

Tics in the Theatre:

The Quiet Audience, the Relaxed Performance, and the Neurodivergent Spectatorⁱ

It's not unusual to hear people complaining about audience etiquette.ⁱⁱ Benedict Cumberbatch made headlines in 2015 when he asked that fans refrain from filming him in *Hamlet* at the Barbican Centre; "nothing," he said, was "less supportive" ("Hamlet" n.p.). Oliver Burkeman penned an entire *Guardian* editorial on the horrors of noisy fellow spectators, cheerfully recalling an usher "who lectured the noisemakers so forcibly and successfully" that the very memory can still, he confesses, "thrill" him (n.p.). So keen is the modern sense of the need for respectful silence, so quick is the modern spectator to condemn those who contravene established theatre etiquette, that one might quickly forget that the concept of the 'quiet' or 'invisible' audience is both a recent and a historically atypical one.

As a result, it is also easy for the modern spectator to forget how the cult of the 'quiet' audience presents a sometimes insurmountable challenge to the neurodivergent spectator, whose cognitive and/or physical functioning may mean that she cannot guarantee that her body will remain quiet during the length of a performance. Alongside what Max Barton calls "audience attitudes that are potentially linked to disrespect, such as heckling, using phones and crackling sweep and crisp packets" (n.p.), much other audience noise that signals only an alternatively functioning body is condemned as equally inappropriate or disrespectful in the theatre auditorium: the verbal tic or motor convulsion of the person with Tourette syndrome, the repetitive tapping of the individual with OCD, or the self-comforting rocking of the child with autism. Partially as a result of such stringent policing of 'quiet audience' etiquette, individuals with a disability or long-term illness have significantly lower rates of arts attendance than others (Smith 40). The acceptance of 'quiet audience' etiquette as theatrical norm radically decreases the auditorium's accessibility.

However, the neurodivergent spectator's presence in the auditorium offers a new perspective on theatre's value as an embodied communal event. This essay begins by tracing how the modern prioritizing of the quiet audience has prevented neurodivergent individuals from accessing theatre spaces. It then uses this grounding to explore how re-establishing the 'relaxed audience' as an institutional norm might affect the potential of the theatre auditorium as a public sphere. Rethinking 'quiet audience' etiquette not only benefits the neurodivergent spectator who might otherwise struggle to access the mainstream theatre auditorium; it also puts a renewed emphasis on the theatre's fundamental construction as a live, embodied encounter with other individuals.

Intolerance and Inaccessibility: The Quiet Audience

The concept of the 'quiet audience' is a distinctly modern phenomenon, although the precise historical moment of this change is more in dispute.ⁱⁱⁱ Some of the clearest examples of the British theatre audience being explicitly trained in a new quiet etiquette, however, can be pinpointed in 1950s mainstream UK theatre. A combination of class and generational anxieties in the long post-war period in Britain saw audience etiquette being not only fiercely policed, but also being carefully *taught*, with instruction on the 'quiet audience' etiquette coming from theatre venues, practitioners, and media critics. The British Drama League sent major celebrities of the time to lecture the public in the new theatre etiquette. Both Richard Burton and Sybil Thorndike instructed schoolchildren that it was no longer acceptable to consume food in the theatre, in contrast to the habits of their parents ("Should Audiences Eat Chocolate?" n.p.). In 1963, the Royal Festival Hall included "The Plain Man's Guide to Coughing" in their program, since "a single unrestrained cough" could, audience members were warned, "effectively ruin the enjoyment of three thousand listeners" (n.p.). Barton reflects on "the sense that the theatre is a club, that it comes with [...] a series of rules and

with the risk of being judged” (n.p.); here we find this “series of rules” concerning auditorium behavior being laid down unambiguously in UK theatre institutions.

This instruction in respectful silence as the correct theatre etiquette has lasted from the 1950s into present-day Britain. However, in contrast to the explicit 1950s instruction by theatre venues and professionals, today’s regulating of audience behavior has become primarily a matter of self-policing by the collective audience. With the exception of the usher’s request to switch off mobile phones, and the occasional stage-door outburst from Benedict Cumberbatch, most audience etiquette is now enforced by other spectators, rather than through the theatre’s authority figures. Modern audiences self-regulate by shaming those who break the ordained quiet spectatorial status: Burkeman, for example, recalls “casting a Meaningful Glance in the wrongdoer’s direction” (n.p.), and *The Times* theatre critic Benedict Nightingale advises “a schoolmarm stare and an English sniff, followed by a reproachful smile” as an antidote to disruptive spectators (3). The modern UK theatre audience bears a distinct resemblance to Michel Foucault’s docile bodies, regulated under their own surveillance. Well might Burkeman wryly worry that his “feeling exhilarated while watching authoritarian ushers enforce the law may be how totalitarian regimes get off the ground” (n.p.).

Of course, many would argue that what is being policed here is willfully disrespectful audience noise, such as talking, eating, and idle fidgeting. Theatre critic Maddy Costa disagrees, observing that “for an art form so dedicated to thinking about human behavior and interaction, theatre is remarkably bad at allowing its audiences to be human beings once they take their seats” and that a spectator with a cold or cough, or permanent impairment “can expect to be pretty much despised” in the modern auditorium (n.p.). Noises signaling a willful disrespect for a performance or fellow spectator and noises produced by alternative embodiments and enmindments are routinely condemned with equal vigor.^{iv} Thus, zealous

policing of audience noise, intended out of respect for actors and fellow patrons, too easily slips into self-righteous discrimination. A 2009 survey by *The Times* on UK audience experience recorded multiple complaints concerning the disruptive presence of disabled spectators in the auditorium: the commentary required by a blind patron at Shaftesbury Theatre, for example, or the heavy breathing of a service dog at a London opera (Whipple 4). Both mainstream and fringe UK theatre have made increasing progress over recent decades in providing technologies of access to individuals with a range of disabilities, including open captioning screens and closed captioning smart glasses, audio description via individual infrared headsets, BSL-interpreted performances, wheelchair and service animal access, and pre-performance visual story information that allows the spectator to view photographs of the building's interior and read a summary of the likely progress of a visit in advance, and pre-visit 'touch tours' that allow visually impaired spectators to familiarize themselves with the set ahead of time. However, the demand for a 'quiet audience' still frequently appears to outweigh the needs of individual disabled spectators in modern UK theatre.

This ableist intolerance to anything other than the obediently silence body is demonstrated starkly in a 2015 article by journalist Susan Elkin in *The Stage*. Elkin begins on an apparently inclusive note, declaring, "Theatre is for everyone. No one should ever be excluded. It's a universal medium." Almost immediately, however, she backtracks: "But it isn't as simple as that, is it?" (n.p.). She complains about a group of schoolchildren with unspecified "learning difficulties" whose "rustling, banging and oral noise" disrupted a performance she recently attended at the Polka Theatre. That the Polka Theatre specializes in creating inclusive environments for children with access issues seemed not to deter Elkin: "If their enjoyment cancels out someone else's then surely it's a problem?" she demands. Elkin's "someone else" here replicates the assumed able-bodied universal being, the universal identity which implicitly encompasses only the able-bodied. The assumed right to a silent

auditorium often works in direct opposition to the right to simply be able to access the theatre space. Jess Thom, co-founder of the English theatre group Tourette's Hero, has first-hand experience of the access challenges posed by ableist expectations of the 'quiet audience.' Thom, who has Tourette syndrome and exhibits motor and verbal tics, says she began performing because being onstage offered her "the one seat in the house I knew I wouldn't be asked to leave" (2017). Ben Fletcher-Watson points out that Article 30 in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities makes explicit the right of people with disabilities to "enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres (United Nations n.p., qtd. in Fletcher-Watson 75). Nevertheless, the historically atypical 'quiet audience' etiquette has been normalized to the extent that it poses a very real challenge to even legally protected audience access.

Relaxed Performances: The Current Condition

Thom has become a powerful advocate for more inclusive performance events and spaces. She champions the "relaxed performance," which, as she describes it:

takes a relaxed approach to sound and movement coming from the audience, understands that an audience will include people who need to do things in various ways, and does not make assumptions about how an audience might "be" or watch a piece, and understands that focus and attention can look different to different types of bodies. (2017)

Relaxed performances are a relatively modern concept, born out of sensory-friendly film screenings for autistic audiences in the 1990s, and introduced to British theatre via a nationwide pilot program in 2012. The relaxed performance aims to render audience spaces more accessible to all spectators, via measures such as allowing exit out of and re-entry into the auditorium throughout the performance, leaving the house lights on dimly, designating a 'chill out' area in the foyer which spectators can use during the show, reducing jarring audio

and strobe lights, and training front-of-house staff and actors to accept higher levels of audience noise. Thus, a spectator at a relaxed performance may find herself aware of the sound of a Tourette's tic or the movement of stimming somewhere in the auditorium, or be obliged to move her knees to allow their neighbor with a chronic pain condition to exit and re-enter their seating row – or she might encounter none of these things.

More broadly, the relaxed performance aims to rid theatre auditoria of what Salette Gressett, Arts Manager for the British Council, calls the “hushed reverence, [the idea] that you must be quiet, you must be still” that currently reigns in modern Western theatre (qtd. in Greiving n.p.). The relaxed performance welcomes diverse ways of being and engaging in the public sphere, recognizing that different individuals have different attentional behaviors. Thom explains, “For me being still and silent doesn't mean that I'm focusing on what's in front of me; it means I'm putting energy into physically restraining and controlling my body” (2017). Edward Palmer, a young man with Tourette's syndrome, agrees, explaining that when he experience particularly notable tics in a theatre auditorium, “so much of my attention is focused on trying to reduce my tics that I pay almost no attention to the performance itself” (2017). The relaxed performance acknowledges that a mobile or vocal spectator can still be a focused spectator. For many individuals – including those with no diagnosed impairment but simply noisier or more kinetic attentional behavior – the non-conformance to ‘quiet audience’ etiquette in fact often indicates a more intense and genuine attention to the performance at hand.

The Relaxed Performance Project was the first widespread organization of relaxed performances, bringing together eight high-profile UK venues in a year-long pilot program. Although their work highlights autism as a key group of target spectators, they also noted that relaxed performances were “also suitable for people with learning difficulties, sensory and communication disorders” (*Executive Summary* 2). From November 2012 to June 2013, plays

were performed for a total of 4,983 spectators across the eight venues. 60% of the spectators reported that they had never been to the theatre together as a family before; 30% of the spectators had never been to the theatre before. An analysis of evaluation data revealed that the most significant outcomes for audience members were access to theatre, enjoyment, and increased confidence and self-esteem. Anonymous audience feedback was published at the Project's conference. Responses included: "People sitting next to you, they start to judge, because they don't understand. But this performance [...] nobody cares, because they all understand. It's such a beautiful thing to be able to do, it's really lovely!" (*Executive Summary* 3), "We would attend every relaxed performance. Please put on more shows; they are the only way our family can go out" (*Case Studies* 5).

Representatives of the Relaxed Performance Project stated that the pilot's intention was "to provide a starting point for all organizations to begin the process of programming Relaxed Performances as a way of diversifying audiences" (*Include Arts* n.p.). Increasing numbers of mainstream and West End theatres have begun scheduling occasional relaxed performances over the last decade. Nevertheless, finding a relaxed performance in mainstream London theatre can still be difficult. I contacted more than forty major central London theatres which emphasized their commitment to accessibility on the websites.^v Typical claims included variously "dedicated to assisting patrons with all needs" and "cater[ing] for every audience member's needs and to be accessible to all." Virtually none could offer me a relaxed performance of an adult play. The only upcoming relaxed performances in indoor theatre available to book at the time of writing were one-off performances of *The Lion King* (sold out) at the Lyceum theatre, *Aladdin the Musical* at the Prince Edward theatre, *Tiddler and Other Terrific Tales* at Leicester Square, and *The Who's Tommy: The Rock Musical* at the Theatre Royal. Moreover, relaxed performances that were available were invariably single performances of shows in a long run, routinely scheduled as

a weekday matinee.^{vi} Polka Theatre is currently the only indoor London theatre that scheduled more regular relaxed performances, which take place every couple of months, but these were limited to children's theatre.

The predominance of shows for children and musicals demonstrates the severely limited availability – and, indeed, severely limited perception – of relaxed performances in Britain. Thom observes, “There’s a misconception that relaxed performance can only work for certain types of plays. [...] I’m interested in seeing a really broad range of work. I think it’s a mistake to shut down what type of work can be a relaxed performance” (2017). Already a number of relaxed performances in Britain, including William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear* at the Globe Theatre in 2017 and Athena Stevens’s *Schism* and Selina Fillinger’s *Faceless* at Park Theatre in 2018, have demonstrated that the medium can work equally well for ‘straight’ theatre as for children’s or musical dramas, as Lucy Andrews, a freelance consultant on relaxed performance and the Access and Training Coordinator at Access All Areas, points out. Andrews wants to see an expanded variety of relaxed performances on offer: “The big question now is, why should people with autism only see children’s shows? [...] It’s time now to look at different genres of performance and what is suitable for different audiences” (2017). She argues that venues shouldn’t necessarily start by asking “What show should we put on for an accessible audience? These places aren’t the same type of venues, they don’t produce the same type of shows, so their relaxed performances are going to look different as well,” she explains of the major UK theatres: “A raunchy show, or say Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* – you aren’t going to get many families coming to relaxed performances of those! But you might get some people who have autism and who are interested in that kind of theatre” (2017).

Andrews’s example of Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* as a potential relaxed performance emphasizes what she and Thom see as the potential for all theatre plays to be produced as

relaxed performance, regardless of content or formal qualities. Thom in particular vehemently disagrees with the idea that plays that rely heavily on dialogue or emotional intensity stands to suffer from a relaxed performance. Her next project, recently debuted at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2017 and continuing at Battersea Arts Theatre at the time of writing, is Samuel Beckett's *Not I*, a high-speed, near-constant monologue lasting between nine and eighteen minutes. Thom performs *Not I* in her wheelchair, initially at floor-level where she can engage with the audience while she introduces the production, alongside her BSL interpreter Charmaine Wombwell, who signs everything Thom says, including her tics. Her audience are seated on the floor in front of her, or own an array of benches and chairs further back in the auditorium, depending on their mobility needs; there is no assigned seating, and spectators are free to enter and exit the auditorium at will. To perform her monologue, Thom is lifted eight feet into the air on a specially designed hydraulic platform, her mouth lit by a light hidden within the hood that she pulls over her eyes and nose. Given Thom's popularity within the Tourette's community, there are often large numbers of individuals with Tourette's in the audience and ticing is audible during Thom's introduction and subsequent Q&A session – Thom herself alternates between ignoring and engaging humorously with audience tics – but tends to decrease noticeably in frequency during Thom's intense monologue performance. Thom calls the performance her “difficult second album,” a deliberately controversial choice of play intended to “challeng[e] that idea of what type of material suits a relaxed performance”:

We like the idea of taking one of the most intense and obtuse pieces of English [sic] theatre, and making that accessible at every level. [...] I want to show how you can have a relaxed performance of an intense theatrical piece of work without increasing the intensity, but while creating a space where people are safe to see it. (2017)

Thom's comments highlight the potentially misleading element of the term "relaxed performance": "relaxed" refers to the spectator's state of body and mind, and does not imply a "relaxed" (in the sense of "half-hearted" or "compromised") performance of the play itself.^{vii} It's important to Thom that her production offers "a rigorous presentation" of *Not I*, "honouring that text and the stage directions" while also creating a relaxed performance, to demonstrate what she sees as the limitless range of plays that can be rendered as relaxed performances.

At least two major UK theatres are currently transitioning to more extensive relaxed performance programming, having recognized the wider benefits that such a move might bring to audiences as a whole. Since its participation in the Relaxed Performance Project, for example, the Oxford Playhouse has held one relaxed performance for all its in-house productions, and is also now experimenting with making relaxed conditions a standard part of its programming. This focus on access needs indicates the growing recognition in the mainstream theatre industry of how engaged attention to access opportunities can enhance the creative and affective potential of the theatrical performance, following works such as Kaite O'Reilly's *peeling* (2002) and Jenny Sealey's Graeae productions of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (2006-7) and Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (2014).^{viii} "What I am really hoping," Oxford Playhouse Producer Hannah Groombridge notes, "is that this will make the experience better for everyone, not just those with accessibility needs" (2017). It is to this question of how a more accessible theatre – and most specifically the relaxed audience – stands to benefit its spectators more broadly that this paper now turns.

Re-Establishing the Relaxed Audience

Although the relaxed performance model does important work in disability access and outreach, "allow[ing] for more of us to be deemed 'human' and 'valuable' in our world"

(Kuppers 9), it also bears the potential to benefit the neurotypical spectator as well. As Gardiner Comfort, an actor with Tourette syndrome, observes, “not only is it kind to these [neurodiverse] audience members, it creates a whole new experience for everyone” (qtd. in Serratore n.p.). Examining the participatory politics of the theatre medium reveals the further potential benefits of a relaxed audience that reach beyond issues of access to questions of how, as Thom puts it, “making theatre more inclusive makes it *better* – for disabled people and non-disabled people” (qtd. in Bent n.p.). As the Globe’s Access Manager David Bellwood contends, the relaxed performance can be more productively considered “not [as] a work of charity, but rather a potentially stimulating and artistically engaged process” that enhances the theatrical experience for the audience more broadly conceived (n.p.).

One primary value of the live theatre experience is the unique phenomenological experience of spectatorship among a co-present embodied audience. Theatre scholarship is increasingly recognizing the affective community that can develop between audience members. Thus, where Michael Mangan emphasizes “the sense of communication and complicity between stage and audience that live performance is able to create” (168), Helen Freshwater emphasizes instead “the significance and value of ‘spectator-to-spectator contact’” (47). Likewise, where Monica Prendergast theorizes that “due to the inherent nature of *shared presence* in live performance, the potential exists for authentic, meaningful interactions between performers and spectators in a way that is not possible in most media-based performance forms” (46, emphasis in original), Nicholas Ridout observes the same potential for meaningful recognition between fellow spectators “who are aware of their status as spectators who are engaged in reciprocal spectatorship” (15). There is as great a potential for felt communion between spectators gathered in the theatre auditorium, as between actor and spectator. The heightened sensorial awareness of one’s fellow spectators that the relaxed

performance can generate offers a renewed perspective on theatre as an embodied and communal event, “a social art form” (Ridout 13), and on its consequent value as a medium.

The ‘quiet audience’ risks lessening this sense of shared presence because the silent and unmoving being, while occupying the same physical and temporal space, often does not offer the same potential opportunity for felt communion as the sensorially perceptible individual. Although there can be moments of intensely felt psychological communion in the theatrical moment of utter silence and stillness, such moments are lessened in value and impact when situated amid forced silence and stillness. At its most extreme, the ‘quiet audience’ can become an oppressive and indeed potentially depoliticized structure, turning the gathered spectatorship into a silent, undifferentiated, unspeaking mass, “settled into a quiet attention that might [be] mistaken for a collective nap” (Weaver ix). Jacques Rancière famously argued against reading the theatre spectator as passive simply because she was not engaged in physical action. On one hand, Rancière here counters ableist notions that would identify the spectator who “remains immobile in her seat” as being “separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act” (2). Rather, Rancière emphasizes that “[t]he spectator also acts” in how she “observes, selects, compares, interprets. [...] She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way” (13). However, this active participation is for Rancière better limited to interaction between stage and individual spectator, rather than between spectator and spectator, who should be kept “separate from one another” (17). Rancière indirectly demands a silent auditorium, both by defending the quietly seated spectator and prioritizing the need for the spectator to be left to silent, internal thought, engaged only in the stage action and in her own “unique intellectual adventure,” undisturbed by any sensorial perception of the rest of the auditorium (16).

Rancière’s model of the “emancipated spectator” ignores the potential advantages to be derived from the spectator’s recognition, acknowledgement and validation of her and her

fellow spectators' proximate embodied existences. Baz Kershaw is vociferous in his criticism of self-absorbed and self-contained spectatorship, arguing that the "growing acquiescence of audiences" to their own silencing has equated to "a relinquishing of cultural power" (135) and "an undermining of its democratic potential" (143) that acts to "reduce the political, and especially the democratic, potential of theatre" (151). Kershaw's censure is born of an anti-neoliberalist reading that connects the professionalization of theatre to the "global democratic deficit" which he perceives in the modern world (138). As compellingly as Kershaw makes this argument, I read a closer, more immediate politics in the disruption of the 'quiet audience': not only increased accessibility for neurodivergent spectators, but a renewed training ground for the acceptance of others' existence within one's own phenomenological sphere, and of the possibility of being affected and indeed changed by this interaction, one instance of what Petra Kuppers calls the "transformational moment at the formal level, rather than the diegetic one" that is possible in the theatre (69).

George Home-Cook's examination of aural accommodation in the theatre, although it does not deal explicitly with neurodiverse spectators, offers a model for aligning 'accepting non-staged noise in the theatre' and 'accepting the existence of other human beings in proximity to us'. Home-Cook observes that theatre noise levels "can never be fully contained [or] controlled" (167), and that unscripted noises in the theatre "are not necessarily technical or perceptual problems to be 'solved,' but rather are to be savoured, or even sought after" (45). The sensorial awareness of the surrounding world, of the live and embodied presence of others, indicates a fundamental dimension of the theatrical experience, rather than its interruption. I would emphasize that the "ability to accommodate unintended sounds" is closely related to the ability to accommodate other *people* (44). The theatrical medium by its very nature involves a prolonged encounter with the existence of other people – and, more specifically here, the noises emanating inevitably from the existence of other human beings

inhabiting the same phenomenological space as us. Theatre's extraneous noises "make us increasingly aware of our own embodied position" in the world, Home-Cook notes (172). Such noises also, I would stress, make the spectator aware of the relation of other human beings, and their embodied existence, to her own. The 'quiet audience' attempts to negate this recognition of the existence of others within one's own phenomenological sphere. By contract, the relaxed audience acknowledges and welcomes this recognition of others in one's own world, in a dynamic, intersubjective process of mutual accommodation.

The relaxed performance audience, then, offers one example of how theatre can "participat[e] in a process of managing the way people think about relationships with one another and their potential for creating societies in which everyone can enjoy freedom" (Ridout 7). Where the 1950s theatre industry focused on teaching its spectators to stay silent in the auditorium, contemporary theatre practice holds the potential to teach its spectators to engage more readily and more responsively with the individuals in the auditorium and in the world around them. To attempt to contain or control *which* noises, *which* beings, we will allow to affect us, is to resist the very basis of theatre itself, and its potential positive effects. Jill Dolan has observed what she calls utopian "moments of transformation" in audience sensibility (36), the "feeling of affinity" that allows spectators to "experience themselves as part of a congenial public" (14). Dolan emphasizes the potential for such utopian moments to offer a "new idea of how to be and how to be with each other" beyond the theatre context, can allow audiences to "reconsider and change the world outside the theatre [...] to articulate a common, different future" (36). The feeling of communion experienced positively within the theatrical audience, Dolan argues, allows spectators to "imagine, together, the affective potential of a future in which this rich feeling [...] could be experienced regularly and effectively outside the theatre" (14). The 'quiet audience' negates this opportunity for sensorial recognition of others' close existence, and the inaccessible audience renders it

hollow by excluding multiple alternative forms of embodiment and enmindment. The relaxed performance, by contrast, opens up the auditorium to a broader spectrum of society and re-establishes both the fact of the audience's perceptibly and diversely embodied existence and the continued possibility of "affinity" or fellow feeling across bodily and/or mental differences. Opening oneself up to a sensorially perceptible and diversely embodied existence together within the theatre offers a seductive taste of how a similar model of acceptance might equally operate outside the theatre.

Conclusion

The 'quiet audience' is a relatively modern and carefully constructed phenomenon, and has rendered the theatre space largely inaccessible to neurodiverse spectators, who cannot guarantee a passively obedient body that will remain still and quiet throughout the duration of a performance. Relaxed performances, which allow for freer movement and noise in the auditorium, have done productive and necessary work in disrupting the accepted conventions of the 'quiet audience', and in emphasizing that, as Barton observes, the modern Western theatre experience entails "so many aspects we accept because they are culturally inherited as the rules of theatre – these things are changeable" (n.p.). The dynamics of the relaxed performance offers a new perspective on the value of theatre as a live, embodied, collective event which permits felt communion with other individuals – spectators as well as performers. Accepting the manifest existence of other spectators around oneself in the auditorium has the potential to return theatre spectatorship to an open, engaged state in which meaningful affective and political change becomes possible. In highlighting the broader benefits to relaxed performance, I am mindful of Thom's warning against the mindset that "access considerations are only worth being concerned about when they benefit everyone or heighten an experience" ('Relaxed' n.p.), but I hope that this paper has demonstrated how

improved access and the prioritization of a sensorial awareness of one's fellow theatre spectators go hand-in-hand in the context of relaxed performance, each working to mutually complement and reinforce each other, and steering the perception of relaxed performance away from a charity-centric model to a theatrical form valued in its own right. By embracing the relaxed performance, contemporary theatre has the potential both to improve access opportunities, and to re-establish and indeed enhance the theatrical medium's power to generate productive communion between spectators, breeding positive social change beyond as well as within the walls of the auditorium.

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ⁱ The author would like to thank all interview subjects for their time and engagement with this project, including Lucy Andrews, Hannah Groombridge, and Jess Thom. Thanks also to the Association of Medical Humanities and the Globe's David Bellwood for their early involvement.

ⁱⁱ This paper deals specifically with "theatre" narrowly conceived. Consideration of the genres of circus, pantomime, improvisational theatre etc. is unfortunately beyond the scope of this discussion.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a more extensive analysis of the historical shift(s) from the noisy to the 'quiet audience,' see David Wiles, *Theatre and Citizenship: The History of a Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Willmar Sauter, "The Audience" in *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History*, edited by David Wiles and Christine Dymkowski (Cambridge University Press, 2012): 169-183; Baz Kershaw, "Oh for Unruly Audiences! Or, Patterns of Participation in Twentieth-Century Theatre," *Modern Drama* 44, no. 2, (2001): 133-154.

^{iv} I borrow here Petra Kuppers's neologism "endmindment" to refer "to the processual and negotiated way our cultures conceive of 'minds'" (5).

^v Adelphi, Aldwych, Ambassadors, Apollo, Arts Theatre, Barbican, Cambridge Theatre, Dominion, Donmar Warehouse, Duchess, Duke of York, ENO, Fortune, Garrick, Harold Pinter, Her Majesty's Theatre, Leicester Square, London Palladium, Lyceum, Lyric, Mousetrap, National Theatre, New London Theatre, Old Vic, Palace, Phoenix, Piccadilly, Polka Theatre, Prince Edward, Royal Court, Sadler's Wells, Savoy, Shaftesbury, Shakespeare's Globe, St Martins, Theatre Royal Drury Lane, Trafalgar Studios, Tricycle Theatre Royal Haymarket, Vaudeville, Young Vic.

^{vi} The Barbican's Access Officer Rebecca Oliver stood out by not only informing me of later shows that were going to go on sale with relaxed performances later in the year, but also offered to potentially designate one performance of a currently running show as relaxed if there was something I wished to book.

^{vii} Venues involved in the Relaxed Performance Project testified to this. The West Yorkshire Playhouse emphasized that they felt that the Project didn't "undermin[e] the artistic value of the show or the theatre experience" (*Case Studies* 9) and the Lyceum Theatre agreed: "We wanted to be clear that the quality of the production would not be compromised" (*ibid.* 10).

^{viii} For further details on these productions, see Kirsty Johnston, 7-8, 87-88, and 153-162.