

# BRED: dough-ing embodied research into value and productivity

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## **Abstract**

BRED is a practice-as-research and performance-as-research project exploring paradoxes in the discourse on value in the capitalist system. It asks how politics happens in performance, and, secondarily, what practice and performance are able to contribute that theory is not. It is realised through a durational, participatory performance installation in which participants are 'hired' into a fictional company called BRED.

This document traces and reflects on the practical and theoretical research leading to this installation. Beginning with an overview of relevant economic and political concepts, it then covers theoretical and practical research along with methods through the lens of thematic areas of play, power, value, time, and expanded-body materials. Practices which are inherently resistant to capitalism by virtue of the temporalities they inhabit or the way they do (or do not) demonstrate their value publicly generate a performative embodiment of the same system they resist, yet manage to embed a critique within the performance. The document considers a particular iteration of BRED: an 8 hour installation where BRED's headquarters opened its doors for a full working day, 'hiring' four groups of arrivals into a curated experience of training, working, and attending to a Powerpoint presentation. Drawing on political and performance theory from Paolo Virno and Peggy Phelan, the document relates work to traits of political action, politics to change, and change to the temporality of 'now', which is a defining trait of performance, thus opening a space for performance to be the site of political action.

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## Introduction + Chapter Summary

Engaging with a pervasive system through an artistic research project can get complicated; especially if, like me, your tendency is to get interested in *everything*, and see interconnections (nearly) *everywhere*. BRED took an expansive path in both theoretical and practice-based research, engaging with foundational concepts of capitalism and key strands of anti-capitalist thought, as well as the existing field of artistic practice that engages these themes, before going through a process of editing and shedding that coincided with a significant shift in research focus over the course of a year: I began with the idea of using somatics to develop practices of resistance to the capitalist system, but moved towards embodying the system itself, primarily through a durational performance installation. This allowed me to embed critique of the system without pretending to escape what is, as I will argue, a nearly-inescapable system. I explored paradoxes in the discourse on value and productivity through both practice and performance research methodologies, with dance, bread dough, powerpoint and language as materials. Using practices that inherently resist the system, I developed performance that both embodies and critiques the system. Throughout, I played with layers of meaning, cultivating an attitude of playfulness and vulnerability in my practice, while aiming to keep the practical and theoretical inquiry grounded in feminist economics and political economic theory.

## Research Questions

This project was guided by two main questions. These were: *How does politics happen in the performance space?* and *What happens in practice and performance that is impossible in theoretical contexts?* These two questions leave space to address themes of value, productivity and power, while keeping the research grounded in the play between practice and performance. Through engaging with these questions, this artistic research attempts to contribute to the anti-capitalist discourse from an embodied perspective, as well as to present performance and develop embodied practices that function politically.

### ***What are Capitalism, Politics and Performance?***

Before continuing, I would like to further define the terms capitalism, politics, and performance as they relate to this project. All three can take on different shades of meaning in different contexts - however, a more specific understanding of each will help the reader in following the thread of this document. Capitalism, the general term for our economic system, is the main filter through which we understand value, productivity and power, and has given rise to many related terms, for example, neoliberal capitalism, racial capitalism, and late capitalism, all with their own political and economic perspectives on value, productivity and efficiency, which I will not be attempting to unpick here. My project is, however, specifically engaged with certain traits of capitalism, namely, 'constant expansion' (Hickel, 2020 p. 20), 'elite accumulation' (Hickel 2020 p. 45) and their temporal partner, acceleration. Put simply, more growth, more stuff, more speed: an endless more. Since my research is dealing specifically with this endless *more*, I would like to introduce a 'more' precise term and call this overall system the moremoremore (MMM) - hopefully helping to disentangle it from the geopolitical concerns associated with terms like neoliberal capitalism mentioned above. I also playfully note the double meaning of "mmm" as a way to verbally express appreciation\*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I am not the first to use the acronym Mmm in an artistic research context; see Michael Clark's 1992 piece Mmm... which in his case stood for "Michael's Modern Masterpiece"

Politics, likewise, has been defined in many ways over the years. So what is it exactly that am I hoping will happen in the performance space? A campaign? A vote? A debate? Rather, I draw on Arendt's articulation of politics as that which has to do with the polis, or citizens, and their debating and decision making. (Antonini, 2018 para 3). I further draw on Paolo Virno's characteristics of political *action*: "unforeseeability, the ability to begin something new, linguistic performances' and 'an ability to range among alternative possibilities" (Virno n.d. para 4)

What about performance? Spatz contends that performance has 2 meanings: representation and embodiment (Spatz 2018 p. 211). He describes representation as 'signs that produce shared meaning' and embodiment as 'the importance of the living organism in that discussion'. I follow these two meanings in BRED, the first by creating common signs and meaning through the training video and onboarding process and the second centering the importance of the living bodies (dough and human) in the room through the participatory nature of the installation. All living organisms present are necessary for the work to happen, and make decisions together based on shared meaning (albeit artificially constructed for the purposes of the performance installation). I would suggest that this embodied engagement with shared meaning also offers an overlap with the shared decision-making and social engagement I have just described in politics.

## **BRED's Materials**

Now that I have clarified how I am engaging with these three terms, I will introduce my materials. They might seem at first like an unlikely assemblage: dance and the body, bread dough, and powerpoint. I will contextualise each material theoretically and then try to answer a deceptively simple question: "What can the material do?" (Burrows 2010 p. 5), a question which helps me to place each material in the practical research.



I'll look at dance and the body first, as each material acts as an expansion of this primary one.

### ***Dance and the Body***

Dance, as an industry, could be considered an example of the adaptable precarity that the MMM requires (long before the arrival of the Uber driver or WeWork denizen, dancers were sacrificing steady pay and settled places to live/work for their industry) -- and, as an art form, has also been considered a potentially perfect resistance to the system due to its productless nature and the fact that it is situated in the messy, biological human body. However, the dance industry is certainly not separate from the MMM system - just look at the environmental costs of touring for instance - and even the body is sometimes treated as a machine to be 'hacked' in service of the MMM. That being said, as a material for this project I define dance as *the movement of bodies in space and time*. Moreover, I focus on improvisational and somatic practices which are self-directed and the outward expression of which vary greatly according to the individual. Seen this way, dance is a potential pathway to divorce artistic practice from systemic imperatives and come from an 'authentic core' (Kunst 2015 p. 20), that is, a subjectivity that is rooted inward as much as turning outward. From a dualist perspective, the body (as opposed to the mind) has historically been tied to the non-linear rhythms of the world, put simply, 'nature', which would also support dance being an effective medium of resistance to the (historically associated and defined) rational mind and 'humanity' (Hickel 2020 p. 74). In fact, since the beginning of the 20th century dance has (sometimes, not always) served as a vehicle for anti-capitalist or extra-capitalist art; while there is not enough space to cover this adequately here, I will share a few examples from different periods. Isadora Duncan's expressive performance as social critique explicitly advocated for Communism and also included speeches (Daly 1995 p. 180), while the somatics practitioners of the 20th century saw their developing practices as radically autonomous from dominant systems (George 2020 p. 48), and more recently Tino Sehgal's 'situations' dedicate themselves to immateriality and

ephemerality, intentionally avoiding traditional signals of value in the art world by refusing documentation.<sup>2</sup>

In this project, dance and the body serve to bring what could otherwise be an extremely conceptual area into embodied territory. Arlander (2018 p. 133) quotes Barad: “we don’t obtain knowledge by standing outside the world, we know because we are OF the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming”. In other words, knowing and being are co-implicated. In BRED, critique of the MMM turns on our bodies being implicated: the installation only exists insofar as there is a group of workers there embodying it, and meaning arises from the being in/of the work, rather from watching and analysing.

I also use dance for its ability to bring us into the *now*. (Phelan 1993 p.146) Dance exists only in the moment, and, as I will demonstrate, so does politics. Both depend on split second decisions, *now*. The *now* is a way of being-in-time, which is also a facet of human experience around which much of this project is organised.

### ***Bread dough***

Bread dough<sup>3</sup>, the second key material, has three main functions in this project. It becomes a container for meaning, a signifier of layers of experience. It is also a marker of certain temporalities. Last but not least, it acts as a subversive spark, a minor object - essentially, an object gone rogue - terms which I will introduce now.

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/jul/11/tino-sehgal-blenheim-palace-interview>

<sup>3</sup> Other artists have used dough in combination with the body: Laura Wilson (<https://www.laurawilson.me/>) has made multiple dough works including Fold and Stretch, a 2016 collaboration with dancers and bakers in 2016 which explored the liveness of dough and ‘manipulation of material as a way to transfer knowledge’, and Folds, a life-modeling studio with dough as the body. Santina Amato (<https://santinaamato.com/about>) is interested in dough’s references to domesticity and its life cycle and uses it in her photography and installation work.

### *Rogue Dough*

Dough, in BRED, is not in a kitchen and is not baked. Divorced from its usual use as food, dough becomes available to fulfill other functions. As such, it becomes what Oli Mould calls a 'spark of subversive creativity', or an object 'freed of its usual context and function' to take on any number of metaphorical and physical functions. (Mould, 2019 para 22) In the BRED offices, dough is not food-in-waiting, instead it becomes the main object of our work, and even care. Dough becomes an enforcer of stillness, as we wait with it on our skin. Mould's subversive spark is related to Felix Guattari's 'minor object', which is an object that gains some autonomy by virtue of being taken out of its habitual context. Taking an object out of context in this way shifts the 'major language' of the dominant structures - changes expectations for these structures. (Guattari as cited in Cocker 2011 p. 95) I include both these similar terms to draw out a distinction between the spark, which has a quality of rippling into new ideas and functions over time, and the minor object which has a quality of destabilising the 'dominant spaces.' around it. In BRED, both replacing dominant work symbols like the computer with dough on the workers' desks, as well as unfolding new functions of dough over the duration of the installation help make an embedded critique of the MMM within the embodiment of itself possible.

So, dough can act as a subversive spark and as a minor object. What else can this material do? Bread dough as a material can contain layers of meaning. It is actually literally growing, in a tactile mirror of the MMM. If we remember a slang meaning of 'dough' it stands in for money itself, slowly growing on the desks of the office, perhaps mirroring how capital accumulates in bank accounts. Dough brings associations with domesticity and the home. Caring for it as it holds you more or less immobile, which the main working act of BRED requires, touches on concepts of value and productivity, perhaps gesturing toward concepts from feminist economics around undervalued reproductive labour. Dough also forces an experience of certain temporalities: rising takes time and has no immediately visible outcome. It's not obviously productive. Kneading is active, rhythmic, an embodiment of relentless activity.

## **Powerpoint**

Powerpoint is a material that is embedded in the MMM, but that also can be a container for any words and image: it functions, in this project, as a digital choreographic space. It also represents a reverse appropriation: the appropriation of corporate tools for artistic ends. Able to be controlled remotely and thus participate in an arrangement of body, image and words in space and time with the presenter, I argue that it also represents an extended body. In May 2020, I was inspired by Doug Fishbone's use of unacknowledged images in his 2013 work *The World According to Me*.<sup>4</sup> He features images that work a bit like subliminal messages, appearing and quickly disappearing, often to a humorous effect. This led me to the realisation that Powerpoint as a material can smuggle the unspoken into the room, in ways that can be both funny and poignant. In BRED, personal images and poetry that arose from somatic movement research are exposed in the corporate/digital frame of the presentation, without being explicitly acknowledged. In this way, using Powerpoint allows me to create a tension between personal content and corporate form.

## **Time**

Finally, I will introduce the embodied/theoretical role that time plays in this project. Time is not exactly a material - it can't be seen - but it can be sensed, and this project has pivoted around time theoretically and in the practice of specific temporalities. Why? Our relationship to time is implicated in both our participation in, and resistance to, the MMM. The linear, fast-paced temporality of progress and un-ending growth through time is a foundational assumption of the MMM. (Tsing 2015 p. 21). This assumption, when combined with precarity and the increasing encroachment of on-call time into all moments of the day and night (Crary, 2014 p.75) is felt in our bodies in the relentless rhythm of modern working life. Our age is 'characterised by anxiety as a dominant affect' (Firth 2016 p. 123) and a constant state of 'bodily excitation' due to the un-ending barrage of information and compartmentalised time. (Firth 2016 p. 124) Bojana Kunst

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<sup>4</sup> The World According to Me <https://www.dougfishbone.com/en/works/76>

calls this relentless rhythm ‘pseudo-activity’, a state of perpetual activity without much meaning. (Kunst 2015 p. 7) Operating from this place of anxiety and perpetual doing, there is simply not enough space for people to imagine anything else, much less take action to bring about a change. Therefore, various thinkers interested in resistance to the MMM have engaged with suspended temporalities, both because they are inherently oppositional to progress and because they have the effect of creating what Baraitser (2017 p.2) calls “an alternative to the capitalist everyday.”

I began the embodied research with an embodied engagement with Baraitser’s work on waiting and other suspended, repetitive temporalities (which I will cover more in depth in Chapter 4), attempting to create a space ‘outside the capitalist everyday’. However, as I mentioned earlier, the project shifted to embody the system it also criticizes.

*“I am in-carn-ating capitalist work processes - making them fleshy through movement and language” - Personal Notebook, April 2021*

I felt that this shift perhaps brought the project closer to aligning with Kunst’s idea of what constitutes radical art today: that which ‘makes ALL political identities uncomfortable’ (rather than, for instance, a leftist performance which only makes those on the right cringe, or vice versa). (Kunst 2015 p. 13) By performing traits of a system which we are all implicated and immersed in, I hoped to move past a specific political perspective to open the possibility for *everyone, myself and Manuela included*, to feel uncomfortable and think again, not just those who might not agree with me.

## **A note on Practice, Performance and Research Design**

I have chosen to interweave most of my discussion of methodology and methods into the chapters on the research, because many of my methods seemed to arise *from* the research and readings. In order to best represent this co-evolving process, I will go directly from a theoretical exploration of capitalist and anti-capitalist thought, art and

resistance in Chapter 1 to considering the research process as a whole, organised by concept. However, I would like to briefly summarise here the two methodologies I am working with: Practice-as-Research (PaR) and Performance-as-Research (PAR) (acronyms from Barton, 2018 p. 4) Let's look at each in turn.

PaR depends on practice as a fundamental method of research. (Nelson 2013, p. 8) Characterized by knowing-through-doing, PaR includes practice as part of the 'substantial evidence' of the research (Nelson 2013, p. 8) Performance-as-Research (PAR) is a bit harder to nail down: connecting artistic performance (i.e. live performance of music, dance, theatre, or art for an audience) with research, it 'refuses binaries, creating space for the unknown' (Barton 2018 p. 9), and is typically associated with interdisciplinarity. In my research, it has come to mean that some of the knowing comes through performing, both in the installation and in the studio. Insofar as BRED exists between movement, language and image, it is also associated with interdisciplinarity and seeks to 'create space for the unknown'. Finally, performance itself has a double meaning, referring to both artistic performance, and to the evaluation of quality, efficiency and ultimately overall value of our work.

Karen Barad's frames "material-discursive practices" as those which "refuse to separate discourse and materiality" (Arlander 2018, p 137). This concept is relevant to both how I developed practice and what practices emerged. In short, discourse and embodiment did not exist separately in the project, rather they often depended on each other to advance.

### ***The stakes***

In this project, the play between practice and performance led naturally to the notion of 'raising the stakes', drawing on Ben Spatz's contention that simply performing an action can be obviously insincere - that when we really practice it the stakes are much higher because our identities are implicated. (Spatz 2018 p. 220). The performance or imitation of certain behaviours associated with corporate life in our culture were dropped in favour of cultivating practices unique to the fictional company. Performance

improvisation was used in the studio to inhabit some corporate behaviours from the outside-in and develop rules of practice based on what was emerging in the performance register. In sum, both practice underpinned performance and performance became a practice, something I will address more specifically in Chapter 2.

### ***Design shift***

For the entire first phase of this project, until April 2021, I worked solo. I had intended to work with a live group, but COVID restrictions prevented this and it was not initially clear whether the work still demanded a group. By March, the research questions demanded a shift in design: it became clear that more bodies and minds in the space would add depth and bring the work alive, and so sparked moving from solo work, to a close collaborator group, to a wider friendship group in open rehearsal, and finally to the public presentation.

First, I amplified my solo practices onto collaborators. I assigned a small group of collaborators to make bread dough and allow it to rise on their body, documenting with video and writing their thoughts and responses. I invited participants to bring their own ideas and perspectives, as if they were members of a real working team. This worked well for the initial exercise but I wonder in retrospect if it was off putting, or if I was not clear enough myself, because a group of 3 quickly narrowed to myself and Manuela. This was a blessing in disguise, however, as it forced the design to move to more clearly incorporate of PAR, and, participatory performance.

## **Chapter Summary and Installation Map**

Here is a brief summary of what I will cover in the following chapters as well as a map of the 21st July installation space.

## **Chapter 1: Capitalist thought, Anti-Capitalist thought and Art**

This chapter covers tenets of the MMM system which are most relevant to this project, acknowledging that there is a huge amount of theory out there which I am not covering within the scope of BRED. I will cover (briefly) the evolution of modes of production from Fordist to Post-Fordist. I will cover basic concepts like growth, appropriation and accumulation and continue with some basic concepts around economic growth and capitalist appropriation. Next, I will touch on the wide field of Feminist Economics to highlight the question of *which* work we value. I will also cover some key thinkers such as Virno and Baraitser who offer strategies for resistance and escape, and whose work has been crucial to this project.

## **Chapter 2: Play and Power in Practice and Performance**

In this chapter I look at themes of play and power which were present in the studio and installation. Play is both an ontology and a methodological orientation of playing between disciplines and meaning. As an ontology play is an ego-destabiliser and a mode of resistance to dominant systems. I will cover rehearsal structures that reflected this, and the idea that not being a 'tight-ass' (Clarke 2015 p 301) can support effective research and creativity. I then go on to address power and how it manifests in this installation, touching on rules, ambiguity and pleasure, the notion of delegated performance which underpins the participatory nature of the installation, including in the BRED score, a directed group branding exercise and movement improvisation which faced a particular ethical dilemma.

## **Chapter 3: Value in Practice and Performance**

Value in practice and performance begins with unpacking how use-value and exchange-value differ, leading to the invisibility of work that does not turn a profit. I look at temporalities which conceal hidden value such as maintenance and repetition. The notion of the value in what is unseen became a starting point to develop a movement improvisation practice that embodies this paradox, what I call the 'value dance'. Drawing on Virno, this practice is a refusal to prove virtuosity and therefore becomes a practice of temporary liberation from the MMM.



## **Chapter 4: Time in practice and performance**

Chapter 4 looks at how the research engages with temporalities that both resist and embody the MMM, drawing on Baraitser (2017) and others. I talk about my studio-based cycles practice, and go into two manifestations of dough-time: rising/worker time which is associated with unproductive staying / waiting, kneading-time or manager-time is associated with the 'productive cadence' or 'manager time'. Rising time and kneading time are both types of suspension: the first, a suspension of action, leading to a spaciousness in felt experience and perhaps increased agency to act, and the second, a suspension in action, which might give rise to a paralysation of agency.

## **Chapter 5: Expanding the body: Language and the digital**

In this chapter I will talk about language as input and output manifesting as lingo (public, jargon-y, sometimes nonsense) and language (springs from the inner life, poetic). I will talk about language as a way of directing the body in the BRED score (a participatory movement score that is also a branding exercise). I will talk about using Powerpoint as a digital expanded body and choreographic space.

## **Chapter 6: Suspension of Activity**

This last chapter returns to the central questions of the research and also notes some thoughts that for now, remain suspended. Rather than attempting a final end and/or definitive conclusion, I 'suspend' activity, explaining that the choice to abstain from firm conclusions is grounded in multiple facets of the nature of the project: the process orientated nature of embodied research, the perpetual next of the MMM, and appears in anti-capitalist discourse, including in relation to Anna Tsing's notion of salvage rhythms.

## **Installation Map + Key**

In order to support the reader's understanding of the components of the installation, which I will reference regularly in this document, I insert a map of the installation here. "Julia" and "Manuela" are myself and my primary collaborator in developing the project.

“Workers” are the participants. The Value Dance and 1:1 Meeting are two movement components of the installation, which I will elaborate in Chapters 3 and 5 respectively. The spaces for chilling out and the presentation area are marked as well.

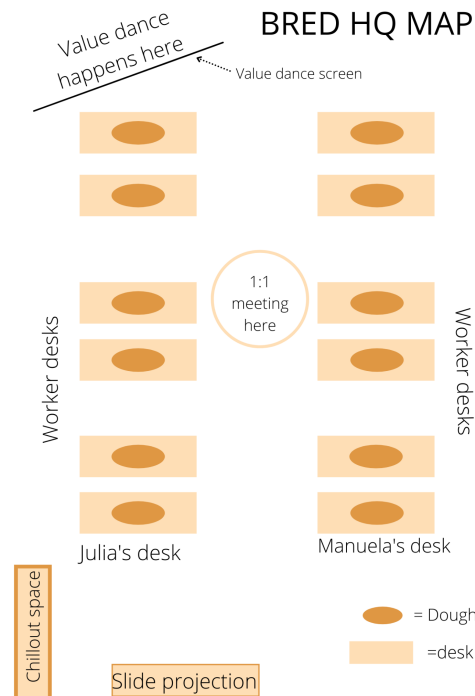


Fig 1: Map of the Installation

## Chapter 1: Capitalist thought, Anti-Capitalist thought, and Art

*“...all wage labour has something of the performing artist about it”*  
(Virno, n.d. Para 19)

This chapter will contextualise the project with concepts from the literature which were important for investigating the research questions.

## **Fordist and Post-Fordist labour**

First I would like to introduce the idea of evolution of the modes of production (the way profits are produced), which will lead us to how subjectivity and affect have become modes of production in the MMM system. The 20th and 21st centuries have seen the mode of production shift from workers' physical labour to their social and emotional labour. Fordist labour was practical and mechanical; the name references Henry Ford's 20th century assembly lines turning out car after car, and makes me think of Charlie Bucket's dad in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, screwing endless toothpaste caps on tubes. This was the time of physical, repetitive work...which also gave workers' power, as they could band together and refuse to produce profits without basic conditions being met. (Hardt and Negri, 2017 p. 111) However, as automation became widespread, workers' bodies were less necessary, which meant that workers had less power but also more freedom from the capitalist system. To retain power, capitalism needed to 'put the social terrain to work... the mode of production had to be interwoven ever more tightly with forms of life.' (Hardt and Negri, 2017 p. 112). Today, our 'creativity and artistic subjectivity' has literally become a mode of production (Kunst 2015 p. 10). We can understand this idea by thinking of the monetisation of our preferences and intentions via Instagram for instance, where advertising spend to the tune of \$18.16 billion in 2021<sup>5</sup> is attracted by the possibility to micro-target millions of people based on their self-reported ideas and opinions. However, as the mode of production has literally been taken INTO the workers bodies (because it is their thoughts and feelings), a new possibility for resistance opens: bodies have the 'potential to become increasingly foreign to and autonomous from capital'. (Hardt and Negri 2017 p. 115).<sup>6</sup>

## **Growth, Progress and Appropriation**

Economic growth is typically measured with the metric Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or, the total economic value of all goods and services produced by a country. But the

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<sup>5</sup> (Source: [Statista](#))

<sup>6</sup> Initiatives like the Pirate Care Syllabus (<https://syllabus.pirate.care/>) and the Four Thieves Vinegar Collective (<https://fourthievesvinegar.org/?mission>), are examples of current efforts to reclaim autonomy of bodies, care and health.

fact that GDP growth, meant to be endless, depends on the use of finite resources poses a problem. (Hickel 2020 p. 20) Economic growth is also entwined with the (post-Enlightenment) Western belief that 'progress' is a particular characteristic of being human. (Tsing, 2015 p. 21) This idea of progress is associated with a relentless rhythm and envisions both human lives and history as a continuous forward and upward trajectory. However, ENDLESS growth (rather than an alternative model of cycles of growth, maturity and death) is actually a destructive force. (Hickel 2020 p. 107) This is because endless growth depends on abandoning the idea of 'use-value' for the idea of 'exchange-value'. Use-value is the real-life value material, object, or service has for humans while exchange-value refers to how much money a material, object or service is worth in the market. Production and profit become 'fundamentally unhinged from any conception of human need.' (Hickel 2020 p. 85) Finally, we must guard against assuming that things are this way because of 'bad people'; rather, continuously expanding growth is embedded in the system, so today the only way for a business to assure success, or find investors, is to keep growing. (Hickel 2020 p. 88)

Further, growth depends on appropriation (for free) of natural resources and people's labour. (Hickel, 2020 p. 82). Capitalism's origin story is that of creating profit from slavery and enclosure (this term describes the theft of common lands and resources from ordinary people by elites that occurred in Europe after 1500) (Hickel 2020 p. 76). Since its inception, capital has had to continue to look for new resources in order to fuel growth. Today, one of these resources is human subjectivity. (Kunst 2015 p. 20) One place where this is really evident is in the workplace, where 'creativity and passion, along with collaboration, become things we are 'forced to perform' (Mould 2018 p. 28). To be successful, we must demonstrate evidence of our passion and creativity, through our attitudes, social media posts and, often, by working longer hours for free.

The workplace is one site where human subjectivity is a profitable resource, but the MMM is endlessly creative when it comes to usurping and appropriating any spaces that seem beyond its reach. As Mould states, "Capitalism's creative power does not create, it appropriates...capitalism mobilizes its agitators as vehicles for proliferation" (Mould

2018 p. 14). It is this proliferation that is capable of turning the most personal territory into a commodity.

Let's take the formerly personal territory of rest, and sleep. Crary argues that sleep is being "wrecked" and "despoiled" in order to break down the "last of what Marx called 'natural barriers' to the full realization of 24/7 capitalism" (Crary 2014 p. 17) and that with the 24/7 availability of digital transaction opportunities, we have reached a state where there is no life untouched by the MMM system (Crary 2014 p. 75). Crary illustrates just how dark this idea is in the following quote:

"If one accepts that a meaningful notion of everyday life is inseparable from its fugitive anonymity, then it would be difficult to grasp what it might have in common with time spent in which one's gestures are all recorded, permanently archived, and processed, with the aim of predetermining one's future choices and actions." (Crary 2014 p. 76). In 2014, Crary was describing the attention economy, or the increasing microtargeting and monetisation of peoples' attention and interest, which, now, from the perspective of 2021 seems nearly impossible to evade.

The appropriative reach of the MMM also extends to spheres that supposedly run counter to it. For example, somatics began as a countercultural movement - a way to free bodies and minds. Doran George, however, describes how somatics took on characteristics of the MMM: "As part of the revision of somatics, diversity and ingenuity also reconstructed themselves through new corporate ethics." (George 2020 p 48), going on to say "If the central contribution of the (somatic) approach to contemporary dance is a sense of authentic individual creativity and natural physical autonomy and yet this embodies liberal capitalist ideals, artists seem to be robbed, theoretically at least, of some of the independence from commerce and access to artistic critique that Somatics promises." (George 2020 p. 139) In other words, somatics as a field now often embodies the ideals which it critiqued in its infancy, similar to Mould's workplace performance of creativity and passion. Wellness and therapy culture have traced a similar trajectory, repurposing tools for self-care and emotional literacy as a tool for productivity, rather than resistance. (Firth 2016 p. 126) To recap, growth is assumed to

be necessary at all costs, but endless growth is actually a destructive force. The MMM has always depended on the appropriation of (free) resources to sustain growth and today these include our own human subjectivities. Fields which spring up in resistance to the MMM are also usurped.

## **Accumulation and Acceleration**

Ultimately, the MMM is a system of accumulation, designed to support the concentration of wealth. (Tsing 2015 p. 62). This accumulation of wealth by an elite is served and sustained by un-ending growth, which is served and sustained by extractive processes - of labour, subjectivities and raw materials. But, in fact, growthism, or the assumption that we must have growth at all costs, is actually a 'process of breakdown' in disguise: it is literally destroying life-sustaining systems while selling itself as prosperity. (Hickel 2020, p. 107).

This financial accumulation is happening in concert with an accumulation of speed: acceleration. Crary notes that the acceleration of 'novelty production' (i.e. new devices, new stuff) means a 'disabling of collective memory' to 'help ensure the systematic erasure of the past as part of the fantasmatic construction of the present' (Crary 2014 p. 45) He goes further to say that "Social phenomena that are characterised by the appearance of stasis or slow rates of change are marginalised and drained of value or desirability," (Crary 2014 p. 46). Like the accumulation of stuff, acceleration is actually a process of breakdown in disguise, resulting in widespread anxiety and a paralysis of action - but these are points I will discuss later.

## **Feminist Economics**

Feminist economics came into being as a field to address gaps in traditional economics; one huge gap is that unpaid caring or domestic work are not included in GDP. I will introduce some concepts from the field that are relevant to this project now. Feminist economics is an economics that values both 'efficiency and equity' (Jacobsen, 2020 p.1) and contends that issues like affordable child care outside the home and (in)equitable divisions of domestic labour are in fact integral to the field of economics,

and notes that traditional economics has also been largely developed by men. (Jacobsen 2020 p. 2). The value of care work and reproductive labour, which is often accomplished by women and takes a substantial amount of time, is notoriously un- or under-accounted for in the economy. Further, this invisible and un-valued work is actually essential: reproductive labour (the kind of labour that teaches children to behave well and makes sure everyone's lunches are made) is completely essential to how our society functions, (Federici 1975 p.6) Let's turn now to a discussion of some of the literature on art and resistance to the MMM, which is most relevant to this research.

## **Art and Resistance**

How does the above theory intersect with artistic practice? To flesh out this question, I will look at some thinkers addressing the intersection of work, art, and politics.

Time can be considered a site of resistance to the MMM. In the introduction I introduced the basic idea that a belief in linear time and forward progress are inseparable from the MMM; these conceptions of 'how time is' are also related to feminist economics' questioning of how time spent caring is valued. So, if inhabiting time that moves only forward is also inhabiting the MMM, perhaps intentionally inhabiting temporalities 'outside the capitalist everyday' (Baraitser 2017 p. 2) can provide a mode of resistance or partial escape. In her book *Enduring Time*, Baraitser writes about a series of temporalities that she contends exist, if not totally separate from, then at least not in synch with, the MMM. The most relevant for this work are staying and repetition. I will address these more fully in Chapter Four.

Italian autonomist philosopher Paolo Virno relates virtuosity to productivity in his essay *Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus*. He defines virtuosity as 'activity without finished work' - think musicians and dancers (and I'd relate it as well to reproductive labour as theorised by Baraitser), but claims that work has taken over virtuosity, which used to be the 'architrave of ethics and politics' (Virno n.d. para 7). Further, he writes, in post-Fordist production, all waged labour is

‘activity-without-a-finished-work’. (Virno n.d. para 9) He then calls out the ‘presence of others’ as both the ‘instrument and the object of labour’ - noting that ‘there is none so poor as the one who sees his or her own ability to relate to the ‘presence of others’ reduced to waged labour’ (Virno n.d. para 11). In other words, we have reached a point where virtuosity is now concentrated in our waged labour, instead of in our political action, and depends on public observation (the presence of others) for validation. He goes on to advocate for an ‘engaged withdrawal’ from the system (Virno n.d. para 22). Virno’s exit is ‘the alliance between general intellect (general social knowledge) and political action’. (Virno n.d. para 21) The ridiculous working act of allowing bread dough to rise on the body is both a virtuosic challenge and results in no finished ‘work’. This combination also underpins a practice I call the ‘value dance’, a practice which also inverts the dependence on the presence of others, which I will describe in Chapter 3.

Virno’s notion of ‘exodus’ correlates with Ramsay Burt’s argument that choreographic work which ‘diverts homogenized space to their own purposes’ is a force for transformation, arguing that ‘disruptive spatial practices can produce new kinds of affective relations between performer and audience member’ (Burt 2018 p. 99). By choosing how we use space, perhaps moving away from expected uses, might we transform social interaction, and therefore politics? Colleen Bartley’s installation *Non-Active Activism: A Listening Space* by Colleen Bartley<sup>7</sup> in September 2020 offered an idea of this kind of repurposed space. She transformed an empty storefront into a (free) space to be, chat, move, eat. What happened in the space depended entirely on who was there and promised no product or standardization. Here the escape is out of the controlled or homogenized space, to find spaces for the individual, the un-controlled. So we have time-based and space-based modes of escape, sustained by an alliance between intellect and political action (which I might call thinking + moving outside the control of the MMM system). Through mis-using, in a sense, both time and space in the open plan offices of BRED, what modes of intellect and action might arise?

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<sup>7</sup> Part of this programme in Poplar by Young Bloods Initiative:  
<https://youngbloodinitiative.com/Wake-Up-Smell-the-Tear-Gas-Agenda>



Constant activity is another feature of the MMM. Bojana Kunst describes what she calls the 'pseudo-activity' of today's people and artists (doing for doing's sake) and, draws a connection to what she terms art's 'pseudo-engagement' -- or ineffectual political engagement, making a similar point to Virno. As I noted earlier, Kunst introduces the idea that art that 'triggers uneasiness at both the [political] right and left' is a fertile place for effective resistance quoting Jacques Rancière that 'politics is an activity that breaks up this unity of processes and interferes with the orderly configuration of the sensual. This makes politics profoundly linked to change.' (Kunst 2015 p. 13) I would argue that artistic practice also has the potential to 'interfere with the orderly configuration of the sensual' and that this is one commonality with the political that makes performance a potential site for politics and change.

## **Chapter 2: Play and Power in Performance and Practice**

*"The perverse pleasures underlying these artistic gestures offer an alternative form of knowledge about capitalism's commodification of the individual, especially when both participants + viewers appear to enjoy the transgression of subordination to a work of art."*

(Bishop, 2012, p102)

*"The performative quality of power is shaping the global future as it never has before"*

(Kershaw 1999 p5)

## Play

Play is both an ontology in the practice and performance of the research and a methodological orientation of ‘playing between’ disciplines and linguistic meanings: a way to inhabit paradoxes. I see ontological research-play as both a tool to destabilise the ego, opening up a wider field of creative possibilities, and a mode of rebellion against dominant systems. My use of play as an ego destabilising force is informed by Deborah Hay’s work: she uses impossible questions to disrupt habitual movement and even begins a lecture by barking like a dog (Hay 2016 p. 12). Taking this idea of undermining myself as a ‘serious artist’, and introducing my own version of the disruptive question as I’ll discuss further in Chapter 3, allowed me to experiment more widely with movement: using movement that is pedestrian, instinctive - movement that feels expansive and free in terms of style, rhythm, and form, at times veering into the random, disjointed, and absurd. With less ego to contend with, I found more artistic freedom.

Establishing play as an ontology, in my experience, also required a certain flexible attentiveness, an open focus. Suiko McCall speaks about something similar in her painting practice:

*“There’s a dynamism between how I can deepen and marry the relationship between my artistic and spiritual practice and how there can also be some breathing room and have it be enjoyable”* (Colomban, L., Gale-Feeny, A., Gerussi, M. and Pond, J. 2021)

Artist-researcher Alissa Clarke also distinguishes between ‘being tight-assed about the work’ and ‘remaining attentive’ (Clarke 2015 p. 301). In my work, this sense of playful attentiveness is key. The willingness to laugh and be irreverent becomes a force for going deeper into the research, whether through double meanings that reveal paradoxical relations, or through developing trust amongst collaborators to support more effective collaboration.

Play can also be considered a form of resistance or rebellion to a prevailing order. Clarke argues for 'recognising the messy body as an antidote to the seriousness of the law, and the prevailing systems' (Clarke 2015 p. 298). Laughter and play can be considered as related to the 'grotesque' body - the body with the 'potential to contaminate and distort the integrity of the societal order' (Vlieghe as cited in Clarke 2015 p. 297) This orientation also points to how 'the body and its processes, are, as Bakhtin (1984) points out, 'unfinished' and always moving and learning. it highlights how, as Bakhtin (1984 as cited in Clarke 2015 p. 122) underlines 'True open seriousness fears neither parody, nor irony, nor any other form of reduced laughter, for it is aware of being part of an uncompleted whole' (Clarke, 2015 p. 303) The training video shown in the beginning of the installation (Appendix B Video 1: 03:39-05:40), for example, is satirical but also indicates it is part of this bodily 'uncompleted whole' by exposing my own lumps and bumps, and by instructing emotion rather than only action. I also explored the messy body through the playful, somewhat ridiculous act of lying with (or attempting to knead) ten kilos of bread dough, exposing alongside the dough my own body's imperfections, being-with the unfinished, imperfect, and untamed, body, a way to play visually with categories of dough and flesh. Video of this practical research forms part of the 'Morning Routine' presentation. (Appendix B, Video 2: 08:29-11:29) On a personal note, I credit maintaining a playful 'what-if' and free-associative attitude to my studio and home practice with giving me courage to shift my practice significantly in an experimental direction, and away from the more conventional choreographic work I had done previously.

## **Power**

Successful capitalist appropriation of individuals happens because it also offers, at some level, pleasures of consumption. Lisa Baraitser quotes Judith Butler arguing that it must also, somehow, make sense to us: "We must account for our desire for subjection" (Baraitser 2017 p. 41)

So power depends on creating some kind of complicity, something we can tell ourselves about why we submit. Put simply, there must be a semblance of choice about

the whole thing, an intuitive or conscious way to explain our complicity in the MMM. I was interested in how power dynamics might be set up and manipulated in the practice and performance spaces; specifically experimenting artistically with techniques that the corporate office and the world of work use to keep people involved and compliant. I acknowledge here that there are many historic and sociological angles to human compliance and authority, which I won't be able to address in this project.

I was interested specifically in artistic gestures which might also offer what Bishop (2012, p.102) calls a 'perverse pleasure', which could operate ambiguously enough to remain ethical but which could create enough complicity to foster a sense of personal investment. But how could I create this kind of complicity and ethical coercion working solo, or just with my collaborator Manuela?

This led to the choice, before the March 16 sharing, to make the public and PAR manifestations of this work participatory. A participatory context offered the challenge of creating the right rules or invitations to foster pleasure, a sense of agency, and obedience. So, I began to develop training instructions for 'workers.' I started to think about rules and instructions.

## **Rules and Instructions**

As artists, we work with restrictions and rules in improvisation and making. Cocker quotes Deleuze: "It's a matter of optional rules that make existence a work of art." (2011, p. 94) I was curious about creating for BRED, in performance, what Crary argues the economy creates to keep itself going: the "formation and perpetuation of malleable and assenting individuals." (Crary 2014 p. 42) Additionally, creating parameters for the workers at BRED allowed us to access shared meaning through 'common signs', (Spatz 2017 p. 211). The pre-installation email (see Fig. 2) and training video (Appendix B, Video 1: 3:39-5:45) were both crucial to this process of creating a language that myself, Manuela and participants could all share.

To create a sense of agency within compliance, I left some ambiguity in instructions: some space for individual interpretation and choice (for example, where to place the dough on your skin). I also looked at real corporate training videos as source material. Something they had in common was an emphasis on performing outwardly what you were meant to be feeling inwardly (with no need to prove otherwise that you were, indeed, feeling it). I see this as a choreography of affect<sup>8</sup>, which I tried to mirror in the installation. The instructions in the BRED training video, for example, request an external performance of internal sensation when they ask the worker to “make a sign to show that they don’t mind waiting.”

I used performance improvisation with corporate training videos and also texts on ‘what makes a great manager’ as a starting point, to develop these behavioural rules for the worker and the managers. A free-association improvisation with a combination of moving and speaking, which allowed me to access guidelines that sit on the line between the absurd and the overly-intimate (i.e. to be “skin-to-skin” with the dough). The managers’ rules (which are not shared with participants) are to ‘be vertical’, and to ‘speak no more than 10% of the time’. There was a differentiation between vertical / horizontal and manager/worker which was present in studio practice but became only partially apparent in the installation as many workers chose sitting positions to expose skin. The second managerial rule, which was speaking no more than 10% of the time landed closer to its intended effect, allowing time for workers to be with their dough in silence. (Appendix B, Video 1: 7:50-8:10)

### **Audience, Participant, Performer?**

The move to make BRED participatory turned the people in the room, by their own consent, into performers and artistic material. Claire Bishop writes about ‘delegated

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<sup>8</sup> This video from Canity urges the worker to let the customer vent, with precise instructions on how to demonstrate they care: make eye contact, and, if you’re on the phone, to make noises from time to time to show you are listening:

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rt1DEkxVbds&t=29s>)

This Tesco video reframes a menial job as a virtuosic superhero role:

[https://www.wyzowl.com/effective-training-videos/#1\\_Superempowering\\_people\\_\(Tesco\)](https://www.wyzowl.com/effective-training-videos/#1_Superempowering_people_(Tesco))

performance, participatory work which she explains is designed to be carried out by the “collective body of a social group” (Bishop 2012 p. 99). Bishop is referring to works of art where the bodies in question are, for example, actual police people, while in my work the social group is artificially constructed; it is ‘those (performatively) hired by BRED.’ However, the onboarding and training have the effect of creating a temporary social group - the social group of BRED employees - and without this temporary social group BRED would not exist. BRED is designed to be executed by whoever is ‘hired’ into this group on the day.

Welcome to BRED! We are looking forward to working with you.

As your first day approaches, here is some more information to help you prepare and make the most of your time at the company, and feel comfortable from the word 'go'.

- If you can, please wear two-piece outfits (i.e., a shirt and trousers instead of a dress or dungarees). This will allow you to work more freely with our dough.
- If you can, wear clothes that won't be harmed (and might even be enhanced) by contact with our dough.
- Remember that 'imposter syndrome' (the feeling that you're faking it) is a very common experience. You won't be the only new starter - so relax, enjoy, and go with the flow!

How to find us:

We are located in the Laban Building, Creekside, SE8 3DZ.

If you are coming from outside the building, please arrive 10-15 minutes before your booked arrival time. One of our team will

meet you at reception and take you to the first floor where you will find our offices. If you have been at another location in the building, please just come to the offices 5 minutes before your start time.

Finally, the talent and creativity of our workers is the reason for BRED's rising profile and continuous growth. We care about you! Please feel free to ping us at (our temporary contact) [info@juliapond.com](mailto:info@juliapond.com) ahead of your start date with any questions.

Fig 2: Text of BRED event confirmation email.

Creating a feeling of being a group, however, required more than simply asking people to show up, as I learned at my open rehearsal. (Personal Notebook, 1 July) So, for the open installation I invited people to begin identifying as BRED workers by sending participants a welcome email before arriving (Fig. 2), a gesture which also mimics a corporate onboarding experience. On arrival, I engaged them in participating immediately, allowing them to explore the space before finding their assigned desk, and then starting 'training' with the instructional video which we projected. (Appendix B, Video 2: 00:09-2:11) BRED as delegated performance mirrors the pervasive nature of the MMM: it is not possible not to be participating. Unlike a dance work which can be rehearsed in a studio and remains in some sense intact whether people watch or not, BRED cannot happen 'without us'.

## **Freedom and Precarity**

Inviting workers to be creative can create a false sense of personal investment, when in reality, our creative acts are the modes of production in the MMM - or we agree to work flexibly in a promised trade for more freedom - actually more precarity. How passionate,

engaged and creative we are becomes a point of judgement in the workplace. It also touches on the dissolution of boundaries between personal and professional time: the paradox of being free to work anywhere means you are always now at work. If part of the working contract (perhaps just the unwritten bit) is to demonstrate 'passion', people will find all sorts of ways of showing they are going above and beyond what is required - and in effect, deliver more than their contracted work at no additional cost. (Mould 2018, Crary 2014). I mirror these poor boundaries and request for passion in the presentation of the value dance slide by thanking the workers who were the 'most dedicated', having worked on an exciting, secret project in their own time (i.e. dancing the dance and recording their data). I then instruct 'workers' in the room to head behind the screen in order to make their own contribution to the project. (Appendix B Video 1: 15:53-19:30)

## **Pleasure**

I would like to linger for a moment on pleasure. Compliance is pleasurable as a worker at BRED, because the dough feels good as it slowly rises and warms to the skin.

*"I love that it makes me aware of my own body heat, feeling how the dough heats up by having contact with my body " - Michaela Gerussi, March 2021*

*"I fell in love with my dough" - Anna Symes, 1 July 2021*

But these pleasures of texture and body heat sit alongside an underlying trouble: the challenge of staying still, frustrations and feelings of being trapped. In my early practical research, I felt this was associated with the patriarchy and the burden of maternal + household work, perhaps because of the dough's placement on my stomach (mimicking a pregnancy) and also the sense of useless waiting (which mimicked, for me, the kind of waiting around you do as a mother, for your kid to sleep, or to finish looking at a duck, for instance). This seemed to be reflected for some collaborators. Manuela Albrecht (my main collaborator) said, "I tried to relax but caught myself arching again. It brought me



reflections about having to be sexy, porn industry, and so forth and how inherent these "patterns of postures" are in us" (Manuela Albrecht, personal communication March 2021) while another collaborator stated "It's interesting how you mention discomfort...it's definitely a big part of the experience, figuring out how to navigate discomfort and manage little micro shifts, as the weight of the dough changes and I get restless. (Michaela Gerussi, personal communication, March 2021)

I resonated with both Manuela's description of feeling programmed to display a 'sexy' image and also with Michaela's description of 'navigating discomfort' and adjusting herself to the needs of the dough, a navigation that some feminist theorists would say also characterises the female experience navigating the patriarchy, from street harassment to doing most of the emotional labour in a family. Silvia Federici said it in the 1970s in her seminal essay *Wages against Housework*: "we have cooked, smiled, fucked throughout the years not because it was easier for us than for anyone else, but because we did not have any other choice." (Federici 1975 p. 5)

This troubled pleasure of being with the dough, for me, reflects an unresolved tension between pleasure and coercion.

### **Playing in and between - disciplines, methodologies, methods**

Now I will return to play, this time in the context of methodology and methods. Play could be considered inherent in inter- and trans- disciplinary work, cultivating a sense of improvisation and flexibility between modes of expression. This quote reflects my perspective: 'Transdisciplinary methods...you've described this space as a playground, and in certain forms of play there is a not-yet-knowing which I see as an interplay between knowing and a kind of wilful ignorance' ' - (Heron and Kershaw 2017, p 21).

My own research exists in what I experience as a kind of playground space between movement, image and language (appearing both as writing and speaking). These are

not dealt with separately in the studio or in the performance space, rather, they are blurred into one set of practices.

Alongside this play between disciplines is a play between performance and practice. PAR is 'directed at not-knowing, or not-yet-knowing...[it]creates room for that which is unthought, that which is unexpected' (Barton 2018, p. 9). This space for what is unexpected is important in the PAR installation: for example, we experienced periods of improvisatory co-working that yielded moments of tender concentration with the dough. This 'room for that which is unthought' was also relevant to PaR experiences: studio practices often yielded new insights through embodied practice.

However I would like to leave aside the space for the unexpected generated by PaR and PAR in order to consider more fully what Ben Spatz calls 'the stakes', or the level of personal risk and implication in the research, which I mentioned in the introduction and which I feel gives us a relevant lens through which to understand how practice and performance relate in my work. First, performance allows a kind of personal separation from material, while practice forces an intimacy. Ben Spatz contends that in his research, which involved singing Jewish religious songs, *performance* is less risky as *practice* implies something about 'attempting to produce new techniques of identity.' (Spatz 2018, p. 217) In other words, practice is something you do with sincerity as a person, and has the power to actually shift something about the performer's or researcher's identity.

In the studio and at home, waiting-with the dough and cycles (See Chapter 4 on Time and Appendix) both fell into this category of sincere, personal practice. They both fostered spacious, improvisatory states of mind and body. Cycles became a dependable practice that I will take forward with me. I also used improvised performance of corporate lingo as a practice to generate material and to inhabit the character of the BRED CEO more deeply. This personal practice of performing allowed me to find imagined corporate lingo and to allow the embodiment to unfold. I began working with collaborators with this sense of improvised performance -as-practice, but it became

clear that things had to turn around: improvising a performance of corporate life resulted in something that felt superficial and imitative. It became clear that accessing the practice *beneath* a performance needed to become important.

Personal Notebook, 20th May 2021:

*“When we are performing with each other, it feels silly, we need to perform the practice I think: so the question is what are we practicing? What are we doing together?...when I ‘go to work’ but replace the work with lying down with the bread dough, this feels good.”*

Shifting the focus to developing *what* we were *practicing together* allowed us to choose actions and words that read as a more interesting, edgier *performance*, and perhaps a sense of practicing publicly. In the installation these layers are also reflected: I am asking us to *practice* something together, in a way which might lay the ground for questioning our own identities (by inviting us to work at the absurd tasks of the company with some degree of earnestness, as if we are really fully in the MMM, which of course we always are in reality, but here are not because it’s a performance).

When Manuela and I tried to really *practice* our performance, it opened access to layers of meaning which turned what might have been imitation into critique. Thinking of placing practice *beneath* performance (layering them rather than replacing performance with practice) was also a way to shift something about the performer’s or participant’s identity. In BRED, activating practice beneath performance adds an unresolved ‘or are we?’ to an initial, more reassuring, sense that ‘we are all just performing’.

This leads me to another point about what might be considered the first, albeit unconscious, phase of this research: my own practice of corporate life. Practice in this sense isn’t just about forming new identities but can also be about habits from former identities. The practices of presenting powerpoints, using corporate lingo, are drawn from a former identity of mine that was itself built through daily practice during that period of my life. During that period, I became a character that I didn’t actually deeply identify with. Yet, who we *are is also what we do* - our habitual actions become, even if

we wish it were otherwise, who we are in the world. We might be aware of and critical of the MMM intellectually, but insofar as we are practicing it daily, we are implicated. In BRED, I am essentially taking that old *practice* of corporate performance (in the sense of delivering quality work) and turning it into an actual performance. This shift - the practice of corporate life becoming the performance of the practice of corporate life - has had the effect of freeing up (or exposing) my personal identity as an artist.

*“BRED is also a context. Cultures may develop. Conflict may happen. Experience tendencies to perform, to resist, to be free.”*

- Personal Notebook, 9 March 2021

### ***Playing between disciplines***

Improvisation which doesn't discriminate between moving, writing, drawing and speaking became a key method with which I engaged the above ideas. Sometimes speaking while moving, or writing from moving, or moving from reading, or (earlier on) drawing from moving) I improvised in these overlapping spaces. Coming from a place of 'not-yet-knowing', of playing between registers and disciplines, it was important to simply begin, allowing material to emerge.

Sometimes an improvisational spark was linguistic, drawn from, for example, Goop<sup>9</sup> (<https://goop.com/>) morning routines, or Anna Tsing's *Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015). Sometimes it was score-based, as with the value dance, or sensual (as with lying with and kneading bread dough). I used this mix of movement, language and image consistently across different thematic material.

Throughout I tried not to hold too tightly to methods, allowing them to shift and change according to curiosity and intuition; this led to more integration of speaking and moving than had previously been present in my practice. It also led to greater freedom with

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<sup>9</sup> Goop is the corporate wellness site (in its own terms, a 'modern lifestyle brand') run by actor Gwyneth Paltrow. I drew on a column where various women share their morning routine.

source materials; I credit this attitude with the freedom I took to incorporate text from Goop, for instance, something that I wouldn't necessarily have previously considered as artistic source material.

## **Chapter 3: Value in Practice and Performance**

### **Use-value, exchange-value and feminist economics**

I have already covered the concept of use-value and exchange-value in the MMM: in sum, the way that today's system tracks exchange value (how much money something is worth) not use-value (how useful it is to our real, embodied lives). So, In the MMM we overlook use-value in order to privilege exchange value - what money an activity generates. In such a system anything not creating profit, not adding to the growth of the economy, becomes invisible. Feminist economics tells us that this invisible work is also historically, and still disproportionately today, done by women, a notion was underscored and perhaps expanded during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic; in which it became clear that what came to be called 'essential' work (and includes grocery delivery and nursing, for example, in addition to reproductive and domestic labour) - is the some of the most valuable and essential for society in terms of meeting our basic needs, while receiving low or non-existent levels of both pay and prestige. (Kisner, 2021)

## What is hidden

Lisa Baraitser engages with these ideas in her discussion of “maintenance time”, asking “Whose time is precious, whose time is not?” (Baraitser 2017 p. 49), using as an example Meredith Ukeles’ “Maintenance Manifesto”<sup>10</sup>, which was a performance of essential gallery maintenance: sweeping, mopping, and maintaining the gallery space in order to bring invisible maintenance work into the spotlight. This sense of value in what is unseen or hidden is also recognized by Tsing, who, describing the process of finding signs of the precious matsutake mushroom in the forest, writes “I think of sensing a heave” (Tsing 2015 p. 242), that is, a sign of disruption in the earth that might point to a mushroom. Tsing implies that it may be time, in human history, to look for the value in these hidden spaces when she says “Agnostic about where we are going we might look for what has been ignored because it never fit the timeline of progress.” (Tsing 2015 p. 21) My engagement with this theoretical material translated in my work to an interest in the imperfect and unseen, especially as related to the body, and to the dough. While I have my own personal experience of invisibility related to living in my 43 year old female body, I didn’t want to tell my stories, rather to use image and poetry to relate dough and flesh: sticky surfaces and domestic/intimate spaces presented with enough stillness to leave space for being-with. These images reference the ways my own flesh does not fit the timeline of progress and the demands of productivity. Dough, via its association with domesticity and the daily work of feeding people, also was able to take on slow, repetitive maintenance time.

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<sup>10</sup> Maintenance Art Manifesto:  
<https://queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Ukeles-Manifesto-for-Maintenance-Art-1969.pdf>



Fig 3: Doughflesh. Image: Julia Pond

On the other hand, remaining out of sight might contain its own power, or, as Peggy Phelan says, talking about visibility and representation, “there is real power in remaining unmarked.” (Phelan 1993 p. 6) Exposing dough/flesh and poetic language is not acknowledged publicly in the installation, not to lower their importance but to underscore their power. Video of dough and the body are close up, still and slow, and long enough to allow for them to become less recognizable. Faces, bodies, are partially hidden by dough. Finally I hide myself, as the words ‘let what is hidden lead’ appear on the final slide. (Appendix B Video 1: 41:37-41:42)

## **The Value Dance**

The value dance is an experiment in engaging with use-value and exchange-value

through the body. It engages with these questions: What do we value? How is our work valued? What is it like to hide the real value - the dance - while surfacing quantitative data about the dance? Deborah Hay relates one of her practices: “set up “what if” questions to be with and not look for an answer” (Hay 2016 p. 11). Drawing on Deborah Hay, the value dance moves with-and-in the question: “*What if the value of my dance is that it has no value?*”

It is practiced mainly alone, in the studio or, in the installation, behind a screen (see Fig.1: Map of BRED installation). No record is kept of the dance itself (either through attempts to remember its iterations as choreography or to document it digitally). Instead, I track when, where, and for how long the dance was practiced in a spreadsheet (Appendix E: Log of the Value Dance), or, in the installation, in a written chart. (See Fig. 4: Log of the Value Dance, 21st July). In the installation, all participants are invited to practice the dance during their free time. The data became the source of a chart and an infographic (See Appendix B: Video 2, 2:29-2:32, and Appendix C: Posters) which *are* presented publicly in the installation. The rules of the dance (as I practice it) are:

- No one watches the value dance
- Follow impulse
- Allow absurdity/allow beauty
- Repeating is okay
- Repeating is okay
- Record the data
- No one is ever going to know what you did



DATA			
Name	Start Time	Total time danced	
Manuela	11:28	11:31	3
Kirsty	11:44	11:47	3
Manuela	12:33	12:35.5	2.5
Alice	12:45	12:46	1
Frazer	12:50	12:52	2
Alice	12:55	12:57	2
Manuela	15:03	15:07	4
Alex	15:30	15:35	5
Manuela	16:17	16:21	4
Gaby	16:45	16:48	3
Mia	16:50	16:52	2
Adrianna	16:53	16:55	2
Emma	16:55	16:57	2

Fig. 4: Value dance log, 21st July.

As I continued to practice this score, various insights emerged. One was that recording the ‘wrong’ information - the data - leaving what would normally be considered valuable hidden, was a portal to emotional registers veering between frustration and joy. It was a powerful way to expose my own need for recognition.

I found myself dwelling in one side or the other of the source phrase, which prompted the image of a balancing seesaw to emerge. If I danced with an emphasis on the first part of the question ‘What if the value in my dance’ I felt encouraged - (my dance has value!) while tipping to the other side ‘is that it has no value’ the movement became infused with a sense of uselessness (My dance has no value!). I began to work with the question as a tool for balancing in the present moment, right between the two sides of

the question and striving not to tip towards either one; a nuance which connected to my interest in temporalities, as well as the 'now' connection between performance and politics.

I would also like to reflect on this practice through the lens of Virno's theory of Exodus. First, he states that 'activity-without-a-finished-work' is the basic condition of Post-Fordist labour. (Virno n.d. Para 9) Virno contends that Post-Fordist workers must give 'proof of virtuosity' (Virno n.d para 12), in a sense, demonstrating their value publicly. However, that is exactly what this practice refuses to do, by not allowing the principle artistic activity - the activity *meant* to be 'in relationship to the presence of others' (Virno n.d. Para 11) to be recorded and seen. Ergo, this dance is anti-virtuosity, anti-work. Virno also says that today, virtuosic activity comes across as 'universal servile labour,' because it is offered mainly for the approval and public acknowledgment of others. ( Virno n.d. para 19) If we take the dancing of this score to be virtuosic activity that refuses the Post-Fordist condition of being in service to the presence of others, then the value dance becomes a *dance of liberation*: by refusing to allow virtuosity to be *demonstrated to others* (on the internet, in person) it creates a temporary escape route from the MMM - a space and time that is a respite from 24/7 time, valid for the time that it is being practiced.

*As I continued to practice the dance, I also began to experience a certain freedom. If the value in my dance was that it has no value, then I could do absolutely everything and anything, and it was fine - be graceful, awkward, rhythmic, polyrhythmic.*

- Personal Notebook, April 2021

### *Traces*

Practice for its own sake brings me to the notion of traces. Can the act of having-done a practice nevertheless change something real in the practitioner? I imagine the traces - bits of dough - the bread dough leaves on the body, or am reminded of McCall relating our lives to her observation of a sea anemone's barely visible 'exquisite patterns and trails'. (Colomban, Gale-Feeny, Gerussi, and Pond, 8 April 2021 22:18-22:22) The

sense is of an act that only leaves a faint trace somehow also being incredibly important. In rehearsals, as we worked with the dough, the traces left on the body and in the room began to signify both what we had done with the dough and what it had done to our bodies. The dough already sometimes represented the MMM and sometimes represented the self. Manuela asked 'What are the remainders of the system in our body'? (Personal Notebook, 20th May 2021). Traces changed both the meaning of the dough and the meaning of the surface it was left on.

The dough became a temporal metaphor for resistance to the system and in substance for the system itself, but perhaps the key point was that we felt changed by having-worked-with the dough. Likewise, I am changed by having-danced the value score for 400 minutes. It has shifted something attentionally in my movement, opened doors to the ridiculous and also to the precise and beautiful that might otherwise have stayed closed.

## **Chapter 4: Time in Practice and Performance**

As I discussed in the introduction, a theoretical association of linear time with the MMM has resulted in widespread (in the West) narratives of forward-moving progress and accumulation of wealth that are generally visualised as a continuous upward trajectory. This narrative results in economic policies that depend on maintaining exponential growth as a basic condition of success. When I submitted the research proposal for this project, it described an inquiry into temporal methods of resistance to the MMM - specifically suspension - but, as I also noted in the introduction, in the thick of practice and performance, shifted into an embodiment of aspects of the MMM, with the critique embedded. Temporal practices were an important lens to access both critique and embodiment.

I chose to lean on cyclical time, which I argue is inherently resistant to the MMM, in my practice. I was interested in moving outside linear time and inside the kind of time that spirals and cycles, like breath or the seasons, and I was curious about how that might

affect the research process, whether it could begin to interrupt my own expectations of progress and linearity. I also wanted a method that could be a container for exploring other conceptual material.

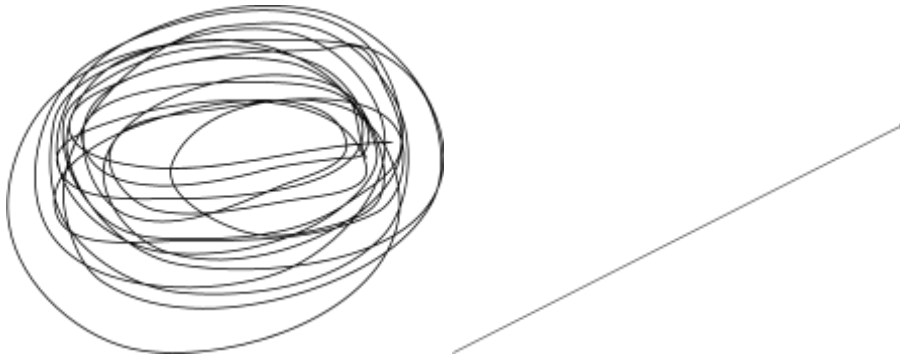


Fig 5. Cyclical layers/Linear Progression

I developed a timed cyclical practice, which became a key method for studio research.

## Cyclical practice

Cycles have 3 phases: stillness, moving, and reflecting. Each phase can shift between a few different manifestations.

The stillness phase clears the mind and body. Stillness can be sitting meditation (watching the breath), or lying on the floor, or even standing. I see the stillness as *stillness without stopping*: referring to states that are physically still but are attending to breath or internal attentional shifts, as well as the slowed or stilled moments that can characterise transitions in movement, and states of between and among, or permeability. I see the practice of this *stillness without stopping*, as inherently resistant to the qualities of the MMM. It is important to distinguish that it is *not* stillness with the goal of improving the movement to come. Suiko McCall's articulation of her experience with stillness is relevant to my practice:

*‘Coming into stillness as a starting point allows me to shift the whole process because of the way our lives are always oriented to slipping into the future, doing, actualising, conceptualising and manifesting...making art from there can be more alive and unpredictable - there’s a connection to intuition and freedom that i don’t know how to access in any other way’ (Colomban, Gale-Feeny, Gerussi, and Pond, 2021-present, 4:46-6:16)*

Likewise, I find that initiating the cycle with stillness allows me to access a more flexible, improvisatory state that gets me out of my own movement habits faster - but that this does not work if I approach stillness with this as a goal. The moving phase is an exploration of a certain conceptual, physical or linguistic territory. Different iterations in this project included embodied explorations of text, or of the physical act of kneading, or of the presentation of data from a slide, for example.

The reflection phase of the cycle preserves traces of the movement phase *and/or* the stillness. Especially as a cycle repeats, insights arise in stillness as well as movement. Reflecting can shift between writing, drawing, and moving. Reflecting through movement originated from the idea of ‘baking’ the ‘dough’ of the moving phase, using imaginary heat to reduce and solidify it. The movement-memories get ‘baked’ - forming repetitions, alliances, becoming more solid (or perhaps memorable). Writing from movement was the main mode of reflection for me, and manifested reliably as a stream of consciousness writing or poetry. As the project continued drawing arose rarely in the reflection phase; however earlier in the project drawing was useful to reflect without words, but on paper.

This practice is both dependable and flexible. It is timed, so it doesn’t feel too open-ended; it is a container for exploring almost anything through movement and words. Repetition of the cycles is key to create a sense of spiraling/deepening of the inquiry and to break with the embodied sense of linear time. I experimented with 10 minute and 5 minute and 7 minute intervals: for me, 7-10 minutes allowed a deeper level of concentration and immersion in each phase. After 2 cycles I would often find

myself in a slightly altered state; not noticing time passing, feeling deeply present in the research, 3 cycles or more usually felt satisfying and often generated surprising material. Repetition also helps me get beyond habitual movement and writing. The stillnesses at the beginning of each cycle create a feeling of spaciousness around the enquiry for me; interrupting the urge to do do do and go go go (the somatic manifestation of the MMM). As such, cycles became a research method that exists outside the temporality of linear progress associated with the MMM.

As the practice evolved, I used cycles to explore some of Baraitser's temporalities: namely waiting, maintaining, and delaying. These explorations were also presented as public workshops and resulted in somatically-informed insights like an association between waiting and anxiety, which was released by discerning between 'waiting-with' and 'waiting-for'. Maintenance brought associations with the rhythm of daily life, and sustainability, while the delay became a technique of power, as well as oppression (depending on who was delaying). (Personal notebook, September 2020) As I continued to explore inhabiting corporate structures with the dough, I also began to associate different dough-times with life in the MMM: worker-time, or rising-time, and manager-time (the productive cadence), or kneading-time, which I will discuss in a moment.

Additionally, it seems that using these practices which might be considered resistant (stillness, improvisation with all its ephemerality) to the MMM, to create an embodiment of the MMM, are a key to creating a tension and ambiguity for the workers in the installation that allows us to think again, rather than, for example, creating in a process that mirrors the MMM by quickly generating and setting as much material as possible - or, indeed the kind of earnest space entirely outside the MMM I was originally interested in finding.

### *Contemplative Reading: a twist on cycles*

This contemplative reading practice draws on Christine Paintner's take on the Benedictine monastic practice of *Lectio Divina*, or sacred reading. It reflects my interest

in possibilities for using somatic and contemplative techniques to approach theory (rather than bringing theory to the body to digest). In this practice, a small piece of text is chosen, read a few times in a settled, slow way, perhaps with one word or phrase demanding more attention. That word or phrase is then 'savored', allowed to activate the imagination, and senses. Third, oratio is a 'serving and summoning' phase where the practitioner listens for what action might be called forth, and fourth, returns to stillness and meditation. (Paintner 2012 p. 12) In my practice, I read a small piece of text slowly, allowing something (usually a smaller phrase) to shimmer to the surface. Then I move-with that shorter phrase for some length - at least 10 minutes - seeing what movement is called up by that phrase - before returning to meditate on the read-and-moved phrase through stream-of-consciousness writing. This offered me a method for interacting with and feeling into theoretical text from an embodied starting point. I used this both with texts I consider to come from the heart of the MMM (Goop's My Morning Routine column) and snippets of text questioning it: 'as long as we imagine that humans are made through progress'. (Tsing, 2015 p. 21) Exploring the Tsing phrase was an insight into how immersed I am in what I am trying to resist, as shown in writing from the practice: "mud, sticky, circular, what is it to completely let go of progress? I feel immediately lost, bereft" (Personal Notebook, 11 Feb 2021). Even imagining through movement that what I am purportedly interested in dismantling is gone, felt devastating - a point which could be interesting with regards to the fully participatory nature of the work. Can immersion in the performance space spark grief or confusion about what we are immersed in in our 'real' lives?

## **Dough-time**

Before going into more detail about dough-time, I would like to revisit the 'spark of subversive creativity' and the 'minor object', two concepts from the introduction, as well as address quantities of dough.

Mould argues that if we can free objects of their proscribed uses, they become 'sparks of subversive creativity', and, acting together with humans, can take on a range of new functions, which can resist their socially or politically assigned, mandated uses - what Mould calls, after Baudrillard, functionalities. (Mould 2019 para 17). In this framing,

bread dough's functionality would be to become baked bread, in a kitchen or in a bread factory. It comes into contact with humans principally through kneading, assuming it's not being kneaded by machine (before becoming bread and being eaten). In the BRED installation, it is cared for and placed on the body to rise, or left to rise on desks, never entering a kitchen, never being baked. The dough is only adjacent to the gesture of kneading, rather than part of it. All this is what leaves it free to become a signifier of what I call rising time (or worker time) and kneading time (or manager time). The dough takes on qualities of the subversive spark, catapulting us into new experiences and thought-feeling combinations; and the whole act of allowing bread dough to rise on the body (with the accompanying stillness and silence) operates as a Deleuze-Guattarian 'minor practice' - having been 'deterritorialized' and 'appropriated for strange and minor uses'. (Cocker 2011 p. 90).

Dough as a material begs the question of 'how much'? Acknowledging that there are many ways to approach this question, I chose to work with two main quantities. In the live installation, loaf-size portions of dough were distributed to each worker's desk (see the Fig. 1: Map of the Installation). This amount of dough was easily placed on skin to rise, or manipulated. Used dough accumulated into a bucket near the door or went home with people after their work finished. Manageable pieces of dough grew less and less manageable over the course of the day as they lay, expanding, in the bucket and sometimes on the dough shelf: each worker's manageable quantity, taken together, became unmanageable. In my own solo practical research, I introduced larger quantities of dough made with 10 kilo of flour, which immediately presented challenges and insights. Lying under its weight was uncomfortable, manipulating it required a palpable physical effort, perhaps echoing the overwhelm and grind of the MMM. In a sense, in a larger quantity the dough came to embody the MMM, while in smaller quantities it seemed to shift more readily between meanings. While I considered how larger amounts of dough might come into the live space, I finally decided to represent the larger amounts of dough on video in the slides; (Appendix B, Video 2: 8:17-11:24) this was both a logistical decision and also came to align with how I am representing the



outer and inner worlds in the research; as the manager I publicly present the outer and allow the inner to be seen without commenting on it.

### ***Worker-time or rising-time***

Dough in rising-time forces the participant to suspend all activity. Placing it on the body and waiting for it to rise forces us to be still, (Appendix B, Video 1: 7:57-8:12) though we have verbally designated the activity as 'work'. (Appendix B, Video 1: 3:39-5:39) The dough also becomes a signifier of flesh: through its proximity to participants' skin and also its appearance in the powerpoint in larger form. The dough rising on the body is a physical marker of suspended time as well as the unruly body: slow, amorphous. I would like to unpack some of the ideas behind this.

### ***Staying***

Baraitser writes about 'staying', using Serres' notion of a 'temporal folding', which, like a 'baker kneading dough', 'produces contiguities, proximities and confluences of thought', in contrast to linear time which is framed as 'inherently violent', (Baraitser 2017 p. 33), breaking thoughts, memories and sensations apart. In my research, the dough functions similarly with skin as a sort of time trap. It creates an embodied meeting place for concepts of the body, time, patriarchy, growth and consumption, allowing them to co-exist in the folds. It creates shifting sensations of frustration and pleasure, restriction and comfort. Dough, in BRED, takes on shades of the patriarchy and thankless reproductive labour, and also becomes loveable, adorable, something to care for. In the branding exercise, it becomes our own flesh. Hosting the invisible process of dough rising on the skin, inhabiting dough-time, becomes a container for multiple meanings.

### ***Repetition***

Baraitser connects repetition with reproductive labour, drawing on de Beauvoir to state that reproductive labour embodies a kind of 'necessity and futility' that 'renders it an absurdity'. (Baraitser 2017 p. 70). She also makes a connection with maternal time:

suggesting that what differentiates maternal time is that it is the “time of repetition that comes to matter” (Baraitser 2017 p. 76). This ‘mattering’ is not economic and cannot even be related to the kind of person the child becomes: it’s bound up in the intimacy of attachment. She continues, “perhaps the maternal relation, and perhaps maternal time, suggests simply a willingness on the part of one to stay alongside another regardless of outcome.” (Baraitser 2017 p. 91) So rising-time, then, might be said to both echo maternal time, *and* to thwart patriarchal/MMM expectations of a specific future outcome. This is why the bread dough is held on the body, supported in its rising, and then abandoned (either in the bucket in the space or to go home to an uncertain fate with the worker who was with that dough). The dough’s future (and by association, perhaps our future) is actually done away with, the work of lying with the dough becomes an act of maternal time, that is divorced from a concrete or known outcome. It attempts to embody something of what Baraitser calls “a crisis in the reliability that the future will unfold,” (Baraitser 2017 p. 90) which is, also, a characteristic of life in the time of the climate crisis.

Requesting workers to assume a prone, and ‘beautiful’ position with their bodies (Appendix B, Video 1: 4:52) for the dough to rise on is a way to gesture towards the blurring of self and (domestic, emotional) work for women under the patriarchy. (Federici, 1975 p. 7) But it also places it in the context of reproductive labor, which, according to Baraitser’s reading of de Beauvoir, is composed of a “combination of necessity and futility...that renders it an absurdity.” (Baraitser, 2017 p. 70) The instruction “skin-to-skin” (Appendix B Video 1: 4:58) recalls the literal reproductive labor of holding a baby close. Repetitive tasks like cooking and cleaning have no lasting result, in contrast with what Baraitser calls ‘transcendent activity’ which might lead to a permanent result, like a novel or piece of music. (Baraitser 2017 p. 71). In the installation, dough refers to repetitive tasks associated with domesticity and, placing caring-for-its-rising into the category of ‘work’, becomes paradoxically both transcendent and absurd, resulting in a deterritorializing of the corporate productivity space.

The big dough video footage in the Powerpoint also aligns with rising time. The video is sited in a messy domestic space, which refers to perhaps a failure to accomplish domestic repetition. Dough and the body take up more or less equal screen space, as if the dough is capable of eclipsing the body, perhaps in the way a gesture of resistance to the MMM is appropriated by the MMM to become another agent of consumption. On a very practical level, that amount of dough also points to more consumption, and the question of waste. (Appendix 2, Video 1: 36:09-40:20)

In sum, rising-time acts as a catalyst for entering non-productive temporalities. The proximity of dough and skin in the installation and on video, allows us to access temporalities like staying, waiting and repetition, and perhaps sense into shades of meaning contained in the folds of the dough.

### ***Manager-time or kneading-time***

Manager-time, takes the act of kneading out of its usual territory (dough) and turns it into a gesture that simply maintains, as we say in the installation, 'a productive cadence'. Removed from dough, kneading also can look like rhythmic punching or hitting - language that recalls corporate lingo like 'hitting targets.' Rhythmic kneading / punching the air becomes a signature movement practice of the managers at BRED, taking on the feeling of relentless, yet pointless, activity. (Appendix B, Video 1: 8:59-9:59) This managerial practice was developed with cycles practice, using kneading and improvisational speaking in the managerial register. This practice brought up questions of agency, of 'who am I doing this for' and forcing a kind of exhaustion-from-action (Personal notebook, April 2021). This is related to pseudo-activity, or being busy for its own sake, a state which Žižek<sup>11</sup> says is the 'basic threat' (to meaningful action) (Kunst 2015 p. 7).

This relentless pseudo-activity can become another kind of suspension. Crary articulates this: "24/7 announces a time without time, a time extracted from any material

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<sup>11</sup> Slavoj Žižek, the Slovenian philosopher

or identifiable demarcations, a time without sequence or recurrence' (Crary, 2014 p. 29). It is a kind of inverse of the kind of suspension which is a refusal to act and participate, that Hardt and Negri term a pre-revolutionary gesture. (Harrison 2011 p.15) In some way relentless pseudo-activity suspends individual agency and feeling - while stillness allows space for them to surface.

There is another function the bread dough accomplishes, which is as a metaphor for endless growth and the brand at BRED. I will cover this in the next Chapter.

## Chapter 5: Expanding the body: Language and the Digital

### The BRED score, a movement-based branding experience

*Note: The BRED score also straddles themes of language and power. I have chosen to put it here because it is writing that is designed to be spoken in order to support a facilitated group movement experience. As such, it is an example of using language as an input for movement, and also, as I will describe, became an example of language that layers meanings.*

What would it mean to *become* endless growth - rather than *imagine* it? To have an almost cellular level experience of endless growth? I wanted to create an immersive experience of endless growth, one where you could feel endless growth in your cells, rather than imagining a picture of it; I wanted to take it out of the conceptual and create an experience of dough taking over the internal spaces of the body - an experience of becoming rather than imagining. Having experienced this becoming-moving in Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) classes, I chose to work loosely with Skinner ideas, blended with the chemical process of yeast causing dough to rise,<sup>12</sup> and devised an image-based movement score, in which movers become the dough, rising and stretching. (Appendix B, Video 1: 20:23-28:04) I wanted to 'submerge the individual in

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.compoundchem.com/2016/01/13/bread/>

something that's larger than the individual' (Neuhaus, 2010 para 8) - in this case, the MMM.

Might this type of experience be transformational to our understanding of endless growth, essentially shifting our ideas about reality? In the score, the body becomes malleable dough, stretching and growing, each time it finds an obstacle simply growing in a new direction. Following Skinner, this experience meant to merge (the image of) dough and the body, the way Skinner describes here: (the) "individual receives the image and the energy inside it, and then eventually one merges with an image and becomes transformed by it." (Neuhaus 2010 para 5)

However, an interesting ethical dilemma arose when it came to using this score in the installation and not just in my studio practice. SRT classes create an intentionally spacious and safe environment designed to support practitioners entering deep states of concentration and immersion, bringing with them a certain vulnerability. (Kirsty Alexander, personal communication July 2021). BRED is a performance installation designed to open up questions about power, productivity and value: it is intentionally not this type of a safe space. I ultimately decided that to resolve the tension I would draw on the corporate practice of 'internal brand activation'<sup>13</sup> to frame the BRED score as a branding exercise and thus inject a sense of lightness and play into it. (The words have double meanings: internal refers to both 'in the company' and 'in the body,' and activation is about activating the brand, but is also a word we use to refer to yeast.) To bring the score into a lighter territory, I connected dough images explicitly with the language of productivity. As the image of the "doughflesh" rose in new directions this was compared to 'how we are always innovating at BRED' and finally participants are asked to experiment with how *'their own dough-flesh' moves - Is your dough sticky - and productive? Dense - and single-minded? Airy and multi-tasking? We need ALL types of dough at BRED.* (excerpted from BRED score, personal notebook, 2021).

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<sup>13</sup> Internal brand activation is the corporate practice of getting employees excited about the brand, in a sense to get them to internalize the brand's values and really embody it in their working (and often, online) lives. (Jessica Hardy, personal communication April 2020). The installation poster 'O Brand, Activate in Me' in the appendix also draws on this concept.

Making the BRED score a branding exercise allowed me to maintain a consistency of tone (balancing between the personal and satirical) and also to avoid possible pitfalls of trying to draw on a technique (SRT) that I have only encountered over two weeks and a weekend of workshops. As an editor of my own work, it left me with two questions to take forward into future practice: how am I balancing creativity and ethics, and also, how aligned each piece of material is to my most important research questions. In other words, would shifting something fundamentally undermine the investigation into the research questions - and am I balancing experimentation with acting ethically as a researcher and artist? In this case, the answer to both questions was no, making it an easy decision to shift the score into lighter, more satirical territory.

## **Language - and Lingo**

*“The written replaces the spoken, not the better to fix or formulate it, but, on the contrary, to enjoy its explosion as each part is exposed to reading at its various stages, its different levels of sense” (Edmund Jabès as cited in Gregory, 2015, para 1)*

*“If you choose to speak, what does it reveal and what might it mask of the movement or images you’re working with?” (Burrows 2010 p. 185)*

Throughout the research language has been a key material in spoken and written forms. It is a material which arises from the body either writing-from-movement or moving-and-speaking. My perspective on the connection between the body and language draws on the idea that language is fundamentally bodied and, as Negri interprets Wittgenstein, that to speak is to “manage the body,” and that “language is all there within the body,” (as cited in Rotman 2015 p. 56).

I would like to differentiate between the writing-from-movement or moving-and-speaking by using the terms ‘language’ and ‘lingo’ which mean, respectively, the more revealing, poetic language which emerged largely in written form,

and corporate jargon or improvised speech in the register of corporate jargon - which was a spoken improvisational material. Further, language, usually our main tool for discernment, fails at discernment when it becomes lingo - leaving space for what somatic practice does so well: to create a level of bodily discernment that we can usually only access through language, and that, in dealing in a dimension of experience that is before/beyond language, also resists the mind-body dualism. (Kirsty Alexander, personal communication May 2021).

### ***Language***

I'll look first at written, poetic language, which, in this research, arose from movement. While I also worked with language as a direct material input from which to improvise, I covered this aspect fairly comprehensively in chapter 3 when I talk about the value dance. Here I will concentrate on poetic language emerging from movement improvisation.

Language is often connected to the 3rd phase of cycles practice: reflection. When this language emerges it feels as if the body has written it already; it emerges as both poetry and free writing. It is writing from this practice that, with some editing, generated the poems in BRED: the O Brand poem (which in the installation is displayed in the relaxation area) (Appendix C, Poster 2), the poetic language interspersed with spoken lingo on the slides (Appendix B, Video 2, 3:02-6:50) and the poems at the end of the 'Morning Routine' slide deck (Appendix B, Video 2, 11:43-13:20). Editing this writing is a process of revisiting and shedding what seems extra, allowing the mores to drop away.

I chose to not read or present poetic writing out loud, rather to display it for people to read. Reading takes more time, and leaving the words unsaid allows participants in the room to engage individually. I either leave my body in the space but don't acknowledge the words or, at the end, remove my body from the space, reading the last poem out loud on a mic from behind the value dance screen. I treated the appearance of poetic language as part of the choreography, typing itself out on the slides or, in one slide,

growing slowly past the boundaries of the edges until it disappears, seeking to make the words “distinct bodies in themselves, performing materials and matters of language in a dance not of the unsayable but rather of what urges to be written” (Polydorou, Michailidis, and Bullock 2015 p. 130) It was important to make the words dance, because the words themselves arose from my dancing body. They are indeed what ‘urged to be written’ in response to movement practice, and in BRED appear seemingly with their own agency as I present the slides. As such, the space on the slides also becomes its own performance space and the words become their own event. (Polydorou, Michailidis, and Bullock 2015 p. 129)

### ***Lingo***

Spoken lingo is an improvisational material in this research. In both performance and practice, words as much as movement were the material I worked with. The corporeal nature of corporate lingo (drill down, pull the trigger, internal brand activation) opened what felt like a natural space for improvisation. I used snippets of lingo from my own experience in the corporate world, as well as from websites Goop and the Harvard Business Review as input to move with, allowing the lingo to morph into new rhythms and volumes, or more lingo - or take on new meaning in combination with movement. I tried to avoid representing the lingo physically, looked for an intentional balance of movement and speech, and sometimes used movement to spur new lingo into existence. Some of this practical research appears in the Mana(ger)festo in the installation. (Appendix B, Video 1: 30:56-30:15)

Improving with lingo created a gap where language and body do NOT align (in contrast to what arose in writing from the body).

*The sense that the voice performing and the body moving are set to separate frequencies. The voice is for show and the body is showing what is going on in the interior. (Personal Notebook April 2021)*



These mis-aligned spaces allowed the somatic discernment to co-exist more equally with language. In this way, lingo becomes a 'minor object' - displaced from its usual context, allowing space for projecting our own stories and fears: "I'm sorry if that was too personal, but I thought it would give you more context" (Appendix B, Video 1, 11:33-11:46)

The interplay between lingo and somatic discernment also animates the 1:1 meeting which Manuela and I hold while the workers are allowing the dough to rise on themselves. (Appendix B, Video 1: 10:02-13:31) We do not request anyone else's attention, although we are now, for the first time, dancing. This allows whatever range of affect arises in the rest of the 'workers' to remain undirected, un-cared-for. Though everyone can hear, they have different levels of visual access to the meeting. Manuela and I began practicing the 1:1 meeting with one person as a manager and one as a worker; both talking and moving, holding the dough between us, practicing a negotiation held between the movement, speech and dough. As we continued to practice, we found that we did not need the dough, and that speaking only occasionally in what we called 'transitional' language composed of corporate cliches ("Wow!" or "That's an interesting concept") to restrict ourselves and shift the balance of the communication to the movement: this allowed space to infer various subtexts - which in turn allowed us a sense of affect: we experienced a spectrum of vulnerability, accomplishment, power-over, and frustration in both rehearsal and performance.

### **Powerpoint as a digital choreographic space**

Powerpoint slides are a symbol of corporate culture, used to anchor presentations in meetings throughout the world. In May 2020, during my research on the Investigative Practice module, I began using them as a way to present artistic research because I felt they created a tension with the suspended temporalities I was exploring through bread dough, but they soon became a choreographic material in their own right. Following on

from the idea above that language is of the body, I see the slides as a digital extension of my body, providing what Theodoridou (2013) calls a 'screen floor' for language and lingo, as well as image. Displaying language on slides is different to displaying analog text (for example on the posters in the room) and speaking. The digital display of text is temporary; it shifts and introduces motion to the text, whether it changes with the change of slides or appears and disappears on the same slide. (Theodoridou 2013 p. 132). Making language visually mobile in this way helps to relate it to dance - the movement of bodies in space and time. I worked with the words in various ways.

I used the slides to contrast lingo with language, giving each its own font and register. Lingo appeared in conventional presentation style, all at once, and I read it out loud, presenting it to the workers. Poetic language appeared and disappeared on the slides, sometimes next to the lingo and sometimes on its own slide. This made it an extension of my movement - you could say part of the choreography - as I had to make choices about how words appeared in space and time in combination with my body and voice. As such, I wanted to make sure the powerpoint did not 'limit the kinaesthetic processes but rather become part of, and offer stimulations to, the mechanism that inspires and creates the intention of the dancer" (Polydorou 2015 p. 199)

How could I move towards a choreography that included the slides - creating a space where my body and the slides are a human/digital duet? I tried to reduce differentiation between myself and the slides, to leave behind the idea that I was presenting the slides, that they were completely distinct from me. Choosing to time the appearance of text and change of slides through a ring-remote on my finger was one way to accomplish this. With the ring remote, I could shift my focus to different parts of the room, while still triggering the movement on the slides when I chose, and without having to look at them in a traditional presentational manner. The poetic text, which appears as if by itself often next to the lingo/presented text is, in a sense, presenting me - or the inner life of my character. Likewise, shifting the focus between words and image and body helped blur boundaries. When the body/large dough footage appears on the screen floor, words (spoken and written) disappear. Workers wait-with the body and dough images on the

slides, after having had the experience in the room with our own dough. My own body and voice disappear as I cue the appearance of poetic text remotely from behind the value dance screen, before just my voice re-appears to read the appearing text.

(Appendix B, Video 1: 40:16 - 41:43)

This blurring of bodily boundaries with language, lingo and powerpoint is also characteristic of PAR's affiliation with transdisciplinary methods, and allowed for shifts between different registers for a greater versatility of expression.

## **Chapter 6: Suspension of activity**

*"Activity is never finished, only suspended"*

-BRED Company Values (See Appendix C: Poster 3)

*"Anna: Can this happen without us?"*

*Julia: No."*

*-Personal Notebook, 1 July Open Rehearsal*

I am not sure it is possible to come to final conclusions about this project, which would imply a neat ending, or perhaps a mastery of this research and topic. In fact, certain aspects of the nature of this project would imply that final conclusions are impossible. First, the nature of embodied research is one of process over product. Having tried to embed this sensibility into my artistic research methods, it would feel like a betrayal of the work to try now to create a neat, finalized package. A final conclusion would *also* be antithetical to the nature of the MMM system which BRED embodies - this is a system which, as we have seen, is dependent on a perpetual next, and the constant

expectation of something new, something more. (Kirsty Alexander, personal communication 9 Sept 2021) . Finally, theoretical material I have engaged with would also suggest that suspension is a more appropriate metaphor than conclusion. I think of Anna Tsing's 'salvage rhythms', her word for the way livelihoods self-organize when we leave the 'pulse of progress' behind. (Tsing 2015 p. 132) This seems like a relevant way to visualise how elements of this project might, having come together in the ways I have described here, be left suspended and remain available to new relationships with myself and other beings, poised to co- and re-create shifting salvage rhythms, to spark different acts of subversive creativity. On suspending action on this project, I do feel that perhaps the most accurate way to describe the temporality I have inhabited overall is that of the salvage rhythm - the rhythm of unlikely elements coming together and making an illogically logical whole. I would like to leave a few thoughts on future potentials here, along with a short reflection on my research question 'how can politics happen in the performance space'?

### **Reflections on the 8 hour work day**

Mirroring the duration of a working day in the installation was a way to experiment with the radical potentials of blurring practice and performance, to make the experience of 'working' at BRED feel more credible. To accommodate the expected performance / assessment durations of 40 minutes, however, I decided that Manuela and I would both be present for 8 hours, but host 4 groups of 'workers' over the course of the day.

Retaining an aspect of duration felt important, as a way to "disrupt expected rhythms of work, socialising and practice." (Spatz 2018 p. 215) In this case, Manuela and I would disrupt the amount of time we would normally spend in artistic or performance practice in order to experiment with embodying the 8 hour duration of the Post-Fordist work day, with the caveat that we would repeat a training and presenting sequence over the course of the day - which would not necessarily be true in a regular work environment.

The experiment yielded some interesting insights.

First, there was a constraint to how deeply we could enter the play between practice and performance because of the need to structure the work to fit into the shorter cycles, making sure that everyone who arrived was able to be trained in the work of the 'company'. On one hand, this repetition freed Manuela and I to be playful over the course of the day, as we both relaxed into the repeated cycle and enjoyed it, however, I also felt the repetition took away from the 'practice' and made it feel more like 4 'performances', and, by the afternoon I didn't feel like I was walking the line between practice and performance as much as inhabiting nuances in a semi-improvised performance. Perhaps one reason this happened was that the repetition took us out of the edgier space of not knowing what would happen next.

Nevertheless, there were still interesting variations to observe throughout the day. The four groups approached the free working times very differently. The 2:45pm group especially entered quickly into silent, suspended temporalities, a sense of 'waiting-with' the dough permeating the room. The 4pm group, in contrast, seemed to be aiming to be productive - people performed the value dance multiple times, and sat or lay perfunctorily with the dough, sometimes kneading it. (The 11am group did not stay for the free working time, while the 12:15 group stayed for 5 minutes or so.) In both cases in the afternoon, it is unclear whether it was something in the particular group of people assembled, or in our invitation, that changed the outcome, but the main point is that it was interesting to remain constant in the room through the repetitions and be part of the different dynamics that emerged from the same instructions. This sense of emergent dynamics is certainly related to how politics and social interaction happen, underscoring the importance of who-is-present to what-happens.

## **Future potentials**

A future potential for the work might be to engage even more deeply with the practice / performance of the company, maybe embodying the 8 hour day more fully by removing repetitions. This could be accomplished with more 'managers' available to train new

workers, and a public meeting schedule, which would allow for participants to arrive at set times, but to remain for as long as they wanted (rather than needing to clear the space). Another possibility might be experimenting with other corporate structures like working groups or teams within the team. Introducing payment for the workers could be an added layer of meaning: creating an aspect of embodiment of waged labour opens up a range of choices about *who* is 'employed' by BRED and turns the usual financial model of performance (where people pay to come or it is offered for free) upside down, while creating 'jobs' - generally considered to be a social good. This might impact on which types of funding are available for the project.

I have already written in depth about the value dance and cycles practice, but here I would like to note their future potentials. Both have the potential to be adapted and practiced outside the context of BRED, as oases in space and time outside the MMM. Both these practices also point the way to something that practice offers which theory does not: an embodied sense of non-linear temporalities or un-observed yet virtuosic activity. Thinkers may describe both, but I would argue that from our standpoint of deep implication in the MMM, they are both impossible to truly understand without embodied practice.

## **How does politics happen in the performance space?**

*"The "secret" of theatre's power is dependent on the "truth" of its illusion"*  
(Phelan 1993 p. 112)

When I first chose to present the work in a fully participatory form in March, it became clear that having everyone implicated in doing the work could quickly shift how politics (defined, as I stated in the introduction, as people and their decision making together, characterized by Virno's traits of political *action* like unforeseeability) happened in the room. For example, during the March 16th sharing verbal managerial language was

adopted swiftly in most of the group, so much so that the practice of giving verbal feedback took precedence in the space, disrupting the potentials of entering rising-time with the dough...an outcome I hadn't considered. This was important because one of my research interests was how embodying 'unproductive' temporalities (which I have described in Chapter 4) might shed light or shift our perception of the MMM. Without the experience of these temporalities, the embedded critique of the MMM doesn't work - the installation becomes simply embodiment.

A thought from Jonathan Burrows helped: *"The most important thing is to consider the relative weight of what we will see and what we will hear"* (Burrows 2010 p. 185). We shifted the dynamic by increasing the 'weight' of what we see (and feel) by restricting speech, limiting the manager function to myself and Manuela and further restricting ourselves to speaking no more than 10% of the time (excepting while presenting). I am left with the notion that, in a sense, the rules help shape the politics, mitigating unforeseeability by thinking carefully about the factors that allow culture and relationships to develop. Relations between people WILL take on their own life and shift depending on who is in the room, so carefully defining the factors that were within my control as a maker became essential.

The shift to participatory or delegated performance also has implications for my research question about what performance and practice can do that theory can not. As I have argued, drawing on Spatz (2018), by practicing together in the performance space, identities are implicated. I would argue that identity is something that simply reading theory cannot touch.

Finally, there is a theoretical trail I would like to trace that speaks to the question of how politics might happen in performance. Let's return to Virno's contention that 'work has absorbed the distinctive traits of political action', (Virno n.d. Para 3) namely, "unforeseeability, the ability to begin something new, (and) linguistic performances, and an ability to range among alternative possibilities" (Virno n.d. para 4). It's not by accident that BRED is a performance of work. Then, on p. 27 I also quoted Rancière's

contention that politics is deeply linked to change. I would argue that change links us to time, specifically to the 'now', which is always shifting. This is a bridge to Phelan, who argues that the temporality of *performance* is 'now', that performance can only become itself through its own disappearance. (Phelan 1993 p. 146) So work has absorbed the traits of politics, politics is change, and change and performance inhabit the same temporality. This conceptual salvage rhythm suggests that politics happens in the performance space through their shared mode of being-in-time. Further, because of work's absorption of political traits, performing work is a particularly interesting way to bring politics into performance. So, by *performing* work, we are doubly engaged in politics - because key traits of politics (and performance) are now embedded in the working structures we are embodying. This performance, layered over practice, is perhaps just real enough to leave a trace.

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## DATA

Name	Start Time	Total time danced
Manuela	11:28	11:31
Kirby	11:44	11:47
Manuela	12:33	12:35.5
Alice	12:45	12:46
Fraus	12:50	12:52
Alice	12:55	12:57
Manuela	15:03	15:07
Alex	15:50	15:38
Manuela	16:17	16:21
Gaby	16:45	16:48
Mia	16:50	16:52
Adrianna	16:53	16:55
Emma	16:55	16:57

