiality can start to take shape' (vii), where 'agency' or 'efficacy' emerges from an 'animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power' (23), or what Deleuze and Guattari describe as an assemblage: 'ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts' (23), — or, a multiplicity 'made up of many heterogenous terms' which 'establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns — different natures' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: 69).

We cannot refer to an aesthetics of assemblage without noting the emergence of the term in artistic practices of the twentieth century. We should note, as Kristine Stiles has done, how Deleuze and Guattari failed to cite 'the living artists who invented and developed assemblage' (Stiles 1999: 3), but on the understanding that we can only refer to these artists briefly:

So let us proceed by naming as our extreme contemporaries Allan Kaprow and Jean-Jacques Lebel — contemporaries with whom, in their turns away from the theatre, we must necessarily disagree, having asked differently after the terms of relation between art, so-called, and life, so-called, and what it ever was, or even is, to blur them.

And let us recall Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso, Kurt Schwitters, Joseph Cornell, and, passionately, The Baroness Else von Freytag-Loringhoven as our contemporaries also.

And amongst these, let us not forget George Herms, the American assemblage artist who turned toward the theatre, producing works he described as: 'a Joseph Cornell box

big enough you can walk around in. It's just a continuation of my sculpture, one year at a time' (Allen and Herms 2010: n.p.). Noteworthy, too, is Herms' remark: 'I turn shit into gold. I just really want to see something I've never seen before' (Fan 2013: n.p.). In theatre and performance we have all of us seen a good deal more shit than gold. We return to theatre, as place, as promise and as prospect, because our attention is turned there anew, so that we come to see material processes in *ways* we have not seen them before.

And fondly we may note, from William Seitz: 'Assemblage has become, temporarily at least, the language for impatient, hyper-critical, and anarchistic young artists', careful to regard to the date, 1961, and the context, the exhibition catalogue for the New York Museum of Modern Art's The Art of Assemblage (1961: 87).

Thus there are alliances — not filiations — to be observed between the artists of the historical avant gardes for whom became a mode of artistic production, and the postwar, post-'68 philosophers, for whom assemblage became an organising concept, and the artists of the present for whom assemblage proposes a mode of specifically theatrical experience. Whilst philosophy is the art of forming concepts (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 2) art consists in the intensification of sensation, the production of percepts and affects (Grosz 2008). Perhaps the difference between the art of assemblages of the early to mid-twentieth century and the theatre of assemblages emerging presently is, precisely, a deeper conceptual awareness of assemblage as concept, for, I will maintain, the theatre remains a place where action is theorised.

Desire, an implicate order

Following Butler, we have considered human action as conditioned, made possible, by material supports. We have noted, briefly, taking the example of SUMMIT, how the commonest of theatrical devices can foreground these material supports. Following Bennett, we have begun to consider how human action entails nonhuman action, the ways in which human powers and forces are mediated by nonhuman powers and forces. Here I must state explicitly: what interests me in Bennett's thought is not her deliberation, or lack, regarding the question of material agency. Since nobody really knows what agency is, I am unconcerned with resolving that question. I am concerned, rather, with the implications of an emerging mode of theatre practice which consists in the forming of assemblages. In such a practice, we can more closely observe what we might refer to, after Ingold, as the bodily tensions, intentions, inner tensions (2017: 107) of both humans and nonhumans, persons and things, which 'train our attention to perceive the self-differentiating powers of

this world, in all its multiplicity' (Cull 2015: 147). This refers, finally, to a process of orientation, between 'longitude' and 'latitude'; the relationship between speeds and slownesses, and the capacity to affect and be affected which are common to all bodies — of whatever kind (Spinoza in Deleuze 1988: 123). In certain modes of theatrical practice we can closely observe the tendencies of things.

Of these emerging theatrical modes I take as an exemplar a single performance installation by johnsmith, entitled we are all made of stars (2016-17), notable for its framing text, which describes each of its composite elements as 'actants':

> Anna Smith, blue food dye, carpet tape, cork, electricity, feathers, foam, Francine Perry, glucose, heart sensor, invisible thread, johnsmith, lichen, Lisa Savini, LR44 batteries, Mary Osborn, medical glue, microphones, mirror, moss, pond liner, projector, Rob Pell-Walpole, soil, speakers, Tim Spooner, Tom Cassani, uv dye, Vivianna Chiotini and water' (johnsmith 2016: n.p.).

we are all made of stars begins in darkness, an originary darkness. We hear breath, amplified, as continuous as the darkness which surrounds us. This darkness, which has seemed limitless and whole, is rended by flashes of light, a constellation that contracts and expands with the rise and fall of the body prostrate before us. Light comes as a wound, stars converging to form a reddening sun, bleeding to pink and purple, its circle scored and crossed with lines. A crisp, rustling sound takes on a time signature, becoming musical, lacerating beats cutting through the air, until a voice comes deep and low, between speech and song: "Every boy / is a snake / is a lily / Every pearl / is a lynx / is a girl" The preceding lines from Björk's *Oceania*, omitted, draw out an evolutionary and an ecological concern: "One breathe away from mother Oceania / Your nimble feet make points in my sands / You have done good for yourselves / Since you left my wet embrace / And crawled ashore' (Björk 2004).

Skin, vibrantly coloured with UV dyes, projected against a vast screen, skin revealed with microscopic detail, a landscape — or: a territory — desire itself territorialized, deterritorialized — a meshwork, yielding up shards of mirror, pools of fructose, and patches of moss — grown in the weeks leading up to the performance by the artist themselves. The scale of the work swells beyond a sense of bodily proportion, as millimetres of porous skin, projected on a large screen. Amid the flashes of colour — intensifications of pigments, skin, dye, there appears a single attenuation of light, a concrete, shifting, image. The camera opens its gaze between the legs of the body

onstage, and our eyes reopen upon the folds of a vulva. Here in this light, which is guileless, a flower blooms from within the flesh. In this gesture, this image, it is the figures of nature and culture which are turned around, echoing the anthropomorphic aesthetic described by Bennett, to reveal 'similarities across categorical divides', and lights up 'structural parallels between material forms in "nature" and those in "culture"' so that: 'anthropomorphism can reveal isomorphisms' (Bennett 2010: 99). The pleasure of this image is not the materialisation of the promise of one sex, or gender, of woman 'constantly touching herself' (Irigaray 1985: 29), it is a promise opening 'across sexes and reigns — different natures' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: 69): all bodies, mine also, becoming erogenous. The lips and the petals are not — or, not only — organs of reproduction, but folds of desire, desire as an implicate order:

> Bodies aren't some kind of fullness or filled space (space is filled everywhere): they are *open* space, implying, in some sense, a space more properly *spacious* than spatial, what could also be called a *place*. Bodies are places of existence, and nothing exists without a place, a *there*, a "here", a "here is," for a *this*. The body-place isn't full or empty, since it doesn't have an outside or an inside, any more than it has parts, a totality, functions, or finality. It's acephalic and aphallic in every sense, as it were. Yet it is skin, variously folded, re-folded, on folded, multiplied, invaginated, extrogastrulated, orificed, invasive, invaded, stretched, relaxed, excited, distressed, tied, untied. In these and the thousands of other ways, the body makes room for existence (no "a priori forms of intuition" here, no "table of categories": the transcendental resides in an indefinite modification and spacious modulation of skin) (Nancy 2008: 17)

After the image of the flower, we see next a human face, or the organs of a face, eyes, nostrils, mouth, as the body rises from its position on a hospital gurney, stands and performs a lip-sync'd rendition of Moby's we are all made of stars: 'People come together / People fall apart / No one can stop us now / 'Cause we are all made of stars' (Moby 2002). We witness, then, finally, the reemergence of the human, an extraction of the human from within a milieu, profoundly altered in our perception, through the density of material engagements and experiences that have lent it form.

A Parliament of Things

'Every thing is a parliament of lines' writes Ingold (2007: 5). For originally, '"thing" meant a gathering of people and a place where they would meet to resolve their affairs' (*ibid*). It may be that in a theatre of assemblages, little resolution can be found. Describing a 'parliament of things', Bruno Latour affirms: 'Modernism was not an illusion, but an active performing' (144). There are times, he suggests when 'new words are needed to convene a new assembly' (ibid). It will not fall to philosophers, or scientists, but to 'Others' to 'convene the parliament of things' (145). These others, I would suggest, may be theatre-artists: The theatre provides a venue for (a-coming of) this convention. Our mode of assembly is neither juridical, nor legislative. It is instead heuristic, experimental and demonstrative.

There remains the question of how this 'agency', 'efficacy', might be distributed. johnsmith reflects: 'in my practice I would say honestly the way that I most recognise the agency of nonhuman is [by] being thwarted' (smith 2018), before suggesting 'an equal amount of being thwarted in my intentions and being guided by something that comes out of the material', concluding: 'my practice is quite top-down in that sense I suppose' (ibid.):

> I have an image in my head that I want to create and the process that I go on is how to manifest that image. But then along the way the materials that I start to work with feed into, interrupt, and change that process (ibid).

In interview, the artist describes the cultivation of moss, one of the materials in the ensemble of actants, a heuristic process which:

> potentially killed more moss that it would have done if I'd just used some on every performance and just thrown it away. So although I know more about moss now than I did then I still wouldn't say our relationship is particularly harmonious - and I don't know whether the moss would perceive this as a collaboration (smith 2018)

Tied to the grammar of agency, one is tied, also to the logic of the intentional subject: indeed, we are 'responsible beyond our intentions' (Levinas 1998: 3). Perhaps only way in which responsibility for, or responsiveness to non-human forces (conceived as agents, or bodies) can begin, is by reflecting that: 'desires, intentions and feelings actually comes

from close observation of the material world' (Ingold 2017: 107). This process of observation, with its corresponding, if gradual, partial, divestment of subjective intentionality, entails a corresponding receptivity.

In the *Nomadology* section of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari discuss the limitations of a 'hylomorphic model' of making, or, the imposition of form onto matter. What they call a 'Royal Science' is inseparable from this hylomorphism, which reflects the distribution of power in 'a society divided into governors and governed' (369). Against this, Deleuze and Guattari propose a 'nomad science' which 'follows the connections between singularities of matter and traits of expression, and lodges on the level of these connections, whether they be natural or forced' (ibid.). As Bennett summarises: Deleuze and Guattari believe that a material vitalism 'doubtless exists everywhere but is ordinarily hidden or covered, rendered unrecognizable by the hylomorphic model' (Bennett 2010: 56). And yet, she argues: 'The hylomorphic model is thus a kind of vitalism, positing some nonmaterial supplement with the power to transform mere matter into embodied life' (ibid.)

If considered a mode of politics, the parliament of things cannot be limited to "we, the people"; to speaking bodies with throats and mouths (Esposito 2015: 154-7), or, indeed, faces, for there can be no 'reduction to faciality as the sole substance of expression' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 117). Here, we are not 'speaking only about human bodies' but also 'the environments, the machines, and the social organisation of interdependency upon which they rely, all of which form the conditions of their persistence and flourishing' (Butler 2015: 208).

The political task emerges, for Esposito, as we acknowledge: 'the body has always been the ground where persons pass into things' and also 'the point of resistance that opposes this passage — not in the sense of a return from thing to person, but as a rejection of the dichotomous order that has always organised the two' (2015: 144). For the living body is 'foreign to both the semantics of the person and to those of the thing'. The body is composed of 'vast multitudes' which demand 'the radical renewal of the vocabulary of politics, law, and philosophy' (ibid).

Theatre / Cosmology

> Once earth and sky were passionately one, yet nothing had form; Everything was virtual. For the world and its forms and its extension to come into existence, earth and sky had to be torn apart and separated (Berger 1984: 90)

Here, John Berger writes of a beginning, the same beginning Elizabeth Grosz describes as a 'whirling, unpredictable movement of forces, vibratory oscillations that constitute the universe': not an 'absolute disorder' but a 'plethora of orders, forms, wills—forces' (2008. 5). Karen Barad reflects: 'Gazing out into the night sky or deep down into the structure of matter, with telescope or microscope in hand, Man reconfirms his ability to negotiate immense differences in scale in the blink of an eye…his separateness is the key' (2007: 134). For Deleuze and Guattari, art is between <u>oikos</u> and <u>cosmos</u>, combining 'House and Universe, <u>Heimlich</u> and <u>Unheimlich</u>, territory and deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 186). To explicate:

> We will call an *assemblage* every *constellation* of singularities and traits deducted from the flow—selected, organized, stratified—in such a way as to converge (consistency) artificially and naturally' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 406).

Desire comes from the stars: <u>de</u>-(down) + <u>sider</u>-(star). Here, desire is not intentional, object-directed. It does not refer to lack, but to abundance, as a 'nonhuman and pre-personal force, which is everywhere' (Stark 2017: 50):

> When johnsmith was born an atom was fired at two slits. The scientist was surprised yo see that the singular atom/john behaved like a fluid wave, and flowed through both. They fired again and watched. Under the pressure of an audience the atom/john chose a slit. In each performance john chrystallises one persona from many possibilities (smith 2916, n.p.).

Berger continues: 'Every form of interrogation of the stars has been about this, and every theory of origin is a story invented to describe the experience of being here' (1984: 91). And 'if there was to be any story at all' it could only emerge from deployment, extension, space, separateness. Ma femme' (Berger, 1984: 90-1).

Assemblages work by 'inter-action' and not 'intra-action'. In the relation between separable parts, assemblages affirm: 'the first gesture of art is the fabrication of the frame' (2008: 10). Without frame or boundary, there is no territory, and 'without territory there may be objects or things but not qualities that can become expressive, intensifying and transforming living bodies' (Grosz 2008: 11). Art — of whatever kind — requires a cut, a separation, across a plane of immanence.

As Sara Ahmed notes: to 'actualise a potential is to create a horizon' (4). 'What is "here" is also accomplished' (Ahmed 2014: 40). As Arendt observed: 'once an act is accomplished "it loses its air of contingency"' (1978: 30). We might refer to this contingency, in Spinozan terms, as *conatus*. Conatus unites consciousness, life and matter in 'strivings' which are ever 'in conjunction and competition with each other'; subject to 'nascent changes of direction' (Bennett 2010: 76).

Here we converge with Butler, regarding 'the conditions according to which a body can do anything at all' (2015: 223-4). 'There can be no flight from embodied existence' she writes, since the body 'imposes the principle of humility and a sense of the necessary limits of all human action' (47). In a theatre of assemblages, we attend to and attune ourselves with the various strivings of bodily forms in order to ask as Butler does: 'What holds them together there, and what are their conditions of persistence and of power in relation to their precarity and exposure?' (73-4).

A theatre of assemblages proposes modes of relation enacted across and between all of the separations defining bodily life. As Manuel DeLanda observes: 'The contrast between filiations and alliances gives is a clue regarding the type of relationships needed to hold the parts together' (2016: 2). Assemblage 'does not define identity' but connects identities 'in exteriority' (ibid.). Between exteriorities, the assemblage's 'only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. Assemblages are thus defined by their 'alliances, alloys' — not by 'successions, lines of descent' but by 'contagions, epidemics, the wind' [Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 69].

To model a definition of theatrical assembly, we might follow Ridout's conception of describes 'solitude in relation' (2015: 143), derived from Nancy's phrase 'compearance'. It describes (in a Deleuzean construction) a process of becoming-audience (153); a mode of 'feeling-in-common' which approach 'but never closes into identification, participation, or community' — 'a feeling-in-common of not being regulated by the temporality of capital (ibid.). In Nancy's formulation, listening is close to touch *as*, — or *more* — intimate as touch. Ridout refers to an Aristotelian 'common sense' and 'inner touch' in order to describe listening as a 'perceptible singularity' that:

> bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (aisthetic) condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion (Nancy 2007: 14 in Ridout, *ibid*., 153; *my emphasis*).

To relate the assemblage to embodied life, we might reflect, along with Ingold: 'We can reach for the stars, but cannot touch them' (2011: 21). If being, in every mode — stars, stones, trees, water, and 'all the diverse forms of animal, plant, fungal and bacterial life' — are 'part of the material world' Ingold argues, 'then the same must be true of my own body' (22). we are all made of stars proposes a politics of embodied life by restating the vibrancy of life, matter and consciousness. Between the 'cellular and the cosmic' (smith 2016), *we are all made of stars* affirms: 'The universe is not only queerer than we suppose, it is queerer than we *can* suppose' (Haldane in Bagemihl 2000: 9; in Barad 2011, my emphases). It is not first a cosmology and then a politics, but a synthesis between the small and the large refrain. Thus, with some particular economy, smith extracts and delineates a field of desire in which a queer politics animates evolutionary potentials.

As Berger suggests, in every language, love is found quoting the stars, and every cosmology returns to sexuality' (Berger, 1984: 90). Art, of whatever sort, is an extension of cosmological forces and erotic desire. Its significances and its appeal, emerges in the return to what Merleau-Ponty called the 'vibration of appearances — the cradle of all things (1964: 18). To be cradled here, marks an 'entrance into plenitude' which can only ever be temporary, unfolding a mode of desire which insists on 'a giving away: the plenitude of a silence, a darkness in which everything's at peace' (Berger 2008: 126).

'Those who first invented and named the constellations were storytellers' (Berger 1984: 8): 'Tracing an imaginary line between a cluster of stars gave them an image and an identity' (ibid.). Between the blackouts lending a grammar to SUMMIT and the material images giving form to we are all made of stars, we draw a line between two points of an expansive constellation of artistic practices. Future elaborations must necessarily include Laura Burns, Tim Spooner, and Elinor Lewis, Elinor Sikorski, as artists concerned with materiality, assemblage, vitalism. Here, I have only begun to formalise theatricality as an intensification of the interplay of cosmological forces. For now, I will suggest that a theatre of assemblages may be defined by a particular vitality and precarity, as it returns us to the 'world of circumstance and contingency' into which we were born (Berger 1984: 93) and within which we are made and remade continually.

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