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Love Songs and Awkwardness:

Non-Professional Performers and Affective Labour

An oft-repeated distinction made in critical discourse between professional and amateur spheres of cultural production is that the former consists of those who work for money and the latter of those who work for love.¹ As Giulia Palladini (2012) has argued, however, when applied to theatre and performance this is a distinction that creates a 'social system of theatre production [...] that does not recognize amateur labor as labor' (96). In recent years theatre and performance studies has increasingly focussed on the terms 'non-professional' and 'amateur', with publications that recuperate these terms within the vocabulary of critical practice, for instance to refer to artists who use associations with amateurism as aesthetic or political strategies (Bailes 2011; Jackson 2012; Ridout 2013), or to explore specific traditions and histories of amateur dramatics (Cochrane 2003; Dobson 2011).² This strengthening of interest in the figure of the amateur is in many ways an encouraging move that signals the continuing diversification of cultural practices under examination in theatre and performance studies. However, each time a performer is labelled professional, non-professional, or amateur, a nexus of power relations is brought to bear upon that performance moment, constructing performers' identities and dividing performance communities. In a detailed article on the tension between amateur and professional statuses of performers in US YouTube videos, Nick Salvato (2009) attends to the contextual complexities within these terms and warns that, in theatre and performance studies, 'when we use the qualifiers "amateur" and "professional" to describe both contemporary and historical performance, we use them as though their meanings were transparent' (69). With Salvato's warning and Palladini's work in mind, then, this article seeks to question what it means to say that non-professionals work for love.³

To do so, I focus on three performances seen in London in 2014 that, when considered together, expose a conjuncture of assumptions regarding the authenticity of non-professional performers, the affective labour of such performers, and the representation of family bonds onstage. These performances are *Testament* (2010) by She She Pop and Their Fathers, at the Barbican; *Where We Live & What We Live For, Part 1* (2009) by Kings of England, at the Battersea Arts Centre (BAC); and *Dad Dancing* (2014) by Rosie Heafford, Alexandrina Hemsley and Helena Webb, also at the BAC. In these three shows, company members made devised autobiographical performances with their fathers, who may be described as non-professional performers either because they have not received institutional training, have little previous stage experience, or because performance is not what they do to earn their living. In *Testament*, Berlin-based performance collective She She Pop rework William Shakespeare's *King Lear* (c. 1606), each of whose five acts relates to an equivalent section of the show, with members of She She Pop negotiating the terms of their inheritance with their fathers onstage. Different combinations of performers feature in each iteration of *Testament*, and the night I attended did not feature Annemarie (Mieke) and Manfred Matzke, but did include

Sebastien and Joachim Bark, Lisa Lucassen, Fanni and Peter Halmburger, and Ilia and Theo Papatheodorou. *Dad Dancing*, co-produced by London-based company Second Hand Dance and the BAC, is a form of dance theatre in which three daughters—Rosie, Alexandrina and Helena—try to teach their fathers about their careers in dance; in return the fathers—Adrian, David and Andy—share their perspectives on parenthood. The show also includes a collective of other parents and children who participated in outreach workshops during the show's development, and who join in the show to dance and discuss their relationships. *Where We Live* employs the structure of an academic lecture in which Peter and Simon Bowes, a father-son duo working between London and Derbyshire, compare two historical moments: a photograph of Peter jumping into the sea as a young man and memories of a stroke he suffered in 2001. Simon takes on the role of the lecturer, using this comparison to contemplate the nature of time and intergenerational connections. He calls on to the stage articles of evidence, including his father and, briefly, his mother, Sandy, who participates in the performance by cueing Peter's lines from a seat in the audience and later going onstage to dance with her husband.

In certain journalistic and academic receptions of the shows—*Testament* and *Dad Dancing* in particular—there emerges a pattern where performers established as non-professional are read as offering an authenticity not held by their professional counterparts. This impression of authenticity is often connected by these spectators with the intimate affects the non-professionals generate, and what is perceived to be the unique aesthetic quality of their bodily stage presence. Most notably, this quality takes the form of awkwardness. Paradoxically, through an emphasis on the supposedly natural awkwardness of the fathers' bodies, their physical labour is downplayed or not perceived as labour. Laboriousness is stripped of labour, dubbed 'awkwardness', and read as an essential bodily quality, not work. At the same time the intimate affects this awkwardness generates are not recognised as another form of work—of affective labour—conducted by the fathers. By 'affective labour' I understand a theory of labour developed by feminist scholars (Federici 1975; Dalla Costa and James 1975; Dalla Costa and Dalla Costa 1999) to include the work of the family and which Michael Hardt (1999) explains as 'laboring practices [that] produce collective subjectivities, produce sociality, and ultimately produce society itself' (89). In receptions of the shows that emphasise the fathers' awkwardness, however, elements of the fathers' labour are ignored, both because of their status as non-professional performers and because they are family members featuring in autobiographical performances.

In contrast to approaches such as these, I demonstrate in this article that these productions in fact open up for examination the structure of family relationships and the divisions of labour within them. In so doing, they throw into question the very impression of authenticity that they appear to generate. This is often achieved by way of a contrast between the visual representations on stage and the shows' use of music. Music-making works in the shows as a double means of projecting seemingly authentic feeling and simultaneously understanding feeling as a form of labour. Significantly, the specific musical choices invoke a history in which certain groups of people have not had their labour recognised. The types of music employed in the shows reference a genealogy of cultural exchange in which musical traditions emerge out of interactions between different cultural influences, including the mimicry and appropriation among African-American, Euro-American and European musical forms. Although this article does not focus on tracing this history in detail (work that has already been performed by scholars including Joseph Roach, Paul Gilroy, Eric Lott, Amiri Baraka and Fred Moten), it does consider how the affects this music transmits complicate discussions around representations of the human in European performances today, including cultural moments that are not thematically concerned with the construction of racial identity.

The Appearance of Authenticity

These shows represent a trend in European experimental performance where performers work with their family members during the devising process and in performance.⁴ Such 'familial performances' (Bowes, 2015: n. p.) often seek to destabilise boundaries between the non-professional and professional as exemplified in an article by Geraldine Harris (2008) on *Susan & Darren* (2006). Produced by Manchester-based companies Quarantine and Company Fierce, *Susan & Darren* is an autobiographical performance involving a mother and son: Susan, a 'professional cleaner', and Darren, a 'professional dancer' (Harris 2008: 4). Alongside her article, Harris includes a gloss written by Quarantine's artistic directors, Renny O'Shea and Richard Gregory, who comment on 'a problem of definition' in Harris's article when Harris describes Susan as a 'non-professional performer':

'Non-professional' or even 'amateur' often imply either unpaid or inept. Susan and Darren were neither. [...] 'Non-performer' is absurd, because they clearly are performers in the context they're encountered in [...]: 'untrained' is not specific enough, and what kind of training counts: RADA? BTEC? degree in theatre history? The workshop-hunting autodidact? (Harris 2008: 9)

In their commentary O'Shea and Gregory identify the subtle yet pervasive ways in which the performance industry orders and divides forms of labour. The logic of their comments moves from the non-professional or amateur, round to the autodidact whose self-led learning similarly places him or her outside institutional affiliations. Their comments also imply that certain forms of labour, such as non-professional, amateur or self-taught, may not 'count' as much as others and that embedded in this division of labour is a hierarchical power structure. They attempt to circumvent the prescriptive effects of these terms by describing Susan instead using 'Rimini Protokoll's term (or thereabouts) "experts in everyday life"', asserting the particularity of her identity outside of such hierarchical structures by stating that 'Susan is there because nobody else could replace her' (2008: 9).⁵

Harris herself opens out some of the issues relating to this problem of definition in the body of the article. Harris remarks that after seeing *Susan & Darren* she experienced an 'attack of politeness' where, because of 'the impression [*Susan & Darren*] gives of an encounter with Susan as a "real person"', Harris felt it would 'seem rude, even unethical, to take up the sort of distance from her that would be implied by analysing her (performance?) in terms of the politics of identity' (2008: 6). Harris then works through her initial reaction to what she calls Susan's 'appearance of authenticity', trying to locate what generated it and also what implications this has for her as a professional spectator (2008: 1). According to Harris, the impression of authenticity emanates from Susan's physical appearance, which Harris breaks down into two elements: Susan's 'bodily style' and her 'stage presence' (2008: 5). Harris describes Susan's 'bodily style' as 'that of an "ordinary" middle-aged woman of the sort only rarely visible in professional theatre, performance or live art' and states that Susan's stage presence contrasts with that of professional performers because it contains 'no trace of theatrical self-reflexivity' (2008: 5–6). Harris stresses that Susan's ability to appear ordinary arises out of her extraordinary nature in relation to professional performance, opening up a question regarding what kind of people normally get to participate in performance or get to be considered professionals in this field. Utilising Jacques Rancière's work on the politics of aesthetics, Harris concludes that her attack of politeness emerged out of a disruption of the sensible generated by 'a presupposition of equality in Quarantine's work between [...] artist and non-artist' (2008: 9). Quarantine, then, challenge expectations of what constitutes the ordinary

and extraordinary in relation to UK performance, while Harris also opens out a consideration of what it might mean to say that someone represents an ordinary human in this context.

Awkward Bodies

Critical receptions of *Dad Dancing* and *Testament* also emphasise the quality of the fathers' bodily stage presence, but rather than challenging distinctions between performers' statuses, in this instance the emphasis ingrains them. Luke Jennings' review of *Dad Dancing* in the *Guardian*, for instance, describes the production as characterised by the style of the fathers' movements:

The show is touching, awkward, funny and revealing. [...] The dad genre, like any other, has its fundamentals. A forceful adherence to rhythm, a tendency towards violent and dramatic shape-throwing [...] and an enigmatic, druidical shuffling. (Jennings 2014: n. p.).

The fathers' awkwardness reveals the scaffolding of the performance moment: showing up rhythm by being overly adherent, undermining theatricality by being violently dramatic. Jennings' lexis recalls the *Oxford English Dictionary's* recent definition of 'dad dancing', added in June 2013, which describes this phenomenon as 'an awkward, unfashionable, or unrestrained style of dancing to pop music, as characteristically performed by middle-aged or older men'.⁶ Yet, rather than limiting the efficacy of the performance, Jennings' review places the fathers' awkwardness as the driving force that reveals '[a]t the heart of the piece [...] the intimacy that the shared process has generated' (Jennings 2014: n. p.). The intimacy of the performance and its awkwardness are implicitly linked, with the awkwardness revealing an affect generated outside of, or in spite of, theatrical techniques such as rhythm and dramatic gestures. This is presented as an affect—a love—that comes from the heart.



Fig 1. *Dad Dancing* by Rosie Heafford, Alexandrina Hemsley and Helena Webb, 2014. Andy and Helena Webb are pictured in the centre. Photo: Zoe Manders. Image courtesy of Rosie Heafford.

Likewise, Kate Bredeson, in a reading of *Testament*, aligns the position of the non-professional performer with those who generate the show's affect and figures awkwardness as a quality essential to this. She writes that 'She She Pop has long proclaimed that no one of them are actors, directors, or playwrights; this is especially true of their non-theatre artist fathers, whose presence on stage is warm, slightly awkward, and entirely charming' (Bredeson 2014: 47). As with Harris' reading of *Susan & Darren*, Bredeson describes the fathers' stage presence as being partly attributable to their physicality, as *Testament* 'takes elderly bodies that are often not seen in the theatre, or, to a large degree, in society, and puts them center stage' (2014: 48). Though they are described as artists, the fathers are read as 'especially' distant from the processes of theatrical representation because they are 'non-theatre'. The turn to stage presence compounds the fathers' distance from theatrical representation by figuring their awkwardness as an essential bodily quality that charms the audience without relying on theatrical artifice. Yet, recalling the pressure O'Shea and Gregory placed on Harris' use of 'non-performer', similar pressure can be applied to Bredeson's use of the term 'non-theatre'. For, even though She She Pop make an aesthetic and political decision not to describe themselves as actors, their and their fathers' reworking of *King Lear* is still in a knowing relationship with the theatrical canon and acting techniques. In an article about the group's practice, for instance, Mieke Matzke states that even though She She Pop are not 'role actors in the classical sense' they are still 'constantly hinting at character fragments' and that they are 'not concerned with authentic self-presentation' (Matzke 2011: 117).

Bredeson's article, however, establishes an implicit preference for those who don't act or perform the work of theatrical mimesis, viewing those who are 'especially' distant from it as able to generate the show's intimate affects. The obviousness of the non-professionals' physical labour, emphasised by their awkwardness, works to place the performers outside the particular aesthetic framework of an acting style that tries to conceal its work. Robin Bernstein (2012) and Nicholas Ridout (2006) have both written about the shame and embarrassment generated by theatre modelled on such an aesthetic framework. Bernstein and Ridout start their analyses from a shared point of interest: Konstantin Stanislavski's descriptions of experiences of shame and stage fright. Bernstein draws on a production of *The Method Gun* (2008) by the Rude Mechs to analyse the relationship between shame and a distortion—'an institutionalized misinterpretation'—of the work of a number of psychological-realist actor training "schools" that has resulted in 'a mass of acting students literally performing their training on stage (as opposed to using that training as a tool to create their performance)' (Bernstein 2012: 217).⁷ Although Bernstein refers to performers caught up in this distortion as 'method actors', she clarifies that the Rude Mechs' use of 'method' is a 'caricature' which conflates training practices as wide ranging as Stanislavskian techniques, the work of Lee Strasberg, and the teachings of Sanford Meisner (Bernstein 2012: 216). I will therefore use scare quotes to signal this usage. Bernstein figures "method actors" as seeking simultaneously to show the authentic individual and to conceal the threat of shame that goes alongside that:

The method actor risks categories of shame that her avant-garde sister does not: for example, the method actor might cry or kiss in ways that fail to register as "authentic" within the narrow criteria of realism. [...] Furthermore, even while realism intensifies shame, it can cloak that structure, along with so much other theatre scaffolding, behind the claim of authenticity. (Bernstein 2012: 216)

Similarly, Nicholas Ridout claims that tensions arise when theatrical performance attempts to conceal its economic scaffolding and that embarrassment occurs when audiences become aware of the economic exchanges shaping the appearance of the theatrical encounter. He explains that 'the theatre that falls into the wrong, or acknowledges its wrongness, succeeds in making people

appear, on the stage and in the house, not as authentic unproblematic and unified subjects, but doubled, in an appearance that is both truth and simulation' (2006: 93).

The shows under discussion in this article are themselves influenced by what Bernstein calls 'avant-garde' performance aesthetics rather than by psychological-realist styles of acting. This is reflected in the training backgrounds of the various company members: the Dad Dancing collective met while studying dance at Trinity Laban; Simon Bowes undertook a PhD at the University of Central Lancashire; and the members of She She Pop met at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies at Gießen (also attended by members of Rimini Protokoll), which is known for taking 'an experimental mindset' towards performance making.⁸ The frequent citation of awkwardness in writing on *Dad Dancing* and *Testament* emphasises the company members' distance from psychological-realist acting, a distance that allows them to avoid what Ridout identifies as the doubling of truth and simulation and to express the fathers' exceptional ability to communicate 'real' feeling. Paradoxically, however, in doing this, Jennings' review and Bredeson's article uphold remarkably similar values to those Bernstein locates within "method acting". According to Bernstein, "method acting" requires performers to 'expose their emotional lives, to manifest "authenticity" and therefore avow a personal connection to and investment in onstage behaviours' (Bernstein 2012: 221). Similarly the fathers are described as exposing aspects of their familial emotional life and having a personal connection with their actions onstage. The emphasis on the fathers' awkwardness is therefore both an acknowledgement and a denial of their labour. It acknowledges the fathers' laboriousness as a means of distancing them from the shame or embarrassment associated with culturally specific notions of the professional actor, as constructed by psychological-realist schools of actor training. The emphasis on authenticity, however, then denies the work—in particular the affective labour—behind this other mode of performance and the aesthetic structures behind this new claim to authenticity.⁹

As a clear counter to readings of the non-professionals as naturally awkward, all three performances utilise awkwardness in distinct ways, not as an essential bodily quality, but as a dramaturgical tool and, as such, an act of labour intended to instigate thought or feeling in the audience. In *Testament*, for instance, the fathers' stiff movements are partly generated by their costumes, which includes large boots that Bredeson describes as 'enormous, black leather [...] with protruding toe studs' and which she acknowledges make the fathers walk 'awkwardly' (Bredeson 2014: 47). Modelled on the decline of Lear, the vulnerability of his character is paralleled by the fathers' burdensome costumes that force them to move in a laboured fashion, accentuating their aging bodies. This becomes evident in the second half of the show when Sebastien Bark and Lisa Lucassen sing a rendition of Dolly Parton's 'Daddy's Working Boots' (1973) as the three fathers perform a stiff line dance in the centre of the stage. In this instance the boots also tie into a gentle hostility between the fathers and children referenced throughout the show, which relates to She She Pop's exploration of power struggles between father and child. This tension gives a certain edge to the costume choices highlighted by the Parton song, with the song's lyrics reminding the fathers of an obligation to labour for their children until death.

To a less confrontational end, towards the start of *Where We Live* Simon also introduces Peter to the audience by emphasising his aging body, describing it as 'now more or less resistant to the will when it comes to walking up a flight of stairs without getting puffed, or to chopping firewood without slipping a disc'.¹⁰ Simon's introduction foregrounds aspects of Peter's performance that highlight the fragility of his body, such as the fact that he reads all of his lines from cue cards held up by Sandy, or that he moves slowly when lying down on the floor to re-enact his stroke later in the show. In another way, however, Peter's body is introduced as a site of choreographed control, from his formal dress (crisp suit, tie, and polished shoes) to his fluid dance later in the show, a

moment I analyse in more depth later in this article. Peter's ability to self-present is exemplified by one section of the performance where he stands confidently at the front of the stage and recites Charles Bukowski's poem 'style' (1972), describing style as 'the difference, a way of doing, a way of being done' (Bukowski 1972: 156). In *Where We Live* awkwardness and style are bodily qualities contrasted and dramaturgically structured by both performers for affective and expressive purposes.

Differently again, *Dad Dancing* openly attempts to undermine cultural assumptions that older men dance badly. This approach is made clear by a section included on the company's website which laid out their research questions while the full show was still in development:

How can we integrate professional and non-professional bodies and movement characteristics into a cohesive dance work? [...] What makes us embarrassed about Dad's dancing? [...] Can our relationships with our dads be developed through movement? (Heafford et al. 2014: n. p.)

Three sections of the show, in which each father dances solo to three tracks of contrasting music, seem to explore these questions particularly clearly. During David Hemsley's dance, one of the tracks selected was 'Slam' (2005) by UK-based Australian drum and bass group, Pendulum. In the performance I saw, this section initially made some of the audience laugh, perhaps because of the seeming cultural incongruity between an older man dancing and music commonly associated with rave culture. As the laughter died down, I noted that the longer the dance went on for the more difficult it was to read Hemsley's bodily style as simply referencing a joke about how dads dance. In Jennings' review of the show he recalls this moment and flippantly describes it as one where 'life and art become one', remarking that David, a former advertising executive, 'favours polishing and stirring motions', leading Jennings to wonder 'was he responsible for household product accounts?' (Jennings 2014: n. p.). Jennings' joking response explains away David's ambiguous movements by reading his dance style in terms of his profession. Instead of this being a challenge to aesthetic expectations of how older men dance, an act of performance labour, this moment becomes physical labour that can be identified according to a professional framework external to the performance industry. On their website, however, the company openly comment on the intentional diversity of their soundtrack which allows the performers to 'slip and slide their way through their differences and commonalities' (Heafford et al. 2015: n. p.). By utilising the vibrations of drum and bass, the company destabilise assumptions about who gets to represent what, allowing Hemsley's performance style to be a product of a cultural juncture as much indebted to the transnational influence of Afro-Caribbean dub sounds on Jungle and drum and bass as it is to the different forms of work he has pursued in his lifetime.

At the same time as emphasising the fathers' bodily labour, there is an attempt in certain critical responses to the shows to underplay another form of labour they are undertaking: the affective labour of the performance. The fathers are said to charm, warm, and move the audience to tears, not because they are working to do this as performers, but because their emotional ties with their children generate an affect that is entirely natural and to be expected. Clearly, however, feminist theories of immaterial and affective labour have established that the generation of emotion needs to be considered not just as "natural", but as a concerted effort, not unrelated to the economic sphere of work. Other theorists have also examined how the model of the nuclear family has spilled outwards, disturbing distinctions between private and public realms of human activity (Berlant 1997; Hardt et al. 2000).¹¹ Both *Dad Dancing* and *Testament* engage with these discourses by demonstrating how economic and familial spheres continually disrupt each other. For example, in the performance I saw of *Dad Dancing* Andy Webb was unable to perform in the show because

of work commitments. Instead an audience member was asked to wear a t-shirt with 'Andy' written on the front to stand in for the absent father. Andy also participated in the show via pre-recorded video sequences that were projected onto the back wall of the stage and through a live telephone conversation with his daughter that was put on loudspeaker for the audience to hear. In an opening video, Andy apologised for his absence, explaining that he worked freelance and that sometimes 'he had to show his customers that he cares'.¹² Professional responsibilities, affective obligations, and family life met in a moment where work is love and love gives way to work.

She She Pop go a step further by depicting the familial sphere as actively constructed by economics through their discussion of family inheritance and the contractual obligations of father-child relationships. Moments in which genuine affect appears to be generated are then subverted, often through the use of music. In the fourth act of *Testament*, for instance, a father sings Dolly Parton's hit song, 'I Will Always Love You' (1972), to his daughter. A review by a spectator posting as 'Willie' on the blog for On the Boards, the Seattle venue where She She Pop performed *Testament* in 2013, describes a performance in which Manfred Matzke takes this part:

It sounds totally ham-fisted, I know, but it just *works*. People were crying into their scarves while this craggy-faced German physicist staked his claim on one of the best love songs of the 20th century. (2013: n. p.)

The blog entry emphasises Manfred's non-professional performance status, by referencing his work outside of the performance as a scientist. Moreover, the description of Manfred as a 'craggy' geological landscape once again conflates the non-professional performer with notions of physical vulnerability, impressions of naturalness, and the generation of affect. In the performance I saw the song was sung by Peter Halmburger, and as her father sang, Fanni Halmburger listed the different stages of care she will have to provide as he ages, from '[w]ashing the wet bedclothes in the morning' to '[e]ating puréed food yourself without even mentioning it'.¹³ Peter's singing was quiet and soothing, though his voice sometimes broke slightly, only just keeping in time (his tempo was conducted by fellow cast-member Sebastien Bark), or faltering over a change of notes. Affect was constructed through the juxtaposition of Peter's song with Fanni's list, in what reviewer Lyn Gardner describes as 'a heartbreakingly but smartly layered sequence' (Gardner 2014: n. p.).

Indeed, She She Pop are knowingly tapping into a twentieth-century history of performance citation so that the affect generated by Peter's song is also worked for by a series of performers who came before him. 'I Will Always Love You' is in fact something of an anthem to affective labour. Written in 1972, it was performed by Parton as a farewell message to fellow-musician Porter Wagoner after she decided to leave his television show, *The Porter Wagoner Show*, which had first brought her to the public's attention when she featured on it in 1967 (Miller, 2008: 135). Parton rerecorded the song a decade later when starring in the film adaptation of *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (1982). In the film the matron of a brothel (Parton) sings the song to say goodbye to her long-time customer, Sheriff Ed Earl Dodd. Another decade after that, Whitney Houston covered the song for her film debut in *The Bodyguard* (1992), to be again sung at a point of professional parting as a pop star (Houston) says goodbye to her bodyguard after their working relationship becomes compromised by a romantic entanglement. In all three of these contexts the song combines an affective and a professional relationship in which the professional engagement generates the lyrics' promise of love. When Peter sings the song he calls upon a similarly contractual obligation within the father-child bond as constructed by a heteronormative European model of family life. To repeat the blog's phrasing, Peter does 'stake his claim' during the song, not only to the affective labour he is owed by his child, but to the song's cultural heritage. The fathers' affective labour, then, is not labour conducted solely on behalf of their children (performing out of

love for their children), or even solely directed towards the activity of performing (performing out of love for performance), but instead relates to the affective labour demanded by performance: the labour required to enact, invoke, mimic or replay historically formed feelings.



Fig 2. Mieke Matzke and her father Manfred Matzke in *Testament* by *She She Pop*, 2010. Photo: Doro Tuch. Image courtesy of Anna Wille.

Ham and Affect

Peter's song generates an ambivalent relationship between affect and professionalism, and it is just such an ambivalence that the blogger cited above seeks to assuage when he assures the reader that, although the performance 'sounds totally ham-fisted', nonetheless 'it just *works*' (Willie, 2013: n. p.). The blogger's use of 'ham-fisted' is significant in terms of the cultural history the phrase recalls. In the following section, I consider how the blog's reading of Manfred's performance intertwines three concepts—ham, affect, and the repetition of songs—in a complex construction of non-professional identity. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* to be ham-fisted is to be 'heavy-handed, awkward; bungling'.¹⁴ Etymologically, one possible avenue for the phrase leads towards a variation of the older term 'mutton-fisted', whereby a human hand resembles the flesh of a slaughtered animal, in the case of ham, particularly the thickness of a thigh. This version of the phrase presents the human-as-animal as inept, undexterous, meat without feeling. Another avenue of meaning leads towards the American slang term 'hamfatter', which came into common use in the 1880s to describe 'an ineffective actor' or a 'mediocre jazz musician', in its early uses particularly 'a negro minstrel'.¹⁵ This connection is supported by histories of minstrelsy in which 'ham', when used in relation to performers, is often attributed to the combination of ham fat mixed with burnt cork that formed the foundation of the blackface makeup used by minstrel artists (Linn 1991: 9). In its various uses, 'ham' brings a discourse around professional and non-professional performance ability together with a discourse around the construction of racial identity in performance.

Karen Linn, for instance, in her work on the history of the banjo in the US, records that from the 1860s to the 1890s there was a movement among some middle-class Euro-American musicians to 'elevate' the banjo to 'a higher class of musical practice and a better class of people' (Linn 1991: 6). Linn gives as an example the prolific writings of Euro-American musician and critic Samuel Swain Stuart, who dissociates himself from what he terms 'ham' banjo players in the minstrel theatre who play by ear as opposed to reading music (Linn 1994: 9). In an article published in 1886, Stewart claims that 'unless something was done to save the banjo from the "ham", [then] the "ham fever" would become contagious, and the rise of the banjo impeded for another generation' (Stewart 1886: 1; qtd. in Linn 1991: 9). The banjo was an instrument thought to have been introduced to America by African slaves (Linn 1991: 1). It became an iconic instrument in both African-American and Euro-American folk music, in turn influencing the development of the country music sung by Dolly Parton. The banjo was also used in blackface minstrelsy by Euro-American performers as it 'bestowed authenticity' upon the performers in their mimicry of what were perceived to be authentic African-American amateur cultural forms (Linn 1991: 2). Elevating the banjo, then, meant disassociating the banjo from its usage among African-American performers and creating a newly professionalised image for its promotion. The ham banjo player is not necessarily amateur or African-American, but can also be a professional Euro-American musician who plays in such a way that acknowledges a connection to an antecedent African-American amateur culture which threatens to destabilise fixed Euro-American notions of professionalism and expertise.

'Ham' evidences the ambivalent affective relationship Euro-Americans held with African-American culture, the duelling desires of 'love and theft' identified by Eric Lott in his work on blackface minstrelsy (Lott 1993: 6). Lott's work explores how minstrelsy at times offered a connection between the plights of the African-American and working class Euro-American population through aesthetic forms in which '[m]instrel performers often attempted to repress through ridicule the real interest in black cultural practices they nonetheless betrayed' (Lott 1993: 6). Both a description of the costume techniques of blackface minstrelsy and a ridiculing of the very culture those costumes

attempt to mimic, the contrasting usages of the term 'ham' exemplifies such dualities of desire. As Amiri Baraka writes of cultural depictions of African-American people as comic stereotypes in the antebellum era, 'perhaps the only consistent way of justifying what had been done to him—now that he had reached what can be called a post-bestial stage—was to demonstrate the ridiculousness of his inability to act as a “normal” human being' (Baraka 2002: 84). Likewise a ham is someone who fails to act like an ordinary human being according to a hegemonic aesthetic regime.

In its description of Manfred's rendition of 'I Will Always Love You', the blog post uses the connotations of 'ham' to contrast professional over-theatricality with the authenticity of the amateur, an authenticity established by the affect the non-professional performer generates in the audience.¹⁶ In Peter's rendition of Parton's song this affect was generated by She She Pop's use of awkwardness, because Peter's voice does not match up to Parton's performance aesthetic and is instead faltering, moving haltingly over phrases with uncontrolled breathing, and therefore speaks to the kinds of physical vulnerability his daughter lists. As 'ham' and awkwardness share the same linguistic and conceptual territory, however, both Peter and Manfred's mimicries of Dolly Parton engage in an ambivalent negotiation of different historical and contemporary aesthetic forms. 'Ham' has returned as a quality of both the amateur and the professional, with the key distinction that when the amateur is awkward his inability to do the work of representation is taken as a token of his authenticity; whereas when the professional is awkward it is taken to prove what was known all along, that representation is artificial, fake, a bungling lie. Awkwardness and ham both define a performer's position within an aesthetic regime that has its genealogy in inequitable divisions of labour within the performance industry. The continued existence of such historical governing structures lies in accretions of meaning within language that describes performers' statuses and is openly revealed in discourses surrounding performers' representations of the human as constructed by affect.

Being Human

At the most extreme end of the discourse around awkwardness, affect, and amateurism, there emerges a moment in which the concern is not whether a performer is real or authentic in opposition to theatricality, but whether they are real or authentic in terms of fixed notions of what constitutes the human. Affect becomes critical in constituting this notion of the human in contrast to meat-without-feeling, yet what is cloaked in this process is the structure of labour which generates that affect, as opposed to a feeling which springs naturally from the fount of the human heart. This is not to undermine the value of emotion or feeling in constituting forms of shared humanity, but to suggest that the ways in which emotion links groups of people is a socially and culturally specific structure for which those individuals labour in order to bind themselves together. Those individuals classed as non-professional, then, cannot simply be figured as naturally generating or experiencing affect. Doing something for the love of it is work, even if it is not work for money. It is a socially contingent activity. If non-professionals are the bearers of affect it is because they are being made to carry that affect for the particular ends of a specific industry hierarchy.

An exploration of how such affective labour may be ethically recognised is perhaps offered in a section of *Where We Live* referenced earlier, when Simon's mother comes onstage to dance with his father. On his blog Simon describes the show as an exploration of eternalism in which 'everybody, those who have lived, those living, and those who are yet to live, are alive now' (Bowes 2009: n.p.). In this way Bowes sees his grandfathers as 'still labouring to support us long after they have disappeared' (2009: n.p.). The show is a thoughtful and nuanced contemplation of

the way that family genealogies function across a time that repeats and returns, loaded with memories and intertextual references. When Simon's mother joins his father onstage to reconstruct a courtship dance, they perform a lively swing dance to a 1973 instrumental arrangement by John Fahey of Billy Taylor's song released in 1964, 'I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free', an arrangement which includes a Dixieland style orchestra complete with banjo. It was a sequence designed to generate affect and Catherine Love in a review of the show describes it as 'tear-jerkingly lovely' (Love 2014: n.p.). Another review contrasts Simon's mode of delivery to Peter's dance stating that the 'gently choreographed memory of youthful dance is given, by contrast with the lecturer, the impact of a production number' (Loxton 2009: n.p.). Indeed, in the performance I saw both Peter and Sandy demonstrated recognisable performance skill as dancers and the dance was structured to gradually reveal the extent of that skill, moving from small side-steps in the opening bars of the music, to more extended and complicated steps when the music crescendos a few bars later. To recall Peter's citation of Bukowski, the couple have style.



Fig 3. Peter and Sandy Bowes in *Where We Live & What We Live For, Part 1* by Kings of England, 2009. Photo: Kate Rowles. Image courtesy of Simon Bowes.

Importantly, Taylor's song was itself an act of affective labour between the generations, written to teach his daughter, Kim Taylor Thompson, 'the correct way to sing spirituals' (Taylor et al. 2013: 147). A rendition of the song was later recorded by Nina Simone in 1967, after which it became an anthem for the civil rights movement in the US (Brun-Lambert 2010: 161). At least three histories resonate during the dance in *Where We Live*, from memories of courtship between a married couple, to a collective of people fighting for civil rights, and a father sharing his musical expertise and cultural tradition with his daughter. Three genealogies of non-professional and professional affective labour generate the poignancy of the present performance moment. With its thematic concern not being the specific genealogy of the song, *Where We Live* doesn't directly acknowledge this unseen affective labour. Nevertheless, the show has a way of thinking about temporality that

recognises the presence of the past in the present and the importance of musical practices and citation in detecting these cross-temporal relations.

The use of the Fahey track in *Where We Live* recalls Paul Gilroy's (1993) writing on authenticity and music in his work on the black Atlantic, where he observes that the appropriation and adaptation of music from the civil rights movement in new cultural contexts produces a particular kind of public space of interaction in Britain:

The style, rhetoric, and moral authority of the civil rights movement and of Black Power [...] were detached from their original ethnic markers and historical origins, exported and adapted, with evident respect but little sentimentality, to local needs and political climates. [...] Dislocated from their original conditions of existence, the sound tracks of this new African-American cultural broadcast fed a new metaphysics of blackness elaborated and enacted in Europe and elsewhere within the underground, alternative, public spaces constituted around an expressive culture that was dominated by music. (Gilroy 1993: 82–83)

Gilroy's passage refers specifically to the role that Black British interactions with African-American music play in constituting new hybrid notions of black culture around the Atlantic. As such the context in which I apply this quotation differs from the original, the performers in *Where We Live* being White British and representing another form of cultural interaction with this music. Nonetheless Gilroy's analysis locates some key linking patterns between the potential motivations behind such transatlantic cultural interactions, which include a 'commentary on the relationship of work to leisure and the respective forms of freedom with which these opposing worlds become identified' and 'a special fascination with history and the significance of its recovery by those who have been expelled from the official dramas of civilisation' (Gilroy 1993: 83). As such, Gilroy recalls the importance of both professional and non-professional cultures of music-making in the US in challenging delimitations of what constitutes the human (in the context that Gilroy examines, a delimitation that was founded on the construction of differing racial identities). The Fahey track in *Where We Live* places a contemporary European performance in an embodied relationship with this genealogy of performance in the US, constructing an alternative public space within the supposedly private family unit and generating ambivalence within the representations on stage. Indeed the music in the other two productions has something of the same effect, from the drum and bass tracks in *Dad Dancing*, to Dolly Parton's songs in *Testament*. They place the performances in dialogue with a genealogy of hierarchical structures and divisions within the UK and US performance industries, including divisions between professional and non-professional spheres of cultural production. The resultant 'expressive culture' is one that relies on the affective labour of both recognised professional performers and those whose labour has not been historically recognised or has not been seen to count as work. This perhaps opens up a space in which distinctions made in the UK between non-professional and professional labour can be historicised and reconceived in relation to theoretical work that has already been done on affective labour and on transatlantic cultural interaction.

All three productions, because they consciously work through assumptions regarding the authenticity of non-professional performers, affective labour, and the representation of family life, open up a public space that brings to the surface a genealogy of distinctions made between the labour of professionals and non-professionals in the contemporary performance industry. By staging father-child relationships the performances question the inheritance of affective labour that has been passed between generations of performers and those maybe forgotten performers still labouring in the present to emote for contemporary audiences. They complicate readings of non-

professional affective labour and open up the critical distance from which we can begin to analyse how such terms are employed in discourse on performance today.

Notes

1. For examples of this distinction see Edward Said on the motivations of academics (1994: 76) and Amiri Baraka (aka LeRoi Jones) on the professionalisation of blues music (1963: 82).

2. Increase in interest is also signalled by the establishment of an international research network focussing on amateur performance, *Research into Amateur Performance and Private Theatricals* (<http://rappt.org/>), and a national research project in the UK funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, *Amateur Dramatics: Crafting Communities in Time and Space* (<http://amateurdramaresearch.com/>).

3. It is important to note extensive research on amateur affective labour has been conducted in fields outside of theatre and performance studies, particularly in relation to the internet's role in destabilising notions of professionalism and promoting amateur cultures (Coté et al., 2007; Paasonen, 2010; Hunter et al., 2013).

4. Other productions in which artists work with parents onstage include *A Family Outing* (1998) by Ursula Martinez; *The Post-Show Party Show* (2009) by Michael Pinchbeck; *Everything Must Go* (2009) by Kristin Fredericksson; *Chip* (2009) by Glas(s) Performance; and *Frankland & Sons* (2012) by Tom and John Frankland. Kim Noble's *You're Not Alone* (2014) responds to this trend, although the show doesn't feature his father live on stage, but through video footage. Outside of parent-child groupings, Bryony Kimmings' *Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model* (2013) was created with her niece and in *Sister* (2014) Rosanna Cade worked with her sibling Amy. Also notable is The Institute for Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, a family collective led by Gary Anderson, Lena Simic, and their three children, who have run residencies and events from their home since 2008 (<http://www.twoaddthree.org/>).

5. O'Shea and Gregory refer here to Rimini Protokoll's term 'Experten des Alltags', usually translated as 'experts of the everyday'.

6. *Oxford English Dictionary* online version, 'dad, n. 1', December (2014), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/46813?redirectedFrom=dad+dancing>.

7. Here Bernstein quotes the Rude Mechs' Lana Lesley.

8. Institute for Applied Theatre Studies, 'Profile for the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies' (2015), <http://www.inst.uni-giessen.de/theater/en/institute>. For further information on performers' backgrounds see 'All About She She Pop' (2015), <http://www.shesheshepop.de/en/about-us.html>; 'Biographies' (2015), <http://www.dad-dancing.org/about-dad-dancing/biographies/>; and 'Kings of England Field Trip/ PhD', 27 July (2008), <http://t-h-r-o-w-i-n-g.blogspot.co.uk/>.

9. For a further examination of anti-theatrical approaches in performance, Shannon Jackson (2012) develops an insightful discussion of awkwardness when she distinguishes between performance art's engagement with Paolo Virno's notions of virtuosity as an immaterial labour process, and an anti-theatrical rejection of virtuosity as a form of elitist performance skill. In contrast to the latter, Jackson characterises Virno's use of virtuosity as implying something 'decidedly not unique and exceptional but democratized and awkward, something that all of us have the capacity to access', whereby '[m]ediocre dancing can be good conceptual art' (2012: 17; 20).

10. All quotations are taken from my transcript of an unpublished recording shared with me by Simon Bowes.

11. Lauren Berlant (1997) writes of how the political future of the US was figured as an intimate domestic future during Ronald Reagan's rise to power and consequently considers what other forms of human

collectivity can be imagined and what affects of intimacy, or love, could be generated within them. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (2000) cite Berlant as they caution that '[one] should not think that the crisis of the nuclear family has brought a decline in the forces of patriarchy' as 'discourses and practices of "family values" seem to be everywhere across the social field' (2000: 197).

12. All quotations are taken from my transcript of *Dad Dancing* at the Battersea Arts Centre on 5 November 2014.

13. *She She Pop, Testament DVD* (Berlin: She She Pop, 2010). Quotations are taken from the English subtitles on the DVD.

14. *Oxford English Dictionary* online version, 'ham, n. 1 and adj. ', December (2014), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/83690?redirectedFrom=hamfisted#eid2248934>.

15. Ibid.

16. That several of the commentaries I turn to in this article are blog posts indicates that amateur and professional binaries are currently being disrupted not only at the level of the production of performance in the UK, but also at the level of critical reception. The rise of prolific theatre bloggers, such as Catherine Love (cited in this article), has opened up theatre criticism to a wider range of spectators than what Lyn Gardner succinctly describes as its previous 'white, male and Oxbridge-educated' norms (Gardner, 2013: n.p.). This shift has been met with a mixture of interest and concern by The Critics' Circle, an organisation open to professional arts critics, whose Drama Section devoted their Centenary Conference on 27 September 2013 to a consideration of 'the future of professional theatre reviewing in a world of tweets and blogs' (<http://oldsite.cssd.ac.uk/events/open-days/critics-circle-centenary-conference#sthash.TizkpOyC.dpuf>).

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