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Kane, Nina R.

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Dr. Nina Kane,

Artistic Director Cast-Off Drama / Ocarina Nina Street-Theatre & Singing.

20 minute paper given at Performance, Place, Possibility: Performance in Contemporary Urban Contexts, One-day conference, Friday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014, Stage@Leeds, University of Leeds, UK.

Loitering / Busking Bodies / Subversive Singing: Why Street-Theatre is Essential to Our Cities.

Writing in *The Practice of Everyday Life* in 1974, French Cultural Studies theorist Michel de Certeau describes looking down at Manhattan from the 110<sup>th</sup> Floor of the World Trade Centre.<sup>1</sup> The experience opens up for him some new reflections on both the act of looking at the city from above, and on being and moving in the city below. In relating his experience, he establishes a paradigm for a discussion of power, locating scopic domination, detachment and disassociation (dissociation) in the position of the 'voyeur-god' overlooking the city; and arguing that there are spaces for resistance, agency and poetry made by those forming the mass of 'blind' walking bodies in the city below. Of the experience of viewing the city from a height he notes:

The panorama-city is a 'theoretical' (that is, visual), simulacrum, in short, a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices. The voyeur-god created by this fiction, who, like Schreber's God, knows only cadavers, must disentangle himself from the murky, intertwining, daily behaviours, and make himself alien to them.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the 'bodies' of 'walkers' below:

follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read [...]. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each others' arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognised poems in which each body is an element signed by others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city, were characterized by blindness.<sup>3</sup>

'To walk' de Certeau notes, 'is to lack a place.'<sup>4</sup> The walker operates within a 'framework of enunciation' akin to speech and dreaming, and asserts a relational dynamic within the city through his or her movement through it, constituting: 'in relation to his position, both a near and a far, a *here* and a *there*'.<sup>5</sup> The act of walking in the city, he argues, ultimately

affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects [...] the trajectories it "speaks". All the modalities sing a part in this chorus, changing from step to step, stepping in through proportions, sequences and intensities, which vary according to the time, the path taken and the walker. These enunciations are of an unlimited diversity. They therefore cannot be reduced to their graphic trail.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall, California, University of California Press, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

I have found de Certeau's paradigm of 'voyeur-god' and 'blind walkers' of interest when considering the role of street-theatre in the city, and in particular when considering the practice of street-theatre performers operating in the UK today in urban spaces that have become increasingly policed and framed by surveillance from above in the form of Closed Circuit Television Systems (CCTV). The paradigm's organizing logic usefully expresses something of the dynamics of moving in the city where spaces are monitored through watching, and lends itself to wider thinking on social control and resistance. The way CCTV is organised, however, effectively presents a tension to de Certeau's model. The tension lies in the fact that with CCTV, the 'voyeur-god' or gods watching from above, are not set at such a great height that they can achieve full disassociation. Similarly, the walkers below are increasingly aware that their movements through the city are being watched, and therefore lose something of their 'blindness'. Through this the pleasure and freedoms of the city for both the watchers from above and the walkers below are reduced.



The viewing technology does not allow for a sweeping panorama, rather a fragmented and multiple viewing of human beings moving in the city who can be individualised and identified at close-range. This, paradoxically, both intensifies and undermines the 'fiction' that those below are 'other' from those who watch them from above. Walkers in the city are continually reminded that their movements, images and journeys are potentially being mapped from above; their 'pedestrian speech act' (which de Certeau notes is characterised by the present, the discrete and the phatic) disrupted and intruded upon by a technological 'elsewhere' beyond their body. Signs placed at eye-level such as the rather sarcastic and aggressive 'SMILE: You're on CCTV' (Transpennine Trains), to 'No Loitering' admonitions in shopping malls similarly interfere with the walker's inclination to speak and dream their way through the city lovingly, blind and at their own pace.



Whilst they continue as ‘a swarming mass’ whose ‘intertwined paths give [...] shape to spaces’, whose movements ‘weave places together’ give voice to and enunciate the fabric and texts of the city itself, the pedestrians’ appropriation of the topographical space is undertaken with an awareness or perception at some level that they are being constantly watched by invisible others.<sup>7</sup> This gives rise, as Jeremy Bentham notes in his writings on the Panopticon, to superstition – a fear of ghosts and God - to docility, disorientation and heightened self-consciousness or self-censoring.<sup>8</sup>

Considering de Certeau’s paradigm and UK cities today, I found myself asking to what extent street-performers interrupt the ‘voyeur-gods’ privilege of seeing from above, by introducing and then maintaining a ‘seeing’ space in (and as part of) the ‘blind’ poetry and rhythms of the street? Recognising that the street-performer invites passers-by to stop and watch, and introducing through our close and embodied proximity a ‘looking back’ at the audience in a horizontal exchange of gazes, I suggest that street-theatre potentially offers a challenge to the scopic and panoptic domination of being watched from above. At its most essential level, street-theatre asserts a space for human beings to look at each other, to establish, a ‘here and there’, a ‘near and far’ in relation to one another, to become aware of our own texts and presence in the moment, to touch, to enunciate and to weave something in the fabric of the city spontaneously. Much of street-theatre’s power comes from its itinerancy – performers arrive at their spot having walked through the city, and having appropriated a space to inhabit and perform something of the dreams of that moment or place. Street-performers are of, and from the streets, and the theatre conveys and illuminates something of the collective and indefinable shaping of the city we all make as we move through it.

The heightening of scopic conditions occasioned by the introduction of mass CCTV surveillance in UK city centres potentially disrupts and unbalances the conducive function of street-theatre as a visual medium, and has the capacity to trouble the passer-by with a reminder of their own performativity and watched status. In reminding the walker of the joys and tensions of loitering, in directing individual attention to the journey of the walker at street-level, and in creating nostalgia, the performer can unwittingly evoke ‘unheimlich’ associations in the space of the street, stirring up the fear of ghosts already set up by the panopticalised conditions. Towards the end of this paper, I will draw on an example from my own practice to further explore this notion of the ‘unheimlich’.<sup>9</sup> Street-performers have responded to the growth of CCTV surveillance in the UK in numerous ways, and there was a notable shift of aesthetic from the early ‘noughties’ onwards, with street theatre employing strategies of disappearance, stillness and silence in their performance. Many buskers, marked out a boundary for themselves in the space of the street with technological apparatus and occupied a loud, unyielding, aural presence that far outreached the presence of their physical bodies. This means that such buskers are often heard long before they are seen, and when one finally sees them, the performer is frequently set back at a distance from the passers-by fenced in by wires, amps, stands and microphones, sometimes playing the amp so loud it becomes hard to approach the space where their hat rests to drop a coin in it. One strategy of street performance has been to remove the visual focus on the performer’s body / image / voice and transfer emphasis through site-specific engagement to the spaces and movement of the street itself (essentially

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 97. See P. Lewis, ‘You’re Being Watched: There’s 1 CCTV Camera for Every 32 People in the UK’, *Guardian*, 2 March 2011, [website], <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/mar/02/cctv-cameras-watching-surveillance>, (accessed 3 April 2014).

<sup>8</sup> J. Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings*, London and New York, Verso, 1995. See ‘Introduction’, pp. 1-27.

<sup>9</sup> S. Freud, *The Uncanny*, London, Penguin, 1985.



inhabiting, and laying emphasis to the 'blind and opaque mobility of the bustling city' in ways that bypass or displace the scopic). Another strategy has been to heighten the individualised, static and pictorial quality of theatrical performance as a mirror to the current conditions of the street. Taking this latter example, I suggest that the rise in popularity of Living Sculpture as a street-theatre act has a relationship to panopticalised conditions, also to an imperative to shop that currently dominates city spaces.

I would like at this point to briefly introduce the notion of nostalgia and suggest that where costumed, clown or mask-based street-theatre is presented in the UK, nostalgia plays a big role in its formation and performing. Nostalgia in my work is related to a feminist interest in the power of song to connect back through genealogies of women, and to hold and pass on memories, resonances and values from lived experience. The characters represent a Clown mask of myself, but they are also sketched nostalgically on women I have known. These characters – and their costumes / props - frequently evoke memories or associations of women they have known to listeners. To discuss this further, I will give a brief overview of my street-theatre practice which is essentially rooted in busking, and to a lesser degree in the history of the 'poses plastiques' or life-modelling theatre.



The Singing Secretary, (Ocarina Nina Street-Theatre & Singing).



Fiona Folk



Christmas Carol (Ocarina Nina Street-Theatre & Singing)



The acts are singing walkabouts, with their own costumes, props and modus operandi, and work either as a straight busking number, or as a walkabout that interacts with festival goers working to a set approach.<sup>10</sup> Christmas Carol is a straight Christmas busking act. The Singing Secretary and Fiona Folk both work to an exchange that involves offering the punter a box of buttons, and asking them to choose a button they like. With The Singing Secretary they are asked to 'pop it in the box and I'll sing you a song!' (the 'box' in question is a travel bag). With Fiona Folk, they are invited to 'Feed a button to the hedgehog and I'll sing you a song!' and presented with a toy hedgehog sitting in a basket. The invitation to choose a button from a button box, also to draw near and look in the receptacle, is an invitation to share in both breath (or pause), and in nostalgia. The Singing Secretary's case is an old 1970s travel bag, with a satin red and gold interior, holding an old-fashioned red telephone with cord, a desk diary, a miniature fire extinguisher that squirts water and a toy parrot. Fiona Folk's basket contains the aforesaid button-munching toy hedgehog, flowers, a pack of playing cards with lucky heather on the front, ribbons and bows. Both receptacles frequently prompt storytelling, reminiscences, laughter and play from the punter even before the song has started, and thus is a rapport and exchange established which encourages further conversation after the song is finished.

There is a strong storytelling capacity within singing which connects very positively with audiences of all ages and backgrounds, and I draw on a repertoire of nearly 3,000 songs from all genres, sung acapella, most of which have meant something to me in my 41 years' history! The importance of nostalgia in busking lies in the capacity of song to effectively draw up the past and contain it in a way that is positive and healing. In his 1966 book, *Nostalgia: An Existential Exploration of Longing and Fulfillment in the Modern Age* Ralph Harper notes that there are:

inherent contradictions in nostalgia'... [It] combines bitterness and sweetness, the lost and the found, the far and the near, the new and the familiar, absence and presence. The past which is over and gone, from which we have been or are being removed, by some magic becomes present again for a short while. But its realness seems even more familiar, because renewed, than it ever was, more enchanting and more lovely.<sup>11</sup>

Thus busking – whether an audience are familiar with the song or not - frequently opens up the moment to the present. It grounds and centres performer and audience in that moment and space, and provides a strong anchor to the past in a way that eschews disconnection or forgetting. The act of singing an old song in different places and to new people, however, continually opens the song up to the present and invites the future in. Most buskers, myself included, will sing new and contemporary songs but there is always a through-line to older songs and sounds in our selection of material. The value of walkabout and offering a one-to-one or small-group acapella singing experience to the public in a festival or street space can usefully engender a culture of listening and breath in the exchange. Busking teaches that singing in the street – whether exchanged for a coin, button, cup of tea or smile, and whilst an important way of gaining money and sustenance in the short-term for many of us on a low income - largely relates to a gift-exchange economy. With regard

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<sup>10</sup> See Ocarina Nina Street-Theatre & Singing's blog page, [web-blog], 2014, <http://ocarinanina.blogspot.co.uk/>, (accessed 3 April 2014).

<sup>11</sup> R. Harper, *Nostalgia: An Existential Exploration of Longing and Fulfillment in the Modern Age*, USA, Western Reserve University, 1966, p. 120.

to connection, my own approach has been to offer the song and the singing as a gift in balance with the wider environment and needs of passers-by. This decision is at odds with the dominant Capitalist function of selling in British city centres, that relies on the purchase of a material product for which an exact predetermined price is demanded. My decision not to use amps or microphones with any of my street-theatre characters related in part to this gift-exchange. My feeling is that singing connects most strongly when people choose to hear a song, and come closer to listen. If someone does not want to hear a song, they are then free to pass on by without listening. In making a gesture of exchange through offering the button box, then inviting the listener in close by singing in a localised space free from technological amplification, I invite the hearer to share in a culture of breath; a culture that feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray notes as essential in rebalancing the individual with the natural world, and in centring someone within their own rhythms and sphere of autonomy:

We speak of elementary needs like the need to eat and to drink, but not of the need to breathe. That corresponds nevertheless to our first and most radical need. And we are not really born, not really autonomous or living as long as we do not take care, in a conscious and voluntary way, of our breathing [...]. Breathing in a conscious and free manner is equivalent to taking charge of one's own life, to accepting solitude through cutting the umbilical cord, to respecting and cultivating life for oneself and for others.<sup>12</sup>

In the early years of The Singing Secretary I was invited to perform in one-day festivals organised by towns and neighbourhoods within larger cities. Arriving at the destination and entering the town as a stranger frequently reinforced and evoked the itinerant and vagabond history of travelling artists; a history that has been marked variously by structures of inclusion (usually where commerce benefitted) and exclusion due to prejudice, xenophobia and fear. I would frequently travel by train to these festivals, and note with interest de Certeau's writing on the link between railway travel, the rationalization of panoptic power within the carriage, and the scopic domination of the land framed by the carriage window which nevertheless cannot totally contain or control the space for nostalgia and dreaming found in 'the chiasm [...] produced by the windowpane and the rail'<sup>13</sup>:

The window glass and the iron (rail) line divide, on the one hand, the traveller's [...] interiority and, on the other, the power of being, constituted as an object without discourse, the strength of an exterior silence. But paradoxically it is the silence of these things put at a distance, behind the windowpane, which from a great distance, makes our memories speak, or draws out of the shadows the dreams of our secrets. [...] Glass and iron produce speculative thinkers or gnostics. This cutting-off is necessary for the birth, outside of these things but not without them, of unknown landscapes and the strange fables of our private stories.<sup>14</sup>

It is this capacity of train travel to take us into a dreaming or thinking space that is disrupted when windows on the doors that release the dreamer have a sign placed, like a rude wake-up call, with the words 'Smile: You're on CCTV'. It is not insignificant that these are on the door, for the doors of the train are the portal to the city one is arriving at. The sign interrupts a visitor's visual encountering of the city and acts as a warning to any outsider that the urban space they are about to enter will not tolerate unruliness, drifting or dreaming. Despite this rather reductive and confrontational welcome,

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<sup>12</sup> L. Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, trans. S. Pluháček, Delhi, New India Books, 2005, p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> de Certeau, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>14</sup> *Loc. cit.*



The Singing Secretary has always, found that the essential character of its town and its peoples are expressed strongly when one engages in singing exchange within its environs. In many ways the character acts as a 'litmus test' or 'barometer' that tests the measure of a community through breath and song. It is nevertheless, I have discovered, important for the character to disappear from the town by the end of the day, thus allowing the dreams, stories and nostalgia stirred up by the activity to settle.

Fiona Folk is a little different. She essentially conforms to an art-historical and theatrical tradition of performing the itinerant hawker and musician in the urban space, and sits within a history that is rarely noted in discussions of English street-theatre *vis-a-vis* the pictorial history of the London Cries. Originating in Paris, France in the early 1500s, and lasting as a genre until the early C20th, Nuremberg, Vienna, London, Boston, Philadelphia and New York all had their own version of the Cries, initially carved in wood, and then by woodblock printing on paper and sometimes silk. As Sean Shesgreen notes, the Cries were inherently linked, from the outset, to nostalgia:

Spelled with a capital 'C' to distinguish vendors' likenesses from their yells, the metaphorical term 'Cries' identifies storied images that represent sounds silently. Sounds and voices that in life were common, vulgar, transgressive, even threatening, socially and politically. [...] The very first set [...] marked the beginning of a tradition of images depicting peddlers, not as clowns or louts, but as dignified city labourers. [...] Established as a genre by 1550, Cries pictured what was local about this or that city, just when those places looked ever more alike to nostalgic beholders. They sold to urban buyers interested not only in the human landscape of the city, but also in how society organized itself and represented that organization in art.<sup>15</sup>



<sup>15</sup> S. Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast: The Urban Poor in the Cries of London*, Manchester, University of Manchester Press, 2002, p. 2.





Though static as objects, the Cries captured the gestural language of the vendors, representing it as large and persuasive. Shesgreen again:

Every article from sausages to marking-stones is exhibited by a showy, insistent, gesture. This speech of the limbs, and especially of the hands, integral to the artisanal culture of peddlers, invited intervention. Unlike the contained, self-referential manners of 'the Quality', it was active, productive, and aimed at others.<sup>16</sup>

Travelling musician, clowns, jesters, dancers and actors gradually made their way into the London Cries, notably enjoying a boom during the 1640s and 1650s, the era of the English Revolution, when many theatres and musicians not dedicating their art to the furthering of Puritan ideas were closed down. Despite their appearance in art, and the high status value placed on images of musicians, actors and peddlers bought by the middle classes, this did not equate to an unqualified acceptance of them in the city spaces. Their status was highest in the C16th and C17th, but reached an all-time low during the C19th, and at all times there are accounts of travelling peddlers and musicians being physically assaulted or receiving punishments through the Courts for the simple act of following their art and moving from place to place.

This history has implications for street artists today, and it is perhaps not surprising that in an era of increasing scopic control in UK cities, that the pictorial history of the itinerant performer or musician –with all the uncertainty and changing fortunes that that history carries - should assert itself, as I suggest it has done through the growth of Living Sculpture. Figured here are two Living Sculpture artists whom I photographed performing at Covent Garden last month.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



Plastered in thick gold paint, the first (pictured left) played to the inherently technologised, economic and scopic conditions of the street, waving his arms in excessive gestures, beckoning people with children to him and miming the gesture of taking a photo of himself with a mobile phone. Family after family rushed to meet the beckon, and stood for a brief ten seconds taking photos dropping coins in his bucket before being airily waved on. Next to him, a little way up the street was this pirate character (pictured right). He stood resolutely still. People kept some way back from him, daring themselves to approach and drop coins in his tankard. When they had done so, he continued to stand, frozen and staring. When one got close, it became apparent that the mask the performer was wearing was set so far in front of the face, it was not possible to see the performer's eyes through the slits. Instead, the figure stood, spectral, hollow-eyed and quietly menacing, making no gesture of interaction or response. The quiet, steady breathing were the only indicator of life, and the punters having dared themselves to get close, screamed and retreated all the more quickly when the figure literally did nothing but continue to stand his ground. Their performances, whilst compelling, were resolutely tied to a commercial agenda, and to a singular and unyielding model of mechanical repetition. The performances were swiftly consumed and dispensed with on the part of passers-by, whilst demanding a challenging – almost excruciating - level of endurance from the performers. There is nevertheless a strong market for Living Sculpture existing in the Capital, and it is the form of theatre that appears to be most comfortable to local authorities, being relatively easy to contain, manage and see.

By contrast, street musicians and buskers are increasingly dealing with changes in the law that threaten to make the simple act of public singing with its gift-exchange economy an illegal offence. The imposition of £1,000 fines for anyone busking without a license in Camden, London in October

2013 brought a wave of protests from musicians, many of whom had for years been encouraged by local authorities and the tourist boards to play in the areas to boost its 'cool', 'street' image.<sup>17</sup> This distressing move against street musicians, and the criminalisation of artists who until very recently were viewed as positive contributors to the cultural and social economy of the city, is a logical extension of a surveillance society whose values are shaped by neoliberal and entrepreneurial political agendas, as Roy Coleman notes:

What is most obvious and yet often unacknowledged is that cameras overwhelmingly focus on the street and 'street people', [...] Street camera surveillance disproportionately surveys and casts suspicion on the poor in the spaces of the city.[...] Normative processes are manifest in the discursive exchanges between public and private police and are integral parts of the low-level social ordering activities that construct and demarcate 'responsible' and 'irresponsible' uses of city centre space. [...] As surveillance cameras routinely monitor the street prohibitions of the neoliberal city, they also reinforce the moral codes, intolerances and normative prescriptions of its creators. Paradoxical as it may seem, for all the talk of cultural celebration, and putting 'culture' at the centre of current urban renaissance drives, certain forms of culture are increasingly being subject to oppressive monitoring and curtailment.<sup>18</sup>

Recognising this, the Association of Street Performers and Artists issued the following statement on values:

Public spaces should be places of *spontaneity* which allow for *serendipitous* experiences, in which a sense of urban *community* prevails. To that end, *consideration* and *compromise* are right at the heart of our values as an organization. Because all humans possess an inherent dignity, each of us are worthy of being treated with *consideration* in our own right as persons, regardless of our views or affiliations.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Press Association, 'High Court Upholds Camden Busking Restrictions', *Guardian*, 11 March 2014, [Website], <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/mar/11/high-court-upholds-camden-busking-restrictions>, (accessed 3 April 2014). See also the Keep Streets Live Campaign - <http://keepstreetslive.com/>, (accessed 3 April 2014).

<sup>18</sup> R. Coleman, *Reclaiming the Streets: Surveillance, Social Control and the City*, Devon, USA and Canada, Willan Publishing, 2004, p. 228.

<sup>19</sup> Association of Street Performers and Artists, [website], <http://streetslive.org/>, (accessed 3 April 2014).



I conclude this paper with a story of performance failure – more specifically perhaps, a story of poetic failure, and in doing so return to my observation that street-performers and buskers can often provoke ‘unheimlich’ or uncanny conditions and an uneasy nostalgia in the city space. I have no problem with acknowledging my moment of poetic and performative failure, concurring with Sara Jane Bailes’ observation that:

The discourse of failure [...] undermines the perceived stability of mainstream capitalist ideology’s preferred aspiration to achieve, succeed, or win [...]. Failure challenges the cultural dominance of instrumental rationality and the fictions of continuity that bind the way we imagine and manufacture the world. [...] Failure *works*. Which is to say that although ostensibly it signals the breakdown of an aspiration, or an agreed demand, breakdown indexes an alternative route or way of doing or making. In its status as ‘wrongdoing’, a failed objective establishes an aperture, an opening onto several (and often many) other ways of doing that counter the authority of a singular or ‘correct’ outcome.<sup>20</sup>

So my performative failure was this. It was two days before Christmas just gone (Christmas 2013) and I volunteered to perform the Christmas Carol busking act at a local bus station as part of their fundraising drive to raise money for a charity. A bus station attendant was assisting me in collecting money and after I had sung to one group of bus passengers, he urged me to come over to another group of thirty or so people, all standing waiting for the bus, who he said had given very generously whilst I was singing to another group. So I came over to the group, thanked them for contributing and proceeded to sing *Twelve Days of Christmas* for them thinking it to be a good collective sing-along-number. The bus attendant was happily joining in with the song, but by the second verse it was apparent that none of the gathered audience were inclined or willing to participate in any shape or form with singing along, smiling or even moving to the song. Instead they stood in a quiet neutral, looking straight at us as we sang. Now I kept singing with gusto, and my bus station colleague tried to rouse them to participate but the passengers just continued mildly staring ahead. I began to wonder by verse five whether I should continue, but reasoned that it was not a song that can easily be stopped. It is usual in festival and street arts to judge the moment – if people are clearly bored, disengaged, embarrassed or abusive, it is acceptable (even advisable) just to end the song and walk elsewhere, but this was not the case. The audience just continued quietly watching and listening in a state of uncertainty and acceptance. By verse seven, my colleague had given up trying to cajole the audience and instead happily hummed and danced along with the singing.

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<sup>20</sup> S.J. Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*, Oxon, USA and Canada, Routledge, 2011, p. 3.



Looking back at the audience, I became aware that they had all gradually moved a position of what in theatre we would call 'point zero' neutral. Hands were held by their side, eyes front and their faces wore the same expressionless masks. It was like looking at a Chorus in a Greek Tragedy. I was a little troubled by the homogeneity of the response so I decided to give over to the frame of the song and let that dictate the direction of the performance. I continued to the final 'partridge in a pear treeeeee!', supported with a final flourish from the bus station attendant inviting applause. There was none. Just a quiet, neutral, acceptance that a song had been sung, and was now over. The response was peculiar. For the first time ever as a performer, I found it hard to read the emotional register of my audience. For the first time ever I faced an audience of over 30 people in a public space who collectively registered a dominant emotion of vaguely polite neutrality and made not one gesture to indicate any other emotion or response to the performance either way. As my colleague and I walked away to the far end of the bus station, he asked:

What happened there?' WHAT was that?! Why did none of them join in? Did you see the way they just stood there? All standing in the same way? Spooky! They gave loads of money too! I thought they'd like a song. But the thing is, I think they liked it!

I must admit, I had to agree. Or perhaps some liked it a little, some not a little. The collective performance of neutrality from the individuals gathered; the clear commitment to making no gesture or expression of emotion, nor intervention to either support or stop the performance - ultimately the apparent lack of inclination to change the direction of or put oneself into the scene or exchange in any individual shape or form, was the most peculiar feature of all.

Pondering this curious exchange – this strange performative failure – the word 'unheimlich' wriggled its way to me through the 'aperture'. This was the word I had been looking for, and my colleague had got the same thing. The moment was 'unheimlich', uncanny, ghostly. In his treatise on *The Uncanny*, Freud notes that the origin and roots of the word 'unheimlich' (uncanny or unhomey) lay in its opposite –'heimlich' meaning 'homely'.<sup>21</sup> The things we fear have their strongest root in that which it already knows. I have no definite analysis as yet of this situation, but my inclination is to view the group's response as the logical response of a society that is progressively governed by scopical and technological forces to the point where our physical, gestural and vocal spontaneity in public is reduced to being expressed as a polite neutrality.

I do not have the answers for some of these conundrums, merely share them with you as a point for reflection and consideration as to the performative conditions of the street in the UK at this time. I will conclude however with some thoughts from de Certeau on delinquency:

If the delinquent exists only by displacing itself, if its specific mark is to live not on the margins but in the interstices of the codes that it undoes and displaces, if it is characterized by the privilege of the *tour* over the *state*, then the story is delinquent. Social delinquency consists in taking the story literally, in making it the principle of physical existence where a society no longer offers to its subjects or groups symbolic outlets or expectations of spaces [...] in any event, one can already say that in matters concerning space, this delinquency begins with the inscription of the body in the order's text. The opacity of the body in movement, gesticulating, walking, taking its pleasure, is what indefinitely organizes a *here* in

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<sup>21</sup> Freud, op. cit.

relation to an *abroad*, a 'familiarity' in relation to a 'foreignness' [...] in this focalizing enunciation, space appears once more as a practiced place.<sup>22</sup>

I suggest that street-performers, particularly buskers, bring breath and a necessary 'delinquency' to the 'practiced place' of the street. I conclude that in the current surveillance climate of the UK, the singing, busking, loitering, gesticulating, performing body must resist marginalisation, challenge its ghosts, and continue to 'inscribe itself into the interstices of the codes' of the urban space it both 'undoes and displaces'.

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<sup>22</sup> de Certeau, op. cit., p. 130.

