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In order to combat the social alienation of people with learning disabilities, applied practice in this field is frequently directed towards performance, partly recognising that marginalisation extends to their exclusion from the stage itself, and partly to establish a communicative space where people with learning disabilities and non-disabled people can meet on something approaching equal terms. This latter point also informs the artistic process with non-disabled artists usually integrated with learning disabled artists in the creation of performance. Heavy Load is a band from Brighton consisting of members 'with and without learning disabilities' that draws on the theatrical constructions and posturing of the punk tradition. In this article, I will consider how punk aesthetics are both adopted and negotiated in order to produce meaning at the local and immediate level.

Such adoption and negotiation is more fundamental to applied theatre practice than mainstream performance as it must attend in a detailed and intricate way with the particular lives and contexts it is engaged with. My reflection on Heavy Load is based on two consequent observations about the role of aesthetics in applied theatre. The first is that meaning in applied theatre is carried as much in the aesthetic components of form and structure as it is in content, because the participant here occupies a wholly experiential position inside the creative project rather than the traditional, decoding relationship of the spectator. For many learning disabled performers - including those in Heavy Load - the applied dimension of the work means that they occupy a dual role of participant and practitioner. The second is that this aesthetic dimension is not necessarily contained within the immediate and local, but also a source of diachronic associations. Punk exemplifies this in two ways. It has strong historical and geographical associations in itself which perpetuate a mythological punk identity. It also declares itself as an anti-aesthetic, necessitating a relationship to other aesthetic forms that is both oppositional and contingent. My study of Heavy Load is therefore a consideration of the ways in which aesthetic choices can inform, support and threaten applied theatre practice and the necessity of re-imagining artistic practice in such contexts.

Oliver Double (2007, p.47) suggests that punk combines political opposition with theatrical tactics when he notes that it puts 'ideas from the avant garde into a popular theatrical form.' While the avant garde is a broad church, Graver (1995, p.6) argues that it has most 'conceptual clarity' when it incorporates 'pronounced sociopolitical programs that...challenge the hegemony of the dominant culture.' Punk's hegemonic challenge involves a defiant attitude, real and assumed moral transgression and the anarchic refusal of dominant values. This finds expression in an anti-aesthetic which rejects the values masked by institutionalised codes of art, such as ornamentation, virtuosity and conventional notions of beauty. The anti-aesthetic traits of this movement include the comic framing of deviance, a vacant response to social orthodoxy and the detournment of texts and images in order to destabilise moral sensibilities. Of added interest to Heavy Load, it also utilises a model of learning disability.

The popular theatrical form that Double identifies draws most potently from music hall, as Ruth Adams recognises, and positions punk as 'operating outside the "legitimate theatre" and characterized by clownish outfits, silly walks, smutty jokes, and cocking a snook at the Establishment' (Adams, 2008, p.470). In occupying this illegitimate space, punk claims the freedom to reject aesthetic structures and rebuild them, but does so in a way that liberates populist accessibility from the elitist control of the Establishment. These aesthetic structures, as Adams

suggests, extend beyond music into a theatrical range incorporating costume, physicality, and humour. The back-to-basics accessibility also makes it a relevant and attractive form for learning disabled performers. Heavy Load's own socio-cultural intervention, descending from punk ancestry, is much more specific than punk's wholesale anarchy, in its contemporaneity, its constituency of people with learning disabilities and in the repositioning of their relationship to wider society.

Heavy Load's "rise to notoriety" (Heavy Load, no date) has accelerated in recent years following the completion of two albums (*The Queen Mother's Dead* and *Shut It*), increased presence on the Music Festival circuit and featuring as the eponymous subject of Jerry Rothwell's documentary. It consists of five members: Simon Barker (vocals), Jimmy Nichols (guitar and vocals) and Michael White (drums) all have learning disabilities, whilst Paul Richards (bass) and Mick Williams (guitar and vocals) are non-disabled. Formed in Brighton in 1996, the band met when the members were either tenants or workers at Southdown Housing, and describes itself as:

subject to the combustible flux of ego, ambition, fantasy, expectation and desire that fuels any emerging band. But they're also uniquely, made up of musicians with and without learning disabilities.

(Heavy Load, no date)

Inherent in its own description is a dual emphasis on what connects it to, and what distinguishes it from, 'any emerging band', marking points of affinity with the mainstream whilst emphasising a significant point of departure. The affinities suggest that, as yet, the band's vision is unrealised: 'ambition, fantasy, expectation and desire' all hint at future fulfilment rather than existing currency.

The point of departure, resting on the integrated membership of learning disabled and non-disabled performers, carries associations that seem out of step with popular expectations of rock performers. People with learning disabilities are often linked to concerns around vulnerability, dependency and social care whereas rock stars are more frequently associated with excess, rebellion and glamour.

Just as punk yoked avant garde innovation to a populist music hall tradition, by defining learning disabled artists in mainstream terms the band places something strange in the centre of familiar surroundings. This proximity of the familiar and the strange is reflected aesthetically on *The Queen Mother's Dead*. Cover versions of pop songs (*I Can't Get You Out Of My Head*, *Be-Bop-A-Lula*, *I See You Baby*) reinterpreted as raw punk tunes both affirm and dislocate the audience's sense of familiarity.

Another dimension of the familiar and the strange emerges in Rothwell's documentary centring on a discrepancy in autonomy in the daily lives of the disabled and non-disabled band members. At one point in the film, learning disabled drummer Michael White wants to move to Newcastle-upon-Tyne after passing through the city on the way to a gig. This ambition is brought to his formal review meeting and discussed by his family, his support worker and others involved in his care, and, for the reason that he knows no-one in Newcastle, it is settled that the council cannot support or facilitate the move. By contrast, midway through the film, Mick Williams calls a band meeting to announce he, his partner and young family have decided to move to France.

White also laments the lack of opportunity to go out to nightclubs where he can meet women and fulfil another desire: to be in a relationship. Lead singer Simon Barker is in a relationship but the narration implies that this is carefully overseen by his support staff, to the

extent that dates with his partner are contingent on pre-arrangement by the manager of his sheltered housing. The combined impression of White's and Barker's experiences is that learning disabled sexuality is guarded, regulated and unfulfilled. Williams and Richards, on the other hand, are both presented as happily settled with long-term partners and young families.

From a non-disabled perspective – the perspective of the majority – it is the autonomy of the non-disabled members that is most familiar. The disempowerment of the learning disabled artists is not strange in itself, as it too is a familiar narrative, but there is a different intensity of familiarity. In Boalian terms, the non-disabled audience shares a process of 'identification' with the autonomy of the non-disabled band members, which reflects their 'own sensibility rather than just the approximate knowledge she may have of another person's sensibility' (Boal, 1995, p.68). The familiarity with learning disabled disempowerment is likely to be 'recognition', which is more distant because it is 'mobilised by her knowledge of an 'other'...whom she knows well' but does not share the situation of (Boal, 1995, p.69). This marks the question of autonomy as a persistent point of estrangement between disabled and non-disabled people, and establishes the context for Heavy Load's intervention. It also suggests that the learning disabled artists in the band have more to prove and further to travel if they are to fulfil their ambitions, fantasies, expectations and desires.

Heavy Load does not address such questions explicitly. Bass player Paul Richards explains 'we could have started writing songs about disabled rights, but it was nothing any of us talked about' (personal interview, 5th September 2009). Instead, the intervention is made in the band's own structures and established in the aesthetic domain through the adoption of punk theatricality. Even this adoption is instrumental in challenging the conventional disempowerment of learning disabled people, as aesthetic choice is not imposed by the non-disabled performers but emerges from the 'combustible flux of ego' with all members contributing equally. Richards explains that 'punk was the default noise that came out when we started playing together' (personal correspondence by e-mail, 26th August 2009).

The possibility of music as a 'default noise' is permitted through punk's operation as an anti-aesthetic, resisting or denouncing the conventional expectations of 'art' and demanding new forms to replace them. Simonelli (2002, p.127) recognises a strand of punk in which 'amateurism was a virtue' as one which creates entrances into the world of performance for those who might otherwise be excluded 'since anybody could be incompetent on an instrument.' The punk anti-aesthetic accordingly embraces what is simple, direct and immediate, and celebrates energy and volume over intricacy and sophistication. This is based, in Johnny Rotten's explanation, on a challenge to cultural thinking that is institutionalised through formal education. In 1976 he commented '[e]veryone is so fed up with the old way. We are constantly being dictated to by musical old farts out of university who've got rich parents' (Luerssen, 2009, p.20) and the following year added 'You don't need a music degree or twenty A levels or a far-out musical university' (Luerssen, 2009, p.62). The 'old way' places aesthetic determination in the hands of an outmoded elite which renders it irrelevant to the mainstream population. For those who are alienated from formal education at advanced or undergraduate level – which is near enough the entire community of people with learning disabilities – punk's anti-aesthetic makes artistic participation and recognition more widely available. For Heavy Load, this accessibility sees punk offer a viable means of realising its ambitions.

The shared autonomy extends to the choice of subject, with the lyrical content of the songs drawing primarily from the band's conversations, especially those of frontman Simon Barker. This has resulted in comic songs that both satirise and celebrate contemporary everyday culture, a

tactic of punk and its antecedent music hall. In Heavy Load's case the subject is often media and celebrity. The album *Shut It* includes song about Eastenders characters and Top of the Pops. Other songs have lyrics such as 'Is Bruce Forsyth dead? He's looking very old' and 'We love George Michael, 'cause he's gay at weekends, gay in the week' (Heavy Load, 2008b). This autonomy of composition leads the band towards subjects that have instinctive relevance for them and, in placing them inside a populist tradition, presumes a shared relevance for the audience.

The commitment to redressing autonomy also informs the artistic work in ways that defy conventional expectations of performance. In the documentary, guitarist Mick Williams describes Michael White as 'the backbone of Heavy Load, whether that's fast and energetic or sometimes falling apart' (*Heavy Load*, 2008a) and in performance White spontaneously speeds up and slows down the rhythms with the rest of the band following his lead. Barker matches White's rhythmic autonomy with a lyrical autonomy that sees him randomly drop lines from one song into the middle of another, discarding the expectation that songs form neatly self-contained units.

The anti-aesthetic at play in Heavy Load then rejects neat categorisations and expectations that are inscribed in dominant structures. Punk's wider assault on conventional thinking formed part of a general project, named by The Sex Pistols as anarchy, that shattered existing artistic conventions in order to prepare the 'active construction of new social and aesthetic modes of being' (Adams, 2008, p.472). By wrapping its provocation in an anti-aesthetic, Heavy Load intervenes in social and aesthetic modes that delimit the autonomy and authorise the intellectual exclusion of people with learning disabilities and suggests that what takes place on stage presents a potential model for social development offstage. The particular interplay with punk theatricality offers further opportunities to reflect on and respond to the socially marginalised position of people with learning disabilities, not least because an impression of learning disabled identity had already been placed inside this particular anti-aesthetic.

Sean Albiez (2003, p.366) cites an incident where Rotten had fallen foul of Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren for 'flaunting his good taste and relatively sophisticated cultural capital in public' (2003, p.366). Rotten's response exposes this part of the construction of The Sex Pistols' identity: 'it seemed to mean that if I liked records that I couldn't be half as ignorant, *moronic* [my emphasis], violent, destructive etc. as they wanted to promote me as' (cited in Albiez, 2003, p.366). 'Moronic' originated as a term of classification for people with mild learning disabilities, a connotation which would have been more readily available in the 1970s. It was applied again to The Sex Pistols in Susan Compo's review of Sid Vicious, whose 'moronically comical yet threatening behaviour makes up for his fourth-rate playing' (Luerssen, 2009, p.157). The 'moronic' stereotype is clownish in the music hall tradition, constructed through quirky physicality, exaggerated facial expressions, linguistic simplicity and a playful spirit of social impropriety. It is also adopted lyrically in the song *Pretty Vacant*. 'Vacant' itself carries colloquial overtones of learning disability, reinforced by other slang lyrics for intellectual impairment such as 'you'll always find us out to lunch' and 'we're not all there' (Sex Pistols, 1996).

Vacancy informs punk's anti-aesthetic stance by enacting a response to social orthodoxy in which, Dick Hebdige observes, 'alienation...gave itself up to the cameras in 'blankness', the removal of expression' (Hebdige, 1979, p.28). Such blankness confronts prevalent codes and values with a mixture of disengagement and incomprehension that empties them of authority. Challenging dominant values through a vacuous response reflects the avant-garde political strategies of the expressionists and futurists as outlined by Graver insofar as 'their work often focuses more on criticizing the status quo than on delineating a future utopia' (Graver, 1995, p.7).

Hebdige notes similarly that punk's challenge to dominant values is not built on an alternative vision but the demolition of existing institutions when he writes that punk adherents 'had an alibi, an elsewhere... But paradoxically ... this 'elsewhere' was also a nowhere – a twilight zone – a zone constituted out of negativity' (Hebdige, 1979, p.65).

Learning disability can be seen as offering punk a contemporaneous model for the 'nowhere' and 'blankness' that Hebdige identifies. In the 1970s, following a series of scandals, the large long-stay institutions that had contained people with learning disabilities for decades were beginning to close, and people were returning to their communities (see Ryan, 1987). These places were isolated and closed sites of exclusion that operated outside of cultural and social hegemony. For people with learning disabilities, the return to mainstream society was a source of incomprehension as they encountered values and codes they had been genuinely alienated from. The long-stay institutions were themselves an elsewhere-that-is-nowhere and so society's reunion with the puzzled inhabitants from an impossible world presented a 'blankness' that may well have inspired the punk construction.

While learning disability can be appropriated to signify a socially-alienated vacancy, it is not culturally neutral and the punk anti-aesthetic can also explore and reposition the values attached to it. The twilight zone, having stripped dominant values of their presumed potency, opens a space in which new modes of being can be tested and imagined without stability or commitment. The invocation of learning disability inside the anti-aesthetic offers opportunities to examine two sets of values, one social and one aesthetic. The first is a challenge to questions of morality, a central component of punk mythology. The second follows on from the first, and is a revisiting of aesthetic notions revolving around the symbolic functions of disability, and its relationship to beauty, ugliness, good and evil. When Heavy Load adopts the punk anti-aesthetic, the interventions into specific social contexts are already informed by such associations embedded within this particular form. The negotiation and interplay between these positions determine the strategic challenge to dominant values.

The mythology of punk is based in large part, according to Sean Albiez, on 'popular memories of media-fuelled moral panics' (Albiez, 2003, p.360). It is in the transgression of both social and aesthetic propriety that punk occasioned moral panic, whether that involved swearing during early evening live television or wearing safety pins as jewellery. Such theatrical elements of punk theatre were experienced as aggressive in ways that were understood as much as a threat as a provocation. This was accentuated by placing these strange new modes in the familiar territory of the King's Road, denying witnesses a frame which marks it as performance.

The instances of appropriated 'moronic' behaviour outlined above also contribute to the moral panic occasioned by punk anti-aesthetics. In Rotten's terms, his persona combines learning disability with violence and destruction, while Compo acknowledges the threatening dimension of Vicious' performed moronism. These associations are not invented by The Sex Pistols, but reference an existing mythology of learning disability.

Joanna Ryan draws attention to 'Howe's speculations on the origins of idiocy' in 1848 which considered learning disability to be a 'punishment for sins' (Ryan, 1987, p.103). This theme was expanded on by a sequence of educationalists and doctors until people with learning disabilities

came to be regarded as both the result, and increasingly the bearers, of all kinds of social degeneration: alcoholism, masturbation, poverty, thieving, illegitimacy etc. By the early twentieth century it was to be society itself rather than the individual idiot which needed freeing from the degradations of idiocy.

(Ryan, 1987, p.106)

While punk engineers a performance of moral transgression in order to threaten dominant values, this same association has been involuntarily imposed on the learning disabled community. The incarceration in long-stay hospitals was partly justified on the basis of the need for the moral protection of people with learning disabilities themselves and to contain their implicit threat to wider society.

The moral panic associated with punk is reflected in the anti-aesthetic structure which, by replacing intricate melody and sophisticated virtuosity with raw energy, pace and volume, is intended and received as a violent assault on form that is equally transgressive. The connotations of moral deviance are so inscribed in punk at mythological and artistic levels that they are difficult, if not impossible, for Heavy Load to escape and the band responds explicitly and implicitly throughout its work.

The most overtly interventionist element of Heavy Load's work is the Stay Up Late Campaign which emerged from the recognition that many of the learning disabled audience members were forced to leave gigs early when the support workers needed to change shifts. Williams elaborates that the campaign is driven by 'helping people to live a normal life. You know, go out, have fun, get pissed, get shagged' (*Heavy Load*, 2008a). The references to alcohol and sexuality in this observation recall the moral anxieties that Ryan identifies as historically prevalent, suggesting that such concerns are partially responsible for the curfew. The same sense of moral guardianship hovers around the administrative overseeing of Barker's personal relationship mentioned above.

Paul Richards notes that the Stay Up Late campaign addresses 'a real issue that everyone was annoyed about' (personal interview, 5th September 2009). Mick Williams adds that the tactics are encouraging rather than confrontational:

I always think we've always been quite polite about changing things...The guys [with learning disabilities] still have support needs, they still have staff...you want everyone to get on your side rather than getting up on stage and saying 'things have got to change now or we're going to rip the place apart'

(personal interview, 5th September 2009)

The intervention into moral anxieties that place restrictions on people with learning disabilities is dependent on a process of engagement rather than alienation, and Heavy Load needs to moderate the mythology of punk panic in order to achieve this. The campaign itself, as portrayed in the documentary, is orchestrated through conventional presentations and dialogue with relevant parties as well as promoted through the performances. Within its theatrical presentation, where a punk anti-aesthetic might be expected to hurl abuse at the audience, Heavy Load hurls beach balls instead, drawing people inside a playful relationship with the performance and foregrounding an often overlooked sense of fun which Sid Vicious once claimed 'was the whole thing about the Pistols from the very beginning' (Luerksen, 2009, p.133). Filling the aesthetic space with fun assists the performers in building positive relationships that can support their intervention, while it also loosens the moral shackles placed around learning disabled people. Williams inclusion of 'have fun' in the purpose of the Stay Up Late campaign implies that it too is restricted and, if not immoral in its own right, provides a qualifying characteristic of immoral behaviour. Inviting fun in this context signals a covert invitation to transgress moral boundaries.

Even with the distraction of beach balls, the mythological associations of moral panic are too ingrained in the anti-aesthetic to be wholly escaped, and in Rothwell's documentary the moral

complexities are not glossed over or idealised. Barker, as the frontman of the band, most markedly embodies the punk persona of moral transgressor through the persistent and deliberate stream of swearing so elemental in the original anti-aesthetic. Following a performance at the Wychwood Festival, the camera follows Barker and his support worker on a walkabout and captures an exchange with a group of young women. Barker's comments include 'I'd kiss her on the backside. [To his support worker] You dance with that one over there. Do you fancy her?' (*Heavy Load*, 2008a). Such sexually inappropriate remarks provoke moral discomfort because, regardless of his learning disability, Barker's gender and age affords him power over the much younger women. In watching the episode unfold, the audience becomes reliant on the vigilant – and uncomfortably silent – support worker to reassure us that Barker's verbal transgressions will not escalate to physical ones. The fear we are confronted with is that learning disability may impede the ability to be morally responsible if freed from its institutional guardians.

The context therefore exposes the difficulty that the current safeguarding of learning disabled morality is unsatisfactory because it limits personal freedoms and rights, yet its possible removal raises questions about moral responsibility. In response to these questions, *Heavy Load* re-enacts the anti-aesthetic mode of 'blankness' and leaves a vacancy where moral responsibility conventionally lies. As in punk's construction, the blank attitude is a defiant one and Williams identifies a complementary stance – named by Hebdige (1979, p.28) as 'the refusal to speak and be positioned' – when he says 'I don't think you need to say a great deal, just being up on stage with everyone and having loads of attitude about who we are and not making any excuses' (personal interview, 5th September 2009). When 'who we are' includes latent or manifest moral transgressions accompanied by a blank refusal of responsibility for them, the space is reopened in which moral law and its implementation is presented back to society as lacking and in need of reconsideration.

Within this anti-aesthetic space, punk has already subverted these moral definitions. Simonelli notes that punk detourns 'traditional symbols of deviance such as the swastika or fetishist clothing' (Simonelli, 2002, p.125) adopting images and texts that are avowedly degenerate as far as cultural hegemony is concerned and then rejecting the values conventionally attached to them. Through dissociating the image from its dominant socio-cultural understanding, punk attempted to destabilise the hegemonic value system. The images chosen were not always as controversial as Nazi iconography. Disability has also been a longstanding symbol of deviance through theatrical and other representations and punk was more than willing to incorporate it in the process of detournment.

In a review of a 1977 Sex Pistols' performance, Jon Savage described the stage persona of Johnny Rotten as 'a spastic pantomime villain, with evil for real' (Luerssen, 2009, p.51). The noted influences on this 'spastic' characterisation are drawn from real and fictional disabled sources. Oliver Double (2007, p.38) observes that the disabled singer Ian Dury recognised Rotten's performances as imitations of his own physical stage actions, and Double adds that 'more surprisingly, [Rotten] also names Laurence Olivier's Richard III as an important influence.'

In borrowing such imagery, The Sex Pistols intervenes directly into conventional notions of beauty and the values assigned to them. Jenny Morris exposes such values by extending a feminist perspective to the representation of disability when she writes '[t]o be considered beautiful is to give value to the absence of physical 'impairment' ... Just as beauty – and goodness – are defined by the absence of disability, so ugliness – and evil – are defined by its presence' (Morris, 1991, p.21). The cultural signification of 'evil' through a hunchback, a limp, facial disfigurement and scarring or other physical impairment is well known, including Shakespeare's /

Olivier's presentation of Richard III.

Embedded in Savage's review is a distinction between the fallacy through which disability symbolises evil and 'evil for real'. In holding a sense of pretend evil close to a suggestion of actual evil, Rotten unsettles the certainty of attaching authenticity, and therefore judgement, to either. By laying a parodic impersonation of disability over his own non-disabled body, he further complicates the network of relationships between the real, the symbol and the symbolised to the degree that equations between good, ugliness, evil and beauty become irreducibly confused. Where Simonelli contends that 'like the Russian futurists, punks espoused ugliness' (2002, p.125) I would argue rather that they explode accepted distinctions between beauty and ugliness as institutionally or culturally determined.

As Rotten has done here with physical disability, Vicious' impersonation of 'moronic' behaviour detourns learning disability. In combining the comical and threatening, the same confused relationship between pantomimic villainy and an authentic one is established. Those concerns raised and feared by Howe and his successors are now celebrated by Vicious, whose own addictive and sexual transgressions promote their own mythology. Furthermore, Compo finds the artistic merit of his performance to exist in this theatrical construction as opposed to his musical ineptitude, lending the learning disabled presence a cultural value and significance that it is conventionally denied.

Heavy Load consequently inherits a form already structured to dismantle prevailing values through detournment, blankness and the confusion of real and symbolic violence. The performers' identities as learning disabled artists have been appropriated in this cause, which, alongside other mythological associations of punk, is ingrained in the anti-aesthetic. At the same time, Heavy Load is more focussed on an interventionist response to its own specific circumstances than the anarchic destabilising of all hegemonic values: the learning disability here is not parodied or impersonated but real, just as their social marginalisation locates them in a genuine rather than performed elsewhere-that-is-nowhere.

In this respect, there are two crucial distinctions worth noting between punk's socio-political intervention and the one sought by Heavy Load. First, where punk builds a mythological space in which it can assume alienation in order to refuse hegemony, such alienation is an imposed and institutionalised position for learning disabled people that is beyond refusal and consequently a site of disempowerment. Second, with the exception of blankness where moral responsibility conventionally lies, Heavy Load is more interested in delineating a future utopia than punk is, and its 'ambition, fantasy, expectation and desire' is a movement towards a known place rather than a twilight zone constituted out of negativity. That place is a version of the mainstream in which people with learning disabilities have the same rights, freedoms and autonomy as their non-disabled counterparts.

To achieve the ambition of any mainstream band, the points of affinity and departure that define Heavy Load's relationship to the mainstream must ultimately eradicate the sense of the strange and locate the band – including its learning disabled artists – entirely within the familiar. Where the punk anti-aesthetic is finally valuable in making this intervention is that its relevance as an anti-aesthetic is itself now part of the mythology. When Heavy Load emerges as a punk band by 'default', the implication is clear that the artistic approach, structure, character and tactics of punk are familiar enough to render the form recognisable: it has passed from being an anti-aesthetic to an aesthetic with its own conventions, values and features.

The historical shift that punk has made from the unknown to the known is re-performed in Rothwell's documentary at each of the filmed gigs by Heavy Load. The audience encounter with

the band begins in an image of curiosity and uncertainty as they are confronted by the rarity of the learning disabled performer. Invariably, this transforms to open engagement by the end of the performance and the move from incomprehension to recognition is facilitated by the absolute familiarity of the punk form in all of its theatrical richness, including the musical and lyrical directness, the performers' unapologetic attitudes, the performance of moral transgression, the violation of conventional aesthetics that is itself a convention of punk and the reassuring impression of the learning disabled persona that pre-existed in the mythology.

Garnett notes that '[t]he moment of punk passed not simply because it was recuperated, reified or processed by the culture industry, it passed because the space within which it operated was closed down' (cited in Adams, 2008, p.479). This closure was enabled by the inevitable transformation of punk space from an elsewhere-that-is-nowhere into an elsewhere-that-is-somewhere. Familiarity with this space makes it safer by nullifying the potential for moral panic and diffusing the danger of destabilising dominant values. When Heavy Load steps into it, therefore, it is able to detourn punk texts into a playful and encouraging invitation which even allows the audience to reconsider the possibility of moral transgression with safety.

Nonetheless, the spectre of punk mythology continues to invest this space with the shudder, if not the terror, of a genuine anti-aesthetic. Whereas Richards remarks that the Stay Up Late campaign was provoked by a sense of annoyance, Rothwell's narration in the documentary inflates the underlying aggression when he observes that the situation 'always made the band *angry*' [my emphasis] (*Heavy Load*, 2008a). Escalating the intensity of the band's feeling appears to bring into play an aura of mythological punk rage which has no actual emotional presence and is neither claimed nor manifested by the band in the 'polite' enactment of the campaign. This spectre maintains awareness that what is taking place is oppositional and transformative in intent, and the familiarity safely cushions the possibility that this transformation will involve the dismantling of cherished cultural assumptions.

The applied performance practice of Heavy Load exists, then, on two levels, with the learning disabled members undertaking a dual role. In the process of constructing the band, they are participants while in the applied dimension of performance (representing learning disabled ambition, autonomy and artistry as normative) they are practitioners.

In the participant role, meaning is carried at an experiential level through the aesthetic practice. It is here that the learning disabled members share equal status with the non-disabled band members, and that the social constraints on autonomy can be lifted. Within applied theatre processes, the choice of form not only serves to engage, attract or inspire participants but also can be more central to the facilitation of social impact. It is through the anti-aesthetic allusions of the punk form, for example, that Heavy Load can claim the oppositional space it does.

At a practitioner level, however, the lateral and historical associations of the aesthetic must be carefully managed within the local and immediate context of applied practice. Heavy Load's objective is the realisation of its own ambition for assimilation into an accommodating mainstream, rather than the anarchic destruction and rebuilding of social values. The confrontational and transgressive elements of the oppositional space remain, in spirit, to acknowledge that something new exists here, but they are also offset by foregrounding the playful and pleasurable, the refusal to take sole responsibility for them and a reimagining of the punk persona from aggressor to ambassador. In doing so, the anti-aesthetic is appropriated and redirected towards a strategic challenge of dominant values through the adoption, re-emphasis, redefinition and amelioration of the qualities that persistently haunt the form.

James Thompson (2009, pp35-6) has noted recently that applied theatre practice 'might

instil in participants rich and complex means of coping and subtly resisting the worst of a context, but rarely are they able to equip people to transcend it'. Within the space constructed for applied theatre, however, wider social realities can be transcended in an authentic way and can be achieved through aesthetic structures, just as the status, equality and autonomy of Heavy Load's learning disabled performers is facilitated through punk's anti-aesthetic. Nonetheless, the space itself cannot transcend that wider reality, in the same way that the aesthetic (or anti-aesthetic) properties of art are contingent upon the context in which they are produced or encountered. The aesthetic dimension of applied theatre practice in itself connects the work to other times, other places, other ideas that inform, advance and disrupt the work. Where such associations prove helpful, they can be embraced and enjoyed; where they confound intentions, they can be engaged with differently, forming new relationships and meanings; and where they elude incorporation or negotiation, they mark, and can be marked as, the points at which applied theatre's own artistry is 'subject to the combustible flux' of aesthetic collision.

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