

Representing Private Citizens in
Contemporary British Theatre:
The Legal and Ethical Challenges

A. Brockie

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

Modifications to the work:

- i. This work has been modified from the original intention to submit a PhD thesis.
- ii. Due to Covid lockdown restrictions in 2020, the PaR performance of *Suneet's Story* was adapted and presented online via Zoom (03.07.20).
- iii. Due to technical issues, the Q&A with the audience for *Suneet's Story* was not captured on the video recording.

ABSTRACT

Among the considerations within UK law when determining what can or cannot be written or expressed about a person, there is a clear distinction between a private citizen and one whose life is in the public domain (Defamation Act 2013). Given that the law recognises this distinction, and that biographical work about well-known people is more prevalent and subject to scrutiny, there are fewer models for the process of successful collaboration with, and representation of, people who are not public figures.

Creating theatre based on the ‘facts’ of somebody’s life requires a degree of selection, enhancement and / or invention which is further complicated when the subject is living. Their capacity to change over time presents significant challenges. Similarly, the malleable medium of theatre itself, described in the *Analysis of Theatre in England* report (Arts Council, 2016) as being “responsive to time and place, circumstance and situations”, further complicates the process. This research project aims to test and demonstrate the issues involved in reconciling the ethical, legal and practical problems inherent in creating drama from the shared personal narrative of a private individual.

The ‘Reality Theatre’ modes, as categorised by Caroline Wake (2010) - such as documentary, verbatim and biography - demonstrate and exemplify different ways in which theatre can become a vehicle for the representation of personal narrative. With specific reference to verbatim theatre, Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2011, p.200) acknowledges that “there seem to be very few examples of playwrights evaluating their projects by consulting those whose stories generated it”. This thesis argues that consultation and transparency of practice for working in any of the ‘Reality Theatre’ modes, where living subjects are involved, is essential to successful collaboration and for reducing what Mary Luckhurst describes as “ethical stress” (2011, p.135) for those involved in the creation of such work. With a view to raising and illustrating these issues, it seemed appropriate to explore how different theatrical modes could impact on the choices and decisions made in how to interpret a ‘told’ story.

With the intention of exploring what this might mean in practical terms, I invited the collaboration of a person whose life is not in the public domain, and with their consent documented a series of interviews which contributed to, and culminated in, a performance based on events in their life. Suneet, a Psychology Lecturer with whom I professionally worked at the time, agreed to be involved in this project as a research participant (RP) and together we collaborated on the creation of an original ‘Reality Theatre’ play entitled *Suneet’s Story*. This short play follows a simple narrative structure based loosely on Gustav Freytag’s ‘Pyramid’, adapting each of the plot points to correlate with shifts in presentational style through the ‘Reality Theatre’ modes: documentary, verbatim and (auto)biography.

The ensuing investigation explores, through Practice as Research (PaR), the challenges and opportunities for contemporary theatre makers wishing to represent living private citizens in their work by considering issues surrounding the ethics and legality of approaches to research, ethical value, the generation and ownership of material, social and political intent, notions of personhood, truth and truthfulness, and the degrees to which lived experience can ever be authentically represented. All aspects of this study are to be transparent and held up to scrutiny in order to generate findings that will inform future theatre-making practice.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2010 Professor Mary Luckhurst cited an “explosion of interest” in representing real people on stage and screen (Cantrell and Luckhurst, p.1). In British theatre this interest has intensified in subsequent years with plays including, in chronological order: *The Riots* (Slovo, 2011), *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* (Price, 2012), *The Events* (Greig, 2013), *King Charles III* (Bartlett, 2014), *An Evening with Lucian Freud* (Foley, 2015), *Don't Leave Me Now* (Daniels, 2016), *Quiz* (Graham, 2017), *Touching the Void* (Greig, 2018), *A Very Expensive Poison* (Prebble, 2019) and *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* (Hare, 2020)¹. These plays typically concern cultural and aristocratic figures - such as Prince Charles - people collectively and individually involved in newsworthy events - such as the London Riots - and people impacted by well-known issues within society, such as dementia - as is the case in *Don't Leave Me Now*. Whilst the rise in interest that Luckhurst identified has continued, little has been done to examine this phenomenon in terms of ethics and legality from the perspective of the whole theatrical process i.e. creation, performance and reflection, and in particular when dealing with living subjects who are not public figures and with life stories which are not in the public domain.

The practical end-product of this study is *Suneet's Story* (Appendix iii); a short ‘Reality Theatre’² play about a Scottish Sikh woman who is a private citizen, recounting personal details of a marriage engagement in 2013-14 which was called off due to family disapproval. The process by which this play, as the audience saw it when performed (via Zoom) came about - through collaboration with the research participant

¹ See Appendix i for a more expansive list of British ‘Reality Theatre’ plays produced between 2010-2020.

² The term ‘Reality Theatre’ comes from Caroline Wake’s *Verbatim: Staging Memory and Community* (2010) and is used as an umbrella term for: autobiographical, community, verbatim, documentary, tribunal and history plays.

(Suneet), as well as the actress who portrayed her (Gurpreet) - illustrates the ethical and legal challenges and opportunities referred to in the research question.

Prior practice on creating an original play entitled *The Inferno Kid* (Appendix viii), based on a then-living person - Tom Billington (1958-2018) - raised my awareness of many issues with regard to 'ethical stress' (Luckhurst, 2011) - a term to which Luckhurst does not attach a fixed definition but equates to an increased sense of responsibility when representing real people in performance (p.135) - and even about the boundaries of legality when creating a piece of 'Reality Theatre'. The subject of this play was a retired wrestler, Billington - known professionally as 'The Dynamite Kid' - was, in effect, both a private citizen and a public figure. Once internationally famous, he was at the time of writing disabled and living in social housing in Greater Manchester, his fame and fortune long since gone. My attempts to research his earlier and then-present life without his knowledge or consent, caused me to question and adapt my process in response to the experiences I encountered ethically, and also practically with those with whom I attempted to collaborate. For this reason, when planning *Suneet's Story*, my reading on the subject of 'ethical stress' was essential in informing my practice.

The ethical differences between writing about well-known subjects and private citizens are not of themselves very different. Consent, privacy and truthfulness are features in writing about both groups. However, there is the obvious advantage to the author of easier access to a private citizen, and in terms of truthfulness, it is likely that preliminary discussions will lead to a more in depth understanding of - and empathy with - the subject. In addition, the audience will have less prior knowledge of the

subject, and the value of receiving a performance with fewer preconceived ideas and an open mind is of a different kind to seeing a work about a well-known person.

Gaining the attention of a subject who is not in the public domain and establishing boundaries in which to undertake honest and thorough collaboration, is a challenge which is identified, if not extensively explored, by the work exemplified above. Initially, the issue of privacy which overshadowed and to an extent distorted *The Inferno Kid*, due to the absence of direct collaboration with the subject, demonstrated that the barriers between permissible dramatization and sheer speculation in order to create interest can become blurred and lead to ‘ethical stress’ for those involved. For *Suneet’s Story*, however, the research participant (RP) voluntarily collaborates, and so the legal and ethical distinction between representing a well-known living subject and a private citizen comes into sharp focus.

The primary approach for this study is through Practice as Research (PaR) which Robin Nelson defines as “doing-thinking” (2013, p.11) whereby “insightful practice is submitted as a substantial part of the evidence for a research enquiry” (p.9). Following an inductive line, my focus is on creation, performance and reflection, with the aim of enriching theoretical understanding whilst informing contemporary theatre-making practice.

Theatre & Biography

With the intention of this study being to examine the challenges and opportunities presented in making a play about a private individual, I began my research by reading extensively on how this process compared and contrasted with other kinds of biographical work about living subjects.

Biographical literature is an area rich in commentary on the ethics and legality of dramatising 'life stories' of the famous and infamous. In *Vulnerable Subjects* (2004) G. Thomas Couser explores the ethics of representation in a number of life-writing scenarios where the subjects are unable to have autonomy over the representation of themselves and others in their work - or in work created about them - due to disadvantageous conditions such as having certain kinds of disability and are therefore particularly "vulnerable to misrepresentation or betrayal" (p.7). Couser concludes that strict legal and regulatory 'policing' of life writing - whilst "well intentioned" - can be "excessively burdensome to life writers" and "insufficiently protective of subjects" (p.201). Instead he emphasises the importance of ethics, claiming that "life writing needs to be delicately and carefully nurtured, not coercively controlled" (p.202) and that "protection of subjects may depend as much on the ethos of particular life writers... as on their adherence to professional practices" (p.201). In more commercial fields, the success of 'unauthorised biographies', such as Andrew O'Hagen's 2011 biography of Julian Assange, gives rise to an ambiguous public response. On one hand, such books sell in their tens of thousands, which demonstrates that such accounts - which claim a disconnection between the public image of a well-known person and their private behaviour - have transgressive appeal. On the other hand, there is potential for legal redress if information is unverifiable, as was the case with O'Hagen's biography which apparently began with Assange's full co-operation, but from which he withdrew his approval when the material began to displease him (Addley, 2014).

It became clear through my initial reading that making a piece of theatre about a living subject and a particular period in their life, which is current and continuing to develop, may serve a variety of purposes, but it is not the same as writing a biography,

or historical account - although some of the ethical challenges are similar. The level of scrutiny to which live performances are subject is probably no greater, but it is scrutiny of a different kind. It can be argued that a greater degree of 'trust' is required from an audience when watching the presentation of a life on stage than in the recounting of the events of a life as written text alone. Ursula Canton supports this view by citing an "an increased willingness on the part of the audience to extend the high degree of 'authenticity' to the play's content" (2008, p.322). Canton suggests that this may be due to the immediacy and focus of the theatrical act and the form of theatre, which prevents, or resists, retrospection and review. The audience, and the actors, are 'in the moment', and the 'truth' of the content cannot, in that moment at least, be authenticated or disproved. Therefore, the mutual trust issue becomes magnified, as does the ethical underpinning of the theatre maker's process. In Chapter 3 of her thesis *The Use of Biographical Material in Contemporary British Theatre* (2007) Canton explores the distinctions between dramatic and prose biography, and cites: collective authorship, direct presentation and, perhaps most significantly, the shared three dimensional space between author(s), actor(s) and audience as the main sources of difference - and it is in these areas where the audience's trust is anchored. It is possible for more retrospective fact checking with written biographical text, and there is typically more transparency of research and due diligence in gathering the information than in a live production of a play. Whilst the 'truthfulness' of a live event can be interrogated internally, in the moment, by the audience, and even by the theatre-maker(s), this is done without interrupting the process of performance, so it is likely to be retrospective of the whole work. By contrast, a written text containing the same or similar information can be reviewed intermittently during the reading process, and the effect of this may interrupt

the experience or not, depending on the preference of the individual reader. There may also be the potential for contesting ‘facts’ even where the sources are reliable due to the “culturally, temporally and individually located perspective” of different biographical accounts (Canton, 2007, p.39). However, in a piece of live theatre, the ethical aspect of its production involves ‘trust’ in both the process and the ‘producer’ as being reliable, and in not misleading the audience by sensationalising or distorting the ‘truth’ or factual basis of an event to meet the demands of the dramatic form.

Film is another area with an abundance of discourse on the representation of lived experience. For example, Dennis Bingham’s *Whose Lives are they Anyway?* (2010) approaches representation specifically through the medium of film and analyses a range of biopics varying in style and genre, unpicking truth from cultural mythology whilst cataloguing the evolution of this cinematic phenomenon. However the distinctions between recorded film and live theatre expand on those of written text and live theatre and help give my research a unique ethical dimension - a claim which can be seen to be substantiated by Peggy Phelan’s assertion that in theatre “a performance’s only life is in the present” (1993, p.146) and that it is its ‘liveness’ that separates it from its mediatised counterparts; television and film. This view - whilst vehemently challenged by Philip Auslander in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999) - is positively reaffirmed by Stephen Bottoms who claims that there is “a mythology specific to theatre - that of presence” (2006, p.59).

Another distinction of live theatre is its malleability. In the case of presenting an account of a real life at a particular moment in time, there is scope to modify what is seen and said in the performance to reflect changes and developments - and should changes and adaptations be necessary, they can be added or omitted with greater ease

and facility. This contrasts with other mediums where once the material is made it creates a preserved record which becomes more difficult to change. This may also apply to changes in the social context, as well as in the character(s) themselves. Where plays become published texts they are, however, in the same category as biography and film and therefore the written word, as distinct from the spoken word, becomes fixed at a moment in time, and resistant to modification. The source material may also change over time, and the written text and the information conveyed in it and by it may become subject to revision. A heightened example of this can be seen in *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* (Price, 2012), in which the title itself, as it now stands, could be said to 'lead' the reader of the script or the audience of the play to an expectation to which the work no longer aligns, since following gender reassignment Bradley Manning has now become Chelsea Manning. However, the more 'flexible' form of live theatre allows for organic change through performance, and can therefore arguably maintain more relevance. A performance such as *Suneet's Story*, for example, where the subject is still living and at an age - twenty seven at the start of our collaboration - where the events being depicted and interpreted still have real-time consequences, may contain within its scope time to revisit and reflect upon the events and the feelings which have occurred.

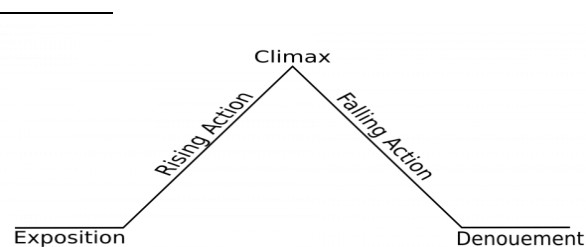
In this PaR project, the alignment with Freytag's 'Pyramid'³ and Wake's 'Reality Theatre' modes encompasses the plasticity of text presented / projected as

³ Freytag's 'Pyramid' is a linear narrative model of storytelling for tragedy developed by German novelist and playwright Gustav Freytag (1816-1895). It sets out the five key stages of a story: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action and Denouement:

‘written’ text in the first part of the performance, the static documentary form of the recorded / narrated content by the actual subject of the play (Suneet), and the subsequent more interpretive stages in which the actual words remain spoken by an actress (Gurpreet), and finally a substantially dramatized scene illustrating the creative input of myself as the theatre maker. Each of these stages may, in practical terms, be changed and modified, but the ‘Pyramid’ narrative structure, with each stage linked to the next, can remain visible, and therefore enable the ‘story’ retain its ‘truth’.

‘Reality Theatre’

In the discipline of theatre, study directly related representing lived experience is far less familiar territory than it is in written biography and film. Tom Cantrell and Mary Luckhurst’s *Playing For Real* (2010), a collection of transcripts of interviews with actors reflecting on various aspects of their process when portraying real people on stage and screen, is a useful starting point. The issues surrounding the presentation of a character such as Robert Mugabe, for example, are discussed in Cantrell’s interview with Joseph Mydell (pp.116-123) who played the title role in Fraser Graces’ *Breakfast with Mugabe* at the RSC’s New Writing Festival in 2005. Mugabe’s increasing paranoia and superstition presented ethical challenges to the public perception of cultural



identity, which had to be addressed as well as the more obvious problem of portraying a living African subject in a European theatre to a largely European audience whose preconceptions of Mugabe were generally considered to be negative. Even Mydell, who expresses a degree of empathy toward Mugabe, refers to him as a “monster” on several occasions in the interview. The implications of this for the research question are that presenting a person whose life has been lived in the public domain encompasses ethical challenges distinct from those experienced by both actor and theatre maker when working with private citizens. The problem of presentation is heightened in the case of presenting a public figure such as Mugabe, whose life as a prominent politician and dictator has been widely discussed and largely censured in the European press. The events of his life, real and reported, inspire not only speculation in terms of the facts, but also compromise neutrality and may encourage confirmation bias on the part of the artists, and the audience. This contrasts with the relative freedom, and consequent additional ethical responsibility, offered by making a play about a private individual. Similarly, whether presenting Mugabe as a ‘monster’, or simply as a product of his time and context, the theatre maker will be potentially judged on the cultural stance the work appears to take, as well as the veracity of the details about Mugabe’s life. In contrast, making a play about a person whose political attitudes and life events are not previously known to the public has less potential to draw the audience - or the actor - into bringing existing bias to the execution or reception of the performance. Cantrell and Luckhurst’s study, whilst insightful, is however not specific to live theatre, but also applies to film and television performance, and approaches the subject of representation solely from the perspective of the actor. Furthermore, the words ‘ethics’ and ‘legality’, or derivations thereof, do not feature in any of the questions put to the actors who were interviewed

and I have therefore been required to extrapolate their findings in order to maintain relevance to my research.

Publications uniquely relating to theatre tend to be similarly adjacent to the specific research area addressed in this thesis. Ursula Canton's *Biographical Theatre* (2011), for example, provides a broad overview of issues and considerations but again deals exclusively with well-known historical and contemporary figures and focuses primarily on analysing the contributing factors which have led to the popularity of the biographical form. Caroline Wake's *Verbatim: Staging Memory and Community* (2010), whilst not dealing with the specifics of my own research, provides more direct links and practical approaches to creating biographical work, and does so in relation to theatrical modes: autobiographical, community, verbatim, documentary, tribunal and history - which she describes as distinguishable by "the distance between the actual person and the writer" (p.7). Wake uses the umbrella term 'Reality Theatre' to encompass these modes (p.6) and for the purposes of my study the term 'Reality Theatre' has been adopted and extended to include any form of theatre where living subjects are represented.

Theatre & Law

Although inspiration for this research project came from the experiences I had with the practical and ethical issues encountered when writing *The Inferno Kid* (Appendix viii) - a play about a living, though well known, person - I realised that any preparation for this new project had to be planned in accordance with the protocols of the University of Worcester, and within the legal framework in operation at the time.

To develop my knowledge of relevant aspects of law pertaining to this research project, I studied various Government documents, including the Defamation Act (2013), and the Human Rights Act (1998) - particularly Articles 8 and 10 relating to privacy and freedom of expression. I also read the Government guidelines on how cases of defamation may be accessed by private citizens, and analysed the Data Protection Act (2018) in order to review the adequacy of the law to control and monitor personal information in a developing technological scenario. In addition, I considered the implications of the Theatres Act (1968) for the representation of living persons on stage, and also read the *Analysis of Theatre in England* report (Arts Council, 2016) in which the changing nature and ethos of audience behaviour is reviewed in the light of increased diversity. This report, in particular, informed my thinking by alerting me to the range of theatrical possibilities being exposed through technological advancement and which the law finds difficult to maintain pace with. This applies to popular as well as less commercialised areas of theatre which can be supported by current and emerging technology - such as live streaming performances as well as access to peoples 'personal stories' through their social media accounts. This contains opportunities for the kind of biographical project being undertaken here, where the 'risks' are predominantly ethical rather than legal.

The issue of what can be said, published or otherwise expressed about people is an area of civil, rather than criminal, law primarily concerned with the rights and duties of individuals towards each other and it is dependent on many factors. Defamation, for example, is an action whereby 'serious harm' is caused to one's reputation (Defamation Act 2013). It typically cannot be claimed on someone else's behalf and core arguments in legal defence are 'truth' and 'honest opinion'. The manner and mode in which

something is expressed is also of significance and is typified by the distinction between libel (written) and slander (spoken)⁴ - a distinction which has become clouded in recent years with the evolution of online communication. In addition to legal acts, there are also individual liberties as protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights such as the right to 'private and family life' (Article 8) and the right to 'freedom of expression' (Article 10) which are frequently argued from oppositional standpoints in defamation cases.

A person whose life is depicted on stage is unlikely to seek legal redress if the perspective the performance puts on them is favourable. In the event of an unfavourable representation, a person may consult a solicitor, the Citizens' Advice Bureau, or visit the government website for guidelines on how to open and pursue a civil action case. This existence of a route for complaint and compensation for emotional and reputational harm confirms the potential for creating emotional and reputational damage to the individual(s) depicted. The limits and limitations of demonstrable legal harm are, however, not necessarily the same as those of the ethical considerations.

The lives of private citizens are as complex as those of well-known subjects, and whatever events are shared either in the collaboration process or ultimately with an audience through the performance of the work are not solely the 'property' of the person doing the telling. With *Suneet's Story*, for example, there are ethical implications in how the persons who have impacted upon Suneet's life, as depicted in the play, are represented. However, because the play was performed within an academic context, rather than in a public performance venue, the audience was not truly 'public' and so the opportunities for legal redress for defamation of character by the persons depicted are

⁴ Theatres Act (1968): "For the purposes of the law... the publication of words in the course of the performance of a play shall, subject to Section 7 of this Act, be treated as publication in permanent form."

few, if any. Yet, the ethical dilemmas remain. Suneet's control of the story is what makes it 'Suneet's Story', and clearly as a defined piece of 'Reality Theatre' it can be claimed that it represents events which happened to her, and feelings which she has communicated herself as having felt. The other people depicted in her story, however, did not give their consent to representation, and did not have opportunities to challenge the 'truth' of her recollections. This is a kind of secondary 'ethical stress', provoked by the impact of Suneet's recollected events on family members who may remember them differently, and who have no knowledge and therefore no control. In looking for a 'model' to support and inform practice, this suggests that theatre makers engaging in this kind of collaborative work might consider such potential impact when making decisions about selection and dramatization.

There are also wider societal implications to consider when representing people - real or fictional - in terms of social identity and potential concerns for public safety. The liberalising changes in society which led to the Theatres Act (1968)⁵ and brought about the end of state censorship on British Theatre widened the scope available to the artist and provided an expanding platform for artistic expression. Content however is still subject to indirect control, for example, through concerns for public health and safety relating to the likelihood of public protest, as was the case with Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's *Behzti* (2004) - a fictional play about the traumas that a young Sikh girl and her mother face within their community. *Behzti* (Dishonour) premiered at the Birmingham Rep in December 2004 and was quickly cancelled as a result of violent protest from members of the Sikh community who were offended by the play's explicit content and

⁵ The Licencing Act of 1737 gave the state powers of censorship over all plays in England until the passing of The Theatre's Act of 1968. The Licencing Act was originally put in place by Sir Robert Walpole in response to plays satirising political figures such as himself.

specifically an act of rape which takes place inside a Gurdwara. This sparked national debate around issues of freedom of speech, censorship and multiculturalism.

In the *Analysis of Theatre in England* report (Arts Council, 2016) the medium of theatre is described as being “infinitely malleable” and “responsive to time and place, circumstance and situations”. Having regular commissioned reports of this kind to address changes to funding, audience diversity and changes in social behaviours illustrates the fluidity of the sector and how it constantly adapts to society at large. The law, however, remains typically less responsive to change, and thus control over content is exerted by more indirect means. Therefore, in addition to being clear about current legal parameters there are also many strands of ethics to consider when representing living people in contemporary British theatre.

Theatre & Ethics

For this PaR I was to take a story from a private citizen, who would trust me to use it responsibly in order to make a play. On close reading there appears to be a disconnection between what is enshrined in the law, and what is expected to guide the individual person, particularly the artist, to behave morally and with respect towards their subject(s) and subject matter.

Alasdair Macintyre’s *History of Ethics* (2004) provides a timeline of how ethical issues and the moral systems upholding them have developed in Western society. This informed my understanding of the problems with relativism, and led me to explore the ethical implications of my project through the writings of G. Thomas Couser on vulnerable subjects, and Joanna K. Forstrom on John Locke’s theories of personal identity. Through looking at the evolution from classical, deterministic ethics and

comparing it with the post-Enlightenment emphasis on personal responsibility, and the rise of the self-referential morality of the individual, I also engaged with the introductory works of Simon Blackburn (2003) and Nicholas Ridout (2009), who set out different accounts of the ethical problems relating to the nature of individuals, and the difficulty of representing what is 'real' with integrity. Research into these areas enabled me to work towards forming an ethical alignment and aided me in developing a play which illustrates a counter-narrative to philosopher Galen Strawson - whose belief about the irrelevance of the past in the identity of the individual seemed, and still seems, at odds with what I have experienced in my work. The writings of these scholars, and others with competing beliefs about identity and personhood, influenced my methodology and the direction and nature of my planning and preparation for this PaR.

Before content is even considered, one of the potential differences between purely biographical work and producing a dramatic re-telling of a life on stage is that of presenting the actual direct speech of the subject. In *Suneet's Story*, the RP's reported / 'textualised' speech - direct speech presented by themselves and the actor (Gurpreet) speaking the same words - and the presentation of imagined speech and interaction resulting from what has been said, are all exemplified through the narrative 'Pyramid' structure I followed. The whole piece becomes, therefore, an exhibition of different ways of presenting what is 'true', with each escalating creative 'stage' intended to lend authenticity to the next. The verbatim speech, which evolved through the creative process into imagined speech, is a different process from narrating a series of events or quoting or reporting what was - rather than what may have been - actually said.

Verbatim theatre, as initially defined by Derek Paget, is: "a form of theatre firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with 'ordinary'

people done in the context of research” (1987, p.317). Verbatim Theatre has since evolved to mean a diversity of things involving direct speech presented in different ways. The main difference between presenting what is said, and moving beyond it into a more creative, imagined form, is the ethical justification for doing so.

If the theatre maker selects the subject and devises the work, they have done so deliberately and will likely have some idea, before starting the project, of the intended value of the finished product. During the investigative stages which precede the process of making a piece of theatre it may be necessary to research details not in the public domain and to therefore infringe the spirit, if not the letter, of an individual’s expectations of privacy. In a research project such as *Suneet’s Story* which has the potential to infringe the privacy of a living subject, consent and a binding agreement to respect any information acquired in the course of the research are all essential to the agreement of the institution to accommodate the project (Appendix vii). As a piece of academic research, any person whose life is being made the subject of a devised piece of theatre has to be assured under the Ethics Policy of the university that the information obtained will be respected. In the case of professional theatre, however, where the life of the subject is a potential source of financial or creative gains, the ethical considerations are different due to the potential for defamation in front of a wider public audience and this is one of the main reasons why such work is often accompanied by legal disclaimers. For example, in the published text of *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* (Price, 2012) the author has included the following disclaimer:

This play is a fictional account which has been inspired by a true story. The incidents, characters and timelines have been changed for dramatic purposes. In some cases, fictitious characters and incidents have been added to the plot, and the words are those imagined by the author. The play should not be understood as a biography or any other factual account.

Such disclaimers are often used to indemnify authors of material which has clearly been inspired by real events and real people.

The calculation of risk, endemic to the production of any piece of art which has a potential impact on the right to privacy of a subject balanced against a perceived wider public, or even individual, ‘good’, is present in almost every line of text in *Suneet’s Story*. The ethical considerations stray beyond the stated boundaries and recommendations set out in the University of Worcester’s Research Ethics Policy (2018). This project concerns a private citizen, and has been undertaken under strict guidelines, but the voluntary nature of the collaboration and the restricted scope of the performance do not exonerate either the theatre maker or the subject from the responsibility of maintaining mutual respect and a climate of truthfulness.

Uniting both commercial and non-commercial contexts, the definition of ‘truthfulness’ remains crucial, as is clarity about the range of people to whom the production will be exposed. If art has intrinsic value, the question of the *nature* of the value - commercial, didactic or simply private - is important to establish. The question of how many people, to what purpose, and with what intended value, the work is to be shown is a philosophical, as well as a logistical, issue. A reference to the Utilitarian notion of justification may apply here, at least as a consideration.

John Stuart Mill devised the ‘Principle of Utility’ in response to views of ethics which earlier philosophers such as Immanuel Kant promoted through the idea that right and wrong were absolutes, independent of context and motive (Crisp, 1997). Mill’s view that the moral status of an action could be evaluated by the level of ‘good’ achieved by it, and the number of people who benefitted from it, was explored in his

book, *Utilitarianism* (1863), and has relevance to the present project - and to the ethical issues surrounding biographical writing across all forms and genres. In general, on a scale of harms and benefits, the theory - and the artistic work itself - may be usefully tested by this formula, and some delineation of its moral status arrived at, or at least discussed when making decisions about what, where and when it may be justified to compromise the privacy of a subject, and the integrity of the production and the product.

In Chapter 2, Part 1 of *Utilitarianism* (2001, pp.6-26) Mill sets out a taxonomy of pleasures: higher pleasures, leading to a higher good, and lesser pleasures, which simply offer short term gratification without any lasting impact on social or individual 'good'. This may have been an artificial way of qualifying what 'good' means, but even without the philosophical language and framework, it can be observed that it means different things to different people. Happiness, or pleasure, may for example, be the consequence of the devising process on the part of the playwright / theatre maker and the actors involved, who may or may not outnumber the physical audience.

The presentation of *Suneet's Story* may, or may not, satisfy the Utilitarian ideal of providing the 'greatest happiness to the greatest number of people', and whether this is the case could be built into a model to which writers who seek to represent the truth of the life of a private individual could refer. Given the 'cost' in terms of potentially infringing the privacy of the subject, even with their actual or assumed consent and co-operation, it seems important for writers to consider the 'benefits' of devising and presenting a piece in which details of somebody's life are revealed, possibly speculated about or even deliberately left out or hidden for artistic reasons, or simply for the purpose of discretion.

In the preparatory interviews and conversations which form the basis for *Suneet's Story*, there were episodes in which the emotions recalled in the course of talking retrospectively about what she had experienced aroused strong emotion in Suneet. These were not counselling sessions, and the academic purpose of them was never compromised. However, she did remark from time to time that talking about her experiences to somebody who did not know her well enabled her to process what had happened, and sometimes even to change her own perspective about it.

One of the issues around 'ethical stress' (Luckhurst, 2011) seems to be connected with the potential for the situation, particularly at the preparatory level, to become cathartic for the subject as well as for the potential audience. A holistic interpretation of what is providing 'good' and to whom might accommodate this possibility. In the sense that Mill was offering a formula to apply to situations and actions which bring about 'good', Suneet's wellbeing may have been enhanced by her disclosures. However, had such recollections been painful and remained unresolved for her, there may have been issues of responsibility and harm-limitation for me as the listener, and the potential 'exploiter' of her story. As an exemplary formulation of a 'model' for practice of this kind, which may provoke practitioners to proceed with caution when interviewing subjects, this project seeks to present a situation and to explore its challenges and opportunities.

The principle of utility may also come into conflict with other benchmarks of 'value' should a work go on to achieve commercial success - although the value of the work in terms of its fulfilment as a didactic instrument may or not be conditional upon this. A piece of theatre devised around the life of a particular living subject is unlikely to provide 'happiness' in terms of material advantage to the author(s) of the piece unless

the subject is well known in the public domain, in which case to add any ‘new’ perspective may invite controversy and initiate legal risk. However, the lives of more private ‘real’ individuals, as distinct from private ‘fictional’ ones, may be insufficiently interesting to attract notable commercial attention - and yet this would not necessarily diminish the ‘value’ of the work in other respects.

Mill seems to struggle with the notion of ‘happiness’, and not just in terms of the extent to which it equates to ‘good’. In the context of this study, and the ethical considerations surrounding research, as well as practice, the motive or the ‘value’ of the work produced is an aspect of both the particular project, and what it might reveal about similar projects in the future. In Utilitarian terms, Mill’s formula may be applied to the choice of subject at the outset, consciously or unconsciously, by the author: what is the value, or ‘good, to be gained from the piece, and whether it justifies the means selected for creating it.

The intention to produce ‘value’ is an interesting starting point for the theatre maker in considering whether developing potentially sensitive work serves a worthwhile purpose. This brings ethics into focus in terms of how the initial decision to create the work is made. However, if the ‘character’, or the ‘choice’, is ‘good’ as far as one can ascertain, then the resulting work is more likely to have uncertain outcomes if the ‘character’ is a living person due to their potential to change over time. Therefore, built into the ethical scaffolding supporting the project should be an acknowledgement that the character - being alive - has the capacity and the right to change over time, and that the direction of development both in the narrative and in the evolution of the was character may be uncertain. An additional ethical concern encountered in this project surrounds having a white male retelling and directing the story of an Asian woman. This

was something that had not occurred to me initially, but through discussion with my supervisor it soon became apparent that it may be an avenue to explore on the basis of race, gender and culture.

An acknowledgment of potential problems which may arise when working across racial boundaries, such as stereotyping, or ignorance towards cultural practices, may be appropriate in the course of this study. However, this is a collaborative work, and the words used in the script are largely Suneet's own, and the events of her story are presented chronologically as they were related to me. The words of the play, therefore, are more authentic to her voice and in turn her culture than they may have been had the play been a work of fiction. This is not to say that she is intentionally representing anything more than herself as an individual, despite the fact that arranged marriage and oppression of women within families, such as parental coercion and control, are issues which are widely regarded as problematic within Indian culture.

Notions of Personhood

Views on personhood and identity as expounded by Enlightenment philosophers like Immanuel Kant and John Locke, are significant to this study, particularly in the connections they draw between law and ethics. The law, according to Kant, is a negotiated framework which safeguards the security and welfare of citizens (Kant & Gregor, 2017). The moral status of an action, however, is independent of whether the action is legal or not, and relates to an individual's choice, and motive - which, unlike the legal status of the action, can never be known. The law can change, and change can be negotiated - as can be demonstrated in the context of this study by the historical and ongoing changes in legislation which are currently struggling to keep

pace with technology. However, the ethical element of biographical writing - particularly for theatrical performance - is less clear, and presents more potential for risk and harm to the subject, even where the law may be complied with. The legal status of a person, and their 'personhood', or identity, may be connected and may coincide, but they are not the same thing. For the purpose of this study, it is important to consider the contemporary relevance of considering this distinction. Analysis of the subsequent challenges placed on these concepts by recent changes in law such as the Data Protection Act (2018), as well as emerging philosophical views and approaches to performance practice in the wake of postmodernism gives this study distinct contemporary relevance. Also to be considered is the impact of social media on the individual's notion of, or claim to, 'personhood' and privacy. Views on individual identity and the voluntary surrender of personal information are changing rapidly, challenging earlier ideas about research ethics, dramatically altering expectations about how individuals permit themselves to be seen by others.

Examining the issues of control of personal information in the postmodern period, Charles Ess notes that we "tend to take the notion of individual privacy as a positive good that is ethically and politically absolute" (2013, p.260). The informal 'staging' of ones' own life through social media has led to the emergence of personhood as a 'layered phenomenon'. Living individuals operate, as they have always operated, in a wide range of contexts within the same life, and with varying degrees of intimacy. However, the complexity of a life being 'lived', rather than a life being seen in retrospect, is now more visible than ever. In terms of this study, it could be possible to undertake ethically legitimate research prior to making a piece of theatre by curating a wide range of information voluntarily surrendered through social media by a living

individual, even without their knowledge. However, use of this material in performance would be in violation of the subject's rights to privacy, as set out in Article 8 of the Declaration of Human Rights. It would also be in violation of the Terms and Conditions of social media platforms such as Facebook's which clearly states that "you own the intellectual property rights to any material that you publish" (Facebook, 2021). Hence, an individual such as a theatre maker may look at other people's 'material' on an online platform, but cannot claim the right to assimilate it into their own intellectual property, as they would be doing if they incorporated it into a performance. Therefore, far from making the ethical issues involved clearer, the more accessible personal information is to the wider range of recipients the more complex it becomes.

In secular society, the existential notion of personhood is not necessarily tied to a transcendental account, and does not need to be linked to a supposed 'spiritual' identity, but for relational personhood - or the identity one has in society which is defined and recognised by other people - brings an emotional dimension to the representation of oneself, or somebody else's self, in a theatrical or broadly dramatized form to other people (White, 2013). Whether a person is more than the sum of their behaviour, gestures, actions or stated beliefs has never been more difficult to establish, despite - or because of - the way in which we present ourselves being so diverse and so fluid. If a person's identity consists of the individual characteristics others can recognise them by, then the variety of roles any person can assume through social media, or as social media increasingly allows people to assume, is within their control but may be subject to their desire for approval and conformity. In simpler terms, people are becoming more enabled through technology to represent themselves as they prefer to be seen and recognised, and, knowing that this is the case for themselves, what they

believe about the truthfulness of other people's accounts of themselves may be compromised. For the theatre maker attempting to mine social and print media for information with which to create a 'truthful' account or narrative about a living subject, there are caveats which cannot be ignored.

Humans adapt their behaviour according to context. Linguistic code switching and social convergence is by no means a modern phenomenon. However, the digital age has made individuals and individualism more visible, but no less elusive. A theatre maker establishing a particular perspective through which they want the subject of their work to be seen is faced with a diversity of self-disclosed information through which they will incur some degree of ethical risk by selecting and editing. Devising a play about a living person of any age, at a particular point in their lives, is working against time and space. Research over time may be continually compromised simply by the character's situation, views or social context changing.

Authorship, Creative Licence & 'Truthfulness'

It is not enough for an author to simply ensure that a work is not infringing the law, and to claim that if this is the case, they can gain information and adapt it at will to make a piece of theatre. The changing definitions of 'personhood', as introduced above, directs potential authors of life writing to the need for an ethical framework which is specific to this area of theatre making, which distinguishes it from other forms of biographical work, and which establishes principles which transcend the constantly changing capacity of technology, and the evolving expectations of private individuals. This ethical framework, it will be suggested, should supersede the legislative and institutional parameters which necessarily evolve over time in order to frame and

control the changing technological landscape. The need to control and monitor artistic activity, particularly in theatre making, cannot remain constant as both the theatre making process and the context in which it is undertaken are malleable. Therefore, the ethical baselines of trust, honesty and integrity should necessarily be incumbent on the artist themselves.

If representing living persons on stage and adapting not only their life events but also their physical ‘person’ and their social context, is ethically problematic, this does not mean that the ethical issues cannot be resolved - and on a ‘case by case’ basis, current projects do appear to resolve them. There are successful representations of living persons which have received acclaim, and which are considered to have fairly - or at least lawfully - represented things which have happened. For example, Tim Price’s *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* (2012) is an impressionistic semi-biographical account of the life of the Welsh-born US soldier who was imprisoned in 2010 for disclosing classified information to WikiLeaks about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Welsh playwright, Price, clearly aligns his sympathy with the titular protagonist and liberally blurs fact with fiction to provide an exposé of the injustices inflicted on Manning in both childhood and adulthood. Price stated that the play “is not and could not be a straight biographical play” (*Broad Street Review*, 2016) as Manning was in solitary confinement awaiting trial at the time. This illustrates the difficulty - legal and ethical - of creating theatre and publishing play texts about ongoing situations and emerging information which may impact on the perceived ‘truthfulness’ of the work. This difficulty was brought even more sharply into focus when Bradley Manning became Chelsea Manning in 2013, only a year after the play was originally produced.

The extent to which creative licence can be used - particularly to illustrate wider social issues - is various and dependent on context. Successive decades of social change and the rapid emergence of enabling technology have all impacted on what people can and do say to and about each other to the extent that reactive legislation has less control than ever over what can be represented.

Although the shared understanding of what constitutes 'truthfulness' is continually challenged by the mediating role of social media, it is different for the theatre maker. A person may represent themselves however they please, provided they do not profit fraudulently from it, but if somebody else represents them - or represents a 'creative', mediated take on what they imagine them to be - it raises broader ethical issues, whether commercial gain is made from the result or not. The issue of who is in control of the subject's 'personhood' is not just a contemporary question, although this study has been undertaken with a view to the practical aspect of it at least being explored in order to address a contemporary issue.

A parallel could be drawn between the need for this proposed ethical framework, and the historical philosophical struggle between moral relativism and moral absolutism. The ethical issues around personhood, consent and appropriation seem, in the light of current academic research, to be too complex to be reduced to a set of Arts Council 'guidelines', the parameters of the Data Protection Act (2018), and the application of the Theatres Act (1968). Regulation of itself will not necessarily ensure that the process of making theatre about living persons is undertaken respectfully. Similarly, even the requirements of the ethical standards mechanisms of the University, such as the Ethics Review Board, cannot ensure uniform levels of compliance, although it can and does seek to monitor practice and eliminate abuse. The overarching need for

‘truthfulness’, if it is to be anything more than an aspirational form of words, cannot be satisfied simply by eliminating non-compliance. The question of how ‘Reality Theatre’ involving living persons not in the public domain may challenge both the letter of the law, and the ethical parameters around privacy and consent which the law remains inadequate to control, is central to the research question. The challenges and opportunities placed before the author / theatre maker may have a variety of clear, and less clear, impacts upon the integrity of the play being made.

If the formal, written constraints are becoming less effective over time with the advance of social media and technology because they cannot keep up with the pace at which it is moving, then the need to look to more absolute, abstract concepts of ethical value and behaviours appears to be becoming more urgent. Even if the law had the capacity to adapt more quickly to protect individual privacy and to prevent exploitation of personal information, the level of compliance would remain uncertain in view of the diversity of outlets for performance and publication. Compliance with the law, or with the guidelines of academic institutions, may be an act of self-protection for those involved in the creation of the work, and protection for the subject, but conformity may not represent an ethical choice, apart from the choice to conform. The choice of subject, and the direction of the project over time, requires continual ethical vigilance to avoid harm, and to create the delicate balance of risk, trust and open-ness which needs to exist between author and living subject in order to produce the anticipated value. Thus, in the face of the inadequacy of regulation, personal ethical values are important. In these matters, the law is a blunt instrument to control the excesses of moral relativism, but it cannot be invoked to police the intentions of the theatre maker - or for that matter the subject, or the intended audience.

2. METHODOLOGY

The dual role of researcher and artist is complex and multifaceted and so to enrich my critical understanding of how I - as researcher and theatre maker in this PaR - engage with living subjects and their 'life stories', I employ a blended approach to methodology which is underpinned by the Research Ethics Policy of the University of Worcester. Combining aspects of Grounded Theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967), Practice as Research (Nelson, 2013) and qualitative research, I have conducted my study through the development of an original piece of theatre constructed around the frameworks of Freytag's 'Pyramid' and Wake's 'Reality Theatre' modes.

Research Ethics

Research ethics, including those involved in this study, are set out by institutions and it is within clearly understood parameters that information about individuals may be responsibly gathered and used. The ethical challenges placed on research as set out in this study conform to the requirements of the institution under whose supervision it is being undertaken: University of Worcester. It has this in common with all university research, and its ethical underpinning is a good starting point for the development of a framework. It is hoped that any obstacles encountered in the course of the practical and theoretical work being undertaken will highlight the difficulties which may be encountered by artists working in the genre of 'Reality Theatre'.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is a methodology first established by American sociologists Glaser and Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). It has since spurred many iterations but essentially is concerned with human behaviours and interactions and requires a qualitative and inductive approach. The main aim of Grounded Theory is to generate new theories rather than validate existing ones (Glaser and Strauss, 2017, p.18) and it is therefore an appropriate starting point for a study such as this where the aim is to develop insight into practical experiences.

Practice as Research

Robin Nelson defines Practice as Research (PaR) as a study that “involves a research project in which practice is a key method of enquiry and where, in respect to the arts, a practice is submitted as substantial evidence” (2013, pp.8-9). For this study, the ‘praxis’ - “theory imbricated within practice” (p.5) - is explored through *Suneet’s Story*, a short play developed from the true story of a living subject. Taking a PaR approach is one which I feel is necessary in order to arrive at what Patricia Leavy (2014, p.3) describes as a “holistic integrated perspective”. For example, the ‘ethical stress’ I personally felt when working on my previous play, *The Inferno Kid*, could not have been reflected on fully, and in turn would not have inspired this MPhil study, had it not been experienced first-hand.

This PaR contributes to knowledge by providing a practice model for future theatrical processes which widens the scope of possible, meaningful works which explore and present the lived experiences of people whose lives are not in the public domain. The choices of subject are relatable and relevant to audiences who are less

interested in celebrity and stereotypes. This may feed into traditional biographically based theatre making as a complementary form, in which empathy and personal identification with character and situation are prioritised in the experience. The wider inclusion of the audience in the experience, as a reactive and reflective part of the process, challenges the definition of ‘performance’ and encourages participative and proactive involvement. PaR, in this respect, exemplifies and affirms this development. Identification and assimilation is encouraged, because the researcher’s empathy with the subject creates and extends the dialogue from a simple giving and receiving of information and the development of a play based on it, outwards to the organic emergence of a technique, or a variety of technical possibilities, which can broaden the range of expectations of theatre.

Research practice for this project falls into two categories: process and performance. A particular focus is on how material is gathered, interpreted and (re)presented within a live theatre context and an analysis of the reflections before, during and after the project’s completion. Furthermore, following an inductive path, the research findings have been documented and analysed concurrently in relation to my own emerging ethical stance and approach to performance practice.

One key aspect of this PaR is ethics and authorship as it relates to the subject’s ownership of the story and the theatre maker’s imperative to shape the story to engage an audience, and how this was negotiated. In the case of *Suneet’s Story*, there is an acknowledgment of co-authorship, and there were agreed parameters of our working relationship. Suneet’s disclosure of the events in her life to me was open and she agreed to respond to my questions but did not want to have input into the creative process

beyond that. As a result, there were no negative tensions in the process of making the play, and I ensured that she would have access to the adaptations any time she wanted.

Qualitative Research

To shed light on what is fundamentally an interpretive practice, I have adopted the role of qualitative researcher as ‘bricoleur’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.5) - piecing together a range of research methods including in-depth evaluation and analysis of primary and secondary materials such as academic publications and legal documentation and well as reference to contemporary plays and playwrights working within the ‘Reality Theatre’ genre. This has supplemented my performance methods and together collectively enables the research to fulfil what Douglas and Carless define as being the purpose of PaR by resulting in “unique insights into human experiences and social issues” (2013, p.5). In performance there is always a “dialectic at work that is spurred by a culture’s structure of feeling and its artistic expressions, meandering between aesthetic distance and verisimilitude” (Schulze, p.6). Therefore, among the ‘insights’ gained through this PaR - aside from the cultural and psychological aspects of the subject’s story itself - include how the use of different ‘Reality Theatre’ modes impact on the ‘truthfulness’ of the work as seen and accepted by an audience. The Q&A discussion for *Suneet’s Story*, which involved interaction between the audience, subject, actor and theatre maker, was intended to identify what, if any, impact the implementation of these modes had on the work in its reflection of human experience.

Research Participants

The subject of this study - Suneet - assumed the role of research participant (RP) and as such was made fully aware of the process and practice being undertaken and their contribution has been sought throughout all stages of the work. The RP was initially approached and presented with a written outline of the project and a questionnaire asking why they were interested in participating. Further discussion then took place in order to establish a mutually agreed methodology relating to modes of questioning as well as to specific content parameters.

As current legislation on data protection laws applies to any research where personal information is processed it was also necessary to demonstrate legal compliance. This was done via a consent form (Appendix vii) and the featuring of a legal disclaimer accompanying the presentation of the work. There was also the option of pseudonymising names as well as providing the RP with the opportunity to opt-out at any stage in the process.

Interviews

An integral aspect of this practice was the interview methods and questioning techniques adopted. As Deirdre Heddon (2008, p.130) observes, “in addition to sourcing and selecting interviewees, verbatim practitioners also construct the questions that are then posed, arguably thereby prompting certain answers”. Whilst it is improbable for one to ever be entirely objective, it is not the purpose of this praxis to push any particular ideological viewpoint but rather to analyse the legal and ethical responsibilities of those involved. Therefore in the interview stage an emphasis was on

open, closed and probing questions rather than leading questions and the RP was free to share as much or as little of their 'life story' as they wished.

In this study, I took from the various accounts a summary of the psychological and professional challenges faced by those with whom I collaborated (RP and actress), and of the opportunities presented within performance to explore and dismantle public perception of characters, and to adapt what was presented to seek out and be continually aware of the pressures which might be placed on the participants and on myself. The play in this study - *Suneet's Story* - arose from a one sided account by the RP recounted in a series of conversations solely with myself. Without the added complication of the subject being in the public domain, and without the diversity of public expectation, more freedom of interpretation may have been possible, but it was important to be aware of the potential for authorial and cultural bias. The practical and administrative parameters of our preparation did change, but were never out of sight. As well as trying to accommodate, or reject, or challenge the expectations of a production team and the expectations of a potential audience, there would be the potentially problematic impact on the subject recollecting a difficult past. Vigilance needed to be exercised about the private emotional 'load' experienced by the character, and by the person 'playing' them.'

Video recordings were made of the interviews with Suneet for documentation purposes, and also to provide an aesthetic model from which to draw performative influence for the actress who would be playing her. In this context the aesthetics of representation are addressed. Beyond attempting to replicate vocal and physical traits there was also the opportunity for performer and RP to actually meet to discuss the

project and its subject matter face to face – which they did on 9th March 2020 (Appendix ii).

Freytag's 'Pyramid' and Wake's 'Reality Theatre'

Drawing on Gustav Freytag's 'Pyramid' model, the narrative of *Suneet's Story* - beginning with exposition - is built upon a linear structure of events as she told them to me, and through the escalation of events which happened to her. The 'Pyramid' structure became initially a framework for constructing a basic tragic narrative, through exposition, rising action, climax – in this case the confrontational encounter with her parents - falling action and denouement, which in this case was the audience's discussion of the play and their opportunity to ask questions of all the people involved at the end of the performance.

The research into 'Reality Theatre' modes - the strengths and weaknesses of using projected text, voice and video recording and real and imagined dialogue - offered the opportunity to present *Suneet's Story* through a variety of different styles, on a framed structure loosely based on Freytag's 'Pyramid'. The issue of 'truthfulness' could then be explored initially through projected text, which invites the audience to see some biographical information Suneet shared (Appendix v & vi), and to consider the content. The next part was to play a recording of Suneet herself, telling part of her story, which was almost a 'documentary' section, contrasting with the text they had seen, and becoming slightly more immersive. Having an actress, Gurpreet, then speak Suneet's words may have led the audience to question the 'truthfulness' of this account when compared with the previous stages. As the performance moved into its final stage, where the imagined but informed confrontation with her parents takes place, the more

'created' nature of the biographical genre was devised to demonstrate how 'truthfulness' could be interpreted whilst retaining the integrity of the project and the responsibility of the theatre maker towards the subject and the audience. The 'factual' text and 'documentary' sections, and the sections where Gurpreet essentially played the part of Suneet, were devised and structured to illustrate the ethical and theatrical dilemmas facing the theatre maker in devising 'Reality Theatre' through exploring a range of its sub-categories. Because Suneet was present throughout - as a member of the audience - and because the play had the immersive element in which the audience knew this, and was invited to discuss the performance with all involved at the end, the exercise had different outcomes for the different participants, but the main focus of the discussion did develop into one about ethics, privacy and 'identity' / personhood.

3. LEGAL PERSPECTIVES

Since the emergence of conventional text-based theatre in Ancient Greece there have always been rules which govern the making of a play and the expectations of an audience. Considered within the context of British theatre, the Licensing Act of 1737 is an appropriate starting point for analysis. The passing of Sir Robert Walpole's Licensing Act was an overtly political reaction against theatre satirising the government - specifically Walpole himself - and it notably placed censorship on, among many things, presenting living people on stage in an "invidious manner" (Canton, 2011, p.3). However, the origins of the idea that people have a right to privacy date, in their modern understanding, from the nineteenth century, and the development of media within the wider public sphere (Richardson, 2017). The contemporary relevance of this can be summarised in three areas. Initially, the current legal provisions have evolved from the Theatres Act (1968), the Defamation Act (2013), the Data Protection Act (2018) and the requirements of the Human Rights Act, Articles 8 and 10. Difficulties are emerging due to the development of social media concerning the enforceability of these laws and rights, as tested through legal cases relating to defamation of character and invasion of privacy. The limitations the law places upon artists and how this relates to commercial exploitation of living persons needs to be balanced against UK law pertaining to freedom of expression. The right to expose wrongdoing as typified by issues surrounding the 'freedom of the press', is vulnerable to the activities of legal enforcement and the complex system of compensation, which effectively may be seen to monetise complaint and to encourage risk aversion on the part of artists, in the commercial and non-commercial sectors.

The aforementioned legal aspects are brought sharply into focus by the practical application of this study. Within the context of the protocols of the institution relating to gaining the formal consent of the subject of the drama, the challenges faced within the practical project are different from those faced in a commercial context, and where there is money to be made and the reputations of the subjects to be considered. Due to the scope enabled to artists by the Theatres Act (1968) - which states that “the licensing authority shall not have power to impose any term, condition or restriction as to the nature of the plays which may be performed under the licence or as to the manner of performing plays thereunder” - it is possible to write and present drama about anybody’s life without presenting it under the guise of fiction. The legal implications may be, and are, subject to scrutiny by the legal advisers of anybody planning to invest in the production, and may have an influence on how, and whether, a production is put on. This is where legal and ethical issues dovetail into each other: if there is a dimension of public interest in a performance, and the likelihood of controversy, this may justify any perceived risk, and may be advanced in mitigation of any action or complaint - as it is with news and documentary.

However, the mediation of authorship adds a dimension to the scenario which places the question beyond the parameters of what is and is not legal, extending the question into one of what is or is not - or may not be - ethical. The theatre maker is engaged in a different activity to the journalist - rather like the portrait artist is doing something different from the photographer. Both processes may be accused of, or even celebrated for, the individual perspectives from which they represent what they see, and what they want the viewer to see. However, the theatre maker, like the portrait artist, may be in a more privileged position due to the fact that they have a wider range of

expectations to match. People coming to see a play are co-operating in and sharing a perspective which is the author's own, selected for the purpose and crafted to present their particular 'authenticity'.

Writing about real persons who have died may invite legal consequences and, if the account is derogatory, hostility, but once a person is dead, the 'facts' from which the drama is derived will not change - although they can of course be open to interpretation and be contested and reconceived if more information comes to light. While people are alive, the level of legal protection depends on the harms which can be proved under the statute, including the right to privacy enshrined in the Human Rights Act. The evolution of social media - and the extent to which platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are responsible for harms and privacy infringements - complicate the administration of the law as it exists at the time of writing, because people can and do disclose and publish 'facts' about themselves and have little control over what others make of the information they get.

In terms of this specific project - *Suneet's Story* - the preparatory discussions were face to face. In addition to this I had access to Suneet's social media which, with her consent, I used to fact check and develop a timeline of her life (Appendix vi). Because some of her recollections of the behaviours of family members and partners were negative, it was important even within this limited context, where no publicity was likely, to minimise any potential harms, either to Suneet herself in the form of reprisals, or to other people connected with her story. Caution over possible claims of defamation of character is an aspect of biographical writing which requires consideration whatever the scope of the project, and although this is Suneet's story and presented as such, it is also a story about other people. The extent to which it is equally important to protect

their name, or their privacy, is a balance which could become a source of ‘ethical stress’, and as such the legal and ethical parameters around writing about other people are important to know and to understand.

The link between emerging legal challenges and philosophy - particularly ethics - is becoming increasingly strong. Truth and falsehood are the core business of both disciplines, and the line between the two notions appears to move and become blurred all the time. If something is truthful, it has to be considered whether it is ‘right’, or necessary, to publish it or express it publicly. In journalism and in prose and film biography, there will be a commercial balance to be established before publication takes place, and in theatre this may also create the same conversation. However, the intervention in, or mediation of, the ‘facts’ - life events, personality, motivation, characterisation - may be said to place a greater burden of responsibility on the artist when making decisions on how to present, represent or appropriate the life of the subject.

The editorship and presentation of the written text for *Suneet’s Story* was a collaborative, negotiated process in which a lengthy series of notes and recordings had been made, and from which much of the presented text was extracted. Similarly, the recording of Suneet’s voice was extracted from a lengthy series of recorded interviews. The challenge in these parts of the play was to retain and convey the ‘truthfulness’ of the recounted events as they had been related, and to crystallise, rather than to simply condense, what had been told.

There was, and is, also a burden of responsibility on the actor, as I have tried to demonstrate in both the preparatory activity leading to Gurpreet’s performance ‘as’ Suneet. The events being related in the section of the play where Gurpreet speaks

Suneet's words are personal events, and the actor is not simply reading the words without expression. In order to convey the emotions which are implied by the words, it was important in the context of the study for actor and subject to meet and to exchange ideas which could contribute to the performance.

More obviously, when the climax of the narrative was initially improvised at some length, and in different ways, throughout the rehearsal/preparatory period, the responsibility for how far to adhere to the facts as recollected by Suneet, and how far to venture beyond them, was initially my own as the theatre maker. However, in collaboration with the actor, the scene developed, and the performance seen by the audience for the purpose of the study may, if repeated, develop further over time. This is an opportunity to retain relevance and to have the freedom to modify and adapt in response to audience reaction and changes which may take place in the actual subject's recollection in retrospect. That the work - as in *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* - remains recognisably 'the work', retaining its identity whilst being capable of being re-interpreted and re-imagined in the light of change, is important in the 'answering' of the research question. As *Suneet's Story* - in the context of this study - was a restricted, non-commercial piece, the legal constraints had theoretical, rather than practical, impact on the project, though there was a duty to explore and offer an account and definition of what they are and might become. However, the ethical considerations which had to be accommodated, including the consensual element, and the dangers and advantages of retaining malleability of form, were and are, all the greater for the scope afforded by creating, or representing, the story of a living, private subject's life.

4. ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

Since Aristotle, successive societies have sought to legislate and control human behaviour by means of different ethical frameworks, for example: religious and secular laws and expectations. Alistair MacIntyre, who acknowledges this diversity, believes that any study of moral philosophy should therefore be done in light of social and historical contexts, and distinguishes between ‘Ancient’ and ‘Modern’ ethics by stating that the former was generally concerned with answering the question: “What am I to do if I am to fare well?” and the latter with: “What ought I to do if I am to do right?” (2004, p.81). Within a contemporary theatrical context, when applied to the representation of living people, it is therefore pertinent to consider the nature of ‘doing right’. A further contextualised consideration might be: to whom one has a responsibility to ‘do right’ by?

Even if one agrees with MacIntyre’s characterisation of ‘Modern ethics’, and accepts the Kantian view that there is a way to act which constitutes ‘doing right’ (Kant & Gregor, 2017), the diversity of interests involved in representing living subjects presents moral complexity. Tom Cantrell’s interview with Sir Ian McKellen (Cantrell and Luckhurst, 2010), for example, in which McKellen talks about the difficulties of ‘playing himself’ in Ricky Gervais’ television sitcom *Extras*, is a light-hearted but pertinent illustration of the problems encountered by representation, and by those who seek to represent living subjects. McKellen’s remark: “It was scary how I could land on those bits of myself that were all too appropriate for this pompous idiot” (p.107) highlights the selective nature of representation for actors as they are typically required to enhance certain aspects or ‘bits’ of a character to meet the demands of a production. However, is it ‘doing right’ by an audience to present them with a portrayal of a

character which causes them to question their preconceptions? Or to select and appropriate aspects of a subject's life and behaviour in order to make an authorial point? Whether the subject finds the representation in accordance with his or her own perspective of him or herself is possibly, or possibly not, ethically significant. Even a subject playing the part of himself, like McKellen, may not be 'doing right' in terms of confirming, or confounding, the views of others about him.

There are debated scholarly distinctions between ethics and morality. Both words are derived from the Greek 'ethos', albeit the latter via way of the Latin translation 'moralis'. Ethos has two meanings: in the singular it relates to character (as in good or bad people) and in the plural it relates to custom (as in good or bad actions). For Aristotle, who connects the two, "ethics rests in the character of an individual" (Ridout, 2009, p.3). In the introduction to his translation of the *Poetics* (1996), Malcolm Heath affirms this view by stating that, "when Aristotle is talking about character he is not talking about the quirks and details of someone's individuality, but about the structure of their moral dispositions in so far as it becomes clear through what they say and do" (p.xliii). In this sense ones actions determine ones character.

The ethical dilemma of doing right by people inevitably faces contemporary theatre makers creating drama from the 'life stories' of living people. For example, in his play *The Events* (2013) David Greig specifically opted not to make a documentary drama of the real events on which the play is based: a mass shooting in Norway in 2011. In an interview with BBC Writers Room (2014) to promote a radio adaptation of *The Events*, Greig explains that he decided to re-imagine the 'events' and relocate his story to Scotland out of respect for the living descendants of the victims. Here Greig claims to have acted in accordance with his own moral principles by anonymising the people and

events that inspired the work. In the same interview he also provides insight into the 'ethical stress' he encountered when developing the play: "I didn't however interview survivors at that point as it was only three or four months after the shootings and it felt too raw and close. I was tremendously worried about it being seen as exploitative or voyeuristic and shyed away from interviewing survivors as that was what everyone else was doing." Whilst his intentions for the play appear to have been to examine moral and social dilemmas, his 'based on a true story' acknowledgement of source material also echoes theatre and film practices grounded in commercial priorities and, as such, could be seen as something more akin to a legal disclaimer. Whilst this would be a pessimistic view of Greig's intentions, it aligns the two key components central to this study: ethics and legality.

For a human being cannot see into the depths of his own heart so as to be quite certain in every single action of the purity of his moral intention and the sincerity of his disposition, even when he has no doubt about the legality of his action. (Kant & Gregor, 2017, p.166)

In the above quote Kant draws a clear connection between ethics and legality, and suggests that there is a problem within human nature rooted in the tendency to self-deceive. He does not dismiss legality as a benchmark for deciding on morally good or bad actions - in fact, he acknowledges that legality exists and can be referred to in the process of making moral decisions. However, theoretically in Kant, and practically in everyday life, the 'purity' of 'moral intention' is at best elusive, and at worst an insincere attempt to appear virtuous to others. In this sense, being a 'person' is more than being a legal entity within a society made up of other legal entities, and we are not always - indeed, according to Kant, we are rarely - what we seem or what we would like to seem. So who, and what, is a 'person', and what is the value of a 'person'?

Furthermore, in terms of the representation of a 'person' in theatre, who has the right to decide whether, and how, to represent a 'person'?

In exploring what constitutes 'intellectual property', seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke advanced the view that a person's working activity, creativity and mental faculties had the same value as the material objects they made or owned. Therefore they could be exploited and appropriated and needed the same level of protection (Forstrom, 2011). For Hegel, 'personhood' was an intrinsic, abstract state of being existing independently of outside, material influences (Schick, 2015). G. Thomas Couser goes further by equating one's genetic code with a written text thereby suggesting that humans, by way of DNA, could be regarded as authors of their own lives (Couser, 2004, pp.165-197) and therefore any non-consensual representation, irrespective of medium, form or genre, could be viewed as a breach of copyright. However, when one views such a stance in relation to determinism a counter argument could be that; "since it is 'all in the genes', the enterprise of ethics becomes hopeless" (Blackburn, 2003, p.38) as our capacity to interpret and act in accordance with our notions of 'right and wrong' are also encoded in our DNA. Another contrasting view is that of analytic philosopher Galen Strawson who holds a 'non-narrativist' perspective of 'the self' which he outlines in *The Unstoried Life* where he proclaims, "I have no clear sense of who or what I am" (2018, p.199). In his article, *Against Narrativity* (2004), he distinguishes more directly between the titular forms of self-experience through what he terms the 'diachronic' (narrativist view) and 'non-diachronic' (non-narrativist view). Arguing against the 'diachronic' whereby "one naturally figures oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future" (p.430) he claims that one's past, present and future selves are distinct from one

another and that the only 'self' one ever truly knows is the one in the immediate present. He also claims that whilst this is not a dismissal of cause and effect, it is non-narrativist as one's life cannot be recounted authentically due to a number of factors including memory being unreliable and revisionist. In considering such views of 'personhood', this study attempts to clarify some of the potential difficulties in applying legislation to the relationship between theatre makers, their subjects, and the expectations of society.

In the discussion about where this project is located in the landscape of modern and postmodern theatre, it is its very resistance to the boundaries of genre and expectation that make it difficult to 'label' or categorise. This work is about a living subject, whose life may be considered unimportant to anyone besides those in the immediate circle of the central character in the different roles of their professional and family life. The ethics operating in the process are separate from, yet integrated into, what is selected and told through the drama, and who the drama is presented to. Underpinning this is the situation of the play within a PaR project in which the recollections of an individual have been mined in order to present a viable piece of drama, and to produce a result. However, the question remains, is it ethical to use the information voluntarily given, in order to illustrate one or several theoretical points?

Writing about an individual, and encouraging reflection and introspection about the nature of personal identity and the consequences of individual moral choices, is at the heart of this project, and is the source of the dilemma suggested in the research question. To present with credibility and authority a representation of a living subject, with their co-operation and a shared intention to create a work of value, is both challenge and opportunity. The range of social roles which one individual inhabits at any moment in their life will to an extent reflect not only their feelings and identity, but

will also reflect the culture or cultures in which their life is situated and to which they are accountable, so producing a truthful account of their individual experience will also produce, and present, an account of the context of that experience.

In postmodern theatre there is more of an emphasis on process over product and that what matters ethically or politically is the form of the play rather than its content.

Therefore presenting *Suneet's Story* in an eclectic fusion of 'Reality Theatre' modes across its linear 'Pyramid' structure gives the work a 'meta' quality which enables the material to be examined more academically in terms of the ethics of representation and therefore creates as a focus for discussion, reflection and evaluation.

5. PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

Prior Practice: Lessons Learnt from *The Inferno Kid*

My initial experience with *The Inferno Kid* (Appendix viii) was one of perceived freedom. Tom Billington, on whom the play was based, had previously been famous, but at the time of writing he was a private citizen. He had released a ghost-written autobiography (*Pure Dynamite*, 1999) and had given interviews to various media outlets where he had discussed details of his professional and personal life. Writing a play based on my reading of a mediated version of his life in the public domain did not appear to me to present any privacy issues in the legal sense. However, I eventually received censure from people in his life, and found myself compelled to change initially the names and eventually the whole direction of the play. This revealed to me how compromised I had actually been due to not having involved Billington in the research for the play, or obtained his consent. It also led me to consider the value of what I had produced, and to learn more about the experiences of other theatre makers who were producing work about living subjects.

High profile living subjects, it appeared to me, were inappropriate as a means of answering the research questions I had started to consider. Apart from the difficulty of gaining access to them, there would also be the challenge of getting to a level of trust where the preservation of their public ‘persona’ may be seen to be at stake. The resulting piece may in turn be predictable, and superficial, and would be competing with a prism of other perspectives in the media. Therefore, for this current study, I turned my attention to finding a subject about whom little was known, even to me at the start of the project, and whose ‘voice’ I could work with. I had to decide whose story to tell, and how to tell it in a way which would illustrate the issues raised in the research question. I

also recognised the importance of creating a work of value to all participants, and not subordinating the subject's authentic story and voice to a series of illustrative exercises.

Towards the end of 2018, I began planning this PaR to trial some of the ideas I had been investigating. I had to consider who was going to be involved, how my research and existing experience of creating theatre would feed into it, and whether the ethics and the objectives of this aspect of my course of study could adequately be met. It started informally, asking friends and colleagues who may have had stories to tell whether they would be willing to collaborate with me. Then the challenge was how to set parameters within the academic regulatory framework, which distinguished the resulting piece from one of a simple re-enacted chat between myself and the subject into a viable piece of PaR which could inform and provoke reflection in an audience.

Current Practice: *Suneet's Story*

Suneet's Story is a linear re-telling of a specific series of events in the RP's life, structured in accordance with the five points of Freytag's 'Pyramid': exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement. Each structural point is marked by a distinct shift in presentational style so that the performance covers a range of Wake's 'Reality Theatre' modes. The exposition, for example, draws its main influence from the documentary mode, whereas the rising action is more rooted in verbatim practice. The final 'denouement' section takes the form of a discussion panel where the audience are invited to ask questions relating to process and performance to those involved in the creation of the piece. Wake's modes were also key to the research, as I was attempting to ascertain whether form had an impact on ethics in relation to 'truthfulness'. Freytag's 'Pyramid' exemplified a further structural model, and was seminal in the decisions

made about which parts of the narrative could be most effectively presented in which mode. The projected text which the audience sees when the play opens is a clear, informative visual statement of a situation. The dialogue and the narrative climax of the imagined scene are crafted to entertain, and to stimulate audience reaction. The reflective Q&A session with the audience and the participants together is unscripted and immersive, moving the play through the narrative framework from the confined nature of a written text to the less restricted medium of open discussion, which still forms part of the story and brings it down to a resolution, or denouement, in which the ‘truthfulness’ to which the project is committed can be interrogated and examined.

Prior reading and research had also given me a clearer stance in relation to my own views of personhood which would inevitably feed into the practical application of my work - most significantly through the view that a living subject and their experiences, captured in a moment or a short period of their ongoing lives, is not a pronouncement on their values and their choices for all time. Just as Billington was still living, and evolving in his life when I was working on *The Inferno Kid*, I knew that when I constructed this new play, the main character would have a past, which may be recounted from their own perspective, a future which could not be predicted, and a present set of choices and emotions which were going to be captured for the stated purpose of producing a piece about a living subject. This led me to consider the non-narrativist view of Strawson, whereby once a person’s experience has receded into the past it ceases to be part of their identity and present a challenge to this through *Suneet’s Story*. As a story maker, a narrativist account of what constitutes a personal identity seems necessary to signpost the direction, and the process, of the project. Through my research I came to see the events and the reactions of the subject, Suneet, as integrated

in order to form a view of her as a whole person which led me to view past events as building blocks intrinsic to one's personhood.

Finding a Research Participant

The decision of who the subject of the play for this research project was to be, and what was going to be selected from their 'story' in order to make the play, was not going to be simple. The subject would need to undertake to work on this project with full knowledge of the purpose, nature and range of what was being attempted. From my experience with *The Inferno Kid* and other plays I have worked on, I realised that even when a project starts with a clear vision of what it sets out to portray and achieve, it can take on a life of its own and end up going in a completely different direction. Managing the expectations of a subject, avoiding offence, and resolving any conflicts which might arise can create a cocktail of fear and hesitancy which made it important to 'tailor' my search for a living subject with a story they were willing to tell.

When I had initially conceived of this research project, I had recently started a new job at a college of Further Education, and my fellow department lecturers had invited me to join their WhatsApp group. I did not know any of them well at this stage, but I posted a request on there outlining what I hoped to do with my study and asked if anybody would be interested in taking part. Only one response came back, and I arranged a meeting with that person, Suneet, who appeared to be fully conversant with why and how this performance project would be made, and was excited about being involved.

Suneet and I taught in the same building and shared an office and so I confirmed before Christmas in 2018 (Appendix ii) that she wanted to do it, and we agreed to meet

in college in the upcoming February half term to film an interview in which she would tell her story. I then showed her the most up to date abstract of my thesis and she signed a consent form (Appendix vi) to confirm that she agreed to have the story she shared with me used as material for this project.

Interview with Suneet

On the day of filming our ‘interview’ I had no idea what Suneet was going to say or what ‘story’ she was going to share. I was also careful not to ask many direct questions as I did not want to influence her in any way. It was filmed in a small classroom, using a DSLR camera and with only the two of us present - although another colleague was in the proximity and aware that we were using the space. The interview lasted about an hour in total, with some questions from me to her towards the end to clarify certain details.

Suneet spoke to camera with confidence, and at length, without much prompting. Despite being only twenty seven at the time, she depicted how her life had taken many turns which had clearly affected her adversely. Her troubled relationship with her parents, their disapproval of her relationships, her marriage and divorce, all fed into an overarching narrative of control and survival.

Suneet is a Scottish Indian woman who was brought up in Falkirk, a town between Edinburgh and Glasgow. Her accent is well-spoken Scottish, staccato and intense, and the stories as she told them formed a coherent linear story of her abusive relationship whilst studying at university, then her long-term relationship with a partner which her parents - traditional Sikh - attempted to prevent, and finally caused to end. She also shared details of a subsequent marriage to another man, with whom she moved

to the Midlands, and which ultimately proved disastrous. At the time of our interview, she had started proceedings to divorce him for adultery. She said that this project was a kind of catharsis for her, at which point I did express caution over committing to it in case things changed and she developed regrets at sharing her experiences - especially as some were still relatively recent. However, she was willing to continue, and has continued to provide support and encouragement, as well as creative input, throughout the development of the work.

Follow-up Questions

After the initial interview we agreed that I could message Suneet via WhatsApp with any follow-up questions about herself or the events in her story and she would reply at a convenient time with answers. Because my enquiries were in the form of messages rather than phone calls, this felt less intrusive, and we agreed that there was no need to respond immediately. She did find the sheer amount of questions I sent, and their apparent irrelevance to her story, puzzling at times. These included things like; ‘What is your favourite film?’, ‘What is your blood type?’ and ‘When did you lose your virginity?’ - with none of the answers likely to find their way into the play itself. I explained that they were to enable me to help develop characterisation for the actress who was going to ‘play’ her, and also because her answers may reveal details which would add to the interest of the story and / or help me to understand certain aspects of it better. Of particular benefit were questions relating to her cultural background and religious upbringing.

This process forms the basis of a template for future character development research prior to writing a play about a living subject (see Appendix v & vi). On this

occasion, I felt that the questions came out sporadically and at random, because they were not prepared from the start but arose during the creative process. The apparent lack of structure in the order in which they were asked may appear unsettling to a subject in similar situations going forward, and so more preparation may give more reassurance to them of the professionalism and quality of the work being created. There were indeed times when Suneet did half-jokingly ask what, for example, her ‘favourite animal’ (camel) had to do with the project, and this encouraged me to be more thorough and structured in my approach going forward.

Structuring the Play

As mentioned, the plan was to take Suneet’s story and to apply Wake’s taxonomy of ‘Reality Theatre’ modes to various parts of it. Therefore, I took particular interest in seeking out details to support parts of the story which would form the basis for some of the strands: (Auto)biographical, Verbatim & Documentary. For example, the opening would consist of a PowerPoint presentation showing various character profile facts about Suneet, in the style of documentary, confirming that she is a real person and providing some basic information about her which is contained within the character profile I created about Suneet as research for the project (Appendix v). In the climactic ‘scene’, the play would culminate in a highly dramatized version of an encounter with her parents, accompanied by her abusive ex-boyfriend, trying to break into the flat she was sharing with her then fiancé, Bav. The stages in between would be crafted to represent examples of verbatim theatre through episodes in which an actress delivers Suneet’s actual words. Finally, there would be a Q&A discussion in which the ‘reality’ of the different parts of the play would be discussed by myself, Suneet, the

actress playing her, and the audience. Here we would be breaking the ‘fourth wall’, not simply to illustrate a technique, but to enhance the experience of Suneet’s life as represented and presented to others.

Finding an Actress

Canton asserts that “performed biography could be described as a transfer of a life onto the body of the actor” (2008, p.322) whilst Auslander claims that “Even in the most conventionally mimetic forms of modern Western theatre, the actor’s body never fully becomes the character’s body” (1997 p.90). These competing ideas led me to consider the importance of physical similarities between Suneet and the actress who would play her in the performance.

The process of finding an actress began with going on casting websites such as Star Now and looking for a performer suitable for the role. Aesthetically, the part required a brown female, playing age 20-30, slim build, approx. 5’ 7”. It was specified in the ads that they would be playing a real person, and that they would have the opportunity to meet the person they would be playing, assist in the devising process and participate in a Q&A discussion with the audience. There were a few responses from interested actors, and I shared their applications with Suneet. This allowed Suneet the opportunity to look at their headshots, and to talk about the issues of authenticity. Her reactions were initially mainly in relation to aesthetics, concerning age and appearance rather than culture and ethnicity. She was also interested in how easy it would be to find somebody who not only resembled her but could replicate her distinct Scottish accent - which we both believe to be a significant aspect of her identity.

This selecting process was interesting because the audience would have no preconceived idea of what Suneet looked like. She was not a public figure, and the clips of the original interview video which were to be used in the performance, were edited to look deliberately grainy to avoid presenting her too recognisably to the audience. Despite this, none of the applicants from the casting sites were suitable, as it turned out - either they lived too far away, making rehearsals difficult to arrange, or they did not 'look right' for the part. My supervisor then introduced me to two of her third-year undergraduate students, who were keen on gaining experience and who seemed more suitable. I met them on 31st January 2020 (Appendix ii), and with Suneet's permission showed them the video of her original interview. The subsequent agreement between the girls that one of them, Gurpreet, would be more suited to the role because she looked more like Suneet confirmed the belief that when acting the part of a living person on stage, physical resemblance is often seen to be of considerable importance.

It may have seemed superficial to place so much importance on physical similarity, but as the project acquired more depth and detail, the reasons for choosing an actress who physically resembled Suneet became more obvious and seemed less shallow. This is, by definition and intention, a play about Suneet, and her experiences as she saw them. In a representation of a real, living subject, recognisable resemblance takes on more importance than if she were simply an archetype of the socially dislocated female.

Gurpreet Meets Suneet

There are issues of ethics around any kind of representation, even of the historical variety, but the ethical issues are never more sharply brought into focus as

when a theatre maker and an actor make a drama which represents another living person. In the case of *Suneet's Story*, this is combined with the issue of trust where the subject has been invited to become part of the process. Is it restrictive? Is it inhibiting? Is it even true, if it emanates from the subject's own perspective of events which have been contributed to by others in their life, and whose perspective may be equally self-justifying but very different? These questions are ethical in both the professional and academic sense, certainly, but these considerations can be guarded by procedures, which may or may not be complied with but which are in place to ensure that what is produced is truthful and consensual. In the wider philosophical sense, however, what constitutes truth is much more elusive.

On 9th March Gurpreet met Suneet when the three of us went for a meal together in Birmingham. Gurpreet later said that she was incredibly nervous about this meeting (ethical stress?), because not only was she going to play Suneet on stage, but Suneet was actually going to be watching her and taking part the Q&A discussion at the end.

There were clear differences between Gurpreet and Suneet which, when they met, became obvious despite their physical similarities. Gurpreet was also Sikh, but from Birmingham, not Scotland, and even within the Sikh demographic there are stark differences in cultural experiences. During the meeting, when discussing the events of Suneet's story, Gurpreet said that although she had heard of repressive family influences, and of marital problems caused by religious and cultural beliefs and practices, she had personally never known anybody who had had their lives impacted upon by them as Suneet's had been. Therefore, her resemblance to the real character was restricted to her looks and the accent she acquired for the performance.

Whilst Gurpreet seemed sympathetic and somewhat enamoured by Suneet, Suneet seemed almost maternal towards Gurpreet, complimenting her, and encouraging her participation in the work. This could have been because she is several years older, and was in a more authoritative position professionally than a third year drama student. However, there was a slight but perceptible element of control involved, with Suneet clearly establishing the identity of the character as ‘hers’.

Rehearsals

Suneet was an abused girlfriend, then one half of a loving relationship - having to reconcile this with being at the same time an undutiful daughter - and then she became an unhappy, betrayed wife. It would be the stuff of soap opera, were it not for the fact that these events happened to a real and young professional woman. The viewing public are probably desensitised to this kind of event sequence, and mentally prepare themselves for another disaster as soon as one becomes resolved. However, this is live, intimate theatre about a person who appears, at the end of the performance, in front of an audience open to their possible judgment of her life choices, or to their sympathy for her treatment at the hands of others.

My job as a maker of theatre representing real people and real events is to create authenticity, and in a sense this is a contradiction in terms. The audience only see grainy images of the real Suneet during the performance, and see and hear Gurpreet saying Suneet’s words, whilst progressing through Wake’s strands of ‘Reality Theatre’ modes and culminating in a highly dramatized version of the events in the life of somebody who looks and speaks like her. Does the actress have to be ‘more real’ than Suneet in order to emphasise the selected parts of her life as recounted to me? The challenge for

Gurpreet was considerable, even for a student who had been studying drama at university for three years and who rehearsed diligently throughout the preparation period.

Rehearsals were initially slightly awkward. Gurpreet worked hard on the Scottish accent, and was self-conscious about the result of her efforts, and how acceptable it would be, specifically to Suneet herself. Gurpreet began slowly, but she had a natural talent for mimicry, and through use of the video recording of Suneet's interview, she was able to sound sufficiently like Suneet to make the point. This aspect is particularly significant for, as Luckhurst notes, "The emotional timbres of an individual voice, specific decisions about stress and punctuation, body stance, gesture and movement all change the meaning of a written text" (Luckhurst, 2011, p.139). Furthermore, we all felt it was important to include it as a feature of the characterisation because Suneet's mixture of heritages is important to the story and helps the audience understand her more as a person. Furthermore, in the interests of authenticity, it was important to include the accent, because in this work the audience see, and hear, Suneet in the final section when the 'fourth wall' is broken during the Q&A discussion at the end and they have the opportunity to see and comment on the performance and to dig into the less obvious implications of the play, the process and even the events of Suneet's real life. Therefore, there was a lot of pressure on Gurpreet to portray Suneet in a way which made her seem to be not just what she looked like, or sounded like, but what she was (and is) - a complex woman between cultural territories, negotiating a complex path, herself in search of an identity.

Performance

Due to the UK Lockdown as a result of Covid-19, the planned live performance was adapted to be presented online via Zoom. In some ways, although we had used the mediatisation effects before in rehearsal, and were fairly confident that it would work, it was still a source of anxiety. The pre-recorded sections technically worked well, and although the content was essentially reflective rather than documentary, the choice of video to put these sections into rather detracted from the intended spontaneous nature of the piece.

The original intention was to present a live performance of the play, with a live audience participating in discussion at the end (the denouement section). Early on, we had rehearsed live, and found that the play had developed through initial improvisation. The script was flexible, so we were able to edit and adapt part of it as we went along. This had to stop when we needed to arrive at a definitive version to record and present without further adaptation. Whilst this imposed discipline and focus on both the content and the structure of the play, the earlier flexibility was restricted, and it limited the level of interaction between subject and performer which would be visible to the audience. This may provide a physical detachment from the audience, but on the other hand as the audience is not in the shared space, it may be a more intense experience as, for example, they could see Gurpreet in close-up.

The level and type of empathy the audience could feel may have been impacted by seeing the live streamed performance, rather than a live in person one. Seeing expressions in close up, and action from a calculated distance, may seem at first to reduce the empathy which may be expected from a live and physically intimate performance. However, on reflection, the experience of looking at a screen is intense in

the sense that it is private experience, even if the feedback was collective, and the reactions of individual audience members were very diverse - suggesting that not being able to communicate with each other verbally or non-verbally made seeing the play a more personal experience in which the audience could be more, rather than less, immersed.

Gurpreet brought a more emotional quality to the story than was evident even in my preliminary 'researching' conversations with Suneet herself - although some of the recollections of uncomfortable events in her life clearly affected her. Her words, minimally redrawn and scripted in a different order for dramatic effect, took on more audible pathos when delivered by an actress. By the time of the performance, Gurpreet's anxiety about how closely she would be able to 'replicate' Suneet's accent and gestures eased, and she became more concerned with representing Suneet's character: a wronged woman, treated badly, but retaining her self-respect through a series of unwelcome events.

The content of the performance remained Suneet's story, but because of the selection of events - and to some extent because of the mediatisation of the performance - there was a slight television 'soap opera' quality about the finished product.

Q&A (denouement)

Classifying this section as an immersive part of the performance was built into the model of practice. Following the performance's climax and 'falling action', there was a ten-minute recess to allow people to gather their thoughts before the Q&A discussion (denouement). I have defined this as the denouement in accordance with Freytag's Pyramid, where explanations and resolutions are reflected upon in relation to

the plot - and in this case the performance project at large as well. The audience at this point may want to know more of the details around Suneet's story than what had been shown, as well as wanting to know more about the construction of the narrative. Having Suneet present for this, as she had been watching as part of the audience up until this point, as well as having myself and Gurpreet on hand as well, provided an opportunity for a unique insight for the audience from multiple perspectives.

The Q&A section lasted approximately 30 minutes and immersed the audience directly in the work. There were approximately a dozen audience members in total, a mix of university lecturers, students and of course myself and Suneet. Although I acted as emcee for the Q&A discussion, there was no set script to follow and no rehearsals for it had taken place. This means that the distance between the subject and the theatre maker was therefore at its closest, which makes this section the most heightened of the Reality Theatre modes displayed in this work.

Both Suneet and Gurpreet had opportunities to answer, and ask, questions about the play and how it demonstrated, or highlighted, the ethical and artistic challenges inherent in the project. Because the women had met socially by this time and had talked about similar things as they were invited to talk about on this occasion, both were very honest about their doubts and anxieties. Suneet was polite about Gurpreet's determination to master her accent. Gurpreet expressed empathy with the poor treatment Suneet had been subjected to and said that their meeting had helped her to get into the role, and to convey distress and frustration 'as' Suneet. This empathy was noticeably echoed by those in the audience who contributed reflections on the work, prefacing their comments with compassionate remarks to Suneet.

I was asked by a member of the audience whether I had any ethical - or artistic - reservations about being a white male whose project involved acting as a conduit to the real-life narrative of an Asian woman. I replied that as a theatre maker and academic researcher, rather than a political or social activist, I hoped that I had approached the project respectfully and that I had enabled Suneet to tell her 'truth' through a recognised cultural medium, without prejudice - and Suneet agreed that her representation was indeed truthful (Appendix iv). The intent of the work was never to offer a critique on the issues of arranged marriage, partner-coercion and control which emerge through Suneet's story but rather to prepare and present the story in a way that would address the research question.

The impact of form through the shifts in 'Reality Theatre' modes was also discussed, although not in as much detail as I had anticipated. Whilst this may have been due to time constraints, or a lack of guided discussion facilitation on my part, it may also have been because of a 'theatrical desensitization' of the audience. As all members of the invited audience - with the exception of Suneet - were lecturers and students from the University of Worcester's Drama and Performance department, they were perhaps too familiar with the theatrical techniques employed to fully register their varying levels of impact on perceived 'truthfulness'. In her analysis of audience reception and context in relation to biographical theatre, Canton suggests that regular theatre goers are inevitably impacted by prior theatrical experiences and that: "where they find similarities to other performances they have seen, they might therefore see the stage actions primarily as elements of a theatrical tradition, and less as a way of presenting the past" (Canton, 2007, p.175). This led me to consider the potential benefit of a revised follow-up performance of *Suneet's Story* whereby I present a reversal of the

sequence of modes featured in the play. This may be useful in further demonstrating how and to what extent theatrical modes convey a private person's 'truth'. If, for example the first part of the narrative were to be in the form of a discussion with the audience where the legal and ethical issues were considered, and then followed by dramatized, verbatim and documentary sections, before culminating in a climax which took the form of a piece of projected text, the result could then be aligned and critiqued along with the findings from this project. This could in turn form the basis for further study into an exploration of the impact of theatrical modes on 'truthfulness'.

Further Reflection

On further reflection it seems that in order to represent true events which happen to real people, it is necessary to use the skills of selection, adaptation and artistic expression in order to focus the audience on the importance of the events, not only to the people they happened to, but also to wider society. However, this must be handled with respect to the individual and their story first and foremost. Each part of *Suneet's Story* is about not fitting in - a staple element of all kinds of fiction, but equally in factual narrative. This is a 'told' story, not just a shared story, where the element of crafting, appropriation and adaptation are aligned, and resisted, through my illustration of the various stages of Wake's taxonomy. However illustrative of the cultures of 'difference', 'otherness' and cultural alienation the particular events in the life of a real person are, it is the story that contains and conveys the message, not the other way round. If this was simply a play about cultural diversity within one individual, or about the complex nature of family relationships, it would not have to be about Suneet at all.

6. CONCLUSION

The decision to undertake this study in the form of Practice as Research carried the risk of the account becoming too subjective, and it is important to state that the research, preparation and actual working of the play produced did seamlessly integrate into how the research question was addressed. Across the period of the study, it became evident that the challenges and opportunities presented by producing a piece of theatre about a subject not in the public domain were acknowledged in the literature on the subject, and that all the academic and practitioner articles and publications confirmed that there was a particular set of problems which did not arise when writing about ‘famous’ people ‘ - how, for example, the risk of reputational damage could be assessed when the subject did not make a living based on public perception.

There are legal precedents for libel and slander where members of the general public are involved in everyday situations, where adverse comments lead to an impact on their businesses and personal lives, but the play being produced in this case was being made with the consent and participation of the subject, and was going to result in a performance - albeit an adapted virtual performance with a restricted audience - and with the process having been closely monitored for conformity with a strict ethical code, imposed by the University. Therefore, it became, and remains, a living ‘question mark’ over the research question itself.

However, one thing which came across very clearly was the level of empathy for the subject from the audience, as evidenced during the Q&A discussion (denouement).

Challenges & Opportunities

Cantrell and Luckhurst, in their interviews with actors who had played living subjects, repeatedly found examples of ‘ethical stress’ created in them by the activity of representing a living character. There was also an element of ‘ethical stress’ in the writers of the plays mentioned in this thesis, resulting from the conflict between representing ‘real’ life events, but in a way which created viable and interesting drama which would attract and sustain the interest of the audience. Although this project did not face the same challenges as those in professional theatre, the intention was still to produce theatre, rather than re-enactment or mimicry, so the main challenge faced by myself as the theatre maker was that of selection and omission of key events revealed through a lengthy process of researching and developing the script of the play (Appendix iii). In practical terms, making physical notes, or making recordings, during a personal conversation puts up a physical, and emotional, barrier between participants, and could be said to cause issues around power within the conversation. It also, undoubtedly, makes the conversation and the subjects raised within it more inhibited. This, I found, was particularly the case when working on *Suneet’s Story* where the living subject was not famous, and did not do a job where this context was familiar territory. There was, certainly initially, no desire to withhold uncomfortable details as far as it could be ascertained - in fact, this was an advantage, because the absence of a wider ‘public image’ to protect gave more freedom to talk about personal issues and to present themselves ‘truthfully’. However, this was, and remains, inevitably a one-sided account.

Initially, the most noticeable opportunity to arise through the PaR was that of freedom because the subject had, on the surface, internal editorial control over what

they told me, or shared with the actress playing the part of her. Externally, Suneet had editorial control over what was in the play, and hence about how the production would represent her. However, in practice this was less straightforward. Because the play includes reference to her marriage, and the difficulties experienced, from her point of view, the account necessarily excluded other family members who may have seen the events differently, and yet whose feelings are speculated upon throughout the piece. The ethical position of the theatre maker when making judgments about selecting material and sequencing events therefore became less clear. On one hand, the restricted nature of the production would, in practice, reduce if not entirely eliminate any harms to the others referred to within it. It was after all not intended to be performed in public, and the other 'characters' would not see it, and would probably be unaware of it. On the other hand, there was still a sense of 'ethical stress' felt by all involved. This became most pronounced when Suneet revealed to me that, whilst she found the performance to be both truthful and moving - and even cathartic for her - she would still not be comfortable with her family seeing it.

Additional Findings

There were deeper and more abstract concerns which revealed themselves as the process developed. How to reconcile this one-sided account with the need for 'truthfulness'. There are unmistakeable didactic aspects to a story about broken relationships and resolution of conflict within families. The privacy issues, initially, appear to conflict with the need to remain 'truthful'. The nature of the subject herself as a private citizen in control of what they said about themselves would appear to 'guarantee' a truthful account and to eliminate the possibility of authorial bias.

However, even in personal interaction within ordinary, ephemeral conversation, where there is no intention to publish or interpret what is said in any way, there is still unconscious editorship because people generally want to be thought well of. If during the conversation events are recounted involving other people, this might have an adverse impact on how others outside the conversation are perceived.

Suneet's Story is about the subject, and based on what they say about themselves, but it is not a private conversation or an exercise of self-exposition. The ethical questions uncovered during the process were at times uncomfortable to think about - for example, the reference to domestic abuse. As there is a didactic element to the play, the events leading up to the climax were complex, but certainly involved other people and some complex family interventions. The play, with the main character reflecting on the events, may be presented as an example of the consequences of relationships ending amid the context of a wider family and cultural expectations which did not square with the reality of the subject's lived experiences.

This raised topical and political issues which could raise the awareness of the audience about such abstracts as gender inequality and racial prejudice. However, offering a personal account about an individual from their own point of view in order to - even coincidentally - make a political stance carries responsibility, and the risk of authorial bias. When Suneet was asked by the audience whether she was comfortable with the fact that I - the theatre maker / director - was a white male, she answered that she was. She expanded upon this by saying that because I had been thorough and transparent in my approach to research, and that the story as far as she was concerned was a personal one rather than one representative of culture, race or religion at large. It did not seem to her that the work carried an ideological agenda. Therefore, she had no

problems with it. This confirmed that a relationship of trust had been established and respected.

There is of course still scope for accusations of authorial bias both in the process and the outcome of the project. It is difficult, because of human nature, not to present some cultural perspective when creating art. The funding issues around commercial public theatre are, of course, influential in a way beyond the scope of this project, but the act of producing a play quite absolved from the need to confirm or reject any particular political stance remains vulnerable to bias. The subject, in this case, recounted a series of events in which they were victimised, and celebrated, by the people in their life, and the cultural contexts in which they live. However, it would be difficult not to present others operating in these events as oppressive, and the subject as sympathetic and abused. The scenario - on the stage as in life - is not neutral, because there is a story to be told, and the 'value' of its presentation to those invited to share their experience by watching it and by sharing their questions both with the subject and the actor representing them is in the activity as a whole.

Reflection upon wider cultural considerations as a consequence could be said to be the intended 'value' of the exercise. Residual bias in the sense of a natural tendency to sympathise with the character, and to revile those who treated them badly, may be present, but was not, and is not, explicit. However, the potential for challenge to the portrayal of the other people in the life of the subject who may present different accounts of what happened remains, and continues to haunt the project.

Through the research I have undertaken, I have been able to underpin the production of the play by coming to an understanding of the debates within the literature about the different forms and possibilities within 'Reality Theatre'. Although

much of the writing concerns commercial biography about the lives of people who are in the public domain, it was possible to identify where theory supported, and where it conflicted with, practice. I also, albeit provisionally and based on my experience with this project, and on the subsequent discussions I have had about it, have come to believe that the ethical considerations raised by writing about living subjects are not simply based on legal permissibility and pragmatic considerations around ‘ethical stress’ and transient contextual factors.

Kant’s view that people living with others in society have a tendency to ‘dissemble’, and to appear to be as they are not in order to gain approval (Kant & Gregor, 2017), is an observation, not a judgment, in the context of this project. I have gone through the process of representing life events as they were recounted to me, and have taken them at face value. The story is from the point of view of a highly plausible and co-operative subject, and was no less ‘truthful’ because it was told from her point of view. I did not seek out the point of view of the others involved in the events she recounted, and so the resulting narrative is *her* story rather than *their* story. The play explores and demonstrates how ‘truthfulness’ - in this case, about a person - can be conveyed through various theatrical forms, and that written text, verbatim speech and dramatization around the different parts of the story added dimensions to the events, and, as it happened, confirmed that different ways of presenting a ‘true’ story created different levels of credibility and challenge.

Suneet’s Story was not a documentary, and, as Kant points out, it is scarcely if ever possible for a person to be completely sure of their own authentic feelings and motivations. This play, and both the preparation and the feedback around it, is on one level a piece of drama, an entertaining, true story with some speculative enactment of

recounted events. On another level, it is an illustration - or rather, an exploration - of how effective different theatrical modes are in conveying 'truthfulness'. On a more abstract level, it is a demonstration of the elusive nature of truth and 'truthfulness', and the decision to work with a private subject in order to maintain some immunity from the 'spin' of publicity which surrounds public figures and events has gone some way to show how challenging it is to represent 'truthfulness' through a medium which in its nature is replicative.

Finally, the ethical value of *Suneet's Story* is most pronounced in the approach taken in developing and presenting it. I personally did not encounter the same degree of 'ethical stress' when working on *Suneet's Story* as I had done with *The Inferno Kid* and I believe this is because of the transparency of my practice which in turn allowed Suneet, as research participant, to place a great degree of trust in me and my handling of her story. The Q&A section of the performance (the denouement) highlighted the trust between us for the audience and this leads me to conclude that open and honest communication of practice is essential when working with living subjects - especially private citizens who are less likely to be exposed to such potentially exploitative scenarios. Regardless of one's individual ethical stance, in collaborative projects such as this, the theatre maker and research participant should be in complete agreement as to the methods and practices employed and, furthermore, should be regarded as co-creators of the work for, as Causer rightly observes: "the product cannot be divorced from the collaboration that produced it" (2004, p.3).

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APPENDICES

i. British Reality Theatre Plays (2010-2020)

Listed in order of original production

PLAY	YEAR	PLAYWRIGHT(S)	SUBJECT(S)
<i>The Children's Monologues</i>	2010	Various	South African children
<i>Handbagged</i>	2010	Moira Buffini	Queen Elizabeth II & Margaret Thatcher
<i>London Road</i>	2011	Alecky Blythe	Residents of London Road, prostitutes & media members
<i>The Riots</i>	2011	Gillian Slovo	Politicians, police, rioters & victims linked to the London Riots
<i>The Two Worlds of Charlie F.</i>	2012	Owen Sheers	Service personnel serving in Afghanistan
<i>Cocktail Sticks</i>	2012	Alan Bennett	Alan Bennet (playwright)
<i>Someone to Blame</i>	2012	Tess Berry-Hart	Sam Hallam and people linked to his murder trial
<i>The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning</i>	2012	Tim Price	Chelsea Manning (born Bradley Manning - whistleblower)
<i>Monkey Bars</i>	2012	Chris Goode	Children aged 8-10
<i>This House</i>	2012	James Graham	1970s political figures
<i>The Audience</i>	2013	Peter Morgan	Royalty & political figures
<i>The Events</i>	2013	David Greig	Anders Breivik (Norwegian terrorist)
<i>Home</i>	2013	Nadia Fall	Hostel residents and workers
<i>The Duck House</i>	2013	Dan Patterson	Political figures
<i>The Arrest of Ai Weiwei</i>	2013	Howard Brenton	Ai Weiwei (Chinese artist & activist)
<i>Sochi 2014</i>	2014	Tess Berry-Hart	Members of the Russian LGBT community
<i>King Charles III</i>	2014	Mike Bartlett	Prince Charles & other Royal Family members
<i>Confirmation</i>	2014	Chris Thorpe	'Nazi Web Master'
<i>Little Revolution</i>	2014	Alecky Blythe	Residents of Hackney & media members
<i>An Evening with Lucian Freud</i>	2015	Laura-Jane Foley	Lucian Freud (painter)
<i>Crouch, Touch, Pause, Engage</i>	2015	Robin Soans	Gareth Thomas (rugby player)
<i>Another World: Losing our Children to Islamic State</i>	2016	Gillian Slovo	People effected by - and fighting against - the Islamic State
<i>Don't Leave Me Now</i>	2016	Brian Daniels	Dementia patients
<i>Everybody's Talking About Jamie</i>	2017	Tom MacRae	Jamie Campbell (drag queen)
<i>Limehouse</i>	2017	Steve Waters	Political figures from the 1980s
<i>Ink</i>	2017	James Graham	Rupert Murdoch (media mogul)
<i>Adam</i>	2017	Frances Poet	Adam Kashmiry (trans activist)
<i>Eve</i>	2017	Jo Clifford & Chris Goode	Jo Clifford (playwright & trans activist)
<i>Love Song to Lavender Menace</i>	2017	James Ley	Bob & Sigrid (Scottish LGBT bookshop owners)
<i>The Jungle</i>	2017	Joe Robertson & Joe Murphy	Calais migrant camp workers
<i>Nigel Slater's Toast</i>	2018	Henry Filloux-Bennett	Nigel Slater (food writer & journalist)
<i>Don't Forget the Birds</i>	2018	Catrina McHugh	Cheryl & Abigail Byron (ex-convict mother & daughter)
<i>Touching the Void</i>	2018	David Greig	Joe Simpson & Simon Yates (mountaineers)
<i>A Very Expensive Poison</i>	2019	Lucy Prebble	Alexander Litvinenko (Russian FSB defector)
<i>There are no Beginnings</i>	2019	Charley Miles	Women impacted by the 1970s Yorkshire Ripper murders
<i>Ravens: Spassky vs. Fischer</i>	2019	Tom Morton-Smith	Boris Spassky & Bobby Fischer (chess champions)
<i>Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue</i>	2020	David Hare	David Hare (playwright)

ii. Timeline of Practice

2018	
November	Scouting for subjects
2019	
February 20 th	Interview with Suneet (video recorded)
2020	
January	Scouting for actresses via casting sites and through the university
January 31 st	Gurpreet's audition at the University of Worcester
February 21 st	First rehearsal with Gurpreet
March 4 th	Original performance date is set for April 2 nd
March 9 th	Suneet meets Gurpreet (for a meal in Birmingham City Centre)
March 23 rd	UK goes into Lockdown due to COVID-19
July 3 rd	An adapted performance of <i>Suneet's Story</i> is presented via Zoom

iii. *Suneet's Story* (script)

Suneet's Story

by

Alex Brockie

SYNOPSIS

Suneet is a 28 year old psychology lecturer from Falkirk, Scotland. A few years ago she was engaged to the man of her dreams but what followed was a nightmare. This is her story.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS SCRIPT APPEARS HERE AS IT WAS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN FOR THE INTENDED LIVE THEATRE PERCOMANCE. CERTAIN EDITS WERE MADE WHEN IT NEEDED TO BE ADAPTED FOR ONLINE PERFORMANCE.

Alex Brockie
07714 171987

PART 1. Factual (Documentary)

PRESET:

LX. Dim wash (with house)

PROJECTION 1. Intro

AUDIENCE ENTER. SUNEET IS SETTING THE STAGE;
PLACING PROPS & ARRANGING PURPLE CUSHIONS ON
A SMALL SOFA (C). SHE IS DRESSED IN BLACK &
HER HAIR IS UP.

LX 1. Blackout

NAME: Suneet Kaur Lalli
GENDER: Female
NATIONALITY: Scottish-British (Skittish)
HOMETOWN: Falkirk (between Edinburgh & Glasgow)
D.O.B: 8.12.91
STAR SIGN: Sagittarius
SEXUALITY: Heterosexual
OCCUPATION: A-Level Psychology lecturer
RELIGION: Sikh (non-practicing)

LX 2. Purple special D/R

(INTO MIC) Hi, I'm Suneet or 'Sunny'. The name actually means 'Rays of the Sun' - or at least that's what I tell people. I'm from Falkirk and currently live just north of Bonnie Birmingham. Now before I get into the story I was asked to share for this project here's a wee bit of background on me. And I say 'wee bit' - when putting this thing together I was asked a lot of fucking questions so these are just my responses to some:

PROJECTION 2. Physical Appearance

Alright so: me (SILHOUETTE) What? Fuck off! It's my show; I'll have a sexy silhouette if I want one! - Anyway (CLEARS THROAT) I'm brown, 5ft7 and weigh between 8½ and 9½ stone depending on the week. I'm flat-footed, short-sighted and right-handed. My dress size is 8, my shoe size is 6 and out of 10 I rate myself a 4. (REMOVES SHOES) Sorry, sometimes my feet just need space... (UNTIES HAIR) OK... I have long hair, a narrow chin and round cheeks: these ones (FACE),

the others are getting there (SQUATS). I like my smile but not my nose. I have straight white teeth and deep-set eyes, and ears you probably wouldn't notice. I have a few freckles; this one's my favourite (RIGHT FOREARM). I have a birth mark here (CLICK) and 5 tattoos; (CLICK). I also have 4 piercings (RIGHT/LEFT EARS x2) and a wee scar here (FOREHEAD) from a fight when I was 20.

PROJECTION 3. Education

Well, I went to a private school (Beaconhurst) where my brother and I were the *only* non-white kids (CLICK-CLICK). I was a prefect and the youngest head girl; the school isn't there anymore. My favourite subject was Drama but I'm Indian so my A-Levels are in Biology, Chemistry and Maths - and also English and *Geography* - so I can pin-point on a map exactly how out of place I feel. I also have a BA Psychology and Neuroscience and an MA in Statistical Analysis - which seems rather apt right now.

PROJECTION 4. Hobbies and Interests

Hobbies and interests, right... As a kid I did this (CLICK: BADMINTON), this (CLICK: PIANO) and this (CLICK: DRUMS) and unfortunately for the bitch who gave me this (SCAR) I also did this (CLICK: KARATE). I was a fiercely competitive child - still am. I love the Harry Potter films *and* books and pretty much anything about psychopaths. I mostly listen to R&B but also 'whiter stuff' like Paolo Nutini. My favourite food is Chinese and my favourite drink is Irn Bru - and I also love a hot manuka honey with fresh lemon (POURS A GLASS OF WHITE WINE). My favourite colour is purple. My favourite smell is coconut. I'm weary of horses and have a phobia of Octopus but other than that I adore animals, especially Camels. I think they're very misunderstood. Like; they do a lot for people and maybe they spit at them because they just don't fucking like 'em. (BEAT) What else? Oh, I speak Punjabi and a bit of

Hindi and I can read Urdu. I also enjoy walking, dancing and shopping - lots of shopping - but the most important things I own are photographs. Oh and I'm currently going through a divorce... but this isn't about that. Thank fuck! (DRINKS)

LX 3. Blackout

Part 2. Documentary/Verbatim

PROJECTION 5. Interview clip 1 (00:01:30 - 00:02:00)

LX 4. Purple special D/L

SUNEET IS SEATED D/L TALKING INTO A
CAMERA

**(VERBATIM - FROM WHERE THE RECORDING LEFT
OFF)**

...erm... and he was amazing for the first six months, like the best thing you can think of but now looking back on it he was... erm... he got to know my routine, he got to know my timetable, he got to know where I was, when I was, and just infiltrated *my whole life*. (PAUSE) And because I'm Indian - even though he was Indian - I couldn't go home and tell my parents... that I was in a relationship. So I kind of kept that all together until he showed up at my work. Just (PAUSE) towards like the end of everything... and... he showed up at my work and he managed somehow to quote the last few messages I had sent to one of my *male* friends that I had not spoken to in a while. Now me and Pete (the friend) went to school together and it was his birthday and I had noticed the dates when I was working that - cuz I worked at a shop; not my mum and dad's shop ironically a different shop run by white people erm...

LX 5. Blackout

PROJECTION 6. Interview Clip 2 (00:03:00 - 00:04:03)

LX 6. Lights up as before

(VERBATIM - FROM WHERE THE RECORDING LEFT OFF)

...I know he worked for that phone company. The phone that... under... he-he-had my contract kinda thing so... but I don't know how he managed to find out what the content of those messages were. I don't know. I still don't know. He did ah... he worked in... he was very good with I.T. and if I was sitting at home on my laptop he'd overtake my screen.

LX 6. Blackout

PROJECTION 7. Interview Clip 3 (00:04:30 - 00:05:45)

Part 3. Verbatim with minor alterations

LX 7. Bright wash

Six months *after that...*

SUNEET STANDS AND MOVES FREELY FOR THE FOLLOWING

My mate at Uni 'Lucky' was tired of me complaining I could never meet anyone decent so she says, "Right, I'm setting you up on a blind date." Now, Lucky was in the year above and did Eastern European Studies (ROLLS EYES) and all the time she was hanging out with ethnically ambiguous pot-heads... You know the ones; they always have long hair... a moustache... (TO AUDIENCE MEMBERS) Aye, you know the ones. And I can tell *you* definitely know the ones! And so I was like; "Thanks Lucky but, you know, the greasy Jesus type just really isn't my thing so..." But she's all "No-no-no, I'll set you up with someone *you'll* like. And if you don't like him then it's no hard feelings."

So the next week I turned up at this Chinese restaurant all nervous and dying for some shredded crispy chicken when then this guy turns up and I couldn't believe it; it was

her brother Bav! Seriously Lucky; what the fuck? Girl code's literally two rules: you don't go out with ex's or brothers! - Ex's brothers is fine and so is brother's ex's if you're no fussy but Bav? Fuck! Anyway, we sat and spoke and actually got so swept up in conversation that our food went cold. And I called Lucky up after and was like; "I can't believe you've done this! (PAUSE) He's really sweet. Thanks for ruining my fucking meal!"

So me and Bav go on a few more dates and on the third - at their house, in his bedroom - I'd casually thrown a pillow at him and he threw it back and we just ended up having this full blown pillow fight. Two adults. I was 21, he was 23. And after we just lay there and I remember turning to him, thinking; 'I'm gonna marry this bloke!' (PAUSE)

Over the next few months my mum had noticed I'd been texting a lot and leaving the room to answer calls so she was like "Right, who are you going out with?" I told her and she said, "You're Dad's not gonna like that" and I was like "Why?" My Dad and his dad were friends. Bav was also the same religion; same caste within the religion - my parents owned a shop; he ran a shop - but sure enough dad was like "No, you're not going out with him." - "Why?" - "Because I said so" ... 'Because I said so?'... 'Because I said so' had always been the reason I'd been given to *anything* growing up. I wasn't allowed an iPod 'because we said so' - we weren't allowed to watch MTV 'because we said so'... Anyway, I'm now an adult and not taking 'because you fucking said so' as an answer. You need to give me a valid reason... because as far as I can see he's perfect: honest, consistent, kind... and fucking gorgeous... and someone who'd never hurt me. So I continued going out with him. And then it got more serious.

Now, his parents were happy to have me over; they had a lovely home and a gorgeous wee

German Shephard called Star... and they were just very supportive - even Star! Anyway, after a while our parents got together and his mom said "Look, can we just make this official? It's a small Indian community - these two go out all the time - we just don't want our family saying; "Oh, your son's been going out with her for months, did you not fancy telling us?"

So in spite of my Dad initially saying 'no' it was agreed and we had like an official Indian engagement

Part 4. Heavily edited and paraphrased

LX 8. Neutral wash

My mum was all guns blazing sorting the outfits, invitations, fruit baskets. Gran made the sweets. And so it happened... and then it was onto the wedding. Again mum made a big show of sorting everything - it was about all we could do to suggest a song for the first dance. Bav wanted David Gray; 'The One I Love' (PAUSE). And so it was all set for August 23rd - and I can't forget that date.

I know we were young but the plan was to grow together y'know. The Indian way's to get married and move into your in-laws - and their house was bloody massive so space wouldn't be an issue. But just then I got offered a job in Aberdeen which is 2 ½ hours away. I figured I'd take it and get transferred back to Glasgow at the first opportunity or get another job back home if that didn't happen. So I called Bav and he was all "That's amazing! I'll help you move. I'll do this, I'll do that" and I got off the phone a little bit dejected, I must say. Like, why are you so fucking happy I'm leaving?

Anyway, I move to Aberdeen and I asked why he didn't try and stop me and he said "Oh, I was just so happy for you, Suneet. I didn't

want to be the reason you didn't take the job" and I thought: that's just the measure of you as a man isn't it? - He was like "There's nothing we won't do to make this work."

So we'd see each other on alternate weekends and then one month my mum rings me; "I've cancelled your wedding" (PAUSE) *What?* - She goes "Yeah, I've just cancelled everything and you can tell his parents because I'm not speaking to them." (PAUSE) *Wait, what?* - Then she starts on about; "He needs to be more financially settled, he's too short, he needs a better car..." blah blah blah. So I phoned Bav and he was like "Oh she's probably just having a bad day" - He was ever Mr. Positive. "She'll phone my mum eventually and explain what's going on. Just ignore her. She's probably not done it anyway" and because he said that I was like; OK, you're probably right. It's fine. But it just got worse from there.

So the next weekend I was home and my parents were adamant; "It's cancelled; what you on about? There's no wedding" - like I was being weird. Then my Dad called everyone into the living room and said, "I want everyone to watch this." My brother was like, "What the fuck's going on?" I was like; "I don't know" - but I just had this really bad feeling. My dad hates my grandad; hates my gran; doesn't like me - so to call everyone into the room with him is just... Anyway, he puts this unmarked DVD on... and it was of Bav smoking outside his shop.

Now, I knew he smoked. I didn't know at *that time* though. Not that-that's an issue with me; I smoke. Well; used to. Not that they knew that.

Anyway, it was filmed from a car window - different dates, times, angles... From the interior I could tell it wasn't a car we owned so I asked my dad where he got it and he was like "Never mind" and asked if I knew that he smoked and I said "No" and he was

like "You're fucking lying!" I said, "I swear to God". And then my grandparents were like "Well you definitely can't marry him now: he smokes." So there's a reason. They didn't have one at first and then my Dad went and found one. And then my mum took my ring off me and gave it back to his parents and said, "Your son's a liar and we don't want anything to do with you."

Bav came up the next weekend and said, "I'm sorry, I should have told you". - He's the love of my life, smoking doesn't matter to me so I said "It's fine. We're together and that's it." - Anyway, later that day we'd just been 'together' and I'd gone for a shower and there was this loud banging at the door. And you know when you get that feeling again? And my door didn't have a peep-hole - I was living in a flat - so I opened it with the chain on and the door just went 'pfft' and in walked my dad, my mum (PAUSE) and my ex-boyfriend. (PAUSE) I couldn't believe it. Despite everything that I'd said that he'd ever done to me. Why was he there? I couldn't figure it out.

Part 5. Dramatised

LX 9. Dark wash

PROJECTION 8. Heartbeat (sound)

So Bav comes out of the bedroom. He's so scared that he doesn't even sit next to me. He sits closest to the door. My dad starts yelling: "What the hell's going on? What the fuck's he doing here? Why haven't you got your clothes on? You're a fucking disgrace!" - I'm thinking to myself; fuck you! This is my flat, I live here, I pay for everything. It's a Sunday afternoon. *Fuck you!*

He carries on: "What have you two been doing, eh? ... Well? ... What have you done today? Tell me *exactly*." I don't have any words so he tells *us*: "You went for a walk in a park, then you went to lunch and then the cinema." - He then reels off times and

details even I hadn't noticed. And all the while my psycho ex who I hadn't even seen in two years is chiming in with dumb comments to the point where Bav goes: "Erm, I'm sorry mate but who are you?" "I'm her boyfriend" - Like 'current' - "I'm her boyfriend" - Seriously; what the fuck?

Then my Dad takes our pictures off the fireplace and tears them up in front of me. Then he turns to Bav; "You're a dead man! I'm gonna break your fucking legs! I'm gonna burn your fucking face in that fucking fire!" and then he goes for him. Like; proper lunges. So I step in front and push him back and then he grabs my arm with a look in his eyes as if he's about to hit me. I brace myself. There's a long pause. Our eyes never break. (PAUSE) Slowly I pull away but continue standing my ground. Without looking I say to Bav: "You need to go. Put your shoes on and leave"

"Are you coming with me?"

"No"

LX 10: Purple special D/R

ON MIC

I should have said yes but I said "No"

And he left. And that was the beginning of the end for us. We tried to make things work after but too much had happened - and continued to happen - it was just impossible.

I cut contact with my parents as much as I could after that... fixed my door... and called the police.

But yeah... that's the first part of what would go on to be a very crazy saga. It isn't something I've shared with many people and to this day I still have no idea why it happened the way it did. My parents have never really explained what their problem

was; why my ex was there... why they were so
against me and Bav getting married. (PAUSE)
He was a good person... I loved him... I still
do.

LX 11. Blackout

PROJECTION 11: Outro

LX 12. Lights up (inc. house)

Part 6. Real

ACTOR, DIRECTOR AND SUNEET SIT ON SOFA
FOR Q&A WITH THE AUDIENCE.

THE END

iv. Audience Feedback

After discovering that the Q&A section of the performance presentation of *Suneet's Story* had not been captured on the video recording, I asked for written recollections from audience members. Below is a response from one of my supervisors, Daniel Somerville:

...

From: d.somerville@worc.ac.uk

“Hi Alex

My recollection of the Q&A:

I asked a question to Gurpreet about what it felt like to perform a character who she knew was watching. Her response was that she felt a sense of responsibility not only personally but also because as a Sikh she felt a cultural responsibility also. A responsibility to do the story and person of Suneet justice and also she recognised the cultural component and wanted to represent it with due consideration.

I followed this with a question to Suneet as to whether she felt there was an ethical issue attached to a white male author having such a central position in the telling of a British Asian woman's story. Suneet acknowledged that there may be people in the community [Sikh or British Asian] who might find an objection to that scenario but the main emphasis of her answer was in praise of your sensitive approach and your good practice of researching and understanding the cultural context and honouring the telling of her story. She did not feel that there was an ethical component as an individual and acknowledged that this may be because you had a pre-existing friendship. None the less it was clear that your respectful and diligent approach had greatly enhanced the process and made her feel that she could trust you to see the story from her perspective.

There was a discussion on how one might replicate a process with someone who is not already a friend but I'm not certain how that concluded. Clearly forming a relationship of trust and respect would be the key ingredients whether the subject is known or not.”

13.7.2020

v. Character Profile of Suneet

Initial Details	
Name	Suneet Kaur Lalli - Sometimes called 'Sunny'.
Date of Birth	08.12.91 - Sagittarius. Is interested in star signs.
Gender	Female - Strong feminine look and demeanour.
Nationality	British - Scottish-British ('Skittish').
Hometown	Falkirk, Scotland - Grew up in a 4-bed detached with parents, grandparents and brother until 2013. There is a park across the road.
Accent	Scottish - 'Posh' / Articulate / Picked up a 'Glasgow twang' at Uni.
Race	Caucasian - Grew up in a predominantly 'white' area. Didn't experience much overt racism.
Ethnicity	British-Indian - Culturally aware.
Religion	Sikh - Non-practicing but occasionally still goes to the temple. Lost her faith in God (around 2014).
Caste	Jatt - 'Landowners'.
Sexuality	Heterosexual - Lost virginity at 19. Most attracted to black men. Finds some women attractive but has never 'experimented'.
Social class	Middle class - Presents a slightly snobbish attitude toward certain things e.g. class (a parental influence?).
Marital status	Married - Married in July 2018. Currently going through a divorce.
Occupation	A-Level Lecturer: Psychology (& Sociology) - Started at Sutton Coldfield College (BMET) in September 2018. Is also a college Safeguarding Officer.

Current residence	Fradley (South Staffordshire) - <i>A shared-house with 5 other tenants. Has some extended family in the Midlands.</i>
Driving licence	Full / clean - <i>Passed test in 2011 (2nd attempt). First car was a Peugeot 308. Has had points for speeding in the past.</i>
Criminal Record	None - <i>RDB checked for teaching.</i>
Allergies	Penicillin
Physical Appearance	
Height	5ft 7 - <i>Tall and with good posture.</i>
Weight	9 stone - <i>Regularly fluctuates between 8.5 - 9.5 stone.</i>
Build	Slim - <i>Dress size 6-8. An almost an hourglass figure.</i>
Shoe size	6 (UK) - <i>Often takes shoes off for comfort. Flat footed.</i>
Gait	Natural - <i>Purposeful and confident.</i>
Hands	Proportionate - <i>Right handed. False nails.</i>
Skin	Brown - <i>Dark olive tone.</i>
Eyes	Brown - <i>Sometimes wears glasses (short-sighted).</i>
Hair	Long, black, straight - <i>Generally wears hair down unless stressed or at work or for practical purposes.</i>
Tattoos	5 - <i>Right ankle: crescent moon. Right thigh: lily. Upper back: co-ordinates. Shoulders: a prayer.</i>
Piercings	4 - <i>Left ear x2 (low). Right ear x2 (high and low)</i>

Birthmark	1 - <i>Back of left calf.</i>
Scars	1 - <i>Small scar on forehead from fight with a girl (aged 20).</i>

Education

Beaconhurst (1995-2009)	A-Levels: Maths, English, Biology, Chemistry & Geography * <i>was a house captain (youngest in the school) & a prefect</i>	<i>After 14 years at a small private school with just 400 students (aged 3-17) – all white except her and her brother - she studies Psychology and Neuroscience at university. These subjects were selected at random via a careers booklet – with the main goal of NOT following her parents’ wishes of studying medicine and becoming a Doctor.</i>
Glasgow University (2009-2012)	B.A. Psychology & Neuroscience	<i>Had wanted to move away to University but her parents wouldn’t allow her to as they wanted her within their reach. She ended up staying at home and commuting to Glasgow Uni. By December of her 1st year she developed an eating disorder which she had for the remainder of her time there. She sought counselling for this.</i>
Glasgow Caledonian University (2012-2013)	M.A. Statistical Analysis	
University of Wolverhampton (2017-2018)	PGCE	<i>Went to Wolverhampton because she didn’t get into Manchester?</i>
Other qualifications	A trained massage therapist	

Family

Spouse (2018-)	?	<i>Currently going through a divorce</i>
Mother	Surinder	<i>Shop owner/worker</i> - <i>5ft 6, pretty, pear-shaped, ‘working hands’</i> - <i>Strict, controlling, materialistic, vain</i> - <i>Non-practicing Sikh - sometimes goes to the temple</i>
Father	Rags	<i>Shop owner/worker – also business partner with brother (pubs and houses)</i> - <i>5ft 11 (9191pprox...), black belt in taekwondo</i> - <i>Strict, stubborn and can be very angry/emotional</i> - <i>Non-practicing Sikh - does not go to the temple</i>

Brother	Sanraj	<i>Pharmacist</i> - 5 years younger - Intelligent and friendly - Suneet is very protective of him
Grandparents	Granny & Grandad	Had been factory workers in Huddersfield before opening a shop in Scotland
Likes and Dislikes		
Favourite colour	Purple	- Likes purple grapes.
Favourite films	<i>Forgetting Sarah Marshall</i> (2008), <i>Snatch</i> (2000), <i>Troy</i> (2004) - Also likes horror movies & Harry Potter.	
Favourite T.V. shows	<i>That 70's Show</i>, <i>Prison Break</i>, <i>Catchphrase</i>, <i>The Chase</i> - Also likes <i>Friends</i>	
Favourite food	Chinese food	- Loves shredded crispy chicken with egg fried rice.
Favourite drink	Irn Bru & Honey & lemon	- Also likes white wine.
Favourite books	Harry Potter	- Also likes anything to do with psychopaths and anything by Jon Ronson.
Favourite music	R&B	- Nikki Minaj, Cardi B, Jacob Banks, Drake, Chris Brown, Usher. Also likes Paolo Nutini & Hozier
Favourite animal	Camels	- "Maybe they spit at people because they don't like them?" - Also loves dogs. Is quite weary of horses
Favourite perfume	Narciso Rodriguez	- Also loves the smell of coconut.
Favourite subject(s) in school	Drama	- Is particularly good at accents and impersonations.
Favourite things about Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hill-walking • Fewer but generally friendlier people 	
Most important belongings	Photographs	

Personality	
Best habits	Puts “best foot forward” in most situations - <i>Thinks people wouldn’t necessarily know if she was unhappy or uncomfortable.</i>
Worst habits	Easily irritated - <i>Hates having to repeat herself.</i>
Political views	Left-wing - <i>Not overly political but holds typically liberal views.</i>
Charitable causes	Family donates to an orphanage in a village in India - <i>This village is where her Father is from. Considers adopting from here in the future</i>
Social life	Shopping & socialising in Glasgow <i>Sees Glasgow as a more modern, vibrant & multi-cultural city than Edinburgh.</i>
Activities	Dancing: Bhangra & Bollywood <i>Also played badminton, piano and drums and practiced karate growing up.</i>
Languages	English & Punjabi <i>Also speaks a bit of Hindi and understands Urdu (but cannot speak it).</i>
Phobias	Octopus
Other	
Person who knows her best	Manpreet (cousin) - <i>Manpreet lives in Yorkshire and they speak on the phone most days.</i>
Things she looks for in men	Honesty, consistency & kindness - <i>“In that order, I think”</i>
Longest relationship	3 years (93approx.) - <i>With Bav (2012-2015?)</i>
Life ambition	To be a mother - <i>Very important.</i>

vi. Timeline of Suneet's Life

1991	Born
1994	Starts school at Beaconhurst?
2009	Finishes A-Levels: Maths, English, Biology, Chemistry & Geography
2009 (September)	Starts studying Psychology and Neuroscience at University of Glasgow
2009 (December)	Develops eating disorder
2010	Starts relationship with a man (Stevie!) who is 8 ½ years older
2011	Passes driving test on 2 nd attempt
2012	Splits with 'horrible' boyfriend after 2 years (approx.)
2012 (June)	Finishes B.A.
2012 (September)	Starts M.A. in Statistical Analysis at Glasgow Caledonian University
2012	Starts relationship with Bav - she is 21 and he is 23
2013 (June)	Finishes M.A.
2013	Is proposed to by Bav – wedding date set for 23rd August, 2014
2013 (August)	Moves to Aberdeen to work as assistant director for education company
	Wedding is cancelled by parents
2014	Incident with Parents and ex-boyfriend?
2015	Moves to Glasgow / starts working for Procter and Gamble fragrances?
	Diagnosed with depression?
2016	Starts Bhangra classes in Glasgow
2017 (August)	Moves to Birmingham and starts PGCE
2018 (June)	Finishes PGCE
2018 (July 7 th)	Gets married
2018	Files for divorce
2018 (September)	Starts working at BMET

vii. Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
This project has been fully explained to me.		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		
I agree to take part in the project.		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary.		
I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time.		
I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio / video).		
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
I agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will be named in these outputs unless I specifically request not to be.		
I agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Worcester.		

Name of participant:

Signature:

Date:

Name of Researcher:

Signature:

Date:

Project contact details for further information:

Researcher: Mr. Alex Brockie

Director of Studies: Professor Claire Cochrane

viii. Prior Practice: *The Inferno Kid*

This MPhil was conceived as a result of reflection on a key area my M.A. in Drama and Performance, which was completed in 2012. As part of my dissertation on ‘the ethics of representation’ - in a more generic sense than is being addressed in this current study - I wrote and produced a play called *The Inferno Kid*. This was based on the retired life of professional wrestler, Tom Billington (1958-2018), known professionally as ‘The Dynamite Kid’. This play - in which I also played the main character - toured many local theatres in the Midlands in 2013-14 including The Arena in Wolverhampton, The Crescent in Birmingham and a week-long run at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

As a lifelong wrestling fan I was already familiar with, and intrigued by, Billington’s life story. From Wigan, he became internationally famous in the 1970s and 80s. He is best remembered for his acrobatic and intrepid style of wrestling which was showcased to millions during his tenure in the American wrestling promotion the WWE (then WWF). Billington’s run with the WWE came to an end in 1988 following a back injury which caused a steady decline in his physical abilities and would ultimately leave him permanently confined to a wheelchair by the age of forty.

Billington’s autobiography *Pure Dynamite* (1999) was one of many commercially published books I had read on the real lives of professional wrestlers. However, his stood out to me due to the remarkably stoic candour with which he reflected on his extraordinary experiences. For example, he recounts with glee many acts cruelty he inflicted on fellow wrestlers he travelled with such as spiking their drinks and setting fire to their hotel beds whilst they were sleeping in them. In one particularly sadistic anecdote he recalls pouring burning hot coffee onto Jake ‘the

Snake' Roberts' mascot snake, Damien, who at the time was secured in a canvas sack backstage before a match. He claims to have done this so that when Jake opened the bag in the ring, as per his routine, the snake would jump out in anger and thus provide a more entertaining spectacle for the audience. In showing no remorse for such animal cruelty, or any regret for the more significant life choices which ultimately left him disabled and destitute, I found him to be an interesting choice of protagonist for a play; one who would certainly challenge an audience's sympathies.

For further research into Billington's life I watched many broadcast interviews in which he featured, and I looked at archives from local newspapers in the Manchester area which reported on his success, as well as more negative events involving his lifestyle. In addition to this I communicated with his ex-wife, Michelle Billington, via Facebook and also with Alison Coleman, the ghost-writer of his autobiography, via email. The insight gained from my communication with them, as well as from wider research, was uncomfortably illuminating. For example, I learnt that towards the end of his career he had become an alcoholic and drug addict and once threatened his wife, Michelle, with a shotgun whilst she was pregnant with their third child. This character research led to a negative representation of Billington in my play - although his name and certain details of his life were changed for perceived legal and ethical reasons. However, despite my efforts to distance the work from its subject, I was always conscious of who the play was really about, and felt guilty for not having been brave enough to contact him directly to invite his approval and / or collaboration.

Billington was living on a council estate near Wigan at the time I was working on the play and, whilst I did drive to his house on one occasion after finding his address on the electoral register, I did not muster the courage to knock on his door to introduce

myself as I had heard that he kept a machete in the porch. The character of the Inferno Kid was therefore created on the basis of mediated accounts, some from third parties, without having ever spoken to the man himself. This led me to question my own personal ethics in how I had chosen to represent him in my capacity as playwright and actor and in turn caused me to experience what Luckhurst describes as ‘ethical stress’ (2011). Whilst Luckhurst does not attach a specific definition to this term, her analysis of the ‘greater responsibility’ felt by actors portraying real people is something which resonated with me as both performer and writer and which spurred me to carry out further research into the practices of appropriating the life-stories of famous, infamous and / or ‘ordinary’ living people - descriptors which could all have been attributed to Billington at various points in his life.

This perspective on what constitutes personhood is one of the challenges of writing about a living subject. If the ‘story’, or sequence of events, can permissibly be subject to filtering - either by the teller or by the person being told, where is the requirement for ‘truthfulness’ either fulfilled or lost? The ethical question of whose responsibility it is to verify, or to accept at face value, what is being told, came into sharp focus when I was working on the piece about Billington. For *The Inferno Kid* I had obtained no consent from Billington, and although I was writing about somebody personally unknown to me, in a way that gave me more scope to speculate, for example, on the disintegration of his sanity as well as his physical disability.

It genuinely seemed to me, when watching a CNN documentary in which he appeared (*Death Grip: Inside Pro Wrestling*, 2007), that he was losing control of his faculties during the latter stages of his life. Filmed in his home, he appeared shirtless and his responses to questions were blunt and incongruous to the piece’s sensitive

subject matter: an expose on the effects of steroid abuse in wrestling. For example, at one point in the interview he apathetically admits to threatening his wife with a shotgun when she was pregnant. He also needed to be subtitled due to the thickness of his accent and his tendency to mumble and speak with his finger in his mouth. However, when I based my play on the assumption, rather than any reported medical evidence, that he was suffering from mental health issues, and possibly brain trauma, I began to become aware of concerns. I recognised for the first time that these speculations were open to challenge, and that ‘getting it wrong’ undermined the validity and authenticity, at least as perceived, of my play. Added to which, given that my portrayal of him was deliberately unflattering - he was antagonist rather than protagonist for much of the piece - had he known about it then offence and distress may have been caused.

The interplay of responses to *The Inferno Kid* caused me to examine, through this present project, the conflict caused by the disconnection within drama of fact and fiction, and the blurring of the lines when trying to balance the need for factual accuracy and the need to capture audience attention. Billington, at the time of my writing *The Inferno Kid*, was a disabled man in a wheelchair living on benefits, who potentially had friends and neighbours who may not even have been aware of his earlier life as a professional entertainer. Although the play itself was set in the ‘present’, where Billington thinks back to his time as a famous wrestler and fantasises about a resurgence of his career, many of the experiences in it are clearly identifiable as hallucinations. It was when the factual account developed into one of speculation and fantasy that I realised the difficulty, which I hope my present project will reconcile. It is crucial, I learned, to ensure that the purpose and context of the project remains consistent.

Informing and entertaining are intertwined, but one cannot effectively and ethically masquerade as the other.

In pursuit of more details when developing *The Inferno Kid*, I contacted the ghost writer of Billington's autobiography, Alison Coleman, a journalist from Lancashire who had based his published authorised memoir on many interviews with him. Initially, she was co-operative, and gave me information readily, as I had said to her that I was a wrestling fan and post-graduate theatre student writing a play based on Billington's life. However, realising that his autobiography and other sources were already in the public domain, and looking for an angle which would bring something new to the narrative, I pushed the boundaries of the actual life events of Billington, and found myself using them as a vehicle to explore the liminal area between truth and speculation. I introduced a fantasy 'journalist' character into the piece, interviewing Billington about his fame, and seducing him with the notion of a comeback, and proposed to base this character on the persona of Coleman herself.

I told Coleman about this new departure, and she expressed her unhappiness with the development which placed her in the 'other woman' role embroiled in a love triangle with Billington and his wife and carer, Dot. Coleman said she would not be helping me any further and added that in her view I had not been clear about the objective of my project - to write a 'truthful' biographical play about Billington - and that to be further involved, and particularly being represented in character-form as one of the play's antagonists, 'undermined her professional integrity'. She explained that it was the change of direction which had caused her to withdraw.

In response to this, I changed the name of the play from *Shades of Dynamite* to *The Inferno Kid*, Tom (Tommy) became 'Terry', his wife Dot became 'Debbie', and the

journalist, Alison, became 'Angela'. I also altered a few biographical details, which I felt enabled me to continue to progress the piece into the proposed fantasy area, with a wheelchair-bound man in his forties - played by myself - who still bore a resemblance to Billington in his later years, becoming detached from reality and fantasising about a famous past he may or may not have actually had.

When the piece was completed, the design for the marketing material - a poster and a flyer - showed 'my' character of 'the Kid', complete with glasses and wheelchair, was posted on online wrestling forums and on social media hoping to generate interest for the play's run in the West Midlands and Edinburgh. The response from some users, particularly on the wrestling heritage sites, was not supportive, with a feeling from some members that this was obviously about Billington because I physically resembled him and there were thinly veiled allusions to his wrestling past in the synopsis. It was felt that it was not right, or at least not kind, to base a play on such a recognisable character when he was known to be 'down on his luck' and confined to a wheelchair, and - importantly - was still alive, and furthermore appeared not to have been consulted. It was remarked on social media that Billington 'should sue' me for creatively suggesting that his mental state had deteriorated. The tag line on the poster had read "Disabled, Destitute and Descending into Madness". However, I investigated with some anxiety whether this would have been a viable claim for a legal action, but discovered that due to the small scale of the play, there was no real monetary gain, and that Billington's reputation had already been defamed in the public eye to the extent that it could not be defamed any further by what was being said or implied in my play or its marketing materials.

Because of the physical resemblance, rather than the content of the play, which those commenting adversely had not read or seen, I would have found it difficult to challenge any of the comments, so I altered the physical appearance on the marketing material completely, changed the name again, now to *El Britannico*, and made a further adaptation of the character into a former British Mexican wrestling star (a luchador), adding a mask. The play went ahead, with only a few diehard wrestling fans who came to watch it realising it was based on ‘The Dynamite Kid’ Tom Billington.

These experiences led me to ensure that I would be more consistent and transparent in my approach when working with, or from, the experiences of living subjects going forward. Writing about living subjects, in this context, carries particular potential problems, which have been widely referred to in the literature about depictions of real events on stage. In the case of real events of a nature which attract the public interest, for example, the shootings in the States and northern Europe (*The Events*, Greig, 2013), there is clearly more emphasis on the ‘events’, and exploration of character and motive may be pivotal to the appeal of the drama, but relate to the events in a different way to a piece set against a background of a less well known, ‘ordinary’ person facing a more relatable set of dilemmas.