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Performing the ‘aesthetics of care’

James Thompson

In this chapter, I develop some of the thinking introduced in an article I wrote in 2015 around what I described as an ‘aesthetic of care’ (see Chapter 2 of this edited collection). To speak of care as a mode of aesthetics is to make two related claims. First, that reciprocal acts of caring, whether formal, informal, interpersonal or collective, have a sensory, crafted quality that could be called an aesthetic. Caring, thus, I suggest, has an artistry and there are inspirational carers who exhibit a virtuosity in the way they care for and with others. As Maurice Hamington argues, ‘this does not suggest that care givers are artists [...] but it does suggest that care givers are artists in terms of being aesthetically attuned to the bodies, actions, and relations of themselves to others’ (2015: 279). I am locating the aesthetics here in the shape, style, action and interaction between two people, and I propose that in that focused attention between bodies we can recognise an artfulness that is too rarely acknowledged. The second claim is that arts processes, and I am concerned principally with community-based or applied theatre practices here, can be caring or uncaring. In process, design and execution, the arts, I suggest, can promote or exhibit inter-human forms of care that demonstrate a mutually reliant, selfless and constructive form of sociality – and, of course, they can do precisely the opposite of this. Both the first and second claims have a related politics – the first, in suggesting that carers have an artistry, is also a comment on care that fails to exhibit any relational, sensory quality. So care in an institutional health setting, for example, that pays limited attention to felt or embodied relations between people, or is forced to pay limited attention due to social or financial constraints, is likely to be unsatisfactory and a potential source of injustice. The second claim, that community-based art practices can be more or less caring, suggests that processes and products/productions that fail to acknowledge the importance of care, and the quality of relations that are part of different projects, can also be the source of injustice, no matter the claims of those who lead them. In summary, care practices need attention to their aesthetics, and community-based arts programmes need an understanding of care, if either is to make claims to be contributing to social justice. In making,

and therefore linking, these two claims, I am asserting that care aesthetics is concerned with how to develop successful arts projects, for example, in homes for the elderly, but I am also recognising the artistry that is already demonstrated by those who live and work in these different community settings. While this chapter accepts that there is more work to be done on the aesthetic, artistic and crafted practices of caregivers in health and other related settings, this will not be the focus here. In my 2015 article, I outlined a broad case for an *aesthetics of care*, whereas here, I will describe a number of micro-examples to illustrate what this focus reveals about certain arts practices. In the second half of the chapter, I examine three examples of theatre practice that, I suggest, demonstrate intricate ways that performance can be said to generate care for one another. Two of these examples draw on projects by the London Bubble Theatre – one linked to the devising of their show *The Grandchildren of Hiroshima*, and the other a drama workshop programme for Year 1 (five-year-old) primary schoolchildren called *Speech Bubbles*. The third example comes from a performance of *Ruff* (2013) by Peggy Shaw and directed by Lois Weaver. In my engagement with these examples, I demonstrate how arts practices can produce or strengthen important interdependent social relations between groups and communities. By foregrounding these relationships in performance these projects invite us to recognise the importance of interdependence within socially engaged performance and to rethink what constitutes artistry and efficacy. The argument is that practices that acknowledge their presence in networks of interdependent care can build communities of affective solidarity, supporting the development of what Judith Butler terms a ‘sensate democracy’ (2015: 207) – that is, a society that is more just, caring, mutually supportive and crafted with a collaborative, joyous sense of artistry. A *sensate democracy* here is understood as the contribution of artistic, and more broadly aesthetic, activity to the political arena. It is also, however, in the sense I am using it here, the end result of artistic activism that produces a democratic arrangement that properly values the full sensory life of different communities. Butler’s term will be connected later in the chapter to Rancière’s idea of the *distribution of the sensible* (2004), where a redistribution of sensory relations becomes a priority for enabling the democratic arrangements that Butler is proposing.

The case for interdependency

To understand the ethics, and then aesthetics, of care proposed here, I want to link what Hamington calls a ‘performance of care’ (2015: 288) to Eva Kittay’s and Judith Butler’s accounts of interdependency. The case to make is that well-crafted care does not ‘end with a particular act of kindness’ but starts from a broader ‘dramatic rehearsal, a habituation of going out and learning about others in varied, humble, open, and meaningful ways’ (Hamington,

2015: 288), which can then be part of a wider 'struggle for an egalitarian social and political order in which a livable interdependency becomes possible' (Butler, 2015: 69). The perspective on interdependency here, with its insistence on the reality of mutual reliance, does not somehow validate relations of dependence as automatically positive, but does insist they are, to use Kittay's term, 'inextricable' (2015). Eva Kittay, in an extended feminist critique of individualised ethics, suggests that 'at best our independence is relative, but at heart it is really a fiction' (2015: 55). The argument is that those who claim their ability or right to act autonomously, or aspire for human independence as a social good, are in fact denying those dependencies on which their apparent freedoms rely. So while we are all dependent on networks of care and infrastructures of support, *those dependencies* are frequently elided, and in our current society access to enabling structures are rarely distributed equally. Paradoxically, often those who are most strident in their assertion of an individual's freedom to act as they choose are those that most benefit from dependent relations distributed unequally along class, gendered and racial lines. Working-class communities, women and people from minority or migrant backgrounds take a substantially higher proportion of the frequently poorly paid care burden. It is not that seeking a realm of independent action is an automatic negative, but it is based on the fiction that denies, and frequently hides, those social and communal supports that make one's independence possible. And the arts are, of course, not immune from promoting this fiction. Of course, the other side to that denial is the tendency of those who advocate self-reliance as a fundamental social good, to seek to undermine those very structures of dependency and infrastructures of social care that make many lives possible. This is the vision of a neoliberal campaigner proposing the cutting of support for public provision of childcare, while privately paying for their own that makes their 'independent' presence in the public sphere possible. A campaign for justice and a fairer society does not deny that unequal distribution of different sustaining care and solidarity practices. Instead, it acknowledges the dependencies on which we all rely, and then, 'by removing the political, social, and economic disadvantages that attach to dependency' seeks to make them a source of value (Kittay, 2015: 67). They then become 'a source of connection, an occasion for developing our capacities for thought, empathy, sensitivity, trust, ingenuity, and creativity; in short, as providing for us the conditions of our distinct human dignity' (Kittay, 2015: 67).

It is, therefore, the unequal distribution of dependency that is the problem and not dependency itself. The claim here is that recognition of our dependency helps it become a potential source for developing the capacities outlined by Kittay, but also any process that fosters 'empathy, sensitivity, trust, ingenuity, and creativity' will itself promote the beneficial aspects of living in dependent relations with others (Kittay, 2015: 67). These processes – which the argument here suggests can be found in arts projects with a well-developed aesthetics of care – can maintain and strengthen

those mutually supportive human relations and promote the more equitable 'conditions of our distinct human dignity' that we all need (Kittay, 2015: 67).

Judith Butler in her work on a 'performative theory of assembly' (2015) argues similarly for us to take account of the paradoxical status of dependency. It is a given that 'everyone is dependent on social relations and enduring infrastructure in order to maintain a livable life' but at the same time, she argues, it is important to recognise that while dependency is 'not the same as a condition of subjugation, [it] can easily become one' (Butler, 2015: 21). The perspective advocated by Butler, and developed in this account, is not to deny that dependent relations might be the source of injustice or the unequal exercise of power, but to affirm and seek out human activity where those forms of dependency might become sources for mutual support and solidarity. The argument here seeks to value these as the foundation of movements that aim to counter the ethos of radical, selfish individualism. The denial of inextricable interdependency and the concomitant avowal of self-sufficiency as a 'moral ideal' (Butler, 2015: 14) is the foundation of a neoliberal ideal of entrepreneurial self-sufficiency. And, while proponents of individual responsibility delegate, and often hide, their dependency on others, they simultaneously support the undermining of those sustaining inter-human and social infrastructures that make lives liveable.

To link this perspective to the ethics of care proposed in this edited collection, therefore, is to recognise our dependency on others, and acknowledge the inequalities in how that dependence is distributed, organised and experienced. Starting from this position, particular forms of caring solidarity and care-filled political action become necessary: when life 'is understood as both equally valuable and interdependent, certain ethical formulations follow' (Butler, 2015: 43). Subsequently, it is important to critique those activities that deny interdependency and reproduce the social conditions that undermine the productive forms of dependency that make more equal forms of social life likely. This critique of 'that unacknowledged dependency' (Butler, 2015: 206) suggests the search for a 'sensible democracy' (Butler, 2015: 207) that demands forms of 'improvisation in the course of devising collective and institutional ways of addressing induced precarity' (Butler, 2015: 22). My argument is that these 'collective' and 'institutional' approaches can be system wide but also of a much smaller scale – and can be evoked and developed to different degrees within art projects as will be argued in the next section of the chapter. They can be part of what Hamington calls 'the performance of care' exhibited within a 'dramatic rehearsal, a habituation of going out and learning about others' (2015: 288). Felt, embodied, careful collaborative acts of mutual reliance are the minute building blocks of that more caring, just society and examples of what sociologist Christian Smith would call 'the microfoundations of social life' (2015: 2). These, I will suggest, are made visible in the examples of practice outlined below.

Aesthetics of care in action

This section outlines three examples of aesthetics of care. Since I started writing on this theme, and in particular during earlier work on my 2015 article, I have searched for moments or glimpses of care aesthetics in practices that I encountered both personally and professionally. So here, the patting down of masking tape by five-year-olds in a *Speech Bubbles* workshop, a trust game in a London Bubble Theatre workshop and a spoken intervention from director Lois Weaver during a performance of Peggy Shaw's one woman show *Ruff*, become my chosen examples. My argument is that they illustrate ways that the arts can promote and perhaps produce inter-human relations with deeply embedded mutual care. In each example, the art is being made with and between people, in one sense modelling forms of a caring relationship that might be an inspiration for a more cooperative form of social arrangement, but also crucially enacting that relationship in the moment of the art making. My argument here is that an aesthetics of care can be a demonstration, a showing of caring, but, more significantly, it can be the actual moment of building a more just distribution of caring and increase participants' capacity to care and be cared for.

The understanding of aesthetics here is, on the one hand broad, signalling aesthetic in the sense of the appreciation of something crafted, artistic or beautiful. However, on the other hand, I am also using it in a more particular sense borrowed from the work of Jacques Rancière and his framework of the 'distribution of the sensible' (see Rancière, 2004: 12–19). If, according to Rancière, politics 'revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak', then 'aesthetics practices' are an intervention in those ways of 'doing and making' (Rancière, 2004: 13). Aesthetic practices are, therefore, always part of the processes by which capacities for seeing, doing, making and speaking are organised and these practices will, to varying degrees, maintain or undermine different 'distributions of the sensible'. So the examples I offer here might inspire as examples or representations of caring relations, but they are also actual interventions in political distributions of 'ways of doing and making as well as the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility' (Rancière, 2004: 13). In building new sensory relations, caring interactions and less familiar patterns of mutual support, they are interventions in existing, and frequently iniquitous distributions of, *ways of doing*. They are acts of redistribution that are vital if we are to create a more caring, just world: a more 'sensate democracy' in Butler's terms. While the examples I examine here are small in scale, somehow these moments opened up something wider and therefore, they suggest something grander as potential sources for gentler, kinder forms of inter-human relations. They were glimpses of an aesthetics of care, and, maybe, hints of a more hopeful, equitable way of being together.

The Grandchildren of Hiroshima

In April 2015, the London Bubble Theatre was working on a new performance piece in Hiroshima, Japan called *The Grandchildren of Hiroshima* as part of a project to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the bombing of the city in August 1945. I have written elsewhere about the broader project (Thompson, 2017) and here will only focus on one exercise from a workshop early in the process. I want to demonstrate how the playing of games, and this game in particular, in a devising workshop can exhibit, but then importantly practice and build a form of artful care. It can stage and ultimately produce the interdependencies discussed above. This was particularly important in this context, as the project was intergenerational, bringing young children into contact with elders in a programme that asked questions about how young Japanese could connect with the experiences of the war generation: how they could value and learn from their mutual dependency. Playing with each other became a symbol of that connection, an actual moment of connecting and also a memorial act as, through this process, elders remembered themselves as children at the time of the nuclear attack.

Games within community-based theatre have numerous purposes, including the sensitising of participants to their own and others' bodies, the rekindling of a capacity for and comfort with play so vital for collaborative theatre making and to enhance an embodied sense of connection and trust with one's fellow participants. Play can be joyous, disruptive and anarchic, as well as rule-bound, disciplinary and, of course, controlling. The intention here is not to offer a detailed analysis of play within community performance, but to argue that its relational qualities can both prepare and perhaps rehearse groups for attentiveness to the other and also can be actual examples of that bodily interdependence. They can be part of a process by which groups of individuals enhance their caring capacities, identified by care ethicist Jean Tronto as including 'attentiveness, deep reflection on responsibility [...] and responsiveness both to care receivers and to the process and effectiveness of care itself' (2015: 262). Attentiveness, in terms of the arguments of this chapter, is, therefore, a central capacity through which interdependencies are realised and strengthened. While I have no doubt that games can be used to exclude and divide, the account here suggests that they can also develop a capacity for inter-human care, engendering, in Tronto's words, 'the qualities of solidarity and trust' (2015: 262) that are a crucial part of the case for an aesthetics of care.

Early in one of the group's first workshops, the director of London Bubble, Jonathan 'Peth' Petherbridge, chose an exercise that required the group to work in pairs. The participants, a mix of Japanese children, young adults and elders, were all working on a performance piece about the experience of people on the day of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. This particular exercise was broken into several stages, becoming more challenging as it progressed. The first stage required one person 'A' in the pair to rest his or her hand on the 'B' partner's shoulder and then with the other hand hold

the partner's left hand gently. 'A' was then asked to guide 'B' around the space with 'B' keeping her or his eyes shut. After a short period of the pairs taking tentative – careful – steps around the space, they were asked to swap over so 'B' took on the 'A' role, and the process was repeated.

At all times, Peth encouraged people both to explore the space, but also ensure that the person with their eyes closed was marshalled gently around without bumping into other people or objects. After this first element of the exercise, the partners briefly discussed how they felt about it – was this safe, scary or enjoyable? The next stage increased the challenge and the lead partner no longer held the other's hand but just placed his or her single hand on the shoulder of their collaborator. There was the same close process of directing someone around the space, but the connection was lighter. After both had done this variant, it was changed once again, so that the lead now kept her or his hand on the shoulder only to direct movement but took it off otherwise, leaving the partner to move around the space with no contact. The hand was only returned to the shoulder to redirect, slow down or stop a person: that is, to keep them safe from the other players and obstacles in the room. The final stage changed again with the instruction for the leaders to make eye contact with other leaders and, when they took their hands off a partner's shoulder, they swapped partner and moved their hand to a new shoulder. Ideally the person with their eyes closed hardly noticed the switch, as they were conducted around the room with different partners just making gentle shoulder touches to stop, turn and carefully orientate them only when absolutely necessary. In the playing, this final section lasted longest with the group quietly and relatively effortlessly allowing the walkers their space with the leaders pivoting between different individuals allowing them to explore the room safely.

This final stage was almost balletic – as a lead partner moved stealthily around the room to catch a new person and then pirouette around another. Each needed to be minutely connected with other leaders to ensure that all remained safe, at the same time as watching closely for her or his particular partner and partners they would soon be assisting. The exercise built a particular (not of course completely unproblematic – of which, more later) model of care. First, there was an intimate connection to the direct partner as the person quietly led him or her around the space. Second, as the touch became slighter, there was the experience of the reciprocal nature of that touch as the person being led had to respond to the feel of the fingers and had to concentrate on the quality of the connection to understand what it sought. And finally, there was an ensemble moving in a combined act of care that shared responsibility for ensuring people could move safely around the space. In this final stage, just as a person released the touch from one person, she or he moved on to support another – and the exercise built to the point where relative independence was assured by the sensation that, if someone shifted too close to an edge or to a table, she or he would be retrieved by someone in the group; by a sense of collective responsibility. As the exercise developed, the somewhat functional, perhaps over protective

hand-on-shoulder-hand-in-hand relationship became replaced with more relaxed, gentler movements of the eye-closed partner. This was coupled with the dance of care around the different partners as the others moved to support each other, balancing and shifting physically through the space with an artful set of movements whose objective was to ensure the collective safety of all players. And this was a display, a choreography of care, as the fluid movements had a shape and pattern: it was dance-like as one person caught another, but then moved to someone else, shifting a body around the space to ensure the network of care and support was not broken. But of course, it also was not a display, in the sense of being for someone outside the group to witness. It existed in its own right as a mutual and relational experience for the group that modelled, and built, that subtle trust needed for quality ensemble work. It was, to rephrase Rancière, an act of redistributing the sensible relations between members of this group.

As I note above, there is a danger in assuming that this is a complete metaphor for an aesthetic realisation of a caring relationship. Requiring one person to close their eyes, hints at the disabling metaphor at the centre of the exercise. There is, of course, the danger of paternalism in the relationship between the carer and the 'blind' cared for, where one ultimately maintains the direction and power over the other. Care ethics, as discussed above, is concerned with the inequalities and imbalances in caring relations as much as the potential for forging more just relations based on mutual interdependency. Butler warns that attention must be paid to modes of dependency based on forms of subjugation but, in doing so, she does still assert that interdependence can form the basis for more just relations (2015: 21). A response to this problem did, however, emerge here. As the exercise developed, we witnessed some surprising acts of support, for example, between a smaller child and an adult or between a teenager and an elder, and between women and men. The exercise in fact could be viewed as one that shifted the dynamics of interpersonal care and dependency, and reassembled caring relations in ways that broke some of the expected, more familiar relations between children and elders, between the young and the old. A trust game that was part of the process of building up a theatre-making ensemble thus made new forms of mutual awareness, interdependency and interpersonal solidarity possible.

In this example, caring expertise – that grew through the exercise – had an artistry, a physicality and sensory quality. It was not the perhaps clumsy touch of the opening stage (which was a literal aiding of a partner and, of course, a metaphor for multiple different interpersonal relationships) that was valued, but the emergent delicate touch, release and sharing of responsibility for collective care. In a way, this mirrored the shift in care ethics from one-to-one caring relationships (for example, parent to child) to more social models of caring exemplified in the work of Virginia Held (2006) and Jean Tronto ([1993] 2009) on care's politics. For both these authors, there is an important move in care ethics from the assumed ground of a primarily private set of interpersonal relations, to the social and ultimately political

implications of a broader vision of a more caring social order. The shift was made visible through the exercise in a process of increased difficulty and increased focus on the collective responsibility for multiple, interrelated acts of care. Significantly for an argument about aesthetics, the success of this more collective stage required the interdependent care to be valued in part, of course, for its gracefulness. A child lightly touched the shoulder of an older woman to keep her safe; a teenage girl coaxed a middle-aged man to move gently across the room. The game demonstrated that the execution of care for the other required practice, rehearsal in the theatrical sense, as well as networks of connectedness and mutual support. However, it also showed that it required craft, attention to minute differences in inter-human physicality and a sense of awareness of the body in space and its rhythms of connection to others. The significance for community-based theatre is that this was a key *outcome* that was realised within the process itself and was not merely a moment of preparation for a final performance. So, in fact, this was not care 'like' a dance, as if the dance were a metaphor for or representation of care. Instead, high-quality care was shown in and of itself to be embodied in and have the aesthetic dimensions of dance – and the more graceful the dance, the higher quality the care. The exercise built the group's capacity to respond and then enabled them to enjoy dancing their care for each other.

While it is not the primary purpose of this chapter to discuss the broader connections this exercise made with the intergenerational performance project between elders and youth in the context of the memorialisation of the nuclear bomb, this small moment did illustrate the wider project's ambition to demonstrate and perhaps prefigure new modes of connection between older Japanese and the contemporary young citizens of the city of Hiroshima. Exercises such as the one described here practised, exhibited and then permitted the group to experience the mutual care between members. This enabled a group to create a performance piece that showed *and developed* collaborative and caring ways of working and listening between older and younger actors. The point to emphasise, for an account of the *aesthetics of care*, was that there was not a linear move from rehearsals where care was practised to the presentation of a play in which care was performed. In multiple moments across the devising, workshopping, rehearsing and performing of *The Grandchildren of Hiroshima* caring relations were built, felt and experienced. The play was, following Rancière (2004), *about* new 'modes of being and forms of visibility', but the example here also suggests that that at multiple micro-moments, the process was an actual intervention in the distribution of 'ways of doing and making' – a game, that briefest of exercises in the rehearsal room, allowed new interdependencies to be realised.

Ruff

Peggy Shaw is a performance artist celebrated for her work with Lois Weaver in the duo Split Britches. Pioneers of the queer and experimental performance scene in New York in the 1960s and 1970s, they have, since the 1980s,

drawn on contemporary, classical and popular forms to create performance projects dealing with a huge range of lesbian, feminist and other themes. Peggy Shaw, in particular, is known for her one-woman shows dealing with the many characters, stories, inspirations and personal experiences that have shaped her life. In response to her stroke in 2011, she developed a new show, *Ruff*, directed by Lois Weaver, dealing with the impact of the event on her life, her body and her memories. It explored her subsequent recovery, her ability to recall stories and her new found capacities and struggles. *Ruff* toured the UK in 2013 and 2014, visiting Manchester's Contact Theatre where I saw it with an audience of young people, stroke survivors and medical professionals.

Peggy took her post-stroke memory challenges as inspiration to construct a show that used monitors, green screen and other technological memory aids, including the presence of director Lois Weaver in the audience, to enable her to move her way through its multiple sections and stories. The presence of a mobile screen on stage laid bare the support structures that are often made invisible in many performance pieces – almost in homage to a Brechtian desire to make visible the mechanics that makes the theatre possible. In a straightforward way, there was an honesty about the structures of care that were needed to make this particular performance possible, which acted as a commentary on the way theatre more usually hides the means by which the performers are supported in order to come on to, and stay safe, onstage. There was no independent, entirely autonomous autobiographical performer here, but a person acutely aware of their own vulnerability and joyously presenting the tools needed to transform that vulnerability into a live presentation. The performance was not a story of an individual with extraordinary power to overcome, but a demonstration of the inevitable need for people to draw on the care and support of others, to make, in Butler's terms, 'life liveable'. Peggy told stories from her stroke, her hospital care, her recovery and her past, including relations with friends and family. Fragmentary accounts of tea with friends, hospital stays and her sister's wedding, interspersed with sound from 'her band' and green-screened images, built up a moving and comedic account of the stroke's impact on her life. While the monitors positioned around the front of the stage were in one sense the machinery of care – they were also, by being present with the actor, given an aesthetic presence. They were co-performers (along with Lois, see below) with Peggy, giving the care that she needed to make the show an onstage form. Their presence enacted a refusal to deny the performer's dependency, and in so doing made visible something of the interdependency of all performance, and of course, all performers.

This sense of laying bare and giving form to care in performance, however, was realised most directly in a couple of moments in the show I saw in Manchester, which, for me, placed care at the centre of the event in a way that further emphasised something of the vulnerability of all performers. At a couple of points in the show, Peggy looked up to ask: 'Am I in the right place?' and 'Where do I go now?' As an audience member,

being hyper-aware of the medical history that Peggy was presenting, my immediate thought when this first happened was that something was going terribly wrong. However, from the semi-obscurity of the audience a voice was heard giving reassurance, saying, 'yes that's right', 'you're fine' and 'yes, just there'. Unbeknown to me, and I assume others, director Lois Weaver was close to the front of the auditorium, ready to provide orientation and gentle guidance if the screens and other technical prompts failed to provide it. She made audible the usually unheard process of directorial guidance and signalled the care that was part of the labour inherent in it. There was something profoundly moving about this voice from the darkness. It seemed to express what was acutely present, but unspoken, in the audience; that is, an overwhelming sense of willing Peggy's success as she travelled through her complex, multilayered story telling. During the performance, there was a nervous anticipation, an almost collective holding of breath, as those watching urged Peggy to remain in control of the show. Lois' words of encouragement voiced the unspoken care of this particular director for her actor, a responsibility that is by no means ubiquitous, but in an argument for the importance of care aesthetics should be more central to a director and actor's relationship. While some theatre traditions might be prepared to tolerate less caring relations between directors and actors, the argument here insists that there should not be a means-justify-ends logic in theatre making and also that in applied theatre or community-based performance, means and ends are indistinguishable. As demonstrated in the example from Hiroshima, mutual care between participants should not be seen as optional but a potential, vital outcome of each workshop, rehearsal and performance moment.

Lois' interjections also voiced the audience's desire to connect with and support the unfolding narrative of Peggy's performance. Her ad libs both illustrated that the facilitating human technology behind this exceptional performance was a relationship of care and that in being voiced from the auditorium, she gave that care audible form: she made it present in the show. The support structure became part of the artistry of the event – something admitted and celebrated rather than something denied – and a structure that drew those in the audience into a relationship of care with the performer. The aesthetics of care, here, is in laying bare the relationship between audience and stage to make us all aware of the sensation of mutual regard, and care, which make successful performances possible. We witnessed a solo performer as a dependent person, relying on visible technologies and invisible spoken assurances – on networks of affective solidarity. This was not dependency as a source of subjugation, following Butler's concerns, but dependency that through mutual support became a display of productive and inspiring 'human dignity' (Kittay, 2015: 67).

The formulation of aesthetics of care that I am arguing for, therefore, insists that the aesthetic successes and failures of the show are not located solely in what takes place on the stage, but in the sensations of mutual reliance and concern between audience and performers, and between performers

and their creative support teams. And, in the example of Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver's *Ruff*, this involved ensuring that the crafted care that allowed Peggy to perform successfully became visible and part of what was appreciated about the performance. Lois' care for Peggy in that 'you're fine' became part of the moving, care-filled beauty of this piece, and spoken from within the audience, it brought those of us watching into the relationship of care that she expressed. Lois demonstrated for the audience something of Butler's 'ethos of solidarity' (2015: 22) that is based firmly in an acknowledgement of mutual dependency. While there was a singular relationship here between performer and director, her position within the audience seemed to share that responsibility with a group of spectators who were then, in turn, called upon to care. The dance of collective care from the exercise in *Hiroshima* was here the collective, heightened attention of a caring audience, drawn into a relationship with a performer who allowed her dependency to be made visible and audible. The fact of that dependency is not an impediment to living well but should be regarded, to repeat the quotation from Kittay, 'as a source of value: a source of connection, an occasion for developing our capacities for thought, empathy, sensitivity, trust, ingenuity, and creativity' (2015: 67). Interdependency, therefore, so movingly demonstrated within this performance piece, becomes a touchstone for intimate forms of human justice, where the arts can be an occasion for developing those resources of care that make collective dignity more likely.

Speech Bubbles

London Bubble Theatre, the creative force behind the *The Grandchildren of Hiroshima* performance piece, also run a programme called *Speech Bubbles* for Year 1 and Year 2 schoolchildren (five- to seven-year-olds) who have communication issues, such as speech delays, both near their base in London and across the UK. It is a school-based, year-long intervention with a group of ten children who are selected by the school and spend forty-five minutes each week, out of their classes, joining in a series of drama workshops focusing on whole-body communication. There are multiple reasons for their selection, relating to problems with their verbal and non-verbal contribution to their classroom studies; from speech impediments, selective mutism, English as a second language to struggles with verbalisation, sentence formation and other forms of verbal and participation anxiety. Each *Speech Bubbles* workshop is run by a lead drama worker supported by a member of support staff from the local school, either a teaching assistant or learning support assistant, who will know the children from her or his work with the different classes within the school.

A *Speech Bubbles* workshop follows a familiar pattern, slightly varying depending on the style of the drama worker and the particular needs of the young people. Broadly, they will start with a welcome game, including a name exercise and then some simple theatre games that support the children in their use of their bodies and their confidence in verbal and physical

expression. Games that support taking turns, listening to each other and expressing themselves make up the first section of the workshop. The second half concentrates on acting out a story that one of the children will have had noted down the previous week. This includes laying out a story square on the floor with masking tape, large enough for roughly three children to sit along each side. The space outside the square is for attentive audience members and inside is for the performers. Once the square has been established, one child's story will be acted out within the acting area with different children (and teachers and visiting adults!) being encouraged by the drama workshop leader to play the various characters and objects that make up the story. The child whose story it is is given an opportunity to take the role they want to, but otherwise the story is collectively worked on, expertly marshalled by the drama worker to ensure all have an opportunity to take on different acting challenges. Some stories are fantastical with talking animals and wondrous creatures, some are based on contemporary popular culture (from the latest animated or comic hero films) and others might be based on the familiar worlds of five-year-olds, with parents, siblings and other family members appearing as the leading characters. Once the story is finished, the workshop ends with a few concluding exercises. This includes a routine to 'wash off' the story, showering away the varying roles the child will have played, a group sharing of their favourite moments of the day and then a final song. In most *Speech Bubbles* sessions, one child stays behind to tell a story to the drama worker for the following week and that story is taken word for word into the *Speech Bubbles* notebook.

The playwright and young people's theatre expert Noël Greig, when running devising sessions, used to explain his approach as a process that moved 'from limitation to stimulation' (Personal communication, 1992). This was his formula for expressing how restrictions or constraints can inspire creative responses in making theatre with young people. In many ways, this ethos could be assumed to run through *Speech Bubbles* as the precisely chosen and repeated structure shapes the involvement of the children each week. What I want to argue here, however, is thinking about structure in theatre workshops in terms of 'restriction' or 'constraint' fails to account for how structure might be a particular route to taking good care of participants. The case to make is that *structure as care* provides an alternative, perhaps more productive, register. Debates about theatre workshop shape can become about how tightly or freely they are planned, and whether a strictness with timing and the format of exercises should be replaced with a greater openness or free-flowing process. For the argument I am making here, and in the case of *Speech Bubbles*, I want to explore how a structure that was repeated with almost ritualised elements actually provided a framework of care that held, maintained and made possible the play and delight of the children. Here, therefore, far from being a constraint, structure enabled the performance of care to emerge and this is what made possible the young people's creative success. For *Speech Bubbles*, the format of the workshop was not something simply to make the theatre possible – to limit in order

to stimulate. The shape *and the content* of the workshop were owned by the children in such a way that both constituted the art of this particular form of drama work – they combined as the aesthetic of this practice of care.

When it is time for the story square to be delineated on the carpet with sticky masking tape, the drama worker pulls the tape and constructs the basic outline, but the children relish patting down the lines and ensuring that it is properly aligned. This happened in every session I witnessed, in different schools. Once the square was properly stuck down, the children would then enthusiastically sit in place behind the lines. They repeatedly showed a sense of consideration and protection for the boundary that was both part of the structure of this section of the workshop and was visible on the floor in front of them. The frame was present, and it allowed them both to tell their stories and watch them being made. Children knew that when moving into the square they became the characters of that day's story – animals, superheroes, family members – and then, with a 'whoosh', they would jump out of the circle and sit back just behind the line. The workshop felt like a container of these young people, holding them in place, in safety, ushering them in certain directions, prompting their somewhat uneasy vocalisations, but also handing on that shape for the participants to claim themselves.

The structure was not so much a limitation, in Greig's terms, as a form of gently holding in place – for young people who had multiple, different and, at times, challenging means of being present in that space. The *hold* had a sensory quality as the tape on the carpet provided an almost magical line across which startling things were made possible. I would argue there was a caring pattern to the workshop that, in being repeated, constantly visible and shared with the children, had a sensory, affective and aesthetic quality. The workshop structure or form was part of the felt delight and excitement the children had for the session itself. The patterns were visible through the words of the drama worker, on the floor and in the actions and movements of the children – all becoming enabling features of its success. Feeling the tape on the floor was a process of sensing the shape or the care provided by the workshop. This was also the case with other exercises and workshop moments, which the children delighted in knowing the structure of and the order in which they appeared. Again, this places the care process – that supported these young people who were struggling for multiple reasons in their first year of primary school – as one that was practised, precisely crafted and collaboratively developed. The pattern had a certain beauty, artistry and ritualised quality in the way that it held these young people and sustained them through the workshop process. A *Speech Bubbles* workshop was, therefore, a set of mutually reinforcing exercises that gently prompted the participants and allowed them also to take hold of the workshop structure themselves. They were invited to have ownership of the workshop's shape – to pat it down – to take control, in a small way, of the mutual support that would make them feel more confident and excited about expressing themselves and making themselves part of their wider school experience.

Conclusion

The examples shared here are, of course, small scale. They are illustrations that art making can build powerful forms of interdependent care that have a quality and beauty – and that these aesthetic elements are as vital to the art as they are to the experiences of those involved. The examples model forms of embodied, mutually reliant relationships, then rehearse and develop those relations and finally share or display them. They exhibit caring, artful structures that are integral to the performance on display – whether it is the balletic drama exercise, the one-women show or the children's workshop. The art processes are richer and more moving because of their display of the interdependencies that give them their strength. Art making here is not an independent practice of the specifically trained or talented, but rather a practice that in being embedded in more interpersonal, caring processes, points to a world where mutual dependency is a source of less self-centred or unequal relations.

This chapter has aimed to articulate an *aesthetics of care* as a counter to the valuing of autonomy and independence, both within arts practices and the wider world in which they take place. It has also suggested that projects that enable well-crafted sensory, mutually supportive artistic experiences can become interventions that prefigure a fairer society, where art making actively redistributes the sensible in favour of more equitable arrangements to allow people's interdependent flourishing. It has made the case that rehearsals, demonstrations, performances and workshops where these care aesthetics are realised become places through which more care-filled social relations and just interdependencies are experienced. The ritualised caring structure owned by the children participants in *Speech Bubbles*, the graceful care ballet of the simple exercise in *Hiroshima* and the sensation of affective solidarity between audience, director and performer in *Ruff*, all showed how caring artistry provides glimpses of more mutually sustaining social relations. The arts and artists are, thus, not valued primarily for their capacity to comment independently, to awaken understanding or challenge the world, however important these qualities may be. Instead, they are valued for the intimate way they connect people with each other in mutually supportive communities. In a world that seems endlessly in the thrall of individualised prowess, privatised responsibility and wanton disregard for the welfare of others, beautiful moments of inter-human artful care perhaps hint that there is a better mode of being human and living well together.