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**Exploring the Practices for Sustainable Site-Specific Performance**

**in**

**Intentional Communities**

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## Abstract

Once again, people are leaving the city and moving to the countryside for the hope of connection found in the intentional community (Howard, 2021; Shenker, 1986, p.3). Similarly, the orthodox theatre has competition. Cries of inaccessibility and now regulations in response to Covid-19 mean site-specific performances are also on the rise (MacPherson, 2021), and entering previously un-used community spaces.

Combining cultural theory and performance studies, this thesis explores the unique point of interaction that is site-specific performance within intentional community spaces.

An evocative auto-ethnographic methodology underpins (Ellis and Bochner, 2016) active-participant fieldwork at the intentional community of Coed Hills Rural Artspace. Here I lived off-the-grid, observed, and actively participated, in addition to employing practice-as-research methodologies of the 'self' for two years. The ambition was to divine the experience of the visiting performer to an intentional community, as well as the role of the community member in hosting the visiting performer.

For the culmination of my two-year residency and research, I conducted interviews with core community members and co-produced a site-specific performance event. Through reflexive praxis I was able to test theories and refine the answers to my research question: *What practices for sustainable site-specific performance are being explored in intentional community spaces?*

This thesis utilises the idea of shifting away from the final performance being paramount for analysis. Instead it moves toward the relationships a performer has with an environment and community during the rehearsal process as an indication of sustainability.

The ideological concepts I devised from my fieldwork were form, freedom, community-mindedness, and self-sufficiency. From these four seemingly binary principles, the concepts of art and exchange are born. These ideological concepts are explored as embodied practices to evaluate the three site-specific performances this thesis presents: *The Bliss of Wildness* (2018), *promenade with PYLON* (2019), and *Coed Roots & Legends* (2019).

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I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Jenny Kidd who went above and beyond to inspire me to follow this unique project and believed in my vision from the start. I will fondly think back on sitting in my cabin with you at Coed Hills, or meeting for coffee and bringing it to a grassy space. Early readings you suggested shaped so much of this thesis, informed my ethics, and gave me the confidence to undertake such a big project as this.

Coming from drama school and the years of actor training before that, I was highly trained in following the instructions of a superior. In my first year at Cardiff University, Dr. Paul Bowman led a Wednesday morning class, discussing different philosophers with PhD students and I was invited to attend, as a first year MPhil. This was my first experience of the Socratic seminar and I felt like a fish out of water - not only did we have to understand the text, but we were meant to form our own opinions *about* the text. It was Dr Bowman who first taught me that it was okay to disagree with a superior in an academic setting and to engage critically with a text. I remember that blowing my mind at the time, it being very difficult, and also completely invaluable.

Firenza Guidi, thank you for showing me what site-specific performance could be. You taught me so much about the pathways into authentic performance, and majorly inspired this degree. Working with you in Cardiff and in Italy changed my whole view of what performance is. Thank you for writing my recommendation letter for this degree, I am forever in your debt.

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yourselves in the text and want to talk further about some of the claims this thesis presents. Any critique you have with the text I am very open to discussing further and am excited by this prospect.

I wish I could mention you all by name, now, but that would be counter-intuitive to all the anonymisation and the careful re-naming that we did for the following chapters.

I continue to be in awe of your collective self-sufficiency, community mindedness, creativity, and tenacity.

Finally, I would like to thank my father, Pedro. He was an English professor, musician and visual artist and would have been my proofreader for this thesis and a great sounding board. He passed away just a few months into my first year, and I took two years off because of this. At times I did not think I could do it without him, and perhaps this is why there is such a strong theme of 'inspiration' in my gratitude list, above. This may also shed some light as to why those individuals I met in the first few weeks of this degree made a lasting impact on me, and gave me all the more reason to come back and try again.

I dedicate this thesis to his memory and to the people of Coed Hills Rural Artspace who gave me the time and space to process his loss, while still allowing me responsibilities, and the unbridled joy of devising site-specific performance and facilitating others in their visions.

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## Introduction

This study asks the question: *What practices for sustainable site-specific performance are being explored in intentional community spaces?* Site-specific performance is a kind of practice where the action takes place outside the traditional, or orthodox, theatre setting (Thompkins, 2012, pp. 2-3). This unorthodox setting can be anywhere from an inner-city abandoned tube station to a rural woodland (Pavis, 1998, p.338). In site-specific performance, the environment plays a major part in the production, “the site itself... an active component in the creation of performative meaning, rather than a neutral space of exposition or scenic backdrop for dramatic action” (Pearson, 2012, p.70). What makes a performance site-specific, is the unique interaction the text has with a physical environment (Wilkie, 2002, p.249, Smith, 2019, p.20).

There are no previous practices outlined for sustainable site-specific performance within intentional community spaces. The pioneering research in this thesis called for an embodied focus on sustainability, and this was done for two reasons. Firstly, to reflect the ideologies and practices of the larger intentional community movement; “while others are talking, we are doing” (Shenker, 1986, p.103). Specifically, to reflect the ideology of the intentional community which housed my active-participant fieldwork: Coed Hills Rural Artspace. Although intellectualism is present in intentional communities because there is a focus on the embodied practice rather than the theoretical evaluation, this work is of significant originality, as it includes two different spheres of knowledge (the written word and the embodied practice) in a novel intentional community space.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, with the hope that this framework with the needs of the

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<sup>1</sup> In 2021 the first full length book about an intentional community in Wales, Lamas Village, was self-published. (Tao Paul Wimbush, *The Lamas Ecovillage: Deep Roots and Stormy Skies*, 2021, Self-published).

community members as the focus, will be the foundation for future artistic and performance-as-research investigations that involve communities.

Before embarking on this research, I had acted in a few site-specific performances, and my main critique was the companies did not have much interaction with, or respect for, the hosting communities and their ideology. This can be demonstrated by a quick recounting of a site-specific performance event I acted in, at a community garden during the 2015 Prague Quadrennial. The director and stage managers had planned for the actors' staging, and the rehearsal process took place in Cardiff, Wales. A few weeks later, the cast arrived in Prague and when the show was getting set up in the community gardens hosting the performance, the focus was primarily on rehearsing the staging of the actors. Not much attention was paid to the natural environment to which we were reflexively fitting this performance. The community garden hosting our performance was trashed by the second showing, due to audience footfall. Somewhat ironically, the play was about climate change. Due to the damage of the gardens, the message of the performance went unheard as the subsequent shows were cancelled. This impacted the following festivals as well, for the community gardens would no longer accept performances out of fear or mistrust of the site-specific performance practices.

From my perspective, there was something missing between the *ideology*<sup>2</sup> the company was espousing and the *practices* the company employed. Due to this and other similar experiences,

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hall's definition of ideology argues the term has evolved to, "convey all organized forms of social thinking... the practical as well as the theoretical knowledges which enable people to 'figure out' society" (Hall, 1986, p.26). And this thesis uses this definition.

I realised I did not know enough to launch my own site-specific performance company at this stage in my career.

I had seen first-hand that ideologies represented by some site-specific performance companies did not match their practices in performance and almost no focus was placed on a sustainable interaction with a hosting community or physical environment. I wanted to find out why this discrepancy persisted and what I could do to close this theoretical gap. It would greatly benefit me to devote the next four years to studying site-specific performance and asking what practices could be employed so something like this does not happen, again.

Also, important to consider are the practices of the site-specific performances, while the traditional way to view theatre and performance changes with Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions. At the time of writing, indoor theatre performances will be performed outdoors to keep in-line with health and safety factors that had not previously needed consideration. And some performances will become site-specific productions ([MacPherson, 2021](#)).

As these productions explore their local community performance spaces, the relationships with hosting communities and site-specific performers will be relevant and various practices tested. Orthodox theatres are commonly criticized for their capitalistic foundations, making productions very expensive. As the push for accessibility continues, this research will also directly relate to the site-specific performance spaces chosen to host more accessible and outdoor, community-based site-specific performance. However, communities that did not host performances in the past might be exploited due to lack of clarity in the practices for hosting site-specific performances. The site-specific performance might, although unintentionally, exploit the hosting community either physically or emotionally. Due to this risk of exploitation, sustainable practices

for site-specific performance in intentional communities will be investigated through the lens of two specific aspects of sustainability: the environmental, and the emotional. In the community gardens example explained above, a physical exploitation of the hosting community's environment occurred, where the land was marred. An emotionally sustainable practice will consider the view of the community members who are hosting a site-specific performance.

There is a moving-away-from the cities, and the eco-conscious are turning to the rural intentional communities set up by their 'hippy' fore-parents ([Obadia, 2020](#)). In 2021, more people than ever are seeking out these alternative and intentional lifestyles ([Howard, 2021](#)), and the current intentional community count rests at 400 in the UK ([ibid](#)).

The crisis of climate change has thematically dominated site-specific performance and theatre in the UK since the 1980's ([Angelaki, 2009](#)), and as the climate crisis becomes more urgent, this pattern will continue. The Extinction Rebellion movement and performance group illustrate the link between site-specific performance and an ecological message. The want for connection, moving out of the Covid-19 restrictions and away from screens or darkened orthodox theatres have perhaps prompted the romantic idea of the intentional community once again. Moreover, as the age of neo-liberal isolation reigns paramount, site-specific performance within an intentional community space is appealing and can be explored on many levels.

The first level is the natural connection of the ecological underpinning, which the intentional community movement in general shares with environmental site-specific performance. This is true both in ideology and in the aesthetics of spatiality. Meaning that site-specific performances commonly have an ecological message in addition to their entertainment factor. And site-specific performances are commonly devised with the environment of the hosting community

intentionally considered and influencing the performance. Due to this reflexive nature of site-specific performance, the practices which are used to convey the ideology, will be explored to evaluate their practices.

Another level of natural connection between site-specific performance and intentional communities; are their tendencies to uphold key traits of neo-liberalism. Smith (2019), compared the site-specific performance to that of the artist's studio. Both exist in isolation and can play a part in the, "redevelopment, gentrification, and monetization of 'run down' neighborhoods" (Pearson, 2012, p.69). In broader terms, site-specific performance has the ability to populate previously unused spaces, (Smith, 2019, p.11), with an artistic intent; and according to Smith (2019) and Pearson (2012) the power is given, or "rented" (McKinnie, 2012, pp. 23,24) to the audience by means of capitalistic ownership. In this reading of the relationship between the hosting environment and the site-specific performance using the land, the audience get to play pretend and feel ownership of a space. Outside the perimeters of the performance, the audience members would be outsiders or the site could even be inaccessible.

Although the concept of neo-liberalism is not at the forefront of this thesis; I believe it necessary to devote some time now to unpack the term so that background and context are given for understanding why there is such a push towards site-specific performance within intentional communities. Neoliberalism, I argue, is a driving force for the recent rise in the popularity of site-specific performance, and the way this most recent push is interpreted. McKinnie (2012) argued the site-specific performance is, "monopolistic and rent-seeking" (p. 24). This view is included here for the same reason Smith (2019) includes this argument in Chapter 1, titled: "Why Make Site-Specific Performance?" (ibid). Smith (2019) wrote McKinnie's (2012) argument was



essential to combat the assumption that the site for a site-specific performance is inherently ecologically blank and that the main focus for the creators will be to harness a site's aesthetics (p. 11). Smith (2019, p.3) furthered this argument with a semiotic breakdown of "site", challenging the anthropocentric nature of the word:

It suggests that a human choice has already defined its boundaries, meaning and identity. A site is always the site *of* something; with the implication that it is a kind of container for what is really important... but it is different from the space itself. It says that space accrues its meaning through its use by humans (Italics in original).

The physical environment of an intentional community framed as a site can be given meaning and identity through the initial intent of the landowner. The landowner is the only one with the power to allow or invite others to inhabit and cultivate their private land. And, like site-specific performance, I extend this argument to include the intentional community as the site. There is commonly a component of ecological ideology in the intentional community (Shenker, 1986, pp.10-11); and in marrying two separate ideologies, derived from the intentional community and the site-specific performance, the meaning behind a site-specific performance is intensified.<sup>3</sup> Smith's deconstruction is relatable for most site-specific performance. As Wilkie's (2002, p.150) demonstrates, this is especially true when the site-specific performance is taking place within an intentional community:

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<sup>3</sup> More on this concept of juxtaposition, later in this chapter

Not only does the use of non-theatre venues contribute to 'an enquiry into what theatre is and might be', it also incorporates a 'set of productive spatial metaphors, whereby practitioners use their focus on geographical space to explore a range of theatrical, conceptual, political and virtual spaces.'

What at first glance might seem to be a criticism of site by Smith (2019), is illuminated by Wilkie's analysis of the 'site' in site-specific theatre and performance. The 'productive spatial metaphors' are, in the case of the intentional community, used to symbolically transport the audience out of the intentional community and inhabit other 'spaces' that are linked through the geographical signifiers of the chosen site. Site-specific performance is proposed to interact with the site by 'operating within architectures that are not backdrops' (McLucas, Morgan, and Pearson 1995: 17, cited in Kaye 2000, p.55), which can suggest a cultural significance or even agency to the notion of a site. This thesis investigates the relationship between land, art, and artist when the site is not a derelict building, or uninhabited green space, but a communal living space. The performance space and the hosting site can co-exist, whilst having their individual properties and cultural and political meanings. 'Place... is explicitly constituted in performance itself, even where the 'site' may have a 'parallel' identity of its own. (CM: McLucas *et al.* 1995, p. 33. cited in Kaye 2000, p.55). Indeed, this research will then be able to be applied further than these explicitly 'uninhabited spaces', as no site is truly uninhabited, or without cultural significance. And when the audience member places their own experience of site, they can co-create a message with the performers that is both lasting and ephemeral (Kwon 2004, p. 11). "It is in these liminal spaces and with these heterogenous elements that archeology and performance work and negotiate identities, of people and things (Pearson and Shanks 2001, p. 54).

Addressed in this thesis will be the communities that inhabit a space beginning with the unintentional (on the microbial level, when discussing site-specific art works in the ocean). The investigation will continue to explore means of exchange for an interaction between the larger scale inhabitants (that is, human) who form and live in intentional communities.

Colloquially called communes (ibid), intentional communities, specifically in England and Wales have been in existence since 17404 (Metcalf, 2004, p.23). Interestingly, Wales and England have a long history of artist and back-to-the-land intentional communities<sup>5</sup> (ibid). I had not come across these intentional communities based in the arts in all my institutionalised drama training. On the contrary, it was at an open mic in Cardiff where I learned of Coed Hills Rural Artspace, an intentional community for the arts, which existed just outside the city's limits. Years later, when speaking to members of that community; it was revealed the perceived anonymity – the lack of online presence or marketing - was deliberate and, like other intentional communities and their historical foundations, a political choice.

Professor Luke Martell from the University of Sussex teaches a course on alternative societies. Speaking on their founding in the UK he told Guardian journalist Sally Howard:

'These movements had a grand vision to change society, often along lines of economic communism, and rejected social norms such as monogamy and the concept of

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4 When Protestant refugees formed early intentional communities: Fulnek, Ockbrook, Gracehill and Fairfield (ibid).

5 See *The 38 Factors which can provide individual satisfaction* (Shenker, 1985, p.249).

traditional childhood. Of course, with the failure of the communist states, these revolutionary ideas lost currency, even as the communities they gave rise to live on'.

(Martell, cited in Howard, 2021)

Intentional communities in the UK, commonly, were formed in opposition to some cultural phenomenon which caused the group to 'other' themselves and form a living space which is outside mainstream society - both in ideology and spatiality (Metcalf 2004; Howard 2021). This grassroots and community focused ideology caught my attention as an academic and performance-maker. It occurred to me there might already be intentional communities where the place and purpose of performance in their society was debated. Even more appealing was the concept this debate might take place in practice as well as ideology. In the last sentence of the quote above, Professor Martell touched upon the conflict which drives this thesis, "these revolutionary ideas lost currency, even as the communities they gave rise to live on" (Sally Howard, 2021). Encapsulated here is a hint towards the ideologies which drove the founding of the most recent intentional community movement in the United Kingdom.

The intentional community movement of today, was likened by Howard (ibid) to the performative and idealistic practices of the Extinction Rebellion movement with, "its focus on low-carbon living" (ibid). Those who seek to distance themselves from the city and carbon-outputs are turning towards the isolated and idealistic intentional communities of today that are leading by example and striving for a different way of living which is more ecological and environmentally conscious. However, the ideological inconsistency which Martell (2021) spoke of is more relevant; although the practices of an intentional community might change, it does not take away from the value or merit of its dedication to the overarching ideologies.

Shenker (1986, p.114) stated, “the point is that if the community is to survive, it frequently cannot put its pure ideology into practice or risk outdated practices and even alienation from its spatial relatives.” Shenker continues to argue that, if an intentional community is to have the influence for social change it is seeking, it must be in good relations with the aforementioned neighbors (p.115), so they would be open to exchange whether that be intellectual or physical (ibid). This is proven to be true in Wales in regard to planning permissions, where a private citizen can report an individual to the Local Planning Authorities if they suspect a breach of the contract has been made (Henderson and Orford, 2019, pp.2-7). What Martell (2021) references could be not the shift away from a previous ideology; such as non-traditional childcare, relationships, personal food production (ibid) but rather, a practice. Furthermore, is the fact that monetary funding must be present on some level for an intentional community to persist, and it also helps to give status to the non-traditional way of life these communities practice (2021, p.116). If a community decides to open their doors to more external events or performances to add to the economic power of that community, as it is suggested by Shenker that many will do (1986, p.114); this research will be instrumental in giving a voice to the wants of the intentional community, to prevent exploitation. Site-specific performance plays a big part in intentional community spaces because of the overlap in the two fields. Both site-specific performance and intentional communities are ‘other’ as they exist outside of their traditional or assumed zones of function - mainstream society, and the orthodox theatre.

Similarly, site-specific performance lends itself to intentional community spaces as they are open to people travelling through. This is particularly true of the intentional communities formed with ecological ideologies underpinning their foundations. Additionally, when the performance at an intentional community is open to the public, that community’s ideology and practices are

clearly displayed to those visiting the site-specific performance. The audience will be exposed to a new way of life, and the community will be able to share what they do without having to explicitly give a tour or talk. The site-specific performance, in other words, has a great scope of benefit for those in the audience, but also, if done with care, the hosting community as well.

The ideologies which eco-conscious site-specific performances seek to promote by staging their productions within intentional community spaces can be fully represented through the combined practices of both parties. The discrepancy which develops, alluded to by Howard and Martell (2021), is between the ideologies of the intentional communities and the practices they develop over time (Shenker, 1986, p.116). This thesis expands the argument and focuses on the practices that the site-specific performance company employs within an intentional community space. It asks, *What practices are being explored to achieve a sustainable relationship between the land, art, artist in an intentional community space?*

In the Autumn of 2018, I moved on-site to Coed Hills and began my fieldwork. Living at the intentional community Coed Hills; I had the opportunity to closely and actively observe the artists and performers who visited the community and took extensive fieldnotes on their (and my) experiences. I was able to divine what was making the site-specific performances 'work' or not - from the perspective of the intentional community members. I could learn from the community members who had hosted performers and artists since the founding of the community in 1997. This embodied perspective was even more appealing and novel to me as a researcher. The following statement from *Creating Worlds: How to Make Immersive Theatre* aligns with my philosophy as a researcher performance-maker, doing fieldwork at the intentional community Coed Hills Rural Artspace, "it's a privilege to be working in a field that's so

uncharted, where every project is an opportunity to do something truly innovative” (Warren, 2017, viii). I share the sentiment that it is a privilege to devote such a great amount of time towards a field that is so uncharted. To live on-site as a member of Coed Hills Rural Artspace while actively participating as a researcher in residence and performance maker, was a privilege in every sense of the word. However, site-specific performance as a field of study, although not a practice, is relatively new to the world of academia and serious academic thought.

Site-specific performance, which sits under the umbrella of immersive theatre (Machon, 2013; Smith, 2019) is not dissimilar in the uncharted-ness of its field. Site-specificity of dance and visual art however, have been thoroughly interrogated and those findings can provide some insight to the history and foundations to this field of study of site-specific performance. Although I choose to have a particular perspective, as Kwon (2004) and Kaye (2001) would argue against Machon (2013) that site-specific performance is a form of site-specific art, and that from minimalism movement in the art world. Antithetical to the claim,

“If you have to change a sculpture for a site there is something wrong with the sculpture, (Kelly 1997) ” site-specific art, whether interruptive or assimilative, gave it self up to its environmental context, being formally determined or directed by it.

(Kwon 2004, p. 11)

Merideth Monk, a site-specific dancer and choreographer shares this same sentiment. Seeing the changing quality of her dance, as it moves from space to space not as a hinderance but as an exciting new element of site-specific dance. On her relationship with space as a choreographer and performer she wrote:

What satisfied me most about working in a nontheatrical space was that the process became a dialogue between an environment that already existed and me... I liked that I was not constructing a reality that would be the same no matter where I went.

(Monk, 1969, p 1 cited in Klotzel and Pavlik 2009, p. 34).

There are other overlapping agreements of the historical reasoning for site-specific performance and art. Kwon (2004), and Kaye (2001), and Monk (1969) attribute site-specific art and dance as coming out of the gallery or theatrical space to have an interaction with it's location, which would transform the work of art and make it, literally, specific to the site.

Also interesting to note is the shifting of role of the observer or audience member, to that of an active participant is shared in site-specific art (Kwon 2004, p.103), which was echoed in the movement of immersive art (Bishop 2006, p.102), and immersive theatre (Warren 2017).

Warren argued that immersive theatre gave the audience a fuller experience, noting the changing of the audience member's role from *passive viewer* to *active participant* (Warren, 2017). This change is made by, "give(ing) to the audience greater access to the performance" (ibid). I took this methodology and applied it to myself, as the researcher. To give myself a fuller understanding, I required more access to the rehearsal process and how the visiting artists interacted with daily life of the community members. To do this, I took systems of rehearsal and performance ideologies outlined by Augusto Boal; specifically the links to social change through the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2019) and the Rainbow of Desire (Boal, 1995). I also drew from ideologies by Richard Schechner and the vast works he authored on performance studies, both in and out of the orthodox theatre (1994, 2000, 2009, 2013); and Ben Spatz on their theories of embodiment (Spatz, 2017). These theories were tested in this new context of site-specific performance within an intentional community. Then, I refined my theories in accordance



and opposition to theirs and tested them again. The result was, I more deeply understood the complex social and environmental impacts of site-specific performance in an intentional community.

In *Chapter 1: Site-Specific Performance*, the first of literature review chapter of this thesis, I draw from case-studies of site-specific performance, investigating the practices of various site-specific performances from A Masque at Ludlow Castle (1634) to Darren Brown's Apocalypse (2012). Chapter 1 also tracks the chronological history of site-specific performance for a thematic analysis of site-specific performance. The themes: art, artist, land/environment, and community are established in this first chapter. These four themes have shaped the recording of my fieldnotes and provided a jumping-off point from which to analyze the varied performances that moved through Coed Hills during my fieldwork (2017-2019).

The second part of the literature review, Chapter 2: Sustainability in Site-Specific Performance explores the concept of sustainability in site-specific performance. This is carried out through environmental sustainability (4.1) and also emotional sustainability (4.2).

Chapter 3: Intentional Communities, introduces and defines the concept of the intentional community (5). Noting the differences in spatiality and ideology which define the intentional community versus the un-intentional, or 'light' community (Van de Grift, Vervoort and Cuppen: 10, 2017). In this section the current practices for site-specific performance in light intentional communities are outlined. In doing so, a wider field of study is opened up in the next chapter, titled: *Sustainable practices for site-specific performance in intentional communities*.

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, *Intentional Communities and Site-Specific Performance* I introduce the themes: art, artist, community, and land, showing their interconnectedness as a way to evaluate site-specific performance in intentional communities. In this chapter the shift away from the final performance and towards the rehearsal process is introduced via an introductory section about the artistic process within an intentional community. This chapter proposes the separate entities of art, artist, community, and land are better evaluated in conjunction with one another, and the sections reflect this in their titling (*Artist and Land*, *Land and Art*, *Artist and Community*) and subsequent exploration. In this chapter, I develop the notion of 'community mindedness' and how one concerns oneself with the community. This as a concept that seems to be at odds with another concept in intentional community ideology: self-sufficiency. This perceived binary between community mindedness and self-sufficiency in the context of sustainably relating oneself to a wider community is explored in this chapter.

In Chapter 5 I introduce the methods I used for this study which were ethnography and active participation. This evocative auto-ethnographic methodology underpinned my active-participant fieldwork at the intentional community of Coed Hills Rural Artspace, wherein I observed, assisted, and took extensive field notes. While living on site, I employed practice-as-research methodologies of the 'self' ([Arlander et al., 2017](#); [Spatz, 2017](#)), thinking critically on my place as researcher-in-residence as well as a performance maker and co-curator.

In Chapters 6 through nine, I outline my findings, specifically documenting my experience working with two artists visiting Coed Hills: Dorothea in 2018 (Chapter 7) and Skye in 2019 (Chapter 8). I analyse data produced as a result of these case study projects, in light of the themes of the literature review: art, artist, land/environment, and community. And finally, to test my theories, in July of 2019 I co-produced a one-day festival: *Coed Roots & Legends (2019)*, which I consider in Chapter 9.

I interviewed the eight community members who were living on-site at the time about their experiences with the various visiting artists and the lead-up to the performance. This grounded my findings in the experiences and understanding of the group I was studying. While living in the community for a year and observing the practices being explored in the community, I devised questions for the members surrounding these practices, asking for their opinions and experiences surrounding the visiting artists and performers living with them.

The interviews I conducted gave rise to essential components, or themes, for site-specific performance in intentional community spaces. The themes were: form/structure, freedom, self-sufficiency, and community-mindedness. These themes were useful in understanding *how* site-specific performance is practiced in intentional communities, and why the performances aren't always sustainable.

Through praxis I was able to test theories and explore answers to my research question: *What practices for sustainable site-specific performance are being explored in intentional community spaces?*

## Performance

It is necessary to give a broad understanding as to what this study refers to as 'performance' in the context of site-specific performance. The decision to use the term *performance* as opposed to *theatre* is intentional and done so for clarity, inclusivity, and preciseness. While *theatre*

signifies a play set in a traditional, or orthodox 'theatre setting', *performance* encompasses more art forms - such as performance art or site-specific installations. Performance can encompass many aspects of community life, as well as structured rehearsal techniques. Theatre is more limited in its explicit assumed expression.

However, this inclusivity gained by using the term 'performance' comes with it a whole field of theoretical and philosophical studies. To further narrow-down the scope of 'performance', Schechner's 6 'The Fan' (fig 1) can be used.

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6 Richard Schechner is a key academic and practitioner instrumental in developing the field of performance studies. In addition to his academic career and penning the first book investigating Environmental Theatre (1973), he continued his research through performance and rehearsal techniques and application with performance groups from within the university and the community. Schechner used his method of developing practices as praxis for refining his embodied and literary knowledge surrounding the emerging field of performance studies throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. It was during this time he created 'The Fan'.



Figure 1, The Fan (Schechner, 1988, xvi)

In *The Fan* (figure 1) Schechner (1988, 2009) breaks down the components that can fall under the term: performance. These types of performance are placed into the shape of a fan, as the commonality of these different types of action spring fourth from the inspiration point of performance, much like stalks from a fan (p.xvi). This study is interested primarily in, 'Performance in everyday life, sports, entertainments', which sits between 'Eruption and resolution of crises', and 'Play'.

At the top, there is, 'Rites, ceremonies', then the next in line is 'Shamanism', followed by the inclusion of the political sphere: 'Eruption and resolution of crises'. In the middle of the fan is

'Performance in everyday life, sports, entertainments', followed by 'Play' then 'Art making process' and, finally, 'Ritualization'.

The relation of 'performance in everyday life, sports, entertainments', to its neighbors on The Fan (figure 1) are significant. These relationships help further understanding of the kind of performance this study will cover, and the types of performance this study deliberately does not investigate.

First, is important to note the 'Play' section of the fan referred to an action taken for *pure pleasure*, as opposed to practicality or an audience (ibid). Secondly, the 'entertainment' type of performance, which is primarily covered in this study, sits between 'Play' and 'Eruption and resolution of crisis', which was inspired by Turner's (1974) model of the four actions of the social drama<sup>7</sup> (Schechner, 1988, p.201). This was to show that performance for entertainment fits between the imaginary and impractical and that which is purely results - based, or what Turner (1974) and Schechner (1988) would call the aesthetic drama versus the social drama.

Schechner (1988, p.176) also outlined a broad criterion which could define the chronological practices for both the audience and the performer, to explain what constitutes an aesthetic drama, or performance for entertainment:

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<sup>7</sup> Turner's model (1974) of the four actions of the social drama as: 1) Breach 2) Crisis 3) Redressive action 4) Reintegration. (Turner, 1974, cited in Schechner, 1988, pp.211-218). An example of this, in connection to practices for sustainable site-specific performance in intentional community spaces will be further explored in Chapter 9, Coed Roots & Legends (12).

1. Gathering
2. Playing out an action or actions
3. Dispersing

... the pattern of gathering, performing, dispersing is a specifically theatrical pattern.

The audience and environment interact in a certain way, and this constitutes performance (Schechner, 1988, p.177). To further define the criteria of 1: 'Gathering', Schechner elaborated this must be, "a place that is not 'home' for any group" (p.172). Site-specific performance is noted to be, "a nomadic form" (Tompkins, 2012, p.13) which is in contrast with the *host* and *ghost* (Birch and Tompkins, 2012). Schechner's criterion of site-specific performance shifted since the writing of his book in 1988. Birch and Tompkins (2012) share this sentiment in their book, *Performing Site-Specific Theatre*, and the shift is reflected in this study. For the purpose of exploring the findings this study yielded, it is necessary to take Schechner's definition as more of a jumping off point. Similarly, Eugino Brba (1995) wrote:

The theatre's raw material is not the actor, not the space nor the text, but the attention, the seeing, the hearing, the mind of the spectator. Theater is the art of the spectator.

Just like Peter Brook's boastful (if not colonial) line, "I can take any space and call it a blank stage" (Brook 1968). Barba (1995) states that the making of theatre is not solely down to the subjective intent of the act-or. According to Barba (1995) the spectator is integral to solidify the merging of time and space to create another world, the performance. Schechner's Fan (figure 1)

makes this analysis more nuanced, with classifications of performance 'types', however, the basic principle of the three practitioners' claims is the same: the intent of the performer to perform, with a spectator to observe the performance defines this performance<sup>8</sup> for entertainment.

## Host and ghost

*Host* and *ghost* are two terms which further explore the connotations of a physical site, or architecture wherein a performance takes place (the host). And the performance as an entity itself (the ghost). These terms are put forth by Pearson and McLucas (Pearson 2012, p.70. Kaye 2000, p.52-57), based on his feelings of personal histories being tied to a *host*, and how the *ghost* can be used strategically to represent more than the physical setting of a performance:

In the early 1990's, and much influenced by Tschumi's theoretical perceptions, Cliff McLucas, designer and co-artistic director of Welsh theatre company Brith Gof, began to characterize site-specific performance as the coexistence and overlay of two basic sets of architectures: those of the extant building or what he called the *host*, that which is *at*

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<sup>8</sup> When there is no spectator to observe, the performer forgoes their role of 'performer', and the act becomes ritual. Ritual is on Schechner's *Fan* (1973) (fig. 1); and Web (1994) (fig 2); and the concept of ritual is very closely linked to performance in general. This is not to say the role which the performer or audience member place themselves in is not mutable. Or even that, in a site-specific production with only one performer and only one audience member that the role of each might be different from what is felt by them, versus what is thought of them by the other.



site- and those of the constructed scenography and performance, or what he called *ghost*, that which is temporarily brought to site.

The nuances of *host* and *ghost* provide specificity which was needed for the clarity of argument and investigation of this study's research question: *What practices for sustainable site-specific performance are being explored in intentional communities?*

As Pearson (2012) continued to investigate the *host* and *ghost* in *Performing Site-Specific Theatre*, he made three points about the *host* and *ghost*. Firstly, the *host* has its own unique quality which is inherent to the narrative. Secondly, the *ghost* will, or will not, choose to interact with the *host*, citing these two entities as, "functionally independent" in practice (2012, p.70). Thirdly, the interaction of the *host* and *ghost* (if the creative team so chooses) also need not be explicitly literal. This is to say, the placement of an unfamiliar *ghost* might add an aesthetically pleasing dynamic, by means of a perceived binary which can be compelling to a performance. Something which Turner (2004, p.373) calls, "the creative potency of an uneasy fit."

However, there is one key element missing from this analysis and that is the witness. McLucas (1995) wrote

'the real site-specific works that we do, are the ones where we create a piece of work which is hybrid of the place, the public, and the performance'

(McLucas, Morgan and Pearson 1995, p 48 cited in Kaye 2000, p.55)

The concept of the witness comes in to play here, and is important for defining and discussing what makes site-specific performance. The witness of the site-specific performance is that observer or audience member who witnesses the piece of performance and through their interpretation of the

events the performance is propelled into reality. (Kaye 2000, 55-57). They can be a community member or have some strong emotional or cultural tie to the host or ghost (ibid).

Pearson (2012) does not expand to explicitly include the people of an intentional community being part of the *host* entity in Site Specific Performance as his workings of host applies directly to the physical layout of the environment. For the purpose of this study, in keeping with Pearson's (2012, pp. 35-36) definition, the *host* will not include the people who live on site, rather the, "core community members." Who are also the witnesses and co-creators of the site-specific performance, as their upkeep of the land and connection to the land informs the subjective and individual meanings of the other witnesses (Kaye 2000, p.57).

#### The audience member versus the participant

The Host site is haunted for a time by a Ghost that the theatre-makers create. Like all ghosts it is transparent and the Host can be seen through the Ghost. Add into this a third term — the Witness, i.e. the audience, and we have a kind of a Trinity that constitutes the Work. It is the mobilisation of this trinity that is important — not simply the creation of the ghost. All three are active components in the bid to make site-specific work

(Kaye, 2000 p.128)

Foundational to this study is the concept of an audience. As this chapter discusses, the idea of what an audience is and the role an audience member might play can be varied. In addition, there can be some cross-over and changing of the role an audience member might play over the duration of a single performance (Schechner, 1988, p.219).

The decision to use the term, 'audience member', as opposed to 'participant' is due to two primary factors. First, the term 'participant' will be used in the traditional context in the later chapters of this study, when referring to my methodology, case-studies, and findings. It is true that some practitioners use the terms interchangeably, to mean all audience members are participants in site-specific theatre (ibid). It can also be argued this is *not* true for the type of site-specific performance analysed in this thesis. Although the concept of participation is sometimes involved, with the role of an audience member at a site-specific performance, it is not always present. The audience member participates with the environment in a site-specific performance, which is integral to the performance.

However, the human emotional interaction can be on any level. In the context of this thesis, 'participation' is a component of a role for an audience member, as opposed to a definitive criterion.

When a performance is site-specific, the relationship with the audience becomes more relevant to the performers. Although the relationship with an audience is in the background of this study, the knowledge will benefit the reader when the staging style promenade is discussed (Chapter 3: Intentional Communities, Section 3), as well as the concept of participation more fully, below.

### Participation

When applied to performance and art, the concept of "participation" takes on an intricate and layered presence, slightly differing, yet stemming from the O.E.D 's definition, "the action of

taking part in something” (Oxford University Press 2015). Christopher Small in his book *Musicking* (1998), ruminates on what constitutes ‘taking part’ from the perspective of the audience member. He asks the reader, “What does it mean to take part in a performance of Western concert music in a concert hall in these closing years of the twentieth century?” (Small 1998, p.16).

Small expands on the audience member’s role in the act of ‘taking part’ as not limited to those who are the ‘spectator’ but all who prepare and care for the event space. He says their contribution directly effects the outcome and adds to the representation and presentation of the event as a whole. To Small (1988, p.35), the degree of participation is great and widespread. To further his point, he remarked on concert halls:

There is the internal organization of the hall itself. Like any other enterprise in our society, it is organized hierarchically with its boss and its administrators as well as its proletariat, whose joint task it is to keep the place running smoothly throughout the season without the appearance of effort.... Most of these people are invisible to us or at least taken for granted and unnoticed even when we do glimpse them at work, but all are working to create the illusion of a magical place set aside from everyday life, where we can contemplate, in stillness and in silence, the works of master musicians. All are contributing to the nature of the musicking, and their working relationships of the events that take place in the hall and thus of the meanings that the performances generate.

Often, when performance or art is placed in a more traditional setting - such as an orthodox theatre with a proscenium arch or museum with physical boundaries and frames surrounding the artwork, it is clearer if one is either viewing the performance as an uninvolved voyeur or participating<sup>9</sup>. But, when the boundaries are blurred between the performer and voyeur, the degree or presence of participation becomes less clear and more up to interpretation. Small's point about the invisible task force, maintaining the illusion of ease can be applied to the audience members' hoped experience in a promenade performance piece. Using ushers, commonly in costume, the audience member is led through the world of the performance space, allowing them to suspend their disbelief a little more, the literal threshold of the performance is crossed with a guide, as opposed to alone.

Participation can be used as a dramatic device and then disposed of at will because the modern day theatre is not always an inherently participatory event (Smith, 1988, pp. 39-49). Although participation may be used as an element in orthodox theatres, this thesis will discuss whether a distinguishing feature of site-specific performance is that one cannot take the participatory element away. Even when not consciously done, can one not help but interact with the environment of the performance, when the performance employs site specificity? The land or space interacting with the spectator is a factor that informs the creation, with the classification of 'site specific'.

If participation does not exist solely by the action itself, but also by its outcome or effect – 'participation in performance' for this thesis, can be defined as: *Any theatrical performance or*

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<sup>9</sup> Like in a panto. This concept of performance as play could be represented by the make-believe games played by children.

*experience where, to some varying degree, the 'other' becomes involved with the physical environment or people of a performance.*

The accidental and integral audience

The relationship with the audience also becomes more relevant to the core community members when a site-specific performance takes place in an intentional community. For this reason, this thesis will use terminology that exists to demystify the audience / performance relationship within intentional community settings.

The *integral* and *accidental* audience, as outlined by Richard Schechner in his book *Performance Theory* (1988, p.220) will be of special significance to this research and following case-studies:

An accidental audience is a group of people who, individually or in small clusters, go to the theatre – the performances are publicly advertised and open to all. On opening nights of commercial shows, the attendance of the critics and friends constitutes an integral rather than an accidental audience.... An integral audience is one where people come because they have to or because the event is of special significance to them. Integral audiences include the relatives of the bride and groom at a wedding, the tribe assembled for initiation rites, dignitaries on the podium for an inauguration... every artistic community develops an integral audience: people who know each other, are involved with each other, support each other.

In the context of this study, the *accidental* audience member will refer to a person who is 'accidental' in their viewing of the performance, meaning they are not a part of the hosting community. The *integral* audience member will refer to a person who is a part of the community hosting the performance, socially (not living on site, but a part of the extended social community). Although the integral audience member pays less attention to the performance, their act of pilgrimage of attending the performance is ritualized and supportive (Schechner 1988, p.220). Both of these audience member types are placed in contrast with the core community member, who is a part of the 'hosting' community.

## Literature review: an introduction

This literature review is broken down into three chapters: *Site-specific performance*, *Intentional communities*, and *Sustainable practices for site-specific performance within intentional communities*. The literature review aims to set out a foundation of theory to frame this study's research question: *What are the practices for sustainable site-specific performance in intentional community spaces?*

To do this I will use texts from the disciplines of performance studies and cultural theory.

Performance is defined using Richard Schechner's text *Performance Theory* (1988, 2009) and using the Wheel (fig 1) and Web (fig 2), where the different types of performance are separated into their own entities, based on their function within society.

The concepts of land and environment are investigated broadly and then grounded in the context of site-specific performance. *Theatre & Environment* (2019) by Vicky Angelaki, focuses largely on a subset of performance studies: 'eco-theatre in natural environments'. The text is used to explore the semiotics and ideologies, while also debating the practices of 'eco-theatre'.

First, a chronological history of site-specific performance brings the reader up to date with the influences and changing functions of site-specific performances, finishing with the exact type of site-specific performance this thesis investigates.

Next, the themes of land and environment are explored in terms of how they relate to site-specific performance. Meanwhile, the analysis draws out themes from which to compare the



varied performances this thesis investigates, in the case-studies and findings. The themes are land and environment, art or performance, artist or performer and community. Through these themes, the practices of sustainability in intentional communities will be explored (6).

*Environmental Theatre* (Schechner, 1976) and the *Cambridge Introduction to Performance Studies* (Shepherd, 2016) are used to further investigate where site-specific performance fits in an intentional community.

The research also seeks to find out if this juxtaposing of cross disciplinary theories can be utilised for sustainable practices in future performances. In the final chapter of this literature review, I ask the core research question of this study: What practices for sustainable site-specific performance are being explored in intentional community spaces?

## Literature Review Chapter 1: Site-Specific Performance

### Chronological history of site-specific performance in Britain and the United States

As established in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Performance, there are different kinds of performance. This was explicitly noted in *The Fan* by Schechner (fig 1). Additionally, there can be some crossover between performance types, and *The Web* (fig 2, below) reflects this by showing the interconnectivity of performance types. As performance types come from specificity of intent (Brook, 1968; Boal, 2019), *The Web* (fig 2) shows how this sometimes-unconscious overlap can still be made sense of. Schechner updated *The Fan* (fig 1) and expanded it to make *The Web* (fig 2) to be used in conjunction with one another, and this act framed his own practice (1988, xix). Number five on *The Web* (fig 2) is 'Contemporary Environmental Theatre'.

According to this passage by Schechner (1994) 'Contemporary Environmental Theatre' is the term and idea from which site-specific performance was born (Schechner 1994, McKinnie 2012,

p.22). Schechner places this at the center of the Web (fig 2) because it was his most passionate field of research and practice (ibid).

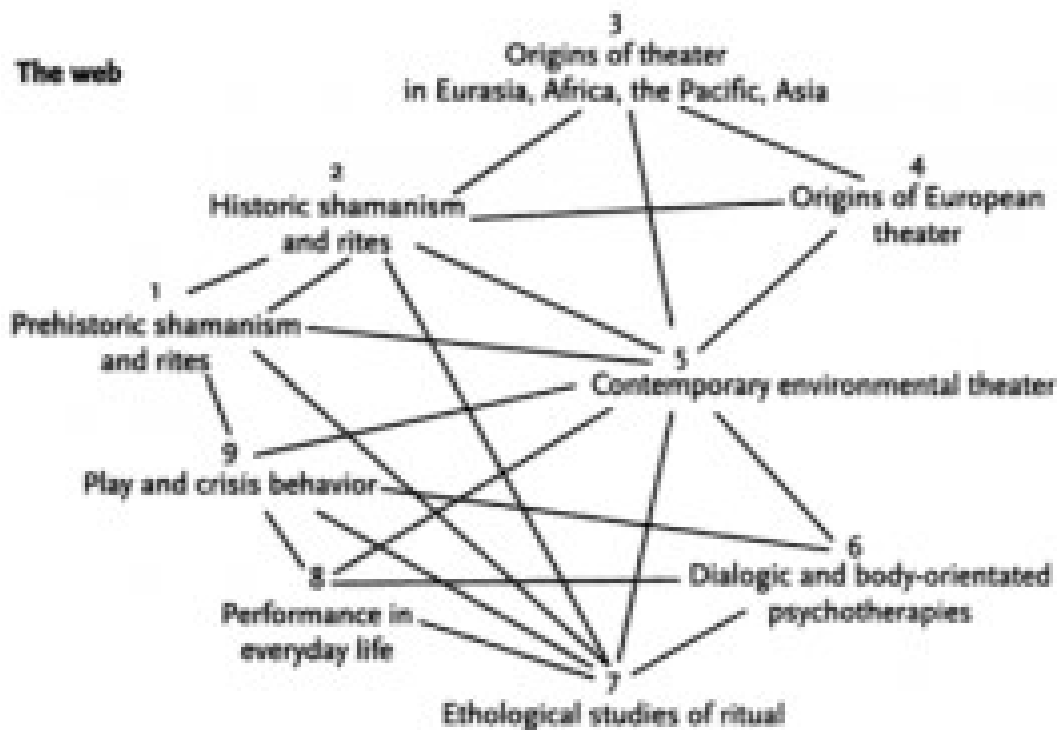


Figure 2, The Web, (Schechner, 1988, xi).

'The Web' (fig. 2) diagram was designed by Schechner (1988, xvii) to be a more 'representation of how much interaction there is between the various performance types. It is noted by Schechner (xvii) there are emerging technologies<sup>10</sup> which might add new performance types to The Web, in the future.

<sup>10</sup> This has been proven to be true as the introduction of video and VR. An exciting example of a site-specific performance using new technologies is Chicago Shakespeare Theatre's production of *Measure for Measure* (2014). This was filmed site-specifically through the city, and the audience was guided through the city via an app downloaded to their phones. The audience

As number three on The Web (fig 2) establishes, performance happens in 'everyday life' as well as for 'entertainment' (Schechner, 1994, ix). Different portrayals of the performance types are represented in The Web (fig 2), as it shows how they can interact and overlap with each other. For example, finding components from "3: Historic shamanism and rites"<sup>11</sup> present in '5: Contemporary environmental theatre'<sup>12</sup> is common, not only on the stage but also in everyday life. For Schechner the difference between '3: Historic shamanism and rites' and '5: Contemporary environmental theatre', is found in the vantage the observer takes (130, 159). To use Schechner's own example of this phenomenon, a group of monks chanting at the Brooklyn academy demonstrates how more than one type of performance can co-exist. In this case, contemporary environmental theatre and historic shamanism and rites are represented). Furthermore, through the act of the performance, a transformation is able to take place. This means what begins as a rite, or ceremony can be transformed to entertainment through the performative act of the ritual (ibid) and the vantage of the observer. This is important to understand when defining what this thesis will refer to as site-specific performance, and how the analysis will include not only the final performance, but also the rehearsal process - which, although not intended for an audience, is still under the umbrella of performance (xviii).

Other schools of thought on the origins of site-specific theatre and performance cite the site-specific art and dance movements which were born of minimalism in the 1960's (Kaye 2000, p. 26) and the want to leave the environment of gallery spaces (Kaye 2000, ibid, Kwon 2004, p.1).

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would follow a GPS ordinance to a specific location, to unlock each scene (Baker, 2014; Pacheco, 2018).

11 Such as Monks chanting

12 Such as the example of Measure for Measure outlined previously on page 26 (footnote 10)

The term 'environment' has multiple meanings when placed in conjunction with theatre and performance. Schechner's *Environmental Theatre* (1988) was not the same kind of theatre referred to as the performances covered in *Theatre & Environment* (Angelaki, 2019). *Environmental Theatre* (1988) analysed the physicality of staging and rehearsal practices, imagining 'environments ecological or theatrical... not only as spaces but as active players in complex systems of transformation (1994, xi, Pearson and Shanks 2001 p 5-6). In this case, the physical environment takes on a major role in the performance, influencing what Schechner calls 'complex systems of transformations' (ibid), or the journey the performance takes the audience member on. Systems of transformation are the basis for social change and human growth, in general (Bateson 1958, pp.171-97; cited in Schechner 1994, p.187), which is his ultimate goal for an audience (pp.186-193). *Theatre & Environment* (Angelaki, 2019) mainly critiques the ideological philosophy of a performance, providing scriptural analyses of a selected grouping of performances, focusing on the content of message of the theatre piece. Both these texts are useful in the framing of this literature review's theory as they investigate the ideological and the practical practices of site-specific performance.

*Theatre & Environment* offers chapters with detailed critique of ecologically idealistic performances. These critiques are focused on the content of the message of the performance, via the means of scriptural analysis. Authorial intent and an ecological message are critiqued, as opposed to practices or rehearsal techniques. According to Angelaki (2019, p.9) it is no surprise to see that popular scientific findings can be presented to a wider audience, and in lay man's terms through the medium of theatre:

Publications probing the issue of performance and climate change from different specialist angles and gaining from the growing interest in the relationship between theatre and science more broadly.

Angelaki, in the quote above, commented on communicating scientific findings through the medium of the theatre. This interplay between science and theatre relates to the research question this thesis seeks to answer in the intermingling of ideology and practice, what Shenker refers to as: the tension between ideology and reality (p 42). Topics such as carbon output, accepted social norms, for instance in childcare and relationships, and participation in capitalism are commonly challenged by intentional communities through their practices, which stem from their overarching ideologies (Shenker, 1986, p.67). Although the ideology is clearly stated, the actions that are taken to uphold an ideology will sometimes lead to tension in an intentional community (ibid). The practices that either an individual or a group take are called by Shenker (1986, p.67), "some social activities that are linked by ideological prescription and others are not". But both are justified in intentional community spaces, on the basis that the group will influence and be influenced by these activities that might sit outside the 'ideological sphere' of the intentional community (p.43). This means that, due to the nature of the intentional community, those who wish to visit the site or produce site-specific theatre should be allowed to do so (ibid). This is another reason the investigation of practices within intentional community spaces is relevant.

When asking what practices are being explored for sustainable site-specific performance in community spaces, it is shown that there are not practices outlined for sustainability. It is usual only that 'social activities' - which can include site-specific performance - should be allowed, for

the benefit<sup>13</sup> of the greater community. In the same way site-specific performance lends itself to discussion of climate change (Pearson, 2010, p.102; Angelaki, 2019) site-specific performance in an intentional community, places the ideological environmental themes found in a text and the practiced ideology of environmental performance (Schechner, 1994) into the same realm. In doing so, there is more scope to fully understand the issues addressed in a text and to see more clearly, by example, the solutions proposed by the performance makers and the intentional community.

A hope of placing site-specific performance in an intentional community is that the setting can show, as opposed to tell, an audience that there is a place where one can exist 'outside the system', or at least outside of neo-liberalist isolation of the individual (Shenker, 1986, p.3). In the case of site-specific performance, the relationship between the science surrounding climate change and the land and environment of the *host* have their own 'dialogue', a counter-cultural practical socio-solution (Birch and Tompkins, 2012, p.70). Implied in this setting choice, is an alternative to mainstream society which commonly has underpinnings of environmental change (Machon, 2013, p.89).

Since the late 1980s, there has been a divergence from the traditional definition of environmental theatre, which has bred site-specific performance (Machon 2013, pp.31-3). Perhaps this is because the relationship a performance or *ghost* has with a *host* has become the unique phenomenon for which site-specific performance is now defined (ibid). Machon's (2019) definition of the term: 'Site-specific' states is an umbrella term for which other performance

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<sup>13</sup> Some benefits, according to Shenker (1986) include: meeting the needs of the younger community members (41), combatting the risk of 'over-integration' (43) and further alienation from society (44).

types fit underneath. *Site-sympathetic*, or *site-responsive* performance are yet more subsets of site-specific performance (Punchdrunk and Machon, 2019, p.251). Both of these performance types - *sympathetic* and *responsive* - rely heavily on the *host* during the writing and rehearsal process of the show. Leading immersive theatre company, Punchdrunk include 'site-specific' in *The Punchdrunk Encyclopedia* (2019) to provide a contrast to their preferred term: 'site-sympathetic' (ibid). For this company, the exciting and novel aspect for their site-sympathetic performances is gained with a 'impressionist' dynamic between the hosting site and the performance which creates a less literal and more metaphysical *ghost* (Machon 2019, p.251).

#### 1. Theatre practitioners and the embodied process of rehearsal

This section aims to explore different modalities of interpreting a character in their relationship to *site*, through the lenses of practitioners: Grotowski, Stanislavski, Meisner and Schechner. This is done with the hope that, once understood, the site-specific performance rehearsal process within intentional community spaces will be slightly demystified. By outlining key concepts from each well-known practitioner, the unique methodology of this thesis will be informed and guided by previous life works. What is appealing about these practitioners is their focus on the performance as well as the rehearsal process and that they all are used in the 'classical' style of contemporary acting training at conservatory. Rather than purely aesthetic analysis of performance, all four practitioners that are discussed in the proceeding section place major focus on the artistic process, rather than the final performance or relationship with an audience. Embodiment as a core concept will be explored as well as the act of repetition. Both these concepts are chosen for closer analysis as I predict they are also relevant to the role of artist or performer in community. Robbins (1980, p.124) asks, "where and how is one to seek those roads into the secret sources on inspiration?" Referring here to the artistic process, Robbins

enquires about finding the less obvious techniques that are required for an authentic performance.

This question can be easily expanded to many areas of ideology and practice, but in concerning site-specific performance in intentional community spaces; it hints at the unchartedness of this specific field of study. This sections aims to identify the paths to inspiration as practiced by Grotowski, Stanislavski, Meisner and Schechner in the hope their roads will pave the way for the gap in theoretical knowledge this study seeks to fill.

In the 1960s, practitioners were mixing rehearsal systems to develop new techniques. Ben Spatz (2007, p.140) supposed Grotowski's career-arching research question to be:

How can technique that is composed according to its direct perceptibility, as in dance or song, be made to carry organically out of human embodiment?

Grotowski seeks to answer how a performance can be freely performed (Grotowski cited in Stinespring, 2000; Spatz, 2007), meaning performed with perceived authenticity from the audience, and also from the perspective of the actor. Dance and song are performance genres which are easily perceived. Spatz, in their analysis of Grotowski's work gave the example of a movement, the visually stimulating dance. In this case the audience member-observer can clearly see the embodiment of genre. Auditory stimulates are also mentioned in Spatz's analysis, and song is proposed, as one can hear musical notes combined with a rhythm or melody. And these performances are cited in direct opposition to what Grotowski called "organic... human embodiment" (Grotowski cited in Spatz 2007, p.140).



The search for authenticity of expression within a specific form, judged on the quality by an audience member-observer, is the quest from which many most post-Stanislavsky acting philosophies spring from. To hone in upon the studies of intentional communities as the host for a site-specific performance, the rehearsal process for orthodox theatre performances will now be examined through the practices of Constantin Stanislavski, Jerzy Grotowski, Augusto Boal, and Richard Schechner. With Stanislavski, there was a profound shift away from traditional spectator-led staging, and this began during the rehearsal process. As Toporkov (2004, p.116) stated, “rehearsing without staging, without focusing on where the audience would eventually be.”

This was Stanislavski’s answer to the question supposed by Spatz (2019), of Grotowski: How does an actor embody innately performative song or dance, and express it with an authenticity powerful enough to pass judgment of an audience of observers? (ibid). And how can an actor perform with an organic ease which will allow them to convey the message of the text or movement with believability? (ibid). If the actor is placed within a community, then the embodied avenues into organic performance interact with the hosting environment and community, at-length. This unique research focuses on the rehearsal process, rather than the end result of the performance. For this purpose, the rehearsal process, and ideologies of what allows for authentic performance will be investigated through an embodied lens, to explore the practices of site-specific performance within intentional community spaces.

The organic rehearsal style mentioned above is broadly what academic and practitioner Ben Spatz (2007, p.140) refers to as relating to, “training and technique”. Some embodied

components of Spatz's process and practice can be linked to the director and practitioner Meisner and his repetition techniques. These repetition techniques were informed by Stanislavski, who outlined practices for the rehearsal process in his book, *An Actor Prepares* (Stanislavski, 2013, p.30) and which Connolly and Ralley (2007, p 241) further expand upon, below:

Left to inspiration, the problem is exacerbated, as performance based on inspiration lacks systematic process. The actor's efforts are not underpinned by understanding, or subject to control; instead, there is an arbitrary quality.

A systematic process was introduced by Stanislavsky to de-mystify the acting process, the search for authenticity, and, in his own words, discover what conditions could produce, "creative nature" (Stanislavsky and Benedetti, 2010, p.166). In his *book An Actor Prepares* (2013), Stanislavsky introduced his concept of intentional and repeated physical practices, which would inform a performance to give the conscious mind more freedom, through a known repetition. This was done to allow the actors' subconscious mind to create and respond in a truthful way, which was not necessarily linked to a textual instruction. (Stanislavsky 2014, p.330; Connolly and Ralley, 2007, p.238).

Commonly known as, "The Method", (Durham, 2004, p.153) Meisner employed in his rehearsal process acts of word repetition (Stinespring, 2000, p. 98) to exercise and expand upon the non-verbal subtexts of a performance and to keep the actor, "in the moment" (ibid). Stinespring (p.98) explores further:

Meisner's "repetition exercise" functions as a destabilizer of truth in a Derridian sense because the principle that actors behave truthfully is an underlying theoretic subject to interpretation. Rather than pre-planned behavior, actors' instincts or emotional impulses are the driving force behind this truthful behavior. Instinct and impulse are not something preconceived but ephemeral.

These repeated sequences, be they verbal such as Meisner's exercises focused on re-acting<sup>14</sup> to one's scene partner, or physically repeated sequences like Spatz's movements, give the process a form or structure. This allows the mind of the performer to relax due to the familiarity, and reflexively listen to the body, noting how their body reacts, sub-consciously (ibid). Repetition and listening are Meisner's practices to attain authentic performance.

What practitioners of site-specific performance seek to do is harness this quality of embodiment to use it to answer the question, supposed by Spatz of Grotowski: How does one perform with authenticity from within a form which is so clearly technical - with obvious signifiers of the genre- such as song, or dance? Spatz seeks to perform with authenticity from the place of embodied technique; by first acknowledging the body as the first affordance (Spatz, 2017). This means the actor experiences the internal which then informs the external and perceivable, resulting in observable performance (Spatz, 2017, p.258). Spatz went into more detail, investigating and

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<sup>14</sup> "Acting is re-acting" Meisner (Stinespring, 2000, p. 98).

defining the different kinds of embodiment which performance and performance as research methodologies can utilise<sup>15</sup>.

Schechner, like Grotowski before him, employed the use of yoga asanas in his rehearsal room; what he called, “getting in touch,” with one’s body (Schechner, 1994, p.130). Yoga asanas were used as repeated movement sequences, and their purpose in Schechner’s rehearsal system was to identify emotions which were thought to be held in different areas of the body and to calm the mind through focusing on the repeated sequences. Consciously, the actor could exaggerate those interpretations to produce a visual representation of that internal feeling. All of this is done during the rehearsal process, with the goal that repeated exercises will inform the subconscious muscle-memory<sup>16</sup> of the actor carrying out the exercise.

The concept there is the muscle memory will be stored, subconsciously, to be re-called at a later stage of rehearsal or during the actual performance. Similar to Spatz’s (2020) proposal, here is an example of the body being the first threshold crossed towards authentic performance.

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<sup>15</sup> See, What a Body Can Do: “embodied knowledge, embodied practice, embodied technique, and embodied research.” (Spatz, 2015, pp. 11-14).

<sup>16</sup> “Muscle memory is a term commonly used in everyday discourse for the sort of embodied implicit memory that unconsciously helps us to perform various motor tasks we have somehow learned through habituation, either through explicit, intentional training or simply as the result of informal, unintentional, or even unconscious learning from repeated prior experience.” (Shusterman, 2011)

To summarise, the interaction between the knowledge which is sourced from the body by the mind is given the title 'embodied<sup>17</sup>'.

The concept of embodiment and connection to site has special relevance to site-specific performance for the following reasons:

First, the felt experience in the body, when placed in a *host* environment, will bring new insights to a performance which are authentic and embodied. This is because the personally felt interaction of the *ghost* and *host* manifest in an external representation by the actor, through the freeing of the unconscious mind. Just as the practices outlined in the previous section, where repetition was used to calm the thinking brain, placing the actor in an authentic environment might also free up the conscious brain. Otherwise, it would be working to suspend disbelief from the interior of an orthodox theatre or rehearsal room. Truthfulness and authenticity might be attained at less mental cost to the actor, under these prerequisites, in a full environment where all the senses are stimulated.

Pearson and Shanks explain their more sensual method for devising site-specific performance as tuning in to the feeling of the site as the first jumping of point in *Theatre/Archeology* (2001).

Similar to stimulating the senses, allowing the actor the right to fail might incur less pressure on the actor to perform and thus enjoy the process more; commenting on the 'poetics of failure as a

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<sup>17</sup> Embodiment will also be discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, in a methodological context.

concept Bennett shares: “I’ve adopted a creative practice that mines the treasures of failure, and I have promoted failure’s potential as a method of scholarship (Bennett 2011, p.127).

The orthodox theatre carries with it a multitude of signifiers (Schechner, 1988, p.337) that can cause stress to the person performing; resulting in the actor ‘watching’ themselves, something which is usually warned against on stage and in the rehearsal process as it takes them out of the moment. However, it is this awkwardness that the group Elevator Repair Service strives for!

Elevator Repair Service’s poetics of failure is predicated upon a zealous awkwardness affected by an ‘onslaught of constant disruptions’ or misfires (2011: 152), such as a character who accidentally wanders ‘into the wrong set’ or the performance being interrupted by ‘the lights going out mid-scene’ (153). Human awkwardness.

(Bailey 2011 cited in Bennett 2011, p. 129)

Second concerns the practices of a site-specific rehearsal process. When a performer is allowed to use the site-specific performance space then the time the performer spends in the space can also influence the unconscious reactions and emotions felt in the body. Not only in performance, but in the practices leading up to the performance. Conceivably more intently in site-specific performance, the authenticity felt, and feelings performed are divined by setting, or perhaps, the sense of self in the setting. Cliff McLucas confirms this theory in his practice with Cardiff Lab Theatre:

I want to constitute performance as a discontinuous and interrupted practice of different modes of expression, of varying types and intensities, in which different orders of narrative can run simultaneously, in which dramatic concept may spring from site, not story, and which may include rapid changes in mode and material.

(McLucas 1998, p. 40-41)

In relation to my research question, *What are the practices for sustainable-site specific performance in intentional communities?*; one must continue to explore the techniques and frameworks from the field of performance studies.

This study, like the field of performance studies itself, is interdisciplinary (Schechner, 1988, xix); and thus the theoretical framework draws across disciplines. In the following sub-section, 'Rehearsal Processes of the Orthodox Theatre, Compared with Embodiment of Site-Specific Performance (3.3), key practitioners who were once experimental, and whose practices are now normalised (Richard Schechner, 1973); will be presented with main arguments and additions that inform site-specific performance within an intentional community.

## **2. Rehearsal processes of the orthodox theatre, compared with embodiment of site-specific performance**

When a site-specific production moves to an intentional community with an environmental approach, the rehearsal process becomes more than the orthodox theatre actor's rehearsal process<sup>18</sup>. This is because the cast are using the space of a community, as opposed to the traditional theatre, a building which is left unoccupied most of the time (Brecht et al., 2015, p.26). If the current practices for site-specific performance in intentional communities are influenced by the classic theatre practitioners; exploration of their themes in accordance with the new spatiality of an intentional community will give insights on the impact the *ghost* will have on the *host*, outside the performance. The theatre practitioners who have previously outlined their

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<sup>18</sup> In this case, where the actors travel to a rehearsal room somewhere far from the final performance space, usually the orthodox theatre.

rehearsal processes will inform where clarity is still needed in terms of defining a practice for site-specific performance within intentional communities.

Stanislavski instructed his actors to rehearse as if in a real environment, where the spectator's viewpoint is multi-focal (Stanislavski, 2014). For example, if using the Stanislavski method for rehearsing a performance, a company might set-up a rehearsal room to reflect a kitchen, which is rooted in orthodox rehearsal practices. Where the Stanislavski *environmental* rehearsal process will deviate is in the choice to not mark out where the audience would stand. In addition to the environmental and spatial freedoms allowed, the rehearsal process would also seek to eliminate the concept of time. In not making time limits for any improvisation or scene duration, the character work becomes more ritualised in rehearsal; with the audience being an integral one such as the other cast members and production team. The goal of these rehearsal techniques is to add depth to the performance, divining character out of script and bringing a muscle - or at least non-imagined - memory into the body of the actor<sup>19</sup>. Here, the influence that environment, space, and time have on the artistic process is represented.

Jerzy Grotowski was influenced by Stanislavski, in centring the rehearsal process around an individual's experience, that of the actors. He did this by creating physical movement sequences, seemingly unlinked to the text of a script. Where Stanislavski was more based in improvisational and repetitive actions linking to character, Grotowski designed his sequences by borrowing from Yogic values and terminology, terming them, "Movement Asanas" (Kapsali, 2010). Grotowski would dedicate months of the rehearsal process to embodied character

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<sup>19</sup> This is what would later inform Environmental Theatre, where this rehearsal process becomes performance practice.



development. Based in Stanislavski's practices that claimed a need for the actor to react as their character truthfully and honestly in any situation; Grotowski's assumption here was if the actor could practice what it was like to move as their character so much that it becomes natural; this need for truthful action would be fulfilled on stage.

Richard Schechner was also a contemporary of Grotowski and was influenced by the experimental theatre and 'happenings' gaining popularity in the 1960s and 70s. Participation with the audience was becoming instrumental in the outcome of the performance in some cases.

As this type of audience involvement was common it was no wonder that the rehearsal process was trying to find a way to prepare the actor; and emulate the spontaneity that an audience member's participation could add to the dynamic of the live performance. In the Stanislavski method, as in Grotowski's; the actor is given time to embody their character in a myriad of different situations, either related to the text or not. According to Stanislavski and Grotowski, embodiment of character would make it easier to perform and thus, the character appears more natural, organic, and 'believable'.

Forced Entertainment is a performance group that utilizes methods contrary to those outlined in the section above. Below is a passage which describes a site-specific performance by Forced Entertainment from 1997:

As a soundtrack plays over its speakers, the bus climbs to Sky Edge, above the Manor Park estate, beyond which the city centre and its industrial and suburban sprawl reach out into the distance. Here, once the driver Ray has pointed out the place where he first worked in the city, his home, and 'the place where he was married fifteen years ago', the party is joined by Alan, a 'professional' tour guide seemingly worse-the-wear for drink, played by company member Richard Lowdon. As the bus criss-crosses various parts of the city, Alan offers a guide to its streets and landmarks which becomes progressively more distracted...

(Kaye 2000, p. 8)

Tim Etchells, writer and director for Forced Entertainment (ibid) explains his process for devising performance must acknowledge that the actors, try as they might, cannot embody a whole city. (ibid). Thus, he incorporates this uneasy fit into the text of his plays, “the company engage in a 'writing over the city' which reflects the notion that;

The space that we really live in is a kind of electronically mediated one. And it feels like one's landscape – the source of one's images, the things that haunt you – are likely to be second, third, fourth-hand'

(Kaye 1996, p 236 cited in Kaye 2000 p. 7)

Here, the end-goal is not perfect inhabitation of role, but a self-conscious new reality which is shared in co-creation with the host, and the ghost the witness. (Kaye 2000, p. 8)

Goat Island, like Forced Entertainment, is a performance group which uses an experimental model of exploring connection (Bennett 2011). One aspect of these company's unique modes of enquiry into connection are called the poetics of failure. This is an 'unorthodox and eccentric model of performance as failure' (Bailes 2011) that claims:

Failure challenges the cultural dominance of instrumental rationality and the fictions of continuity that bind the way we imagine and manufacture the world'

(Bailes 2011: 2 cited in Bennett 2011, p.129)

Alternative to the likes of Grotowski, Stanislavski and Meisner, Goat Island and Forced Entertainment's approaches to performance are from an iconoclastic and playful state (ibid). This subversive practice seeks to make the connection with the audience or witness through

recognizing the awkwardness or real life and turning away from the traditional presentational, or 'perfect' goal that many schools of traditional performance preach to be the ideal (126).

As Schechner (1994) himself states on the back of the 15<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary edition of Environmental Theatre:

Here are exercised which began as radical departures from standard actor training etiquette and which stand now as classic means through which the performer discovers his or her true power of transformation.

This type of rehearsal or artistic process has become widespread and is now the norm - to pick and choose different techniques for the actor to use in the rehearsal room, yet they still do not deviate from 'traditional theatre's pursuit of a fixed representation or product' (Bennett 2011, p. 126).

There has been much thought around artistic process as systems of rehearsal, are aimed at the preparation for orthodox theatre performances. The data falls short when exploring practices for site-specific performance, and rehearsal process in the intentional community. I make the distinction here for the rehearsal process to reflect the unique positionality of this study. As the *ghost* will be having prolonged contact with the *host* and *witness*, their process of interacting with the community and land will function as a part of the site-specific rehearsal process. This discussion is continued in the methodology Chapter (8.4), which brings in community performance techniques from Petra Kupperts (2019), Jason Warren (2017) in practices of community theatre and creating immersive theatre. Both these texts touch on the relationships between a *host* and *ghost* and *witness* with community members. Although these texts present

studies in relation to communities, the intentional community is still not mentioned. This research seeks to fill this theoretical gap.

### 3.4 Social and physical environments influencing site-specific performance

If a performance is devised, the social environment plays a vital role in every step of the artistic process. In the last section embodiment was discussed as an element of the site-specific performance rehearsal process (3.2) and it was shown the environment also affects the body of the performer. Ben Spatz, in the introduction to their book *Blue Sky Body* (2020, xiv), agreed, “certainty there is no ethical or epistemological line which separates the body from its environment.”

The physical environment was deconstructed in its influence and affectation on the body in the rehearsal process, but what of the social environment? The social environment has an equal effect on the site-specific performance, including the writing or devising of the script (Schechner, 1994).

This can be traced back to the earliest performances, where side comments and even plot lines informed the audience members of social dramas, political or economic conflicts of the time. It is a common practice to study the script of a play to gain better insights into the everyday life of the peoples who first performed or penned the script.

We must begin to deal with 'what it is', not 'what it might have been' or even 'what it resembles'.

Instead, we might concentrate on the sensual experiences of its individual agents, performance preserved in the bodies and memories of its varying orders of participants?. Touch, proximity, texture ...

In site-specific performance, the *host* plays an interesting part for the experience of the audience member. This is true in not only the establishment of setting, but also as a key factor in the interpretation of space, time, and place. Additionally, the witness is integral in the defining of the experience of the performance (Kaye 2000 p.128).

A phenomenon of site-specific performance is the witness willingly accepting the changing of their own role. And this phenomenon is directly linked to the *host*. It could be argued that when an audience member arrives at the place of gathering for a site-specific performance, it is their personal identity which is at the foreground of that journey. As referenced earlier in this thesis, the site-specific performance can be a space of liminality for the witness (Pearson and Shanks 2001, p. 54). And this journeying of role is influenced by both the social and physical environment.

Today, the performance goer, especially the theatregoer, believes themselves to be acting with autonomy in their day-to-day life. It is their *choice* to take on the role of the orthodox theatre audience member, a witness. The audience member's everyday role changes upon entering the site-specific performance space; from active participant of one's own life to that of audience member. Regardless of the level of participation, the audience member is now operating within the environment of the *host* and *ghost*, they have purview of the relationship - both with the performer and the space.

In defining what constitutes a performance space, it was problematically (Shanks 2001, p.185) argued by Peter Brook that the space changes only because we are led to perceive it differently.

The mind, Brook wrote, is the primary factor which shapes the role of a performance space. And the unshaped role of the space, according to Brook, is based on expectation and tradition. The mutable quality of a performance space is foundationally sourced from the intent of the performer. Thus, the possibilities of space and performer are changed or influenced. With participation, the audience member is allowed to 'play' along, suspended make-believe<sup>20</sup>. Brook (1968, p.11) boasts in the opening line of his book, *The Empty Space*, "I can take any blank space and call it a bare stage."

If citing Brook, one could claim that any 'blank space' then, is a stage. However, one must not dismiss the use of the word "I" (Brook, p.11) which hints at this quote's more insidious implications. The use of 'I' infers intent is very present and I interpret this quote to mean; with the intent of performance, any space is mine for the taking and considered 'blank', before I imprint meaning onto it. However, as this study concerns people and communities further unpacking of this quote is relevant and necessary. Against the context of site-specific performance staging a performance piece outside of the theatre setting can be problematic if the local culture (both social or environmental) is not considered. This quote from Brook (1968) is not only boastful, but hints at a continuing of an imperialism for the 'naming of place' as a form of appropriation (Carter 1987, 1996 cited in Pearson and Shanks 2001, p. 185). Similar to site-specific performance, the promenade staging style is intended to challenge boundaries placed on a production when contained in an orthodox theatre. The staging choice of promenade gives the audience freedom of movement (departing from their seats) and therefore, releases them from the social rules and connotations of the contemporary and traditional audience member (Birch and Tompkins, 2012, pp.56-7). This space based participatory technique is utilised by the witness of the site-specific performance as well. The audience member's connection to the

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<sup>20</sup> 'Play' features in *The Fan* by Schechner (fig 1).

performance is attained through the alienation of an old or traditional role and immersed in the new. By placing the audience directly in the action-world of a performance, they are existing in an intentional environment for this performance. Thus, the relationship the audience member has with the existing environment has the opportunity to change and effect the interpretation of the role of the audience-self and that of the performance as well.

### Participation

Participation is an overarching theme in site-specific performances (Machon, 2013, p.30). The concept of participation also lends itself to analysis of intentional communities, through the lenses of volunteerism and exchange, what is called, "displaying a degree of active commitment (as opposed to passive identification)" (Shenker, 1986, 184). To understand the practices which make site-specific performance sustainable in intentional community spaces, a brief history of participation in the orthodox theatre will now be given. From this, the reader will gain an understanding of where this element of site-specific performance was founded, and I will divine which practices within the genre of participation will be applicable in this study.

In the late nineteenth century, the composers Richard Wagner and Henry Irving began the then revolutionary act of lowering light over the audience when a play began (White, 2007, p.7):

The passive audience really came into being in the nineteenth century...Wagner... and Henry Irving ... took some of the many small steps in the nineteenth century that physically separated the audience from the performance and discouraged the audience spectatorial acts of ownership or displeasure or even vociferous approval.

Lowering the lights when a performance began was practiced and encouraged. This practice created what is now understood to be a, “cinematic” effect (Bryson, 2007, p.71). The lowered lights separate what is the performance from what is reality. This was done to invite the viewer to take a break from reality, and passively check-out by watching an act or two of a performance, thus ending the Elizabethan practices of participatory spectatorship. Walking into London’s seventeenth century Globe theatre to see a performance, one might first experience a stench rising from the soil. There, those who purchased the cheapest ticket, directly below the front of the stage, would stand to watch the show, eat, socialise, and as was customary at the time, urinate on the ground where they stood (Bryson, 2007, p.72). In addition to the prostitutes and heavy drinking, Shakespeare’s theatre was a place of mass audience participation (Bryson, 2007, p.73). This is shown in the texts of many Shakespearian speeches, which have passages written as soliloquies<sup>21</sup>. In Elizabethan times it would not be unusual for the question, “to be or not to be”, to be followed by an eruption of opinions from the crowd. It would not be strange to see an actor, even while performing in the “mystic chasm” (Wagner, cited in Kuritz, 1988, p.263) also known as the stage behind the proscenium arch of the orthodox theatre, turn towards the audience and ask their advice. Around the end of the nineteenth century, Wagner and Irving’s pioneering passivity had become the standard practice for orthodox theatre audiences.

The next shift in participatory practices for audiences can be traced to the ‘Dada Season’ of Paris in the 1920s, when the audience-actor relationship yet again changed (Bishop, 2006, p.10). It is important to understand the influences this movement had in both the immediate and more distant past of site-specific performance and participation within. In May, in the early nineteen-twenties, one of the first performative installation pieces was delivered in Cologne, Germany. A social commentary was constructed, performed inside the lavatories of a glass-

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<sup>21</sup> When the actor speaks, directly addressing the audience.



roofed house. Although the artist, Max Ernst, was told to shut down his exhibition shortly after it opened, due to complaints of his work having a pornographic nature, it sparked such controversy that the censorship only made Ernst's work more popular. It was this instillation that put into discourse the concept of site-specificity. German Dada sprung from a protest against the terror of World War One decrying the injustice of racism, sexism and the downfall of society when engaged in warfare (ibid). Especially in Berlin, art and politics in popular culture were being challenged through the publication of ironic and self-aware periodicals <sup>22</sup>. And the unconventional splicing of photos and ready-mades paved the way for new forms of artistic expression, both on and off the printed page.

Like others who studied at the Frankfurt school, Ernst did not find the creative fulfillment that he sought in Europe, so he moved to the United States. There, Ernst, and his Dadaist counterparts took the art scene by storm via their mixed media and style of presentation (Bishop, 2006, p.10). Theatre in the 1920s diversified the existing norms to create a new, dynamic addition to the way the public perceived audience-performer relationships, both in performance and in the creative process (ibid).

The creative processes were different for this group, in the way the Frankfurt School artists chose to have the public interact with their art. Such practices included holding art shows site-specifically, on the sides of buildings or in the streets. During this time, art and performance merged and grew together (Brook, 1968, p.75).

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<sup>22</sup> Pop-art magazine, usually hand made.

The rise of the post-modern burlesque performance illustrates the tremendous influence in the development of participation in performance. At this time, Lydia Thompson and her 'British Blondes' had, like Max Ernst and those from the Frankfurt school, moved their art to the United States. In the Golden Age of Broadway, audience members had been trained to dress their best and applaud when appropriate. Americans, when they attended a burlesque show, were allowed and even encouraged to make noise and have their opinions heard. Not only were audience comments tolerated, but they were sometimes imperative to the narrative. An example of this is a burlesque routine revolving around double entendre, where Miss Lydia Thompson, founder, and lead dancer of burlesque act: The British Blondes, sweetly asked the audience something along the lines of, "Who wants to see my pussy?" The audience would, of course, shout its ravenous desire, and Miss Lydia would flirtatiously lift up her skirt to reveal specially crocheted knickers with a pocket in the front. In the pocket? A live kitten. (Motta and Biagini, 2017, p 578)

Although this was considered crude by many, the participatory aspect of the performance freed the audience-performer relationship. Interestingly, and in stark contrast to participatory practices in orthodox theatre at the time, the narrative of Lydia's joke is dependent on audience participation. This interaction is like another form of participation in theatre: the tradition of participation in the pantomime. Deriving from Comedia Del Arte, the pantomime made its way to Britain the 18th century and could have influenced Miss Lydia Thompson's act. White (2013, p. 41) describes the implicit invitation to the audience to participate:

Enough of any audience at a British 'panto' will be familiar with its traditions that if they see one character (a pirate in Robinson Crusoe, for example, a ghost in versions of almost any pantomime story) begin to creep up from behind another (Ben Gunn, Buttons) they will shout, apparently simultaneously, 'he's behind you!'

This, "implicit invitation" (p.41) is crucial to understand as participatory performance and art become more common, and the relationship between performer and audience member evolves. The implicit invitation is one that is obvious to the audience. They do not need to think, 'Is this what I should be doing?'. Implicit invitations are normalised and the role as an active-audience member is obvious. In White's (2013) example, the audience member knows to shout out, 'He's behind you!'. Perhaps the audience member had been to a pantomime before, or they had seen it done on the television, or heard a story. This form of audience participation is ingrained in our popular culture, so shouting out is just 'something you do'. However, just because participation is normalised as an implicit invitation in one setting, does not mean audience members are comfortable with participating. The concept of the implicit invitation (ibid) is interesting when applied to site-specific performance in intentional communities, in terms of the way the artist or performer is introduced to the intentional community's site. I predict, just as the audience member is given allowances, such as a clear form so they do not need to be self-conscious, they will be able to act more freely and feel comfortable to participate in all aspects of communal life that might inform and benefit the performance. Also, this information is useful for the community member in learning how to welcome the *ghost* or performance company into their space.

This chapter began with a distinctive focus on the rehearsal process. By comparing the practices of influential drama practitioners, it looked to identify commonalities for which to frame this study's methodology and inform the exploration of the findings with generally accepted practices of rehearsal.

The concept of embodiment was introduced as a pathway into 'organic' enactment and debated in terms of applicability to the individual actor inhabiting a role<sup>23</sup>. White's "implicit invitation" (p.41) was also explored as yet another lens of practice for involving someone outside of the site-specific production. This was carried out with the hope that White's (2013) theory of participation through the act of the implicit invitation (ibid) will transfer to the artist or performer entering an intentional community.

## Chapter 2: Sustainability in (Site-Specific Theatre)

In this chapter, more potential frames of sustainable practices for site-specific performance are explored. The emergence of the term 'eco' is challenged and its relevance is debated through the lens of ideology versus practice.

### Environmental Sustainability

Environmental themed dramas surged in the 1970s and resurged in 2015 (Angelaki, 2019, p.9). A contribution to the *Theatre&-* series titled, *Theatre& Environment* (2019) by well-known arts

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<sup>23</sup> This concept of embodiment is also relevant to the methodology of this study and will be further expanded upon in chapter 5.

and environmental scholar Vicky Angelaki, is a great example of a commonly found critical analysis of environmental themed drama. This small book gives a thorough introduction to the roles the environment can play in site-specific performance. As stated above, the meaning of 'environment' in performance shifted in the late '70s or '80s from the spatial and setting definition towards the ecological meaning as it still does today (Schechner, 1994, ix). In the third section of the book, 'The Anthropocene and the Exo-Lexicon', Angelaki (2019, p.5) tracks the prefix 'eco' in relation to popular culture, agreeing with Schechner (1973, 1994), stating that environment's meaning in this context has shifted over the last 30 years or so. Angelaki moves this idea further by stating in the later 1980s conjunctions, that the terms appear to, "underline human agency" (Angelaki, 2019, p.8). Examples include (2019, p.8):

eco-audit (1980), ecotourism (1982), eco-label (1989), eco-tax (1990), eco-architect (1991), eco-efficiency (1992), eco-literacy (1993), eco-charities (2000), eco-friendly (2000), eco-footprint (2002)"

These terms present an implied moral binary - by adding the prefix of 'eco-', the former is somehow un-environmentally friendly. According to Angelaki (2019), the neoliberalist is a free-thinking human being, with agency, responsibility, and accountability towards the environment. This is relevant for the representation and implementation of an 'eco-friendly', or environmentally sustainable performance and performance spaces. The progression of environmentalism in performance is important when asking what practices for sustainable site-specific performance are being explored in intentional community spaces, as environmentalism as a theme may be inclusive of both the ideological and the practiced.

This section will continue to look at practices for interacting ideologically with natural environments. To unpack the practices for site-specific performance in an intentional community under the lens of sustainability, the aesthetics of natural environments are relevant to the scenography of the performance and practiced ideology of the performer or artist.

In the 1960s there was a return towards the experimental interpretation of space, and an interestedness in space - the “fullness of space, the endless ways space can be transformed, articulated, animated” (Schechner, 1994, p.1). Not only was there new attention towards and inspiration sought from the natural environment, but also the beginnings of divining character and personification from the (seemly) static and empty spaces (Schechner, 1994, p.1). And this way of interacting with space has continued to evolve and be explored in modern theatre practices. For instance, Helen Freshwater (2004) on Frantic Assembly’s ‘Sell Out’, references the way the audience interacts with newer experimental theatre has shifted, as well. When speaking with Billington, a theatre critic, she cites him as saying:

'I was astonished by the audience, who reacted with ... innocent credulousness ... whatever happened to Brechtian critical detachment?' (Billington 1999, p. 2).

Contrary to disinterestedness, modern experimental performances invite the witness into the world of the performance, asking them to join-in:

They explore the ordinary, the everyday, and the contemporary, whilst their performances trade upon emotional involvement, common experience and a sense of proximity between the performers and their audience, and the performers and the characters they present.

(Freshwater 2004, p.34)

Angelaki (2019, p.8) continues a focus on returning to the natural environment, in a contextual analysis which points out a textual and thematic returning:

At the same time, the growing engagement of the arts with the environment has produced terms intermixing 'eco' with different performance and visual arts genres, stretching back to 1970, when 'eco-art' makes its first appearance.

If 'eco-art' came into popularity and recognition in the early 1970's (ibid), then how has the genre progressed in terms of how the artist or performer interacts with the ecology of the environment that their work is inhabiting? A shift in the way a performer interacts with the ecology and environment of a site-specific performance is evidenced by Pearson (2010, p 8), "from fixity to mobility; from architectonic to peripatetic manifestations" (ibid). This hints that the audience would rather interact with the site of a site-specific performance in a way that acknowledges the livingness of the site. Wilkie (2008, pp.100-1 cited in Pearson, 2010, p.8) analyses some developments and shifts in practice surrounding natural environments housing site-specific performances. She calls the change in the last few years:

an active re-thinking of how 'site' is constituted- how art- and in our case performance creates a space of an encounter.... A shift in form can be noted from performance that inhabits a space to performance that moves through spaces'

In *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments* (2004), Yrjö Sepänmaa tracks the personification of nature in semiotic terms, noting how nature is also composed of signs (ibid). However, Sepänmaa notes; considering the vast scope of nature, there have not been clearly matched

and assigned signifiers, as we have in language. Nature can be unpredictable in meaning and even more arbitrary than language in what it signifies from person to person, community to community, or culture to culture (ibid). Site-specific performance seeks to harness the arbitrary quality of nature and utilise the natural signifiers to infer meaning, non-verbally, through the pre-existing surroundings, chosen to house a performance (Warren, 2017, p.18; Pearson, 2010, p. 13). What Wilkie referenced, is the changing intent of how a performance interacts with a space. And analysis by Sepänmaa of the personification of nature prove the theories of Warren (2017) and Pearson (2010) that the site has become a major component in site-specific performance in the last 20 years (Pearson, 2010, p.7).

The progression of environment in site-specific performance is shown by moving out of the super-imposed physical void of an orthodox theatre setting, and looking towards natural environments to host site-specific performance. Using their natural splendour - or lack of - not as an entity for a neutral backdrop, or container, but as a main element or even character in site-specific performance. Sepänmaa (2004, p.290) states the narrative of nature is never-ending; constantly changing and ephemeral:

The narrative of nature never ends, but stories told by people always have a beginning and an ending. They have limits. There is an inside and an outside, that which is part of the story and that which is not.

In natural environments chosen for their specialty or specificity: the performance aims to take an environmental narrative. And to perform the narrative by working with the natural aesthetics of environment and placing them in conjunction or opposition to a written or devised narrative (ibid). "The play-as-event belongs to the space, and makes the space perform as much as it



makes actors perform” (Wiles, 2000, p.1, cited in Pearson, 2010, p.7). Not only can site-specific performances embrace natural spaces, but the physical environments are fundamental elements of the site-specific performance (Schechner, 1994, x). Pearson and Shanks (2001) comment on the linking of performance and site in Theatre /Archeology stating, many times through the text, that one cannot exist without the other, by very definition of site-specific performance (Kaye 2000, p.52). Concerning narratives (Speånmaa 2004, p.290), Pearson and Shanks (2001) could add:

The wider issue is how to document/represent social and cultural experience. This is the archeological question- what is to be done with the remains of past lives? Performance survives as a cluster of narratives, those of the watchers and of the watched and of all those who facilitate their interaction.

With a turn towards aesthetically and narratively embracing physical environments and the popularity of the agency-implied ‘eco’ (Angelaki, 2019, p.8) site-specific performance is twofold in its manifestation – environmental and socially driven. The ‘innate agency’ of the ‘eco’ prefix that Angelaki (2019) supposes, is tied into the concept of the individual’s power to exist and challenge current normative systems (Trauger, 2009, p.118), specifically relating to the climate crisis. However, a criticism of agency in the context of social action is that, although ideologically one is able to challenge systems, the framework of wider society’s systems is the one in which the challenging discourse takes place. (p.119).

The most commonly mandated practice for measuring the sustainability of a production in an orthodox theatre setting, is via the carbon footprint. To answer the question: *What is the way*

*forward for environmental themed works of art and performance?* Angelaki (2019) wrote, “We must return to institutional spaces” (p.65) and suggested the way forward is to work within the current system, and prompt a more sustainable future from the clearly unsustainable present (ibid). The hope is that a super-imposed structure will ‘work’ and the institutional spaces that have social and economic power will adapt a new plan for sustainability. This being executed, the institutional spaces will then lead by example, creating a sort-of environmentally friendly domino effect. An example of this proposed system features in *Ecoveneue* (2012).

In London, from 2009 to 2012, an environmentally aware group called *Ecoveneue* was created to mark the carbon footprints orthodox theatres in London produced. Data was collected quantitatively with the hope of understanding how to possibly offset this carbon footprint (Angelaki, 2019, pp.65-66). To collect this data, *Ecoveneue* created productions which were hosted across the city’s orthodox theatres. These productions measured the carbon footprint left from each orthodox theatre, including factors such as the audience member’s travel and front of house lighting.

In the Green Theatre Act of 2008, made by Boris Johnson, orthodox theatres were targeted as pollutants to the city of London (Angelaki, 2019, p.67). The Green Theatre Act (2008) aimed to reduce the carbon footprint of orthodox theatre buildings in London by 60 percent (ibid).

Productions driving for economic growth in conjunction with major theatre companies do not always have environmentally friendly solutions to climate change at the foreground of their practices (p.66). And after the Green Theatre’s final report (2008) *Ecoveneue* (2012) took on the mantle of establishing the carbon-footprint of London orthodox theatres (ibid).

However, funding for projects like the Green Theatre (2008) and *Ecovenu*e (2012) were from the European Union (ibid). And without this, there have been struggles to attain Johnson's goal of a 60 percent decrease in greenhouse gas emissions within the theatre sector (Johnson, pp. 4-5; Angelaki, 2019, p.66). Johnson's claim is indicative of another trend concerning sustainability and theatre in general, known as "green-washing"<sup>24</sup> (Shahan, 2013, p.81). Green-washing, or the misleading public facing representation of sustainable practices for capital gain, is not uncommon and is becoming more prevalent (ibid). The above is a critique and trend which also pertains to site-specific performances in intentional communities as perhaps site-specific performances will seek out privately owned land to host their productions.

In the United Kingdom, the theatre-going class often indicate that climate change and environmental sustainability is something they care about in terms of the public sphere of the theatre (Fisek, 2019, p.15). It is therefore no surprise there is much textual content which discusses climate change and sustainability as a theme (Angelaki, 2019).

The theatre-going classes and companies they patron influence and feed one another, as climate change continues to affect the people who are not in the room for the debates. The bourgeois living room is a place which is not political, nor private. At the turn of the century, the public sphere of the bourgeois living room can be likened to the intentional community. To further examine the practices of the companies who produce performances addressing climate change and sustainability will be further scrutinizing the current practices and techniques

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<sup>24</sup> Green-washing is the act of companies or institutions portraying their practices to be eco-friendly, as a marketing technique. Green-washing as a concept is heavily researched in the fields of Marketing and the seminal study on this phenomena yielded the sharp increase and continues to issue a full report each year (Dahl, 2010, 247).

developed. This critique is reminiscent of the Marxist criticism regarding public art. The 'bourgeois liberal class' does not create art for the public, but for a select few to enjoy (Cook, 1986, p.273). Cook wrote critically on public engagement with art galleries, and Habermas confirmed this accusation by explicitly writing, "the bourgeoisie public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public" (p.27).

Similarly, Angelaki (2019, p.65) states, "[we must return to institutional spaces to ask] what the theatre can do not only for repertoire but also for operational practices." The distinction Angelaki makes between 'repertoire' and 'operational practices' (Angelaki, 2019, p.65) is relevant to the question of creating sustainable site-specific performance. There is a dichotomy in the message of sustainability performed and produced with a, "lack of operational practice(s)" to fully embody an environmental ideology (Angelaki, 2019, p.65). The connection here is what this study refers to as sustainable practices versus a represented ideology. Operational practices are the way a company interoperates and embodies an ideology of sustainability.

Angelaki proposed to move forward with a new set of operational practices and in this proposition, referred to the orthodox theatres in London, stating that we must return to these spaces to enact real change. As a researcher, I am not interested in the continuing of this study without the practices of operation or embodied practices of sustainability being at the foreground of the analysis. Nor does this research seek to add any insight into the processes of environmental sustainability being measured by the architectures and carbon-outputs of institutional spaces<sup>25</sup>. Where my research seeks to fill the gap is within the "operational

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25 The Green Theatre Book (2021) still in beta testing, a reader for aspiring and established theatre companies alike. Focused mainly on waste management, buying practices, and infrastructure the Green Theatre Book is where I would direct practitioners for a thoroughly researched set of standards - on a

practices” (Angelaki, 2019, p.65) which do not always align with the represented ideologies of performance companies. This thesis looks away from institutional spaces (ibid)), and instead towards the site-specific performance spaces and operational practices of the artistic process.

There is a great deal of research in green building techniques for sustainable design and projects. *Ecovenue* (2009 - 2012), CLIMARTE, and Artcop21 seek to measure impact, based on the levels of carbon-footprint generated. Even in 2014, then mayor Boris Jonson, put into effect the Green Theatre Act as an incentive to lower the carbon footprint of theatres in the city of London<sup>26</sup>. This thesis will not be continuing the carbon-output based quantitative research. The focus of this research is more concerning what has been said regarding the relationship between land and environment within a community. And thus, framing ‘sustainability’ to be measured in terms of social impact of the performance upon the social community and hosting physical land or environment, qualitatively.

## **Emotional Sustainability**

In the following chapter, the study will shift focus to introduce the concept of an intentional community, grounding the analysis of site-specific performance in later chapters. The main research question this study asks is, *What sustainable practices for site-specific performance are being explored in intentional communities?* The previous two chapters, *Chapter 1: Site-*

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sliding scale from ‘baseline’ to ‘advanced’ - and guidelines for producing a more environmentally sustainable, orthodox theatre.

<sup>26</sup> The Arts were the only sector targeted by Johnson in his bid to clean-up the carbon footprint of London.

*Specific Performance* (3) and *Chapter 2: Sustainability in Site-Specific Performance* (4) outline concepts needed to deconstruct the central question. Engaging with terms such as *host* and *ghost*, it solidifies the many types of ‘*performance*’ and which type this study refers to. It also examines site-specific performance as a genre of performance relating the textual to a spatially defined physical and emotional environment. The terminology around site-specific performance, specifically the ideological ‘eco’ prefix is scrutinised under the suspicion that the aesthetic presentation and representation of the ideology does not match the practice.

Although intentional communities have been mentioned in the previous chapters, this next chapter will go into more in-depth in its analysis of the inner workings of an intentional community.

## Chapter 3: Intentional Communities

An intentional community is a broad term that can be defined as a group of people who have “voluntarily come together for the purpose of ameliorating perceived social problems or inadequacies”

(Metcalf, 2004, p.9)

This chapter will give an overview of what constitutes an intentional community. This is done through noting the difference in meaning from the ‘commune’ and exploring the links to social change movements which inspired the most recent wave of intentional communities (3.1). It will investigate the hierarchy and leadership systems found most commonly within intentional communities (3.2). To explore the practices of sustainable site-specific performance in intentional community spaces, this chapter will next draw from community theatre studies to give an overview of current practices for devising live works in light intentional community<sup>27</sup> performances. (3.3). Finally, this chapter will end asking the question: *How does site-specific performance fit in an intentional community?* The aim is to bring out and explore themes which can be used to cross-compare cultural and performance studies for this interdisciplinary literature review. This chapter will benefit the reader by drawing out core concepts which are applicable to both site-specific performances, and intentional community spaces.

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<sup>27</sup> Light intentional communities refers to the ethos or ideology being the connecting factor, as opposed to a land or spatially based intentional community.

## 1. Ideologies and practices of intentional communities.

Intentional community is a term which was developed in the post-modern age, born of individualism, and rebelling against the all-powerful consumer and capitalist culture which was sweeping the United Kingdom in the second half of the twentieth century (Shenker, 1986; Wimbush, 2021). Intentional communities had their most recent boom in the 1970s in Great Britain (Shenker, 1986, p. 3; Howard, 2021). It was during a move away from the mainstream society or city that the intentional community movement began to put its roots down in the United Kingdom – and, specific to this study, in Wales, a place that Pearson (1998) calls: ‘England’s first colony’ (Pearson 1998, p. 5). Land in West Wales was cheap and easy to access for the English; an easily accessible ‘escape’ from the city (Wimbush, 2021, p.16). To this day, demographically speaking, there are few Welsh residents at Welsh intentional communities (Frost, 2019, p.3). However, it does not seem to be a part of the ethos of the intentional community movement to represent the demographic of the larger hosting cities or countries (Obadia, 2020). Interestingly, this *moving away from* the societal or cultural norm has always been at the foreground of social movements which result in intentional communities. Be they religious or therapeutic, they are almost always formed in opposition to the norm (Shenker 1986; Metcalf, 2004).

It could be argued a greater knowledge of the self’s skillset will mean a greater asset and less friction encountered as a community member – which is a theory explored further in the findings chapter of this thesis (13).



The task of self-sufficiency and discovery is a common ideal shared across intentional communities around the world (Shenker; 1986)<sup>28</sup>. When considering a place one has in a community, Foucault (1988) was inspired to write on Plato's evaluation of the Grecian creed of his day, *to know oneself*. Foucault (1988), through the example of Plato's work *The Apology of Socrates* (date unknown) *made* the point that, in order for one to know oneself, one must first concern oneself with oneself: 29

Socrates says three important things with regard to his invitation to others to occupy themselves with themselves: (1) His mission was conferred on him by the gods, and he won't abandon it except with his last breath. (2) For this task he demands no reward; he is disinterested; he performs it out of benevolence. (3) His mission is useful for the city ... because in teaching people too occupy themselves with themselves, he teaches them to occupy themselves with the city.

Foucault's interpretation is relevant to this study because his musings on Delphic society are easily applied to the modern-day intentional community. The quote above might be a useful way to view the foundations of the hierarchical power, social dynamics, and driving intent which creates intentional communities. The wealthy landowner and their private land, made more public (although exclusive) land can be compared with Socrates' 'city'. The land owners encourage a group of individuals who live on their land to 'know themselves'. (1) The idea of

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<sup>28</sup> And especially in the South of Wales, such as Coed Hills, or Llamas Ecovillage (Wimbush 2021 p 20).

<sup>29</sup> Even further, this principle was Delphic in the sense that the next step for the citizen who knows themselves, is to seek advice of the Delphic Oracle. And to ask the right question of the gods, is to acknowledge that oneself is not a god. To adhere to the hierarchy of society and not want for more above ones' station. (Foucault, 2019)

working towards a common goal, in the intentional community's case; ecological and societal sustainability through acts of subversion. (2) According to Foucault's analysis, the act of service without the want for reward is present and integral to the concept of 'knowing oneself'<sup>30</sup>. This participation benefits the landowner, for they have work done for them and also the community member, as they feel greater ownership of the land. (3) The mission being useful for the 'city' is taken to mean the environment and social climate where the community lives. Because the more the community members willingly give acts of service without the want for reward, their days and minds slowly turn to be filled with only thoughts of the community. Hence, the birth of what this study refers to as: '*Community mindedness*'.

Intentional community theorist Barry Shenker (2011, p.37) would view the concept of knowing the self, and community mindedness through this lens:

... this is not a question of submerging oneself totally in the relationship and giving oneself up to it totally: on the contrast, the strength of the relationship lies in it providing the partner with a feeling that as a result of the relationship their personal autonomy grows... So it is with intentional communities.

Shenker chooses to deconstruct roles of intentional community members the ambitions that drive them to be a part of the community', by viewing the individual, first. In Shenker's (2011) interpretation, what defines a shared ideology, what this thesis called *community mindedness*, is due to the individual feeling a close connection with a spatial community which ties, or bonds,

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<sup>30</sup> Foucault called this *volunteerism* (Michel Foucault, 1988).

the group together. Represented here, is the experience of the individual being the focus. Socrates based his initial interpretation of what constitutes *community mindedness* on the act of servitude being handed down 'by the gods' to the self. And although the end goal is self-knowing, or concerning oneself with the self, the end result is a compliant citizen acting without ambition for the self, rather a selfless - or disinterested - act or acts of servitude which benefit the many, and the governing institution of power - in this case, the wealthy landowner.

The other noteworthy type of intentional community to discuss is the '*light*' intentional community. This will add to the argument, as the lack of academic work on practices for sustainable site-specific performance in intentional communities means this thesis utilises practices set forth, that will easily compare to the central practice of this study.

The light intentional community, like the commune, is not defined by a communal living space, rather shared ideals. Van de Grift et al (2017) conducted a study which covered a town's social movement towards more ecologically sustainable practices for the city of Lewes. In their published journal article, Van de Grift et al (2017) classified the Transformation movement in Lewes as a *light intentional community* because it was, "a group of people coming together to pursue a shared aim, with an openness regarding the level of participation required of community members" (Van de Grift et al., 2017, p.10.).

Referencing Brown's list of what constitutes an intentional community and drawing similarities and differences to their project, they further acknowledged that a light intentional community will also have changing roles and community members. Therefore, the level of participation (and thus affect) is directly related to social friction within the community. (Van de Grift et al., 2017, p. 11). The light intentional community is proposed to be a way of working through community

transformation, without the prerequisite of the community itself being isolated. In this way, the light intentional community has more scope to gain concrete results in social change movements through exchange of ideas and resources in their community. Because the light intentional community is not spatially bound, the rural intentional community by nature, is less able to influence their neighbours.

If intentional communities are political in the sense that they are formed in the opposition to a societal norm and are also formed with (usually) a clear message (Metcalf 2004). Without putting blame on to the current inhabitants or land owners, it is still important to investigate this phenomenon that the ownership or the land of intentional communities were not always private.

The fact this thesis explicitly investigates the practices for site-specific performance within an intentional community in Wales merits the discussion of Welsh land ownership and their wider connection to the land.

And by this time there's nothing there but trees

Impertinent roots suck dry old soil:

Trees were neighborhood was,

And a forest that once was farmland.

Where was verse-writing and scripture

Is the South's bastardised English.

(Rhydymerau' Jones 1986: 285-6 cited in Pearson and Shanks 2005, 155).

When faced with the afforestation around his ancestral community in West Wales, Jones (1986) wrote a poem concerning his feelings on this type of industrialization. Jones expressed how oppressive the act of planting trees for cash crops was to the people of his Welsh Wales community, who, like many people in Wales gained a deep sense of their cultural identity from the land (Pearson 1996, p.5). Afforestation of former farmland is incredibly impactful and disappears landscapes and thus local histories or landmarks; something which future generations might not take much notice of but has happened in many times throughout the history of the Welsh countryside (ibid).

“Not only then do places disappear, they are also silenced. What is lost here, literally and symbolically, are those locales where Welsh discourse, where Welshness itself, is generated. We say symbolically because the Welsh sense of place is enshrined in that series of concrete maps surrounding home and neighborhood where particular discourses, discrete ways of telling, and engendered. These ‘site of disappearance’ continue to animate the political and poetic imagination in Wales: these ruins, traces, memories persist as places where meanings and identities... are indeed ‘represented, contested and inverted’.

(Pearson and Shanks 2005, p 155)

By these definitions and examples, the intentional community movement in Wales could be read as a continuation of the colonization of the Welsh land. Cliff McLucas and Mike Pearson dedicated much of their practice to exploring this and even learned Welsh (Pearson 1996, p.5) when their site-specific practice moved to Wales, full time. McLucas dedicated his practice to performing and reclaiming Welsh sites and this sustained his relationship with the people and the land was done with such care, fair exchange and commitment that upon his death, his life works, the works of an Englishman, were archived in the National Library of Wales (McLucas, 2011).

This thesis will now look towards current practices for curating performances in light intentional community spaces, before narrowing down the scope of research to strictly site-specific performance within an intentional community in the findings chapters (7, 8, 9).

### Curating performances in light intentional community spaces

Following Angelaki's (2019, p.62) suggestion of, "first looking towards institutional spaces", this section examines existing practices for curating live works from performers in the light intentional community space: the museum. Museums are relevant to this chapter because some already have a focus on interacting with or curating site-specific performance. It is useful to the background of this study to analyse practices for curating site-specific performance in museum spaces. Their practices might lend insight to intentional communities seeking to invite site-specific performers into their community to create and perform. And when quantifying impact, the museum has a longer history of documentation and analysis (ibid) than intentional communities housing site-specific performance.

There is a three-point system provided by *The Live List*, called *What to Consider When Collecting Live Works*. "Collecting the Performative", is a paper generated by the research network, *Examining Emerging Practice for Collecting and Conserving Performance-based Art* (Wijer, et al., 2014). This field of study and the research network are trying to make the ephemeral slightly more solid by giving criteria for 'collecting and conserving' live performances, specifically in museum spaces (ibid).

In the Live List (2014) the first section is to, *Agree and understand the basic parameters of the work*. This section is geared towards the benefit of and from the viewpoint of an institutional space. It includes a set of questions for those holding positions of power to ask the visiting or external artist, to understand what the artist is seeking to create, how, and what the nature of the 'work' is intended to be.

The second section is titled *Relationship with the Museum / collection*. Within this section, the first question asked by Wijer, et al.,(2014) was:

What are the key points that need to be negotiated with the museum in relation to the acquisition of performance (eg. the extent of artist involvement).”

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Although the relationship with a museum/collection addresses the element of participation from the museum's audience, there are no prompts or guidelines provided for post-performance relationships or aftercare practices. Stuart Hall (1997, p.4) when writing specifically for institutional spaces such as museums, stated:

Museums do not simply issue objective descriptions or form logical assemblages; they generate representations and attribute meaning and value in line with certain perspectives or classificatory schemas which are historically specific.

Hall touched on the perspectives of the institutional space which informs what and who moves through them, and the content performed. And this is true for most institutional spaces that become the *host* for a *ghost*, or 'other' creator of performance and is not confined to the museum. Although, the relationship between institution and artist is more nuanced when the site-specific performance takes place outside the traditional performance setting.

In acknowledging this hierarchy, *The Live List* asked, *Does this work challenge or critique the museum, if so, how?* (ibid).

By asking this question and making it a part of a dialogue from the beginning of the relationship between the art and the museum, the hope is that transparency will allow for more expression, and check that the institution does not only collect works which will show them in a good favour.

Interestingly, throughout *The Live List's* suggested considerations, there is no mention of the artist and art being connected. The writing signifies a separation of art and artist, asking questions of how safe the art is, but not the performing artist. When the performance is referred to, it is only as "work", something which is disconnected from performer. There is no mention of the term 'sustainability' either in the physicality of the 'work', nor an emotional sustainability which would be had by the performance-based artist. In this, the creative process and performance of artist and art are listed in opposition.

In the third section of *The Live List* titled *The production of the performance*; health and safety concerns are introduced, regarding the 'work'. This section focuses on more of the practical



side, meaning *The Live List* asks: *Who needs to be externally involved, what are the various roles to be assumed, and by whom?* Again, this section focused on the institution of the museum in relation to the performance, the 'work', not the performer or artist/worker.

The fourth section detailed documentation and asked: *What categories of documentation are present and needed for this work?* For example, instructions, artist statement, archival documentation of previous performances, and audience experience. This represents further the moving away from the actual live performance, towards the catalogue and what representation of the art had already been documented.

*The Live List* pursued an already established work, or performance piece which would then fit into the museum space, as is on par with a museum's frequent and traditional interactions and thus, expectations. Throughout *The Live List's* suggested considerations, there is no mention of the artist and art being in and of the same. The writing signifies a separation of art and artist, asking questions of how safe the art is, but not the performing artist. When the performance is referred to, it is only as "work", something which is disconnected from worker. There is no mention of the term 'sustainability' either in the physical sense of the performance-based art, nor an emotional sustainability which would be experienced by the performance artist.

Sub section: The Theatre of the Oppressed vs the Rainbow of Desire

This section will compare the process of collecting and curating live performance in light intentional communities through two works by Augusto Boal. This section will outline *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (1993) with Boal's later work *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995) focusing explicitly on the relationships he outlines between himself as a 'scholar-artist' and the communities his performances seek to serve. I include these two texts in comparison to

highlight the ideological shift Boal undergoes as result of interaction with a 'light hosting' community. Boal's ideological shift from *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (1993) to *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995) is relevant to the research question this thesis supposes. To find sustainable practices for site-specific performance, the concept of emotional sustainability between performers and community groups must be scrutinized and Boal's, perhaps unexpected, reflexive practice supports this claim.

The driving suspicion of this study is that the ideological and aesthetic factors do not equate the practice of sustainable performance, especially when performed within intentional communities. This suspicion is reflected in Augusto Boal's practice, as the following section will illuminate. It is a useful practice to compare Augusto Boal's works: *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) with his later work *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995) to gain an understanding of what this thesis will try to articulate over findings chapters 7,8, and 9 in terms of praxis and the emotional sustainability of performer-community relationships. These texts are referenced to give an example of one practitioner's journey in working with and for communities of people. Using performance as the device to interact with, and uplift marginalized groups. Jackson (1995, xvii) discusses:

...'The Rainbow of Desire', [is] the name Boal gives to a collection of theatrical techniques and exercises designed to harness the power of the 'the aesthetic space' (the stage) to examine individual, internalized oppressions and to place them within a larger context.

Boal (1995) did not believe there can be a complete separation of the individual from society, and this can be manifested in accordance and discordance to the individual's experience of

society and of themselves. His exercises outlined in *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995) combat the neo-liberalist idea that the individual is separate from the wider societal group, stating “Individuals, and by extension society itself, can be changed by a catharsis” (Jackson, 1994, xxi). Jackson puts fourth Boal’s interpretation of the term: *catharsis*, countering that *the Rainbow of Desire*’s (1995) catharsis does not normalise, negate, or shun ‘asocial’ behaviour, which is what he identifies as the driving critique in a Marxist reading of this process. A Marxist reading of *the Rainbow of Desire* (1995) would rely heavily on the interpretation that individualism is at the center of this rehearsal and artistic process. Thus, the significance to a larger group or society is minimal (Jackson, 1994, xxi). On the contrary, Boal might argue his catharsis is an outlet and expression for human desires; to use Boal’s terms, it is a removal of *blockages*.

Boal takes suggestions of blockages from a group, which are phenomena or situations that occur in everyday life which keeps the actor from achieving their wants. Then the group performs their conflicts to one another. Boal’s exercises expand upon the concept of the ‘cop in your head’. To combat this phenomenon, Boal urges his actors, in a Founculdian-like way, to “free yourself from the cop in your head” (Boal, 1995, p.42) using exercises in *the Rainbow of Desire* (1995).

The first step in *the Rainbow of Desire* (1995) is improvisation based on an actual situation, where the real-life protagonist casts, directs, and plays themselves. The second is where the scene is dynamised, meaning the actors bring the image to life and play the action out. They ask for subjective or objective commentaries from those involved, with the condition that the person offering the commentary specifies their stance as one of the two. The author notes there are no mis-readings only multiple readings, and in terms of therapeutic effect, the more binary and opposing in nature the interpretations are from the spectators, the more ‘fruitful and

revealing' for the real-life protagonist. Spectators are deemed to be those involved in the improvisation, and those just observing. The author is careful to note that interpretations and subjective observations are to be taken or left, almost with a grain of salt, by the real life-protagonist. This implication is very important to note, as it implies that the agency is not compromised by *the Rainbow of Desire* (1995). The agency is not taken away from the real-life protagonist in that they have the choice of casting, of direction, and there is no set action they must complete after working through the situation with the group. There is little outlined for practices of immediate aftercare, in terms of closure. It is Boal's principle in relation to closure of a session that the participants do not bring more than they can handle to group-work. And that to outline specific practices following a session would be patronising (Jackson, 1994, xxv).

Boal and Jackson believe if more is needed for the spectating group in terms of closure, the group or affected individual will ask the director for this (Jackson 1994, xx-xxvi).

The practice outlines the after-care policy is to be led and defined by the group, on a case-by-case basis. This shows power of agency resting with the individual or group of spectators, as opposed to the director or facilitator.

However, in looking at Boal's earlier work, *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal, 1995), a different power dynamic is presented regarding individual agency and the role of the director or facilitator. In *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) the roles of the performer<sup>31</sup> and the audience member involve a more Brechtian style of hierarchy, meaning the audience is under the instruction of the performance. Boal, in *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995), critiques his techniques used in *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985):

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31 (As this text and technique pre-dated the invention of the spectator).

It seemed right to us, indeed a matter of great urgency, to exhort the oppressed to struggle against oppression. Which oppressed? All of them. The oppressed in general sense. Too general a sense. And we made use of our cast to tell Truths, to bring Solutions. We taught the peasants how to fight for their lands - we, who lived in the big cities. We taught the blacks how to combat racial prejudice - we, who were almost all very, very white. We taught women how to struggle against their oppressors. Which oppressors? Why, us, since we were feminists to a man - and virtually all of us were men. Nevertheless, the intention was good.

(Boal, 1995, p.1)

Boal (1995) begins by telling of his theatre company, the Teatro de Arena de Sao Paulo, which was touring around Brazil, “telling Truth and bringing Solutions” to the peasants and “oppressed” peoples. At this time, Boal’s (1985) work performed what he thought people should be doing to free themselves from oppression; bloody, violent, and didactical in presentation. The play would commonly end with a song with lyrics that went something like, ‘Let us spill our blood’ (Boal, 1995, 2) [for freedom, for our land, *our* true country].

It was after a show of Boal’s in a North-Eastern rural town in Brazil when a peasant man named Virgilio spoke to Boal (1995, p.1). This man had been enamoured by the performance, and believed that the cast were on his side, literally<sup>32</sup>. He expressed there had been ongoing

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<sup>32</sup> Perhaps they were ‘literally’- see Spatz work on the word. Perhaps, rather, they were not *embodied* in their sharing of beliefs.

violence between the landowners (or colonels) in the area. The colonels had burnt down the home of a local family and made violent threats towards that same family to diminish any retaliation from the community. Inspired by Boal's message, Virgilio asked the company of performers to join him and his comrades as they stormed the colonels and demanded their rites. They cited lines from the performance they had just witnessed, which Boal himself wrote.

Boal explained they were only performers; their guns were fake and himself and the cast had much sympathy. However, his and his theatre group's role in his village was that of performance, not to act in literal terms and join the revolution of which they preached. Virgilio was disheartened and angered, leaving Boal and his company feeling frustration and disempowerment; starkly contrasting the previous moment's feeling of invigoration and hope. Boal called out after him to 'come back and have a talk' but to no avail. Boal noted, "I never saw him again" (Boal, 1995, p.3). This incongruence of ideological message and practice disillusioned Boal. And his practice shifted forever because of this experience with the man Virgilio (Boal, 1995, pp.1-3).

In *Playing Boal – Theatre, Therapy, and Activism* (2002), Schutzman and Cohn-Cruz comment on the works and practices of Boal, discussing the political nature of his teachings. Through a feminist lens, the Theatre of the Oppressed does not give enough an answer to problems of race, and class when inspiring participants to become 'actors' in their own political life's (186). This could be because the blurring of the lines between the personal, political and the performance and issues of safety and boundaries are cited (185). Although Boal (1994) in the *Rainbow of Desire* does his best to combat these critiques, instead of refining the Theatre of the Oppressed, he instead created a whole new modality. This modality eventually became Forum

Theatre (227) and this exists more comfortably in 'political theatre' or even 'therapy and activism', rather than theatre for pure entertainment (ibid). Although this 'theatre was 'site-specific, meaning the text devised was that of an environment (McLucas, Morgan and Pearson 1995, p 48 cited in Kaye 2000, p.55) the end-goal and function are real political change.

The experience of Boal's which inspired him to leave behind the Theatre of the Oppressed in this original form highlights a few key concepts in this study's breakdown of what constitutes an emotionally sustainable practice between community and performer. The first being the concept that, commonly, the ideology of the performers does not match their practice. This concept, when performing within the context of an intentional community, could be taken further to demonstrate that ideology in site-specific performance is largely performative in function. With site-specific performance in an intentional community, it is necessary to initially view them as separate from the ideology to divine the true ethos of the site-specific performance/performer. And instead, to shift focus to that of exchange between the *host* and *ghost*, rather than presentation. In this way, the focus is shifted away from the final performance and towards the rehearsal process, for exploration of the practices of sustainable site-specific performance within intentional community spaces.

## Chapter 4: Intentional communities and site-specific performance

This chapter will use examples primarily focusing on intentional communities in Wales. This is done for clarity when investigating the findings of this study, which are also localised in Wales.<sup>33</sup>

It is now necessary to zoom out to view the macro of this study. Site-specific performance does not take place within a void; on the contrary, this unique performance type was born from the same countercultural and postmodern movements as the visual turn towards modern artists like Jackson Pollock (Bishop, 2006, p.102). These movements break barriers of the orthodox theatre, reimagining natural or urban environments as performance spaces. These performances are placed within communities, be they environmental communities (such as the flora and fauna in a field) or, specific to this study; cultural and emotional - the people who make up the hosting intentional community.

This chapter looks more closely at practices for site-specific performance in intentional communities. Schechner (1994) notes that most performance centres are left empty for much of their existence and only at certain times will the audience make their way to the performance.

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<sup>33</sup> These practices are centred around the experience of largely white, cisgender, philosophers and practitioners from the global north. This land and social/political climate are most like the intentional community this study was able to access. However, this choice is potentially a representation of the heteronormative and patriarchal systems which govern intentional communities and the fields of drama and theatre in academic research, in general. Seymour comments on the turn in academic work as based on a returning to a, "focus on the body" (Seymour, 237). And Spatz takes this observation into further discourse with the challenging question: *Whose bodies?* (Spatz, 2019).



However, this critique is centred around performance spaces in the city. In the intentional community, the space is always inhabited, but the intent of use of the space changes.

As White (2013) stated in his book *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*, common critiques of participation in performance are based in the fear of the unknown, of being put on-the-spot and saying the wrong thing. Looking deeper into where this fear comes from it might be interpreted as the audience member feeling they've been alienated or given the opportunity to fail. White attempts to harness this fear (failure or doing the 'wrong' action) and explains that the audience, in order to feel safe enough to participate in the performance, must be taken care of from the very first interaction between the audience and performer. White describes this initial moment and the way it is navigated as, "the aesthetics of the initiation". White describes this moment as the essential component to create any form of audience participation (White, 2013). This concept will be unpacked and tested further, in relation to the case studies explored in the findings chapters.

## Environments and sustainability

This section gives an overview of land and its relationship to site-specific performance.

I will use texts from within the performance studies discipline which cover both natural and unnatural (or man-made) land/environments. This section also will explore how environmental sustainability is practiced by artists and performers, as Angelacki discusses (2019, pp.10-11):

...implementing the environmental turn in performance to shape new methods for staging and develop new conditions for spectating, imagining theatre audiences as communities and attacking neoliberalist insularity by promoting stronger civic awareness.

Angelakis's (2019) Brechtian call also brings a few questions. If a site-specific performance has idealistic environmental values, where writers and directors engage with the, "shared ethics, responsibilities" (Angelaki, 2019, p.11) of a neo-liberalist audience and community, how can site-specific performance have a positive impact? Or is this eco-renaissance simply the next phase of green-washing<sup>34</sup> with an environmentally sustainable ideology at the foreground, but the actualised practices of these ideologies are of less importance? This could be the case, as it has been noted that the popularisation of green-washing began in the mid-1980s (Dahl, 2010, 247); the same time the 'eco' prefix gained popularity (Angelaki, 2019, p.5). Environmentally aware performances with the audience framed as a community can break down barriers in communities and connect groups through a collective rising awareness (pp.10-11). In this case, the community, as audience, can be strengthened and steered towards a more sustainable existence by means of institutionally led connection. Also, social sustainability can be at the foreground in these socially and community engaged site-specific performance groups.

DeCaires Taylor is a sculptor whose work Angelaki discusses (2019, pp.58-9):

DeCaires Taylor's work furnished co systems with agents to which they may be receptive, sustaining their growth...the sculptures - 'are individually designed using safe pH neutral materials with textured surfaces to create homes, breeding areas and protective spaces' (Threats')... the term that DeCaires Taylor uses for her work that, submerged into oceanic depths, has provided welcome ground for native fauna and flora

to develop is 'colonised'... a foreign body that is reclaimed by nature, rather than the other way around, which has been the norm.

This work is an example of an environmentally sustainable operational practice, as opposed to purely ideological. This "moving of a foreign body to allow the natural and fauna" (pp.58-9) is speaking of an art installation piece created by sculptor, DeCaires Taylor, In response to governmental funding and / or actions towards climate change. The piece draws spectators and hopes to act as a catalyst for action (Angelaki, 2019, p.58).

This installation is relevant because the sculpture itself has an environmental ideology, and also a practice. The pH neutral material acts as a base for underwater life to make their new home, reclaiming the space, with the presence of a foreign body which does not govern or control. Although arguably easier to interact this way with a microbial population as opposed to a human one, this serves as an example that performance and art need not be less invasive to have minimal negative impact, but it is the quality and practices of the impact which makes a difference.

Claire Bishop defined the concept of participation between audience and artwork as a, "social experience" (Bishop, 2006, p.12). Participation transforms the role of the audience member from passive viewer to active collaborator by creating a new and different actor-audience relationship. Participation evokes an audience-actor relationship shift in a way that differs from the contemporary style of traditional theatre. This new dynamic creates a novel relationship with the text which, arguably, a classic performance simply could not (Birch and Tompkins, 2012; Pearson, 2010). Bishop defined participation as a, "social experience" (Bishop, 2007, p.12) and

this definition lends itself to that of the rehearsal process of the artist or performer in an intentional community.

A community's involvement during the site-specific process can be manifold. In *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634), a production in celebration of an Earl's inauguration, the cast was made up, in part, of the Earl's three children. (Birch and Tompkins, 2012, p.38)

The invitation to participate in a production on the level of the community inextricably joins the community to the event (p.40), for once the community accepts their role as a participant, their involvement – whether active or passive – will be a factor for the performance run. In some cases, even after the performance finishes its official run, there may still be an aspect of community participation (p.41).

One focus of sustainability is likening the contact the performance has with a hosting environment to that of the camping rule of thumb: *Always leave the space looking better than you found it* (Dillon, 2021, p.55).

White (2013) argued there should be a continuation of contact once the initial interaction has been established; to keep the relationship between community and performance and the discourse bred from that relationship ongoing and effective, even after the show has completed its run. In a post-show forum, inclusion of those involved in the production proper and audience members; allows each space to supply feedback.

This process encourages critical thinking; not only about the audience member's experience, but hopefully the realisation of the role they play in the bigger picture of their family, community, or society as a whole. Boal, in the *Theatre of the Oppressed* (2009, p.122), reiterates and expands upon this notion of an active and politically charged audience:

[T]he spectator no longer delegates power to his characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action!

Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal for a revolution.

Although many performance companies embrace and endorse this notion; presenting the audience with an opportunity to participate or a mission statement to go along with the company/production, it is still quite uncommon in orthodox theatre practices.

In addition to the limitation of audience participation, on the individual level, the connections made within a participating community are usually broken when the run of the show is finished. When thinking of the emotional toll a performance can take on one actor or one audience member; imagine how affected an entire community could be. This is a main driving force behind the argument for site-specific theatre being a new frontier to explore social affect theory.

The Theatre Green Book (2021), in its current beta trial (2.0) explored the lasting effect a site-specific production might have on a physical environment. First the book states the camping rule referenced earlier, but The Theatre Green Book furthered the idea:

Still better, a production should be seen as an opportunity to improve ecology and biodiversity, for example by cleaning up waste, removing rubble, improving soil or planting.

(Theatre Green Book 2021, beta 2.0 cited with permission of author)

This collection of policies focuses mainly on the carbon impact of orthodox theatres and looking towards a circular economy. Page 55 of the Theatre Green Book (2021) is devoted to site-specific performance.

Yet, this also may be used as a cautionary counsel. Take, for instance, the gravity of the situation where the performer is in the position to have the audience at his or her complete disposal, able to imprint and ask anything of the audience member, assuming they - the audience member - are willing. There is an implied responsibility. It includes the assurance there will be no physical damage done. There will be nothing asked of the audience member or community which would be beyond their comfort level or ability. The audience or community will not need time to physically nor emotionally recover. The audience or community will not be pressured to do something which would cause embarrassment. And, the audience member, if accepting the invitation; will be kept excited and encouraged to take the risk while always feeling safe from the “danger” of performing. As White recounts (2013, p.85):

The perception of the risk is nuanced by the performance of the invitation and after it: fire jugglers create an air of real physical danger around their shows, which is not entirely fictional, but the risk to performer and participant is much less than it is made to appear.

This is a concept with which magician Darren Brown is very familiar and utilises with acute professionalism. Take, for example, his show *Apocalypse* (2012). On a large scale and infused with spectacle, this show showcases Brown's skills as a manipulator and magician; to make a 'normal man' believe a zombie apocalypse is not only possible but also coming to fruition. Mr. Brown selects his volunteer from a list of pre-approved applicants who are all vying for the opportunity to be part of the show<sup>35</sup>. Those applying have been physiologically tested and have all passed what a certified psychoanalyst had deemed 'mentally able to participate'. Though the participant was told he was not chosen because of the forms he signed giving away certain rights, Brown, with the help of the participants' friends and family begin to change this man's life drastically, as he becomes (unbeknown to him) the main character in *Apocalypse*. The participant, in this case, post-show will receive from Brown's company weeks, if not months of therapy, and awarded the opportunity to give Brown feedback, having had first-hand an experience with Brown's unorthodox techniques. He or she who participated in Brown's show may help with Brown's handling and caring for future participants. This practice of feedback is not only useful for the relationship between Brown and the participant, but also for the hosting community. This concept of feedback will be explored further in the findings chapters of this thesis (7, 8, 9), and also in the methodology chapter (5).

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<sup>35</sup> This is important as it demonstrates the want to be involved.

When a community allows a site-specific performance to use their physical space as the set, they are involved with the production, the *ghost*. This is especially true if their day-to-day lives are affected. As demonstrated by Brown's aftercare practices; when the *ghost* leaves, the *host* must be eased back into the way of their past normality. This is especially important when considering the changes that a community may face. Drama Therapy can occur without it ever being the initial intention from those producing the performance. Feelings, experiences, or memories can be brought to the surface, depending on the rehearsal techniques employed<sup>36</sup>, which the participant may not have the tools<sup>37</sup> to accept or process. Once that contact or change has been made, as demonstrated by Brown; it would be the responsibility of those who brought about the change or experience to assist the host and community members who interacted with the *ghost* while they continued on with community life, post-performance.

#### The liminality of site-specific performance in Intentional Communities

Gareth White in *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*, charted audience-performer participation from the moment initial contact is made - the "invitation" (White, 2013). He did this by citing the theories of liminality by Turner (1969)<sup>38</sup> alongside findings from his own practice. The concept of liminality is applied to the ephemeral nature of participatory site-specific performance to examine the foundations of the universal human experience found as participation in performance (White, 2013).

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36 See 'Theatre practitioners and the Embodied Process of Rehearsal' (3.2).

37 Theatre term to mean mental capability of coping. 'Tools' is also used as a synonym of rehearsal techniques an actor has trained with.

38 More on this in section 1.6.6 "Liminality"



This study argues participation in intentional communities is one of the core practices for a sustainable site-specific performance. The first moment of contact the artist or performer has with the community is of great importance. This moment can invite the artist or performer to 'join in' and become 'a part of', in other words, to connect. The first moment of contact can also alienate and isolate, depending on the way the opportunity is presented. White (2013, p.139) argues liminality functions in the "invitation" by:

Using a very focused procedural authorship to produce very intense experiences that mark moments of change in the lives of participants.

*A focused procedural authorship* refers to the practice of how one invited the audience member to participate. As the title suggests, the aesthetics of the invitation will inform the experience of the audience member and function of the participation. White's interpretation of Turner's (1969) liminality is especially useful as he explicitly compares this concept of liminality to site-specific performance and the audience member.

The first phase is "separation" (p.139). This separation is in reference to the subject being alienated from "society" (ibid), here the role the subject would play in their day-to-day life, or in the physical act of traveling to a new place. Both acts of separation (ibid) reference the moving away from a normality, whether in one's own mind or physically, by making a journey or pilgrimage. The second phase is outlined as the marginal phase:

... the marginal phase, the ritual subject is at the threshold, both about to become something new and about to leave behind their previous self.

(Turner, 1969, p.94; White 2007, pp.138-9)

This “marginal phase” is standing in front of the fire. About to jump through it. One knows where they’ve been, what got them to this point, and they can see the end goal, but the act, the drive of the jump, the moment before the final phase. This is where one has shed their old role and are about to assume a new one. In this sense, the present moment is infinite; the inertia of action all encompassing. White continues to explain this newfound state which the audience member finds himself in as a “period of liminality” (White, 2007, p.139).

According to Turner ‘during the intervening “liminal” period, the characteristics of the ritual subject [...] are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the characteristics of the past or coming state”

(Turner 1969, p. 94 cited in White 2007, p.138-139)

Here, the *cultural realm* (White, 2007, p.139) is the site-specific performance. As an audience member in an architecturally subversive situation; they are in no particular social role and thus made to bear none of the normal consequences of impulsive action. Lack of knowledge about the role they are meant to play can allow an audience member to express and interact with the production more freely and without role-related social obligations. At least this is one of the goals of audience participation in performance; the allowance for the freedom to create and the

freedom to act. I propose freedom to create and act are also the hope when the community is holding space for an artist or performer.<sup>39</sup>

This process can be applied to that of the site-specific performer entering an intentional community. If liminality and the aesthetics of the invitation are applied to site-specific performance in intentional community spaces, participation can become the community members acting as mediators between performer and land. To unpack what I mean here, two things must be clear. First, site-specific performance has a unique relationship to the land upon which it is performed. Second, the community members in an intentional community perform their ideology through a series of repeated tasks and discourse surrounding the meaning of the tasks.

With this reading, the way to ease the performer into the creative space is to liaise with them, with the community members acting as 'space holders'. In this way the aesthetics of the initiation also apply to the performer-community member relationship.

White (2013) sites the three phases of liminality when marking the moment of change or changes the audience member goes through, from beginning to end. Although the phases of liminality will initially happen chronologically; when applied to performer in intentional community this research supposes that once all three phases are completed the cycle can begin again, and move un-sequentially. These three phases may reoccur, and one may experience one or two or

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<sup>39</sup> White's theories surrounding the aesthetics of the invitation will be used to explore the relationship between the performer/artist and community members in the findings chapter of this study.

all of the phases at different points in their artistic endeavour. The phases of liminality are not to be worked through and then completed. Rather, when these phases of liminality are applied to artist or performer participating in community, it is an ongoing process. This view is not commented upon in White's reading of liminality and how it relates to the aesthetics of the invitation. And this could be perhaps, that the 'moment' Turner (1967) and White (2013) wrote about is just a moment; whereas in an intentional community, the singular moment also exists with more moments to come after. Discussion of this concept will continue in Chapter 7: *The Bliss of Wildness* (2018) and also informed this study's methodology in relation to how the researcher invited the artist-in-residence and performers to perform and participate with the intentional community.

In her book *Theatre & Audience* (2009), Helen Freshwater citing Kurt Lancaster on performances that make use of audience participation, wrote:

These performances give people the opportunity to inject their own values and beliefs into the event... Participants are able to break out of the restrictive social roles: the role of an over-worked laborer, mother, teenage, or student, for example.

(Lancaster, 1997, cited in Freshwater 2009, p.77)

Participation hopes to allow the audience unhindered artistic expression. The artist or performer hopes the audience member participates and thus feels more intimately involved, that they might personalize and relate to the text, on a deeper level.

## Further thoughts on site-specific performance within intentional communities

This literature review section began with a brief history of site-specific theatre and performance where in the concept of site-specific performance was debated and defined. Originally named *environmental theatre* by Richard Schechner (1973), site-specific theatre and performance take place outside the orthodox theatre (Birch and Tompkins, 2012). Because of its subversive beginnings, site-specific performance is often linked to social change movements. For this reason, site specific performance also lends itself well to environmental critique, as represented in performance groups like Extinction Rebellion (Angelaki, 2019). By placing a performance outside the orthodox theatre, in a natural environment, the ecological implication is taken from the setting - in that case, a real environment. Perhaps due to this factor, there is a surplus of environmentally themed texts and performances which are commonly critiqued and interrogated based on their message, through a textual analysis (Angelaki, 2019). This is good for spreading the word, but the ideological representations do not match the practices and can harm the natural environments hosting the performances.

This chapter argued that it is impossible to separate the, “social experience” (Bishop, 2006, p.12) from the artistic process when performance takes place within an intentional community. The two separate entities, the social experience and the artistic process, combine as the artist or performer is accepted into the community. And, through the practice of participation with the intentional community, the artist or performer and community relationship is the foundation for the artistic endeavour and outcome. This is how sustainability functions for the emotionality of the artist and the community living together.

From this relationship, the hope is the artist or performer feels comfortable to create what is in their mind and to also feel supported in doing so. The “social experience” (Bishop 2006, p.12) is then, not only existing when the art or performance is installed or performed, but as soon as the artist or performer comes into contact with the community and land. When considering the space or land a site-specific performance will inhabit, Phil Smith, a creator of site-specific performance, wrote:

A maker of site-based performance, then, may need to be a multivalent one, capable of engaging with multiple partners, human and unhuman, including the active presence of space itself.

(Smith, 54, p. 2019)

*The Live List* (2012) was chosen for discussion in *Curating live performance in light intentional community spaces* (5.3), as it represented the institution-led practice for collecting live works. In seeking to define the practices for site-specific performance, the land or environment of an intentional community was compared to the land or environment of a museum. This was done to give the reader a case-study relating to how this major institution interacted with the visiting artists or performers. This section challenged the apparent disconnect between artist and art or performer and performance. This was done to highlight there were not practices outlined for emotional sustainability.

Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) and *the Rainbow of Desire* (1995) express a type of praxis which can be used to counter an unexpected and widely ranging scope of the

effect a site-specific performance can have on a community. Specifically, these texts were explored regarding the emotional sustainability of the community hosting a site-specific performance. This chapter examined Boal's practices in contrast with one another, showing how the affect a company has on a community, can inform the company's practice. However, this is not to say that Boal is an exemplar of compassion or leader in how one should interact with a community, but, rather, to demonstrate how a practice might shift once new knowledge or feedback from a community is gleaned.

## Chapter 5: Methodology

“As soon as I learned how ethnographers did research, I knew that was what I wanted to do. For me, the ideal work was to be out in the world with people I wanted to learn about, experiencing their lives with them.”

(Bochner and Ellis, 2016, p.25)

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)

(Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005 cited in Bochner, Ellis, 2011).

I began this study enrolled in JOMEC’S Master of Philosophy programme. I had not come across the method of autoethnography and assumed, as I was to embark on an academic study of great proportion; I would be keeping my living space/personal life and academic research separate.

Perhaps I would observe productions touring intentional communities or document a performance which moved through light community spaces. At that time, my understanding of research and researcher were at odds with another, on either side of a binary. However, as my research plan became more solid, thinkers such as Foucault (1991) and Barthes (1972) caused my gaze to shift. When attending the theatre, I was conducting semiotic breakdowns of the sets,



the costumes, the dramaturgical choices and found it near impossible to 'turn off' that analytic mind. I found it hard to look past even the proscenium arch, which is present in most traditional and modern theatres. Quite suddenly, the spectacle of the orthodox theatre was diminished, and the textual analysis of the performances were shown in stark contrast with the practices for communicating the themes. There seemed to be a separation from the methods, or ideology of the performance and the means of communicating this ethos or ideology. In addition to the semiotic breakdowns I conducted, I underwent a profound shift in the way I viewed knowledge itself, and this influenced the style of the methodology this study adopted. Hirschman (1967, p.14) examines the tricks of creativity:

Creativity always comes as a surprise to us: we can never count on it, and we dare not believe in it until it has happened. In other words, we could not consciously engage upon those tasks whose success clearly requires that creativity be forthcoming. Hence, the only way in which we can bring out creative resources into full play is by misjudging the nature of the task, by presenting it to ourselves as more routine, simple, and undemanding of creativity than it will turn out to be.

The iterative aspect is defined as the thesis and the antithesis to creativity. Undertaking repetition, without the prerequisite for visible results being the defining factor for success. This describes the daily practice of my methodology, as the end goal was to co-produce a site-specific performance at the intentional community.

I wanted my reflexive practice to be deeply involved in the context of the intentional community which this research explores; in the way that Bishop (2012, p.5) describes:

To grasp participatory art from images alone is almost impossible: casual photographs of people talking, eating, attending a workshop or screening or seminar tell us very little, almost nothing, about the concept and context of a given project.

Site-specific performance is inherently participatory, and I would extend this view of participant to the land once again. A non-human entity which has scope to shape a site-specific performance, and also, based on the interaction of performances with this element of land, the practice might render the entire performance environmentally sustainable or not. The intentional community members informed my practice of creating site-specific performance within this international community. This was to be a sustained process; becoming practice; which became performance; and through praxis, knowledge.

In this early stage of my research, I experienced a fundamental shift towards the body, in the way I understood how performance technique was stored. Also shifting was *how* I would communicate this study's findings in relation to the concepts of art, artist, performance, and environment/land. In addition, the role of myself as a practitioner of performance-making was legitimised through research concerning epistemology (Arlander, 2018). According to Arlander (2018), the subjectivity of the artist-researcher is usually considered an asset rather than a disadvantage (p.134). Arlander expands upon Barad's (2007) theory of entangled matter and meaning which, to broadly summarise, problematises the assumed Cartesian cut<sup>40</sup>. Barad (2007) proposes that an agential cut is what allows researchers to, "contribute to the differential mattering of the world" (Barad, 2007, 178 cited in Arlander, 2018). Arlander highlights the

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40 The "I" in Peter Brook's *The Empty Space* (1968).

interconnectivity of human and non-human entities to her own practice of performance and performance-as-research (Arlander 2018, pp.133-134, p.147).

Barad's (2007) concept of interconnectivity between human and non-human entities and Arlander's (2018) interpretation of the agential cut (Barad 2007) informed my choice to conduct active-participant fieldwork at Coed Hills Rural Artspace.

Theories of epistemology in the philosophical and metaphysical context were in stark contrast to my previous performing arts training at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama<sup>41</sup>, an institution which resides a mere street away from Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media, and Culture.

Although I had explored how a character knew something in a text, I had never explored how I knew the character knew something. Nor did it occur to me, that techniques gained through the rehearsal process of repetition (Meisner cited in Durham in Meisner 2014) and stored in the body were another kind, or measure (p.141) of knowledge acquisition. Pathways to knowledge are not unilateral, but rhizomatic in structure and can also be embodied (Spatz, 2015, 2019). Knowledge acquisition and the ontological shift in epistemic studies directly related to and influenced the chosen methodology for this thesis. As this study has proven, the physical environment is an important factor in site-specific performance; and reasons for this are illuminated by the concept of the agential cut in its relation to land and environment (Arlander, 2018).

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<sup>41</sup> I found epistemology is practiced in essence, in most rehearsals and 'table work' sessions (where the cast sit at a table with the script and analyse it). To play a character one must interrogate the script and look for clues in the political and social climates which might have influenced the penning of a script.

In Chapter 6 of *Performance as Research* (2018) Anette Arlander wrote about the concepts of art, artist, performance, and environment and land; in an attempt to break down the actors or parts necessary to engage in onto-epistemic performance. Arlander's usage and interpretation of Barad's text is of special significance as it uses the term performance in the same way this study does. While other interpretations of Barad's text (2007) frame 'performance' as an unexpected result of recording research (Sciannamblo, 2019, pp. 79-80). Arlander (2018) uses Barad's (2007) to explicitly explore the self-creating-performance as a means of producing knowledge (p.134).

Arlander (2018, p.136) expands upon Barad's theory of the agential cut (2007) as it is applied to Arlander's creative process of 'performing landscape':

"...the heightened attention to onto-epistemology, even if not labeled as much, in creative research teaches positivists and linguists alike something about their practices and suggests that "all these practices are at once specific in terms of the knowledge produced and generic in onto-epistemology." (ibid)

Just as the "knowledge produced" (p.136) is specific to the actor taking part in a standard rehearsal process or creative research; Arlander, like Spatz (2019, p.5) argues this knowledge gained through research is specific to the researcher. A self-driven onto-epistemology connects the theoretical framework from the literature review of this study to the methodology. It delivers

the planned modalities of knowledge collection through the style of evocative autoethnography in a structured, well-studied philosophy of knowledge creation.

This chapter begins with a section discussing the concept of evocative autoethnography,

defining the style's relevance to the social sciences; as a means of communicating and creating qualitative data sets from groups of people, through co-habitation, and presenting the data to the public. The second section will delve into my own

*Section 3.1: Evocative auto-ethnography will have boxes of italicized text which communicate using the personal narrative evocative autoethnography style introduced in full, in the findings of this chapter:*

*Personal narratives propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives*

*(Ellis, 2004, p.46 cited in Ellis et al, 2011)*

*This personal narrative style is introduced in this chapter to show myself as a*

role as a researcher; debating the multiplicity as an active participant and community member conducting fieldwork at an intentional community, Coed Hills Rural Artspace. The third section will discuss the ethics of my place as a researcher living on-site and creating performances. And finally, in the fourth section the decision to conduct interviews with the eight core community members at Coed Hills, will be explained and expanded upon.

This is all undertaken with the hope that others who are in this intersection of culture - be that an intentional community member or a fellow researcher - will relate to my experiences as a researcher and provide a deeper meaning to the data in this study.

### Evocative Autoethnography

Autoethnography is, simply put, the self, writing about their own experiences interacting with, or observing a cultural group. This is the personal experience to help understand cultural experience (Bochner, 2010). Auto and Ethnography are two words uniquely combined by Carolyn Ellis in 1995 (p.9). Spelled without a hyphen the positioning shows that it is a genre in its own right, not just in connection with 'ethnography' (ibid).

Autoethnography as a communication method, has been linked to many performances such as dance, drama and song; and the communicating of such performances lends itself well to the autoethnographic style ([Holman et al, 2016, p.446](#)). This is because the experience of being an audience member at a performance, be it dance, song or theatrical, is difficult to translate to the written word (p 444). And furthermore, the artist-researcher needed a paved academic avenue so they could translate into the written word the ephemeral complexities they feel and interpret during a performance (ibid). Ellis et al (2010, pp 270-71) discuss the method's strengths:

Autoethnography, as method, attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art. Autoethnographers believe research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical *and* emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena.

This inclusive form for conducting research focuses on communicating the findings from ethnographic fieldwork to appeal “emotionally and intelligently to the lives of the readers” (Bochner and Ellis, 2016). Ellis and Bochner created a handout for evocative autoethnographic writing workshops titled: *Research Precepts for Interpretive Qualitative Research* (Ellis and Bochner, 2016, p.56) which is shown, below.

## **HANDOUT #1**

### **Research Precepts for Interpretive Qualitative Research**

- (1) The researcher is part of the research data;
- (2) A social science text always is composed by a particular somebody someplace;
- (3) The writing process is part of the inquiry;
- (4) Research involves the emotionality and subjectivity of both researchers and participants;
- (5) The relationship between researchers and research participants should be democratic; the researcher's voice should not dominate the choices of participants;
- (6) Researchers should accept an ethical obligation to give something important back to the people and communities they study and write about;
- (7) What researchers write should be “for” participants as much as “about” them;

- (8) Researchers and participants should be accountable to each other;
- (9) Research should be about what could be (not just about what has been);
- (10) The reader should be conceived as a co-participant, not a spectator, and given opportunities to think with (not just about) the research story (or findings).

This handout is included to show the ethical questions and concepts which are intrinsically linked to this kind of onto epistemology ( [Sciannamblo, 2019](#)). Number one on this handout, *The researcher is part of the research data* is reminiscent of the *who* that Ben Spatz references in their book *Blue Sky Body* (2019). As one is to fully embody a technique in a rehearsal process, the researcher is impossible to separate from the research (Bochner and Ellis, 2016, Handout 1). This applies to my autoethnographic work at Coed Hills, in the way that I as a researcher also chose to fully embody the way of the community I entered.

Spatz (2019, p.88) stated, "If I have the courage to take something seriously then others will too". There are two sides to this statement. The courage to take something seriously (ibid), perhaps, can be applied to many theses and past PhD studies. What Spatz refers to as courage, I would add, is made in part from rigour and discipline. Entering an intentional community space with the rigour and discipline required of myself as a PhD candidate and researcher meant I had to fully embody the role of researcher-in-residence to have that role valued and accepted in the intentional community, in question. The other side to this quotation is the 'other' of the University. To devote four years to the study of a small intentional community and site-specific performance within, although it might seem to be too niche, performance studies in this context, as this thesis will attest, has impact. It can transcend these specific case-



studies (Spatz, 2018, p.211) and, hopefully, benefit the intentional community which agreed to host the fieldwork.

Embodiment and clarity of role (of the self) must not disallow the recognition that an institutionalised structure and support system<sup>42</sup> can be present. Meaning, the researcher must recognise that there is an inherent hierarchy when an individual is backed by a university. This is true even if the researcher takes as many precautions as possible and steps to eliminate and acknowledge their position of power; like in the post-Grotowski rehearsal room and the concept of an intentional surrender (Spatz, 2019, p.188) or submission.

To fully define the nuances of the role of myself as a researcher, living in community; I cite Spatz, who added the classification “spatialized” (Spatz, 2019, p. 5) to their methods of onto-epistemology. Spatz boldly pioneers spatially and bodily aware, self-centered knowledge acquirement. Their research explores *what* and *how*, in an epistemic breakdown of embodied technique. Spatz also explores and acknowledges the *who*. Spatz differs from their predecessors in their understanding of a key concept: submission and surrender. Submission and surrender are also concepts regarding the actor-director relationship. This relationship with submission could be Grotowskian (p.168), which is teetering on the edge of abusive when taken to an extreme. Or the relationship between director and actor and the concepts of surrender and submission can be ‘informal’ (Spatz, 2020, p.190), with actors and directors conversing freely and interacting socially (ibid). Much like the way I entered the community, the concepts of surrender and submission informed an aspect of what this study refers to as

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<sup>42</sup> As was the case with this study, in the form of Cardiff University.

'community mindedness'. My role and acceptance within the intentional community determined the successfulness of my fieldwork and ultimately, this study. This is another way of looking at hierarchy systems and also, acknowledging that the researcher or subject utilises agency as defined by Barad (2007); where the concept is not something which one 'has'. According to this interpretation, agency is more of a relationship, and in keeping with Barad's philosophy, agency is then also defined by the complex systems of intra-actions that one experiences in the everyday. The intra-action (Barad 2007) I performed, without the sectoral 'other' to define the phenomena, was the act of field-note taking. A process that Back,

*At the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama the students were graded on how well they acted the roles assigned to them in plays. In these rehearsals we discussed, mainly, the character in terms of their thoughts, feelings, wants, objectives. This was opposed to reading the play as a cultural text and discussing how socio- or political factors could have influenced the writing. In the third year, the performance year, the audience was very narrow. The main purpose for performance in this context is to gain representation from an agency in London, and, as such, increase the social standing and thus, funding, of the institution. It is astounding that The Guardian's top school in the UK for drama (2015) has no emphasis on embodied technique nor acknowledgment of the theorists who laid out the*

described as: "The little notebooks we carry around are not only ledgers of our thinking but also records of our philosophy" (Back, 2007, p.2).

Carolyn Ellis (2016) described her process of taking field notes as a therapeutic experience, one which was inseparable from her academic research. Ellis (2016) argued: one cannot truly be a reflexive autoethnographer without the exchange and interplay of emotion and reason (p.27). This outlook was addressed by the theatre practitioners Grotowski and Brook textually, in the

discipline of theatre studies; and practice, in their rehearsal rooms. Both defied the reason-heavy morality plays of their predecessor Brecht. Where Brecht would create didactic theatre

(Benjamin et al., 2003, p.8)

Grotowski and Brook would focus on the wants or tribulations of the characters.

They criticised Brecht for creating performances which sought to change the 'conditions' but not the 'soul' and bringing to the foreground political hope.

This methodology asked specific questions with no set

answers, like Grotowski and Brook, in my own role as performer and researcher in-residence.

Regarding my way of communicating with the reader Bochner (2016, p.37) states,

"Communication should be *not only what we study* but *how we represent what we study*; that is, in stories that connect the readers". Here is another connection between the two philosophies of performance-making and the social-science modalities which Bochner (2016) alluded to in the above quote. Bochner (2016) reiterated the sentiment of results being linked to process and methods of storytelling. His project's research methods reflected this sentiment as well. In the field of cultural studies this is called the methodology and findings; and in drama studies, the rehearsal process and performance. Methodology is how one is to go about something, and this is comparable to the rehearsal process; in the way the cast and director work out how they will perform the final performance. The findings of a rehearsal process are presented to an audience in the performance stage. This is to say the rehearsal process is an ongoing

*The critic above is echoed by Spatz (2020) in Making a Laboratory.*

*"...In theatre-making, the aims of experimentation and knowledge production compete with those of artistic composition and public spectacle."*

*(Spatz 2020, p. 25)*

*On one side of the theatre-making (incentive) spectrum above sits spectacle; aesthetically pleasing, easy-viewing. On the other side is a more technical and academically driven onto-experiment which uses theatre arts to answer a research question. My methods for this study investigated the interplay between this perceived binary of knowledge exploration and acquisition, and the artistic, public-driven (or pleasing) performance. Through this study, the*

experiment where the cast and director work together to find a way to best communicate a message and emotion to an audience. However, performance and roles are not limited to the stage (Brook, 1968; Spatz 2019; Schechner, 1998, 2009). Nor was the case-study of Coed Hills Rural Artspace defined to one event or role. The community exercised a non-traditional stance on hierarchy - or at least in voiced representation - (hierarchy is explored more fully in section 10.2) and reflexivity of self as a researcher was very important to the methodology of this study.

In the Art of Listening, Back (2007) argued for a type of ethnographic and sociological inquiry which embraces what he called: 'interpretation without legislation' (1). This thesis is in line with Back's mode of inquiry, where, as researcher, I did not attempt to legislate or superimpose my own theories of structure (for sustainable relationship between community member and visiting *host*) rather than observe what structures already existed and from that point make my exploration and describe not what to do, but what I found. Now, however, I would like to acknowledge the implications of my describing the words and actions my participants to shatter any and all notions of objectivity.

Here thinking, talking and describing is always a betrayal- albeit a necessary one- of either the person about whom one is speaking or the things that we know about them but which remain unsaid

(Back, 2007, p.4)

In this passage, Back described Derrida's (1993) interrogation into his reasoning to have written *Circumfession* (Back 2007, 38) wherein Derrida documented and described the death of his mother. Interrogating *why he wrote this*, asking *whom* did his work serve and *how*? Back (2007). 'One cannot find the right words, yet silence is also impossible' (Derrida 1993, p36) like Derrida (1993) and myself in this acknowledge the multiplicities judgments one will have on the

author, through the analysis of their analysis. Proving once again, that my depiction of events and peoples represented in this thesis are none other than my own.

And although I triangulate my description of the afore mentioned events, and people with interviews from the community members and borrowed lenses of interpretation: as I spent almost three years living in this community the views expressed are subjective and informed by my own experiences of this intentional community and working closely with the visiting artists and performers.

Thomas Kuhn (1970), at the time of Richard Schechner's Environmental Theatre (1994) and emerging theatre studies, was a social scientist also debating the very idea of true objectivity, even in the context of the empirical data sets (Kuhn, 1970; Bochner, 2016). He went so far as to place the subjectivity of humans at the centre of the scientific process. Bochner (2016, p.37) wrote on this theory:

If you couldn't eliminate the influence of the observer on the observed, then no theories or findings could ever be completely free of human values and subjectivity. The investigator would always be implicated in the product.

Textually, their plays were often open ended and asked questions of the audience. In Grotowski's theatre - he hoped to inspire the spectator to leave the theatre feeling in charge of their own life after having deeply felt another's human experience. In this way they hoped to reach the emotions of the audience; and believed that this would inspire more empathy for their

fellow man outside the theatre, to become politically minded. I saw a direct correlation here with Ellis' hope of evocative autoethnography (2016, p.9):

This work made me feel I was doing something meaningful for myself and hopefully for others, and that feelings helped relieve my malaise too. In doing this writing, I no longer accepted that the words 'research' and 'therapeutic' were an anathema if said in the same sentence. I vowed then that I would only do work that had the potential to be helpful to my participants, readers, and me as a researcher.

Social change and social sciences have been linked (Ellis and Bochner, 2016, p.50), and in this meeting of fields, this research comes into play. This is done with an explicit marrying of the two fields of study - performance studies and cultural theory. Another overlap between

autoethnographic research and site-specific performance, is making the hope for the future way a driving force for impact. Ellis and Bochner write about this topic in their book, *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories* (2016). Perhaps the focus on 'story telling' is where the link between site-specific performance and the social sciences was made, on communication and dissemination of knowledge.

*Autoethnographic research lends itself to trauma, Ellis states many times over her body of work. There is something about why people, researches in particular, seek out communities and I believe that my going to Coed Hills was very much in link with the sudden death of my father, just three months into my degree, nine months before I moved to Coed Hills. I believe that I was naturally drawn to community life as it was something I was deeply missing on a subconscious level. The opportunity to have hands-on experience with building, creating art, being in nature, and still pursue my degree was a dream come true. So much about community life is steeped in the reflexive interpretation of events through feelings in the mind and body. I felt the need to throw myself into the experience, the community, completely- and I thought it would be therapeutic for myself as well. I remember viewing myself as participant in the experiment and the conductor, and so the style of autoethnography is the most authentic method for this study not only*

What is the primary outcome

for a research project - is the main prerogative to inform? And if so, how can this be done in the most efficient way? According to Bochner and Ellis (2016), and Dunleavy (2015), the delivery of message must be centred around the audience. Spatz cites the audience as, "the most fundamental principle of contemporary performing arts" (Spatz, 2020, p. 20). The audience has the ability to shape the style and voice of the piece - whether it be written or performed. But less

often is the question asked, “who is writing this?” And the answer has a great deal of importance, if one wishes to contextualize the research presented by Jones et al (2016, p.108):

The purpose of autoethnography, at least from the social science perspective, is not only to tell personal stories. It intends to expand the understanding of social realities through the lens of the researcher’s personal experiences.

I looked towards traditional rehearsal systems to define my route into research. I based my methods on those of theatre makers Grotowski (2010), Brook (1964), Spatz (2019), Stanislavski (2013) and Schechner (1994); and used exercises from their rehearsal room practices which informed my social sciences research. In character work, Grotowski would have the actor play the same scene over and over in different scenarios; allowing them to feel the range of emotions they could have in varying situations and heights of stakes (Durham, 2004). Here, in this style, the director hoped the actor would not ‘become’ the character, which was the goal with Meisner’s and Stanislavski’s ‘Method’ (Schechner, 2000); but access the parts of themselves which were already connected to the text and character. By putting the text and actor into different situations – for example soldiers in WW1 versus kids at a soda bar - the actor will resonate with different readings of the line. Do this enough, and when the actor returns to the situation from the text, the repetition work done will be emotionally recalled via the text, with the hope that this will add more layers of authentic feelings underneath the surface. This, as hoped by the directors mentioned, would make the actor’s portrayal, as viewed by the spectator, (and the actor themselves) ‘believable’ (Kapsali, 2010).



I expand this process of rehearsal to my methods of researching. Systems of rehearsal are strikingly similar to the systems of research which are practiced in the fields of the social sciences 43. For exploring how sustainability is practiced for the 'actor' in community, and seeing as there is no concrete map of this specific endeavour, I looked to the theatre practitioners who were informed by the 'classic' theatre directors; Stanislavski (2010); Brecht (2015); Peter Brook (1964); and Boal (1993, 1995); who took their experimentations with the relationship between the 'actor'; 'act-er' and 'observer'; 'audience'. Brook (1964) paved the way for Richard Schechner's pioneering text: *Performance Studies* (2009). This created an avenue for Ben Spatz's work in embodied research (2018, 2020); and the concept of performance being applicable across disciplines (Spatz, 2018, p.211). Their workings surrounding the concept of embodiment and technique, are as knowledge stored in the body (Spatz 2015). This relates to an acting term, 'sense-memory' which is prominent in Stanislavski's methods (Stanislavskij and Hapgood 2013); and which I was also inspired by (2019) on the previously actor-centric practice.

In many ways rehearsing for a play is like performing one long experiment, or case study. And as theatre practitioners had done the work in organising their rehearsal room, I looked to their modes of implementation, and continued to be on the lookout for other crossovers which had the opportunity to be uncovered through my residency at Coed Hills.

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43 See *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985) Richard Schechner.

The reflexivity and exploration of 'roles' made this evocative autoethnographic style appealing; and also necessary to my research process. Van der Turin questions the separation of

*Because the Artspace was purpose build for permaculture and the arts, there could be the very human want to prove themselves as doing better (or even a skewed vision of 'worse') than the reality. Communities which exist inside bubbles are not able to be objective, so interviewing the residents I did not believe would be enough, although I did conduct interviews as well, there was more to be uncovered and seen, embodied. I found that reading other evocative autoethnographic stories and accounts inspired in me real emotion and that, like the theatre, is what left a lasting impression on myself as a reader. I chose to write about communities telling stories through performance, and mirror what they are doing in my writing of my experience, in other worlds, to live in community, telling a*

'scientific' and 'artistic'. I do not resonate with the binary in my identity as a researcher; and I also do not think it beneficial to unnecessarily dwell on the differences between qualitative or quantitative research, nor the distinction between the physical and social sciences. Barad makes this point and stated the research is driven by the researcher, and this is not actually as 'bad' as we perceive it (Barad, 2007). Van der Turin criticized the anthropocentric tradition of the cold, 'authoritative

scientist' (Arlander, 2017, p.136); who in a completely neutral environment, coldly logs data from a silenced participant or object. Arlander (2017) continues to define performance as phenomena created by artist-researchers, citing Barad (2007), who defines the phenomena in practice as:

Not merely make(ing) the epistemological inseparability of 'observer' and 'observed'; rather phenomena are [...] ontological entanglements.

(Barad, 2007, p.333 cited in Arlander, 2017, p.136)

I see the comparison here drawn to ontological epistemologies; defining practice and arts based research and knowledge acquisition; but resulting in performance based. It concerns the idea that there must be an observer for the performance to constitute just that; otherwise it would go into the act of ritual or ceremony (Shepherd, 2016; Schechner, 2009).

...our love of language leads us to try to create one of our own and as a result weakens our ability as communicators

(Back, 2007, 2)

The needless bandying about of complicated and new terminology to justify this nuance in experience seems forced. Through the constant creation of new terminology, Arlander (2017) misses the point. As if the writer is trying to over-explain her purpose and place in the arts-based research, the text becomes hard to read without a dictionary to hand, or a thorough understanding of her specific field of research. Although I want this text to stand up to it's theoretical contemporaries I also want it to be accessible for practitioners of performance, and those living in intentional communities. I would pin my research to be not so much concerned with the study of epistemology, knowledge or even onto-epistemology, although this method could run alongside my style of auto-ethnography, and I do see the benefits<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> More on this in 3.4 Interviews and Empirical data.

This research does not seek to problematise or dissect the theory of practice generating new knowledge, but accepts the terms previously laid out. This research is novel in the filling of the gap between the intersecting fields of performance and cultural studies; where this art form of site-specific performance within an intentional community is realised and explored. Uniquely, this is not based on a week or two as artist-in-residence; this field work is centred around sustained contact, over a period of two years living in the artistic community. Back (2007) wrote that while the task of organizing society might be too large or even dangerous (citing where the social sciences attempt to organize society as in Nazi Germany (1)), the role of the sociologist for representing and understanding their participants or community is to pay attention to the fragments they personally experience, and give those fleeting or prolonged moments of observation “serious attention” (1) , by which this style of research hopes to achieve.

#### Field work as an active participant

There is little to no substitute for direct participation and observation

(Atkinson 2017, 123)

Fieldwork as an active participant was a main component of my method. To do this, I needed to engineer an authentic integration with a hosting community. This was carried out for the purpose of field notes, with observation as an active participant at the forefront. In line with the idea that a researcher must position themselves in the actual environment, or manifestations of “objects and with people” (Chang, 2018, p.108). I was a resident in the intentional community for two years. The time period was October 2017 to October 2019.

Gatekeepers of the theatre put up boundaries which keep out new modalities. They position 'high culture' or purely aesthetic and spectacle theatre as something which is perfect and cannot be altered for fear of losing whatever it is that gives the audiences "Theatre". A criticism of sustainable methods for performance creation is the idea that enforcing sustainability will hinder the aesthetic value of the performance, negating the whole reason and significance for the performance in question.

*Sustainability in production: Exploring eco-creativity within the parameters of conventional theatre* (Beer et al., 2017), studied a performance from the beginning of rehearsals to the final performance. A key aim for their research, which was conducted in Australia, was to contribute to the ecological design paradigm. It argued that the supposed limitation of sustainable design need not be a hinderance. This research contended that ecologically aware design is rather a new opportunity to think critically and creatively in building and scenography practices (Has and Beer, 2017 p.40). Their methodology explored practice-based research methods and was carried out by the researcher and set-designer as active-participant fieldwork. The methodology of this study is similar to the framework laid out by Beer et al., (2017) in the following ways.

Firstly, Beer et al., (2017) cite their role as triangulating the concerns from director, "integrating creative processes with eco-efficiency, aesthetics, organizational considerations and director's expectations" (p.33). The aim of my role in the first two case studies was not to "integrate a creative process with" (p.33); so much as to observe the creative process which already existed. This is because Beer and Hes (2017) were entering the orthodox theatre; which is in comparison to a site-specific performance within an intentional community, a more controlled

environment. I chose to take my time in implementing my own theories until the third case-study this thesis will present. I wanted to observe what practices were being explored for sustainable site-specific performance in this intentional community space; as opposed to instruct before I knew the current practices. Eco-efficiency was already a concept at Coed Hills and their current practices for the events space reflected this ideology. However, the practices of the smaller-scaled performances that would happen outside the event space and site-specifically around the intentional community's land; were regulated by the ideology of the visiting performer, as opposed to the intentional community.

In doing fieldwork as an active participant, I was able to gauge the wishes of the community members and more fully integrate the visiting artist or performer with the intentional community. This was in terms of both the practices chosen to reflect the ideology of the performance piece and the intentional community members themselves. This is similar to what Beer et al., (2017) aimed to do in addressing the, "aesthetics, organizational considerations and director's expectations" (p.33) as parts to be integrated with eco-efficiency (ibid). With the end-goal of sustainability as measured by emotional and environmental impact; I had to be clear with the visiting artists and performers, plus community members. I, like Beer et al., (2017) was on site to observe and explore some aspects of the design and installation process.

However, this study's research goes even further in the categories of time and role(s) played while conducting the active-participant fieldwork, as Ellis (2016, p.28) delineates:

I saw the need to live in multiple realities simultaneously

I can relate to Ellis' experience of a multiplicity of roles, for several reasons. Being at Coed Hills Rural Artspace I was an active participant conducting fieldwork. This umbrella role had included the other roles of resident/researcher/performer /observer; not only for the planned two years of research<sup>45</sup>, but for the times surrounding the official start and end date of my fieldwork.

I would also like to draw attention to Elli's use of the word "live" (Ellis, 2016, p. 28). When I asked: '*What practices for sustainable site-specific performance are being explored in intentional community spaces?*' my research looked to deconstruct this question not only from the perspective of the researcher but also from the more underrepresented entity; the intentional community member. A goal was to see how ideologies of sustainability were strived for, both emotionally and environmentally; and how those ideologies were practiced from the perspective of the intentional community member. Sustainability as a theme is often environmental and investigated from the production's standpoint, such as in *The Green Theatre Book* (Dillon, 2021). The viewpoint of sustainability in the emotional realm, however, is left out. To answer my research question, my methodology had to deeply explore both perspectives. And, as I had a background in performance creation; conducting field work as an active participant in an arts community gave the depth of experience this question needed to be answered.

Again, acknowledging the criticism of (autoethnographic) fieldwork and research being too centred around the researcher (Adams et al, pp. 8-9); I looked at other avenues which are more quantitative, rather than qualitative. An alternative method I considered was a standard carbon analysis of performance, using the Industry Green calculator devised by Julie's Bicycle, a

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<sup>45</sup> See timeline in Findings chapter (p. 135)

charity think-tank which tracks greenhouse emissions (Mosley, 2015). This carbon calculator was appealing not only because the tool measures carbon output and various electric and material environmental impacts but also because it was created with the performing arts sector in mind (Beer et al., 2017, p.38). The IG was used explicitly in the 2017 study, where Beer et al., (2017) surveyed a production in an orthodox theatre and evaluated environmental sustainability on the merits of Eco scenography, eco-efficiency, and environmentally sustainable production principles (such a re-using and recycling old props). However, in the context of this study, there are many other factors at play which would be immeasurable by the IG. If the research were based in this calculation alone, my findings would be incomplete in relation to emotional sustainability, which is a key component regarding my research question. Bicycle's IG is extremely useful for traditional theatre and theatre spaces, but not off-the grid or site-specific use. In the Green Theatre Book (Dillon 2021) the use of the IG is not recommended for use unless the production has chosen a 'Sustainability Champion' (p.55) who has been trained in how to use the calculator. This is also only done if the level of commitment to sustainability is in the upper two tiers outlined by Dillon et al, in the Green Theatre Book (2021). This research was not in the upper two tiers, rather, in the beginning level. Additionally, the (2017) research by IG and Beer et al., did not focus on the emotional sustainability of the hosting community but solely on the environmental impact.

In order to use the IG, I would have also liked access to information on electric bills, and a history of costs to be able to compare productions and long-term consistency of practices. Plus, I wanted to implement specific tactics to see how changes in practice might affect the carbon and electrical output - something which might have affected the monetary gain of the Wedding Company or the artistic freedom of the artists and performers-in-residence. These risks and difficulties made me turn away from the more quantifiable breakdown of sustainability and



towards a more onto-epistemic deconstruction, and out of this reflexive practice, focusing on the emotional sustainability of the performers and community members. These qualitative methods of practice-based, active-participant research assisted me in the exploration of the sustainable practices for site-specific performance in intentional communities.

I implemented the use of Mason's Table (Beer et al., 2017, p 40) for the analysis and documentation of the case studies which took place at Coed Hills over 2017-2019. In using this table as a base, my unique methodology is anchored in another's research. This choice gives my new positionality a concrete foundation and using this table as a tool for deconstruction allowed me to distance myself from the personal observations I made during my fieldwork and residency at Coed Hills.

The practice-led researcher is interested in "understanding the situation", she is primarily focused on active research for the service of change and the betterment of the field through an interactive process of problem setting, tacit knowledge and reflection in action (Schön, 1983, p. 147). This methodology supports the scenographer as a catalyst and facilitator of change in instigating ecological improvement and potential... knowledge creating... established though the very process of developing ... where problems were not only identified on the job but also practiced to resolution (Haseman, 2007, p. 147)

(Beer et al., 2017, p.38)

Although the research of this thesis was not focused on scenography, the research was interested in the environmental and ecological sustainability of a production and how one can measure and, in some cases, impact an outcome. This research is also interested in the

emotional sustainability of the community acting as host. In the quote above from Beer et al., (2017), there is an important line to address. The hope that this new process will instigate change is a sentiment reflected in work by Boal and Schechner, Spatz and Ellis and Bochner. Their research aims to reflexively uncover new methods for environmental and ecological sustainability with the hope of creating practices that would inform future decisions, making for a more sustainable future. This onto-epistemic methodology is rooted in qualitative and active-participant research. Like theatre for social change, the reflection-in-action is also a driving force of the method. The new questions and problems that were discovered during field work are paramount in a community where so much can change on a day to day basis<sup>46</sup>. Reading about the community, or interviewing community members from Coed Hills would, for the reason outlined above, not have been sufficient. Active participant field work therefore suits my question, as I am asking it from the perspective of the performance maker; and to aid the future developments of site-specific performance within intentional communities.

A component of sustainability which arose through this field work as active participant is the concept of 'time' in relation to sustainability. I explored long-term contact with community while living on site. Conducting fieldwork was the most appropriate modality for me to truly experience what it would be like for an arts practitioner to live in an intentional community and create site-specific performance pieces; and there is limited published research and writing around this process. In thinking about sustainable performance long-term; from the beginning it was clearly important to me as a researcher that my methods reflected the end-goal of the question. And I hope this research lives on in the hands of other practitioners and intentional community members; the fieldwork becoming a field guide.

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<sup>46</sup> see table of changes in the Findings chapter

As postmodern research contends, data sets are inextricably linked with the researcher, the one conducting the experiment (Barad, 2007; Ellis et al, 2010). The methods of this active-participant fieldwork reflect this idea in the way of living space, and relations with the intentional community members. Yelena Gluzman (2016) states, "it is no longer outrageous to claim that performance can be a method of investigation" (p.105), and my research surrounding three site-specific performances within this intentional community proves her stance. Active-participant and observational fieldwork, as well as performance-as-research, were utilised in conjunction with one another to give this research a robust foundation. In addition, it is reflexive to the needs of the people who populate the intentional community; and the visiting artists and performers who instigated the site-specific performances.

This methodology combined cultural and community theatre principles; for the researcher lived with an intentional community for just over two years, investigating the practices for sustainable site-specific performance. The goal here was to create a prolonged and sustainable contact, as the findings will attest and further explore.

During November 2017 - July 2019, I facilitated other artists and performers in the productions and staging of their visions. This included daily tasks such as: taking notes; photographs; writing poetry as a way to process my feelings around the work; and getting involved in building projects on site. All the while taking careful fieldnotes and journal entries. My own personal and private creative output was used for deconstructing the themes which began to arise from the time I spent living in the community.

Concerning timing, unfortunately or perhaps fortunately; I could not be in two places at once. I had a wealth of embodied knowledge and techniques and was able to interpret reflexively; aided by the practiced hours spent devoted to the task of repetition and ritual in the rehearsal room. The opportunity to live and research on site was also too good to let pass; and now looking back at Coed Hills, I can confidently say my research benefited from this timing.

After the two years, my research was complete. I produced my own performance-event, which is documented in the findings from my earlier case-studies. Afterwards, I interviewed the eight intentional community members about their experiences with the site-specific performances. Trauger (2009, p. 119 ) describes a similar approach:

After this intensive phase I visited the member farms on follow-up visits and participated in network activities (conferences, educational events and harvest festivals) throughout the entire year of field work and afterwards. (ibid )

Similar to Trauger (2009), when she had finished the most intensive portion of her fieldwork, I stepped out of the role of community member and into the role of artist/performer/researcher. To take this step away from the community, moving back to Cardiff gave me physical separation, and allowed me space and time to process the two years I spent living on-site.

Living off-the-grid

Some theorists believe that social media has rewired our nervous system so that humans now require constant arousal (Zimbardo and Duncan, 2012; Ellis and Bochner 2016) and this has

been echoed in the media we consume as well. This sentiment relates to my method of writing habits and lifestyle as an autoethnographer, as well as my involvement in the community.

There would be obvious challenges to living off-the-grid while I conducted my research, and I was acutely aware that this decision might make my fieldwork less valid in the eyes of some more traditional or science-based academics. However, I believe it is a strong suit of my fieldwork that I lived off-the-grid for the first year of my degree and shows how dedicated and rigorous I had to be, at a base level. And as Ellis (2016) wrote:

Of course, you can get distracted anywhere these days. So the question becomes: Can you resist? What is your level of discipline and determination? These are questions only you can answer. (Ellis and Bochner, 2016, 97)

I could have been just as easily distracted by sitting in my flat in the city, with the world of the internet at my fingertips. Cultivating a healthy and dedicated writing practice is going to be difficult for anyone, regardless of the place. And although my environment presented me with fresh obstacles of practicality and distraction, the daily practice of analogue field notes followed by electronic write-ups grounded and focused my time. I also saw my process to be in line with sustainable living - a site-specific PhD; as I liked to think of it at times. Out of necessity, I made sure to go to 'the Barn' every morning and drop off my laptop to charge (1 on fig. 6); and then began my daily activities with a notebook and pencil in hand for making fieldnotes as the day went on. I gathered my laptop at the end of the working day and typed up my notes in the evening, while the laptop was charged. I had no running water, electricity, or Wi-Fi in my cabin and was thus immersed in the culture of the intentional community from the first day of arriving on site. In this practice of living off-the-grid, moving into the cabin (15 on fig. 6) mid-November; the hope was to live like the other members of the community did, and that I might gain respect.

I read: *Principles of Self-Sufficiency* (Seymore, 1976), described as “the bible of the self-sufficiency movement” ( Bates, 2016) and was recommended to me by a community member in my first weeks living on site. It was also recommended by a community member I read, or re-read, *On Walden Pond* (Thoreau and Thoreau, 1962), which was a childhood favorite of mine.

Due to the nature of my research, it would feel hypocritical to perhaps travel once a day to visit the community or have an electrically heated student house with Wi-Fi. This would only add to the separation and, along with the personal reasons outlined earlier, there was no question in my mind that I wanted to take on this physical challenge. And following Ellis and Bochner’s (2016) advice: “Researchers should accept an ethical obligation to give something important back to the people and communities they study and write about” (p.56).

### Ethics of an active participant

The ethics of an ‘outsider’ artist or performer entering an intentional community to create sustainable site-specific performance for and of the community is tricky. Intentional communities are on the rise (Howard, 2021) and wandering artists and performers have traditionally spent time in intentional communities. The intrinsic link between site-specific performance and social change proves that performance can play an important role in renewal projects and community transformation (McKinnie, 2012, p.30; Schechner, 1977).

Although not a widely spread criticism, Wiles (2003, p.8) outlines one of the principal areas for concern in relation to performance within community spaces:

Some performance events appropriate spaces for their own uses and on their own terms  
- they subsume them within the apparatus of the events as much as entering into a  
dialogue with them.

I feel it is necessary to be especially reflexive in my relating to this point, while divining this modality.

For a researcher to live within the context of a pre-existing community, especially one that is tied closely to land, there is an ethical awareness needed. Not only in the interpersonal and human relationships, but also to those relationships the researcher forms with the land and physical environment of the community. Artist Ned Thomas stated, "the scenery is never separate from the history of the place, from the feeling for the lives that have lived there (Thomas, 1973, p.72). This is an argument for the creative and artistic merits of site-specific performance, and also for conducting the majority of my research as fieldwork. This interconnectivity between the land and scenography of a performance has been explored by Mike Pearson, in Chapter 5 of *Performing Site-Specific Theatre* (2010). He discusses a production by National Theatre Wales which was performed site-specifically at a reconstructed village in Sennybridge Training Area, just outside of Llanelli in South Wales. Here Pearson writes the performance was devised in a studio in Cardiff; and because access to the site was limited, moved in only a few weeks before the performance began. The author is careful to note that the 'barracks' - where the audience entered - was where the actors had been eating (Pearson, 2010, p.74). The author goes forward to explain, in detail, the path the audience take, a 20-minute walk across the village to

the larger structure. There is no mention of how the locals felt about this nightly walk across their village, nor how the performers felt in the act of walking.

I include this account because there was also a political motive for the spatiality of this performance. The hope that this unique positionality of the Grecian text in this English-defiled Welsh town, would bring about nuances and raise connotations from within the text which would otherwise be nonexistent.

In asking if a site-specific production is sustainable, the ethics of me, as a researcher, asking this question are also brought into scrutiny. Although it is recognised that a performance can have many benefits to an intentional community, ([Giovanni, 2002, p.16](#)), this research had to be sensitive and not only be aware of the benefits. If a site-specific performance appropriates the land or community acting as host and if my research brought about this exploitation; not only would the production be unsustainable but my place as researcher in the community would be too.

To negate this risk for the goal of environmental sustainability; I clearly communicated with the intentional community members the potentialities of bringing in other performers and artists. The community had already been housing visiting artists and performers since its founding in the 1980s. Because of this, the community members were most looking forward to having my research surrounding environmental sustainability to act as a frame for these visiting artists and performers. In the past, there were no guidelines for environmental sustainability of site-specific performance in this intentional community. Furthermore, there had not previously been a person who lived on-site to be a point-of-contact for the visiting artists and performers. I would devote time to discovering the practices for sustainable site-specific performance within the intentional



community; and the community supported this as the exploration. And, findings would be centred around their practices, with my own research of other practitioners from the field. It was agreed that this would benefit the community.

The last line of the chapter notes that nothing has changed by this performance happening in this location, at least in terms of land acquisition. However, the emotional effect, though ephemeral, was palpable and meaningful to those members of the host community (Pearson, 2010, p.83). I ask if this fleeting social impact is enough?

I moved on site a few months before my official research period began; so there were already bonds and connections present with myself and the community members when I entered the official research phase. This issue concerning 'relational ethics' (Ellis, 2007) is common in autoethnographic studies (Bochner, 2011). It was always my intention to generate writing and create site-specific performance in this intentional community; and that was my role in daily life outside the community. This intention was how I introduced myself to the landowners and gardener in my initial visit. I let myself become completely immersed in community life for the first few months, rarely taking time to go to class in Cardiff University or visit with friends outside the intentional community. From the early days of this fieldwork, it was clear that an end-goal of my research would be to produce a site-specific performance from within the intentional community as my culmination of residency; and experiment with what I'd learned, through the embodied knowledge I was hoping to acquire. But before I could do that, I had to learn from the intentional community.

Petra Kupperts, author of *Community Performance*, asks: Who tells these stories? Whose stories are they to tell? And: What is the role of the community performance artist? (Kupperts

and Robertson, 2007). The community where my research was to be conducted was centred around the arts and thus, perhaps inherently, counter cultural (Schechner, 2000).

As it was established in the section titled: *Evocative autoethnography* (8.2), the notion of objectivity had to be carefully interrogated and exercise transparency throughout my descriptions. I would have to, as Atkinson (2015) stated; "...write the author 'into' the ethnographic text, so that the process of inquiry and authorship are simultaneously available to the reader" (162).

Too much of separating myself from the community would mean that I might lose reflexivity, in thinking that my position was truly the only justified belief at play. If I was to keep my researcher role at the foreground of my residency at Coed Hills; I would be need to be wary of believing my observations held more weight than those of the community members. In other words, too much of a critical eye during the active participation would hinder my place socially and also keep me from learning. However, too little observation meant I'd still lose the reflexivity required for praxis such as this; but in a sense of full submission to the community by placing their values and philosophies over my own critical analysis. Losing myself in the daily community life and tasks was always a risk as the community needed help constantly. And there was pressure to succumb to the latter - this is not uncommon in the fields of thought surrounding community art (Lynch, 2014). The producer or artist can gain merit based on their perceived willingness to give over ownership to their collaborators (ibid; Marstine, 2011). To stay, ethically, in the intentional community meant fulfilling the promises of my methodology and honoring the rigour regarding my university and the intentional community members. A delicate balancing of roles and communication with the university and the community members was a key component in maintaining this balance. Another side to the question of ethics is the issue of reading the

intentional community as a text, to divine their practices for sustainable site-specific performance, as examined by Shepard (2016, pp.11-12, own elision):

The activity of reading subculture as text...they [anthropologists] could understand more about the people they studied by learning to identify and interpret their symbols or sign-systems....it was important to them because it could explain the opinions or ideology and thereby reveal how dominant social structures maintained themselves in being.

Observation of the practices of this sub-cultures group - the intentional community of Coed Hills - is carried out, as Shepard (2016) states, to reveal how dominant social structures are maintained and enacted through the collective practices. "Everyday life presents the ethnographer with a remarkable array of collectives and networks that furnish opportunities for actors to cultivate sources of identification, loyalty, and commitment" ( Atkinson 2017, 99)

Observing a community group as an active participant would allow me to participate in the practices, thus, gaining a deeper understanding of how their ideology is embodied (Shepard, 2016 11-12). Before the three case studies this thesis will present, I will describe the typical day in the life of a community member at Coed Hills rural Artspace from November 2017-February 2020. To give the reader a sense of the community as it existed, without the interference of the researcher, though told through the lens of myself, as observer.

Taking into account Atkinson's '*granular ethnography*' (working with the grain of the everyday life of this community' (2017, 171) for my starting off point of this analysis, Atkinson suggests to define the unique social object as exploring the knowledge and uniqueness of the 'spatial and temporal, aesthetic and material, linguistic and interpersonal" (ibid)

To understand the practices for sustainable site-specific performance; first I had to define what this specific sub-culture was and to pick out key points that made this group's unique ideology. This is so I could acknowledge it, and let this information inform my interpretation of the group (ibid). Therefore, more clearly defining my own place and behaviours within its context.

My position could be imagined as a storyteller (Gluzman, 2017, p.105) in this community, and not only as the literal "performer" or "actor" which was also fulfilled intentionally at times. The performance or performer role can be taken to relate to the act of living in community. If one is always being the observed, as the community members were, one performs that *role* of community member.

Schechner (1994) references the place of a performer in community with a model:



Figure 3 'Untitled', Schechner, 1994, p 245.

This model shows the blurring of the lines, and interconnected-ness of the performer and community member. The lines going in and out of the two circles show the movement of the physical bodies; but also they show the mental framework at play during a performance of this kind. Here I'm using the term performance to encompass my placement in community, and not just during the intentional site-specific performances with the official spectator and audience.

I include this more focused breakdown of performance here in my methodology, because performance in community can take on many meanings; and the lines can be blurred between what constitutes a site-specific performance within an intentional community space. Through the readings and lived experiences of my fieldwork, I wish to challenge the self-imposed binary. I acknowledge that there is not always a line between when a performance is happening, or the community member becomes the performer, or vice versa. It is necessary to explore the

multiplicities concept of performance within a community now, to frame the ethical boundaries of my findings<sup>47</sup>, beginning with commentary by Shepard (2016, p.10):

Face-work, game, play and ritual all seem to be models of human behavior that are somehow intensified beyond the accidental or casual... these modes of behaviors all have understood, if not necessarily conscious rules, and second, they all operate as modes of communication. Because this are modes of communication which work specifically to communicate ideas of self, it seems reasonable and coinvent to group them as forms of “non-theatrical performance”

This breakdown by Shepard is helpful in further narrowing my definition of what performance and non-theatrical performance can be, within the context of this community. How I differentiate between the modes of deconstruction of my case studies will rely on this difference; and also highlight the interwoven-ness of the two types of performance.

The group circles<sup>48</sup> provided an excellent opportunity for group feedback and a structured space where grievances could be aired, questions asked, and emotional check-ins were facilitated.

Atkinson (2017) wrote it is not the primary role of the ethnographer to become proficient in practice, with the knowledge gained from their fieldwork and observation- however, to understand how people interact, make decisions, and how conflicts were resolved or ‘left open’ (2017, 111). I will tackle this other goal of my research and explore how I understood the

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<sup>47</sup> Aspects of ritual and shamanism (fig 1) were present at Coed Hills Rural Artspace but as it was not entertainment-as-as-focus, I chose not to include these as performances to explore in my findings. This is also due to the personal nature of these rituals and ceremonies.

<sup>48</sup> The group circles took place every Wednesday at 9am and would last until 11 or 12pm.

community as they interacted with each other, and how decisions were made in this intentional community.

The concept of 'group' is also echoed by Schechner (1973), Koppers (2007), and Stanislavski (2013). Their groups were spaces where a cast of performers could informally meet, share emotions, and do group-building exercises (ibid). And in the community of Coed Hills, like the groups outlined by Schechner (1973), attendance at this group circle was not mandatory. But, social pressure (and perhaps ease for decision making) made it so almost every member of the company would attend 49.

Participation in the group circles at Coed Hills Rural Artspace gave me the opportunity to share my vulnerability by means of telling personal stories and expressing myself with the community, and in turn, this trust and openness was given back to me by the community through the sharing of their stories. The function of the weekly sharing circles in this community were to make sure everyone was on the same page - both in terms of the practical tasks that needed to be done; and emotionally. Schechner (1973) and Spatz (2019) talk about power dynamics in the rehearsal room, with the role of a facilitator present. This person, in Schechner (1973) and Spatz's (2019) writings is usually named as such so their position of power is acknowledged – such as the 'Director'.

For myself as a researcher, a reflexive performance was in constant action; except when alone, reflecting and preparing for the next day's act(ivity) (Gluzman, 2018, p.105). And in doing so, reflexively, I learned more about what 'worked' and what did not work for sustainable site-specific performance.

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49 More on the concept of who attends the group circles and implications surrounding this act, can be found in the findings and conclusions of this thesis.

I would not suppose to say my analysis of how this community functions is definitive, however, I would like to describe how I made sense of this community critically and theoretically. Because I had a background and training in site-specific performance I was accepted into my role of [performance-maker in the community. Also, perhaps because of my enthusiasm for embracing as much of the community life as possible<sup>50</sup>. The acceptance of the researcher into a community of like-minded individuals is linked by Atkinson (2017) to the concept of being a 'connoisseur' of whatever phenomenon of culture the researcher wishes to investigate, and shares with the community in question.

While a degree of knowledge and commitment may be a prerequisite to entry, cognoscenti are normally all too eager to share their enthusiasm (It can be harder to stop them!)

Consequently, access and field relations can be relatively easy, provided that one is willing to share and participate in the local culture

(Atkinson 2017, 101)

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<sup>50</sup> Especially in the early days, before I had to spend more and more time researching, reading, and writing



## Interviews

Autoethnographers enter their field with a unique familiarity with how and where they may locate relevant data (Chang, 2013).

I chose to conduct interviews for a number of reasons. The first was informed by being an autoethnographic researcher and sensitive to the main critique of autoethnography. That is, too much focus on the self without empirical or quantitative data sets to 'backup' the claims made by the researcher/participant, that, "individual autoethnography is at danger of privileging one perspective" (Chang, 2013, p.111). In response to a similar critique of her work concerning autoethnography and fieldwork, Chang (2013) states the autoethnographer has a unique relationship to the environment in which her research is conducted. She infers in the following lines that this is actually an appeal and strength (Chang 2013). And to combat this danger of privileging one perspective; I was led once again to decide that interviews with the community members would become an important side to my methodology.

To a reflexive researcher, theories and expectations are constantly changing, as new information is presented. In wondering how sustainability positions itself as a *concept* versus *implementation* of said sustainable techniques. I wanted to build a rapport with the community members which would allow for freer conversations during the interview process, with the hope that this trust and comfortability would better add to the information shared. I also hoped that this would more authentically represent the intentions versus actualities of the community in terms of sustainability, and also how the community members interacted with the visiting performers. Drawing upon the principles of relational ethics (Chang 2013, Ellis 2007), I utilised my communication skills and openness with the community members to always be:

Recognizing and valuing “mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work.

(Ellis, 2007, p.5 cited in Chang, 2013, p.11)

When a community is so deeply rooted in ideals and representation, merely asking questions about sustainability - had I not lived with them for so long - would not be enough. In fact, it could even be seen as challenging, which would not be ideal in looking for authentic and truthful insights. But, in conjunction with my lived experience as participant and researcher and the relationships built during that time, the data will become more grounded. Taking every measure does not privilege my own experience as the researcher, merely because I was the one asking the questions.

Something I was acutely aware of, when the time to conduct interviews with the community members came about, was my role and social standing within the community. By this I mean the inherent position of power I held when I took on the role of interviewer, with the backing of an institution. Coming back to the community with the intent to ask official questions, consent form in hand, felt ingenuine. If not handled with care and the relational ethics outlined above, I felt that it might hinder the ‘connectedness’ which Chang (2013) and Ellis (2007) reference as a key principle of autoethnographic research in relation to interviewing. I would also like to draw attention to the phrasing of Chang’s line, “privileging one perspective” (Chang, 2013, p.111). My position might not only be privileged in my telling of the story; but acknowledging my privilege as researcher-practitioner-author in residence was instrumental to my own emotional sustainability within the intentional community.

Ben Spatz (2020), in their book *Blue Sky Body* writes that they do, “not want to reject my life or career or life history any more than I want to give up the privileges that make my life stable enough to write this essay” (Spatz, 2020, p.184). Spatz (2020) brings to light the concept of privilege in another way, in relation to research and I share this sentiment. I was supported by the university in the decision to live off-the-grid and conduct this unique fieldwork. I was also supported by Laurent who accepted me into the community under the conditions that I would be a researcher-in-residence and assist with the artist-in-residency programme. Additionally, I was able to get paid work from the wedding company that operated out of the main event space, the Barn (1). My motive for living at Coed Hills was for academic research and self-development as an artist-practitioner. I was able to conduct this fieldwork with special exceptions to community work such as daily gardening. And, time I spent assisting artists and performers, or planning the performances went towards my daily 4 hours of volunteer time. This positionality came with its own connotations from those living in the community; especially in terms of exchange as will be disclosed and discussed in Chapter 6: *An Evocative Introduction to My Residency at Coed Hills* (9.2).

The want - and sometimes need - to live at this place is extremely unique and individual to this group of people who occupy the space<sup>51</sup>. Although I had spent countless hours observing and actively participating, there are many questions which can't be answered by observation and my interpretation of events alone (Bishop, 2012, p.5). In order to move away from both concepts of privilege (Chang, 2013 and Spatz, 2020); I chose to explore the opinions of those who had no other motive to living at Coed Hills than to be living there, in nature, as a part of the community. I chose to include the testimonies of the core community member of Coed Hills to make a

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<sup>51</sup> A concept which will be explored further in the findings of this thesis.

grounded and more obviously transferable framework of this research and fieldwork which is very localised, as autoethnographic work is prone to producing. By triangulating my research in this way, this study is relevant for those from within an intentional community, and those wishing to create site-specific performance within an intentional community.

The demographic of the community where my research was conducted was all white, aged 24-56, and of European descent. This is very common for intentional communities in Wales, as referenced earlier in this thesis in chapter three: Intentional communities.

In this case, the marginalisation of this group of people was spatial and perhaps cultural - rather than economical, in most cases of intentional communities. Just as no one performed the same role in the community, the culture was not homogenous in every sphere of the community life. In fact, one of the appeals to me as a researcher was the conversations with wildly differing viewpoints from within the community.<sup>52</sup>

Spatz writes in *Blue Sky Body* (2020), “in order to teach or demonstrate what one knows, one has to hold it up, step away from it, establish distance, and enact closure” (Spatz, 2020, p.7).

The subject Spatz refers to in the line above is not only the self, but also the ‘knows’ and I take that to be what embodied knowledge has been imparted to myself. In viewing the sentiment with knowledge as the subject (as opposed to the self). To hold ‘it’ up is to put the experience I had living in this community into words and journal entries; trying to disseminate knowledge and

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<sup>52</sup> For example, Brexit was both contested and supported.

technique from the body to the conscious mind and then to the page. I would explore the sustainable practices for site-specific performances at Coed Hills in literary terms.

At the end of the summer of 2019, I staged a festival celebrating the 'Roots and Legends' of Coed Hills. This gave me the space and opportunity to hold up what I had learned and display for all to see. In holding up (Spatz, 2020) the embodied knowledge and technique, I was presenting it not only to myself, but for those around me to see as well. Defining what 'it' is, was the first step. Then, to "step away from it" (Spatz, 2020, p.7) was the second. I waited 6 months after the *Coed Roots & Legends* (2019) site-specific performance event, to conduct the interviews with the eight core community members. In that time, I would periodically visit the community, help out, take drum lessons, interact with the community, no longer as a researcher. As a result of that, I will not disclose the experiences I had in that last 6 months of limited contact as part of my findings.

To "enact closure" (Spatz, 2020, p.7) is to physically act out closure. There is an implied movement and intention with this line. To enact, "closure" becomes an active verb, "closure" being something one does, symbolically and consciously. I closed my time symbolically at Coed Hills with an interview of the community members and cleaning out the cabin where I had stayed, in the same week. I wanted a ceremonial exit that would be symbolically meaningful to me as a member of the community, and also to commemorate my time as a researcher ending, even after I had moved out. Although I had left Coed to live in Cardiff with the beginning of the academic year; there were still many social and practical obligations which would bring me back to the community on weekends, and sometimes into the first few days of the week. The process

of interviewing the community members symbolically, consciously, and literally closed my time with the community.

When I set out to conduct interviews with the core community members of Coed Hills, the 'full time residents' as I called them at this time; I had to find those who had been living on site during my official residency at Coed Hills: November 2017 - October 2019.

Pseudonyms were chosen for each member of the intentional community, for anonymity. This was done with care and attention to try to match the pseudonym with what each real name conveyed about their social and cultural background. Hopefully, this will help the reader to interpret the characters of the intentional community as fully as they can, without my disclosing of their real names.

From the beginning of my placement at Coed Hills I was transparent with the community members about my role in the intentional community. Although it did take reminding on a few occasions; and one member felt my place in the community had become unbalanced when I began accepting pay for carrying out house-keeping for the weddings<sup>53</sup>. When, in the final weeks of my residency I announced it was time for the interviews, there was much excitement. I discussed very carefully the questions I wished to ask the community members about their experiences, in relation to shows and installations coming through Coed Hills. This was a two-tiered inquiry. One, to answer the question of sustainability in site specific performance,

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<sup>53</sup> This highlights the concept of exchange, which will be explored further in findings chapters 7, 8, and 9.

focusing on the experience of the community member in their everyday activities. Two, in regard to the performances which used Coed Hills as their host community. Firstly, I was interested in how they felt about various aspects of the performances; and also their interactions with the people who would be putting on these shows or arranging these installations. I notified the community members over Facebook and email and arranged to be back on site for a whole week. Then, I would also go about the final cleaning out of 'my' cabin - which had been abandoned at the beginning of the academic year, and no one had come to

*Perhaps for reasons of imposter syndrome I expected the interviewing process to be seen as a nuisance and expected to not be taken seriously. I made it very clear that the interviews should not take more than 20 mins start to finish and designed them to be the case as well.*

*I was blown away by the amount of respect, patience and insight paid by every community member towards this process. It was incredibly moving to be 'seen' in this role, something that was lacking while I was living in the community, and this gave me more insight to unspoken rules around exchange and that will inform any future research*

claim it yet. There were a few problems with this, communication being a key factor in many of the breakdowns at Coed Hills. It proved quite difficult to make a schedule for all the interviews as I would have done in the city by using a spreadsheet or a google doc, shared via email. Instead, I wrote a note and put it in the communal eating area for the community members to see. Not all the residents use this area, so I also made the rounds to the Workshop and Barn to let everyone know I'd be on site the following week and would love to have 15-20 minutes of their time for the interviews. 'I can just come and find you wherever you are and we can do it - you don't even have to stop working!' I said, hoping to entice the community members who I knew would be busy.

The data collected from interviews was coded using the program Quirkos, based on themes and words used by the community members. I attempted to 'read' the culture of the community using methods set out by anthropologist Victor Turner (1969), and Claude-Levi-Strauss (1996) and his usage of the method of qualitative inquiry: 'Bricolage' (1996):

Together, object and meaning constitute a sign, and, within any one culture, such signs are assembled, repeatedly, into characteristic forms of discourse. However, when the *bricoleur* re-locates the significant object in a different position within that discourse... a new discourse is constituted, a different message conveyed.

(Clarke, 1975, p.77 cited in Shepard, 2016)

More 'texts' of the community and messages arose in the interview process that I could not have imagined before. This was another goal of opening up my research to include the viewpoints of others. Where I felt my careful fieldnotes would accurately cover the day-to-day activities and my unique positionality, the interview data covered the unique position of the core community members in relation to the land, the performers, and the performances themselves. I asked not only what was and was not considered 'sustainable' but also what sustainability meant to each community member. However, a pitfall of the ethnographer trying to legitimize their self into the field of social sciences is the reliance on coding and coding programs to quantify the empirical (Atkinson, 2015, 59). As programs for coding textual data are useful to attaching **'labels to segments or instances of textual data, so that they could be searched for and found and then collected together under thematic headings'** (60) Atkinson likens this practice to an overreliance on one-dimensional sources, citing that the data has to be un-contextualized and then re-contextualized before it fit for analysis in this process. This is not to mean that this practice is the antithesis to ethnographic analysis, however, the lure of over-



relying on this as perhaps imposter syndrome can lead one to do is to be closely monitored. To ask oneself why this process is necessary for the particular case study or fieldwork is necessary as a reflexive researcher (72). I made large webs from my interview data as the interviews were so lengthy and covered so many topics. I color coded them with colors that emotionally corresponded to the topics covered (sustainability was green, turbulence in the community – red) and this helped me to see from a different perspective, the themes we talked about in our interviews. For myself as a researcher, the flashy program I used made me feel empowered in a way that was not necessarily essential to the end-goal of my analysis, but undoubtedly a stepping stone to a more holistic and free approach to my fieldwork and case studies (72).

The data sets I collected from the community interviews were anonymised, and I left out the full transcripts of the interviews to maintain anonymity. As there are no official records as to who was living on-site at that time, I believe that simply taking away the names to give anonymity is sufficient.

I followed the guidelines set out by my supervisor and Cardiff University Ethics Department, and taking methods from the ethics of autoethnographic research; I made sure to be as transparent with the core community members when introducing the concept of interviews (Ellis, 2007). I let the eight interviewees know that they could ask me to omit anything they said from the record, and that we could stop any time they wished, as well.

The interviews of the core residents of Coed Hills Rural Artspace were conducted the third week of February 2020. This was one month after I had moved out of my cabin officially, although I had not been a full-time resident since October 2020 (See fig timeline on page 135)

I felt it was important that I stayed on site for a whole week, so that I might help with tasks and community projects in between the interviews. Because of this week-long stay, I was not rushed in the interview-taking, and there was no pressure on the residents.

From the beginning of living at Coed Hills in November 2017, I was transparent with my intentions. I would discuss various aspects of my degree both in one-on-one personal conversations, and with the community as a whole in the weekly circle meetings. From November 2017 to October 2019, I lived as

*I began to transcribe the interviews with the eight core community members of Coed Hills, from my home in California, April 2020. There, I had become 'stuck', due to restrictions placed on travel as Coronavirus developed, and an ill-timed VISA renewal appointment.*

researcher, active participant and community member. My research questions and the writing of my literature review framed the context of my place in the community as well as my research in the strictly literary sense.

Indeed, much of my processing of 'role,' was done aloud, in the weekly group circles with the other core community members. After the circles, I would take time to write down what I had processed about my role in the community aloud, into written field-notes and memos. This process would then inform my understanding of my role as a researcher, in addition to the roles of active-participant and community member. I used the pattern of the week's activities, followed by the group circle and writing in my field notes to create a unique reflexive praxis.

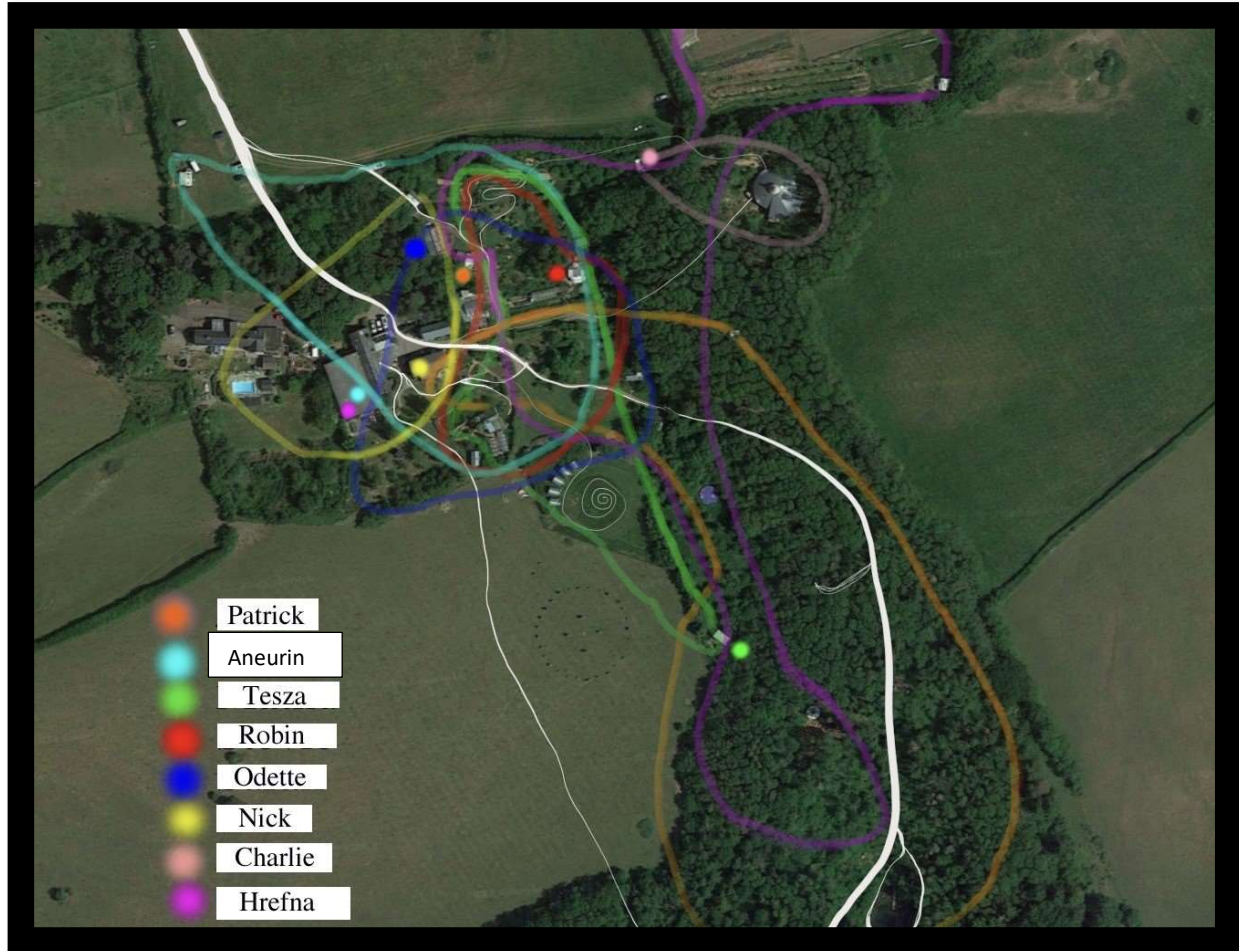
In the month before the interviews were to be conducted, I spoke to the group at large. At a circle, I let them know the interviews would be happening in a month's time and if they wanted to take part to please let me know. It took about two weeks to get the responses from all of the

community members. And, to my surprise, all the residents wanted to take part. I sent out another Facebook message to remind the core community one week before I was to stay at Coed Hills in February 2020. I also left a note in the communal eating space, the *Mushroom Lab*, with hearts and swirls drawn on it. It was important for me to express that this was not an 'expose' piece - I was not trying to catch anyone out or take advantage of them in any way. Nor did I want to come across as 'preachy' or a know-it-all. I believe that I had internalised and was hyper-aware of the position of power a university holds, and, having moved off-site, back to the perhaps perceived 'ivory tower' of Cardiff University; I might have over-compensated to deter this view.

*From the advice of my supervisor, Dr. Jenny Kidd, 'walking interviews' were encouraged, and I noticed how at-ease this made the residents. It was a great suggestion and it helped to put the interviewee at ease, and myself.*

Part of the agreement I proposed to the community members was I would not take-up people's time. From my time living on site, I knew late February was viewed as a 'busy time of the year'. If I was to introduce the concept of interviews together with taking people away from their working day this might have added resistance to the idea or led to a rushed feeling during the interviews. These interviews were the culminating conversations of my fieldwork; and the last thing I wanted was for any avoidable factor to influence the quality of the conversations. I presented the interviewing week very much in the way that I had presented all my artistic and performance-based endeavours at Coed Hills; that is to say: rooted in self-sufficiency. I told the core community members that I could find them wherever they were on site and do the interview while they were working. I framed the interviews as conversations, designed to last about 20 minutes. The interviews took place all over Coed Hills. On the map below I have drawn dots to show where each interview took place. I have also coordinated the coloured dots with coloured circles. The circular shapes represent the areas that each community member works, most

often.



*As shown in Fig. 3 above, the interviews were not centralised in one location. Patrick was in the communal cooking space, the Mushroom Lab (5 on fig. 6). Aneurin and Hrefna met me in the Barn (1 on fig. 6), and we had our interviews over cups of tea. Tesza had just finished building her home, so I went to help her sort herbs and we did her interview in her new wagon-house. Robin was happy to stop for tea near the spot where he sculpts. Odette welcomed me into her warm home, and we drank tea together. I found Nick in the workshop, and he continued to work while I interviewed him, pausing only a handful of times to consider his words before answering a question. Charlie was happy to have a break from studying in his caravan and welcomed me into his space as well.*

Figure 4: Map of Coed Hills with community member's zones marked. Created by author (2021).

The median interview length was 20 minutes, giving a range of 7- 42 minutes. The set of questions were as follows:

### **Coed Core Community Interviews, February 2020**

1. How are you? What have you been doing today?
2. A) How did you hear about Coed Hills? B) How and when did you arrive?
3. What is your relationship like with the land of Coed Hills / What do you normally do on site?
4. Can you tell me a little about the community?
5. Are there any practices that keep you connected to one another?
6. What do you think about the performances that happen at Coed?

Prompt: If someone said there's a show happening next week, what's your gut reaction?

7. Are you involved with the performers' process at all?
8. Is there a system in place for artists coming into the community?
9. If so, could you sustain this relationship? Could Coed? If not, why not?
10. Did you attend *Coed Roots and Legends/Promenade with PYLON/The Bliss of Wildness*?
11. What did you think of the show(s)?

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the artists, the community, the land, or your practice in relation to the performances?

13. What does Coed Hills mean to you?

14. Anything else?

In the first round of listening back to the answers and transcribing, I was struck by how the interviewees considered each question and really took their time in answering. Apart from two interviews, every question was answered.

I noticed that the questions which had an implied binary in them did not allow for the interviewee to give their opinion freely or ruminate on their answer. For example:

7. Are you involved in the performers' process at all?

The wording of this question implied: the community member was, or they were not. This meant, if the interviewee did not think that they were officially involved, then they would just say 'No' and the conversation around that question would end. I wanted to learn more regardless of the 'no,' and I realized I would then have to ask follow-up questions to try to coax more of an answer which was longer than one word. However, this did not appeal to me as I did not want the core community members to feel I was fishing or leading them to an answer.

*Many interviewees mentioned how 'busy' they were. Even those who said they had a 'day off' still listed off tasks which had been completed, or people they had helped. This is informational but also could be them having to justify taking some time off - more on this in the conclusion chapter. This is something which I observed in the performers and artists as well, I reminded them that taking the time to 'get to know the space' was a part of their practice and valid, even though there were no immediate visual results of this practice.*

I had a few predetermined themes divined from literature concerning community performance and intentional community studies. And, as an active participant, I had observed the community members at large

being involved with the processes of artists and performers even if it was not in the most straight forward way. In the first interview I changed the wording to, 'do you feel like you are involved in the artist's process at all?' This change allowed for more nuanced answers, as the data will suggest.

I offered each community member a copy of the questions I was to ask to read in advance, and again at the beginning of the interview after they read the consent forms provided by Cardiff University. However, none of the eight community members I interviewed wished to know the questions beforehand, and this was surprising to me.

## Conclusions

In the section titled *Evocative Autoethnography* (8.2), I outlined the reasons why this method of knowledge collection and sharing best suited my research questions, and the full-time, or 'core' community members of Coed Hills Rural Artspace. Through field notes I was able to question my own beliefs and judgements over the long period of time spent as a researcher in residence at Coed Hills Rural Artspace. Here the concept of time, which is revealed in my findings in relation to sustainability, was also relevant in my own role and deconstruction of my place as researcher in the intentional community.

Evocative autoethnography requires a gentle acknowledgment of the emotionality and subjectivity (Bochner and Ellis, 2016, p.56) involved in the ethics of this kind of work. And, attention to the comfortability of the full-time-residents and the *ghosts* who moved through their intentional community.

In *Fieldwork as an active participant* (8.3) I discussed the role I was to play as researcher-in-residence and community member. I position reflexivity at the core of my method, supported by active participant observation, and culminating in a paraxial. In *Ethics of an Active Participant and Community Member* (8.4), the emotionality and subjectivity outlined by Ellis and Bochner (2016) was defined as not exclusive to participants in evocative autoethnography and must be acknowledged in the researcher, as well.

In the section titled *Interviews* (8.5), I discussed the way I would be deconstructing the interviews carried out as part of my residency culmination at Coed Hills. The idea of 'reading' a community was introduced, and my decision of timing - to leave the community for five months (October 2020 -



February 2020) before conducting interviews, in order to, “step away from it, establish distance, and enact closure” (Spatz, 2020, p.7). This was explained in detail and carried out to reach my goal set at the beginning, following Ellis and Bochner’s (2016) advice to consider my place as a researcher in an onto-epistemological modality. “An ethnography of... artistic performers... ought to include an ethnography of the interview itself” (Atkinson, 2015, p. 95). Interviews themselves are a part of the cultural tapestry being presented and the narrative of the community. With questions of truth and objectivity, the goal is not to seek out objective truth, but to explore how the interviewees know what they are saying is true and the role of the ethnographer in this is to do their best to discern their bias, as well as my own (95) To fully inhabit my role in the community, I attempted to engage with the community on every level to my fullest ability, using my fieldnotes as a way of deconstructing the day’s activities, while still actively participating fully in the moment. I followed this with the list of questions I asked the eight core community members of Coed Hills and included auto ethnographic observations (in italics) taken in April 2020, while I initially transcribed and explored the interviews. I included these to highlight the reflexive process I employed in the exploration of the interviews.

In conclusion, I have carefully mixed modalities from cultural and drama studies to create a specific research plan tailored to my research question. In his book, *For Ethnography* (2015) Atkinson muses on the topic of reflexivity, fieldwork and the self as researcher conducting ethnographic work. He outlines why the reasons why this route into investigation might be the most robust or appropriate in the quote from the text, below:

In essence, for example, a purely deductive approach tells us nothing about what is a plausible or fruitful line of inquiry to pursue. It has very little to say in guiding us in the concrete exploration of a social world. A purely theory-driven research agenda thus has little or no room for practical experience. Yet the researcher necessarily relies on some form of experience – a generalized experience with the academic discipline in question,

and a more specific experience based on her or his general comprehension of the research topic. We do not pull theories and hypotheses out of thin air. We derive them from a variety of sources: our own prior exposure to phenomena, the work of others (published or otherwise) and our first engagements with our research field.

(Atkinson 2015, p. 56)

Atkinson stated a 'purely theory-driven research agenda thus has little or no room

This

interdisciplinarity is essential. The case-study and fieldwork itself drew from many modalities of function in the daily life and understanding of community, living as a researcher in residence, artistic creator, and community member. for practical experience (56)'. Herein again does my method of immersing myself in the world of the intentional community to create and facilitate site-specific performance gain comradery of theoretical approach. My agenda, driven by theory, was also majorly formed and enacted through embodied experiences where I was enamored by site specific performances, and life inside community spaces.

Evocative autoethnography suited my telling and exploration of the concepts outlined in the literature review, as social change and the possibility for the future are key components of evocative autoethnographic research (Ellis and Bochner, 2016, p.62). I would like to return to the context of the quote above (Atkinson, 2015) , to explain where it sits in the broader context of his chapter and to reflexively situate his arguments concerning objectivity, against my own methodology and notions of objectivity o be combatted by reflexivity. As a researcher and autoethnographer, I internally struggled to legitimize my own data and experience by relying on interviews and statistics. This was to prove to myself and others in the fields of the social sciences that my work was grounded and was able to move between subjective and objective analysis. This, however, would be the undermining factor of the thesis' findings and indeed of myself as an ethnographer. Once again, it is prudent and essential to situate myself as the

interpreter of the events and peoples of which my research brought me into contact and community. Atkinson's (2015) critique of what he calls a 'grounded theory' as a fool proof method for ethnographic research warns against this very notion: an over-reliance on interviews to feign or claim objectivity (58, 94). Similarly, the way that grounded theory has evolved (58) can mean that data collected through fieldwork runs the risk of being cloudified. The nuanced personal experience from the fieldwork can be pigeonholed by an overly theoretical approach, and the experience through a 'prescriptive, formulaic approach' (57) loses the imagination and passion of the ethnographer's investigation (ibid) (Atkinson 2017, 167). This is something which I do not want to happen in the conveying of my fieldwork, and thus the use of evocative autoethnography as a means to communicate I found very useful, and true to my experience which was, in itself evocative and embodied.

## Coed Hills Rural Artspace Fieldwork

timeline of major community events, artists in residency and performances.

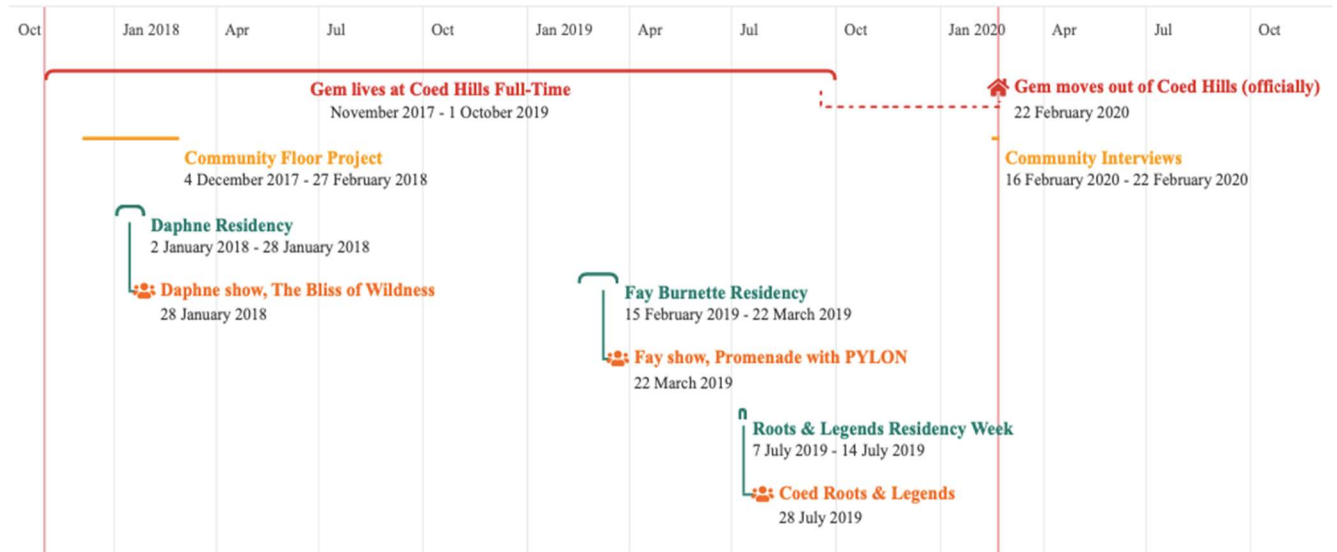


Figure 5: Timeline of fieldwork at Coed Hills Rural Artspace. Created by author (2021).

### Gem lives at Coed Hills Full-Time

November 2017 - 1 October 2019

I lived off the grid and on-site as a researcher in residence and community member. My roles also included site-specific performance practitioner; devising site-specific performances and organizing an artist-in-residency program.

### Community Floor Project

4 December 2017 - 27 February 2018

The community's first project after I moved on site. Referenced in the introduction to my findings chapter of this thesis.

#### Dorothea Residency







2 January 2018 - 28 January 2018

Dorothea lives in the Bothy, creating art for the first time since her husband's passing with the intent of a site-specific installation at the end of her residency.

### Dorothea show, the Bliss of Wildness

28 January 2018

A site-specific installation in the Barn, as the floor project was in full swing. Dorothea painted flowers, native to Coed Hills on long scrolls of paper. We draped the paintings over the top level in the barn and composed music to underscore a poem she wrote about her relationship with flowers in her youth and now, as a recent widow.

-  **Skye** **Residency**  
15 February 2019 - 22 March 2019  
[redacted] lives in a caravan, clearing a space for her sculpture and using the workshop to finish her welding.
-  **Skye** **Promenade with PYLON**  
22 March 2019  
Promenade with PYLON took place as a performance and community banana roast around the installation Fay created.
-  **Roots & Legends Residency Week**  
7 July 2019 - 14 July 2019  
Artists are invited to live at Coed Hills for a week, to workshop their site-specific performances. [redacted] led an optional writing exercise in the morning, and I led an optional group bodywork session. After a communal breakfast (provided) the artists were invited to use the space as they wished.
-  **Coed Roots & Legends**  
28 July 2019  
A site-specific performance festival, lasting 13 hours with 30+ performers. The event began with an 'opening ceremony on horseback, of the landowner and his daughter. The event was attended by over 150 locals, community members, friends and strangers. Some core-community members were ushers, wearing wings and beating drums to lead the audiences through the woods to the various stages and installations.
-  **Community Interviews**  
16 February 2020 - 22 February 2020  
I interviewed the core-community members from the time I lived at Coed Hills (November 2017-October 2019). I asked them about their experiences with the visiting artists and the site-specific performances that took place.
-  **Gem moves out of Coed Hills (officially)**  
22 February 2020  
This marks the day I finished clearing out the Cabin and also completed interviewing the 8 core community members.

To deconstruct my research question: *What sustainable practices for site-specific performances are being explored in intentional communities?* I investigated the interplay between land and community, art and artist in the Literature Review, Chapters 3 and 4 of this study. This structure

continued, as I explored the relationships between land, art, and artist within the context of this intentional community, Coed Hills Rural Artspace.

Through these chapters, the concepts of embodied sustainability are developed and explored via the telling of each example of site-specific performance in this intentional community. These concepts are *Self-Sufficiency*, *Community Mindedness*, *Form or Structure*, and *Freedom or Spontaneity*. I propose that through the combining of these four concepts, exchange and an emotionally sustainable artistic process are born.

In Chapter 6, *An Evocative Autoethnographic Introduction to Coed Hills and my Residency*, I introduce the land and community of Coed Hills by giving an evocative autoethnographic account of my arrival and the initial months where I was researcher in residence, practitioner, and community member. My unique positionality as a research student and reflexive arts practitioner, combined with my methodological approach, will add new insights to this process of entering this intentional community and devising or rehearsing site-specific performance within. My contribution to this field is informed by theoretical knowledge and the practical and embodied research of performance, through my many years of training. I spent two years living in an intentional community, observing and assisting visiting artist-performers. To my knowledge, there has never been a study of this scale, at the intersection of the fields of cultural and performance studies.

My hope is that an evocative autoethnographic account of the social and physical environment of Coed Hills Rural Artspace that I entered in November of 2017, will give the reader context and 'set the scene' for the same environment which other visiting artists and performers entered over the course of my time living on site.

The environment of Coed Hills Rural Artspace is outlined with the assistance of maps and overlays that I created, to give the reader a visual representation of the many physical and social systems which exist at Coed Hills, and demonstrate their connectedness to the land.

I further explored the social and cultural systems in this community by describing character traits of individual community members and the various roles they perform at Coed Hills. Here as well, I created an overlay for the map of Coed Hills, noticing how the realms of the personal expertise of individual community members are translated to physical realms in caretaking of the land. The maps I have drawn of 1: the pathways with the buildings and accommodations (fig 4), and 2: of the areas of personal expertise within core community members (fig 3); are taken from a satellite image of Coed Hills found via Google Earth (2020). The relationships of these complex and personal cultural systems are more easily understood with the aid of visual maps and overlays (Brennan-Horley et al., 2010, and Powell, 2010, p.240) and will add context for some quotations from the core community members. This is all done to give context and explain how the current practices at Coed Hills affect the land environmentally, and to show how the core community members caretake the land and where there is space for the performer to contribute.

With the context given, I will move on to exploring the findings from my case study through the relationships between art, artist, land, within the intentional community of Coed Hills.

In the following chapters I broadly focused on the experience of the visiting artist and performers, communicated from my point of view as site-liaison and core community member.

Chronologically, I introduced three case studies for which I performed the roles of active

participant, site-liaison, and researcher-in-residence, all under the umbrella of community member. *Bliss of Wildness* (2018), *promenade with PYLON* (2019) and, finally, *Coed Roots & Legends* (2019). Throughout this chapter there are selected entries from the field work journals I wrote during my time spent in the community, these entries will be in italics and are dated. Also, in this chapter are photos of the performances which took place at Coed Hills and are referenced in this text.

I interviewed the eight core community members of Coed Hills in February of 2020. These data sets added to and informed the thematic structure of this chapter and grounded my theoretical understanding in the experiences of others. By placing data from the core community interviews in juxtaposition with my own experiences I added more perspectives to my first-person insights. As autoethnography focuses on the experience of the inner-self, and the sense-making capacity of the researcher (Ellis and Bochner, 1996, 2000, 2016; Boyle and Parry, 2007) I triangulated my findings by adding interviews to my

*I asked Aneurin how the intentional community of Coed Hills operates, he said, "The whole time I've been here?" To which I responded, "Yes," there is a pause, and the community member asks: "Since I was 12?" We both laugh, and I clarify the dates I am after – "thanks for that, no, when I was living in the community, actually." I want to bring up this moment because it's so easy as a researcher to become hyper-focused on the self, and to forget that I am asking about their experiences. Ellis (2016) wrote the role of the autoethnographic researcher and storyteller is to tell the stories of people whose voices are or have become marginalised. Conducting these interviews is about gaining perspective of the community members and this moment caught me out; humbled me. Showed me I had become focused on my experience and brought me back to the intention*

methodology. Ellis (2004), lists examples of style of autoethnographic litterateurs, in opposition to one another, classifying each into the 'impressionist' and the 'realist'. In contrast, Atkinson states that the two classes should not be listed in opposition, but rather go "hand-in-hand. The



desire to create evocative texts does not absolve us, collectively, from an analytic stance towards the social world”(Atkinson, 2015, p.165)

To analyze this social world, I deconstructed these interviews by exploring the practices around emotional and environmental sustainability in the community of Coed Hills and the visiting performers and artists. This was done by presenting key themes that arose from my research and were found as well in the interview texts and disclosing surprising insights and quotes from the interviews with the eight core community members.

Each of the chapters detailing site-specific performance events at Coed Hills; *The Bliss of Wildness* (Chapter 7), *promenade with PYLON* (Chapter 8) and *Coed Roots & Legends* (Chapter 9) end with an in-depth analysis of what I observed in congruence and in contrast with other researchers who have entered this field. I add my findings to their conversations and debates, specific to three 54 examples of site-specific performance within this intentional community.

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54 There were two other performances during my residency which I will choose not to disclose in this chapter. There was a project called *The Woman's Library Box* (Spring 2018) which never came to fruition. This saddens me as I believe it would have been my favorite project to work on. There will be a small summary of the vision for this piece in the notes, following the conclusions chapter as there is potential for a future performance.

An evocative autoethnographic introduction to Coed Hills and my residency

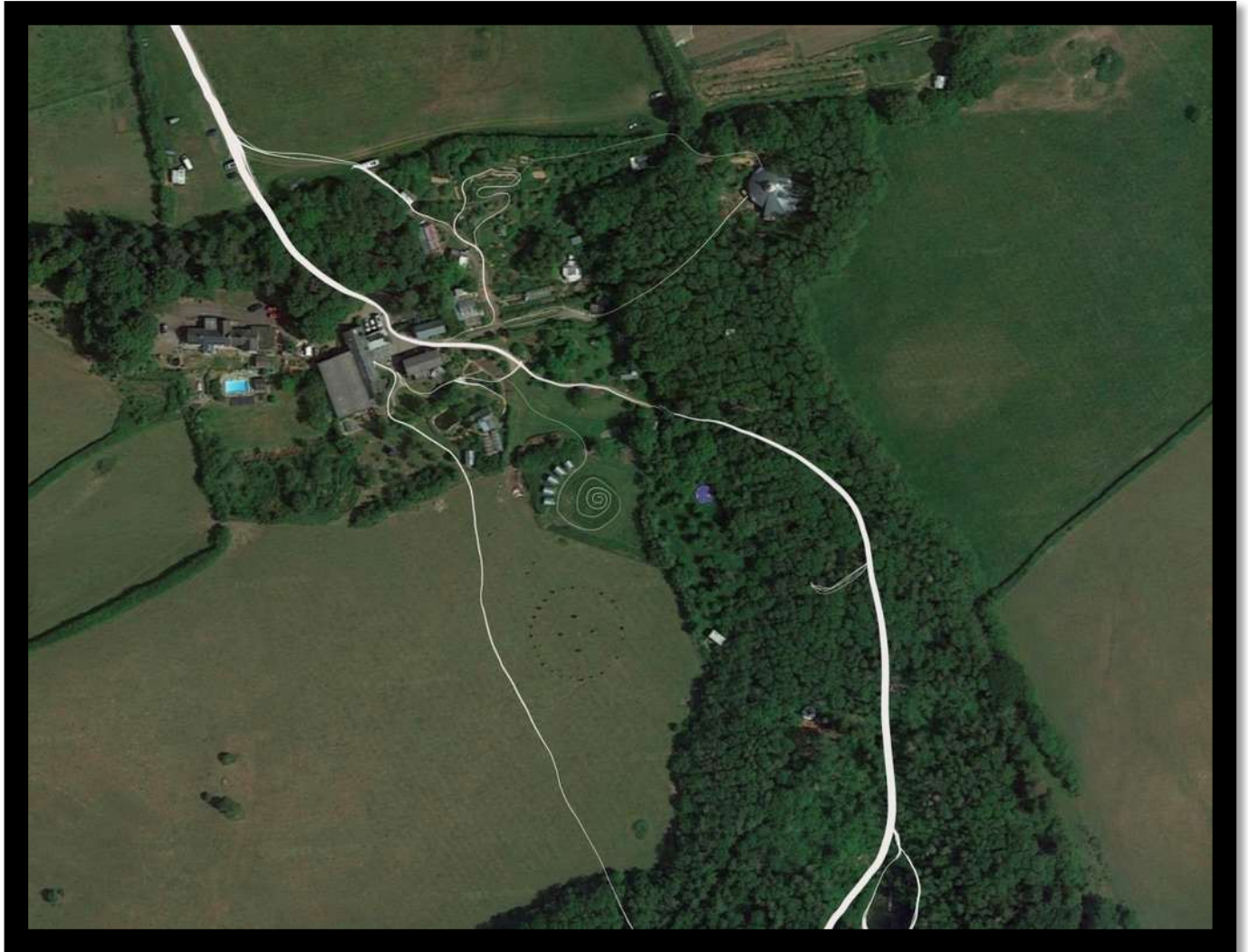


Figure 6: Satellite image of Coed Hills Rural Artspace with the pathways drawn by author (2021).

### **Land and Community: Arriving at Coed Hills**

Land and community are uniquely explored in this introductory section to the analysis of the first case study. No other section focuses on this relationship and interplay, and it does not relate to my research question. However, it is necessary to explain this dynamic and how I came to the fieldwork before further discussing the nuances of visiting artists and performers in an intentional community. This process of explaining how I came to hear about Coed also serves as an example to how anyone finds an intentional community – whether they're artist or performer, volunteer or community member to-be.

There was no established online presence for Coed Hills Rural Artspace (bar a seemingly forgotten Facebook page), and I was glad to have found the entrance.

Looking at my new surroundings, I marvelled at how I got to this point. Word-of-mouth at an open mic led me to scouring the internet in vain for information on how to get involved with the intentional community. I found a number for Coed Weddings which operated from the main space in the summer months, and, through a chirpy voice on the phone, was given the number for a man named Robin, who, “ran the volunteer program at Coed”. I called him straight away, and we talked for about half an hour. Robin was very welcoming, and his voice gave me the impression he was quite possibly close to my age – younger than I'd assumed before talking. We spoke about my interests in herbalism, gardening, forestry, foraging, and my many passions surrounding the arts. My bags already packed in the room next to me, we decided on a date which would be good for me to show up. I asked about long-term positions available, and he said we would discuss that after a few weeks.

I arrived at Coed Hills Rural Artspace on a windy day, in early November 2017. The drive from Cardiff took only half an hour. However, the contrast between the city's cold concretes and the warm, autumnal oranges of the countryside, implied that the journey had been longer.

I took many field notes and wrote journal entries alongside the writing of this thesis. This was done to keep track of new ideas, and where they came from. And to keep an account of my experience of viewing this research, as a community member. I would write a paragraph or two and then journal about how I felt about that paragraph or two, reflexively. The journal entry to the right was made in a situation such as that. It was a response to where I was in the writing process of these findings chapters, as the introduction to this chapter was one of the first things I wrote while living on-site.

*Journal Entry 56: "...I'm writing this, from the very dwelling I moved into a few weeks after that phone call. It's now November 2018, one year on from when I moved on site. I live alone in a small cabin and am a Full-Time Resident of Coed Hills.*

*In the following paragraphs, I will explain in more detail the conditions upon which I entered the community, the environment, the role of performance and art within Coed Hills, and the core community members I lived and worked with. Beginning with the environment."*

*Self, Field notes, November 2018*

Coed Hills Rural Artspace represents more than the physical location, as the community members attested:

There's really two forms of ... the Coed community. One is the community that lives on site. And the other one is the extended network. So, the extended network might compromise 1000 people, you know, people who've come and gone through the space,

who knows, maybe spent a week here, maybe spent a year here, some people spent four years here, but certainly hundreds of people. *And those people still have taken something in their hearts from the place and have given a lot.* And that made it partly what it is now. It's definitely not just the people who are living here now who've made it. It's been an ongoing project of voluntary goodwill and passion and exploration of ideas, both kind of ecological and artistic.

(Robin, February 2020)

Those connected with the land, referred to as the 'extended network' in the quote above, also referred to as "friends of coed" throughout the chapter and colloquially by the community, can be found all over the world and living a range of alternative and traditional lifestyles. What Robin is talking about in the quote above, when he says, "*And those people still have taken something in their hearts from the place and have given a lot*" (Robin, 2020), is the concept of exchange. Exchange is a concept that is integral to community life and important to note when defining the practices of sustainable relationships and performances. For the sake of preciseness, this study will focus on the core community of Coed Hills and their experiences with the three site-specific performances this thesis covers.

The land where I lived from November 2017 to August 2019 is where the core community members reside and is the heart of Coed Hills in both the physical environment and 'extended network' (Robin, 2020). Picture the geometric symbol: The Flower of Life, this is how I envision the socio-systems of Coed Hills. Coed Hills as a central entity from which many circles spring; all connected and in constant ebb and flow with one another. Separate yet sharing the unique point of connection that is the physical land of Coed Hills. The blood rushing through and pumping out to fuel the extremities. This mixed metaphor of the flower of life, with a heart at the center describes the core community of Coed Hills, the day-to-day activities, emotions, and

symbiotic relationships with the land. For the core community member, the center of Coed Hills has a five-acre circumference which comprises the main buildings and gardens.



Figure 7: Map of Coed Hills with Pathways and Places of Interest. Drawn by author 2021

To the top and centre of the map, a long driveway is the entrance; a dirt and gravel road lined with young apple trees. Many people camped in vans or bell tents in the summer, on either side of the driveway. The centre of Coed Hills is the main event space 'The Barn' (1), which sits adjacent to the Bothy (1a) and the kitchen (1b). To their right is the Workshop (2) and across from that are two crafting studios (3, 4). Up the path and on the left is the crew cooking space

called the Mushroom Lab (5) and the Forest Garden (6). Back on the path and going southwards are the solar showers (7) on the right. Past the labyrinth (8) and the various wedding and event accommodations (9, 10, 11, 12, 13) is the Stone Circle (14). My residence (15) is on the left of the path through the woods. It cannot be seen from the satellite image, due to tree cover, so I have represented the foot path.

While fulfilling my roles as researcher-in-residence and core community member, I lived in a small cabin in the woods and held the most Southern residence, on the outskirts of the centre. At the front door of my cabin (15 on fig. 6), the 180-acre woodland sprawled.



Figure 8: The Cabin (15) where I lived from November 2017-October 2020. Photo by author, 2018.





Figure 9: Up-close images of the Barn (1 on fig. 6) and Kitchen (1b on fig.6). On the right is the front view, and the left image is the side view. Photos accessed from Coed Weddings Website (2021).

A community member recommended I read *The Complete Book of Self Sufficiency* by John Seymour 55 (1997) during my first week of arriving. It had been read by many in this community and this book influenced the way I viewed my place in the intentional community in terms of it preparing me for what the community expected of me, or so I thought. This book positions self-sufficiency and living off-the-grid as the prime goals of sustainable practices in this intentional community. Self-Sufficiency and sustainability were synonymous, and this is the lens that informed my first few months at Coed Hills.

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55 Called the 'Bible of Self-Sufficiency movement' (Howard, 2021).

We also need to pay attention to the esoteric knowledge that characterizes many domains of specialized activity – in settings of work, science or belief. Embodied fieldwork therefore lends us to an understanding of things and their uses. Our visual capacity to observe is complimented by an understanding of materials and senses, of surfaces and textures, together with the competence to manipulate and use them

(Atkinson 2017, 123)

For this concept of local and embodied knowledge are the reasons for joining-in community work. I was gladly thrust into a community floor construction project which lasted the entire Winter. Excited to see how this community functioned for completing large scale tasks.

For the duration of this winter project, I was awake before the sun, to bed long after it had set, working in the large drafty barn (number 1 on fig. 6) with no heating. I performed my daily tasks as a hard worker, self-sufficient, and thus beneficial to the community (Seymour 1997).



*Mid-project, Winter 2018. I am on the left, grouting between the limestone slabs with the granddaughters of the landowners.*

Figure 10: Mid-flood project, photo supplied with permission (2018).

The floor project was a great introduction to how things worked at Coed Hills. Son of the landowners and founder of the additional 'Rural Artspace' to Coed Hills, Laurent Winslow, had proposed the floor project before I arrived. Laurent wanted to re-do the concrete floor in the Barn before the summer and the weddings began, and the task was going to be completed as a community. Only two workers were hired in, who were bricklayers; we had their help for just one week out of the six weeks the project took to complete. The community relied heavily on the resident stone mason, and the gardener/mathematician, who were at the head of making the exact calculations needed to cut the limestone slabs which would make up the floor. The centre

of the Barn had a circular sprung wooden floor, and the limestone slabs were to fan outwards from that circle, eventually ending at the square barn walls. Tzera was laying the stones, along with Nick, Laurent, and the hired-in workers. Sue, the housekeeper from the next village, would come in once a week and Hoover up the dust from the cutting of the stone, remarking at how 'messy/lovely/overwhelming' the space looked to her that week. I was on patrol for uniformity. It was the first time I had used an angle grinder and was shocked at how much I enjoyed using the power tool.

The entire 60 square-foot barn floor was levelled, painted with adhesive, and covered with orange plastic mats. Following this, came another layer of concrete and then the floor was laid, custom-cut limestone slab by custom-cut limestone slab. Here is where I would come in with the angle grinder, using it to dig out the adhesive that had pushed up through the spaces between the slabs. Then I would apply grout where I had ground out the extra adhesive, and then wash the stones in preparation for their sealing<sup>56</sup>. We moved around the space as an organism, we were separate in our tasks yet connected, working towards a clear end goal.

Over these first few weeks, a routine was established, as my place and role in the community slightly solidified. At eight in the morning, I would shuffle across the dew-dropped field to the Barn, and switch on the radio. The sunlight poured through the South-Western windows as the birds woke and added their melodies to the Classical FM already filling the space, until the hired

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<sup>56</sup> Using an angle grinder to cut the joints of limestone slabs, then grouting in-between them I rotated between the two tasks the entire working day. When I relaxed my hands at the end of a working day, my muscles, unable to release, would spring back into the claw-like shape of holding a phantom grouting palate. Gently opening and massaging my palm was enough of a stretch to make me inhale sharply and cramp back up.

workers arrived. Someone would make coffee, and *yips* of approval and appreciation would ring out. In the first weeks of the project, before it was time for the angle-grinding, I would navigate from role to role, performing whatever task was needed to be done at that given moment. I saw my place as researcher to experience as much as possible of the job at present. To be fully immersed in the day, and reflect in the evenings in my devoted journal-writing time. At lunch, during the barn project, we sat down together and shared a meal prepared by Laurent's partner, Nancy. We would chat and eat at the picnic tables outside, or in a circle in the middle of the barn, depending on the weather. And then, after about an hour, would all do our dishes and head back into the barn to work. At the end of the working day, around six or seven in the evening, Laurent would disappear for fifteen minutes or so, as we (the core community members) cleaned our tools and tidied the floor in preparation for the next day's work. Laurent would return with locally made ale or cider which we would share together and talk of moments from the day and what was to be done tomorrow.

Sharing in food and drink - albeit a packet of crisps and pint of cider, ritualistically closed the day. A clear sign that work was finished, for everyone, and it was time to rest. This is another insight to how the concept of exchange was practiced at Coed Hills; although Laurent did not always clean with us, he was providing support and gratitude by going to fetch the food and drink for the end-of-the-day ritual. Laurent also held his position of power this way, after spending the working day as a member of the team he would step away and leave the more menial tasks to the core community members but returned with a service for us. This established that he provided for the core community members and that he did not have to do any specific job if he did not wish to. His positionality as leader of the community is interesting and also unique because he no longer lived on site as he had when the community was founded. However, Laurent still held the position because he established the community,

developed the space, his parents own the land, and so he has the final say on all major community projects<sup>57</sup>.



Figure 11: The finished floor project. Photo by author, Spring (2018).

I will now give some history on the founding of Coed Hills Rural Artspace to demonstrate how it has evolved over the last thirty years and where my positionality as a researcher sits within the historical context of the community.

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<sup>57</sup> Although his final say is usually the call for a vote from the core community members.

Coed Hills Rural Artspace was founded in the early 90s. The landowners, Ed and Dotti Winslow, had moved onto the property shortly after being married in 1968, although the land had been in Ed's family since the 1930s. When Ed and Dotti moved back to St Hilary, Coed Hills was primarily farmland, but Ed Winslow purchased the woodland which surrounds the property today. Laurent first set up the art space as a yurt community<sup>58</sup>. Firewood was harvested from the woodland, and those cuts fuelled the biomass boiler. This is still the system in place today and, working alongside solar panels and wind turbines, enough energy is supplied to power the main event spaces.<sup>59</sup>

For the residents, however, it is up to the individual dwelling to source their own electricity. I had no electricity in my cabin like three other core community members, while the rest had mixtures of solar and wind powering their dwellings. I had a small burner for heating and cooking (pictured below), fairy lights with rechargeable batteries, two rechargeable LED strip lights, and candles. Pictured below is the interior view of the cabin I lived in.

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<sup>58</sup> To appease the local council, as all yurts are classified as non-permanent living structures, or at least, could be argued as seasonal residencies.

<sup>59</sup> and there was always talk of excavating the well

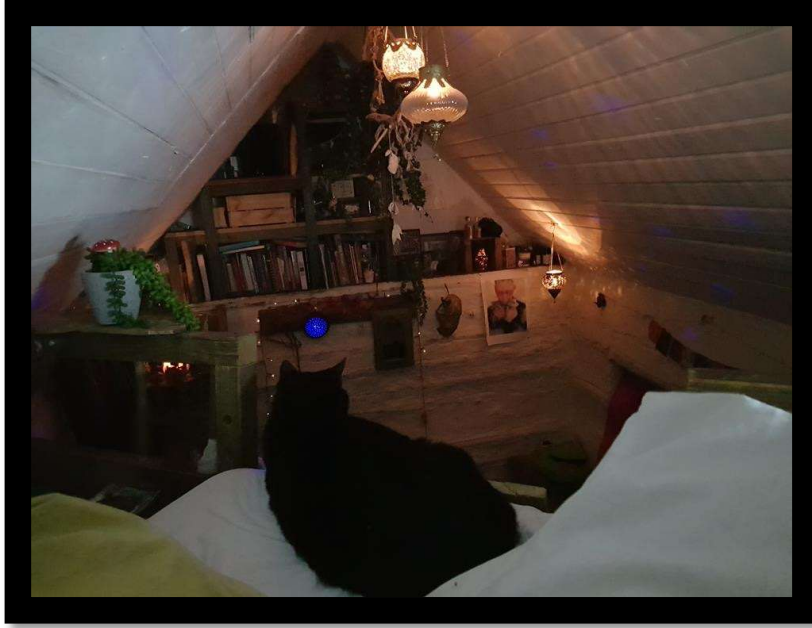


Figure 12: Photo (left) taken from the loft bed at night, highlighting the candles and 'the barn cat', Salem. (2019).





Figure 13: Photo (right) taken across from the burner, wood store and small radio. (2018).

At the beginning of my studies, in October of 2015, I was living in Cardiff, in 'student-ville,' known as Cathays. Having graduated recently from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama with a BA (Hons) in Acting, I was new to the world of academia. My head was buzzing with ideas and looking for site-specific performance companies I could follow and observe in

Cardiff. One potential avenue was following a Welsh National Theatre production, another was possibly collecting data alongside a Yello Brick60 production.

Both options would fit my research in terms of site-specificity and community involvement, but I did not see the pre-existing focus on a sustainable relationship for which I was looking, or the intentional community space acting as host. Coed Hills not only had a pre-existing commitment to sustainability in terms of environmental impact, but the community also strived for a sustainable relationship with the people who lived on site. Coed Hills seemed to be the perfect environment to investigate the relationships between art, artist, land, and community.

Additionally, pre-existing platforms and practices appealed to me, in terms of allowing me informal sessions to gain information and feedback from the community members about the day-to-day activities on site and with visiting performers and artists.

I investigated the relationships between art, artist, land, and community, as part of seeking to answer the question: *What are the practices for sustainable site-specific performance in intentional communities?* The viewpoint of the artist or performer coming into an intentional community is lacking both across academic literature, and in the documentation of intentional communities. I did not have the knowledge, at that time, to follow a company and implement my hypothesis for sustainable interaction, without the real-life experience upon which I could base

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60 yello brick & playARK

Yello Brick uses creative, digital storytelling and participation techniques to help companies (theatre, media, etc.) engage with their audiences. “We create meaningful digital-physical experiences that place audiences at the center of the story.” (Accessed: February 2021)

such a hypothesis. The literature surrounding sustainable communities does not include sections about art and performances, and where they do, documentation is usually surrounding the final performances, and without information on how the relationships between the community members and artists and performers developed or continued. 61

My training in drama school and practice as an actor taught me how to interact with communities and land a small period of time, as an artist and performer. But I did not experience long-term contact with community members or land of an intentional community until my residency at Coed Hills. And, in my past experiences as an actor, I was not looking through the academic lens of cultural and performance theory. This study places me as a part of the community of Coed Hills Rural Artspace and gives my research a fresh insight. It gives me an understanding of the real-life application of concepts I come across in reading, which I can then use in praxis; freely testing out theories, reflexively. Additionally, I had an insider's view of intentional community life, taking part in conversations and hearing opinions which would not be broadcasted to people outside of the core community.

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61 For example, in *Performing site-specific theatre: politics, place, practice* (Birch and Tompkins, 2012) A Masque at Ludlow Castle (1634) is evaluated on the themes of politically driven social influence to the surrounding people and townships. However, there is no documentation of the experience of the core community members/performers (feudal servants and the children of the Lord (43-45).

Chapter 7: Findings of the *Bliss of Wildness* by Dorothea Caslett.

An artist lived in the Bothy (1 a) on fig. 6) at Coed Hills, from January 2<sup>nd</sup> to January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018. She, with my help in the role of site-liaison, created a site-specific visual and auditory performance, in the Barn (15 on fig. 6).



Figure 14 Dorothea pictured in the kitchen of the Bothy (1a) with the sign she made to welcome guests into the Barn (15 on fig. 6). Photo by author (2018).

**an ARTIST arrives**    *Introduction to Dorothea Caslett*

We're trying to be very efficient with the amount of space that we have to live in, which is really not very much residence space, with quite limited facilities and quite challenging weather conditions for up to six months of the year.... So, we look for kind of skilled people who could hold themselves primarily, and have stuff to give, and will also enjoy, you know, receiving the abundance that's there as well.

(Robin, February 2020)

In response to this study's research question of a sustainable practice, I draw attention to the social systems which run alongside the ideologies of the intentional community, Coed Hills Rural Artspace. I observed the hierarchical systems which govern Coed Hills and took into consideration that the Artspace is also rented out as a wedding and event space in the summer months. Coed Weddings was founded 2015<sup>62</sup>.

The politics of a creative space can become complicated when monetary gain is involved. And hierarchy/systems of leadership exist in even the most community-oriented of places. Just as a

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<sup>62</sup> This is something which in 2015, was a new monetary and social edition to Coed Hills. Having a wedding business to fund artistic and environmental endeavours of an intentional community is a common practice. Other intentional communities who operate as an event space is Findhorn in Scotland and juxtaposed with privately-owned 'buy in' communities such as neighboring Llamas, also in South Wales (Wimbush 2021).

family unit has a system with specific roles for the individual to satisfy the needs of the whole group, it only seems natural that a small community would step into or mirror those same roles.

I predict an artist or performer entering an intentional community would have to find their niche in the emotional and environmental setting, negating a fair exchange so they could coexist with the core community members and feel free enough to make their site-specific art or performance.

Dorothea Caslett arrived without warning. Well, at least for me. It was three weeks after I had arrived at Coed Hills, and I was just beginning to settle into the daily routine of life as a core community member. The weather turned from the bright autumn of my arrival, where crispy fallen leaves drying and crunching on the ground filled our noses and ears. Now the early winter rains made the trailside leaves damp and slippery, producing the decomposing smell I now associate with the dimming light of the winter.

There was an unusually dry summer preceding the autumn of 2018, with the fields prematurely turning to dirt. The pathways and shortcuts around the land were now thick with mud. One could sludge along at a slow pace happily if they did not mind the squelching. Just a few days before Dorothea arrived, I had taken four tree stumps I found in the woods from some previous chain sawing job, long abandoned. I wheelbarrowed them up the woodland track and set to work to combat the seven-inch-deep mud river that used to be the path to my cabin. Once chicken wire had been staple-gunned to the tops of these tree stumps, I did not even need to dig, just to apply pressure to the stumps and they sank into the mud.

While I was doing this, Laurent came to find me: “We have a lady coming, her name is Dorothea. Never met her but she’s an artist and her works are beautiful... She’ll be arriving sometime this week- shall we put her in the yurt, Gem?”

I was taken aback that Laurent was asking my opinion on something I viewed so important.<sup>63</sup> “Oh, that would be nice - it’s the biggest, isn’t it?” I spoke. “No running water though, is she outdoorsy?”

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<sup>63</sup> This is foreshadowing Laurent’s leadership style.

Laurent was energised, and potentially overwhelmed at the prospect of this new woman arriving. Laurent was known for having a big heart and even bigger hugs. Laurent had been contacted by a mystery woman, a friend of a friend and of course, Laurent had invited her to stay and create some art. This is not an uncommon occurrence at Coed Hills, but it was not as frequent as it had once been.

As each generation of community members moved through the land of Coed Hills, they brought with them a primary focus. The focus of Coed Hill's core residents had moved from visual art, ritual, and ceremonies to the current focus: permaculture. And it was also unusual for an artist or performer to arrive to the intentional

community as winter was beginning to descend upon the hills. I remember the floor project had just begin in the barn when Dorothea was set to arrive, and there was concrete everywhere as we had not yet begun to lay the slabs of limestone.

Laurent and I slowly wandered around the veg patch by the trampoline and solar showers, and we chatted about artists and performers and how they come and go from Coed Hills. We talked about how there is really no set way or routine recommended by the Coed Hills community - just that they help. Sometimes, if they pay, they do not have to, but Dorothea was going through a challenging time. She has recently lost her husband of many years and was moving back to the

*Laurent, when asked who was meant to be the project manager on a particular construction job replied:*

*'We're all the project manager!'*

*This is a perfect example of Laurent's leadership style. Laurent's preferred leadership style is collaborative. Non-hierarchical, holistic with an integrated approach. It is, "Post-Heroic" (Raelin, 2005) in the sense that Laurent set up Coed to have a shared leadership system powered by everyday interactions, enabling the community members to have collaborative ownership and achieve their own, self-set goals (ibid) as opposed to a more traditional leadership style. He was encouraged by positive feedback from the other community members, reflexive systems and practices put in place to integrate feedback. The 'ideal leader' (ibid) in this collaborative leadership style is the task at hand, rather than the individual.*



United Kingdom from sunny Salento in Southern Italy. At 72 this was no small feat, and she did not drive. Laurent voiced concerns that she might feel isolated, “Would you stop in in the evening, Gems, and make sure she has enough firewood?”

I happily agreed and made up my mind to bring a bottle of wine, as well. I happened to be around as she and Laurent pulled up in the car. I had just cleaned and done the bedding in the yurt, and I bounded over to the two of them, offered to carry some bags, and away we went. There was a little commotion when she arrived at the yurt, but I paid no mind and went off to use the loo, when I came back the bags were outside the yurt and Laurent was motioning to me towards the Barn, “Let’s put her in the Bothy!”

So, up went the bags, and I rushed ahead to make sure the Bothy was clean and ready for Dorothea’s settling in. I remember thinking, ‘We should have put here there right off the bat, followed by, ‘Why did she decide to come here in the winter?’

There were many concerns voiced by Dorothea from the first week of her living in the community. It was colder than she expected:

“Why is there no hair drier? I must bathe in the morning and then I can’t go outside at all with wet hair, so I need help to bring in the wood! I don’t want to catch a cold, what would I do then?”

There were no high-powered lights or art supplies ready for her upon arrival in the Bothy. It became clear to me that there had not been much communication from either end, and that she did not know what to expect, and thus, was very unprepared. It would appear Dorothea's friend,

the one who had visited Coed Hills, had done so in the summer, and many years ago. Dorothea was shocked that she had only seen me and Laurent since her arrival and, now that evening was drawing nearer, was wondering why we did not have a community meal planned for everyone and our new community member.

Her friend made it seem like there was a large group of people living together and that she would have a lot of company. She hoped the community would help Dorothea take her mind off the recent passing of her husband, and to even feed her if she could not care for herself. I observed Dorothea seeking comfort from the community and people of Coed Hills. And we as the hosts, were under the impression she had come for an experience more like art-therapy. We thought Daphanie would be creating an installation or art specific to Coed in exchange for her stay, but it turns out she wanted community and comfort without the expectation to produce.

That first night I found myself walking up the cobbled path, barley a moon in the sky, to the sound of laughter coming the Bothy. Curious, I knocked and heard a jolly: "Come in!"

The door opened to the scene of a blazing fire, where a warm breath of fresh air exhaled from the living room hearth and so I quickly and carefully pounced over the threshold, turned to shut the door behind me and draw the thick curtains. Turning around none other than Nick the stonemason was sitting with Dorothea, already drinking wine, and looking at an art book with noticeably and uniquely long pages. Dorothea smiled warmly and gestured that I join them. She had let her black hair down from the travelling updo which she adorned earlier in the day, and she looked graceful and elegant. She wore little blue earrings and a long skirt with leggings underneath. I enjoyed the warmth of this sturdy house, which was in sharp contrast to my still run-down cabin, where I could feel the strong northern wind blowing through the walls. Placing

my hands carefully, as to not make my hands dirty from the thick mud that had congealed into a sloppy tutu outlining the boot, I wiggled my feet free, and brought my wine to join this odd pairing, sitting by the fire... noticing that my socks had stayed surprisingly dry.

Artist and land; how the land influences Dorothea's creative process

The next morning, I was out of bed early, with a list of supplies and ideas. The three of us has drunk the bottle of wine, and Dorothea had opened up about her art and the longing for a community of like-minded artists. Nick, ever the realist, had made it clear that this was not the time (or really the place) to fulfill such a wanting of the soul. "You should have come in the summer if you wanted that... we are no community" (Nick, Winter 2018).

"We are no community" appears to be very jarring at the first reading of this statement, and I'd like to further explore this opinion of the community member.

People are far too keen to focus on others' reported activity (through interviews) than to pay sufficiently close attention to what they actually do and how they do it

(Atkinson 2017, p. 43. Citing Jerolmack and Khan 2014; Maynard 2014)

Why is it that Nick, the resident stone mason, and also longest community member on site felt that there is no community, or did he mean the idea that Dorothea held as 'community' is different than the actual community on site? This positionality of Nick relates to the place of the visiting artist or performer in community, in terms of making a case for practices which emotionally bond community members plus visiting artists and performers. That *just living* in the same space is not enough to define 'community' as we understand it. I believe the main reason

this person feels disconnected is they choose to not take part in the weekly circles. Interestingly, the choice to not participate is one that could only be made by someone who is high up on the hierarchy/leadership system in place at Coed Hills. In other instances, with younger and newer community members, the choice to not join in the weekly circle would ostracise them from the group. However, in the case of Nick, this stance is accepted by the landowners, Laurent and the wider community members for a few reasons.

First, Nick is the resident electrician and repair person. He does maintenance for the core community and for the Coed Weddings company, and it would not be unusual for Nick to be called to the 'main house' where the Winslows live, next door. In many ways the community needs Nick to thrive. His no-nonsense attitude, much like his chosen craft<sup>64</sup> of stonemasonry, provides a solid foundation to the community, with the most practical and hands-on of tasks being completed by him. All the other interviews touched upon the circles as being key to how the community operates sustainably. A lack of participation by Nick in the emotional realm of sustainable practices is in stark contrast with the environmental sustainability and other practical supports which he provides to the visiting artists and performers. I spend so much time demonstrating this because I wish to illustrate that the exchange between Nick and the wider community is perceived as fair, and I perceive this to be why he does not have to participate in the emotional weekly circles, although he is consulted often in the practical meetings. Just as Dorothea would not be expected to chop wood as contribution to the intentional community. The goal is not to participate in everything, but to make sure that where one is participating, as an artist or performer, is within one's skill set and is also needed. Here is another reason why this

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<sup>64</sup> Nick self-identified as a craftsman when I referred to him as an artist in the interviews, which is why I use this term to describe his mode of expression, now.

research is important; I make the case that the presence of site-specific performance within an intentional community is integral to the wellbeing of the residents and a useful tool for sharing the embodied ideologies of the intentional community to a wider audience. But exchange as a concept is key to maintaining emotional and environmental sustainability between the visiting artist or performer, and the hosting community.

In the interviews carried out in February of 2020, Nick said he, “did not do much for the artists, other than making sure they have working electricity and appliances, tools from the workshop, and firewood if they need it” (Nick, 2020).

To look at the greater debate outside this case study, it will also relate to neo-liberal isolation and how the arts both employ and defy this ethos. I had been handed the unofficial the role of artist and environment liaison by Laurent. This meant I would be responsible for assisting Dorothea with any physical tasks she needed doing, giving her the tour, plus making her feel at-home and cared for throughout her stay. I was ready to prove myself yet again. In my mind, if I did an adequate job with this project, I would be allowed to create more in the future. After a long walk around the site with Dorothea and Laurent, some issues became clear. Dorothea was not the best walker and did not like the cold. This meant that she could not get up the stairs to the Artist's Studio, nor would she want to stay in that unheated room all day. We decided that she would work instead in the Bothy, and I brought in an inspection light for her. I remember being grateful that Nick had been my company the night before, with the three of us looking at the books with the long pages - which turned out to be Dorothea's collections of her past exhibitions. Her specialty was the female figure and painted with layer upon layer to give the acrylic paintings an almost pastel feeling. The impression was that the artist had moved over the same canvas many times to layer the emotion of expression and movement with each shadow

or arch of light reflected on the body. They were beautiful, wounded, free. I suggested: *“What about doing panels? You could have the women of Coed sit for you, and we can put them up in the Yurt when we leave? Like, archetypal female forms?”*

Dorothea was not in the place to paint women again, she said. She was unsure and wanted to do something more specific to Coed, *Perhaps the flowers?”* I thought about this for a moment before responding, *“There are not many in bloom now, but I can find you pictures if you like”!*

Due to the signal being blocked by the woods and sometimes even the harsher winds, Dorothea was not able to access the internet on her phone. She asked that I do this for her, and, although I would have liked to use my tablet for other things, I quickly agreed to help her with this, and ended up leaving the tablet for her to use for the remainder of her stay. We sat together in the warm Bothy, and I showed her photos of the blooming flowers and natural fauna that adorns Coed Hills in the spring and summer. It was decided that she would create paintings of these flowers and weeds and that I would think of how to present them as an installation piece. We would fit her site-specific paintings to a site, specific to Coed Hills.

Land and art; or how the land influences the art Dorothea created

Twelve paintings of plants and flowers which grew around the land were to be the culmination of Dorothea’s residence at Coed Hills. But where to showcase them, and how? The traditional space for exhibitions was the Barn. However, the Barn was under construction at this time—and her last week living on the land of Coed Hills was to be the week *before* the floor was put in. So, our main exhibition space was a construction zone. Instead of natural light tumbling in rays through the wide south-west facing windows, there was ‘DO NOT CROSS’ tape, as if it were

bunting, alongside bright orange plastic glued to the foundations of the floor. We went for a walk around the grounds again. I remember very clearly these tall glass panels with metal frames, which had been out in the rain for what looked like years, and suggesting that she create some scrolls to display inside the three of these forgotten frames? There was a but if a fuss around how to get the old paintings - on silk, and now very faded - out of the metal frames and we decided it would be too much of a stress to go down this avenue. And, more importantly, the idea did not come from Dorothea. Thinking of the audience, we wanted a warm and dry space that was easily accessible. We returned to the barn, and I put on the kettle. Laurent and I silently sipped our hot tea while Dorothea returned to the Bothy to put on slippers. Then I got excited; I had a vision. I said to Laurent:

“What do you think, Rawls? I'd love to put her art in contrast with the ‘work zone.’ The barn is still the perfect place for this cause it's going to be raining and the target audience will be older I reckon. And it's gonna be cool, like, especially with the subject matter... it's that classic natural space vs urban positionality and I think placing these paintings of the natural beauty, amongst the chaos of construction would work.... it would look intentional!”

At once Laurent responded with: “I love it! We'll give the crew the afternoon off, and we can all go! I'll write to the paper in St Hilary and see if they want to put a little advert for it! Good thinking, Gems.”

However, Dorothea was not as on board with this idea. Nor was she happy with this idea of putting an exhibition in a real construction zone. We sat down to talk about it one evening; she

felt like her art had been sidelined and made to be less important than a building project.

Dorothea was worried that her art would not be honoured in the way she wanted, or really, was used to in the days of her past. We asked her if she could think of a better idea and gave her a few weeks to do so. However, in the flurry of events which followed this topic was laid to rest and not mentioned again until just before the installation's showing to the public. And I mean minutes.

Artist and community; Dorothea needs, and the community gives

This was to be one of the first site-specific projects Dorothea had done. There were grumblings from the community that Dorothea needed too much support and was not meant for a lengthy stay at Coed Hills. This was discussed in conversations at the weekly circles, and a theme coming up was: she was not self-sufficient enough to warrant her use of the space.

However, we decided as a community that the worst thing to do would be to kick her out. This was a common theme at Coed. It was almost never an option to kick a person out of the community and this was my first personal experience of this theme at Coed Hills, but it would repeat throughout my fieldwork and be present in each case study this chapter addresses.

The intentional community acts as a microcosm for modern society and culture, and this is not a fact lost on the residents. On the contrary, many residents of Coed Hills feel this is part of their duty to and for society, to work through issues that affect communities on a macro-level, with



compassion and subversive understanding. In addition, to practice a type of radical love and compassion which is only possible through deep self-reflection. Thinking about the situation from Dorothea's point of view, we as a community wondered if she might feel afraid that she had lost the ability to take care of herself; that she was reliant on others who were practically strangers, plus she was far from her home. The community hoped that this 'lack of ability' did not need to make Dorothea feel as if she could not take care of herself, but we also knew that in this climate of the land: the cold, muddy and wet winter, she would need support from the community in her creative process. Although it was not explicitly spoken of, most of the tension came from the idea of exchange. Exchange is important in intentional communities, and especially in eco-communities. I have found 'exchange' to be the point where the two opposing ideals of Self-Sufficiency and Communal Living interact and overlap.

In chapter 5: *Methodology*, figure 3 represents this study's focus on a sustainably functioning community by noting the skillsets of community members and visually representing where and how they overlap. In taking this simple model of a core community system, one can easily talk with the visiting artist to see if and where they would be able to benefit the community. It is a simple practice, but regardless a new pathway into finding the niche that the artist can fill, while still being creatively fulfilled. This model and exercise might give an indication if the presence of an individual artist and their process of artistic creation would be sustainable in the emotional and environmental sense, based solely on the skills of the community members hosting. Although this model is limited in terms of nuance, I believe it would add some clarity to what is already a vague process. This model would fit in communities with a less traditional leadership structure.

For instance, Dorothea had not had a conversation about exchange or fitting in, and it was becoming a problem. The community had spoken in the circle, and, albeit led by Laurent's

enthusiasm and my support, we all agreed she should stay. The main responsibility of assisting this artist in residence was to rest with me. I would light her fire every evening and check in to see how her art was progressing each day. We made a routine where I would go to her in the evenings, light her fire, and stay for a glass of wine and a bit of a chat. To see what she might need in the days to come, I noticed it seemed helpful for her when I would bring my notebook and jot down ideas that she or I had.

Exchange and support are difficult to qualify. The liminal phase of the artist's introduction to a site ([White, 2013](#)), and the person who guides the artist through this transition can inform the art, and the artistic process directly. When Dorothea arrived on site, I was there to support her, and she was told I would be acting as her guide and host to the site; that she could rely on me. This is important and appropriate considering this woman was elderly, needed support physically and was grieving. Shenker wrote about the "therapeutic community" (Shenker 1986 p 63 and it seems to me that this was the type of community Dorothea's friend assumed Coed Hills was - not just for the core community members, but that this ideology extended towards the visiting artists and performers, as well.

Towards the end of her stay, Dorothea was finding it hard to live at Coed due to the daily tasks that required physical effort, plus the cold. The community began to express their concerns for her wellbeing more acutely, in the weekly circles. Reflecting on this time, Hrefna expressed to me:

"She was a vulnerable older woman, possibly suffering from dementia. And I feel like that, that in itself was quite difficult for the community to support, particularly the

individual that took on the majority of the responsibility. I don't think that was a necessarily particularly conscious decision for that individual either. It was sort of like it just landed on them. And they just had to sort of care for this person that happened to turn up and had nowhere else to go.”

(Hrefna, February 2020)

Hrefna was talking about me, as the person who cared for the artist. And a lot of this community member's concern and knowledge of the relationship with Dorothea Caslett stemmed from my sharing in the group circles and their experience of watching this type of thing happen cyclically at Coed Hills. Hrefna did not have much interaction with Dorothea, personally, but she saw the toll it was taking on me, Laurent and Nick. And, like others in the community at the time, she was worried.

Dorothea came down to my cabin early one morning, waking me because she needed help with lighting her fire. I discovered that she made use of a wood burning stove back at her home in Italy, so this daily act I slightly resented. I was having trouble expressing boundaries, as she needed so much support, and she had agreed to my writing about her process and assisting her in staging her site-specific installation, performance and staging the exhibition in it's entirety. I remember talking to a community member and friend about this struggle, making sure to note that it was a pattern of mine and to not project any feelings of resentment onto Dorothea. I would just try to express my struggles, and redefine my personal boundaries around support, if necessary.

Dorothea had burnt her hands not once, but twice now - forgetting that the decorative pieces of clay which sat atop the burner would be hot and going to pick them up to look at them. This coupled with the idea that Laurent had been stealing her cans of soup let me know that there was more at play here than just grief, and that I was not qualified to support her emotionally. I made sure that there were other systems of support available to her - connecting her with Dotti, the similarly aged landowner of Coed Hills who lived just next door. They began to do shops together, and she had someone who could check in on her as a friend. I still lit her fires, and we had the same evening check-ins. But with this experience, I redefined the expectations surrounding assistance within the artist-in-residency programme. The mornings and afternoons were for me to work on my own research, community tasks and source materials. In the evenings I would be available to brainstorm and talk through staging techniques. Thankfully, I was able to focus again on the curation of her event and this would serve me in the next two performances at Coed Hills.

Art and land; the culmination of the residency or how art is placed on the land

In the few days before her show, Dorothea was unsure whether she would finish her paintings in time. I was feeling calm, as my background in the theatre told me that things always are impossible at this time, and there was nothing to fear. Being a step removed, that it was not my creation, but another's, helped me in problem solving. The many hours spent diligently by her fire had culminated in a clear theme for the exhibition. "*Bliss of Wildness*" had been chosen as a name, something which Dorothea felt represented her time at Coed Hills - the learning curve and 'letting go.'

I measured the space between the upper level of the barn and the floor - figuring that we would need to attach about 4 sheets of paper to reach the bottom if we were to cascade the paintings-turned-scrolls down from the top level. We tied the paintings together with bits of string and twine we found abandoned in the workshop. I contacted a friend who played violin and we discussed scoring the event.

There was a small ad placed in the local paper of St Hilary and it was decided that Aneurin and Robin would make teas and cakes for the audience. Dorothea would introduce her work with a poem. I had the idea there could be music on the upper level as the guests arrived and I took a song by the artist Ayla Nero called "Whispers" which lists many trees and herbs. I would adapt the lyrics to contain references to the flowers of Coed, the same ones Dorothea had painted. Dorothea had grown up in India and had memories of the flora and fauna of her home country. I listened to her tell her story, recorded her speaking and that night in my cabin, re-wrote her words with a little more structure, as a poem. We spoke about connecting her feelings of sadness and isolation to her husband passing with being thrown into this environment, a place which defied her expectations. Dorothea and I were as transparent and honest as possible with the poem-story, and with just a few edits, Dorothea agreed she had a beautiful paragraph to introduce herself and explain her connection to her art created while at Coed Hills.

"The Barn was in a state of, like, partial construction around the place, of bits of floor not, like, down yet and like, and then there was these beautiful green fresh vibrant Spring, Summer colors of plants, mildly abstract, you know, which were all you know, right. But it was this juxtaposition, you know. And it all felt quite symbolic."

The audience entered through the front doors of the Barn, to their right was tea and coffee and biscuits set out. Above, the audience could hear my guitar, and my friend's violin. My friend and I moved around the space, mirroring our melodic counterparts in balanced harmonics around the circle of the upper level. We traversed five or six times before we came to the end of the song and assumed the positions which let Dorothea know it was time for her speech.

Below, a crowd of about 30 locals and friends of Coed had arrived and were huddled close to each other in the meek late-January sun. Dorothea's body language showed she felt immensely proud, and she performed her poem beautifully. I spoke with Dorothea about the way her heart hurts after she lost her loved one, how it was difficult for her to access the areas from which she had felt such passion before. The passion to create and perform lies in the heart, and if your heart is broken, that foundation of self-expression is sometimes too unstable to be built upon. The decision to place this exhibition in the Barn, a torn construction zone not meant for anything beautiful, was deeper than just convenience. This was true for not only the macro, to find nature in urban settings. Plus, a purely aesthetic reading of this, is the pleasure of contrast, the "potency of an uneasy fit" (Turner, 2004, p.373). But also, this site-specific placement stands for this concept in the micro, on a personal level. The Barn representing the saddened, heartbroken self. The very foundations in disarray. A huge project to rebuild, of self-reliance and sufficiency, attention to detail and of asking for help, making plans, and sticking to them. And finally, the fragile flowers in a zone of harsh and sharp objects and real danger represents the allowing of oneself to be vulnerable and open, feeling the fragility deep pain turns into, and yet, still striving to create and finding strength, the very expression of the apparent weakness. The flowers of

summer *imagined* from the reality of the winter-browned and rotted stalks and brush. Hope for greens and yellows where blacks and browns were all that was visible. Dorothea revealed to the audience it was the first time she had painted since the death of her husband and thanked us for all our help. There was a minor meltdown in the seconds before the doors opened. What I do remember is her strength and what she taught me about a community of people holding space for an artist or performer, and the importance of clearly defining boundaries, from the perspective of the hosting community, a practice which was to be explored again in the next case study, Section 5.3: *promenade with PYLON*.

## Conclusions on The Bliss of Wildness

This section will summarise the *Bliss of Wildness* and introduce two perceived binaries, which will be a basis for my analysis over the next two examples of site-specific performance within the intentional community of Coed Hills. This study sets out to discover the sustainable practices which are being explored for site-specific performance in intentional community spaces. In the sub section titled, 'artist and community', it is shown that the artist needs support from the community, be that emotional or practical, there must be something given in return, an exchange.

Bliss of Wildness and Dorothea's residency at Coed Hills offered insights as to the complexities of site-specific performances moving through intentional community spaces. Even the concept of an intentional community is blurred for the core community members who live on-site. As the

interviews disclosed, Patrick became uncomfortable when I asked about the intentional community and decided not to answer the question:

#### **4. Can you tell me a little about the community?**

And because of this I dropped the follow-up question:

#### **5. Are there any practices that keep you connected to one another?**

I was not surprised this community member did not want to talk about the community. At the time of the interviews, he had not been on the best of terms with the community. I did not press him for more information, as I wanted to hear his opinions on the performances. In contrast to the community questions, this interviewee was very comfortable talking about the artists and their process. Patrick, when asked the question: *Are you involved with the performers' process at all?* He identified that he was directly involved - the only person who did so. He spoke about how hectic energy can be brought into the community by a visiting performer and this highlights the importance of a sustainable emotional relationship between the artist and community. A practice of sustainability explored involved the concepts of support and exchange, and how they are articulated between the core community and the visiting artists and performers. Hrefna and I spoke about the concept of support and exchange, in relation to this specific example whereby Dorothea needed emotional support as an artist in this community:

“I felt it felt good as well in some ways to support that kind of process... or see that supporting process, and to reminisce on what it could and couldn't be. The sort of place that the elderly in society as a whole, I think. It made us generally on-site reflect quite a lot about what the community isn't, it made us sort of realise in a lot of ways that despite the fact that there is a community, on site is also a functioning business and events space, which is tricky.”



(Hrefna, February 2020)

Hrefna ties this claim to the community members having to run and maintain the Barn and guest accommodations for the retreats and weddings. This means that spaces which were formally community spaces, such as the barn, and the kitchen to the barn, now have to be kept clean and vacant for most of the summer months. This lack of large community hub for this community member, contributes to the ideology of the intentional community not being practiced, “What this community isn’t”. Although Coed Hills had been represented as a rural arts community, they have no official manifesto in literary form and no website. Without any system or structure, artists and performers will show up and it is only later that the core community learn they can’t care for or accommodate them, as was the case with Dorothea.

This first example of performance within this intentional community, set up criteria for exploration which I continued in the subsequent case studies. These criteria are defined by two perceived binaries or opposing viewpoints represented in the experience of assisting this visiting artist. These are drawn from the literature studied in the first chapters of this thesis, and in the information gained from interviewing the eight core community members in February 2020.

The first perceived binary is that between the ideals of community-mindedness and self-sufficiency. It is common for a person to arrive at Coed Hills ‘bright-eyed, bushy tailed’, and ready to work. Charlie pointed out in his interview that it is a common practice for the new community member or visiting artist to spend the first few days, weeks or months ‘proving’ themselves, speaking from his personal experience, “We just made ourselves as useful as we

possibly could. And we've worked our absolute ass off for the next few months". (Charlie, February 2020).

Charlie entered the community with a lot of time and energy to devote to communal living practices<sup>65</sup>. It is important to note that Charlie was able to do this work without instruction from anyone in the community - highlighting the ideal of self-sufficiency. He and his partner could go into the woods and 'clear'<sup>66</sup>, a job which always needed to be done at Coed Hills and was a two-person job. This act benefited the community and not just the individual, this act demonstrated community-mindedness. The two concepts, opposed in ideology, can be placed on a sliding scale. Exchange as a concept, is connected community-mindedness and self-sufficiency. I would argue, as demonstrated by Patrick, that it can be an indication of an emotionally sustainable relationship between a visiting artist and the existing core community members.

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<sup>65</sup> , I.e., doing work that would benefit the community as opposed to an individual.

<sup>66</sup> Colloquial term: to clear is to chainsaw trees that are dead or bramble that has overgrown and make a large pile which is either burned on site, or wheel-barrowed up to the main space for use in the biomass wood burner.

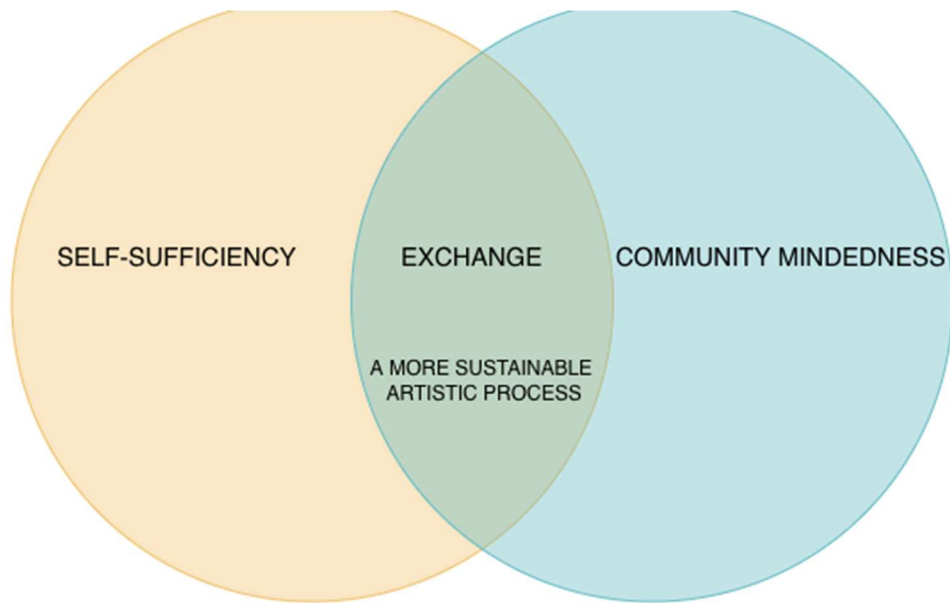


Figure 15: Representation of ideologies Self-Sufficiency and Community Mindedness overlapping to create the embodied concept of Exchange.

As shown in this case study, when what is asked of the artist is left to Turner's (1969) liminality and then combined with *The Aesthetics of the Invitation* (White, 2013) an unknown and limitless potential can inform the artistic process. This means the phase of liminality is consciously entered, but unvirtualised as it will be the first time the artist arrived on site. She did not know what to expect, and it was a liminal phase for her because she, almost literally, was on the threshold of two roles. She was arriving as a new widow who had not performed or exhibited her artwork, and she knew that by the time she left Coed Hills, she would be transformed into a working artist again, with hopes that she would have spent her time on site feeling supported by a community. Although her performance was a success, her place in the intentional community was not emotionally sustainable and she was not encouraged to stay longer than her residency, nor was she invited back for another site-specific performance event centred around her artworks. Additionally, as Hrefna stated in her interview, Dorothea's presence in the community had a lasting effect on the core community members. This impact is an example of how the exchange between the performer or *ghost* and the hosting community should not be limited in

its agential cut (Barad 2006; Spatz 2019), to show only the time when the *ghost* was performing upon the *host*. What this research does is extend the parameters of the cut regarding time and viewpoints considered.

As shown in this example, the Bliss of Wildness (2018), the artistic process does not exist separately from the environmental relationship curated by the hosting community. This theory was introduced through the recounting of Dorothea's arrival at Coed Hills, and the relationships she formed with the community members. I detailed these interactions through evocative autoethnographic accounts; empirical and candid interview data collated from the community members; and deconstructed now in the conclusions of Dorothea's residency. The emotional and environmental relationships were deconstructed using the players of artist, art, community, and land, as will continue throughout the next two case studies. Each of these sub-sections highlighted an interesting or surprising point of conflict, presented alongside an evocative autoethnographic recounting of the social and cultural environment<sup>67</sup>.

The second perceived binary I found through this case study was that between form or structure and spontaneity or freedom. Interestingly, I found that the hoped-for artistic freedom to create, when given through the lack of a system or leadership model, as was present in this first case study, would yield conflict between the community members and artist(s). I did not expect this and questioned whether this was an isolated incident in the specificity of the older age of the artist, or if it was indicating a hidden imbalance which, if so, would be evidenced in the subsequent case studies. I placed (art) in the middle ground between the two opposing ideals in

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<sup>67</sup> This acted as a small-scale example of conflicts that larger-scaled productions can face, as well as light communities (more on this in the conclusion chapter of this thesis).

figure 5: structure/form and spontaneity/freedom, noting the intersectionality of these concepts is where art is possible within this intentional community.

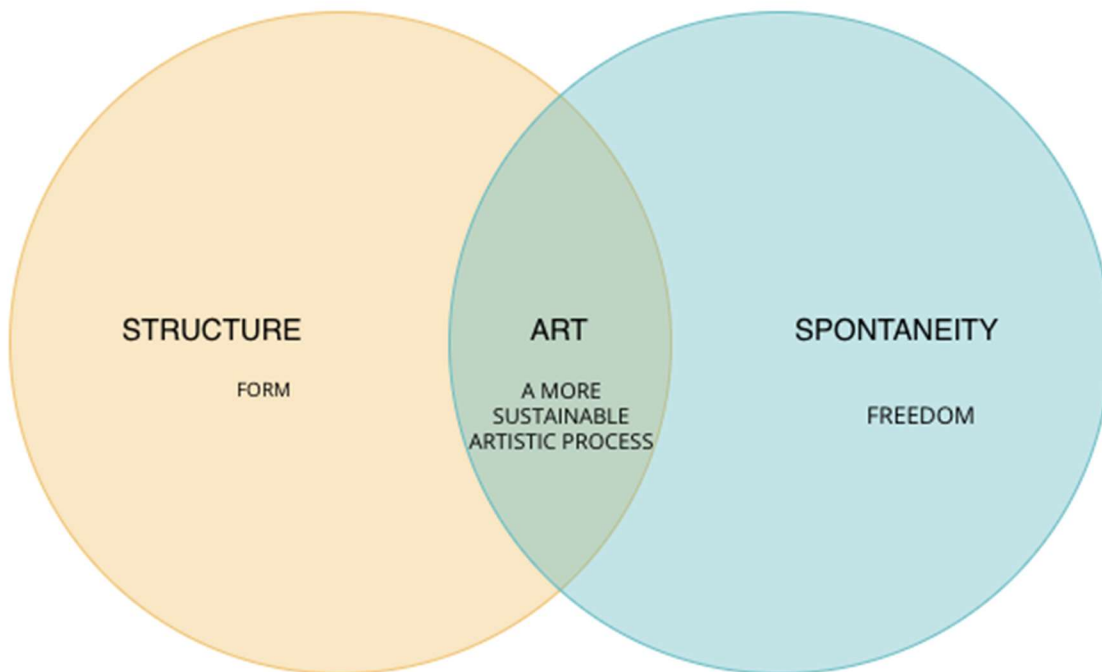


Figure 16: Representation of ideologies: Art, by author.

Once again, I found one cannot exist without the other, and theorised the creation of a conscious system might aid in the relationships between the community and the artist. Patrick said he did not see much of a current system in place when it comes to incoming artists in the community. He acknowledged that there 'must be' a system, however, because 'it works'. If the end goal is sustainability of emotion and environment, perhaps the foundation of a system or structure would allow more time for spontaneity and freedom to create.

The concept of structure came up in the interviews with Odette and Tesza as well. To about half of the core community members, Coed Hills is an example of not actually needing a system if the community were reflexive enough to decide on a case-by-case basis. In this way, what was

or was not working in the daily-interactions between artist, art, land, and core community members, would inform the overall sustainability of the site-specific performance within the community space.

In this view, the community's lack of structure is what actually gives the artist the freedom to create. This view would align with Turner's liminality (1969), where the specifics of the ritual are

less important than the performance of the ritual. Furthermore, whether planned or not, Turner conceded, "the phase of liminality must eventually end" (Turner, 1969). When the phase of liminality ends, a new role will be assumed. This will be especially important in Chapter 8, when discussing the findings of *promenade with PYLON* (2019). Where the role of the artist/performer transforms from visiting artist/performer to community

*The concept of praxis is reflected in the description of how core community members attempt to optimise their practices. I am making connections from Hrefna's interview to Odette's. This reflexive and self-aware process was reflected in the syntax of Hrefna's speaking. The language used surrounding performance in community reflected Odette's process, in relation to performance in the intentional community.*

*Odette, like Hrefna, said she doesn't see the point at first, but knows to trust that it will benefit the community. Odette credits the, 'spirit of Coed Hills', to Laurent, specifically in relation to performance and the arts, and she added that I have done a great deal to add to the spirit of*

member with her phase of liminality ending as the completion of her performance 68

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68 Interestingly, a transformation of role takes place again with the culmination of the site-specific performance at Coed Roots & Legends (2019), when the community member is asked to leave the role of community member and assume the previous role of visiting artist.

1. Chapter 8: Findings *promenade with PYLON*; a performance and interactive installation by Skye Creswell. *January - March 2019*.



Figure 17: Both PYLON sculptures at a festival in Wales, Summer 2016 photo supplied by Skye Creswell, edited by author, to create the invitation to the site-specific performance event (2019).

*Skye, a 22-year-old recent graduate from a university in London, is set to spend three weeks at Coed Hills as our Artist-in-Residence. While here, Skye will install two of her sculptures, site-specifically. Previously the sculptures, PYLON, were presented with temporary scaffolds, and traveled around festivals in the summer. At Coed Hills, she hopes they will find their permanent home.*

*Skye's intention is to use the workshop, and order supplies to Coed Hills to build the scaffold-like frames which will hold the PYLON upright, this time permanently. The metal a-frames, one for each of the bugle horn-shaped PYLON will hold the PYLON at head-height, so that the public can make noise through the horns, communicating with one another from across the water, and out of one another's sight. "An interactive and analogue sound sculpture" Self field notes 2019*

“Yeah, so this is like a completely different situation. Very, very young artist sort of really starting to experience who they are trying to figure out what that is like young raw, angsty energy clashing with everything. Lust and fighting-ness, fire and yeah, you know, and actually the artwork was created was, is, really great I mean really like it really appreciate it stands beautifully, you know around the lake it sort of triggered a really beautiful transformation of space that was really, really great. The trauma it triggered generally in the community, not so great, but, you know, again, everybody got something from it. You know, you've got to suffer to learn, apparently.”

(Hrefna, February 2020)

Informed by Dorothea's stay the winter before (November 2018), I arranged for Skye to live in the Bothy for the weeks that she would spend with us. Not only the most central accommodation - and the only accommodation with electric and heating, but also clearly the 'nicest'



accommodation. I wanted her to feel welcome and comforted from the moment of her arrival<sup>69</sup>. Laurent gave Skye permission to use the workshop and tools provided. As she was also joining us for the meals, she would become a direct part of the community for the duration of her art installing period on the land of Coed Hills. It had been a year and one month since Dorothea had left Coed Hills and my role as site-liaison had solidified. This time around, when Laurent approached me, he said:

“Gems, can I give your number to a new girl we’ve got interested in doing some artist-in-residence stuff? I told her you were our go-to gal! She’s very passionate, if not a bit young. Been traveling all around festivals with her art and we’ve known her dad and brother for years.”

I was over the moon that we were getting another young woman, especially as I was wondering if the age of the last artist in residence played a part in her relationship dynamic with the community. I asked for Skye’s number from Laurent and composed a text message straight away:

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69 Due to the ambiguous hierarchy in both the community and artist-in-residency program, I thought the placement of Skye in the Bothy might also give her status to combat her young age, and my own prejudice that she would be more ‘artsy’ than ‘practical’. By placing Skye in the Bothy, I hoped the community would see her, like the Bothy, itself, as a part of the community but slightly elevated and thus not a slave to the daily chores. If she wanted to make art all day, I wanted no reason as to why she should not be doing just that.

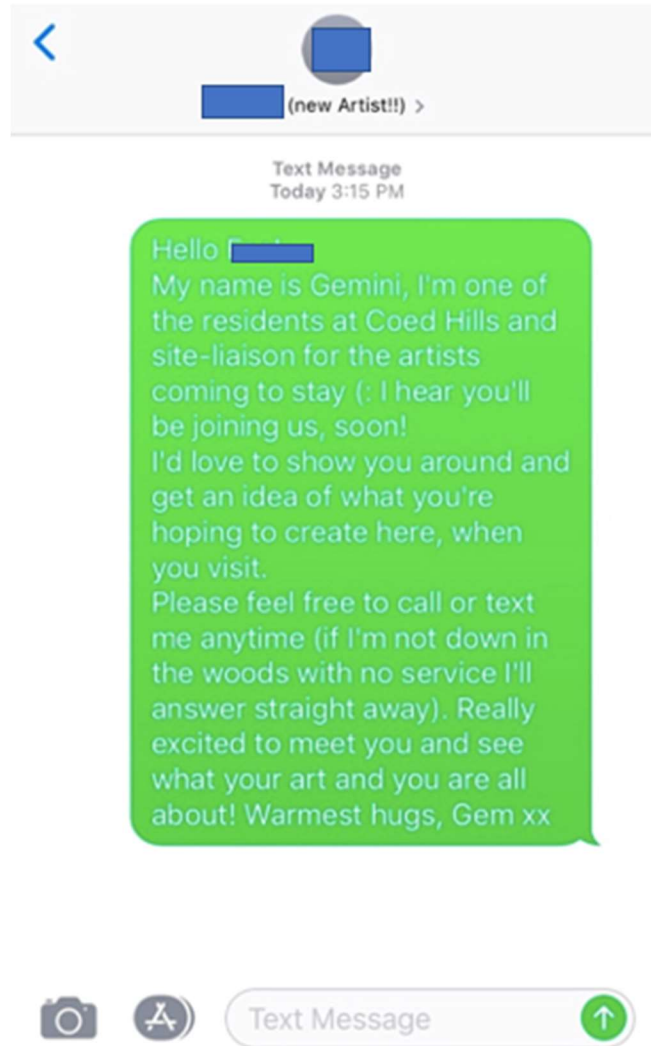


Figure 18: Screen shot of text message sent from author to visiting artist Skye Creswell. (2019).

I did this because I wanted this experience to feel more structured than the last. In the last example of site-specific performance in this intentional community, *Bliss of Wildness (2018)*, where the artist, Dorothea, was enthusiastically welcomed, but chaotically so. Arriving to one accommodation, being moved to another in the dark (literally and metaphorically). I also sent this text because I wanted to establish the structure which would hold her artistic process, with myself as her liaison with the community and land. Skye texted back quickly, and we made

arrangements for her to arrive at Coed Hills later that week. When she did arrive, it was with the PYLON in her father's truck. However, the sculptures were much larger than we as a community had imagined. When Skye arrived on a chilly yet sunny afternoon, we all scrambled to get the large horn-shaped sculptures out of the truck and to a place they could be stored. It was quickly decided the place would be the camping field, and as a community we moved the PYLON the short distance before returning to our

*When art or performance are present in a community, the 'aesthetics of the initiation' (White, 2013) will apply to the artist arriving in the community as well. If this is taken to be true, then in site-specific performance in intentional communities, the process and aesthetics of the initiation are relevant even before the art or performance devising begins.*

*I mean here that, just as in a building project the foundations shape the result, a rickety core cannot have a stable structure built upon it. The walk down the drive at Coed Hills, the introduction to the workshop and the tools, plus of course, the people. All of these first impressions are key in creating that moment of liminality; freedom to create.*

respective activities. Skye changed her shoes, dropped off a bag or two, and we were away, chatting happily and excitedly.

Artist and land; how the land influenced the artistic process

From fieldnotes taken the winter of 2019:

*I found Skye on Wednesday morning, at 9 am in the Mushroom Lab, making her morning coffee and porridge before our weekly Circle (Wednesday). We spoke the day before about a chat later in the afternoon, so I checked-in with her to see how she slept, asking if this afternoon was still an appropriate time for the conversation. I explained I wanted a clear idea of how she was settling into the community, and to know her feelings as she lived, worked, and created on the land.*

*After the morning circle and work session, I met her with a cup of tea, in the workshop about 1pm. Skye was already working on welding her metal a-frame structures so I took some photos as she finished marking the lines to cut on the poles, she explained she would eventually weld them together to form the arms of the sculpture's frame. Then we went upstairs, to the old art studio.*

*Sitting down at the desk I see - cigarette butts, seashells, charcoal, empty teacups, razor blades and a thick layer of new sawdust combined with the years of old, regular dust. I cleared a space for my laptop to sit, pulled around two chairs, and we began to chat.*

*(Self, field notes January 2019)*

In this initial chat, Skye showed unbridled enthusiasm and a real want to join the community. At this point, February 2019, we had begun doing community workdays after the circle on Wednesday. Using the community gathering as an opportunity to propose ideas for bigger projects, that might take more than two hands. Skye expressed her want to join the community

in terms of physical practices like volunteering in the gardens. And also in the emotional practices as well, such as giving her all in the sharing circles and taking on the advice of other community members. When Skye arrived, it was with a clear intention: to build permanent frames in which the Pylon would sit, and site-specifically install them as 'art to stay' at Coed Hills.

Skye was an amateur welder and so she made her base in the workshop. The first step for these frames was that they needed to be galvanised<sup>70</sup> if they were to stay outside permanently. To do this Skye, and Laurent - who also was a metalwork artist - contacted a workshop in Bridgend and sent off for the metal poles that she ordered to arrive at Coed Hills. Skye and I took long walks around the property of Coed; finding a permanent home for the Pylon would be challenging. Skye had not thought about the ground being muddy and thus unstable in her designing of the base of the Pylon, as that had been done before she arrived on site. We soon realised that if she was to install the Pylon on the land of Coed, she would also have to think about altering the sculptures' bases. Skye decided on concrete, and because of the landscape of the muddy site, she chose to install the Pylon.

The lake is number 16 on the map. It is a large clay bottomed, man-made swimming pond. There is a downward sloping footpath which was burdened by the ever encroaching brambles and the stony path was illegible, thick with mud. And here began the three-month project of *promenade with Pylon*. Skye and I walked around the lake at the beginning of her second

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<sup>70</sup> Galvanising is the process of applying a protective zinc coating to steel or iron, to prevent rusting. The most common method is hot-dip galvanising, in which the parts are submerged in a bath of molten hot zinc. This could not be done on site.

week living on site. However, we had not yet found the perfect place for her art to live. As site liaison I was keeping clear boundaries around the amount of exchange I was to have with Skye. I had learned from Dorothea there was a fine line, and it was not up to the artist alone to be conscious of this balance. The nature of the PYLON is that they are made to be used as a gateway to social interaction with a stranger. It is participatory art with the hope of aiding people to making connections.



Figure 19: PYLON at the Lake (16 on fig. 6), photo given with permission by Sharron Taylor. (2019).

An auditory experience, we realised together that a person would not necessarily have to see the second PYLON from the vantage point of the first, and that this playful and intentional hiding of the physical tool might make the experimentation with the auditory experience even more fulfilling. We thought that the sounds echoing off the water would provide a beautiful audio aesthetic. Skye reminded me:

“The PYLON is equally about listening as it is speaking. The funnel shape makes an analogue amplifier for the voice, but we can't forget that it's also like a tin-can for all the sounds of nature around you! You can listen through them and hear so much. I'm really glad they can live here.”

(Skye, 2019)

She gave my hand a squeeze. It was my job to focus on the structure, and to provide practical advice for eventual audience footfall, both integral and accidental. I considered the environment and the feelings of the community about that area of Coed at the next group circle. After we had decided that her PYLON could indeed live down by the lake, Skye and myself took another walk around the perimeter, fighting to get through the brambles and squelching through the mud, both of us imagining what the space could be, once cleared and lit. It was getting cold, the sun was setting, and we thought it would be a promising idea to return to the mushroom lab and further our ideas in the warmth and comfort of the indoors. Perhaps with a cup of tea.

Land and art; how the land influenced the art

Sitting down in the mushroom lab, we were unexpectedly joined by Patrick, who helped us very much in the planning of the structural integrity of this installation. I was all for an environmentally sustainable installation and assumed that the metal frames would be sitting above ground. I was initially concerned that they would sink down into the mud. So, I opened the space to have a brainstorming session on the topic of *how* to create a solid base. After much discussion, Skye and Patrick had decided, and Patrick said he had the ability, and the time to assist in this. Although the final decision was not my first choice of building material or method, this aspect of the project was not up to me. I believed that my role had been fulfilled by opening the space for this conversation, and connecting Skye with Patrick, the community member who knew how to help her in her vision and who would have the most time *to* help. As mentioned in *Sustainability in production: Exploring eco-creativity within the parameters of conventional theatre* (Beer et al., 2017) in the methodology chapter of this study (5), one of the practices of sustainable performance design is not the end-goal of perfection. Beer et al., (2017) state the final performance is but a small outcome, and the artistic experiment focuses on integrating the process of creation with sustainable building values and techniques. Due to the placement of the PYLON, the concrete became a part of the artwork, something Skye had not intended until it was fit specifically to the site.

The concept of the promenade was also particularly important to this piece's exhibition. Themes important to Skye as an artist and performer, were communication and participation. In the branding of the PYLON, the words she most used were, "interactive sound sculpture" and "analogue." This implied that she wanted natural and easy interaction - and I suggested that we used promenade staging to bring this experience of relating, of participation not only to the guests who were actively using the sound sculptures, but to open it up from the very beginning. "*promenade with PYLON*" was chosen as the working title for the installation. And, it was



decided there would be a procession beginning at the entrance to the woods, led by a bell, and the audience would move down the wooded path together. The performances would not happen in one central location at the lake, but around it: in nooks and crannies. This meant there would be more work to do in the clearing of the pathways for the audience to be walking and exploring.

As the month progressed, Skye was still waiting on the base structures to be galvanized. This allowed her to get stuck in to doing some more community focused work. Robin gave Skye her daily tasks to complete, including digging in the gardens, de-weeding the potato patch, and painting the laundry room.

The theme of exchange was again present in this case-study; and was now to be tested. I had learned from my experience over the last year that a sustainable relationship between a visiting artist or performer and the core community members meant connecting the visiting artist or performer to the land. This would also mitigate the experience of the community for the visiting artist or performer. As such, care should be taken to consider the entire environment of Coed Hills, in both emotional and physical<sup>71</sup> ways.

In the past example of Dorothea's residency, there was tension in the community when someone showed up who made the community fear they were not going to get what they needed. I found this was because of the extra needs of a visiting artist or performer and the fear of an unbalanced exchange.

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71 The 'site' in 'site liaison' could also be 'social and physical environment'- liaison, so it would include both the social and physical components of the site. However, that is too wordy, and it was only in my research that I was able to take the time to explain what I meant by 'site'.

Initially there was a mixed review of feelings from the community members surrounding Skye's presence at Coed Hills. The winter months being a time of building and rest, there is a pressure that comes with each season; but, in winter the pressure of daylight leaving trumps all others. For this reason, I made myself exclusively available to Skye's needs and wants. It turned quickly into the younger community members getting involved. Getting the space ready was a hugely physical task, and an emotional one for Skye. The presence of her partner on site made the smaller jobs and decisions self-sufficient, as she had his help and his counsel; she was not drawing on the time of the community members. But as their relationship deteriorated, her support system transitioned away from those outside the community, to those within.

Artist and community; the artist needs, and the community gives

The following section highlights themes of exchange; and explores how a once emotionally sustainable relationship with the community changes to an unsustainable relationship.

There was a man who arrived just a week or so after Skye did. He was a tree surgeon and that is always welcome at Coed Hills. He could use a chainsaw; had a pickup truck; and his own Alaskan Sawmill to share with the community. Many people pass through Coed Hills, and at the time there was no form or structure which was imposed unilaterally, for those who wanted to join the community full-time. Nor was there an external form or structure for who wanted to come as a performer or artist-in-residence, it was mostly done through semi-official conversations with the community and the leader of the community. This meant we as a community, had no way of telling if he would even be back for a second visit.

However, Skye and this man quickly

formed a bond. The explicit wishes of about 2 or 3 community members, including myself, asked that he would not be allowed to live on site. And in a circle meeting, it was decided to not invite him to live onsite. So, Skye brought him in to help her with the clearing of the land for the PYLON. Initially, Skye kept it hidden from the wider community that he was staying at the bottom the woods in a tent, so he could help her clear and build in the days. This was kept from me as well, and I believe this was the start of our professional relationship beginning to deteriorate. As they formed a closer relationship, the community accepted that he was living on site; I was baffled at the time, but now understood this kind of thing happens.

*To be transparent, I did not like this man from the beginning. I felt uneasy and defensive around him, and I did not welcome him as I normally would with visitors. Instead of exploring the 'invitation' (White, 2013), I made sure he was leaving the community that evening, when I went to the crew space late that night and found him still there. I even had a few conversations with my supervisor, about my feelings of unease when this man was around. I voiced my concerns to the community members as well, and some of them - mostly the women on site, shared my views.*

*Self, field notes 2019*

Alex moved out of his tent and began to restore an abandoned arthouse down at the bottom of the woods. When this was discovered, the community decided that it was not right to kick someone out of the community, without giving them a good chance to work through their 'stuff'.

That is, whatever it was that was making many of the women on site uncomfortable. This partnership between Skye and Alex became one of the predominant factors in the relationship between the art

*Although this incident seems isolated, there will always be external factors involved when an artist or performer visits a community to install their artwork or to perform. And the mood and feelings of the hosting community will directly affect the art/ performance if it is site-specific.*

*PYLON* and the community of Coed Hills. At the time I did not see the significance of, or the detail involved in accepting someone into the Coed Hills community. However, "The most important outcome of ethnography is the constant reminder of the diversity of human affairs, and the regularities that underpin it." (2017, 169). A principle of Coed Hills, which differed to myself at this time as a researcher, and which I have only realized upon reflection; is to always give second chances. This is a structure which is common in intentional communities that have a therapeutic leaning (Shenker, 1986); this ideology translates to embodied practice as the community acts to make someone feel welcome, regardless of their actions. This practice extends to artists and performers living in the community and was shown in how the community grappled with the concept of asking Alex to leave.

I had been reading about the transformative potential that site-specific performance has to offer (Boal, 1995; Birch and Thompkins, 2012); and I combined the concept with the reflexive and transparent writing process I had been employing for my thesis. I was keen to explore a new way of approaching the artist-in-residency programme in terms of participation; and, how the site-specific performance would participate with the community. I wondered how much of my

aversion to help was wrapped up in the ego, something that institutions and museums also struggle with (Lynch, 2014). I experienced a more symbolic giving up of power during *Bliss of Wildness* (2017); and I felt this friction arise again in *PYLON*. There was an element of fear; and this manifested itself in a few ways. The first being stress; thinking: '*if this job of clearing the space is given away, and out of my hands, it will not get done "right" (according to my individual vision) and that will mean more work down the line*'.

The *PYLON* space creation also highlighted a concept of time running out, of predicting the feeling of being overwhelmed down the line, and this fear made me want to hold on to all the responsibilities. The other way this fear manifested itself was in the ego, and thus the process of co-creation was affected. I worried if this installation and performance were not done 'right' it would reflect badly on me; not only as a fellow artist and performer, but also as an academic. This was not a healthy way of approaching any project; particularly considering my experiences in the past and working with Dorothea. I knew this type of thinking was unsustainable for my emotional well-being. In *Whose Cake is it Anyway* (Lynch, 2014) I learned if I was to work from a place of authenticity in co-curation and community involvement; I had to give up the power that I had, indeed, given myself with the role of 'artist site-liaison'. The give and take between the people of the intentional community and the visiting artist or performer need not end in the permaculture gardens, and this "Artspace" might only return to being an Artspace, with the support and participation of the community.

I presented the opportunity to participate with *PYLON* to the group like this:

“Skye and I have been clearing the space down by the first lake to get it ready for the unveiling in March. It would be amazing if we could make a community workday out of it one afternoon, after the circle? Patrick has been down there a bunch and I think Alex has as well. But Robin and Tesza – ‘cause the landscape will change so much in the spring, I would love it if you could take a look at the way the water flows downhill? It might decimate the pat with more rain-- there’s not much keeping the soil in place.”

(The author, 2019)

The community was mixed on this idea of helping, for reasons such as other projects they had comitted to, and outside work.

In the end, just over half the group agreed to come down in the next few weeks. They decided they would not just clear, but with Robin’s expertise, landscape a new large pathway as well!

Robin and Tesza started the process to create this pathway and dug trenches to help divert the

water runoff. They planted herbs, flowers, and, most importantly, threw down grass seeds to hold the soil together. This was a transformative and bonding experience for the community member who helped with this, and I think contributed to the feelings of joy and accomplishment which surrounded the PYLON performance. Additionally, this process of grass seeds and



Figure 20: Clearing at the Lake for promenade with PYLON. Photo by author (2019).

diverting where the water would run meant that the path would fair better throughout all four seasons, not just the summer. Something which exemplifies a sustainable relationship with the land for future people to visit this artwork and the lake (16 on map).

Another change I made from *Bliss of Wildness* was asking the core community members to be directly involved with the creative side of the artist's residency. Unlike *Bliss of Wildness*, where I looked outward, to bring performers IN to the space, instead of OUT from it.

At a circle about a month before *PYLON* was ready for the public, I brought up this idea. I opened it up the group; *How, and would you, like to participate?* Skye presented her intentions around the 'interactive sound sculptures' and as a group we talked about ways to bring people together. The main themes that came from this conversation were: connection, playfulness and sharing.

These themes were manifested in the idea of the food for the event. As a group Skye and the core community members decided to write *BYOB* (Bring Your Own Banana) on the invitations. The community would supply

*There was a fire pit we had uncovered in the group-clearing day at the lake, and it had already turned into a social gathering space. I would now have company in the later parts of the days, while I cleared the brambles by the lake, and trimmed the pathway. Around sundown one or two community members would show up, light the firepit and hangout. It was comforting to have the company. And a welcome change for the community to have a space which was 'ours,' but away from the main buildings and the reminders of jobs to be done. Revealing itself was the unintentional development of a new community space, through site-specific art.*

bananas for those who did not or could not bring one, and the idea was to make a banana roast.

1. Art(ist) and land: culmination of residency - the performance

In the final days before the performance everything was quite calm. We had made various spreadsheets; lists of phone numbers and people who would be around to help. I invited all the performers out to visit in the months prior and gave them all time to get to know the space again all together the week before the performance (see timeline on page 135 ). I devoted my time to being down by the lake every day; strimming the path which circled the lake so there would be space for the audience to walk from structure to structure. The long pathway down from the top of the woodland path had been immaculately cleared and planted by the community. One would occasionally see a community member popping down to check it out in the final days; stopping to make sure a mint plant had survived the last round of strimming, or the buried clay pots had not collapsed where they were acting as underground aqueduct. The early signs of Spring were inspiring and invigorating for myself and the community members.

We had done some 'social media blasts', and through Laurent, reached out to the 'friends of Coed'. The audience on the day was mostly compromised of that integral audience; people who had been to Coed; lived on site; come for a retreat; or were a friend of the Winslow family. The performance day was filled with laughter and the whole community showed up to support, barring two of the residents - who had helped a great deal in the set up. Mason Fitzgerald's poem was adorned with a handmade costume and presented at the very end of the jetty. His voice rang out and reflected over the water's surface. Bats flew overhead and he allowed much time in-between lines for the audience to listen to the sounds of nature.

Although I felt like the once exciting bond between Skye and myself was dwindling; the joy of the performance day made that feeling fade into the distance. It was going so well, and it was time for Skye to perform. I had a clipboard with the running time on it and we had been



searching for Laurent for the better part of an hour. He had been pulled away to help a visiting friend of Coed with some unknown problem, so Skye and Katie went on with their performance, weaving in and out of sight and sound. I remember looking at the faces of the guests around me, some of them a little sticky with banana residue, and seeing them pay close attention to the performance which accompanied the metal structures.

When the sun went down, most of the guests made their way up the paper lantern-lit pathway and left the site. I had already retired to my cabin when I heard them, the singing group that were staying on site for a workshop in the Barn the next day. Hare Krishna-esque, dancing down the woodland path towards the lake, drumming and singing. I did not leave my cabin, but listened as I lay my head down, finally warmed by my own fire.

As a community, we had already begun to dream up the next show. I was ready to make this my final project in conjunction with my research and thesis; implementing what I thought I had learned from my two years on-site and the two site-specific performances acting as site-liaison.

## Chapter 9: Coed Roots & Legends, Self and Skye Creswell as Co-Curators

'Coed Roots & Legends', a performance and art event, took place over 5 acres of land, with a duration of 13 hours, and over 30 performers. This project had the most

involvement, on my part, of all three case studies. I had a leadership role in this project and operated between the roles of co-curator and researcher.

The following chapter is divided into two subsections, per section. *Coed Roots & Legends* was the most expansive performance; both in terms of land covered and the number of artists and performers who were invited. I choose to step out of my role as active participant and performer (as best I could) to fully inhabit my role as researcher and creator or co-curator for this final project. This was done so that my findings will focus on the curation and creation of this site-specific performance event; alongside the dynamics which influenced the overall emotional and environmental sustainability. In addition, my role as site-liaison could continue with more attention to detail if I chose to step out of my role as performer.

I highlight the following experience as an example of the concept of exchange being practiced between a visiting artist or performer and the hosting community. In April of 2019, the wedding season had just begun at Coed Hills. This was considered the busiest time of the year, even though we as a community would finally have more daylight<sup>72</sup>. The amount of work added due to the weddings, almost matched to the minute, the extra hours of daylight provided by the Spring. There was so much to do that most community benefiting projects halted during this time of year. The weddings provided the monetary funding for the community to thrive<sup>73</sup>. And I had taken on the role of head of housekeeping, for the 2019 summer season. This was my second year in this role, and this time Tesza asked Skye to help out. As the bedding was such a

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<sup>72</sup> Due to the low electric living of the community, more light meant more time to work.

<sup>73</sup> Capitol from the weddings goes to the landowners. From that they pay for the community members' essential food orders, laundry detergent, any building supplies that cannot be foraged or donated, bills, etc.

big job, I accepted the help. To get the job of the bedding done, we formed two teams, as Skye invited Alex to help her with the job. The first team consisted of me, and occasionally my partner, who lived off-site; the other team being Skye and Alex. Instead of working together on the housekeeping duties, and perhaps forming a bond; Skye and I became more distant from one another.

I wanted this performance event to have a strong theme of community and sustainability running through it; and it was

interesting that there was such discord within our own community as this was happening. I specifically looked towards 'Friends of Coed'<sup>74</sup> for the performances. I posted callouts to social media, including Facebook and Instagram, for performance contributions and works of literature, poetry or photography.

*This is an important moment to note the value of exchange. As Skye was now living on site with no intention to leave, the core community members wanted her to contribute in ways other than her art.*

*Skye had joined the community full-time, with plans to leave at the end of the summer. There was turmoil within the pairing and the way Skye and Alex, as artists, interacted with the core community members and the land. Although Alex had been accepted into the community through Skye and his contribution to her art, I was keeping my distance from him. During the circle, I requested Alex didn't come to my home unannounced, and another woman in the community shared this same request. This incited an angry episode which only deepened my discomfort around the man.*

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<sup>74</sup> Members of the wider community of coed Hills. People who do not live on-site, but adhere to the shared ideology of the community and visit often.

Artist/Art and land; how the land influenced my creative process

The land directly influenced the process of curating and creating this upcoming show, *Coed Roots & Legends (2019)*. From the inception of writing this thesis; I knew I wanted to work exclusively in promenade staging.

This project was unique; different to the last two because of the amount of land I wanted to cover. I took many long walks around the property during my time living at Coed Hills and had found my favorite paths naturally and in an unhurried way. I knew that the first thing the audience should see was the Bird Cage in the top field (fig. 23). I started there one morning, and with a notebook.

I walked through the community member's side entrance; a little hole in the hedgerow which separated the top field from the community space and brings you right into the middle of the Forest Garden (6 on fig. 6). Looking around, I saw the clearing by the blackcurrant bushes where we had a picnic table setup. I wrote in my notebook: *Stage 1; Forest Garden*. Following the path, I crossed the road and looked around - to my left stood the sweat lodge and gooseberry bushes. To my right was a field with the Labyrinth (8 on fig. 6). Before me was the path into the woods, and behind me was the fork in the road, which would have led me from the Forest Garden (6 on fig. 6) to the Barn (1 on fig. 6) had I chosen the alternate route. I thought; *'this is where people are going to hangout the most'*. I predicted it would become what, as Warren (2017) would call it, the 'hub' (p.46). I circled this area on the rough map I had sketched out thinking, *'signage here, maybe'*.

The willow trees were in full summery splendour at this time of year. They intermingled with the gooseberry bushes, and I walked through the living woven-willow archway I had created the year before; to stand in the clearing where the sweat lodge was built. I sat down with my notebook and listened to the sounds. It was quiet here, and the size of the clearing made it feel very intimate. 'A spoken word or poetry stage?' I thought to myself and noted it down on the map. Beside it I wrote: 'Rebecca?' I was already thinking about who could run each area. This was a new concept to me. As a result of PYLON, I had learned that coordinating a site-specific production while also acting as the host or emcee proved to be difficult, although not un-doable. However, considering the intended 13-hour run time of *Coed Roots & Legends*; it made the most sense to me to have each 'stage' or found performance space be a self-sufficient zone, operating on its own.

Employing techniques by Warren (2017) and Machon (2013) in terms of immersive theatre practices; I looked to the space and noticed key features which made them different or unique. If each production that toured through a community decided they were to make a new performance space; as Skye had done; the tax on the core community members would be large. As also evidenced in Skye's project; the building and designing of performance spaces can tax the time of community members; plus their time; brain power; and sometimes - patience.

*I found the process of site-specific performance where the performance and art are introduced to an already existing space is far less taxing on the community members. This is because it is a job that can be done entirely by the artist-liaison, or artist/performers themselves. In addition, there is little to no new upkeep needed after the artist has left the intentional community, as the performance space already existed.*

In Dorothea's *Bliss of Wildness*, however, the art and site-specific performances were the focus, as opposed to the performance space. This meant the creative process was not to build a set or transform a landscape; but to find a way to juxtapose or fit her paintings site-specifically to the pre-existing space, which was the Barn. As *Roots & Legends* was to be an expansive event, I chose to take my inspiration from the environment rather than try to alter it to fit a preconceived vision.

The land slopes down, through the woods before bringing you to the far-end of Coed Hills; where parallel country lanes intersect and end the forest and pastures. We did not need to take the audience that far, I thought, and I turned back.<sup>75</sup> I stopped off at the second lake thinking that would be a dynamic place for another performance. I continued up the forest path when I remembered the cow gate that takes you up the cow field to the stone circle. I knew that I wanted performances to take place there so I set off, making sure it would be all right for people to make that same journey. I was satisfied that it would be, and it went down in my notes as a performance space. In the beginning, I really wanted the man who conceptualised the stone circle to tell stories up there; so the land was directly influencing my creative process. I put a note down next to that venue with his name. Moving forward, across the stone circle is the gate which leads to the front of the Barn. A perfect place to end the activities with a dance

Artist and community; I need, and the community gives

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<sup>75</sup> I thought to myself that I would have liked to use the abandoned scout fort at the bottom of the woods, but it was just too big of an ask of the audience and quite frankly, a risk with all the rust and unstable structures.

“I have to say it sort of seemed like everybody always knew what they were doing. Like there was a nice sort of precursor to where Karan and a few other people turned up to rehearse that was quite nice. Like it was quite interactive. Like there's was never a time where I've seen performers sort of wandering going, 'I don't know'”.

(Hrefna, February 2020)

I was planning the introduction of the site to the artists who would be joining us for this larger event. From the callouts, I was hoping that people would create site-specific art for this event, and to aide in this I planned an *Artists Week*. The Artists Week would be a week-long retreat on the land of Coed Hills, catered and without the exchange of working or pay. I wanted to apply White's theories of the initiation ([White, 2013](#)) to not the observer or audience member becoming the observed. Rather, to the performer becoming the community member; or engaging in the relationship with the land that would inform their performance. It was important to me that the artists had the opportunity to meet the community members and engage with the land and environment of Coed Hills before coming to perform there. I wanted to integrate the community with the visiting artists; with their roles as artist-in-residence viewed as valid.

As predicted, Robin queried, “So, *what will they pay? Or how many hours of work will they do?*” I explained that their art was their contribution. That, in fact, artists are sometimes paid *to* create art. The irony of my statement did not go unnoticed, and after they understood, we had a laugh.

The community members agreed that this artists’ week should go ahead.

*At this time, the summer of 2019, I too was being challenged for not contributing enough to the community by Tesza. Or rather, she felt that I should not be accepting pay for the work I was doing for the weddings, as “It could have counted as my volunteering hours”. I was working on this thesis - reading and writing, and this was not seen as, ‘work for the community’, in the eyes of this community member.*

I share this moment to present a nuanced issue surrounding the practices of sustainable site-specific performance: the clarity of exchange. For example, as I’m about to share; one community member expressed the need for a fair exchange between visiting artist or performer and community. This was not in terms of monetary exchange; but participation and energy:

“You also sometimes have to cook for all of us because we cook for you all the time. And you also have to know a little bit where everything is in the garden because you know, I’m going to tell you each time, and sometimes the compost does needs to be emptied. And, and, so then you learn a little bit more and a little bit more. And one day, you’ll also be painting cupboards because it just needs to happen today because there’s an event coming in tomorrow, and then you can work on your art again.”

(Tesza, February 2020).

The concept of exchange is noted in the quote above. Exchange is asked for, but not in a set term of agreement; it’s a reflexive and relative request in this intentional community. Daily life at



this intentional community changes depending on the time of year; length of stay; or whichever event has been booked. Tesza alluded to this when she said, "*Painting cupboards because it just needs to happen today because there's an event coming in tomorrow, and then you can work on your art again*" (ibid).

To get this quote in the interview was exciting to me; for personal views of exchange in explicit relation to the artists-in-residence was not often spoken of. However, this belief is the cultural normal in this intentional community. Robin slightly alluded to it when criticising the practices and materials used by a past artist-in-residence, some years before this research. But still, his critique was focused on the lasting effects of the sustainability of her performance, rather than her exchange while living in the community<sup>76</sup>.

Influenced by the view the majority of the community members had surrounding exchange; that art was 'other' to community mindedness, I attempted the Artists Week with a robust approach. This was divined from my past two experiences of how the community members viewed the visiting artist or performer in community.

Self-sufficiency was an important theme; as was community mindedness; and I outline in Chapter 7: *The Bliss of Wildness* (10.6) that I believe exchange is born from a combination of the two concepts being practiced. In order to embody both self-sufficiency and community

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<sup>76</sup> More on this story in the next section Land & Art (10.5).

mindedness as ideologies; I proposed a unique practice for the meals the artists-in-residence would be eating.

I let the community members know that I would be taking care of all the cooking for the artist-in-residency week. Out of pocket, I gave Robin twenty pounds to cover the cost of vegetables from the garden that I would be taking that week. I employed a monetary exchange because I knew I would be busy helping the artists and performers during the daylight hours and I wanted there to be an element of self-sufficiency for the group. By making the food for the artists and performers more self-sufficient, it meant the artists were free from relying on the community members to host as well as feed a group of 'outsiders'. To appeal to the community mindedness, I invited the community members to share in food that was cooked for the performers. I let the core community members know the visiting artists, performers and I, would be eating our meals as a group; if they wished to join us.

In preparation for the performance, I asked the core community members if there was anyone who would want to show people around on the day, acting as the ushers. Two community members volunteered, and we decided they could be dressed as fairies on the day, have hand drums, and that would be an easy visual cue for the guests<sup>77</sup>. I hoped this role of usher would provide the community members with more ownership of the performance; and, hopefully, feel like they were a part of the event.

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<sup>77</sup> Names omitted as photos of the community members as ushers are included in Chapter 13.

Skye volunteered to make signs, and we did a walk-through of the site, deciding where people might get confused. As I was starting to sketch a map, Robin found an old hand drawn one he had made, to act as the base for this new one.

Land and art; how the land influenced the art we created

Seven of the performers arrived and stayed for a full week. This week consisted of a very loose structure, with set times available for support, each day. I did not want to intrude too much on the space of the visiting artists, so I asked them if they would mind my floating in and out, sometimes with a camera. No one minded, so I watched from afar as they explored their artistic processes and took notes.

Most of the artists and performers arrived with a basic structure of what they wished to perform. Tentatively they would move into the space. One performer in particular spent hours walking the path through the forest garden over and over, then returning to her iPad, making notes, walking, returning, making notes<sup>78</sup>. I approached her a few days in and asked if I could do anything to help. All she wanted was a set of eyes, so I was the first to watch this devised piece called '*Different Fruit-ures*'. This performer was an acquaintance of mine; and we had worked on a site-specific show at the Welsh festival TrueFest<sup>79</sup>, three years prior to this. She was a little zany, but she was so enthusiastic about permaculture and the blending of the two fields of

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<sup>78</sup> I thought it was interesting watching her that she did not bring the iPad with her. But placed it in a central location, so she had to move to it, to write down what she did.

<sup>79</sup> A music and performance festival at Baskerville Hall, in the Brecon Beacons.

performance and permaculture. 'Different Fruit-ures' was the perfect fit for a show at Coed Hills, and I invited her to live on site for a week to devise the piece 80. Her practice was themed around sustainability, but like others before her, the play was more focused on the ideological message than the practices of sustainability. Robin spoke on this as a common theme for performances at this Intentional Community, as a similar performance had taken place some years before:

“This lady who, like, who did this performance that was going to be about growing sunflowers. And basically... she kind of did this sunflower dance and pop sunflower seeds in the crack in the earth, but they were just eaten by the birds. And no sunflowers grew. So, I think that kind of highlighted for me that there was a kind of, like this disconnect with reality. Although it might have been good to kind of promote the ideas of planting seeds and, you know, healing the earth, which I think it's what it was about, you know, maybe it could have been done in some kind of performative way that actually had some lasting results.

(Robin, February 2020).

Lasting results seems to be the key phrase for defining sustainability for this community member; but as mentioned above, his place in the community outlasts the other core community members, except Nick and arguably, Aneurin. When Robin commented on the lasting effects from site-specific performance in intentional communities; he implied that sustainability is two-fold, in the present and in the future. This relates to my research question in the way that the

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80 Here is presented an example of how one can use site-specific devising techniques to add new qualities to a performance through external input of the environment. This might give the performance a fresh dynamic, something different and exciting which might not have been found in the rehearsal room.

passing of time is important to consider for site specific performance within an intentional community.

Jason Warren (2017) outlined his *Strand Rehearsal* method for rehearsing and preparing an immersive theatre show; and this method included a specific focus on audience participation (Warren, 2017, p.119). The Strands are two distinct methods of rehearsal; that keep what can be an expansive rehearsal process, clear and specific. They are called the *Concrete Strand* and the *Interactive Strand*. The concrete strand is used to describe the immobile, or “static” (ibid) production elements. These rehearsals are mainly focused on the text or movement sequences that must be repeated with every performance. With the interactive strand the point is to run the interactive parts of the show. This can be done with, “what if” scenarios exercised, such as audience participation where the cast has the opportunity to explore unexpected circumstances (p.126). This step can also be done with the aid of other cast members, or a small, invited audience. Following Warren’s (2017) advice, “Starting with a clearly defined process that can become more free-form if you decide it’s appropriate - it’s much harder to impose a new structure on a fluid process” (p.119); we decided to structure the rehearsal process using the two-strand method for Karan’s piece (Warren, 2017).

Karan was rehearsing in the Forest Garden (6 on fig. 6) where gooseberry bushes; raspberry; strawberry; apple; plum; and pear trees would line a path through a birch grove. The path circled back to the entrance of this forest garden; where the ‘stage’ I had planned the month prior was set up<sup>81</sup>. We had a chat and she informed me that the way the path wound and

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<sup>81</sup> We borrowed an old, wooden yurt platform from the workshop to act as the stage.

sloped in the beginning would mirror the development of this piece. That it would begin as a promenade; following the action of the performance; and then come to rest at the stage area for the climax. Therefore, she had devoted so much time walking and re-walking the path; she was using each movement to inform her emotionality in connecting with the space, and devising a storyline from those feelings. I asked her if she would like me to act as an usher, directing the audience on the day, and she was grateful for that. We decided that she would do a showing at the end of the week for the community members, so she could test out the more participatory elements of the show with a live audience.

Another woman I had set-up in the Bothy, Francesca's Word Salad; was another festival performer I had befriended that had a history of visiting Coed Hills. As a vegan and feminist, she fitted in very well and I invited her to perform. Fran's approach was different to Karan's; in the way that she came with a musical performance in mind, and then worked to fit it, reflexively, to the space. I asked her if there was anything I could do to assist her and she said that she was fine on her own, so I left her to it.

The other artist I would like to mention is Jett, who I had asked to run the spoken word stage. We walked to the spoken word area I had defined earlier and sat down together. As she was going to be acting as host and emcee of this venue, we envisioned what décor would be needed.

Jett assured me she could source everything sustainably; by borrowing from friends, her own art supplies, and using Coed's extensive back log. Here, the practice of sustainable-site specific performance is represented, in the way that Beer et al. (2017) outline via means of the

conversation. As Beer et al. (2017) predicted, the conversation we had around sustainable design was not a hindrance to the creative process.

In the mornings she held different writing sessions in the Barn, and that was invaluable to the process. I wanted the artists and performers to feel like they had the whole of Coed at their fingertips; but had also learned that presenting this vast land to any one person without any structure, can be very overwhelming. Using the strand rehearsal method (Warren, 2017), the concrete strand needed to be given time to develop with intent. The morning writing exercise provided this structure and a contrast so when they were 'let out,' they eagerly explored the spaces, naturally shifting to the immersive strand as their location changed. I used the strand rehearsal method for this week because it would provide attention to the element which was missing from the residency week; and that was the element of audience and potential for audience participation (Warren, 2017, p. 119). Also, in this method of rehearsal technique, there is an opportunity to have a small, invited audience watch the works-in-progress. Based on theories of participation being a transformative and inclusive action, if the community members were invited as the small audience; I predicted their involvement at such an early stage would give them a sense of ownership with the performance. This related to the exploration of the practices of sustainability in intentional community spaces in the realms of emotional sustainability and exchange, and participation.

Skye had returned from her course in Amsterdam via London, where she had met a performance art group of twelve, that she invited down to perform.

The performance art group was called *Primordial Soup* and they arrived two days before the performance. Twelve sweaty and artsy kids - none of them older than me; had taken the bus from London to Cardiff, and then Cardiff to Coed Hills

*Initially I felt resistance to the London group being invited to perform, for several reasons. I knew I could not compensate them for their time; I thought of the travel costs of them coming down from London. Skye informed me there had been no mention of pay and they were happy to get themselves to Coed and just perform on the day. I still felt resistance to this idea, and truth be told, peeved we had not been communicated this before. However, my role of researcher got the better of me and so I just asked for their contact emails so I could keep*

and they arrived fabulously dressed in costumes and carrying props and tents. They had been preparing a musical piece to be sung around the lake, and they quickly dropped off their bags and headed down there as a group; whooping and singing as soon as they left the structure of the Bothy.

Art and land and community; the performance



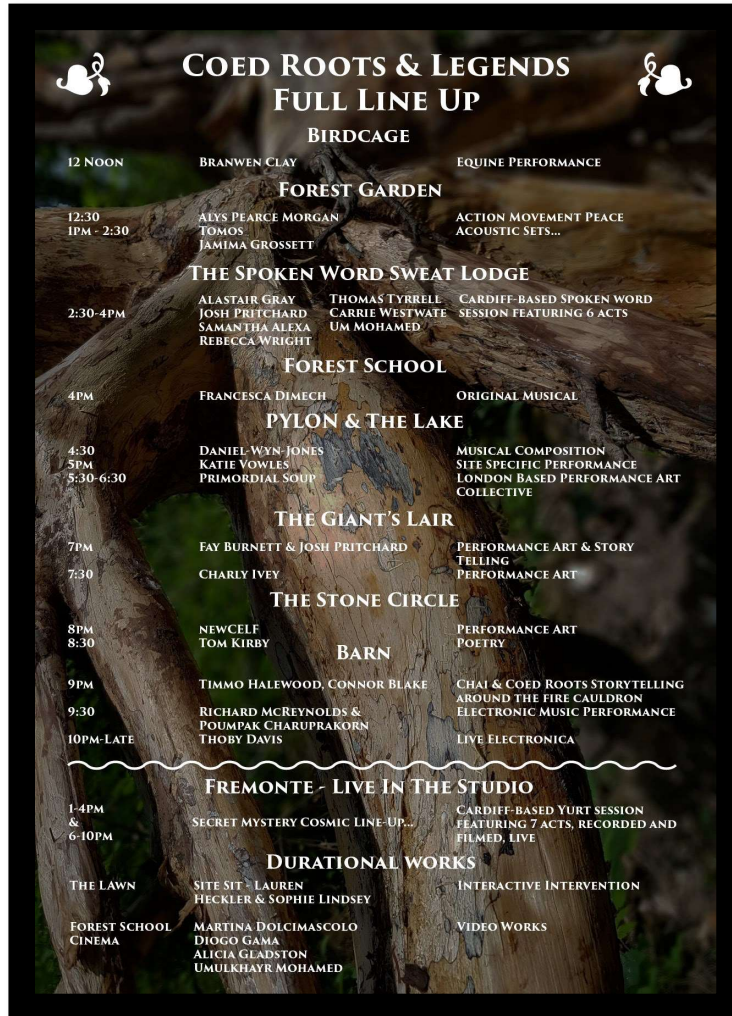


Figure 21: Coed Roots& Legends (2019) Full Line-Up with stages and times. Created by author (2018).

The night before Coed Roots & Legends, I was up until midnight; finalising the signs that had slipped by yet to be done; but happily chatting with my mother and friend who had come up to Coed Hills early to help me. We were shivering in the studio; under an inspection light with scissors in our hands, cutting out leaves for an interactive art display at the spoken word stage. There were some last-minute things to do, but the checklist had been completed in the days prior and the community had stepped up; taking on jobs from my list without me asking. I was

reminded again how this community could work like a well-oiled machine when there is some structure; participation; self-sufficiency; and a clear benefit to the community underpinning the tasks. The maps were handed out at the Birdcage in the morning, and there was a procession which was led by the granddaughter of the landowners - Seren Winslow - on horseback. The son of a workshop leader at Coed Hills was playing djembe on top of the bird cage, and a group had formed. I called to Skye on our walkie-talkies, and she gave me the go ahead.



Figure 22: Sign of Coed Roots & Legends as guests enter (2019) photo by Conor Blake.



Figure 23: Site-Specific performance 'Opening Ceremonies on Horseback' (2019) photo by  
Conor Blake.

Living on-site, it's easy to forget how interesting everything is at Coed Hills. When you are living in the city; traveling to the countryside even brings interesting smells. Skye had positioned herself in the Birdcage with a table and was giving out the programmes I had designed. There

was a map, which would direct people to where and when performances were happening with a suggested pathway, and the names of all the artists and performers featured<sup>82</sup>.

Coed Roots & Legends (2019) was an expert display of community support. I was surprised when the audience was intrigued by the community just as much as by the performances and art. So many questions arose surrounding sustainability and permaculture; when I had not expected this. Just by placing the event in this location; I had made a site-specific festival, which was not intended. It is funny that I did this because I had become so focused on the micro - each individual act happening around Coed hills; that I forgot about the macro - that this festival as a performance - could only happen at Coed Hills. What had begun as a celebration of the Community's roots, myths and legends had turned into a showcase for community members; 'Friends of Coed; and also for a whole new generation from the Cardiff Art Scene, who had only heard stories of the events that used to happen, "*Up at Coed*".

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<sup>82</sup> See hand drawn map of promenade path and site-specific performance spaces (fig 31) at the end of this section.



Figure 24: Skye hands out the maps and schedule for the day of performances. A performer drums on top of the birdcage Laurent built. Photography by Conor Blake (2019).



Figure 25: Landowner Dotti Winslow, pictured with grandchild watching Karan's site-specific performance at Coed Roots & Legends (2019) photography by Conor Blake.

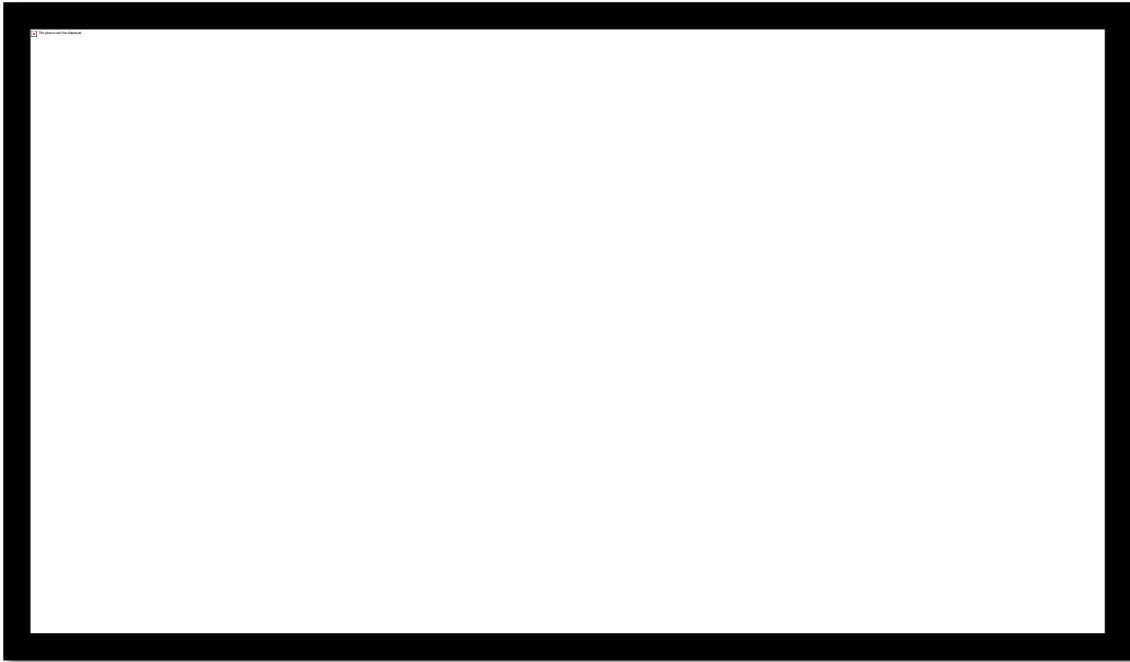


Figure 26: Skye Creswell pictured at The Giant's Lair in the woods. The seating structure was built from trees on location, to make a stage area for this event (2019) Photography by Conor Blake.

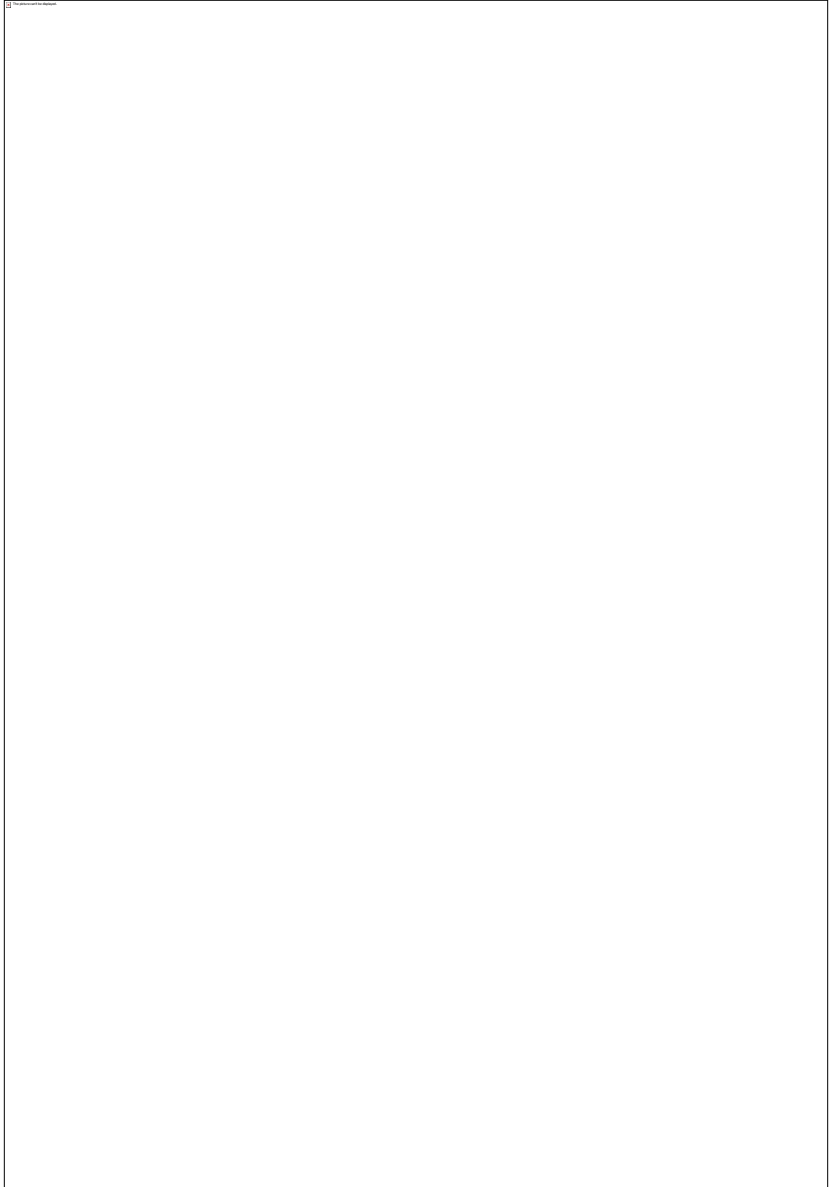


Figure 27: (From left): Heather and Savannah; site-specific performance artists. Photography by Matt Kirby (2019).



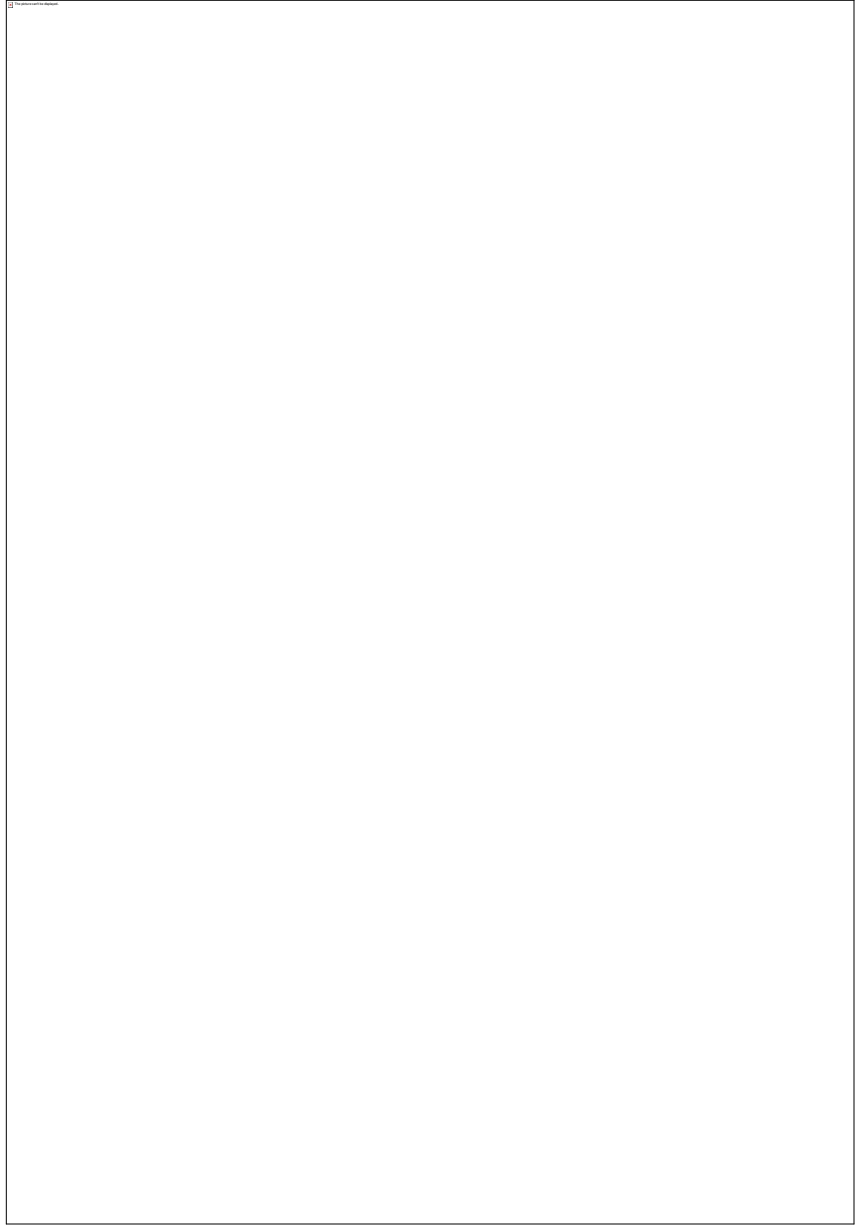


Figure 28: Mason Fitzgerald; poet. Photography by Matt Kirby (2019).

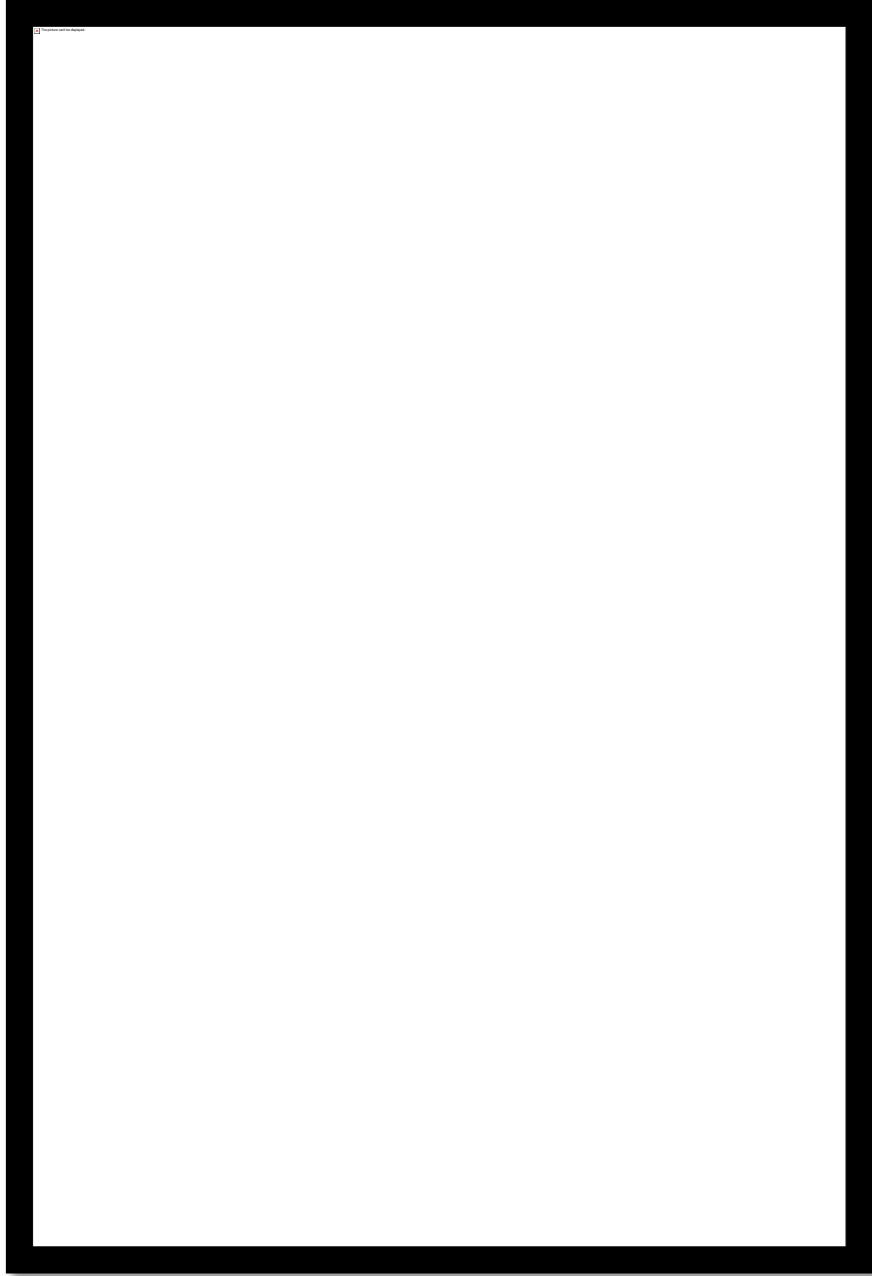


Figure 29: Community Member with fairy wings, acting as an usher and guide for the audience.  
Photo by Conor Blake (2019).

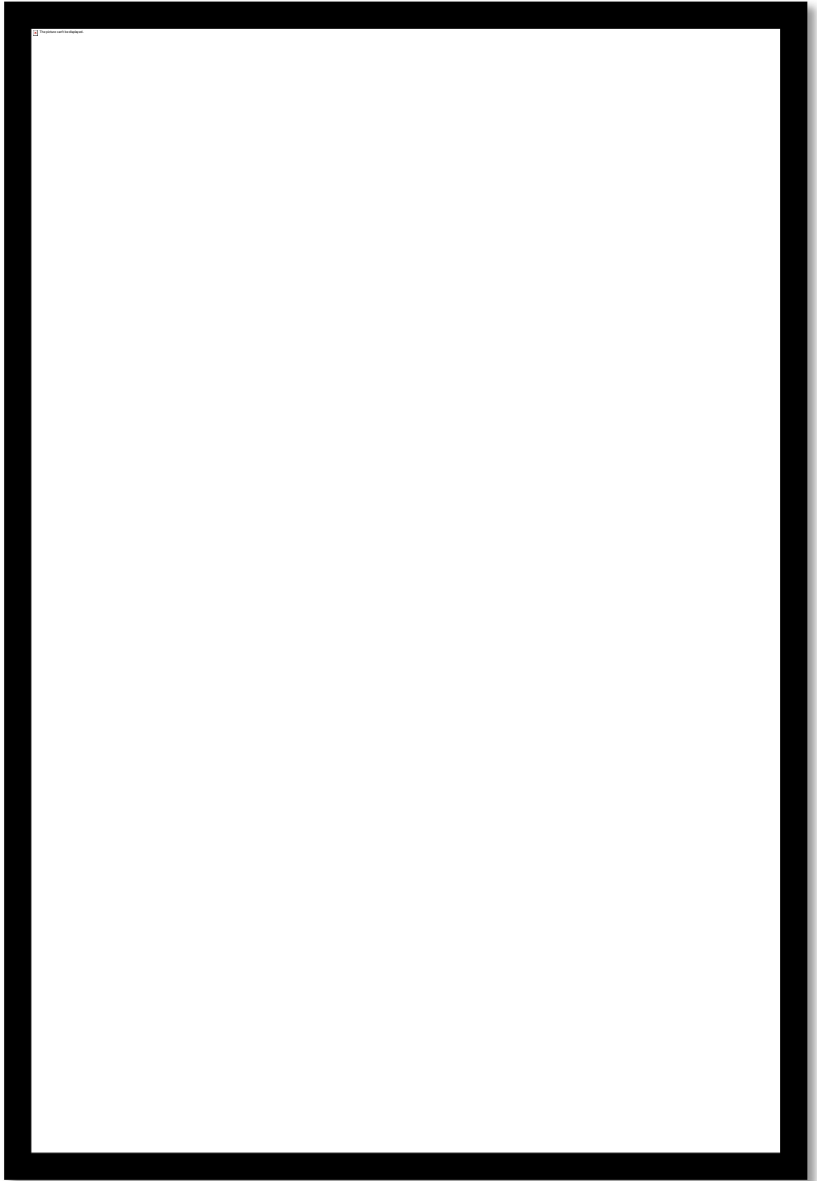


Figure 30: Community member with fairy wings, serving tea to the audience members and guests at Coed Roots & Legends. Photo by Hywl George (2019.)

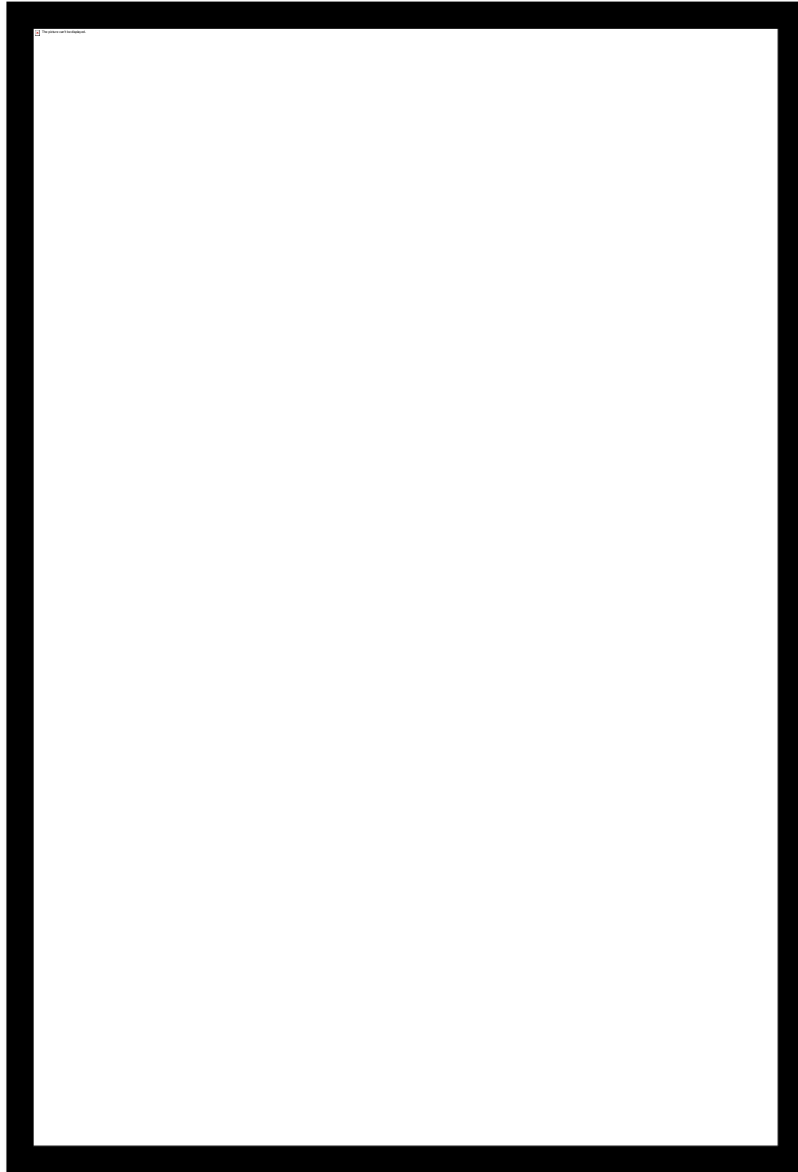


Figure 31: Author with supervisor Jenny Kidd, during Coed Roots & Legends. Here they are pictured talking, on “The Lawn” in fig. 31, below (2019). Photography by Conor Blake.

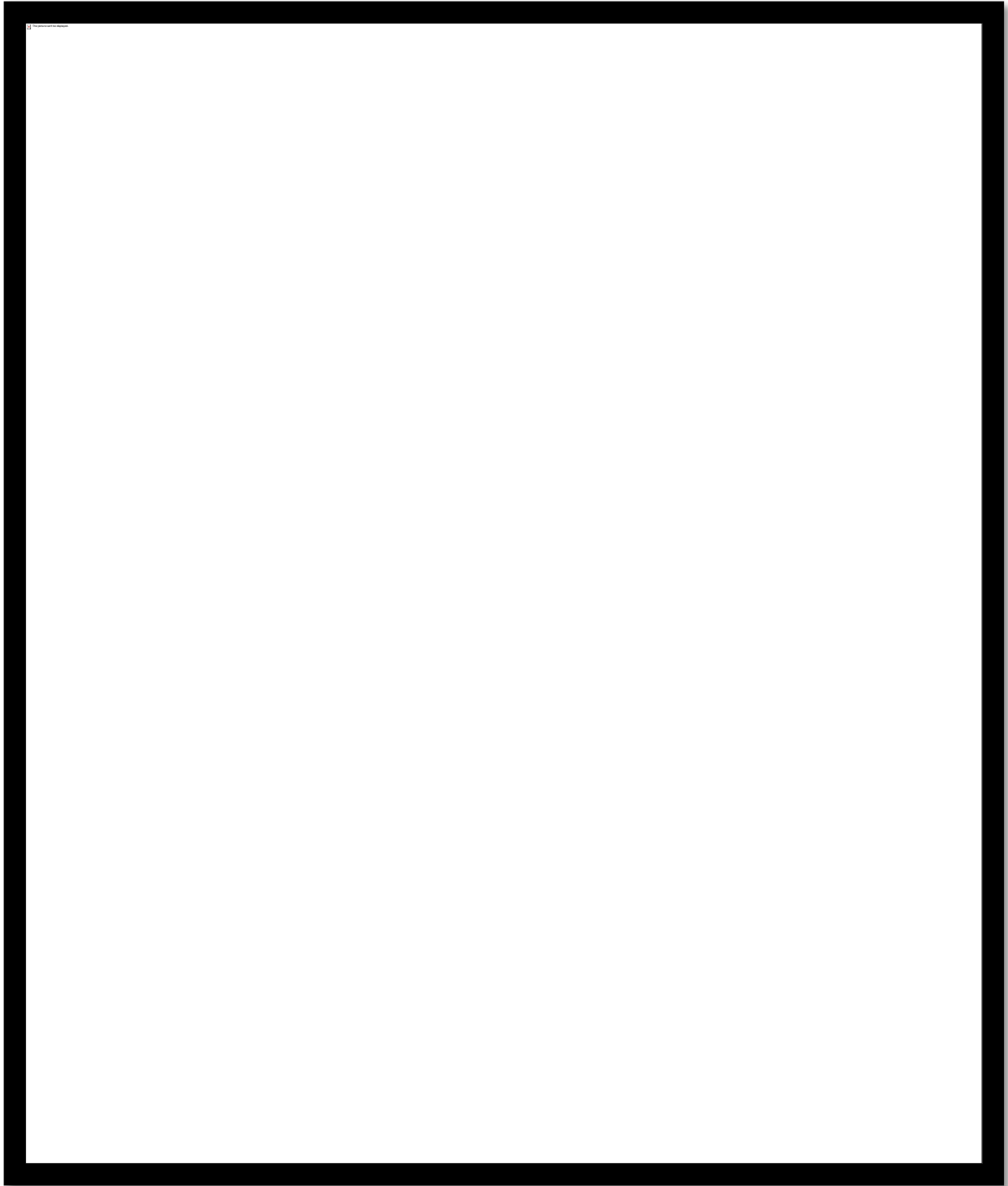


Figure 32: Map of Coed Hills promenade path with the site-specific performance locations; created for Coed Roots & Legends by author (2019).

Chapter 10: Further thoughts on the Bliss of Wildness (2018), promenade with PYLON (2019) and Coed Roots & Legends (2019)

All eight of the core community members believed that Coed could sustain itself in its current system, long-term. But they said this while acknowledging the ever-changing quality and place of the arts at Coed Hills and that emotional sustainability will not always be static.

In the first example of site-specific performance within this intentional community – (5.2) *Bliss of Wildness (2018)*; the themes of art; artist; land; and community were re-introduced from the literature reviews and methodology chapters (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). In presenting the autoethnographic data from this residency evocatively; I highlighted prolonged contact with the community and the importance of structure in this relationship. The following paragraphs will discuss emotional sustainability through the experiences of the artist and hosting core community members.

When Dorothea arrived, I met her needs as an artist on site. I assumed that once she was set up in the Bothy and was given the arts supplies; that her needs would become less over time. However, the assistance and attention Dorothea required did not lessen as I assumed they would. In fact, the opposite was true; the conditions for Dorothea's residency were set up with the initial support and she expected the same level, or more, as the weeks continued. I explored this to show the changing and shifting beliefs of the parts of an ideology of an intentional community; and to highlight the reflexivity and communication needed to sustainably work *with* or *for* an intentional community as an artist or performer. The importance of self-sufficiency was also introduced in concept, from the moment of Dorothea arriving to the intentional community. This was demonstrated in terms of environment; including the rural location, with limited access

to hot water. The emotional climate of the residents is also rooted in self-sufficiency and had been lost in the words-of-mouths which had reached Dorothea's ears to tell her about the, '*Community at Coed Hills*'. It came to be seen that Dorothea was arriving at an intentional community for the arts; which was vastly different from the one that she had been expecting.

The initial commune and back-to-the-land movements in Wales and the UK changed from the 1970s when the commune was the ideal; with practices of connection and permaculture at the foreground. With the progression of neo-liberalism and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; brought the change from commune to intentional community, where the focus came to be on self-sufficiency and, perhaps, proving oneself.<sup>83</sup>

For the relationship between artist and community to be a healthy and sustaining one; clarity of the role the artist is inhabiting is essential to sustainable site-specific theatre practices, as proved by this example.

When taking into consideration the following case study, *promenade with PYLON* (2019); the need for structure was proven, again. This was shown by the performers and artists who entered the community to perform in *promenade with PYLON* and *Coed Roots & Legends*.

One of the most interesting insights regarding self-sufficiency is the inherent need for the community working together, for self-sufficiency to be attained. This idea that one must be completely self-sufficient to be accepted into the community was found to be based in the need

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for the incoming community member to be hardy and skilled. But this concept, in the reality of community life, was proven to be tricky by the case studies presented in this thesis.

In Chapter 7: The Bliss of Wildness, Dorothea's arrival (10.2) shows that every artist comes with a unique skill set, and thus a reflexive practice will be required for all parties involved. To ask an incoming artist to be completely self-sufficient is what seems to be the key goal here. If there is some kind of exchange worked out with the visiting artists and performers; there will be a chance that the core community members feel like the artist-in-residence is part of their community.

In Chapter 8: promenade with PYLON, Skye's arrival (11.2) shows this same factor; when at first she was only spending time in the workshop and living in the Bothy, the greater community did not feel as if they wanted to be involved with her project. But, when waiting on the poles of the PYLON to be galvanized, she 'got stuck in' to community life by chopping wood, cooking with Robin and clearing in the gardens. Then, when the poles for PYLON returned, the community was much more at-ease with her in the workshop. Although this privilege was abused later with the bringing in of Alex against the wishes of the community; it proved that community mindedness is key for visiting artists in this community.

The structure of having a clarity of role when Skye arrived on site proved for an initial smoother relationship between artist/performer and community. However, the emotional sustainability became strained with the building of the stage for the PYLON installation and site-specific-performance. As proven by Alex and Skye's artistic presence in the community; the more artists isolated themselves, the less positive the relationship became with the core community



members. Participation with the community is undoubtedly an important component of sustainable site-specific performance practice, for the emotional sustainability of both artist and community members. This theory of mine; informed by Richard Schechner's (1989) writings on the subject, were outlined in the literature review and employed in my active-participant research. His claim is supported by my experience as researcher, artist on site and community member. But, considering my findings, I would go further to add the clarification: 'unpaid' participation, or volunteering. I followed all the rules and suggestions set out by White (2004), and Schechner (1989); and even incorporated elements from the Live List (2012). Yet, I experienced uncomfortable interactions with some members of the community when it was discovered I was accepting money for the housekeeping job; creating the time when my place in the community was questioned most. Interestingly, it was a person in the community who was not the landowner, nor the one who was paying me; that took umbrage with my employment. From my perspective; accepting payment for the housekeeping job meant I did not have to leave site as often to work and earn money in another way. But from the community member's perspective, I was not giving enough of my free time to the community; and was becoming a leach as opposed to a productive and equal member<sup>84</sup>.

When asked about visiting performers coming to the intentional community for site-specific performances, Tesza (February 2020) responded, "*In the beginning, I'm always finding negatives...I've really got to clear...there's so much work... why would you do that?*" Tesza said, "In the beginning", which implies that in the end there is a different feeling. However, this

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<sup>84</sup> This same situation occurred with another community member who had begun taking pay for their work in the market garden. This person was spoken to strongly in the weekly circle and, although the landowner again had no problem with this, the core community member speaking out did. This was enough to drive the marker-gardener community member to move their house from the heart of Coed Hills to a northern field.

initial invitation or arrival of the artist being contested is where I'd like to begin the deconstruction of this quote from Tesza. Why would a prospect of site-specific performance not be exciting to this community member who lived at a self-proclaimed 'Artspace'?

As mentioned in section (3.1), the daily practices of Coed Hills Rural Artspace transitioned from 'Artspace' to a permaculture-focused practice. Forestry, gardening, building projects, and ritual and spiritual ceremonies became priority; and this did not leave much time for creative endeavours. It is interesting to note that these interviews were conducted about eleven months after *promenade with PYLON*, so the community member still felt this way. In my wording of the interview, I did not ask her to 'think back to this time', but how she *feels* about performances happening at Coed Hills, with the implied present tense. She states her confusion or judgement concerning the physical work needed, or that might be diverted from the gardens; for an artistic endeavour.

So, what practices will make this relationship and interaction more sustainable? The delicate balance of community mindedness versus self-sufficiency is in play during this case study, as well as form or structure being at odds with spontaneity and freedom. When I asked Tesza if there was a system for the visiting artists; she said no, that it was all down to Laurent's mind and influence over the community. This shows that in her mind, it is down to the leader of the community to set the form and structure for each visiting artist. I agree that each artist should be treated as an individual and have an artistic process that is not 'one size fits all'. However, I'd like to further deconstruct why she finds so many negatives. She showed in this statement that she assumed Laurent wants her to commit to helping with the artists and performers; even though she does not, initially, want to extend herself that far. I do not know if this is due to her

upbringing spent helping her father with crafts, and her history of living nomadically for the past eighteen years; but Tesza is always moving and pushing herself further than before. It was not a case of laziness that gave her an aversion to the assisting of a visiting artist or performer. Nor does she hate the arts, the opposite is true; and she was a big supporter of my creative practice, outside the community. But it is my understanding that firstly, there is something in Tesza that says she *should* want to help. Secondly, a belief that without her help the project might fail. Furthermore, an absent leader of the community left in his wake an unclear form or structure in relation to the arts at Coed Hills, only making it known that he likes them. "I think Laurent also just goes for: 'It's a cool project, so let's do it.' Not thinking at all what the consequences are" (Tesza, February 2020).

Without a clear structure or form there is no chance for freedom, spontaneity and therefore artistic creation. In Findhorn, there is a clearly defined structure for the community members and what they were expected to give in exchange for living on the land, and this gave them the freedom to live on their own terms, at least within those terms set out by the community leaders (Metcalf, 2004).

Perhaps Tesza's interpretation of Laurent's community leadership style is correct. Indeed, her stance that Laurent doesn't think about site-specific performances entering the intentional community; might not even be a judgement at all if viewed under my lens of the perceived binaries of 'form and structure' versus 'freedom and spontaneity'. For example, Laurent's openness to 'anyone coming to the community to create site-specific performances' is an example of spontaneity and freedom embodied. On the opposite side of this spontaneity; are the forms and structure which make sure the gardens are cared for; the twenty hours a week of

work from each volunteer; the wood chopped and so on. It is in this interaction where creativity is nurtured and sustainable practices for performances within the intentional community can be produced. It lies between Laurent's spontaneity of invitation to site-specific performers, combined with the structure and forms listed above. It is not in the elimination of either structure and forms; or spontaneity and freedom. The two concepts act in conjunction with one another; and when they overlap this is what allows for the creation of a sustainable practice for site-specific performance.

To explain this with another example; Patrick disclosed one of his favourite aspects of Coed is the freedom to "*Leave whatever I am doing, like chopping wood, and write poetry*" (Patrick, February 2020). Patrick embodied the concept of form and structure versus spontaneity and freedom by breeding a sustainable artistic practice within the intentional community, much like poetry itself; for it exists within a form such as a villanelle or sonnet. To have only structure or only spontaneity negates sustainable artistic creation within this intentional community. If this is taken to be true, then a large responsibility of a sustainable practice within an intentional community relies on the intentional community setting up the forms and structures so that they might be played with, utilised as intended, and perhaps broken by acts of spontaneity and freedom. "Sometimes I think Coed is like Laurent's mind, like we're all like a part of Laurent's mind actually" (Aneurin, 26.00).

The role Laurent ultimately should play then, is what he is already doing; being the spontaneous and free leader of the intentional community so that the rural artspace might persist. To sustainably practice the concepts of freedom and spontaneity; some forms and structures must already be in place which have built-in and reflexive practices for artists and performers coming

into the space. Odette points out that the core community is constantly trying new ways to get things done and taking the time to evaluate their efforts afterwards in the group circles. Odette expressed the core community members are 'continuing on', and always trying to incorporate any new knowledge gained, "It's a very communal process and the meetings can take a long time" (Odette, 2020).

These structures and forms, such as the circles and feedback sessions about past events referenced by Odette, will allow spontaneity and freedom for the artist, and assist in the emotional sustainability of the visiting site-specific performer with the hosting intentional community. This finding might appear circular, as does Foucault's (1988) claim, "serve the city to serve the self (to serve the city)". Such would be the case with Patrick, chopping the wood as his daily practice, but, knowing that he is able to put the axe down and pick up his poetry journal gives him the balance to sustain his artistic practice within this intentional community, even as a core community member.

Regarding a sustainable environmental practice, Teseza said she was proud of the way the Coed Weddings company promoted sustainability in their practices and ethos. However, she would not say the core community is successful in being sustainable, as of yet:

"By far not with everything. There is still a lot of foam, use. In the building, whatever kind of materials are cheapest or handiest and, but then on other levels, like how we treat our shit, you know, like the compost toilets or the whole wastewater system or that we really hoping to get more solar panels and that way you know, so it's all takes a lot of petrol, so it's very difficult. But it's... I think it's an inside... when you start to be conscious it's an inside vessel you'll always have".

(Teseza, February 2020)

In the quote above, the opinion of the community member is that, Coed is not sustainable. Here they speak about the various building techniques used by community members and volunteers and visiting artists. Unsustainable (or toxic) foam is a cheap way to seal drafts or act as insulation against rats. And some of the newer raised beds in the gardens are lined with plastics to prevent weeds growing. Tesza is critical of the compost toilets and water filtration system; a willow grove which is downhill from the Barn, away from the accommodations and gardens<sup>85</sup>. Tesza mentioned 'petrol' which was used by the chainsaws and lawn mowers; another toxic and environmentally unsustainable element. However, she finished with this, "But Coed and sustainability. I think we're an extremely good example. I believe that if we will all live this way we will live in a very happy world. That's what I think. Yeah" (Tesza, February 2020).

Again, I notice a contradiction. How can a community be unsuccessful in their goals of environmental sustainability, but still an 'extremely good example'? Praxis is paramount here, and reflexivity, and this must continue to be explored and evaluated if a sustainable future is on the horizon for artists visiting this community:

"And I really believe that Coed on a lot of levels is doing the best it can like, at least I am doing the best I can... There's no like, 'Okay, this is easy now, so let's just take that solution'. It's really trying to be conscious with what we're doing."

(Tesza, February 2020).

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<sup>85</sup> A willow grove is a naturally antiseptic solution for waste disposal.

After spending some time living on site, this community member was made aware of everything she could do, especially regarding 'environmental sustainability' at Coed Hills. Once her inner self was made aware, she could not 'turn off' or 'unsee' all that she *could* be doing. So, even though several of the buildings use alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power, there are still more layers to unpack and always methods of improving. She has a very critical eye and the community benefits from this for they are being pushed towards a more ecological and aware model of community mindedness. In this community member's ideology, 'doing the best she can' is, although not the end-goal, a perfect example of what everyone *should* be doing, and that extends beyond the borders of Coed Hills.

The concept of waste generated from performance at Coed Hills was challenged in Coed Roots & Legends. Those items under my jurisdiction to source were the decorations; set dressings; costumes; signs and food. The stages were built from found objects or elements of the natural environment of Coed Hills. The clean-up of the event included doing the washing up in the barn using ceramic plates borrowed from the wedding company to feed the 150 guests; burning napkins on the communal bonfire the evening of the site-specific performance event; and tidying-away the borrowed set decorations; while natural building materials were returned to where they came from. Skye left ropes which were used to make her performance piece for Coed Roots & Legends, which Hrefna spoke about in her interview - questioning whose job it was to clean them away.

Coed Hills was unique in its positionality of 'Rural Artspace' and the individuals who occupy the land. When I moved on site as researcher in residence and community member in November

2017 it was to ask the question: *What practices for sustainable site-specific performance are being explored in intentional community spaces?* I found there are two sets of binaries which govern the emotionally and environmentally sustainable practices in this intentional community. These perceived binaries are Self-Sufficiency versus Community Mindedness, and Form or Structure versus Freedom and Spontaneity. And out of these binaries working together, are born the themes of exchange and artistic process.

Coed Hills represents an ecology and culture that is not dissimilar to the art scene in Cardiff, and by exploring the place site-specific performance has within this intentional community; the place of the arts in greater society can be explored and shed light upon. In the next and final chapter of this thesis, I will explore the findings from these examples of site-specific performance within an intentional community space; and open them up to wider interpretation and relevance.



## Chapter 11: Conclusions

This thesis investigated the practices for sustainable site-specific performance in intentional community spaces. Through praxis, and using an approach that was hands-on; the findings from this study were researched and communicated using an evocative autoethnographic style.

These ideas need to be used as starting points, not as the ends of analysis

(Atkinson 2017, 167)

For me, this work will never conclude. The longer I spent living in this intentional community, the more I realised the nuances of communal living are manifold; as is the presence of a site-specific artist/performer living with the intentional community. It will take more than a single thesis and two years of active-participant research to truly divine what environmental sustainability looks like in practice; as the very definition of sustainability for this community involves the passing of time. However, I have come closer than others before me in this site-specific - and literal - field of research; especially in terms of exploring the emotionally sustainable practices for site-specific performance within an intentional community. Here I presented the tip of the iceberg.

The interplay of site-specific performance, intentional community spaces and the concepts of emotional and environmental sustainability within both, were presented as a nuanced and specific research area. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of these core concepts; the fields of cultural and performance studies were used to explore site-specific performance; intentional

community spaces; and the ideology of sustainability. These three concepts in conjunction with one another and employing a methodology of active-participant observation and practice were before unresearched.

In the first chapter titled Site-Specific Performance, the concept of site-specific performance was chronologically introduced; presented against the backdrop of performance studies. Site-specific performance alone; was just one part of the macro view of this thesis. Importantly, and uniquely; site-specific performance within an intentional community was also investigated.

There are some accounts of this kind of performance happening in Wales and England. The first being the Masque At Ludlow Castle (Birch and Tompkins, 2012), where the core community members were the *ghost and host* for a site-specific production in the 1600s. The similarities included how those who worked and lived on site as serfs and servants performed for the public, at the request of the lord of the land. They performed with the lord's children and the purpose of the performance other than to entertain, was political (Schechner's fan fig 1); to establish the new lord of the land with the townspeople (Birch and Tompkins, 2012, p.39). This is not dissimilar to Coed Roots & Legends (2019), where the core community members performed and acted, to varying degrees, as the *hosts* and *ghosts*<sup>86</sup>. However, where A Masque at Ludlow Castle (Birch and Tompkins, 2012) and Coed Roots & Legends (2019) differ; is in the ideology expressed and intent of the performance. Coed Roots & Legends was not performed at the request of the landowner, although it was financially supported by him. The purpose of Coed Roots & Legends was political and to entertain; to share the ideology of the intentional community with an audience who were not integral to the intentional community.

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<sup>86</sup> The community members and I performed with the Coed Hill landowners' children as well. In fact, Laurent's daughter began the whole show on horseback, leading the audience through the hedgerow into the forest garden.

Unlike the other performances discussed in Chapter 7: *The Bliss of Wildness* (2018) and Chapter 8: *PYLON* (2019), *Coed Roots & Legends* (2019) reached a wider accidental audience. The integral audience, the core community members, were also invited to join in, and felt more ownership of this performance<sup>87</sup>, than in the other two performances discussed. Perhaps because they were involved at every stage of the planning of the performance, and it was clear what their exchange was to be. Whereas, in *The Bliss of Wildness* (2018) the community members were solely the integral audience and not *host* or *ghost*. This demonstrates the claim that all theatre is political and site-specific performance in particular, lends itself well to movements of social change. Brecht told the audience how to act, and Boal wanted to change their souls (Campbell, 2019). Site-specific performance in this context, does not so much instruct, but show.

Some are at Coed because of the land, and some are there because of the people and community; while others do not see the distinction between these three entities. It appeared to me that the Coed community was rooted in an ideology of concepts, relationships, and shared values, which sprang from a connection to the physical space. This confirms my earlier suspicion that ideology played a large part in defining what informs the practices for sustainable site-specific performance in this intentional community.

The prefix 'eco' when added to performance and art is commonly found to be descriptive of the ideology, as opposed to the actual practices of the artist or performer. This was proven to be

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<sup>87</sup> This was noted in the interview process by the community members using the word "we" to talk about the Coed Roots & Legends performance while with the other two performances discussed, the community members would refer to the name of the visiting artist, or 'she' as the pronoun.

true for site-specific performances at Coed Hills. For example; Robin's interview disclosed the story of a woman who, in doing a site-specific performance about gardening, left glass and plastic all over the space, which was a field where cows grazed<sup>88</sup>. Skye's site-specific *promenade with PYLON* was all about listening and communication, but her relationships with the community defied that message in practice; through the act of bringing in Alex without and then against the permission and wishes of the other core community members. Skye also brought in smoke bombs for aesthetic affect and those props, added last minute, negated the ecological aspect. Furthermore, two years on, the *PYLON* sculptures have been laid down. One fell naturally and is yet to be put up again. The other had to be re-thought, as an owl kept flying in and getting stuck. This discrepancy of ideology and practice was represented again in the *Coed Roots & Legends* site-specific performance event in the summer of 2019. The ideology of this piece was zero waste; with connection to the stories of this intentional community. However, the deep connection to the community this site-specific performance was meant to highlight was marred, in the rehearsal process at least; by the community discord brought about by Alex's continued presence in the intentional community. And, post-show, the Spider Web rope network was not taken down by Skye.

Through my active-participant fieldwork and observations, I was able to explore the practices of emotional and environmental sustainability for site-specific performances in this intentional community. At Coed Hills, there are embodied practices of sustainability which the community members hold themselves to, and those who use the community for site-specific performance, be they *ghosts* or artists in residence; are held to these same principles by each community member.

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<sup>88</sup> The performance was located between the Stone Circle (14 on fig. 6) and the Labyrinth (8 on fig. 6).

In investigating the interplay of community, land, art, and artist in accordance with the embodied practices of sustainability; I found not all community members had the same practices, although all core community members agreed on the overarching ideologies. These overarching ideologies were found to be self-sufficiency, community mindedness, freedom, and form. These ideologies, in practice, were expected of the visiting *ghost*, site-specific performers or artists, and tension would arise when a community member or members did not feel the concepts were being embodied. This was true especially if the exchange was not perceived to be equal, as was the case with Dorothea who needed more, emotionally, than the community could give her. This was also shown to be true when involving monetary compensation; as was the case when I was using my community volunteer time to plan Coed Roots & Legends but also taking pay for doing the house keeping job in the summer of 2019.

The subjective nature of practicing ideology was made even more clear in the interviews with the core community members in February 2020. Before the major themes of sustainability and community were even discussed, the entire concepts of 'community' and 'sustainability' were scrutinised. Core community members had their own ethos about what 'community' meant to them, and subsequently, if Coed Hills Rural Artspace came under that umbrella.

*"We are no community"* (Nick) appeared to be very jarring at the first reading of this statement and I'd like to further explore the opinion of this community member. My intention is to highlight the reflexivity needed in embodying and exploring the concept of emotional and environmental sustainability for site-specific performance in intentional communities. Did Nick, the resident stone mason and longest core community member living on-site; feel that there is no

community? I would argue that he meant this in reference to the idea that the visiting artist defined 'community' differently than the actual community that lived on site. And this was because the intentional community had not given the artist a clear structure or form to adhere to before her arrival; to manage her expectations. Nick chose to not take part in the weekly circles. And he is the only core-community member who made this choice. He is also the only community member who said there was not a community at Coed Hills, and this highlights the weekly circles as a major practice for emotional sustainability within the intentional community. The practices of sustainability, as an ideology, are subjective for each community member. And hierarchy in the community also informs the daily practices of the residents, regarding emotional sustainability of the intentional community.

The choice to not participate is one that could only be made by someone who is higher up on the hierarchy/leadership system in place at Coed Hills. In other instances, with younger artists and performers newer to the sites, the choice to not join in the weekly circle would ostracise them to the core community members<sup>89</sup>. But what does this say, not only about the individual's perception of what practices make the community sustainable, but also about how they wish to be viewed by the other community members? And furthermore, how does this apply to the visiting artist in community?

This act of 'not showing up' to participate in the circles is performed weekly and implies that the regular practices of the community do not apply to this individual. This stance is accepted by the community members and landowners for a few reasons. Nick is the resident electrician and repair person. Nick does maintenance for the core community and for the Coed Weddings

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<sup>89</sup> I never missed a circle while living on-site.

company; and, as mentioned above, it would not be unusual for Nick to be called to the 'main house' where the landowners live, next door, to perform a variety of tasks. In many ways the community needs Nick to thrive. His no-nonsense attitude, much like his chosen craft<sup>90</sup> of stonemasonry, provides a solid foundation to the community, with the most practical and hands-on of tasks being completed by him. All the other interviews touched upon the circles as being key to how the community operates sustainably on an emotional level. A lack of participation from Nick in the emotional realm of sustainable practices; is in stark contrast with the environmental sustainability and other practical supports which he provides to the visiting artists.

The first two artists I assisted and observed, Dorothea Caslett and Skye Creswell; encountered much turbulence within the community. The artist and performer took what they needed from Coed Hills in the physical sense; tools, food from the garden, and asking for rides to the shops. In the emotional sense, the needs of the artist and performer in residency were also addressed by the other core community members; through group circles, nightly check-ins, and me acting as a sounding board and liaison. Although their practices for site-specific performance at Coed Hills were very different from one another; both still struggled to get the balance between self-sufficiency and community mindedness to create a fair exchange with the intentional community members. However, the lack of structure or form from the Coed Hill's perspective, did not set up Dorothea to succeed in this area. Dorothea arrived at Coed Hills to create art and to be metaphorically held by a community. The community Dorothea thought she was entering was not the one which was waiting for her.

The 'community' as defined in the literature review of this thesis, is not even the main attraction for most of the core community members. Indeed, the term 'community', is subjective to the

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<sup>90</sup> This core community member self-identified as 'craftsman' as opposed to 'artist'.

core community members of Coed Hills. The subjectivity in defining 'community' among the core community members was new information to me; which I learned during the interviews with the eight core community members (February 2020). Nick said, above, that Coed Hills "was no community", when to Charlie, the community at Coed Hills was very much alive, almost too alive for him.

In fact, the concept of 'community' was one of the least appealing aspects of Coed Hills when he first arrived at the site. When I interviewed Charlie, he shared his feelings of unease and the change-of-heart regarding how he practiced community mindedness, and the emotionally sustainability which comes when that concept is embodied. I will share Charlie's take on community, now, to highlight a few concepts. Firstly, the binary of self-sufficiency and community-mindedness is exemplified in this quotation:

"How resistant I was to community life when I first arrived. Because that's been probably, for me, the most interesting and profound journey in terms of my personal relationship with Coed and the community itself... the resistance came just from a complete sense of unfamiliarity with it. I really struggled with, you know, the sharing circles, hated them, absolutely hated the whole idea of it. You know, have no idea why people would want to do that, what purpose it served in any way shape or form, and especially how I could benefit, benefit from it in any way or anybody else benefit from my presence there.

(Charlie, February 2020).

This intentional community sustained an individual who entered the community without any intention or want to join in the emotional practices of communal living. It would appear this individual was very self-sufficient, regarding the environmental sustainability of his place in the



community. This is demonstrated by the work he did, 'clearing' in the forest. But Charlie said he was not that community minded in the beginning of his time spent as a core community member at Coed Hills. The theme of participation is relevant here, in how an embodied practice of participation can relate to community-mindedness, which I argue is a main component of the practices for sustainable site-specific performance within this intentional community.

In the literature review chapters of this study, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4; I explored the initial interactions and techniques of involving an audience member with site-specific performance (White, 2013). In the first of the Literature Review chapters: Site Specific Performance, titled: Participation (3.5); I now take this concept of participation and expand it to explore participation as an embodied practice of sustainable site-specific performance within this intentional community. This is undertaken through the lens of exploring the arrival of the potential core community member to the intentional community; and questioning if these practices aide in the emotionally and environmentally sustainable relationship a performer or artist has with the intentional community's culture and land.

I used the two viewpoints of community member and visiting artist/performer through respective the mediums of interview data and active-participant observation. I added my own unique viewpoint, communicating the autoethnographic findings evocatively to triangulate the unique positionality of an artist or performer arriving in an intentional community. The following is the common path for integration to this intentional community, compiled from the eight core community members, and combined to create a basic narrative.

As a rule, the intentional community of Coed Hills does not accept any potential community members who have young children living with them, or any dogs<sup>91</sup>. The agreement is the potential community member will volunteer for first two weeks, then there will be a community meeting to evaluate their presence in the community. The potential community member, in the role of the volunteer, arrives at the intentional community and begins to prove themselves to the wider community; highlighting embodied practices of self-sufficiency such as chopping wood or clearing in the woodland and weeding in the garden. After a week or two, with the platform of the sharing circle, the potential core community member joins in sharing their feelings with the group, at large. Through this practice, an emotional bond is formed with the other core community members, embodying community mindedness. Through these acts, the embodiment of environmental and emotional self-sufficient practices benefits the community with hopefully a fair exchange from both perspectives. As time progresses, the new community member finds their niche, in line with their skill set, that allows them to contribute to the community while still fulfilling their own needs. This emotional and environmental sustainability is the ideal for this intentional community.

This process of emotional and environmental sustainability via the lens of exchange, found through embodying the practices of self-sufficiency and community mindedness is reflected and in contrast with the two examples of Dorothea and Skye entering the community as artist and performer.

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<sup>91</sup> Although the rule about dogs is broken more often than maintained.

Like Patrick, Hrefna spoke in her interview about the artist and performer Skye coming into the community, and the fact that she caused so much turmoil for the core community members. The lack of community mindedness was touched upon with the decision to bring Alex into the community to live, against the wishes of Hrefna; and against the permission of the core community members as a group. The site-specific performance *promenade with PYLON* was transformational for the community in terms of environmental change. A new performance space was established, by the lake (16 on fig. 6) but the lasting impact of the artwork had negative reviews from the community members. Eventually, at the end of the summer, after much deliberating at Laurent's home, Skye and Alex were both asked to leave the community. This further proves when the balance is not found, then the presence in the community of the artist or performer is not sustainable.

#### 14.1 The embodied practices of emotional and environmental sustainability

The two years of field work, and weekly circles, combined with assisting the artist-in-residency programme outlined in the last section; culminated in my argument that practices of emotional and environmental sustainability for site specific performance within intentional community spaces must have an equal balance between community mindedness and self sufficiency. To find balance in these spaces, the practices for sustainable site-specific performance must be reflexive. The themes I defined were a set of relevant values which are informed by the ideologies of this intentional community. They also manifested in the daily practices of each core community member; providing useful themes for analysis of the visiting artist or performer. These themes were defined as self-sufficiency; community-mindedness; form or structure; and freedom or spontaneity.

Self-sufficiency is perhaps the most common theme touched upon by the ideology of Coed Hills Rural Artspace. Self-sufficiency was the first theme I became aware of, through the suggestions of the core community members when I arrived at Coed Hills. This ideological belief informs various practices; such as wood collection for one's own fire; the ability to light a fire; the means to feed yourself; and the ability to know what job to do without being told, among many other practices of daily life in the intentional community. This clearly relates to the life of the community member in the intentional community, and my research added to and explored self-sufficiency in this context, concept via the site-specific performer in the intentional community.

In fact, I found self-sufficiency to be such an important theme in this intentional community that the artists-in-residence also; are expected to have an element of self-sufficiency if they are to make art or perform at Coed Hills. This was explored via *The Bliss of Wildness* (2018) and Dorothea's place in the community; noting the emotional strain her presence put on the community. Dorothea could not light her own fire, and when she did, she burnt herself. She arrived on site to be comforted first, create art second. Her artistic endeavours were informed and inspired by the flowers that grew at Coed Hills in the spring and summer; and the exhibition of her artworks were installed site-specifically in the Barn (1). All this was done, however, with assistance from someone on site to act as the site-liaison for this artist-in-residence. *The Bliss of Wildness* (2018) was proven to be un-sustainable, emotionally, during her residency.

However, the environmental sustainability of her finished work was in a fair exchange with the land of Coed Hills, as the paintings of the Coed-specific flowers highlighted the natural beauty of the land and environment. Also, on a personal level, the art had impact on Dorothea as she was unaware of many of the medicinal qualities of the wild plants she decided to paint. This gave Dorothea a deeper connection to the land and inspired the title: *The Bliss of Wildness*. Although Dorothea was a strain on the community, and not self-sufficient enough to find balance between

self-sufficiency and community mindedness; the impact the experience Coed Hills had on her was profound (See appendix) .

Skye practiced self-sufficiency to another extreme. Her vision for the installation of her artwork was so strong; she bypassed the community and brought in an outsider to help her complete the task. This next example of site-specific performance within intentional community spaces, highlights the practices of self-sufficiency for *promenade with PYLON* (2019). For this site-specific performance, the first community workday for a visiting artist and performer was organised. The core community members were happy to help for a few reasons. First, the space, once clear, would become a new hangout which was far away from the Barn (1 on fig. 6) where the Weddings and other events external to the community, are booked. This new clearing would become a place just for the core community members, and those who were brave enough to venture into the woods; and this was very appealing to the community members. Second, and very importantly, Laurent wanted to get 'art back' into the woods and the core community members worked to support this vision. The balance for *promenade with PYLON* (2019) was found between self-sufficiency and community mindedness.

Self-sufficiency was explored in *Coed Roots & Legends* (2019) during the artists' week. The decision to pay Robin for food from the gardens and cook food for the artists with an invitation for the community to join-in; rather than having the performers join-in the community lunches; demonstrated self-sufficiency. Also, community-mindedness was in play, for it was the *ghost* that was feeding the *host*, literally. This practice demonstrated self-sufficiency and community mindedness combining to create a fair exchange for the core community members, and the

success of this performance inspired the community to want to do *Coed Roots & Legends* round two, in the Summer of 2020<sup>92</sup>.

Form or structure is the agreed-upon way of doing things on site; the boundaries that the community will have with a visiting artist or performer. At Coed Hills, this is represented from the core community members as participating in the weekly circles; and agreeing that one would work four hours a day, five days a week for their rent-free accommodation. For the artists, this theme is represented in having a clear idea of what one is to accomplish while living on site and what they need to give back if anything.

I found it is the responsibility of the host community to set out the foundation of this structure or form. The artist then, will be metaphorically held by the forms and structures. If the artist feels held; then they are allowed to take the next step of adding spontaneity and freedom to the structure and forms. It was in the combining of these two entities that the artistic process was allowed to thrive. Before Dorothea arrived on site, she was not made aware of the terms of her artist-in-residency. Because of this, she was not prepared emotionally or physically for the month-long residency at Coed Hills. The structure of Dorothea's residency was created reflexively, as she lived and created artwork in the community. This meant there were moments where her needs as an artist could not be met, as she could not drive and did not realise how rural the 'rural Artspace' was. This meant she was driven by Bobbi Winslow and Laurent to the shops and art supply stores. Furthermore, there was no heating in the artist studio which was unacceptable for Dorothea. Nick and I made her a studio in the Bothy and that took a few days to get up and running. Although Coed Hills had aspects of the therapeutic community, as

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<sup>92</sup> Of course, this was not able to happen, due to Covid-19.

outlined by Shenker (1986), that is not how the community functioned. Dorothea's reason for coming to the intentional community, from the perspective of Coed Hills, was to be an artist-in-residence and create a site-specific installation and performance to showcase her art. This experience of lack of structure from the community, informed my future practices for inviting artists into the intentional community and their initiation into community life. Structure was again explored through *promenade with PYLON* (2019). In Chapter 8, I noted how I sent Skye a text message (fig. 17) before her arrival on-site, which introduced myself as a site-liaison and that made it clear that she was coming to Coed Hills to create artwork. I explained how this practice of structure continued smoothly for this performance.

The next performance, *Coed Roots & Legends* (2019) however, found effects of the lack of structure once again. This site-specific performance was co-curated by me and Skye, and Skye took liberties with who she invited to live on-site to help with the design of her new performance venue. These invitations and conditions of the artists and performers on-site were not carefully structured. Without a clear way to introduce Alex into the community as an artist and set designer; I outlined how the lead-up to the performance was hectic, as did Hrefna and Patrick. There were time constraints; distrust of Alex from many of the women on site; and requests by core community members were ignored by Skye and Alex. Laurent did his best to mitigate this; and a group Constellation Therapy<sup>93</sup> session helped to escalate, then calm down the distress surrounding this pair and the installation piece they were creating in the woods.

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<sup>93</sup> Constellation Therapy is a experimental kind of psychotherapy where a group, with a facilitator, stand-in for family members of a person in the group. The idea is to make the emotional dynamics represented physically, to show and investigate how subconscious factors (such as interpersonal relationships or familial patterns) could be influencing an individual or group's dynamic. (Stiefel, Harris and Zollmann, 2002) (Cohen 2006)

If I observed the performances alone, I would have missed out on the reason why both the artists and the community experienced such turmoil. However, I was on-site to assist both artists and took fieldnotes on their experience living-off-the-grid at Coed Hills. Therefore, I was able to closely observe the daily interactions which attributed to the overall emotional sustainability of the relationship between the artist and the social environment. This methodology was unique and grounded my research to the experiences of the community members; the visiting artists; and the self as a performer; as opposed to the audience.

Freedom and spontaneity were represented in the community's ideology of Coed and, like other intentional communities, found its beginnings in the subversion of wider society's norms (Shenker, 2011). The practices of freedom were explored through the residents' embodiment to non-capitalistic activities such as writing poetry or smelling flowers. In addition; the ability to take time off and go into the woods if 'needed' for one's mental health and to work when one feels like it; not to be held to a schedule set by someone other than the self. Freedom and spontaneity were represented in the practices of sustainable site-specific performance within this intentional community regarding the artistic process; as one of the practices for maintaining emotional sustainability. In the *Bliss of Wildness* (2019), Dorothea was constantly thinking about or working on her art, apart from the evenings when Nick and I would join her with a bottle of wine and a notebook. Although this evolved into routine, it began with a spontaneous first night-meeting, and as it evolved into a nightly practice, I found it helped the overall emotionality of Dorothea as artist-in-residence. Additionally, the choice to stage her production in the unfinished barn, part way through our floor replacement project; was a spontaneous choice dictated by the fact there was not a working gallery space at the time. This site-specific performance and installation was inspired by the potency of the uneasy fit (Turner, 2004, p.373); and classical



music on violin and guitar accompanied Dorothea's poem which marked the beginning of the site-specific installation and performance. Spontaneity and freedom were represented and explored by Skye Creswell in *promenade with PYLON* (2019) via the choice of installation space, again. This time, the lake was the spontaneously chosen site for the site-specific performance and installation. I implemented the aesthetics of the invitation (White, 2013) from the moment she arrived on site, and I found that this structure allowed her the artistic freedom and confidence which manifested in several ways. First, the freedom to choose the location for the PYLON to permanently be installed. And secondly, in the devising of the performance piece that she created for *promenade with PYLON* (2019).

The concepts of self-sufficiency; community mindedness; structure or form; and spontaneity or freedom; are complex and non-binary, meaning the themes are not either 'present' or 'non-existent'. Rather, they exist in conjunction with one another; and should be represented as such. When defined and listed, the pillars of sustainability for site-specific performance in intentional communities seemed to be in opposition with another. However, a major finding from this study is that embodied concepts for sustainable site-specific performance in intentional communities are better expressed in sliding scales. This interconnectedness was demonstrated first in the conclusions of Chapter 7, *The Bliss of Wildness* (2018) (10.5); and then implemented as a theme through Chapters 8 and 9, and yet again in Chapter 10 titled: Further thoughts on *The Bliss of Wildness* (2018) *promenade with PYLON* (2019) and *Coed Roots & Legends* (2019) (13.1). And out of these four concepts: Community Mindedness; Self-Sufficiency; Freedom or Spontaneity; and Form or Structure; two distinct ideological concepts which already exist at Coed Hills, are defined: Art and Exchange.



Figure 33: Representation of Interconnected Ideological Concepts for sustainable Site-Specific Performance within an Intentional Community. (Chart by author 2021)

Art can be found at every point on the scale from *Form* to *Freedom*. And *Exchange* can be found at every point on the scale from *Self-Sufficiency* to *Community-Mindedness*. This representation also allows for reflexivity between a visiting artist or performer and the hosting community because it does not define the level of interaction or presence of both ideologies. Instead of saying there must be a quantifiable amount of each ideological concept, as long as there was an element of the ideology embodied in the practice of a visiting artist or performer to the community, exchange and art were still found. This is also done to highlight that every visiting artist or performer will not have the skillset to chop wood, or even walk through the woods in the mud.

There was tension in the community when an artist or performer arrived at Coed Hills who made the community fear they were not going to be community-minded, or not self-sufficient enough. This was the case with Dorothea and also with Alex, in Coed Roots & Legends, as referenced in Chapters 7, 8, and 9. There was also tension for the visiting artist or performer and the community members supporting them when a structure was not present; or the spontaneity and freedom was over or under practiced. This was also shown in Chapters 7, 8, and 9. In short, if the exchange seemed as if it was going to be unbalanced then the core community would object; and the artist would not be sustainably performing within the intentional community.

#### 14.2 Societal reflections and implications; society and performance

An early theme I found emerged in question 11, in relation to the personal 'artistic process'. During the interviews with the core community members of Coed Hills in February of 2020, two out of the eight residents referred to themselves not as artists, but as 'craftsmen', while a third interviewee reiterated this sentiment but with slightly different terminology. This is an interesting concept in this context, because it might hint at the place artists and art in general in this intentional community has for these core community members, and perhaps, the intentional community at-large. Is the term "craft" employed to legitimise an artistic practice? The concept of working hard and not resting as a showing of personal merit or ethics and commitment to the greater system is present in this, and other, intentional communities. This was demonstrated by Tesza, Aneurin and Patrick in their interviews; as well as Skye from my observations of her while she was living on-site. There is an element of justification which has to be done if a core community member or visiting artist or performer wants to engage in their artistic practice within this intentional community. If a structure is in place that agrees the function of the artist or performer in the community is to make art, as was the case with the *Artists Week* for Coed

Roots & Legends; the emotional sustainability between the intentional community members can be natural. This practice of emotional sustainability through structure and clarity of role gives the performer or artist more freedom to explore the physical environment. This juxtaposition of structure and freedom gives the artistic process an emotionally sustainable connection with the intentional community members, as expectations had been managed from the beginning (White, 2013).

The findings of this study can add fresh insights to neo-liberal isolation and how the arts represent and defy the communal ideology; underpinned by monetary gain or social status. By removing the specifics of this case study and viewing the findings as a stand-alone data set, one widens the scope on this lens of performance and cultural studies to include wider society. One is able to gain insights towards where performance sits in society, and how that delicate balance is sustained. This macro cultural phenomenon can be examined by viewing the sustainable site-specific performance practices in the micro intentional community.

For example, what does the performer or artist need to exchange for their right to perform within a community and what constitutes 'work'? The Live List (2014) did not make a distinction between artistic output and 'work'. If a performer and artist enter a community space and their self-sufficient contribution is their performance or art, I found the relationship with the hosting community members will be sustainable if they feel there is a fair exchange. By using my scales of self-sufficiency and community mindedness, perhaps the performer and the community will have clarity in defining the role of the performer and the performance in the community space. And this lens, if taken into a community space, would be further helpful when investigating the practices for sustainable site-specific performance. As there are many variations of rehearsal process practice for orthodox theatre and site-specific performance; it is not too great an ask to

add this way of thinking to the 'tool kit' for site-specific performance within community spaces. No literature that I could find explores, specifically, site-specific performance within intentional community spaces but these performances are happening every day to varying degrees of participation, impact, and sustainability. This research demystifies the process of an artist or performer entering an intentional community and is also hopefully instructive on how to approach a community space for site-specific performance.

The sliding scale of forms and structures versus freedom and spontaneity are also useful; for they could be introduced from the site-specific performance maker to the community before the performer arrives on site. This would give the hosting community time to think about what their forms and structures are; to work through their ideological embodied practices of sustainability and define them in clear terms for the entering artist. This research can explain that the care taken to define the structures and forms for the visiting artist or performer in the community will allow both the performer and the community members the chance for spontaneity and creation. Spontaneity and creation, when utilised against a backdrop of structure and forms will add to and inform the emotional sustainability of the artistic process.

The findings of this study can also be applied to wider society; for the intentional community and the un-intentional community. This could be represented in the practices of emotional sustainability represented by friendship groups; social change; or arts organisations. For instance, the sliding scale of self-sufficiency and community mindedness which breeds exchange can be utilised in understanding why some friendships break down. I am not suggesting one takes these sliding scales and rigidly applies them to all relationships; but if there is a relationship which is not working, these scales are useful for investigating why a

relationship has become unsustainable, or perhaps to discover the unbalanced foundations upon which a relationship was built.

For the social change organisation, these scales can be utilised for understanding community engagements and have a potential for changing perception of their brand from within their wider community, and also with the other social change and performance art organisations or individuals that a social organisation works with. The concept of exchange on the individual level is often missed with social change performance art; as the ideologies they are representing with their art do not always equate to the practices. This is especially true for social change groups because their identity is steeped in ideology (Smiles and Edwards, 2021), and some can make the case that the group only needs to get the message out, regardless of the practices surrounding that message (ibid)<sup>94</sup>.

Earlier in this thesis, Chapter 7: *Further thoughts on site-specific performance and intentional communities*; Extinction Rebellion were mentioned as an example of a social change site-specific performance art organisation. I'd like to further explore how the scales could be utilised for this social-change, site-specific performance art group. Another critique of this movement focused on Extinction Rebellion's engagement with other social change groups and communities. I include the next quote to show the practices do not match the ideology the social change movement is performing, or representing themselves to have:

"XR Norwich members had seen representatives from indigenous groups speaking at XR's First International Rebellion Protest in April 2019 and were aware that XR Norwich

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<sup>94</sup> See Table 2, Diagnostic Frames of XR Norwich).

had tweeted articles concerning indigenous struggles. Yet most were reluctant to include the demands of such groups within XR's collective action frames. It appears that they were content, as Roosvall and Tegelberg (2013) argue, to use such activists to represent the immediacy of climate change, whilst ignoring their political demands."

(Smiles and Edwards, 2021).

Here was an example of possible exploitation by a performance art group. Extinction Rebellion Norwich tweeted their support of the indigenous groups who were invited to speak at the first of Extinction Rebellion Norwich's protest events. However, there was no engagement with the practices that the ideologies were meant to be supporting. What this paper describes rather, is an ideology and performance, but without a practice. This is especially important because mentions of the indigenous groups that Extinction Rebellion invited to speak were used in social media posts, representing to their followers that XR supports the other groups, while making no real changes to their practices which would support the other groups. In this way, XR exploited the other groups by using the other groups' practices and demands as decoration to their social media pages.

If Extinction Rebellion were concerned about their exchange and the impact on the communities that their performance-art has, these scales could provide clarity for the other groups who performed, and this exploitation could be avoided. And, perhaps, by use of the scales between XR and their city of Norwich; Extinction Rebellion could be a more welcome fixture in these communities. Importantly, my research includes reflexivity and spontaneity and freedom for the purpose of looking after the performance art group's artistic integrity and artistic expression.

Arts organisations who interact with a community can use this research and the sliding scales to envision how performance will be sustained in their social and environmental community space. It has also been my experience that the communities hosting the festivals of Boomtown and Glastonbury are fed up with the performance and music events due to their unsustainability; in both the emotional and environmental contexts of their respective communities. If my research could be made available to the communities who are hosting the events; they would divine similarities to their own experiences from reading and connecting to my evocative autoethnographic reflections. In this way, the sliding scales act as a tool for understanding and visualising the subjective nature of sustainable performance in community spaces.

Much is to be gleaned for the site-specific practitioner of performance from this research. Seldom does the highly trained actor take time to live off-the-grid and engage with permaculture values or even the more theoretical side of drama and performance studies (Kershaw, 2011, p.63). From this unique research, the site-specific performer is given fresh insights as to what the community expects: and quite importantly what they don't expect. There is trust given to both parties when a site-specific performance enters a community space. My hope is this research adds to the actors' toolbox for how a performer can work to not exploit people of the community they are performing in; and to have a sustainable relationship with the land and community so that they will be invited back.

Methodologically, this process can also be very beneficial for artistic social change organisations that want to work from within community spaces. If a representative from the organisation lives with or in a community group, they can use the methods of field notes; active-participant observation; and perhaps take on the practice of the weekly sharing circles. The circles were found to be a very beneficial practice for emotional and environmental sustainability



at Coed Hills. They aided in finding out what the community needs and how the artist can practically contribute or interact with that community's ideologies through their artistic social change practices.

The findings of the sliding scales as a way to work through sustainability between site-specific performance and the hosting community can also apply to spatialised un-intentional communities, such as the communities found in neighborhoods.

### Moving Forward

This research was unique methodologically, as my unique positionality as researcher, place of research and duration of research attested. Currently, I still am in the role I created as part of this research, as the director of the Artist-in-Residence programme at Coed Hills. Although there have been issues of access due to Covid; the self-sufficient disclaimer means that, for the robust performer, an isolated cabin at the bottom of the woods could be provided to them. This would be a true artists and performers' retreat.

Facilitating the artists as a part of my fieldwork made an impact on me; and these skills, for me as a researcher and practitioner will be transferable to many different sites and communities<sup>95</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> St Fagan's LGBTQ+ Curator, Mark Etheridge, as a potential collaboration with the LGBTQ+ community of Cardiff and the artifacts and stories collected by the museum of the historical LGBTQ+ community in Wales. A site-specific promenade performance around the grounds of St Fagan's. The history could be told through storytelling presented alongside artifacts, performed as a heritage piece in and around the period buildings of St Fagan's.  
b) By drawing the performers from the LGBTQ+ community in Cardiff the impact and cultural healing benefits are significant, as are the ethics of the study.

As this autoethnographic and embodied research continues, I will employ the embodied practices of sustainability divined from and explored through this study. I hope to visit the remaining twenty-one intentional communities in Wales, employing performance-as-research techniques to document my time spent interacting with these communities.

Intentional communities are self-marginalised groups and I'm interested to see how this research can apply to the societal or cultural place that performance takes when the community producing the art is marginalised *without* the intent. Removing the emotionally and personally qualified 'intentional', from the spatially oriented 'community', would open the interpretation of the findings to glean insights through the similarities, or differences, found in other communities one examines.

To explain this concept further I give this next example. Already, my research has taken me to working as community-liaison for *Season of the Time Media Productions* (STMPs), a film production company in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. On their behalf I am currently reaching out, online, to social change organisations and NGO's that want to help the young adults and children of Kakuma, in their artistic endeavours. By putting the needs of their community first and understanding that performance can take place sustainably within intentional communities; I made a case for STMPs to secure funding for their performance types of media, music, and film within the refugee camp.

The most common resistance I have found with companies who have funding to offer is that they don't see how performance in this community will benefit the community. *One Better World Collective*, for example, was keen to help but thought they'd rather raise money for food and

waste management. By using my scales, I showed that performance within a community space highlighted a few key aspects that could help the kids and young adults function better as a community.

First, in the case of STMPs, the performers come from within the community. My research works well here, as I was also a performer living in the community and I was able to observe and explore Skye's transition from visiting performer to community member. My research found that just because one is in the community with their skillset as 'Artist of Performer', does not mean that their exchange is exclusively based in their art. In the case of Coed Hills, other community minded practices supported the artist or performer living in the community, as community members. However, I do hope further research challenges this view. The transformative power of performance within a community (Sonn et al., 2015) applies here, and my research has already lent itself to advocating for the place of performance within the unintentional, intentional community: Kakuma Refugee Camp.

The second way site-specific performance in a community, using my scales, benefits the community is this; self-sufficiency and community mindedness are jargon-free concepts which are easy to grasp. Their overlapping to create 'exchange' is an idea that clearly benefits the people of a community and need not be a laborious process. This research proposed that the artistic process is of equal importance to the final performance; and this was reflected through the focus on the rehearsal processes outlined in Chapter 1: *Theatre practitioners and the embodied process of rehearsal* (3.2). If analysis and exploration treat the rehearsal process and the way the artist or performer interacts with the hosting community and land as paramount; sustainability is increased on the emotional and the environmental levels (as shown in Chapters 7, 8, and 9 to varying degrees). The skills I learned from my fieldwork at Coed Hills while

working as artist site-liaison taught me how to negate subtle and complex social systems so both parties involved felt emotional and environmental sustainability from one another's presence in sharing a space.

*'Different Fruit-ures'* has continued to be performed. Karan attributes the success of her piece to the time she was allowed to develop the site-specific performance on the land of Coed Hills, during the Coed Roots & Legends Artists Week (summer 2019). The musical Francesca wrote during that same week has also gone on site-specific tour, to the festival Green Gathering (2021).

Contributions to this field of site-specific performance and community spaces can also be made in the form of a published field guide, which would include more evocative auto-ethnographic recounting of performers and performances that travelled through Coed Hills<sup>96</sup>. Additionally, contributions to this field could be made in informal talks given to artist-practitioners who want to experiment with visiting intentional communities, especially in urban community gardens<sup>97</sup>, where the inspiration for this research began.

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<sup>96</sup> As stated in the introduction, there are at least two examples of site-specific performance and one on-location film production at Coed Hills which I was unable to include.

<sup>97</sup> Such as the one in Prague.



## Appendices

### **Appendix A:** Mason's Poetry

During the first few weeks that Skye was living at Coed Hills, she came to one of my shows in the city. She met a fellow performer, a man named Mason Fitzgerald who is well-known to the Cardiff poetry scene. Upon realizing he had only performed professionally once, at that very show, Skye decided to invite him to perform around the PYLON. It was important to me that the visiting artists really had time to get to know the land, to let it seep into their performance, so I invited him up one month before the 'unveiling' as we had begun to call it. I gave Mason the tour of Coed Hills, and then we ended up walking around the lake for a while. As I had done with Skye, I encouraged Mason to choose a place to perform: "I mean, honestly Mason, you could sit in a tree if you want to, we would just want to figure out how to light you" (Author, 2019).

I explained my research question and the concept of emotionally and environmentally sustainable site-specific performance practices. Mason really took this on; deciding to write a new piece of poetry influenced by his walk around Coed that day. He decided he would like to stand on the little jetty which protruded into the lake.



Figure 34: The Jetty at the Lake, photo by author (2019).

I remember Mason staying much longer than I had expected him to stay. He brought a few friends along; which I had encouraged in my invitation. They had a lovely evening, sat down by the lake, sharing stories, and soaking up the nature.

Luckily, their visit coincided with the burning of what we had cleared in the previous days. The brush and bramble were bunched up into three or four bonfire piles, and they were lit one-by-one as the night progressed. And again, like with Dorothea, there was a bottle of wine passed around.

Although this was Mason's first time visiting Coed Hills, he later shared that being given the freedom to roam around the space; and us not asking him to leave straight away made him feel comfortable and at ease. And because of this initial interaction; the community members felt more at ease with him being on site, as well. From this experience, I found bringing a performer to the community, with their intentions clear, and a clear definition of their role to the community established, helped to put both the performer and community members at ease.

#### Appendix B: The Women's Library Box

The Women's Library Box was imagined in May of 2018, in conjunction with Women Connect First Wales and Coed Hills Rural Artspace.

*The following are my fieldnotes from June 2018:*

#### **The Women's Story/Library Box.**

*Group:* Women Connect First (Cardiff Branch)

*Place:* Coed Hills Rural Artspace

*Timeline:* May 2018 - February 2019

*Rough Description of Sculpture Trail:* The Sculpture Trail is a greater project set to happen at Coed Hills, with Women Connect First (Cardiff Branch) who will present, down the woodland path, individual art projects.

*Rough Description of Intention:* A group of women refugees create an open library box at Coed Hills Rural Art Space, containing their stories of coming to the UK.

*Rough Description of Structure:* Cob structure. Size of a small fridge, raised from the ground. An arched dome as a roof and built around sand-filled plastic bottles. A small door and interior space with shelves.

### ***Field Trip from Women Connect First (Cardiff Branch)***

#### **Personal Narrative Field notes, June 2018:**

*The women came to Coed Hills in the late Spring to have a walk, and get out of the city. Many of the women had their young children with them. Chatting happily as I showed them around the grounds of Coed Hills, we wanted to go down to the pond as the weather was so nice and they had been on a bus for a good hour on their way out of the city.*

*The walk usually takes 10 minutes on average, however, we stopped frequently as one woman would remark at a flower she recognized from home, or to ask about a flower she had never seen before. Or to give an example of how this weed was useful in the medicine cabinet (it was plantain, we use it at Coed as well for minor cuts and bruises). The women hugged one another looking at the greenery or walked hand-in-hand. Their children running freely ahead, or behind.*

*As we made our way through the woods, down the little path, they began to share stories from their journey. One woman walked with a cane - she had not the need of such support before the journey to the United Kingdom she shared. She had been healthy before, but after the stress and toil of the journey, her body had taken the brunt of the toll.*

*This was a group of women who came to this country as refugees or seeking asylum from their home countries. Many had walked the distance from their home country - Syria, paying human traffickers to smuggle them and their children through. We paused at the lake, opting for a group photo. Some the women and children did a lap of the lake with me, to see the other half of the group standing on the bridge, across, waving!*



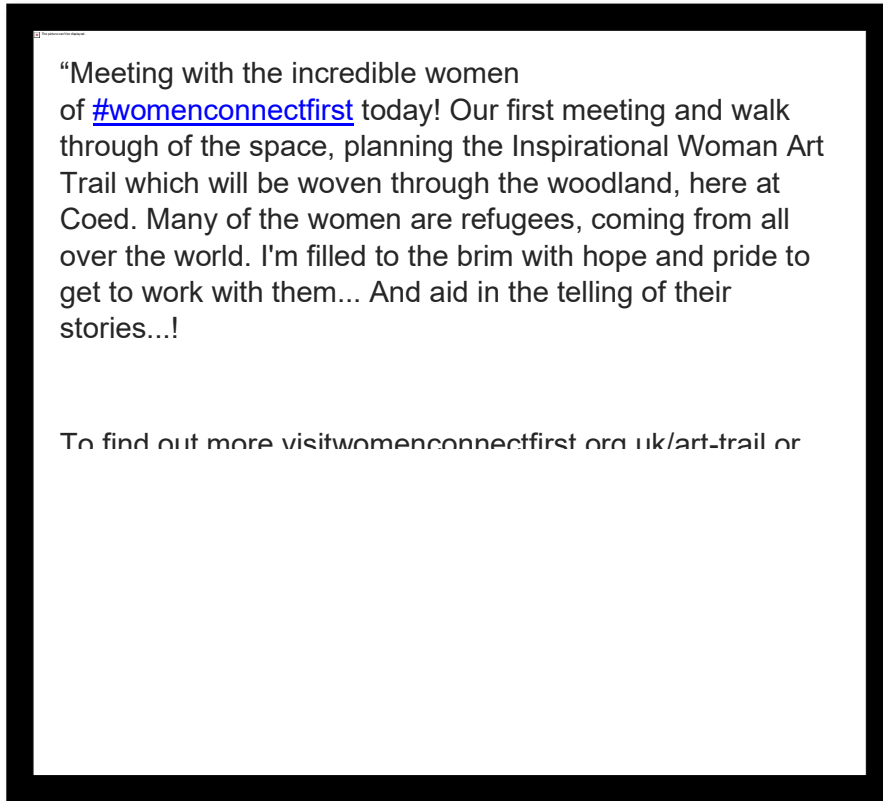


Figure 35: Instagram post by author, May 29, 2018. The image shows the women standing at second lake (not pictured on fig. 6). The text from the post is overlaid on top of the image.

(Fieldnotes Continued)

*Back up in the barn, I made tea as Aneurin held the hand of the older woman, with the cane. She was speaking in Arabic, and Aneurin was listening intently. Although I did not understand her words, her emotion was flowing. Aneurin was doing his best to translate (as he'd spent the last year studying in an Arabic-speaking country), and the story became clearer to me and then, when another woman from the group began to translate sentence for sentence, I was able to understand her on a deeper level.*

*Her story was one of absolute bravery and her mere presence in the woods, was a testament to her character. Every woman had a story to tell. This unique group of women and the thread by which all their stories are connected is what will fill the cob library box. They all made a journey to the UK, and this library box will hold their stories of travel. Any passersby will have the opportunity to read their stories, in conjunction with 'the Sculpture Trail'.*

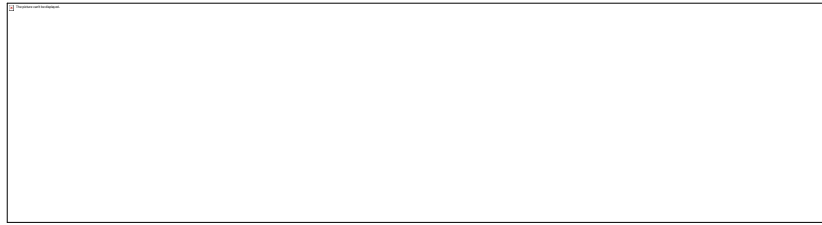
*What I hope to learn:*

*I would like to explore the ethics in the way that the women are related to, represented and interacted with the space and facilitators of Coed Hills. Cross referencing readings on community art co-creation and co-curation. Check out Bernadette Lynch's writing on this, says Jenny.*

*I'd like to pay close attention to the way their voices are going to be heard and how much of the process is under their control. The women are refugees, some of them not speaking much English, and, keeping this in mind, the way that their ideas and intent are communicated will be interesting to analyze. There is a trend, with institutions working with those who are drawing upon personal experience and expression as a form of healing, to exploit their experience as a monetary or social gain. Directly, or indirectly, and this must be acknowledged heading into this project. To facilitate as opposed to control. A lot of this, interestingly, means negating my personal creative outlook and letting go of the outcome. Letting go of my personal interpretation and putting the faith in the person who is the author of their own story.*

*-End Fieldnotes-*

The women's library Box never came to fruition at Coed Hills, but I would happily return to act as site-liaison in the future, should the women wish to continue this project.



### **COED: ROOTS AND LEGENDS**

Coed Hills Rural Artspace are glad to present **COED: Roots & Legends**, a site-specific performance & arts event.

Public event on 31st July 2019                      Participants workshop 8th-12th July  
*Access to the site upon request from June*

Following the success of our recent event *promenade with PYLON*, we invite you to take part in our next site-specific performance event, **Coed: Roots & Legends/ Coed: Gwreiddiau A Chwedlau**. Continuing the theme of performativity through the woods, we are taking a look back on the people and happenings that formed the unique mythology, which makes up Coed as we know it, today. With more performance spaces available, **Coed: Roots & Legends/ Coed: Gwreiddiau A Chwedlau** will cover more land. Expect a family festival feel, with workshops and music in addition to performance art.

Coed Hills Rural Artspace is a community run permaculture, arts and events space. Founded in 1997, when our first exhibition erupted in the woods with 40 artists and over 500 works of art. Coed has evolved through many phases. The focus shifting between a predominant involvement in the arts, to strictly permaculture based.

Today, our community marries the practical to the artistic. The roots which bind us together- our common goal of sustainability, expressed through the love of cultivation and creation.

### **STORYTELLING**

Storytelling has been happening as long as humans have been sitting around fires! Stories relate to the individual and on a mass scale. Stories are passed on, Stories change. Stories are made up. Stories are real. Stories teach. Stories can trick. Stories can treat. Stories can reveal. Stories can be deep or simply entertain. Stories can be told through word or through action, through static object or through sound. We want to experience and facilitate stories of all forms - We all have stories to tell, what's your story? What do you wanna say, do, make, share. be. see? Has something happened to you. to someone else. has something not vet

(Call-out continued)

## ROOTS

The source of nourishment. Our historic roots; from where we have grown. Both as the human species and as individuals; we invite you to explore your connection to your own roots and also the physical roots of our woodland. We invite these stories to be presented and shared through performance or installation.

We will host a workshop week from the 8th of July when we invite you to visit or stay at Coed Hills Rural Artspace - this will be time to brainstorm ideas, settle into spaces, get inspired, get creating and discussing, to try things out and really feel your potential in the space.

Gemini and Skye will be on site to liaise with the community and support your artistic endeavors - to integrate artist with community and land.

## TEASER

We have been creating the Giant's Lair, a site specific amphitheater created from the very trees that surround it! The woods in its entirety is available for any sustainable endeavors - some sites of interest include The Birdcage sitting at the top of the carpark field with its bent bars...The lake hosting Pylon; interactive sound sculpture, The Immaculate Chamber; a glasshouse in the woods, The Bunker...

**Contact us!** Send an email, make a call to either of us, contact info below. We will be accepting applications through any format you feel best represents your work, be that text, video, photo, conversation...

Looking forward to hearing from you! Gemini & [REDACTED]

**Gemini Anderson**

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## Promenade with Pylon

### What's happening?

*Promenade with Pylon* will be a performance and sculptural arts event taking place in the Coed Hills Woodland from dusk on **Saturday, 22nd of March 2019** based around the opening of *Pylon*, sculpture by [REDACTED] curated with a programme of live works. We invite you to contribute site-specific performance to an immersive evening of performativity and ceremony.

### What is Pylon?

*Pylon* is an interactive sound sculpture; 2 cone-like structures suspended on steel frames. Installed either side of the lake at Coed Hill. , Visitors can communicate with one another. By using the cone as a megaphone or speaking quietly into one, the corresponding user can listen through the other cone, on the other side of the lake - a device similar to the tin-can telephone.

*Pylon* amplifies and channels the user's voice as well as the sounds of the surrounding landscape, alerting the user's attention to the present moment.

The intention of the piece is to aid communication and encourage stranger to stranger interaction.

A sculpture in its own right, which is also an object to played with, handled and used - *Pylon* is sculptural in nature and performative integrally. *Pylon* facilitates performativity!

### We want you!

Coed Hills woodland holds a history of artistic endeavour; there are tales to be told from sculptures through the thicket. Over recent years there has been some silence from artistic activity here, now we can feel a rustling up again...

We invite performers to interact with *Pylon* directly; song or word could be performed through the cones. Works can also take place elsewhere, around the lake and through the woods, which engage with but are not limited to themes of communication, interaction, soundscape, interchanging roles of audience/performer, the sense of hearing, connecting to nature... There will be space for poetry speakings around a bonfire bringing in the Spring.

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