



Heddon, D. (2016) Confounding ecospectations: disappointment and hope in the forest. *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*. 20(3), pp. 324-339. (doi:10.1080/14688417.2016.1192001)

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Deposited on: 23 May 2016

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Confounding ecospectations: disappointment and hope in the forest

Abstract

The task of this essay is to stage an encounter with disappointment. Though the 'affective turn' is manifest across many disciplines, there has been little reckoning with disappointment as a particular affect. In the over-lapping contexts of environmental catastrophe and environmentally or ecologically-oriented performance – where the global challenges are immense, solutions impossible, but action vital – disappointment is inevitable. It seems imperative that we begin to think through disappointment's affective registers in order to understand where disappointment comes from and what it does. What sort of affect, or force, is disappointment? How does it work and what work does it do? Where does it go and what does it take with it? I argue that disappointment remains vital to hope. If disappointment is figured as the space created between expectation and disconfirmation, then that space in-between is the necessary place of hope's reappearance.

Keywords: disappointment, expectations, ecospectations, affect, theatre, forest

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Forest Pitch: Pitching the forest

On August 25 2012, two football matches were played on a full-sized pitch cut into the middle of a spruce plantation-forest located in the Borders of Scotland. The four teams – two male and two female – were comprised of amateur players from across Scotland, the majority of who were recently granted their British citizenship or Leave to Remain. In December 2012, the white lines of the pitch were planted with 800 native trees. This hybrid art work, merging sport, performance, music, design, architecture and sculpture, was called *Forest Pitch*. Created by German-born, Scottish-based artist, Craig Coulthard, *Forest Pitch*

was Scotland's single contribution to the Cultural Olympiad 2012 and was one of only 12 projects selected under the Cultural Olympiad banner of 'Artists Taking the Lead'.

The published guidance for applicants submitting to this national competition noted that successful projects would be 'developed closely with local communities, creating culturally relevant and inspiring art in unexpected places' (Arts Council England 2008, 6). They would also be 'fully accessible and celebrate the cultural diversity and creativity of this country' (6). It is within this rhetorical context – a celebration of cultural diversity through inspiring art made in unexpected places – that Coulthard's pitch for *Forest Pitch* must have ticked highly competitive boxes: unexpected place = mono-cultural plantation forest; cultural diversity = participants who have moved to Scotland from countries outside of the UK; celebration = community football game; and, culturally relevant = the bringing together of sport and art and questions of nationhood and identity.

Stating the demonstrable alignment between the Olympiad criteria and *Forest Pitch's* aspirations is not intended to belittle the work. An explicit aim of *Forest Pitch* – though we should recognise this as strategic in the context of competitive funding – was to address a diverse range of themes. These were published in the Programme distributed to spectators/participants at the live event/football matches on the 25 August:

Diversity – what this means in the environment and in Scottish society.

Mythology and Collective Memory – how do myths develop?

National Identity – what it means to be Scottish and/or British and why does it matter?

The Power of Sport – its potential as a positive, unifying force, as well as a dividing and disruptive force.

Environmental Impact/Sustainability – how do we balance our desires to live modern lives while trying to live in balance with the natural world? (*Forest Pitch Programme 2012, 21*)

Whilst there is insufficient space here to offer a comprehensive analysis of all of these themes, they were mostly explicit in the work's content and form. For example, in a context

in which the black and Asian minority ethnic population of Scotland is 4% of the total population, the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic football teams, comprised of 'new Scots', projected a more diverse future for Scotland (Scottish Government 2011). Equally, given that 99% of visitors to Forestry Commission forests in Scotland between 2004 and 2007 were white (Forestry Commission Scotland 2007), *Forest Pitch's* ethnically diverse football teams and their supporters inserted diversity into the heart of still predominantly 'mono-cultural' greenspace.

Forest Pitch also functioned as a technology of place making. The subsequent planting out of the pitch's lines after the games leaves tangible marks in the landscape, testimony not only to football, or to Olympics 2012, but to the diverse group of people, including 'new Scots', who literally made this new place. As well as generating its own potential myths - one can easily imagine future visitors wondering at the strange configuration of trees - the clearing in the forest harks back to more ancient myths. It served to re-enact the mythical, originary moment of civilisation. The legendary history of the founding of Rome is that it had first to overcome the forest (Harrison 1992, 2). Eighteenth-century philosopher, Giambattista Vico, proclaimed the clearing of the forest as the space required for the emergence of family (6). The clearing in the forest for *Forest Pitch* created a similar space for the gathering and construction of a new family of 'new Scots', a place for the planting of 'family' roots. (The literal tree-planting which took place afterwards functioned metonymically for the putting down of roots [see Harrison, 35 and Spirn 1998, 11].) When the people who participated in *Forest Pitch* are no longer alive, this landscape of trees will function as a transmitter of memories from one generation to another (Spirn, 63). *Forest Pitch* is an arboreal monument, a 'hybrid timespace' conjuring presents, pasts and futures (Owain and Cloke 2002, 223, 187). As a participatory event focused on 'new Scots', *Forest Pitch* also afforded a means for 'outsiders' to come into the mainstream to perform *as* citizens; what could be more mainstream than the Olympics? (Romulus's clearing in the forest also provided asylum for those 'outside' the law to come 'inside' civil society.)

The symbolic functions of the pitch were heightened further by its setting in the Borders. The matches took place just two years before the referendum on Scottish independence.¹ The Olympic Games also provided an additional context for reflecting on nation and citizenship. The only national team permitted in the Olympics is Team GB. Notably, Team GB for football in 2012 had no representatives from Scotland or Northern Ireland. By contrast, the players in the football games in *Forest Pitch* were mostly recent immigrants who had been granted citizenship or Leave to Remain. The Citizenship Pledge makes no reference to the different nations of Britain. At least one question in the 'Official Practice Citizenship Test' published online in 2013, relating to NHS prescription charges, presented as British a policy specific to England. (Scotland abolished all NHS prescription charges in 2011.)² The work also challenged essentialist notions of nationality's relationship to genealogy. According to *Forest Pitch*, you do not have to be born in Scotland to be a Scot.

Finally, to take one more strand, the planting out of native trees after the game suggested a direct engagement with biodiversity. In the 1970s and 1980s large tracts of Scottish land were transformed radically by the development and management of massive conifer plantations ('fast woods'), constituted mostly from imported Sitka spruce and lodge-pole pine (Smout 2003). By the twenty-first century, just over 2% of Scotland's land area was covered by semi-natural woodland, leading to a national effort to practice more sustainable approaches to forestry. The planting out of native trees after the game takes its place in this context of environmental restoration.

This summary analysis of *Forest Pitch* is intended to evoke the demonstrably rich weave of symbolic, political, social, cultural and mythical connections made by the work. In aesthetic terms, *Forest Pitch* was relational, participatory and immersive, as well as representational and performative. Based on the Programme's Introduction, it was intended to be affecting too:

¹ The referendum on Scottish independence was held on 18 September 2014.

² <http://www.ukcitizenshiptest.co.uk/> (accessed 15 March 2013)

Today's *Forest Pitch* football matches are a very special celebration of sport, the Olympic spirit and Scottish culture. By being here today you are much more than a spectator – you are at the heart of a bold and joyful arts experience which is one of Scotland's biggest contributions to the Cultural Olympiad and London 2012 Festival (Programme, 3).

I had high expectations for *Forest Pitch*.

Forest Pitch: The scene of disappointment

On the 25 August 2012 I attended *Forest Pitch*. Shortly after, I wrote an (unpublished) account of my experience. I reproduce this here in full:

Originally scheduled to take place on Saturday 21 July, high levels of rainfall have meant a later date. On the morning of the 25 August, I set off from my home in the City of Glasgow, accompanied by my partner and a friend. We hire a car for the two-hour drive south. As we arrive at the designated Park and Ride, the rain bounces off our windscreen. The courtesy bus transports us the short distance to Clarilawmuir forest, just off the A699 between the town of Selkirk and the village of St. Boswells. This is Borders country. People gather inside a marquee in the field, sheltering from the rain and (even for Scotland) the unseasonably cold weather.

Eventually, we are led across the field towards the edge of an archetypal, commercial plantation. A wide muddy path has already been walked between the trees. We enter, in procession, and before long step out again and into a clearing – a football pitch. A few tree trunks act as seats for spectators, whilst others have been used for fencing, goalposts and changing rooms. It's a full sized pitch and there don't seem enough spectators to surround it. A brass band plays in the rain as we wait for kick-off.

The first of two matches is the women's game. The football strips they wear have been designed by Primary School children, selected from more than 2000 entries. All

of them reference the assemblage of forest and football, one of them also sports a Saltire.

Watching from the fencepost, it is clear that some players are not yet fully familiar with the rules of football, though others are skilled. Final score: Delphi 5, Corinth 1. The players from both teams are crowned with green wreaths, Delphi presented with a trophy. We eat our late lunch in the drizzle. I am cold and wet. The men are just beginning to warm up, but kick off is still some time away. The final score is Nemea 4, Olympia 3. I am not there to witness this though. Four hours in the rain has proven more than enough for me. Walking back through the forest, I step over discarded paper cups. At the marquee I add my name to the commemorative posters intended to 'provide a lasting record of each person's involvement in this memorable occasion'.³ I came, I saw, I went.

My initial response to *Forest Pitch* seems sodden with disappointment: the expense, time and effort to travel there, the rain, the cold, the mud, the traipsing in a line, the waiting, the hunger, the lack of skill, the modest scale and small audience, the rubbish left behind, the passive involvement: *I came, I saw, I went*. The writing of this essay in 2016 serves as a performative rejoinder to that earlier self-certainty: in fact, you came, you saw, you stayed. More precisely, even: you came, you *felt*, you stayed. Something in my *feeling* of disappointment, keeps me at the scene, proving the accuracy of James Thompson's insight that 'affect lingers, stretching performance across time and space' (Thompson 2009, 158). The persistence of affect challenges the much-cited ontological condition of performance: its temporal presentness, ephemerality and disappearance (Phelan 1993, 146). Disappointment is a sticky affect, causing me to stick around. The stickiness of disappointment registers its relation to attachment (Ahmed 2004, 16). Lodged with me at the scene of disappointment is a question posed by Sarah Jane Bailes in her publication *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* (2010): 'What do we learn from the disappointment of expectation?' (Bailes 2010, 114). Bailes' suturing of disappointment to expectation reveals disappointment's structural condition. Sign-posting the direction of

³ Pre-event instructions sent to ticket holders.

travel, I add other questions: what do we learn *about* disappointment from its appearance; what is it that disappointment does; and what do we do with it?

Elspeth Probyn, in her wonderfully honest essay, 'Writing Shame', admits to a terror of failing to interest the reader. I share that fear acutely in this instance. My writing about disappointment risks disappointing. Though the persistence of disappointment's affect, its lingering, suggests that it warrants closer attention than has been paid so far, I worry that disappointment might disappoint. I also worry that I might 'not get the words right or get the argument across' (Probyn 2010, 72); that is, I might disappoint disappointment. In the same essay, Probyn reminds the reader of Sedgwick and Frank's perception that, ironically, writings on affect tended to lack feeling (74). Sedgwick and Frank's wider point was that affect was too often treated as a unitary state, as if it made no difference which affect was being addressed. Extending this insight, Probyn suggests that approaching affect in an abstract way 'places the writing [about it] in an uninterested relation'. Affects, though, 'are inherently interested' (74). Disappointment seems related to interest particularly, given its emergence from desire's confounding. Following Probyn's example, my focus on *Forest Pitch* allows me to consider how disappointment makes me 'feel, write, think and act' differently (ibid.). Thompson offers different guidance here, when he proposes that 'the transaction of affect between the event and the critic's body should continue in the tension of the stammer in the writing' (2009, 133). Whilst I don't want my writing to *be* disappointing, I do want it to retain something of disappointment's affects. A version of Thompson's stammer surfaces in the pages that follow; it can be felt in the coming and going between expectation and disconfirmation and is remarked in the repeated *however*s, *whilst*s, *though*s and *but*s. Disappointment is a complex affect, in part because the movement it undertakes is intended to undo. Disappointment propels mitigation, which in turn enacts a movement of the self in relation to the thing that apparently disappoints or vice versa. One potential of disappointment, then, is that it unsettles: disappointment offers a particular register of becoming.

Disappointment as affect

My turn to disappointment – the disappointment *of* performance, my disappointment in relation to *this* performance – is a turn towards a negative affect. Though the 'affective turn'

is manifest across many disciplines, there has been little reckoning with disappointment as a particular affect, or even an aesthetic.⁴ Attending to disappointment seems to go against the grain of recent critical work situated on the interface between performance/theatre studies and 'affect studies'. Excellent publications such as Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (2005) and Thompson's *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (2009) focus on theatre's hopeful potential. Take, for example, Dolan's opening sentence:

Utopia in Performance argues that live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world (Dolan 2005, 2).

Dolan's book is full of hope of and for theatre, and in turn the world. Thompson's imperative, related explicitly to Dolan's, is to focus on those 'bits of practice that are largely ignored such as joy, fun, pleasure or beauty', prioritising affect over effect (though admitting their contiguity) (2009, 115). These affective capacities operate 'as a protective force [...] that enables people to tolerate suffering [...] so that they have the energy to continue to resist' (2). From this perspective, the affective dimension of performance functions not as opiate but nourishment.

Both Dolan and Thompson's hope for and of theatre is a dynamic one. In the face of such optimistic vitality, my turn to disappointment feels a bit like a bucket of cold water. Notably, the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010) deploys similarly vibrant terms of reference: affect 'is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces [...], vital forces [...] that can suspend us [...] or leave us overwhelmed' (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 1). And in

⁴ The only significant study I can locate is Carmen Faye Mathes' PhD: *Romantic Descent: Poetry and the Aesthetics of Disappointment, 1790-1820* (2015, unpublished). My turn to a negative affect is not without precedence; Probyn studies shame, Ahmed pain and hate, Paul Harrison considers the embrace of sadness over joy (2015), and Judith Halberstam offers failure as useful resistance in an era that insists on positivity in the face of impossible odds.

studies of affect, where specific affects are focused on, they do seem forceful, even if not always optimistic: take for example Sara Ahmed's important study, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), which dedicates a chapter each to Pain, Hate, Fear, Disgust, Shame and Love. The etymology of emotion, as Ahmed reminds us, is *emovere*: 'to move, to move out' (2004, 11). The intensity of an affect moves us. If this is so, then what sort of affect, or intensity, is disappointment and what sort of movement does it perform? Synonyms for disappointment offer a visual representation of a movement of sorts: disappointment is 'a comedown', 'a downer', 'a let-down', 'a blow'. The terms and the images conjured do not so much suggest dynamic vitality as dis-affection, the movement figured as a vertical descent, albeit not a particularly precipitous one. Though the editors of *The Affect Theory Reader* write that 'Affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*', they moderate this assumption by confirming that the term 'force' 'can be a bit of a misnomer since affect need not be especially forceful' (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 2). Disappointment may not explicitly signify a vital force, but its etymology nevertheless contains movement. To be disappointed comes from early fifteenth-century Middle French: to remove from office. In dis-appointment's affective encounter, we might ask: who is removed and from what appointment?

Disappointment, expectation and ecospectation

Disappointment bears a structural relationship to expectation. There can be no disappointment without expectation, or what Ortony *et al.* refer to as *prospects*. Disappointment's structure is therefore temporal in nature, the prospective, hopeful future undone by an event's passing. Disappointment follows 'the disconfirmation of the prospect of a desirable event' (Ortony et al. 1988, p. 110). Once disappointment lets-down, where does it go or take us? Unless disappointment leads to despair, it is an affect from which we recover or move on. Mitigation strategies suggest that responses to disappointment depend on flexibility, adaptability and resilience; in the face of disappointment, we transform/are transformed. A key way of dealing with disappointment is to dis-appoint expectation retrospectively. Mitigating disappointment can mean reviewing expectations from the place of the 'let-down' and lowering them as a result; we might call this 'grounding optimism', a movement towards realism. Disappointment both depends on expectations and re-orientates them.

In reflecting on expectations, Ahmed writes that,

Our expectations come from somewhere. To think the genealogy of expectation is to think about promises and how they point us somewhere, which is ‘the where’ from which we expect so much (2010, 41).

Ahmed misses expectations’ shifts here. Nevertheless, her insight importantly renders disappointment a cultural and social practice, rather than a state of psychological interiority (2004, 8-9). My disappointment is not mine alone. It is an informed and shaped disappointment, an oriented one. In this essay I explore a confluence of four formational flows which not only set my expectations high (the horizon of expectation invoked first by Hans Robert Jauss and Stanley Fish), but which orient me at a specific angle: first, the publicity surrounding *Forest Pitch*; second, the narratives attached still to social and applied performance practices; third, an anticipation of the affect of performance; and, finally, ‘ecospectation’ – a neologism coined to signify the interplay of expectation, ecology and spectatorship.

Part of the Cultural Olympiad, the publicity machine supporting *Forest Pitch* is immense, generating a hyperbolic effect that is difficult to resist. The Programme alone presents it as: ‘a very special celebration’, ‘a bold and joyful arts experience’, a ‘highly imaginative project’, ‘an inspirational event’, part of ‘the largest cultural celebration in the history of the modern Olympic and Paralympic movements’ (2012, 3). Press comments from Coulthard before the event contribute to the anticipation and expectation. In *The List*, for example, a national magazine publicising cultural events across Scotland, Coulthard states:

I hope to create a memorable and inspiring day – and an environment and occasion which enables those present to question certain notions they may have had. In the long-term, I hope to achieve the creation of a site which grows and develops into something beautiful in the depths of what is otherwise a dark and suffocating monoculture (*The List*, 25 June 2012).

The traction of *Forest Pitch*'s hype is gained in part because it is attached to the work's central and extraordinary idea: the cutting a football pitch into the middle of a plantation forest.

Related to these expectations for *Forest Pitch* are historical discourses of social and applied arts practices. Presumptions are still generated from policy and funding spheres, where aspirations cohere around notions of 'effect' and the particular social work that a work is expected or promises to deliver. In this vein, Róisín O'Gorman and Margaret Werry write in their reflection on failure and pedagogy that 'the pedagogy of public art – as recent literature on relational aesthetics and established Frireiran and Boalian work on theatre for social changes attests – also carries an ameliorative and developmental charge yoking artistic ventures to teleological narratives of hope, aspiration and social transformation' (2012, 3). However, as they go on to note, most of these projects 'fail most of the time; fail to democratize, raise visibility, transform understandings or experiences or even gain the understanding and support of those they claim to aid' (3). In terms of measurable social transformation, *Forest Pitch* must fail. Whilst it might symbolize a welcoming, multi-cultural Scotland, and might even enact a model of it for a few hours, the intervention can only ever be partial and temporary. Similarly, whilst the work literally inserts an arboreal multi-culture into an otherwise mono-cultural plantation, the scale of that shift towards a more sustainable, ecologically diverse landscape is the modest size of a football pitch.⁵ And whilst the Duke of Buccleuch, the owner of the Clarilawmuir Estate – in fact, the owner of more land than any other private landowner in the UK – agreed to his plantation being used for the staging of this public artwork, permitting public access to his lands for at least 60 years, *Forest Pitch* cannot feasibly redress land use, inequality or land ownership on any significant, long-term or concerted scale.

⁵ Coulthard's note in the Programme for *Forest Pitch* does recognise the limits of the project: 'In the grand scheme of things, an area the size of a football pitch is not a huge space to try to transform, improve and infuse with a story and memories' (2012, 4). It is notable that Coulthard's point of reference here is to the symbolic transformation of place, rather than its social and cultural transformation.

Approaching performance expecting it to deliver amelioration is to guarantee disappointment. The work that disappointment does, then, in its mitigation, is both to reiterate the scale of the challenge and function as a corrective drag on impossible aspirations for art's efficacy. This is a movement that admits too, if admission is required, that the work cannot be expected to do the extensive, transformative work needed. To 'expect' is a passive proposition, a 'waiting for'. If the work carries the burden of projected expectations, expectation's disappointment repositions: since the work cannot possibly do all that is required, and since that work remains undone, what is it that we must actively do?

Missing from O'Gorman and Werry's account of the 'impossibly titanic' expectations attached to applied and social practices (3) are the persistent and consistent challenges made by twenty-first century applied theatre scholars to this narrative and rhetoric of amelioration. Thompson's monograph on theatre's affect is intended precisely as robust riposte to twentieth-century presumptions of or desires for theatre's efficacious effects. Thompson's work also serves to re-scale expectations, whilst at the same time holding onto the hope of performance by recognising the power of the affective response. The intense sensation made by a work 'is no longer the adjunct, the expendable adjective, but the dynamic texture of the work through which it finds its force' (Thompson, 132). Thompson makes his point by borrowing Dolan's 'faith' that "'emotions might move us to political action'" (Dolan, 15; cited in Thompson, 128). For Thompson, 'no change is possible without enthusiasm, commitment and a passionate sense of the possibility of a better life' (128). That sense of the possibility of a better life is an outcome, an effect, of affect, of the passionate experience of joy in the present. What happens, though, when the sensation rendered by the work is disappointment not joy?

There is another movement in disappointment's affect, in addition to the one which revises impossible expectations downwards. Disappointment mobilises the imagination. In the face of what did not happen, I imagine what might have happened. For example, reflecting on 'diversity' and 'sustainability' as key themes of *Forest Pitch*, I was disappointed by the artist's choice to plant out only native trees after the game. This seemed to contradict Coulthard's clearly stated aim of the work symbolising a welcoming Scotland and celebrating a multicultural society. My disappointment, then, was of a critical order. Though

Coulthard does note in the Programme that the non-native species surrounding the pitch will likely reseed, re-crossing the boundaries and mixing the species, the explicit focus on native trees in *Forest Pitch* remains troubling. The monoculture spruce trees of the plantation are replaced by native trees. Paradoxically, this prioritisation of the 'native' over the 'introduced', or even the 'naturalised', risks re-inscribing its own monoculture. In the language of environmental and natural science, 'alien' species threaten, invade, dominate, disrupt, hybridize, whilst native species are authentic, desirable and in need of protection. Though the language of restoration ecology operates within its own discursive field, language travels, its meanings transported beyond intended circuits of communication (O'Brien 2006, 75). *Forest Pitch*, a *cultural* event, in any case reiterates implicitly the same values of the 'native' by planting only native trees. Where the categorisation of 'native' flora rests on the geographical boundaries of a 'nation', as it does in *Forest Pitch* (native to Scotland), the dangers of overlapping discourses are even more acute.⁶ Ideas of the alien/native map onto nationalist discourse, producing a 'bizarrely nationalistic view of biogeography [that has] neither ecological nor practical value' (Brown 1997, 192). The replacement of the non-native with the native prompts a reading which reverberates with patriotic and nationalistic sentiments (Peretti 1998, 184). When these native trees stand in for the 'new Scots'/immigrants, the 'place makers', some of whom have likely been forcibly uprooted, the contradictions of *Forest Pitch* are magnified. The focus on the 'native' seems to put in tension Coulthard's commitment to 'new Scots', people with no biological connection to the land whatsoever.

Disappointed by what I perceive, initially at least, as Coulthard's choice, I am prompted to imagine an alternative. In my *Forest Pitch*, Coulthard chooses to plant out both 'native' and 'non-native' trees, but allows each species the space needed to live a full life. (What does a Spruce tree look like when it is freed from the regimented lines of the plantation?) Part of the work of disappointment, then, is to put my criticality and imagination to work in order to think through what else the work might have done; what other possible worlds might yet emerge. Disappointment might be dis-affecting, but it can also activate. This is a form of

⁶ The words native, nature and nation are connected to and derived from the Latin root – Natis – Nasci – 'to be born'.

mitigation too; my imagination serves to undo the object of my disappointment. Confronting disappointment, I imagine a different work and in this movement of disappointment the work itself, as it stands before me, is dis-appointed and re-appointed differently.

One other movement of disappointment is traceable in this particular encounter though, and this is a turn towards misattribution. Disappointment is mitigated by finding it misplaced: what right have I to be disappointed? (This response hints at disappointment as a moral judgement.) As noted above, a stated theme of *Forest Pitch* is 'diversity', prompting reflection on what 'this means in the environment and in Scottish society' (Programme, 2012, 21). It is clear in my efforts to re-appoint *Forest Pitch* that the tensions and contradictions of the work have proven highly generative of reflection.

Before turning to the final influence on my expectations I want to return briefly to the displacement of performance's effects with affects, since this provides a significant and not-incidentally overlap with ecospectation. The hyperbole attached to *Forest Pitch* arguably bears more resemblance to Thompson's affective dimensions than to the unrealistic and outdated notions of performance's transformative potential. That *Forest Pitch* was to be a joyful celebration signals perhaps a wider cultural shift in the discursive framing of community-based arts practices. Whilst presumptions about what performance is able to deliver have been rightly and wholeheartedly challenged, new expectations have emerged in their wake. The transformative demands made of performance are replaced with affective ones; that is, the work *will be* affecting. Thompson's reference to passion indicates a particular affective horizon. Ironically, the disappointment I felt was in part due to the lack of promised affect – celebratory joy. The work failed to affect me in the way I expected and desired, which is not to say that I was unaffected.

The expectation of particular affect coincides with what I call 'ecospectation'. Ahmed's theorisation of emotions and affects is useful in helping me understand expectations as oriented in a particular way and needing to be re-oriented. Similar to Probyn's reminder, noted above, that affects are interested, Ahmed writes that 'emotions are relational: they involve (re)actions or relations of "towardness" or "awayness" in relation to [...] objects'

(Ahmed 2004, 8). My primary attraction to *Forest Pitch* was its siting in a forest; my attachment is to the forest.⁷ I came to *Forest Pitch* for the forest, not – more remarkable surely? – the siting of a full-size football pitch in a forest; nor for the football games to be played there by ‘new Scots’. The disappointment felt is a result of the work’s failure to align with ecospectations. Whilst these ecospectations were informed in part by the event’s publicity, which made much of the forest as a site for the work and the planting-out afterwards of native trees, they were influenced as much by ‘ecological’ discourses circulating throughout theatre and performance studies. These extend the affective hopes for performance, a media which always stages an encounter in the here and now.

In a context of climate crises and global environmental degradation, critical attentiveness to the ecological and environmental engagements of performance work is imperative. However, as Timothy Morton writes, this attention (which I distinguish from expectation) needs to be brought to bear on *all* aesthetic practice, not just that which is badged as being ‘environmental’ or as taking place in ‘natural’ sites. Ecospection, like Morton’s ‘Nature’, implies a particular ideological orientation: “‘Nature’ is a focal point that compels us to assume certain attitudes. Ideology resides in the attitude we assume’ (2007, 20). Where Norton’s focus in *Ecology without Nature* is ‘Nature’ and the limit or damage wrought by that concept in relation to ecological thinking, in the emergent field of theatre eco-criticism similar limits might be set by an over-determined focus on ‘ecology’ as a modality of *affective encountering*. We might now need ecology without ecology.

Ecospectation signals the prevalence of ecological tropes in performance and theatre studies, which reduce ecology to a generic sense of embeddedness and relatedness. Repeated iterations of ideas such as ‘reciprocity’, ‘enmeshment’ and ‘interdependence’ – almost always projected positively (none of Morton’s ‘dark matter’ here) – propose a repertoire of ‘eco-orthodoxy’. In the face of such tropes, we already know what an eco-performance should be and do. A few examples from the recently published collection,

⁷ I grew up surrounded by forests (my father was a forester). Coulthard shares some of this attachment since *Forest Pitch* was inspired by his childhood in Germany, where he played football on a pitch in a forest. There’s a nostalgic attachment at play for both of us in *Forest Pitch* which creates dynamic potential for disappointment.

Readings in Performance and Ecology, illustrate this eco-orthodoxy: editors Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May use the term 'eco-dramaturgy' (coined originally by May) to describe 'theater and performance making that puts ecological reciprocity and community at the center of its theatrical and thematic intent' (2012, 4). In their introduction, they impress the need to acknowledge and keep present 'the material reality of the more-than-human world' which will help us 'find compelling ways to reframe our relationship to it' (2). They summarise the approaches of contributing authors as focusing on the 'insights theater and performance can provide into our material embeddedness and enmeshment in and with the more-than-human environment that contains and sustains us' (3). They make an appeal for work that 'might shock us into recognition of the inescapable interdependencies and shared contingencies' (6). That the outcome of the shock is known in advance of its staging renders the very idea of a shock paradoxical. Una Chaudhuri, meanwhile, foregrounds the potential for performance's production of 'somatic knowledge, a way of understanding the Other by going beyond rationalizations and abstractions to embodiment and physicalization' (2012, 53).

With such tropes already recirculating in a field only just emerging, Wallace Heim's epilogue to Aron's and May's collection, appropriately titled 'Thinking Forward...', is a welcome intervention. Heim prompts us to be alert to how an ethos 'can be translated into conformity in how one is supposed to "do" nature-human relations' (2012, 212-13). In reflecting critically on my disappointment – another mitigating strategy to deal with its affect – I come to understand my ecospectations as conformist orientations, the partiality of which risks closing down options. The angle of my encounter frames and then fixes the work.

To explicate this point, it is useful to develop an analogy from James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998). Scott positions scientific forestry as an exemplar of state projects which sought to make a phenomenon more legible. This legibility was dependent on a process of simplification – 'a narrowing of vision' which brought into 'sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality' (Scott 1998, 11). The resultant legibility in turn made the phenomenon 'more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation' which, when combined with other similar observations, allowed for an overall 'synoptic view of a

selective reality', 'making possible a high degree of schematic knowledge, control, and manipulation' (11). The lens for legibility in this case was predominantly fiscal: how much revenue the forest timber would yield. The prioritisation of fiscal concerns caused all the other uses of trees (fodder, food, fencing, kindling, medicine, resin, etc.) to fall out view (12-13). The state's myopic vision erased everything but the 'abstract tree', permitting the forester to take in the whole wood in a single purview (15). Focusing only on the commercial value of wood, the forester 'sees' a certain type of forest. In a remarkable feat of technological reversal, the tools enabling this perspective became the means for creating forests that looked like it, so it could be better managed and audited. The chaotic forest was simplified into 'a single commodity', an 'administrative forest' that 'bracketed' everything unrelated to the endeavour of production and extraction of trees/profit (18-22). A 'static grid' was placed over a 'profusion of unknowable possibilities' (139), transforming the chaotic and disorderly into something static and schematic (81). The scientific forester obdurately saw the wood but not the trees.

Ecospectation evokes the scientific forester's 'static grid', combining both expectations and spectatorial approaches, which together prompt a particular angle of encounter and organise an otherwise lively work. Having come for the forest, I was disappointed that it receded into the background (ignoring the fact that it was a plantation forest of regimented trees). I was disappointed that we only passed through the forest, on our way to somewhere else – to the cultural (ignoring the fact that the forest plantation was *already* cultural). I was disappointed that we were not encouraged to dwell in or on the forest, that the forest remained 'out there' (ignoring the fact that the density of plantation forests makes them difficult to 'get into'.) I was disappointed that though a new forest was promised, the connection between those at the live event (that is, me) and that new forest was marginal. School children and some footballers would plant the native trees some months later, but most of us 'participating' in Forest Pitch did not go near a tree (ignoring the fact that we walked through trees on our way to the pitch and were surrounded on all sides by forest; that the clearing was *in* a forest. I was immersed in the forest, drenched with rain, and cold to the bone – I was disappointed by the weather. There was plenty of affect in the work, just not the affect I was looking for). I was disappointed that I was a spectator (ignorant to the fact that the performance had strategically de-centred me from

my typical position of privilege and access and hardly aware of the different affects circling around me – children playing *in* the forest with each other, families and friends excited when a goal was scored, players enjoying the play, and delighted when they won).⁸

The parentheses used here are intended to function like off-stage directions. My disappointment stands still as a legitimate response to the work, but it is a partial and interested one. Looking out for eco-affects, I surveyed the work. Borrowing from Thompson, I was no longer ‘beside’ the work as a collaborator or co-enquirer (2009, 133-34). The risk of ecospectation is that of transforming the chaotic and alive into something fully legible and accountable. Ecospectation prompts an audit of the wood but misses the trees. Though *Forest Pitch* took place outside of the proscenium-arch theatre or white cube gallery,⁹ my ‘set’ of expectations oriented me to the work in a particular way, and I found it wanting.

Failure and disappointment

The work’s failure to meet my ecospectations brings disappointment into the territory of ‘failure criticism’, which seeks to recuperate failure as a generative and political act (Antebi et al. [2008]; Le Feuvre [2010]; Bailes [2010]; Halberstam [2011]; O’Gorman and Werry [2012]). Queer theorist Judith Halberstam, for example, writes in *The Queer Art of Failure* that, ‘Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world’ (2011, 2-3). Given the scale of global crises, I would agree that different and surprising ways of being in the world are crucial. An ‘inventory’ of failure produced by Werry and O’Gorman demonstrates how the terms of failure’s recuperation can be shared usefully or already overlap with disappointment: failure[/disappointment] forces us to think critically and reimagine (2012b, 105); failure[/disappointment] ‘maps what is thinkable, acceptable, appropriate, normal, desirable in any given set of conditions’ and it ‘helps us reflexively see the orders in which

⁸ Different angles on the event can be found in the images on the official *Forest Pitch* website <http://www.forestpitch.org/>

⁹ The grid-like forest and the gallery cube are analogous tools of modernist management and rationalism.

we are embedded' (106); symptomatically, 'failure[/disappointment] makes visible the places where aspirations and material realities collide'; diagnostically, failure[/disappointment] points 'us to the thing we have to change. The thing we cannot bear any more' (106).

Considered at a meta-level, the particular value of failure – and, by proximity, disappointment – to these times of environmental disaster is its interruption of and challenge to the teleological notion of rational progress; a narrative which has arguably led to planetary catastrophe. In these terms, failure contests the still active European Enlightenment world-view of man as innately rational, separate from nature, and thus able to control it for his own benefits (and without irreversible consequences). Colin Dickey draws on the work of Walter Benjamin and W.G. Sebald to resist the casting of history as progressively and deterministically forward-moving. As Dickey puts it, the belief in redemptive history demands the forgetting of catastrophic failure, whereas a 'history of failure leads one, finally, to recognize the failure of history' (Dickey 2008, 20). For Sebald, the catastrophes of the twentieth-century gave lie to human history as autonomous and rational, returning us – humans – to 'the larger history of nature', with its continuous, ongoing experiments and mistakes (21). 'History' cast as 'process' rather than 'progress' puts a stop to the futural 'dream of redemption' (ibid.). Abandoning the fantasy of *future* salvation is crucial given that, as Morton puts it, 'environmental catastrophe, far from being imminent, *has already taken place*' (2007, 28). There is no longer – if there ever was – a future to which we can defer.

Failure and performance have been linked in recent critical writing. Werry and O'Gorman go so far as to propose, after Phelan, that failure is performance's ontological condition. Less prosaically, they also offer failure as 'the hallmark of performance: with its endless interruptions, accidents, breakdowns, flops, misfires, deadends and surprises, moodiness and messiness' (2012, 2). Failure marks performance as an agential process, a contingent and relational act which takes place inside a thick, lively and complex matrix of interconnected actants. To accept failure is to give up the pretence of control (2012, 119). Bailes remarks too failure as performance's condition. A representational act, it can only ever fail, and doubly so:

Representation proposes a double-failure. First, each representative act underscores the failure of the present that instigates the initial impulse toward artistic activity. [...] But failure then repeats (its doubling) for the art object produced inevitably fails to be the thing it wishes to communicate (2010, 11).

From this critical perspective, performance is always an enactment of failure.

Accepting the inevitability of (performance's) failure might be another way to militate against disappointment. If failure is inevitable, there should be no expectation of success. An irresolvable paradox or two lurks in this formulation: failure is inserted precisely as an expectation, and within the frame of 'failure criticism' the work's failure becomes its success. Choosing to focus on disappointment rather than failure offers a way to sidestep, if not escape, this paradox. Whilst disappointment is related to failure, in that it is the failure to meet expectations that causes disappointment, disappointment and failure are not identical. The difference that lies in-between disappointment and failure is significant. As an affect, disappointment's dynamic is always relational. Whilst I might be disappointed *by* the work, my disappointment is not *of* the work. The work cannot by itself disappoint. The distinction I seek to make here is important. The disappointment lies not in the work and the claims made for it, but in my relationship to the work. The failure of *Forest Pitch*, if we want to call it that, lies in my orientation. *Forest Pitch* failed me. Attachments and orientations turned me towards some things and away from other potentialities, including the works' many possible futures. *Forest Pitch* will continue to unfold over the next sixty or so years, engendering all sorts of relations, both predicted and unforeseen. As Coulthard's reference to the self-seeding of the spruce trees suggests, the work has considerable and long-term agency. I cannot know, now, where it will go; and, I will never know where it goes (the work will outlive me). It will also prompt all manner of responses, human and more-than-human alike, encompassing the agonistic as well as the reciprocated. My response to the work, my very disappointment, is evidence of performance's contingent relationality. Acknowledging disappointment as an orientated affect is a reminder that other work and affects have and will undoubtedly take place. The relationality of disappointment, then, undoes mastery. The contingency of disappointment – unlike the certainty of failure, even failure recuperated as success – leaves the work open to other responses, other

performances to come. It also remains possible to state that a work disappoints, in a way that failure's recuperation makes it impossible to say that a work fails.

Disappointment's movements render it a more-than negative affect. Disappointment compels multiple strategies of mitigation but the space created between expectations and their disconfirmation is fundamental to hope's reappearance. Getting closer to disappointment's potentiality requires reversing the outcomes. What would have been the affect of my expectations being met and where would that have moved or turned me? The meeting of expectations leaves no space in-between, no re-orientation to somewhere else, nowhere to go, nowhere to become otherwise. As Lisa Le Feuvre notes, 'success' is a form of resolution and an end point, a fixed place: 'nothing can be improved, nothing added' (2010, 14). Paradoxically, it is my disappointment that keeps me returning to the scene of performance to see what might yet happen; not just the scene of *Forest Pitch*, in my attempts to deal with my disappointment, but other future performances. The space between my expectations and their failure – the space *made* by disappointment – is the very place of hope.

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