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The In-common of Phenomenology: Performing KMA's *Congregation*

Eirini Nedelkopoulou

This chapter approaches the relationship between the individual and the group by considering the experience of solitude in the context of the interactive public performance, *Congregation* by KMA. I start this discussion with the suggestion that performance concerns a spatial embodied reality of exposure between singularity and plurality. This reality resonates the phenomenological claim that "our individuality is inherently social in the way that it is experienced" (Ingram and Protevi 574). In the current context of "socially turned"[1] performance that positions the participant in the place of the performer, it is worth foregrounding phenomenology's approaches to social mechanisms in order to comprehend the dynamics of the audience's performance.

The chapter forms a phenomenological analysis of the modes of participation in *Congregation* through the perspective of Jean-Luc Nancy's sociopolitical negotiation of "in-common." Nancy's "being-in-common" expresses "both the desire of the effectuation or formation of 'community' (as communion) through myth and the impossibility of any effective myth" (Morin 92). Therefore, on one hand, Nancy's philosophical scope identifies with the Derridean skepticism towards institutional frameworks, and a rejection of common values and substance amongst the members of a community. On the other hand, Nancy's thought demonstrates strong

[1] Jen Harvie talks about "socially turned art and performance" in her *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (2013) reflecting on Claire Bishop's commentary on the "social turn" in contemporary art (see Chapter 1 in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of spectatorship* [2012]).

phenomenological qualities and investigates structures that make the world possible. Drawing on this ambiguous dynamic of "being-in-common," which enhances and contradicts phenomenology's foregrounding of relationality, I explore the tension that defines contemporary understandings of social relations on the basis of interaction, exposure and difference. *Congregation* engages playfully with these tensions inviting a different understanding of participation as performance of solitude, that is, participation which is not performed alone.

Congregation follows a decentred structure, which rethematizes the notion of community shifting from identity to difference, from proximity to isolation, and from disjunction to connection. Here participation is rethought not as a product or work of plurality but as a space of assemblage of solitaries, where participants are alone while together. The phenomenology of in-common in *Congregation* emerges as praxis of sense that defines audience's engagement/disengagement, which lies in the *limitation* of their contact, of being-together and with others.

KMA's *Congregation*

According to their website, KMA are a "collaboration between UK media artists Kit Monkman and Tom Wexler. Their work is primarily focused on illuminating, encouraging and developing interactions between people in public spaces using digitally-controlled projections."[2] KMA create projects for theatre, film and television. *Congregation* is an interactive kinetic light installation that takes place within a public space, a space that usually people go past on their way back from work, while walking their dogs, jogging, picking up their children from school.

[2] http://www.kma.co.uk (Last accessed July 2014)

[INSERT FIGURE 10.1 HERE]

Figure 10.1. Congregation, Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, 2010. Photo: Sun Zhongqin

Congregation was designed for accidental pedestrian-performers: joggers, families, friends and strangers, which is to say, anyone who happened to go past the urban landmarks and city squares such as Square Market in Pittsburgh, Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai, Bournemouth Square, Tate Britain in London, Tapseac Square in Macau, Bury Light Night. The setup of the installation is simple and straightforward: a 50-foot-wide screen and a light projection on a 25-minute loop of different shapes and patterns are projected within a circular space on the ground accompanied by Peter Broderick's musical score. A thermal camera up on the top of a 125-foot crane picks up on the participants' presence. Then the network that the camera is connected to generates a loop of light projections which spotlight, map, connect the participants to and separate them from each other.

[INSERT 10.2 HERE]

Figure 10.2. *Congregation*, Tapseac Square, Macau, 2012. Photo: Kit Monkman

[INSERT FIGURE 10.3 HERE]

Figure 10.3. *Congregation*, Market Square, Pittsburgh, 2014. Photo: Kit Monkman

The screen is a relay and offers a bird's eye view of the space, turning the participants into digital blobs. Striking imagery of participants' dispersal into a human-atom map is projected on the ground with light lines connecting and separating the individual circular areas and the participants within them. In the first half, participants are invited to explore an unfamiliar environment led by a projected human silhouette that appears on the ground at the centre of it all. The human outline draws attention and people position themselves in relation to this virtual presence. In the second half of the work, the human silhouette disappears and the focus shifts to the (literal and emotional) connections developed amongst the passers-by who become the project's participants. The participants respond to the visual and kinetic technology with their presence, their impromptu choreographies and their encounters with a group of strangers into the open air. Even without any verbal or textual input, the audience picks up the structure of the artwork quickly. Although the audiences' actions and reactions vary, there are several similar responses that can be observed almost every night.[3]

[**INSERT FIGURE 10.4 HERE]**

Figure 10.4. Congregation, Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, 2010. Photo: Tom Wexler

For example, very often participants hold hands, creating the outline contour of the human figure; they observe the screen trying to track themselves down and wave at

[3] The description of the project is based on my own experience of different shows of *Congregation*, discussions with Kit Monkman and Tom Wexler of KMA, online reviews, KMA's website, documentation of different shows provided to me by KMA, documented TV and radio interviews with the artists, discussion with members of the audience. Some of the on-line sources can be found here: *Market Square Public Art*, http://www.marketsquarepublicart.com/2014/ (Last Accessed May 2014)

their virtual selves on the screen; they move playfully within the space activating different visual effects that generate organic patterns. Some participants take initiative and group together, set up simple tasks, organize their co-participants into different groups without necessarily talking, but by holding hands instead. At times, people stand still and alone within the boundaries of their circular projection. They do not hesitate to lie on the top of their projected silhouettes or the central human figure; they look up to the screen or down on the patterns and lights, to each other or just the lit sky of the urban landscape. And indeed there are times that they drift away to get back in to the circular space, or not. More often than not, the random unpredictable reactions, initiatives and behaviors of individuals, pairs or even groups disrupt and challenge their neighbor participants' activity, as I describe later on in the chapter.

Congregation and Participation

Before I move to my analysis of *Congregation* as a space of "being-in-common," I would like to provide a brief discussion of the project's relevance to the current context of *participatory*, (or) *social*, (or) *interactive* art and performance. All these concepts could be used to describe *Congregation*. In the last decade or so, many pixels have lit up in the exploration of audience experience, "the hells and heavens"[4] of participatory performance. The political, economic and psychological framework of social relations have been extensively discussed, questioned and challenged. [5] The

[4] I am appropriating Claire Bishop's latest book title called *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012).
[5] For some of the recent works that address "the hells and heavens" of participation, see Adam Alston (2013, 2012), Claire Bishop (2004, 2006, 2012), Laura Cull & Karoline Gritzner (2011), Jen Harvie (2013), Shannon Jackson (2011), Susan Kattwinkel (2003), Jo Machon (2013), Nicholas Ridout (2013), Nicola Shaughnessy (2012), Gareth White (2013).

aesthetics and politics of participation have become a field of productive academic debate and incessant quest for artists, cultural organizations and funding bodies.

The search for how the "we" performs, interacts and collaborates within a context which is more than "just art" characterizes an event-based culture that is keen to experience new conditions of togetherness, community and belonging. For Nicholas Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), participatory art and performance love to think about the making and rising of communities, the sustainability of "models of sociability" and the production of human relations (70). Routinely, participatory and socially turned performance attempts to inspire positive social contacts that are defined by "neighborliness" and by "harmony and cohabitation" (Bourriaud 47, 53). Nevertheless, this view and practice has been strongly criticized for being naïve and unrealistic by critical thinkers, and for echoing in its "reversibility […] the commodified friendship of customer services" (Stewart Martin qtd. in Ridout 13).

Congregation is part of this event-based culture, which primarily focuses on audiences' interaction and experience in public spaces. KMA is keen to test and encourage new modes of participation between members of the public. Robert Klanten, Sven Ehmann and Verena Hanschke consider *Congregation* as a "social play" and suggest that it creates "a networked 'digital playground'" where

> [t]he resulting social engagements reaffirm the urban community through embodied, rather than verbal, discourse […] The participants are able to take

> ownership of the work and the environment in which it is staged, creating a sense of occasion that informs and illuminates the public space (240).

Indeed, *Congregation* could be identified as *participatory* or *socially turned* work in the sense that both concepts aim "to restore and realize a communal, collective space of shared social engagement" (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 275). These types of practices actively engage "others who are not the artists (so principally, but not always, audiences)" and enhance "their social engagement" (Harvie 5). Unlike *Congregation*, the popular conceptualization of participatory performance and socially turned art rarely invites either "silent solitude" (Harvie 5) or "one to one relationship of 'interactivity'" (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 1). KMA's performance is undoubtedly structured as an interactive practice that "places the action of the recipient at the heart of its aesthetics" (Kwastek xvii), and yet it does provide the space and the time for one to feel at peace in one's own company.

At this point, drawing on Dan Graham's opening citation of Bishop's latest book, I would like to reflect on the "realness" of the audience's experience within KMA's interactive public frame. Graham claims that all artists "dream of doing something that's more social, more collaborative, and more real than art" (in Bishop *Artificial Hells* 1). What is more real than human beings' tendency to socially co-exist, collaborate or often isolate from their cohabitants, disrupt their peers' efforts and even abandon the community to move on alone or with other cohabitants?

So What is the *In-common*?

Nancy has discussed extensively the ontology of in-common "where being is *in* common, without ever being common" ("Of Being-in-common" 8, emphasis in original). In his *Inoperative Community* (1991) and *Being Singular Plural* (2000), amongst other works, Nancy rethinks community on the basis of being-in-common. In his "ontological and existential recasting" of community, Nancy refers to the latter as "a structure of a shared existence," rather than "a specific social formation or mode of organization" (James 176). In a more recent publication co-authored with Laurens ten Kate, Nancy identifies being-in-common as a topological condition where I/other, disjunction/conjunction, singularity/plurality, aloneness/togetheness coexist (40). In-common does not refer to mutual, similar or even equal qualities between people constituting an assemblage. It refers to a liminal space "between those communicating, between the I and its other, between you and me, and between us" (ibid.). The writers underline that "anything can happen, can take place in this strange place […] peace and violence, order and disorder, cohesion and destruction" (37). Hence, the concept of in-common offers a philosophical framework to think participation in *Congregation* without presupposing an idealistic structure in which participants coexist.

Nancy's formulation of being-in-common is indebted to the "withness" of being-in-the-world in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927/1962) and particularly Heidegger's concepts Mitdasein/Mitsein. Both thinkers relate being-in-common with a type of making (and in Nancy's case breaking) of community. The difference between the two philosophers lies in their distinct approach to withness as being-in-common (Nancy) and common being (Heidegger). Nancy's thought regarding withness diverges from Heidegger's slide back to subjectivity. Nancy's major

objection lies in the belief that Heidegger's later phenomenology "thinks access in terms of appropriation" (Morin 45). According to Nancy's alternative approach to coexistence, community needs to maintain its "common." Otherwise, it becomes a single thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader…)" (Nancy, *Inoperative Community* xxxix). By losing its "common," community becomes a "work" that participants need to produce, rather than experience. This is always the risk (and the trap) with participatory forms of social interaction. Community could be easily transformed into a project predicated on communal goals, eliminating difference and investing in the group's "unicity and substanciality" (Nancy *Inoperative Community* xxxxix).

In this respect, being-in-common has to deal with the strident and pressurized realities of participatory frameworks. These realities concern, according to Harvie, "models of social relation and community which either fetishize a myth of a unified singularity and thereby obliterate difference, or propose an unresolved multitude" (10). The longing for the creation of an original aesthetic community that can be sustained and regrouped and stay in contact after each event, apart from the obvious marketing and financial pressures linked to collective presence, echoes a purported premodern harmonious community. This is what Nancy would identify as a mythical picture that asks for a long-lost "familiarity, fraternity and conviviality" (*Inoperative Community* 10). Inspired by Nancy, Bishop argues that these communities imagined by Bourriard's relational aesthetics "require a unified subject as a prerequisite for community-as-togetherness" ("Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" 79). These are "microtopian" communities of "immanent togetherness" (67). Nevertheless, participation cannot be based on the utopia of intimate and operative communities simply because these communities have never existed in order to be longed for. On

the contrary, community can only be possible on the basis of its "désœuvrement,"[6] "inoperativeness," which is constitutive of its communication and of being-in-common. Community is "what happens to us" (Nancy, *Inoperative Community* 11).

Congregation and In-common

Commentators on *Congregation* have predictably focused on the group dynamics and the spatiality engendered by the piece. Klanten, Ehmann and Hanschke observe "a large assembled group of participants learns the piece together, acting as a coincidental community, attempting to comprehend their environment in a new way" (243). Tom Wexler emphasizes the spatiality of temporary solitude and togetherness of the experience when he argues that KMA's work "causes people to stop for a moment, and to reconsider their place in that space, and also their relationship to other people in that space" (in Crawley).[7] What is of particular interest in the above sentiments is Klanten's remark on a sense of belonging and Wexler's reference to a spatial experience of a collective, a congregation of singularities. Both claims refer to an open-ended spatiality that lies at the intersection of the communal, unfamiliar, personal and public space.

This position needs to be considered in relation to the social as an ontological condition in which random passers-by find themselves in contact with each other. In *Congregation* the space and "spacing" of the relational being of (being-) in-common,

[6] Nancy borrowed this term (désoeuvré) from Maurice Blanchot to think community as a fragmented and interrupted entity.
[7] For CBS Pittsburgh, http://pittsburgh.cbslocal.com/2014/02/21/unique-traveling-light-show-makes-pittsburgh-its-first-north-american-stop/ (Last accessed May 2014).

(being-) with-the-other(s) tests and challenges the social encounter within the public environment. This is not Bourriaud's affirmative relational aesthetics, a "place that produces a specific sociability" and "tightens the space of relations" (*Relational Aesthetics* 16,15). In *Congregation*, the being-with is not "presupposed," but only "exposed" through the participants' lived experiences.[8] KMA's interactive project balances between disruption and coordination; neither does "dissensus" become the objective of the practice, nor audience coordination "rests too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole" (Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" 67).[9] In this instance, participants are not invited to form a mythical condition of "neighborliness" based on its members' common qualities. And yet, *Congregation* does not stage the failure of community either. Rather, it allows participants to be in-common.

In *Congregation*, random pedestrians are invited into an open-air event that is not rehearsed or dependent on any verbal or textual input. In principle, there is no particular expectation of the performers apart from making an appearance, even if this is a brief crossing of the space. In-common is created through the planned and performed hindrances to community and communication. The performance operates as an interval to the local community by inviting them to engage in a particular task with strangers. Participants act upon the conventions and stimuli available, while their immediate contribution reveals and establishes their understanding to the open work.

[8] I refer here to Nancy's view that similar to community, being-in-common "cannot be presupposed. It is only exposed" (*Inoperative Community* xxxix). Alan Read, discussing the political in theatre, suggests that "[i]nverting the common velocity from individual to group, from self to collective, it is here the situation of 'being in common' that gives rise to the experience of being-self. It is only through such community that one is posed within an exterior, that one experiences an outside to one's self and you, in Nancy's provocative term, become exposed" (198). This negotiation between singularity and plurality as part of being-in-common in performance participation is discussed later in the chapter.

[9] Jackson (2011) and Harvie (2013) expand on "social coordination" and "how art practices contribute to inter-dependent social imagining" (*Social Works* 14).

Their impromptu choreographies are almost always incomplete, even if some of them try desperately to complete a task, for instance, to circle the projected silhouette holding hands or to create a group heart shape.

The nostalgic idea of creating a feel-good community is not completely eliminated in KMA's piece. People still try to reach a specific goal or task by interacting with audiovisual stimuli and each other. However, the interactive structure of the installation, its public character, and the passers'-by (in)activity constantly interrupts this mythical ideal of community. *Congregation* introduces a stylized framework in public that disrupts the urban community. The community within the community is consecutively interrupted and offers a type of "inoperativeness," which has no longer "to do with production or with completion" (Nancy, *Inoperative Community* 31). According to Nancy "incompletion" is an active process "of sharing," a "communication of finitude" that is hardly ever completed (35). Although, interruption is not a type of participation that *Congregation* necessarily invites, the piece interjects idealistic and purposeful modes of participation. In the absence of interruption and separation, participants cannot expose themselves to each other, as they become assimilated into the group commonality. Therefore, there is no in-common, no community.

Monkman, the creative director, admits that KMA did not plan for the audience members to connect, engage or interact in a particular way (interview). The participants hardly ever speak to each other. They hold hands when they function in pairs or groups instead. I would argue that this form of contact is very much interlinked with a condition of in-common, being-with, not in a metaphorical or

idealist context, but a materialist one. Nancy proclaims that

> The ontology of being-with can only be "materialist," in the sense that "matter" does not designate a substance or a subject […] The ontology of being-with is an ontology of bodies, of every body, whether they are inanimate, animate, sentient, speaking, thinking, having weight, and so on. Above all else, "body" really means what is outside, insofar as it is outside, next to, against, nearby, with a(n) (other) body, from body to body, in dis-position (*Being Singular Plural* 83-4).

Being-in common as a social structure both exceeds and returns to its phenomenological dimension. According to Nancy, the "world invites us to no longer think of the level of the phenomenon, however it may be understood (as surging forth, appearing, becoming visible, brilliance, occurrence, event), but on the level […] of disposition (spacing, touching, contact, crossing)" (*The Sense of the World* 176). In similar terms, I focus on the "with" rather than on "being."

[INSERT FIGURE 10.5 HERE]

Figure 10.5: *Congregation,* 2010, Tate Britain. Photo: Kit Monkman

In *Congregation*, technology oscillates between visibility and invisibility. The sensor thermal mechanism that activates the event can be considered as a type of panoptic technology, responsible for appropriating and surveilling human experience. However, in this particular context the network system responds to the "with" of the in-common, of you and me and others and us. Technology is not the authority that changes and defines the audiences' encounter with oneself or others; "with" is. Nancy discussing the "with" of being-with or being-in-common, writes:

> we do nothing but appear together with one another, co-appearing before no other authority than this "with" itself, the meaning of which seems to us to instantly dissolve into insignificance, into exteriority, into the inorganic, empirical, and randomly contingent inconsistency of the pure and simple "with" (*Being Singular Plural* 63).

The network system appears to simply indicate the potentiality of the participants' withness to soon escape their attention and interest and "dissolve into insignificance." What comes to the foreground is participants' experience of *being singular-plural*.

For the first part of the performance, soon after the music starts and the digital human contour appears, people start grouping together into a circular shape framing the human silhouette. Why are random strangers repeatedly drawn to hold hands as part of the different sections in *Congregation*? This is an opportunity to think about touch as a spontaneous reaction to the artistic frame set up by KMA, but also as an expression of a sense of "realness" and belonging. Touching can be risky and ambiguous in the sense that it opens one participant to another. This opening demonstrates the paradox of being incomplete, limited by the singularity of each human body, while also highlights each participant's dependency on others. Nancy writes, "Touching one another with their mutual weights, bodies do not become undone, nor do they dissolve into other bodies, nor do they fuse with a spirit—this is what makes them, properly speaking, bodies" (*The Birth to Presence* 203). *Congregation*'s "exposers" consent to their performance and participation, to this in-common convention that has an absolute limit in the contact of skin with skin. A sense of community and belonging emerges when strangers reach out their hands to touch their co-participants, whose bodies are "absolutely separated and shared"

(Nancy, *The Birth to Presence* 204). Touch marks this limit between separation and sharing where singularity and plurality co-exist.

The experience of *Congregation* in Bournemouth offers an example of a clear celebration of togetherness in the name of community when a group of twenty-five participants – university students, elderly people, the homeless, and families amongst others hold hands. This disparate community, brought together by *Congregation*, in a euphoric and gregarious atmosphere make a circular shape with their bodies, some of them lung with one foot towards the middle and others lie on the ground. In this overtly affirmative experience, Monkman identifies a paradox: "the more they participate, the more they become a part of a collective body (and the more the collective body borrows from, and expands on, their participation). The more they become part of a collective body, the less significant their contributions become" (KMA blog).[10] As Nancy would say in this occasion:

> The community that becomes *a single thing* [...] necessarily […] loses the *with* or the *together* that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being *of* togetherness (*Inoperative Community* xxxix).

Hence, participants cannot maintain themselves within the intimacy of a group; any attempt to maintain this intimacy leads to appropriation of communication and propriety of a group. Binding all participants into an idealist basis of a hypothetical shared identity suppresses and ultimately sabotages community. In this case, the welcoming of a sense of belonging is confronted with the realization of the impossibility of the group insularity.

[10] http://www.kma.co.uk/blog/ (last accessed May 2014)

There is a political quality to touching as an act of participation in the open air, amongst strangers and random pedestrians. While each singularity opens itself and remains open and incomplete expecting to receive from and share with the others, there are examples where participants were left out of a group, or refused to hold hands with strangers. In these cases, the opening and *inclination toward*[11] others' difference is restricted as it is filtered through what Rosalyn Diprose identifies as "the meanings that provide the horizon of my sense of belonging" (126). Touching as a mode of "co-appearing"[12] brings to surface the sensitive balance between inclusion and exclusion; the artists try to obtain the former (inclusion) and avoid the latter (exclusion). Of course, one is nested into the other, as one's inclusion will always result in somebody else's exclusion. This happens because inclusion defines a border. Even if the group is welcoming, the definition of this individual group identifies a distinction that excludes those who are not part of the group.

Indeed, feel-good moments follow through the imposition of social meanings, which inevitably include exceeding the limit of one's body by touch. And these moments seem essential, as this touching and being-touched facilitate participation in interactive performance. So, while affirmative moments of acting together include assimilation of difference, they can also easily exclude difference either intentionally or inadvertently. For instance, a university student moves to the other side of the circle when a homeless man attempts to take her hand in the group's circulation formation. This rapid reaction to his touch signifies the establishment and rejection of

[11] Nancy talks about "clinamen […] an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other" (*Inoperative Community* 3). Inclination enables the opening and exposure of one to another.

[12] Drawing on Nancy's discussion of "co-appearance" it could be proposed that touching hands signifies the participants' "appearing to" themselves "and to one another, all at once" (*Being Singular Plural* 67).

otherness through the withdrawal from the limit of another's touch. We can decide to find this proposition as an event of *othering*, and even vilification, when one is deprived of the ability to establish his uniqueness on the basis of his presupposed difference. According to Monkman, the life duration of similar moments of euphoric gatherings do not last longer than a few minutes, when a participant decides (or is made) to break from the group and devise one's own solitary space of *Congregation* (Interview).

In his recently published book *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism and Love* (2013), Nicholas Ridout reminds us of the necessity of distance "across which one encounters someone else that permits or even produces relations" in theatre audiences (148). There is an "apparent confusion between relation and unrelation," which echoes the theatrical dimension in Nancy's conception of "compearance" (Ridout 147). "We" expresses *there* and *then*, how passers-by inhabit their space inside and outside *Congregation* by being exposed simultaneously to relationship and its lack thereof. It is useful to recall here Nancy when he presents us with the challenge to "disidentify ourselves from every sort of 'we' that would be the subject of its own representation, and we have to do this insofar as 'we' coappear" (*Being Singular and Plural* 71). The "we" of the participants and passers-by is that of their exposure to each other and the world they constitute. There is, as mentioned above, a temporal and spatial specificity to the "we." Indeed, people that happen to cross a particular square or go past a specific venue during evening times comprise the performers of *Congregation*.

The "realness" of the audience's responses to *Congregation*, from their welcoming holding hands, to their irritability and finally to their withdrawal, constitutes "a relation without relation" ("Of-Nancy, Being-in-Common" 7). This is exactly the paradox of community: it cannot "control its in-common," it cannot "control 'itself'" (Nancy & ten Kate 39). Therefore, as soon as participants coappear to each other in the space, "there is community," and participants are "inadvertently in common" (ibid. 37). Anything can happen. What audiences do not fully grasp is that the moment they try to control their in-common and engage in a particular type of operation or communal task, they stop being a community. That is, the idea of community (in an operative sense) fails them.

Solitude/ Loneliness

Congregation neither promises nor realizes community *per se*. While there are moments when participants find themselves working towards a common goal and sharing the same task, there is always the possibility of somebody dropping out, being forgotten by the group, not keeping up with the task. The question is: what happens to the participant who is momentarily excluded? Or to any potential participant whose limit has been exceeded to the extent that they are rejected from a temporary community for being foreign, strange and other? In this context, engagement between random pedestrians reveals a social and embodied vulnerability that is anchored to the sensitive negotiation between inclusion and exclusion.

Surely the homeless participant rejected by the university student in the example given above is set apart from the particular encounter for being different and unfamiliar. And yet, whether or not he accepts this rejection and departs, his reaction

to the incident affects the unified presence of the circle, that is, his co-participants' response to the structure of their performance as well as the thermal sensory system of the installation, and *vice versa*. A participant's imposed withdrawal from a particular task (or *Congregation* overall) offers an opportunity to consider aloneness as a mode of participatory and social encounter. In particular, a potential exclusion of a participant not only identifies the failure of a harmonious coexistence of a cohesive community, but also it raises a paradox. On one hand, exclusion strips a member from his or her exposure towards other participants. Aloneness occurs due to the interruption of inclination towards the other and puts the "excluded" member into a position of, as Diprose would identify it, "losing sense" (126). That is, the participant is left alone and momentarily (at least) deprived of the ability to signify his uniqueness within the context of the specific task. On the other hand, this exclusion causes the rearrangement of the circle and therefore the members' contribution becomes more significant to the system that picks up different types of activity, other than the homogeneous movement of a collective presence. The myth of togetherness is interrupted, reinstigating its in-common condition. The above incident of exclusion, as much unfortunate and troubling it proves to be, also functions as a reminder of the impossibility of community as an *operative* totality, or a *work* of careful planning. Thus, community needs to be *unworked* (désoeuvré). Echoing Morin, "community is the experience of interruption of communion"and "this is the only possible community" (76).

However, not all types of aloneness within social environments signify individuals' forced withdrawal. Particularly in reference to the previous example, loneliness as a type of aloneness is often identified with a sense of (self)exclusion. According to

Stern, loneliness expresses "the pain of being alone" and "the understanding is that you are rejected by others and believe that, in some sense, you deserve to be rejected and therefore reject yourself" (38). Hannah Arendt draws a line between the experience of loneliness and solitude, proposing that "[l]oneliness comes about when I am alone without being able to split up into the two-in-one, without being able to keep myself company," in contrast to solitude which "is that human situation in which I keep myself company"(185). Solitude, as often observed in different shows and projects of *Congregation*, is a form of aloneness that celebrates plurality by promoting engagement and attributing a creative, aesthetic and dialectical value to volitional withdrawal.

Over its touring years KMA's project has been exploring the tensions and exchange between "the individual and the collective, loneliness and togetherness" (*Congregation* Programme). At times the participants embody these tensions in very predicable ways, while at other times, their responses exceed the artists' expectations. The human-atom-like map projected on the ground with light lines connects the participants to and separates them from the individual circular areas. Quite often participants break from their groups and pairs to playfully engage with their own game: either to occupy their digital imprint, observe the screen, or just be, stay still, lie or sit down. In doing so, they both establish and inhabit the performance space between a crowd and its singularities.

[INSERT FIGURE 10.6 HERE]

Figure 10.6: *Congregation*, 2010, Tate Britain. Photo: Kit Monkman

Reflecting on the instances when participants as singularities break from the collective, responding to the experience of *Congregation's* kinetic and interactive

network, solitude appears as a choice, not as a punishment or rejection. The participants stand alone and draw their attention to themselves, to their co-players from a distance, and to their immediate performance and urban environment. And yet they are in-common. Indeed, these simultaneous moments of intersubjectivity define the audience's participatory activity.

Hence, there is a need for participation to be kept in movement,[13] in circulation to avoid formulating an *operative* together or product of careful planning. In *Congregation*, passers-by move in and out of the performance space. They flexibly break from their temporary groups and pairs, or they choose to never join them and delineate their own individual space. According to Monkman,

> it is the intuitive network which adjusts to the participants' mobility. *Congregation's* invisible technology and public character liberates audience from a sense of "responsibility" that they have to stay until the end of the show to applaud the labour of the live performers (interview).

The pressure and responsibility of meeting the conventions of spectatorship is partly lifted, as participants stage their in-common performance.

Solitude is a concept ignored in socially turned, community orientated art and performance due to a cultural fascination with active collective participation, and the hypothesis that solitude – similar to loneliness (but crucially, different) – appears as counter-cultural agent to sociability. Tillich offers an explanation to the above phenomenon in relation to quotidian experiences:

[13] By movement I mean here the *being-towards others* and the world.

> today, more intensely than in preceding periods, man is so lonely that he cannot bear solitude. And he tries desperately to become a part of the crowd […] The same holds true of the forms of communal life, the school, college, office and factory. An unceasing pressure attempts to destroy even our desire for solitude (8).

Yet, according to Sherry Turkle, solitude appears an imperative state that "refreshes and restores" (288). This type of aloneness is experienced fully as part of our networked life only when we are "able to summon" ourselves by ourselves:[14] "Otherwise, [we] will only know how to be lonely" (ibid). The risk that contemporary (network) performance needs to take is to discover and devise new ways that allow audience members to enjoy their own company.

In *Congregation*, solitude appears as a "retreat" and "subtraction" of this pressure to destroy our right to be alone; which is to say that solitude is a retreat and subtraction of the exteriority of collective participation, when the latter becomes a *single thing*. Nancy writes that "retreat opens, and continues to keep open, this strange being-the-one-with-the-other, to which we are exposed" and "[c]ommunity is made of what retreats from it" (*Inoperative Community* xxxix). That is, togetherness and participation could both become problematic "either as the product of the working community, or else the community itself as work" (ibid). Retreat from "unicity" is necessary to prevent the diminution of the individual's contribution to the performance without interrupting the exposure and the opening to otherness.

[14] Solitude signifies the value of spending time with yourself; being able to keep yourself company by choice. The analysis of this embodied *summoning of self by oneself* is beyond the remit of this chapter.

Thomas Bernhard identifies a tension in the audience theatre experience, according to which "[e]ach person wants to participate and at the same time to be left alone" (Bernhard in Hoffman 11). While Bernhard underlines the impossibility of this tendency and the conflict that emerges from it, the in-common structure of *Congregation* seems to lie in the tension between aloneness and togetherness. Repeating Nancy's terminology, the audience's participation is also enabled from "what retreats from it" (*Inoperative Community* xxxix). The participant's choice to act in solitude emerges from one's response to animate and inanimate stimuli, other participants, the environment and the installation's interactive system.

KMA recognize the participatory context of *Congregation* in "the physical and empathic connections that separate us, and conjoin us" (*Congregation* Programme). One of the incidents at the opening night of *Congregation* in Bournemouth shows aspects of the tension (rather than conflict that Bernhard describes above) between solitude and togetherness. In an utterly euphoric atmosphere the group made a heart shape with their bodies when a couple said that they had been married the previous week (KMA Blog).[15] The scene ended with a big round of applause. Reflecting on the specific incident of, no doubt, a well-intentioned gathering celebrating the collective, solitude (as withdrawal and disengagement from the euphoric group activity) was not absent. The giving of oneself during exposure to the other could reveal an ambivalent sense of aloneness between members of the audience, which is informed by constructive, uncertain, and even problematic communication. The heart-shaped arrangement of participants could be considered an amalgamation of all three. Certain participants joined the specific group, others remained observers to the participants'

[15] http://www.kma.co.uk/blog/ (Last accessed May 2014).

makings and finally some were not interested and withdrew to look for different potential within the space.

Withdrawal and solitude in *Congregation* when one drops out of the performance or marks one's own separate space is very much interlinked with the participants' sense of belonging. So somebody may say, echoing the Derridean denunciation of community, "I am not part of this group. Don't count me in" (27), which also means that one wants to keep one's freedom and choose one's own way of engaging with an activity, group and performance. Hence, the encounters between one and others are interrupted and often recuperated – strengthening the condition of in-common even through the choice of disengagement. We can decide to find solitude as a mode of participation that prevents audience members not only from losing themselves in the crowd but also from losing the *others* as well.[16] Solitude declares the participants' need for protection from what is expected that they offer back to the group, but also the need to engage with the performance alone or from a distance. For this reason, this type of withdrawal in *Congregation* does not take the form of loneliness - and I would identify loneliness with exclusion here. Rather, solitude defines a creative space that is part of the in-common of participants' openness and coexistence.

Conclusion

In *Congregation*, in-common is a topological encounter where a heterogeneous assemblage co-exists in "the noise"[17] of an initially non-shared space. These random

[16] Here I reflect on Derrida's sentiments against the "organic totality" imposed by the mechanisms of a community, family, a group etc. as described in his essay "I Have a Taste for the Secret" (27).

[17] The noise of people who have nothing in common, as Alphonso Lingis writes in his book *The Community of Those who Have Nothing in Common* (1994 12,73,80,97,105). Lingis'

pedestrians have, at first, no shared purpose. Yet their encounter is essential to the communication and making of an interactive participatory practice that attempts to test the grounds of social engagement within the public sphere, without forcing specific responsibilities, fees or behavioral patterns to the audience. Of course, there are playful patterns, which audiences can choose to follow or not. Although KMA hardly ever mention the concept of community to describe the company's interactive and participatory practice, their project "eagerly promotes inclusion and attempts to work creatively with exclusion" (*Congregation* Programme).

Philosophers and theorists often address with skepticism the good and benevolent intentions of community. In the face of historical and political distrust of the concept, as well as the commodification of artistic products, at a time when human singularities as part of the collective are reduced to numbers, there is a big question: Why do we still care enough to talk about and theorize community, to devise work based on the challenging condition of community? Derrida offers a suggestion here when he argues that "[t]he desire to belong to any community whatsoever, the desire for belonging tout court, implies that one does not belong" ("I Have a Taste for the Secret" 28).

As much we are convinced by the troubling context and exclusive character of community, there is a need to think of belonging or to "re-invent the stage" of participation, especially within a creative milieu. As Nancy would argue here, this is

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view seems to echo Nancy's sentiment regarding limitation in communication, which obtains being-in-common in our everyday experience. Nancy argues: "I no longer hear in it what the other wants to say to me, but I hear that the other speaks and that there is an essential archi-articulation of voices which constitutes the being-in-common" (*Inoperative Community* 76).

not about “innovation”: we need to reinvent the staging of our co-appearance “each time, each time making our entrance anew” (*Being Singular Plural* 70-1). This is not to suggest that performance and art destabilize and challenge the pressures of cultural production by accommodating this s*tage*. But I do find *Congregation* amongst other public, social and participatory artworks offers convincing and partial responses to these pressures. I willingly observe modes of solitude and social effective encounters within this interactive practice. If we can talk about a coincidental condition of in-common in *Congregation*, it is important to see community not simply as the product of the random participants’ encounter; it is not just the sum of individuals having something in common. Rather, community in this interactive work is and could only be possible as a “désoeuvre,” “inoperative” congregation of singularities.

The phenomenological discussion of the interactive public performance of *Congregation* reflects on the current infatuation with making *more* collaborative, *more* social, *more* inclusive performances. In response to economic, social and cultural tensions, which in many ways are impossible to avoid, the intermissive structure of in-common offers a theoretical and material format that “reinvents the stage” of our human contact through displacement, solitude and retreat. *Congregation* stages a place where participants are in-common, “only to discover that this ‘in-common’ cannot always be controlled by them and so eludes them” (Nancy and ten Kate 37). Nevertheless, this in-common condition, which sits in the bind between our connection to, and perception of, familiarity and difference, could still allow a sense of belonging to thrive, at least every now and then.

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