Theatre in the Dark: Dramaturgies of Uncertainty

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Declaration of Originality

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Abstract

This practice research inquiry examines the relationships between darkness and uncertainty in performance. ‘Theatre in the dark’, as the name suggests, refers to performances or events that physically locate the audience in the dark – either by using blindfolds or by positioning the audience in near/pitch darkness. Within the growing interest in darkness and obstructed vision in contemporary practices, this PhD – comprised of this thesis, practice presentations and contextualised documentation – explores the different dramaturgies and manifestations of uncertainty that are in play in these performances. Using Practice Research and embracing a compositional-structural perspective, I propose the framework of *dramaturgies of uncertainty* to analyse theatrical compositions that seek to challenge clarity and generate indeterminate and ambiguous perceptions, as a means to conceptualise the substantive role and possibilities of darkness in performance.

At the same time, as uncertainty has been regarded as a prominent characteristic of the current socio-political climate this doctoral research suggests that while it may be overwhelming and alarming, uncertainty can also be a generative experience, producing different or new understandings of what is perceived. As theatre in the dark can equally influence and alter perception, darkness becomes a useful setting through which to investigate the broader ramifications of uncertainty and the possibilities it might generate. Therefore, this PhD argues that theatre in the dark can facilitate different modes of being with others that move beyond fixed visual recognition or identification. Through three cycles of exploration, which resulted in three performance presentations (*Campfire* (2016), *Overcast* (2017) and *Certain Ways* (2018)), I study how darkness evokes different perceptions and forms of engagement. As a result, and when contesting the dominance of the visual, this research seeks to outline an altered state of clarity, which can trouble different visual biases and regimes, and bring forward more plural and inclusive perceptions and views.
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A note on Documentation

This PhD research is comprised of this written thesis, practice presentations and documentation of practice. The documentation of practice can be found on www.keepinthedark.com and is arranged in the order of this thesis’ chapters. Throughout this written commentary, hyperlinks direct the reader to various materials and items from the above website, which elaborate or demonstrate particular points made in this thesis. Viewing this material is recommended while reading the different chapters at the specific points in which they are referenced. The password to all password protected items is keepinthedark.
1. Introduction

[Follow the link to play Just Fine]

This practice research inquiry seeks to investigate relationships between darkness and uncertainty in performance. By considering different dramaturgies and manifestations of uncertainty that are in play in theatre in the dark performances, the primary objective of this PhD – comprised of this thesis, practice presentations and contextualised documentation – is to develop the hypothesis that darkness is a productive setting in which to explore multiple modes of togetherness. Two pillars thus frame this thesis: darkness and uncertainty. The underlining postulation underpinning this research is that theatre in the dark provides a fertile ground to explore uncertainty and its implications more broadly since darkness – as a graspable variant in performance – can influence and alter what is perceived. Moreover, while uncertainty can be overwhelming and alarming, this PhD suggests that it can also be a generative experience. Using Practice Research and embracing the maker’s perspective, I examine how uncertainty might be generated in theatre in the dark performances, to study *how* darkness cultivates different perceptions and forms of engagement. Consequently, I seek to advance the argument that theatre in the dark can challenge the dominance of the visual, especially in (studies of) theatre production and design. Darkness, as this thesis will suggest, can bring forward a new or altered state of clarity, one which allows us to think and practice different modes of being with others that move beyond the supposed fixity produced by opticality.\(^1\)

‘Theatre in the dark’, as the name suggests, refers to performances or events that physically locate the audience in the dark – either by using blindfolds or by positioning the

\(^1\) I position this thesis within the long tradition that critiques Ocularcentrism (see primarily Jay 1994 and a detailed survey in Chapter 4).
audience in near/pitch darkness. A similar interest can be found in installation/visual art. Contemporary artists and companies such as Darkfield, Sound&Fury, Lundahl & Seitl, as well as Ann Veronica Janssens, Sam Winston and Tino Sehgal utilise darkness as a key feature in their performances or installations. These artworks provide audiences with unique experiences linked to the broader contexts of immersive environments and the wider cultural phenomenon of new sensorial experiences (such as IMAX, VR or dining in the dark). The extensiveness of these creative possibilities – from diverse fields of practice – indicates the rich potential of darkness, which in performance exceeds the conventional use of blackouts, dimming of houselights in auditoria or the accentuation of lighting compositions using darkness.

This research concentrates on engineered (theatrical) darkness where audience members spend long periods of time with others in unfamiliar environments. The unusual and uncommon experience of being and seeing in this darkness can create a disorienting state, where uncertainty may be experienced in many forms: confusion, doubt, indeterminacy, vagueness, or ambiguity. These experiences might elicit many affects and sensations such as vulnerability, excitement, anxiety, bewilderment, liberation or anticipation. Being in the dark, then, metaphorically and literally, offers complex and varied experiences where different forms and modes of knowing and perceiving take place. In that sense, underscoring this exploration of the substantial role of darkness in performance – both as an independent agent or as a performative entity working with other elements – is the ‘paradoxical engagement’ with it, ‘in which its obscurity becomes a form of revelation’ (Welton 2017b, p.501).

Indeed, within the growing interest in darkness in practice and research, recent studies have associated and identified uncertainty as an important element in/of theatre in the dark performances (see Welton 2013; Alston 2013b, 2016; Home-Cook 2015; Till 2015; Kendrick 2015). However, existing scholarship often disregards how uncertainty is generated in these

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2 Positioning the audience in total darkness might stand in relation to theatre’s own etymology from the ancient Greek term *theatron*, which refers to a place of seeing or the place from which we see (see Alston and Welton 2017, p.18; Welton 2017b, p.509).
performances, how it operates in darkness, or how it influences the composition of the piece. In response, I argue that uncertainty offers a necessary critical framework to further investigate theatre in the dark. Not only is uncertainty a prominent aspect of (the dramaturgy and experiences of) these performances, but it is a pertinent tool for questioning — compositionally, politically and through darkness — the habitual flow of perception in the process of sense-making and when making-sense. Critically, this perceptual uncertainty (exhibited in dark performances) holds the capacity to gesture towards alternative modes of sensory engagements and understandings of one’s environment, and even ‘set up a different imagination of the world’ and how one lives in it (Voegelin 2019, p.2).

At the same time, uncertainty has been characterised as a notable experience in the current socio-political climate, sedimenting dominant (neoliberal capitalist) ideologies of power and control. These ideologies are interlinked and manifested through various scopic and optic regimes which promote fixity, distinct classification and identification, and subsequently result in different (racial, sexist, human exceptionalist) biases born out of the recognition that things (human or other-than-human) are as they are because of how they appear (or are apprehended through vision). Hence, the central argument of this thesis suggests that while uncertainty can be overwhelming, distressing or comprehended as something that needs to be overcome, it can also be a generative experience. I argue that being uncertain is not simply an experience of not-knowing or ignorance (Smithson 1989). Rather, uncertainty opens the possibility to re-evaluate not only what is known or perceived but also how one makes sense to begin with, generating or producing different, new or multiple understandings of what is perceived.

Admittedly, the uncertainty attached to this current socio-political or cultural state of affairs — along with risk and anxiety, which occupy similar discourses — may differ from the uncertainty associated or manifested in theatre in the dark performances. The latter tends to be read as uncertainty regarding perception and sensation, exhibited for example through indeterminacy about what is seen or disorientation of where one is in space. However, as this practice research seeks to suggest, these two ‘manifestations’ or ‘states’ of uncertainty are
interconnected and can inform one another. This is because being in the dark – metaphorically and literally – can create ‘excavations and speculations that loosen our assumptions of what we know and encourage us to embrace the instability of knowledge’ (Voegelin 2019, p. 1). In other words, if various ideologies coerce and root notions of otherness and normativity, or enhance different ocular biases, which through their fixity leave no room for resistance or for ‘escaping technologies of control’ (Bal and Hernández-Navarro 2011, p.11), I propose that uncertainty in darkness can disrupt the hegemonic status quo, and call for different political possibilities, which can object, or resist worldviews established through visuality. Consequently, in this thesis, uncertainty is a significant notion both in describing a socio-political state of affairs as well as for my own inquiry into darkness and its use in performance. Put differently, using Practice Research (henceforth PR), combined with an investigation and dramaturgical analysis of case studies, this thesis examines the dramaturgical significance of uncertainty in theatre in the dark performances and its socio-political potential, seeking to articulate how engineered or theatrical darkness can also inform the study of uncertainty.

I propose the concept of dramaturgies of uncertainty to refer to compositions that aim to create what Mieke Bal (2013) terms ‘loss of clarity’. Loss of clarity, as I interpret it, denotes not so much a ‘lack’, but a generative moment of indeterminate and ambiguous perception, which relates either to the objects perceived or the act of perception itself. Thus, this thesis focuses initially on uncertainty in relation to perception in order to consider and extrapolate the ramifications of these uncertainties, and the possibilities they might reveal more broadly. Concurrently, dramaturgies of uncertainty serve as an overarching framework through which I articulate (conceptually and compositionally) what darkness can do performatively and as a material of/for theatre. Emphasising the significance of the complex notion of uncertainty to the study of theatre in the dark, this PR seeks to advance the thinking of how a practitioner could attempt to evoke loss of clarity, beyond simply turning off the lights. Such a move is important first, to develop a stronger conceptual understanding of uncertainty and darkness, and to surpass the hackneyed proclamation that darkness amplifies other senses. Second, the
analysis of dramaturgies of uncertainty can also help to evaluate how darkness becomes a productive site to engage with different modes of negotiated togetherness. By negotiated togetherness, I allude to different social encounters or interactions that might not sit neatly together – or even contradict each other – yet are still thinkable, imaginable and manifested in/through darkness.

To pursue the study of dramaturgies of uncertainty, this thesis will focus on three vital components I identify in dark performances: the presence of other audience members, compositions of light (and obstructed vision) and the prominent usage of sound. These have been studied across three cycles of practice and resulted in three performance presentations: Campfire (2016), Overcast (2017), and Certain Ways (2018). Leading this exploration, this inquiry examines the generation and emergence of uncertainty in theatre in the dark performances, addressing the following questions:

- What are the dramaturgical significances of uncertainty in theatre in the dark, and what are its socio-political implications?
- How can lighting design generate loss of clarity?
- How does the exploration of a range of sonic strategies offer new insights about uncertainty?

On the surface, there is an apparent paradox to this research as it aims to present something certain and concrete about uncertainty. However, this exploration does not seek to overcome uncertainty or reveal what is entirely unknown. Instead of a clear set of answers to the above questions – which tie uncertainty and darkness – this PR seeks to recognise some of the multiple ways in which darkness influences dramaturgical compositions of/in performance and the various displays of uncertainty darkness can foster. Moving beyond the simple identification of uncertainty in theatre spaces, as a small act of resistance and a response to the aforementioned socio-political state of affairs, this PhD seeks to propose an altered sense of clarity. With caution, I tread carefully not to fall foul of the risky abstractness of such an
attempt. Following Bal’s conceptualisation of uncertainty, I suggest that rather than a sense of 
loss, dramaturgies of uncertainty can bring forward a different sense of clarity. In darkness, this 
altered or new sense of clarity resists fixity and, through it, one is able to reassess their 
perception and reflect on different or new ways of perceiving and being with others. This 
altered clarity that emerges in/through darkness, is one which not only allows us to see what 
remains unseen, but it opens the space for the plurality of perception and the inclusion of 
multiple perspectives and views that can coexist in darkness, without prioritising one.

While this thesis concentrates on instances of theatrical darkness, the insights 
developed throughout this research could hopefully be applied to other dark spaces 
(metaphorically and literally) or even extend beyond darkness after the lights have been 
switched back on. Through practical experimentations, critical reflection and analysis, this 
complementary writing attempts to translate tacit, practitioner knowledge, as it emerged in the 
studio, rendering it explicit, and positioning those insights in theoretical and artistic contexts 
where my advocacy of a new and unfixed sense of clarity can be examined and developed 
(Nelson 2013). By encouraging and establishing an altered sense of clarity through the process of 
making, I seek to move beyond generalised assertions that darkness can make space for ‘ethical 
thoughts’ (Welton 2017a, p.262), to a more sustained and rigorous interrogation of how exactly 
darkness becomes a productive site to consider multiple (sensory) perceptions, through 
different manifestations of uncertainty, as well as modes of togetherness that might 
undermine existing ocular biases. It is precisely this gap that my research attempts to tackle 
and where the original contribution of this thesis lies.

While there has been a profound growth in its investigation in recent years, 
positioning theatre in the dark in the current scholarly landscape is not an easy task. 
Moreover, this specific inquiry can be applied or read in light of many of the dizzying ‘turns’ 
that saturate the arts and humanities. Partly the result of academic branding or terminology 
accretion, the sensory turn, scenographic turn, acoustic turn, social turn, practice turn, 
performative turn, atmospheric turn, turn to affect and (for some aspects of this thesis) non-
human turn – to name a few – can all dictate and direct the movement of this research and
give it a scholarly home or positioning. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into all these turns. Yet, what I hope this list evidences is how this PhD’s contribution – through my study of theatrical darkness, dramaturgies of uncertainty, unique sensory experiences, perceptual instability and negotiated togetherness – can be applicable and relevant to the above discussions. In that sense, despite its comparatively small mass in theatre and performance studies, theatre in the dark is not just a niche concern or artistic whim. Rather, as a field of practice and area of scholarship, it holds enormous importance to the wider discipline and across the arts and humanities more broadly, as it utilises the exploration of production and design of contemporary practice to generate new insights about perception and its politics.

Therefore, in this introduction, I situate this practice research and establish the key features of this exploration. To orient my approach, I begin by framing uncertainty and develop Bal’s concepts of *loss of clarity* and *andness*. Next, I outline how darkness is approached and understood in this thesis, before contextualising the recent field of theatre in the dark and positioning this PR within an artistic lineage. Finally, I provide an outline of the chapters of this thesis.

**Introducing Uncertainty**

While not a distinct field or faculty, uncertainty has become a growing object of study and has been conceptualised from various perspectives, sprawling ‘across a considerable variety of disciplines, professions and problem domains’ (Smithson 2008, p.13; Bammer and Smithson 2008). As Michael Smithson notes, it is ‘difficult to communicate clearly about uncertainty, and even more difficult to find out very much about it’ (ibid). As one of this thesis’ aims is to provide new insights about uncertainty, this section starts to establish the connections between darkness and uncertainty and frames the approach this inquiry adopts for the latter. I do so by positioning my discussion in relation to similar conversations about risk and anxiety. Then, I unpack Bal’s framing of uncertainty as *loss of clarity* and ‘andness’. Next, I consider
what the political potential of uncertainty might mean and finally, I further outline the uncertain socio-political backdrop this thesis responds to and how it reinforces the reconsideration of uncertainty and the study of different modes of togetherness.

Indeed, the attempt to unpack the unknown or indeterminate is by no means a new motivation – spanning from scepticism, doubt and agnosticism, to existentialism, risk calculation and statistics (Reith 2004). However, in the past few decades, in what was defined by sociologists as late, second or liquid modernity (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990; Bauman 2000; Dawson 2010) uncertainty has become a significant characterisation of the everyday experience in the western world (Wolff 2008; Bauman 2013; Solnit 2016a; Beck 2009; Zinn 2004). Derived from a variety of disciplines such as economics, philosophy, sociology or aesthetics, definitions of uncertainty move from a state of not knowing (Reith 2004), to not entirely knowing or not having certain knowledge (Knight 2006); as the risk of something that might happen (Reith 2008), randomness (Taleb 2007), doubt (Hecht 2010; Fields 2012), slipperiness and confusion (Bailes 2011), indeterminacy and chance (Cage 1969), or defamiliarization (Smithson 1996), to name a few. All these definitions touch on either a state of unknowing or an object that is unknown, unfixed, undecided or not definite.

Similar theoretical territory is occupied by risk and anxiety (Furedi 1997; Dunant and Porter 1996; Lyng 2005) which continues to examine the turn of the century uncertainties, risks and anxieties. Risk assessment, risk management, environmental risks or volatile political systems can be seen as consequences or effects of a broader uncertain climate. Scholarship on risk and anxiety in performance has become extensive (notable examples include Performance Research: On Risk 1996; Duggan 2016, 2017, 2018; Alston 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2016; Grant 2014; O’Grady 2017). I do not attempt to provide a complete survey of how this risk has been developed and appropriated as a theoretical tool to analyse performance, but rather to utilise risk to further illuminate uncertainty. Risk and uncertainty are often conflated (O’Grady 2017, p.5; Alston 2016, p.71), and the former has been a central feature of recent performance theory, developing critical mass. Akin to the climate of different uncertain occurrences such as Brexit, the 2008 financial crisis, terrorism or Donald Trump’s presidency, ‘the dial has been
turned up on public fear, and the rhetoric around the threat to public safety has become ubiquitous’ (O’Grady 2017, p.5), enforcing risk as something to be avoided. Following economist Frank Knight, unlike uncertainty, risk can be measured, and thus its calculation can help to minimise unwanted damage (2006). Therefore – and when examining ‘performance practices where risk, vulnerability, and degrees of unknowing play an integral role in multiple and complex ways’ (O’Grady 2017, p.vii) – understanding how risk operates in this particular context can illuminate ‘how risk is constructed, mobilised, and experienced elsewhere’ (ibid, p.6). Whether a ‘risky’ performance or not, to ‘embrace risk is to be open to uncertainty, to weigh up the odds, and to welcome the possible’ (ibid, p.ix).

Beyond overt risks, uncertainty has been embraced in theatre and performance studies in theorisations ranging from a component in a ‘poetics of failure’ (Bailes 2011), underpinning principle for playwriting (Durbach 2006) or a trope to engage with different aspects of environmentalism and its intersections with performance in community-related settings (Heddon and Mackey 2012). In contrast, this thesis engages with perceptual uncertainty through the unique sensory experiences of theatre in the dark. Thus, due to her focus on perpetual uncertainty in immersive environments, this project specifically builds on Mieke Bal’s formulation of uncertainty, which I will now elaborate on.

In her broad analysis of the work of British-Belgian contemporary artist Ann Veronica Janssens, Bal suggests two intertwining characterisations of uncertainty that are beneficial for the discussion here. The first is loss of clarity (2013, p.21), which relates to the physical experience of sight, where what is seen becomes unfixed and ambiguous, for example in relation to the perception of surface and depth (ibid, pp. 67, 186). Unlike a single state of not-knowing, loss of clarity provides a more processual and nuanced understanding of uncertainty. If clarity holds a strong affinity to brightness and coherence, its loss denotes intangibility and can extend to other (not necessarily visual) perceptions and experiences. These, for Bal, encompass the perception of space, its limits and the visitor’s location within it (p.50); the form of the work (p.101), the relation between the visitor’s body and the artwork (p.137) or the perception of that which cannot be grasped (p.8). In Janssens’ work – including some of
her work with darkness and her mist room installations, which envelope the visitors in rooms filled with colourful mist and thus, obfuscating or challenging visual perception – ambiguity, which is the result of impeded sight, is not arbitrary, ‘we see very clearly what we cannot see’ (ibid, p.102). As such, it ‘enables our senses to perceive that which normally remains unseen’ (ibid, p.22). Or, crucially, ‘that which is generally not deemed worthy of being seen’ (Lepecki 2016, p.73, my emphasis). In other words, loss of clarity brings forward a moment of uncertainty that ‘push[es] back the limits of perception, to multiply the participation of the senses in events of perception’ (Bal 2013, p.8). In this indeterminate experience, perception becomes undecided, it demands time and questioning. According to Bal, visitors or participants encountering Janssens’ artworks (which ironically, the former terms ‘viewers’) contemplate – even if just for a moment – what they see and experience, and how. Bal uses loss of clarity to explore abstractness (see chapters 2 and 4), however, her conceptualisation resonates with my own exploration of uncertainty and denotes a disposition where clarity is suspended, obstructed or disrupted.

Echoing Bal, Welton asks: ‘What of the productive possibilities of a lack of clarity, out of which understanding might arise, or be discovered?’ (2017a, p.245). This is a question that this thesis grapples with. However, as I argue, loss or lack of clarity do not necessarily imply the elimination of clarity in its entirety. Rather, it is a challenge to precision, fixity or decidedness. Therefore, expanding Bal’s theorisation, I move from its initial loss and approach uncertainty as the transformation of clarity through the modulation of perception. Put differently, theatre in the dark blurs, conceals or manipulates (perceptual) certainties. It could, as Nicholas Till points out, ‘question the testimony of eye and ear through deception and illusion: [...] whether we can trust the evidence of our senses – what we see, what we hear, what we are told’ (2015, p.111). For example, in Ring (2012-2015), a performance by David Rosenberg and Glen Neath, once the lights went off the audience heard the instruction to form a circle, followed by the sound of moving chairs. As an audience member, I immediately felt a strong sense of uncertainty about whether or not I should move, where to and how to do so without stumbling on others. When Sound&Fury played a loud thunderstorm in Going
Dark (2010-2014), I ducked to avoid the rain. Or in Safe Word (2014), a performance I co-devised with Fye and Foul, once the space went dark, a voice started moving around the space, announcing that they are going to run their fingers across the back of someone’s neck, raising the question of who and how many will be touched. Dark performances then can obscure or upset clarity. Importantly, for many sighted people seeing is ‘believing’ (see Welton 2006, p.47) and many ‘certainties’ come from being able to see, which risks asserting various ocular biases. In contrast, theatre in the dark can deprive audiences of the ability to see – or perceive – clearly (both physically, and more metaphorically). Thus, it holds the capacity to generate similar experiences to Bal’s loss of clarity.3 This does not mean heedlessly celebrating blindness or not seeing, since in the dark I might still see, albeit differently (see below). Rather, by utilising loss of clarity, I seek to promote (through performance) the questioning of different modes of perception in order to trouble those which have been prioritised as supposedly leading to certainty and consider the potential of other (more multiple and inclusive) views.

The constant questioning wrought by loss of clarity brings forward the second meaning of uncertainty which informs this thesis: what Bal – building on Gilles Deleuze – terms ‘andness’. Bal defines abstraction through accumulation. As she explains: ‘abstraction in Deleuze’s work is understood in terms of an endless extension of possibility’ (Bal 2013, p.28). As if saying and, and, and instead of or (Stalpaert 2009, p.125). Emphasising the ‘conjunction and makes for an almost endless potential for inclusion’ of possibilities, views and interpretations (Bal 2013, p.28, original emphasis). This additive-rhizomatic logic resists strict binaries and holds the capacity to continuously include and negotiate between different possibilities and potentialities, which might not sit neatly together but are still thinkable and imaginable. These potentialities, I propose, could emerge in moments of uncertainty or destabilised perception. By suspending clarity, these moments open the prospect to think and

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3 Smithson regards common metaphors in English speaking cultures as a way to define uncertainty. Drawing from Lakoff and Johnson, Smithson states that ‘Uncertainty is obstructed vision. Uncertainty is blindness. To know is to see. Vague ideas are blurry, murky, hazy, unclear, obscured. [...] Uncertainty is dim and dark’ (2018, p.17).
view perception and what is perceived anew. In other words, they invite an encounter with different and multiple perspectives and ‘open up endless possibilities of understanding, experiencing and “feeling” them’ (ibid, p.29). For example, in the relationship between the viewer’s body and body of the work, loss of clarity opens up a space for negotiation and consideration between both bodies, a moment Bal sees as ‘always ephemeral, fragile, wavering, or otherwise uncertain’, and it is this uncertainty that is not only ‘generative of new forms but also of new conceptions of what body is’ (ibid, p.137). Proceeding from Deleuze’s formulation of the stutter or stammer, ‘the work “stutters”’, as Bal explains, ‘because its movements refuse to be smooth; […] yet those instants together bring to life something that does not exist outside of the stuttering’ (p. 231; see Deleuze 1994, 1997).

In a similar vein, the perceptual uncertainties that emerge in the dark can illuminate different possibilities, which become conceivable and perceptible (Bal 2013, p.264-5). By observing loss of clarity in darkness and considering uncertainty beyond the mere disorienting challenge to visuality (or simply as a mode of theatrical expression), it becomes possible to think about the ‘endless andness’ of darkness. As Welton aptly notes, ‘the relentlessness of social and political drives towards ever-increasing conditions of clarity or transparency gives one pause to revalue darkness’ (Welton 2017a, p.245). Drawing from Bal’s propositions, this research turns to darkness by thinking through both loss of clarity and andness in order to uncover the unique dramaturgical and socio-political implications (and possibilities) of uncertainty in darkness (and of darkness itself).

One way to view this political potential emerges from the work of documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis. In ‘Oh Dear’ism II – Non-Linear War (2014) Curtis traces how positioning people in a state of uncertainty or what he calls ‘destabilised perception’ (n.p.) could be used to enhance political power. Curtis describes Putin’s rule in Russia and how the latter uses uncertainty as a model for governance. Then, he locates such dangers in the UK government. Such a perspective may emphasise the significance of uncertainty (and its understanding) in current discourse, yet I, of course, do not seek to ‘test’ the tactics Curtis reveals, as such a route is of course ethically and politically dangerous. Equally, I do not
blindly celebrate uncertainty. In lieu, I wish to propose a shared and collective thinking about uncertainty (through practice): one that builds on the endless ‘andness’ potentialities that derive from carefully constructed dramaturgies. Put differently, rooting my discussion within the realm of the politics of perception (see Lehmann 2006, pp.185-186), I consider how thinking about and through uncertainty could be political, in contrast to how ‘making people uncertain’ is political. Following Heddon and Mackey’s assertion that the current epoch of uncertainty, ‘demands imaginative (‘what if’) and fluid responses’ (2012, p.171), I try to better highlight possible consequences and the generative potentials of uncertainty within the frame of theatre in the dark, against a backdrop of affairs that demand a better understanding of uncertainty.

As mentioned, uncertainty has been employed to describe a dominant feeling or life experience in the West (Orozco 2017, p.39) as a result of its political and ideological fabric, leading to the current epoch being identified as an ‘age of uncertainty’ (Bauman 2007, Solnit 2016a, 2016b; Heddon and Mackey 2012; Fragakou 2019). For Marissia Fragkou, the current political zeitgeist is suffused with spiralling uncertainties and precarities. Looking specifically at precarity, Fragkou suggests how from the start of the new millennium, ‘vocabularies of precarity have been gaining much purchase in the field of the arts, humanities and social sciences’ (2019, p.3). Crucially, she points to the partiality of dominant discourses around ‘risk society’ (Beck 1992) or ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2000), and their inadequacy to capture the state we are living in, as they ‘often fail to account for the multifarious interconnections and implications of such risks and uncertainties’ (Fragkou 2019, p.4). Much like the initial proposition of this research regarding uncertainty, Fragkou considers precarity as both troubling and enabling. Thus, she pursues proliferating and diverse responses where theatre in Britain (in the last two decades) directly responds to the escalating uncertainties, ‘evidencing a dynamic resurgence of politics in the theatre’ (ibid, p.3). In a related move, this study seeks to consider the conditions that might generate perceptual uncertainties in darkness. ‘The key to darkness’ as Craig Martin suggests, ‘is its relationship to an altered form of visual perception’ (2011, p.458). Expanding Martin’s focus to other perceptual modes, I follow his claim of how uncertainty denotes processes and ‘things’ that do not adhere to prescribed modes of ordering
Instead of a negative occurrence, Martin subscribes to the value of uncertainty or disruption, in order to reflect on questions of visual distance, immersion, disorientation, and entanglement and how they inform experiences of fog. Borrowing from Martin, this thesis also seeks to recognise how certain ideologies are challenged by the bifurcations of uncertainty, by encountering them in performances of darkness.

In that sense, darkness becomes a setting within which to reflect on what Timothy Morton terms *possibility space*: a concept used to denote particular modes of being which sustain particular narratives and are suffused with ideologies and expectations (usually it is a ‘patriarchal, hierarchical, heteronormative possibility space’ (Morton 2017, pp.188-189)). Through the uncertainty that emerges in darkness, one might begin or try ‘to feel out these possibility spaces, especially if/when we’re not very aware of them’ (Morton 2018, p.7). As these different ideologies tend to go unnoticed and fix ‘patterns of thought, assumptions, and behavior that underlie prejudice’, the *possibility spaces* they exercise, or operate within, ‘aren’t very obvious to us [and] can exert all kinds of control over us’ (ibid). Therefore, pausing and figuring out these pervasive possibility spaces can assist in resisting these narratives, or at least getting a better sense of what the coordinates are of these possibility spaces. This step is important: not to repeat and reconfirm hegemonic views and biases, but to invest in the potential, imagination and practice of other possibilities, to access other ways of how things could be (Voegelin 2019, p.9).

These ‘normative’ ideologies run along climate change and the ecological crisis (I address Morton’s ecological thinking in Chapter 3); the migration crisis – and the broader ‘migratory’ culture replete with perpetual movement, surveillance and control (Bal and Hernández-Navarro 2011); Anti-LGBTQ purges in Chechnya; sexism and racial discrimination; the rise of nationalist voices motivated by ideologies of national sovereignty – ‘which is often presented as a key component in perceptions of identity and belonging’ (Fragakou 2019, p.2) – or neoliberal promotion of alienation and isolation (Bishop 2006; Harvie 2013). This socio-political backdrop constitutes what Fragkou terms ‘a social ecology of precarity that firmly connects issues of dispossession, intolerance, fear, xenophobia,
uncertainty and disillusionment for the future humans and the planet’ (2019, p.2). In response to this alarming status quo, as a practitioner-researcher living and working at this point in time, the importance and relevance of rethinking uncertainty and its socio-political work seem invaluable in order to better understand and respond to such a climate (and the manifold ocular biases that are sustained by it). In response to these divisive and vexed discourses, searching or gesturing towards alternative modes of togetherness and outlining uncertainty’s generative potential becomes a vital antidote. The deliberation and contemplation of these possibilities, which I reflect on through darkness, do not ‘avoid the politics of everyday life’; instead, to borrow from Salomé Voegelin, it is a process which tries to provide new access to practices and norms ‘via the contingent experience of arts’ possibility’ (2019, p.5). As she continues

[j]It is not a privileging of art, but a privileging of practice, the creative practice of doing and of experiencing, outside purpose and function, that affords glimpses on what things do, and how things could be done (ibid).

In that sense, this thesis does not attempt to give conclusive tactics for overcoming uncertainty or revealing the unknown. In lieu, by approaching uncertainty in creative terms, and illuminating different dramaturgies driven by the generation of perceptual uncertainty, I seek to sketch an altered state of clarity, one that highlights the pluralisation of perception and brings about multiple perspectives; actively working towards disclosing relationality through performance while still facilitating friction and contradiction; resisting stable and fixed preconceptions, ideologies and privileged points of view; and allowing different and new perspectives to come to light.

Introducing Darkness

As mentioned, part of this PR’s objective is to uncover the roles and dramaturgical influences of darkness in performance. Whilst I position this research within the growing field of theatre in the dark, it is important to note that ‘theatre in the dark’ is not a particular genre
‘identifiable by a consistent set of conventions’ or fixed characteristics (Alston and Welton 2017, p.4). Rather, ‘theatre in the dark’ refers to a diverse (but related) set of practices, in which darkness is utilised as a significant component. Although theatre in the dark encompasses multiple aesthetics, as darkness is an important element within this kind of theatre-making, there is still merit in exploring its compositional traits and dramaturgical significance, especially when these are utilised to call for an altered sense of clarity in/through darkness. Therefore, in what follows, I frame my approach to darkness. Two key understandings underscore my endeavour to pursue a new/altered sense of clarity in darkness: first, Liam Jarvis’ acknowledgement of different ‘darknesses’; second, the conceptualisation of darkness as a form-giving entity (as opposed to the absence of light), which promotes a reconfigured sensory encounter. I unpack both notions below.

When considering the different possibilities of working in/with darkness and darkness as a material of/for performance, Jarvis provides a useful framing when he argues that ‘darkness should be understood as relational and pluralistic insofar as it performs different roles in different contexts’ (2017, p.89). In other words, there are different ‘darknesses’. Jarvis characterises darkness as a key tool for meaning-making and surveys different ways in which artists have conceived and deployed it in performance to generate meaning. For example, in relation to Chris Goode’s use of darkness in *Who You Are* (2010), Jarvis proposes that ‘it is the eroticism and latency of this specific darkness that is signposted as a space of becoming and conceiving where “there are more possibilities”’ (ibid, p.92). The theorisation of darkness as pluralistic and diverse does not merely imply that darkness offers different possibilities for theatrical practice and form (Welton 2013). Rather, it draws attention to the variety of framings and meanings darkness can obtain and generate in and of itself. As a ‘form-giving entity’ (Alston and Welton 2017, p.3), understanding darkness through plurality foregrounds how darkness can lend itself to different modes of theatrical expression.4 Thus, engineered

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4 In his analysis of Shaun Prendergast’s *The True History of the Tragic Life and Triumphant Death of Julia Pastrana, the Ugliest Woman in the World*, Jarvis exemplifies how theatrical darkness can become transformative and diegetic within the context of the drama itself, pointing to different ‘darknesses’ within the ‘world of the play’. Furthermore, he maintains how the context in which the show is performed can render the understanding and
darkness becomes ‘its own kind of performer’ (Jarvis 2017, p.107). In that sense, darkness is not a single-unified entity but a theatrical component which could be ‘composed’ and contextualised in various ways, and consequently lead to numerous affects and experiences.

Furthermore, darkness is not simply a dramatic device but is also a potent symbol and metaphor in various cultural, historical or religious practices and contexts. As Alston and Welton explain, darkness is ‘haunted by signification, and hence also by the ideologies that code signification’ (2017, p.23). Evil, mystery, fear or blindness, as well as the opposition to knowledge, clarity, and purity have been associated with darkness. Equally, the pairing of darkness and blackness – as colour, non-colour, monochrome and racialised blackness – ‘is well-rehearsed in myriad forms’ (ibid; see English 2007; Harvey 2013; Badiou 2016; Rose 2006; Ben Shaul 2012). While the composition of theatre in the dark can certainly draw from or be inspired by these symbols, this PhD does not seek to trace what darkness represents or signifies. Rather, I attempt to examine “darkness as such” […] before it is whisked away to stand in for something else’ (Welton 2017b, p.500). By this I do not mean to allude to an inherent essence of darkness resulting in predetermined experiences. Instead, I approach darkness as a graspable variant that is context specific and stands in relation to other possible darknesses. This is also where I differ from Jarvis and his semiotic reading of darkness(es). Indeed, I too recognise the plurality, relationality and context-dependent form(s) of darkness. Likewise, akin to Jarvis, this PR seeks to pay attention to the different ways in which darkness operates. Yet, instead of outlining what darkness signifies or the theatrical images (or non-images) it produces, in my compositional approach, I conceptualise darkness through the possible manifestations of uncertainty it evokes – what darkness might elicit. ‘Different darknesses’ then, takes the first step to appreciate the complexity and nuance in the deployment of darkness as a medium or condition for theatre practice. Advancing this proposition, I seek to better understand how darkness operates by studying the dramaturgies which operate as part of it and within it.

experience of darkness more substantial. For instance, Prendergast’s play performed both in 2003 and 2012. Due to the relative proximity of the events of 9/11 darkness in the 2003 USA production was made all the more contentious (2017, pp.98-103).
The second point which underpins my approach to darkness suggests that theatre in the dark does not promote an experience of not seeing or seeing nothing, since in the dark one can still see – namely, the darkness (Sorensen 2004, pp.457,459). In other words, ‘one’s visual sense remains active even in conditions of total blackout’ (Alston and Welton 2017, pp.8,18). Thus, the removal of visual references or the ambiguous perception of depth, for example, foster an altered or reconfigured sensory perception. I am wary of conflating darkness with blindness, as the two are not identical (Alston 2017; Cavallo and Oshodi 2017; Feeney 2007). Indeed, darkness can ‘invite one to experience the alterity of non-normative visual experiences’ (Alston and Welton 2017, p.25). However, I am cautious of a direct comparison with blindness, and the ethically problematic promises of a better understating of blindness or the experience of the visually impaired through darkness. Paraphrasing poet George Szirtes: I am not talking about blindness, ‘I can’t see how I could’ (2018, n.p.). Obviously, the attempt to chart an unfixed and altered sense of clarity raises the question of what is clear to whom and from which point of view. Yet, proposing a new sense of clarity, which not only resists fixity but also tries to undermine definite preconceptions, ideologies and privileged modes of looking, might equally make room for more plural/other modes of sense-making and making-sense. Pluralising these opportunities can be read – to borrow from Alston and Welton – as a means of ‘dealing with the politics of perception that acknowledges how seeing or sensing darkness [...] can be bound up with other modes of looking and sensing’, surpassing those that might be defined as ‘ableist’ (2017, p.25). Thus, while some modes of seeing in this thesis might still be rooted in concrete activities of sight, these are still part of a greater ambition to emphasise the multiplicity of perspectives and perceptions that critically extend to other senses and sense-modalities.

Evidently, darkness is far from being a neutral conduit. For Welton, ‘what one sees is never entirely distinct from how one does so’ (2017a, p.245). Within the various ways in which artists manipulate sight, or make audiences see in different ways, this PR employs complete darkness and low-lighting rather than using blindfolds. Consequently, the new/altered clarity that I wish to consider stems from the significance of seeing (in) darkness –
as a particular *dark thing*, counter to shadows for example (see Sorenson 2004, 2008; Casati 2007; Welton 2017a), and as distinct from seeing *blindfold*. As Andrew Lennon elucidates

> [c]losing one’s eyes is the avoidance of the act of seeing – as well as an individual choice, which must also be taken into consideration. Being blindfolded […] is the act of being made to not see, when seeing is possible. Complete blackout can be taken as the removal of all possibility of visual signs; however, even in such conditions one is still seeing, but observes that there is nothing to see, or, only nothingness to be seen (2018, p.58).

Despite the technical challenge which accompanies the production of complete darkness, the latter can enhance ‘both the minutia of what it is we are forced to see, and the affect that an excess of darkness can have upon spectators’ (ibid, p.59). Moving beyond the customarily overused postulation that darkness simply heightens other senses (ibid, p.60; see Kendrick 2018), I seek to foster transmogrifying states of seeing and making sense differently.

> This act of seeing – read as both looking and understanding – ‘does not merely offer up the things of the world to perception, but is itself an activity of *making sense*’ (Welton 2017a, p. 245, my emphasis). Therefore, this particular and uncommon experience of being in total darkness must take into account the “stuff” of vision – both its object and medium’ (Welton 2017b, p.497). Welton invites the consideration of looking *at* and *in* darkness as a threshold state for seeing, reflecting on what it means to look at darkness *per se* contrary to more metaphorical darkneses. Engaging with the materiality of darkness, he observes the peculiarity of darkness as a removal of light rather than a representation for something else, distancing darkness ‘from the social and physical conditions of blindness and blackness that are often assumed to be its corollaries’ (ibid). Challenging certain views that darkness is neither a *thing* nor ‘seeable’, Welton proposes that the unique visual sensibility that accompanies the aesthetics of darkness asks ‘participants to engage in a rematerialized visual practice: rematerialized in that it calls the actuality of seeing back to the foreground of attention, and makes the physical sense of seeing (or not) a tangible part of the aesthetic
experience’ (ibid, p.509). As a result, darkness, becomes more than a condition for performance, immersion or imagination – which are often used interchangeably in theatre in the dark scholarship and thus approach darkness in somewhat general or vague terms (see Welton 2013; Home-Cook 2015, 2017) – but rather a medium or condition for vision.

Distinguishing between looking at and in darkness, Welton proposes that both hold the capacity to baffle the eye, eradicate the appearance of a surface and engage the viewer ‘in a bodily, sensual relationship to darkness, as well as being suggestive psychologically or imaginatively’ (2017b, p.513). However, in instances of ‘looking at’ darkness – in some theatrical darknesses or aesthetic objects – darkness remains a ‘property’ of the objects it covers (or it is part of) and is thus necessarily ‘perceived as set apart from those who behold it’ (ibid). In contrast, ‘looking in’ darkness manifests a sustained immersion in this enveloping entity. Experienced as a medium or condition (for seeing) which eclipses visible spatial boundaries, ‘looking in’ darkness epitomises the alluring potential for ‘presence and movement of others’ who might also be there in the dark. Paradoxically, this darkness serves to highlight, not obfuscate, ‘the publicness of theatre’ (Alston and Welton 2017, p.3). This is a useful framing for my approach to darkness, which focuses on instances of engineered or theatrical darkness, in which audiences are invited to see in (and within) darkness and engage with negotiated togetherness.

In sum, in this section, I outlined my approach to darkness through two core concerns. First, I addressed Jarvis’ proposition of different darknesses, which emphasises the plurality and diversity of darkness and its ability to perform differently. Second, by highlighting being in darkness through the experience of seeing darkness (which differs from not seeing), I began to frame darkness as that which promotes a reconfigured sensory perception. Both Welton and Lennon contest the understanding of darkness as simply an absence (of light or otherwise) and attempt to emphasise darkness’ own (material) presence. However, even when taking the nothing of ‘seeing-nothing’ ‘seriously’, or attempting to re-conceptualise this nothing as something, both accounts still slip into negating or deficient vocabularies. In contrast, I seek to frame darkness in generative terms: not a consequence of the attenuation of light, but as a
form-giving entity, which ‘can create kinds of theatre that play on and with the senses’ (Lennon 2018, p.67), in order to highlight the creative possibilities darkness encourages and the socio-political significance it might hold. In the next section, I begin my engagement with these possibilities by positioning this PR in relation to artistic and scholarly lineages.

**Making and Researching Theatre in the Dark**

I come at this research from the perspective of a theatre and performance maker, after years of professional work exploring indeterminate and unfixed encounters. Particularly focusing on theatre in the dark, I collaborate and co-direct Fye and Foul theatre company with Giulio Blason and Lisa Savini. Fye and Foul devises unique sonic experiences, engaging with darkness and extremes. This collaboration has certainly inspired my practice, thinking and helped to propagate this research. As a practitioner-researcher, I approach theatre in the dark from a compositional-structural perspective, shifting the focus to the process of performance-making rather than the perception or experience of the piece – which is mostly the angle of exploration in theatre in the dark scholarship (Alston 2013b; Machon 2013b; Welton 2006, 2011, 2013, 2017b). Therefore, in this section, I outline the importance of the maker’s perspective and position this PR in scholarly and artistic lineages.

Key to this research is an interest in the ways in which darkness influences the composition of performance through processes of meaning-making, and as such its framework extends beyond phenomenological concerns or critical engagements with individual experiences. The maker’s perspective provides an alternative viewpoint to theatre in the dark research. This viewpoint offers me a unique position from which to offer new insights into the field of theatre in the dark and theatre studies more broadly, especially as it positions practice as a tool for research and the production of new insights (rather than simply creative outputs). The maker’s perspective is significant, first as it responds to a dominant gap in the field, providing an ‘insider’s view’ to the process of its making, in order to pave the way to understanding how those various audiences’ experiences are being structured or induced. Second, the maker’s perspective helps to explore and identify the dramaturgical and compositional traits of darkness so as to better understand darkness’ use in contemporary
practices. Shifting the focus to the process of creation and the conditions or stimuli set by a (performance) maker offers a deeper understanding of practice by means of experimentation (and research), which might not be available in isolated analysis of case studies, or in artistic accounts that elaborate on the creative process.

Moreover, through PR I am able to approach the exploration in the darkened studio with the particular focus on uncertainty – both as an artistic ambition and critical inquiry – which sets up my own terms for making work in darkness. This is also why I have not repurposed my work with Fye and Foul as research (along with questions of authorship and ownership). In other words, I consider the devising process and experimentation in the studio as a productive vehicle to further reflect on the elusive, complex and timely concept of uncertainty and expand the investigative scope of current work around darkness (and dramaturgy) in performance.

As noted, there is a growing interest in darkness, shadows and gloom in both artistic practice as well as in diverse disciplines and fields of exploration. Throughout this thesis, I contextualise my cycles of practice (and the study of darkness and uncertainty) in relation to more specific theoretical and artistic inquiries. Here, however, I position my exploration and outline the broader field of theatre and performance in the dark, though with a particular focus on the UK. Two accounts (Alston 2016; Alston and Welton 2017) provide exhaustive surveys of both practice and scholarship around darkness which help to frame this inquiry. In their recently published edited volume,5 Alston and Welton contextualise the prevalence of theatre in the dark through historical and geographical perspectives and seek to account for the various ways in which the aesthetics of darkness has been experimented with, ‘proposing a range of approaches to the phenomenon of darkness in theatre and other closely related cultural practices’ (2017, pp.8-9). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present a comprehensive history of theatre in the dark practices and all the theoretical discourses

5 The collection emerged from a symposium entitled “Theatre in the dark” held at the University of Surrey in July 2014, organised by Adam Alston, which I also attended.
surrounding darkness. Instead, for the remainder of this section, I position my inquiry by mapping precise lineages and relevant conversations.

Among the various angles informing the understanding and theorisation of darkness, one might find the religious contexts and metaphors of darkness and light (Alston and Welton 2017); the politics and economics of experiencing darkness/night-time in public (Schivelbusch 1988; Koslofsky 2011; Bogard 2013; Edensor 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2017); racial connotations of blackness (English 2007; Hurley 2004); ethical questions of blindness and disability (Saerberg 2007; Bolt 2013; Apospori 2015; Orestano 2016); the development of new technologies and the history of darkness and light in the design of theatrical spaces (Elcott 2016; Palmer 2013; 2017; Welton 2017a); and the employment of blackout as a dramatic device throughout theatre history (Alston and Welton address Symbolism as well as the work of Beckett and Pinter. See also Chamberlain 1997; Di Benedetto 2001; Hurley 2004; Rayner 2006; Bailes 2011).

The (fairly recent and limited) scholarship addressing theatre (and dance) in the dark studies different issues concerning the history, dramaturgy, aesthetics, phenomenology and politics of dark performances, usually from the perspective (or experience) of the audience member. Notable examples include the works of Welton (2005, 2006, 2011, 2013, 2017a, 2017b), who explores how theatre could ‘make sense’ under different conditions, one of which is darkness; the way in which we ‘feel’ in theatre through its various means; what it is like to perform and see in darkness, and the ethical implications of eliminating lights. Alston (2013b, 2016, 2017) examines the politics and productive modes of participation in the dark, through the experience of perceived risk and trepidation, the production of affect and emotion and the challenge to the audience’s agency in theatre in the dark productions and different social enterprises (such as dining in the dark. See also Edensor and Falconer 2015). Josephine Machon interviews Lundahl & Seitl (2013a) – which provides a relevant, albeit minor, contribution to the view of maker’s process – and discusses her own (syn)aesthetic, multisensory (specifically haptic) experience in Lundahl & Seitl’s work – in an interesting contrast to Alston’s analysis of his experience (2013b). George Home-Cook (2015) provides a
phenomenological account of attending to sound in darkness, analysing Sound&Fury’s *Kursk* and *Ether Frolics* (as well as Beckett and Pinter’s Radio plays). Similarly, Lynne Kendrick (2014, 2015, 2017, 2018) and Nicholas Till (2015) focus on the sonic element of dark performances, and the role of sound for meaning-making and manipulation in shaping the audience’s experience. Andre Lepecki (2016) on the other hand, considers dance performances that employ darkness or low lighting and examines their political potential (through Deleuze’s notion of becoming). Other scholars that engage or present their research and/or practice in darkness include Liam Jarvis, Andrew Lennon, Flaviana Sampaio, David Shearing and Lee Campbell. Finally, two further accounts address the maker’s process and perspective: Michelle Man (2014), who describes dancing and choreographing in/for darkness, and Ella Finer (2012), who spends a small part of her Practice Research PhD addressing the (female) voice, its materiality and how it emerges in darkness. I advance these accounts by conducting a dramaturgical study of darkness and uncertainty, focusing on the unexplored production and devising of theatre in the dark (and hence embracing the maker’s perspective). By addressing the ways through which uncertainty and loss of clarity are being generated, I seek to look at the broader socio-political implications of darkness and how it might facilitate different modes of social engagement and lead to a new sense of clarity.

Broadly speaking, theatre in the dark (and dark aesthetics) can be viewed as a diverse array of practices that is ‘rooted in tradition, enhanced by innovation, and that encompasses a field that includes performances that utilize complete darkness or gloom, blindfolds and other similar technologies, the night sky and shadow play’ (Alston and Welton 2017, p.9). Acknowledging the broader contexts of immersive environments and enhanced sensorial experiences using darkness (such as dining, concerts or comedy in the dark), this PhD focuses on artworks that incorporate engineered blackouts and that position the audience in near/total darkness. These refer mostly to performances in theatre spaces. However, as theatre in the dark ‘upsets taxonomic boundaries between theatre and installation art’ (ibid, p.7), this research is also informed by artworks, performances and installations by artists such as Tino Sehgal, Carsten Höller, James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, Yayoi Kusama, Ann Veronica
Janssens, Sam Winston and Ayoung Kim who incorporate darkness, low-light or seek to alter the visitor’s perception.

In theatre, two momentous seasons dedicated to experiences, events and performances in darkness – namely the ‘Dark/Noir’ season at Avignon Festival (1993) and ‘Playing in the dark’ festival at BAC in London (1998) – signify an important moment within the recent interest in the possibilities of darkness. Within the artists and companies experimenting with darkness in performance – that enlighten this investigation – one can find Darkfield, Sound&Fury, Shunt, Extant, Lundahl & Seidl, Punchdrunk, Analogue, Complicite, Goat and Monkey, Pan Pan Theatre, Ontroerend Goed, Chris Goode, Tim Crouch, Andy Field, Hofesh Schechter, David Shearing and Fye and Foul. As mentioned, Alston and Welton provide an extensive survey of theatre in the dark performances (2017, pp.5-14; Alston 2016, pp.63-70) which I will not repeat here. However, more recent productions that integrate darkness in substantive ways include: Lucy Carter / Michael Hulls’ No Body (2016), Lisa Dwan No’s Knife (2016), Dries Verhoeven’s Phobiarama (2017), Philip Ridley’s Killer (2017), Lulu Raczka’s A Girl in School Uniform (Walks Into a Bar) (2018), Ultimate Dancer’s YAYAYAAYAYAYAY (2018) and Darkfield’s Séance (2017 –) and Flight (2018 –).

The above performances and this PR could also be situated within the emerging field of immersive theatre. Immersive theatre is a prominent movement in contemporary performance tending ‘towards a visceral and participatory audience experience with an all-encompassing, sensual style of production aesthetic’ (Machon 2013a, p.66). Current scholarship around immersive theatre acknowledges the variety of forms, styles and practices that might be termed ‘immersive’, for instance, one-on-one performance, large-scale free-roaming theatre, role-playing and participatory events or indeed theatre in the dark (White 2012, 2013; Harvie 2013; Alston 2016; Harpin and Nicholson 2016; Frieze 2016, Journal of Contemporary Drama in English 4(1) 2016). “Pitch-black theatre” – one of the terms suggested for performances that include total darkness – while being a noteworthy practice within this field, often remains on the edges of the debate.
Dark performances such as Sound&Fury’s *Going Dark* (2010-2014) telling the story of a planetarium guide going blind, or the prolonged period of darkness in Cordelia Lynn’s *Lela and Co.* (2015) in which a brutal rape scene is described, could be seen as promoting immersive moments or experiences relying on ‘the development and completion of a cohesive immersive aesthetic’ (Alston 2016, p.145; see Machon 2013a, p.63). However, within this context, I find more resonance with the work of David Rosenberg and Glen Neath’s *Ring* (2012-2015) and *Fiction* (2014), or Darkfield’s *Séance* (2017 –) and *Flight* (2018 – ), who use headphones with binaural recording to immerse and disorient audiences in total darkness, creating disruptive uncertain experiences. Similarly, my own collaborations with Fye and Foul in *Safe Word* (2014-2015), *Cathedral* (2015-2016) and *Leaving Parties* (2017) seek to take advantage of the immersive quality of darkness, to create ‘an ambiguous situation whereby it is unclear whether the work is happening around, to, or within the spectator participant’ (White 2012, p.223). In contrast to the ambiguity regarding world representation (see Lehmann 2006, pp.100, 179-180), or the more metaphorical use of darkness, which permeates or might be identified in the former set of examples, the latter seeks to exploit the disorientating quality of darkness. The dramaturgies of these performances rely on the unique sensory experiences they produce in order to generate perceptual uncertainties and question what and how one perceives. That being said, while the latter set of examples convey alarming and or fear-inducing experiences, this PR arguably fosters more subtle interventions as opposed to simply scaring or confusing the audience. This is a deliberate (artistic) choice for the purpose of illuminating the complexity, diversity and richness of the possibilities of/in darkness.

To recap, in the last two sections I have introduced how darkness is understood in this thesis and where I position this investigation. In the previous section, I outlined two theoretical approaches which frame my understanding of darkness as a plural form-giving

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6 Much like my use of total darkness as opposed to blindfolds, I utilise speakers rather than headphones. Though partly for technical reasons, I did not want to confine audiences to fictional soundscapes (being made to listen to specific things) but utilising the conflation and confusion between the designed and actual sonic environments to further generate uncertainty.
entity. As a graspable variant, I have defined darkness not through the absence of light, but as a context specific theatrical device which can encourage an altered sensory engagement. Here, I have highlighted the significance of the maker’s perspective and briefly reviewed the recent scholarship surrounding theatre in the dark. By positioning my inquiry within the growing collection of artworks (both performances and installations) that incorporate near/total darkness as a major component constituting the work, I sought to both situate my PR in artistic and theoretical conversations and to illustrate once more how darkness is not merely a passing curiosity but a flourishing set of artistic interests comprising of multiple aesthetics and creative expressions. As this thesis unfolds, I continue to contextualise my cycles of practice in relation to more specific practical and artistic concerns, which resonate with the broader field of theatre and performance in the dark outlined above.

**Chapter Outline**

This final introductory section maps the structure of this complementary writing (thesis). This introduction outlined uncertainty and darkness as the two pillars and key concepts of this research, and positioned this PR in a specific field of practice. Chapter 2 continues to develop the terms for this investigation by providing the methodological rationale for this practice research. Expanding the conceptual frameworks set up thus far, this chapter addresses the process and approaches used to pursue this inquiry. I begin Chapter 2 by tackling some of the apparent contradictions at the core of this research – namely, the attempt to compose the uncertain and the generation of concrete insights about uncertainty. Then, I frame my approach to Practice Research, discuss how this research is being led as well as some of the characteristics of this particular inquiry, including a more sustained attention to dramaturgy, as a significant feature of this PR.

After these first two chapters, the following three chapters move to pay close attention to the three cycles of practice and the three research questions which drive this PhD. Each chapter emphasises a specific facet of uncertainty and focuses on a particular theatrical ‘building block’. As this investigation is practice-oriented, this thesis’ structure seeks to mirror
my thinking process, i.e. the development of practical research and research *through* practice. Thus, each chapter aligns with a specific cycle of practice, while also building on insights and examples that were established in earlier stages. I adopt a cumulative relationship between cycles of practice (and thesis chapters), so as to provide a richer account and a better understanding of the strategies and insights that I propose around uncertainty and darkness.

Chapter 3 examines the tension between the isolating and shared experiences of dark performances, concentrating on indeterminacy as an understanding of uncertainty. In this chapter, I reflect on the process of devising *Campfire* ([watch trailer](#)). *Campfire* gathered the audience around a sonic ‘fire’ and through various invitations explored different configurations of sociality and interaction in the dark. Through this first cycle, I begin to evaluate the dramaturgical and socio-political significance of uncertainty and consider how *negotiated togetherness* unfolds in darkness. In my attempt to facilitate an understanding of a new/ altered sense of clarity, this chapter argues that darkness enables different interactions and modes of coexistence that challenge categories, are still in-formation, and which might not sit neatly together or even contradict each other, without fixing or prioritising one particular exchange.

Chapter 4 investigates light and lighting design – through my second cycle of practice – expanding the study of darkness to visual obfuscation more broadly. Looking at vagueness, I consider the significance of *not seeing clearly*. This chapter examines *Overcast* ([watch trailer](#)), an intimate performance attempting to emulate the experience of being immersed in clouds or looking through overcast. Chapter 4 responds to the second research question, concerning how lighting design can generate *loss of clarity*. I propose two specific strategies – plunges to darkness and compositions of low-lighting – which manifest light’s ability to unsettle, obfuscate or destabilise vision. To continue and establish the new sense of clarity, this chapter proposes that *not seeing clearly* can generate new forms of perception that do not rely on visual or clear identification and recognition. Instead, the undecidability around the object perceived can make space for inclusion of multiple views and understandings.
In Chapter 5, my study of negotiated togetherness tends to being-with the other-than-human. This chapter studies sound, disorientation and dislocation. I turn to *Certain Ways* (watch trailer), a ‘sonic journey’ taking place in total darkness, in which robotic voices guide the audience through different (sonic) environments. By conceptualising sound as a significant performative tool that can alter and affect how and what is perceived, I seek to respond to the third research question, which traces how the exploration of a range of sonic strategies can offer new insights about uncertainty. More specifically, I suggest that sound can manifest our coexistence with the other-than-human, trouble the human/non-human binary and unsettle the boundaries between the natural and the artificial, the organic and the technological. Thus, the robotic voice exhibits part of the wider socio-political significance of uncertainty. Similarly, in the dark, sound can set an invitation to sound out the space differently; which can reveal new possibilities of/for perception, turning from the known and familiar, towards the unseen, or ignored.

I conclude this thesis by summarising the principal insights that have emerged through this inquiry and underpin how the new/altered sense of clarity that this PR tried to sketch might look like. Overall, pulling together these diverging threads and explorations of different theatrical devices (in/through darkness), this thesis seeks to highlight the rich and exciting possibilities of theatre in the dark, contributing not only to a contemporary set of practices but to a quickly growing critical field. Read alongside and in relation to my practice, this research traces the political and productive potential of uncertainty as an important intervention pressing against ocularcentrism and fixity. Embracing lightlessness, I walk carefully into the dark, seeking to discover what might be revealed under the cover of darkness.
2. Methodology:

The ‘how to’ of the ‘how to’

This chapter provides the methodological rationale for this practice research. In what follows, I seek to expand the conceptual frameworks established in the introduction by addressing the design, process, and approaches that have been used to pursue this inquiry. Utilising practical experimentations and dramaturgical analysis as my main methods, the core task of this chapter is to elucidate how this research was conducted.

As stated, the two core objectives leading this practice research and thesis are first, to provide new insights about the dramaturgies operating in theatre in the dark performances from the relatively unexplored perspective of the maker, thus contributing to the growing interest in darkness in both practice and research. Subsequently, dramaturgy is to be understood in this thesis as the ‘underpinning principles of theatrical construction’ (Turner, 2015, p.2). Dramaturgy denotes the composition, structure and process of making that constitute a practice, and provides a mode of analysis of that practice. As such, it is a key aspect of making and conceptualising theatre in the dark and reflecting on uncertainty. Second, by critically analysing and considering the implications of these dramaturgies, this research seeks to generate new insights about uncertainty and consider how these theatrical encounters might draw audiences together in ways that render sociality in-formation and do not rely on fixed recognition or classification. Using the devising process and ‘insider’s knowing’ to better access and study what I call ‘dramaturgies of uncertainty’, I have set out to examine the possible stimuli carefully put forward by the maker that might evoke loss of clarity, paying close attention to the various manifestations of uncertainty that are in play in these performances and practical explorations.

This thesis is grounded in practice research (henceforth PR) as a means of investigating dramaturgies of uncertainty through the process of making theatre in the dark.
Following Rachel Hann, who seeks to eliminate the micro-politics that could be associated with practice as/through/based/led research (Hann 2015), I refer to this method as Practice Research – rather than Practice as Research (PaR), Performance as Research (PAR), artistic research (AR) or other possible titles (see Barton 2018, p.4-5). PR avoids the institutional and methodological politics, which risks asserting a hierarchy or even a binary between practice and research. It also foregrounds practice as the object of exploration itself – as opposed to just a method of conducting the investigation – reading ‘practice research’ in a literal sense. Put differently, the insights arising from this research emerge in and through practice, practice is presented as a means to encounter the different ‘knowings’ arising from this inquiry, and the insights presented in this thesis are also about the practice itself. In that sense, practice is approached both as a mode of doing and as an art form. Therefore, though some of the definitions and articulations I draw from in this methodological account (and this thesis in general) use different terminologies, they are discussed and applied here as PR.

In practice, this inquiry spans three cycles of exploration, each focusing on a specific theatrical ‘building block’ and tied to a particular facet of uncertainty. Often associated with Action Research (Riley and Hunter 2009), I am borrowing the term ‘cycle’ (see Smith and Dean 2013; Barrett and Bolt 2014; Shearing 2015) to account for the iterative process of exploration in the studio. Indeed, the three cycles forming this research do not work in isolation and there are many overlaps between them. However, the term underpins the tussle between creative experimentation, critical reflection, refinement and insights arising from these experimentations. This thesis stems from these cycles of practice, each of which resulted in a performance piece and manifested some of the insights emerging from this inquiry: Campfire (2016), Overcast (2017) and Certain ways (2018). In conjunction with these performances (and their documentation), each of the following chapters will reflect and expand upon specific dramaturgies of uncertainty that were investigated in relation to the ‘building block’ explored. For example, Chapter 4 will delve into lighting design, and will discuss how specific lighting compositions attempted to destabilise, de-familiarise, or challenge perceptual certainties.
Apart from the seemingly contradictory motivation of this research project – to present certain and concrete ‘knowings’ about uncertainty (with regards to perception and clarity) – this examination brings forward another possible paradox: namely, how a concrete, known and carefully chosen compilation of elements is sought to result in performance structures that generate uncertainty. Therefore, I begin this chapter, by trying to settle this contradiction and outline some of the strategies with which I conceptualise the work in the studio. Importantly, I do not propose a one-and-only way to encounter (perceptual) uncertainty. Looking at Ann Veronica Janssens’ process, for example, the artist, ‘works with what escapes her, not to grasp it, but rather to experiment with its ‘ungraspability’” (Bal 2013, p.8). I share and apply this motivation to my PR. My hope is not to dispel or overcome the uncertainty of darkness or achieve certainty in darkness. On the contrary, this PR seeks to revel in that uncertainty. My intent is to explore some of possibilities and potentialities for/of an altered sense clarity as it emerges through the process of devising and using this process as a way to reflect on the socio-political significance of this new/altered sense of clarity.\footnote{It is worth emphasising that while this research builds on and (mostly) takes place in the devising process, which like the practice research itself, is full of uncertainty (Barton 2018, p.9; Borgdorff 2011, p.61; Barrett 2014, p.3), my focus is not on the not-knowing that accompanies the process of devising and performance making, nor on the actual ‘how to’ of theatre-making itself. In other words, the sense of uncertainty that I consider is not a methodological one.}

Moreover, I recognise that examining the generation of uncertainty implies a perceiving audience member upon whom uncertainty is contingent (if it is to be perceived/felt at all) and that focusing on composition might be perceived as championing particular experiences. However, this PR does not seek to validate or quantify the extent to which uncertainty was sensed/felt, or whether I ‘succeeded’ as a maker. Following Janssens, when exploring the composition of performances in the dark and dramaturgies of uncertainty, I consider the devising of material as stimuli which might result in uncertainty. Informed by both theoretical frameworks and my own tacit and practitioner knowing, I reflect on these concrete stimuli (sound, light, invitations, framing etc.) as possible conditions for uncertainty, emphasising primarily performative structures. Such stimuli give room to and could elicit many different and possible affects or experiences, rather than dictate a specific one. Likewise,
defining uncertainty initially as loss of clarity, approaches uncertainty in processual terms, as opposed to a simple knowing/not-knowing binary. Unlike a singular state of not knowing, loss of clarity denotes a more nuanced and wide-ranging framework to analyse and evaluate uncertainty as it emerges in darkness. Thus, it allows me to account for a range of manifestations of perceptual uncertainties, in order to examine what that ‘loss’ might entail and what could be some of its broader implications. Thinking predominantly of the various ‘conditions’ – the concrete material or dramaturgical decisions – that might result in a transformed sense of clarity shifts the focus from a subjective (audience) experience of uncertainty (or darkness) to the structures and compositions that can eventually generate or evoke those experiences in/using darkness. Such a move enables a different perspective for the understanding of uncertainty as it looks at the various conditions that might contribute to its emergence, rather than essentialising or universalising a particular experience.

After attending to some of the challenges of composing the ‘uncertain’, I move on to frame (both theoretically and practically) my approach to PR – which builds on Robin Nelson’s and Henk Borgdorff’s definitions and the former’s model for PR – in order to establish how this particular research is being led. Finally, I discuss dramaturgy as a significant feature of my PR. Specifically, how dramaturgy serves to illuminate the process of structuring and experimenting with various compositions and how it allows me to consider uncertainty from a compositional perspective.

Composing the Uncertain

To institute the notion of dramaturgies of uncertainty, this thesis grapples with particular structures, tendencies, and compositional concerns – considering a range of techniques and modalities that can be understood as a series of strategies which propose stimuli that might evoke a sense (or experience) of uncertainty. Mapping and analysing such compositional strategies foreground the maker’s perspective, as well as highlight the range of dramaturgies operating in theatre in the dark performances. Consequently, such analysis provides a different path for reflecting and considering uncertainty itself. If we assume a fixed and
consequential set of answers to research questions through a clear set of experiences of uncertainty, on the face of it, there is an inherent contradiction at the core of this research as it seeks to clarify, (and ambitiously compose) uncertainty or that which resists clarity. In brief, dramaturgies of uncertainty are strategies attempting to generate a sense of uncertainty. Yet, how can one approach the composition of something ungraspable, ambiguous and unknown? How can a concrete set of strategies and materials result in vagueness and indeterminacy? Such questions accompanied this inquiry from its inception and in this section, I outline three approaches to reconcile such ‘paradoxes’: first, I reframe the act of composition as the proposition of stimuli or the creation of gaps (White 2013). Second, I turn to Mieke Bal’s paradoxical notion of ‘concrete abstraction’ and metaphor of fire (2013). Finally, I draw from the recent thinking around atmosphere production as another way of thinking about the composition of diffuse or indeterminate phenomena.

The act of composition denotes both the process of particular arrangements and dispositions within the artwork, as well as the overall activity of shaping a creative work. In its origin, the verb ‘to shape’, as George Home-Cook notes, meant ‘to create, form, or destine’ (2015, p.60). Studying theatrical sound design, Home-Cook clarifies how sound design is ‘not only “destined” to be perceived, but specifically intends to direct the attentional focus of the audience’ (ibid). Unpicking the word ‘design’, he details that,

[it] is not only inherently associated with intent, but with trickery, deception, and manipulation. As well as referring to the act of handling or manhandling an object, thing, or person, to ‘manipulate’ is to ingeniously bring about a particular effect or action through the use of underhand persuasion or dextrous contrivance. Designed sound is thus not only sound that has been carefully crafted, but that is intended to shape or manipulate the experience of the percipient (ibid, p.59).
Considering the shaping of theatrical devices more broadly, this PR not only attempts to devise theatre in dark, but more importantly it does so with the particular intent of evoking a sense of uncertainty. Divorcing manipulation from its devious connotations, I look at crafting the experience of the percipient – myself included – to prompt reflection and contemplation on what might be perceived in practice. Notably, there can be a substantial variation between a maker’s intentions and the actual experience of the audience – a gap between what was intended to what was attended (Ibid, p.60). However, as this PhD argues, exhibiting and reflecting on the careful consideration and creative crafting of theatre in the dark itself, can still be of great value to articulating how darkness can be manifested in performance, and how loss of clarity can be shaped. I have described these compositions as stimuli or conditions geared towards the arousal of uncertainty. Another way to view these stimuli is through what Gareth White terms ‘gaps’. Examining interactive and participatory performances, White proposes that the work ‘is prepared so that it has gaps to be filled with the actions of participating audience members’ (2013, p.30). These gaps necessitate the thought and felt response of the audience in order to make sense of the various material they encounter. Thus, a significant part of making interactive work ‘consists of creating the structure within which these particular gaps appear’ (Ibid). Applying White’s proposition to my own process, producing performance that evokes uncertainty is (partially) a matter creating gaps or openings for the spectators to fill. A similar vocabulary is used by David Rosenberg and his account for making performance using darkness. As Rosenberg describes,

In all my work I am looking for the gap in the performance where the audience fits in – an audience shaped hole. Sometimes it is through an incomplete or disjointed narrative or in Ring the darkness provides another hole for the audience to place themselves; from where they can create the image; the image that also includes themselves (Rosenberg in McLaren 2013, n.p.).

These ‘gaps’ infer that these compositions are incomplete until the interaction with a perceiving subject – the audience member. However, rather than approaching definite individual experiences, when discussing an altered sense of clarity, one which postpones or
resists fixity, these compositions can also become potentials, opportunities which might unfold in different ways before being fixed to a particular and certain interpretation. Critically, I read these gaps as dramatic and dramaturgical structures, which could still be examined in and of themselves, before being seized by an individual experience. Using the cyclical model, I review and re-examine my own observations as they emerge from my experimentation in the studio. Thus, instead of looking at the process of composition as an act of constituting fixed or ideal experiences (a way to clearly know the unknown), I underscore the theatrical principles and devices that generate these gaps, reflecting on the possible experiences they might induce. Evaluating my practical experimentations through this lens, I approach these different gaps or stimuli as a benchmark for analysing why they can lead to uncertainty and how they might destabilise perception.

A second way to consider composing the uncertain is found in Bal’s study of abstract art. Bal argues that due to the concrete quality of Janssens’ event-works, one cannot easily place them in either the tradition of figurative art or what is traditionally understood as ‘abstract’ art (2013, p.12). While in some of Janssens’ installations the visitor can encounter physical objects, others – such as her light beam sculptures or mist rooms, which immerse the viewers in spaces filled with colourful mist – are comprised of ephemeral and diffuse materials. Thus, it is not simply that Janssens’ work defies representation – or traditional understandings of form – it is also abstract since even though her work is concretely there it is physically hard to grasp. To describe Janssens’ work, Bal suggests the paradoxical notion of ‘concrete abstraction’, asking, ‘is this a contradiction, a truism, or Janssens’ way to reconsider what both terms mean and what their stakes are?’ (ibid). Putting aside the ontological questions about what constitutes an artwork, such a view still moves from unpacking experiences to discussing form and structure. As such, it carves the way to analyse intangible or ungraspable artworks and materials – including those which incorporate darkness as a graspable variant. Despite the concreteness of Janssens’ art (the ability to point at the different elements the work is made of, and which make the work), her work still qualifies as abstract. Put differently, it is precisely the experimentation with both terms (concreteness and abstraction) and identifying the
tensions between them that, for Bal, extends and enriches the understanding of abstraction. Observing my own ‘certainty regarding uncertainty’ and ‘the certain that generates uncertainty’ contradictions in light of the ‘concrete abstraction’ proposition, this research seeks to expand and advance the understanding of uncertainty by examining its relationships with darkness and the tensions between clarity and its loss. Janssens ‘seeks to push back the limits of perception, to multiply the participation of the senses in events of perception’ (ibid, p.8). Using abstraction and light as her tools for making work and pushing the former to the extreme, ‘her work “theorizes” abstraction, and can be used to understand the works of many other contemporary artists as well’ (ibid, p.12). This PR does not engage with abstraction. However, Janssens’ exploration of ‘what it is that makes us lose clarity, what that loss entails and how that very loss helps us live in the political, with all the tensions and contradictions that environment holds’ (ibid, p.21), resonates strongly with this research’s ambition. Correlatively, by experimenting with darkness, and attempting to destabilise clarity by means of different theatrical ‘building blocks’, I seek to study perceptual uncertainty through different artistic configurations and exercising them to consider the socio-political implications of these artistic interventions.

Another way to tackle these inherent challenges is through the metaphor of fire. Bal turns to J. L. Austin to examine the performativity of Janssens’ art. Austin aptly compares performance with fire, as they both take time, and more importantly because of their ontological indeterminacy: ‘both hover between a thing and event’ (Bal 2013, p.13). For Bal, Austin’s felicitous comparison with fire assists in accentuating the materiality of performance and its temporality. The former is useful for Bal’s discussion since Janssens explores the materiality of light. Again, Janssens’ light becomes almost tangible and in a similar vein could be applied to the darkness I work with, which I argue can be ‘composed’ or at least obtain different dramaturgical functions. What I find beneficial in turning to fire to reflect on performance, is less the slightly hyperbolic intensification of risks and potentials arising in encounters with it. Rather, more acutely for my discussion, is the recognition that despite its ontological indeterminacy one can still start a fire using a specific set of materials (e.g. wood,
matches, lighting fluid). Furthermore, one can utilise a different set of materials (a lighter instead of matches, paper and twigs instead of logs) and still light a fire. Thus, despite the fact that it is hard to grasp, one way to study (the vague phenomenon of) fire is to trace and experiment with the various materials and possibilities that might result in such fire. Correspondingly, I have set out to study uncertainty by experimenting with various compositions and theatrical structures which might result in a sense of uncertainty, something hard to grasp yet still perceptible. Equally, one can point to fire, feel its heat and observe its sparks. In other words, I can consider its effects, affects and what fire does. In a related move, part of the aim of this research is to articulate what darkness can do – dramaturgically (and performatively), and as a material for/in performance.

To further attend to the challenge of composing something intangible, diffuse and hard to grasp, I turn to the recent study of atmosphere production. For philosopher Gernot Böhme, while atmospheres ‘fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze’, we are unsure where they are, exactly, and ‘whether we should attribute them to the objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them’ (1993, p.114). Böhme describes atmospheres as floating in between: between subject and object (2013, p.3), between being subjective and objective (or quasi-objective) (1993, p.122). Following Böhme, atmospheres emerge between the perceiver and the perceived. The hazy and diffuse phenomenon of atmosphere emanates from the ensemble of elements that make up the perceived ‘object’ and so they belong to the perceived object. On the other hand, they require someone to ‘apprehend’ them and as such, they also belong to the perceiving subject (Anderson 2009, p.79) – much like White’s gaps that need to be ‘filled’ by an audience. Put differently, atmosphere is what relates factors of the environment with my experience in that environment in a particular moment; they form that relation and its qualities. Leading from the ‘in-betweeness’ or relational view of atmosphere, Böhme suggests two routes of inquiry: atmosphere reception and atmosphere production. I concentrate on the latter.

For Böhme, atmospheres can be produced and are involved whenever something is being staged and where design is a factor (1993, p.125; 2013, p.3). By composing an
atmosphere, one seeks to orchestrate and shape ‘the experience of, and emotional response to, a place through the material environment’ (Bille et al. 2015, p.33) in order to facilitate particular feelings or sensations. This perspective allows us to identify various processes of aestheticisation and manipulation, for instance in architecture, commerce, advertising or even politics, as well as attempts to generate particular atmospheres in various places – such as restaurants, shops or theatres – by considering the composition and arrangement of both material and immaterial elements of that environment. The composition of atmosphere, therefore, becomes central to the design of experiences, which is of particular importance when it comes to theatre-making. Böhme even looks at the theatrical stage set as a paradigm for atmosphere production, since scenography presents some of the necessary elements to produce an atmosphere on stage (2017, p.2; 2013). Accordingly, I conceive of atmosphere production as a deliberate, distinct and carefully constructed dramaturgical (or scenographic) arrangement geared toward the creation of a ‘tuned space’, where the various mise en scènes and their configuration of/on the stage can extend beyond the mere function of design or staging and which might lead to or shape a particular atmosphere.

Here other challenges arise. While the composition of atmospheres can be seen as the modulation of a constellation of different materials – natural or artificial, tangible or intangible – atmospheres do not have one specific point of origin: they always exceed and are not bound to the materials that form them. Atmospheres ‘name the affective qualities of gathering intensities of feeling while always escaping the recognizable form of that gathering’ (McCormack 2015, p.84; Salter 2018, p.174). Furthermore, if the process of composition itself implies the arrangement of various disparate elements, atmosphere production also involves some ephemeral fleeting elements that are neither visual nor material. So how could these be crafted? Finally, the act of composition might imply some degree of separation between the composer and the ‘object’ composed, which highlights an inherent paradox in the process (and analysis) of atmosphere production, since one is always part of and immersed in the atmosphere that is being produced.
In response, Tonino Griffero proposes that atmospheres are not composed but *generated*, namely, they succeed from their specific ‘generators’, whether material or immaterial (2017, n.p.). In that sense, and building on Böhme’s relationality, these arrangements or compositions do not form the atmosphere – or a representation of an atmosphere for that matter. In lieu, they create ‘tuned’ spaces and set up the conditions for atmospheres to appear. These compositions can establish a dominant tone in a space or situation that will only fully emerge as atmosphere when they are met with a perceiving subject. By this, I do not mean to imply that there is a ‘pre-atmosphere’ or ‘semi-atmosphere’ in space, since we are constantly immersed in atmospheres. Rather, I argue that the composition of atmosphere is an invitation that seeks to enhance or shift the tone, the general character of a space, or intensify its experiential qualities as a result of particular material circumstances. Indeed, these invitations could be changed or even declined by its attendees (ibid). Nevertheless, this material or practical view allows for a shift of focus from the personal perspective to a broader appreciation of the different (affective, sensuous, reflective) engagements between people and spaces or events. As such, it traverses the framework provided by a subjectivity-bounded phenomenology (Sørensen 2015, p.67), which is tied to a particular experiencing subject. As Böhme elucidates, ‘[o]nly from the perspective of the subject is atmosphere perceived as the emotional response to the presence of something or someone’ (2017, p.26). From the perspective of their production, on the other hand, and in line with my compositional approach, atmospheres can equally be examined from what Böhme terms ‘the object’, namely, the ‘sphere of its perceptible presence’ (ibid). Correspondingly, recognising that uncertainty might be *generated* in the encounter or interaction with the work, I approach the dramaturgies I devise in the studio as conditions which might result in a sense of uncertainty, as it emerges from specific ‘generators’ and therefore focus on these particular originators (the ‘sphere of its perceptible presence’).

One way to investigate or practice atmosphere production is looking, for instance, at one’s first impression of a space (more below). According to Griffero, the first impression is an affective and corporeal perception, succeeded by immediate evaluation (either conscious or
felt). Imbued with atmospheric potentiality, the first impression ‘influences and directs with its atmospheric charge every subsequent reflection and perception’ (2014, p.30–31). In that sense, the perceived ‘cosiness’ of a room or the ‘threat’ of a dark alley might be seen as a result of the initial encounter with the dominant tonality in these particular spaces. If the first impression is ‘charged with an enormous yet fragile atmospheric potentiality’ (Griffero 2014, p.31), I suggest that accounting for or modulating that first impression or interaction – utilising and articulating practitioner-knowledge – is a productive practical way to access the composition of atmosphere. I do not intend to continue and develop the ontology of atmospheres, yet the study of their production is still useful to inform the composition and study of that which is diffuse, indeterminate and resists clarity. As Griffero concludes,

although a planned atmosphere exists obviously in an incomplete and only potential way, I resist assuming that theatre, like other aesthetic works, never actually produces atmospheres but only evokes them in the spectator in a vague and imprecise way. Arranging spatio-temporal scenes that successfully invite certain viewers to know and feel something implies being perfectly aware of how to design theatrical affordances-atmospheres (2017, n.p.).

Perhaps, as a final proposition, adhering to the maker’s perspective opens the possibility to both harness my practitioner’s knowing (informed by artistic and theoretical frameworks) as well as acting as a (knowledgeable) audience member of my own creative process and practice. Put differently, the project aims to utilise both of these informed perspectives (and expand them through critical reflection and iterative processes), as opposed to simply corroborating my practice through different theories – as is the case with most theorists of atmosphere or other aesthetic theories which address the relationship between perceiving subjects and perceived objects (see Rebentisch 2012; Böhme 2017). In other words, merging both of these viewpoints (maker and audience) is a way of figuring, reviewing and ultimately shaping the generation of uncertainty through different configurations of dramaturgical elements.
To conclude, whether stimuli or gaps this section traced three possibilities to consider the composition of diffuse, indeterminate or ungraspable phenomena. I began by looking at shaping theatrical structures as creating gaps. Then, I examined the notion of concrete abstraction and the metaphor of fire and drew from the study of atmosphere production to suggest how different material arrangements can be geared towards shaping or studying various sensory and perceptual engagements. While arguably informed by my own experience as an audience of my own practice, in reinforcing the process of making, I build on the devising process as a vehicle for questioning the dramaturgical capacities and implications of darkness and uncertainty. I have specifically opted not to include subjective experiences of my practice through audience responses (more below). This was a purposeful decision to illuminate the creative possibilities of darkness in performance as opposed to sustaining the focus on experience (or the appearance of an attempt to validate my findings). The latter risks limiting the scope and richness of the manifestations of darkness and uncertainty in performance by tying them to fixed interpretations or experiences. Therefore, this research seeks to fill a significant gap by considering dramaturgical components that might spark these experiences in the first place. I now move to expand on PR was applied in this inquiry and establish how the exploration in the studio unfolded in practice.

**Practice Research**

Practice Research is an umbrella term for various research activities and different methods that, when it comes to theatre and performance, are used to investigate different elements, roles or aspects of the creative process as well as numerous aesthetics and forms. Defined by multiplicity, it is ‘an intentionally inclusive category’ in which diverse forms of artistic and creative practice are employed as an integrated aspect of the inquiry process (Barton 2018, p.4). While this diversity can offer numerous perspectives, definitions and understandings of how research could be conducted, the growing variety of PR projects and PR’s disparate applications could result in a ‘relatively ambiguous profile’, which is risky, especially as PR still faces a tenuous status within many institutional and professional contexts (ibid). While PR
appears to be largely accepted as a valid method (at least within the discipline of theatre and performance studies and from the narrow perspective of UK Higher Education institutions), there is still a great deal of uncertainty about PR when it comes to questions of assessment, dissemination and implications. In other words, PR ‘remains a conspicuously elusive idea – at precisely the same time that it is passionately advocated’ (ibid, p, 2). Therefore, in this section, I articulate how PR is manifested within this particular research. I begin by defining PR and positioning this project within the current PR discourse. Next, I outline how my exploration unfolded in practice – building on Robin Nelson’s initial model for PaR (2006). Finally, I address some of the particularities of this project – namely, the omission of audience responses, collaborations and documentation.

According to Rachel Hann, PR has recently entered a new stage, which Hann defines as ‘second wave’ (2015). If the ‘first wave’ of practice research was concerned with gaining institutional recognition and legitimising practice as a valid method for conducting research, ‘second wave’ focuses on ‘questions of accessibility and quality’ (ibid, n.p.). While quality has also been important to justify institutional acceptance (Piccini and Kershaw 2003; Piccini 2004), the way I interpret Hann’s ‘second wave’, is that it relates to the particularities of the different modes and methods comprising PR and the different ways through which PR could be conducted and eventually evaluated, assessed and shared. Admittedly, at least currently – every PR project is also about PR itself, reconfiguring how PR works, its frameworks and ‘what it can be’ (Scott 2016, p.xvii). This might be the case with any method, but is, I suggest, of particular importance to PR due to the recent and growing discussion around it (see Hann and Ladron de Guevara 2015, pp.3-5) and the challenge PR poses to conventional understandings of knowledge (Johnson 2011; Barret 2014).

Therefore, while the initial research objectives of this project were not specifically methodological, using this ‘fairly new’ method (see Piccini 2004) – at least in terms of institutional recognition – still contributes to the scope and thinking around the interrelation between practice and theory; the articulation and analysis of the artistic process (and of tacit knowledge); or the documentation and sharing of the findings/insights to name a few. Whilst
I do not seek to validate PR per se, I still aim to advance the ‘second wave’ discussion by proposing new insights arising from the way in which PR operates in this particular project. It is not my intention to outline all available interpretations of PR, survey the current state of the field or provide an exhaustive historical account for its development, as these are available in numerous publications (see Piccini 2004; Allegue et al. 2009; Riley and Hunter 2009; Biggs and Karlsson 2011; Nelson 2013) and are beyond the scope of this thesis. Likewise, instead of proposing new models or advocating for a new terminology, I seek to contribute to the current discourse around PR, by clearly articulating the specificities of PR in this research project, outlining which models and approaches proved useful and how I have used them, as well as which questions and challenges emerged. Indeed, there is no one-size-fits-all model, and PR projects are often context, institution and geography specific. However, by implicitly questioning methodological frameworks, the explicit articulation of this PR can be considered as another way to increase and establish the accessibility and quality Hann calls for. Thus, this methodological account – and arguably this thesis as a whole – will hopefully delineate some significant issues, attributes or characteristics of PR, within the wider spectrum of creative or artistic inquiries. For instance, considering the role or function of the document within a PR process – which clearly presents particular challenges when the practice concerns darkness.

While I situate my PR within the ‘second wave’ paradigm, the discussion associated with ‘first wave’ PR still proves useful in defining the various ways in which, to use Borgdorff, ‘the creative process forms the pathway (or part of it)’ for new insights and understandings (2011, p.46). The majority of scholarship that could be associated with ‘first wave’ PR attempts to legitimise practice as a significant method for steering research; negotiates how and why PR might fit within the academy; and presents case studies to exemplify how PR operates in practice (significant examples include: Trimingham 2002; White 2002; Oddey and Naish 2002; Melrose 2002; O’Brien 2007 Barrett and Bolt 2007; Smith and Dean 2009; Kershaw 2011). However, even in newer publications, anthologies and reports (Barret and Bolt 2014; Andrews and Nelson n.d; Arlander et al. 2018), that arguably seek to refine and propose newer methodological possibilities, features, models or questions, one might still
identify an attempt to validate PR, either in response to the ongoing need to prove its legitimacy as an equal mode of conducting research or traces of the anxiety regarding institutional acceptance (Barton 2018, p.7). Looking specifically at PR in relation to theatre and performance, Allegue et al. (2009) is a significant edited collection and output of PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance), a five-year project (2001-2006) held at the University of Bristol that investigated both creative and academic issues raised by PR. The collection is comprised of important propositions that informed the development of my own inquiry—e.g. Rye and Piccini on documentation and Nelson’s model for Practice as Research. Lastly, this inquiry builds, as already suggested, on Nelson’s writing and model(s) for PaR (2006, 2009, 2013) and Borgdorff’s definitions for practical and artistic research (2007, 2011).

Put simply, PR ‘involves a research project in which practice is the key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice […] is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry’ (Nelson 2013, pp.8-9). Moreover, PR allows for articulating ‘knowledge claims that embrace the intrinsic qualities and processes that inform artistic practices’ (Hann and Ladron de Guevara 2015, p.3). This PhD considers the process of devising performance in the dark, the event of performance itself and the reflection on both, as productive sites of/for new insights, and as valuable means of exploring the dramaturgical significance of darkness and uncertainty in performance. PR enables the exploration, reflection and evaluation of different strategies and processes that could be used by a performance maker. As PR affords an ‘insider’s perspective’ and a substantial understanding around the process of making, it aligns with my ambition to investigate dramaturgies which might evoke loss of clarity in the dark. As I employ it, PR combines the experimentation in the studio with rigorous reflection (in and out of the studio) and therefore it helps to better account for the composition of dramaturgies of uncertainty and their implications. These compositions cannot be abstractly conceived but are a matter of practical exploration in the darkened studio (Nelson 2013, pp.8-9).

When considering the various definitions of PR, it is clear that not every practical or artistic question will be considered research (see Heddon 2016, pp.82-84; Jackson 2009).
Borgdorff attempts to define ‘when art practice qualifies as research’ (2007, p.6, original emphasis) and concludes:

Art practice qualifies as research if its purpose is to expand our knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative processes. Art research begins by addressing questions that are pertinent in the research context and in the art world. Researchers employ experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes. Research processes and outcomes are documented and disseminated in an appropriate manner to the research community and the wider public (ibid, p.14).

Building on Borgdorff’s observation – which draws from the RAE and AHRC’s definitions for research in general (Borgdorff 2007, p.7-8) – it is important to note that the purpose of PR is not to develop that artistic practice, or for the personal artistic development of the practitioner (Borgdorff 2011, pp.49, 54). Instead, and as is the case here, the aim is to discover and advance the thinking (‘expand knowledge’) around theatre in the dark and dramaturgies of uncertainty through and in the doing, reflecting and articulating the process of making those performances. In this vein, much like Borgdorff’s definition, the purpose of this research is to follow an artistic and critical inquiry around an altered clarity and theatre in the dark in order to provide new insights (both in the presentation of practice and in complementary writing). I have been using practical experimentations to conduct an investigation ‘in and through art objects’ (performances) and utilised the creative processes in the studio in order to respond to gaps in the field and to address ‘questions that are pertinent’. The outcomes and insights arising from my experimentation, were then disseminated in practice, its documentation and this thesis; the latter also seeks to contextualise the exploration, articulate tacit knowledge acquired through practice and highlight the insights that emerged ‘to the research community and the wider public’. What I contest in Borgdorff’s definition is his choice to use knowledge as a noun, implying a concrete, specific and certain entity, ‘a body of true statements’
(Johnson 2011, p.145). Although PR and its articulation orientate towards the production of 'new knowledge', akin to the experimental, experiential and processual nature of this mode of research (and especially when uncertainty is the topic of exploration), I refer to the different contributions of this PR as knowing(s) (Johnson 2011; Scott 2016) – a continuous verb underscoring process – or insights (Nel 2013) to highlight the ongoing and tacit nature of these understandings.

While Borgdorff’s framing steered this project from its inception, for this inquiry, I have been using Nelson’s model for PaR (2006, see figure 1) that proposes merging conceptual frameworks – located within both scholarly and artistic lineages – with practical exploration that combines both tacit knowing and the insights that emerge from more conventional scholarly research (Nelson 2013, p.32). Nelson rearticulated his model twice (2009, 2013), however, upon reflection, I found that in the context of my own PR, the newer iterations – albeit systematic – proved too rigid and lost the initial model’s simplicity and dynamic nature. Placing some frameworks/features in a particular ‘box’ hindered the process, especially as some ‘elements’ do not sit so neatly in a particular part of the model or are easily associated with insider/outsider knowing. For example, as stated, dramaturgy in this inquiry fits more than one ‘box’ as it is a theoretical feature, mode of analysis, an approach to practice and part of my practitioner’s knowing.8

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8 Adopting Nelson’s older model, allowed me to avoid some of the taxonomy proposed in the newer iterations (i.e. know-how, know-that) that proves to be more of a limitation in this case, as these are not easily quantifiable.
In practice

This inquiry unfolded over three ‘cycles’, with each of these contributing and enriching the study of uncertainty and darkness by focusing on a different facet of uncertainty and a key theatrical device. In the following chapters, I describe in greater detail the generation of specific compositions from each cycle of practice. Therefore, here I give a more general overview of how the project evolved in order to elucidate the process of exploration. Due to the technical demand of this research and for practical reasons (dark spaces, space availability, technical support) each cycle spanned across a few intensive weeks in the studio (normally 3-4), with some gaps between the different weeks to allow reflection and review of documentation outside the studio. To facilitate more time for experimentation, in the final cycle of practice, I conducted three additional ‘bursts’ of practice (of one or two days) to
explore specific, smaller scale ideas regarding sound and the robotic voice. As the project advanced, I have worked on the different cycles of practice in parallel – for example, refining *Overcast* over one intensive week of practice while experimenting with new sonic possibilities for *Certain ways* the following week. Such a move not only supported the iterative nature of my devising process, promoting a review and refinement of the material, but it also allowed the different cycles to inform and build on each other, encouraging greater reflection and the pursuit of resonances and corresponding threads of inquiry.

Drawing from the study of atmosphere production and my ‘practitioner knowing’, each cycle was initiated by a particular ‘first impression’ – normally a scenario that frames the performance or an image which the audience are meant to encounter as they enter the space. Every first impression was accompanied by a set of questions or artistic motivations linked to that impression. Upon entering the studio, I began by trying to implement this first impression (the campfire, clouds laboratory and academic conference with robotic speakers) and reflected on how the performance can develop this image/setting further. Expanding the first impression, I began to experiment with those different possibilities which I documented alongside my different trials. For example, as indicated by the (rough) recorded reflection I logged before my first week in the studio (*play recording*), I embarked on the first cycle of practice – that explored uncertainty in relation to the shared presence with other audience members in the dark – with a particular ‘image’ and a set of inquiries. Building on the questions or themes I wished to tackle before entering the studio, I devised the initial set-up for the performance (the campfire), positioning the speakers in the space and illuminating them. Then, I improvised and reflected on the various compositions that could creatively respond to this framework or emerge from this set-up. For example, the appearance of darkness, the choice and location of sound and the different invitations proposed to the audience. To drive my exploration during my weeks in the studio, I have asked specific practical questions – how do I highlight the presence of others in the dark? How do I invite the audience to dance? In which order should this set of invitations be made to establish a sense of comfort? Using task-led experimentation, I sought to respond both to the larger
questions of this thread of inquiry (How is darkness a productive site to explore negotiated
togetherness?) and identify smaller fragments or interventions within the campfire setting I
have created for this particular performance (Such as the collective recreation of the sound of
fire).

As another example to better elucidate the process, when approaching the
development of Overcast, I considered different materials which might evoke the ‘making’ of
clouds in my ‘laboratory’ and decided to use a bowl of water as part of the first impression of
this piece, as a material from which I could potentially ‘make clouds’ (echoing the water
droplets from which actual clouds are made). As the Bowl experimentation exhibits (see
video), having devised the first impression, I began exploring various creative possibilities of
how to illuminate the bowl – and how each lighting state alters its appearance – before
contemplating their different implications and configuration in the final performance. As the
cycles of practice progressed, I have used mostly notes, sketches, and extensive
documentation (through lighting plans, images, videos and sound recordings) to review and
evaluate the devising process in the studio, abandoning the recorded reflections as they were
not as productive for me to articulate my thinking.

That being said, critical reflection, while not in audio form, still played a significant
part both in and out of the studio. As such, I employed Donald Schön’s (1983) proposition of
reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The former is meant to further illuminate and
shape the practice as it progresses; setting up tasks to try out, evaluating the sequences
composed and more importantly, opening the space for the discovery in the studio. As Estelle
Barrett posits, ‘[k]nowing through action involves the application of personal knowledge,
sensation and tacit and intuitive know-how in order to bring about unexpected changes to the
perceived world’ (2014, p.6).9 When playing with the different robotic voices in the studio, for
instance, I have spotted a quiet sound on the audio track appearing every time Alex’s voice

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9 Nelson testifies that to ‘achieve a profoundly critical reflection,’ one is ‘required to dislocate habitual ways of
seeing’ (Nelson 2013, p.45). This dislocation is key for my exploration of loss of clarity, which seeks to alter clarity
or the habitual flow of perception.
began to speak. Zooming in, I have noticed an intake of breath, which revealed the exciting prospect of the robot’s breath. Following this finding (reflection-in-action), I devised a new sequence turning the short pant or gasp into an extensive breathing sequence. Crucial to my study of uncertainty, further reflection outside the studio – combined with more conventional scholarly research – revealed how the sound of the robot breathing can become dramaturgically significant as it blurs the boundaries between the natural and artificial, the organic and the technological. Reflection-on-action then, refers to an overall, deeper and critical contemplation, evaluation and analysis of my practical exploration. Put differently, the insights arising from this PR emerge in/through practice and are also consequent to further reflection and integration of my analysis with theoretical frameworks. This mode of reflection not only led to the insights presented in this thesis, it also resulted in further questions and revealed other creative prospects, some of which I addressed and investigated in subsequent cycles of practice – continuing, for example, the exploration of haze from Campfire in Overcast.

By merging both strands of critical reflection (in- and on-action) and rooting them in conceptual frameworks, I was able to advance threads of inquiry that proved insightful, tying together my ‘tacit knowledge’ with other modes of academic research while equally allowing scholarly research to spark ideas to explore in the studio.

Having established the overall structure of this PR, for the remainder of this section. I focus on specific aspects of this process: the omission of audience responses, collaboration and documentation.

**Audience responses**

At the bottom left corner of his model, Nelson mentions ‘audience research’ implying that the experience of practice is key when conducting PR. However, to give greater emphasis to the unexplored maker’s perspective, I deliberately omitted audience responses from this thesis. Throughout this PhD research I presented numerous work-in-progress showings, that were undoubtedly valuable for the development and refinement of my PR. These showings allowed me to observe my work in a slightly different context. In each showing, I left blank papers for
the audience to (anonymously) respond, feedback or share their thoughts should they wish to. This was not a formal collection of data to evidence, validate or confirm how my practice is being perceived. Rather, these responses, drawings or questions – along with informal conversations with audience members after the showings – provided a more anecdotal account of the various audiences’ experiences. Acting as a supplement, these were utilised primarily to inform my own critical reflection, assessing emerging insights, and adjusting my methods and practice accordingly. I have also invited different ‘outside eyes’ (Stalpaert 2009) not simply to feedback on my practice, but to instigate and prompt my analysis and thinking which eventually helped me to clarify and articulate my inquiries and findings.

Ultimately, this is not an inquiry around audience reception but one which considers theatrical production. Building and perusing my own ‘insider’s perspective’, this PhD studies dramaturgies of uncertainty through their composition as opposed to their experience. Instead of corroborating my insights through technical information or empirical evidence (see Sedgman and Reason 2015), I ground my knowings and analysis in theoretical and critical frameworks. In other words, I use my own tacit knowings and investigative reflection as a vehicle for evaluating and analysing the dramaturgical significance and manifestations of darkness and uncertainty in performance. Critically, I bring my own ‘practitioner knowing’ into dialogue with the different theoretical frameworks that I employed, in a process of mutual interchange (see Shearing 2015, p.49). This has been a purposeful standpoint within this research, as a means of distancing the findings about darkness and uncertainty from dominant discussions of (audience) experience and paving a path for new insights from the nascent maker’s perspective. Notably, as indicated in the previous section, in a way, I am acting as my own audience and harnessing my own informed observations (‘audience responses’) as a strategy for modifying and refining the arousal of uncertainty in a particular configuration of dramaturgical elements.

Due to the individual nature of the artistic process, not including audience responses hints at a possible limitation of PR – the danger of solipsism (Barrett and Bolt 2014). To overcome such limitation, show more than one approach to practice, enrich my contribution
to the field of theatre in the dark and establish additional connections with professional practice, this thesis also builds on an examination and analysis of relevant case studies from other practitioners, conducting a dramaturgical analysis of pertinent compositions as opposed to simply locating my PR in a field of practice. The engagement with other performances might reveal alternative approaches to compositions of uncertainty or a particular manifestation of it, and in turn, contribute to my thinking around the maker’s process. Arguably, I have encountered these compositions as an audience, however, in my evaluation, I focus on how uncertainty was composed through the use of different theatrical ‘building blocks’ – how uncertainty was triggered – as opposed to a simple critical engagement with my own experience.

Collaboration

Despite the individualistic affinity that is implicit by adopting the ‘maker’s perspectives’, collaboration and participation were a key feature of this PR. Theatre is a collaborative medium and much ‘contemporary arts practice involves collaboration’ (Nelson 2013, p.110; Shearing 2015). Indeed, even ‘the most apparently individual or solo practice might in fact contain strong collaborative tendencies’ (Cull Ó Maoilearca 2016, p.95; see also Barton 2018, p.9; Bouko in Romanska 2015; Heddon and Mackey 2012, p.165; Wallace 2016). In the case of my PR, apart from the aforementioned invitation of ‘outside eyes’, I asked performers and other creatives to join me for a day in the studio to experiment or accomplish particular images; I requested and collected audio recordings in Campfire and Overcast; involved audience participation in Campfire, worked closely with composer and sound artist James Edward Armstrong; and responded to stimuli from the robotic voices, ‘extending the concept of creative collaboration to include non-human collaborators’ (ibid, p.105). These collaborations not only fostered creativity (Nelson 2013, p.28); they also contributed greatly to my critical reflection. While I have decided not to repurpose my collaboration with Fye and Foul as PR – due to questions of authorship and ownership (Piccini and Kershaw 2003, p.122) – I quickly discovered that collaboration is a significant factor of my practice and forms my ‘practitioner knowing’. Furthermore, specifically when exploring negotiated togetherness, it seems that
participation and collaboration, as processes of ‘working with’ (whether other processes or one another), are vital (Cull Ó Maoilearca 2016, p.104).

Apart from the obvious credits acknowledging the generosity of others who helped and were involved in the process, I have approached these collaborations as a way to enhance this inquiry. In a similar manner to my working through tasks, the above collaborations were task driven. For example, I asked performer Laura Brera, who joined my clouds laboratory, to improvise and ‘catch’ the clouds. Similarly, for Overcast, I emailed my potential ‘collaborators’ with a task to record their description of three Turner paintings (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, when moving from the scenario of an academic conference with robotic voices to a guided tour, I approached James to compose music for the piece. In our conversations in the studio when making Certain ways, I mentioned my artistic ambition to blur the boundaries between nature and technology, which has led to the joint decision of composing sound that incorporates digital mixing, electric guitar and field recordings. I named a list of locations and invited James to creatively respond to these places, as well as generating sound which echoes other sounds (rewinding of a cassette tape that sounds like rain). Once a composition draft was complete, I fed back, if necessary, on how to refine the sound composition (such as emphasising more/less the field recording or shortening its length) in line with the overall configuration of the piece.

In her examination of collaboration, Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca urges us to expand the understanding of collaboration, ‘beyond any necessary constraint to working with knowing, intentional or rational others and to include our openness to being altered by the other material bodies involved in our processes’ (2016, p.105). Embracing this openness and discovery, I have approached all the above artistic responses to tasks (by human and other-than-human) as stimuli for my own process. First, by critically reflecting on them – how these depictions of Turner, for example, articulate not seeing clearly and how they enlighten my study of vagueness; or how the robot’s breath troubles its mechanical characteristics. Second, by creatively reacting to these provocations – for instance, improvising with the robotic voices’ conversation by following their tone and intonation; or responding to the movement of haze

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in space and its interaction with light. Equally, I have used James’ sonic compositions as inspiration for the writing dialogue, juxtaposing or aligning different scenarios with the sonic locations that were mutually decided.

A ‘tendency towards collaboration, towards greater levels of connection to others’, Cull Ó Maoilearca postulates, involves ‘a movement that we could also characterize as a tendency towards instability, disorganization, chaos and an openness to change’ (Cull Ó Maoilearca 2016, p.95). This openness to change can refer and be applied to the sense of (shared or mutual) discovery in the studio (reflection-in-action), but it might also inform a greater recognition and understanding of ‘negotiated togetherness’ leading to further insights in/through practice.

**Documentation**

With PR becoming a prominent method, recent scholarship points to the significance of documentation for evidencing and disseminating findings and sharing them as part of the circulation of knowledge (Smith and Dean 2009; Nelson 2013; Hann 2015). But what about darkness? As Roy Sorensen asks, ‘Could there be a picture of total darkness?’ (2004, p.470). The experience of being in total darkness is still very much visual, since in the dark one can still see – namely, the darkness (ibid, pp.457,459). Yet, when it comes to documenting theatre in the dark, as Katerina Papadakou states, darkness ‘is not particularly photogenic’ (Papadakou 2014). Indeed, as with every document, we cannot control the way it will be attended to and therefore cannot expect people to switch off the lights in their office. And even if they will, the challenge of creating the same level of darkness offered by the documented event will quickly become apparent. First, light from a computer, charger or a crack under the door will probably creep in and disrupt the dark. Second, being deprived of sight in an unfamiliar space is different from switching off the lights in a comfortable environment. Third, and crucially for this research – theatre in the dark is an event shared with others and while I do not always see them, I know they are there somewhere. Consequently, in documenting this PR, I have approached documentation not simply as a way to capture the practice, but as a performative,
creative platform to repurpose, manifest or generate in/through the document the uncertain compositions that were manifested in the performances.

Granted, every document can only be a representation of reproduction of what it captures, yet it seems that videos and photographs are particularly challenging media for documenting darkness, since ‘the camera cannot “see” with the same sophistication as the human eye’ (Graham 2018a, p.87). Such modes of documentation often alter colour, brightness and do not properly capture subtle fades (ibid). Moreover, cameras often do not register the extremely low lighting levels that this inquiry engages with, and one often has to ‘cheat’ by raising the latter to a perceptible ‘capturable’ level. For Papadakou, ‘it is often the case that darkness itself and the experience it elicits, might never in fact find their way into a document’ (Papadakou 2014, n.p.). Or, recalling Welton’s distinction, while during theatre in the dark performances one looks in darkness, in attending to their documentation, one looks at darkness. Therefore, the document needs to go beyond the indication of darkness. Being in total-darkness is not just being deprived of sight – as in putting on a blindfold. The ability to see is very much there, the eyes are free to roll and wonder, but the means by which we make sense are different, which might be the key for documenting this practice. As Bal considers:

The uncanny experience of viewing a space that threatens to envelop the viewer cannot be repeated in printed, flat reproduction. Instead, the photograph only offers signs of this experience. Are these signs traces or blueprints? (2013, p.67).

Recognising its limitations, following Bal, my approach for documentation in this inquiry aims to present both traces and blueprints. By ‘traces’, I refer to an attempt to document – as much as possible – my practice presentations, whereas the ‘blueprints’ aim to offer an insight to the process of experimentation in the studio (Nelson 2013, p.63). By considering both traces and blueprints, I seek to evidence my thinking and reflection process, as well as suggest various ways to access and review the practice after the event. Drawing from Nelson’s multi-modal approach to PR, and like the examples of PR documentations I have encountered (Scott 2015; Shearing 2015; Julier et al. 2015; TaPRA Galleries 2016-2018), in this thesis, I present
documentation from different media – such as sound samples, videos, images, sketches, recorded reflections and thick descriptions (see portfolio) – in order to ‘mind the gap’ of relying solely on visual documentation and to provide diverse and multiple ways to both encounter the work and to get an insight into the devising process. Despite some of their limiting characteristics, I still utilise video recordings and images since, as one mode of documentation (accompanied by others), these could still illuminate and offer some information and point of access to the performances.

Moreover, if the purpose of PR’s documentation is to support the elucidation of tacit knowledge and making it explicit (Vaughan in Smith and Dean 2009, p.169; Nelson 2009, p.128), I suggest that documentation should not only accompany the process from its inception, but it ought to be thought of through the lens of the practice: thinking about the document as another manifestation of techniques used in the practical work. In this case, for example, considering uncertainty in/through the document much like my thinking of uncertainty in the devising process. This does not mean generating unreliable documents. Rather, as Rye and Piccini note, documentation of PR ‘must operate according to its own aesthetic’ (2009, p.46). That is, trying to incorporate some of the techniques used in the practice and altering them to a new mode of (re)presentation,\(^{10}\) using the document not only as a mode of reproduction and representation but equally as a performative and creative platform. Thus, in some cases, I seek to translate the stimuli put forward in the performance by simulating similar or close sensations in/through the document. For example, in chapter 4, I present images (or videos) where the ambiguity or vagueness of what is seen is underscored, echoing the stimuli I have put forward in the performance. Such a move also bypasses the difficulty to document the low intensities of light, as the document becomes more about the unfixed image rather than being bound to technical accuracy. Another example is the use of headphones, as they could induce some of the spatial manipulations that operate in my practice (Stankievech 2007).

\(^{10}\) Rebecca Schneider warns that ‘the same detail of information can sound, feel, look, smell, or taste radically different when accessed [...] via disparate media’ (2012, pp.74-75), however, I argue that the variety, change and exchange in media could actually lead to new insights and further exploration of both form and medium.
To reiterate, considering possible means for documenting my PR from its early stages, I was able to utilise different strategies for capturing my experimentation in the studio, revisit my practice presentations, or attempt to echo the different compositions of uncertainty that were presented during the live event in the document itself. Thus, this PR harnesses documentation not only as a tool for representation but as a performative, creative platform to demonstrate, recreate or elicit in the document the uncertain compositions that were manifested in the performances.

Summarising this section, I have positioned PR as a significant framing and method of this research. I have situated PR in the ‘second wave’ paradigm and outlined how I have approached the exploration in practice, with a closer look on some key aspects of this investigation – i.e. omission of audience responses, collaboration and documentation. The reasons for conducting PR for this inquiry are first, the particular focus on uncertainty – as a particular artistic ambition and critical inquiry – which sets up my own terms for making work in darkness. Second, the recognition of the devising process as a productive vehicle for new insights, using this ‘insider’s knowing’ to inform the ‘maker’s perspective’, as well as a deeper understanding of practice through processes of experimentation, which might not be available in isolated analysis of case studies. Focusing on the process of creation has afforded me a unique position from which to offer insights into the field of theatre in the dark. Throughout this research, I was able to construct a series of practical experiments that examined specific strategies using different theatrical building blocks and focusing on different particular aspects of uncertainty. The resonance and mobilisation of all these elements – practical exploration, documentation, reflection, analysis of case studies, and articulation of tacit knowledge – provide not only ‘different types of evidence arising from a multi-mode research inquiry’ but also maximise ‘the potential of that contribution to knowledge which “academic” research entails’ (Nelson 2013, p.20). To finalize my methodological account, in the next section I expand on dramaturgy as a crucial feature of my PR.
Dramaturgy

Dramaturgy underscores the process of making and composition. As such, dramaturgy lends itself to the exploration, experimentation and analysis of theatrical forms and structures as they are manifested in the theatre in the dark performances and devised by the maker. Dramaturgy drives this PR by framing my ‘practitioner knowing’ and the actual process of fabricating the work, as well as underpinning my reflective analysis that complements the work in the studio. The focus on dramaturgy helps me to establish the maker’s perspective, as it highlights the artistic conditions, structures, shapes, the interaction between various theatrical elements and their different manifestations or configurations. This is why I seek to foreground dramaturgies of uncertainty as opposed to a poetics of uncertainty or aesthetics of uncertainty (counter Wolff 2008). While I acknowledge the blurriness and commonalities between categories, dramaturgy best accounts for the process of making, reflecting on different theatrical building blocks. Following a long tradition of multiple understandings, dramaturgy has become an expanded field of interdisciplinary applications and interpretations. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to comprehensively survey this entire corpus. Instead, in this section, I examine how dramaturgy operates within the context of this inquiry and how it provides an approach to access and consider the experimentation in the studio and the work of other practitioners.

In his attempt to provide an overview of the state and current understandings of dramaturgy, Patrice Pavis identifies the contemporary moment as both a ‘triumph’ and an ‘explosion’ of approaches to dramaturgy (2014, p.14). Indeed, as Pewny et al. concur, it is almost impossible to consolidate the divergent range of practices into one unifying definition of dramaturgy. As performance practices diversify and evolve, they add, so does dramaturgy (Pewny et al. 2014, p.7). Dramaturgy also refers to the work of the dramaturg(e) and her various tasks, which differ radically between cultures (see Romanska 2015), posing a challenge to providing one singular definition. Other recent accounts for dramaturgy, along with historical reviews, equally point – implicitly or explicitly – to the same challenge and the
insufficiency of definitions (see Romanska 2015; Trencsényi and Cochrane 2014; Turner and Behrendt 2008; Luckhurst 2009; special issues of Performance Research 14(3) and CTR 20(2)).

However, these recent accounts also attempt to excavate a new theoretical ground by expanding current understandings of dramaturgy and presenting new possibilities, methods or strategies for ‘doing’ dramaturgy, which respond, directly or indirectly, to the literary tradition which previously defined dramaturgy. As Pewny et al. note,

Traditionally, the dramaturgy of a performance most commonly refers to the composition of the play, its organisation in different scenes, and its aesthetic framework. Consequently, engaging with dramaturgy generally points to a critical reflection about the structure and composition of a play, mostly in function of a practical development of the performance through rehearsals (2014, p.7).

The venture to move beyond such tradition is useful for this inquiry, as it allows me to apply (or integrate) dramaturgy to another set of artistic practices, or art forms that incorporate darkness (including my own), but which do not necessarily prioritise or even engage with play texts. Similarly, while I have worked as a dramaturg in the past and thus it informs my ‘practitioner knowing’ (in relation to Nelson’s model), in this thesis, I move away from associating dramaturgy solely with the work of the dramaturg. Instead, I approach dramaturgy more broadly as a framework for considering theatre-making.

Two previous studies have also addressed the dramaturgy of uncertainty though with reference to very different contexts than the one in which I position this inquiry. The first, by Errol Durbach (2006), explores the tropes engineered by Ibsen for the composition and structuring of uncertainty in his plays, using Ghosts (1881) and The Wild Duck (1884) as case studies. In his literary analysis – that acknowledges Pinter and Beckett as well – Durbach also nods to Michael Frayn’s play, Copenhagen (1998). Frayn’s play portrays the encounter between Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, the latter introduced the ‘uncertainty principle’ in quantum mechanics. The second study, by David Barnett (2005), also examines Copenhagen, but with a view to establishing a parallel between Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle and
Frayn’s play construction. My focus on compositions/stimuli which generate a state of uncertainty moves beyond these literary/textual means which differentiates my inquiry’s view of dramaturgy from the studies above. By looking at theatrical devices or ‘building blocks’ other than the literary text (such as sound, light, or framing) I seek to expand the scope of possible ways in which uncertainty could be thought of within the theatrical event.

At its core, then, dramaturgy ‘is an overarching term for the composition of a work’ (Turner and Behrndt 2008, p.17) along with the analysis of such compositions. Dramaturgy is the study of theatrical configurations and the practice of their making. On the one hand, dramaturgy explicates the process and strategies for theatre-making by taking the mise en scène, spatial arrangement, sequencing, frame or thread which structure the work as its subject or object of exploration. As a working definition for this aspect of dramaturgy, I draw from Turner and Behrndt, who propose that dramaturgy refers to ‘the structuring of an artwork in all its elements (words, images, sounds and so on)’ (ibid, p.4). For example, looking specifically at theatre in the dark, the consideration of darkness as a compositional element is crucial, since the different ways in which darkness is positioned ‘can possess very different characteristics and promote very different kinds of effect and affect’ (Alston 2017, p.66). This inquiry, however, does not focus solely on darkness, and reflects on different creative components (lights, sound, framing and invitations), their relation to each other as well as the sequencing, configuration and assembling of the work in its entirety (the dramaturgy of the work). In working towards Campfire, for instance, the campfire itself helped to frame the entire event by proposing a dramaturgy of shared presence. Within this framing, a significant dramaturgical aspect was the ordering of invitations for the audience: how they progress as the performance advances and shift or develop the encounter generated (see Chapter 3).

On the other hand, dramaturgical analysis implies ‘a process of interpretation, of looking at the ways in which levels of meaning are orchestrated’ (Turner and Behrndt 2008, p.18; see Bleeker 2003). Darkness or blackout, for example, can serve many dramaturgical functions. In her (dramaturgical) analysis of Adrienne Kennedy’s Funnyhouse of a Negro (1964), Erin Hurley maintains that the blackouts in the play, ‘perform their usual theatrical and
dramaturgical functions. Dramaturgically they punctuate the narrative and indicate a change in location or time. They also frustrate attempts at making clear and ‘logical’ sense of the play’s plot or characters’ (Hurley 2004, p.209). While blackouts, for Hurley, function in this instance as a site of transformation, and establish the world of the play as a distinct conceptual universe, darkness can also serve other dramaturgical functions, implying that darkness can be ‘composed’, contextualised and understood in different ways. As Alston and Welton’s comparison between two recent productions of Samuel Beckett’s *All that Fall* (1956) attests, in each performance darkness was “‘composed’ very differently, and these different compositions inflected the text with different meanings, and resulted in the arousal of different kinds of experience” (2017, p.2).

The tussle between composition and analysis, making and interpretation, serves this inquiry, as it seeks to both experiment with various compositions as well as consider their significance, possible meaning and wider implications. In other words, dramaturgy as a framework is vital for considering the various ‘building blocks’ of a performance/event, the way(s) in which they are structured or assembled, as well as the context(s) – artistic and theoretical – through which they might be understood. As Turner and Behrndt explain,

> dramaturgy links theory and practice through the many ways in which it invokes an applied contextual and kinetic analysis and understanding of the deep structures of theatre and performance works. A dramaturgical approach involves observation of the principles implicit in the unfolding of performance in process and production (2010, p.145).

Thinking about the various compositions that this inquiry seeks to explore, dramaturgy provides a useful framing to address, first, the various elements of a theatrical event (sound, light, text, framing) and how they are devised in the studio – articulating and analysing structural evaluations. Second, dramaturgy helps me to assess how the artwork examined differs from other compositions in/of darkness, or how the contexts within which my practice is located or operates informs its understanding. Third, paying attention to the
principles steering the process (and production) could shed light both on the theatrical form/practice as well as ‘knowings’ inspiring the artistic work, which in this case are geared towards loss of clarity and its various manifestations and implications, particularly in relation to negotiated togetherness.

Indeed, some definitions of dramaturgy, particularly those that describe the role of the dramaturg, position dramaturgy as ‘the research space within traditional theatre production’ or as that which bridges theory and practice (Rossini 2009, p.237, original emphasis; see Stalpaert 2009; Lehmann and Primavesi 2009, p.6; Luckhurst 2009). I am wary of reading every dramaturgical process as PR (at least as the latter is understood by current scholarly definitions). However, bringing together both aspects of dramaturgy (making and analysis), together with the connection between theory and practice Turner and Behrndt propose, help to pin down some of the vagueness that surrounds PR, which is undoubtedly beneficial for this inquiry. Similarly, what I find useful in Turner and Behrndt’s extensive account, apart from the wide-ranging survey of numerous readings and theorisations of dramaturgy, is the level of self-reflexivity they introduce to dramaturgical practices, which of course ties with my own critical reflection that guides this PR. This aligns with Milan Zvada’s claim that

[j]ust like a philosopher, who wonders at perspectives, reflects, and questions the nature and causes of things, the dramaturg contemplates possible variations on stage in terms of their effects (“aesthetical”) and follows the underlying principles that keep all aspects of the performance together (idea – sound – image). It is the dramaturg’s constant questioning, and making the obvious problematic, which is the basic mode of his/her work (Zvada in Romanska 2015, p. 206).

While this refers to the work of the dramaturg, such a view is also relevant for me as a practitioner-researcher, as it combines critical reflection within the process of performance making. Moreover, it denotes and emphasises how the composition, sequence, position of the various theatrical devices could lead to different effects/affects.
Furthermore, according to Cathy Turner, dramaturgy could be used as a noun – inferring a structure of a performance, or the composition of an artwork – but it is also something one can *do* (2015, p.3). Following Turner, and much like the differentiation between knowing and knowledge that was discussed before, in my interpretation of dramaturgy, I prefer to use verbs (rather than nouns), conjugated in the present progressive, to account for its ongoing and processual nature, as it reinforces this PR and better describes my iterative approach. The emphasis on process can also be found in Marianne van Kerkhoven’s concept of *new dramaturgy*. While covering an array of methods and styles, *new dramaturgy* is seen as a *process-oriented* way of working, where the meanings, intentions, and forms of the artistic work arise *during* the working process, rather than being pre-determined. In other words, dramaturgy is ‘(a quest for) a provisional or possible arrangement’ (Van Kerkhoven in Trencsényi and Cochrane 2014, pp.xiii-xiv). Or, as Pavis explains, dramaturgy ‘helps us find the best (or the least bad) solution of the moment, not in absolute terms, but according to the situation and logic of the planned staging or the staging as it gradually takes shape’ (2014, p.17). I do not mean to suggest that the process is entirely tentative or arbitrary. Instead, as I approach the work in the studio and this exploration as a whole, both emerged from a clear set of inquiries and motivations (articulated in the introduction), which were then put in play in studio experimentation to give rise not only to ‘possible arrangements’ but also to new insights and understandings.

More precisely, *doing* dramaturgy is considered here as a method and an approach for devising performance, understood as ‘creating the conditions for the experience’ (Danan 2014, p.8, original emphasis), or as *facilitating an encounter* – situations ‘that enable something to happen’ (Behrendt 2014, p.130, original emphasis; see Pewny et al. 2014, p.10). To be more specific, Behrendt proposes that dramaturgical work in devising processes is about ‘creating a space for initial exploration and then to extrapolate potential and create a structure and dramaturgy’ (ibid, original emphasis). These explanations not only shift the emphasis from the audience experiences to the invitation or stimuli put forward by the maker, but they also articulate my process in the studio. For instance, my experimentation with robotic voices in the third cycle
of practice, began by setting up the framework of an academic conference (Play Three speakers videos).

The overarching frame of an academic conference provided the initial starting point for Certain Ways. Such a framework, with its own set of conventions and expectations, enabled a space of exploration, with a possible performative structure, as well as facilitating the initial conversation with/between the robotic voices of Sam, Alex and Karen. Evidently, as the investigation developed and as a result of critical reflection between my visits to the studio, the dramaturgies comprising the performance changed. Identifying the rich potential of the robotic voices (as other-than-human performers), I have pursued and focused my experimentation on the creative possibilities they might offer. This decision also led me to take a step back and not take part in the conversation (and the final performance) to explore the possibilities of the robotic voice in and of itself rather than in the interaction with a human voice. Equally, the guided tour, as a dramaturgy of orientation, afforded a more productive framework than the academic conference for advancing my exploration and guiding the audience through different aural environments with various vocal manifestations and invitations. The guided tour also suggested other, smaller compositions, such as getting lost or reaching a dead end. While text was a significant element in this piece, it was not pre-written but devised in the studio, either in response to the sounds and musical compositions – enhancing or juxtaposing the pieces proposed by James (the composer) – or through improvisation and response to the creative (disorienting and destabilising) possibilities of the robotic voices previously discovered (stutter, breath, singing etc.).

In that sense, my inquiry is process-oriented first, as it draws from the maker’s process as a productive site for new insights, where the understandings emerge in/through the process of making. Second, it allows the process of experimentation to guide the practice: not only accounting for the various compositions of the theatrical ‘building blocks’ and how they inform the study of uncertainty, but also allowing them to shift, change and develop with each iteration. In other words, if ‘doing dramaturgy’ is about creating the conditions for the experience, or facilitating an encounter, this inquiry as an iterative process, allows these
conditions or encounters to evolve, refining previous compositions while continuing to explore new terrains.

Finally, examining the design of performance and performance design – denoting both the intention of crafting a performance, spatial arrangement, and the consideration of different theatrical building blocks which are often associated with scenography (such as light or sound) – demonstrates a great deal of slippage between dramaturgy and (the equally emerging field) of scenography. Particularly when scenography is understood in broader terms, beyond design, as a way of reading performance that ‘encompasses multiple interrelationships of performance elements, incorporating not only design objects but the whole performance environment, the interactions between materials and performers’ bodies, and the ways in which these relationships impact on an audience’ (Graham 2018a, p.197). Indeed, Graham’s proposition resonates with the definition of dramaturgy proposed above. Christopher Baugh goes as far as suggesting that ‘scenography has become the principal dramaturgy of performance-making’ (2013, p.240). However, instead of distancing or distinguishing between these theoretical frameworks, I suggest that the study of dramaturgies of uncertainty can only benefit from drawing from both these pools of knowledge and their porous or blurry boundaries, especially as a ‘more productive convergence can be located when the two terms, “scenography” and “dramaturgy”, are used in relationship to another’ (Hann 2019, p.59). Hann challenges reading scenography simply through dramaturgical frameworks and proposes new frameworks to theorise scenography (ibid; see McKinney and Palmer 2017). Accordingly, embracing these recent conceptualisations of scenography informs not only how scenography expands the performance-maker’s ‘palette’, informing the process of composition, but it also carves other, richer, paths for analysis. One can also argue that dramaturgy intersects with other theoretical frameworks such as aesthetics, poetics, performance analysis, and choreography. Such theoretical dialogue can, of course, invite a fruitful exchange. Nonetheless and for clarity, dramaturgy as viewed here, suggests a practical approach in relation to a processual, self-reflective composition, making and structuring of a theatrical event. The focus on compositions rather than experience is also why I am not
conducting a phenomenology of darkness or uncertainty (see Welton 2013, 2017b; Kendrick 2018). Phenomenology certainly informs the overall context within which this inquiry operates, and indeed I draw from numerous phenomenological accounts when approaching my work in the studio. Studying different experiences – of sound, orientation, light, darkness etc. – enriches the ‘practitioner knowing’ that is harnessed in the process of making and reflecting. However, this inquiry – and insights it seeks to generate – regards composing objects in space and time and their significance and implications as its focus, rather than my or the audience’s experience of them.

Conclusion
In this chapter, I addressed the methodological concerns of this PR. I considered some of the challenges of composing uncertainty. Next, I contextualised PR, and outlined how this research is being led. Finally, I have concentrated on dramaturgy as a key feature of this project.

Indeed, the creative process (whether solo or collaborative) is often experiential, uncertain, unfixed as well as intuitive, unique and ‘disorderly’ (Trimingham 2002, p.55). Therefore, one of the major challenges for PR is to articulate those tacit understandings and the different insights or decisions taken in the studio, making them explicit and thus communicate and share what has emerged from/in practice (Trimingham 2002, pp.54-55; See Nelson 2009, p.128, Borgdorff 2007, p.12). Pointing once more to Borgdorff’s definition, PR is meant to reveal and express the ‘tacit knowledge’ – implied or inner understandings/insights. To highlight and uncover the maker’s perspective, the complementary writing and contextualised documentation are extremely important. In that sense, this written account does not seek to justify, demonstrate or apply a particular theoretical framework to the practice presentations. Rather, as Nelson and Andrews suggest, the written outcome seeks to ‘contextualize the project and include a retrospective analysis of the process and outcomes, reflecting on chosen research methodologies and production processes and the relation between them (n.d., p.3); or as Jo Scott proposes, the writing ‘seeks
to position, clarify, expose, and analyse the practice according to the ‘knowings’ and insights which have arisen by and through making work’ (2016, p.xviii). Moreover, one of this PR’s ambitions is to use the practice (and its relationship with the complementary writing, through reflection and dissemination) as an opportunity for further insights that extend beyond my own specific practice or that utilise my exploration in the studio to advance or rethink broader theoretical discourses, about sensory experiences or visual obfuscation, for instance.

In that sense, the following chapters attempt to decipher or articulate these tacit knowings and extrapolate from them – via critical reflection, dramaturgical analysis and evaluation – new insights around uncertainty and darkness. Perhaps, more modestly, it is a matter of what Nelson terms ‘seeking resonances’, either with parallel inquiries undertaken in other fields (Nelson in Scott 2016, p.ix) or between theory and practice – not to sustain a binary between them, but to establish new connections, interactions between them or reforming existing modes of thinking. To this end, the aims of this chapter and this thesis more broadly are to illuminate particular aspects of the practice and process; to give readers an insight into the work undergone in the studio; to position and contextualise the PR within an artistic and scholarly lineage, to articulate the tacit knowings and understandings that have accompanied the reflexive process as well as to bypass the ephemerality of performance and extend the ‘shelf-life’ of this PR by disseminating it and presenting it in alternative modes. In other words, building on this methodological account, through a cyclical process of making-documenting-reflecting-reading-articulating-analysing-showing-refining-questioning (see Nelson 2013, p.32), as this thesis unfolds, I review my three cycles of practice. I outline my motivation to pursue certain lines of inquiry, unpack and nuance my dramaturgical explorations in the studio, and finally, building on my analysis, I articulate the insights that emerged, responding to the research questions which drive this thesis.
The audience enters a semi-dark and misty room, in which they find a circle of chairs. In the middle of the space, three speakers play a recording of an outdoor campfire (crickets and wind included). I sit on one of the chairs, greet the audience and invite them to sit down. Once everyone assembles around the ‘fire’, and after a short health and safety introduction, I pass around marshmallows. The audience is then invited to make themselves comfortable, keep warm, and observe the ‘fire’ and each other. After a while, the lights start to fade, very slowly, leaving only one narrow beam that illuminates the three speakers. After a moment, the beam also begins to fade. The sound of the fire continues. The space is now pitch-black.

This ‘sonic fire’ played throughout the entire performance of Campfire (2016) in an attempt to gather the audience and highlight the fact that although in the dark, this temporary group is still together, sharing a space. The performance continued to unfold in total darkness through a series of sounds and invitations ranging from stretching exercises, a shared moment of coughing, a recreation of the sound of fire by clicking fingers and clapping, and eventually saying hello, before getting up and dancing freely in the dark (see Campfire excerpts). At the end of the dancing sequence, the (working) lights come back on. Following a shared moment in light that allows the audience to reassess the space and others, the sound of fire stops, ending the performance.

Campfire emerged from my first cycle of practical exploration and in what follows, I reflect on the process of its devising.\(^\text{11}\) Campfire was the first time I was facing working in darkness alone. This led me to think about being with others in the dark, and what modes of

\(^{11}\) Campfire was devised throughout three and a half weeks of experimentation in the studio. After the first week of practice, I presented a work in progress at The Second Annual Practice Research Symposium at the University of Surrey in July 2016. I further developed Campfire with two additional showings in January 2017.
sociality might be promoted in, or are conditioned by, darkness. Consequently, when evaluating this first cycle, this chapter considers what can happen to sociality under the cover of darkness. Concentrating on indeterminacy as a particular facet of uncertainty, I focus on the uncertainty regarding the presence of others in the dark. While, darkness could denote ‘a realm in which bad things lurk in the shadows’ or one can come across ‘insubstantial and indeterminate forms’ (Edensor 2013, p.449), in this chapter, I investigate the tension between the isolating-anonymous experience in darkness and the experience of shared presence with other audience members that occurs during performance in the dark. On the one hand, each audience member is wrapped in and is isolated by darkness, as other audience members (including performers and crew) cannot be seen. On the other hand, performance in the dark is still on many occasions an event shared with others and while the audience cannot see one another, they still know others are there somewhere. Therefore, indeterminacy here, refers to instances when something is indefinite, unfixed, not exactly known or clearly defined – specifically in this chapter, different modes of sociality.

By turning to the composition of collective and shared experiences, I begin to respond to my first research question, asking: what are the dramaturgical significances of uncertainty in theatre in the dark, and what are its socio-political implications? In my attempt to facilitate an understanding of a new/changed sense of clarity, this chapter analyses how negotiated togetherness unfolds in darkness. By evaluating the insights that emerged from Campfire, I argue that darkness enables different interactions – which might not sit neatly together or even contradict each other – without fixing or prioritising one particular exchange. Importantly, I seek to move beyond propositions that ‘the enveloping properties of darkness’ can serve ‘as means of exploring otherness’ (Welton 2017b, p.506) to a more sustained interrogation of how exactly darkness becomes a productive site to engage with different modes of (negotiated) togetherness.

Therefore, I begin this chapter by positioning and defining negotiated togetherness and my exploration of sociality (in the dark), drawing from Adelina Ong’s theory for negotiated living and Timothy Morton’s ecological coexistence. Next, to pursue the
exploration of being-together in darkness, I show how performance in the dark and
dramaturgies of uncertainty can undermine the seemingly isolating experience in/of darkness,
forming isolation in relation. Such a move leads the way to explore different modes of
togetherness that do not rely on visual recognition or classification, as the latter can firm up
and prioritise specific modes of interaction born out of different scopic regimes and visual
biases. Then, thinking through indeterminacy, which by definition excludes distinctness, I
propose that negotiated togetherness renders sociality in darkness undecided and unfixed,
highlighting how coexistence in the dark is continuously in-formation. Thus, as part of my
advocation for a transformed sense of clarity, I suggest that dramaturgies of uncertainty
underpinned by the indeterminacy of the interaction (in darkness) can both destabilise current
understandings and make space for different (both multiple and alternative) possibilities of
being-together.

Negotiated Togetherness

In my attempt to sketch a new/altered sense of clarity in/through darkness, I pursue the
contention that darkness is a productive setting to explore multiple modes of being-together,
as a way to focus on some of the possible implications and generative potential of uncertainty.
In promoting a sense of clarity which resists fixity and definitiveness, I frame the socio-
political approach of this thesis as negotiated togetherness, which I begin to unpack in this section.

The focus on being-together is part of the growing interest in sociality and interaction
where contemporary theatre-makers grapple with how new forms of engagement present
creative opportunities (Harpin and Nicholson 2017; Jackson 2011; Alston 2012, 2016;
Machon 2013; White 2013). This artistic interest encapsulates, as Jen Harvie identifies,
‘practices that engage audiences socially – by inviting those audiences to participate, act, work
and create together; observe one another; or simply be together’ (2013, p.1, original
emphasis). This is part of a broader backdrop of a ‘recent surge of artistic interest in
collectivity’ and collaboration (Bishop 2009, p.238, Bishop 2006, p.12; Bourriaud 1998; Kester
Indeed, the collectivity of the audience has long been a point of discussion (See Ridout 2013). However, the emergence of immersive and participatory performance has led various scholars and artists to evaluate the aesthetic and socio-political importance of communality, participation, collectivity, intimacy and human interaction as they are manifested through those practices. This is by no means a new artistic motivation or ‘a ‘social turn’ but rather a return to the social (Bishop 2012, p.3), arguably a response to the current socio-political climate.12

While this thesis engages with the conceptual dynamics between politics and artistic interaction, I do not limit my investigation to the restricted understanding of audience participation or interactive performance. By considering how the cultural and political vocabularies at stake in the term participation are entangled, Anna Harpin and Helen Nicholson propose that

Participation is politically pliable, and it can no longer be taken for granted that its dramaturgical strategies carry specific political meanings or social imperatives.

Nor can it be assumed that to participate is to claim space and voice in ways that might be considered ‘empowering’ or anti-authoritarian (2017, p.3).

Notably, they highlight Gareth White’s theorisation of audience participation as aesthetic ‘invitation’, which can be experienced in multiple ways (White 2013). Conceiving participation through affective encounters, Harpin and Nicholson seek to elide the sentient with the spatial and environmental in a ‘dance’ between the affective agency of environments, social relations and subjectivities (2017, p.7). Moving from ‘a transactional reading of bodies and behaviours and towards a messier ecology of senses and sensing’, and embracing ‘a more unsteady, intersectional understanding of participation’ (ibid, p.5). This is where I position my exploration of negotiated togetherness.

12 Bishop argues that the ‘impetuses behind participatory art has [...] been a restoration of the social bond’ in response to the ‘alienating and isolating effects of capitalism’ (2006, p.12). Similarly, for Harvie, this isolation of individuals is connected to ‘dominant neoliberal capitalist ideologies, which aggressively promote individualism and entrepreneurialism’ (2013, p. 2; see Chapter 1).
In examining sociality within theatre in the dark, a prominent example is Martin Welton’s account for the (social) possibilities in darkness (2013). Welton observes the shared experience of being (and seeing) in Chris Goode’s dark performance *Who You Are* (2010) and the attention the performance drew to ‘the specific and peculiar reality’ of ‘being together in darkness’ (2013, p.6). For Welton, theatrical events maintain the ability ‘to generate a sort of proto-community’ (ibid, p.5), even if it is due to the fact that a group of people share a collective experience in a particular space and time. He then goes on to ask: ‘might the dark offer more possibilities for actually being together?’ (ibid, p.14). While the article implies a positive answer, in my view the question remains largely unanswered. This, of course, begs the question: how does darkness elicit those possibilities for togetherness? Or, what are the (socio-political) implications of being-with others in the dark? Furthermore, there seems to be a slippage in the use of the term ‘possibilities’ in Welton’s article, as it refers both to possibilities for social encounters as well as to the possibilities of theatrical practice and form. Put differently, how darkness might impact sociality on the one hand and how darkness could be utilised and shape theatrical practice on the other. Welton continues to prompt similar questions in later publications, suggesting for example that,

By forcing us out of the regime of clarity […] gloom makes space for ethical thoughts, if not quite ethics per se. Who are we, and how should we be together? What is it that we share? What separates? The performances touched upon […] offer no direct answers to these questions; instead, they offer states of gloom – both affect and appearance – as states of difference from the photic excess outside the theatre that obscures the possibility for looking and feeling differently together in the shadows (2017a, p.262).

Or,

By drawing the medium of seeing into the aesthetic foreground, such works present a threshold of possibility for shared, social experience that might otherwise be lost in the light. […] these endarkened occasions of theatrical seeing
offer an important opportunity through which to (re) consider the aesthetic and affective dimensions of looking at and together with others (2017b, p.513).

Indeed, there is much value in framing theatre in the dark in light of ethics, politics and possibilities for different encounters, to recalibrate and celebrate its wider significance and influence. Welton might deliberately resist naming definite modes of sociality; and arguably when championing a new sense of unfixed clarity, articulating or backing definitive manners of social interactions could risk falling into the same problematic fixity this thesis seeks to challenge. Nevertheless, there is still room to suggest not simply that darkness makes space for unconventional meetings, but also how these encounters are constructed and how they might draw audiences together differently, without explicitly prioritising an ultimate ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière 2004).

To avoid privileging certain social interactions – limiting the endless andness of political and artistic possibilities – I follow Adelina Ong’s proposition for negotiated togetherness. Ong offers a theory for negotiated living, searching for more compassionate ways of living together (2018, p.94). Looking at applied performance practices inspired by urban-art (such as parkour, art du déplacement, breakin’ and graffiti), Ong positions compassion as a care for togetherness which renders living together possible. If ‘living together in a shared place is necessarily a process of negotiation’ (ibid, p.99), I suggest that this negotiation can offer a useful framework through which to examine sociality in darkness and the modulation of different proto-communities or temporary gatherings, as it highlights the always in-formation and unsettled nature of those encounters. Ong builds on philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s social ontology, in which the latter asserts that ‘Being is with’ and ‘the plurality of being is at the foundation of Being’ (Nancy 2000, pp.12,38, original emphasis). For Nancy, ‘Being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singularly plural coexistence’ (ibid, p.3, original emphasis). In other words, one’s different roles or relationships with others defines one’s being, and as Ong explains, ‘it is through this relationship with others that people form an understanding of themselves in the world’ (2018, p.96). Following Nancy, Ong emphasises that interconnectedness is then key for establishing
and changing the understating of the world, which is collectively constructed and emerges from ‘these relationships and interconnections between all living and nonliving entities in this world’ (ibid, p.98). Notably, the hyphens in Nancy’s being-singular-plural, which render ‘one with the other’, mark ‘both union and division’ (Heddon 2017, p.27). In other words, this is not an idyllic holism or coming together of entities but a continuous process of negotiation: an immanent encounter, movement or dialogue which (implicitly or explicitly) shapes this interconnectedness. Coexistence (with others) is then not free of challenges or collisions. Following Ong, negotiated togetherness, ‘works towards the coexistence of multiple, conflicting hopes for a shared place such that one is not advanced at the expense of another’ (Ong 2018, p.97). In line with my thinking of uncertainty as andness, or continuous variation, negotiated togetherness – as I suggest it takes place in theatre in the dark performances – can disclose different modes of being-with and interconnections without prioritising a single, fixed and clearly defined interaction. These interactions might also defy visual recognition which is suffused with different ideologies, scopic biases or regimes. When these various (and possibly conflictual) modes of togetherness unfold in darkness, with its challenge to perception, they might gesture toward or even generate moments of togetherness which do not rely on fixed habitual social organisation and understanding. It is not a simple anything goes but an active formulation of transferable and flexible strategies or invitations for negotiation, interaction and being-with others.

Such a view resonates strongly with Timothy Morton’s ecological thinking. In brief, for Morton, coexistence with strangers, is ecological being-with (2013, p.194). Morton’s ‘ecological thought’ is ‘a type of thinking characterised by interconnectedness, interdependencies and relationalities’ (Lavery in Christopher and Grodin 2016, p.237). For Morton, the world has ended. Granted, the planet has not exploded, but it seems that in the new geological age of the Anthropocene the concept of world is no longer operational. Metaphysically, the world is so vast, and we are too enmeshed in it, that the world – at least as a concept – is no longer thinkable or imaginable. This is partly due to climate change that along with melting glaciers have ‘melted our ideas of world and worlding’ (Morton 2013,
Crucially, what remains after the ‘end of the world’ (as a concept) is radical intimacy, ‘coexistence with other beings sentient and otherwise’ in a ‘vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without a definite centre or edge’ (2010, p.8). Since all life forms coexist, we cannot draw a neat line around them, deftly binding all entities. In that sense, thinking ecology ‘means thinking coexistence and intimacy in constant flux’ (2011, p.169). Intimacy, as Lauren Berlant elucidates, ‘involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others’ (1998, p.281). While I am not entirely convinced by the framing of narrative/story, as they suggest a pre-conceived and already given experience, the notion of ‘something shared’ and interrelation between one and others offers a strong departure point for exploring – and indeed aspiring for – being with others in the dark.

Morton’s infinite mesh of connections is both real and not solid, as it changes, shifts and reconfigures how entities come together, once again embracing conflict, inconsistency and paradox as part of this interconnectedness. Thus, ‘instead of reducing everything to sameness, ecological interdependence multiplies differences everywhere’ (2010, p.277; see Chapter 5). In other words, parallel to Ong, ecology for Morton is ‘profoundly about coexistence’ (ibid, p.4) and this coexistence assumes contradiction and ambiguity (Morton 2016, p.143). Morton’s ecological thought helps me to articulate the significance and connection between uncertainty and togetherness. As he explains, ‘[t]hinking ecologically isn’t simply about nonhuman things’ (2010, p.4). Ecology ‘includes all the ways we imagine how we live together’ (ibid). Moreover, as Morton crystallises,

Ecology shows us that all beings are connected. [...] The ecological thought is the thought about ecology, but it’s also a thinking that is ecological. Thinking the ecological thought is part of an ecological project. [...] It’s a practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings (ibid, p.7).

Thus, I do not mention Morton’s ecological thinking simply because the ecological future is uncertain – although it does echo the broader concern of climate change which forms part of
the backdrop that this thesis responds to, thus highlighting the importance and timeliness of (re)considering uncertainty. Moreover, while ecology has been a growing concern in theatre and performance studies (and in arts and humanities more generally) this is not a thesis about ecology. While I draw from and employ ecological thinking in this chapter, this is by no means an extensive study of this entire corpus. Critically, ecology can extend beyond the scientific study of organisms, their relations to one another and their surroundings, to a ‘mode of cultural observation’ (Giannachi and Stewart 2005, p. 20), one which considers those relationships more broadly, and how they span to the wider analysis of interconnectedness and interdependencies between humans, non-humans and the other-than-human world (Woynarski 2015, p. 13; Morton 2010, p.7; Lavery 2016b, p.308; Bottoms et al. 2012, p.1; see Chapter 5). Therefore, it is a useful framework through which to consider negotiated togetherness and sociality in darkness.

In line with this ecological thinking, sociality in the dark could be approached as ‘a form of ecological doing’ (Lavery 2016a, p.230). This need not (necessarily) involve discussing ecological issues, advocating or enacting ‘greener’ ways of living. Nor does it mean performing outdoors. Again, it is ecological in an expanded sense: an aspiration for a way of being in/with ‘the universe’ and which, as Minty Donald suggests, ‘acknowledges differences, antagonisms and contradictions, rather than seeking resolution or transcendence’ (2016, p.252). In that sense, theatre-making that is doing something ecologically can be seen through the act of disclosing, unveiling, critiquing, problematising and extending ‘thinking of ecological relationships’ (Woynarski 2015, p.24). Therefore, I approach this ‘ecological doing’ by attempting to produce theatre (in the dark), which is indeterminate and does not seek to represent or produce ‘the real’, but to corrode it, ‘making the world problematic, multiple and complex’ (Lavery 2016a, p.233). In other words, instead of trying to impose a top-down system to prescribe one way for being-together, negotiated togetherness charts a model of theatre that is interrogative and indeterminate (ibid, p.232). It investigates how darkness can promote different modes of togetherness without solidifying or specifying one.
Moreover, for Carl Lavery, ‘if theatre’s ecocritical potential is located in how the immanence of the medium poses a challenge to human intentionality, then to prescribe a meaning that audiences are expected to act upon is problematised in advance (ibid). Recognising the possible contradiction of artistic agency in a PhD that embraces the maker’s perspective and seeks to articulate artistic intentions (residing with me as the artist guiding this research), I conceptualise the examination of togetherness in darkness as an indeterminate (and not pre-determinate) encounter. Through the uncertainty that emerges in darkness, ‘objects lose their mooring as discrete things’ which can trouble ‘the parameters of the human subject’ (Lavery 2016b, p.308). Thus, in line with Ong and Morton, the aim of Campfire was to reconsider some of this vast network of interconnecting entities (human and other-than-human) by highlighting the blurriness or instability of this network. While my analysis may be seen as underscoring individual/artistic/human intentionality, it does not aim to prioritise definitive meetings or modes of being-together. Instead, it is an attempt to negotiate togetherness ‘in relation to the community and other entities, be they organic or otherwise’ (Causey 2016, p.432). Put differently, like Nancy’s hyphen in being-with, Campfire sought to highlight interconnectedness as a way ‘that simultaneously bind[s] and distance[s]’ in a theatre ‘where everything, including us, is caught up together, attracting and repulsing’ (Lavery 2016b, pp. 305, 307). As this inquiry unfolded, my aim was not to produce, to borrow from Lavery, ‘yet more artworks that seek to create participation or immersion (or both) as intentional acts’; rather, more modestly – but just as vital – my aim was ‘to uncover the extent to which we are always already participating, always already immersed’ (ibid, p.305). Thus, while Campfire did generate invitations for participation which I unpack below, by attempting to equivalently invoke uncertainty and indeterminacy, I sought to propose and invite the audience to contemplate and reassess how – when being together in darkness and questioning how things are organised – sense could be made differently, new clarity could be regained, and interaction might be reconsidered.

To reiterate, in light of Ong, Morton and Lavery, I do not recognise social interaction in darkness as a utopian coming together of audiences. Instead, what emerged from this PR is
the understanding that sociality in darkness is manifested through a messy interaction and intersection of different modes of engagements which might not sit neatly together, or even contradict each other. Darkness, I propose, can simultaneously host and foster these different social and artistic possibilities, and it is my ambition to begin to trace how.

Isolation (in relation)

To uncover how darkness cultivates other modes of social encounters (beyond the logic of visual recognition), it is important to show first how darkness does not simply isolate audiences from each other. Or, better yet, how theatre in the dark can bring forward relationality despite of apparent separation. Therefore, in this section, I examine different compositions that respond or rely on the isolating quality of being in the dark, and question whether isolation is, in fact, an inevitable consequence of darkness. I reflect on isolation as it emerges in Campfire and in David Rosenberg and Glen Neath’s Ring (2012-2015).

To instigate my study of isolation I turn to philosopher Jacques Rancière who proclaims that, (human) ‘beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together’ (2011, p.56). If, for Rancière, politics is about the transformation of this ‘sensory fabric’, works of art hold the potential to reveal a ‘multiplication of connections and disconnections’ that reframe those relations between bodies (ibid, p.72; Sherman 2016, pp.81-88). These interrelations manifest themselves in a tension Rancière identifies between ‘being apart’ and ‘being together’. For Rancière the apart-together tension, when explored in artistic practice, could illuminate ‘either the ways in which the community is tentatively produced or […] [explore] the potential of community entailed in separation itself’ (ibid, p.78). Building on Rancière, being apart, despite its seemingly dividing quality, still highlights a relational tendency, an acknowledgement of the others we are separated from. Therefore, the first point to make is that isolation and togetherness are not exact opposites. One could feel secluded within a group, from a group, or when there is nobody else there. A group could share an isolating feeling within a larger crowd, and a collection of
people could undergo and share experiences of isolation concurrently – be ‘alone together’ (See also Riesman et al. 2001 [1950]; Lingis 1994; Turkle 2013; Kendrick 2018). In other words, isolation does not necessarily mean ‘alone’, and isolating experiences do not have to imply solitude.

The secluding characteristic of darkness implies a more literal understanding of isolation. Isolation is not a quality of darkness per se but rather a consequence of being wrapped in/by it. As Adam Alston suggests, ‘darkness hides actual and imagined things and people’ (2016, p.104), secluding those in it from seeing what/who is around them. Moreover, the shared experience of being enveloped by darkness can ‘ignite a kind of cohesion between spectators’, which Lennon terms a ‘community of individuals’, referring to moments when visual traces of the collective audience body are not present, and individuals can only reference their own presence within these darkened experiences. Patrons are obviously aware they are not alone in the auditorium; however, such assurance is diminished in prolonged blackouts when one cannot locate a visual sign for their own body, let alone those of fellow spectators. (2018, p.57)

Yet, despite the possible withdrawal from visual presence that darkness facilitates, I suggest that performance in the dark can still foster shared and relational encounters. Keeping fellow companions out of sight renders social encounters in darkness indeterminate and this seclusion could, in turn, raise the question of who/what is around (or how far). However, as I propose, this questioning also needs to be promoted dramaturgically. In other words, relationality is not quite an emergent consequence of theatre in the dark, but one that has to be continuously underpinned and initiated. If dramaturgy encapsulates directing attention or underpinning principles when composing performance, I suggest that these could be geared towards underscoring the shared presence with others. Compositionally, both of this section’s case studies rely on the indeterminacy of this ‘alone-together’ configuration and thus highlight isolation and/in relation.
Ring questions the collectivity of the group by emphasising its presence and simultaneous ‘separation from one another’ (Bishop 2006, p.12), both physically and through the role that the audience is given. Upon entering the auditorium, the audience receives a pair of headphones and is greeted by Michael (Simon Kane) – who, as they later find out, is the ‘facilitator’ of the event. After taking their seats in the traverse configuration, a few audience members are asked for their name. Once everyone is sat, Michael welcomes the audience, inviting them to put on their headphones before instructing: ‘can I ask you all to stand up please? And go and sit somewhere else... so you’re not sitting with the person you came with’ (Rosenberg and Neath 2013, p.2). Even before going dark, a composition of a group re-organisation is introduced, separating people from their intended company for the evening (a recurring trait in Rosenberg and Neath’s work). After a few housekeeping instructions total darkness emerged. In the dark, the audience is asked to form a circle. Following a moment of uncertainty induced by the sound of moving chairs, Michael whispers in everyone’s ear ‘It’s okay Frances, you can stay where you are’ (ibid, p.4). While the initial gathering seemed like a group therapy session, in the dark, the reasons for coming together started to become more ambiguous, as the audience quickly found out that Frances/Francis was not a popular group member and is, in fact, responsible for various misbehaviours including a manipulation to murder.

In Ring, darkness and headphones produce an isolating composition as they hide or separate one from others. Yet, at the same time, the framing of a group gathering/session constantly flag the presence of others. Throughout the performance, the audience is prompted to imagine a group of people that they are with, but which they cannot see, making them simultaneously part of a group but also somewhat removed from it. Lynne Kendrick references the binaural recording and the effect it had in creating something of an ‘audience paradox’: the listener is simultaneously isolated and accompanied, ‘concurrently ‘alone together’” (2018, p.54; Wenn 2015). The sound technology and the experience it generates become a key dramaturgical effect, particularly as this listening experience takes place in darkness. While one is very much isolated by darkness, the audience is critically connected to
other similarly ‘lonely people in the room’ through the sound in their headphones (Rosenberg in McLaren 2013, n.p.).

These slippages and blurriness are also enriched by Ring’s narrative. By being subjected to a distinct role (Frances/Francis), each audience member becomes a protagonist that is differentiated and distinguished from the group and therefore separated from it. As Kendrick contends, Ring ‘not only captures its audience, it also positions us, literally, as the subject of the production’ (2014, n.p.). On the other hand, to construct ‘the group’ and the illusion that one is actually the Frances of that group, Ring’s dramaturgy depends on the shared presence of/with others and the audience’s assurance that one is not alone in the auditorium. Counter the diminished confidence in Lennon’s ‘community of individuals’, in Ring there is a sense of doubling of audience: the binaural recording invokes the presence of others such as Michael and other group members, while the audience also shares the space with other actual audience members – they are amongst many “Franceses” (Kendrick 2018, p.65). This commingling or doubling of the audience results, as Kendrick notes, in a particular experience that bleeds ‘between fictional and actual presences, which makes for a very complex audience experience. Our immersion is similarly somewhere between the collective hearing of a narrative and individual listening’ (ibid, p.54). This is further emphasised by Ring’s conflation of the diegetic and extra-diegetic locations. The group gathers at – in case of the performance I attended – BAC’s council chamber and remains there for the majority of the fictional event.

Fundamentally, following Kendrick, the impact of this unique ‘alone together’ gathering is held in ‘the potential of the shared experience to create an ‘imagined community’ (ibid, p.68). In Ring, the tussle between separation/isolation – which relies on darkness, listening experience, framing and narrative – and the shared presence of (actual or fictional) group-members brings forward what Nicholas Ridout terms ‘solitude in relation’. For Ridout, solitude in relation refers to ‘the kind of social relation in which solitude does not preclude an entry into some apprehension of collectivity’ (2013, p.147). Thinking about the ‘multiplication of connections and disconnections’ proposed by Rancière, which ‘reframe the relation between bodies’ (2011, p.72), solitude in Ring is always in relation to the group. Ring demands
we think about others in the space, how we interact and more importantly how we imagine our interaction to be. The uncertain and indeterminate engagement with others opens the space to reflect on sociality in darkness, an act that is part of Ring’s underpinning dramaturgy, but which also extends beyond the performance. Ring raises the question of who we are – as Frances/ Francis as well as a group, as Michael notes in the performance:

So here we all are...We are all here, we have all come here... to be transported. Haven’t we? To be transported out of ourselves. And to imagine a better outcome... for each and every one of us. Good. That is the purpose of the group. This group. To come together and imagine something we could not imagine on our own, something that is especially powerful because we have imagined it together, as a group (Neath and Rosenberg 2013, pp.4-5).

And so, while solitude in Ring is established in relation, what has been thought and imagined in/as solitude/isolation might also ‘place that solitude in new relations’ (Ridout 2013, pp.154-155), opening up the possibility for new modes of sociality in darkness. By questioning one’s role and relationship to the group, Ring does not simply frame the audience as a ‘collective body’ that becomes a collective by simply being together in the dark. It is not merely a recognition of (the presence of/with) others which are somewhere in the dark. Instead, the group emerges as a result of its isolation in relation and becomes its unique self through this shared – yet uncertain and indeterminate – imagination. In other words, despite perhaps the ‘expected’ isolation in darkness, by foregrounding darkness as a site of collective transportation and transformation, Ring brings forward a more relational form of engagement that not only points to others in the dark, but draws them closer to consider how we are and might be with them, how togetherness is formed, conceived and negotiated.

As another example for dramaturgies which attempt to generate ‘isolation in relation’, I turn to Campfire and reflect on my own dramaturgical attempts to ‘undermine’ isolation in darkness. In her account for dark spaces, Maya Nanitchkova Öztürk proposes that ‘darkness is regarded as advantageous in that it allows members of the audience to retreat into the
anonymity of a “safe seat in darkness”, “withdraw from presence”, or retain privacy’ (2010, p.311). For Öztürk, apart from encouraging fear-related effects or spatial disorientation, darkness dissolves

the physical definitions of space, irrespective of their surface treatment. It has the capacity to frustrate the senses, and thus deprive the spectator of the possibility of locating the self within an overall legible scheme. Hence for the agent ‘placed’ in the dark, it undermines the ‘certainty’ and ‘safety’ of a seat, turning into a sense of being arrested, held within an indeterminate and elusive matter: dark space (ibid).

Darkness then, not only separates me from others and others from me, but the dislocation and disorientation, provoked by darkness – what Bal terms ‘lostness’ (2013, p.23) – equally isolate me from the different properties of/in the space. Therefore, in Campfire, from the early stages of the experimentation process I searched for ways to emphasise the shared presence with others in the dark. Paradoxically, my investigation of dramaturgies of uncertainty began by trying to ‘undermine’ the ambiguity regarding the presence of others in the dark. Consequently, I have used the sonic fire as a dramaturgical strategy to position the audience in the space in relation to a specific point, one which attempts to assemble and form this collection of people as a group (see recorded reflection). The continuous sound of the fire (see going dark videos), which came from the same spot in the middle of the space – and played throughout the entire performance – sought to challenge the secluding experience of being in the dark. Reinforced by the round configuration of chairs, I attempted to sustain an awareness of fellow participants (Öztürk 2010, p.313) which moved beyond the simple acknowledgement of being with others out of sight. By establishing the group gathering around the fire as the backbone that composed that shared experience – and framing the dramaturgy of the piece – this continuous crackling sound aimed to signal that while unseen to each other, we are all still together, sitting around and listening to the ‘fire’. As such, by stressing the collectivity of the shared activity I sought to establish isolation in relation (to the fire or the group), as a means of composing a dramaturgy of shared presence.
Another strategy that emerged from experimenting and devising *Campfire* relates to the greeting and set up of the event. If ‘in this lull before the show starts, [audiences] begin to develop something of a sense of themselves as a collective’ (Welton 2013, p.7), I propose that this can be further encouraged by a direct address, which frames the event as a shared experience. Looking at the respective openings of *Ring* and *Campfire*

MICHAEL: Welcome. Welcome all. All the new faces and old friends. Hello X. (here MICHAEL inserts the name of a ‘genuine’ audience member who’s name he has just learnt) Y? (...and the same again) (Neath and Rosenberg 2013, p.2).

YARON: Hello, hello there.... Thank you for joining us, come on in, [...] Hi, hello there. [Pause. looking at the fire] Thank you for being here. I realise this has been a long and busy day, so I hope this will give you a chance to relax a little and enjoy our time together (*Campfire*, 2016).

Both openings directly address the audience, greeting them or thanking them, while referring to the collectivity of the event. Framing the event, either by greeting, gesturing, as well as opening the space, or pointing to the maker’s intentions, can help to ‘establish the parameters and permissions of the event, much as the safety demonstration at the start of a flight helps to frame what follows’ (Goode 2016, p.264). This is not, of course, a strategy unique to theatre in the dark, yet as the group would not be visible to each other for the majority of the event, dramaturgically, a direct address to the audience could emphasise or at least initiate the collective quality of the performance. Essentially, setting up the performance in light became significant, not just for health and safety reasons. Rather, as the facilitator of the event, Michael and I could be envisaged and recalled (Kendrick 2018, p.58). For Kendrick, a lit beginning helps to build an image in the audience’s mind, since the ‘initial visual recognitions feed the auditory experience’ (ibid, p.59). Beyond that, however, these envisaged faces/voices serve to underscore the (shared) presence with others. That being said, recalling Lennon’s
diminished assurance of fellow patrons in sustained blackouts, in _Campfire_, I have found that I had to constantly address and re-establish the terms of engagement. Indeed, the set-up/greeting at the start of the performance was significant in the attempt to frame the ‘rules of the game’ and helped to institute the event as a collective experience. Yet, when reflecting on _Campfire_, the repeated direct address, the recurring sound of my voice (and fire) and especially the different invitations became equally significant dramaturgical tools to move – as in _Ring_ – from simply highlighting the presence of others and to a deliberate – even if subtle – exploration and questioning of how we are with/to each other in the dark.

Therefore, while for Welton, theatrical darkness is ‘heavy with the presence of others’ (2013, p.12), as the above account attest, relationality is arguably not quite an emergent quality in dark performances, but one that has to be consciously initiated in order to open the space for considering different interactions in the dark. In other words, as I proposed in this section, despite the apparent isolating characteristic of being in the dark, dark performances can highlight the interrelation and shared presence with others through different dramaturgies. However, what brings the audience together is not necessarily the fact that they are all actually together in the dark. Specifically, I have noted how the use of sound – through continuous and recurring sound (as a point of reference) and the particular shared listening experience – along with the framing of the event, and direct address can be seen as strategies that seek to emphasise the possibility for relationality in darkness. By turning to _Ring_ (2012-2015) and _Campfire_, I concluded that while relationality is a necessary step towards negotiated togetherness, it is one that has to be constantly initiated, exceeding the simple indication or nod to the presence of others. Consequently, In the next section, I continue to consider how darkness becomes a productive site to engage with different modes of negotiated togetherness, by emphasising the significance of indeterminacy in those encounters as a way to trouble existing understandings or revealing different possibilities.
Coexistence in-formation

If, according to Morton, the ‘politics of coexistence are always contingent, brittle, and flawed’ (2016, p.6), in this concluding section, I advance my exploration of the socio-political significance of uncertainty by suggesting that being-with others in darkness promotes coexistence that could be seen as in-formation. Thinking through indeterminacy, and drawing from Morton’s ecological thinking, I propose that negotiated togetherness – as an always incomplete ‘jigsaw puzzle’ (ibid, p.141) – could render sociality in darkness undecided and unfixed. Therefore, when thinking how exactly darkness becomes a productive site to engage with different modes of (negotiated) togetherness, I suggest that the indeterminacy of the interaction (in darkness) can both destabilise current understandings and categories that dictate how space is shared and make room for different (both multiple and alternative) possibilities for being-together to emerge. I examine Andy Field’s Non in Luce and Campfire to suggest at how both case studies not only gesture to the presence of others, but promote more relational interactions which in turn, might induce reflection on how we are with others in the dark.

The instruction is simple: build a new city. Before entering the space, visitors stand in front of a box, filled with black Lego bricks in various shapes. Everyone is invited to design and execute a construction of their choosing (I designed a three-story house). When the designs are ready, the usher opens the door and visitors enter a totally darkened space. There, visitors are invited to place their Lego construction, and contribution to the new city on a big white mat/map in the middle of the space, where they see fit. Eventually, a new city was built made from over six thousand Lego bricks.

Non In Luce (2015) was an interactive installation conceived by Field for ‘On Light’, a three day event at the Wellcome Collection in May 2015 that explored our relation to light. Field’s installation, though, took place mostly in darkness.\textsuperscript{13} In the dark, the relatively simple

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13} Non In Luce was listed as a 15-minute long installation although audience members were free to leave the space before and stay for longer. The installation took place mostly in complete darkness apart from audience members entering/exiting and, as described in Field’s website: ‘Every fifteen minutes a camera flash would}
activity of placing a piece of Lego on the floor became challenging. It was not only an attempt not to fall, trample and destroy other contributions to the ‘ever-growing miniature city’ (Field 2015, n.p) – on purpose or by accident – but also, as Field explains, ‘[s]tripped, even just temporarily, of such comforting support we are required to resort to more instinctive strategies of collaboration, generosity and collective care’ (ibid). This symbolic task of building a city in Non In Luce asks participants to consider how they act within an ever-growing town and how they interact or relate to others, primarily in but arguably beyond the installation. Without seeing others – either in the dark or all those who visited the installation during its run – participants become part of a group. By placing one’s contribution on the white surface, visitors revive the lineage of the new city founders. Even without witnessing others, or the final result for that matter, the act of building (or not) ties visitors together, as they negotiate to find (literally and figuratively) a place for them, and their contribution within the new ‘town’. Visitors might accept or refuse the invitation. Thus, they position themselves in relation to a common motivation or a collective action (Lingis 1994), which they could accept or amend. Non In Luce encourages participants to consider and ‘imagine our relation both to others in the gallery and to those whom we will never encounter’ (Jackson 2011, p.46). In other words, the installation underlines ‘the undecidability’ of the experience as a mode of perception that possibly inspire the ‘questioning of how things are organized’ (Bishop 2009, pp.249-250), how visitors of the installation interact, negotiate or share space (in the imagined city or the actual dark space).

In collectively building a city, Non In Luce experiments with how we might come together in the dark, a venture rooted in uncertainty and indeterminacy. In comparison, Campfire initiated not so much a task, but consisted of small invitations that the audience was free to accept or decline. I started with silent and solitary actions, which only hinted at the presence of others in the space (‘look left, look right’) – directing attention to where others are likely to be without explicitly referencing them. (Here I also relied on the ambiguous ‘you’ briefly illuminate the room and the city. These photographs also form the main documentation of the event’ (2015, n.p.). Other events in ‘On Light’ also explored notions of darkness, such as Astrid Alben and Hester Aardse’s performance Some Like Dark.
which could structure this direct address as either singular or plural, thus both *relating* and *differentiating* (see, for example, Hill and Paris 2014, p. 13)). Then, I moved on to initiate shared group actions, that primarily relied on sound: breathing, a shared moment of coughing together and a playful recreation of the sound of fire through clapping and clicking of fingers (‘I would like us to make another fire, one of our own’). While coughing and breathing sought to highlight one’s presence in the dark and its relation to others (‘You know, I find that many times in situations like this, people tend to cough…feel themselves there. So, let’s cough together’), the playful game of collectively making a fire sought to generate an open social exchange. As opposed to simply reminding people of the collectivity of the event this invitation sought to produce a *shared* moment both in the sense of a group activity and one that brings the audience together by performing a collective task. Recreating the sound of fire demonstrated the need for negotiation in the dark. Whether a result of isolation in darkness or the enthusiasm in participation, the audience clapped a lot more than I initially anticipated, underscoring the complexity and uncertainty of interaction in that situation. What started as an endeavour to explore and experiment with the tension between isolation and togetherness, eventually led me to the realisation that the significance of these dramaturgies lies not so much in their ability to disclose or underscore the shared presence or recognition of others in the dark. But crucially, it is their capacity to – explicitly or implicitly – promote reflection of *how* we are with others in the dark that becomes key.

The indeterminacy of who is going to clap next highlights the undecidability of the experience and points to the need to actively reflect and negotiate this collaboration with others out of sight. Thus, it could promote the consideration of how space is shared, how things are organised or how things *could be* organised. Since darkness challenges perception, it is through this modification of perception that, to borrow from Bal, ‘visitors are encouraged, sometimes perhaps even compelled, to open themselves up to the otherness that surrounds them, through all the means the artist has deployed’ (ibid, p.291; see Welton 2013). By this I

14 Robert Shaw equally links darkness and openness. As he argues, in the dark ‘we become significantly more open to the “other”: [...] If I can see the other, I know that I am not him/her/it. As this ability is lost in the dark,
do not mean an unquestionable idyllic touchy-feely being together with others (though it is a prospect that could potentially emerge). Rather, I interpret this openness to otherness, as the promotion of reflection – through different compositions – which draws attention to who/what else is in the dark and how I might relate and share the space with what is unseen: a possibility for negotiated togetherness. This continuous process of negotiation that emerges from this playful game renders sociality undecided and therefore still in-formation.

As another composition for negotiated togetherness in Campfire, I initiated a ‘wave’ in darkness, where the audience was invited to each say hello in the dark. (*And now, I wanted us to make a wave together. Again, this might not work, but I hope you are willing to try this with me. I will start the wave, and from my left, let’s all say hello, one at a time, each in our turn. Let’s try. (pause). Hello*). Devised in the third week of practice, this was another invitation/task rooted in collaboration. This collective action sought not only to produce sound to emphasise the presence of myself and others, but also to give room to each audience member in the group, while paradoxically still allowing individuals to remain anonymous in darkness. It was a different form of interaction, not relying on visual recognition. Much like the recreation of fire, indeterminacy is also embedded in this the sonic wave. Again, tracing where the ‘hellos’ are coming from, how close are others to me, when is my turn and even disconnecting voice from appearance, can promote similar reflection of how space is shared and how we are with/to each other. Put differently, questioning ‘how things are organised’ is as much socio-political as it is dramaturgical, thus, it allows me to shift to the wider socio-political significance of uncertainty in Campfire and subsequently in darkness.

As stated, by uncertainty I draw from Mieke Bal, who defines uncertainty as loss of clarity. Loss of clarity suggests a moment of ambiguous perception that ‘enables our senses to perceive that which normally remains unseen’ (Bal 2013, p.22). As such, uncertainty refers not only to the actual thing perceived (and the challenge to decipher it). Rather, the indeterminacy the self is instead rendered open to the other, dissolving or at least reducing our sense of bounded selves’ (ibid, p. 586), which could create possibilities for new and unexpected connections (ibid, p. 591).
of perception could also bring forward multiple (andness) understandings and interpretations – both real and imaginary, known or not-yet-known – in light of what is perceived or the act of perception itself (ibid, p.207). For Bal, those ‘infinitely enriching possibilities’ manifested through ‘the endless “andness” of uncertainty’ hold a (socio-) political potential since the suspension (or modification) of clarity renders politics, interaction and relation unfixed or indeterminate (2013, pp.264-265; see Read 2007, p.41). Notably, by definition, indeterminacy excludes distinctiveness. Therefore, through this indeterminate and undecided interaction, ‘alternative states of affairs’ can become thinkable (Bal 2013, p.83; Massumi and McKim 2009, p.20). Put differently, this andness of possibilities – which can also emerge in darkness – holds the potential to rethink and embrace other forms of interaction, that may overlap, contradict and affect those in darkness in a myriad of ways.

In Campfire the moment that, in my view, clearly marked the negotiation and/togetherness and possibility to consider alternative social interactions was proposed in the closing sequence of the performance. Before the lights came on, the audience was invited to stand up, sway gently from side to side, and eventually – without any verbal indication from me, but with the adding of a beat – to move or dance alone/together in the dark. This shared moment of dancing is indeterminate, as it could invite liberation and isolation, negotiation and togetherness, risk and freedom. Indeed, while dancing in the dark ‘affirm alternative modalities for living and experiencing collective moments that make the world alien to itself’ (Lepecki 2016, p.79); fear and health and safety considerations are likely to root people in their spot. However, dancing together in the dark also opens up a space for doing something together, where the ways in which one is with others become undecided. They are still information. In the dark, as Welton argues, ‘the collapse of visible spatial (and thus also social) boundaries opens aesthetic and political potentials in audiences’ experience […] that lit conditions might paradoxically obscure’. (2017b, p.507; see O’Grady 2017, p.10) What is equally vital about this openness, I suggest, is that apart from admitting endless possibilities it also helps to rethink or destabilise current fixed understandings that emerge through modes of interaction understood or underscored by opticality. While dancing in the dark could imply
isolation and separation, it could equally emphasise the mutual, ‘being together’. Indeed, when ‘you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcomes’ (Solnit 2016b: xii). Thus, unseen to each other, the group can reform and reconsider their interaction. If the earlier compositions I discussed can be seen as directing the mode of interaction or gesturing towards a desirable/intended outcome (though even then the indeterminacy of darkness can alter the form of interaction anticipated), dancing in the dark fosters a more open engagement, one that demands the consideration of others but without facilitating a direct or pre-defined collaboration with them. The undecidability of this moment might in turn, destabilise current understandings of how space is normally shared as it requires and gives access to different modes of interaction that do not rely on visual recognition and clear distinctions between one and others.

Recalling Morton’s particular form of ecological thinking, concerning interdependencies and relationalities, Morton explores the possibility of a new ecological aesthetics: dark ecology, which puts ‘hesitation, uncertainty, irony, and thoughtfulness back into ecological thinking’ (2010, p.16). Again, I do not necessarily frame this PR as ecological or environmental art (in the sense that it is not about birds, fish or oceans), nor do I point to Morton’s aesthetics as it mentions darkness in its title. Rather, I turn to Morton to be able to better root and embrace difference, ambiguity and interconnectedness as part of the socio-political implications of uncertainty that I examine in this chapter. Morton’s ecological thinking – and its uncertainty – similarly involves being radically open. Equally, André Lepecki contends that performances in the dark ‘open up, through darkness, and build, as darkness, a much needed space of potentiality’ (Lepecki 2016, p.58), which chimes with Bal’s ‘endless andness’ of possibilities. Tellingly, for Morton, the more entangled one realises they are, the more open and ambiguous everything becomes (2010, p.17), which brings forward a different and more metaphorical understanding of darkness, though one which is equally understood through uncertainty. For Morton, accepting the fundamental interconnectedness of the world (following the ecological thought) can result in more uncertainty, fear or even pain — a dark ecology. Following Morton, while ‘reading poetry won’t save the planet’ art can still ‘allow us
to get a glimpse of being(s) ‘that exist beyond and between our normal categories’ (ibid, p.60).

In other words, dark ecology serves to frame my ambition to propose a new sense of unfixed clarity, as it points to the possibility of destabilised understandings of different categories – specifically here, modes of being together. Following Morton, ecological thinking (or awareness) ‘forces us to think and feel at multiple scales, scales that disorient normative concepts such as “present,” “life,” “human,” “nature,” “thing,” “thought,” and “logic”’ (2016, p.159). Thus, correlatively, it undermines definitive and pre-fixed social interactions. In other words, and in light of Morton, the significance of sociality in darkness lies not only in the fact that it draws audiences together and encourage ‘openness’ to other/new possible and shared interactions, but also the indeterminacy of being in the dark renders these joint experiences undecided and unfixed, suspending presupposed and assumed politics – practiced in and through visuality (in day to day interaction) – and thus trouble particular engagements.

An example might help to better elucidate my point. Questions of participation in immersive arts practices are often analysed in response to the distinction between Nicholas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics (2002[1998]) and Claire Bishop’s framework of antagonism (2004). Bourriaud considers how numerous artists in the 1990s investigated social exchange and interaction that formed part of the artistic/aesthetic experience in an attempt to create ‘spaces where we can elaborate alternative forms of sociability […] and moments of constructed conviviality’ (2002, p.166). For example, in Rirkrit Tiravanija’s Untitled (Still) (1992) the artist served curries to gallery visitors. The constructed ‘models of sociability’ (ibid, p.70) associated with relational aesthetics, could conjure, as Harvie suggests, Nancy’s notions of ‘being-with’ or ‘being-in-common’, which accommodate difference in mutuality (Harvie 2013, p.8). However, Bourriaud’s framing has often been critiqued as generating ‘soft and fuzzy’ social spaces, which risk seeming ‘utopian, naive and unrealistic’ (ibid, pp.7-8). Put differently, conviviality and its harmonious qualities are deemed ‘uncritical’, since those intersubjective encounters ‘i.e., those that “feel good”’ – risk neutralizing the capacity of critical reflection’ (Jackson 2011, p. 47). The models of social interaction advocated by Bishop, on the other hand, cultivate ‘socially antagonistic and dissonant relations, in recognition that a
Democratic sociality is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased (Harvie 2013, p.8, original emphasis; see also Bishop 2004; White 2013, pp.17-20). Instead of maintaining the dichotomy or opposition between conviviality (Bourriaud) and antagonism/rupture (Bishop) I suggest that Campfire can be seen as promoting both, fostering unstable possibilities for interaction that are in-formation. Thus, the performance can encourage socio-political questions without determining a distinctive outcome or by destabilising the distinctiveness of particular outcomes. Thinking about the apparent warmth and ‘fuzziness’ that might be induced through Campfire, collectivity and interaction as they emerge in particular moments of the event still demand explicit negotiation – finding one’s space in relation to others through ‘inter-subjective exchange’ (Jackson 2011, p.45). In that sense, while encouraging reflection, negotiation and amicability, sociality in Campfire does not fully abide or neatly fit either of these frameworks or categories. Put differently, the indeterminacy of/in darkness can raise friction, sustain tension, and be seen as disruptive (to perception, and subsequently to social interaction), even in shared convivial playful or ‘fuzzy’ interactions.

Darkness might erase the apparent visual differences each audience member might hold. But paradoxically, it can render audiences as more ‘equal’, either because their differences are diminished or since members share a similar condition of challenged vision in indeterminate environment. In that sense, this indeterminacy does not suppress contemplation (Bishop 2004, p.66) but arguably promote it. Thus, despite the fact that darkness can seemingly obliterate conflicts or differences and in light of the convivial quality of Campfire, its challenge to perception can nevertheless encourage reflection of how the audience is drawn together. In this vein, it demands the negotiation relational works have been criticised for not maintaining. This reflection, I argue, stems from the altered sense of clarity in darkness which can emerge even in moments of ‘harmonious’ or friendly conviviality, while still destabilising their initial understanding. In other words, while the convivial “feel good” dancing with others could neutralize and maintain the formal/current organisation of the group, under the veil of darkness, it could also promote reflection and different multiple understandings of how the space is shared and interactions are negotiated,
without fixing a particular encounter. Consequently, instead of viewing conviviality/antagonism as strictly dissenting binaries that coexist in darkness, when reflecting and analysing Campfire, I propose that different dramaturgies of uncertainty and indeterminacy can render sociality in darkness undecided and unfixed, which can destabilise current understandings of different categories of social organisation.

This indeterminacy can also make room for different (both multiple and alternative) possibilities for being-together to emerge. If something is indeterminate, one cannot tell exactly what it is – which can be applied both to existing possibilities but also inform unknown opportunities of being with others. In their challenge to perception, the definitiveness of these interactions is rejected. In that sense, the uncertain and unfixed relationships in darkness, can be imagined differently not only according to existing categories. In other words, this uncertainty does not only encapsulate a possibility for conditions for interactions that are ‘not yet set’ (Dolan 2005, p.7) but opens the space to reflect on possibilities which may have not even been conceived. In that sense ‘darkness names a realm, or a zone, beyond the combinatorial of possibles and their pre-established pre-givens’ (Lepecki 2016, p.56, my emphasis). Rather than a restrictive, ‘finite image of the “what should be”’ dramaturgies of uncertainty in darkness highlight the opportunity for experimentation with other possibilities (Dolan 2005, p.13), illuminating more plural modes of perception. Thus, moving from different (non-visual) recognition of others, to negotiation and finally to aspiration, the making of Campfire allowed me to approach darkness through the subjunctive ‘what if’, which when shifting from the creative possibilities to the socio-political ones, can refer to an imaginative scope of possibilities that are not only unfixed but are continuously in-formation in darkness.

To draw this section to a close, I turn once again to Welton, who – drawing from Emmanuel Levinas – explores gloom and facial visibility and argues that ‘the loss of facial clarity (of one’s own as well as that of others) marks the possibility for ethical beginnings’ (2017a, pp.260-261; see Thompson 2009). In this section, I pointed how darkness might erase ‘faces’ and present a unified crowd by eliminating the differences audience members might
hold. However, as I tried to suggest, it is exactly the inability to see or fix faces that becomes important. As Lepecki concludes, in the dark, ‘a collective amalgamates precisely because it lacks a face’ (2016, p.81, my emphasis). In that sense, indeterminacy could make room for a pluralisation of perception, rendering sociality in-formation. Darkness and negotiated togetherness highlight the possibility to consider simultaneously countless views without prioritising one, both by destabilising current understanding and practices or by revealing new possibilities. Undecidability and indeterminacy, thus, do not force choosing one possibility (for sociality) on top of the other but make room for multiplicity.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined the notion of negotiated togetherness as a means to explore different interactions in darkness. By turning to compositions that highlight the collective and shared nature of dark performances, I started to respond to my first research question, considering some of the dramaturgical socio-political implications of uncertainty and darkness. By discussing Ring, Non In Luce, and Campfire, I have shown how theatre in the dark can ‘undermine’ the sense of isolation in darkness and evoke more relational interactions. I have focused on indeterminacy as a particular facet of uncertainty in darkness, one which resists fixity and definitiveness, and suggested that in darkness one can consider both difference and mutuality, being-in-common and negotiation.

In that sense, the unfixed perception, and by extension politics, can make space for more possibilities, promoting a reconsideration and a setting that can host and include various modes of sociality. This is because, as Bal asserts, to divest ‘oneself and others of perceptual routine is also a political act of opening up a world that had been closed off. Only then can one suspend already-known forms’ (2013, p. 210). In other words, the indeterminacy manifested in/through darkness, can facilitate an altered sense of clarity which can reveal and include new or other modes of interaction. In that sense, underpinning performative moments which are constructed and relied on negotiation and non-visual recognition.
(regarding the presence of others), can reveal the andness of socio-political relations in darkness and how they might be conceived or understood, either by destabilising current understandings or by supporting other possible ‘social imaginings’, known or not known yet. In the next chapter, I move on to explore light and lighting design and how these might promote an altered sense of clarity in darkness.
4. Inside a Cloud:

Light and Visual Obfuscation

This chapter continues my exploration of dramaturgies of uncertainty, considering the significance of light and lighting design in destabilising and transforming clarity. Since theatre in the dark is often associated with switching the lights off, investigating lighting compositions might be seen as counterintuitive. However, I suggest that light still plays an important role in dark performances. Indeed, theatre in the dark, despite its title, does not refer solely to performances in complete darkness. It also accounts for, to follow Alston and Welton, performances or events that incorporate gloom or other conditions of obstructed vision (2017, p.4). Lighting compositions such as houselights and their elimination; partial images; the manifestation of gloom through low and diffuse lighting states; the punctuation or piercing of darkness by light; excessive or blinding light – and arguably even unintentional glows from conspicuous LEDs and other unmasked lighting sources – all contribute to the design and experiences of dark performances. Thus, the exploration of theatre in the dark should not only address the functions of darkness and sensory deprivation in performance; it should also acknowledge ‘half- and low-light’ and the ‘interchanges between light, dark and obscured vision as compelling elements of theatre design’ (ibid, p.9; see also Jarvis 2017, p.93).

Similarly, the growing scholarship studying theatre light, which foregrounds or traces the significance and manifestation of light in performance – and equally informs this chapter – recognises the many interconnections and interplays between light and darkness. As light scholar Katherine Graham asserts, ‘the judicious use of darkness in performance is integral to the sculpting of light, so much so that light and dark are not separate phenomena in performance but opposite aspects of the same phenomenon’ (2018a, p.25). For Graham, ‘darkness is a condition of light’ and the study of darkness sketches the potency ‘of controlled – or controllable – conditions of light in performance’ (ibid), implying that the practice of lighting design, ‘is as much about designing darkness as it is about designing light’ (Graham
While obstructed vision can be manifested via other dramaturgies and designs, I argue that theatre in the dark offers an essential case study through which to explore its effects.

Akin to the confluence of light and darkness, this chapter critically reflects on the use of light within my practice research (PR) as a means to continue cultivating and analysing the dramaturgical traits of theatre in the dark and the complex manifestations of darkness in performance. When charting an altered sense of clarity in/through darkness, I suggest that the challenge to visual certainty in dark performances can bring forward alternative views and understandings born of different modes of sensory engagement. As opposed to the previous chapter, in which I highlighted the significance and implication of seeing darkness (in relation to sociality), this chapter advances and expands this study by focusing on light’s ability to unsettle, obfuscate or destabilise vision. Specifically, in line with my exploration of dramaturgies of uncertainty, I argue that light, like darkness – or light’s interaction with darkness – can transform what is perceived and thus, I examine how light is utilised for generating a sense of uncertainty.

Consequently, this chapter seeks to tackle my second research question and continue to develop my first: How can lighting design generate loss of clarity? And what is the dramaturgical significance of not seeing clearly? Linked primarily to my second cycle of PR, this chapter examines the process of devising Overcast (2017) and the dramaturgies of uncertainty manifested in this performance. In its final iteration, Overcast utilised darkness, haze and various lighting compositions to simulate the ‘making’ and emergence of clouds as well as attempting to emulate the experience of being immersed in overcast or looking through mist – instantiating experiences of not seeing clearly. To discuss lighting compositions beyond their mere formal properties, I use Graham’s (2016) framework of ‘scenographic light’ which seeks to better understand and critically engage with the influence of light in performance by looking at its structural and dramaturgical aspects and light’s contribution to meaning-making in and of itself (pp. 74-75). Retaining the understanding of dramaturgy as the ‘underpinning principles of theatrical construction’ (Turner, 2015, p.2) or ‘an overarching term for the
composition of a work’ (Turner and Behrndt 2008, p.17), this chapter conducts a
dramaturgical analysis of lighting design within my PR. Thus, I disseminate and evaluate the
insights emerging from the process of experimentation and structuring of theatre in the dark
using light. By addressing both these questions, this chapter contributes to the emerging
discourse around light in performance by taking theatre in the dark as its main case study and
approaching an altered interplay between light and darkness – one where light can also
condition darkness. In other words, this chapter explores how light in dark performances can
be used to challenge what is perceived.

Again, by loss of clarity, I follow Mieke Bal’s conceptualisation and approach to
uncertainty through moments of indeterminate and ambiguous perception which refer either
to the objects perceived or the act of perception itself. In her formidable analysis of
contemporary artist Ann Veronica Janssens’ work, Bal’s initial understanding of loss of clarity
stems from the physical experience of sight. For example, in Janssens ‘mist room’
installations, which immerse the visitors in a room filled with colourful mist and thus,
obfuscat ing or challenging their visual perception, what is seen becomes unfixed and vague.
Such vagueness relates, for instance, to one’s perception of surface and depth or the
boundaries of the space or artwork (2013, pp. 21, 67, 186). Expanding Bal’s theorisation and
moving towards conceptualising uncertainty through transformation rather than loss, this
chapter continues the study of uncertainty by focusing on the particular facet of vagueness.
As Andreas Rauh explains, ‘vagueness is ascribed to statements, situations, and perceptions that
are uncertain or that lack clarity or definition’ (2017, p.3). In other words, vagueness denotes
fuzziness, imprecision or indistinctness. Vagueness can be understood as a gesture that ‘resists
categories, boundaries, calculations and identities’ in an attempt to escape determination
(Carney and Miller 2009, p.35). When something appears to be vague – or possessing vague
properties – it is understood as not entirely definite, not clearly defined – physically, but also
conceptually. Recalling the metaphor of fire that I used to elucidate the composition of
uncertainty, fire is vague since I cannot point exactly to its outline – where it begins and ends.
Fire is something I can perceive, but not capture. Likewise, in line with its fuzzy and imprecise
definition, fire is also vague as it hovers between a thing and an event. It is this _hover_ or movement-between that this chapter addresses, in its consideration of light, darkness, and haze – as haze, like fire, shares this sense of vagueness as an unfixed yet concrete ‘thing’. I argue that vagueness, when understood through perceptual obscurity and sensory manipulation, blurs fixity in order to dismantle preconceptions. Focusing on vagueness in relation to light and darkness affords a reconsideration of vision and clarity. Such a move is important firstly because destabilising fixity challenges the privilege of a single, stable or constant point of _view_ (a false sense of clarity). Secondly, vagueness highlights how vision (and light) can also be unreliable, therefore contributing to the critique of various ocular biases – such as ‘seeing is believing’ – which this PR seeks to challenge. Thus, vagueness can invite us to pause and reassess the habitual flow of (visual) perception, which serves my attempt to conceive darkness as a site of potentiality that discloses negotiated togetherness: different modes of coexistence that resist recognition and that might not sit neatly together yet are still thinkable and imaginable.

Sitting within the growing interest in vision and visuality in theatre and performance studies (Bleeker 2003, 2008; di Benedetto 2010; Johnson 2012; McKinney 2018; Welton 2006, 2017b), I seek to continue and trouble the assumption that things are as they are because of how they are seen. Despite being known for emphasising doubt, René Descartes famously proclaimed that ‘sight is the noblest and most comprehensive of the senses’ (2002 [1637], p.116; Jonas 1954). Refuting Descartes, Maaike Bleeker notes that vision actually appears to be irrational, inconsistent and undependable (2008, p.2). Not only can we be misled by what we see, but following Bleeker, we can identify “institutions of perspective”: a way to understand ‘how our senses are cultured to perceive certain privileged modes of representation as more natural, real, objective, or convincing than others, and to relate these effects to the discourses which mediate in what we think we see’ (ibid, 13). Put differently, the definitiveness of sight lends itself to a false sense of clarity, one which solidifies, fixes or neutralises tenacious points of view. Crucially, as I already suggested, in moments of transformed clarity, ‘an endless extension of possibility’ comes into view (Bal 2013, p.28).
Assuming that the ‘institution of perspective’ can be challenged, transformed or unlearned, these moments of uncertainty hold the potential to think and view perception and what is perceived anew as they invite an encounter with different, altered and multiple perspectives, ‘bristling with unknown and unseen possibilities and powers’ (ibid, p.134). Altered clarity then, can bring these unseen possibilities to light.

Hence, this chapter considers the significance of not seeing clearly, both literally and metaphorically. ‘Unable to see clearly’, Welton suggests, ‘one is left to wonder how, and what one sees’ (2017a, p.247). Welton’s observation has important ramifications, since ‘[f]ar from the stupefaction of one’s sensibility, peering, befuddled into gloom as the lights fade to black out in the theatre, the audience are not preparing for seeing nothing, but for seeing – and also thus for feeling – differently’ (ibid). Therefore, within my broader consideration of how darkness cultivates different modes of being-with others, I propose that not seeing clearly can generate new forms of perception, encouraging plurality and multiplicity. Thwarting fixity, identification and recognition, not seeing clearly brings forward concurrent multivalent meanings and interpretations of what is seen. Thus, it opens the space and possibility for inclusion of different views and reconsidered understandings.

I begin this account by introducing Overcast as the main case study of this chapter. Next, I position this inquiry within the growing exploration of light in theory and practice, before addressing specific strategies that emerged from my PR. This cycle of PR yielded two main threads that this chapter addresses: plunges into darkness through compositions of houselights, and the use of low-lighting as a means to generate hazy, or partial images. Tracing the play and interchange between light and darkness, this chapter analyses different lighting compositions in Overcast, and revisits earlier insights arising from Campfire. Such a move allows me first to consider what light does in performance, advancing light’s recent study. Second, the exploration of vagueness as it emerges from low-lighting and the elimination of houselights exemplifies light’s dramaturgical significance in these experimentations: namely, how light can be employed to disrupt clarity and enhance uncertainty.
The Clouds Laboratory

*Overcast* hosts four audience members around a table covered by a navy-blue tablecloth. On the cloth, sits a bowl of water, along with white floury powder which is scattered to create random shapes and constellations. As the audience members enter the (fairly large) space, they find their way due to two bright beams of light. Albeit in shadows, the table is still visible. Much like *Campfire*, the audience moves from a corridor that is brightly lit by fluorescent lights to a hazy and relatively dark space. Unlike *Campfire*, instead of occupying the majority of the studio, the set up for *Overcast* – which consisted of the above – was concentrated in the middle of the space, framed by four lighting ‘booms’ (portable stands to rig lights on), that were placed behind each chair. Once the audience takes their seats, the light begins to gently fade and halfway through its fade, it suddenly cuts (*play Overcast documentation*).

In darkness, different voices (emerging from four speakers, placed at the bottom of each boom) begin to describe unclear images, which are in fact descriptions of three Turner paintings (*see invitation*). After a relatively long sequence of the voices agreeing and disagreeing on the nature of the image(s) in darkness, a loud pulsing sound of a smoke machine fills the space. It is followed by a gentle brush of air and the sound of rippling water which gently fades in. Then, extremely dimmed or hazy ‘images’ begin to re-emerge, plunging the space in and out of darkness. First, a low frosty beam slowly appears. As the soft light beam becomes brighter, or as the audience is more accustomed to its very low its intensity, both light and the vague image begin to solidify: they appear sharper, clearer, discernible. It is the water bowl, and the light reflects the water back on the ceiling. Second, a strip of warm-orange light above the audience’s head shines through the slowly moving haze. Finally, an extended composition of low white and blue lighting emerges above and behind the audience and creates multiple vague and hallucinatory silhouettes, outlines and distorted images. The haze shapeshifts around the space and dips in and out of light to simulate the experience of being immersed in clouds. Interrelating light and darkness, *Overcast* sought to alter the audience’s sense and perception of space, as well as the appearance of fellow audience members sitting around the table.
I identify the seeds for *Overcast* in my initial exploration when devising *Campfire*. My attempt to ‘make fire’ (see videos) using haze and light, led me to experiment with visual obfuscation more broadly, by reflecting on ‘hazy’ and vague phenomena such as clouds and mist (play clouds laboratory video). Evidencing the ongoing research through practice, this video documents my second week of PR when I was devising *Campfire*. Revisiting this early development having recognised the productive potential of this line of inquiry, I returned to my ‘clouds laboratory’ for my second cycle of practice. In devising *Overcast*, I continued to explore blurry and hazy images, creating the conditions for environments in which uncertainty can be identified and further interrogated. I have been experimenting with low-lighting and hazy compositions for two weeks in the studio, at the end of which I presented a work-in-progress showing at the university’s 2017 Doctoral College conference. As part of my iterative process, I reviewed *Overcast* alongside the making of *Certain Ways* for further refinement, with final showings in July 2018.

The capacity of these unsteady or vague images to alter perception is already manifested through the performance. However, unlike the vague Turner paintings, light (in performance) through angle, colour, or intensity as well as properties of glare, glow, sparkle and animation (Edensor 2017, p.154), can continuously alter the appearance of a given object (a bowl of water, the presence of other audience members), thus ‘creating uncertainty and perceptual instability’ (Graham 2018a, p.49). Darkness might intensify *not seeing clearly*, which makes light – through obstructed vision – a significant theatrical device to examine dramaturgies of uncertainty. Especially in performance, light is (largely) processual – transforming and shifting as it moves between different lighting ‘states’ that fade and bleed into one another. By unpacking *Overcast*, I am able to focus on fleeting and indistinct occurrences for which I (as a maker) proposed the stimuli for. These compositions were not a simple ruse to trick or manipulate the audience, but rather an invitation to consider the implications of lack of precision or distinctness. Viewed in tandem with my PR and the process of experimentation that resulted in *Overcast*, I continue to contextualise this thread of inquiry in order to highlight how lighting design can generate instances of *not seeing clearly*. 
Illuminating the Field

The etymology of ‘vague’ lies in ‘wandering’, ‘strolling’, ‘rambling’ (Carney and Miller 2009). Thus, to investigate light, clarity and vagueness, this section moves to wander across, map this unwieldy field and position my inquiry within it. First, I introduce the recent exploration of light, vision and visuality. Second, I elaborate on the work of Ann Veronica Janssens to better illuminate my own exploration. Third, I outline Graham’s framework to facilitate the dramaturgical exploration of light. Fourth, I conceptualise vagueness as a key concern of this chapter.

As mentioned, light and its design have become a flourishing object of inquiry. In theatre and performance, light’s study ranges from more historical accounts – that both survey the history of stage lighting and revisit it to theorise recent practices (Aronson 2005; Baugh 2013; Palmer 2013, 2017) – to reflections by lighting designers on their process and designs (Crisafulli 2013; Abulafia 2016; Moran 2017). Scholarship emphasising technical aspects of lighting design (Palmer 1994; Hunt 2011, 2013) sits alongside an increased recognition of light’s significance in performance, both in and of itself (Graham 2016, 2018a, 2018b), or as part of a broader understanding of scenography (McKinney and Butterworth 2009; Collins and Nisbet 2010; Lotker and Gough 2013; Shearing 2015; McKinney and Palmer 2017; Aronson 2018; Hann 2019). Equally, within the emerging exploration of atmospheres, light has been theorised as a significant agent for their production (Pallasmaa 2005; Zumthor 2006; Erwine 2017; Edensor 2015a, 2017; Bille 2015a, 2015b; Böhme 2017).

Similarly, amidst theatre in the dark scholarship, light is not a new line of inquiry. Recent research addresses the historical evolution of dimming the lights in the auditorium (Palmer 2013, 2017; Welton 2013, 2017a; Alston 2017), as well as unique performative manifestations of light within dark events and performances (Welton 2012, 2017a, 2017b; 15

Despite the many resonances with the hazy and vague notion of atmosphere, I do not wish to provide another definition of this ‘ontologically puzzling’ phenomenon (Salter 2018, p.174; see Sørensen 2015; Böhme 2017; Edensor 2017). Rather, in line with this overall inquiry, I utilise my dramaturgical analysis of light as a means to illuminate dramaturgies of uncertainty.
Home-Cook 2015; Espiner and Home-Cook 2017; Cavallo and Oshodi 2017; Kotzamani 2017). However, while certain lighting compositions have been discussed in the exploration of theatre in the dark – such as the red LED, which creates the illusion of almost-blackout before its disappearance in Shunt and Sound&Fury’s *Ether Frolics* (2006), or the quick flashes of lights in Extant’s *Sheer* (2012) – their dramaturgical significance receives scant attention and largely remains out of sight. Therefore, in line with my dramaturgical study, this chapter examines dramaturgies of uncertainty using light, as a vital factor of theatre in dark performances.

Central to this study is the growing array of practices which inform and demonstrate the complex relationships between light and perception. The numerous engagements and designs by practitioners and artists – such as Elizabeth Diller and Dirk Hebel, David Shearing, Katrin Brack and Fujiko Nakaya – who explore the movement and transformation of climates, the production of artificial weather or the recreation of various hazy phenomena definitely informed my clouds laboratory. However, in this cycle of practice, I drew primarily from the rich tradition of light art and the use of light and darkness in contemporary installations. Artworks by artists such as James Turrell,16 Yayoi Kusama, Antony Gormley, Olafur Eliasson, Liz West and, notably, Ann Veronica Janssens, all inspired my exploration in the studio. Each in their own way used light, darkness (and occasionally haze) to investigate the depths of perception and how light, colour, darkness and vapour can alter or transform clarity and invite a reconsideration of one’s own environment. Returning to Bal’s description of Janssens’ oeuvre, her artworks, especially her mist rooms – such as *yellowbluepink* (2015) – and light sculptures – such as *Bluette* (2006) or *Yellow Rose* (2007) that form coloured star shapes using only light beams – are ‘[b]ased on the simple, lucid idea of transforming perception by slowing it down’, challenging its clarity, ‘and using light to counter vision rather than supporting it’ (2013, p.135).

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16 Brian Massumi’s exploration of Ganzfeld (“total field of vision”) considers the manner in which slowly shifting and overlapping gradients of haze, fog or light can result in a growing sense of disorientation (Massumi 2002; Salter 2014, p.234).
As evident in *Overcast* and the examples above, light is far from being a neutral conduit. More importantly, from a practitioner perspective, the process of designing light can impact what and how something will be seen. This is why Hal Foster distinguishes between vision, the physical operation or mechanism of seeing; and visuality, the historical, social and discursive techniques and determinations in which vision takes place (1988, p.ix). Similarly, Jonathan Crary considers how practices of vision are historically constructed (1999). Akin to Foster and Crary, Bleeker examines *visuality* through practices of seeing in the theatre, arguing that visuality is rooted and entangled with particular cultural and historical manifestations of visual experience (2008, p.1). In a similar vein, in her critique of the traditional distinctions between the visual and aural senses, Lynne Kendrick alludes to ‘the enduring visual bias that has rendered sight the dominant sense or the residual prejudice that assumes the world is reproduced for the eye’ (2017, p.119). Kendrick clarifies that Ocularcentrism – which theatre in the dark (and arguably, the case studies above) can be seen as a response to – ‘does not mean that the eye itself is dominant; rather swathes of historical and political discourses have made recourse to vision, cleaving apart the senses and forming a hierarchy of perceptual engagement’ (ibid; see Jay 1994). Notably, Foster proposes the notion of a “scopic regime” to account for the complex interrelation between vision and visuality in a given time or place, where ‘many social visualities’ turn into ‘one essential vision’ (1988, p.ix; McKinney 2018, p.104).

In analysing Janssens’ work, Bal cites Bleeker’s notion of a ‘critical vision machine’ which the latter formulates as the mission of theatre, recognising theatre’s capacity to produce ‘visions’, understood as faculties of sight, imagination and apparitions. Whether subtle or overwhelming, the experiences of Janssens’ artworks can be seen as ‘a devastating critique of routine vision’ (Bal 2013, p.136). Such a critique undermines self-evident or unquestioned modes of looking by drawing attention to the process of perception itself. As such, these

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17 This chapter is concerned primarily with the philosophical underpinning of dramaturgies that seek to induce altered *visuality*. Therefore, while the ongoing debate of whether we see light or in light (see Ingold 2005, 2016; Böhme 2017) as well as optics and biological aspects of visual experience (see Sorensen 2004, 2007; Welton 2017b) are important to the study of vision it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address them in depth.
works trouble the assumption that things (objects, fellow visitors) are knowable, measured and precise because of how they are habitually seen or understood both physically and conceptually. As a result of this critique, Bal argues, ‘other possibilities begin to shimmer’ (ibid, p.136). Distancing vision from its routine, Janssens’ work, for example, invites viewers to enjoy the ‘marvel of seeing shapes that far from representing anything, appear to be just fragments of light and shade’ (ibid, p.209), which resonates strongly with my own ambition. These fragments not only hover between different states of perception, they also push viewers to ponder on how and what they see, or choose to see, rendering seeing as political. Janssens then, according to Bal, ‘literalizes the idea that art can illuminate us’ (ibid, p.14).

Janssens’ installations create situations that are primarily experiential and ephemeral. Working frequently with intangible materials such as light or mist, her work operates ‘more as a proposition’, suggesting that there ‘need not be specific reasons or logic for doing things’ (Horn et al. 2003, p.54). While Janssens’ work can be read through its theatricality (ibid, p.54; see Bal 2013), what draws me to her practice, is less her employment of ‘theatrical’ materials or devices (such as spotlights or artificial mist), but more a shared interest in thresholds between ‘states of perception’ (Lauson et al. 2018, n.p.). Akin to my PR and particularly the focus on vagueness and clarity, Janssens also ‘attempts to establish moments of visual, temporal, or physical instability that enable us to move, as she puts it, from “one reality to another”’ (ibid). Where I differ from Janssens is with my focus on darkness as a form-giving entity in and of itself: not as a result of the attenuation of light, but by championing the creative possibilities of darkness, and how these are enhanced through darkness’ interaction with light.

Of course, darkness also carries a long tradition of histories, discursive and symbolic manifestations, which might still invoke particular modes of seeing in the dark – such as an unfocused way of looking or one that is infused by fear and trepidation. That being said, for Welton, ‘critical concerns for visuality and visual culture often appear to downplay the significance of the physical act and circumstances of seeing in making-meaning’ (2017b, p.500). For Welton,
The historical and political shaping of seeing is certainly a matter for which theatre and performance studies is well-positioned to offer a critical vantage point, but it is one that cannot properly take in what is to be seen from it, if seeing itself has been evacuated (ibid).

Welton’s statement is a bit misleading, since the ‘evacuation’ of seeing, does not mean that darkness offers an experience of not seeing or seeing nothing. That is, I have already suggested how seeing in darkness is an experience of seeing darkness – albeit according to an altered visual modality, one where visual references or clear objects of vision are removed, vague or indistinct. Such a view stems from Welton’s earlier account where he proposes that rather than ‘a nothingness that renders seeing impossible’, total darkness ‘(unusual as it is), has both a material and a phenomenal substance in which seeing, whilst frustrated, is not altogether absent’ (2012, p.53). For Welton, theatre in the dark ‘offers an opportunity to “make sense” of theatrical vision afresh, to reclaim the visual in theatre for the realm of the senses’ (ibid. p.52). Therefore, as he recently suggested, it becomes important to ‘not only attend to the objects of vision, and to their viewers’ relations with them as political and historical subjects, but also to the “physical facts” of seeing: position, condition, surface, illumination, contrast, shadow, and so on’ (2017b, p.500). These, he argues, are as equally “complex” as the politics of representation(s), which discourses of visual culture often highlight.

Proceeding with caution from Welton’s attempt for a ‘more empirical than strictly theoretical’ account (ibid), it is my contention that dramaturgically, theatre in the dark and its incorporation of light holds the potential to destabilise visual (and sensory) engagement. As evident in Overcast, perceptual uncertainty is not ‘an exclusively scopic experience but something that appeals to the whole body of the spectator’ (McKinney and Palmer 2017, p.10; McKinney 2018 p.115; Graham 2018a, p.277; Bal 2013, p.87). However, in my exploration of dramaturgies of uncertainty using light I focus on clarity by means of sight since ‘light is both a means and a material of vision in the theatre’ (Graham 2018a, p.126). As Graham explains, light invites ‘the audience to see the space and bodies in its path in a certain way. This invitation to see, in a certain way, is necessarily dramaturgical because it – at least partially – determines
the seer’s initial engagement with the work’ (ibid, original emphasis). While I acknowledge that the ocular focus of this chapter might reinforce the (false) priority of vision, it is my intention to utilise loss of clarity in order to destabilise or further trouble this ‘one essential vision’ or the alleged certainty accompanying vision and thus reveal the ‘many visualities’ and plurality of ways in which objects of sight can be encountered, through my work with darkness. Therefore, recognising the discursive and historical shaping of vision that is still in play in the background, the shaping of vision that I deal with here is a compositional-dramaturgical one, which tackles visuality by attempting to evoke an altered visual modality where the ‘physical facts’ of seeing also render the objects of perception vague.

To develop my exploration of dramaturgies of uncertainty I look at light from a dramaturgical perspective and follow Graham’s framework of scenographic light which discerns how light contributes to the complex processes of meaning-making in performance in and of itself.\(^\text{18}\) Instead of accounting for stylistic or widely acknowledged purposes of performance light such as colouring the stage picture, determining the space, form, style or mood, scenographic light studies how light can generate meanings ‘in excess of its formal properties’ (2018a, p.216). For example, Graham proposes that the pace of shifts between lighting states during a performance can dictate its rhythm. In other words, light becomes a performing object and a generative force that is capable of ‘independently contributing to performance through its manipulation of space, time, and visuality’ (ibid, pp.10-11). For Graham, light ‘creates the conditions in which we encounter body, space, movement, and gesture, but also continually reconfigures those conditions’, therefore, light also serves to produce and manipulate the conditions in which meaning is generated (2018b, pp.198, 208). Since scenographic light encapsulates ‘the ability of performance light to actively inscribe dramaturgical meaning’ (2018a, p.iv), it supports my exploration of dramaturgies of uncertainty that considers the transformation of clarity not just as a mode of theatrical

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\(^\text{18}\) I have already pointed to the many similarities between dramaturgy and scenography. The exploration of the latter undoubtedly informs this research, and while this thesis emphasises dramaturgy to account for the maker’s perspective, I approach scenography not strictly as a formal aspect of (theatrical) design but rather a useful theoretical framework that recognises how design equally contributes to processes of meaning-making, intermingling with dramaturgy.
expression but as a significant intervention in the processes of sense-making. Consequently, scenographic light serves to establish and advance my argument that lighting design plays a vital role in theatre in dark performances and their overall dramaturgy. Specifically, underpinning the complex relationship between clarity and vision is light's influence (or shaping) of performance through its capacity to transform what is visible and insert doubt into what is seen or how it is seen, as well as draw attention to what remains unseen.

To conclude this section, I introduce vagueness as a significant facet of uncertainty so as to better account for how it is manifested through my exploration of light and clarity. If the etymology of ‘vagueness’ denotes movement or ‘an activity that cannot be bordered, territorialized or occupied’ (Carney and Miller 2009, p.35), the origin of clarity is rooted in brightness. So conventionally, clarity is conditioned by the saturation of light. However, as I suggested, light and sight can be misleading, rendering our sense of clarity false. Or as Kees van Deemter notes, ‘we seem to like clarity so much that we see it where it does not exist’ (2012, p.5). If clarity implies well-defined entities, recognition or identification, vagueness tends towards change, instability or the avoidance of precision – echoing the hover stated previously. The theorisation of vagueness spans across a range of fields and disciplines from philosophy to social and natural sciences (Miller 2006; Unger 1980; Sørensen 2004, 2018; Rauh 2017), with more than one account singing its ‘praises’ (van Deemter 2012; Pallasmaa 2012; Sørensen 2016). Conversely though, as Phil Carney and Vincent Miller observe,

When we speak about the vague in the everyday it is often morally negative in its association with blurring, haziness, the erratic, the restless, a lack of character, an absence of purpose. Similarly, when we philosophize about the vague, we only seem to be able to speak about it in terminologically negative words, of the indefinite, the im-precise (2009, p.51)

In line with my broader reconsideration of uncertainty as not simply alarming, I do not wish to pursue the deviant associations of vagueness. Instead, I propose that vagueness can account for the different ways through which perception becomes indistinct or unfixed,
opening the possibility to encounter what is seen in new or unexpected ways. Looking at *not seeing clearly* through vagueness can bring forward an altered sense of clarity: one that avoids sharp boundaries and clear distinctions and is constantly in movement and formation, ‘permitting openness and possibility’ (Carney and Miller 2009, p.52). In other words, in advancing my argument, I do not define vagueness as a deficiency or lack but rather through openness. Counter perhaps to ambivalence or ambiguity, which refer to a potential understanding of an object in two or more (distinct) ways and belonging to both categories (Miller 2006, p.457; Sørensen 2016, p.747), vagueness, as Miller explains, ‘suggests not undecidability but openness in general, with no fixedness or “choice between.”’ Thus, vagueness is a condition in itself, not a choice between alternate conditions’ (2006, p.457). Miller goes on to suggest that the nature of representations tends towards precision, which contradicts the vagueness ‘of the world and, therefore, the openness of social life’, since in the shifts between vagueness and precision power relations are enacted (Miller 2006, p.464). Thinking about *how* darkness promotes different modes of negotiated togetherness, I suggest that the openness, possibility and unpredictability evoked by/through vagueness can create multiplicity in perception and therefore destabilise current views and make room to include different perspectives.

To reiterate, this section positioned my exploration of light and vision within a field of practice and theoretical framework. I suggested that despite the fact that light makes vision possible, light can work to obscure and disrupt as much as illuminate and reveal. In other words, ‘a space in which light is manipulated is always a site of uncertainty and mutability’ (Graham 2018b, p.200). I introduced Graham’s framework of scenographic light, since the ‘tussle between light and darkness […] demonstrates that a dramaturgy of light is also a dramaturgy of darkness (2018b, p.201). Moving away, as per Welton’s proposition for simply examining representations, I seek to explore the dramaturgical significance of light in dark performances. To further develop my dramaturgical examination in/of darkness, I now move to explore plunges into darkness and low-lighting as specific strategies to alter clarity.
Plunges to Darkness: Dramaturgies of Going Dark

This section examines plunges into darkness through compositions of houselights and their elimination. Building on geographer Tim Edensor’s assertion that light and darkness can express meanings and transform spaces in complex and multiple ways (2015a, p.130; 2015c, p.331), I suggest that dramaturgically not all plunges are the same. The usage of the term ‘plunge’ is now widely accepted within theatre in the dark scholarship, but its diverse manifestations are often glossed over. Whilst most plunges to darkness – either in theatre in the dark or in more conventional (indoor) performance settings – move the audience from light to dark, I propose that the different ways in which light is eliminated – or the ways in which darkness appears – have a substantial impact on the dramaturgy, structure and consequently, the meaning-making process in/of the performance. Tellingly, eradicating houselights signals the start of the show and ‘directs seeing’ – which already obtains a dramaturgical function. Yet, as I argue below, houselights carry a richer dramaturgical significance and contribute to the overall dramaturgy of the piece, especially for theatre in the dark. Therefore, lighting design and its analysis should extend beyond the stage (even if the distinction between stage and auditorium is not so evident, as indicated by the examples I address below). Specifically, much like the design of lighting on stage, the colour, angle and intensity of lights in the auditorium and their elimination in theatre in the dark can play an equally important role in generating loss or transformation of clarity.19

As theatre in the dark performances usually extinguish both light in the auditorium and on stage, which already troubles the labelling of ‘houselights’ in itself, I argue that the way in which the space is plunged into darkness is of particular importance to the overall composition of the piece. When reflecting on my exploration in the studio, it became clear that plunges to darkness are fundamentally interconnected and depend on the design of houselights. As such, the two are examined here in tandem. Plunges to darkness thus

19 From the perspective of atmosphere production, houselights and their elimination can also contribute to the generation of the ‘first impression’ in performance (Griffero 2014; Shyldkrot 2018), ‘setting the tone’ for the event (Bille 2015a, p.57).
exemplify the interrelation between light and darkness and thus, present a useful touchstone for my inquiry into the role of light in dark performances and light’s dramaturgical significance. Specifically, in line with the cultivation of dramaturgies of uncertainty and this chapter’s research questions, I look at the ways in which plunges to darkness can evoke loss of clarity. Additionally, by extending my analysis of Overcast and Campfire, I continue to examine the dramaturgical significance of not seeing clearly, and how, when manifested through plunges to darkness, light can be employed to destabilising fixity and distinctness and thus encourage more multivalent and plural modes of perception.

Houselights and their elimination are often taken for granted. When designing lights for a show or an event, the creative team will typically start by looking directly at the stage, setting an initial lighting state (preset) followed by fading out the lights in the auditorium, before swiftly moving to the design of the first lighting cue. Dimming the houselights and darkening the auditorium ‘often mark and signal the precise moment at which the performance begins’ (Palmer 2017, p.37). Since darkening auditoriums for theatre performances is a well-established convention, it is easy to forget that it is a relatively recent tradition (Welton 2012, p.52). A number of historical accounts indeed review and trace the development of house lighting practices and the process of darkening the auditorium (see Palmer 2013, 2017; Ridout 2006; Elcott 2016; Welton 2017). In cinema, for instance, as Noam Elcott explains, ‘because high contrast created a brighter, more powerful image, many cinema operators maintained maximum contrast or even plunged the house in darkness for several minutes before the show began so as to “make the picture appear brighter” (2016, p.67). Similar reasoning is perhaps manifested in theatre where, as Welton explains, darkening the auditorium ‘is a counterweight to the lighting of the stage. It makes the stage easier to see, and also directs seeing towards it’ (2012, p.52). However, whether a purposeful decision or a technical error, a total blackout or a simple lowering of the lights sufficient to merely signal darkness (Welton 2017, pp.247, 254; Garner 1994, p.41), following these deeply-rooted traditions, houselights are now in many respects a given, already dictated by the theatre itself. Nevertheless, while they are often quickly dimmed at the start of the event, houselights go
beyond ‘the pragmatic deployment of illumination’ (Edensor 2015c, p.335) or the mere functionality of allowing the audience to safely find their seat.

Furthermore, it seems that theatre and performance studies – and particularly theatre in the dark scholarship – have embraced the ‘plunge’ as a way to account for the sense of immersion or submersion when audiences are engulfed or at least covered by darkness (see for example Hurley 2004; Shearing 2015; Home-Cook 2015; Alston 2016; Welton 2012, 2017a; Kendrick 2018; Graham 2018). Alice Rayner, for instance, suggests how ‘the effectiveness of the blackout, as both metaphor and event [...] relies upon its suddenness, on the sense of shock of the disorienting plunge into darkness’ (Rayner 2006, p.158). Similarly, Lennon questions ‘how excessive darkness might spark a sense of fragility within a spectator plunged into complete blackout (2018 p.57): an experience which Stanton Garner terms ‘perceptual unmooring’ (1994, p.41), specifically referring to the initial shift to darkness when houselights fade out. To give a more practical example, in her description of Glen Neath and David Rosenberg’s Fiction (2015), Kendrick notes: ‘After a swift induction to our headsets [Fiction] plunges us into [darkness] seemingly without warning, before throwing us back into light, with a final notice flashed before our eyes – “this is your last opportunity to leave”’ (2017, p.116). When the notice disappears from the large screen in front of the audience, the space immediately goes dark again, and remains dark for the remainder of the performance.

In this brutal transition, the verb ‘to plunge’ seems appropriate. Echoing a sudden descent or dip in water, ‘to plunge’ accounts for a sudden thrust, a sense of being thrown into something; a quick, unexpected fall into a state, environment or course of action that is possibly forceful or even violent. It is a movement forward, down or into something (OED). This choice of wording is unsurprising, particularly if we situate theatre in the dark within the broader field of immersive theatre that, as George Home-Cook attests, ‘[claim] to be able to “plunge” the audience not only into the world of the performance, but into the world of

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20 Welton cites lighting designer and theatre practitioner Edward Gordon Craig who recalls how ‘It was from Irving that I learnt to plunge my scenes in a good deal too much gloom’ (Craig in Welton 2017, p.205).
experience. To be more precise: immersive theatre is about manifesting an experience of being immersed (2015, p.134, original emphasis).

Phenomenologically, the radical appearance of total darkness can certainly raise a sense of submersion or engulfment in this disorienting environment. For Rayner, the blackout ‘marks a point of leave-taking’, which she characterises as uncanny, mostly due to the ‘return of visibility that, in returning, […] puts in question everything that returns to visibility: What happened in the interim? And what, exactly, has returned?’ (2006, p.161). However, this doubtful movement points not only to the possible phenomenological or affective impact of the plunge in (and out) of darkness, but it also denotes a dramaturgical significance. Dramatically, as Erin Hurley explains, blackouts, ‘punctuate the narrative and indicate a change in location or time’ and in the case of Adrienne Kennedy’s Funnyhouse of a Negro (1964), they ‘also frustrate attempts at making clear and ‘logical’ sense of the play’s plot or characters; each time one approaches insight, Kennedy cuts the power’ (2004, p.209; see Welton 2012, pp.71,75). While a relationship between darkness and blackness in its racialised sense is also at stake in Kennedy’s play, Hurley’s remark on the dramaturgical significance of blackouts illustrates how the more practical reasons for darkening auditoriums mentioned above, coalesce with particular implications for meaning- and sense-making. In that sense, this shift from light to dark, and the initial set up from which it occurs are not identical for every piece of performance, as Lennon implicitly proposes in his sketching of different experiences in/of darkness in performances of Beckett’s plays (2018). While all blackouts eliminate or withhold light to some extent, they are not all the same. Partly, I argue, this is because they are influenced by the plunge that initiated them.

The ‘plunge’ can be gentle or aggressive, gradual or immediate and can commence from a bright or fairly dimmed auditorium. Therefore, counter, perhaps, to the Heideggerian

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21 Similarly, underscoring the link between atmosphere and immersion Jean-Paul Thibaud, suggests that we can ‘[be] plunged together into a single ambiance […] whilst experiencing different ways of feeling submerged (Thibaud 2014, p.288).

22 Interestingly though, in her outline of the ontology of performance, Peggy Phelan reference the live event as that which ‘plunges into visibility’ before it disappears into memory (1993, p.148).
thrownness – ‘the sense we have of being in a significant worldly situation that is not of our own making’ (Ratcliffe 2013, p.159) – I suggest that despite the possible suddenness of the appearance of darkness, the plunge to darkness relies on the contrast and impressions that came before. In other words, we are not simply thrust into darkness from nowhere. Rather, to borrow from Edensor once more, ‘as we apprehend landscape we are immersed in the currents and energies of a world-in-formation. […] plunged into light, weather and earthliness, bodies are situated in the continuous and generative becoming of the world’ (Edensor 2010, p.234).

And so, there are many ways in which auditoriums and audiences can encounter darkness. Returning to Kendrick’s description, Fiction, for example, included an initiatory plunge to darkness at the start of the show. During Theatre Sense, a symposium exploring opportunities for sensory engagement in performance held in May 2018 (as part of a series of events marking 20 years since Battersea Arts Centre’s Playing in the Dark season), David Rosenberg – one of Fiction’s creators – jokingly explained that giving the audience a brief taste of darkness before switching the houselights back on is a practical decision, attempting to eliminate the hassle of getting a frightened audience member out of a pitch-black auditorium. Nevertheless, I suggest that even this seemingly practical decision holds some dramaturgical implications and can support different sense and meaning-making in the performance. In the case of Fiction, for example, it enhanced the sense of fragmentation and the rapid transitions between different states of consciousness that were manifested through sound during the rest of the performance. Those quick movements between locations and scenes which deliberately disrupted the audience’s ability to follow the show’s narrative (as the soundscape quickly travelled from one place to another), are already encapsulated in this exemplary initiatory plunge. After this relatively quick plunge, the audience spends a short moment in darkness. In it, they hear the soundscape of a forest from which a voice is calling from a distance – ‘hey, where are you?’. The listener is already lost, thrown off, arguably confused as to where they have been plunged to. Thrusting the audience into darkness not only challenged their grip on what was happening; it also hinted at what was about to unfold: where are we? Where are we
going? But before the audience had time to figure things out, light snapped back on. Following the context of vagueness which I am exploring here, dramaturgically, the immediate appearance of darkness (through this quick plunge) renders the start of the show indistinct. Is this plunge a preamble? A prologue? Already a part of the show? Such questioning is crucial here, as it already reframes familiar aspects of the performance as unreliable, destabilising and unfixing existing conventions – such as beginning a show by lowering the houselights.

Focusing on the plunges to darkness in my PR, Campfire (2016) began with a long sequence in which the audience sat around the sonic ‘fire’ while the lights faded in an extremely slow fade of over 5 minutes (see figure 2). First, the – already dimmed – (house)lights that illuminate the audience fade out, followed by the lantern that lights the ‘fire’ (three speakers in the middle of the space). As the performance was held mostly in total darkness, the audience’s initial interaction with the space was crucial. From a bright corridor lit by white fluorescent lights,
the audience entered a gloomy (in terms of light level), misty room. The room was lit just enough so the audience could find their seats. The softness and dimness of houselights was then part of the composition of the piece, seeking to initiate a relaxing, intimate set up that might lead to a similar sensation when the space would be covered by darkness.

With this slow fade I experimented with pushing the plunge to its limit – asking: is it a brutal thrust when its duration is much slower? Initially, by giving the space a long time to go dark, I was looking to challenge the isolating or disorientating quality that is often attributed to darkness: I sought to convey the feeling that the audience might get ‘to know darkness better’, feel safer in it or leave traces of the group in it – to further emphasise and envisage the audience’s shared presence in darkness as part of my consideration of negotiated togetherness (see chapter 3). It was an attempt to ‘burn’ as much of the space, its features and everything in it on the retina (or mind) in order to prolong and defer its disappearance from sight. Supported by the round configuration, darkness’ slow emergence attempted to ‘ease in’ the audience, allowing them to get used to the dark, before clarity was disrupted by shadows and everything faded into caliginous darkness.

Eventually, upon reflection and in line with the exploration of vagueness, this slow fade generated an image in which it was almost impossible to distinguish whether the light was still on or whether what the audience could see was, in fact, an afterimage in the dark – challenging perceptual clarity. In other words, this slow fade of light or thickening of gloom, composes a dramaturgy of uncertainty that pushes the threshold of visuality to the extreme, where the difference between light and darkness – or the distinction between near- and total darkness – became unfixed. Notably, objects in/of sight turned vague and unstable. As opposed to the immediate removal of all light sources that can easily leave viewers, ‘to ponder our conditional engagements with the near and far’ (Martin 2011, p.455), the slow emergence of darkness disrupted the stage-image by rendering it vague, clearly indistinct. By setting a particular point of focus in space through (relative) brightness (Welton 2017b, p.504; Graham 2016, p.76), and slowly blurring it, challenging its outlines, I sought to evoke the ‘questioning [of] the objectivity of the distanced vantage point’ (Martin, p.458). Indeed, after this slow fade,
Campfire covered the space in darkness which ultimately challenged clear reference points (ibid, pp.456-457). While low-lighting may have helped with an initial orientation in the dark by retaining a point of focus, the gradual lowering of lights unixed and destabilised the image: challenging what was seen, since as Welton proposes, ‘the darkness suggested by “gloom” is one that is hard – but not impossible – to see into’ (2017, p.246). Darkness’ descent in Campfire generated an ‘image’ where one was unable ‘to see the image clearly’, but also an image that ‘may be perceived as unclear due to its vague boundaries’ (Sørensen 2016, p.747).

Darkness’ emergence in Campfire was arguably less of a plunge and more what Claire Bishop termed ‘stepping into’ darkness (2005, p.82): a gradual acclimatisation to the dark. In this sense, ‘stepping into’ this darkness holds a different dramaturgical significance which can lead to a different sense of uncertainty: not an immediate disorientation of where one is in space, but a vague and fuzzy moment of questioned vision and what one can actually see. The challenge to perception emerging from this sequence can relate to the questioning of whether what one sees is an after-image, a fragment of their imagination or the actual dimly lit speaker, directing attention to perception itself. Thus, the sense of vagueness that this composition (of uncertainty) can bring forward is one that ‘cannot be resolved, or at least it is resilient to any final and decisive conclusion, offering, at best, a tentative or potential interpretation’ (Sørensen 2016, p.748). Crucially, this ‘stepping into’ or slow fade encouraged once more familiar objects (and other audience members) to be seen differently, in multiple ways, where existing conceptions or understandings could be challenged. In such low intensities, the different ‘degrees’ of darkness imply a blurriness or relativity in categories, in this case of light and darkness, challenging their distinct opposition and hovering between them.

In Overcast, I pursued this exploration further. When the audience entered the space, two thick light beams illuminated the chairs on two ends of the table. The table itself was not directly lit (figure 3). If light, to echo Welton, ‘directs seeing’ and dramaturgically, emphasises what is lit as the important thing to see, in Overcast it was the audience members themselves. In contrast to Campfire where I tried to establish an even lighting-state across the entire space (so the audience could see each other) as well as the “fire” as the element that brings the
group together, in *Overcast*, light not only brought the audience together around the table, it also underscored the close proximity of fellow audience members and how they are seen to each other – already anticipating one of the underpinning principles of the performance.

*Overcast* began with a relatively slow fade of both beams that was abruptly cut, covering the space with darkness. In a similar – albeit more forceful – manner to *Campfire*, this plunge to darkness also sought to draw attention to the vagueness of the contrast between darkness and light in such low intensities. To think about this composition in terms of vagueness, I turn again to Hurley, who suggests that

> When a lit image is suddenly plunged into blackout conditions, an after-image is produced. Hovering for a moment before fading, belatedly, into obscurity, the apparition burned onto the retina captures the outline of what had previously been lit. Put differently, one ‘sees’ phantoms. (Hurley 2004, p.207)

Blurred by the mist and the opaque and indistinct darkness, these ‘phantoms’ resonate with the vagueness or indistinctness that I was tracing thus far. This dramaturgy of uncertainty which suddenly cuts the light leaves the table and fellow audience members blurred and unclear, a collection of shapes and images gently glowing in the dark, thus generating destabilised clarity. If one was looking at the lanterns that produced the beam – in an attempt to latch on to a light source for orientation – it was hard to distinguish whether the gloaming glow emanating from the lantern was the dimming fixture or an after-image, a figure of the imagination or the edge of vision. In that sense, building on Hurley’s initial hover and obscurity, such composition can also bring forward a sense of vagueness, where what is seen is challenged and one is not simply disoriented in/by darkness. Recalling Graham, light that ‘can profoundly manipulate the appearance of other elements of performance is, principally, dramaturgical’ (2018a, p.113). As the performance continued to explore lighting compositions in low-intensities, the plunge to darkness and the composition of houselights were employed to support the dramaturgy of hazy or blurry images, where objects of sight hover between multiple possible interpretations, delaying or disrupting fixity. Underlining the audience as the
important thing to see, and then turning those sitting on the other side of the table to ‘phantoms’, or to unidentified outlines or silhouettes not clearly seen, facilitated a different kind of view or interaction: one that, again, does not rely on clear and concrete identification and recognition, but that is still in-formation – remaining open and undecided (physically, and therefore conceptually).

To contrast its shapeshifting and blurring qualities, the use of haze in relatively bright conditions, thickened the light beam and increased its presence and discernibility (see figure 3 and image gallery). My endeavour was not to generate a brighter image, but rather to establish light’s appearance as more tangible and graspable. Such a vivid or ‘solid’ beam, along with the stable prominent wooden chairs and table, generated a state of somewhat clear visibility and thus false or temporary sense of clarity that was then meant to be challenged throughout the performance. If light’s dramaturgical significance is to mediate vision and make the audience
see in a certain way (Graham 2018a, p.156), houselights in Overcast were intended to explore how this sense of certainty – produced by light and sight – can become misleading or false. Accompanied by the abrupt cut of light, my aim was to counter the expectation of a continuous ongoing fade to darkness. Considering the dramaturgical significance of this plunge to darkness (slow fade and sudden cut), the potentially unexpected thrust to darkness indicates how the assumed sense of clarity that was established using houselights might actually be false. Compositonally, light and its sudden elimination suggested that despite its apparent ‘concreteness’ through haze and the sense of clarity it may have raised when first encountered, light (especially in this performance) is not something that can always be trusted or relied on in order to make sense. Attempting to destabilise concrete images, conceptions and views and render them unfixed and vague throughout the performance, light’s elimination became a dramaturgical tool to draw attention to what is in sight and how it is viewed.

In sum, this section considered the design of houselights and plunges to darkness as dramaturgies of uncertainty that can generate moments of not seeing clearly. Houselights, tend to focus the attention of the audience to the stage in front. However, as I argued, they carry a significant dramaturgical function and play an important role in the overall composition of the piece. As the examples I addressed show, the different ways in which houselights are used and eliminated could contribute to both meaning and sense-making of the show. While in many auditoriums, houselights are often pre-determined, even a slight change in intensity, colour or angle could produce a different composition and therefore influence how sense is made in the performance. By nuancing dramaturgical decisions, I sought to show how the design of houselights and plunges to darkness can be considered a deliberate, intentional lighting composition and thus becoming a significant component of the performance’s dramaturgy. Fundamentally, light impacts and transforms the organisation of what is seen and what can be seen (Graham 2018a, p.157). More specifically, and to respond to my research questions, when it comes to theatre in the dark, while plunges into darkness can evoke a sense of disorientation and challenge the overall spatial sensibility, they might also bring forward a sense of vagueness. This vagueness can transform clarity by rendering what is seen indistinct:
inserting doubt into whether what is seen is an afterimage or not, either by cutting of the lights, or slowly disfiguring the image. Consequently, in the next section, I continue to reflect on the significance of low-lighting by reflecting on its composition in Overcast as a means to destabilise images and therefore clarity.

Low Lights and Partial Images

Pursuing further my examination of instances of not seeing clearly, I look at light’s ability ‘to disrupt, obscure, or destabilise vision’ (Graham 2018a, p.159) through the use of low-light and the generation of partial images as a strategy for transforming clarity to challenge the dominance of visuality in theatre practices and design. Building on the previous section, I return to my broader investigation of negotiated togetherness – and examine, first, the dramaturgical manifestation of low-lighting in Overcast and the composition of vague images. Second, I analyse the socio-political significance of not seeing clearly and argue that these occasions can encourage plurality and multiplicity in perception. Moving between the literal and metaphorical and resisting fixity and clear recognition, I suggest that through vagueness, darkness might unsettle or reorientate different sensory encounters with the world. In other words, darkness cultivates alternative modes of being-with others that do not rely on fixed recognition or identification since it can bring forward a wander between multiple visualities which undermines the habitual flow of perception. Low-lighting (as a dramaturgy of uncertainty), then, becomes pertinent to open the space and possibility for inclusion of different views and reconsidered understandings, without prioritising one single or essential vision.

As mentioned, in my ‘clouds laboratory’, I have been examining vague phenomena such as clouds, mist, and fog in order to consider what these indistinct and diffuse entities might offer the exploration of loss of clarity. Retelling his experience of looking through fog, Craig Martin suggests that the ‘thickened aerial presence was impenetrable, so murky we became disoriented to the extent that it ruptured our spatial sensibility. Reference points lost,
invisible to us: distance seemed questioned’ (2011, p.457). The ‘disorienting excess’ created by fog, he maintains, ‘left vision damaged for that instant’ (ibid, p.454). Describing his visual faculty as ‘damaged’ implies that sight is harmed, broken or even no longer useful. Yet, as this chapter argues, in moments of challenged visuality, it is not that one cannot see and sight is ‘broken’, but rather one cannot see clearly. Clarity is not entirely lost. Martin compares looking through fog to the ‘disarming’ and ‘disorientating’ qualities of darkness as the former equally demands ‘a specific engagement with the question of the visual’ (ibid, p.458). Unlike Martin, in this cycle of PR, I turned to clouds and mist to expand my study of darkness through the former’s vague, rather than disorienting manifestations (I explore disorientation in the next chapter). Thus, in contrast to the negative or devious connotations that vagueness and its cognates are ‘freighted with’ – such as ‘lacking in character and purpose’, or ‘haziness in thought’ (Carney and Miller 2009, p.35) – I argue that blurring objects of/in sight can also be constructive. Namely, the cloudiness of/in both darkness and mist, can undermine fixity and ocular illusions of clarity. This is important not only to question how ‘things appear to us – and we to them’, and what one sees, ‘a more exacting proposition in the gloom’ (Welton 2017a, p.246)), but also in order to welcome a new sense of clarity, one that constantly wanders, hovers and is unable to decide. Thus, it does not necessarily endure recognition, identity, definitiveness or classification that form ‘one essential ‘vision’, due to different ideological reasons which sustain or privilege specific points of view.

Moving from the smoke of Campfire to the smog of Overcast, this cycle of practice began by tracing the movements of haze and its interaction with light. I attempted to create palpable yet unstable images, heightened by the fuzzy boundaries of a cloud, which ‘can be experienced as a vague phenomenon because we cannot precisely define its edges’ (Sørensen 2016, pp.748,750). As a second venture, I used backlights (see video) to consider how light and haze might alter the appearance of the performer’s body. Using both of these experiments as the foundation for Overcast, I decided to position the audience within these cloudy images rather than simply looking at them from a distance. This choice was partly practical (to avoid sourcing performers), but more importantly, I sought to create a greater
sense of immersion, one which simulates the perceptual stance of *being in* clouds rather than *looking at* them (Rauh 2017). Initially, I focused on how light can be used dramaturgically to direct the audience’s gaze – moving from ‘making’ clouds in the laboratory to getting lost in the clouds that were just ‘made’ (see sketches) – examining how light can shift attention when piercing through darkness. This thread stemmed from the realisation that, as Barbra Erwine explains,

> a pool of light with darker space surrounding it focuses attention. The brightest node is usually perceived as the most important […]. Since people are phrotropic (tending to move toward the light), a node of light at an entrance or intersection or leaking out around a corner may draw people toward it, adding a directional flow to the experience of the space (Erwine 2017, p.65).

While clarifying physiological trait, Erwine already alludes to Foster’s ‘scopic regimes’ or Blecker’s ‘institution of perspective’ which privilege or deem certain visions as more important, valuable or worthy of being seen. Earlier, I developed Lepecki’s and Bal’s proposition that in darkness, we can see that which is usually deemed not worthy of being seen (Lepecki 2016, p.73). However, in this cycle, the question I ultimately found more intriguing was: what happens when the supposedly ‘most important’ thing to see is unclear? Or, keeping with my study of being-with others, what happens when we are not visibly clear to each other? Recognising, as Graham elaborates, that ‘the ability of light to negate the visible is at least as important as its capacity to direct the eye’ (2018a, p.103), I refocussed my investigation to the lower end of the intensity scale.

Accordingly, I propose low-lighting and partial images as practical strategies and dramaturgies of uncertainty that challenge vision by generating instances of *not seeing clearly*. The two are intrinsically linked, yet as low-light might imply a more general state of diffuse illumination (or gloom), I also name partial images as a theatrical tactic, where light sources (bright or otherwise), pierce through darkness but only reveal part of the object in sight, generating an incomplete or vague image. Positioning this thread of inquiry within a broader
field of practice, I identify for instance, how Ad Infinitum’s *Light* (2016) used torches and low-lights to create a sci-fi-like story that portrayed a dystopian Orwellian future of state surveillance. Penetrating darkness by creating fast-paced and anime-like movements, light in *Light* produced unstable images: either by rapidly shifting to a different light source and thus altering the images produced or by only partially illuminating the object in sight. Both strategies were used to conjure the dark future (both physically and metaphorically) and evoke the snappy aesthetic of a computer game. In contrast, Ultimate Dancer and Robbie Thomson’s *YAYAYA AYAYAY* (2017-2018), kept extending the duration of the appearance of the low-lighting source to uncover the dancer’s body and used brightly coloured LEDs to create hallucinogenic and incoherent images. Drawing from darkness’ ceremonial function as a shamanic tool, this ‘Ultra-terrestrial’ dance piece used low-lighting to create trippy ritual dances accompanied by undiscernible chants, where the extremely expanded pupils try to grasp and make sense of the image. Light was not employed ‘to make contrast with the dark, but to operate within it at the very threshold of the visual faculty’ and, to use Welton’s description of *Ether Frolics* (2006), ‘what light there was, was often barely there at all’ (Welton 2012, p.58). Similarly, Fye and Foul’s *Cathedral* (2015-2016) used low and diffused lighting states and slow movement to create blurry images, intending not only to alienate the performers’ bodies but also to echo faded memories which were hard to reach. The production, of which I was one of the co-creators, also used handheld torches to pierce darkness with small yet brightly lit sources in order to produce partial and uncanny images, portraying unreliable and emotionally contaminated memories drowning and resurfacing from the dark.

In comparison, *Overcast* sought to destabilise the appearance of one audience member to another, using low-lights as undependable sources that shift and alter perception, challenging the assumption that, as Gernot Böhme notes ‘seeing always means seeing something, or, to be more precise, something tangible, an object’ (2017, p.206). Light (and haze) in *Overcast* was not designed to illuminate the space per se, but to primarily draw attention to light itself (whether source, beam or colour) and to the subtle movements of
air/haze – through the light-beam, under the lantern or around the audience’s bodies. Borrowing from Chris Salter, who examines the potency of artificial haze,

Such a dense constellation of particles obscures the visual scene, generating a great ‘cloud of unknowing’ by distorting the properties of the scene. Yet, an artificial blanket of haze (far less dense than fog) also creates surfaces in motion; overlapping density gradients that scatter light by bouncing it off minute condensation particles in all directions, continually shifting the optical signal/noise ratio. (Salter 2014, pp. 232-233).

Thus, unlike traditional ‘well lit’ images, the murky and vague images that placed the audience in overcast did not seek to verify, define or pin down any facts. While Overcast was framed as simulating the experience of being immersed in clouds, it was by no means an attempt for a direct representation of the experience. Through light, I attempted to undermine the audience’s ability to determine what one sees: whether it is the shape of a cloud or the subtle passage of air, the silhouette of the person sitting across the table, or a figure of their imagination. These intentionally cloudy images became like sound, with multiple possible meanings, interpretations and affective resonances. The documentation presented in this chapter (as well as the bowl experimentation from chapter 2) demonstrates for example, how the angle and level of light can shift the bowl’s appearance, to the point where its original shape and form are rendered indistinct. The narrow beams that illuminated the bowl suspended its materiality, not only facilitating the slow re-emergence of the image, taking the time to set and become a ‘solid’ object or image but also offering a more flexible view of the object. Similarly, when light appeared behind the audience, silhouettes took time to form as the thick haze extended and disrupted people’s outlines, features, or shadows, revealing light’s ability to transform (objects of) perception and ‘realize space’s dynamic nature’ (Bal 2013, p.87).

Experimenting with thresholds of visibility, the lighting compositions that I devised were given time to unfold, but not enough intensity to generate clarity. As low-lighting faded
in and out it recreated the coordinates of space, shifting its edges and turning its architecture ‘fluid’ (ibid, p.99). Put differently, as the perception of accurate detail is arguably removed and people and objects are (perceptually) reduced to essential shapes, in gloom physical forms can lose definition. As such, solid figures can transform ‘in a meagre light into shadow’ (Chamberlain 1997, p.31). Likewise, as gloom thickened, under the cover of haze the boundaries of the body may have grown indistinct, merging together bodies and surroundings and providing an expansive sense of the space, one that goes beyond the table and where audience, or their outlines and silhouettes, can become one with the darkness (Edensor 2013, p.456). For me, in such low-intensities, light appeared as thick brushstrokes or stains, and haze seemed denser and more impenetrable. In the slow fade-ins light became more discernible, almost tangible (as light hit the haze/dust particles) but as it was fading out and changing, light turned out to be fleeting and ungraspable. Ultimately, Overcast sought to create a state of fuzzy vision, which simultaneously revealed and concealed. Light obscured clarity from what one can sees yet invited the observations about what and how one might see. In that sense, the images give up their optical clarity in favour of their material presence, which also becomes harder to establish.

Since all utilise in some capacity light’s ability to dazzle, unfix, disrupt or transform perception by creating vague and unstable images, Overcast and the examples above all respond to the first research question which drives this chapter – how can lighting design generate moments of not seeing clearly. Crucially, designing gloomy states (using low-lighting) can influence and alter the way one encounters what is seen. In other words, ‘we do not see different things, but we do see the same things differently’ (Ingold 2005, 102). As such, not seeing clearly can undermine the certainty which seeing tricks us into, ‘a false sense that the world is as it is: not changeable and subject to change’ (Kendrick 2017, p.128). Put differently, not only that the world is as it appears to be (here and now) – based on certain institutions of perspectives – but critically, that that is the only way the world can be. This false clarity leads to fixity and decidability which prioritise ‘one essential ‘vision’, to echo Foster. In response, the invitation to ‘peer into’ the gloom of low-lighting and cloudy compositions becomes a
proposition ‘to reach out, apprehensively, towards the limits of what is visible’ (Welton 2017a, p.257).

Beginning to delineate the dramaturgical significance of *not seeing clearly*, in line with vagueness, meaning does not persist, and the cloudy dramaturgies or hazy images composed encourage a constant sense of re-viewing, wandering between different interpretations or perspectives. This is not only a way to present the un(re)presentable – a concern also shared by Franc Chamberlain in his study of symbolist drama, for whom darkness ‘conjures a space for the presentation of the unfigurable’ (1997, p.31) – but also an opportunity to constantly re-assemble the objects of sight from a new point of view (see Bille et al. 2015, p.36) or encounter them in a different way. Thus, generating vague images with low-lighting can induce the fluctuation between different perspectives or interpretations of a given object of sight. Consequently, (low)-lighting design can disrupt clarity or alter the viewer’s perception. Looking at the water bowl in *Overcast* as it is lit from different angles alters its appearance making the bowl unfamiliar. However, this is not only a process of estrangement (Carney and Miller 2009, p.34) or de-familiarisation (Smithson 1996). Rather, as the clouds of *Overcast* shift and move, form and dissipate, wandering around and above the audience, they become unfixed or indefinite. Thus, restlessly transforming, due to their constant reconfiguration, these images remain blurry and indistinct. Put simply, vagueness denotes moments where ‘vision is unable to decide’ (Bal 2013, p.67). Destabilised vision might ‘give rise to an unfocused way of looking’ (Pallasmaa 2005, p.46), which might facilitate a different sensory engagement or interaction. By making vision blurry or vague to begin with, one can liberate the eye from the implicit desire ‘for control and power, [and] it is precisely the unfocused vision of our time that is again capable of opening up new realms of vision and thought’ (ibid, p.35). Such sensory manifestation can then offer ‘depth, texture, contour and form to places and situations, which bridges, obfuscates or confuses the boundaries of humans and things’ (Bille

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23 Sculptor Robert Smithson uses the example of looking at an object through ‘both ends of a telescope’ to indicate how a shift in perception or perspective could throw the understanding of the object’s presumably fixed size into question (1996, p.203).
et al. 2015, p.32). As low-lighting can ‘dim the sharpness of vision’, through, for example, making the depth and distance unclear (Pallasmaa 2005, p.46; see Vasseleu 1998, pp.12-13), it also renders the relationship with the object in sight continuously in-formation. In other words, compositions of low-lighting and partial images can give rise to a sense of vagueness. Not simply a mode of seeing differently, but one where I am unable to decide what I actually see, where ‘one essential vision’ can turn back to the ‘many social visualities’ (Foster 1988, p.ix).

To recap, seeing, as Welton suggest, ‘is itself an activity of making sense’ (2017a, p.245). Subsequently, the vagueness of/in gloomy and/or partial images can break the habitual flow of visual perception by resisting identification or recognition. Despite the invitation to see things (clouds, silhouette, shadows, shapes) through multiple perspectives, the images do not champion or prioritise one particular view. Designing low-lights or partial images understood through vagueness reveals the multiplicity of perception where different possibilities become ‘visible’ and perceptible. This ‘endless extension of possibility’ (andness) ‘makes for an almost endless potential for inclusion’ (ibid, p.28). By sitting around the table facing each other, Overcast placed the audience in close proximity, a rather forced intimate situation. In darkness and gloom, such distance became undecided, whether more or less intimidating, it opened up the questioning of how we might appear to each other. Thus, not seeing clearly (both literally and metaphorically), becomes pertinent for encouraging different modes of being-with others and negotiating togetherness. Upsetting fixity, identification, and recognition, not seeing clearly can introduce concurrent multivalent meanings and interpretations of what is seen. These views (literal and metaphorical), I propose, stand in relation to the apparent and arguably false sense of clarity that is manifested through clear vision. Instead, in these low-lighting audiences’ perceptions can become more plural, making room for the inclusion of different understandings and possibilities. These possibilities, in turn, can facilitate multiple exchanges – that might be eliminated through fixity – which might exist simultaneously, without prioritising one singular view.
Seeing Not Seeing (Clearly)

To conclude, in this chapter I considered the vital role of light in dark performances. I focused on two specific compositional strategies to approach light’s dramaturgical significance – plunges to darkness and low-lighting – enhancing the study of darkness and dramaturgies of uncertainty by looking at visual obfuscation more broadly. In Overcast, I invited the audience to step inside a cloud, attempting to generate a fuzzy ‘cloud of unknowing’ that might distort the properties of the scene as well as suggest new or different perspectives, interpretations as well as the questioning of the process of perception. Following Graham’s scenographic light framework, attending ‘to the ways that light constructs vision further demonstrates the dramaturgical construction underpinning the structure of a performance (2018a, p.156). In my study of loss of clarity, I pursued light’s ability to compose moments of not seeing clearly, through the perception of vagueness itself.

Placing my head in the clouds, I examined, through practice, the ‘selection, transformation and organisation of what can be seen’ (ibid. p.157). Subsequently, this chapter traced the broader implications of not seeing clearly. Advocating for an altered sense of clarity that does not rely on identification, recognition or fixity, I analysed vagueness as an important facet of uncertainty which evokes moments of undecidability and indistinctness. Seeking to challenge the false sense of clarity that is often associated with vision, I proposed that vagueness reveals how light and sight can be misleading, influencing not only what is seen but how things are seen. By approaching darkness as a productive site to explore negotiated togetherness, vagueness challenges how we appear to each other as well as inviting audiences to see in a different way. Therefore, darkness can offer the possibility to include new perceptions and perspectives that do not rely on definitive distinctions. The vagueness emerging from low-lighting and plunge to darkness can suggest new modes of sense-making, dramaturgical meanings as well as shifting understandings within the politics of perception. If the previous chapter considered seeing darkness to reveal other or new modes of sociality that might not sit neatly together but might still coexist under the cover of darkness, the vagueness of not seeing clearly extends this argument by suggesting a wander between different multiple
visualities that might undermine preconceptions or the habitual flow of perception, without prioritising one single or essential vision. These shifting and unstable images became like sound, open to various interpretations which cannot be fixed into one consistent vision. Correspondingly, in the next chapter, I move on to explore the use of sound in my PR, through the process of devising Certainty ways. I consider how sonic dramaturgies can dislocate and disorientate in the dark and what insights these might afford to my study of uncertainty and darkness.
5. When Robots Breathe:

Sonic Dramaturgies of Disorientation and Dislocation

In this final chapter, I pursue my sketching of an altered sense of clarity in/through darkness by lending an ear to sound and its manifestations. Advancing my Practice Research (PR), I continue my study of dramaturgies of uncertainty by responding to my third research question: how does the exploration of a range of sonic strategies offer new insights about uncertainty? Much like my previous account of light, I examine what sound can do in theatre in the dark performances: how it performs and transforms. By attending to different ‘sonic dramaturgies’ – used in dark performances which seek to modify clarity, I seek to conceptualise sound as a significant performative tool that can alter and affect how and what is perceived. Thus, approaching uncertainty through disorientation and dislocation, this chapter suggests that sonic dramaturgies can destabilise and modulate different sensory encounters. Consequently, when considering the dramaturgical significance of darkness and uncertainty and their socio-political implications, as well as my investigation of how darkness can foster different interactions, I propose that sound can reorientate – both physically to find one’s way through space, but also metaphorically, attuning to different perspectives or listening to familiar sounds differently. The unique relationship between sound and vision as it unfolds in darkness can encourage listeners to sound out and listen to what remains unheard and allowing it to resonate. By disrupting or dislocating what is normally heard or taken for granted, sound can reveal other – more plural – modes of perception.

This chapter is accompanying my third cycle of practice, where I primarily experimented with robotic voices. This exploration culminated in Certain Ways (2018), a ‘sonic
journey’ taking place in total darkness.²⁴ Alex and Sam (the robotic voices) guide the audience through different (sonic) environments that are generated through a blend of field-recordings, musical compositions (composed in collaboration with James Edward Armstrong) and indeed robotic voices. This route of investigation builds on my previous work in the studio and the making of Overcast. Apart from the use of disembodied voices, Overcast examined light and haze as immaterial or intangible materials and their capacity to destabilise perception. Embarking on my exploration of sound, I sought to further consider the creative potential of other-than-human entities, which has paved the way to devising with robots.

Subsequently, the sonic dramaturgies (of uncertainty) that I analyse below come together under the heading of disorientation or dislocation, as a particular facet of uncertainty. Before addressing particular sonic compositions, to conceptualise sound’s ability to alter and affect how and what is perceived, I draw from Salomé Voegelin’s notion of ‘sonic sensibility’, which I establish in the next section, so as to situate my discussion in this chapter. Then, I analyse dislocation in relation to the perception of space – by means of orientation and disorientation. To show how sound design can influence and alter perception, I draw from all three cycles of practice and consider how sound can act as a tool to both enhance disorientation and assist with orientation (or reorientation) in the dark. By doing so, I begin to establish sound’s capacity for reorientation as a means of facilitating different encounters in darkness. Second, to further exemplify the possibilities of reorientation, I reflect on my use of robotic voices as the dislocation of the human voice. Such a move expands my study of negotiated togetherness beyond the realm of the human as it manifests the coexistence with the other-than-human world. Moreover, by reflecting on the robotic voice’s ability to trouble the human/non-human binary and upset the boundaries between the natural and the artificial, the organic and the technological, I attempt to show how sound might destabilise or unsettle lingering (fixed) conceptions. Thus, the robotic voice equally underscores sound’s ability to alter perception which, in turn, could open up the possibility to sound out the world.

²⁴ An earlier iteration of the performance was titled Solastalgia and was shown as part of ‘Atmospheres’ the third PaR Festival at the University of Surrey in January 2018.
differently or listening to what remains unheard. Such opportunity, I propose, as it emerges from these sonic dramaturgies of uncertainty, is significant when elucidating how darkness generates different (both multiple and alternative) unfixed interactions, leading to an altered sense of clarity.

**Sounding Out Sound**

Sound, as Salomé Voegelin explains, ‘is the invisible layer of the world that shows its relationships, actions, and dynamics’ (2014, p.2). Listening, in this vein, becomes not just a physiological function but ‘an act of engaging with the world. […] it is the sensorial mode of that engagement that determines my constitution and that of the world’ (Voegelin, 2010, p.3). As formless and contingent, as well as through its invisible doings, sound might resist fixity and clarity in and of itself. Furthermore, sound can defy, augment or expand what one sees by producing the reality of lived experience (Voegelin, 2014, p.12). To emphasise, sound can challenge what one hears, sees and how those things produce or participate in the world. This becomes pertinent for my study of uncertainty and perception. However, and when studying theatre-making, and the production of theatre in the dark, I do not wish to assess the doubt that hearing is full of – the ‘phenomenological doubt of the listener about the heard’ (and about herself hearing it) (ibid, p.xii). Rather, when investigating the potential of uncertainty through perception, I attend to the possibilities of (theatre-)sound in order to develop and embrace what Voegelin terms ‘sonic sensibility’, which

reveals the invisible motility below the surface of a visual world and challenges its certain position, not to show a better place but to reveal what this world is made of, to question its singular actuality and to hear other possibilities that are probable too, but which, for reasons of ideology, power and coincidence do not take equal part in the production of knowledge, reality, value, and truth (2014, p.3).
Arguably, a sonic sensibility is vital for an altered sense of clarity as it can unfix or unshackle particular sounds from specific interpretations and meanings. In that sense, dramaturgies of uncertainty rely on such sensibility in order to destabilise or challenge what is heard and invite multiplicity in/through listening. Theatre in the dark, I propose, can assist with attaining such sensibility. Teasing apart ‘sound from its source and/or visible reference points’ darkness questions or impacts the relationships between the seen and the heard – not by ‘forcing them apart’ but by bringing to the foreground the fact that ‘there is a relationship because we paid particular attention to these sounds and how they referred to the visual’ (Kendrick 2018, p.xvii, original emphasis). If ‘dramaturgies of uncertainty’ refer to compositions that seek to modulate perception and evoke a transformed sense of clarity – a moment where what is perceived is indeterminate or put in to question – reading those dramaturgies through a sonic sensibility can draw attention to what remains unheard as well as open up to what could be heard. Not simply by revealing unseen aspects of visuality, but by possibly reconfiguring those dynamics between the seen and the heard, to begin with.

Therefore, within the growing interest in theatre sound, following Lynne Kendrick, I study ‘sound’s generative capacity’, its ability to create or perform (2018, p.39). As such, this chapter engages primarily with sound’s ability to ‘constitute theatre’, rather than amplifying or mediating the presence of something on stage (ibid, xix; original emphasis). I situate my discussion at the intersection between the philosophical concern regarding sound and listening (Nancy 2007; Ingold 2007; Ihde 2007; Nudds and O’callaghan 2013), the growing field of sound studies (notable examples include O’callaghan 2011; Voegelin 2010; Chion 2016; LaBelle 2008, 2010, 2018) the emerging scholarship around sound art (Kelly 2010; Voegelin 2014; Cobussen et al. 2017) and sound in the theatre (Gibbs 2007; Brown 2010; Kendrick and Roesner 2011; Wilkins 2013; Curtin and Roesner 2015, 2016; Home-Cook 2015; Parkinson 2016; Kendrick 2017; Collins 2017, 2018; Deiorio 2019). Moving from the typical gravitation towards ‘the all-too-familiar bells, birds and cocktail party effects; the usual binaries of sound source or sound received, sound objects or events, attention or distraction, eye or ear’ that mostly occupy theories of theatre sound (Kendrick 2018, p.xxiii), I turn to the
growing critical field of aurality. Aurality as Frances Dyson explains, refers to ‘the phenomenal and discursive field of sound’ (2009, p. 6). Parallel to the more established field of visuality, as a flourishing field of inquiry, aurality examines the productive possibilities of listening and hearing, for example, or how voices are heard. But, more importantly, like visuality, aurality also tends to the different structures and discourses that influence sound and its perception, exceeding the phenomenon of sound itself.

In that sense, my aim here is to consider sound as a significant element for sense- and meaning-making in dark performance and how it supports or generates uncertain experiences. Again, I do not simply seek to play with sonic manipulations and ‘tricks’ that evoke uncertainty (Shams et al. 2002), but rather building on a purposeful sensory exploration I tend to the possibilities of sound more broadly and their relation to perception. Therefore, I seek to broaden the scope around the composition and influence of sound in performance by means of uncertainty. Enduring the upheaval or resistance to certain ocular biases that tie clarity to vision (and fixity), my focus on sound aims to further trouble these assumptions – around ‘the terms upon which the visual takes place’ (Kendrick 2018, p.2) – through the domain of aurality, while simultaneously rethinking ‘of the political as being solely an arena of visibility’ (LaBelle 2018, p.155).

Therefore, part of the impetus behind my exploration of sound is its inherent political calibre. For Voegelin, there is ‘something deeply political and social about the sonic’ (2014, p.118). As an animated flow or ‘intensity that moves objects and bodies into the world, extending their reach and relations’, sound ‘intensifies relations by animating their potentiality, exposing the matters and bodies of the world to each other’ (LaBelle 2018, p.61). By radically extending the limits of bodies and things, sound – and sounded actions – epitomises how ‘listening is part of the practice of participation’ (Heddon 2017, p.19). Or, as Kendrick classifies, listening is ‘potentially responsive (open and available to exchange and discourse), explorative (open to and seeking new meaning), and ethical (as the one sense that is open to and available to otherness)’ (2018, p.9).
Sound’s political force is illustrated for example, in Brandon LaBelle’s conceptualisation of sonic agency, through which he draws from experiences of sound and listening that are harnessed in social and political struggles in order to confront conditions of loss and powerlessness (2018, p.155). Alternatively, Dyson’s study of contemporary political struggles critically analyses the ‘tones’ and ‘noises’ of this contemporary climate. Resonating with my study of uncertainty, Dyson utilises sound to form and articulate a critical vocabulary to engage with the current socio-political state of affairs and the complexity of ecological, economic, social or political issues. In her holistic approach, she underscores the potential afforded by a sonic criticality which moves ‘toward a shared sensibility’ in order to build ‘sense, the common, and common sense simultaneously’ (2014, p.149). While I appreciate the prospect of being-in-common, in my study of negotiated togetherness – that considers different modes of engagement – I conceive this shared sensibility not as a holistic coming together of entities. Instead, in line with Morton’s ecological thinking previously outlined – I propose that a sonic sensibility opens the space to consider togetherness as a vast and messy set of entanglements, a collection of interconnections that might (as I aim to show below) not sit neatly together. Therefore, I prefer to conceive sound’s relationality through Voegelin’s notion of bridge or bridging (2014, p.118) insofar as sound connects and brings together while also indicating distances and differentiation. I propose that a sonic sensibility, understood through negotiation, can reveal or foster alternative relationships between the seen and the heard, speakers and listeners, voices and bodies. Critically, when forming or revealing different relations, as speakers – either bodies or equipment that transmit sound – are unseen in the dark, sound in the dark might become dislocated from its originating source. Voices become disembodied, sounds become acousmatic. Such dislocation might contribute to the composition of disorientation but also, I propose, it can establish a different relationship to what is heard, and how what is heard is perceived, which I now move to explore through different sonic strategies.
Orientation, Disorientation, Reorientation

It is no surprise that sound helps us find our way in space. If I hear something, I can usually position myself in relation to it and perceive, or at least assume, if what I hear is coming from my left, right, above, below, in front, behind, near or far. Moreover, I do not always have to see the source (or the object producing the sound) to locate myself and the sound source in space. Similarly, in theatre performances, sound, as Kendrick and Roesner assert, is ‘fundamentally spatial’, it designates and even creates spaces (2011, p.xxvii). As this PR maintains, performance in the dark can blur or manipulate (perceptual) certainties. It might obscure clarity and challenge spatiality. Therefore, this section explores the relationship between sound and spatiality in conditions of disrupted visuality. To establish a reformed sense of clarity and consider how theatre in the dark can unsettle different sensory encounters with the world, I investigate sound by means of orientation. If orientations, as Rachel Hann explains, ‘emerge from how bodies relate to objects (body-to-object), relate to other bodies (body-to-body), and how objects relate to objects (object-to-object)’ (2019, p.19), then conceptualising these relationships in darkness, might inform how sound in the dark can not only disorient and orientate but reorientate, both physically to find one’s way through space, but also metaphorically, revealing the plurality of perception and the ability to perceive — through sonic sensibility – or sound out the world differently. Orientation, following Hann, forms a body-event relationship, which can transform or craft an encounter of and with space (ibid). Darkness can radically impact those encounters, in which sound, as this section suggests, can both increase disorientation while also assisting with orientation. Following Hann’s account for place orientation and Sara Ahmed’s queer phenomenology, I identify the political significance of questions of orientation, as they not only address how we locate ourselves in various spaces, but rather how we apprehend this world, ‘who’ or ‘what’ we direct our attention toward as well as how we share our inhabitation in space and how bodies are situated in it (Ahmed 2006, p.3; Hann 2019). These questions are fundamental for my study of negotiated togetherness. I suggest that by being in the dark, metaphorically and literally,
audience members are invited and even compelled to reassess how they make sense and sound out spaces to begin with, both in moments of disorientation and through attempts to reorient.

I begin this section by defining orientation and consider what might happen to orientation in the dark. Then I propose that while the challenge to visuality in darkness can provide greater definition to other sensory perceptions, sound design in these performances can support the uncertainty that arises when being plunged to darkness. In other words, sound can act as a tool to enhance disorientation. Then, in a reverse move, I question whether sound design can help to orientate or (reorientate) in the dark. Through my PR, I reflect on some of the sonic strategies I have used for reorientation in darkness. While this chapter draws heavily from numerous phenomenologies (of sound, listening and orientation), as mentioned in Chapter 2, my dramaturgical approach still steers this research. I utilise these various (phenomenological) studies of phenomena and experience to inform my study of composition and consider the design of sound. Building on these phenomenologies, I am able to enhance my dramaturgical analysis and practical exploration as part of my attempt to conceptualise sound as a significant element for both sense and meaning-making in (dark) performance, uncovering how it might impact the perception of space and thus alter clarity.

To become oriented, as Ahmed proposes, implies one was first disorientated (2006, p.5). So, I start here, orientating towards orientation. To orientate, as a verb, suggests an act or process of aligning or positioning (something or someone) in relation to something or someone else. According to Oxford dictionaries, ‘locate’ is defined as ‘discover the exact place or position of’ or ‘situate in a particular place,’ while orientate suggests finding ‘one’s position in relation to unfamiliar surroundings’ (Oxford dictionaries, n.p., my emphasis). Both locate and orientate entail achieving a degree of clarity about one’s position in space. However, if the former emphasises where we end up, the latter is more about finding our way by making the ‘strange familiar’ (Ahmed 2006, p.11) While orientation implies an endeavour to overcome a sense of uncertainty, for Hann, ‘orientation is ontologically indeterminate as it conflates empirical conceptions of distance and spatial dynamics with felt orders of knowledge’ (2019, p.37). Focusing on the felt or experiential manifestation of space, for Ahmed, orientation is
how we reside in space. Not only how we find our way or know where we are, but also how we turn toward certain objects. Moreover, in her (queer) phenomenology, where emotions and affects are relational and intentional – I am affected by what I come into contact with and my emotions are directed toward something – one’s experience of space is not predetermined. Rather, ‘the orientations we have toward others shape the contours of space’ as they affect or establish the ‘relations of proximity and distance between bodies’ (ibid, p.3). This can extend beyond the confines of a specific architectonic space and implies a more metaphorical interpretation of orientation, which becomes key for how orientation is manifested darkness, as darkness can challenge, disrupt or at least influence different perceptions of proximity and directionality by removing visual references.

To suggest how orientation depends on bodily inhabitation, Ahmed builds on Immanuel Kant and his example of being blindfolded when stepping into an unfamiliar room: ‘You don’t know where you are, or how where you are relates to the contours of the room, so how would you find your way around the room?’ (ibid, p.6). In Ahmed’s reading of Kant, becoming orientated (in that situation) relies on Kant’s ability to differentiate between the left and right side of the body. Only by distinguishing between both sides, he might know which way he is turning. This explanation suggests how orientation is about the directions one takes in space – how they inhabit or situate themselves in relation to things in space (ibid). So arguably, a blindfolded Kant can find a way in the room, even without seeing, by determining left from right. And yet, it seems that Kant can still get lost, and with this explanation, one can still hit a wall (metaphorically and literally). Put differently, Kant helps Ahmed only as far as identifying the possibility or conditions for orientation. To resolve this, Ahmed turns to Heidegger, to propose that orientation is also about the familiarity with the world (ibid, p.7). One might reach out and feel that wall, since the fact that they know how it feels, or that it marks the edge of the room, already make the room more familiar. As reaching out might not necessarily indicate which way one is facing; following Ahmed, I conceive of orientation as both the way one resides or inhabits space as well as how they make the unfamiliar familiar.
This is not the process of exactly locating something or myself in an environment but more about encountering the unknown and making sense of it.

Like orientation, sound emerges from a particular encounter or characteristics of space. While I acknowledge the ongoing debate on the location of sound itself – whether in the object, the ear, or in between (see Nudds and O’Callaghan 2009), for the purpose of this discussion, I conceive of sound as a composite which both takes place in and is part of space. Sound is embedded and intertwined in space, and it depends on the different ways in which it reverberates, resonates, echoes or moves in space. But its emergence also creates or at least designates a space. As such, sound is essential to the understanding (and perception) of spaces and allows us to sense spaces in ways that are more felt than seen or which cannot be seen (Kendrick 2017, p.114).

As such, both sound and orientation, emerge in, create or designate space. For Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) listening is a ‘straining toward a possible meaning and consequently one that is not immediately accessible’ (Nancy 2007, p.6). Listening thus, can be understood through orientation. It is searching for (ironically translated as on the ‘lookout for’) something that resonates from self to self (ibid, p.9). It is not simply navigating across spaces relying on different sounds, but a ‘conscious and purposeful negotiation’ that ‘requires constant reconfiguration and adaptation. It suggests movement, not just of sounds, but on behalf of the listener’ (Kendrick 2018, p.64). In other words, the attention, embrace or openness towards the sonic event, encapsulates both of Ahmed’s characteristics. It is an act of ‘reaching out’ from the space I inhabit in order to make the unfamiliar familiar.

Darkness, on the other hand, dissolves the physical definitions of space and dispels spatial relations. It can frustrate the senses, and thus challenges the perceiver’s ability to focus or locate herself within an overall legible scheme (Öztürk 2010, p.311; Martin 2011, p.454). It creates an experience of altered perception as it disrupts the distinction between foreground and background, movement and stillness (Ihde 2007, p.88), depth and proximity. In other words, it brings forward a sense of disorientation, which might emerge in other environments,
but is acute in darkness. If sound contributes to the understanding or perception of spaces and can surpass (or is not always dependent on) visual perception, it might be implied then, that sound becomes key for orientation in darkness, for making the unfamiliar familiar.

While this might be true, I suggest that in dark performances, sound and its design can also be used as a playful tool to enhance disorientation, as the recorded sound bed in Shunt and Sound&Fury’s Ether Frolics (2006) demonstrates. In the performance, which simulated the experience of being under anesthesia, as the space went dark, it seemed that it also fell silent. However, at some point, this silence – which was a general hum from a vent – was suddenly ‘switched off’. The apparent clarity of the perceived silence was no longer reliable, and the possible assumptions the audience had made about the space were destabilized (Home-Cook 2015, Welton 2012). Sound design, in this case, is not simply crafting and positioning sound across the space but also, the shaping and manipulation of the percipient sense of space (Home-Cook 2015, p.59), and in darkness, this might enhance or ‘provoke perceptual and emotional disorientation by directly implicating and impacting spectator’s bodies’ (Salter 2018, p. 168).

As another example, in Overcast and Certain ways the text uttered (by the collection of voices describing an image or by the robotic guides) was full of (deliberate) contradictions that hindered the ability to make sense and locate oneself within the space, location or image described. As Kendrick asserts, sound has the ‘capacity to exceed visual space by generating its own diegesis’ since ‘[w]ithout any visual reference, sound can take us where it bloody well likes’ (2017, p.114). In Overcast the image described was simultaneously wet and dry, green and yellow, with a train, a dog (or not a dog?), people dancing and some water. Intentionally hard to follow, it was an attempt to generate a sense of not seeing clearly (as previously discussed). In a related move, in Certain ways, Alex and Sam were often inconsistent, and thus cannot be relied on as tour guides. Disagreeing with each other and with previous information given, they describe ambiguous settings in an indecipherable way in order to challenge the audience’s ability to orientate in space (listen to turning point). Moreover, throughout Certain ways, the robotic voices (and sonic compositions) shifted between different speakers. As sound’s
location moved around, it aimed to provoke a sense of uncertainty in relation to where the sound will come from next, constantly shifting their direction, and preventing the unfamiliar from becoming too familiar. It was a continuous demand for reorientation. By establishing different spatial relations between the audience and the different (fictional/diegetic) sonic environments, this dramaturgy of uncertainty sought to stimulate reflection around the relationship to other bodies in the space, how other bodies are encountered, how they are relative to the listener, and which other bodies could be there also.

Similarly, in David Rosenberg and Glen Neath’s *Fiction* (2015) the sophistication of the binaural recording – played through headphones – can make the sonic world in which the audience is immersed extremely believable to the point where one can forget that the whisper in their left ear is merely a recording (Kendrick 2017, 2018). Furthermore, in one moment in *Fiction* the listener is sitting in a car, and it is raining. After a while, the rain stops and one of the characters mentions ‘I have no sense of the roof now that the rain has stopped. If you turn off the engine will the car disappear as well?’ (Rosenberg and Neath 2015, n.p). Without a car to see, or raindrops to feel, the audience is left with sound to indicate what is going on. Indeed, as Kendrick argues, it is sound that forms the scene – or seen – and ‘the acoustic not only makes them appear to us in the dark but manifests these as places to be inhabited, places we are in’ (2017, p.117). However, if there is no sound of a car or rain, there would not be a car or rain to begin with. While it seems that hearing the car engine indicates something about the aural environment, which is meant to help the audience orientate themselves, paradoxically, the appearance and disappearance of sound might actually enhance disorientation. The text indexes sound that is no longer there and inserts doubt about everything else that could be there. As such, it underscores the artificiality of sound and the fragility of orientation: it is all just part of the fiction. And so, as the murkiness of darkness destabilizes visual clarity, the immersion and isolation in a fictional yet highly believable sonic environment contributes to the feeling of disorientation, ‘through the loss of familiar reference points such as architectural structures, the horizon, […] or indeed fellow companions’ (Martin 2011, p.459).
In comparison, as I would like to propose, sound design might be used in performance in the dark to assist with or at least open up to the possibility of orientation or reorientation. To exemplify sonic compositions geared toward orientation, I return to Campfire. Unlike Fiction, the sound in Campfire was played through loudspeakers. Speakers can undoubtedly lead to disorientation – as with Overcast and Certain ways. However, speakers do not position the audience in an enclosed private and isolated sonic world. They may produce sound that can enhance disorientation, but at the very least audiences can still sound out the space and their environment, (whether designed or unintended) making the unfamiliar familiar, rather than being relocated to an imagined space.

Apart from speakers, as a deliberate compositional choice, another strategy used in Campfire was the continuous sound of fire, playing throughout the entire piece and coming from the same point in space. For Hann, scenography – which also incorporates sound design – is an act of place orientation, a process of material acclimatization (2019, p.21), which resonates with Ahmed’s articulation of how the unfamiliar turns familiar. Dramaturgically, as a constant reference point in space, the sound of fire offered the audience something to acclimatize to or position themselves in relation to. Attuning to that sound can also be seen as an act of ‘reaching out’ – what George Home-Cook termed stretching ourselves (2015) – from the space we inhabit in order to make the unfamiliar familiar. Audience members might not be able to assess exactly the location of the speakers, but compositionally, sound attempts to indicate where one might turn to. In that sense, if the plunge to darkness could give rise to a sense of disorientation, the sound of fire proposed an anchor in the dark. Thus, it sought to help the audience to orientate or more precisely, reorientate in darkness.

Other strategies I experimented with in order to bypass the initial disorientation of darkness were the sound of my voice and invitations. Much like the sound of the fire, my voice was introduced before darkness emerged (and it played through the same speakers). Thus, it was not a voice coming from nowhere, but something that the audience were more familiar with and could locate or follow. Similarly, through different invitations, I tried to facilitate a collective moment of coughing in the dark and a ‘sonic wave’ – in which each
audience member was invited to say hello. The first was an invitation for the audience to sense themselves in space and reflect how they reside in darkness. The second was not only an enhancement of the collectivity of the event (as explored in Chapter 3) but also, by having the sound move throughout the circle it allowed the audience members to position themselves in relation to other members of the group. Again, in the dark, the audience might not be able to accurately evaluate what and who is where. Yet the different sonic dramaturgies I have been experimenting with sought to help the audience to familiarise themselves or acclimatise within the encompassing darkness, fostering some degree of orientation. In the disorientating darkness, sound can therefore enable a different (sensory) encounter with space and its perception.

Whether disorientating or reorientating, all these sonic dramaturgies I have surveyed thus far manifest sound design’s capacity to influence the perception of space. Significantly, overcoming confusion or dislocation, attempts to reorientate – either failed or successful – can push one to ponder on their ‘conditional engagements with the near and far’ (Martin, 2011, p.455). Put differently, one is not simply lost and disorientated. In other words, the uncertainty of being in the dark can be seen as an invitation to sound out the space differently; to question how one appreciates their environment and even encounters it anew. Correlatively, for Ahmed, ‘[m]oments of disorientation are vital’ (2006, p.157). These moments are manifested for Ahmed in/as bodily experiences that ‘throw the world up, or the body from its ground’ (ibid). Whether unsettling or exciting, these moments of disorientation are an opportunity to reflect on one’s direction, to pause, go back, retrace and take stalk, before continuing in the same route or diverting to a different path. Thus, disorientation opens the possibility for reorientation. In other words, by creating or designating spaces, dramaturgies of uncertainty incorporating sound design (in the dark) can upset, generate or reorientate different sensory encounters with the world. Disorientation in darkness then, can alter one’s perception but also, following Ahmed, it challenges one’s involvement in the world (2006, p.177). Subsequently, the attempt for (re)orientation might encourage the audience to reach out and reconsider how they make sense to begin with. Through sonic sensibility,
reorientation can open the possibility to listen to what is currently inaudible or unheard, redirecting perception to what might be tuned out and thus promoting reflection within the politics of perception.

To reiterate, this section proposed how sound and its design can designate space. As sound design can enhance disorientation or assist with orientation in the dark, sound can become a tool for reorientation. If reorientation becomes a process of relationality (turning towards) and familiarisation, it can challenge what is taken for granted and reveal new possibilities, turning from the known and familiar, and sounding out what might be inaudible or unheard. Moving from disorientation to dislocation, I now turn to examine the use of robotic voices.

**Robotic Voices**

To further ground the possibilities encapsulated in sonic sensibility, and as a concrete example of how sound might reorientate or draw attention to what often remains unheard or taken for granted, this section turns to the performance of robotic voices. My reason for that is twofold. First, within my broader consideration of how darkness elicits various modes of being-with others, robotic voices expand my account by including new or alternative modes of being-with the other-than-human. Second, when theorising sound as a tool that can alter what is perceived, listening to these voices in darkness can destabilise current understandings or preconceptions and expose the potential for new or multiple perceptions regarding both the human and other-than-human world.

Robotic voices are all around us, emerging from Siri, our satnav, on phone operations, in popular music, or as actors in performances. Within my PR I have been experimenting with creative possibilities using robotic voices: chatting with them, listening in to their conversations, and exploring how they breathe, laugh, sing, sigh, shout and stutter (see [Chapter 2 documentation](#)). I investigated, for example, how they could express anger, beyond
the obvious raising of volume, or how they sing karaoke (see video). Practically and logistically, robotic voices proved to be a simple solution for my investigation of sound. For one, they could be produced live (and quickly) in the studio without having to source actors. Dramaturgically, they provided a range of voices and possibilities, helping me advance my thinking around sound, uncertainty and darkness. However, more importantly, recalling Morton’s ecological thinking that was introduced in Chapter 3, robotic voices allowed me to expand my study of negotiated togetherness to being-with the other-than-human.

To recount, Morton’s ecological thinking ‘shows us that all beings are connected’ (2010, p.7) and thus it prompts reflection on the multiple relationships between humans, the environment and the other-than-human world. Thus, it actively and explicitly extends the notion of negotiated togetherness beyond the realm of the human. For Morton, the ecological crisis reveals how humans are faced with the prospect of forging new connections with the other-than-human world. These relationships concern not only the natural world of animals, plants and minerals, but might also refer to cyborgs and artificial intelligence, which equally, as Chris Salter proposes, throw off ‘the yoke of a purely human-centric, “human-exceptionalist” worldview and turn toward the actions and behaviors of “nonhuman” objects, things, processes, and forces’ (2015, p.4). Again, akin to negotiated togetherness, the mesh of connections Morton accentuates is far from being a utopian and holistic coming together of entities. It is a complex, vast – and even contradictory – set of entanglements, which might not sit neatly together. As part of my engagement with, and conceptualisation of sound, I suggest that robotic voices (and the dislocation of the human voice) – despite being pre-programmed or seemingly controlled – can draw attention to the being-with the other-than-human and thus help to foster the new alliances that Morton calls for (Morton 2010, 2016). This is because, sound is a ‘material event that activates the unsteady arena existing between bodies’ (LeBalle 2016, p.275). Sound brings together ‘bodies (human and nonhuman, objects and things) that do not necessarily search for each other, forcing them into proximity, into a form of nearness’ (ibid, p.276). Similarly, for Voegelin, ‘[w]e do not hear entities but relationships, the commingling of things that generate a sonic world’ (2014, p.162).
Subsequently, the robotic voice ‘opens a space for communication beyond anthropocentric attachments to purely vocal exchanges’ (Heddon 2017, p.20).

Furthermore, the performance of robotic voices is part of a bigger theoretical discussion, or

[a] current materialist shift taking place in socio-political-technical-ecological practices: the breaking of the binaries between life-matter and nature-culture; the acknowledgment of the forces inherent in objects and processes; decentering or eliminating human exceptionalist ontologies; and, ultimately, developing a political framework that collapses the “great divide” between nature and society (Salter 2015, p.10)

To contribute and advance this discourse through my exploration of sound, I argue that robotic voices (and experiences of listening to them) trouble the human/non-human binary and can unsettle strict boundaries between the natural and the artificial, the organic and the technological. While ‘the use of robots constitutes the most technologically advanced developments in digital performance’ (Dixon 2007, p.271; Parker-Starbuck 2011; Lepage 2016), their capacity to problematise and destabilise clear distinctions (between human/other-than-human) serves my theorisation of sound and demonstrates how sound becomes a significant performative tool that can alter and affect how and what is perceived. As ‘voices cannot be talked about without engaging the ears upon which they fall’ (Kendrick 2018, p.xxii), and in line with Voegelin’s sonic sensibility, I propose that this blurriness and destabilisation can highlight the multiple ways of attending to what we hear. Thus, when considering the broader socio-political implication of the sound of robotic voices, it becomes important as it allows us to listen to what often remains unheard, ignored or inaudible. In other words, at a time when robots tell jokes, sweat or even gain citizenship (Simon 2017; Gohd 2018), this section considers the voice other-than-human performers might have (physically-practically and politically).
But, before I do that, let us take a deep breath (play Alex Breathing). This sound is Alex breathing. I did not work with a voice actor or ask someone to manipulate their voice to sound robotic. Both Alex’s speech and the sound of his breath are computer generated. As mentioned in Chapter 2, when experimenting with robotic voices in the studio, I discovered a quiet sound on the audio track every time Alex’s voice began to speak. Looking closely, I noticed an intake of breath, which revealed this exciting prospect. Dramatically, it underpinned how sound can trouble current distinctions between human and machine.

Indeed, Alex is not entirely non-human. Behind every Alex or Siri there is a voice actor, who recorded a huge amount of data that has been chopped, edited and disseminated, only to be reformed and reused through different algorithms in different technologies (Anderson 2013). This can be seen as an attempt to make robotic voices sound ‘more human’, and therefore, more identifiable and relatable – in contrast to early robotic voices to which filters and noises were added. In that sense, Alex problematises and blurs the distinction between human/non-human. On the one hand, the voice uttered is originally human and belongs to a sentient being, who was sitting in a studio, speaking to a microphone. On the other hand, while not as spontaneous or open to improvisation (as the haze I explored previously), the reformation of the sentence, its intonation or pace, are machine generated. The human part of this human-like voice is now only a trace. So, Alex is not human as his existence and expression are the result of a series of ones and zeros. But I would argue that he is not entirely non-human, as he does hold some human characteristics or traces. Alex is by no means a manifestation of the newest or most sophisticated robotic technology, which attempts to ‘humanise’ the robotic voice and conceal the fact that one is talking to a computer, or a device in their living room. As technology improves, pitch, tone and intonation are mastered and the dissonance between human sounding voice and robotic intonation dissolves. Robotic voices could speak in a way that express emotion, breaking free from the monotony of their intonation. Yet, I suggest that there is a productive potential to Alex’s monotone intonation as it demonstrates or articulates (metaphorically and literally) the indeterminacy and blurriness between human/non-human. It is not simply that we are speaking or listening to a
disembodied voice. Rather, by making that which has become familiar slightly stranger, or reminding listeners of its strangeness, the robotic intonation can make one reconsider the relatively new experience of continuously communicating with or indeed talking and listening to a machine.

Voice, as Ella Finer affirms, is also a material, a sonic substance, continually in negotiation with the implications of vocal meaning (2012, p.35; Mills 2009). Indeed, it is often the case that when I listen, I normally separate meaning or content from the materiality of the voice. I interpret from the voice’s tone, pitch, pace, and thus lend an ear to what is being said and how. However, the voice’s materiality (what is saying what is said) often remains in the background. Listening to the robotic voice, particularly to its imperfect speech, draws attention to the voice’s materiality: not only to what is being communicated but also to who or what is doing the communication. Critically, as a staged sonic strategy (conceived through dramaturgies of uncertainty), the performing robotic voice generates meaning, not only by delivering the content it utters but also by what it does, through the performance of the voice itself. As Kendrick indicates ‘these are not speech acts but voice acts’ (Kendrick 2018, p.98), as the (robotic) voice becomes ‘a performance of sound’ (ibid, p.74). Voice, in other words, ‘is defined not only as a communicative operation, but also as an event of distraction and displacement’ (LaBelle, 2017, p.279). If voice, as Finer maintains, is crucially also ‘the voice of someone’, a matter that has a ‘unique identity formed by the body it materializes within’ (2012, p.36), when it comes to Alex, who is this someone? And what is the body within which the voice materialises?

Disembodied, robotic voices also become acousmatic. The acousmatic, to use Michel Chion (who builds on Pierre Schaeffer), refers to ‘sounds one hears without seeing their originating cause’ (1994, p.71). As Chion continues, ‘Radio, phonograph, and telephone, all which transmit sounds without showing their emitter, are acousmatic media by definition’ (ibid). In performance, and especially in the dark, acousmatisation has particular implications in the meaning-making process. For Kendrick, it ‘prompts its undoing; the presentation of the
voice without body […] prompts audiences to seek and locate its source and, indeed, there is often a dramaturgical imperative to do so’ (2018, p.88; Verstraete 2011).

The robotic voice by sounding ‘not quite right’ or dislocating the expected human intonation, calls into question who is being heard, whether it is human or machine, neither or both. As such, sound has the capacity to make ‘accessible, audible and thinkable, alternative states of affairs that allow us to rethink and relive the materiality and semantics of the real world’ (Voegelin 2014, p.45). Thus, sounding the robotic voice and its off-key karaoke could break the habit of listening and possibly confront with the prospect of co-presence with the other-than-human. Voegelin proposes the notion of sonic materialism as a way to grasp the ‘invisible thing of sound’ and to explore the possibilities of sound and its unseen movement and presence around us (ibid, p.84). What I find useful in Voegelin’s material proposition, is the recognition that the other possibilities or slices of materiality, which sound reveals, are not mental-imagined possibilities, but concrete and actual ones, which not only offers a different perception of ‘identity and materiality’ (ibid, p.117), but also changes (through listening) the ways in which other ‘slices’ of the landscape commingle to produce the world.

Through its dislocation, sound has the capacity to shift how things are perceived, how they sensed or how we make-sense of them. Such a view encourages us to hear the sonic world as possible worlds, listening in ways that move beyond ‘what it is’, to understand what is heard through plurality – negotiating between ‘what it is like’ and ‘what it could be like also’ (ibid, p.46). This questioning of ‘what it could be like also’ is strongly manifested through the sound of Alex’s breathing. The intake and outtake of air, which vitalises sentient beings, stands out when performed by a non- or other-than-human, or at least by something or someone who is not thought about as breathing. The breathing sound reasserts the robot as even more human-like by having an even more sentient bodily quality, as it produces the sound of a bodily action/function such as breathing. While such sound might be perceived as

25 Robotics and CGI design tread carefully around the Uncanny Valley. According to Masahiro Mori (1970), the more humanlike artificial objects become, the more they are embraced, until that moment where the artificial object resembles and becomes too humanlike that it becomes uncanny.
a sign or a representation of the act of breathing, as it highlights the artificiality of the sound or its producer, dramaturgically, listening to the robot breathing, continues and highlights the destabilised distinction between human/nonhuman. In this vein, such point of friction continues to challenge ‘enduring perceptions of a human/non-human binary’ (Donald 2016, p.254) in favour of intricate amalgams that ‘blur and hybridize distinctions between organic and nonorganic, living and nonliving’ (Salter 2015, p.6). It is precisely this ambiguity and blurriness between categories that I find productive, as it challenges or at least expands – through sound – the understanding of what might be thought of as human, body, vocal expression or machine – especially when juxtaposed to more ‘natural’ sounds (play ice cracking).

Following Voegelin, a sonic possible world invites the notion and experience of a plurality of things and worlds (ibid, 119). In that sense, it is not only that this new technology enables other-than-human entities to ‘have a voice’ in the literal and metaphorical/socio-political sense, but also that, by being all around us, performing speaking, they might establish new connections or challenge some of our preconceptions and understandings of what is other-than-human, how it sounds or how we sound it out. Tellingly, the inaudible ‘is always there, but our interpretative listening edits it out, ignores it, pushes it into the background to hear something else, something deemed important and valuable, something inline [sic] with a current notion of sense, validity, and purpose’ (Voegelin 2014, p.170). Accordingly, reorientating toward the robotic voice might allow it to resonate and be heard.

Moreover, this interconnectedness with the other-than-human as part of the expansion of negotiated togetherness highlights the pertinent question of agency. Within the broader theoretical discourse aptly named ‘the nonhuman turn’, a common thread is the critique of key assumptions around ‘agency, meaning, and value of nature’ and how they ‘all derive from cultural, social, or ideological inscription or construction’ (Grusin 2015, p. xi). Hence, an important argument within this conversation asserts that the other-than-human world is not inanimate as humans tend to think it is (Bennett 2010; Barad 2007). When it comes to robotics and AI, new technologies attempt to show how these are able to operate on
their own, and are thus active animate entities, some can even ‘think’ for themselves. Here, the uncertainty that arises when listening to Alex (whether and to what extent is he ‘human’) extends to his agency. How autonomous is he? Was it a human that put words in his mouth?

In a way, a lot of humans were part of generating Alex’s voice: the voice actor, those who developed the technology and finally me, by using the text to speech software and typing his words. However, when thinking about agency, I do not employ it strictly as an intention, choice or ability to act or take part involuntarily. Rather, following Lisa Woynarski (who builds on Karen Barad), I conceive of agency as the ability to produce effects and to affect, influence or to make a difference to something (not necessarily within the realm of the human). Understanding agency as the latter, might therefore be something that Alex, in fact, possesses or enacts, since through his speaking or breathing, Alex still has the potential/capacity to create effects (2015, p.44). These effects are not simply because some human-like characteristics have been projected on, or expressed by Alex, but exactly because he enacts the tension between simultaneously sounding human and other-than-human. In her critique of some aspects of new materialist thinking, Rebecca Schneider cautions that more-than-human performance or where humans and non-humans interact or perform alongside each other could risk being reductively homogenising (Schneider 2014; Donald 2016, p.255). Yet, my point is not to fix every entity – whether human or robot – to a final definition. It is precisely this dislocation, ambiguity and blurriness between categories that I find productive. True, incorporating robotic voices in performance, is still likely, as Donald acknowledges, to ‘privilege human experience […], suggesting an impulse to interpret, capture and archive, and to communicate exclusively among other humans’ (2016, p.254), implying that the agency and vitality of non-human performers ‘will always, inevitably and unproductively’, be bounded to human framing of the performances (ibid). This is indeed a risk, one that I have yet to resolve – especially using this particular technology. Nevertheless, there is still value in poking and problematising fixity, and challenging the categories different human experiences rely upon, in order to expand or refute dominant worldviews and understandings which relegate certain
entities, as well as facilitating listening to other ‘slices’ of materiality, those that might often be taken for granted or remain unheard (play underwater).

To summarise thus far, this section examined the performance of robotic voice as a dramaturgy of uncertainty manifested through dislocation. I suggested that robotic voices can challenge clear boundaries and distinctions between categories such as what counts as bodily and which bodies count (Dixon 2009, p.421). Through a concrete example, I sought to expand my account of sound and uncertainty by looking at how listening might make room for the inaudible or ignored: allowing it resonate, reverberate and change what is perceived by letting ‘other slices’ in and of the world – that coexist but are seemingly inaccessible – show themselves (Voegelin 2014 p.158). In the next section I conclude this chapter by returning to darkness and thinking about the operation of sound within it.

**Resounding sound**

Through my exploration of robotic voices – as a particular sonic dramaturgy (of uncertainty) – I demonstrated how through sonic sensibility sound can alter one’s perception and direct attention to what remains unheard. Having established darkness as a site where sound can reorientate different perceptions, in concluding this chapter I return to darkness and consider how negotiated togetherness might unfold in darkness through sound.

Barry Truax proposes the notion of ‘acoustic ecology’ to elucidate the relationship(s) between ‘the individual listener and communities of listeners to their environment as mediated by sound’, suggesting that the perception of the acoustic space plays a fundamental role in forming these encounters (2017, p.258). Truax then argues that

The habitual sounds we experience daily both reflect and confirm our sense of physical space, as well as our place within it. Individuals and communities have a definite sense of “what belongs” in their acoustic space, and what kinds of noise are “invasions” of that space (ibid).
My exploration of sound and darkness sought to destabilise such definitiveness. As this chapter tried to show, darkness, and the performance of sound within it, can radically change this habitual sonic ‘pattern’ that is often taken for granted. As a result of altering the (acoustic) space which might lead to reorientation, a deep potential for ‘profound comingling’ emerges. Through this reorientation, different types of interaction are encouraged bringing forward the opportunity of ‘relating to what is different from me’ (Labelle 2017, pp. 275-276). Sound then, becomes ‘a force always already departing to incite innumerable points of exchange or contact’ (ibid, p. 278).

As mentioned, while darkness dissolves habitual spatial relations and physical definitions, sound – following LaBelle – can nonetheless bring together bodies who might not necessarily look for each other, but that run into each other through sound and listening. Sound begins to carve the way for different modes of togetherness. Sound integrates. Moreover, due to its contingency and how it forms spaces (and becomes part of them), it is possible to consider, ‘sound and listening as means for bringing near what is often so distant’ (ibid, p.276). In that sense,

acoustic spatiality supplants conventional notions of “the public” as being an identifiable entity: a form of visibility. Indeed, sound contributes to an experimental discourse on what it means to be together, explicitly introducing an associative structure that promotes radical sociality - a dwelling in difference. […] bringing into contact contradictory and divergent forces, spaces, bodies, and things; it is the making of a space inhabited by a community always plural (ibid, original emphasis).

In that sense and building on Nancy – thus completing the circle I began when introducing negotiated togetherness in Chapter 3 – listening is not simply a singular enclosed act; rather, it is always with, ‘an opening to the sensing of the self’ while also ‘sensing of the self in relation to other selves in the world’ (Kendrick 2018, p.152; Nancy 2007).
Sonic dramaturgies, then, hold the capacity to reorientate in the dark and reveal that which might be unheard, inaccessible as well as resound that which is ignored or relegated. As sound brings together, listening and reorientating in the dark (through a sonic sensibility), becomes a means for reflecting or revealing divergent forms or modes of being part of an encounter. As sound continuously re-emerges it unshackles collectivity and togetherness from their apparent fixity, giving room for multiple possibilities and perceptions. Sound, as Kendrick underscores, ‘draws us into more mutable experiences that are relational, changeable and sometimes constitutive of the theatre experience’ (2018, p.43). If both sound and darkness can alter clarity in space by resisting and reconfiguring space’s coordinates, togetherness in the dark can be thought of as constantly emerging and in-formation. Reflecting on this negotiation through sound, listening in the dark might be perceived as ‘itinerant listening’ (LaBelle 2017, p.284). Itinerant or shifting listening – shifting and reforming clarity – allows one to perceive the endless andness of being-with others: a concurrent ‘what it is’ and ‘what it could be like also’. In that sense, listening in the dark can generate the plurality of the heard. By altering listening habits and perceptions, sound in the dark can reveal different social imaginings. Darkness uncovers different modes or forms of perception and being-together which highlights not only ‘the formation of group identity’, but also ‘the proliferation of all that may lie in-between and around such formations’ (ibid, p.284).

In sum, this chapter reflected on how a range of sonic strategies cultivates or encourages different modes of togetherness in darkness. I focused on disorientation and dislocation as particular facets of uncertainty and proposed that sound can become a performative tool that can alter and affect what is perceived. By shifting perceptions, sound might reorientate and reveal new potentials for understandings and perspectives and, consequently, different modes of being-together with others. Expanding my conceptualisation of negotiated togetherness to incorporate the other-than-human world, I continued to show how sound can challenge fixed boundaries and conceptions which open up the possibility to sound out the world differently or facilitate other/different mutable interactions that are continuously in-formation. Thus, by encouraging multiple perspectives, sound in the dark can
contribute to an altered sense of clarity. This clarity, in turn, can help to embrace the political potential of uncertainty by moving between the unfamiliar, the inaudible, and the inaccessible, and allowing them to resonate, making alternative states of affairs thinkable, imaginable and possible.
6. Conclusion:

Towards an Altered Clarity

As visitors move throughout the *Shapes of Light* exhibition at Tate Modern (2018) the colour of the walls becomes clearer: from opaque green to dark grey, lighter grey, until eventually the photographs are presented on pristine white walls. This curatorial decision is contrasted with the artworks shown in the exhibition that become (for the most part) more and more abstract. While the colour of the walls might signal the attempt to achieve the purity of form, and the movement from opacity to translucency echoes the colours’ ability to reflect light, it could also hint towards the search for clarity within that which might resist it. A similar journey followed this thesis, which embraced the apparent contradiction of presenting something concrete and certain about uncertainty. Such a movement towards greater clarity might even stand in opposition to the argument articulated through this practice research, which identifies the productive and generative potential of uncertainty itself.

This practice research (PR) inquiry set out to explore the relationships between uncertainty and darkness. On the one hand, it sought to articulate how engineered or theatrical darkness can inform the study of uncertainty. On the other hand, I proposed that uncertainty offers a necessary critical framework to further investigate and conceptualise theatre in the dark. Recognising the increasing number of performances and installations in which darkness makes a prominent appearance, as well as the growing interest in pieces which utilise extended periods of blackout or incorporate low-lighting and states of gloom as significant compositional elements, this research aimed to identify structures, tendencies and dramaturgical traits that operate as part of theatre in the dark performances. Specifically, I have looked at the shared presence with other audience members, compositions of light and obstructed vision and a range of sonic strategies as significant elements within these performances and explored their various dramaturgical manifestations, ability to generate uncertainty and broader socio-political significance.
By considering different dramaturgies and facets of uncertainty that are in play in theatre in the dark performances, the main goal of this research was to develop the argument that darkness is a productive setting in which to examine multiple modes of togetherness that do not rely on visual recognition or clear identification, and thus outline and altered state of clarity in/through darkness. The initial claim of this PR suggested that darkness – as a graspable variant and form giving entity in performance – can undermine or challenge the dominance of the visual in theatre practices and even resist different scopic regimes born out of different ideologies or biases that are produced by, and rely on, opticality. Darkness, I proposed, not only sheds light and uncovers what is normally deemed unworthy of being seen, heard or acknowledged, but crucially it can invite audiences to make sense differently and perceive through multiplicity, underscoring different interpretations, possibilities and understandings of what is being perceived and what could also be perceived.

In response to the prevalent focus on the audience’s experience in research around theatre in the dark – mostly through scholars’ critical engagement with their own experience – this research adopted a different approach, namely, the maker’s perspective – looking at the process of shaping and composing performances in/with darkness. This novel viewpoint afforded me a unique position from which to offer new insights into the field of theatre in the dark and theatre studies more broadly. The maker’s perspective – apart from pursuing a relatively unexplored terrain in theatre in the dark scholarship – has helped me in identifying different compositional traits of darkness so as to better understand darkness’ influence in contemporary practices. Accordingly, I suggested how shifting the focus to processes of creation – through the conditions or stimuli put forward by a performance-maker – can facilitate a richer and distinctive understanding of practice by means of experimentation (rather than simply the production of creative outputs), which might not be available in isolated analysis of case studies or in artistic accounts that elaborate on the devising process. Thus, the insights that emerged in/through this PR provide an important contribution to theatre in the dark research that can pave the way to better grasp how those various uncertain audiences’ experiences are being shaped, structured or induced. Notably, positioning this
research at the intersection of uncertainty and darkness, and adopting the maker’s perspective was not geared towards unpacking the uncertainty surrounding the artistic process (or the research process for that matter). Equally, the aim was not to provide a practical guide on ‘how to make theatre in the dark’. Instead, the purpose of this PR was to analyse compositions and structures of theatre in the dark as a means of investigating the sense of uncertainty that is generated in dark performances, its different facets and broader implications.

Beyond darkness, uncertainty has been characterised as a prominent experience in the current socio-political climate, to the point where the current epoch has been identified as an ‘age of uncertainty’ (Bauman 2007, Solnit 2016b, Heddon and Mackey 2012; Fragkou 2019). In response to the growing uncertain events and occurrences – such as Climate change, the migration crisis or Brexit – and especially dominant (patriarchal, hierarchical, heteronormative) ideologies, this inquiry was geared towards unpacking and better understanding this prevailing sense of uncertainty and how it might (be used to) resist hegemonic discourses. Critically, these ideologies are entwined and exhibited through various (racial, sexist, human exceptionalist) biases and scopic regimes which promote fixity, distinct classification and identification. This fixity can lead to exclusion and disavowal of others (human or other-than-human), intolerance, xenophobia, precarity and disillusionment. To trouble and defy the assumed sense of clarity – born out of these optic regimes and the assumption that things (human or other-than-human) are as they are because of how they appear – this thesis advocated for more plural modes of perception, as a vital antidote to these isolating, hierarchical and divisive discourses. Against this backdrop, as a practitioner-researcher living and making performance at this point in time, the consideration of uncertainty and its socio-political work (and possibilities) seemed and still seems urgent and pertinent, in order to better understand and respond to such a climate.

Consequently, I suggested that while uncertainty can be alarming, overwhelming and appear as something that needs to be overcome, it can also be a generative opportunity. I argued that being uncertain is not simply an experience of not-knowing. Rather, as a
productive experience, uncertainty – as it unfolds through modulated processes of perception – can open the possibility to re-evaluate what is known and perceived as well as how one makes sense to begin with, suggesting shifts and reconsiderations within the politics of perception. Using PR, this PhD investigated how uncertainty might be generated in theatre in the dark performances so as to trace how theatre in the dark can elicit different perceptions and forms of engagement that facilitate different modes of being together with others, beyond the realm of the visual. Stemming from the understanding that uncertainty is a prominent aspect of (the dramaturgy and experiences of) these performances, as well as a pertinent tool for questioning – compositionally, politically and through darkness – the habitual flow of perception, this research turned to uncertainty in order to investigate and gesture towards alternative modes of sensory engagements and understandings of one’s environment. More precisely, my experimentations in/with darkness sought to illuminate different aspects, facets or manifestations of uncertainty such as the indeterminacy of who and what is around, the vagueness of what one sees or the disorientation and dislocation within one’s sense of space.

To enrich the broader socio-political discourse around uncertainty, this research sought to exceed the simple identification of uncertainty in theatre spaces, or simply suggesting that darkness allows us to consider different encounters. Accordingly, this thesis explored how these different interactions are born out of different sensory engagements and how darkness can foster multiple competing modes of being-with others, conceived as part of an altered clarity. The renewed clarity that emerges in/through darkness, I proposed, is one that underscores the plurality of perception and the inclusion of multiple perspectives, whether renewed understandings or new views, which may coexist in darkness, without prioritising one. Thus, it allows audiences to think and practice different modes of being with others.

I introduced the framework of dramaturgies of uncertainty which served as a principal context through which I articulated (conceptually and compositionally) what darkness can do as a material of/for performance (as an independent agent and when interacting with other performative elements). Expanding Bal’s theorisation, I asserted that clarity is not lost but
transformed or modulated. In other words, uncertainty opens the space and potential for an *altered* state of clarity. As a result, this thesis examined the perceptual uncertainty that might emerge from these various dramaturgies, and then extrapolated the ramifications of these uncertainties, and the wider possibilities they might reveal. Such a move is important not only to develop a stronger conceptual understanding of uncertainty and darkness but also to examine how darkness can become a productive site to engage with different modes of *negotiated togetherness*. While I have focused and explored dramaturgies of uncertainty in relation to theatre in the dark, I suggest that this framework could be extended to other performance practices, not only those which propose radical sensory experiences. In other words, as a conceptual framework, dramaturgies of uncertainty highlights the creative *and* critical potential of uncertainty as it manifested and thought of through performance.

This PR was comprised of three cycles of exploration, which resulted in three performance presentations (*Campfire* (2016), *Overcast* (2017) and *Certain Ways* (2018)) as well as this written thesis. Read in conjunction with the practice presented (and its documentation), the purpose of this written component was, first, to position and contextualise these cycles of experimentation within artistic lineages and relevant theoretical frameworks. Second, this thesis aimed to give the reader an insight to the exploration undergone in the darkened studio (to underscore the maker’s perspective), before disseminating and analysing the different structures and dramaturgies presented in practice. Recognising that any artwork could be read in numerous ways and lend itself to various foci and interpretations, this thesis offers a different mode of articulation: one that highlights specific and significant ‘findings’ or insights that arose from this research as well as attempting to sketch this altered or new sense of clarity, together with the practical interventions. Indeed, some of these findings have been manifested as part of the showings of practice, but it is this thesis that brings those insights to light and further reflects upon them. As this research emphasises the process of *making*, this thesis – accompanied by contextualised documentation – enables clarification of the artistic intentions that might not have been evident when encountering the performances. That being said, the practical showings were not meant to *validate* research findings, nor to present final
conclusions. Audiences – and their diverse experiences – were not the subject(s) of these experiments. Rather, they were invited to join, witness and possibly collaborate in the ongoing process of exploration.

To recap, Chapter 1 positioned uncertainty and darkness as the key features of this research, suggesting that darkness is a form-giving entity that could be understood through plurality (different darknesses). Uncertainty was positioned not simply as loss or altered clarity, but also as andness, an accumulative view that encapsulates the plurality or multiplicity of interpretations, perspectives and perceptions and their mutual coexistence. I have situated this research within a field of practice and outlined the research questions that were set to allow me to uncover and chart this altered state of clarity in darkness. Chapter 2 expanded on the critical frameworks by addressing the methodological rationale for this research, as well as the design, process, and approaches that have been used to pursue this inquiry. I started from Robin Nelson’s model (2006; 2013), Henk Borgdorff’s definitions (2007; 2012), and positioned my investigation within the ‘second wave’ of practice research (Hann 2015). As a practical and artistic inquiry involving experimentation in the studio and relying on the maker’s ‘insider’s perspective’, PR seemed a necessary method for this study. As a significant feature of my PR was dramaturgy, expressed in the development, analysis and reflection around dramaturgies of uncertainty, this chapter also contextualised and defined dramaturgy. As I have argued, to some extent, every inquiry which utilises PR is also about PR itself, grappling with the complexities – as well as politics and concerns – of this method. Thus, proposing another concrete example of how PR could be conducted is also regarded as an important contribution to arts research. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 delved into analysing and reflecting on my PR, each chapter focused predominantly on a specific cycle of practice, a theatrical element or device and a specific facet of uncertainty.

Chapter 3 began to consider the dramaturgical significances of uncertainty in theatre in the dark and its socio-political implications by looking at indeterminacy. Concentrating on the shared presence with other audience members, this chapter proposed that despite the apparent isolating characteristic of being in the dark, dark performance can still establish
relational interactions. Highlighting relationality was key when examining negotiated togetherness. This chapter then suggested how darkness can promote multiple modes of being with others (defining negotiated togetherness) without necessarily promoting a specific one. Building on Timothy Morton’s ecological thinking, I argued that coexistence in darkness can be seen as in-formation, through a complex process of interconnectedness through which darkness can trouble different clear categories and thus highlight different encounters, without championing or fixing a particular engagement.

Chapter 4 turned to lighting design and experiences of not seeing clearly. Expanding my study to visual obfuscation more broadly and looking at vagueness, I argued that not seeing clearly might elicit the plurality of perception by rendering images vague, unfixed and indefinite. Instead of relying on visual recognition, an altered state of clarity is one that in which I can perceive multiple views and perspectives while resisting clear identifications: when one cannot see clearly. I framed low-lighting and plunges to darkness as particular dramaturgies of uncertainty and strategies for making theatre in the dark. These, in turn, can break the habitual flow of perception, challenge certain ocular biases which tie vision to fixity and clarity, and crucially open up to different modes of interaction that might destabilise different preconceptions and enduring views.

Chapter 5 tended to sound as a performative tool that might alter and affect what and how things are perceived. Orientating towards disorientation, I proposed that sound in the dark can reorientate and reveal the multiplicity of perception and cultivate different modes of interaction by inviting audiences to sound out what remains unheard, ignored or inaccessible, allowing it to resonate or reverberate. I turned to the use of robotic voices to expand my study of negotiated togetherness to the other-than-human world as an example of how different sonic dramaturgies can destabilise clear and strict boundaries. I proposed that an altered state of clarity relies on a sonic sensibility which challenges the world’s certain position and categories and eventually places – through sound – bodies in different relations.
Taken together then, in lieu of a clear, fixed and concrete answer to a research question, this exploration has identified and outlined multiple ways through which to approach and consider the significance and generative potential of uncertainty demonstrated in performance and how it influences the composition of theatre in the dark. Advancing the study around the substantial role of darkness in performance, this research continued to trouble enduring conceptions of darkness as the absence of light, and recurring proclamations that darkness simply amplifies other senses. In contrast to these arguably generalising postulations, the insights emerging from this research demonstrate the complex manifestations, dramaturgical possibilities and experiences of darkness as an impactful material for/of performance.

Building on my practical explorations and diverging but relating threads of inquiry, I am slowly turning the lights back on, attempting to sustain the altered sense of clarity that was revealed and developed in/through darkness. Ultimately, as this thesis tried to sketch, this state of clarity is relational, inclusive, plural, and reflective. Embracing multiplicity, it destabilises fixed understandings and perceptions and invites us to think through andness, extending the endless potential of possibilities of being together. Whether in the clouds, around the campfire, or guided by robotic voices, this research sought to invite audiences to revel in the exciting and invigorating prospects of sharing spaces beyond the realm of the visual. Whether unsettling or pleasurable, these collective and uncommon situations anchor the significance of uncertainty and encourage one to pause and reassess, to reflect on one’s direction, before continuing in the same route or diverting to a different path. By questioning perception and its politics, this altered sense of clarity holds the capacity to host different, new and complex understandings, perspectives and views, but leaving them undecided and constantly in-formation. Shifting from the literal to the metaphorical, this thesis concentrated on instances of engineered or theatrical darkness and the creative and critical potential of being kept in the dark. Yet, the insights developed here can hopefully be applied to other dark spaces or even illuminate different possibilities beyond darkness. Instead of thinking through the ‘or’ of clear and distinct categories and binaries, I favour and invite the reader to adopt the
limitless and of andness in order to continue and further discover the multiple possibilities of uncertainty and darkness and perception and togetherness and...and...

[play Tunnel]
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