

“It’s Alive”: Towards a Monsterized Theatre with Beatbox Academy’s Frankenstein: How to Make a Monster (2018 -)’

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11 **“‘It’s Alive’”: Towards a Monsterized Theatre with Beatbox Academy’s *Frankenstein:***
12 ***How to Make a Monster (2018 -)***
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15 Electrifying gig. Thrilling theatre. Tongue-twisting vocal gymnastics. Mary Shelley’s
16 original, re-imagined with songs, soundscapes and sonic trickery. Experience the power of
17 the human voice breathing life into monsters all around us. *Frankenstein* will leave you
18 asking: who are the monsters we fear? Who created them? And how the hell did they just do
19 that with their voices?!f
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23 Description, Edinburgh Fringe Online Programme, 2019. ¹
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27 Following successful runs at Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) in London in 2018 and 2019,
28 *Frankenstein: How to Make a Monster (FHMM)* was performed in the Traverse Theatre in
29 the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2019 by a diverse collective of young people from Beatbox
30 Academy (BA). As an audience member, the atmosphere created by this award-winning hip
31 hop version of Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein* (1818), which had been devised as part of
32 the BA participatory project at BAC, felt electrifying.² The show, which used beatboxing
33 blended with other vocal practices such as rap, MC-ing and melodic singing, engaged with
34 serious subject matter, and unleashed feelings of admiration, goodwill and pleasure. After the
35 performance, I observed people leaving the auditorium energised and excited, experiencing a
36 wave of affect that was carried into on-line reviews. One audience member noted the
37 ‘infectious energy’ and ‘endless generosity’ of the performers, another commented how the
38 show ‘burst with youthful energy’, and on its galvanising effects: ‘at the end of our show the
39 audience literally all jumped up at once’. It was as if the ‘monsters’ identified by the young
40 performers in their adaption of the novel, social ills that included acts of irresponsible
41 creation, cultural cruelty and othering, were temporarily vanquished. Professional reviewers
42 were awestruck by the ‘staggering’ talent and ‘gorgeous’ singing of the BA collective,
43 showering the award-winning show with five-star reviews. Words such as ‘empowerment’,
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51 ¹ Edfringe Online Programme, <https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/frankenstein-how-to-make-a-monster> (accessed December 27, 2019).
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53 ² *FHMM* won Off-West and Total Theatre Awards in 2019, and was a British Council showcase in the
54 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. It was co-directed by Conrad Murray and David Cumming.
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10 'confidence' and 'joy' studded the warm, heartfelt responses. Many referred to a physical,
11 almost visceral response, to alterations in bodily mechanisms, 'This is an old story made
12 electrically alive. Let it take your breath away'. It will 'make your tummy lurch'.³ Reading
13 the reviews a sense of animation emerges of a collective audience body, shocked and
14 electrified by currents of surprise and pleasure, a battery of voices buzzing long enough to
15 document their experiences of thrill, excitement and joy.
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19 Examining the practices and processes deployed by the young performers of the BA
20 collective in the making of *FHMM*, this article explores the capacity of beatboxing to
21 generate rhythmic connections between bodies and materials, creating the sense of
22 'electrification', 'liveness' and 'aliveness' reflected in the above responses, and contributing
23 to the new meanings generated by the adaptation of an old story. In seeking to respond to the
24 growing prevalence of 'gig' forms in British theatre that combine theatrical, musical and
25 technological practices in ways that I suggest nuance and enhance rather than diminish the
26 'usual virtues' of live theatre,⁴ it links to ongoing explorations in performance studies of the
27 animation of sociality through the heightening of sensory engagement and transmission of
28 affect, as well as looking to musicologists to explore the vocal percussion techniques
29 deployed by the BA. Not wishing to simply recirculate clichés around "the magic of live
30 theatre",⁵ I approach the 'liveness' of performance as a set of energies, techniques and
31 powers that are informed by the lived and artistic experience of performers, animated through
32 musical and participatory practices, mediated in performance by sound, breath, blood,
33 plastics, and electronic equipment, and sensed in the bodies of audience members.
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40 In assembling my critical components, I adapt an image used in Donna Haraway's 'The
41 Cyborg Manifesto' of an 'integrated circuit', itself seized by Haraway from the work of
42 second wave feminist Rachel Grossman where it was used to examine the use of management
43 techniques to regulate the labour and behaviour of Malaysian women within the global
44 electronics industry.⁶ Here, I am following Haraway in deploying the phrase metaphorically
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48 ³ These comments are taken from on-line [print media](#) reviews hosted by *The Stage*, *Exeunt*, *The*
49 *Times*, *The Guardian*, *WatsonStage* and *Edfringe* of the productions of *FHMM* at BAC (March
50 2018) and the *Traverse* (August 2019). [\[ALL PRINT MEDIA, WAS THE INTERNET BLOG
RESPONSE DIFFERENT?\]](#)

51 ⁴ Dan Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 41.

52 ⁵ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2-8.

53 ⁶ Donna Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2016) [1985],
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10 to explore artistic, musical and technological practices in contemporary British theatre and its
11 industrial context. Perceptions of this context have been marked by its historical associations
12 with ‘high’ culture, its perpetuation of ‘closed’ and ‘exclusive’ circuits of opportunity and
13 labour, its circulation of ideology through literary and text-based forms of theatre, and a
14 practice of spectatorship based in motionless attention. I am exploring how the ‘integrated
15 circuitry’ of British theatre might be rewired and extended through musical forms that ignite
16 affect, stimulate more unruly and inclusive audiences, and open the industry to wider
17 performance ecologies resonating with diverse cultural traditions and sociocultural practices.
18 In addressing a musical form that has entered British theatre, this article resists familiar
19 discourses and narratives that racialize or simplify hip hop culture, or denigrate incursions of
20 popular or sensory aspects of musical performance. Rather it seeks to engage with a piece of
21 British ‘gig theatre’ that along with others such as Debris Stevenson’s *Poet in da Corner*
22 (2018), Arinzé Kene’s *Misty* (2018), and Middle Child’s *Canary and the Crow* (2020), have
23 in the late 2010s and early 2020s ~~in recent years~~ deployed hip hop styles such as rap and
24 grime to realise musical dramaturgies as a mode of storytelling in a range of UK fringe,
25 subsidised and commercial theatres. I argue that the experience and energy of young voices,
26 empowered through vocal technologies and musical form, and made present through the
27 participatory practices of the BA, provide a catalyst for a reanimated theatre public. I
28 understand the performers of *FHMM* as agents of ‘liveness’ who deploy vibrant sonic and
29 rhythmical practices as skilful dramaturgical strategies that convey narrative and meaning
30 viscerally, and which stimulate the circulation of joyful and exhilarating affect.

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39 As part of my exploration of the sonorous, rhythmic and animating storytelling of *FHMM*, I
40 am interested in the ways that technologies of voice, music, and sound amplification integrate
41 and regulate bodies, materials and technologies in pleasurable and/or transgressive ways.
42 This article will consider not only BA’s creative embodied practices but also its use of
43 amplifiers and microphones, the latter a technology dubbed by a veteran theatre maker in
44 industry newspaper, *The Stage*, a ‘monster of theatre’.⁷ Though such technologies are
45 relatively newly legitimised in British venues known largely for text-based theatre and
46 continue to meet resistance from professionals who favour the ‘natural’ projection of the
47 voice, their integration, along with digitised vocal sound, is part of a current wave of
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53 ⁷ Barrie Rutter in Giverny Masso, ‘Barrie Rutter: Microphone use is the ‘monster of theatre’’, *The*
54 *Stage*, November 14, 2019, 5.

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10 experimentation in the staging of ‘sonic socialities and subjectivities’ noted by Salomé
11 Voegelin.⁸ Not only do sound technologies open and amplify dramaturgical possibilities,
12 they point to the more diverse range of social and cultural contexts through which vocal and
13 embodied practices are reaching the theatre. In exploring ‘cyborgian’ aspects of vocal
14 performance, and its illusionary, uncanny or estranging effects, it has been helpful to refer to
15 the work of the ‘first generation of voice studies scholars’ who have explored properties of
16 voices largely in relation to European traditions of cultural schema.⁹ It has also ~~bec~~
17 ~~nen~~
18 ~~necessary and~~ illuminating to recognise the diverse cultural genealogies of musical and sonic
19 dramaturgies that have informed the development of beatboxing and other hip hop practices.
20 In particular, I have been influenced by the fieldwork of Julian Henriques on the outdoors
21 dancehalls of Kingston Jamaica and its ‘crowd’ (the preferred local term for audience), who
22 attend the dancehall nights for the ‘pleasure of the “vibes”’.¹⁰ Henriques advances a
23 ‘vibration model’ which suggests how affect is expressed and propagated rhythmically
24 through corporeal, material and sociocultural media. His research demonstrates how the use
25 of heavy amplified base heightens the ‘whole-body vibrotactile experience’ generated by
26 amplified musical ‘vibes’.¹¹ This is relevant to beatbox performance, where the human voice
27 imitates the rhythmic beats of machines, where technologies of sound electronically convert,
28 enhance, and amplify the sonic pulse, and where amplified electronic vibrations are the
29 medium of the crowd’s haptic experience.
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36 In this article, I frequently document my sensations and observations as a researcher and
37 member of the crowd. My aim is to deploy a methodology that uses my own embodied
38 responses to acknowledge the energies and affects that passed into and through my body as I
39 encountered BA’s devising processes and the staged musical performance of *FHMM*. This is
40 to follow critical approaches from musicology such as that of Henriques, and also from
41 performance scholarship that tracks affective or embodied responses of audiences.¹² Dugal
42 McKinnon, for example, describes the ‘unnerving and/ or exhilarating’ effect of ‘immersive
43 loudspeaker environments’, where listeners encounter sound ‘in forms of ambiguous
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48 ⁸ Salomé Voegelin, *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound* (New York:
49 Bloomsbury, 2014), 24.

50 ⁹ Konstantinos Thomaidis, *Theatre & Voice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017), 12.

51 ¹⁰ Julian Henriques, ‘The Vibrations of Affect and their Propagation on a Night Out in Kingston’s
52 Dancehall Scene’, *Body & Society* 16:1 (2010), 57-89 (67).

53 ¹¹ Henriques, ‘Vibrations’, 58.

54 ¹² See, for example, Stacey Sewell, ‘Listening Inside Out: Notes on Embodied Analysis’,
55 *Performance Research* 15:3 (2010), 60-65.

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10 provenance, heard in the absence of visual cues.¹³ His observation points to affective
11 response to perceived distortions of image and sound as a form of ‘live’ corporeal
12 registration. ‘Liveness’ therefore can be at least partly reconstituted as a ‘listener-determined’
13 phenomenon that attends to the play of physical and affective impulses and responses in the
14 bodies that stage perception.¹⁴ In adapting this approach I use my verbal interpretations of
15 ‘feeling and sensing’ as a methodological tool that accepts the interrelationality of bodies and
16 things, which enables me to explore affective, rhythmic and temporal sensations, and to
17 address the social relations orchestrated between and experienced by performers and
18 audiences.¹⁵ Exploring my own response to the rhythmic element of beatboxing and the way
19 that its manipulation allows performers to intervene in a listener’s perception and
20 understanding of time has been a crucial element in my critical pursuit of ‘liveness’. As
21 performance scholar Luciano Mariti argues, ‘the ‘temporal “quality”’ particular to
22 performance is drawn from the ‘actor-spectator relationship: a “living” relationship’ that
23 ‘draws upon the “forces” of time’.¹⁶ These are points to which I will return in my
24 explorations of beatboxing (see p. XX), whose temporal and material pulses suggest circuitry
25 that links the human and the electronic. For Conrad Murray, co-founder and artistic director
26 of BA, the ‘liveness’ of performance emerges as moments of interaction with audience
27 members who might otherwise be detached by the deadening effects of the fourth wall in
28 performance and the dominant edict in the majority of theatres for audiences to be quiet and
29 still.¹⁷ Following Murray’s pedagogies and values, beatboxing dramaturgy becomes a live
30 rewiring of theatrical spaces and systems.

31 **Beatbox Academy**

32 Beatbox Academy (BA) based at Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) uses beatboxing as the central
33 artistic practice of its grassroots participatory performance project. It has grown out of a
34 South London context where beatboxing is one of a range of hip hop influenced performance
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47 ¹³ Dugal McKinnon, ‘Broken Magic: The Liveness of Loudspeakers’, in *Experiencing Liveness in*
48 *Contemporary Performance: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. By Matthew Reason and Anja Møller
49 Lindelof (London: Routledge, 2016), 266-271.

50 ¹⁴ McKinnon, ‘Broken Magic’, 269.

51 ¹⁵ Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004),
52 19.

53 ¹⁶ Luciano Mariti, ‘Perception and the Organisation of Time in the Theatre’, in Clelia Falletti (ed.),
54 *Theatre and Cognitive Neuroscience* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 139-156, (142).

55 ¹⁷ Conrad Murray, interview with author, September 20, 2019 London.

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10 practices that includes garage and grime music, the latter a culturally influential form of
11 music making and political critique in the UK. Beatboxing itself is a form of vocal percussion
12 that emerged as part of the hip hop scene in urban centres in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s
13 when proponents started to imitate the sounds of electronic drum machines (beatboxes). It is
14 now practised worldwide by people from younger ages and upwards in every day spaces,
15 such as bedrooms, streets, and schools, as well as in music clubs and in commercialised
16 global championships.¹⁸ In musicology, scholars have located beatboxing within
17 universalistic or evolutionary narratives that regard vocal percussion as a form of human
18 music making, but also point to it as an art form that emerges specifically through histories of
19 black performance that go back to the to the foot stomping and hand clapping ‘ring shout’ of
20 African slaves in American colonies.¹⁹ For communications anthropologist Tok Thompson,
21 beatboxing negotiates ‘a new sort of man-and-machine type of identity, a synthesis between
22 human and computer’.²⁰ As one of a range of vocal practices associated with hip hop,
23 beatboxing remains affiliated with a socially conscious subcultural resistance, and the ‘global
24 hood’, a shifting site of contemporary transnational exchange.²¹ Practitioners often also use
25 or collaborate with spoken word or rap performers, incorporating politicised commentary on
26 issues such as racial and economic inequality. Its often self-taught, cut-and paste DIY
27 aesthetic allows its practitioners to sample and cite other artists’ sounds and rhythms, and by
28 doing this make affiliations that contribute to their development as artists connected with a
29 much wider cultural and industrial ‘circuitry’ that extends across the world, and from which
30 traditional mainstream text-based theatre in the UK has remained largely disconnected.
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39 ¹⁸ See, for example, Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars; What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip*
40 *Hop and Why it Matters* (New York: Basic Books 2008), and Milosz Miszczyński and Adriana Helbig
41 (eds.), *Hip hop at Europe’s Edge: Music, Agency and Social Change* (Bloomington: Indiana
42 University Press, 2017) for critical accounts of commercialized and politically engaged hip hop in
43 local contexts.

44 ¹⁹ See Paul Théberge. ‘Click/ Beat/ Body: Thoughts on the Materiality of Time and Tempo’, in *The*
45 *Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. by Michael Bull and Les Back (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 341-48
46 (344). For more detailed musical genealogies of beatboxing, see Michael Proctor et al, ‘Paralinguistic
47 mechanisms of production in “beatboxing”: A real-time magnetic resonance imaging study’, *The*
48 *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 133 (2013), 1043-1054; and Michael Atherton,
49 ‘Rhythm-Speak: Mnemonic, Language Play or Song’, *Proceedings of the International Conference*
50 *on Music Communication Science*, (Sydney, 2007), 15-18, <http://marcs.uws.edu.au/links/ICoMusic>
(accessed January 20, 2020).

51 ²⁰ Tok Thompson, ‘Beatboxing, Mashups, and Cyborg Identity: Folk Music for the Twenty-First
52 Century’, *Western Folklore*, 70:2 (2011), 171-193 (179).

53 ²¹ Katie Beswick, *Social Housing in Performance: The English Council Estate on and off Stage*
54 (London: Methuen, 2019), 10.

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10 BA uses the distinctive beatboxing style as part of an ensemble process of creation and
11 performance for theatrical spaces, integrating into its collective aesthetic common features of
12 hip hop such as moments where performers' virtuosic skill is spotlighted or where
13 participants contest each other. Unlike more 'spectacular' shows such as the commercial
14 success *Hamilton* (2015), whose vibrant music and choreography refers in depth to hip hop
15 histories, the BA draws on traditions of live hip hop performance as an interactive and
16 participatory form, relating with its audience as a community of which it is a part. Due to its
17 participatory approach, where the BA extends its connections through workshops and
18 outreach both locally and to the places to which it tours, audiences will often include many
19 members to whom the performers are personally known. In the BA shows that have taken
20 place at BAC, many of these audience members are family and friends, some of whom attend
21 to support or collect its participants, fitting this in between other caring responsibilities and
22 obligations at work and in domestic life. The project, which began at BAC in 2008, is
23 advertised as a weekly drop-in group for young people and adults. Murray, who grew up on a
24 nearby social housing estate and joined BAC youth theatre groups as a teenager, spoke to me
25 about his own background, 'I loved listening to music at home, he told me, 'It was the only
26 thing that made me feel good'.²² His remark, understood in the context of the difficult
27 circumstances of his home life, suggests complex relations between pleasure, talent, and
28 opportunity for individuals within disadvantaged economic, social and cultural contexts.²³
29 His inclusive approach to participation in the BA provides a platform of co-creation and
30 collective pleasure in music making, but also supports the development of artistic and
31 economic opportunities for the members of the collective. The devising of *FHMM*, for
32 example, was partly conceived as a means of gaining paid work for its members, some of
33 whom face challenges that include extreme economic precarity, mental health issues and
34 homelessness.

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44 On the evening I visited a BA participatory session at the BAC in London following its
45 Edinburgh run, the group was diverse in terms of age (despite the advertised cap of 30), race,
46 ability and gender, and included participants with autism and learning needs. The session
47 began with participants in a 'circle jam', a base activity, used by Murray in sessions before
48 the introduction of any microphone work. In a jam, one participant starts by vocally
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52 ²² Murray, interview.

53 ²³ Murray's autobiographical performance piece *DenMarked* (2017) portrayed his childhood
54 experience of neglect, violence and racism. See Beswick, *Social Housing*, 103-12.

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10 improvising a rhythmic base line from the foundation sounds of beatboxing, 'Boom-Tee-Cla'
11 that onomatopoeically mimic the sounds of base and snare drums, and hi-hat cymbals.²⁴ This
12 is known as 'pitching', a process that does not happen in relation to the notes specified in the
13 music scales of the classical music tradition, but allows a participant, whether formally
14 trained in music or not, to provide a percussive 'ground' on which other participants vocally
15 weave and layer. As I observed the BA session, participants built on the base pitch, each
16 adding their own sounds, melodies and beats, as well as using 'sampled' fragments and tag
17 lines from well-known hip hop tracks, 'I've got the power' and 'Ready or not'. The sense of
18 'pitch' used in the circle jam is close to the word's meaning as 'hurl' or 'throw', as if the
19 vocal sound sent out is a rhythmic energy for others to catch and to which they attune. As
20 Murray explained, 'Whoever starts that first note or beat, we'll go on that tempo...' In this
21 way, the activity could be understood as a kind of co-composition in time, a continuous
22 interchange of ideas, in which leadership becomes fluid and alternating as in a chamber
23 ensemble or jazz band where information is shared.²⁵ A collective perception seemed to be
24 present, such as that identified by music educators in the shared intentionality of group music
25 making.²⁶ Together the participants seemed to create a moving sculpture of sounds that arose
26 and fell in the room, reaching across and up into its high ceilings, a space that seemed
27 transformed to me by this event of collective sonic imagination. Reflecting on the session
28 afterwards, I thought of the circle jam as a form of artistic heightening of the sonorous
29 interrelations between human beings explored by philosopher Adriana Cavarero, relations
30 embodied and intensified by voices taking a 'vital pleasure' in revealing their own unique
31 textures in communication with others.²⁷

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40 Later in the session, some of the young participants continued to improvise, now using
41 microphones and electronic sound amplification to experiment with highly energised
42 rhythmic clicks, riffs and deep guttural machine-like sounds. Their performance became both
43 intensely concentrated, and gloriously hedonistic, as they wound each other up to beatbox
44 with ever more intensity, volume and speed. At this point, the experiences of pleasure and
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49 ²⁴ For further description see Maddy Costa, 'Backpages 29:4', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 29:4
(2019), 487-501.

50 ²⁵ See J. Murphy McCaleb, *Embodied Knowledge in Ensemble Performance* (Farnham: Ashgate,
51 2014), 1-2.

52 ²⁶ Sebastian Kirschner and Michael Tomasello, 'Joint music making promotes prosocial behaviour',
53 *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 31:1 (2010), 354-364.

54 ²⁷ Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 4-5.

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10 enhanced spatial awareness that I had experienced in hearing the circle jam were nuanced
11 with sensations that were both compelling and disorientating. The addition of microphones
12 had allowed voices to be thrown further, altering the relations of the performers with their
13 own voice, and with me the witness and listener. Standing with the performers behind me, I
14 experienced a sense of spatial distortion as the sounds bombarded me from the speakers
15 angled downwards in front of me, causing my own body to vibrate, and eliciting there a
16 rhythmic response in spite of the somewhat uncanny sensation. Later, I realised I had been
17 experiencing what is known in biomusicology as ‘entrainment’ – where auditory input
18 carrying rhythmic stimulus results in involuntary movements in the body of the listener.²⁸
19 Drawn in by the young performers’ concentrated and spontaneous beats, I had felt suspended
20 in time, magnetised, partly at the mercy of their astonishing vocal play. This, and the
21 impression given by the buzzing, sparking and fizzing of the beatboxing sounds of something
22 mechanical or electronic had given me the uncanny sensation that something non-human
23 were at play. The addition of the microphones had not diminished my pleasure but had
24 changed its character, wiring in my body rhythmically, charging it with the vibes coursing
25 with the beatboxers’ electronically amplified sounds. After staying to chat with the
26 performers, I left the session with a warm, uplifted feeling of social contact, with the energy
27 of the amplified beats still ringing in my ears. My curiosity had been stirred by the BA’s
28 joyful, self-extending and sociable practice, and its ability to get under my skin, making a
29 live and lingering ‘vibrotactile experience’, that affected both my body and mind.
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39 **‘Sonic trickery’ / rhythmic resonance**

40 The participatory processes of BA described above, *draw out* sound and rhythm from
41 performers’ bodies, establishing embodied, integrated relations through collaborative musical
42 composition, and *draw in* listeners through live physical and affective experiences of musical
43 listening. I turn in this section to a consideration of how beatboxing also produces liveness
44 through processes that provoke ideas of bodily transgression, intervention or disturbance,
45 which become triggers for affective response. This article explores the sense, following
46 Haraway, in which beatbox performance might form a kind of ‘cyborgian circuitry’, a
47 knitting together of human and machine that is both ‘potent and taboo’, a kind of ‘rejoicing’
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52 ²⁸ See Patrick Vuilleumier and Wiebke Trost, ‘Music and emotions: from enchantment to
53 entrainment’, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1337 (2015), 212-222 (2016).
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10 in 'illegitimate fusion'.²⁹ The term 'cyborgian', used from the 1960s according to the OED,
11 refers to a person whose capacities are 'extended beyond normal human limitations by a
12 machine or other external agency that modifies the body's functioning'. Alternatively, a
13 cyborg is 'an integrated man-machine system'.³⁰ It follows that in order to qualify as
14 cyborgian, the performative practice of beatboxing must involve the physical *integration* of
15 human and machine, or an *extension* of bodily capacities. Although Dan Stowell and Mark D.
16 Plumbley's characterise beatboxing as an art of 'illusion', 'impersonation' and 'imitation', it
17 is clear from their fascinating elucidation of vocal percussion techniques that the imaginative
18 motor ignition in beatboxing of sonic, electronic and rhythmic energy expands the narrow
19 and normative range of sound produced by humans that serve normal language-based
20 vocalisations.³¹ In fact, as with other forms of vocal training, the vocal techniques that
21 beatboxing demands can distinctively alter human anatomy.³² Even breathing is modified:
22 performers, who can sometimes produce beats and melodic sounds simultaneously, learn to
23 produce non-verbal sounds on in-breaths, making inhaled sounds such as the 'inward clap
24 snare, enabling a continuous flow of sounds and beats'.³³ Such practices intervene in the
25 respiratory mechanism, enhancing the potency and strangeness of performers, their bodies to
26 some extent 'synched' through creative imitation to electronic rather than 'natural' or
27 'human' sounds and rhythms.

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35 It is arguably in its key rhythmic dimension where the integration in beatboxing of wo/man
36 and machine is most potent. For Raymond Williams, whose scholarship is alive to the
37 structures of feelings in lived encounters, 'rhythm is a way of transmitting a description of
38 experience, in such a way that the experience is re-created in the person receiving it'. This is
39 'more than metaphor', but a 'physical experience as real as any other' that is effected 'on the
40 blood, on the breathing, on the physical patterns of the brain'.³⁴ Williams' remarks, which in
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45 ²⁹ Haraway, 57.

46 ³⁰ "cyborg, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019,
47 www.oed.com/view/Entry/46487 (accessed November 25, 2019).

48 ³¹ Dan Stowell and Mark D. Plumbley, 'Characteristics of the Beatboxing Vocal Style', Centre for
49 Digital Music, QMUL, 1-4 (1), February 2008, <http://c4dm.eecs.qmul.ac.uk/papers/2008/Stowell08-beatboxvocalstyle-C4DM-TR-08-01.pdf>, (accessed October 31, 2019).

50 ³² Andrew Saphthavee, 'Functional Endoscopic Analysis of Beatbox Performers', *Journal of Voice*
51 28:3 (2014), 328-331.

52 ³³ Stowell and Plumbley, 'Characteristics', 2.

53 ³⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2011) [1961], 40-43.

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10 some ways anticipate neuroscientific understanding that has developed since the 1990s,³⁵ are
11 made as part of his wider discussion of the ‘vital descriptive effort’ made in human
12 communication, and the ‘powerful means’ that artists possess of achieving it. In this light, the
13 simulation by beatboxers through onomatopoeic performance of electronically generated
14 rhythmic beats and other sounds, suggests a material connection between human and ‘non-
15 human’ actors that is powerfully physically and artistically shared in performance with the
16 bodies of other humans. Rather than producing the deadening expressionlessness and
17 automated obedience however that has sometimes been associated with ‘inhuman’ digital or
18 metronomic beats,³⁶ beatboxing drives an expressiveness that is inevitably de-regularised and
19 enhanced artistically by the human body. In beatboxing sounds and rhythms are accelerated
20 and decelerated, temporarily paused, or ‘mixed’ with sounds of back beat cutting and record
21 scratching. These sounds refer to a repertoire of techniques resonating with many contexts
22 where sound technologies have been manipulated – such as at the outdoor dancehalls
23 described by Henriques where MCs use the ‘rewind’ or ‘pull up’- to build affective impact in
24 the crowd.³⁷ Such techniques can be considered as vocal and auditory versions of the ‘visible
25 cuts, pauses and blackouts’ that according to Mariti generate a felt sense of dynamicity and
26 duration in theatre, and which heighten excitement and pleasurable tension.³⁸ These rhythmic
27 and sonic arts manipulate the crowd’s sense of suspension, and elicit embodied and affective
28 response. For Mariti, the process of “‘embodied simulation’” is not ‘automatic’ but ‘resonant’
29 behaviour’, and a stimulation of “‘dramaturgical competence” through “body-to-body”
30 contact’.³⁹ Applied to hip hop crowds, the animation and pleasure experienced through
31 beatboxing’s rhythmic manipulation is a resonance of the performers’ joy and embrace of the
32 beat that is felt in auditory and haptic modes. I am arguing here that the BA performers, in
33 their hedonistic play, pass sounds, sensations and bodily energies into theatre space, creating
34 social relations that are orchestrated according to the rhythms of bodies which are themselves
35 inspired by and resonating with the embodied echoes and energies of machines.

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³⁵ See Falletti, *Theatre and Cognitive*, 7.

³⁶ Paul Théberge, ‘Click / Beat / Body’, p.346.

³⁷ Henriques, ‘Vibrations’, 64.

³⁸ Mariti, ‘Perception’, 146.

³⁹ Mariti, ‘Perception’, 143. Mariti draws on Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Action and Emotions* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2008).

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10 As I hope will be becoming clear, beatboxing derives some of its potency from its capacity to
11 perform sound in ways that challenge understandings of human ontology and bodily
12 mechanisms. Further, its use of microphones brings into play the relations between the visible
13 and auditory in our understanding of the human subject. Brandon Labelle argues that '*The*
14 *mouth functions to figure and sustain the body as a subject, a subject within a network of*
15 *relations.*' (emphasis original).⁴⁰ Whereas in conventional vocal performance the mouth
16 tends to remain clearly visible as the source of vocal sound, in beatboxing, the microphone is
17 often held so close to the mouth as to obscure it, semi-covered by the hands in order to
18 produce a bassier effect. To the witness like me, a habitual theatre-goer relatively unversed in
19 beatboxing practice, the technique can be disorientating, enhancing a sensation that the vocal
20 sound produced, in its unfamiliar character and mediation, is not entirely of the body. Such
21 perceived distortions, as cultural theorists have discussed with reference to the acousmatic
22 voice, may elicit powerful affective responses related to specific cultural and religious
23 schema.⁴¹ Mladen Dolar points out, for example, that in many languages the word for
24 'breath' is etymologically linked to that for spirit, the voice apparently embodying 'the flesh
25 of the soul'.⁴² In its intimate 'close-mic' technique, beatboxing disturbs the religious and
26 cultural sense of the soulful human interior. At times in beatboxing, the mouth is bypassed all
27 together, the microphone positioned near the nose or throat, amplifying what Murray calls the
28 'sub sounds' of performers' bodies. What becomes audible can be deeply unfamiliar –
29 whirring, clicking or buzzing sounds that suggest a fleshly engineering that is digital,
30 electronic and mechanical rather than divine, and far from the ethereal sounds of chants and
31 psalms which have traditionally suggested spiritual dimensions in religious vocalisation. In
32 beatboxing, performers take delight in a material- technological- human loop, simulating
33 such tympanic and rhythmic properties that have elicited censorious responses in religious
34 contexts and cultural discourse.⁴³ My argument in this article is not that BA avoided the still
35 powerful cultural schema that associate through the voice the human interior with a God-
36 given soul, but rather that through their vocal dexterity they played with such schema in ways
37 that elicited, manipulated and heightened affective responses. As I will explore in the
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48 ⁴⁰ Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary*
49 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2.

50 ⁴¹ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 23;
51 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press,
52 1999), 24.

53 ⁴² Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (London: MIT Press, 2006), 71.

54 ⁴³ See John Potter, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University
55 Press, 1998), 17.

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10 following sections, the ability to ‘touch’ the audience both physiologically and affectively in
11 *FHMM* as part of the monster’s story led to felt and ambiguous moments of live creation and
12 otherness themselves infused with cyborgian practices that left traces in the bodies of
13 audience members. Where attitudes to the other are modelled by the young performers, and
14 where audiences participate through call-and-response and bodily movement, a pleasure in
15 and embrace of otherness became possible.

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21 ***FHMM*: ‘It’s alive’.**

22 I now turn ~~(This section of this article turns~~ to BA’s live performance of *FHMM* to explore
23 how the performers deployed vocal technique to tell the story of the monster’s creation and to
24 make a social commentary, played out live in my own embodied responses. BA’s starting
25 point, *Frankenstein*, imagines the consequences of scientific exploration into the nature and
26 source of electricity, a substance, like sound, that points to the continuities between the
27 biologically human and physical world that humans inhabit. Written when Shelley was
28 eighteen, in the wake of electrical experimentation on body parts in the early nineteenth
29 century by Luigi Galvani, it tells the story of a creature assembled from dead matter and
30 brought to life by the novel’s protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, by passing electricity through
31 it. The novel’s ‘monster’ (as Shelley’s ‘creature’ has come to be popularly known) was
32 excluded by Donna Haraway from a proudly hybrid cyborgian identity by its own desire for
33 completion in conjugal union. The novel itself however has been seen as a channel for
34 cultural anxieties, hopes and fears regarding acts of creation and technological change, ‘a
35 versatile frame for interpreting our relation with technology’, and a cyborgian myth that seems
36 ever more relevant as science advances.⁴⁴ ~~Recently~~ it inspired, ~~for example~~, Jeanette
37 Winterson’s *Frankissstein* (2019), which addresseds contemporary concerns around gender
38 fluidity and Artificial Intelligence. BA’s version belongs to the many recyclings of the novel
39 as a ‘social metaphor’;⁴⁵ the collective used its characters and themes as a jumping off point
40 for sequences that deal with social realities immediately relevant to their own lives. On the
41 occasions I saw the show, the young performers conformed to a familiar ‘street’ aesthetic,
42 positioned around a Gothically darkened set, sitting or leaning on huge amplifier boxes.
43 Dressed in the hoodie gear preferred by many people for its comfort and convenience but
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52 ⁴⁴ Jon Turney, *Frankenstein’s Footsteps: Science, Genetics and Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale
53 University Press, 1998), 2.

54 ⁴⁵ Lester D. Friedman and Allison B. Kavey, *Monstrous Progeny* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2016), 2.

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10 which ~~at the time of the show had come to be viewed by some as has in recent years become~~
11 'a highly politicised and racialised item of apparel', ⁴⁶ *FHMM* ~~explored the show would~~
12 ~~explore~~ the damaging consequences of social stigmatisation. By combining the aesthetics of
13 hip hop culture and Gothic excess through manipulations of sound, light and darkness, it
14 would enable the audience to undergo felt experiences of creation, othering and being
15 together. As I will discuss in what follows, the thrills created by Beatbox Academy ultimately
16 dispelled the sense of social threat implied in its source material, encouraging an enlightened
17 und open sociality between all audience members.

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22 Approaching liveness here, as I described above in the introductory section, as the play of
23 physical and affective impulses and responses in the bodies that stage perception, I want now
24 to track a sequence in *FHMM* which sent pulses and shivers through my body. In this part of
25 the show where the BA performers staged the monster's creation in a liminal space of
26 acousmatic sound, ~~sending pulses and shivers through my body.~~⁴⁷ ~~The sequence deployed~~
27 ~~many of the techniques described above to work a 'crowd', manipulating the beats and~~
28 ~~elements of beatbox and other hip hop practices.~~ Immediately preceding this creation
29 sequence, a fast-paced multivocal track, announced by the performer known as Aminita, 'It's
30 a rave. I'm serious!', had quickened my pulse, and deployed many of the techniques
31 identified by Henriques to work a 'crowd'. With other members of the audience, my body
32 was rhythmically and affectively stimulated by a combination of whipped up, accelerating
33 beats, layered melodies and multiple sonic effects. The speed threatened to career out of
34 control, generating a frenzied euphoria, and prompting the majority of audience members
35 including me to stand and dance. At the climax, I joined in the huge cheer from the excited
36 crowd. After our exertions, the performers' loudly amplified heaving breaths began to slow,
37 and became more deliberate, a significant change in pace and volume focussing my attention
38 back onto the stage and story. I became aware of a new amplified sound, that of a soft thud,
39 the familiar upbeat and downbeat rhythm recognisable as that of the human heart. The sound
40 drew me in, the rhythmic beat fundamental to human life, giving me a sense of suspension in
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50 ⁴⁶ David Lammy, 'Why There's Nothing Scary About a Black Man in a Hoodie', *The Guardian*,
51 February 13, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/13/david-lammy-on-why-theres-nothing-scary-about-a-black-man-in-a-hoodie> (accessed March 14, 2020).

52 ⁴⁷ My description tracks my experience and recording of the show performed by Aminita, Glitch,
53 WIZ-RD, Native, ABH and Grove at the Traverse, August 6, 2019.

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10 time. I felt my own bodily rhythms begin to synchronise with that of the performers'
11 amplified breathing, the simulated sonic heartbeat heightening my own.
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14 As the auditorium and stage darkened, Aminita began a spoken narrative voiceover, her
15 rhythmic words riding the beat, 'From the mouth to the tongue to the teeth to the lungs the air
16 comes in (*sound of performers inhaling*), and makes you one with your surroundings.
17 Grounding your soul.' At this point, I realised the story had reached the critical moment, the
18 lyrics drawing attention to the moment of creation as well as to my own bodily processes. My
19 pulse quickened again. 'The air comes in (*performers inhaling*)...and makes you born again.
20 Breathe out (*performers exhaling*).' I too followed her instructions, as if Aminita was
21 including me in her address to 'you'. 'Breath is life', her voiceover continued, 'Death is its
22 absence...'. By now, the performers were dispersed around the stage, their faces and bodies
23 for the most part barely moving and hidden in the gloom. Only the sound of their amplified
24 voices animated the auditorium. Made aware of the mortal and ethical stakes of the moment,
25 I felt a rapt attention: 'Ideas strangle you like a boa constrictor, until the guilt of potential
26 repercussions turns you lifeless and blue and limp. (*Faster*) 'It's almost like falling in love
27 again. (*Very fast*) It's like falling in love with the chemical reaction within the synapses
28 within your brain and the adrenaline —' Here, a huge intake of breath by the other performers
29 cut the voiceover off. (*Silence*). Held on an in-breath, I waited, aware that the moment of
30 creation was imminent. (*An exhalation*). And then, low in the mix, the steady beeping of a
31 hospital life support monitor, a sign of a fragile life, accompanied by a soft, building
32 breathing. From this came a layered soundscape, a deep pulsing machine-like base- line
33 pitched low, textured with high hat 'tees', steady clicks, and vocalised melodies, arising in a
34 slow-tempo spine-tingling multi-voiced harmony of voices. To my enchanted ear, a complex,
35 living organism appeared to be moving as a pulsing sonic entity, a new being blending the
36 textures of synthesised and amplified sound and held in a space and time by the breathing and
37 beating hearts of my own body and the bodies of audience members around me. A lovely,
38 haunting lyrical melody emerged, continuing to tell the story of the genesis, 'Breathing.
39 Feeling. Seeing is believing. Breathing (*Beat*). It's alive.' The last syllable of this melody fell
40 deeply, diving down to the low base that is associated in the semiotics of sound with non-
41 human being, and vibrating uncannily in me. Faint whirrings and wheezings were also
42 audible in the rhythmic apparatus emerging from the sonic space of the auditorium, and
43 extended in time by the reverberation added at the sound desk. A shiver ran through me, a
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10 moment of *frisson*, accompanied by the sense that this new being, collectively experienced,
11 was not fully human, despite the human breath that sustained it.⁴⁸
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14 The moment of birthing however, experienced in my body and those of others present, had
15 now also become a moment of othering. Not a 'he', 'she' or 'they' had been created, but an
16 'it', alien, separate and unknown. For Nicholas Ridout, the darkness of the theatre and
17 isolation of performer and audience member facilitates a process of 'mutual becoming-for-
18 others'.⁴⁹ A tremor in the body of the audience answers the vibration created in theatre by the
19 'shudder' of the actor's body as it becomes something to be seen by another, or a represented
20 object. In *FHMM*, the bodies of the performers were in this sequence shrouded in darkness as
21 they retreated upstage into the shadows. Through their vocalic projection, and in a shared
22 physiological and imaginative projection, the 'vocalic body' of the monster came into
23 being.⁵⁰ Breathing, the conjured monster was felt as human, but never solidified, a fleeting
24 ambivalent presence existing 'as a shifting property in the theatre air'.⁵¹ Its 'body', like those
25 of the performers, remained unseen, throwing more emphasis onto the synchronised
26 perceptions that took place as it came into being in the imaginations and physiological
27 experiences of audience members. Though it could be felt partly inside and partly outside of
28 all of the bodies present, this presence consisted in sounds that resonated with the powers of
29 machines. If 'it' was other, it was born of our bodies, in conjunction with technologies that
30 integrate with and extend the human beyond its normal capacities. In this case the 'shudder'
31 of 'becoming-for-others' did not materialise or reify a body visually, but was felt by bodies
32 as a cyborgian event, collectively and physiologically staged, and made fleetingly audible by
33 the fusion of vocal apparatus with the wires, plastics and metals of technical equipment.
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41 If the creation of the monster, collectively breathed into life, raises questions regarding the
42 responsibilities of society towards its creations, *FHMM* as a whole made an implicit analogy
43 between the experience of othering that the monster undergoes in the novel and those which
44 occur in contemporary society. Moving on from the scene of creation, the performers
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48 ⁴⁸ For an account of the biological effects of musical *frisson* see Luke Harrison and Psyche Loui, 'Thrills,
49 chills, frissons and skin orgasms: toward an integrative model of transcendent psychophysical
50 experiences in music', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5 (2014), 1-6 (5).

51 ⁴⁹ Nicholas Ridout, 'Welcome to the Vibratorium', *The Sense and Society* 3:2 (2008), 221-232 (226).

52 ⁵⁰ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 36.

53 ⁵¹ Ella Finer, 'Strange objects/ strange properties: Female audibility and the acoustic stage prop',
54 *Voice Studies: Critical approaches to process, performance and experience*, ed. by Konstantinos
55 Thomaidis and Ben Macpherson (London: Routledge, 2015), p.178.

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10 explored the violent processes of objectification using the bright lights of theatre. Staging the
11 struggle between creator and monster through the conventions of a Beatbox battle in the next
12 sequence, the monster was visually represented by the bodies of the young performers as they
13 pretended to be a hideously deformed four-headed creature. Brightly illuminated, the
14 performers' faces and mouths, in this sequence clearly visible, gurned in a parody of a crude
15 and jokey act of representation. In one song sequence, 'Hashtag hideous', the performers
16 turned a stage lamp on the audience, cheekily addressing the kind of spiteful comments found
17 on social media at individuals exposed to and good humouredly shuddering in its objectifying
18 glare. At other moments in the narrative, the playful creators doubled as shadowy 'othered'
19 bodies, fleetingly present in their vocal projection, but not fully visible. As the monster's
20 story progressed, a figure dimly materialised in the hooded shape of a young man, whose
21 problems, it became apparent, were symptomatic of an alienation caused by social failures.
22 Here, the collective made social commentary through an identification of the young man and
23 the monster, both alone and spurned by their creators in an indifferent world. In his cloak of
24 darkness, and singing a low, sad, single melody, this was a deeply empathetic figure. In other
25 numbers, devised from the performers' own experiences, the 'critical voice' bell hooks hears
26 in rap music was apparent, integrating the 'explaining, demanding, urging' voices of the
27 young performers as they conveyed their social critique in rap and spoken word sequences.⁵²
28 Overall, *FHMM* provided a commentary on the *making of* and *being* a monster in the light of
29 contemporary issues and processes of social disconnection, othering and exclusion, and on
30 the disavowal by society of responsibility for its offspring.
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40 **A cyborgian social**

41 The moment of auditory hallucination and haunting beauty that I described above (p. XX) of
42 the monster's creation was for me alive with both imaginative possibility and affective
43 charge. Infused with the 'tummy-lurching', 'breath taking' sense of thrill, as documented in
44 the reviews I quoted above, the shiver it produced in me contrasted with the warmth, energy
45 and sense of inclusivity generated by the participatory gig-theatre style framing of *FHMM* to
46 which I turn to in this final section. This suggested a circulation of energies and model of
47 being with others that has wider implications for the 'integrated circuitry' of British theatre.
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52 ⁵² bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 27.

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11 Rather than observing the familiar convention at the professional theatre that a play starts
12 without introduction or preamble, the performance of *FHMM* was topped and tailed by
13 brightly lit interactive sessions led by Murray in the role of MC. In these sessions, Murray
14 framed the show as an ongoing participatory project of which the audience that night was a
15 part, making clear that the 'relaxed' behaviour (now adopted by BAC for all its shows) was
16 more than acceptable. Chatting and dancing, making photos or videos on phones, moving
17 around the auditorium: all were welcome forms of behaviour and engagement. Such
18 relaxations of theatre etiquette, Murray told me in my interview with him, were part of the
19 BA's ethos of inclusivity, its acknowledgement that to remain alive, theatre must adapt to
20 diverse needs and expectations of audience members.⁵³ At the Traverse, before *FHMM*
21 began, some opening numbers had been presented with participants from Edinburgh's Leith
22 Academy, with whom BA members had worked prior to the run in the Traverse. This
23 opening section had been enthusiastically received by audience members. Convening the
24 final section as if it were one big BA participatory session, Murray divided the whole
25 audience into groups, inviting us to try out beatboxing vocal technique in a 'call and
26 response' session. This antiphonal format belongs to the long-practised tradition descended
27 from African vocal traditions, and resonates through African American musical genres from
28 gospel to hip-hop.⁵⁴ For musicologist Michael Dowdy, it plays an important role in smaller
29 hip hop venues in jointly producing a space of interactive engagement in which dominant
30 cultural values are contested.⁵⁵ Making the basic beatboxing sounds, 'Boom-Tee-Cla', the
31 majority of audience members responded together to Murray's calls, feeling each other's
32 embodied presence through the sounds of bodies massed and resonating together. This was a
33 chance also to explore vocally the space of the auditorium, and the relations it orchestrated
34 with others, especially with the slight delay in the sound as it bounced off surfaces and was
35 affected by the amplification system. To me, this felt like a much larger and more complex
36 version of the tuning in that I had witnessed during the circle jam when I visited BA in
37 Battersea.
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49 ⁵³ Murray in [Maggie Inchley](#), 'Why are we doing this and who is it for?': Youth theatre conversations
50 with Liz Moreton and Conrad Murray at Battersea Arts Centre', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, [30:3](#)
51 (2020), 390-397 (393) (forthcoming).

52 ⁵⁴ William Eric Perkins (ed), 'The Rap Attack: Introduction', in *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on*
53 *Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1996), 1-48.

54 ⁵⁵ Michael Dowdy, 'Live Hip Hop, Collective Agency, and "Acting in Concert"', *Popular Music and*
55 *Society*, 30:1 (2007), 75-91 (75).

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In the beatbox demo that followed, the BA performers played with the form, visibly enjoying themselves, as Murray worked with them to build up and quicken the textures of sounds, stopping and starting the performance abruptly, both amazing us with a display of virtuosity, and physiologically building our experiences of suspense and excitement again through rhythmic play. In these sections, the young performers' hoodies read as a team strip, rather than a sign of delinquency, suggesting a sense of belonging and shared identity. As the energy ramped up, audience members moved and swayed together, some of them using the distinctive chopping, crisscrossing hand gestures that often accompany a hip hop beat. I turned to look, smile at and laugh with people on either side of me, our bodies animated with a dynamic cultural practice whose presence has increased that has in recent years been becoming gradually more present in British theatre auditoria since the late 2010s. It felt as if there was a huge sea of people, transformed from a listening audience, to a 'crowd' sensing, moving and dancing together. We were a circuit where the performers and audience were 're-affecting' each other with the joy that is associated with a spontaneous urge for dancing.⁵⁶ As one critic put it, 'Traverse 1 becomes a rave'.⁵⁷

The palpable circulation of rhythmical energies through vocal percussion, as with other musical performance, 'touches' and opens the listener both to non-normative and to collective, joyful experiences. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), Sara Ahmed returns to Descartes in thinking through the relationships between bodily sensations, emotion and judgement. Ahmed seeks to understand the motions of affect *culturally*, relating the way that affect operates on the surfaces of bodies to produce affective norms that enforce social structures such as inclusion and exclusion. Though the majority of her book deals with the circulation of negative affects such as shame and hatred, she writes briefly on pleasure, arguing that 'queer pleasure' has traditionally been outside existing heteronormative 'circuits of exchange'. 'When bodies touch', she argues, 'and give pleasure to bodies that have been barred from contact, then those bodies are reshaped'.⁵⁸ As a practice that establishes a circuit of exchange that shapes bodies with hip hop beats rather than language-based sound and text-based dialogue, beatboxing transgresses the conventions and boundaries with which contact

⁵⁶ See Ana Pais, 'Re-Affecting the Stage: Affective Resonance as the Function of the Audience', *Humanities* 5:79 (2016); and Vuilleumier and Trost, 216.

⁵⁷ Aisling McGuire, 'Frankenstein: How to Make a Monster', August 7, 2019, <https://theweereview.com/review/frankenstein-how-to-make-a-monster/> (accessed 18th March 2020).

⁵⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 165.

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10 with others has been policed by the dominant bourgeois norms of British theatre. The
11 conviviality that the BA generates overrides the conventions of hushed and still behaviour of
12 audience members, each politely confined to a single seat, and arranged according to price of
13 purchase. Its sonic, vibrational and rhythmic touch circulates a sort of 'queer pleasure'.
14 Ahmed teases out the way that touch is related to our sense of the other who touches: 'To be
15 touched in a certain way,' she argues in an encounter with another which may involve 'a
16 reading not only of that encounter, *but of the other that is encountered as having certain*
17 *characteristics*' (original emphasis). The affective responses generated in encounters with
18 others, for Ahmed are thus 'readings' that 'not only create the borders between selves and
19 others, but also "give" others meaning and value'.⁵⁹

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24 Taking a cue from Ahmed then, the rhythmic touch of music, the impulse to move it creates,
25 and the encounters it produces between friends and strangers can help to unfix the
26 conventional ideas it is possible to make of others, especially when we perceive them as
27 different from ourselves. This argument finds support in the musicology of rhythm, where
28 researchers have found evidence that the physiological stimulus of rhythmic sound affects the
29 ways in which people understand and relate to each other.⁶⁰ For me, the bodily motion and
30 pleasure propagated by the BA collective through their musical practice communed bodies
31 normally managed by the atomising dynamics that have tended to operate in British theatre.
32 Their electrifying, playful and dexterous modes of performance radically altered the sonic
33 and haptic textures of the auditorium, charging audiences with energy that coursed through
34 bodies, and convened the 'crowd' into what Henriques terms a '*collective subject*' (emphasis
35 original), in which the 'epidermal envelope' of individual subjectivity is breached and
36 replaced by an 'open, fluid and multiple whole'.⁶¹ While the BA moved with us as this
37 resuscitated collective body, revived and joyful, connecting its members more intensely
38 and more joyfully, they also established material and affective lines of connection with non-
39 human substances and digital mechanisms, and wired into wider circulations of affect and
40 ideas.
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51 ⁵⁹ Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 28.

52 ⁶⁰ See Bronwyn Tarr, et al, 'Music and social bonding: "self-other" merging and neurohormonal
53 mechanisms', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5 (2014), 1-10.

54 ⁶¹ Henriques, 'Vibrations', 67.
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10 To conclude by returning to Haraway, she defines and explores ‘social reality’ as ‘lived
11 social relations’. Her manifesto recommends a pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and
12 bringing together those who are not related to each other in ‘fission impossible’.⁶² It has been
13 my argument here that *FHMM* brought about such a shift in social relations in audience
14 members on both occasions that I attended the show. Both the virtuosity and adept
15 dramaturgy of *FHMM* demonstrated the collective’s cultural knowledge and skill, placing its
16 young members in a position of critical commentators, with powers to change perceptions
17 and activate alternative ways of being together. As Haraway puts it, ‘taking responsibility for
18 the social task of reconstructing the boundaries of everyday life’ means embracing ‘the
19 skilful task’ of doing this ‘in partial connection with others, in communication with all our
20 parts’.⁶³ BA’s young performers in this way acted as agents with potential to transform
21 systems, spaces and institutions, and the sociocultural norms that operate in them, their work
22 offering to loop the audience into a circuit powered with pleasure and energy. The *cyborgian*
23 *social* generated by BA of which I was a part was an intense experience, and its residues of
24 joy were powerful for me. In the psychophysiology of music, scientists find it is possible to
25 develop a ‘dopaminergic anticipation’ for the return of musical pleasure.⁶⁴ For Henriques,
26 the pleasure of the ‘vibes’ is ‘tangible, all-consuming and contagious’.⁶⁵ As I have argued,
27 through embodied sharing of beatboxing and hip hop practices, audience members become a
28 ‘crowd’. In an asynchronous sense this crowd is part of an integrated circuit that extends not
29 only to their immediate neighbours in the theatre auditorium, but out beyond to people in
30 bedrooms, schools, streets and sites where beatboxing and other hip-hop practices are
31 frequently practiced, and which loops theatre audiences into the practices of protest and
32 critique, and discourses of injustice that preoccupy contemporary grime and hip hop
33 performers. Though theatre scholars are often cautious in claiming that what happens in
34 theatre produces no more than a temporary glitch in social relations, I, for one, am eager that
35 an increasingly ‘monsterised’ theatre will continue to be inclusive of these integrating,
36 inclusive and extending practices.
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51 ⁶² Haraway, *Cyborg*, 5-16.

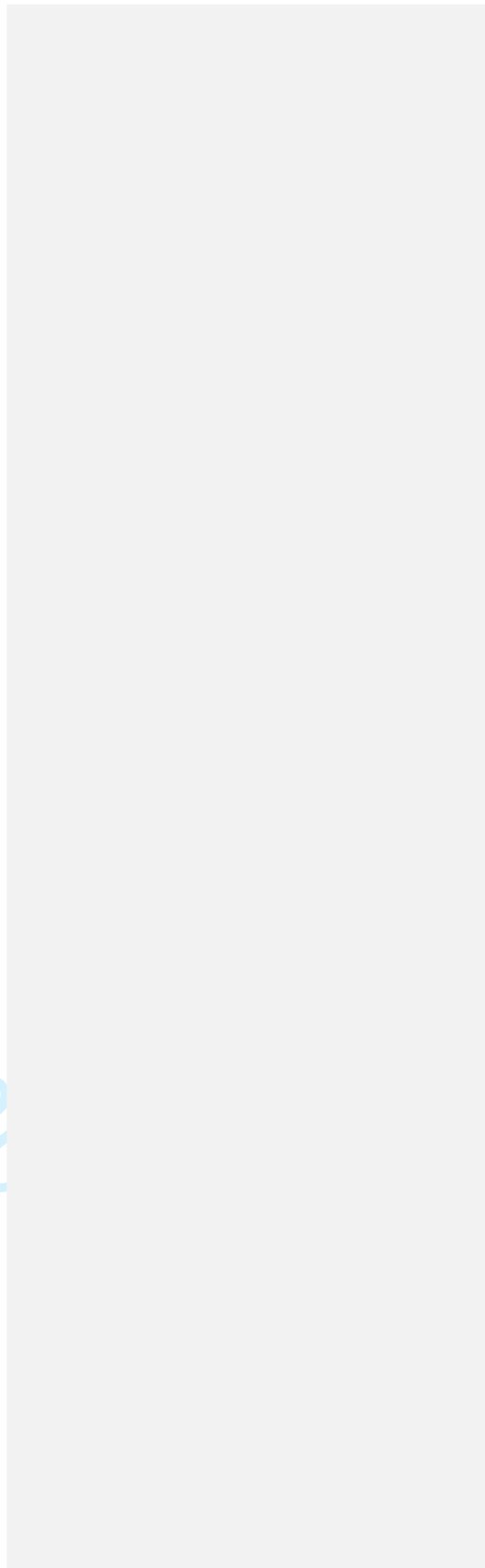
52 ⁶³ Haraway, *Cyborg*, 67.

53 ⁶⁴ Harrison and Loui, ‘Thrills’, 5.

54 ⁶⁵ Henriques, ‘Vibrations’, 67.

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For Peer Review Only



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30 (2015), 272-287. Inchley is Principal Investigator of the AHRC funded practice-based
31 research project, The Verbatim Formula, which explores listening, representation and self-
32 representation in structures and systems of education and social care with care-experienced
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47 which explores listening and representation in systems of education and social care with care-
48 experienced young people. <http://www.theverbatimformula.org.uk>.

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10 **“‘It’s Alive’’: Towards a Monsterized Theatre with Beatbox Academy’s *Frankenstein:***
11 ***How to Make a Monster* (2018 -)’**
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15 Electrifying gig. Thrilling theatre. Tongue-twisting vocal gymnastics. Mary Shelley’s
16 original, re-imagined with songs, soundscapes and sonic trickery. Experience the power of
17 the human voice breathing life into monsters all around us. *Frankenstein* will leave you
18 asking: who are the monsters we fear? Who created them? And how the hell did they just do
19 that with their voices?!f
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23 Description, Edinburgh Fringe Online Programme, 2019. ¹
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27 Following successful runs at Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) in London in 2018 and 2019,
28 *Frankenstein: How to Make a Monster (FHMM)* was performed in the Traverse Theatre in
29 the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2019 by a diverse collective of young people from Beatbox
30 Academy (BA). As an audience member, the atmosphere created by this award-winning hip
31 hop version of Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein* (1818), which had been devised as part of
32 the BA participatory project at BAC, felt electrifying.² The show, which used beatboxing
33 blended with other vocal practices such as rap, MC-ing and melodic singing, engaged with
34 serious subject matter, and unleashed feelings of admiration, goodwill and pleasure. After the
35 performance, I observed people leaving the auditorium energised and excited, experiencing a
36 wave of affect that was carried into on-line reviews. One audience member noted the
37 ‘infectious energy’ and ‘endless generosity’ of the performers, another commented how the
38 show ‘burst with youthful energy’, and on its galvanising effects: ‘at the end of our show the
39 audience literally all jumped up at once’. It was as if the ‘monsters’ identified by the young
40 performers in their adaption of the novel, social ills that included acts of irresponsible
41 creation, cultural cruelty and othering, were temporarily vanquished. Professional reviewers
42 were awestruck by the ‘staggering’ talent and ‘gorgeous’ singing of the BA collective,
43 showering the award-winning show with five-star reviews. Words such as ‘empowerment’,
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51 ¹ Edfringe Online Programme, [https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/frankenstein-how-to-make-a-](https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/frankenstein-how-to-make-a-monster)
52 [monster](https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/frankenstein-how-to-make-a-monster) (accessed December 27, 2019).

53 ² *FHMM* won Off-West and Total Theatre Awards in 2019, and was a British Council showcase in the
54 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. It was co-directed by Conrad Murray and David Cumming.
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10 'confidence' and 'joy' studded the warm, heartfelt responses. Many referred to a physical,
11 almost visceral response, to alterations in bodily mechanisms, 'This is an old story made
12 electrically alive. Let it take your breath away'. It will 'make your tummy lurch'.³ Reading
13 the reviews a sense of animation emerges of a collective audience body, shocked and
14 electrified by currents of surprise and pleasure, a battery of voices buzzing long enough to
15 document their experiences of thrill, excitement and joy.
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19 Examining the practices and processes deployed by the young performers of the BA
20 collective in the making of *FHMM*, this article explores the capacity of beatboxing to
21 generate rhythmic connections between bodies and materials, creating the sense of
22 'electrification', 'liveness' and 'aliveness' reflected in the above responses, and contributing
23 to the new meanings generated by the adaptation of an old story. In seeking to respond to the
24 growing prevalence of 'gig' forms in British theatre that combine theatrical, musical and
25 technological practices in ways that I suggest nuance and enhance rather than diminish the
26 'usual virtues' of live theatre,⁴ it links to ongoing explorations in performance studies of the
27 animation of sociality through the heightening of sensory engagement and transmission of
28 affect, as well as looking to musicologists to explore the vocal percussion techniques
29 deployed by the BA. Not wishing to simply recirculate clichés around "the magic of live
30 theatre",⁵ I approach the 'liveness' of performance as a set of energies, techniques and
31 powers that are informed by the lived and artistic experience of performers, animated through
32 musical and participatory practices, mediated in performance by sound, breath, blood,
33 plastics, and electronic equipment, and sensed in the bodies of audience members.
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40 In assembling my critical components, I adapt an image used in Donna Haraway's 'The
41 Cyborg Manifesto' of an 'integrated circuit', itself seized by Haraway from the work of
42 second wave feminist Rachel Grossman where it was used to examine the use of management
43 techniques to regulate the labour and behaviour of Malaysian women within the global
44 electronics industry.⁶ Here, I am following Haraway in deploying the phrase metaphorically
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48 ³ These comments are taken from on-line [print media](#) reviews hosted by *The Stage*, *Exeunt*, *The*
49 *Times*, *The Guardian*, *WatsonStage* and *Edfringe* of the productions of *FHMM* at BAC (March
50 2018) and the *Traverse* (August 2019). [\[ALL PRINT MEDIA, WAS THE INTERNET BLOG](#)
51 [RESPONSE DIFFERENT?\]](#)

52 ⁴ Dan Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 41.

53 ⁵ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2-8.

54 ⁶ Donna Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2016) [1985],
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10 to explore artistic, musical and technological practices in contemporary British theatre and its
11 industrial context. Perceptions of this context have been marked by its historical associations
12 with 'high' culture, its perpetuation of 'closed' and 'exclusive' circuits of opportunity and
13 labour, its circulation of ideology through literary and text-based forms of theatre, and a
14 practice of spectatorship based in motionless attention. I am exploring how the 'integrated
15 circuitry' of British theatre might be rewired and extended through musical forms that ignite
16 affect, stimulate more unruly and inclusive audiences, and open the industry to wider
17 performance ecologies resonating with diverse cultural traditions and sociocultural practices.
18 In addressing a musical form that has entered British theatre, this article resists familiar
19 discourses and narratives that racialize or simplify hip hop culture, or denigrate incursions of
20 popular or sensory aspects of musical performance. Rather it seeks to engage with a piece of
21 British 'gig theatre' that along with others such as Debris Stevenson's *Poet in da Corner*
22 (2018), Arinzé Kene's *Misty* (2018), and Middle Child's *Canary and the Crow* (2020), have
23 in the late 2010s and early 2020s ~~in recent years~~ deployed hip hop styles such as rap and
24 grime to realise musical dramaturgies as a mode of storytelling in a range of UK fringe,
25 subsidised and commercial theatres. I argue that the experience and energy of young voices,
26 empowered through vocal technologies and musical form, and made present through the
27 participatory practices of the BA, provide a catalyst for a reanimated theatre public. I
28 understand the performers of *FHMM* as agents of 'liveness' who deploy vibrant sonic and
29 rhythmical practices as skilful dramaturgical strategies that convey narrative and meaning
30 viscerally, and which stimulate the circulation of joyful and exhilarating affect.

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39 As part of my exploration of the sonorous, rhythmic and animating storytelling of *FHMM*, I
40 am interested in the ways that technologies of voice, music, and sound amplification integrate
41 and regulate bodies, materials and technologies in pleasurable and/or transgressive ways.
42 This article will consider not only BA's creative embodied practices but also its use of
43 amplifiers and microphones, the latter a technology dubbed by a veteran theatre maker in
44 industry newspaper, *The Stage*, a 'monster of theatre'.⁷ Though such technologies are
45 relatively newly legitimised in British venues known largely for text-based theatre and
46 continue to meet resistance from professionals who favour the 'natural' projection of the
47 voice, their integration, along with digitised vocal sound, is part of a current wave of
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53 ⁷ Barrie Rutter in Giverny Masso, 'Barrie Rutter: Microphone use is the "monster of theatre"', *The*
54 *Stage*, November 14, 2019, 5.

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10 experimentation in the staging of ‘sonic socialities and subjectivities’ noted by Salomé
11 Voegelin.⁸ Not only do sound technologies open and amplify dramaturgical possibilities,
12 they point to the more diverse range of social and cultural contexts through which vocal and
13 embodied practices are reaching the theatre. In exploring ‘cyborgian’ aspects of vocal
14 performance, and its illusionary, uncanny or estranging effects, it has been helpful to refer to
15 the work of the ‘first generation of voice studies scholars’ who have explored properties of
16 voices largely in relation to European traditions of cultural schema.⁹ It has also ~~become~~
17 ~~necessary and~~ illuminating to recognise the diverse cultural genealogies of musical and sonic
18 dramaturgies that have informed the development of beatboxing and other hip hop practices.
19 In particular, I have been influenced by the fieldwork of Julian Henriques on the outdoors
20 dancehalls of Kingston Jamaica and its ‘crowd’ (the preferred local term for audience), who
21 attend the dancehall nights for the ‘pleasure of the “vibes”’.¹⁰ Henriques advances a
22 ‘vibration model’ which suggests how affect is expressed and propagated rhythmically
23 through corporeal, material and sociocultural media. His research demonstrates how the use
24 of heavy amplified base heightens the ‘whole-body vibrotactile experience’ generated by
25 amplified musical ‘vibes’.¹¹ This is relevant to beatbox performance, where the human voice
26 imitates the rhythmic beats of machines, where technologies of sound electronically convert,
27 enhance, and amplify the sonic pulse, and where amplified electronic vibrations are the
28 medium of the crowd’s haptic experience.

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36 In this article, I frequently document my sensations and observations as a researcher and
37 member of the crowd. My aim is to deploy a methodology that uses my own embodied
38 responses to acknowledge the energies and affects that passed into and through my body as I
39 encountered BA’s devising processes and the staged musical performance of *FHMM*. This is
40 to follow critical approaches from musicology such as that of Henriques, and also from
41 performance scholarship that tracks affective or embodied responses of audiences.¹² Dugal
42 McKinnon, for example, describes the ‘unnerving and/ or exhilarating’ effect of ‘immersive
43 loudspeaker environments’, where listeners encounter sound ‘in forms of ambiguous
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48 ⁸ Salomé Voegelin, *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound* (New York:
49 Bloomsbury, 2014), 24.

50 ⁹ Konstantinos Thomaidis, *Theatre & Voice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017), 12.

51 ¹⁰ Julian Henriques, ‘The Vibrations of Affect and their Propagation on a Night Out in Kingston’s
52 Dancehall Scene’, *Body & Society* 16:1 (2010), 57-89 (67).

53 ¹¹ Henriques, ‘Vibrations’, 58.

54 ¹² See, for example, Stacey Sewell, ‘Listening Inside Out: Notes on Embodied Analysis’,
55 *Performance Research* 15:3 (2010), 60-65.

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10 provenance, heard in the absence of visual cues.¹³ His observation points to affective
11 response to perceived distortions of image and sound as a form of ‘live’ corporeal
12 registration. ‘Liveness’ therefore can be at least partly reconstituted as a ‘listener-determined’
13 phenomenon that attends to the play of physical and affective impulses and responses in the
14 bodies that stage perception.¹⁴ In adapting this approach I use my verbal interpretations of
15 ‘feeling and sensing’ as a methodological tool that accepts the interrelationality of bodies and
16 things, which enables me to explore affective, rhythmic and temporal sensations, and to
17 address the social relations orchestrated between and experienced by performers and
18 audiences.¹⁵ Exploring my own response to the rhythmic element of beatboxing and the way
19 that its manipulation allows performers to intervene in a listener’s perception and
20 understanding of time has been a crucial element in my critical pursuit of ‘liveness’. As
21 performance scholar Luciano Mariti argues, ‘the ‘temporal “quality”’ particular to
22 performance is drawn from the ‘actor-spectator relationship: a “living” relationship’ that
23 ‘draws upon the “forces” of time’.¹⁶ These are points to which I will return in my
24 explorations of beatboxing (see p. XX), whose temporal and material pulses suggest circuitry
25 that links the human and the electronic. For Conrad Murray, co-founder and artistic director
26 of BA, the ‘liveness’ of performance emerges as moments of interaction with audience
27 members who might otherwise be detached by the deadening effects of the fourth wall in
28 performance and the dominant edict in the majority of theatres for audiences to be quiet and
29 still.¹⁷ Following Murray’s pedagogies and values, beatboxing dramaturgy becomes a live
30 rewiring of theatrical spaces and systems.

40 **Beatbox Academy**

41 Beatbox Academy (BA) based at Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) uses beatboxing as the central
42 artistic practice of its grassroots participatory performance project. It has grown out of a
43 South London context where beatboxing is one of a range of hip hop influenced performance
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47 ¹³ Dugal McKinnon, ‘Broken Magic: The Liveness of Loudspeakers’, in *Experiencing Liveness in*
48 *Contemporary Performance: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. By Matthew Reason and Anja Møller
49 Lindelof (London: Routledge, 2016), 266-271.

50 ¹⁴ McKinnon, ‘Broken Magic’, 269.

51 ¹⁵ Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004),
52 19.

53 ¹⁶ Luciano Mariti, ‘Perception and the Organisation of Time in the Theatre’, in Clelia Falletti (ed.),
54 *Theatre and Cognitive Neuroscience* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 139-156, (142).

55 ¹⁷ Conrad Murray, interview with author, September 20, 2019 London.

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10 practices that includes garage and grime music, the latter a culturally influential form of
11 music making and political critique in the UK. Beatboxing itself is a form of vocal percussion
12 that emerged as part of the hip hop scene in urban centres in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s
13 when proponents started to imitate the sounds of electronic drum machines (beatboxes). It is
14 now practised worldwide by people from younger ages and upwards in every day spaces,
15 such as bedrooms, streets, and schools, as well as in music clubs and in commercialised
16 global championships.¹⁸ In musicology, scholars have located beatboxing within
17 universalistic or evolutionary narratives that regard vocal percussion as a form of human
18 music making, but also point to it as an art form that emerges specifically through histories of
19 black performance that go back to the to the foot stomping and hand clapping ‘ring shout’ of
20 African slaves in American colonies.¹⁹ For communications anthropologist Tok Thompson,
21 beatboxing negotiates ‘a new sort of man-and-machine type of identity, a synthesis between
22 human and computer’.²⁰ As one of a range of vocal practices associated with hip hop,
23 beatboxing remains affiliated with a socially conscious subcultural resistance, and the ‘global
24 hood’, a shifting site of contemporary transnational exchange.²¹ Practitioners often also use
25 or collaborate with spoken word or rap performers, incorporating politicised commentary on
26 issues such as racial and economic inequality. Its often self-taught, cut-and paste DIY
27 aesthetic allows its practitioners to sample and cite other artists’ sounds and rhythms, and by
28 doing this make affiliations that contribute to their development as artists connected with a
29 much wider cultural and industrial ‘circuitry’ that extends across the world, and from which
30 traditional mainstream text-based theatre in the UK has remained largely disconnected.
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39 ¹⁸ See, for example, Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars; What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip*
40 *Hop and Why it Matters* (New York: Basic Books 2008), and Milosz Miszczyński and Adriana Helbig
41 (eds.), *Hip hop at Europe’s Edge: Music, Agency and Social Change* (Bloomington: Indiana
42 University Press, 2017) for critical accounts of commercialized and politically engaged hip hop in
43 local contexts.

44 ¹⁹ See Paul Théberge. ‘Click/ Beat/ Body: Thoughts on the Materiality of Time and Tempo’, in *The*
45 *Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. by Michael Bull and Les Back (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 341-48
46 (344). For more detailed musical genealogies of beatboxing, see Michael Proctor et al, ‘Paralinguistic
47 mechanisms of production in “beatboxing”: A real-time magnetic resonance imaging study’, *The*
48 *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 133 (2013), 1043-1054; and Michael Atherton,
49 ‘Rhythm-Speak: Mnemonic, Language Play or Song’, *Proceedings of the International Conference*
50 *on Music Communication Science*, (Sydney, 2007), 15-18, <http://marcs.uws.edu.au/links/ICoMusic>
(accessed January 20, 2020).

51 ²⁰ Tok Thompson, ‘Beatboxing, Mashups, and Cyborg Identity: Folk Music for the Twenty-First
52 Century’, *Western Folklore*, 70:2 (2011), 171-193 (179).

53 ²¹ Katie Beswick, *Social Housing in Performance: The English Council Estate on and off Stage*
54 (London: Methuen, 2019), 10.

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10 BA uses the distinctive beatboxing style as part of an ensemble process of creation and
11 performance for theatrical spaces, integrating into its collective aesthetic common features of
12 hip hop such as moments where performers' virtuosic skill is spotlighted or where
13 participants contest each other. Unlike more 'spectacular' shows such as the commercial
14 success *Hamilton* (2015), whose vibrant music and choreography refers in depth to hip hop
15 histories, the BA draws on traditions of live hip hop performance as an interactive and
16 participatory form, relating with its audience as a community of which it is a part. Due to its
17 participatory approach, where the BA extends its connections through workshops and
18 outreach both locally and to the places to which it tours, audiences will often include many
19 members to whom the performers are personally known. In the BA shows that have taken
20 place at BAC, many of these audience members are family and friends, some of whom attend
21 to support or collect its participants, fitting this in between other caring responsibilities and
22 obligations at work and in domestic life. The project, which began at BAC in 2008, is
23 advertised as a weekly drop-in group for young people and adults. Murray, who grew up on a
24 nearby social housing estate and joined BAC youth theatre groups as a teenager, spoke to me
25 about his own background, 'I loved listening to music at home, he told me, 'It was the only
26 thing that made me feel good'.²² His remark, understood in the context of the difficult
27 circumstances of his home life, suggests complex relations between pleasure, talent, and
28 opportunity for individuals within disadvantaged economic, social and cultural contexts.²³
29 His inclusive approach to participation in the BA provides a platform of co-creation and
30 collective pleasure in music making, but also supports the development of artistic and
31 economic opportunities for the members of the collective. The devising of *FHMM*, for
32 example, was partly conceived as a means of gaining paid work for its members, some of
33 whom face challenges that include extreme economic precarity, mental health issues and
34 homelessness.

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44 On the evening I visited a BA participatory session at the BAC in London following its
45 Edinburgh run, the group was diverse in terms of age (despite the advertised cap of 30), race,
46 ability and gender, and included participants with autism and learning needs. The session
47 began with participants in a 'circle jam', a base activity, used by Murray in sessions before
48 the introduction of any microphone work. In a jam, one participant starts by vocally
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52 ²² Murray, interview.

53 ²³ Murray's autobiographical performance piece *DenMarked* (2017) portrayed his childhood
54 experience of neglect, violence and racism. See Beswick, *Social Housing*, 103-12.

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10 improvising a rhythmic base line from the foundation sounds of beatboxing, 'Boom-Tee-Cla'
11 that onomatopoeically mimic the sounds of base and snare drums, and hi-hat cymbals.²⁴ This
12 is known as 'pitching', a process that does not happen in relation to the notes specified in the
13 music scales of the classical music tradition, but allows a participant, whether formally
14 trained in music or not, to provide a percussive 'ground' on which other participants vocally
15 weave and layer. As I observed the BA session, participants built on the base pitch, each
16 adding their own sounds, melodies and beats, as well as using 'sampled' fragments and tag
17 lines from well-known hip hop tracks, 'I've got the power' and 'Ready or not'. The sense of
18 'pitch' used in the circle jam is close to the word's meaning as 'hurl' or 'throw', as if the
19 vocal sound sent out is a rhythmic energy for others to catch and to which they attune. As
20 Murray explained, 'Whoever starts that first note or beat, we'll go on that tempo...' In this
21 way, the activity could be understood as a kind of co-composition in time, a continuous
22 interchange of ideas, in which leadership becomes fluid and alternating as in a chamber
23 ensemble or jazz band where information is shared.²⁵ A collective perception seemed to be
24 present, such as that identified by music educators in the shared intentionality of group music
25 making.²⁶ Together the participants seemed to create a moving sculpture of sounds that arose
26 and fell in the room, reaching across and up into its high ceilings, a space that seemed
27 transformed to me by this event of collective sonic imagination. Reflecting on the session
28 afterwards, I thought of the circle jam as a form of artistic heightening of the sonorous
29 interrelations between human beings explored by philosopher Adriana Cavarero, relations
30 embodied and intensified by voices taking a 'vital pleasure' in revealing their own unique
31 textures in communication with others.²⁷

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40 Later in the session, some of the young participants continued to improvise, now using
41 microphones and electronic sound amplification to experiment with highly energised
42 rhythmic clicks, riffs and deep guttural machine-like sounds. Their performance became both
43 intensely concentrated, and gloriously hedonistic, as they wound each other up to beatbox
44 with ever more intensity, volume and speed. At this point, the experiences of pleasure and
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49 ²⁴ For further description see Maddy Costa, 'Backpages 29:4', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 29:4
(2019), 487-501.

50 ²⁵ See J. Murphy McCaleb, *Embodied Knowledge in Ensemble Performance* (Farnham: Ashgate,
51 2014), 1-2.

52 ²⁶ Sebastian Kirschner and Michael Tomasello, 'Joint music making promotes prosocial behaviour',
53 *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 31:1 (2010), 354-364.

54 ²⁷ Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 4-5.

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10 enhanced spatial awareness that I had experienced in hearing the circle jam were nuanced
11 with sensations that were both compelling and disorientating. The addition of microphones
12 had allowed voices to be thrown further, altering the relations of the performers with their
13 own voice, and with me the witness and listener. Standing with the performers behind me, I
14 experienced a sense of spatial distortion as the sounds bombarded me from the speakers
15 angled downwards in front of me, causing my own body to vibrate, and eliciting there a
16 rhythmic response in spite of the somewhat uncanny sensation. Later, I realised I had been
17 experiencing what is known in biomusicology as ‘entrainment’ – where auditory input
18 carrying rhythmic stimulus results in involuntary movements in the body of the listener.²⁸
19 Drawn in by the young performers’ concentrated and spontaneous beats, I had felt suspended
20 in time, magnetised, partly at the mercy of their astonishing vocal play. This, and the
21 impression given by the buzzing, sparking and fizzing of the beatboxing sounds of something
22 mechanical or electronic had given me the uncanny sensation that something non-human
23 were at play. The addition of the microphones had not diminished my pleasure but had
24 changed its character, wiring in my body rhythmically, charging it with the vibes coursing
25 with the beatboxers’ electronically amplified sounds. After staying to chat with the
26 performers, I left the session with a warm, uplifted feeling of social contact, with the energy
27 of the amplified beats still ringing in my ears. My curiosity had been stirred by the BA’s
28 joyful, self-extending and sociable practice, and its ability to get under my skin, making a
29 live and lingering ‘vibrotactile experience’, that affected both my body and mind.

39 **‘Sonic trickery’ / rhythmic resonance**

40 The participatory processes of BA described above, *draw out* sound and rhythm from
41 performers’ bodies, establishing embodied, integrated relations through collaborative musical
42 composition, and *draw in* listeners through live physical and affective experiences of musical
43 listening. I turn in this section to a consideration of how beatboxing also produces liveness
44 through processes that provoke ideas of bodily transgression, intervention or disturbance,
45 which become triggers for affective response. This article explores the sense, following
46 Haraway, in which beatbox performance might form a kind of ‘cyborgian circuitry’, a
47 knitting together of human and machine that is both ‘potent and taboo’, a kind of ‘rejoicing’

52 ²⁸ See Patrick Vuilleumier and Wiebke Trost, ‘Music and emotions: from enchantment to
53 entrainment’, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1337 (2015), 212-222 (2016).

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10 in 'illegitimate fusion'.²⁹ The term 'cyborgian', used from the 1960s according to the OED,
11 refers to a person whose capacities are 'extended beyond normal human limitations by a
12 machine or other external agency that modifies the body's functioning'. Alternatively, a
13 cyborg is 'an integrated man-machine system'.³⁰ It follows that in order to qualify as
14 cyborgian, the performative practice of beatboxing must involve the physical *integration* of
15 human and machine, or an *extension* of bodily capacities. Although Dan Stowell and Mark D.
16 Plumbley's characterise beatboxing as an art of 'illusion', 'impersonation' and 'imitation', it
17 is clear from their fascinating elucidation of vocal percussion techniques that the imaginative
18 motor ignition in beatboxing of sonic, electronic and rhythmic energy expands the narrow
19 and normative range of sound produced by humans that serve normal language-based
20 vocalisations.³¹ In fact, as with other forms of vocal training, the vocal techniques that
21 beatboxing demands can distinctively alter human anatomy.³² Even breathing is modified:
22 performers, who can sometimes produce beats and melodic sounds simultaneously, learn to
23 produce non-verbal sounds on in-breaths, making inhaled sounds such as the 'inward clap
24 snare, enabling a continuous flow of sounds and beats'.³³ Such practices intervene in the
25 respiratory mechanism, enhancing the potency and strangeness of performers, their bodies to
26 some extent 'synched' through creative imitation to electronic rather than 'natural' or
27 'human' sounds and rhythms.

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35 It is arguably in its key rhythmic dimension where the integration in beatboxing of wo/man
36 and machine is most potent. For Raymond Williams, whose scholarship is alive to the
37 structures of feelings in lived encounters, 'rhythm is a way of transmitting a description of
38 experience, in such a way that the experience is re-created in the person receiving it'. This is
39 'more than metaphor', but a 'physical experience as real as any other' that is effected 'on the
40 blood, on the breathing, on the physical patterns of the brain'.³⁴ Williams' remarks, which in
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45 ²⁹ Haraway, 57.

46 ³⁰ "cyborg, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019,
47 www.oed.com/view/Entry/46487 (accessed November 25, 2019).

48 ³¹ Dan Stowell and Mark D. Plumbley, 'Characteristics of the Beatboxing Vocal Style', Centre for
49 Digital Music, QMUL, 1-4 (1), February 2008, <http://c4dm.eecs.qmul.ac.uk/papers/2008/Stowell08-beatboxvocalstyle-C4DM-TR-08-01.pdf>, (accessed October 31, 2019).

50 ³² Andrew Saphthavee, 'Functional Endoscopic Analysis of Beatbox Performers', *Journal of Voice*
51 28:3 (2014), 328-331.

52 ³³ Stowell and Plumbley, 'Characteristics', 2.

53 ³⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2011) [1961], 40-43.

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10 some ways anticipate neuroscientific understanding that has developed since the 1990s,³⁵ are
11 made as part of his wider discussion of the ‘vital descriptive effort’ made in human
12 communication, and the ‘powerful means’ that artists possess of achieving it. In this light, the
13 simulation by beatboxers through onomatopoeic performance of electronically generated
14 rhythmic beats and other sounds, suggests a material connection between human and ‘non-
15 human’ actors that is powerfully physically and artistically shared in performance with the
16 bodies of other humans. Rather than producing the deadening expressionlessness and
17 automated obedience however that has sometimes been associated with ‘inhuman’ digital or
18 metronomic beats,³⁶ beatboxing drives an expressiveness that is inevitably de-regularised and
19 enhanced artistically by the human body. In beatboxing sounds and rhythms are accelerated
20 and decelerated, temporarily paused, or ‘mixed’ with sounds of back beat cutting and record
21 scratching. These sounds refer to a repertoire of techniques resonating with many contexts
22 where sound technologies have been manipulated – such as at the outdoor dancehalls
23 described by Henriques where MCs use the ‘rewind’ or ‘pull up’- to build affective impact in
24 the crowd.³⁷ Such techniques can be considered as vocal and auditory versions of the ‘visible
25 cuts, pauses and blackouts’ that according to Mariti generate a felt sense of dynamicity and
26 duration in theatre, and which heighten excitement and pleasurable tension.³⁸ These rhythmic
27 and sonic arts manipulate the crowd’s sense of suspension, and elicit embodied and affective
28 response. For Mariti, the process of “‘embodied simulation’” is not ‘automatic’ but ‘resonant’
29 behaviour’, and a stimulation of “‘dramaturgical competence” through “body-to-body”
30 contact’.³⁹ Applied to hip hop crowds, the animation and pleasure experienced through
31 beatboxing’s rhythmic manipulation is a resonance of the performers’ joy and embrace of the
32 beat that is felt in auditory and haptic modes. I am arguing here that the BA performers, in
33 their hedonistic play, pass sounds, sensations and bodily energies into theatre space, creating
34 social relations that are orchestrated according to the rhythms of bodies which are themselves
35 inspired by and resonating with the embodied echoes and energies of machines.

35 See Falletti, *Theatre and Cognitive*, 7.

36 Paul Théberge, ‘Click / Beat / Body’, p.346.

37 Henriques, ‘Vibrations’, 64.

38 Mariti, ‘Perception’, 146.

39 Mariti, ‘Perception’, 143. Mariti draws on Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Action and Emotions* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2008).

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10 As I hope will be becoming clear, beatboxing derives some of its potency from its capacity to
11 perform sound in ways that challenge understandings of human ontology and bodily
12 mechanisms. Further, its use of microphones brings into play the relations between the visible
13 and auditory in our understanding of the human subject. Brandon Labelle argues that *'The*
14 *mouth functions to figure and sustain the body as a subject, a subject within a network of*
15 *relations.'* (emphasis original).⁴⁰ Whereas in conventional vocal performance the mouth
16 tends to remain clearly visible as the source of vocal sound, in beatboxing, the microphone is
17 often held so close to the mouth as to obscure it, semi-covered by the hands in order to
18 produce a bassier effect. To the witness like me, a habitual theatre-goer relatively unversed in
19 beatboxing practice, the technique can be disorientating, enhancing a sensation that the vocal
20 sound produced, in its unfamiliar character and mediation, is not entirely of the body. Such
21 perceived distortions, as cultural theorists have discussed with reference to the acousmatic
22 voice, may elicit powerful affective responses related to specific cultural and religious
23 schema.⁴¹ Mladen Dolar points out, for example, that in many languages the word for
24 'breath' is etymologically linked to that for spirit, the voice apparently embodying 'the flesh
25 of the soul'.⁴² In its intimate 'close-mic' technique, beatboxing disturbs the religious and
26 cultural sense of the soulful human interior. At times in beatboxing, the mouth is bypassed all
27 together, the microphone positioned near the nose or throat, amplifying what Murray calls the
28 'sub sounds' of performers' bodies. What becomes audible can be deeply unfamiliar –
29 whirring, clicking or buzzing sounds that suggest a fleshly engineering that is digital,
30 electronic and mechanical rather than divine, and far from the ethereal sounds of chants and
31 psalms which have traditionally suggested spiritual dimensions in religious vocalisation. In
32 beatboxing, performers take delight in a material- technological- human loop, simulating
33 such tympanic and rhythmic properties that have elicited censorious responses in religious
34 contexts and cultural discourse.⁴³ My argument in this article is not that BA avoided the still
35 powerful cultural schema that associate through the voice the human interior with a God-
36 given soul, but rather that through their vocal dexterity they played with such schema in ways
37 that elicited, manipulated and heightened affective responses. As I will explore in the
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48 ⁴⁰ Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary*
49 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2.

50 ⁴¹ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 23;
51 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press,
52 1999), 24.

53 ⁴² Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (London: MIT Press, 2006), 71.

54 ⁴³ See John Potter, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University
55 Press, 1998), 17.

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10 following sections, the ability to ‘touch’ the audience both physiologically and affectively in
11 *FHMM* as part of the monster’s story led to felt and ambiguous moments of live creation and
12 otherness themselves infused with cyborgian practices that left traces in the bodies of
13 audience members. Where attitudes to the other are modelled by the young performers, and
14 where audiences participate through call-and-response and bodily movement, a pleasure in
15 and embrace of otherness became possible.

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21 ***FHMM*: ‘It’s alive’.**

22 I now turn ~~(This section of this article turns~~ to BA’s live performance of *FHMM* to explore
23 how the performers deployed vocal technique to tell the story of the monster’s creation and to
24 make a social commentary, played out live in my own embodied responses. BA’s starting
25 point, *Frankenstein*, imagines the consequences of scientific exploration into the nature and
26 source of electricity, a substance, like sound, that points to the continuities between the
27 biologically human and physical world that humans inhabit. Written when Shelley was
28 eighteen, in the wake of electrical experimentation on body parts in the early nineteenth
29 century by Luigi Galvani, it tells the story of a creature assembled from dead matter and
30 brought to life by the novel’s protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, by passing electricity through
31 it. The novel’s ‘monster’ (as Shelley’s ‘creature’ has come to be popularly known) was
32 excluded by Donna Haraway from a proudly hybrid cyborgian identity by its own desire for
33 completion in conjugal union. The novel itself however has been seen as a channel for
34 cultural anxieties, hopes and fears regarding acts of creation and technological change, ‘a
35 versatile frame for interpreting our relation with technology’, and a cyborgian myth that seems
36 ever more relevant as science advances.⁴⁴ ~~Recently~~ it inspired, ~~for example~~, Jeanette
37 Winterson’s *Frankissstein* (2019), which addresseds contemporary concerns around gender
38 fluidity and Artificial Intelligence. BA’s version belongs to the many recyclings of the novel
39 as a ‘social metaphor’;⁴⁵ the collective used its characters and themes as a jumping off point
40 for sequences that deal with social realities immediately relevant to their own lives. On the
41 occasions I saw the show, the young performers conformed to a familiar ‘street’ aesthetic,
42 positioned around a Gothically darkened set, sitting or leaning on huge amplifier boxes.
43 Dressed in the hoodie gear preferred by many people for its comfort and convenience but
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52 ⁴⁴ Jon Turney, *Frankenstein’s Footsteps: Science, Genetics and Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale
53 University Press, 1998), 2.

54 ⁴⁵ Lester D. Friedman and Allison B. Kavey, *Monstrous Progeny* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2016), 2.

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10 which ~~at the time of the show had come to be viewed by some as has in recent years become~~
11 'a highly politicised and racialised item of apparel', ⁴⁶ *FHMM* ~~explored the show would~~
12 ~~explore~~ the damaging consequences of social stigmatisation. By combining the aesthetics of
13 hip hop culture and Gothic excess through manipulations of sound, light and darkness, it
14 would enable the audience to undergo felt experiences of creation, othering and being
15 together. As I will discuss in what follows, the thrills created by Beatbox Academy ultimately
16 dispelled the sense of social threat implied in its source material, encouraging an enlightened
17 und open sociality between all audience members.

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22 Approaching liveness here, as I described above in the introductory section, as the play of
23 physical and affective impulses and responses in the bodies that stage perception, I want now
24 to track a sequence in *FHMM* which sent pulses and shivers through my body. In this part of
25 the show where the BA performers staged the monster's creation in a liminal space of
26 acousmatic sound, ~~sending pulses and shivers through my body.~~⁴⁷ ~~The sequence deployed~~
27 ~~many of the techniques described above to work a 'crowd', manipulating the beats and~~
28 ~~elements of beatbox and other hip hop practices.~~ Immediately preceding this creation
29 sequence, a fast-paced multivocal track, announced by the performer known as Aminita, 'It's
30 a rave. I'm serious!', had quickened my pulse, and deployed many of the techniques
31 identified by Henriques to work a 'crowd'. With other members of the audience, my body
32 was rhythmically and affectively stimulated by a combination of whipped up, accelerating
33 beats, layered melodies and multiple sonic effects. The speed threatened to career out of
34 control, generating a frenzied euphoria, and prompting the majority of audience members
35 including me to stand and dance. At the climax, I joined in the huge cheer from the excited
36 crowd. After our exertions, the performers' loudly amplified heaving breaths began to slow,
37 and became more deliberate, a significant change in pace and volume focussing my attention
38 back onto the stage and story. I became aware of a new amplified sound, that of a soft thud,
39 the familiar upbeat and downbeat rhythm recognisable as that of the human heart. The sound
40 drew me in, the rhythmic beat fundamental to human life, giving me a sense of suspension in
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50 ⁴⁶ David Lammy, 'Why There's Nothing Scary About a Black Man in a Hoodie', *The Guardian*,
51 February 13, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/13/david-lammy-on-why-theres-nothing-scary-about-a-black-man-in-a-hoodie> (accessed March 14, 2020).

52 ⁴⁷ My description tracks my experience and recording of the show performed by Aminita, Glitch,
53 WIZ-RD, Native, ABH and Grove at the Traverse, August 6, 2019.

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10 time. I felt my own bodily rhythms begin to synchronise with that of the performers'
11 amplified breathing, the simulated sonic heartbeat heightening my own.
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14 As the auditorium and stage darkened, Aminita began a spoken narrative voiceover, her
15 rhythmic words riding the beat, 'From the mouth to the tongue to the teeth to the lungs the air
16 comes in (*sound of performers inhaling*), and makes you one with your surroundings.
17 Grounding your soul.' At this point, I realised the story had reached the critical moment, the
18 lyrics drawing attention to the moment of creation as well as to my own bodily processes. My
19 pulse quickened again. 'The air comes in (*performers inhaling*)...and makes you born again.
20 Breathe out (*performers exhaling*).' I too followed her instructions, as if Aminita was
21 including me in her address to 'you'. 'Breath is life', her voiceover continued, 'Death is its
22 absence...'. By now, the performers were dispersed around the stage, their faces and bodies
23 for the most part barely moving and hidden in the gloom. Only the sound of their amplified
24 voices animated the auditorium. Made aware of the mortal and ethical stakes of the moment,
25 I felt a rapt attention: 'Ideas strangle you like a boa constrictor, until the guilt of potential
26 repercussions turns you lifeless and blue and limp. (*Faster*) 'It's almost like falling in love
27 again. (*Very fast*) It's like falling in love with the chemical reaction within the synapses
28 within your brain and the adrenaline —' Here, a huge intake of breath by the other performers
29 cut the voiceover off. (*Silence*). Held on an in-breath, I waited, aware that the moment of
30 creation was imminent. (*An exhalation*). And then, low in the mix, the steady beeping of a
31 hospital life support monitor, a sign of a fragile life, accompanied by a soft, building
32 breathing. From this came a layered soundscape, a deep pulsing machine-like base- line
33 pitched low, textured with high hat 'tees', steady clicks, and vocalised melodies, arising in a
34 slow-tempo spine-tingling multi-voiced harmony of voices. To my enchanted ear, a complex,
35 living organism appeared to be moving as a pulsing sonic entity, a new being blending the
36 textures of synthesised and amplified sound and held in a space and time by the breathing and
37 beating hearts of my own body and the bodies of audience members around me. A lovely,
38 haunting lyrical melody emerged, continuing to tell the story of the genesis, 'Breathing.
39 Feeling. Seeing is believing. Breathing (*Beat*). It's alive.' The last syllable of this melody fell
40 deeply, diving down to the low base that is associated in the semiotics of sound with non-
41 human being, and vibrating uncannily in me. Faint whirrings and wheezings were also
42 audible in the rhythmic apparatus emerging from the sonic space of the auditorium, and
43 extended in time by the reverberation added at the sound desk. A shiver ran through me, a
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10 moment of *frisson*, accompanied by the sense that this new being, collectively experienced,
11 was not fully human, despite the human breath that sustained it.⁴⁸
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14 The moment of birthing however, experienced in my body and those of others present, had
15 now also become a moment of othering. Not a 'he', 'she' or 'they' had been created, but an
16 'it', alien, separate and unknown. For Nicholas Ridout, the darkness of the theatre and
17 isolation of performer and audience member facilitates a process of 'mutual becoming-for-
18 others'.⁴⁹ A tremor in the body of the audience answers the vibration created in theatre by the
19 'shudder' of the actor's body as it becomes something to be seen by another, or a represented
20 object. In *FHMM*, the bodies of the performers were in this sequence shrouded in darkness as
21 they retreated upstage into the shadows. Through their vocalic projection, and in a shared
22 physiological and imaginative projection, the 'vocalic body' of the monster came into
23 being.⁵⁰ Breathing, the conjured monster was felt as human, but never solidified, a fleeting
24 ambivalent presence existing 'as a shifting property in the theatre air'.⁵¹ Its 'body', like those
25 of the performers, remained unseen, throwing more emphasis onto the synchronised
26 perceptions that took place as it came into being in the imaginations and physiological
27 experiences of audience members. Though it could be felt partly inside and partly outside of
28 all of the bodies present, this presence consisted in sounds that resonated with the powers of
29 machines. If 'it' was other, it was born of our bodies, in conjunction with technologies that
30 integrate with and extend the human beyond its normal capacities. In this case the 'shudder'
31 of 'becoming-for-others' did not materialise or reify a body visually, but was felt by bodies
32 as a cyborgian event, collectively and physiologically staged, and made fleetingly audible by
33 the fusion of vocal apparatus with the wires, plastics and metals of technical equipment.
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41 If the creation of the monster, collectively breathed into life, raises questions regarding the
42 responsibilities of society towards its creations, *FHMM* as a whole made an implicit analogy
43 between the experience of othering that the monster undergoes in the novel and those which
44 occur in contemporary society. Moving on from the scene of creation, the performers
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48 ⁴⁸ For an account of the biological effects of musical *frisson* see Luke Harrison and Psyche Loui, 'Thrills,
49 chills, frissons and skin orgasms: toward an integrative model of transcendent psychophysical
50 experiences in music', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5 (2014), 1-6 (5).

51 ⁴⁹ Nicholas Ridout, 'Welcome to the Vibratorium', *The Sense and Society* 3:2 (2008), 221-232 (226).

52 ⁵⁰ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 36.

53 ⁵¹ Ella Finer, 'Strange objects/ strange properties: Female audibility and the acoustic stage prop',
54 *Voice Studies: Critical approaches to process, performance and experience*, ed. by Konstantinos
55 Thomaidis and Ben Macpherson (London: Routledge, 2015), p.178.

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10 explored the violent processes of objectification using the bright lights of theatre. Staging the
11 struggle between creator and monster through the conventions of a Beatbox battle in the next
12 sequence, the monster was visually represented by the bodies of the young performers as they
13 pretended to be a hideously deformed four-headed creature. Brightly illuminated, the
14 performers' faces and mouths, in this sequence clearly visible, gurned in a parody of a crude
15 and jokey act of representation. In one song sequence, 'Hashtag hideous', the performers
16 turned a stage lamp on the audience, cheekily addressing the kind of spiteful comments found
17 on social media at individuals exposed to and good humouredly shuddering in its objectifying
18 glare. At other moments in the narrative, the playful creators doubled as shadowy 'othered'
19 bodies, fleetingly present in their vocal projection, but not fully visible. As the monster's
20 story progressed, a figure dimly materialised in the hooded shape of a young man, whose
21 problems, it became apparent, were symptomatic of an alienation caused by social failures.
22 Here, the collective made social commentary through an identification of the young man and
23 the monster, both alone and spurned by their creators in an indifferent world. In his cloak of
24 darkness, and singing a low, sad, single melody, this was a deeply empathetic figure. In other
25 numbers, devised from the performers' own experiences, the 'critical voice' bell hooks hears
26 in rap music was apparent, integrating the 'explaining, demanding, urging' voices of the
27 young performers as they conveyed their social critique in rap and spoken word sequences.⁵²
28 Overall, *FHMM* provided a commentary on the *making of* and *being* a monster in the light of
29 contemporary issues and processes of social disconnection, othering and exclusion, and on
30 the disavowal by society of responsibility for its offspring.
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40 **A cyborgian social**

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42 The moment of auditory hallucination and haunting beauty that I described above (p. XX) of
43 the monster's creation was for me alive with both imaginative possibility and affective
44 charge. Infused with the 'tummy-lurching', 'breath taking' sense of thrill, as documented in
45 the reviews I quoted above, the shiver it produced in me contrasted with the warmth, energy
46 and sense of inclusivity generated by the participatory gig-theatre style framing of *FHMM* to
47 which I turn to in this final section. This suggested a circulation of energies and model of
48 being with others that has wider implications for the 'integrated circuitry' of British theatre.
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53 ⁵² bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 27.
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10 Rather than observing the familiar convention at the professional theatre that a play starts
11 without introduction or preamble, the performance of *FHMM* was topped and tailed by
12 brightly lit interactive sessions led by Murray in the role of MC. In these sessions, Murray
13 framed the show as an ongoing participatory project of which the audience that night was a
14 part, making clear that the ‘relaxed’ behaviour (now adopted by BAC for all its shows) was
15 more than acceptable. Chatting and dancing, making photos or videos on phones, moving
16 around the auditorium: all were welcome forms of behaviour and engagement. Such
17 relaxations of theatre etiquette, Murray told me in my interview with him, were part of the
18 BA’s ethos of inclusivity, its acknowledgement that to remain alive, theatre must adapt to
19 diverse needs and expectations of audience members.⁵³ At the Traverse, before *FHMM*
20 began, some opening numbers had been presented with participants from Edinburgh’s Leith
21 Academy, with whom BA members had worked prior to the run in the Traverse. This
22 opening section had been enthusiastically received by audience members. Convening the
23 final section as if it were one big BA participatory session, Murray divided the whole
24 audience into groups, inviting us to try out beatboxing vocal technique in a ‘call and
25 response’ session. This antiphonal format belongs to the long-practised tradition descended
26 from African vocal traditions, and resonates through African American musical genres from
27 gospel to hip-hop.⁵⁴ For musicologist Michael Dowdy, it plays an important role in smaller
28 hip hop venues in jointly producing a space of interactive engagement in which dominant
29 cultural values are contested.⁵⁵ Making the basic beatboxing sounds, ‘Boom-Tee-Cla’, the
30 majority of audience members responded together to Murray’s calls, feeling each other’s
31 embodied presence through the sounds of bodies massed and resonating together. This was a
32 chance also to explore vocally the space of the auditorium, and the relations it orchestrated
33 with others, especially with the slight delay in the sound as it bounced off surfaces and was
34 affected by the amplification system. To me, this felt like a much larger and more complex
35 version of the tuning in that I had witnessed during the circle jam when I visited BA in
36 Battersea.
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49 ⁵³ Murray in [Maggie Inchley](#), ‘Why are we doing this and who is it for?’: Youth theatre conversations
50 with Liz Moreton and Conrad Murray at Battersea Arts Centre’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, [30:3](#)
51 (2020), 390-397 (393) (forthcoming).

52 ⁵⁴ William Eric Perkins (ed), ‘The Rap Attack: Introduction’, in *Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on*
53 *Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1996), 1-48.

54 ⁵⁵ Michael Dowdy, ‘Live Hip Hop, Collective Agency, and “Acting in Concert”’, *Popular Music and*
55 *Society*, 30:1 (2007), 75-91 (75).

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In the beatbox demo that followed, the BA performers played with the form, visibly enjoying themselves, as Murray worked with them to build up and quicken the textures of sounds, stopping and starting the performance abruptly, both amazing us with a display of virtuosity, and physiologically building our experiences of suspense and excitement again through rhythmic play. In these sections, the young performers' hoodies read as a team strip, rather than a sign of delinquency, suggesting a sense of belonging and shared identity. As the energy ramped up, audience members moved and swayed together, some of them using the distinctive chopping, crisscrossing hand gestures that often accompany a hip hop beat. I turned to look, smile at and laugh with people on either side of me, our bodies animated with a dynamic cultural practice whose presence has increased that has in recent years been becoming gradually more present in British theatre auditoria since the late 2010s. It felt as if there was a huge sea of people, transformed from a listening audience, to a 'crowd' sensing, moving and dancing together. We were a circuit where the performers and audience were 're-affecting' each other with the joy that is associated with a spontaneous urge for dancing.⁵⁶ As one critic put it, 'Traverse 1 becomes a rave'.⁵⁷

The palpable circulation of rhythmical energies through vocal percussion, as with other musical performance, 'touches' and opens the listener both to non-normative and to collective, joyful experiences. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), Sara Ahmed returns to Descartes in thinking through the relationships between bodily sensations, emotion and judgement. Ahmed seeks to understand the motions of affect *culturally*, relating the way that affect operates on the surfaces of bodies to produce affective norms that enforce social structures such as inclusion and exclusion. Though the majority of her book deals with the circulation of negative affects such as shame and hatred, she writes briefly on pleasure, arguing that 'queer pleasure' has traditionally been outside existing heteronormative 'circuits of exchange'. 'When bodies touch', she argues, 'and give pleasure to bodies that have been barred from contact, then those bodies are reshaped'.⁵⁸ As a practice that establishes a circuit of exchange that shapes bodies with hip hop beats rather than language-based sound and text-based dialogue, beatboxing transgresses the conventions and boundaries with which contact

⁵⁶ See Ana Pais, 'Re-Affecting the Stage: Affective Resonance as the Function of the Audience', *Humanities* 5:79 (2016); and Vuilleumier and Trost, 216.

⁵⁷ Aisling McGuire, 'Frankenstein: How to Make a Monster', August 7, 2019, <https://theweereview.com/review/frankenstein-how-to-make-a-monster/> (accessed 18th March 2020).

⁵⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 165.

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10 with others has been policed by the dominant bourgeois norms of British theatre. The
11 conviviality that the BA generates overrides the conventions of hushed and still behaviour of
12 audience members, each politely confined to a single seat, and arranged according to price of
13 purchase. Its sonic, vibrational and rhythmic touch circulates a sort of 'queer pleasure'.
14 Ahmed teases out the way that touch is related to our sense of the other who touches: 'To be
15 touched in a certain way,' she argues in an encounter with another which may involve 'a
16 reading not only of that encounter, *but of the other that is encountered as having certain*
17 *characteristics*' (original emphasis). The affective responses generated in encounters with
18 others, for Ahmed are thus 'readings' that 'not only create the borders between selves and
19 others, but also "give" others meaning and value'.⁵⁹

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24 Taking a cue from Ahmed then, the rhythmic touch of music, the impulse to move it creates,
25 and the encounters it produces between friends and strangers can help to unfix the
26 conventional ideas it is possible to make of others, especially when we perceive them as
27 different from ourselves. This argument finds support in the musicology of rhythm, where
28 researchers have found evidence that the physiological stimulus of rhythmic sound affects the
29 ways in which people understand and relate to each other.⁶⁰ For me, the bodily motion and
30 pleasure propagated by the BA collective through their musical practice communed bodies
31 normally managed by the atomising dynamics that have tended to operate in British theatre.
32 Their electrifying, playful and dexterous modes of performance radically altered the sonic
33 and haptic textures of the auditorium, charging audiences with energy that coursed through
34 bodies, and convened the 'crowd' into what Henriques terms a '*collective subject*' (emphasis
35 original), in which the 'epidermal envelope' of individual subjectivity is breached and
36 replaced by an 'open, fluid and multiple whole'.⁶¹ While the BA moved with us as this
37 resuscitated collective body, revived and joyful, connecting its members more intensely
38 and more joyfully, they also established material and affective lines of connection with non-
39 human substances and digital mechanisms, and wired into wider circulations of affect and
40 ideas.
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51 ⁵⁹ Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 28.

52 ⁶⁰ See Bronwyn Tarr, et al, 'Music and social bonding: "self-other" merging and neurohormonal
53 mechanisms', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5 (2014), 1-10.

54 ⁶¹ Henriques, 'Vibrations', 67.
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10 To conclude by returning to Haraway, she defines and explores ‘social reality’ as ‘lived
11 social relations’. Her manifesto recommends a pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and
12 bringing together those who are not related to each other in ‘fission impossible’.⁶² It has been
13 my argument here that *FHMM* brought about such a shift in social relations in audience
14 members on both occasions that I attended the show. Both the virtuosity and adept
15 dramaturgy of *FHMM* demonstrated the collective’s cultural knowledge and skill, placing its
16 young members in a position of critical commentators, with powers to change perceptions
17 and activate alternative ways of being together. As Haraway puts it, ‘taking responsibility for
18 the social task of reconstructing the boundaries of everyday life’ means embracing ‘the
19 skilful task’ of doing this ‘in partial connection with others, in communication with all our
20 parts’.⁶³ BA’s young performers in this way acted as agents with potential to transform
21 systems, spaces and institutions, and the sociocultural norms that operate in them, their work
22 offering to loop the audience into a circuit powered with pleasure and energy. The *cyborgian*
23 *social* generated by BA of which I was a part was an intense experience, and its residues of
24 joy were powerful for me. In the psychophysiology of music, scientists find it is possible to
25 develop a ‘dopaminergic anticipation’ for the return of musical pleasure.⁶⁴ For Henriques,
26 the pleasure of the ‘vibes’ is ‘tangible, all-consuming and contagious’.⁶⁵ As I have argued,
27 through embodied sharing of beatboxing and hip hop practices, audience members become a
28 ‘crowd’. In an asynchronous sense this crowd is part of an integrated circuit that extends not
29 only to their immediate neighbours in the theatre auditorium, but out beyond to people in
30 bedrooms, schools, streets and sites where beatboxing and other hip-hop practices are
31 frequently practiced, and which loops theatre audiences into the practices of protest and
32 critique, and discourses of injustice that preoccupy contemporary grime and hip hop
33 performers. Though theatre scholars are often cautious in claiming that what happens in
34 theatre produces no more than a temporary glitch in social relations, I, for one, am eager that
35 an increasingly ‘monsterised’ theatre will continue to be inclusive of these integrating,
36 inclusive and extending practices.
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51 ⁶² Haraway, *Cyborg*, 5-16.

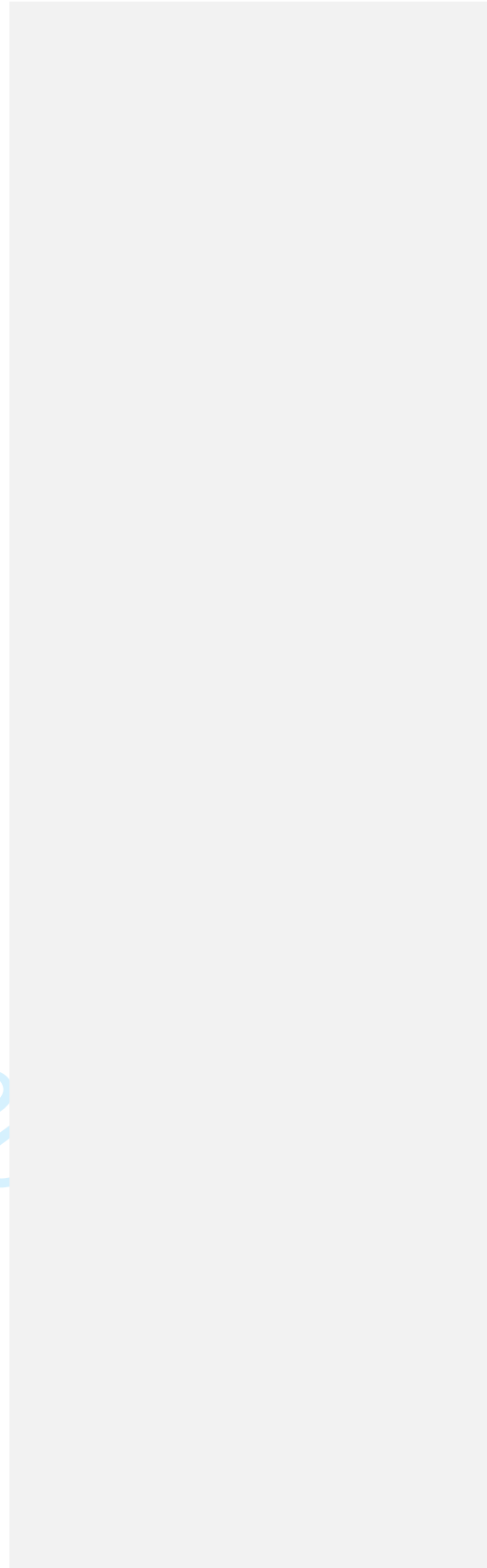
52 ⁶³ Haraway, *Cyborg*, 67.

53 ⁶⁴ Harrison and Loui, ‘Thrills’, 5.

54 ⁶⁵ Henriques, ‘Vibrations’, 67.

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For Peer Review Only



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