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Chapter 3. The Dead Play

This chapter contextualizes three concepts, developed within the field of psychoanalysis: the death drive, desire and the uncanny (unheimlich). Each of these concepts will be discussed to offer imaginative ways to think about them in the context of play and performance making. Performance activity often works as if it is a game, and, significantly, our 'Gary and Claire' creative ideas situate themselves as a world within conceptual psyche. A playful approach to making work means we write the rules and conditions of a project, which in turn determines how we play it or play at it. Making performance (for us) comes about from a playful attitude towards an idea, and this attitude shifts in tone according to the material that we respond to, but often that playfulness slips between the humorous, the mischievous, the surreal and the dark. What is about to be explored is not so much a defence of psychoanalytic ideas but rather a way to think through the terms metaphorically, analogously, imaginatively and to situate such psychoanalytic terms in creatively useful transferable ways, as both a conceptual and structural dramaturgy that we name the Death Drift / Drift Drive.

While we do not make performance work in this order – read theory to make artistic work – we do, while we make performance, reflect upon the worlds (in film or performance) that situate themselves to the themes of death, desire and the uncanny. Therefore, we think critically and playfully about the worlds we are drawn to. While we recognize that the original positions of the three terms are situated in psychoanalysis, we frame their developed thinking by drawing upon the critical thought of Nicholas Royle, Adam Phillips, Julia Kristeva and others.

We begin with an overview of the three terms, starting with the death drive. But we would like to acknowledge that Freud's thinking on the death drive was inspired by a female psychoanalyst.

Death Drive

In November 1911, one of the first female psychoanalysts publishes a paper entitled 'Destruction as the cause of coming into being'. Sabina Spielrein's paper, as Covington (2015) points out, introduces the concept of the death instinct, further incorporated by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in (Freud, 1920). Here Freud marks Spielrein's idea in a footnote articulating it as a destructive component of the sexual instinct.

Freud proposed the idea that 'the aim of life is death' (Strachey, 2001, p.38). Later, while other psychoanalysts were not so confident of Freud's concept of the death drive, Jacques Lacan, while supporting Freud's ideas, asserted that 'death sustains existence' (Lacan, 1970, p.300).

Freud's thinking on the death drive developed in relation to his experience of working with soldiers who suffered trauma during World War I. He observed that his patients returned to their experiences of traumatic events in their dreams. Freud's original separation of life and death instincts were based upon simple ideas around human behaviour; for example, cooperation, love and collaboration would be the basic principles of Eros (the life drive) whereas behaviour associated with Thanatos (the death drive) would be destructive aggressive behaviours. Freud revised his thinking on the death drive in his publication *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). His theory here focused around the essence of the drive and on its impossibility of reaching absolute satisfaction. The result of Freud's understanding of death drive establishes the phenomenon of repetition as part of the overall structure of the human subject and he 'advocated the existence of an innate tendency in all living organisms to return themselves to an inanimate state' (Barford in Weatherill, 1999, p.12).

Freud's idea is a curious one: what is it within us that is compelled to return to an inanimate state? Was Freud suggesting that there is some unconscious impulse to return to a place we know nothing of, something beyond comprehension? For what is an inanimate state? As an idea it suggests our cells have their own instinctual life

with an urge to go back to a place of pre-birth. Interestingly, it feels like the work of fiction. Is the drive a biological, linguistic or a philosophical force?

As a hypothesis, the death drive is something that has never been scientifically proven to exist, but there is something appealing about the elusive and abstract concept. We have to imagine there is the presence of an ambiguous other inside of us, perhaps it is animalistic, or monstrous, or, we announce, quite playful. Whatever characteristic we imagine it to embody, the Lacanian concept of the drive is that an organism strives towards and beyond the death (or the end) of something. Slavov Žižek supports and develops this Lacanian perspective:

The death drive is not the mark of human finitude, but its very opposite, the name for 'eternal (spectral) life', the index of a dimension in human existence that persists forever beyond our physical death, and of which we can never rid ourselves.... (Žižek, 1999, p.294)

Freud's death drive towards destruction and/or as the impossibility of reaching absolute satisfaction was discussed by Lacan as a purpose that does not follow a path to an end, summarized here by Evans, as

the purpose of the drive (*Triebziel*) is not to reach a *goal* (a final destination) but to follow its *aim* (the way itself), which is to circle round the object (cf. S11, 168). Thus the real purpose of the drive is not some mythical goal of full satisfaction, but to return to its circular path, and the real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit. (Evans, 2006, p.47)

Freud's death drive is a biological expression, whereas Lacanian psychoanalysis situates it within a linguistic and cultural frame. These two different ways of thinking about the death drive appeal to us. As a biological expression we are compelled to imagine the cells, the fluids, the flesh of the body working through their own logic, outside of our consciousness via their own impulses. This idea could be addressed through a cultural frame and thought of as an analogy for dramaturgy – the fact that dramaturgy as a performance-making process does not always exist through a conscious intervention by a person in a role but emerges in the abstract, out of the

material constructed and has a particular flow, shape, rhythm and developing inner logic. We ask ourselves what is the equivalent of a biological life of a creative process? Freud theorized that humans repress the death drive, suggesting that it manifests itself in other forms of human behaviour, such as neurosis. The compulsion to repeat (a characteristic associated to the death drive) is a process intrinsic to mimetic behaviour and performance because many creative structures rely on repetition as their art form; but surely not all artists are neurotic?! Theatre director Anthony Howell borrows from the terms death and life instincts when analysing performance processes. He places a cultural meaning onto them by reimagining them as 'forward and reverse drives, rather than of life and death instincts' (Howell, 2003, p.172). However, he does suggest Freud 'is right' to 'insist on the existence of a drive to restore to a previous state, characterized by the compulsion to repeat' (Ibid., p.173). He draws our attention to the actions we experience in performance that repeat from the first significant action, or 'initial action'. He suggests that actions in performance after the initial action diminish in order of significance and therefore any subsequent action that is repeated is an attempt to restore through various additive moments in the work.

Lacan's death drive is situated in what he calls the symbolic order: 'in the seminar of 1954–5, for example, he argues that the death drive is simply the fundamental tendency of the symbolic order to produce REPETITION' (Evans, 2006, p.33). The process of circling is a useful visual metaphor to think about the way ideas are developed for performance because the drive (and Lacan imagined the death drive as a component of every drive) seeks to attain the process of never attaining, of not ever reaching a goal. This means that repetition in performance (either through the making process or the performance itself) seeks not to restore but to accumulate and keep moving. Rather than making an action 'better' or fixing it permanently, or restoring the first action as in Howell's discussion, the death drive in performance (through a Lacanian lens) is always seeking and in this way respects time through the commitment to actions that are moving forwards (not back) and what might emerge from repetition is based upon the experience of desire.

For Lacan, death and its symbolism are related not so much to biology but to our insertion into the world of language and to the work of the signifier. The signifier,

argues Lacan, introduces a negativity that is ultimately productive despite borrowing from destruction in that it offers man the possibility of creating and engaging in a fresh start. (López, 1996, p.4)

Drive implies a moving forward and a surge on impulse. Various artistic processes rely upon the progression of ideas and the production of new worlds most often produced from gut instinct. And, contemporary performance is no stranger to the imaginary universes of imitating, impersonating or represented death or dying. The theatre of the late twentieth century represented most frequently playful live acts of death and dying and in doing so opened up critical contexts for thinking about change and transformation. When discussing the relationship between death and play, Andrew Quick lists the many Forced Entertainment shows where deaths are performed, if not repeated. In *Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me* (1999), 'hundreds of deaths are playfully enacted over twenty-four hours' (Quick, 2004, p.162). Quick also draws our attention to Arthur's dying speech in *Showtime* (1996) suggesting that the 'disruptive activities' of Forced Entertainment performances 'cannot be limited to an interpretation that attempts to identify them solely as the effects of the operations of Eros and Thanatos, as embodiments of Freud's notion of the life and the death drives' (Ibid., p.154). But, the many stage deaths within Forced Entertainment's disruptive play aesthetic, it could be argued, are a death drive in practice. Death returns in many forms in their work, and as one example of many in *Spectacular* (2008), a lone performer dressed in a skeleton costume talks openly to the audience about confronting death, while dressed up as 'death'. *Spectacular* epitomizes a Lacanian concept of the death drive because the material in this show circles around the object of death; the performers repeatedly play dead in a show about death.

While Quick notes there is more to observe than the embodiment of the drives, there is something fundamental at the heart of such an embodiment: the practice of dark and deep play; and Etchells (2008) acknowledges that dying has a charged place in theatre as he describes the actors playing 'like kids fooling with a Ouija board' and points out the whole company has been dying from the early days in shows such as *(Let the Water Run its Course) to the Sea that made its Promise* (1996). And, they don't give up, as Etchells announces, 'no one's fooled. (...), we come back – as a

culture and as a group of artists – waiting till there's no one around, drawing the curtains and starting to play dead again. (Etchells, 2008)

Forced Entertainment continue to circle around the subject of death. In a recent performance of *Dirty Work, The Late Shift* (2018), developed from their 1998 performance of *Dirty Work*, two performers Cathy and Robin sit on chairs for the duration of the performance speaking vivid descriptions to the audience of unfolding dramas set in a theatre somewhere. In this theatre nothing is unstageable, including many gruesome deaths and the audience laugh at the detail and at the fateful misfortune of others. The humour it seems is found in the juxtapositions that collide with the impossible, the ridiculous with the real. Terry, is sat downstage left for the duration of the performance, not saying a word, she plays vinyl on an old record player, it's the sound of a piano. She looks on into the audience. The stories told are quite mesmerising as is the witness (Terry) even when some stories are told in a way to make our stomachs turn, Terry continues to look on, witnessing us witnessing them. Death in this performance keeps on happening and yet no physical action happens on stage, it is the power of language and the way in which the stories of death are told, often playfully, that holds us in a spell, and the stories at times are very dark.

Artists play at constructing, inventing and imagining playful scenarios for performance. *How* performers play and *what* they play (within many processes) can be separated out distinctively within the terms of dark and deep play. While we are aware of the widely discussed discourse available on the many definitions of play, which relate to mimesis, gaming, recreational activities, and so on, we understand how unfixed and broad the definitions of play are. See Huizinga (1988) and Turner (2014), to name a few theorists that define play's meaning and purpose. We acknowledge Caillois' (2001) assertion that play is a 'free and voluntary activity', that we have a choice when it comes to playing. But we also note that the idea of choice is complex within a creative process, as contested by Peters (2013) who elaborates on Gadamer, 'what holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there' (Gadamer, 2013: 106). Peters unpacks Gadamer's notion that a game 'masters the players' and suggests that wanting (desire) leaves little room for choice when it comes to play. We suggest that under such a 'spell' there is a form of a

Lacanian death drive operating. Absorbed in a game's conditions, the rules operate as tasks that we repeat, and in turn we create fictions that seduce us into a deeper level of engagement as if we are in play's magical thrall. It is not that we have no choice (as in being forced) when we play, but rather that desire takes hold of us and keeps us obsessed in a circular experience. When Etchells (1999) talks about 'play as a state in which meaning is flux', there is a realization when engaging in the messiest of improvisation games, the ones where we throw ourselves into the 'dark', that they are deeply transformative. Therefore, paying closer attention to the disruptive and subversive nature of contemporary performance making, the terms 'dark play' and 'deep play' are useful when thinking about a relationship between the death drive and play/ing. Richard Schechner suggests that dark play

Involves fantasy, risk, luck, daring, invention and deception. Dark play may be entirely private, known to the player alone or can erupt suddenly, a bit of micro play, seizing the player(s) and then as quickly subsiding – a wisecrack, burst of frenzy, delirium, or deadly risk. (Schechner, 2002, p.106)

Schechner also states that 'dark play subverts order, dissolves frames and breaks its own rules' (Ibid. p.107). He goes on to say:

The gratification and thrill of dark play involves everything from physical risk-taking to inventing new selves, to engaging one's inner self, to communion with the Other. There is something excitingly liberating about this kind of playing. (Ibid., p.109)

Philosopher Jeremy Bentham first coined the term 'high stakes' within a footnote in his work *The Theory of Legislation* (1802).

If you have just a thousand pounds and the stake is five hundred and you lose, your fortune is diminished by a half; but if you win, the gain is only a third. If the stake is a thousand pounds, and you win, the doubling of the gain in fortune is not matched by a doubling of happiness; but if you lose, your happiness is destroyed (Bentham, 2018).

Clifford Geertz adapted Bentham's observation on 'high stakes' (translated as deep play) as an activity that has cultural meaning. Richard Schechner relates the term 'dark' to 'deep' and brings our attention to the idea that deep play can be an activity where there 'is more at stake than material gain: namely, esteem, honor dignity, respect...' (Schechner, 2002, p.106). Yet theories by Diane Ackerman suggests that feelings evoked by play that involve danger can sometimes arouse and give pleasure to those who take risks, and she describes deep play as

the ecstatic form of play. In its thrall, all the play elements are visible, but they're taken to intense and transcendent heights. Thus deep play should really be classified by mood, not activity. It testifies to how something happens, not what happens. (Ackerman, 1999, p.12)

Ackerman's accounts highlight the difference between 'rapture' and 'ecstasy', both of which, she suggests, are components of deep play. 'Rapture means, literally, being seized by force ..., ecstasy means to be gripped by passion' (Ibid., p.15). Deep play is typically located in high-risk sports, intense and transcendental states, and can be prompted by a variety of spaces, 'both sacred spaces (natural) and ritualistic places (ceremonies to initiate humiliation)' (Ibid., p.15). It seems that the 'depth' of deep play lies more in an attitude towards and during a particular activity rather than the activity itself, since an extremely high-risk activity may not in itself induce intense sensations or engross a player to the point of transcendence. In fact, Ackerman writes of cycling (a particularly low-risk activity) as deep play. It is the player's motivation, mood, attitude and engagement that render the activity 'deep' and rewarding. In essence, deep play is not just associated with high-risk activity.

While it could be argued that dark play as a kittenish activity is a conscious act and the death drive is not, it is dark play's relationship to deep play that gives our theory its currency as relational to the death drive. We bring Schechner's *dark* and Ackerman's *deep* together in practice because we are interested in *what* happens within performance as well as *how* something happens.

Returning to our practice now, as the 'Gary and Claire' projects, we have observed that dark play is a particular activity that subverts rules, or 'normal' codes of

behaviour, and in the case of creative works. For example, it is the fictional or non-fictional play frame that drives the narrative of a project, the persona and performer, or the rules of a performance (this is the *what*). Deep play is the attitude and experience of playing the performance (this is the *how*). Deep play is also attained from the engagement with and the experiencing of the process of performance making, the creation phase of writing and composing or material (the *how*). Yet, the two terms slip and slide into one another: dark play's conscious impulse informs deep play's unconscious urge, or deep play's unconscious urge informs dark play's conscious interest; the two are in a symbiotic relationship.

Dark and deep play can be related to Freud's notion of the unconscious and his suggestion that human drives act as a hidden force behind immediate awareness: 'There are conscious and unconscious ideas, but there are also unconscious drive impulses, feelings, sensations, and so on' (Freud, cited in Frankland, 2005, p.59). We can imagine that dark play as a form of a Freudian death drive is to bind the conscious interest in creative work (subversion) with the unconscious play attitude (mischievous) in an environment akin to that of Freud's structural model of the psyche, the id. We are drawn to Freud's concept of the id because it contains the instinctual impulses – the destructive ones. As an example, Žižek makes an allegory of the id using the character Harpo Marx (Fiennes, 2006), where he suggests that the id, like Harpo, is a very troublesome, very playful and naughty clown. When you watch the Marx Brothers perform, Harpo's silent and mischievous character is humorous because of his animalistic, destructive qualities. And, to imagine deep play as a form of the Lacanian death drive bound to the conscious obsession with creative idea (the passion) and to the unconscious commitment (Gadamer's spell) is to return to the creative journey and its circular process.

Reflecting broadly on both Freud's and Lacan's concepts, we bring in Nicholas Royle's idea that the drive 'is irreducibly bound up with the performative' (Royle, 2003, p.85); the death drive suggests action as, despite us, it gets on with things. In this context, it is worth reminding ourselves that artistic processes are composed of actions that result in many endings (lots of little deaths) because 'death is right inside us, working away busy as a mole all the time' (Royle, 2003). For us as artists, this is provocative territory. In Chapter 1, 'The Dead Rejoice', we pondered

on the idea that death is within us, and Royle's 'busy mole' metaphor allows us to make sense of culture's fascination with the dead and permits us to take on the term death drive in a creative context, not necessarily a wholly destructive one. Rather we drift into this territory and circle around ideas and themes and we become spellbound. Royle thinks of the death drive in terms of a 'current flow' and renames it a 'death drift'. This flow could be thought of as a metaphor for the movement within contemporary dramaturgy, as the drift that occurs within a creative process between one idea that is associated with another. This observation draws us less into conflict between a Freudian or Lacanian interest in the death drive, and rather into the more exciting territory, a slippage between the two:

By 'death drive', Freud does not understand the state of being dead but the wish to be so. This wish for the restfulness associated with death is part of Freud's pleasure principle, which drives us to repeat actions in different contexts and time that bring about states of rest and certainty. According to Žižek's recent interpretation, Freud's term denotes the uncanny persistence, not of death, but of life. (Lord, 2012, p.43)

DESIRE

There are so many things that we desire or, rather, there are so many things we think we desire, but there are so many things we do not know about desire itself. Desire is felt and but not fully comprehended. As a wish it can range from the basic materialistic, to the romantic, the sexual, the sadistic the destructive, to the fantastical, to the nonsensical. Desire is complex, it can be experienced as an intense conscious longing, painfully, or deliciously, out of reach. Desire can be led by irrational impulses, driven by unconscious wishes and according to Žižek certain art forms can even tell us *how* to desire because desire is something we cannot possibly (naturally) know. Of course, Freud once theorized around wish fulfilment in the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1890). He discussed the idea that dreams are desires played out in sleep, as a way to prevent them happening in reality and as means of satisfying desire. But the difficulty with this theory is that most dreams are just too bizarre, or too fragmented, jumbled up in sequence. How can they be taken

seriously when last night I dreamt I opened the door to a giant gorilla? Freud's seminal work on dream interpretation enabled people to understand the complexities of their seemingly irrational desires through the interpretation of dreams. For in the dream, let us not forget, when we are in the dream, it seems perfectly acceptable to open the door to a giant gorilla, and at the time the fear and passion seem real. As sentient beings we feel in the dream, we have that uncanny knowingness of 'ah yes, it's that giant gorilla that picks me up and takes me away'. Regardless of the surreal experience of the dream, the gorilla, at that moment, meant something. Moreover, upon waking, and even years after the dream it still feels like it meant something.

Desire most commonly has been something discussed in relation to sexuality;

Anna Freud once said, in your dreams you can have your eggs cooked the way you want them, but you can't eat them. The implication is clear: magic is satisfying but reality is nourishing. The question is – and it is a question that has haunted psychoanalysis – are the appetites analogous? Is hunger a good picture for sexuality? Because if it isn't, if sexuality isn't akin to, isn't a form of feeding, then the consequences are serious. Indeed, we could reverse Anna Freud's formation and say that when it comes to sexuality it is the fact that you can't eat the eggs that makes them so satisfying. (Phillips, 2007, p.59)

And certainly, in waking life, when we imagine a place for fulfilled or unfulfilled desires it is psychoanalysis that 'describes what happens when we live as if our wishes can come true and what happens when we live as if they cannot (Phillips, 2007, p.162). Therefore, it is easy to see how, over centuries, desire has been used to teach lessons in morality, as a warning to someone if a fantasy is lived out:

The fact that the object of desire is a forbidden object; that what we most passionately want is what we certainly mustn't have. The medium of desire is enigmatic; and the object of desire is aversive. (Ibid., p.166)

Lacan's concept of desire is based upon 'dual and complimentary insistences' (Ibid., p.171). Lack makes 'self-conscious being possible; the object of desire is unnameable,

essentially beyond representation – say; if you can name it is isn't what you want' (Ibid.). In other words, we think we know our desires, but the desires we think we know are a diversion to something that is forever out of reach, something much more enigmatic, it is something we are forever chasing. This is what keeps desire alive within us because we run the risk of losing the passionate feeling of desire itself as explored by Žižek:

Desire is historical and subjectivized, always by definition unsatisfied, metonymical, shifting from one object to another since I do not actually desire what I want. What I actually desire is to sustain desire itself, to postpone the dreaded moment of its satisfaction. (Žižek, 1997, p.80)

If the 'the object of desire is a fantasy' (Phillips, 2007, p.164), we can accommodate desire through the play. The common childhood games, peek-a-boo, hide and seek, have one distinct feature in common: they allow those taking part to perform/rehearse death through the playing out of it. 'From the child's egocentric perspective, what happens (in such games) is that the external world vanishes and then suddenly reappears' (Corr & Corr, 2012: 370) (our interpolation in brackets). Playing games is exciting, rewarding, thrilling but games are also reassuring, we play to remind us that things end, so in the midst of fantasy you witness death over and over again without actually dying. The games we played in childhood enabled us to rehearse the experience of loss, and, more provocatively, desire as Royle's busy 'mole' is working inside us playing out the death drive as catharsis. In the game of sleeping lions, the lions lie as still as possible as if they are dead, and it is the 'waker's' job to stir up the lions, to bring them back from the dead. If you play the game as a lion you experience deadness; playing a corpse means you can experience the *as if* world, what it feels like to be dead. The waker's job is to make the lion move through non-physical contact, but most importantly to laugh. Dead lions wake up in fits of laughter. In this context, death and humour are linked because play is 'the main work of a child's life' (Ibid., p.371), and children are experts in playing dead. In the games where other children are involved, every participant, through the act of repetition, gets to experience the drama of what it is like to be fully alive and what it feels like to be 'death personified' (Kastenbaum, 2015, p.307). Playing dead is a desired activity as there can be no such literal experience of feeling what it is like to be dead. It is useful to note the importance of such dark play activities as cathartic, and perhaps, it is also worth considering that playing dead satisfies the death

drive's aim to continually desire. When we grow up, are we perpetually searching for what we have lost from childhood in the days where we played as active thrill seekers? Playing games test the limits of what is possible without any feelings of guilt or shame.

Lethal violence has been a common theme in children's play through the centuries. As a child in the streets of New York, my friends and I played cops and robbers, sporting wooden guns armed with rubber bands. Medieval children brandished their stick swords as they replayed Crusader Saracen battles. (...) There is no relationship between killer and slain and, of course, no remorse. (Ibid., p.307)

Freud's famous anecdote of fort/da in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* offers a complex and interesting set of interpretations in relation to play and death. Here he discusses, anecdotally, his observations of a child throwing objects away to disappear out of sight only for them to be returned to him, to throw them out of sight again, to be returned again (repeating the action). This behaviour, it has been argued, is both pain and pleasure (experienced through the process of repetition) for the child, where he 'masters a situation' (Freud, in Strachey, 2001, p.15). Through the observation of fort (gone) / da (there) play, Freud interprets a child's behaviour, and claims that the child's compulsion to repeat gives him more of an 'active' role in the game than a passive one. Freud offers many other interpretations too, suggesting that the child might be taking out revenge on the mother for disappearing/leaving him. Or, that play allows the child to fulfil his wish of growing up. Or, that frightening experiences in the child's life are played out on his friends as a means to experience pleasure. Ultimately it seems, Freud suggests there is pleasure experienced in actively repeating traumatic experiences through play. Paul Ricoeur suggests that these experiences of unpleasure are 'mastered by the means of repetition in play, by the staging of the loss of the loved person' (Ricoeur, 2008, p.286).

Examining Ricoeur's reinterpretation of the death drive as an idea of something creative, we can understand the drive's more imaginative, inspiring and human position in relation to desire;

What is surprising is that the death instinct is represented by such an important function which has nothing to do with destruction, but rather with the symbolization of play, with esthetic creation, and with reality-testing itself. (Ibid., p.317)

Some animals play dead in order to escape the fate of predators. The opossum goes stiff, shows its teeth and froths at the mouth to put off its hunter. The animal is not really playing, as in a game, but surviving. The child is also surviving the reality that the end of something is inevitable. Yet more interestingly perhaps, returning to the idea that we play to sustain desire, the child is playing to keep excitement alive, as a constant form of satisfaction rubbing up against a perpetual imminent threat pursued in play. Playing therefore is a means to experience the death drive and the pleasure principle simultaneously:

If pleasure expresses a reduction of tension, and if the death instinct marks a return of living matter to the inorganic, it must be said that pleasure and death are on the same side. (Ibid., p.319)

Roger Caillois' system of categorization for understanding the varied types of play-activity and the varying attitudes while playing can be explicated in the context of many fantasies; this includes improvised play and games where clear rules are established. Also see Hind (2010). Caillois suggests that play has two 'poles', *paidia* and *ludus*. *Paidia* represents all things childish, excitable and turbulent; it includes fantasy and improvisation. *Ludus* in contrast represents convention, rule-based play and formal structures within play. Caillois also theorized around the imaginary worlds encountered in play. For example, he draws our attention to the concept of the 'as if' where someone plays a role or pretends to be something else and where one draws upon an imaginary concept to play a game.

Some forms of play have what Caillois describes as the sentiment of 'as if' (Caillois, 2001, p.9) attached to it, so that make-believe and imagination is key to successful playing. He cites examples such as 'cops and robbers, horses, locomotives, and airplanes – games in general, which presuppose free improvisation, and the chief attraction' (Ibid., p.8). Imaginary play is a playing out of fiction and unlike a netball match where the game is played for real, the 'as if' permits a place of endless improvisation and imagination, of a never ending 'as if'. Yet Caillois observes that 'the sentiment of as if replaces and performs the same function as do rules. Rules themselves create fiction' (Ibid., p.9). And let's not underestimate the complexity of play:

One easily can conceive of children, in order to imitate adults blindly manipulating real or imaginary pieces on an imaginary chessboard, and by pleasant example, playing at 'playing chess'. (Ibid)

Splitting play into types we notice that ruled play (*ludus*), like a game of netball, is played with the pleasure of adhering to the set rules within that game of netball. Play in this context is not so separate from reality, because the game of netball is played for *real*. There is a documented result, a score. Most competitive sports operate in this way.

Yet, within the frame of free play, rules can be created, made and unmade and as the player wishes. We make up the rules as we go along in the midst of imaginary play but we also have the freedom to break rules. In some cases, playing through 'as if', *paidia*, means we can play *as if* we are in the mode of *ludus*. For example, we remember our childhood dramas of the playground where we play out imaginary scenes and play a game of school where a player enacts a hierarchical position of teacher and in doing so creates their own very serious rules and gives the other person playing a detention. These games get more complex and abstract too. For example: *it is as if I am playing a game of school accepting my detention, when I suddenly drop down to the floor as if I am dead*. When the player is 'dead' there is an element of seriousness to this activity, the rules are clear; you play dead for as long as you can in order to try and deceive your partner to trick them into believing that you might actually be dead. This game of deceit of feigned death asserts a level of seriousness for a moment, and the power from the 'pupil' held over the 'teacher' as a punishment for dishing out a detention is apparent.

Caillois' subjunctive playing at playing (as if) theory has been developed further in by Hind (2010) into what she names the *multiple as if* (the as if as if). Playing at playing at playing at... (the multiple as if) and is a useful strategy for writing material because it encourages richly intertextual worlds that in some cases weave in the autobiographical.

Playing through the *multiple as if* in performance and through the lens of desire creates a series of romanticized hybridist situations, characters and places. The multiple as if queers identity within a romanticized space and, as a brief example, our character *Kong Lear*, appearing in Chapter 4 *The Dead Ghost*, challenges the patriarchy, dismantles the binary of male/female, human/non-human because *Kong Lear* is a hybrid of the

Shakespearean character King Lear and the Hollywood beast King Kong performed as female who comes with a set of her own unspoken desires.

Desire is not just simply the motivation or the 'passion' driving the engagement in creative activity, it is a complex and provocative attitude, often slippery, contained in a drive that has similar qualities to dark play in its 'microplay' context where play is 'truly subversive' (Schechner, 2002, p.107).

Phillips suggests we can never understand our desires, or really know them. The paradox of desire is to experience the sheer in the moment ecstasy of something always remaining out of reach. We cannot reach our dreams, we only recall them.

UNHEIMLICH / UNCANNY

In 1919 Freud wrote an essay entitled *Das Unheimliche*, translated in English as 'The Uncanny'. Here he discusses unfamiliarity as uncanny and he lists a range of different experiences that sum up examples of the term that theorists have since derived in different cultural contexts (as do we as practitioners in this chapter). His essay drew attention to the meaningful boundaries of the simultaneity of absence and presence, drawing attention to the idea that the reason things may feel unfamiliar (when in fact they are very familiar) is because they are suppressed. Freud's essay draws our attention specifically to the suggestion that the uncanny is to do with the 'theory of the qualities of feeling' (Freud in McLintock, 2003, p.48). Feeling in performance can be experienced in many ways: through the making of it, when you work from the gut feeling; in the playing out of performance when you perform something in you more than you know (character or part of self); or in witnessing the act of performance where you experience effect – watching performance stirs up emotion.

Kristeva writes in her seminal work *Strangers to Ourselves* on the uncanny and claims that 'The Foreigner is in me, hence we are all foreigners'. She discusses the term uncanny strangeness as...

On the basis of an erotic, death-bearing unconscious, the uncanny strangeness – a projection as well as a first working out of death drive – which adumbrates the work of the ‘second’ Freud, the one of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, sets the difference within us in its most bewildering shape and presents it as the ultimate condition of our being *with* others (Kristeva, 2002, p.290).

Rahimi discusses the Uncanny in association with themes and metaphors of ‘vision, blindness, mirrors, and other optical tropes’ (Rahimi, 2013, p.1). He further expands upon a series of examples that relate to ‘alter egos, self-alienations and split personhoods, phantoms, twins and living dolls’ as a list of uncanniness relating to the ‘visual sphere’ (Ibid., p.1). The uncanny is felt, experienced, hard to concretize, impossible to pin down but nevertheless is encountered in the senses and arrives in many different forms. The uncanny is something that makes one feel strange a ‘peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context’ (Royle, 2003, p.1). In simplistic terms, the uncanny is that hard to locate feeling we experience in a *déjà vu*. It is a strange unfamiliar knowingness, a paradox hard to describe in words other than many variations on the weird or strange or eerie. The uncanny is the joyous feeling we attain at that moment of sheer coincidence as if there is someone else watching and mapping out the course of our lives, driving our fate or the course of a game. It is that deeply familiar feeling that returns upon waking; the residue of a dream, the one that you cannot quite recall haunting the senses all day. It is a smell that takes you immediately back to childhood. It resides in the ‘jinx’ when two children say the same word simultaneously and unexpectedly, experiencing the effects of telepathy. It is that feeling in a dream when you are inside the dream and where you know you are dreaming (lucidity). The uncanny sits and waits in the recurring dream as a reminder that the uncanny returns. It can also be experienced as something deeply unwelcome: that uneasy feeling when you walk in a place of unfamiliar territory, when you stumble into a part of a building and decide you do not like it and you have that feeling of being lost. The list goes on: descending stairs alone, underground shopping malls filled with unnatural light, the overwhelming feeling when driving past the giant cooling towers on the A1(M). The uncanny can be felt in the most negative of head-spaces that might bring on a panic attack where all of sudden the world does not seem real at all. The uncanny is the friend of the existential crisis. The uncanny is also associated with the death drive ‘bound up with the most extreme nostalgia (...) a

compulsion to return to an inorganic state, a desire perhaps (perhaps unconscious) to die, a death drive (Royle, 2003, p.2). Yet the uncanny can be exciting, playful, mysterious 'it can also be a matter of something strangely beautiful, bordering on ecstasy' (Ibid.).

The uncanny resides in the imaginative, it exists in culture and, as a few examples of many, is associated with the disturbance one feels or sees in the presence of ghosts, zombies, monsters, the pantomime horse, papier-mâché doppelgangers, free-floating soap bubbles. Interestingly for us, Freud considered the idea of the uncanny as 'represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits, and ghosts' (Freud, 2003, p.148). In fact, he discusses the idea that humans question the certainty of death, whether 'death is the fate of every living creature or simply a regular, but perhaps avoidable, contingency within life itself' (Ibid). This concept, Freud asserts, plays into the fact that human unconsciousness is 'unreceptive as ever to the idea of our own mortality' (Ibid). It seems that it is from within the experience of uncanniness of not knowing what it is like to be dead that we invent ghosts. The supernatural exists in culture because 'apparitions and ghosts represent that ambiguity and fill with uncanny strangeness our confrontations with the image of death' (Kristeva, 1991, p.187). But performance suggests many different interpretations of, what death is. 'Above all, the uncanny is intimately entwined in language, with how we conceive and represent what is happening within ourselves, to the world, when uncanny strangeness is at issue' (Royle, 2003, p.2).

Psychoanalysis aligns to the human psyche on the basis that humans have a conscience; they have an id, ego and superego. It is rather exciting to imagine terrifying, or playful possibilities of a functioning psyche that of the undead, the ghost, the inanimate object or the hybrid monster; this concept opens up myriad possibilities for writing, performance and performing. The uncertainty of self we experience in life is personified in culture through varying interpretations of the non-human. In performance we embody the anthropomorphic, the mechanical. Think of the ventriloquist's dummy and its cruel and sadistic tongue, the dummy's lack of moral conscience suggests the id is all that performs, and if the dummy is left alone, what is it capable of without its master? The dummy does not speak, the dummy is silent, but somehow it has a voice just the same. When we think about silence in general, the feeling one gets in those uncomfortable silences, or in the unnerving experience of deadly silence, we know that silence is the

uncanny personified. In many ways, silence depicts what the uncanny does above and beyond language itself.

Making performance through the multiple as if (playing at playing at playing), diversifies the effects of the uncanny even further when there are several complex juxtapositions going on. Returning therefore to the terms dark and deep. Deep play determines *how* a performance is played, not necessarily *what*. Dark play is the *what*. Dark play is the rules in performance and is the power those rules hold (known or unknown) within performance structures. Expanding therefore on one of our previously mentioned ideas, dark play is a manifestation of the death drive. Deep play is the state attained within a process that operates within the drive itself, specifically when the drive is heading towards a 'jouissance' (mystical pleasure). It is the *how* and the *what*, *the dark* and the *deep* circling around each other that brings about the uncanny.

Freud keeps coming back to the dark, (...) Darkness is a factor that stares us in the face, so to speak... when it comes to considering the various dictionary definitions of 'heimlich' and 'unheimlich'. (...) Darkness is at least implicitly involved in the crucial definition of the uncanny that Freud takes from Schelling; the unheimlich or uncanny is what 'ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light' (Royle, 2003, p.108)

The Three Terms as a Death Drift / Drift Drive

The thematic interplay between three terms explored here – the death drive, desire and uncanny in the context of the dark and deep play – is wrapped up within the imaginary, poetic, creative and surreal and inform our dramaturgy as our 'Gary and Claire' conceptual psyche. We make sense of the terms in the reimagining of them, creating a logic for them to exist in many ways; they are found within the make-up of the personas that we have invented, reflected upon within the compositional structures of our writing practices and in the form and delivery of performance. Freud's death drive has been critiqued as an abstract concept, 'constructing death in terms of a drive will automatically distort the concept of death' (Razinsky, 2013, p.147). Playfully, our practice distorts

Freud's abstract (distorted) concept, and we need to point out we are not psychoanalysts but as artists we are rethinking psychoanalytic terms.

By reimagining for performance practice Freud, Lacan and Royle's concepts of the death drive (inanimate states, circling objects, drifts), and their relationship to desire and the uncanny, we propose our own named strategy for making and reflecting upon intermedial performance practice. We call it the Death Drift / Drift Drive (DD/DD).

Unpacking DD/DD

Death Drift (acknowledging and appropriating Royle's term as arts practice) is the concept, developing movement and attitude applied to themes in our practice relating to deadness and gives each work its overall quality. It relates to concepts of death in the non-destructive but celebratory sense, marking a life that once was in new ways (through ghosting or intertextual practices). It is when ideas are perpetually circling and when this circling sparks a drift occurrence and a subject moves into new territories, or when a subject or theme is appropriated within the multiple as if and worlds become distorted. It relates to dramaturgical processes of imagining, writing and producing work.

The Drift Drive is the fiction, rules and conditions within a creative process and performance where drift is an embodiment of desire, unfixed and moving in different directions, not pre-set to a particular course turning back on itself. The drive aspect here represents the momentum of energy fuelling the drift. It relates to the conditions set when performing the work or to the rules applied to various script/text formations.

The typographical solidus (or slant) within this abbreviation symbolizes the position play (dark and deep) takes in our thinking. / is less of a division and more of a slippage in thinking that symbolizes the idea that playing within these worlds produces the effect of the uncanny.

A Visual Metaphor for the DD/DD

If we think of a visual metaphor for the DD/DD, imagine a vista, a wide unobstructed space, a horizon, it could be dry and dusty or it could be green and manicured, up to you. Gradually, a zone of energy is forming, heat rises, there is a sense of something bubbling up, starting to churn around, it starts to take on a defined form as a mesocyclone. It is an idea drawing in images, text, material, until it defines its signature shape of a funnel. Once it is established, it is complete, nothing else goes into it. The matter is circling around and around (at this point you might want the artist Francis Alÿs to pick up his video camera and run into it). You are now looking at a very strong defined tornado and you should imagine the rotation as a circling movement of a Death Drift, this death drift will not leave an idea alone and it is playfully wreaking havoc through the constant circling activity surfacing its contents. Now close your eyes. Now open your eyes and you will see an uncanny likeness to the first tornado, only this one is a little finer, with more delicate qualities. Close your eyes and re-open and there is a spindly one with scraggy qualities. Repeat with the eyes and see a minikin one with cheekier qualities and one that is flipped over in the sky. All these twisters are doppelgänger versions of the original. If you close your eyes and open them once more, the vista offers multiple doppelgängers on the horizon. This spectacle experience is the drift drive; slightly epidemic, the driftness offers multiple versions of the first and they all contain their own little worlds, all slightly changed, and contain their own rules and conditions like a variety of stormy cocktails. They co-exist in the landscape but never fully anchored, like a buoy in the water, that has some play (the slant/solidus) in their drift.

Kristeva once proposed that 'the drive is clearly an imaginary construction (we can neither see it nor locate it), but it is an essential one that enables the analyst to remain at the crossroads between the symbolic and the somatic' (Kristeva 1996c, p.87). Kristeva's argument that the death drive is an imagined construct gives us the currency to play on the idea of an idea. We claim a stake in the term and reinvent it as performance practice. Although as you will see in subsequent chapters we do call upon psychoanalysis from time to time, to theorize as a lens to discuss some of our ideas, but in each case, we may turn towards an anti-Oedipal observation in order to allow our readers to see how the psychoanalytic landscape has been challenged; but we do also acknowledge quite sincerely our interest in the ongoing importance and theorization of the unconscious which is what drives creativity in performance. What is original in our practice is the way we view our interests in the psychoanalytic model through the lens of dark and deep play as a

useful creative conceptual framework, as an expanded dramaturgy, and as the psyche of our practice.

The three terms death drive, desire and the uncanny are not lost in the DD/DD, they are its qualities, entwined and circling around one other. But separating how we align psychoanalytic terms to performance might prove useful to understand how they relate in practice. For example, the death drive is rhythm and repetition, desire is passion and serendipity, and the uncanny is effect and phenomena that we (as performers or audience) experience in performance. Of course, by separating out the terms we can see how all three need each other; death drive strives to repeat so that sustained desire can be experienced in the senses as the uncanny.

Adam Phillips suggests that 'desire as a concept keeps something alive in psychoanalysis' (Phillips, 2007, p.166). We like to reframe this statement: death as a concept keeps something alive in performance and desire is the thing that 'works' within performance. Yet we cannot see or identify what 'works' because desire is that magic thing that happens during the throes of a creative epiphany, even when we are making performance that has been carefully structured 'desire is the queer form our unpredictability takes. Where intentions were, there accidents of pleasure shall be. Desire, (...), takes our pleasures to be happy accidents, and accidents will happen' (Ibid., p.177).

What is appealing about all of the terms, desire, uncanny and death drive is they form the romantic, tragic and the mysterious aesthetic embodied in all of our works. The subsequent chapters in this book will also reveal a fascination if not fandom towards the work of David Lynch because we do, as performance makers, tend to make work from a cinematic lens; the porosity between the cinematic and contemporary performance is inherent in our projects. Psychoanalysis is commonly used as a lens to discuss film theory, and many chapters in this book feature a Lynchian reference, style, or anecdote that can be traced back to some of the concepts explored in our work in relation to the three terms set out located in the DD/DD.