



MONASH University

Weekly Ticket Footscray – Towards a practice of slow theatre

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Monash University in 2020
Centre for Theatre and Performance

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Acknowledgements

This research was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship.

Copyeditor: Jim Fulton

Monash University Ethics Approval: Project Number 1587

Thanks to the following:

My academic dream team; Professor Stacy Holman Jones, Dr Chris Cottrell, Dr Stuart Grant and Dr Anne Harris. You have all helped, provoked, mentored and led me in different ways, transforming my thinking and my identity as artist and researcher.

Staff and students at Monash CTP for being part of this journey.

My kids Moses Carr and Rosie Carr, and my extended whānau in New Zealand – Professor Margaret Carr, Dr Malcolm Carr, Dr Polly Atatoa Carr, Robbie Atatoa, Mereana, Maeva and Arieta, all who motivate me and spur me to try and keep up. Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey, instigators and brilliant minds.

All my friend who have done or are doing PhDs and offered me excellent advice.

Staff and locals of Footscray Train Station for being part of this experiment.

And finally David Wells, my partner in life and art for endless inspiration, play and constant support.

Abstract

This research interrogates four years of “Weekly Ticket Footscray,” a weekly improvised participatory performance by David Wells at Footscray Train Station (with 185 performances to date), described in this research as “slow theatre.” Drawing from Jacques Rancière and Nicholas Bourriaud’s theories of equity between performer and audience, this thesis asks: In the context of slow theatre, what might a dramaturgical research framework and critical performance ethnographic methodology reveal about relational encounters between performer and audience?

Participation is increasingly a stated objective of artists working within multimodal arts practices. And while funding bodies, local and state governments and philanthropists seek to “activate” public space with performance and public art, there is little understanding of the relations produced by this type of participatory public performance. Additionally, there is a need to understand what methods can usefully be used to interrogate and understand these relations. In this practice-led research I gather four years of photographs, social media artefacts, recorded and overheard conversations and interviews. These are analysed using a dramaturgical research process to develop the new frameworks of “slow theatre,” “feral conversations” and “contagious audience”. I discuss how the artist disrupts behaviours within social space, in turn creating a complex dialogical “web,” including live and feral conversations. I define how an ethos of play and mutuality creates contagious audience and use these frameworks to offer provocations and principles for slow theatre projects.

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

Introduction

This introduction will “set the scene”¹ (to use a performance term) for this research. Prior to the literature and context review (Chapter 2) and methodology chapter (Chapter 3), I will give a description of the performance project this research analyses, and the specifics of the project’s site, audience, performance style and duration. Thus, I will describe the performance site in detail, outline the history and genesis of the performance project Weekly Ticket Footscray, and tell the story of how this research has evolved from my artistic interests in the field. I will also introduce key terms and define them for clarity, particularly as many descriptors used in the field of performance and theatre are contentious or have very broad meanings. I will discuss how terms such as “activation” and “participation” are used in the context of public performance. I generally use the term “public performance” in this research to describe performance in a public, non-traditional performance site (Footscray Train Station), as opposed to “black box” (theatre) or “white cube” (gallery) spaces, which are of course also public sites. The notion of participation is generally implied in the term “public performance” in this thesis, though sometimes I use the longer term “public participatory performance” for clarification, though it is a bit of a tongue-twister. The terms “audience” and “participant” are also used interchangeably, I generally use the term “participant” instead of “audience”, but due to the broader notions of participation explored in this research at times the term “audience” is used for clarity. My definition of public performance does not include works that transport a rehearsed theatrical performance into an “alternative” space (for example, empty warehouses or parks, which have been extensively used as non-traditional sites). Rather, Weekly Ticket Footscray is an improvised performance by a performing artist (David Wells, generally just called David, or “the artist” for simplicity from now on) in public for an audience, with no clear performance “contracts”; rather, this audience is “uncurated” (my own term, and discussed in more detail in section 1.8 below). Other terms such as “performance art” or “live art” are often used in this context, but these terms often denote a genesis in the visual arts rather than theatre. Key theorists of participation in the visual arts that I draw on are curators such as Nicholas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop and Miwon Kwon. This practice-led research builds on understandings of participation from my practice as a performer and dramaturg of performance in public space, and extends the analysis of relational encounters by dramaturgs such as Lavery & Williams (2011) and White (2013), by specifically enquiring into relations in the context of “slow theatre”. My principal research question is; “In the context of slow theatre, what might a dramaturgical research framework and critical performance ethnographic methodology reveal about relational encounters between performer and audience?”

¹ APA7 referencing requires double speech-marks for terms, slang and ironic use of language, I mention this as it may seem like these are direct quotes.

As the performance director, dramaturg and researcher of Weekly Ticket Footscray,² I describe, document³ and analyse the performative frameworks used to create relations between the audience and performance artist, discovering a complex pattern of feral conversations created by audience and performer existing in relational time.

A visual history of the performance is on our website www.weeklyticket.org. This will provide context for the description of site and performance style that follows.

1.1 Footscray Train Station – A brief description

Footscray train station in Footscray, Melbourne is built on the land of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and the Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation.⁴ It is a busy transport hub, and is the sixth busiest station on Melbourne's metropolitan network, with 3.767 million passenger movements recorded in the 2013/14 financial year (Public Transport Victoria, 2015). It has six platforms, and connecting the platforms is a long, covered overpass. The platforms themselves have waiting rooms and an old signal tower (currently not used) in the original red brick of 1859. Added to the historical architecture are new roof structures that create more shelter and match the modern overpass. Situated next to a large fruit, vegetable and Asian produce market, Footscray Train Station is a collecting and moving point for local, urban and regional travellers in Victoria and wider Melbourne, and an environment that many shoppers walk through to get from one part of Footscray to the shopping precinct. The population of Footscray has historically been a place where new arrivals to Melbourne live, firstly Greek and Italian, then Vietnamese and now East African. In Footscray, 45 percent of people spoke a language other than English at home in 2016 (Maribyrnong City Council, n.d.). The Footscray Nicholson campus of Victoria University is also only 100 meters from the station, with many students moving through the station. Metro Trains currently have the contract to run the train system, with Public Transport Victoria (PTV) being responsible for transport infrastructure. There are several hundred CCTV cameras at Footscray Station and a staff of around 10 people. One cleaner moves constantly throughout the station, and two Metro employees generally wait at one of the busier ticket stiles where commuters touch on or off using their Myki cards (electronic tickets). Sometimes, a group of Metro employees moves through checking Myki cards. Inside the station, office staff assist commuters with buying tickets and questions, coordinate all passenger and train movements and monitor CCTV

² WTF is our deliberate acronym, though I shorten the title to Weekly Ticket in this thesis.

³ The Weekly Ticket Footscray Website includes photographs taken by me each week: <http://weeklyticket.org>

⁴ I acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which we work. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

footage; there is also a staff kitchen and break room with a large TV screen that is set to Channel 7 (a fairly conservative commercial station).

Stories about Footscray sometimes describe the suburb as “Footscrazy.” There is a certain sense of local pride in this term as evidenced by a cushion with this logo I saw in a Footscray shop in 2020;



Image 1.1 – Footscrazy cushion, seen for sale in West Footscray shop. All photographs in this thesis have been taken by me unless credited to another photographer.

I spoke to one woman who was watching David across a platform at Footscray Station in September 2019, she stated: “He’s crazy. He’s definitely crazy. Well it’s Footscray, isn’t it? There’s a lot of crazy people around here.” This descriptor comes from a commonly held perception that illegal drug use in Footscray is prevalent and leads to florid public behaviour, particularly in the centre of the shopping precinct close to the station.⁵ However, the suburb of Footscray and surrounding inner-western suburbs are becoming increasingly gentrified, and the station is currently surrounded by new high-rise apartment buildings that will greatly increase the population density of Footscray in the years to come. Many new “hipster” style cafes and bars have been established in Footscray in the last 5 years, though Vietnamese and African restaurants are still the most numerous in the area. A common topic of conversation for David and older residents involves nostalgic recollections of how Footscray “used to be,” and David, as a local of 20 years,⁶ is able to participate in and instigate these types of conversations and stories, anchoring him more firmly as a “resident.”

⁵ A description of Footscray from an urban culture online magazine “Acclaim” sums it up: “If you live in Melbourne you’ll have heard of the western suburb Footscray, or ‘Footscrazy’, or ‘Footscary’ to those who affectionately call this once industrial, blossoming multi-cultural hub home. Known for its amazing discount store Savers, its influx of young, broke creatives fleeing Brunswick and apparently one of the best hot chocolates in Melbourne. It’s also known for the melodic sound of constant police sirens, drug related violence and neglected landscapes” (Nantes, n.d.).

⁶ David lives in Seddon, one train stop further away from the city to Footscray. Full disclosure: David is my husband and we have lived in the same house in Seddon together since 1999. Moses (born 1997 and now living in Brunswick in a share house (the opposite situation to that described in footnote 5)) and Rosie (born 2004 and a student at Footscray High School) are our children.

1.2 Brief description of the genesis of this performance project

The artistic team of Weekly Ticket are curators and artistic directors Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey, performer David Wells, and me as performance director and dramaturg. Weekly Ticket began in 2011 with Footscray Community Arts Centre calling for tenders for a public artwork at the station. Tim and Madeleine are “audio conceptual artists who create unexpected situations for listening. Their work is driven by a curiosity and questioning about sound in human culture” (Flynn & Humphrey, n.d.). Exploring the possibilities of working within the proposed budget, Tim and Madeleine considered the option of the maintenance allowance (for a sculpture) of \$12,000.00 becoming an artist’s wage, and the artist performing for the 15 years that a physical public object is designed to last. In effect, their key artistic provocation was “what if a public artwork was a performance artist?” They applied to create Weekly Ticket, but were unsuccessful due to funding structure changes at the time. Over the next 7 years, funding possibilities arrived and vanished, and the station itself underwent major renovations and changed public transport providers. In February 2016, Weekly Ticket was finally able to start with a small seeding grant from the Australia Council of the Arts,⁷ in the “emerging and experimental” category, and permission from Metro Trains was granted for a weekly performance schedule.

As the “Artist at the Station,” David carries a wooden chair and improvises: dancing, talking and creating performative moments with the commuters and staff at the station. He is present at the station on a weekly basis, for 2 hours. A full description of modes of performance is presented in Chapter 4. The next sections of this introduction will outline contemporary discussion of what art might “do” in this context, with particular attention to the relationship of artist with audience, the participatory relations created, and the complexity of researching this area, including an analysis of the “magical words” used to describe participation. Using stories, images, conversations and observations that I have gathered from attending and directing four years of weekly performances, this research offers the perspective of a participating artist to provide a specific analysis of participation in a public context. The first “magical” term I will explore is “activation.”

⁷ Australia’s Federal arts funding body.

1.3 “Activation” – a ubiquitous and magical word

Invariably, when public art is discussed, the word “activation” will be part of the description. To give current examples, in the 2017 book *Running the City – Why Public Art Matters* by Australian curator Felicity Fenner, the introduction by Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore expresses a typical attitude, that the public art projects in the book “activate public space not by simply being ‘plonked’ but by being integrated with that space and becoming embedded in its communities” (Fenner, 2017, p. viii). Similarly, the City of Melbourne’s public art strategy has as its first sentence: “The Public Art Framework 2014-2017 outlines the vision, direction and platforms of the Public Art Program over the next three years. It is future focused while reflecting Melbourne’s strong legacy of creative activation of the public realm” (City of Melbourne, n.d.).

Given the ubiquitous use of the term “activate” in relation to public art, it is interesting to try to understand what a received understanding of this word might be. When googled, the common use of the word “activate” relates to sim cards, charcoal, almonds and sewerage, and refers to making something “active or operative.” Perhaps more informally it means that these things work better or more quickly; for example, an “activated almond” can deliver to you (supposedly) more nutrients, it is a more efficient food source. In relation to public art, therefore, there is an inference that a public place is in some way inert or inactive. Will it operate as a “better” public space with art in it? Does it create “better” or more varied human relations? The majority of public spaces are in and of themselves full of activity of different kinds, and already operating as a site of human activity, possibly quite effectively. Certainly, Footscray Train Station is a public space full of activity and the efficient movement of commuters and locals. So, if “activation” is implicitly required of public spaces, then one argument must become that art can change that activity for the better – but how? It seems to me that the idea of “activation” has become as tired and clichéd as previous descriptors such as “community art,” words that rather than describing a recognised phenomenon, simply signify a magical concept that is seldom further defined. Despite this lack of definition, it is used throughout discussions of participation and art, as Claire Bishop, a scholar of participation, notes, “Three concerns – activation; authorship; community – are the most frequently cited motivations for almost all artistic attempts to encourage participation since the 1960s” (2006, p. 12).

In defining the opposite of activation being something like “plonked” (a term the Lord Mayor of Sydney used earlier), or “plop art” (Harvie, 2013), describing a random and sudden appearance of artwork in community space, I argue that most contemporary public art is to a certain extent “plonked.” There may have been “extensive community consultation” (a term commonly used without elaboration by arts bodies or government), but at some point, a thing or an event is organised to respond in some way to a perceived “community.” Jen Harvie, in her book *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism*, describes these projects as,

effectively parachuted in by an outside organization to a community with which neither the art nor the outside organization has much genuine interaction; camouflaging the broader lack of infrastructural support for art in the context of funding cutbacks; and contributing to changing perceptions of neighbourhoods, leading to gentrification and economically necessitating residents’ gradual out-migration. (Harvie, 2013, p. 111)

The contemporary Australian context of Weekly Ticket is a time of dramatic arts funding cuts; at the time of writing, many independent theatre companies have lost their 4-year funding, and the effects of COVID19 remain unknown, impacting “genuine” relationships and interactions with community that have amassed over time.

Weekly Ticket does “plonk” an artist in an unusual place, and this research aims to discover more about what happens next. However, although I began this project as an artist and researcher to seek clear results that could be used to advocate for this project and my practice more generally, as time has passed, I have had to interrogate honestly what I can know and how I can know it. My initial idea of a brief audience survey has been discontinued, because though the resulting information (gathered using an iPad survey) may be seen as useful in some contexts, the information recorded seemed to me to be thin, lifeless and un-representative of the complexity of our audiences and the intimacy of our conversations. For example, one question was: “Have you seen this performer before?” (with image of David), and possible responses being simply yes or no. I am much more interested in the complexity of different modes of participation, and “seeing” David is just one possibility of many. Abandoning my (self-appointed) role as a “proper social scientist researcher” was a crucial point in my research. I decided to acknowledge and embrace the “feral” (Heim 2003), complex and chaotic nature of this setting, and to keep noticing everything I saw and experienced as an artist at the station. Norman Denzin has a broader analysis of the importance of critical enquiry that accounts for the mess of artistic practice and the importance of listening for marginalised voices: “We live in the audit cultures of global neoliberalism.

The politics of evidence that define the audit culture marginalize critical inquiry” (2017, p. 8). Australian theatre director, critic and scholar Julian Meyrick echoes this position in his provocation for artists and cultural organisations to “stop measuring and judge carefully” (2018, p. xxix). I discuss this idea of measurement in more detail in the next section.

1.4 Resisting the measurement imperative

Julian Meyrick’s 2018 book *What Matters? Talking Value in Australian Culture* is an overview of both the analysis and creation of data typically used to justify arts and cultural activity in Australia, particularly in relation to arts funding and the metrics of “excellence.” As both scholar and theatre practitioner, he, along with Tully Barnett and Robert Phiddian, has looked carefully at the magic words and activities used within arguments of value and measurement relating to culture. The following question rings true to me and serves as a key impetus to my research: “...if you are an artist or cultural organisation ... what is it like to talk about the experiences you actually create, rather than provide a shopping list of all imaginable positive outcomes ‘in the language of government’?” (Meyrick, 2018, p. 22). As an artist, I am guilty of using the magical words in funding applications: “Key performance indicators (KPIs),” “community engagement,” “activation,” and other nebulous terms that are seldom defined but expected as the official language of this realm. Meyrick (2016), in an earlier article, analyses key terms (participation, creativity, sustainability and human values) used by a local government to “measure impact on culture,” stating that “participation is an activity, creativity a quality, connectedness and sustainability states of affairs, and human values an ethical theory” (2016, p. 147). He asks: how can terms from such different “semantic orbits” be used in the same methodology to measure “impact,” and what type of data is being collected, and how and why?

These magical terms from the arts “industry” have correlations to words used in academia, and I consider the academic debate on useful ways to measure audience engagement and participation in the arts in Chapter 3; however, the analysis of cultural measurement strategies by Meyrick is important, as it sits within contemporary Australian academic, industry and artistic practice. When I began this research, I had a sense of imperative to create clear research outcomes in order to help secure future funding for this project. This is understandable; we do not have ongoing funding for Weekly Ticket at this stage. However, over the course of this research, I have felt increasingly uncomfortable about pursuing more quantitative elements as a means to provide measurable data on “impact.” Instead, I have come to see this research as an opportunity to

focus on what I see and experience, and resist the opportunity to categorise and quantify using terms and ideas not representative of what is really happening, or to become distracted by funnelling these insights into measurable outcomes. Paying attention to what I experience as an artist and extending this into a dramaturgical research framework is how I have uncovered research themes and outcomes.

Initially I developed an iPad survey in consultation with Monash Statistical Consultants that had ethical clearance from Monash University. The questions were developed to be able to be answered very quickly in situ at the station, with single choice answers to several questions. For example, the survey includes a question asking if the audience member had seen the performer before, and a series of emojis to choose to gauge audience reactions. The survey was rolled out in May 2017, with myself approaching audience members if I had noticed them noticing or participating in the performance in any way. After several weeks of doing this, I decided the data collected by the iPad survey was not representative of audience understandings or co-creations, because the most responsive audience to approach was those people waiting for a regional train (as they had more time); also, those audience members who had a more negative reaction to the performance generally politely refused to participate. So, my surveyed audience was mainly cheerful regional commuters, and whilst I could persevere and perhaps explain the non-representational nature of data collected, it did not seem either useful or ethical to do so. The first day after I stopped the survey, I was at the station simply practising a state of “deep hanging out” (Geertz, 1998), and a young woman approached me. I made notes during our 20-minute conversation, sparked by her inquiry about Weekly Ticket, and the material seemed to me so rich, useful and inspiring that I decided to keep pursuing a methodology that allows for dialogical opportunities, and for me to be present at the station as artist, director and dramaturg. This method also cohesively aligns research and practice for me; the conversations become the text in my “dramaturgical research framework” (my term), with a rich aesthetic quality, as described by Wallace Heim: “To come into conversation can be a disturbing thing, exposing, altering and aesthetic. How the conversation is made can conduct the speakers in an unknown direction, towards friendship, argument, silence, the emergence of something new” (Heim, 2003, p. 183). The purpose of this research is to map out the previously “unknown directions” of the conversations at the station, and where they lead the artist, audience and myself. My pursuit of conversation, discussed in detail in Chapter 6, has evolved into an analysis of a complex conversational “web” created by Weekly Ticket. This extended understanding in turn has created my analysis of “slow theatre” (Chapter 7).

In the next sections of this chapter, I describe the site and audience from my perspective as an artist and researcher in order to give a comprehensive picture of this performance at Footscray Train Station.

1.5 Footscray Train Station as a public performance site

Theories and understandings of space, public space, social space, and art sites as space and place are complex and at times contradictory, as I outline in the next section of this chapter. My understanding of Footscray Station as a performance space comes from my role participating in and attending Weekly Ticket on a weekly basis, and as a local resident travelling through at other times. I also compare this performance site with the many other sites I have created performances for, within, and in reaction to. In the present chapter, I focus on an understanding of the site in relation to how it delineates an audience within it, channelling the movements and stationary points of audience (including station staff) and performer, and allowing or framing different modes of participation.⁸

1.5.1 Audience behaviour within the site

The station is what anthropologist Marc Augé terms a “non-space” (1995) or a liminal space; there is a sense of being in-between, people there are waiting, hovering, moving through. Paradoxically, the station is also far from neutral, as Henri Lefebvre writes: “Space is never neutral but always the product of our lived behaviour and codes” (1991, p. 17). The people moving through Footscray Train Station – who are our audience – are in the middle, start or end of a journey and hoping for a smooth and quiet experience, nothing too unexpected. They arrive on the platforms, distribute themselves evenly across the space and wait. Their waiting activities include: looking at a phone, talking on a phone, listening to music, reading (not very common), looking/not looking in a non-directed way, resting in a state of being present, but not staring specifically at any one person, listening for announcements, and keeping belongings safe. They watch the digital signs to make sure they know when the train will arrive and if it is stopping at the place they want to go. The atmosphere is of diffuse awareness. The artist disrupts both the liminality and the lived codes of the station by being in “explicit” (as described by performance and dance scholar Matthew Reason,

⁸ The term ‘site dance’ is used by several practitioners and scholars (Barbour, Hunter & Kloetzel 2019) (Barbour 2019). “Site dance offers a multitude of approaches both to creating dance that engages with specific sites and to cultivating responsive relationships and dialogues between places and dancers. Site dance is a growing research area in which particular artistic methods employed by choreographers and artists are nuanced in multiple ways in relation to the sites and places chosen for performance (Barbour et al. 2019; Hunter 2015; Kloetzel and Pavlik 2009)” (Barbour, 2019, p. 114). Though Weekly Ticket could certainly be described as a ‘site dance’, I have not drawn extensively on this scholarship or terminology for two reasons; my research has moved away from investigating ‘place’ or ‘site’ towards participation between people in a place, and my background in theatre and performance studies rather than dance means I have drawn more from scholarship and practice from theatre and street performance in this practice-led research.

in Reynolds & Reason, 2012) performance, by behaving in a way that is playful and unexpected. The station-goers are startled and sometimes disarmed to find themselves transforming into an audience. David describes the audience: “They are self-conscious, but they are already involved and don’t know how to behave...I feel like people have disarmed themselves or disclosed themselves unwittingly ... we have jumped across a distance to each-other” (interview August 2018). A more detailed description of how performing modes create these encounters is presented in Chapter 5, with particular reference to how Weekly Ticket disrupts typical behaviours within different proxemic zones (Hall, 1963).

Performing outdoors in a complex human environment has unique challenges. In my field notes, I notice that I often make reference to the weather. When performing outside, the temperature and wind is unable to be ignored.

For example,

dancing on the overpass in an icy winter wind, David wears jacket and gloves, the audience walk swiftly, heads down, a common response is a backward glance after they have passed him.

Field notes, July 2018.

The weather as an element of the site affects all the relationships within it, allowing for shorter or more relaxed interactions depending on temperature and architecture; some spaces are sheltered and favourite places for the artist to talk, others offer a view of the artist dancing from a distance. Contrast this sense of an environment that is live, transformative, complex and responsive with visual artist and theorist Brian O’Doherty’s description of a “white cube” space:

The box, which I have called the white cube, is a curious piece of real estate [...]

However roughly treated, the white cube is like a straight man in a slapstick routine. No matter how repeatedly hit on the head, no matter how many pratfalls, up it springs, its seamless white smile unchanged, eager for more abuse. Brushed off, pampered, re-painted, it resumes in blankness. (O’Doherty, 2009, p. 26)

This sense of a white cube is similar to the “seamless” environment of a black box theatre space, where transient set and lighting design transform a blank canvas. An indoor audience should not be concentrating on the architecture of the theatre itself unless this is a conscious element of the design. One exception to this that I have experienced is the Peacock Theatre in Hobart, Tasmania. Hewn out of a limestone cliff, the theatre actually has raw rock as its back wall, creating an artistic challenge for touring shows who cannot have various rear entrances or a neutral back wall.⁹ My research focus is performance in an outdoor setting, and I understand these ever-changing environments from the perspective of my personal history as performer and deviser in this realm.

⁹ As a director, I have both devised a performance *Hungry For You*, and toured a show *The Concert* to this venue and enjoyed having to adapt to such an unusual indoor theatre space, where the space itself has such a strong “character.”

1.6 Participatory public art practice from a theatre performance perspective

My creative enquiry into performance outside of the “black box” has always been based on an interest in audience, how a relationship can be engendered instantaneously, and what the nature of these relationships are. This allows me to discover what art we are making. Theatre director Anne Bogart describes the genesis of artistic practice: “The primary tool in a creative process is interest.... The state of interest is a liminal experience – the sensation of a threshold” (Bogart, 2001, p. 76). Performing in public space is the feeling of constantly moving across thresholds, finding a place to be seen and heard in the existing architecture and moving into intimate space with strangers. This is a complex negotiation and involves the bravery of the improvising performer making an “offer” and then noticing and building on responses to create mutual playful behaviour. I also have a strong personal interest in working with an audience who may not have access to contemporary performance for a range of reasons including financial and physical accessibility. This is the realm of “street theatre,” where I began my performance career in the early 1990s, and I have always enjoyed being immersed in the diverse audiences I encounter in public environments.

1.6.1 A historical perspective – “live art” replaces “street theatre”

My initial interest in public performance comes from my experience as performer, deviser and dramaturg working in non-traditional public spaces for the last 30 years. I began in New Zealand, then Melbourne, and later toured throughout Europe, Colombia, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, China and Australia with the performance troupe “The Hunting Party.” I describe this more fully in Chapter 2, where I give a detailed artistic context to Weekly Ticket. This personal history, or “enthusiasm of practice” (Haseman, 2007), is the background to my research, particularly as performing overseas offered opportunities to explore how participation and reactions to unexpected performance may be different in different settings. In my experience, Australian audiences are wary when they encounter unexpected performance in public space, more so than European or South American audiences, where an initial reaction of delight and curiosity and an immediate willingness to participate is more common.

This research is timely, as there is currently less public performance from theatre practitioners than there was in the 1990s and 2000s when I was performing extensively in Australia. During those decades, the Melbourne International Festival had comprehensive “street theatre” programs featuring local and international performers¹⁰ performing outside in the Arts Centre Melbourne precinct for free to “uncurated” audiences. I outline this history in detail in Chapter 2. The term “street theatre” is now seldom used in Australia; rather, the term “live art” is current. This thesis argues that a theatre performer operating in public space uses complex methods to engender participation, and a description of these from a theatre background is critical to understanding these relational encounters. This rich description is of value to practitioners, academics and critics in the field of participatory performance, a realm I argue does not have a written legacy in mainstream Australian media due to it being seen as “in-between” conventional forms. Street theatre, circus, cabaret and other previously marginalised forms are having an important resurgence in research interests¹¹, acknowledging the importance of these genres in charting the artistic landscape of Australian contemporary performance.

1.6.2 Dialogical performance “between forms,” the difficulty of critical analysis

Weekly Ticket as an art form lives within several families: Boal’s “Invisible Theatre,” Situationist experiments, Dada events, Fluxus happenings and street theatre to mention a few (more detail of artistic lineage will be described in Chapter 2). In particular, Dada events in the early 20th century and Fluxus happenings in the 1960s and 1970s attracted a great deal of critical and academic interest, as new notions of participation and breaking down barriers between performer and audience and art and life were explored. For many artists this intersection of performer and audience has created a focus on direct relations and conversation.

Contemporary art projects with a focus on participation and conversation are described by performance theorist Grant Kester (2004) as “dialogical projects,” “projects that design innovative spaces for conversation” (p. 10), and they attract less critical attention than art projects that are clearly in the visual arts or theatre worlds. “Dialogical Projects often leave little or no physical trace due to their ephemeral nature. This situation is exacerbated by the general neglect of mainstream publishers and critics” (Kester, 2013, p. 190). Current

¹⁰ See Melbourne Festival archive:

<http://2015.festival.melbourne/about/festival-history/past-festivals/1993-festival/>

¹¹ For example, the 2019 ADSA (Australasian Drama and Theatre studies) conference with the theme of “festivals” contained many papers on non-traditional performances in the context of parades, street theatre, live art and the MONA FOMA (Festival of Music and Art) Tasmanian festival.

“live art” attracts some media attention if the artistic concept is interesting, or extreme in some way, but more as a descriptor of the performance rather than a critical analysis of it. For example, in the 2018 Melbourne Fringe Festival, a major work produced by the Fringe was “Icon,” created by the collective “Field Theory” (artists from a visual arts background who have worked extensively in participatory “Live Art”). This project involved the selection of a random person to become an “icon”, and this person was then celebrated with a festival at Federation Square (in the centre of Melbourne CBD). “Icon” received some media interest, with a full-page article in *The Age* newspaper. However, at the time of writing, the performance outcomes have received no critical attention where the performance is discussed by theatre or art critics, relating this work to others of a similar nature or discussing the objectives and outcomes of this specific project. “The Hunting Party,” as mentioned earlier, despite becoming an export success story for Australian performing artists overseas (and providing long-term wages for ten Australian artists), never received any critical attention, or industry awards¹² other than from one arts review in a newspaper in Bogota, Colombia. I mention these examples to illustrate the “in-between” categorisation that historically and currently exists for public performance in non-traditional spaces, and a confusion about what these types of projects actually do or seek to do. As Heim states:

During the last thirty years, artists-performers-activists have been creating events and actions in which a conversation with a public is the performative core...Because these works are resolutely between conventional forms, criticism from one disciplinary perspective can find the works lacking. From the visual arts, the absence of an object, the durational aspect, and the inclusion of dialogue have required the development of new critical frameworks (see Kester, forthcoming¹³). Likewise, the expectations of theatre, in which extremes of emotions can be conveyed and fictional identities entertained, will not be met by works which are embedded in the everyday, which are constrained by the ethical imperatives and social conventions of speaking face-to-face with another person. (2003, p. 186)

I would argue that “extremes of emotions” and “fictional identities” are not pre-requisites for theatre, as many contemporary performances blur and explore the boundaries between real-life and fiction. However, the importance of new “critical frameworks” is clear, and this research provides both research methods and outcomes by applying a “dramaturgical” framework that looks at the impact of performance in a comprehensive sense, incorporating elements such as audience documenting and sharing performance material on social media

¹² Arguably, there are no relevant categories in the main Victorian (state) Theatre Industry “Green Room Awards,” though some participatory projects might sneak into a subset of the “Contemporary and Experimental” category. At the time of writing, the 2019 Green Room Awards does not have the “site-specific” category that has existed in the past.
¹³ This refers to Grant Kester’s 2013 book *Conversation Pieces, Community and Communication in Modern Art* that is extensively quoted in this research.

and conversations that expand on themselves in a complex web. This analysis echoes Mike Pearson's understanding of performance from his book *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001):

Performance exists as a cluster of narratives...By narrative, we simply mean discrete ways of telling, some recognition of the oral nature of performance practice. But if we extend the notion of narrative to cover all orders of information generated by, and around, performance – strategic, operational, observational, critical, speculative – before, during and after the event then we might envisage documentation as requiring an integration or incorporation of these narratives. (p. 57)

The possibility of discussing Weekly Ticket with the audience during the event is a “live” element critical to this research. This allows conversational possibilities similar to a traditional “white cube” environment (talking about a sculpture in a gallery while you are looking at it) but generally not appropriate to a theatre or “black box.” Amongst the complexity of the people at the station, the waves of coming and going, the trains that noisily bisect any conversation and visual field with diesel rumbles and horns, the audience can talk about the performance as it is happening. This is the “live commentary” that Nicholas Bourriaud describes in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), and my recordings of these commentaries are used to uncover the relations created by Weekly Ticket. The audience may discuss the artist amongst themselves, creating a community that may contain some more expert than others:

Overheard at the station after seeing Weekly Ticket:

Person A - What's he doing?

Person B - I don't know, but it's good.

Field notes, September 2017.

Adding to the “live” element and relational encounter is when an audience member asks the artist at the station directly “What are you doing?” and the artist answers, thus creating a new encounter. Sometimes, the question is asked in an accusatory way, while other times the question is borne of a heartfelt interest or a joyous confusion, at which point the conversation moves into the mode that Bourriaud describes as “moments of sociability” (2002, p. 33) via an extended conversation. Drawing on performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte's description of performance as a cycle of performer and audience co-creating “autopoiesis” (a term drawn from cellular biology meaning continual self-production), Gareth White posits that “the change in the experiential dimension of the work is significant not just to each audience member's understanding, response and contribution, but also to what kind of art work emerges” (2013, p. 164). In order to discover what performance we are making at the station, I must

therefore understand audience as comprehensively as possible. This material will be outlined in the next section, as will the importance of obtaining this directly from an audience.

1.7 Researching the audience

This research seeks to understand the relations generated by this participatory performance more fully by gathering several types of material directly relating to audience participation through the use of ethnographic observations, interviews, informal conversations, dialogue obtained by overhearing audience, social media artefacts, photographs and films. These are then analysed within a dramaturgical research framework.

Generally, audience “understandings” are given by a curator or researcher describing what they see from their perspective as the expert (Bishop, 2004; Fenner, 2017; Kester, 2004; Kwon, 2004). They may describe and interpret an audience that they are watching, or describe a participatory experience from their own experience of it. A rare published description of an audience member’s perspective of a participatory performance (as opposed to a critical review or artist/curator’s description) is included in Felicity Fenner’s 2017 book, though it is not clear how this perspective was obtained. Audience member Sean Kelly describes his experience of an immersive work involving a bus ride, *Iteration: Again*, curated in Tasmania by David Cross: “On the bus I’d got to thinking about how we construct the world, how all relations, all collaborative conceits, originate in the imagination. The idea could have stayed inside the artist’s mind but no, it is out in the world and constructing action in the lives of others.... We all act out of the brains of others” (Fenner, 2017, p. 46). I argue that this type of direct story from an audience offers critical understandings of a participatory performance, the relations implicit within it, and the themes of the work; therefore, material from the audience has been gathered for this research directly via interviews, field notes, social media sites and overheard conversations.

Grant Kester (2013) also calls for observers (curators in this instance) to formulate understandings of participatory performance on a “field-based approach,” where time is taken to understand what the audience actually does do, rather than privilege a purely hypothetical position:

We require new models of reception capable of addressing the actual, rather than the hypothetical, experience of participants in a given project, with a particular awareness of the parameters of agency and affect. What is the relationship between language, utterance, physical gesture, and movement in these encounters? (2013, para. 16).

I use a dramaturgical research framework to deal directly with these elements: language, utterance, physical gesture and movement. What participatory relations are created by these elements is analysed in terms of proxemics (movement in social space), dialogical performance (language and utterance) and slow theatre (how performing over time is a contributing factor to all elements of the performance) in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

1.8 Durational “uncurated” audience

As a durational performance, Weekly Ticket Footscray offers the opportunity for a long-term performance to become, in a sense, “resident” at the station.¹⁴ Within the multiplicity of commuters at the station, very few arrive with the expectation of becoming an “audience.” This is my preferred descriptor, as its current use encompasses notions of participation just as well as other less common terms used in this context, such as “partaker,” “participant,” “witness,” “audience-participant,” “percipient” (Myers 2011) or even “immersant” (Machon, 2016). “‘Audience’ has moved beyond the auditory role indicated by the etymology of the word to become a generic term for the receiver/interpreter of a performance, including where that relationship involves active reception and interpretation through collaborative participation” (Machon, 2016, p. 30).

This research involves investigating what I describe as an “uncurated” audience, an audience not expecting an artistic experience, who encounter David unexpectedly for the first time, or who over time have multiple encounters. This audience also includes station staff who see the performance every week as they work at the ticket stiles, the cleaners who move through the station, and the staff inside the ticket office who watch David on CCTV cameras. The usual social “contracts” for audience are not present in Weekly Ticket, the audience have not organized themselves to be at a place at a certain time, there is no financial exchange, the site of performance is not traditional, the performance is not framed with advertisements, flyers or programmes, and there are no clear guidelines for understanding or participating. Shannon Jackson describes the importance of expectations in regards to arts “understandings”; “If, for instance, we understand a relational art work to be a revision of sculpture, we encounter it differently than if we understand it to be a revision of theatre or dance. Some may not understand the work to be a revision of anything” (2011, p. 18). Our participating audience would generally not understand the work to be a “revision of anything” in terms of expected artistic genres, but instead a revision of typical commuter behaviour.

¹⁴ Similar to an arts residency that may be part of a funding or infrastructure initiative for artists to partner with institutions, but different because the notion of “residency” has been developed over time through artistic exploration. To a certain extent the role of “resident” has been conferred onto David over time by commuters and station staff. This is described in more detail in Chapter 6.6.

David operates in a way that disrupts typical behaviours at the station, carrying his own chair, dancing, and directly approaching people who are watching, moving into an intimate space (described in Chapter 5 in terms of proxemic zones) and talking to people about what he is doing and why, or enquiring about what they are doing. While an artist might, as Kester states, be seen as occupying a “position of perceived cultural authority” (2004, p. 115), in the unexpected context of an Australian suburban train station David’s position is more complex than that within a traditional audience-performer relationship. Indeed, his presence as performing artist in a non-theatrical site can be discomfiting, eliciting responses like that of the passer-by who described him as a “bloody idiot,” or a more complex negative response I transcribed: “Stop it! Stop acting like a dickhead before I treat you like one!” (Field notes, December, 2016). This subversion of a conventional performer/audience relationship and transgression of social norms is the beginning of a “type of relation” (Bishop, 2004) between artist and audience, and its beginning may be more or less antagonistic, depending on the audience member. This relation may change; within one encounter, over time, or through several encounters in face-to-face interactions. I interrogate these relations, within the context of “dialogical performance,” by documenting and analysing conversations, in particular describing some of these conversations as “feral,” as I outline in the next section, and discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6.

1.9 Feral Conversations

I use the term “feral” (from Heim) as a useful descriptor for some of the conversations that radiate out from the performer in this research; these are the conversations we (the artistic team) do not directly have with staff or audience, but conversations that happen at a remove from us. I use the term “feral” in this context not as describing something wild or dangerous but instead following Heim’s definition of feral as ungovernable, celebratory, generous and playful (2003). We offer our work as a provocation to our audience and they run off with it, transforming and returning our ideas in ways that illuminate our work back to us, not only in terms of the themes and understandings of this performance, but in understanding our role and impact as artists.

We cannot control the conversations about our work. Some of our audience have become “regulars,” demonstrating mutual knowledge and recognition, accepting the artist in his role as they would other professionals operating within the

site and describing what he is doing to others. Some audiences assume and misinform others that David is being “paid by the Council,” or in other ways confer on him official status. Staff at the station also classify the performer as having a Metro or Maribyrnong Council sanctioned role in order to answer questions from commuters about what he is doing.

Transcribed from interview with “Paul”¹⁵ - a staff member at the station who described himself as a “Leading Personnel Officer”:

Paul - Most people have been pleasant about him, so, ahhh, no I’ve heard nothing really said about him, some say it’s odd doing this, I say well he’s a paid performer, it’s a question of art, so he’s hired by the council.

(September 13, 2018)

Their descriptions, whilst factually incorrect, have become part of this project, changing the relations between artist and audience, as he is seen by some as being part of the “proper” institutional workings of Footscray Station (distinct from the buskers, sellers of the Big Issue and vendors seeking charitable donations for various causes.) This also aligns the performer with a public art work, typically a sculpture, that would be assumed to be paid for by public money in some way. These transforming descriptions and conversations between station staff and audience are an example of the type of “feral” conversations described by Heim in the realm of dialogical art and her notion of “slow activism.”

The artist initiates an exchange which “works” not only in the immediacy of the event but could “work” in unforeseen situations. That initial exchange, and its setting and narrative, can be recounted and storied. Those stories can continue to reverberate as uncontrollable extensions of the work, with new meanings emerging in unexpected, untraceable places; they become feral (Heim, 2003, p. 187)

This sense of moving away from the expected into new territories is echoed by performance maker and scholar Alyson Campbell, who identifies a “feral approach” to pedagogy:

A feral approach involves de-domesticating previous assumptions and knowledge, taking academic practice and remobilising it in new environments with people often excluded from access to it. Feral pedagogies might also serve us in thinking how we can intervene as performance makers and scholars in starting to fill this hole, through conversation. (Campbell, 2018, p. 63)

¹⁵ All names of station staff have been changed in this research.

This research uses a dramaturgical research framework and critical performance ethnography methodology to reveal the relational encounters within Weekly Ticket, with a specific interest in how performer and audience co-create meaning through conversations.

1.10 Structure of this thesis

I have organised the chapters of this thesis to allow the reader a step-by-step understanding of research themes, processes and outcomes. The chapters are ordered as follows:

Chapter 2 – Literature and context review. This chapter further develops an overview of scholarly writing, theories of participation and my own and David's artistic history that has been outlined briefly in this introduction. This serves to situate this research within both the academic realm of participatory performance and the lineage of street theatre and public performance.

Chapter 3 – This chapter outlines my research process, defining how research and artistic processes of dramaturgy are aligned in this research to create new knowledge.

Chapter 4 – Building on my perspective as a dramaturg in this practice-led research, I will outline my understanding of dance, improvisation and play as key methods of practice. I also describe the particulars of costume and use of a chair as prop within Weekly Ticket

Chapter 5 – As an improvising performer seeking mutuality, David disrupts typical behaviour in relation to “proxemic zones” (Hall 1963), the distances between performer and audience. This creates curiosity, which in turn may be contagious, creating audience. I extend the notion of proxemic zones to discuss the distances between multiple audiences and how using mobile phones adds another element to space and participation in a contemporary context.

Chapter 6 – Building on an understanding of audience and performer in “personal” space creating conversation, this chapter discusses the complexity of “dialogical performance,” performance that creates and contains conversations.

The types of dialogue within Weekly Ticket are explicated and examples are given of dialogical processes that move from live and immediate conversations into “feral” territory, created by audiences who have not directly experienced Weekly Ticket, or conversations that take place on Facebook, Instagram and Reddit.

Chapter 7 – This chapter references “slowness” in relation to slow living, slow food, slow activism and “slow dramaturgy” (Eckersall and Paterson 2011), and defines Weekly Ticket as “slow theatre.” Slow theatre is created by the direct relations of audience and artist existing in “relational time” within an overall ethos of connectivity and generosity.

Chapter 8 – In this conclusion I ask “what next”? and provide an argument of how an ethos of slow theatre could offer an alternative to models of creative practice in the arts during this current pandemic and pandemic-recovery climate (the first half of 2020 in Australia). In order to illustrate this argument, I imagine a future that includes extensive artist in residence projects throughout Australia, an arts model that embraces the long and the local. I also offer practitioners provocations and principles for their own work. The provocations are: What is your art doing to you? and What is your art doing that you will never know? The principles are: create a beginning ritual for performance that you enjoy, be generous, and turn up and pay attention.

Chapter 2 Literature and Context Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a historical context to both the artistic practices and theoretical understandings of participation within Weekly Ticket. This includes a history of what was previously (between approximately 1980 and 2000) called ‘street theatre’ in Australia; this genre has had little academic attention to date and is important to give a frame of reference to the artistic and personal histories within this research. The artistic form of Weekly Ticket is discussed in relation to other public performances, and contextualised within a lineage of Dada, Situationist, Fluxus and performance art experiments that move into what is often called contemporary live art.

This chapter also offers conceptual understandings gathered from practice as well as scholarly writing, responding to the need for practitioner-researchers to investigate participatory projects with rigour and specificity, as dramaturgs Carl Lavery and David Williams write:

it seems that much is to be gained by moving the issue away from questions of definition [of participation] toward those of pragmatics or technique. Perhaps we should stop trying to disclose the substance or ontology of participation (whatever that might be), and instead listen to how artists allow for its specific possibility in and through the different media in which they labour. (Lavery & Williams, 2011, p. 8)

My role as a participatory artist is foundational to research contexts and outcomes. Prior to beginning this research, my exposure to the academic field of theatre and performance studies was cursory at best; my undergraduate theatre degree in Wellington, New Zealand, in the early 1980s was resolutely practical. I have a dog-eared copy of Bim Mason’s 1992 book, *Street Theatre and Other Outdoor Performances* that I bought around 1993 and which gave me a context for European street theatre at a time when I was beginning to work in this area. In the later 1990s, it was exciting for me to see the performers in this book live at international festivals where I was also performing. My academic research experience prior to this thesis was in the field of education, where I explored the process of devising theatre with primary school students. In Chapter 4, I further outline how specific theatre and dance training undertaken by David and I affords skills in improvisation and creating participation.

This chapter is organised around specific genres of public performance, including historic and contemporary treatments of each, rather than a chronological treatment. Each section outlines both the historical lineage of these genres and then moves to the present to discuss their influence on or parallels with Weekly Ticket. For example, the following section (2.1) describes street theatre in Melbourne from the 1980s to practitioners from this lineage still performing today. After that, I discuss Dada and Situationist experiments, environmental and land art, art movements that interrogate the relationship between life and art, and durational performance. I finally outline key theories of participation from Jacques Rancière, Nicolas Bourriaud, Clare Bishop and Grant Kester. These theorists provide a framework that I use to interrogate participation within Weekly Ticket. The key terms interrogated in this chapter in relation to existing scholarship and my practice are: duration, slowness, relational performance, audience performer relations and participation.

2.1 Contextual review – Street theatre in Melbourne and beyond

Creative-practice-as-research scholar, Brad Haseman, describes a “contextual review” in practice-led research; “‘the contextual review’ builds not from a sense of the problem but from the sense of the practice” (2007, p. 6). My interest in public performance comes from my experience as a performer, director and dramaturg working in non-traditional public spaces for the last 30 years, first in New Zealand, then Melbourne, and later touring throughout Europe, Colombia, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, China and Australia. The performance environments of this history are urban streets, outdoor plazas, schools, shopping precincts, sports venues, parties and cabaret venues. The audiences may come specifically to see performances or they might happen upon them unexpectedly, and they are always free of cost to the audience. Also, strong in my memory are the changing rooms inhabited directly prior to performances; these ranged from official theatre dressing rooms to public toilets, tents, mini vans, behind a low partition on the street, a large refrigerated meat safe in Hong Kong and a dusty half-built parking building in Bogotá with a crowd of thousands of people assembling in a plaza nearby. In 1994, I performed with the street theatre group “The Hunting Party” in Canberra at the official government launch of Australia’s National *Creative Nation Policy*.¹ As roving street theatre performers, we were considered an important element of the Australian arts ecology at this time. This personal history, or “enthusiasm of practice” (Haseman, 2007), is the background to my research. The genre of “street theatre” needs further description, as I consider it one of the precursors to what is now often called “live art.”

¹ “An ambitious and expansive project by Paul Keating’s Labor Government, it was the first Commonwealth cultural policy document in Australia’s history. Its initial impact was significant, with Keating committing A\$252 million of additional spending over four years to the arts and cultural industries in Australia” (Hawkins, 2014, para 1).

2.1.1 Street theatre – Definition

I define street theatre as a theatrical performance that takes place in a public space – a street or more often a forecourt, plaza or public open space. An audience will gather and be arranged, often in a large circle or semicircle, usually standing or sitting on the ground. The performance itself may have elements of improvisation but is usually devised by the performers prior to the event. The performers are typically actors, and they may be trained or have experience in vocal production, physical theatre techniques and interaction. I add to this (my own) definition that the performance is often part of a festival or community event where it is programmed and advertised and the audience has largely come specifically to see it. Street theatre is free to watch, and a “hat” is not passed around after the performance to obtain payment (as a busker would). All are welcome to be an audience, and audience members may also encounter the performance unexpectedly strolling past on their way to do something else. They may stay and watch some or all of the performance. The performance is generally suitable for all ages; however, this is not to say the content may not be complex, shocking, or political, but rather that there is an awareness of cultural norms of the place where performance is happening. The audience of street theatre is different to the “uncurated” audience of Weekly Ticket, as the majority of such audiences are expecting to be involved in a performance event. Street theatre audiences are similar to the Weekly Ticket audience in several important ways, however: they are free to leave at any time; they may encounter the performance unexpectedly; the event is free and accessible to all; being outside, it involves weather, surrounding noise and chaos; and performers generally have moments of intimate and direct connection with audience. Some definitions of street theatre (such as the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.) include the element of “controversial political issues” to their description of street theatre, but in my experience this is not the common usage of the term in Australasia, nor was overtly political content universal amongst the European street theatre performances I watched at street theatre festivals in Europe in 1994 and 1995.²

Memories, stories and personal photos are the only record of many of the Australian street theatre performances of the pre-internet 1980s and 1990s. There are no official archives or scholarly records of street theatre and outdoor performances of this era, as they were rarely written about for academic research, they were not reviewed by theatre critics, and responses from the

² Performances that add a theatrical element to street protests may be included in some definitions of “street theatre”, but I do not include this genre as it may not be devised by trained performers, is not part of a festival program and has a purpose beyond the scope of this research.

audience were also not recorded. *RealTime Magazine*³ articles are important, as there are a few that document the thoughts of participating artists or give a contemporary context to street theatre performances. The next section describes a history of street theatre with a focus on Melbourne and, in particular, the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts. I chart the growth and decline of free outdoor theatre in this context and how this has shaped the work of contemporary performing artists including David's and my own.

2.1.2 Street Theatre–History in Melbourne

From 1989 to 2002, the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts had a specific “Festival of the Streets”⁴ program. The changes within the Melbourne Festival are indicative of broader cultural shifts that happened throughout Australia, leading to the current climate where it is very rare to encounter free performance by trained theatre practitioners in public. In this time period (1980s to 2000), many Melbourne performers would have a professional circuit, creating new material for the Melbourne Festival, and then performing throughout summer at regional festivals. For example Castlemaine Festival and other regional towns near Melbourne, along with local municipal council festivals within Melbourne such as Darebin Council, which would have weekend-long summer festivals in January or February. Melbourne events such as the spring racing carnival and the Royal Melbourne Show would also employ street theatre acts. In addition, some groups would tour Europe during the European summer, with tours organised by European agents who would generally have at least one Australian act on their books. Both David Wells and I come from this artistic history. Suburban festivals that were the life-blood of a creative and extensive network of “roving” and street performers have either stopped completely or exist with a smaller budget, so street performers are not employed any more. The reasons for the dwindling of these local events and an entire type of performance that went with them has not been recorded anywhere I can find, but anecdotal discussions amongst performers who worked in this genre in the ‘90s and early 2000s focus on the expense of public liability insurance⁵ for festivals and the general lessening of available arts funding.

3 “Founded in 1994 by Managing Editors Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch, for 21 years *RealTime* was a highly successful bi-monthly print magazine, distributed across Australia and available online since 1996 and with E-ditions commencing in 2009. Since 2016, *RealTime* has appeared exclusively online. *RealTime* is Australia's critical guide to national and international contemporary arts. Our focus is on experimentation in performance—live art, contemporary performance, adventurous theatre, dance, music, sound—photomedia, film, video, interactive media and hybrid arts. *RealTime* is published by ‘Open City Inc’” (*RealTime*, n.d.).

4 Slightly different titles over the years are variations on this theme.

5 An example of this cultural change due to the cost of insurance is from *The Age* newspaper, discussing 20 years of the Melbourne Fringe Festival: “One major change for Fringe in its 20th year is the loss of the iconic Fringe parade and Brunswick Street party, another victim of **public liability insurance**” (my emphasis) (*The Fringe Explosion*, 2002, para. 23).

In a short book published by the Melbourne International Arts Festival in 2005 as a celebration of the first 20 years, the John Truscott years from 1989-1991 were characterised as a “celebration of the street”:

The outdoor program was indeed to be the outstanding feature of John Truscott’s first Festival.... For the duration of the Festival this spectacular lighting display provided a backdrop to 13 outdoor stages which by day and night were to host a range of street theatre performers and artists from around the world. In addition to performing on the stages, various groups roamed the streets, giving impromptu performances to the crowds. (Clarkson, 2005, p. 25)

Over the next decade, these programs dwindled. Artist Jason Cross⁶ of “5 Angry Men” (a street theatre troupe, though he describes the genre as “installation performance”) described this change in an interview with Keith Gallasch in *RealTime*:

In 1995, Jason Cross, Simon Woodward (whom he’d worked with in the performance company Primary Source) and Tomek Koman began to form “5 Angry Men”—the result, he says, of “the Melbourne Festival being prepared to commission work, through Patrick Cronin (then with “The Men Who Knew Too Much”). It was a fantastic period.... In the late 90s and into the early 2000s, we were receiving significant commissions ... but now for young artists, or any artist, attempting to raise \$150,000—which is really a minimum sort of budget for a public art work—it’s not going to happen. That area of practice, of installation performance, object public art, has been completely decimated in the last 10 years. And there’s no peer group any longer. (Gallasch, 2008, p. 14).

This interview from 2008 points to the importance of the Melbourne Festival commissioning work that was designed to be on the street and deemed an essential element of the Festival. The ‘90s were a time when both David Wells and I performed regularly at the Melbourne Festival, and I discuss this period in the following sections. For example, in 1996, the Melbourne Festival provided an extensive program of free street theatre (see below):

⁶ Jason and Victoria Cross were also artistic directors of Melbourne’s “Big West Festival” 2001 to 2005. This was a large bi-annual festival in Footscray and surrounding suburbs that finished in 2015, for various reasons, but principally because of the difficulty of obtaining adequate arts funding for a large-scale community festival where the majority of events were in public spaces and free to attend.



Image 2.1 Program produced by Melbourne Festival 1996 (my archive)



Image 2.2 Program produced by Melbourne Festival 1996 (my archive)

In that year (1996), “The Hunting Party” were commissioned to create a new show *Karavaan*. We were funded by the Melbourne Festival to rehearse this show. Group member Margie MacKay designed new costumes, and we worked with director Neil Cameron who specialises in large-scale outdoor performance events that use fire and large lantern-puppet structures. *Karavaan* involved fire sculptures, costumes embedded with lights, music and characters that spoke a made-up language. We performed alongside six other local companies at the Southgate shopping centre precinct (in the centre of Melbourne CBD next to the Yarra river) and also on the forecourt of the Arts Centre Melbourne. “The Urban Dream Capsule” also performed in the Myer windows during this Festival; this particular project warrants some discussion, as it outlines David’s performance history, and also received considerable attention from press and some scholarly attention. I will outline this project and reactions to it in the following section, particularly focusing on the discussion of participation, which was a key theme of this performance.

2.1.3 The Urban Dream Capsule

In 1996, “The Urban Dream Capsule” (UDC) were commissioned by the Melbourne Festival to live 24 hours a day in the Myer (a large department store) windows in the Bourke Street Mall for the entire duration of the festival. They went on to perform in 13 shop windows around the world, finishing back in the Myer windows at the Commonwealth Games Festival in 2006. David Wells was one of the five (all male) performers of the UDC, taking part in every performance except one in Shanghai. A closer reading of this performance in the historical context of the Festival in 1996 gives useful information of public reactions to and understandings of street theatre and participatory performance. Two fundamental artistic ideas of the UDC were using existing urban spaces as performance sites, and being in public non-stop for 2 weeks (including being visible while sleeping). These align with Weekly Ticket both in using existing urban infrastructure (shop window or train station) and extending typical performance seasons into a long duration (in the case of the UDC: 240 hours non-stop). Somehow, the UDC jumped out of street theatre into something that had an “intellectual artworld pedigree” (Peers, 2004, p. 35), perhaps because it was so popular. It certainly was a flagship event, with extensive press coverage,⁷ and seemed to combine themes of participation in a form that was both accessible and profound, referring also to “Big Brother,” the enormously popular TV show of the time, where audiences watched people living together in a house, as Julie Peers describes:

⁷ Including a weird publicity stunt organised by the Melbourne Festival for TV and press, where I as festival performer in the Hunting Party and partner of David was “rescued” (in costume) from the top (6th) floor of the Myer Building by the Fire Brigade in a cherry-picker (extendable ladder with small wobbly platform on top). I gave David a kiss through the window and ran off. This is an example of the odd things you do at the request of festival publicity departments.

One of the most celebrated and successful Australian use of shop windows was the Urban Dream Capsule's 1996 performance of living in the Myer Melbourne window for the Melbourne International Festival. This event was an immediate crossover success, having both an intellectual artworld pedigree, but also appealing to a broad audience, anticipating the faux transparent promise of reality TV. It also recalled the longstanding Melbourne ritual of the Myer Christmas Windows. (2004, p. 35)

In a rare first-hand scholarly description of encountering the Melbourne Festival in 1996, Benjamin Rossiter and Katherine Gibson's chapter titled *Walking and Performing 'The City': A Melbourne Chronicle* (2003) notes the sense that art was out in public and happened upon by suburban "punters" as a clear theme. The article starts with quotes from architect-sociologist Richard Sennett and philosopher-sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who describe public space as being dangerous and dead, which the authors compare to the experience offered by the Melbourne Festival:

Perhaps it's the fear that Richard Sennett and Zygmunt Bauman are right that drives the City of Melbourne to host a regular International Arts Festival in which all and sundry (and especially those who can't afford the ticket prices of the undercover shows) are enticed out on to the streets of the central city with the offer of free entertainment – street theatre, food stalls, fireworks, and displays....It was during this short burst of urban self-consciousness that I ventured out with family in tow to "take in the sights/sites": walking the streets and enjoying the ambience with a specific look-in on the Urban Dream Capsule – a group of five male performance artists locked up in a department store window for the duration of the Arts Festival. (Rossiter & Gibson, 2003, p. 438)



Image 2.3 *The Urban Dream Capsule, Montreal 2002* (photographer unknown). Difficult to see in this photograph is that there is a pane of glass between performer (Neil Thomas seen from behind) and audience, though the intimate relationship between performer and audience is clearly captured.

Carolyn Connors (1997) described the UDC in *RealTime*: “The audience became voyeur, participating captors, an enthusiastic rabble.... We became performers as they imitated, filmed, read or spoke to us” (p. 33). This descriptor of performance created between performers and audience in a public setting, where the audience becomes the performance, is an important element of the artistic and theoretical history of Weekly Ticket. I will now bring this history up to date, describing briefly how the street program disappeared in the Melbourne Festival, and what is currently happening in Melbourne in terms of free public performance.

2.1.4 The present and immediate future – Melbourne Festival 2020 and contemporary performers

In 2003, Melbourne’s Federation Square, a large cobble-paved public space with a permanent stage, sound system and huge LED screen, was completed. This created a new genre of Melbourne Festival public performance during the artistic directorship of Robyn Archer. For example, “flash mob” type crowd performances and workshop-style interactive events with performers on stage encouraging crowd participation, such as the “dancing in the streets” program of 2003. Varied factors signalled the end of the free outdoor program as it never appeared again after 2003. The Spiegel Tent began its yearly appearance in 2001 on the Arts Centre forecourt (continuing until 2019 with a couple of years off), providing a program of cabaret and music events, but these were all ticketed.

In 2021, three current Melbourne festivals – Melbourne Festival, White Night and Supersense Festival – will combine to create one large festival (titled RISING). It was described by the Melbourne Festival organisation as follows: “Backed by the Victorian Government, the new festival will combine our creative ambition with the wide public engagement of White Night Melbourne to create an ambitious new event of scale not yet seen in Australia” (Melbourne Festival, n.d). Interestingly, the term “wide public engagement” is used here, perhaps pointing to a move back to a more accessible (free) performance program. The White Night Festival has attracted huge crowds into the Melbourne CBD since its first iteration in 2013. Some of the groups programmed in White Night Melbourne fulfil my definition of street theatre,⁸ though performances are designed to cater for vast crowds who generally stay moving within an inner-city precinct. This type of large, standing audience dictates an artistic style with emphasis on visual projections on buildings, lighting displays and large-scale puppets and structures for visibility and high visual impact. How this new 2021

⁸ Performances are devised by theatre performers and are free.

festival will change opportunities for participatory theatre is as yet unknown (at the time of writing the festival has called for proposals from artists), but I hope the opportunity for smaller-scale, intimate participatory performances is possible.⁹

Some Melbourne theatre groups continue to work in public performance (as it is now known, though these groups would also fit my street theatre category) since their beginnings several decades ago, including “Born in a Taxi”, “5 Angry Men”, “Thomas and Wells” (UDC members Neil Thomas and David Wells), the “Snuff Puppets” and some roving stilt walkers, such as Mandy Pickett. “Strange Fruit” (with performers on top of 5-meter-long, flexible poles) have several troupes touring internationally and have been one of the most visible success stories of this genre, though they now rarely perform in Melbourne. Companies such as “Polyglot Theatre”, who began with indoor puppet shows for children, have moved towards creating immersive environments with children, which often occur in public settings.

The following contemporary companies have begun in the last 15 years and correspond to my definition of street theatre, though they do not use the term. This brings us up to date with contemporary performances experimenting with participation in public, and I describe them here in order to emphasise how contemporary explorations of participation in public are still vibrant, varied and current. “Field Theory” (n.d.) describe themselves as “a collective of Australian artists committed to making and supporting projects that cross disciplines, shift contexts and seek new strategies for engaging with the public sphere” (para 1); and work in various collaborative ways in public including public radio broadcasts. Melbourne company “The Environmental Performance Authority” describe themselves as creating ecological performance, performing in sites to raise awareness of ecological issues, with the group’s members having butoh performance backgrounds. “The Huxleys” (Will and Garrett) create “performance art” for festivals, performing in Leigh Bowery,¹⁰ inspired extreme full-body fashion costumes. The Melbourne Botanical Gardens have commissioned artists such as choreographer Jo Lloyd to create free performance works that respond to the environment of the gardens, and this artistic program continues into 2020. Arts Centre Melbourne employed David Wells and Neil Thomas to be “artists in residence,” creating free participatory performances around and in front of the Arts Centre during 2018. “Deep Soulful Sweats” (DSS) was founded in 2013 and is a “collaborative and participatory event led by dance artists Sarah Aiken and Rebecca Jensen” (Aiken & Jensen, n.d., para 1).

⁹ I have put in a proposal for an immersive participatory performance project, collaborating with artist and designer Adele Varcoe.

¹⁰ An Australian costume maker and performance artist, originally from Melbourne, famous for performing at UK nightclub Taboo and collaborating with artists such as Boy George.

DSS fits most of my criteria of street theatre (it often occurs in outdoor spaces and is sometimes free), and their website describes their performances: “in the thick of an unfolding choreography, ritual, rave, contemporary dance class, DSS incrementally and exponentially encourages participants to let go and exorcise through exercise” (n.d., para. 6). My experience of DSS is of a participatory event that has equity as a key theme, where performers and audience are creating together. The companies mentioned here may not have consciously evolved from a lineage of street theatre, but tracking notions of participatory public performance is important to give context to Weekly Ticket, and it is of interest to me as a practitioner to see how the idea of participation is a stated purpose of other contemporary artists.

In this brief history, I consider a representative sample of the current Melbourne arts climate of theatre and dance practitioners working in public space and participatory projects. I mention colleagues who I have encountered as practitioners, collaborators and audience members. This is the context that I have experimented with participation in, as an artist, and these works all inform the understanding of participation that I further in this thesis. This research does not have the scope for a more comprehensive tracking of the lineage of public performance in Melbourne, though this warrants further investigation before this history is forgotten. I also consider this history to be critical in understanding the artistic lineage of contemporary participatory projects, and how arts institutions, local councils, funding bodies and audiences have encountered public performance in the past. In the article previously quoted by Rossiter and Gibson (2003), the term “undercover” performances (to describe indoor works) jumps out at me: perhaps this was a time with the promise of an alternate future, where undercover performances would become the lesser program, and outdoor performance the new normal. This is not the current situation in large-scale Australian Festivals (Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Adelaide), though at the time of writing in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is now an unexpected shift in all facets of our lives, and potentially a future where large scale festivals in Australia program mainly Australian works due to the difficulty of international travel. Social distancing is also impacting the viability of indoor performances that require large audiences sitting in close proximity to each other. This will have as-yet-unknown ramifications for the genres of performance that are commissioned and curated for festivals such as the 2021 RISING festival.

Building on this Melbourne history, I turn in the next section to a global perspective and a century of experiments in performer and audience participation, in order to explicate how Weekly Ticket sits within this broader history. After this artistic history, I will also outline key theorists of participation and art. I build on these theorists to describe in the following chapter (Chapter 3) my own theoretical framework, a “dramaturgical framework” that I use to interrogate the participatory relations within Weekly Ticket.

2.2 A brief artistic history of public performance

This section outlines a historical frame of reference for ideas contained within Weekly Ticket, placing this project and research within a history of performance art and public performance in non-traditional places. As artists, we are re-imagining Footscray Station by treating it as a performance venue, a site of play, an artist’s studio and a rehearsal space – a place to experiment with and discover participation. Considering Weekly Ticket as slow theatre, we have the opportunity to discover participation along with our audience, experimenting with performance structures and uncovering audience understandings over time. An imaginative “re-framing” of public activity has parallels with many artistic movements in the last century that have transformed notions of performance, art and audience.

The following is by necessity a brief history of the last century, and does not include non-western or historical forms of public performance such as “commedia dell’arte.”¹¹ I describe performances or companies that I consider representative of specific movements, in order to discuss themes of “seeing” the environment in a different way, exploring place and the environment, experimenting with the relationship of life and art, and expanding notions of duration. These themes are also exemplified in Weekly Ticket, a performance that treats a train station as a performance venue where the performer is a local resident and embedded in the community over time.

¹¹ A comic and political form of street performance using stock characters and half-masks, popular in Europe from the 16th to 18th Century. A more extensive history of this type of evolving historical form with many geographical variations is outside the realm of this research.

2.2.1 Dada and Situationist experiments in audience and participation

Beginning in Europe at the start of the 1900s, artists grouped around the Dada movement experimented in performer and audience relationships, seeking to shock audiences out of the role of complacent witness into becoming a collaborative and engaged element of the performance itself (Bishop, 2012). Dada became a victim of its own success, as increasingly audiences came to performances expecting the unexpected and planning their “unplanned” contribution to these cabaret-type events where simultaneous theatrical forms on stage and improvisation was key. Dada’s “anti-art” philosophy challenged the audience to see everyday objects or life as art, rebelling against the commodified art objects sold by art dealers.

Dada and Surrealist excursions later inspired the Situationists’ (in Europe in the 1950s to 1970s) “*dérive*,” essentially a walk through an urban environment. Claire Bishop (2012) describes these: “Best undertaken during daylight hours, and in groups of two or three like-minded people, the *dérive* was a crucial research tool in the Situationist para-discipline of ‘psychogeography’, the study of the effects of a given environment on the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (p. 77). A “static-*dérive*” in one location was also considered a possibility if “interesting enough” writes Situationist Guy Debord (1956), for example “an entire day within the Saint-Lazare train station” (p. 2). The resulting narratives and drawings from these *dérive* constitute a new kind of “mapping” of urban environments, and this “psychogeography” re-frames urban environments as sites of human activity and playful wanderings, critically seeing the audience as an active participant and author of their own experience, rather than passive spectator. A similar ethos inspired the event *HAPPSOC 1* (a neologism of “happenings,” “happy,” “society” and “socialism”), where an audience was invited (by invitation card) to see the entire city of Bratislava (now the capital of Slovakia) through an artistic lens for one week in May 1965. In essence, the parameters of the event were set, but there was no definition of the “action within it or the ways in which it was interpreted” (Bishop 2012, p. 142). Four hundred participants were invited to see the city “doubly,” both as a work of art and as a performance.

The idea of treating an existing environment or even entire city with a playful reframing in order to look more carefully or more curiously, or to have different conversations about what audiences see has parallels to Weekly Ticket. The next genre I will outline adds another element, of leaving an ephemeral trace on a particular environment. As Felicity Fenner (2017) articulates, the Situationist provocations of “walking as art” led to Land Art, an extension of the idea of art changing the way we “see” and move through specific environments.

2.2.2 Environmental and Land Art

Land art explores notions of place and how this can be manipulated and explored by moving in specific ways through physical places. This genre is within the realm of performance, not the “Land Art” of visual artists such as Andy Goldsworthy who create ephemeral sculptures made from environmental materials. Two emblematic land art performers are Richard Long, who created *A Line Made by Walking*, by walking back and forth over a patch of grass (1967), and Francis Alÿs (who is exactly the same age as David) who pushed a huge block of ice through Mexico City until it finally melted in *Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing* (1997). These ephemeral works are remembered and documented by photographs. These photographic documents and artist writings become the material available to contemporary researchers and audiences.

Environmental theatre could be considered a branch of land art in its exploration of the human relationship to an environment in a broader ecological sense. Ecological artists such as Helen and Newton Harrison (USA) devise artistic responses to ecosystems such as river systems through dialogical interaction and active listening over long periods of time, creating visual art installations incorporating maps and photographs which “stand for the place and as a meeting ground for discourse” (Kester, 2004, p. 64). Pioneers of “eco-art,” they have been working since the 1970s, and their “process has a specific aim—to generate change in attitudes and solutions to ecological problems” (Kester, 2004, p. 64). Collaborative conversation is considered by the Harrisons as a key part of the material and process of their mapping; this dialogical emphasis and long duration aligns this work with Weekly Ticket.

Many artists perform with a relational emphasis towards site and place, and projects may invite an audience to reconsider their urban surroundings. “Futurefarmers” is an international artist collective that create playful projects with an environmental theme, conducting “hands-on exploration of how people and things, neighbors and grains effect each other” (Futurefarmers, n.d). “Lone Twin” is a UK performance duo; their first performances involved doing difficult things in public, for example moving cumbersome and heavy furniture through a complex urban pathway. They discovered audiences willing to help and advise them:

For two decades the duo have been making work that is characterised by hope and compassion. Making early work that was sometimes arduous and physically demanding, they were surprised to find that people gathered round and tried to help. Ever since that is what they have been doing – encouraging people to gather round (Bristol International Festival, 2017, para. 2).

Founding member Gregg Whelan (2011) describes his understanding of a relationship between performer and audience: “invitations are important to us. We want to make them, but you make them knowing that part of the bargain is to have them refused. Part of the potency of an invitation is in simply offering it. What happens next becomes something else, a second act” (Whelan, as cited in Lavery & Williams, 2011, p. 9). Whelan is currently the co-artistic director with Johanna Tuukkanen of the Anti Festival in Kuopio, Finland, a festival that describes itself as, “Participation, dialogue and exchange: ANTI works with innovative artists on projects that explore and explode urban space” (Anti Festival, n.d.). Whelan met David in Kuopio, where David was performing with “The Megaphone Project,” another public art work created by Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey (a public arrangement of huge megaphones that inspire participatory sound and listening). Whelan had the following advice for David in 2015, the year prior to starting Weekly Ticket: 1) document the beginning of the work carefully as this will be very important to refer back to, and 2) someone should do a PhD on the project as there will be interesting material created to research. The result of that conversation is this thesis.

Moving from describing art processes that interrogate urban and natural environments, another strong theme within participatory art is the relationship of art to life. This is relevant to Weekly Ticket due to the local and durational nature of the performance, where David is recognised as a local resident at the station and as an artist away from the station.

2.2.3 Life and art

Happenings in the 1960s and ‘70s explored participatory performance, situating the audience within performances, and experimenting with non-traditional sites. The blurring of art and life was a crucial theme, with Allan Kaprow famously advocating for a “lifelike art” (1993). “Artlike art holds that art is separated from life and everything else, whereas lifelike art holds that art is connected to life and everything else” (Kaprow, 1993, p. 20). Fluxus artists such as Alison Knowles created scores or instructions for performance, for example “make a salad.” Knowles (Milman, 1992) describes these “event pieces” as

offering an agency for audience to create their own art, much as participatory and relational performance creates an equity between artist and audience;

I think that many of the pieces are just simple refreshment pieces done for whatever day's work you have to do, supporting occurrences in life. It gives members of the audience the ball; they can make their own salad differently, even if they are doing it for their family. It supports those very daily events as being relevant for your art, like the "Identical Lunch."¹² Whatever it is you have to touch and work with, you can make a kind of performance of it, but it has to be stripped of the hangings and accoutrements of theater. (p. 102)

This research places Weekly Ticket within a combination of art and life, perhaps extending the theory into "artlike life" that holds that the artist's life is interconnected with art and everything else. This notion corresponds with Deleuze's metaphor "grass grows from the middle" (as cited in Bourriaud, 2002, p. 13), and is explained by Bourriaud as, "The artist dwells in the circumstances the present offers him [sic], so as to turn the setting of his life (his links with the physical and conceptual world) into a lasting world" (2002, p. 14). A local resident who has lived 5 minutes away from the station for 20 years, audience members may relate to David as a father of a friend, basketball coach, guy who buys fish and chips from the shop where I work, artist who has run music and theatre workshops at my school, neighbour, dog owner, and other roles from life, as well as being recognised increasingly within his art role as the artist at the station.



Image 2.4 David as local – bringing his dog (Ziggy) to Weekly Ticket dressed in the local AFL football team colours and talking to supporters before the game.

¹² Knowles conceived of Identical Lunch in the 1960s and it was performed at MoMA in 2011, with the audience joining her in eating a tuna fish sandwich (her habitual lunch).

An alignment where performer and audience inhabit the same or similar worlds is a critical element of the relations created by Weekly Ticket, and the concept of slow theatre that I develop to describe its ethos. This affords the type of participatory and at times intimate performance that gives an audience a “lived experience” (Hill & Paris, 2014), that meshes with Bourriaud’s description of “contemporary artists who create and stage life-structures that include working methods and ways of life rather than the concrete objects that once defined the field of art” (cited in Bishop, 2006, p. 170). One important element of the “life-structure” of Weekly Ticket is duration, as David is present for such an extended time at the station that notions of life, residency and being local become stronger over time.

2.2.4 Durational performance and slowness

I describe Weekly Ticket as “slow theatre” and will outline duration more specifically in Chapter 7; here, I relate notions of duration within Weekly Ticket to other art projects that explore time. “The phrase ‘durational art’ implies a specific construction of time, a deliberate shaping of it to effect a particular experience for the viewer or the audience” (Scheer, 2012, p. 1). Weekly Ticket’s 15-year duration affects the audience in varied ways: it may offer multiple viewings, hearing about the performance prior to participating, experiencing the performance in multiple ways over time, and the audience building a more familiar relationship with David over time. Our audience would not be aware of our specific 15-year time frame unless they talk to us directly or encounter further information in some way. The complexity of duration creates many different relations within Weekly Ticket, including themes or modes of conversation that evolve over time. This “web of conversation,” including both feral and intimate conversations, is explained in detail in Chapter 6.

Contemporary performance described as durational generally explores extended duration. Marina Abramović uses the term “long duration” to describe her work (such as *The Artist Is Present* [2010], at MoMA in New York, where she sat for 736 hours across from anyone who wanted to sit with her). Scheer (2012) describes duration in performance: “The idea of duration has always been essential to the experience of performance, be it from the briefest execution of the smallest gesture on a stage to the expansive Ram Lila events in India or Tehching Hsieh’s *One Year Performances*” (p. 1). *One Year Performances* (1978 to 1979) consisted of Hsieh punching in a time clock every hour for a year

at the same location, and recording each hour with a single photograph. In her series of performances, *Performing Landscape for Years*, Annette Arlander “inserts human performance into a continuous and endless exchange between the elements and landscape on Harakka Island in Finland” (Jakovljević, 2014, p. 2), similarly documenting her experience with photographs and ethnographic writing over a long duration. The majority of long duration performances I have researched are solitary experiments, where a performance artist encounters a wild natural environment or urban space over a long period of time, and documents this experience with photographs. The photographs then become an exhibition, with an audience participating in the work one step removed from direct encounter with the performer, while the performance itself may have finished years ago. Weekly Ticket is different in that the audience may encounter the performance via weekly photos on our website, or other images shared by the audience, but also may encounter David repeatedly and randomly live over a long duration. This combination of live encounter with documented material is an important element of the performance and the relations created and shared by the audience, as the audience can see photos or comments on social media or participate in conversations about Weekly Ticket before, after or during live encounters.

As I have described in the introduction to this research, the idea of a 15-year duration came from the idea of replacing a physical sculpture that typically has a 15-year lifespan with a living artist at Footscray Station. In its duration, Weekly Ticket disrupts possibilities of what constitutes public art and also disrupts funding structures within theatre and performance, as there are currently no arts funding possibilities to cover the entire time of Weekly Ticket. Discussing this with funding bodies has been another conversational element of the work; as artists, we lobby for more flexibility from funding bodies to sustain durational practice, particularly if an arts project does not require a complex and expensive organisational structure to support it. These discussions of slow theatre projects between artists and funding bodies become part of the project itself, sharing the work and creating conversations.

Artists exploring long duration may have an emphasis on time but not necessarily slowness. Slowness as philosophy, as political statement, and as making methodology is interrogated by a variety of performance scholars and artists. Many refer to slow dramaturgy (drawing on the writing of Eckersall and Paterson 2011) to offer a framework for understanding a new experience of time that occurs when you have to sit within quiet experiences. Josie Eggers describes the elements of slowness as “relentless insistence, ambiguity, and collectivity, and its paradoxes of movement and stillness and of participation and non-participation” (2018, p. 116). Slow theatre, slow scholarship, slow dramaturgy, slow time, slow thinking (Goulish 2000) and slow making (Newman 2019) draw an analysis of slowness from the slow food movement where locality and a slower temporality offer an “enhanced sensory and affective experience” (Parkins & Craig, 2009, p. 93). Lara Stevens describes Casey Jenkins’s “craftivist practice as being “deeply attentive to the material, to rhythm, pace and focus that is at odds with the speed, precarity and flexibility of neoliberal production, industrialization and post-industrialization’s immaterial economies and labour” (2016, p. 178).

How I consider Weekly Ticket as slow theatre and how participants describe the experience of being in ‘relational time’ is the focus of chapter 7.

I move now from a discussion of historical and contemporary art projects that I consider having useful parallels to Weekly Ticket, and a description of artistic themes of seeing the environment in a different way, combining life and art and duration, to an analysis of broader theories and theorists of participation, what it is, what it does, and how it may occur.

2.3 Participation and relations

I define Weekly Ticket as a participatory performance project and my role within it also as participatory. I have always sensed an equal relationship within and between performer and audience. This is even more potent on the street or in the station where the swirling reactions, comments, interactions, glances and conversations between audience members become the performance. As a performer and dramaturg, I improvise, adjusting and creating the material of performance in response to an audience, and every performance is different as every audience is different, and on the street, the time, weather, temperature, and other noise and food vendors nearby are all part of the experience. My embodied experience builds on theorists of participation who are mainly curators, critics and academics from a visual arts background, such as Claire Bishop (2004, 2005, 2006, 2012), Miwon Kwon (2004), Nicholas Bourriaud (2002), Felicity Fenner (2017), Grant Kester (2004), and Nato Thompson (2012, 2015). These writers see the world through the lens of gallery, Biennale and prizes such as Britain's Turner Prize (won in 2015 by "Assemble," a collective of architects who revitalized an area of Liverpool by building dwellings and a workshop, a project that has human relations at its heart.) Claire Bishop, in *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* (2004), describes the participatory artists Bourriaud writes about in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) "with metronomic regularity" rather dismissively: "it is basically installation art in format, but this is a term that many of its practitioners would resist" (2004, p. 55). Other criticisms of relational projects in the visual arts focus on a perceived insular focus by artists, with ideas seldom venturing outside of a gallery setting.

My research into participation began with the writings of Jacques Rancière, Bourriaud and Bishop. Rancière, a philosopher, developed a theory of the "emancipated spectator" in 2007. These ideas were rebutted in various ways by visual art curators and critics Bourriaud and Bishop, with particular attention to relations created by artworks that offer ideals of social equity. I respond in the following sections to these three writers, discussing how their ideas have informed my own practice and also how my understanding of Weekly Ticket may challenge some assumptions. I also include responses from theatre practitioners and scholars Carl Lavery and Suzanne Lacy to these theories of participation.

2.3.1 The Emancipated Spectator – Rancière

Critical to my understanding of audience and participation is that the activity of “watching” is as active as “acting,” as described in Rancière’s *The Emancipated Spectator* (2007). Rancière’s theory began with an analysis of Joseph Jacotot, who in the early 19th century espoused a radical philosophy of education, based on a proclamation of the “equality of intelligences.” (Rancière, 1991). According to this philosophy, an ignorant person could teach another ignorant person what they did not know themselves. Rancière expanded this philosophy to the notion of spectatorship, just as the pupil and teacher are equals, so too are the performer and spectator; spectatorship is not passive, nor is “looking” the opposite of “acting”: “Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting.... The spectator also acts ... she composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her” (2007, p. 13). Rancière’s (2007) writing is predicated on the notion that there is a “paradox” in theatre of a passive audience quietly watching an activity that takes place on a stage. Directors and writers such as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud may cajole, disrupt and manipulate the schism between stage and seating bank, but nevertheless it remains. Rancière rejects the binary proposition of active performer and passive audience, but even his active watchers remain in their seats. Our Weekly Ticket audience participates in a range of ways that go beyond Rancière’s description of watching, however. There are degrees of watching within Weekly Ticket, from a glimpse to a repeated glimpse, watching for a few seconds, watching while there is nothing else to do across a platform, and arresting a journey to watch in a fully captivated manner, which are all discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 and 6. This watching may also transform into or contain elements of direct conversations, or an audience may record the performance and distribute it on social media (operating in a similar way to my participant-researcher role). Whilst these activities correspond to Rancière’s description of active watching – “he [sic] observes, he selects, he compares, he interprets” (2007, p. 277) – these mental activities within Weekly Ticket may emerge as physical action. These actions create different relationships between audience and performer, some of which result in conversations or other relationships that are visible to me as the participating researcher and artist, and the complexity of these different relations are the focus of this research. As Lavery suggests in response to Rancière, “two modes of spectatorship (the emancipated spectator and the active participant) can co-exist at the same time, and in the same work” (2011, p. 8).

Another element of Rancière’s theory of the emancipated spectator is based on the assumption that the dramaturg, director or actor expect or hope that an audience will “see *this* thing, feel *that* feeling, understand *this* lesson (italics in original)” (2007, p. 277). In my experience, it is unlikely that theatre makers expect performances to facilitate a clear “transmission” of emotion or meaning as Rancière describes, or that theatre makers “presuppose the equality–meaning the homogeneity–of cause and effect” (Rancière, 2007, p. 278). The work of making performance is messy, with an awareness that any audience will create different understandings, collectively and individually. Dramaturgs, directors, writers, actors, devisors, or any combination of these may hope for a particular story to be received by an audience in a broad sense, but more complex and multiple resonances, reactions, senses of humour, cultural histories and likes and dislikes are immediately apparent to any practitioner who has performed with or participated with an audience.

Shifting the notions of participation away from philosophical theory and into the complexity of the world of human relations is the “relational aesthetics” of Nicholas Bourriaud, a curator and art critic who was writing about participation at a similar time to Rancière. Bourriaud rebuts Rancière’s analysis of relational aesthetics, in part because “contemporary philosophers [Rancière] make the wrong connection between the library from which they observe the world and the artists’ studios” (2009, p. 1). A closer examination from a more practical perspective is exhorted, though because the arguments from both remain in the domain of libraries, studies, or offices (and extremely nice ones I imagine), I see the importance of testing these ideas on the street. This corresponds with both artistic and research processes, when theory becomes tested and re-evaluated, and as artists move their work from studio or rehearsal room into the public domain. For a closer study of what participatory works may seek to do, and what they actually do, I now outline Bourriaud and Bishop’s discussions of relations and art.

2.3.2 Relational Aesthetics – Bourriaud and Bishop

Bourriaud’s collection of essays, first published as *Esthétique Relationnelle* in 1998 and translated into English in 2002, is an understanding of art as being in the sphere of human interaction within social structures: “the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist” (2002, p. 13). Claire Bishop describes Bourriaud’s theory, emphasising that it is not a way of understanding “interactive” art, but a broader

“do it yourself” approach that contemporary artists take to create “face-to-face” interactions with people:

Rather than a discrete, portable, autonomous work of art that transcends its context, relational art is entirely beholden to the contingencies of its environment and audience. Moreover, this audience is envisaged as a community: rather than a one-to-one relationship between work of art and viewer, relational art sets up situations in which viewers are not just addressed as a collective, social entity, but are actually given the wherewithal to create a community, however temporary or utopian this may be. (2004, p. 54)

Artistic projects in the realm of relational art are described by Bishop as being a “producer of situations” (2012, p.2), and these may involve clear participatory frameworks. An audience member may be invited to carry a heavy load, to cook or eat a meal or be involved in other types of activity or play. The term “social practice” is used in a similar way by Shannon Jackson (2011), describing “art events that are inter-relational, embodied, and durational, the notion of “social practice” might well be a synonym for the goals and methods that many hope to find in the discipline of experimental theatre and performance studies” (p. 12).

An audience encountering a performance unexpectedly, in an unusual place without any financial transaction, operates within a “social interstice”. This is a term used initially by Karl Marx and then Bourriaud to describe a “space in human relations” removed from “the overall economic system” and also “time spans whose rhythms contrast with those structuring everyday life” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 16). Weekly Ticket as a performance encompasses many relationships: performer and audience, audience and other audience, station staff and audience, station staff and performer, and me as researcher/artist/dramaturg within it all.

These various roles are part of the conversational web that this research outlines, which is fully described in Chapter 6. This goes towards identifying the patterns of relations created by Weekly Ticket. As Bourriaud states: “artistic activity is a game, whose forms, patterns and functions develop and evolve according to periods and social contexts; it is not an immutable essence” (2002, p. 11).

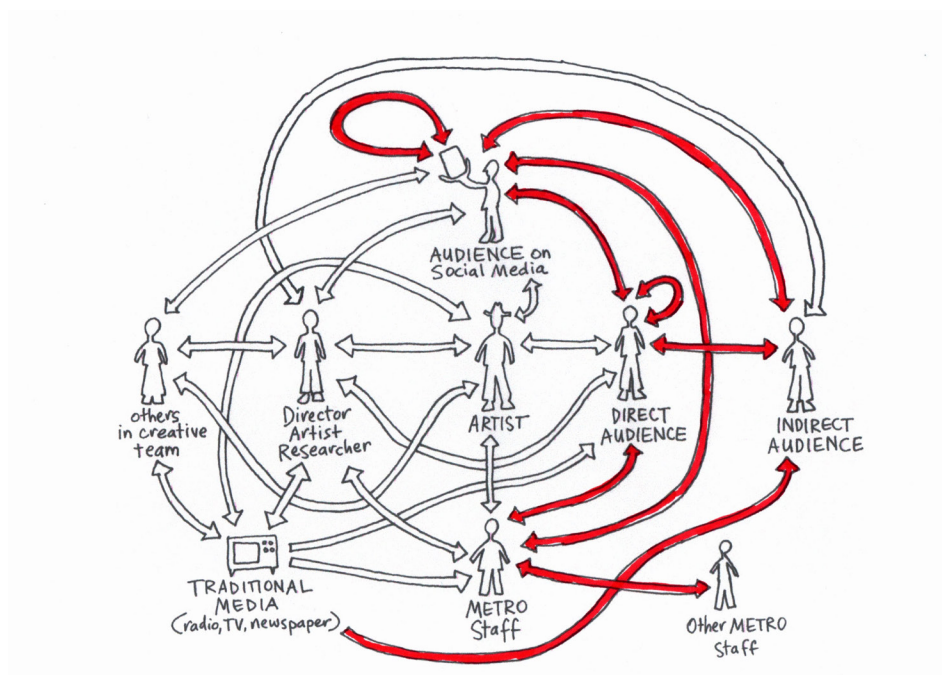


Diagram 2.1 The pattern of audience and artist roles and conversations within Weekly Ticket

This diagram (2.1) outlines the people and categories of people that have conversations or share information with each other about Weekly Ticket (I describe myself as director/artist/researcher). This is how I endeavour to understand and communicate the pattern of relations created by Weekly Ticket. Audience is defined as “direct” (those who have participated in Weekly Ticket, participation considered broadly here—they may have simply seen the artist and not interacted with him in any way), and “indirect” (those who have not participated directly in Weekly Ticket).

The red arrows illustrate feral conversations that happen independent of the artist, myself or others in the creative team. This is the audience who have participated in Weekly Ticket that discuss the project with those who have not participated, via live conversation or social media. How these conversations branch out of direct relations with David and move into feral territory then perhaps back into direct relations is described in detail in Chapter 6. This research diagram is the result of close attention to what happens in participatory performance, and goes towards answering some of the questions posed by theorists, in particular Claire Bishop, who has been a catalyst for this research, as I will now outline.

2.3.3 Claire Bishop “Artificial Hells”

Claire Bishop’s provocation has provided an important instigator of my research: “If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?” (Bishop, 2004, p. 65). Can participatory works create a sense of community, of momentary utopia, of connection? Or is the endeavour doomed, naively ignoring the complexity of power imbalances inherent in any project, seeking a saccharine and momentary heaven but creating an artificial hell? How do artists rigorously interrogate the “three concerns of activation, authorship and community” which “are the most frequently cited motivations for almost all artistic attempts to encourage participation since the 1960s”? (Bishop, 2006, p. 12)

Bishop seems to have a similar attitude to other visual art curators and critics – a distrust of the field of “community art” as being woolly and non-cutting edge. I am tempted to combine the two metaphors; community art is perceived as having a woolly edge, or even further – community art is perceived as being a woolly amorphous shape, with no edge at all. Bishop describes some artists’ methodologies where “consensual collaboration is valued over artistic mastery and individualism, regardless of what the project sets out to do or actually achieves” (Bishop, 2012, p. 20). This statement necessitates a deep analysis of what any project actually does do, and this is what may be missing from these types of debates. An individual participant may only capture a glimpse of what any project does “achieve,” and the “artistic mastery” may be difficult to define. This is where engagement in a participatory project such as Weekly Ticket over time can offer a sophisticated analysis of the complexity of relations created. This may not be readily apparent if a critic or curator viewed Weekly Ticket once for 15 minutes, though if this was combined with conversations from participants about range of relations within Weekly Ticket, a fuller picture of the project and the “mastery” required to create it would be clearer. Importantly, these stories would not all be “utopian” in nature. As this research uncovers, the relations within Weekly Ticket are varied and complex.

Many artists work within both “socially engaged” and “contemporary” settings (this is increasing as arts funding becomes scarce and artists have to diversify). Divisions between the two categories are blurring, and I argue that the skills, ideas and purposes of activity within both platforms remain very similar. Perhaps these types of divisions are fading as ideas of engagement and participation are being explored and disrupted by artists working in many different contexts. “Live Art” still tends to be within the realm of visual arts, and in the next section,

I outline some key theorists from theatre and performance who have provoked useful questions for both my practice and research. This interrogation of the “invitation to audience” is critical to understand participation.

2.4 Participation in performance

The field of theatre and performance studies has “industry outcomes” of theatre festivals, theatre seasons, international arts festivals, street theatre and traditional and non-traditional performance venues. This is the realm of Gareth White’s 2013 book *Audience Participation in the Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*, a comprehensive study of the specific moment that a performer breaks the “fourth wall” and extends a hand (often literally) to the audience. There is useful analysis here, particularly in his key question: “What makes some kinds of audience participation seem trivial and embarrassing, and others substantive, seductive and effective?” (2013, p. 1). From the perspective of a researcher and practitioner, White sees the need for enquiry, stating: “the new trends, the immersive and the one-to-one, motivate an examination of audience participation at this point in time” (p. 3). Focusing on the “invitation to participate,” White argues that “these processes and procedures [of audience participation], particularly in the control they both share and withhold and in the point of view that they engender in the participant, are aesthetically important” (2013, p. 9). Considering the process of participation as creating aesthetic material puts notions of participation at the centre of these artworks.

Paying close attention to the aesthetics and relations created by participation is work being done by contemporary performance scholars and artists. Artists may offer specific “contracts” for participation, such as single audience members agreeing to have their feet washed in Adrian Howell’s performance piece *Footwashing for the Sole* (discussed in Iball, 2013). Performance studies scholar Josephine Machon even stipulates, “Such ‘contracts’ are vital in ensuring the safety of both audience-participant and artist, clarifying the rules and regulations of the world and inviting varying levels of agency and participation” (Machon, 2017, p. 31). Whilst Weekly Ticket does not have such a clear contract within its structure, its participatory nature is based on understandings of the performance itself being created by active spectators, and audience who accept the improvisatory offers of performance, developing a mutual understanding in the moment that fulfils the function of a contract. David also draws on extensive training in theatre and improvisation in order to notice and respond to audience and delineate “explicit” (Reynolds & Reason, 2012) performance. The complexity of these mutual exchanges is explained in detail in Chapter 4.

Performance practices have much to offer understandings of participation, and specifically the genre of street theatre and theatre performance that happen in public space, as outlined previously in this chapter. This genre of performance depends absolutely on participation; it does not create participation but is created by participation. We must understand this mutual relationship in order to understand the performance, as artist Suzanne Lacy describes: “What exists in the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may itself be the artwork” (Lacy, 1995, as cited in Kwon, 2002, p. 105).

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined an artistic history of Weekly Ticket, in particular describing the importance of street theatre to my practice and understandings. Key theorists of participation in the arts have been summarised, and my response to these ideas from my perspective as a participating artist of Weekly Ticket has been given. In order to explore the “specific possibility” of participation rather than debating “substance or ontology” as Carl Lavery suggests (Lavery & Williams, 2011), it is still nevertheless important in this thesis to outline what the substance and ontology of participation is in reference to other theorists and artistic movements, including those of the present day. Once we have a shared understanding of what participation is and what it can be, then I can move into the specifics of how participation happens in Weekly Ticket, in particular how an ethos of play and mutuality drives an “invitation to audience” and creates relations.

In order to describe how research and arts methodologies intersect to create findings, the next chapter outlines a “dramaturgical research framework” and how the creative roles of “researcher” “dramaturg” and “documenter” that I inhabit offer a way of thinking about participation as a complex system of interrelated relations and conversations.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe how I have developed a dramaturgical research framework that aligns my roles as participating artist and researcher. I also describe the guiding principles of practice-led research I ascribe to, what I consider research materials, and the process of collection and creation of research outcomes. In this research I mobilise practice-based dramaturgy and performance in combination with critical performance ethnography to study one specific project. In doing so, I pay attention to an expanded understanding of performance materials. I acknowledge the “social turn” and “performative turn” in fine art and performance research and scholarship, but recognise that these “turns” still begin with, and privilege the visual, static object. Instead, by taking an immersed, inherently practice-based performative approach through the “doing of dramaturgy” over time, in this research I offer new and nuanced understandings of the relations created by performance, not just between performer and audience but amidst audience as well. The dramaturgical research framework I use has uncovered specific themes or stories from fieldwork, these are defined as proxemics, dialogical performance and slow theatre. These themes will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

I have devised my own way of doing and understanding research; this has in turn informed both my research and artistic practice and required me to look critically and in detail at what I do, what I know, and how this knowledge can be of use to others. This aligns with Carole Gray’s definition of practice-led research:

Firstly [it is] research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly... [it is where] the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners (Gray, 1996, cited in Haseman, 2007, p. 3)

I am familiar with the artistic process of dramaturgy, which involves gathering texts, materials and artistic objectives and creating performance outcomes. As an artist, I seek to fully participate in any particular project, bringing my artistic and personal history to an artistic process and building a creative environment for collaborators to work within. I bring this ethos to my understanding of research, and in particular ethnography as Dwight Conquergood describes:

Scholarship in culture and the arts is enhanced, complemented, and complicated in deeply meaningful ways by the participatory understanding and community involvement of the researcher. This experiential and engaged model of inquiry is coextensive with the participant-observation methods of ethnographic research. (2002, p. 153)

As a member of the community of artists and audience created by Weekly Ticket, I have participated in close to 200 performances. This offers me a unique position as both artist and researcher for slow scholarship, as Bishop identifies; “Very few observers are in a position to take such an overview of long-term participatory projects: students and researchers are usually reliant on accounts provided by the artist, the curator, a handful of assistants, and if they are lucky, maybe some of the participants” (2012, p.6).

In this chapter, I begin with a description of my understanding of “critical performance ethnography” and then move more specifically into how I gather the research materials of ethnographic writing, conversations and photographs in order to uncover the complexity of relations created by Weekly Ticket.

3.1 Critical performance ethnography

This practice-led research is a critical performance ethnography, where ethnography is “the disciplined and deliberate witness-cum-recording of human events” (Willis & Trondman, 2000, p. 5). In this research, the human events have a nexus of artist and performance. An ethnographic approach is fundamental to the interplay of research and art in this project, as my understanding of what the artwork actually “is” comes from an increased understanding of the complexity of human relations within Weekly Ticket. D. Soyini Madison articulates a central question of critical ethnography: “How do we create and maintain a dialogue of collaboration in our research projects between ourselves and others?” (2012, p. 5). Collaborative dialogue in the form of conversations and long-term relationships with audience at the station informs this research. This process is not straight-forward, as the material created by audience is very diverse and difficult to access. Nevertheless, Weekly Ticket has a foundation of collaborative play as a key ethos, and I extend this notion of collaboration to a consideration of audience as mutual creators of the work. As critical researcher, I seek to both make and explore arts projects that are available to a broad audience, within an ethos of equity as much as possible.

Defining myself as researcher, theatre artist and local resident begins to outline my “positionality.” This notion goes beyond “subjectivity” in ethnography, and is described by Madison (2012) as being “subjects in dialogue with others ... I contend that critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others” (Madison, 2012, p. 10). The multiplicity of meetings has become a strong theme of this research, and I define the network of meetings and conversations as analogous to a web of relationality. This web of relationality occurs less within a “site” or “locality”, but tracking this complexity affords new understandings of the impact of performance as Sarah Pink describes; “Ethnographic places are therefore not fieldwork localities, but rather they are the entanglements through which ethnographic knowing emerges” (Pink & Morgan, 2013, p. 6).

The following sections outline how this research gathers and communicates relational encounters via ethnographic writing, interviews, remembering conversations, social media conversations and taking photographs.

3.1.1 Ethnographic writing recounting conversations

One of the relations within Weekly Ticket is the relationship of myself as researcher and artist to those participants I talk to, either informally or via a more formal interview process. In recounting interviews, I use first person and descriptive text to communicate the flavour, setting, temperature and sounds of the conversation as fully as possible. This aligns with the “thick description” described by Clifford Geertz to describe ethnographic writing and description: “There are three characteristics of ethnographic description, it is interpretive, what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse, and the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the “said” of such discourse from its perishing occasions” (Geertz, 2008, p. 318). I hope to give a strong sense of the world that these conversations take part in, both the public world of the train station, and also the private world of the staff room where I have had conversations with station staff. Madison describes the importance of considering the bodies and voices of others fully: “Dialogue moves from ethnographic present to ethnographic presence by opening the passageways for readers and audiences to experience and grasp the partial presence of a temporal conversation constituted by others’ voices, bodies, histories and yearnings” (2012, p. 11). I sometimes quote audience verbatim, including grammatical “mistakes,” as audience turns of phrase and words I often find poetic and revelatory, and they give a strong sense of the presence of particular audience members. I think it would be inappropriate to change the words of the interviews I recorded, as this may distort their meaning. Other conversations are recounted from memory and I discuss this process in more detail in section 3.1.2.

The first interview session I conducted with Metro station staff in May 2018 uncovered interesting themes of how the two staff members understood Weekly Ticket, including contrasting attitudes to and histories of artistic practice. I recorded these interviews, and then wrote them up as narratives in order to give a sense of who was talking as well as what they said, and my perspective as a participant in the conversation:

When I ask “Sean” about his artistic preferences (what he likes and doesn’t like) he says he would have to “ask the Missus.” I understand this as meaning he sees the arts as an area understood by others, but definitely not him. He says that art didn’t “float my boat” at school. He grew up in Laverton, a few suburbs further West. When asked how he would describe our project he says, “It’s good, it’s all good,” and also it puts a “bit of a smile on people’s faces in the morbid winter of Melbourne.”

“Lisa” was trained as a singer growing up in India. Her ideas about art are beautiful to me:

“I don’t know how many percentage of people like it or not, for me, personally art is always a way where people are expressing themselves, and there are sometimes some messages in there, when they do the art, they do something specific, and even if in the theatres, and movies, but at the same time maximum they do it for the entertainment purpose, which is a very good thing.” At the end of the interview she describes how she believes art can “refresh the mind” in the middle of our busy lives.

These interviews are used in this research to illustrate specific examples of the reactions and attitudes to Weekly Ticket from station staff. I combine interview material with observations (for example, staff giving David a hug, and times when particular play has been initiated by staff) and informal discussions with David to track the complexity of our changing relationships with station staff. I broadly categorise this relationship as David becoming “resident” at the station, due to increasing familiarity and staff conferring official status on him in various ways. The sustained contact by both David and I as artists is the same process as that of the ethnographer, where extended time is spent immersed in a community. How notions of residency are described by staff is outlined in more detail in Chapter 6.6, where I discuss “narratives of legitimacy” where staff describe Weekly Ticket to commuters as being a project funded by “the Council.”

Another more extensive conversation between me, David, one station officer and a recurring audience who I call “Declan” is extensively quoted in this research (see Chapter 6). I was able to obtain ethics permission by everyone signing a University ethics form prior to the conversation starting. As I knew the station staff member, I was already discussing recording a short conversation with him on the overpass; Declan then walked past and the staff said “you should talk to him!” Declan had both the time to stop and chat and also the time for me to describe my research and obtain his permission to record prior to the conversation. I have used this conversation as an exemplar of the way David encourages and progresses a mutual humorous dialogue. The specific techniques he uses are explored in Chapters 4 and 6 where I describe attentive listening, improvising and a playful attitude. On other occasions, this permission process has been too unwieldy, stopping the natural flow of information, and startling the person I am talking to by mentioning the word “research,” as they often find this idea in the context of Footscray train station odd. Therefore, I have participated in informal conversations, and written them up as field notes after the conversations have taken place. I have also found that some station officers are very reluctant to be recorded; I think they are not sure what they should

say, and what might be an “appropriate” personal or professional opinion. I spent several months trying to record a conversation with one station officer who was usually very chatty, but as soon as I asked him if I could informally and quickly record a conversation he would race off to do something else. After many attempts, I gave up, and in the second half of this research process I began to explore chatting informally with both staff and audience and quickly writing notes after conversations.¹

The conversations I have with David occur throughout the four years of this research. I have recorded formal interviews and these are quoted verbatim, other informal conversations happen randomly at the station or at home. We remember events that happened during the performance, talk about new scores or artistic ideas we have experimented with, and continue to design performance structures together that are sustainable and able to continue the performance until 2031. This includes pragmatic decisions as to how to obtain an extremely light and sturdy chair that David can comfortably dance with for the next 11 years, and how to organise collaborations with other local artists.

3.1.2 Recounting conversations

As my research progressed, I became more and more interested in trying to collect the naturally occurring conversations between audience and between artist and audience. I began to listen carefully, overhearing conversations, or at times “pretending” to be an impartial audience. This could be perhaps considered disingenuous, but generally after a while I would admit I was involved in the performance, or often whoever I was talking to would realise I was involved, partly because of the camera I carry. My process of collection became hastily scribbling down what I remembered from conversations in my field notes. In this research, I generally describe the context for these conversations, in order to “set the scene,” offering the reader more of a sense of where the conversation took place and other descriptive elements that seem to me critical to the nature of the conversation.

An example of a conversation recorded directly after having it is as follows:

I see a guy with a big grey beard and a very tattered hat. He is loitering around and looking at the timetable signs.

I ask him where he is going today. He says he’s going into the city but wanted to watch the performers (David and Giulia) for a while. He asks me what’s going on, I ask him what he thinks is happening, he says “It must be art. I can’t think of anything else it could be.”

When I tell him we have nearly finished four years of weekly performances

¹ I have changed the names of everyone I spoke to, or omitted names completely. I also have Monash ethics clearance to both interview and have informal conversations with staff, audience and participating artists for this research.

he is disbelieving “you’re kidding!” He has been at the State Library reading Popular Mechanics magazines. He fixes old cars and tells me about how he is painting the fence-posts on his property.
Field notes, November 2019.

I approached this commuter as it was clear he was interested in the performance (David in this instance doing a duet with another dancer Giulia), he kept coming near us, moving away and coming near again. His demeanour of curiosity allowed me to approach him, moving into an intimate proxemic zone as is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. I initially discussed where he was going and then asked him about his understanding of Weekly Ticket. I was particularly struck by his expression “It must be art. I can’t think of anything else it could be,” and made sure I remembered it exactly. This is another example of a verbatim quote that seemed to me to be both pragmatic and yet poetic, pointing to the complex “known” and “unknown” quantities of encountering art. This understanding was gained by having a conversation that was more organic than asking for an official “interview”. As our audience are generally about to catch a train, time restraints also inhibit the formal process of describing research objectives, obtaining permission and conducting and recording a conversation.

3.1.3 Photography

A discussion of the complexity of recording performance with photography, or using photographs as ethnographic material, is beyond the scope of this research, but here I describe how photography has become part of my research process and how photography is used by our audience. As part of my research and practice roles, I have attended nearly every performance of Weekly Ticket, taking on average around 20 photographs each time. Each week I post one or two photographs on our website, and (approximately) once a month a photograph and comment on our Facebook page,² creating the type of durational visual representation of Weekly Ticket that I described in Chapter 2 as being essential to other durational performance practices such as that of Hsieh. As this research has progressed, I have found many areas of interest are usefully illustrated by photographs, such as the way audience record performance on their phones or how audience’s physical postures and placement create attention and participation. Photographs in this research are captioned with my description, and this goes towards addressing the “inherent ambiguities” (1989, p. 119) of photographs described by ethnographer Dona Schwartz, though the photographs themselves are open to a range of interpretations. I often photograph elements of performance that I am currently writing and reading

² <https://www.facebook.com/weeklyticket/>

about, with this understanding and documenting process becoming iterative: I document an idea via photograph, then I look at the photographs, which in turn focusses and changes my understandings. For example, I am interested in the technical difficulty of taking a photo of someone else taking a photo of Weekly Ticket. The photograph below captures a station cleaner “Ted” stopping to record a film of Weekly Ticket. Looking at the resulting photo I am struck by the strangeness of the disposable gloves in the image, and the photo asks the question—who is recording? I also realise I do not know what they will do with this footage. Can this photograph capture what an audience sees, how they frame the performance? What is of interest to them? I ask Ted a question, but they are reluctant to discuss with me, due partly to language barriers between us, or perhaps they feel they should not be using their phone when they are working. I begin to realise how much of the effects of Weekly Ticket will remain unknown to me, and I begin to consider this unknowable or “feral” aspect to be critical to include in any understandings. I also realised I had to add the category of “conversations on social media” to the list of relational materials created by Weekly Ticket, as our audience document, frame and share both description and images of the performance via various social media platforms.



Image 3.1 Ted the station cleaner films David. May 13, 2018.

Another encounter that extended my understanding of relations and conversations in public occurred when an audience member was taking a photo of David on platform 3 in November 2019; I asked her what she would do with the photo and she explained she was talking to a friend (on her phone), and then was so distracted by watching David she took a photo of him to send to her friend during their phone conversation to share what she was distracted by. The friend at a remote location then had a direct audience member's description of a "guy dancing with a chair" and a photo to illustrate it, embedded into their pre-existing conversation. This interaction is a dialogical conversation between me and audience, and my interest in this material is from my position as both dramaturg and researcher. My understanding of the activity she is recounting to me becomes performance material, as I consider it a satellite performance, part of an extended network of performative moments, where an image of David dancing is taken, distributed and discussed by audience, viewed by someone at an unknown location, and possibly then re-shared or discussed in turn, though this is impossible to know.

Other moments within Weekly Ticket I have documented via photograph and writing together. These are moments of particular interest to me; an example is a collaboration with visual artist Andrew Forsythe throughout 2016 (I have permission to use Andrew's name). Andrew painted a portrait of David at the Station over several weeks. I was interested in how conversation was used by Andrew as part of his portrait painting process. I recorded both conversation and took photographs and wrote the following in my field notes:

Sitting in the red brick waiting area between platforms 2 and 3, Andrew sets up his easel and paints and talks to David, with conversations ranging from friends in common to parties in the '90s. Commuters wander in and out, some sitting quietly for long periods of time, watching Andrew paint. Andrew deliberately creates an intimate, fun, conversational environment in order to paint his sitter with a spark of life.

"I like something wonky in the portrait ... there's something in between you and me, and it comes out of the conversation" (Andrew).

Field notes, October 2016



Image 3.2 Andrew paints David October 20, 2016

As a visual artist, Andrew is articulating his version of “dialogical art,” that creating a conversation together gives both participants a spark, something wonky, something playful, an element critical to capturing the life of a sitter in a portrait. These conversations early in my research journey began to focus my attention on conversations themselves, and it was the beginning of my interest in how talking together creates participation, how dialogue within performance creates relations and how tracking these conversations creates research material, both regarding what people talk about but also how broadly “conversation” can be defined. The result of this tracking of conversations is the dialogical web, which was introduced in the previous chapter, and is discussed in detail in Chapter 6. This diagram provides a framework to chart all the conversations between various categories of participants within Weekly Ticket.

Both Ted and Andrew are creating and sharing images of Weekly Ticket. Their creative/documentary activity is visible to other audience, in turn creating and encouraging an extended network of communication and focusing the attention of other audience. An audience member might see someone holding their phone up and recording something across the platform. They might wonder: why is that person taking a photo of that person with a chair? The new audience member's focus moves from the photographer to the performer, a transference of curiosity I describe as “contagious audience” (my term) and explain further in Chapter 5.

Moving from a broad explanation of collecting ethnographic material, in the next section I will briefly outline how I consider existing methods for monitoring and analysing audience in an Australian theatre context to be overly simplistic and not appropriate for the complexity of relations within participatory performance, and how this has been fuel for me to develop a specific research process that I consider appropriate, ethical and useful.

3.2 Collecting material about/from audience

Research understandings of audience in a performance context are generally obtained via survey and have a framework of “did this performance achieve audience expectations?” (Brown & Novak, 2007; Radbourne et al., 2009), which relate specifically to measurable outcomes used to curate profitable theatre seasons. This leads to results such as: “‘captivation’ partly relates to temperature in the theatre, comfort of seating, lighting in the hall and composition and character of the audience itself” (Brown & Novak, 2007, p. 33). These statements might make a theatre director rather depressed, as the activity of theatre participation seems equivalent to enjoying a comfortable meal in a restaurant, with no mention of artistic endeavour (and without any food).

The Australia Council for the Arts commissioned the report *Meaningful Measurement. A Review of the Literature about Measuring Artistic Vibrancy* (Bailey, 2009) for arts companies to evaluate their practice and states:

A clear artistic statement of shared artistic purpose is the first step in establishing a meaningful artistic planning and evaluation process. Quantitative and qualitative measures can then be used to monitor whether the company has achieved its artistic goals and if not, why not and what they will do about it in the future. (Bailey, 2009, p. 5)

In the introduction, the report also states: “Researchers are still struggling with the definition of *performance* [emphasis added] for non-profit organisations and governance practices which would improve performance. The performance of non-profit organisations is an area still to be explored” (Bailey, 2009, p. 7). The term “performance” relates to business rather than arts outcomes here, a complexity discussed in *Perform or Else* by John McKenzie (2001). Having a clear “artistic purpose” that can be measured against audience experience is another aspect of how “the language of government” (Meyrick, 2018, p.22) encroaches on the arts, and whilst some version of this measurement may be important for main-stage³ theatre companies to justify receiving arts funding, I consider the whole process to be fundamentally flawed in both objective and process. As I argued in Chapter 2, in relation to Rancière’s theory of the emancipated spectator, a theoretical understanding that artistic activity involves a cause and effect transmission of emotions or understandings reduces arts experience to something that may be measurable, but in the process destroys it.

There is little data gathered about audience participating in a performance that exists outside of institutional artistic frameworks. To redress this situation, the next section outlines the methods I have developed to collect both appropriate and useful material regarding the nature of relations within Weekly Ticket. My initial idea of using a survey to collect data was designed, piloted and then abandoned, and a research framework that I consider analogous to the artistic process of Weekly Ticket emerged.

³ “Main-stage” is the term used in the theatre “industry” to describe companies such as the Melbourne Theatre Company, that receive large on-going organisational funding and are considered at the top level of professional artistic outputs.

3.3 A dramaturgical understanding of creative practice research

My role as researcher and practitioner has involved a process of uncovering what my expertise can bring to this research, to discover and articulate what I authentically believe to be significant without relying on the imaginary words and ideas of government (such as “activation”) as described in Chapter 1, and also not pretending to be a social scientist, psychologist or expert in any field other than my own. As I have developed my own way of doing ethnography and practice-led research, I have been aware of the contradictions and complexities of the process, as Kershaw describes: “Quality PaR [practice as research] always throws up key issues, which arise from what is usually a powerful parade of binary formulations: theory/practice, process/product, ontology/epistemology, artist/academic, resources/infrastructure ... its key issue becomes how to fall into contradiction without only contradicting itself” (Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011, p. 67).

Practice as research, practice through research, practice-based-research⁴ are all terms that seek to describe the interrelation of artist and academic processes and lessen binary separations and contradictions. This research is situated by definition within the academy, particularly in this PhD framework, a new form of output for me. Initially, this PhD was going to be in the form of a practice element (a performance of some kind) with written exegesis – in other words, a practice-based PhD. After 2 years of research, I changed to a fully written thesis, though I still consider this research practice-based or practice-led. A written thesis seemed the best way to communicate the complexity of relations between performance, audience and site within Weekly Ticket, and allowed me the scope to write about the relational context and findings of this research in detail.

Ways of knowing from practice can usefully inform research methodologies, the selection of research materials, research findings and ways of communicating research both within the arts and other disciplines. As my research and practice have evolved together, they are becoming one process, though I consider the term “practice-led” the most appropriate for my research. As a theatre performer, director and dramaturg, I bring my history of practice into research, and though I see the two endeavours as analogous in many ways, it is important to articulate that for me, artistic practice came first chronologically. Theories of participation from other scholars that I use to inform and structure my

⁴ The UK article “PaR for the Course” outlines the wide variety of descriptors used in this context – “Practice-as-Research (Mock, Chamberlain, Ellis, Nicholas & Whelan, 2004), Performance as Research, practice-based, practice-led, mixed-mode research practice, studio-based, arts-based, performance-based, research by creative practice, practice-focused and practice through research (Smith & Dean, 2009), for example” (Boyce-Tillman et al., 2012, p. 9).

research seem true or valid to me, because they articulate understandings that I have gathered from creative exploration as a practicing artist. I have many memories of performing in public; these are visceral and potent. I remember in *The Hunting Party* moving through crowds, towering above the audience on tall stilt-shoes, scanning the crowd in macro and also making eye contact with individuals, sharing fleeting moments of intimate, playful and joyful connection. A successful performance feels like we are all in this together, the energy is of human connection that is impossible to describe but is felt like an elastic bond between performer and audience creating a unified entity. As a performer, the senses are so heightened it is as if every single individual in the audience is also noticed and recognised. This is my lived experience of performing in public and the starting point of my enquiry into this field, which continues to fascinate me.

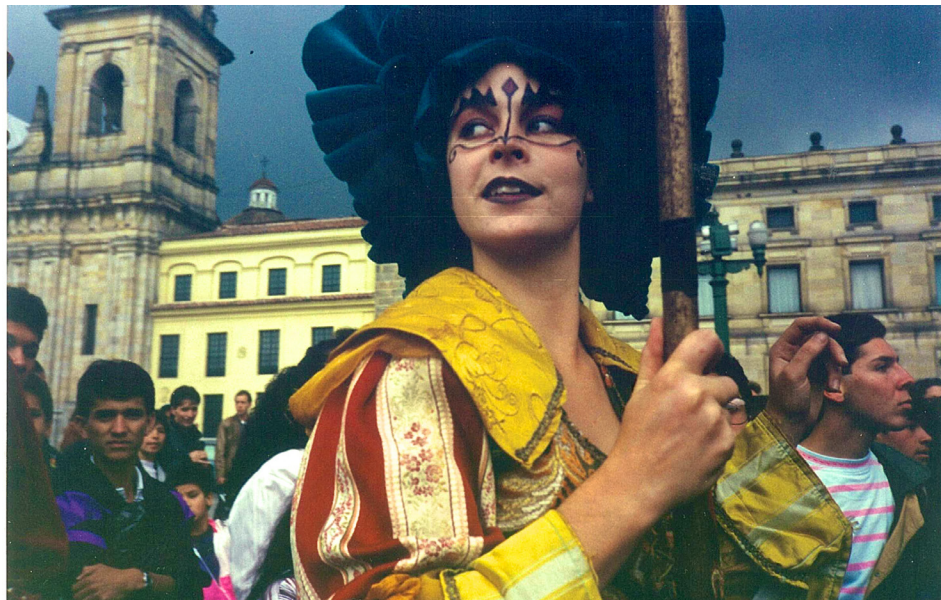


Image 3.3 – The author performing with The Hunting Party, Bogota, Colombia 1994. Photo: P Saulwick

Theories of participation and performance articulated by Bourriaud, Bishop, Kester, Heim, Lavery and others, discussed in the preceding chapter, frame this research. Their ideas have been used, because when I read them, I have a sense of recognition and realisation. They “feel” right, in that they articulate an understanding that I “know” from my experiences as a practising performer. This tacit knowledge has been created by many hundreds of hours of experimentation as a performing artist, working with audiences in a variety of contexts, from international arts festivals to local festivals, flower shows, fringe parades, shopping centres, corporate functions, horse races and many other contexts. Karen Barbour, a choreographer, dancer and scholar, discusses “embodied ways of knowing” that arise from practice, stating: “Moments of creative illumination or insight that occur as we choreograph or score an artistic work, also occur in research when we put specific methods into action

to undertake our research and as we begin to discuss and analyse our findings” (2006, p. 88). This section outlines how practice and research inform each other in this research project, in particular in relation to the practice of dramaturgy.

The artistic process of devising theatre involves beginning with grand ideas and possibilities and then experimenting and whittling them down to what can realistically be made. A similar process has occurred in this research, with my first experiment into further understanding audience being an iPad questionnaire I designed. After trialling this over several weeks, it became clear to me that this process of gathering information was difficult; my interactions with audience to obtain a response was uncomfortable, with no elements of the sense of humour, play and generosity that are core elements of the performance. Asking audience to give me something (their opinion via an iPad survey) without them fully understanding why (because I did not have time to explain it in a comprehensive, personal or relaxed way) seemed a very unbalanced process, and therefore the “data” I obtained seemed artificial. I realised I had to pay attention to what was organically happening and use my understanding of this process as an expert in audience and performance to trust what I could actually see, hear and feel. I also began to understand that this process was aligned to my natural style of directing/devising. I describe myself as an “invisible” director or dramaturg, rather than having a “vision” that I move actors around on stage to achieve; as a director of devised theatre, my role is to facilitate an artistic process that is creative, playful and genuine and involves all contributors equally. This includes setting improvisations and watching, making sure design, sound and light experiments are happening as part of the creative process (and not tacked on at the end), quietly noticing what “works,” finding the joy and spark of performance and endeavouring to retain this spark throughout the arduous rehearsal and production process. David Williams, in his article “Geographies of Requiredness: Notes on the Dramaturg in Collaborative Devising” (2010), outlines various descriptions or methodologies of dramaturgy but states that “they represent a heterogeneous aggregation of dispositions, propositions and questions about how one might live a creative life interwoven with others, rather than ever coalescing into a ‘method’ for making performances” (p. 197). A broad emphasis of “living a creative life” with others is a philosophical stance that encompasses ethics and working methods, and one that I endeavour to attend to in my work.

Perhaps the most powerful binary within practice and research as I see it is the idea that research has a specific outcome, an uncovering of “new knowledge,” yet as I have discussed in the previous chapter, an artistic process is endlessly slippery when seeking a tangible product, due to the complexity of collaboration with audience. Therefore, the findings of this research have become about finding ways to articulate and describe the complexity of the relations within Weekly Ticket using a dramaturgical research framework. This has allowed me to describe and draw diagrams of a web or “landscape of flows, systems and networks” (Lavery, 2016, p. 231), and identify patterns and processes that I hope will be of use and interest to other researchers and practitioners. This research describes my understanding of how the broad philosophical and ethical position of “play” and generosity is used by a theatre practitioner to offer invitations to audience, and how this creates participation and a contagious sense of audience within the context of “slow theatre”.

As a practicing artist, this research also responds to contemporary Melbourne arts concerns. Notions of participation are currently being explored by many artists who are experimenting with performance structures, ideas of direct interaction, and individual agency within performance. In a 2019 performance at Arts Centre Melbourne, “WAISTD” (What am I supposed to do)⁵ was described as a “performance without spectators”; the majority of the audience participated directly, resulting in the stage becoming literally crowded with performers and audience together undergoing various activities (pretending to lie on the beach, doing choreographed dancing). The overall theme was being active in political action, specifically climate change, and there was no room in the performance to be a passive bystander, as a sense of community and group action was carefully choreographed over an hour. These types of artistic experiments in participation seem to be part of a current move towards encouraging an active audience with a sense of agency. Weekly Ticket operates within a broad ethos of mutual play, and the specific skills and dispositions David and I use from theatre performance training to create mutual interactions with diverse audiences is outlined in the next chapter. These performance modes are recognised and analysed from my participant position of dramaturg. Concerns of practice in a wide sense fuel this research: my work as a performer,

⁵ Arts Centre Melbourne “Take Over!” Commission, in association with Melbourne Fringe, created by Sarah Aiken and Rebecca Jensen.

director and dramaturg, as advisor and teacher of theatre practitioners, and as an artist lobbying for funding for durational work. Elements of this research have been used to argue for Creative Victoria (the Victorian state arts funding body) to have a funding stream that allows for durational performance works like Weekly Ticket to be funded. More specifically, my role as performance director and dramaturg directly inform how I have developed my research, and I developed the structure of a “dramaturgical research framework” in order to describe how I see patterns of performance. This requires me to analyse performance methods and structure, and relate these to behaviours, glances, attitudes, conversations and extended conversations created with our audience. The next section describes how my artistic and research roles intertwine in this process of discovery.

3.4 A dramaturgical research framework

Boyce-Tillman et al. (2011) describe a strength of practice-led research as “when that which is studied and the act of studying (often reflexive, immersive doing) either resemble, or metaphorically are, or literally are, one another” (p. 27).

My “act” or activity as researcher and dramaturg aligns with Alyson Campbell’s definition of dramaturgy:

Dramaturgy is a much-contested term and concept, but writers on the subject tend to agree that it is not only about internal composition—the content, organisation, patterns and structures of an object of study that has expanded far beyond theatre—but also about the implications of these compositional elements in terms of what they contribute to our thinking about the socio-political and cultural worlds in which they occur. (Campbell, 2018, p. 7)

In explicitly using dramaturgy as a research methodology, I seek to give equal weight to these elements articulated by Campbell: artistic content (what the artist does at the station), organisation (how performance modes create participation), patterns and structures (conversations, choreography and proxemics), and the cultural context of Weekly Ticket (creating mutual play with audience in the setting of Footscray Train Station). These elements inform and speak to each other. I see my activities and purpose as researcher and dramaturg/director as one and the same – the roles collapse together. “Drama, theatre and performance research develops methods and methodologies that are related homologically to the practices of drama, theatre and performance themselves” (Kershaw, in Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011, p. 10). Dramaturgy is the process of holding the big picture whilst being alert to all the elements in play, being “‘innocent’ and ‘experienced’; an idiot savante; ‘in the know’ and ‘ignorant’; in intimate proximity (in close-up) and at a distance (in long shot)” (Williams, 2010, p. 202). My role as a dramaturg in previous artistic projects has taken various forms, or fulfilled varied job descriptions. A dramaturg may be tasked (by a director or devising actors) with keeping an eye on all the compositional elements of a performance in order to ensure that an artistic objective is being met, or in a more open-ended structure a dramaturg may articulate how elements of performance are contributing to an overall meaning that is emerging. The challenge of the role is understanding the different nature of the materials of performance as much as possible: for example, how does the design of the seating rows in an indoor performance affect how meaning is constructed by the audience? The specific decision of seating design may be made by a director or designer, but how does this element affect all others? The

dramaturg is immersed yet objective, a “kind of critical friend who draws attention to the different elements in circulation and at play, and to what they ‘do’: space, light, bodies, language, sounds, objects, ideas, energies, etc” (Williams, 2010, p. 198).

Dramaturgy is used in this practice-led research as a framework to explore and organise research materials, analogous to the artistic organisation of theatrical “compositional” elements. As a dramaturg and researcher, my epistemological approach is to “make shape” out of the methods the artist uses to invite audience and recognise performance modes that engender participation and create a sense of time. My expertise as a theatre practitioner allows me to identify specific performance skills that create participation, and these are explored in detail in the following chapter. I also argue that the immersed participation of a dramaturg offers understandings of the “landscape of flows, systems and networks” (Lavery, 2016, p. 231) created by performance. These understandings are within the “specific logic of the theatre event” (Lavery & Williams, 2011, p. 8) and illustrated in this research by ethnographic writing, field notes, transcripts and diagrams of conversations and photographs.

The logic of the theatre event contains various elements that are both artistic and research material. How people move, what they look at, how they feel, and how people respond to each other in the context of performance are all materials of interest to me. As this research has evolved, I have become interested both in what I can know, how I know it (my embodied knowledge through practice) and what I cannot know (the complexity of audience understandings and stories). There is a certain perversity in being interested in the impossible to know, but equally, this is what is exciting as an arts practitioner, seeking and receiving glimpses of the performance we are making. This interest has created two of the key “provocations” I offer practitioners in the concluding chapter of this research: 1) What is your art doing to you? and 2) What is your art doing that you will never know? These dramaturgical prompts invite artists to consider the complexity of participation.

David Williams’ description of dramaturgy as “tracking the implications of and connective relations between materials” (2010, p. 197) is analogous to my research process. In order to understand the relations of performer and audience and the complexity of participation, I concentrate in this research on the frameworks of “proxemics,” “dialogical art” and “slow theatre”; this allows me to discuss how elements of human space, conversation and narrative over an extended period of time alter and connect with each other. I give introductory descriptions of these frameworks in the following sections of this chapter, offering a detailed analysis of each in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, respectively.

3.5 Frameworks of “proxemics,” “dialogical performance” and “slow theatre”

3.5.1 Proxemics

Different spatial distances between David and audience change the relations within Weekly Ticket, particularly when the artist moves into an “intimate” space with an audience member. These “proxemic zones” were defined by Edward T. Hall in 1963, and provide a useful framework for understanding social behaviour (for example, less than 45cm of distance between people is considered “intimate space”). These zones denote different human behaviours: “Entry into different zones permits and enables different modes of physical and verbal discourse: different orders of expression may only be apparent within particular zones; different tones or extensions of voice may only be appropriate in each zone” (Pearson, 2001, p. 19). Performer Helen Paris (n.d.) describes “performing encounters,” where the performer and audience are at an intimate distance from each-other: “The vulnerability is two-way. Inasmuch as some audience members cringe from ‘participation,’ the encounter *demands* something from audience *and* performer; the performer initiates the invitation but is also dependent on the audience member to accept it” (p. 8). Perhaps unusually in this performance, an intimate encounter is sometimes initiated by audience members themselves. They may approach David and ask what he is doing and why, or approach me with similar questions.

Audience speaking intimately with a stranger (either David or talking about David), audience noticing someone watching David and then following that attention to watch him across a platform, audience moving past David as he is dancing on the overpass and not being sure what he is doing, all these disruptions of normal behaviour within social space are important elements of Weekly Ticket, and as artists we have learnt to navigate the appropriate and inappropriate in the varied settings we find ourselves performing. Transgressing typical behaviours may delineate performance, or create new relations between David and audience: “Transgression (of social norms within proxemics zones) may be sanctioned in extreme circumstance or by social convention. And by performance too, always at the interface of the appropriate and the inappropriate” (Pearson, 2001, p. 19). The transgressions of social norms within Weekly Ticket that lead to a sense of mutuality and participation are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

3.5.2 Dialogical performance

Dialogical performance is defined as “[theatre] projects that design innovative spaces for conversation” (Kester, 2004, p. 10). Various conversations make up our project, and the complexity of this “web” of narratives, including conversations on social media platforms, is outlined in Chapter 6. David often recounts directly to me conversations he has with audience, or I may overhear or take part in them.

Many understandings from audience will remain unknown to me; they remain secret, untold, and if I ask audience what they think then they would provide me with a version they think I want to know. English is the only language I am fluent in, so audience may communicate in a language I am unable to speak. They share their understandings on digital social media platforms I cannot access. The landscape of audience behaviour I can access are the group movement patterns, gestures and facial responses and live conversations I overhear or are recounted to me. Sometimes interactions or conversations emerge as emblematic, potent and exciting; these are the “ephemeral (and often overlooked) ‘small miracles,’ micro-events of fleeting flarings-into-appearance, atmospheres, intensities” (Williams, 2010, p. 201) recognised by myself as a participating dramaturg. A recognition of these micro-events and macro networks also point to networks, conversations and responses that are not accessible; these are the “known unknowns”⁶ of this performance. This research points to their existence, but they remain within the feral realm of material created by audience.

I know many conversations occur within Weekly Ticket that I will never access, but I also know that they exist. This allows me to state that Weekly Ticket creates a complex dialogical network as an element of my research findings. This network, described in detail in Chapter 6, illustrates the various categories of audience and conversations that occur within Weekly Ticket. I have organised them into nine categories of audience⁷ and describe some of these conversations as feral, “uncontrollable extensions of the work” (Heim, 2003, p. 183).

⁶ “In February 2002, Donald Rumsfeld, the then US Secretary of State for Defence, stated at a Defence Department briefing: ‘There are known knowns. There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we now know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don’t know’” (Logan, 2009, p. 712).

⁷ Artist, artist/researcher, direct audience, indirect audience, metro staff, indirect metro staff, audience on social media, others in creative team and traditional media.

The long duration of Weekly Ticket offers cumulative performance and research materials that reverberate across various forms, as Kester describes:

[Dialogical projects] ... encourage their participants to question fixed identities, stereotypical images and so on, they do so through a cumulative process of exchange and dialogue rather than a single, instantaneous shock of insight precipitated by an image or object. These projects require a shift in our understanding of a work of art – a redefinition of aesthetic experience as durational rather than immediate. (2004 p. 12)

This cumulative, durational process of conversations leads to the next main theme of this research – time. Weekly Ticket, as a 15-year performance, offers the opportunity to research an extended network of audience and conversations, slowly amassing and gathering momentum. Wallace Heim describes this process: “Some works continue to have effect beyond the event, reverberating in the stories about it, passed along like a slow contagion” (Heim, 2003, p. 184). These slow reverberations are an element of what I define as slow theatre.

3.5.3 Slow theatre

Within a dramaturgical framework, my understandings of time relate to performance – how is a lengthy time-frame changing our performance and our understandings of performance? What do I notice about performance when I really take time? In simple terms, a long duration allows us to experiment many times with performing in the same environment, and we also build relationships with audience who we encounter multiple times. However, stating an intention and commitment to a 15-year time frame has become an unexpectedly powerful element of Weekly Ticket that goes beyond the pragmatics of organising a performance that runs from 2016 to 2031.

Weekly Ticket introduces the idea of the “long now” (Eno 1995) into the environment of Footscray Station, a philosophical concept of slowness that invites us to pay attention to everyday patterns of behaviour and a sense of commitment. This durational engagement has changed us as artists and our understanding of the work we make in a range of ways, as our lives and art become deeply intertwined. This is the “living life in performance” (2011, p. 142) that Barbour describes in relation to choreographic improvisation, dance that expresses the accumulation of life within the body of the performer.

The opportunity for me as artist/researcher to be present over a long period of time and to have the opportunity to notice what is happening on a macro and micro level aligns with Peter Eckersall and Eddie Paterson's (2011) notion of "slow dramaturgy"; they identify this dramaturgical process as one that "makes a change to theatre, changes its pace, its structure, and foregrounds its material dimensions" (p. 190). During my time participating in nearly 200 performances of Weekly Ticket, I have the opportunity to notice different things: the tiny things that are happening away from the "main stage"; the silent CCTV cameras pointing at us; the people pretending not to watch; the small gestures of attention from audience; and the people watching through train windows and through the lens of their phones. These all become part of an ethnographic understanding of Weekly Ticket as an ecology of performance and point towards thinking about the patterns of interactions and conversation that occur within this complex ecology.

Slowness and long duration are described by Heim (2003) in terms of "slow activism":

The slowness refers not only to the duration of the event and the drift which can be momentary or extend over years, but to its temper. There is a resistance in slowness which responds to the reductive aspects of haste and frenzy. The locus of change is one person at a time, in a process of communication which is dependent on finding enough common meaning between the artist and participant to sustain a dialogue. (p. 187)

Slowness as activism within Weekly Ticket is: resisting the patterns and energies of fast pace and rush at the station; taking time to dance and talk to people with a sense of mutual play; being ingrained in a local environment as artists over an extended time period; experimenting and evolving over time in collaboration with audience; and challenging the funding structures for creative arts institutions and commissioning organisations. This philosophy is described further in Chapter 7.

Weekly Ticket as "slow theatre" affords the extended possibilities of new understandings flowing back into the performance over time, shaping the performance as part of a generative process. My official role is described as "performance director" of Weekly Ticket. I often use the terms director and dramaturg interchangeably; this is because the term "dramaturg" is not widely used in non-academic or artistic circles. It can seem a bit pretentious, it is difficult to pronounce, and I certainly would not describe myself as dramaturg to station staff or audience, as they would not know the term. The reality is that my role could be seen as either director or dramaturg, but for the purposes of this research I describe myself as dramaturg, as it relates to the descriptions

of dramaturgy given previously and embraces the paradoxes that are at the heart of this role, as Williams describes: “The work [of the dramaturg] requires immersive belief and critical distance, a detailed engagement with part and whole, micro and macro; and she is forever both inside/outside, visible/invisible in the work” (2010, p. 202).

As my role as a dramaturg of Weekly Ticket has evolved over time, I have new understandings of how the micro elements of performance relate to macro understandings, described using patterned metaphors such as landscapes, branches, webs or networks. In this research, I analyse the specific activities David does at the station, moving between proxemic spaces and using the skills he has gathered over time to invite audience with gestures and conversations that create mutual play. My evolving understandings of Weekly Ticket have created less an interest in manipulating these specific performance gestures (by telling David exactly what to do), but more of a focus on paying attention to the overall macro landscape of the performance, making sure that Weekly Ticket remains playful, generous, responsive and sustainable. In fact, as I become more of an “expert,” I attend less to the specifics of what we are doing but think more about the wider necessity of sustaining creative activity. This corresponds to David William’s description of dramaturgy asking “questions about how one might live a creative life interwoven with others” (2010, p. 197).

Moving away from specific methods towards dispositions within performance, this research provides a framework of understanding that feeds back into the performance itself. Broad understandings of participation and connection with audience have become our key concern, and we relate specific performance experiments or “scores” back to this macro understanding. When making the short film in 2019 that articulates many performance structures within Weekly Ticket, we had to constantly remind the two film-makers that the “stopping and chatting” sections were important to capture, and not time for them to move cameras and set up for the next nicely framed “dance” shot.

Critical ethnographic research requires a focus on ethics, not just of research subjects, methods and methodologies but also of research outcomes and purpose. Norman Denzin calls for researchers to not just interpret the world but also to “change the world and to change it in ways that resist injustice while celebrating freedom and full, inclusive, participatory democracy” (2017, p. 9). Understanding our performance as mutually created with our diverse audience and taking the time to notice what they do, say, feel, document, encourage and are annoyed by involves being inclusive and participatory. Recognising the invisible and feral elements of our performance places us on an equal footing

with audience; perhaps some of our purposes are hidden from or not understood by our audience, but the opposite is also true, as elements of our audience understanding become part of the web of conversations about Weekly Ticket that are hidden from us.

3.6 Conclusion

This research describes in detail one performance project and offers an extended understanding of participation, being an ethnography of performance, from the perspective of a participating artist. It points to how I understand participation working and how it creates a complex system of interrelated relations and conversations. I refer to myself in various different ways, sometimes adopting the roles of dramaturg, participatory artist, collaborator, director/artist/researcher, researcher, theatre artist, local resident, collaborator – and sometimes a hybrid combination of roles simultaneously, such as researcher, local resident and theatre artist. These individual and combined perspectives offer different lenses through which relational encounters can be viewed and experienced, and offers a way to do performance research. More specifically, I offer a dramaturgical understanding that could be applied to any arts project and encourage other practitioners to pay attention to the overall ethics of their interactions, arguing for the importance of structures and dispositions that encourage mutuality.

The following chapter elaborates on these structures and dispositions from a theatre performance perspective. I describe key factors of improvisation, dance, and a spirit of “play” that creates relational performance and participation. This broader sense of “play” as a philosophy is important to give context to the following chapters that describe subsidiary frameworks of proxemics, dialogical performance and slow theatre.

Chapter 4: The trained performer in a public performance or Live Art context

Introduction

Following on from the development of a dramaturgical research framework in Chapter 3, this chapter describes specific performance structures and how they create participatory relations within Weekly Ticket. I explicate the elements of performance practice within Weekly Ticket, drawing on my experience as a performer in public space and referring to my theatre training and the tools I use to teach and direct improvising actors and physical performers. Brad Haseman urges practice-based practitioners “to be more explicit in identifying their existing methods of practice, and probably discipline them [existing methods of practice] somewhat to make them the spine of the practice-led research process” (2007, p. 5). In this chapter I will outline my understanding of dance, improvisation and play as key methods of practice within Weekly Ticket.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the complexity of a train station environment, I then describe the specifics of costume and chair, and then move to broader performance training, focusing on the categories of dance, theatre improvisation, play and clown. All these elements contribute to an overarching artistic methodology of improvisation and play, the purpose being to create participation and mutual relations with audience. Explicit knowledge from the performing arts is of use to artists from other disciplines working in the realm of participation, particularly when live art includes interaction between artist and audience in some way, or even more broadly in collaborative work.

4.1 Theatre artists, dancers and musicians working in ‘live art’

All members of the artistic team (me, David, and artistic curators and collaborators Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey) have extensive experience in public participatory performance as performers, musicians, and dancers. This enables us to enter a potential performance site and see possibilities. We analyse the built environment and the people within it in terms of performance: where can a performer be framed? What is the mood in this place? Will people be receptive to interaction? What are the sounds, surfaces, smells and shapes? How can we create an environment using human bodies that encourages interaction with audience and allows new ways of listening to, noticing and experiencing this place?

As performance director and dramaturg, I have worked with actors to devise performances for indoor theatre, circus, cabaret, comedy and outdoor participatory performance. My training as an actor and theatre deviser and my work teaching actors and devisors has a core philosophy of finding ways to become “present” and open to audience and environment. This involves being aware of and recognising environment and audience and building on and responding to “offers” (disruptions of the environment an improviser may respond to). Working in complex public environments, it is essential to be a confident improviser. Outdoor spaces are not controlled indoor theatre environments where the elements of lighting, temperature, placement of audience, movement and lines of actors and audio levels are manipulated by the director to achieve a specific experience for the audience. At a busy train station like Footscray Station, it is impossible to anticipate what will happen; trains may be delayed, a huge group of students may arrive on an excursion, someone might be cycling through the “stage” carrying a television in a box, the weather may be unseasonably hot, or the local busker may have turned their guitar amp up to 10. An artist in this realm must be relaxed, aware and agile enough to notice and respond to all of this. In the following sections, I will outline the artistic evolution of Weekly Ticket to date and how responding to environment and audience with improvisation and play has created specific performance structures that encourage participation.

4.2 Artistic frameworks at the beginning of Weekly Ticket

Costume, chair and improvisatory dance were the initial artistic elements of Weekly Ticket. David was chosen as the artist at the station because of his experience working as an improviser in public environments. As outlined in Chapter 2, David has had an extensive performance history in what was previously called “street theatre,” working physically as a performer and dancer, and predominantly non-verbally. Our first artistic question before Weekly Ticket began was: what will David as an artist in residence at the station do? In fact, (what I initially considered to be) secondary decisions of what David will wear, and if he will have any props with him have illuminated critical performance modes of the project, and experimenting with these elements have allowed us to begin to answer the larger question of what David will do. In the following sections, I will firstly outline how costume and chair have become key elements of our performance structure, and then I relate the performance ethos of Weekly Ticket more broadly to ideas of mutuality and generosity expressed via dance, improvisation, and play.

4.2.1 Costume

One of our initial ideas was that David would operate at the station as if he lived there. We completed our first photo-shoot with David in pyjamas, carrying a towel and toothbrush, as if he had just got up and emerged from his bedroom somewhere within the station. These photos were for publicity, and were taken in 2015 prior to officially starting the 15-year performance.



Image 4.1 David in pyjamas. Image by Shuttermain 2015

This first experience was very instructive as to the nature of performing at the station. I overheard several conversations about David as I followed him around anonymously. Because he was wearing pyjamas the conversations had a theme of “is he unwell?” The costume seemed to denote being in a hospital rather than being “at home” to our audience. One conversation I overheard was a couple discussing if he was dangerous or not, and they decided that because the pyjamas looked clean then he was ok. These were the first overheard stories about Weekly Ticket, and in this instance provoked us to rethink our costume idea. This process also highlighted to me the importance of accessing audience understandings via conversations and stories and was the beginning of my thinking of Weekly Ticket as dialogical performance, as outlined in the previous chapter on this research process.

We decided to mitigate any sense from the audience that David was mentally or physically unwell; therefore, we settled on a much more formal costume of colourful but well-tailored shirt, black trousers, and black shoes (that were comfortable to dance in) and black hat. The hat is both formal but slightly humorous as it is more old-fashioned in style than the kinds of hats usually worn in contemporary Australia. It is also reminiscent of silent movie physical comedians such as Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy. It creates a recognisable silhouette that we have used for various project designs, including a t-shirt (only one has been manufactured to date!)

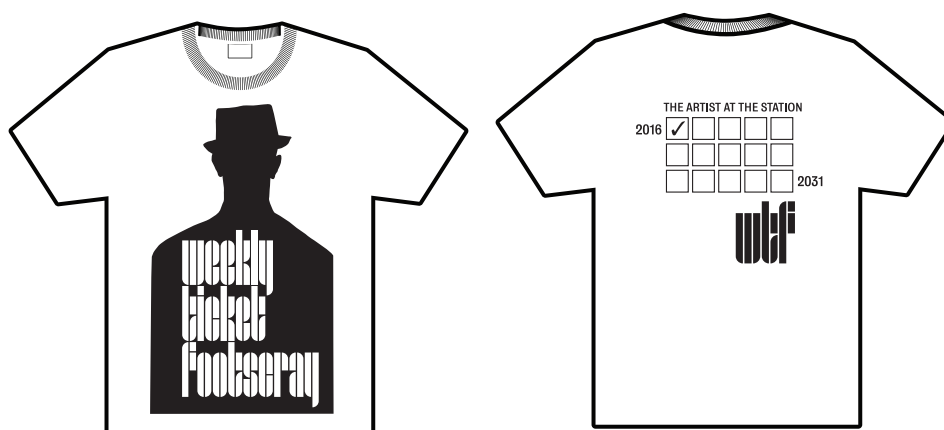


Image 4.2 T-shirt design M Carr, graphic by Letterbox design 2016

Once David had a costume that we considered suitable for “the artist,” we began the 15-year performance season with him simply being present, by being in residence. We also decided our artistic process would be adapting and discovering performance modes by improvising and experimenting in public. We became aware that there was such rich material at the station that we did not need to impose an artistic concept into the environment, but that we would slowly evolve our work with our audience, a key philosophy of my concept of slow theatre as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 7.

Improvisation, therefore, became a core philosophy and structural generator of performance material at the station. Elements of Weekly Ticket that are now familiar and repeatable have been created at the station with our audience. Having conversations, for example, was not a performance strategy we considered prior to starting, but it soon became apparent that conversations were satisfying and a source of rich material. Making an offer, recognising and responding to this offer and then extending it are the fundamental ingredients of theatrical improvisation, to be outlined further in section 4.5 of this chapter. In this instance, the first artistic offer is David’s presence at the station; offers in response to this from the audience create the opportunity for an interactive sequence to emerge. These offers might be a verbal question or statement, a gesture of greeting, a movement that mirrors David’s movement pattern or an audience member stopping and watching David with curiosity. In addition to costume, we added the element of prop – a chair. This differentiates David from other commuters, helping to create a sense of “explicit” performance.

4.2.2 Chair as prop

The chair as a critical element of Weekly Ticket was present on the first day of performance in 2016. This was my second idea as performance director of a performance costume or prop that creates a sense of “I live here,” and “I am comfortable here.” The chair has proved an endlessly useful and flexible prop and staging device. It has become a tiny stage to sit or stand on, a dancing prop to move in many ways and an emblematic element of the performance. These elements will be discussed in this section.

When I searched social media sites as part of this research, I used the search terms “guy with chair at Footscray Station,” or “man with chair at Footscray Station,” or “dancing with chair Footscray Station”; this allowed me to discover many of the “feral” conversations about Weekly Ticket that are discussed in Chapter 6, as this is how members of our audience described or “tagged” Weekly Ticket, as seen below.

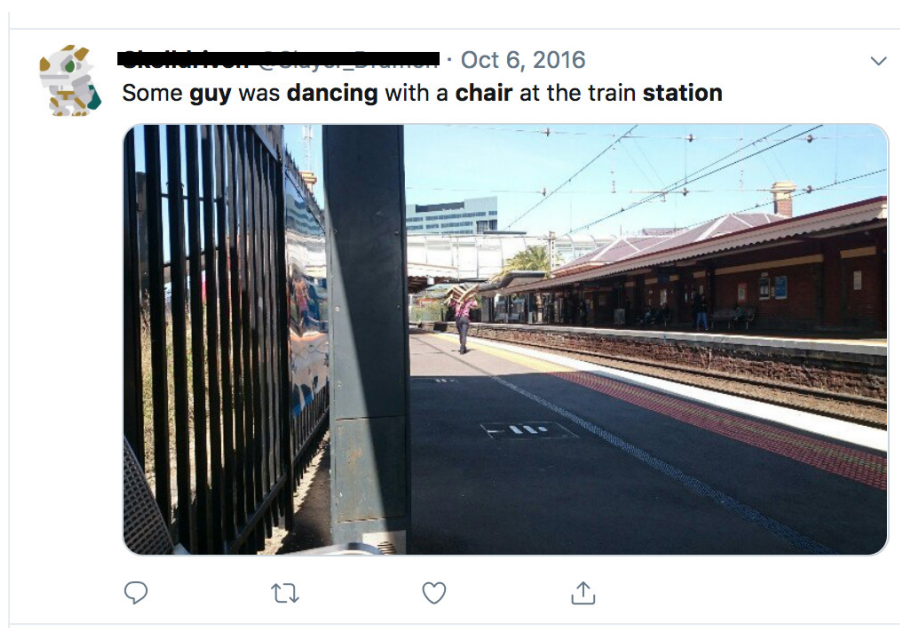


Image 4.3 Twitter October 2016 (emphasis from search terms)

An unexpected additional performance mode has been other performers with chairs performing with David at the station. The first time this happened, it was a covert operation, with several friends turning up at the Station with chairs and surprising David. This resulted in a four-person improvisation for an hour, building on the physical gestures and patterns that David had developed. In this instance, he was more of a leader with the additional three performers and chairs following his movement patterns (for example, running after a leaving train, seen below).



Image 4.4 David dancing with others on chairs, August 2018

The success and visual interest of this “score”¹ has inspired us to continue this idea. David performed on another occasion with five extra performers and four extra chairs in August 2019. We are hoping to secure funding in the future for a new rolling roster of collaborators who will unlock a chair that will be padlocked outside the station and use it to perform with. The placement of the padlocked chairs amongst the bicycles out the front of Footscray Station adds to the visual “footprint” of Weekly Ticket, with a permanent public presence remaining where we are not there.

Regular audience members have expressed an interest in the mechanics of David’s chair, and the actual chair has changed over time, as it needs to be as light-weight as possible. An elderly Belgian man, Yan, who we have met several times, came straight over to David on September 11, 2019, recognising he had a new chair. He picked it up and inspected it in a proprietary manner, looking at the structure of the chair. He told David (who was talking to another woman at the time) that he should have a chair in the design of a “lion tamer,” with a hooped back he could easily carry. The resulting conversation between these three people became about chair structure, circus (“circus comes from Belgium” said Yan) and if there are lions at Footscray Station to be tamed. The woman entered into the spirit of the chair discussion, volunteering the idea that the chair “needs to have a story behind it, it can’t just be any old chair.” This is an example of participatory improvised conversation – three people together in a spirit of fun and openness together agree that the chair is important and that Weekly Ticket is an endeavour that requires a strong consideration of all of its constituent elements.

Yan is an audience member highly involved in Weekly Ticket who we encounter regularly. He worked previously in a chair manufacturing factory, and was keen to share his design expertise. He has talked previously with David about the difficulty of finding a strong, light-weight chair. His input is literally changing the nature of Weekly Ticket, and the type of chair we will use, a particularly concrete (bamboo?) example of the performance being created together by performer and audience. These types of extended relationships are afforded by a durational performance and able to be tracked and recognised by me as both artist and researcher.

¹ Barbour describes scores as follows: “specific structures for performance improvisation... A score is a ‘set of overarching structural guidelines that delimit the improvising body’s choices’ (Foster, 2003, p. 4)” (Barbour, 2011, p. 135).



Image 4.5 Yan our collaborating chair expert inspects David's new chair, September 2019.

4.2.3 Chair as stage for conversations

The chair allows David to sit directly opposite an audience member sitting on a station bench. This position is perfect for conversation. David will generally ask: “Can I sit here and talk to you?” before sitting down opposite a commuter. The intimate possibility of two people sitting directly opposite each-other is not an element of the built design of the station. The waiting rooms have benches facing each-other but they are designed for waiting, being a little bit too far apart for comfortable conversation, and not aligned for people to be directly opposite each-other.



Image 4.6 The benches in the waiting room are staggered, and inhibit conversation, July 2017

In contrast, the following three images demonstrate how placing a chair directly opposite audience allows for three different “types” of conversation. The first is being directly in front of a baby, engaging in eye contact and repeating simple hand gestures as a pre-verbal “conversation.” The second is talking at the same eye-line as a taxi driver in their taxi, a surreal image when seen from a distance, as the taxi driver is invisible, and usually a conversation would take place within the taxi. The third is sitting in a “teacher” role to speak with a group of High School students. The teacher on a chair with a semi-circle of students on the floor is another familiar pattern of “instructive” conversation, with students asking questions and the teacher responding.



Image 4.7 Sitting opposite audience 1



Image 4.8 Sitting opposite audience 2



Image 4.9 Sitting opposite audience 3

The artist's chair changes the environment from a space that inhibits conversation (this may be an intentional design or an unintentional result of random bench positioning) to a place of conversation. Moving into this personal space to allow conversation with audience will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, where specific proxemic zones between people are outlined, and an extended analysis of Weekly Ticket as dialogical art is offered in Chapter 6.

The artist sitting down also demonstrates a willingness to "take time," and this sense of taking time to talk and being available for conversations is part of my definition of "slow theatre," a descriptor and philosophy described in Chapter 7. Standing conversations are more awkward, less comfortable, and seem more temporary. A sitting conversation requires an offer from the artist ("can I sit here?"), an acceptance (or rejection), and then a more considered ending by either person ("thanks for the chat," or "have a good day"). These more formal structures give a sense of repeated ritual to the encounter, and they allow for a more complex and satisfying conversation, a sense of being settled, and the opportunity for the artist to listen to audience and ask questions in a "give and take" process, as described in section 4.5 as being improvisational.

Chair and costume are specific performance materials that shape our performance and create relations in different ways, by making David an explicit performer with a recognisable costume, and a portable stage/conversational seat. In the next few sections, I will unpack the broader performance elements of Weekly Ticket, contextualising the performance style of dance and improvisation, and link this to philosophies of play and generosity that underpin artistic choices.

4.3 Performer as dancer

The improvisational movement style of Weekly Ticket lies within the realm of dance/physical theatre. In this section, I will describe dance as understood by both us (the participating artists) and audience, and go on to discuss improvisation more specifically in a later section (4.5). Influenced by mime, clowning and mask performance, David is an example of the “non-conservatoire” dancer that practitioners such as Merce Cunningham worked with, dancers without rigorous western ballet or contemporary dance training but with a strong sense of the expressive human body moving beyond the pedestrian.² The dancing element of Weekly Ticket fulfils several functions. It puts David into a creative state, creating “explicit” performance: “I pretend to do it, then I’m doing it. I physically knock myself into it [a creative state]” (interview with David, September 2017). Dancing also creates a disruption to the normal physical pattern of human activity at the station, it allows audience to notice and participate in the performance from a distance, and it serves as an invitation to a closer audience interaction (Chapter 5 explores these disruptions of proxemic zones in detail). In addition, dancing allows abstract expressions of joy and beauty, and David uses the gestures and rhythms of the stations, the trajectory of the trains, the waves of goodbye and arrival, the improvisational starting points of sitting, standing, running and carrying to create movement patterns. Over time, David has discovered movements that he enjoys doing; this includes dancing with the chair in a rhythmic way, rocking it forwards and backwards, skipping and crouching with arms extended, carrying the chair in various ways. This “choreography” is not made “onto” his body by another (this is a common descriptor used by dancers who learn specific moves from a choreographer): it emerges from within and is an extension of movement patterns he has evolved over many decades as an improvising performer. As dramaturg, I recognise, describe and remind David what these evolving patterns and scores are, serving as an expert witness and collector of these performance materials. I also facilitate the process of working with collaborating choreographers such as Paea Leach, and document these experiments, for example when Paea texted David provocations for movement via mobile phone.

² We often use the term “pedestrian” to describe a neutral manner of movement, what you might see people doing in normal life, as opposed to abstract movement. Movement scores might then involve exaggerating an element of pedestrian movement to create more explicit performance.

The following film clip³ records several movement patterns that have developed over time to become part of the repertoire of Weekly Ticket:



Image 4.10 Still from promotional film 2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmSWvMSQOpE>

Here I describe specific movement patterns or scores recorded in the film:

Movement number	Time stamp	Description of movement
1	0.26	Treating the chair like a circus prop, throwing it and catching it with control.
2	0.30	Standing on the chair and appearing above commuters, using arm gestures as if conducting the movement of the crowd and the trains.
3	0.39	Dancing next to the chair, responding to music through headphones, using extended arm gestures. Being more immersed in an internal world, the gaze is inward.
4	0.48	The gaze is outward, encouraging a more direct response from audience.
5	0.54	Spinning the chair.
6	0.59	A clear greeting, raising the hat.
7	1.02	In response to someone's curiosity, a playful gesture with the chair, a sense of direct relationship: "this movement is for you."
8	1.05	Responding to the architectural structure of the station, doors and walls.
9	1.12	Running alongside the train as it leaves the platform, visible to audience inside the train.
10	1.25	Sculptural images, epic poses.
11	1.32	Flipping and skipping with the chair in the overpass
12	1.45	Initiating a handshake in response to an audience member who has stopped nearby; this is followed by a conversation.
13	1.48	Placing the chair next to someone sitting, "do you mind if I have a rest here"?
14	2.13	Dancing with the architecture with more of a sense of play and humour.
15	2.34	The audience films David (see Chapter 5 on the implications of mobile phones on performance).
16	2.42	Waving goodbye to a train.
17	2.50	The audience responds by repeating a gesture. This response to an offer may continue with movements being repeated, or may evolve into a conversation.
18	3.01	A commonly understood gesture of initiating a "high five" is responded to by an audience member.

³ Filmed by Singing Bowl Media

Some of these movement scores I would define specifically as issuing an “invitation to audience” (White, 2013); these are numbers 4, 6, 7, 12, 13 and 18. Some of these contain clearly understood gestures of greeting such as raising a hat or offering a “high five,” other movements create a mutual relationship with audience with eye contact and an unspoken conversation “this movement is for you.” A detailed description of how these unspoken negotiations create relationships within personal and intimate proxemics zones is outlined in Chapter 5.

In a discussion I recorded with Paea and David after working together several times, Paea described dance as a “way of being in the world.” This echoes Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica, describing improvised dance as “a total expression of the self” (Bishop, 2006, p. 106). Both these descriptors are of dance being a total state of being, a more complex understanding than a person executing specific physical movements. Dance scholar and philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone describes a state of attentive responsiveness in improvised dance: “I am wondering the world directly, in movement ... the global dynamic world I am perceiving, including the ongoing kinaesthetically felt world of my own movement, is inseparable from the kinetic world in which I am moving” (2014, p. 201). The movement patterns created through improvisation are not completely random and unpredictable, as contemporary dance scholar Lawrence Louppe describes, “because the unpredictable is in fact highly determined by the history of the ‘me’ who improvises, and allows an already inscribed movement memory to appear” (2010, p. 52). David’s dancing contains his life story, it is completely specific to him, and utterly personal. As experimental choreographer Deborah Hay (2007) states, “History choreographs all of us, including dancers” (para 9). David’s body contains the memories and movements of the ‘70s dances he attended as a teenager, the gibbon monkey performances he did at Melbourne Zoo in the ‘80s, the decades of performing and improvising with companies such as “Born in a Taxi” and solo indoor performances. He notes,

What I’m bringing when I’m down there [at Footscray Train Station] is the young David Wells, and it is the very young David Wells the child, and I’m also bringing the father and the mentor and all the things I’m proud of being; the basketball coach, the old friend, the good friend, the life experience, coping with adversity that I’ve gone through. It’s made me more compassionate – the longevity that I’ve got in terms of being an artist and being a person for 56 years.

Interview with David April 2016

This sense of a lifetime of movement expressed physically by an older man (David turned 60 in 2019) may not be a creative practice familiar to our audience. To give an example – the dancing documented in the film at 1.02 I described as “in response to someone’s curiosity, a playful gesture with the chair – ‘this movement is for you.’” The movement itself is not physically difficult to achieve, but it is unusual and inventive, and most importantly there is a strong sense of connection between audience and performer.

There have also been several instances where the descriptor of “dance” has been rejected by audience at the station. In the next section, I will discuss some aspects of audience understanding of “dance” within Weekly Ticket. Dismissing David’s performing as not recognisably skilful or recognisable illuminates our audience’s prior understanding of what performance or dance “should” be.

4.4 Dance defined by our audience

To our Australian audience, dance may relate to certain styles they are familiar with from their cultural backgrounds (for example, traditional Vietnamese dance), or commonly known global Western forms such as ballet. One morning in August 2017, David was performing with Paea, in a version of Weekly Ticket for the “Due West” festival.⁴ In this instance, we specifically encouraged our audience to join in dancing and improvising with David and Paea. Either David or Paea would offer an explicit verbal invitation, “would you like to dance with us?” One woman watched for a while and then stated categorically: “that’s not dance, this is dance!” – she then executed a startling high kick, her leg stretching parallel with her torso – she had obviously trained in ballet. She danced for a while with David and Paea, but the improvisational nature of the dancing was unfamiliar and she soon left. Conversely, another woman joined in and danced for around 15 minutes, and she seemed quite un-self-conscious, copying and extending movement patterns, physically improvising and talking at the same time to both Paea and David. The give and take of conversation and movement seemed natural and organic to me as a watcher, with a strong sense of mutuality and direct relations.

⁴ Due West is a Western Suburbs arts festival that takes place over 2 weeks. These performances were not very different to a “normal” Weekly Ticket, but times were advertised in the Festival brochure and the blurb offered audience the opportunity to directly participate by dancing at the station. I am not sure if our participating dancers came to the station because of the Festival or not.



Image 4.11. David and Paea at the Due West Festival. On the left the ballet dancer moves with Paea, the other dancer improvises opposite David.

Another day, a few women joined in, drawing an appreciative crowd of Metro employees. On a later occasion, one of the male Metro workers told me that the performance was “much better” when there were women involved. The gender norms of the female dancer and male observer in public settings is of interest to me, though an extended discussion of these roles is outside the scope of this research. Only women were prepared to dance and improvise in public with David and Paea during three performances in August 2017 for the Due West Festival.



Image 4.12 Male Metro employee watching David dance with three women, Due West Festival, August 2017

On another occasion, David's "skills" as a dancer or performer were humorously referred to by an audience member, who shouted as they walked past:

Audience I give it 5 out of 10

Me What would bring your score up to 6?

Audience If he could stand on his head!

Field notes, May 2019.

This quick conversation illuminates a judgemental attitude towards David's performing, with this particular audience member expressing a specific score out of 10. In this initial moment of curiosity, they are assessing what he is doing in terms of obvious skills, and choosing to participate by calling out a humorous comment. Revealingly, the audience member would be more impressed if David was displaying the ability to do something more difficult, like standing on his head (or perhaps that is just the first idea they had when I challenged their scoring rubric!) Perhaps also the idea of "scoring" performance comes from reality TV shows such as "Australia's got Talent," where the purpose of performance is to be scored by judges, in the hope of progressing to further rounds of competition. Successful contestants in this genre display extraordinary skills in their particular field. Other interactions we have had also contained the idea that greater (more obvious) "skills" would enhance our performance. I spoke with a station manager in August 2019, asking for his feedback on our project. He said he thought it would be good if David performed with other people, and described these extra people as doing more "acrobatics" or "circus." Performance modes that involve high levels of skill such as ballet or circus are more easily recognised, particularly in non-traditional environments. Buskers who perform "circle shows" rely on high skill and danger levels to engage audience with balancing and juggling.

The improvised dance realm of Weekly Ticket is more difficult to categorise; the skills of the dancer may be less obvious to our audience, with specific movements less obviously physically challenging. The relational skills developed over a lifetime of performance and theatre training may also not be recognised or applauded. However, other audience members have praised David, one person approached David who was dancing on the forecourt of the station. He strode straight up to him with his arm outstretched, offering a hand-shake and enthusiastically told David "you are a very good dancer!" Other audience members have communicated their recognition of David's enjoyment of dancing, saying to David things like "you really love dancing don't you!" One woman confided in me in a particularly intimate manner, "I love watching men dance." Consistently, most audience categorise what David is doing as dancing.

Alongside my earlier descriptor of this mode of dance as being the expression of “inscribed movement memory” (Louppe, 2010, p. 52), improvised dance involves being physically present in a mode of deep attentiveness. In the next section, I relate dance improvisation to theatre improvisation and describe the mutual give and take (of verbal conversation or movement) that creates improvisation. This fundamental element of making and extending offers within improvisation I then relate to a broader state of “flow” and “play” that could be considered the deeper purpose of improvised activity. Being in play and improvising with audience is a strong and enjoyable sense of mutual creation. The final section of this chapter (4.8) gives an example of this type of conversation.

4.5 Improvisation

There are many branches within the field of fully improvised performance; some are dance-based and others veer towards stand-up comedy. A quick description of theatrical improvisation is useful here, and I refer to the 2013 biography by Theresa Dudeck of Keith Johnstone, a key theorist, teacher and performer of improvised theatre performance, best known for founding Theatresports. Dudeck (2013) describes Johnstone’s improvisation as a “system” that requires attention to all aspects of “theories, pedagogy, techniques, exercises, games and terminology” (p. 1), and I would add to this the importance of an ethical position of mutuality and generosity. The following is a concise definition using common terminology from improvisation (often shortened to “impro”):

Most of the improvisational exercises in the impro system encourage collaboration because they combine the imagination of two or more people and rely on the principle of “give and take” to move the story forward and to create relationships. One performer will “make an offer” (i.e., any physical or verbal input) and the other improviser will “accept” or give credibility to that offer and then “offer” something else, taking the initiative, without cancelling any previous offers. (Dudeck, 2013, p. 8)

This mode of collaborative creation is mutual and responsive; performance material is created between performers without either being in control, and when this is happening well, it can feel profoundly enjoyable, creating a sense of being immersed in play.⁵ In order to find ways to build the skills needed for this mutual play, Keith Johnstone’s book *Impro for Storytellers* (1999) lists the following “rules” for performers or players, and I refer to these constantly when I teach improvisation:

5 My experience as an improvising actor in “Melbourne Playback Theatre” from 1999 to 2007 informs my understanding of improvisation. Playback theatre involves the audience telling stories and moments that actors and musicians recreate. Rea Dennis (2008) describes the form in more detail: “Playback theatre is a hybrid performance event that blends personal story and improvisation through the systematic application of basic theatrical devices, simple staging, and consistent shaping by a conductor who primarily uses repetition (of the invitation to tell a story) to build momentum in the process. The method is highly structured in order to enable ‘spontaneous’ theatre that is co-created with the audience” (p. 212). Playback theatre was founded in 1975 by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas, and playback companies currently exist in 40 countries.

If the process is good, I assume that the end-product will be good. This stops me believing that an improvised scene has “quality” if it resembles a written scene (as though improvisation were just a step on the road to conventional theatre).

Players are working well when:

- They’re enjoying the scenes they’re in (this is not the same as enjoying being onstage)
- They’re giving the audience the “future” that it anticipates (while avoiding obscene and disgusting scenes)
- They’re taking care of each other and being altered by each other.
- They’re daring, mischievous, humble and courageous.
- The work feels “natural,” “effortless” and “obvious.”
- No one is trying to be “original” or to think up “clever” ideas.
- They’re uniting the spectators into “one creature.”
- They’re being themselves, rather than fleeing from self-revelation.
- We care about the values expressed in the work.
- The audience’s yearnings, anxieties and fantasies are being made flesh.

(Johnstone, 1999, p. 339)

The third rule, “taking care of and being altered by each other,” is seemingly simple, yet complex enough to devote a lifetime of training to. When performers are joyfully and courageously responding in the moment to each other and creating a story or dance together that is completely mutual, it is a treat to watch and can look effortless when in fact it requires complex labour and attention. The notion of “care” is also critical, as it points to an ethos of generosity and equality, noticing your “partner” in performance (or several partners) and making sure they are contributing equally to a performance. Mutual performance created with audience in the form of extended playful interactions and conversations is the realm of Weekly Ticket, and as a participating artist and researcher, I notice and trace these patterns of interaction.

My own experience as a performer of street theatre, improvised dance, playback theatre, and improvising in public as a musical comic character in performance duo “The Ukulele Ladies”⁶ informs my understanding of noticing and responding to offers from audience. Senses are heightened, and the body is alert yet relaxed, available to respond to a variety of stimuli. These may be verbal, where an audience member may engage in conversation or provoke a verbal response by calling something out (“what are you doing?”), in which case a variety of responses are possible. Or the stimulus may be kinetic, a physical response to other movement or sensations, provoking an immediate but considered

6 A duo with musician and comedian Shirley Billing, 1998 to 2018.

kinaesthetic response. This “state” can be very enjoyable, being the state of “flow” or “high attentional involvement” as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Three features of flow experiences “a distorted sense of time, a merging of action and awareness, and a reduction of self-consciousness—are partly or wholly epiphenomenal to high attentional involvement” (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2012, p. 265). All three of these elements are present in the performance improvisation of Weekly Ticket. Critical to controlling and creating meaningful aesthetic material from such a “flow” zone is being both immersed and also paradoxically aware of surroundings. It is a fallacy that improvisation requires following your first “impulse,” as there is a complex mental sifting that takes place, all without exiting the “flow” completely. For example, a first impulse to say something like “that’s an ugly shirt” might be rejected in favour of another more appropriate response. In public spaces, the complexity of social behaviours and appropriateness is weighed up and decisions made at lightning speed as a performer decides how to react to an audience offer, either physically or verbally. Can this audience participate in a humorous, playful sequence? Are they comfortable? Can I make them feel more comfortable? These questions are asked internally by a performer, and the visual and atmospheric cues they use to make decisions are explored in detail in relation to human behaviours within proxemic zones and social space in the next chapter.

David has developed a procedure to prepare himself for improvisation and play. He describes the process of beginning each Weekly Ticket, moving from normal life into a playful state:

I start feeling lighter as I am riding my bike there [to the station]. And the riding of the bike, I get my body going, I get the joy happening, so by the time I get there I’m physically engaged a bit, there’s a journey I’ve made, there’s an effort I’ve made. And then when I go through the door to pick up my chair, I’m always jolly with the station people. The station people are really jolly (one gave me a hug the other day – I hadn’t met her before). And you sign on, you have to write down what you’re doing and I write ‘perform.’

Interview with David February 2019

This description contains three key elements: building up physical energy and engagement, being playful, and defining his activity as “performance” by signing in at the office. He is then ready to collaborate with audience, to notice and respond to offers, and to be present in a state of play.

How training and performance philosophies focus on play is the theme of the next section, with particular reference to the training and performance philosophy of Jacques Lecoq. Lecoq was originally a sports coach before starting his enormously influential theatre school in France in 1956. Practitioners such as Phillipe Gaulier, John Bolton, Monika Pagneux, and Giovanni Fusetti (all previous students of Lecoq) still teach their adapted versions of his philosophy, influencing the aesthetics and philosophy of many thousands of physical theatre practitioners, myself included. I have participated as an actor and deviser in workshops with Gaulier, and Fusetti, and I attended the full-time year-long John Bolton Theatre School in Melbourne in 1991. David has also trained with Gaulier, Bolton and Fusetti.

4.6 “Le Jeu” – playfulness as training methodology and purpose

Jacques Lecoq (1921–1999) trained performers with the objective of finding a joyful and open sense of performance, building on the ideas of *le jeu* (playfulness), *complicité* (togetherness), and *disponibilité* (openness to the audience/a sense of the authentic self). Actors embarking on the full training undertake workshops on animal movement, neutral mask, becoming the “elements,”⁷ half mask (similar to commedia dell’arte), clown, melodrama and character (usually in that or a similar chronological order). Each week, devised performances are created by groups of students and shown to their cohort and teachers. When exploring the neutral mask, the actor seeks to strip away distracting physical gestures and to become simple and “authentic,” described also by Johnstone: “Players are being themselves, rather than fleeing from self-revelation” (1999, p. 339). The notion of “authentic” is defined differently and disputed across many disciplines, but I use it here from the practice of devising theatre. I recognise a sense of authenticity when I see it in workshop settings or performance – the human performer becomes somehow epic, yet real, charismatic, but completely simple. The actor is “present” and a joy to watch. They “invite” our gaze and we are transfixed. This state of being I see as the “invitation to audience”; when experienced, it is an immersive and powerful experience for performer and audience together. This is the first step before improvisation and play is possible and involves a challenging exploration of the self. Students of improvisation may take several months to just concentrate on not fidgeting on stage, not adjusting their clothes or scratching their nose,

⁷ Fire, Earth, Air and Water, and then other materials such as paper, cellophane, other inanimate materials. The actor in neutral mask attempts to embody these materials.

not standing solidly on the ground, not breathing fully. After working on being simply “present,” there are many exercises that allow performers to improvise and make work together that seeks to be free of artifice and stereotype. Many games are played, often literal ball games. The teacher may freeze the action, drawing attention to the joy and sense of life expressed physically by the player. Simon Murray (2010) describes Lecoq’s philosophy as; “play is the driver of creativity. Without a disposition – and ability – to play it is impossible to produce the conditions whereby the actor/performer is a creator rather than simply interpreter” (p. 223). Play is the beginning of creativity.

This playful presence and creativity can then be brought into any type of performance, an epic tragedy, a comedy, or an intimate naturalistic scene between two performers. Practicing a sense of play creates an openness to others on stage and the audience, a type of generosity that is a critical element of this theatre training and philosophy. Working as a teacher (in an Australian school or university context), I play a range of games and endeavour to give an embodied experience of this play spirit to acting students. The challenge is to then bring this sense of play and generosity onto the stage or performance space. As performers move incrementally from workshop to performance, there is often a moment when that sense of play is lost. This is easy to recognise: the performer suddenly seems leaden and boring. These are times when an experienced teacher will “side-coach” (a term from Johnstone), calling out instructions while an actor is improvising in front of an audience, reminding them to do something simple that they can achieve in that moment. These instructions may be as simple as “keep breathing. I want to see your chest move when you breathe,” or “look at your friend on stage, notice what they are doing.” Improvising within a simple structure and being available to play, listen to and respond to side coaching is a complex physical, emotional and mental endeavour and will often be too much to process by an actor. However, moments of success are exciting and illuminating for both students on stage and the audience; we see the performer alive, responding authentically and joyfully to an offer, extending a narrative or action in a way that is unexpected and fresh for performers and audience alike.

A focus on play in performance also parallels the description of dramaturgy outlined in Chapter 3, where creating a playful and creative environment is the first objective of my artistic role, and the main purpose of endeavour is that of a “creative life interwoven with others” (Williams, 2010, p. 197). A sense of creative play can be contagious. James Carse (1986) identifies two kinds of games (or play): a finite game is played for the purpose of winning and an infinite game for the purpose of continuing play. He describes culture as made

by “makers of possibilities” in the spirit of an infinite game; the result is a “creativity of culture.” “Creativity is a continuity that engenders itself in others” (Carse, 1986, p. 67). In respect to relational performance it is useful to define performance as a generative system in these terms, and the outcomes of playful improvisations are then playful relationships that evolve and multiply over time. I extend this idea into “contagious audience” in the next chapter, describing how audience pick up on energy and cues from other audience, building a complex web of conversations and relations.

In the following section, I will outline how play and generosity lead to specific performance modes that encourage participatory and playful relationships. I will also draw parallels with David’s work as an “elder clown” (described as a “relational clown” by Balfour et al.).

4.7 Generosity and the playful relationship of the elder clown

Being present, open and available to respond to audience is a generous mode of play, creating an equity of audience and performer as outlined in Rancière’s *The Emancipated Spectator* (2007), where looking and acting are equal participatory modes of behaviour. Within Weekly Ticket, initial performance or conversational offers may come from David or audience and are then developed together. A description of generosity from cultural theorist Rosalyn Diprose (2002) is, “[Generosity] is an openness to others that not only precedes and establishes communal relations but constitutes the self as open to otherness” (p. 12). This description has strong echoes of the philosophy of play, improvisation, performance, dance and clowning. These recurring ideas have unifying principles of an authentic self, (dance as “expression of the self” described earlier and Lecoq training that aims to uncover a simple authenticity), an openness to audience (Johnstone’s rule of being “altered by each other” (1999)⁸) and a sense of unity with audience. Defining this ethos as generous is an ethical stance that is further outlined in Chapter 7, with generosity becoming part of the “ambience” of slow theatre.

⁸ A quick point of clarification about my use of the word “other,” as in “an openness to others.” The descriptor “other” has a problematic history in terms of ethnographic research that sees a researcher positioned as typical, and those researched as the foreign “other.” I hope this attitude does not have reverberations in this research when the word “other” is used. I seek in this critical ethnography of performance to continually and critically describe my own participatory position. The participatory nature of this performance and research has at its heart the philosophy that there is no “other”. There are humans that are separate physically to us, but they are equal in terms of complexity of attitude and story.

Generosity, play and the training methods of Lecoq that are part of Weekly Ticket are illuminated in another specific performance role that David performs regularly, that of being an elder clown. This work both influences Weekly Ticket, in particular the conversational structures that create relationships, and our understanding of the possibilities of participatory improvisation in a therapeutic setting. This will be described in the next section.

Clown is a mode of performance that is an essential element of the theatre training methodology described in this chapter. Murray describes this type of clown character and its contemporary relevance as follows:

For Gaulier and Lecoq the clown, far from being merely an irritatingly twee “personage” with a red nose, has a dissenting quality for overturning or denouncing order and the comfort of stability. In reaching the conclusion (quite early in the life of his school) that models of circus clowning had limited potential for theatre, Lecoq—and later—Gaulier align themselves with (Samuel) Beckett in finding the late twentieth-century clown the perfect vehicle for the hopelessly hopeful, but perpetually dissident survivor. (Murray, as cited in Hodge, 2010, p. 233)

This type of theatrical or non-circus clown finds an application in “medical clowning,” “therapeutic clowning” or “relational clowning” (different terms are used globally by performers in this field), where clowns work in hospital settings to engender play, humour and positive health outcomes. Even in these challenging environments, the clown remains “hopelessly hopeful.” Since 2014, David has worked professionally as an elder clown with dementia patients for the Australian Humour Foundation. A 2017 study of engagement between elder clowns and residents with dementia identified a “reciprocal engagement”:

Findings highlight the reciprocal nature of clown-resident engagement and the capacity of residents to initiate as well as respond to verbal and embodied engagement. Termed relational presence, this was achieved and experienced through affective relationality, reciprocal playfulness, and co-constructed imagination. (Kontos et al., 2017, p. 46)

Their term “relational presence” has similarities to the intimate dialogical encounter I analyse in this research, and that forms a particular focus for Chapter 6. A resulting sense of intimacy and play is also identified in their research of elder clown and their audience:

Clown presence is achieved via particular capacities and capabilities, such as attentive listening. Thus, through the clown expressing curiosity and appreciation regarding the individual or group audience, the clown develops a special intimacy with them that results, ideally, in a mutuality or “communitas” (Turner, as cited in de Graan, 2012, p. 89).

(Kontos et al., 2017, p. 50)

I will not discuss in detail Victor Turner’s theory of “communitas” that may be created by performance, ritual and play, though it is of interest to me. Instead I concentrate on the element of play and how it can be cultivated and explored by performance in order to encourage mutuality, particularly in relation to improvisation and the use of humour.

The final section of this chapter shows how particular conversational techniques are used by David, drawing on his elder clown training. As Balfour et al. (2017) describe in their Australian research project titled *Complicite, Le Jeu and the Clown: Playful Engagement and Dementia*,⁹ “relational clowns engage in a constant process of adjustment as they attempt to find the most appropriate form and tone of play for each individual” (p. 8). The use of humour is also a strong element of this particular improvisation and corresponds to “Lone Twin” performer Gregg Whelan’s understanding of collaboration involving “doing something” together and the importance of humour.

For our work, it’s really important that the basic exchange of two people doing something together is understood as a social act. To collaborate is to be sociable per se. We want to move that sense outwards again, to find other people who want to be equally sociable. Humour does that very quickly. (Whelan, as cited in Lavery & Williams, 2011, p. 11)

Using humour and improvisation, the following conversation is an example of how David finds common ground and mutual story with audience.

4.8 Listening, improvising and playing with audience

The skills of attentive listening, improvising and a playful attitude are illustrated by the following section of verbatim conversation that took place in September, 2018. This particular conversation is discussed in Chapter 6 more broadly in terms of the effects of intimate conversation at the station; here, I analyse particular conversational techniques from clown and improvisation training. Prior to this conversation, David was introduced to Declan by one of the Station Officers at the station. Declan is a regular at the station; he lives nearby and does his shopping at the Footscray Market. He knows all the staff as he has a

⁹ A multi-disciplinary study entitled Playful Engagement that was funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant.

great interest in trains. As David and Declan were introduced to each-other by a staff member, the relationship has been encouraged and mediated, with the staff member expressing that they will enjoy talking to each other. Declan is introduced as working at Kooyong station, where his job is raising and lowering the train boom-gates manually (the last non-automated station in Melbourne). This section of conversation begins with the subject of Australian Rules Football; the “Magpies” describes the Collingwood Football Club. The following transcript contains analysis from me in addition to input from David, who has identified several conversational techniques used. One of these techniques is the “binary holiday,”¹⁰ a question that has only two possible answers; this may be easier to answer for dementia patients, as it is a simple structure, or in improvisational terms, a simple offer that can be accepted and advanced. There are no incorrect answers to a “binary holiday” question.

Declan I’m first and foremost a Magpie

(David has found a permissible area of enthusiasm for Declan, once he is ‘in’ with the theme of football, this excitement and energy may carry over to other topics of conversation)

David You look a little bit like a Magpie

(David is purposefully being cheeky, Declan as an older Australian has an understanding of this type of humorous conversation, where you give each other cheek. This may be risky, but if judged correctly infers the intimacy of humour between friends.)

Declan I do, yeah I am. I’ve got a big Collingwood tattoo on my arm

David You haven’t got any trains tattooed on your body?

(Accept and extend the idea of ‘tattoo’. Technique of ‘binary holiday’, also re-introduces an earlier topic of trains)

Declan No!

(David anticipating this answer makes the scenario more extreme, a classic joke set-up)

David What about boom-gates?

(joke punch-line – the idea of tattooed boom-gates.)

¹⁰ A term used in elder clown training by the Humour Foundation.

Declan **No! I tell you what, when I leave that would be the last thing on my mind. I hear those bloody booms coming down every day practically**

David **So you do dream about the job!**
(re-incorporating an earlier theme of asking Declan if he dreams about trains)

Declan **No I don't dream about the job! I just hear those bloody boom gates all the time**

David **Is it a bad sound or a good sound?**
(another 'binary holiday' question)

Declan **(serious) It's a good sound, because it means you're still in work, if the booms ever stop I'm out of a job**

David **Do they pay you per boom-gate?**
(clown principle of 'anything is possible' naivety and imagination)

Declan **(laughing very hard at this idea) I wish they did, I'd be a millionaire!** (enters into and accepts the clown logic of this alternative world)

The final section of the conversation contains several examples of David as a "dissident" clown, creating an image of Declan covered in tattoos of trains and boom-gates, and a humorous alternate world where he is paid every time he raises or lowers a boom gate. This creative and foolish provocation is joyful and engaging for everyone participating. This is Tim Etchells' definition of play as "a state in which meaning is in flux, in which possibility thrives, in which versions multiply, in which confines of what is real are blurred, buckled, broken" (1999, p. 53), or Balfour et al.'s description of the clown creating a "micro-fictive space" (2017, p. 9). The conversation consists of an improvisational process of offers given and accepted, within an overall spirit of play, finishing with an epic image of Declan as a millionaire. Playing together in this way can be transformational for both audience and performer. Heim describes the "allure" of the artist and a

“provisional trustworthiness” (2003). These qualities are developed by theatre training, building the skills of play, authenticity and improvisation:

The allure and the provisional trustworthiness of the artist can draw one into the pleasure of an ethos of listening, and into feelings associated with care and friendship. To become attracted to, even imitative of, their comportment and tone can be a transformative experience. (Heim, 2003, p. 197)

In the conversation described above, both David and Declan improvise together, creating a strong sense of mutual play. The conversation has the quality of friendship, with David using his skills as a relational clown to jump past typical social behaviours into mutual humour and intimacy. These moments of conversation at the station create “relational time”, a sense of time that exists outside of “clock time” and is created by captivating moments of mutual play and conversation. I discuss this in detail in chapter 7 and outline how relational time is an element of slow theatre.

4.9 Conclusion

As the participant dramaturg of Weekly Ticket, my observations over time have allowed me to identify key factors of improvisation, dance, and a spirit of play that create relational performance. This method of working at the station has allowed us to create performance structures with audience and understanding of performance with audience. Playfulness creates playful connections, which in turn generate conversations and intimate moments of connection. Describing this relational play, Balfour et al writes: “Here the pleasure is not about the simple pleasure of performing a character, but the pleasure in the engagement, in the invitation to play and in the inhabited space of the moment” (2017, p. 9). In order to be playful, David must first be explicitly performing, with costume, chair and performance routine helping him change into performance mode from normal life. Then the parameters and structures of dance and improvisation create participation and audience, in particular a sense of awareness from the performer to notice and extend offers in the mutual “give and take” of conversations and playful moments.

The specifics of how David moves in different zones of social space in order to create playful interactions will be addressed in the next chapter, and a more detailed explication of mutually created conversations as a material of performance will be described in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5 Creating audience

Introduction

This chapter describes how as David moves between different proxemic zones (distances between people) he offers different “invitations to audience.” Unlike a conventional indoor theatre performance which an audience travels to, Weekly Ticket enters the environment of our audience. Our audience exists as commuters at the station, and they would be at the station if we were not there. Until David arrives, they are not yet an audience. This chapter describes how disrupting typical behaviours within proxemic zones creates audience and introduces the idea of “contagious audience,” where a sense of curiosity transfers between audience members. Understanding these live relations is important before I extend this analysis into the “feral” relations and conversations created by our audience in Chapter 6.

5.1 The audience is present

This chapter offers an analysis of what creates audience within Weekly Ticket from my perspective as dramaturg. This consists of two elements that I explicate in this chapter; the first is David engaging in “explicit performance” (Reynolds & Reason, 2012) by disrupting typical behaviours within proxemic zones, and the second element is audience noticing David, and displaying a sense of curiosity. Theorists such as Judith Butler (1988) argue that we are all “in audience” whenever we are in public, presenting some type of public performative version of ourselves and aware of others’ performative behaviours.¹ For the purposes of this research, I focus on how Weekly Ticket is created by audience and David, who arrives in the role of “artist” at the station. This situation complicates the idea of “explicit performance” as described by performance and dance scholar Matthew Reason:

When we as an audience watch performers – whether live or on screen, whether in theatre, dance or on film – we are watching other people who are explicitly presenting themselves for us to watch. It is an open and clear invitation for the audience to watch them – watch them act or dance or move or simply be – that is different to the way we might look at people in everyday life. (Reynolds & Reason, 2012, p. 139)

¹ For example, Judith Butler argues that gender identity – like all forms of identity – is not based on pre-existing (e.g., ontological or biological) categories but created by “performative” actions: “In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various speech acts proceed; rather, it is ... an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts (1988, p. 519)...the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed revised and consolidated through time” (1988, p. 523).

By performing for an unsuspecting audience outside of a traditional venue, potential audience may not pick up on the cues we use to denote performance and think David is behaving unusually for another reason. The description by Reynolds and Reason (2012) of offering an “open and clear invitation to watch” (p. 139) is described in this research as an “invitation to audience” as the term “watcher” to me suggests a less engaged participatory behaviour by an audience member.²

Marina Abramović famous participatory work *The Artist is Present*³ provides an interesting juxtaposition, as Weekly Ticket is the opposite of some key conditions of Abramović’s work. Rather than an audience waiting in a selected space and knowing an artist will arrive, our audience are waiting at a selected space, waiting for something else (a train) or doing something else (going to Footscray Market to buy mandarins, for example), and they have no expectation of an artistic experience. The audience is not yet present. In *The Artist is Present*, as soon as Abramović arrives to take her seat, I imagine there would be an enormous emotional charge amongst the waiting participants. But when David enters Footscray Train Station the disruption begins gently. Our audience must be created anew each time, brought into a state of being “in audience” by noticing and participating in Weekly Ticket. The complexity of creating performance in a non-performance environment is described in my field notes as I think about what creates audience:

I am interested in how David is in a performance state and how that if reflected by curiosity, then an audience appears. Rather than the artist is present then the audience becomes present.

Field notes, August 2017

So, what creates audience? This chapter unpacks how David offers invitations to audience that respond to different zones of proxemic space, disrupting typical behaviours within a spirit of play, and in turn creating audience. In order to do this, I will outline Hall’s method of measuring social space, and describe how David and audience move within these spaces. After this, I will outline the critical element of curiosity from audience: this creates relations and participation between audience and David and also between audience and other audience.

² I do describe audience “seeing” or “watching” David if this is a clearer descriptor of specific behaviour than “participating” sometimes; for example, I might describe audience as “seeing” David from across the station train line.
³ First performed at MoMA, New York in 2010 with Abramović sitting opposite audience in a durational performance.

5.2 Proxemic Zones – a definition

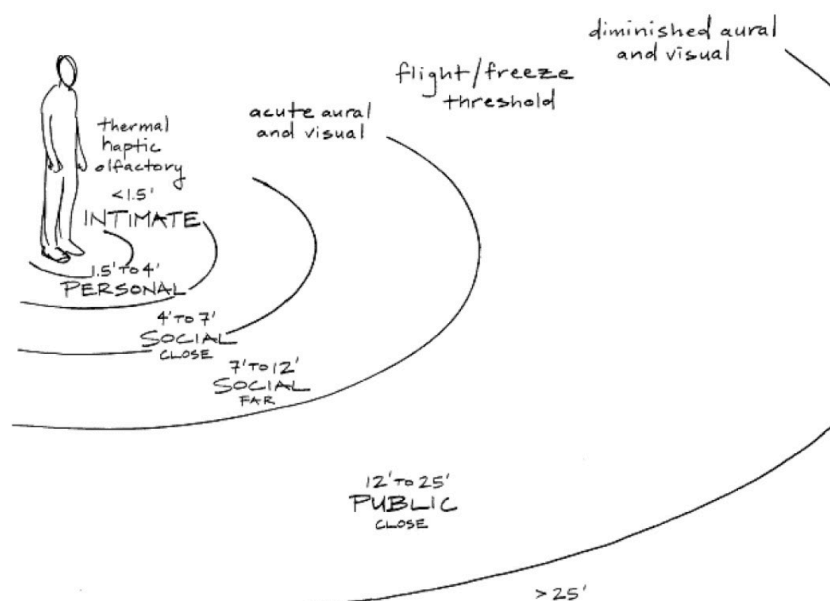


Diagram 5.1 Proxemic Zones - sketch by Angrette McCloskey (Hill & Paris, 2014, p.7)

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall's notation of proxemic zones (1963) defines specific distances between people in order to discuss how various activities are considered socially acceptable within these zones. This notation is still in current use by a range of performers and scholars. I will avoid the more controversial ideas of cultural behaviour that Hall outlined in his original research⁴ and use this framework to discuss the broadly acceptable behaviours within these proxemic zones specific to Footscray Station. I will describe the particular zones as "personal space" or "close social" space and so on, as this seems the most coherent way to write about these distances as outlined in Diagram 5.1.

My understanding of the importance of distance and proxemics is part of my dramaturgical research framework, with my perspective of devising theatre informed by an interest and awareness of space and placement of people in space. What is it to watch a performer at far distance in the landscape? What is it like to observe two people talking with energy and fun together? What is it like to overhear a loud conversation called across a public place? I also have a working understanding of moving within social and public space as a street theatre performer, a lived experience of the complex improvisatory negotiation that takes place in the moment. My interest also comes from a strong sense that space is important to our audience; this was described succinctly by an audience

⁴ Mike Pearson in his book *Theatre/Archaeology* describes Hall's research as a "contentious study of western intercourse" (2001, p. 19). Performer and scholar Leslie Hill states, the original research contains "1960s race and gender 'time bombs'" (2014, p. 7).

member I spoke to in September 2019. This audience member (Gary) was watching David in a surreptitious way as David was dancing on the overpass. By that, I mean he was purposefully standing near David (in close public space) for an extended time, but not engaging in any direct eye-contact with David. When I discussed this with David later, he said he had a strong sense that he should not approach Gary. But Gary was frequently glancing over at me (watching from a further distance), so I moved closer and started a conversation with him. The following conversation is not verbatim: I reconstructed the important points immediately after the conversation took place:

Gary – Is he someone you know (referring to David)?

Me – yes, I do know him. I'm just interested in what people think about what he's doing (I was asking about what he thought of our artistic project).

Gary – (talked about safety and risk rather than any reference to dancing or art) I don't trust anyone, I've got two stab wounds in my back.

Me – (I voice sympathy and ask what happened).

Gary – Someone came at me with a screwdriver, I got stitches taken out on Sunday (he described he was attacked in Footscray Mall, just a couple of blocks away from where we are).

Me – I can understand you would be very wary of anyone behaving unusually.

Gary – definitely... Up to them what they do, entertain themselves, but stand across the border, you know what I mean?

Me – you'd like them to be a few meters away?

Gary – yeah. . . sometimes street performers get in your face, then they know that they're annoying you so they do it more to get the crowd. But he (David) kept his distance.

Field notes, September 2019

Gary identifies several important points about space and performance from an audience perspective. First, that there is a "border," perhaps the border between social and public space as identified by Hall, and if a performer crosses that border into social territory it can be confronting as it is too intimate. Gary also analysed the use of intimate or personal space by other "street performers" to attract a crowd, perhaps by doing something risky like getting an audience member to hold a fire torch, touching them physically or similar. He described this as being "annoying." Gary was only comfortable being in close public space with David, but he stood with me in personal or close social space to have a conversation quite happily. I surmise this is because I was not performing or behaving unusually in any way (I was standing still and watching David from a distance for a while) so appeared un-threatening, and also perhaps because I

am female. This example shows how notions of space are important to audience and performer alike. David, as an experienced performer, looks for cues as to appropriate spaces to inhabit with audience. If cues of avoided eye contact, or an angry demeanour with glaring or defensive body posture (as Gary had towards David) are apparent then the performer who is constantly seeking mutuality moves on. However, the playful performer does take risks; even without eye contact, the performer may make a judgement that moving into closer territory will be possible. I will describe this transition into intimate space within Weekly Ticket in section 5.2.5. Theatre artist and scholar Mike Pearson describes behaviour within proxemic zones, and how performance may disrupt these:

Entry into different zones permits and enables different modes of physical and verbal discourse: different orders of expression may only be apparent within particular zones; different tones or extensions of voice may only be appropriate in each zone.... Transgression may be sanctioned in extreme circumstance or by social convention. And by performance too, always at the interface of the appropriate and the inappropriate. (2001, p. 19)

Behaving “inappropriately” at Footscray Station generally delineates David’s activity as being “explicit performance,” for example dancing at the end of a platform. As described previously, operating within a sense of theatricality, humour, play and mutuality is critical for David’s activity to be recognised as performance and not mental illness or other reasons for “inappropriate” behaviour. I will now discuss various disruptions or transgressions of proxemic behaviour that occur within Weekly Ticket, beginning with the furthest zone, where audience are at a far distance from David. I give specific examples of these “disruptive” behaviours, and illustrate them with photographs, quotes from David and a short film.

5.2.1 Far Public Space

Audience may notice David at a far public distance (further away than 7.6 meters⁵). He might catch their eye because his movement patterns are unusual, or they may notice his chair. His invitation to audience in this instance is “relax and watch me dance,” but his performance mode is being immersed in dance rather than responding to audience.



Image 5.1 David at a distance

In Image 5.1, David is dancing on the furthest reach of the platform, a space where commuters would seldom go, as it is past the area where trains stop (the train in the photo is moving past him). Dancing here he is viewed at a distance as an architectural anomaly, a different shape, a flash of movement, an unusual place for a person to be. For audience idly looking out of the window of the moving train, he would be a surprising, fleeting image, a person appearing where you would only expect to see graffitied concrete walls across the train lines. The size of this audience watching from inside a train is impossible to count, and difficult to research as I have not been a part of these audiences. At times, it would number into the hundreds for any one performance session. A post on our Weekly Ticket Facebook page documents one person’s experience of

⁵ I translate all of Hall’s measurements into metric in this thesis.

being part of a crowd of audience passing David in a train:

Thank you for creating a ripple of warm gentle laughter through the train carriage I was on this morning. As we made the stop in Footscray, enough people looked up and out to see you to tip the balance from a group of individuals in their private spaces to a small community sharing an experience.

Facebook, April 2016

These commuters may have noticed David in the distance and found humour in the unexpected sight of him dancing with a chair. One audience member looking out of the window of the train and laughing may have attracted the attention of other audience. Audience is “safe” to watch at a far distance, or from within a train. They may watch with a sense of “I am completely giving this my undivided attention.” Within the safety of a large distance, the audience has agency to watch as long as they want to, without the anxiety of having to participate directly. If David moves towards them, they might withdraw their attention in order to not participate, or they might keep eye contact and be available for conversation or improvised interaction.



Image 5.2 An audience member watches David in far public space. They have found a comfortable spot to watch for a while even though there is no seating in this area of the station. They feel safe to watch from this distance.

At Footscray Train Station, the closer proxemic zone of “close public space” has a similar sense of safety for audience if there is a train track between them and David.

5.2.2 Close public space

Being in close public space with audience when there is an impassable train line between audience and performer is similar to the sense of safety within far public space; this distance is shown by Image 5.3:



Image 5.3 A relationship across the train line

There is a sense of safety in that it is impossible for David to move quickly into personal space with audience: he cannot cross the train line. However, David often disrupts typical behaviour within this distance, talking to audience across the tracks, offering a verbal invitation to audience. Commuters would generally never have a loud conversation in this way, unless perhaps they saw a friend they wanted to talk to, but this is a dialogical situation where the conversation is very public, and overheard by others at the station. It is another type of playful conversation, and it might begin with David noticing that someone is watching him, or they might have been involved in some simple improvised movements together (an example of this is shown in the film in Chapter 4.3, at 2.50 mins.). If David notices interest or curiosity, he might instigate a conversation across the train line.



Image 5.4 David talking loudly across the train line



Image 5.5 David performing to audience across the train line

The waiting audience on the platform becomes, at times, an unwitting part of the performance even if they are studiously ignoring David. Audience on the same platform as David are able to watch audience responding to him across the train line. This is similar to watching a traverse stage design⁶ performance, as Gregg Whelan describes as part of a trilogy of “Lone Twin” indoor works:

With these shows the idea was to gently foreground the actual act of sitting and watching, which is why we made the shows in traverse with two banks of audiences sitting very close to each other along a long, thin, performance space. You sit and watch people sitting in the audience opposite you as well as people in front of you performing. There’s no set. It’s just a space populated by people and little else: you see people performing and beyond them you see people watching. (Lavery & Williams, 2011, p. 10)

Image 5.5 illustrates how an audience perspective may foreground David but also encompass other audience watching. In this instance, the audience is seeing both the performance and also the effect of the performance on others, and the varied responses of this audience. Seeing others participate in Weekly Ticket by watching, taking photos, laughing, responding in a range of ways offers cues for other audience as to what is happening, and it creates the performance itself in a clearly participatory way. In fact, due to the complex architecture of the station and the range of different places and sight-lines that audience can have, it is entirely possible that audience could participate in Weekly Ticket by watching other audience without seeing David at all.

In Weekly Ticket, the state of being “in audience” can be contagious between audience members across all proxemic zones. I describe this transference in more detail later in this chapter (section 5.4) in relation to “affective atmospheres” and curiosity. Audience may enjoy watching the range of responses from other audience, they may observe David moving into more of a participatory mode by talking directly to someone, and they may overhear conversations. Audience may feel safer watching other audience than directly participating with David. This extra element creates additional layerings of proxemic zones where audience interact with other audience: they may be standing near them, or watching them from a distance. Each audience member may have overlapping relationships encompassing the performer and various audience members. David describes feeling the attention of a wider audience gently turning towards these close public conversations “like a fan,” with audience on both sides of the train tracks moving their heads to

⁶ A good example is a catwalk fashion performance where a thin traverse stage has audience on two sides, and audience are able to directly see each other across the stage.

watch the conversation. In early 2017, I was across the train line from David when he noticed a group of young people standing on the same platform as me and asked them some questions (calling loudly across the line), discovering they were exchange students visiting Melbourne from Italy. I then overheard another person on the same platform as me telling the students they were also an exchange student, but from China. As the train pulled up, all the students boarded together, talking in a group.

In September 2016, I transcribed a conversation David had across the train lines between platforms 5 and 6 with a woman going home to Werribee.⁷ She said “People don’t talk anymore, they are too afraid to talk ... you can’t even get into a taxi and talk because you’ll be worried about saying the wrong thing.” For her, this conversation was an opportunity to give her point of view loudly and in public, in defiance of usually feeling censored. I fear that the opinions she feels she cannot share fall into the realm of “politically incorrect” (to be blunt – racist or similar). However, David steered clear of specific details and the nature of the conversation was joyfully defiant, with her loudly stating a desire to be heard.

Conversations in this context become public, and there is a disruption in typical social behaviour when conversations are shared loudly. Audience overhear a conversation in social space that would normally take place in intimate space. For example, David might ask across the platform “where are you off to today”? If audience answer, they are accepting an invitation, the conversation becomes performative, loud, and the information about their journey is shared with strangers. It is a simple question to answer, and if for example the answer is “I’m going to Ballarat,”⁸ then David might respond “Do you live in Ballarat?” This is a yes or no question (a “binary holiday” question, with two options as answers; see example in Chapter 4), and then whatever response is given can be picked up and responded to (“yes, I live in Ballarat” – “What’s it like living in Ballarat?”). David may also initiate a conversation as if asking for a favour: “I’m getting tired, is it ok if I have a quick chat with you?” This sets up the flavour of the conversation as being friendly, helping someone out, not confrontational or too revealing. These loud conversations David describes as being “exciting,” due to their disruptive volume. Audience seldom ask David what he is doing; the subject of the conversation is the audience – they are the interesting element.

⁷ A regional town just outside Melbourne

⁸ A larger regional town further away than Werribee

David might use the opportunity of these louder declarative conversations to give some information about Weekly Ticket, for example “I would love to visit Ballarat. But I’m here at Footscray Station every week.” In these moments, the ideas behind our artistic project can be shared, giving further information to audience about what we are doing and referring to the long duration of the performance. Audience may in turn share this information in the future with others.

Performing in far public or close public space with train lines between audience and performer allows audience the distance to watch David dance and to participate in loud public conversations. Both of these activities are disruptions of usual behaviour. In the next sections, David moves closer to audience, and I describe how intimate and personal space is negotiated by David and audience, improvising together. A different type of invitation to audience can be issued when performers and audience can see each other’s faces, hear each other more clearly, and pick up on subtle facial cues.

5.2.3 Social space

Moving closer to audience requires a different type of negotiation that responds to facial cues and eye contact. These are mutually negotiated between David and audience, creating the possibility of more intimate physicality or conversation. Within social space (1.2 to 3.6 meters) we can hear (when speaking at a normal conversational volume) and see each other much more easily. This is where facial cues become important in creating participation and an “open invitation” (Reynolds & Reason, 2012), particularly smiling and what David describes as a “softening around the eyes.” This distance allows the performer and audience to see cues of interest and curiosity; the physical distance may remain the same, but a sense of being together is created. As David describes:

A lot of people fall into step with what I’m doing, they fall into the “tune,” they walk a little bit differently, there’s all these little incremental nods, or people can soften around the eyes, and people can obviously smile in the smallest of ways. And – this is almost a 95 percent chance – if I smile at anybody they’ll smile back. And often times, and the really beautiful thing is, there’s a sense of relief that they smile back, and a sense of “thank you” in the smile...when that happens there’s a sense of a distance closing between me and whoever else it is...I’m trying to find the most gentle and natural smile that I can muster, to elicit the same sort of smile back...

Mostly it's in passing. If they're walking past and I see them smile, there's a lingering, as they're not looking at me anymore and they continue on their way and I see the lingering smile as they're walking away and I don't know how long that goes for. And sometimes I see people smiling from 20 meters away and when they get to 5 meters away, they stop smiling (laughs) because they don't want to be seen to engage in that way.

Interview with David, February 2019.

Interestingly, as David describes, an open expression in public space may drop in social space in order to discourage a more personal or intimate encounter. If a smile or a “soft eye” expression stays on an audience's face as they move from public to social space, then they are available to be invited into personal space. David may initiate this invitation to audience by putting out a hand to be shaken. This is a typical Australian gesture of greeting, though it is not appropriate for some commuters, for example Islamic women shaking a male hand. In this instance, David might greet someone with a gentle wave.⁹ During the current COVID19 pandemic we have suspended the performance of Weekly Ticket. Though it could continue in a socially distant mode, the advice remains to stay at home if you can. At the time of writing we are about to resume, and how social restrictions will change the performance is as yet unknown. Constant negotiations of space between people has become an element of all social interactions, and a new proxemic zone of 1.5 meters that is a safe distance in regard to infection is now familiar to everybody.

Eye contact is critical to give and receive audience cues in the environment of Footscray Station. In order for any interaction to take place an audience member must be interested or curious enough to look at David, and then what happens next is a negotiation of that relationship as the distance, both actual and perceived, lessens between them. Performing in public is very different to traditional performance in that levels of interest are constantly being gauged. It would be unusual to attend a traditional theatre performance if you had no interest in it at all. As a performer, it would be terrible to look out to the audience from the stage, past the glare of the theatre lights, and see the audience all with their eyes downcast, or focussing on something other than the stage. But in public space, audience reactions range from wildly enthusiastic to aggressively disinterested and everything between. Picking up on facial gestures including eye contact is important for beginning to negotiate mutual participation.

⁹ At the time of writing health advice during the COVID-19 pandemic discourages touching during greeting gestures. This may become standard practice in the future, changing the way we negotiate the move into intimate space with friends and strangers both in performance and social life.

Me – How do you transmit (a sense of play and friendliness)?

David – facial expressions are really good, because people really do want to see your face. When they're (audience) in the distance they will just watch your body happily, because there's this whole safe distance between us. But if I was up close, say in the overhead walkway, people do really want to see your face because it actually, it conveys more of what you're doing.

There's a playfulness and a clarity in the playfulness, that I'm enjoying myself, and that the game I'm playing is a harmless one. And I'm also saying you can look at me if you want, or you can participate in the game if you want.

Interview with David, February 2019.

Moving from social space into personal space, if audience cues of eye contact are available, David then creates a more intimate relationship, again with eye contact, conveying the idea that a particular dance pattern or gesture he is doing is for a specific audience, conveying a sense of "this is for you":

Me – how do you know who you could approach to talk to?

David – when someone has stopped, or put their hand to their mouth, or is just kind of transfixed, it's really obvious, and what I do next is completely just approach [sic] them. Sometimes I just kind of say to myself "this is for you" and I give them a little look, to the point when they know that I've acknowledged that they are actually really involved, and then they go "oh, I'm involved," and then without chasing them away I do something special for them, this is for you, I've made this for you.

Interview with David, February 2019.

Eye contact conveys a personal invitation to participation – "this is for you" – and a question "do you want to join in this game with me?" If the audience is available to stop, then the dance becomes a mutual conversation, or David, being completely mobile, may follow the audience on their journey, chatting as they walk together.

Footscray Station as a stage for a mobile performer allows a range of dynamic distances and proxemic zones, as audience move past David, David moves with audience, and David and audience move together within a complex environment of pathways, stairs, escalators, spaces and platforms. When trains arrive, sometimes simultaneously, several carriages of commuters empty onto the platforms and stream past David; the human energy increases suddenly and enormously. The energy is always changing, but calmness is restored in a matter

of seconds, and the only sound becomes that of birds. I will discuss this dynamic mobility in the next section before describing disruptions within personal space. The changing proximities of social space within Weekly Ticket offer the opportunity to analyse how and when audience stop, what they notice, and how they show curiosity and interest in order to create mutual participation.

5.2.4 A mobile audience



Image 5.6 In the overpass

The mobile audience of Weekly Ticket can move past David, stop for varied lengths of time, or directly interact with him. My dramaturgical understanding of space informs my analysis of what makes audience interested, and what creates performance. One of our favourite performance environments at Footscray Station is a very long covered overpass (Image 5.6) between platforms where most commuters have to travel through to exit the station, go to their train or get from one side of Footscray to another. The overpass is approximately 110 meters long and seven meters wide, with stairs and escalators at both ends to street level, and other stairs and escalators down to various platforms at intervals along the overpass. This environment offers several interesting performance possibilities. David can walk with commuters, joining their crowd and insinuating himself into their rhythm in close proximity. David can also dance in the overpass in one small area so as not to be in the way, and passing commuters see him from a far distance, then closer, then they pass him and the distance grows again as they walk away. Audience are in charge of the proxemic space they inhabit with David, though this is complicated by the fact that they may need to get past him to continue their journey.

I have observed a common occurrence where audience watch David in public space from a distance as they are walking along the overpass, then look straight ahead in social and personal space when they pass him as they do not want to engage directly, then after they have passed him and they are safely back in public space they turn around to see what he is doing. David describes a strong sense of their attention after they have passed him, almost as if they are looking out of the “back of their heads”; they want to know what he is doing, but they have to wait until they are back within their own sense of safe distance to look at him again. This is a clear example of how audience themselves navigate proxemic zones and gestures of participation (directly watching David), responding to his disruptive behaviour (dancing) in a way that they feel comfortable with. They may be curious or interested but are not comfortable sharing that curiosity with David, as it might encourage him to enter into their personal space, so they watch him surreptitiously.

At the end of the overpass near the main entrance to the station is a large flat area, much wider than the rest of the overpass, which is another favourite performance space, as there is room for David to dance and audience to stand and watch without getting in the way of moving commuters. Audience generally watch from a similar distance, at the edge of close public space, approximately 6 metres away from David (see Image 5.7). There is room here for audience to watch for a while and then move past David without being in personal space with him. My observation is that audience feel more comfortable being able to stop and watch for a while if they can leave without being in personal space with David (giving him a wide berth when they go to the escalators), they do not feel they will be coerced into direct participation.



Image 5.7 A comfortable distance for audience to watch – the proxemic zone of close public space

Australian audiences in my experience are wary of the direct participation that occurs in personal space. As is illustrated by Image 5.7, David is offering a specific invitation to audience appropriate for this proxemic zone: “you can watch me from this distance and I will create a physical movement sequence for you to enjoy. I won’t suddenly approach you.” David is more aware of audience at this distance than when they are further away (the far public space described earlier) and may respond more specifically to them as he can hear laughter or notice audience watching and filming him.

Moving from social to personal and intimate space is the last proxemic zone. Moving into this zone is risky for performers in public space, but can be done if a clear invitation is made and accepted. The relationship of audience and performer in intimate space can be humorous, and also may attract the attention of other audience.

5.2.5 Personal and intimate space

David sometimes disrupts typical behaviour in close personal space at the station. Strangers do share intimate personal space when they are commuting, squeezing into trains, or waiting very close to other people in order to quickly enter a train when the doors open, but these close encounters usually happen without clear eye contact or one person initiating a conversation, such as “where are you off to today?” as David might. As intimate theatre performer and scholar Leslie Hill describes, being close to strangers in these types of environments (non-performance situations where people are in crowds) is considered “close” or “crowded” rather than intimate, with people taking the intimacy out of the closeness by avoiding eye contact, staying as immobile as possible and “withdrawing upon accidental contact (if possible)” (2014, p. 12). The sense of participation is strong when audience can touch, clearly see and hear David in intimate proximity. Also, audience may notice David in intimate proximity with other audience, shaking their hand or touching them in a familiar way on the shoulder, conferring a friendly relationship. Being in intimate space has a particular energy. The senses are heightened as we see the detail of another’s face or touch and even smell another person. In performance, this intimacy has an extra heightened charge, as performer and audience enter an intimate game together in public. This charge is also felt by audience watching from a distance, as I outline in this section.

The following photographs show David in intimate proximity with audience: the first two capture a moment of conversation within intimate space. Intimate space is the perfect distance for quiet conversation, a mutual and playful to and fro not overheard but visible to others.



Image 5.8 Intimate encounter with audience on their way to the football. Sharing a joke.



Image 5.9 Intimate encounter with audience in an elevator. A more serious and personal conversation



Image 5.10 Intimate encounter on the overpass. Sitting on audience's lap

In photograph 5.10 David is sitting on someone's lap – an extremely intimate physical relationship that would only happen with clear negotiation and mutual acceptance. Leslie Hill describes a similar moment when she was an audience member inside a theatre and a performer moved from the stage and sat on her lap. She characterises this negotiation as an unspoken “eye contact conversation” that resulted in her consent, and describes this unspoken conversation; “[Performer:] ‘I know this is strange but if it isn't going to panic you I'm going to sit in your lap now’...Me,... ‘okay’”(2014, p. 13). More commonly in Weekly Ticket, this type of “cheeky” behaviour (sitting on a lap) would be initiated by the audience member rather than David (to ensure it is appropriate and comfortable for both), though still requiring communication via gesture and eye contact. In the instance of David sitting on a woman's lap, as the photo captures, this jumping into intimate space is a source of humour for them both and for the watching audience who are friends of the person on the chair. The crossing of typical intimacy boundaries in this instance is a source of humour as they are both being cheeky and doing something a bit “naughty” and daring. A passing audience or audience in the distance may have their attention drawn to this energetic and joyful interaction and the sound of laughter.

The following film also demonstrates how moving into intimate space with audience attracts the attention of others:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeFNOyCrDM> (1 minute 20 secs)(no sound)¹⁰

Three audience members captured on film clearly participate in Weekly Ticket within different proxemic zones. David enters into close social space with Audience #1, who was standing on the platform prior to David arriving. Audience #2 enters the environment where David is dancing and moves confidently to stand at far social space (similar to the comfortable distance illustrated by Image 5.7). Audience #2's body posture faces David and he has constant eye contact, watching David with curiosity from a distance he has chosen.

Of particular interest is Audience #1; they were in position before David entered, and they do not move away to a further distance but only glance at David from time to time checking what he is doing. However, when Audience #3 enters and immediately moves into intimate space with David, the attention of Audience #1 is fully captured for a moment and they watch with interest the interaction between David and Audience #3.

¹⁰ Filmed by Leo Palmer, who made a short documentary about Weekly Ticket. I have permission to use this short section of footage.



Image 5.11 Still image from film. Intimate connection attracts the attention of other audience.

This moment captures what David and I feel to be true – that confidently moving into intimate proximity with audience creates energy and interest for other audience. Seeing one audience member strongly accepting an “invitation to audience” in close personal space brings others into audience as well. In the next section, I relate this to affect theory, and argue that Weekly Ticket offers multiple examples of “contagious audience,” where interest and curiosity is transmitted between audience. Within the complexity of discussing an infinite range of human behaviours, I concentrate my analysis on what I understand and have recorded as dramaturg and artist.

5.3 Affective atmospheres

In the introduction to this research, I describe a “diffuse awareness” as being the atmosphere at the station, where commuters are in a state of awareness, keeping an eye out for their train and what other people are doing. This atmosphere is ripe for contagious emotions and attentions. We are used to being aware of each other at a train station, looking to other commuters if we are confused (Is the next train delayed? Did you hear that announcement?). We might instinctively move away if someone is behaving erratically, we overhear conversations, both between commuters and one-sided dialogue happening on mobile phones, and we quickly move to help a carer manipulate their child in a push-chair across the

gap between platform and train. When we are physically close to other people, can we “catch” emotions from others? What type of cues do we see, hear, smell or feel that govern our reactions and that create connections? Does performance create these types of sensory connections?

Australian cultural geographer David Bissell studies the experience of travelling on public transport; he describes “affective atmospheres” in this context:

Affective atmospheres must be understood as the relational potential for things to act or change in a particular space. Possibly the most effective way of grasping the idea of an affective atmosphere is therefore to think of it as a propensity: a pull or a charge that might emerge in a particular space which might (or might not) generate particular events and actions, feelings and emotions. (Bissell, 2010, p. 273)

The “pull or charge” in this research is that created by performance, what David describes as a sense of “heightened energy” between himself and others that may pull them into participation and becoming an audience. In order to pick up on this atmosphere, his performance state needs to be “hyper-aware”:

David – You’ve got to be very hyperaware of where people are. And you’ve got to have a feeling for how people are, and who people are.

Your gaze is always hyper-aware ... I’m tuning into frequencies that everyone has down there, and rhythms that everyone has down there and the senses that they are engaged in using down there ... I’m transmitting to people a whole lot of things; this is playful, this is friendly, I’m ok.

Interview with David, March 2018.

This sense of “tuning into other people’s frequencies” is similar to other theories of how humans are affected by each other, such as affect theory¹¹ that describes the “transpersonal or pre-personal intensities that emerge as bodies affect one another” (Anderson, 2009, p. 79). Dee Reynolds, in a chapter titled “Kinesthetic Empathy and the Dance’s Body: From Emotion to Affect” (2012) asks of participating in dance, “whose body are we watching and feeling: the dancer’s, our own or the ‘dance’s body’?” (p. 123). In other words, the dance itself has the possibility of impacting both dancer and watcher/participant, as the dance is intertwined with both bodies. This makes even more sense if we consider the performer and audience as equal, as is the fundamental position of this research.

¹¹ Teresa Brennan gives a simple description of “affect”: “The James-Lange theory (William James and Carl Lange) essentially dictates that bodily responses give rise to affective states. This view is popularly rendered by examples such as ‘crying makes us sad’” (2004, p. 4). However, affect and emotion should not be seen as interchangeable; “Feelings are personal and biographical, emotions are social, and affects are pre-personal” (Shouse, 2005, para. 2). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Touching Feeling* (2003) is central to performance-based understandings of affect. Her work demonstrates how “making work” alters the (onto-epistemological) creation of meanings by linking thinking and doing and making as thinking. Sedgwick’s approach sees affect as indistinguishable from body, mind and feeling.

In terms of embodiment, affect refers to that point at which the body is activated, “excited,” in the process of responding; but this process has not yet reached consciousness to the extent of producing cognitive awareness that can be translated into language. Affect is related to increase in energy level. (Reynolds, 2012, p. 124)

Audience may notice an emotional/intimate interaction as I have described previously, they may hear laughter or a conversation and wonder what’s happening. Sometimes there is a less obvious transmission of energy creating contagious audience. I can see people at the station in this state; they have noticed David, they are “excited,” but they have yet to decide what is going on, and there is a sense of curiosity and awareness before a specific emotion is felt (this performance is funny, strange, annoying, of interest to me.) The reactions and emotions of our audience are diverse and uncontrollable; they are specific to the individual stories of every audience member. Prior to this is what I describe as a sense of curiosity, an in-between moment, when the movement of the audience is arrested. I observe this energy as being contagious for others. This is what pulls audience into being and creates a sense of being together. Describing this moment as being curious is giving it an emotional descriptor when it is more of an in-between pre-personal intensity. However, I use the word “curious” as the common usage of this word articulates what I see, a moment when the attention is caught, a moment in which I see a complex mental shifting, sorting and considering prior to audience deciding what they think or feel about what is happening. I describe what I see in my field notes:

The moment when people first notice David there is a vulnerable and authentic expression on their face for a moment. Childlike curiosity. For a beat. Then they look around for the context. Are other people watching him? Are they watching me watch him? Then they might just watch for a while with a relatively neutral expression on their face.

Field notes, March 2018.

My understanding of curiosity being contagious and creating audience is developed in the next section, where I discuss audience inhabiting the proxemic zones of close and far social space together (measured from David) and picking up on physical cues from each other.

5.4 Contagious audience – transmission of curiosity

Is the state of being in audience contagious? The premise that relational art creates “community” is often stated, to my mind inferring that something happens that turns individuals into a group; “relational art sets up situations in which viewers are not just addressed as a collective, social entity, but are actually given the wherewithal to create a community, however temporary or utopian this may be” (Bishop, 2004, p. 54). What type of “community” does Weekly Ticket create? What are the moments when we all have a sense of being together? As Sara Ahmed writes:

Thinking of affects as contagious helps challenge the idea that affect resides within an individual body, by showing how bodies are affected by what is around them. A question remains: how are we affected by what comes near?... To be affected by another does not mean being affected in the same way as another, or that an affect is simply transmitted, creating a shared feeling or atmosphere. (2008, p. 11)

I argue that this contagion happens when audience mirror each other’s gestures of attention, when audience catch the charged energy of intimate interaction, when suddenly everyone is looking at one thing (the artist) and sometimes (perhaps) unwittingly arrives into physical postures of unison, such as watching Weekly Ticket through their mobile phones as seen in image 5.12. In these moments within social space, the energy of the group is raised, with audience spreading cues of curiosity to others. Conversely, at the end of this section, I describe times when cues of attention are difficult to notice; however, if David approaches a seeming “audience refuser” in a playful mode then it may become clear that participation has been happening.

A relational artwork “creates, within its method of production and then at the moment of its exhibition, a momentary grouping of participating viewers” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 58). In these moments within social space, the energy of the group is raised, with audience spreading cues of curiosity to others. I have often watched a small group of energetic audience responding to David; this attention is picked up by others nearby and, perhaps, some then start to take photos and film. It is clear that this group of people have become an audience when (as happens sometimes) they all applaud when David finishes a movement pattern, or changes what he is doing. Thus, the rituals of Western performance are embraced and the audience claps at the end of a performance. This audience are generally quite close to each other, they can pick up on physical cues with peripheral vision and sound (such as applauding), and they might glance at each other to share their enjoyment.

After a moment of curiosity, our audience may experience a variety of emotions – joy, confusion, frustration, excitement and annoyance, to name a few. The conversations and comments that express these emotions become the stories our audience tells and therefore the art we make. Artist and musician Laurie Anderson writes that “works of art are just ways to pay attention to different things” (2012). In image 5.12, the woman on the left in the long cardigan is arrested in her walking when she first noticed an audience, and she becomes curious – “what are they looking at, what are they taking photos of?” There is a particular heightened energy in this grouping of people looking intently at their phones focused on something. She then follows the direction of their attention to see the performer (David is just out of shot, to the right of the audience).



Image 5.12 Our audience in unison, August 2, 2019.

A similar transference of curiosity happens when audience overhear or notice a conversation between David and another audience, or other disruptions of behaviour within different proxemic zones take place as previously described. A more detailed discussion of audience and mobile phones¹² is needed, as it is something I have noticed from the very first moment of Weekly Ticket (that Tim Humphrey recorded on his mobile phone). The next section outlines how audience viewing performance through a camera lens creates new behaviours in social space, and how sharing these photos creates a new type of conversation, where audience share stories and footage.

¹² I use the term “mobile phone” to describe a hand-held phone with camera and internet connectivity; other terms could be “smart phone” or a shortened “mobile.”

5.4.1 Mobile phones

Audience holding up mobile phones and filming or taking photos is a gesture of curiosity and attention that has become ubiquitous in the last 15 years as mobile phones have become widespread. From a performance perspective, it changes participation in complex ways; an audience behind phones does demonstrate interest and participation, but it lessens the possibility of direct eye contact, as the audience are physically looking at their screen rather than the performance. The urge from audience to record as well as observe will continue to change the relationships between performers and audiences into the future, creating perhaps new public art genres that make explicit the various new proxemic zones at play – the distance between (phone) lens and performer, and lens and audience. These new zones may create new ideas of participation, intimacy and agency, as audience experience performance as something to be filmed, framed, captioned and shared.



Image 5.13 Audience distance from performer mediated by the distance needed to take a good photograph. David responds by “posing” for the camera.

Our audience are transforming live performance into a different form; as Philip Auslander states, it is a “reductive binary that the live event is real and that mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real” (2008, p. 2). His analysis in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* discusses how live performance is reimagined and shaped by film and television, with audiences having a need for “televisual intimacy.” Auslander’s analysis of “liveness” in the context of indoor theatre, stadium music, film, television and opera is a different artistic context to that of Weekly Ticket, but

analysis of the changing nature of live performance and audience experience and dissemination via mobile phone is an area I think requires further thought and research. Performing in the street in the last 5 to 10 years, it has been my experience that it is now common for a performance to a gathered audience to be interrupted by people rushing into the performance area (moving from close public space to intimate space) to stand next to performers in order to pose for a photo, or a “selfie.” What would have been a roving performance becomes a series of posed images to be captured on phones. Image 5.14 shows David and Neil Thomas roving with an act “Cyclo Illuminato” from 2019. An audience member enters into intimate space with the performers to pose for a selfie photo (the mobile phone just out of shot).



Image 5.14 Audience takes a “selfie”

These selfie photos or posing for a friend to take a photo are important elements of proxemic space behaviour, and I have added them to the diagram used previously in order to show how audience may jump into intimate proximity to have their photo taken, and how people stand in far social space to take a photo.

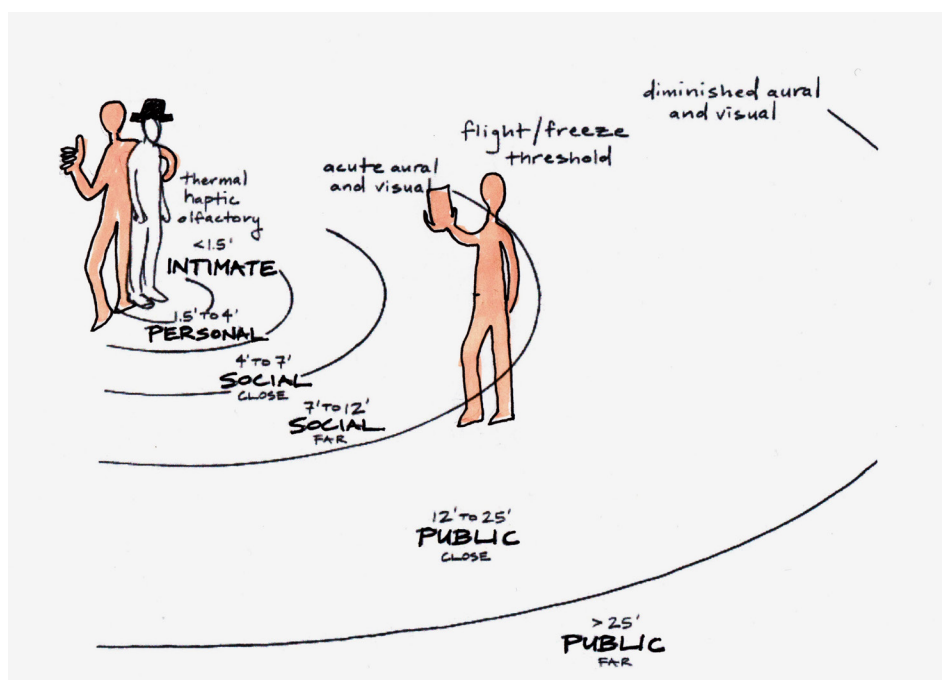


Diagram 5.2 Selfie proxemic zones (orange figures and hat added by the author)

The urge from audience to document and participate in a performance by being included in a photograph is an example of performance disrupting social behaviours. This would be extremely inappropriate behaviour if the performer (in the diagram illustrated by the character in a hat) was not explicitly performing, as the person in the selfie would be encroaching on a non performer's intimate space. A non performer is not inviting participation and even further, documentation, and would worry about why the photo is being taken and how it might be shared. When an audience member jumps into a performer's intimate space to have their photo taken it demonstrates that they have recognised a performance is happening, and they are choosing a form of direct participation.

The use of mobile phones within Weekly Ticket has been of growing interest to me as dramaturg, as these images and films created by audience are shared with other audience, adding another element to the "dialogical performance" of Weekly Ticket. I consider these feral conversations that branch out of the live moment into cyberspace and new audiences as a critical element of understanding our performance. This feral element is discussed in detail in the following chapter. If I am unable to attend a Weekly Ticket performance, David will often ask a staff member or audience to take a photo of him on his mobile phone. I then use this photo on our official website and Facebook page. This is simply an extension of how audience naturally document and share images and stories of Weekly Ticket, and station staff would see nothing unusual in David asking them to record the performance.

After describing the various invitations to audience that David offers within different proxemic zones, and how taking photographs creates a new complexity of relations in social space, I will now discuss one more type of audience before finishing this chapter. This is the “audience refuser,” and though this audience may not be clearly displaying a sense of curiosity, they may still be participating. David uses his skills as an improviser to move into personal space with this audience, picking up on invisible cues that suggest the possibility of participation.

5.4.2 Audience refusal

From a dramaturgical and performance perspective, I have a tacit sense of who is available for an invitation to participation. Some commuters ignore performance as soon as they have a sense something unusual is happening. There is an unwillingness to engage, demonstrated by walking past with eyes fixed ahead. As an observer, sometimes there is a powerful energy about this. I can “feel” the audience has noticed and rejected the performance, and their attitude of “you are invisible to me” has a certain intensity to it, a strong sense of an affective atmosphere being transmitted. It is very obvious to David and me that this person should not be approached, as they are projecting such a strong sense of disinterest. What factors create an “audience refuser” are difficult to categorise, and I struggle to explain why some people are in this category, or what mechanism I could even use to understand this attitude better. In my experience, any potential audience member may respond or not, and any judgement based on appearance (including fashion sense, age, cultural background) cannot forecast who will be a willing or refusing audience. Participation can be confronting for any range of reasons, as contemporary performance scholar Helen Freshwater in *Theatre & Audience* writes:

Theatre practitioners need to acknowledge that participation can be profoundly disturbing; that it may involve making ourselves vulnerable as we open ourselves to unexpected experiences and outcomes. (2009, p. 76)

As practitioners in public performance, we do not want to push anyone into a situation where they feel vulnerable or disturbed. “An ethics of intimate audience is to consider reciprocity, receptivity, reversibility and benevolence” (Iball, 2013, p. 43). We are very wary of making anyone feel uncomfortable or coerced. Moving between proxemic zones into intimate space with an audience, there are subtle negotiations to be made at each threshold by David and audience.

However, even without cues of interested eye contact or body language, a seeming “audience refuser” may still be participating. The following conversation happened because David boldly entered into personal space with an audience and initiated conversation despite getting no obvious cues of interest, and David describes this as follows:

Just the other day, there’s a teenager, head down, looking away, and I just went, “I’m going to talk to him anyway,” went over to him and said, “Hi, how are you going?” and he goes “Hi”, and I’m going, “How are you today?” and he goes “Good, I’ve seen you before,” and I’m going, “Oh! Right!” and he’s going, “It’s really great what you do, I’ve been watching you for two years.” And he seemed to be head down, not looking, but that’s just his way of coping that there’s that guy with the chair nearby.

Interview with David and Paea Leach, April 2019.

A subtle sense of availability, perhaps a few glances towards David, allowed David to approach the “teenager” (to use David’s descriptive term); if he was wrong, then the teenager may have refused to respond, but answering a simple question “Hi, how are you going?” is not too demanding and offers the opening that the teenager then takes to give some information, “I’ve seen you before” and then even praise, “It’s really great what you do.” This subtle sense of who may be approached even though they seem unavailable is difficult to quantify. Many years of performing for an “uncurated audience” builds these skills of awareness, noticing eye contact, “soft eye” facial expression, postures of attention and smiles of interest. It seems to me that the element of playfulness is key, being an extension of how performance disrupts typical behaviours, and this allows skilled performers to approach strangers. In doing so, you will expect to be rejected at times, or for the conversation to not easily progress.

Conclusion

This chapter has described various disruptions of behaviour within proxemic zones by David and audience at Footscray Station. This goes towards further understanding what exactly is performance, audience and participation in this context, building on the description of performance and theatre structures within Weekly Ticket described in the previous chapter. It points to the complex human ecology this performance exists within, with negotiations of space and distance, subtle gestures, unspoken eye contact conversations, mutual rhythms and intimate moments all being performative material we experiment with. Noticing “curiosity” and moments when audience decide to participate are key factors of interest to me as a dramaturg; the wavering sense of audience choosing to embrace and become part of something they might not fully understand is a complex unspoken conversation. This curiosity of audience can transfer to others in what I describe as “contagious audience,” and in the next chapter, I extend this notion into conversations shared between audience that I describe as “feral conversations,” broadening an understanding of dialogical art to an extended analysis of the web of conversations created by Weekly Ticket.

Chapter 6 Dialogical performance and feral conversations

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined how moving between proxemic zones creates the opportunity for David to enter into various types of participatory relations with audience. Some of these relations involve conversations, the dialogical element of the performance. This chapter extends the analysis of dialogical material to conversations in a broader sense, describing how Weekly Ticket creates a web of conversations that take place between several categories of participants, both live and online. Researching this complex web with a critical ethnographic approach allows for a greater understanding of audience within Weekly Ticket, with broader implications for other public performance projects. I define some of these conversations as “feral”; they occur between audience members independent of the artistic team, and they contain themes created by audience. These feral narratives include “the artist is being overpaid tax-payers’ money,” “the artist is paid by the council to keep the station safe” and “art cannot be explained.”

I align my understandings of “feral” with Alyson Campbell’s “feral pedagogies,” which she describes as non-elite and de-domesticated (2018). The notion of de-domesticated in this context relates to “teaching and learning in a spirit of generosity that is removed from the elitism of academic institutions” (2018, p. 62), and she uses conversations as an example of how performance can include participants excluded from access to institutions. This sense of equality and mutuality between performer and audience is echoed by Wallace Heim’s description of “feral stories” in her book *Slow Activism* (2003). Heim characterises performance as an exchange and describes the result of performance in this way: “That initial exchange, and its setting and narrative, can be recounted and storied. Those stories can continue to reverberate as uncontrollable extensions of the work, with new meanings emerging in unexpected, untraceable places; they become feral” (2003, p. 183). Both Campbell and Heim describe conversations within performance as giving agency to audience, and offering new understandings of what performance is doing. The tracking of these “uncontrollable extensions” created by audience and how they create a “landscape of flows, systems and networks” (Lavery, 2016, p. 231) is my focus in this chapter. I will outline types of conversations that happen across different platforms, and themes of live conversations, and I will also use a dialogical web to track relations and understandings that are shared by audience. Researching and documenting this complex web affords an

extended understanding of conversations created by Weekly Ticket, and a rich description of the attitudes, stories, photos, fragments and jokes created by our participatory audience.

Weekly Ticket contains many different categories of dialogue and storytelling that stretch out over time, creating a complex interweaving of material. In Rancière's understanding, our audience is a "community of storytellers and translators" (2007, p. 280). The expression of these stories within Weekly Ticket take many forms: verbal narrations or conversations between audience, with the artist or with me, and photos, films and messages that are distributed by our audience. I can only access the materials of stories I overhear, find online, take part in, or conversations that are recounted to me. The "translation" of Weekly Ticket, to continue in Rancière's framework, we may therefore be unaware of, as conversations about Weekly Ticket take place that we, the artists, are not part of. In this respect, the improvisatory and playful nature of this performance as described in Chapter 4 extends to a broader understanding of the consequences of performing in public, embracing the unknown, fragmentary, or difficult to understand.

Mike Pearson, in his book *Theatre/Archaeology*, describes an extended understanding of the complexity of narratives created by performance:

Performance exists as a cluster of narratives.... By narrative, we simply mean discrete ways of telling, some recognition of the oral nature of performance practice. But if we extend the notion of narrative to cover all orders of information generated by, and around, performance – strategic, operational, observational, critical, speculative – before, during and after the event then we might envisage documentation as requiring an integration or incorporation of these narratives. (Pearson, 2001, p. 57)

The types of narratives outlined in this chapter fall under the categories of observational and critical, and take the form of live conversations, online conversations, media narratives, and narratives of legitimacy. All of these narratives become dramaturgical material, illuminating meanings and relationships created by Weekly Ticket. The next section discusses the live conversations that happen between David and audience and how these have shaped the performance style of Weekly Ticket. After this, I will extend the idea of "dialogical performance" to include other types of conversations that do not happen live at the station. Literary scholar and cultural theorist Lauren Berlant states: "The first impact of an encounter does not constitute the event: it is just a disturbance that sets off a process" (2015, p. 195). The "disturbance" of Weekly Ticket, an encounter between audience and performing artist, creates a participatory relational process, and this process may in turn become a process of dialogue and conversation.

6.1 Live conversation

As previously noted in Chapter 1, dialogical performance is described by Grant Kester as “[theatre] projects that design innovative spaces for conversation” (2004). The conversations themselves are the material, the script of the performance. Conversations at the station are fuel for the performance, they give us interest and energy, they underline a sense of belonging and relevance, and their endlessly surprising nature helps us with the mundane discipline of turning up each week. This is the “dialogic performative” role of ethnographers in the field, as defined by Madison: “The dialogic performative is charged by a desire for a generative and embodied reciprocity, sometimes with pleasure and sometimes with pain. It is a mutual creation of something different and something more from the meeting of bodies in their contexts” (2006, p. 320). Often, the conversations jump into intimate territory quickly, as a question about what the artist is doing turns into a discussion of the audience member’s current activities that may involve trips to hospital, a former life as an accountant and alcoholic, or dreams of being a fashion designer (to give just three recent examples.) These conversations contain surprising and often moving material for all participants. This is due to the skill of David as an improviser who has worked in this realm for many years. This experience allows him to know who to approach and relate to (see Chapter 5), and involves him improvising and responding to audience cues so the conversation is often about the audience, what they are currently doing and what they are interested in. This has parallels to the artist’s regular performance work as an elder clown, creating playful, musical and conversational interactions with people in old age facilities (for full descriptions of these relational processes, see Chapter 4).

Every time David performs at the station, he starts by saying hello to whoever is working behind the ticket window at the main station office. This staff member then walks through the office to open the door from the inside so David can enter the kitchen area of the staffroom, sign into the visitor’s book and collect his chair, which is stored in the kitchen. David tells me that whoever lets him in (we know around 12 different staff now, and new ones arrive periodically) usually initiates a quick chat, in a sense “briefing” David about anything that is happening in the station that day. Sometimes, I enter the inside area with David, and the interactions with staff are always collegial and positive in nature. This has become the beginning ritual of Weekly Ticket, and it is conversational and friendly, endowing David with a type of membership of the staffing team. Conversations might include comments from staff such as “It’s been very quiet today,” or they might tell David about an incident that has happened. This establishing procedure began by chance; I remember being surprised

when I asked a staff member if we could leave our chair in the office after our first performance in early 2016, and they said yes. I did not think we would be officially accepted by the staff of the station so quickly. Storing the artist's chair in an official Metro space has therefore changed the nature of our project enormously, allowing each performance to begin with a type of staff briefing and ensuring David talks to all staff members over time. These conversations add to a sense of residency, with the ritual of an initial conversation being repeated over time, and I describe this as an important element of "Slow Theatre" in the next chapter. As staff get to know David, they are also able to answer questions from commuters about what he is doing, though they may have difficulty describing the project (see descriptions of "live feral conversations about art" later in this chapter in section 7.3.1.)



Image 6.1 David enters and exits through the official side door, October 2018

Continuing on from this initial briefing conversation, or dialogical encounter, at the start of each performance, I now discuss the various categories of live conversations that typically occur between performer and audience, and give examples from my field notes. These conversations are live, responsive and mutual, incorporating the elements of improvisation and play as outlined in Chapter 4.

6.2 Dialogical themes in live conversation

Live conversations at the station have a diverse range of subject matter, but the following two themes are common: a discussion of art, and the audience/participant becoming the hero¹ of the story. These themes are discussed in the sections that follow. Negative views from audience are typically expressed online (see section 6.4 of this chapter for examples of online discussions) or between audience members, rather than directly to David or myself and have the theme of “public money should not support art” or “this guy is weird/sick/stupid.” Direct conversations with David are typically positive, with an emphasis on mutual regard, and taking time to talk, as Kester (2004) describes:

[Dialogical projects] encourage their participants to question fixed identities, stereotypical images and so on, they do so through a cumulative process of exchange and dialogue rather than a single, instantaneous shock of insight precipitated by an image or object. These projects require a shift in our understanding of a work of art – a redefinition of aesthetic experience as durational rather than immediate. (p. 12)

The durational elements of Weekly Ticket encourage conversations in several ways: the artist has time to talk, and seeks conversational possibilities by approaching audience directly. Also, over the long duration of the project, as the artist becomes familiar, an initial wariness may turn into curiosity and then an opportunity to talk. This is illustrated by a comment from an audience member to David:

Audience member: I see you every week! I thought – can I talk to you?
Field notes, September 2017.

How the element of duration changes the nature of this project and therefore the conversations and stories within it is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 as part of my analysis of slow theatre. The next section discusses themes of live conversation; both these themes encourage a sense of mutual participation as David encourages audience to talk about their involvement in artistic practice, or invites them to share intimate details of their lives.

¹ The term “hero” is now considered gender neutral, and I use it in this way.

6.2.1 Conversations about art

One performance objective we have developed is where David seeks to find an artist among the crowd of commuters, and talk to them about their work, choosing someone based on their appearance and demeanour. This may seem a superficial “pigeon holing,” but it is surprisingly effective, and David generally is able to spot an artist.



Image 6.2 David talk to two artists, October 2018

These conversations serve as a way of amplifying our exploration of art in this environment; this theme has evolved over the duration of Weekly Ticket, as we have noticed and recognised many artists at the Station. A targeted audience member may not initially acknowledge that they are involved in the arts but may eventually admit that their study, hobby or occupation is artistic. The couple in image 6.2 above were local artists, and David began the conversation “Are you involved in the arts?” Discussing artistic practice in the unlikely environment of Footscray Train Station adds to the artistic reverberations of David’s role as artist in residence.



Image 6.3 David talks to a performing artist/vampire, March 2018

Conversations about art can be truly surprising; for example, the commuter in the photo 6.3 was walking to a studio in Footscray where he was dressing as a vampire for a professional photo shoot. He actually was a professional vampire (with permanent dental enhancements). After a moment of non-verbal communion that David described as “he looked at me with particular interest,” a conversation developed between them as they walked together over the overpass (a process of moving from public to personal space as discussed in Chapter 5). As they walked and talked together, the vampire described his work to David and how he embodies a vampire character regularly for photographic shoots. When David joins both conversation and movement with audience, this extends the improvisation. Participants share a rhythm and a sense of intimacy as David makes a non-verbal offer, “I will join you for a while, let’s chat,” while walking alongside audience.

Another example of a conversation about art is from August 2016, when David encountered a young poet. She was obviously interested in watching David dance and then, after a conversation was initiated by David, they performed a duet. This duet performance “score” was created collaboratively, with the poet and David deciding that David would dance in response to her reciting a short original poem. The poem was titled “The dance of life,” and the subject was the love affair between time and life, based on a traditional Indian philosophical concept where time is considered male, and life is female. These ideas about time and life became a beautiful and unexpected conversation on platform 5 at the station, creating both performance and philosophical conversation, as the poet described the meaning behind her poem to me.



Image 6.4 A collaboration of dance and poetry, August 2016

In this instance, a mutual conversation about art became an improvised artistic collaboration; David has never danced to spoken poetry before, and the poet had not performed her poetry with a dancer before. This participatory process moved from a conversation about art to a sharing and merging of artistic practice.

Talking about art with audience who are involved in artistic activity or curious about art in general is one theme of conversation; describing Weekly Ticket as “art” is a different conversation outlined in section 6.3.1 of this chapter, where station staff struggle to categorise and explain Weekly Ticket. The next conversational theme that David creates with audience arises from a conversational mode that is more like an interview, with David eliciting information about the audience member. I describe this as “the audience as ‘hero’” – not that the theme of the conversation is their heroism, but they are the subject of the conversation, encouraged and amplified by David’s improvisatory conversation techniques. This type of conversation has evolved over the duration of Weekly Ticket, becoming a useful improvisational offer and structure.

6.2.2 The audience as “hero” of the story

As described in previous chapters, once David enters into an intimate space with audience, he often initiates conversation with a question such as “where are you off to today?” The narrative begins with the artist asking questions rather than talking about what he is doing.

I have analysed a section of the following dialogical encounter in Chapter 4.8, with reference to the specific conversational methods used by David to elicit humour and intimacy. Here, I use the same conversation to illustrate narrative themes mutually created. This conversation is about Declan’s job as a signal operator, and the style of conversation is both personal and humorous. In this conversation between Station Officer George, David, Declan and me (I am more of an observer), there is no question from Declan towards us of “who are you?” or “what are you doing?” As we are introduced by an official, George, Declan accepts us as somehow part of the machinery of the Station, and he comments that he has seen David before.

I firstly describe the setting of this particular conversation, and then an edited transcription of the final section of the conversation:

September 17, 2018. We are talking to one of our favourite customer relations officers George. George was at the station on the very first day of our project and we have got to know him well over the years. As we are talking, another man, Declan, walks past and George waves him over to talk to us. I have seen Declan frequently at the station but never spoken to him. He is an older man, very stooped in posture, and he regularly goes through the station checking the coin return slots on all the vending machines. The conversation starts with George introducing us to Declan

and describing him as a “signal operator” (he is a shift worker, manually operating the boom gates at Kooyong train station. Kooyong is the last station in Melbourne to not be fully automated). Being introduced in a professional capacity at the start of the conversation is important; we are aware that Declan has a job connected to the rail industry, he is also described as living in a small house next to the station.

David picks up on Declan’s conversational manner and forthright personality, gently teasing him, and making the interaction “larger” and more humorous. David continues the conversation with questions to Declan, asking him about AFL football:

Declan	I’m first and foremost a Magpie.
David	You look a little bit like a Magpie.
Declan	I do, yeah I am. I’ve got a big Collingwood tattoo on my arm.
David	You haven’t got any trains tattooed on your body?
Declan	No!
David	What about boom-gates?
Declan	No! I tell you what, when I leave that would be the last thing on my mind. I hear those bloody booms coming down every day practically.
David	So you do dream about the job!
Declan	No I don’t dream about the job! I just hear those bloody boom gates all the time.
David	Is it a bad sound or a good sound?
Declan	(serious) It’s a good sound, because it means you’re still in work, if the booms ever stop I’m out of a job.
David	Do they pay you per boom-gate?
Declan	(laughing very hard at this idea) I wish they did, I’d be a millionaire!

All four people involved in the conversation laugh together at the idea of Declan in his little office tallying up the raising and lowering of boomgates and being paid some tiny amount per boomgate.

Declan is the hero in this narrative, elevated and recognised by others as doing a critical job. The moment when we laugh together in a playful atmosphere is part of the playful improvisatory performance modes of Weekly Ticket. Four people of vastly different ages and interests share the same joke, laughing next to the Myki (electronic ticketing) gates.

After our conversation, George describes Declan as “a very interesting man to talk to, we meet him every day. Every day he passes by and comes says [sic] hello and has a chat.” I have noticed that many of the station officers whose jobs focus on customer relations have personal relationships with regular customers. They are also present, like David, at the station on a regular basis and available to talk. They often stand for long periods next to the Myki gates without anything to do except check that commuters are “touching off” their electronic tickets. Some of the station officers invite more intimate relationships with commuters, others have a sterner demeanour and simply provide timetable information when required and check on safety. It is important to note that the setting of Footscray Station does contain other “official” dialogical roles, these are employees who are available and willing to talk. Perhaps this influences the dialogical realm of Weekly Ticket (though this would be difficult to quantify), as some regular station users are used to having a chat while they are there.

These types of live conversations allow for intimacy of subject as well as proxemic space; they are finely judged journeys of mutual regard and deep humanity. It is beyond the scope of this research to investigate the health implications of these encounters, but I would argue that for locals like Declan, who lives alone in a small house next to the station, these regular and personal conversations with both station staff and willing participants such as David are critical to his mental health. Conversations are personal; as previously described, they involve moving into an intimate space with another person, they require mutual interest between conversing participants, and they involve the opportunity to share personal information and humour.

The next section considers conversations that are created by Weekly Ticket that do not happen immediately between David or me and audience; I categorise these conversations as feral and discuss how they add to an extended understanding of dialogical performance.

6.3 Feral conversations

As a dramaturg, I am particularly interested in feral conversations, those that are created and shared by audience and disappear before we can catch them. Following and articulating the patterns of these conversations seems to me to be critical to understanding the participatory ripple-effects that Weekly Ticket is creating.

The following diagram outlines the people/categories of people that have conversations or share information with each other about Weekly Ticket (I describe myself as director/artist/researcher). I categorise social media comments also as conversational (Facebook, Instagram, Reddit or our website), as audience and artists can post text or a photo, receive a comment and respond to a comment. In this diagram, I outline the complex forms of texts and conversations created by audience, and chart the patterns of conversations and texts and how they move through or bypass various categories of participants.

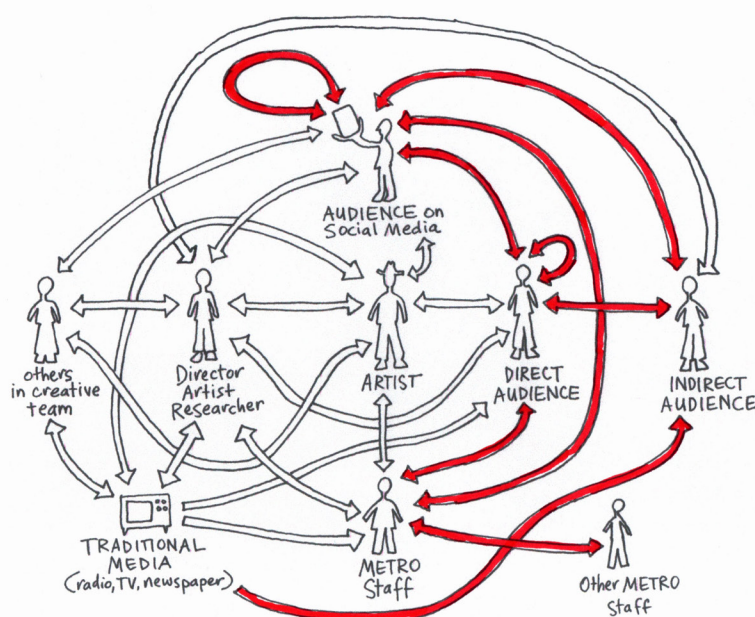


Diagram 6.1 The dialogical web of Weekly Ticket

In this diagram, the arrows denote conversations or information. Most frequently, the arrows have heads on both ends, denoting a flow of information or conversation between two categories of participants. The information flows in a single direction when traditional media gives information to audience, as there is nothing “conversational” about this one-way communication (for example, a news broadcast), as opposed to David giving an interview to the local newspaper (this is the two-headed arrow between the artist and traditional media).

Audience is defined as “direct” (they have participated in Weekly Ticket, with participation being considered broadly – they may have simply seen the artist and not interacted with him in any way, but they have been present at the station), and “indirect” (those who have not participated directly in Weekly Ticket).

The red arrows are of particular interest, as these are the feral conversations that happen independent of the artist, myself or others in the creative team. Audience who have participated in Weekly Ticket may discuss the project with those who have not participated, via live conversation or social media. Audience may discuss Weekly Ticket whilst viewing it from within a moving or stationary train; I have observed these conversations, but the details of them are not accessible to me. Direct audience of Weekly Ticket may gather more information about the project from station staff. Also, conversations about Weekly Ticket may occur on social media between people who have seen it and those that have not, or in a forum where nobody has actually experienced Weekly Ticket directly. The most extreme example of these feral conversations occurred when an indirect audience received information about Weekly Ticket from a traditional media source (Channel 7 news broadcast), and then discussed it on Facebook; the entire conversation took part between people who had not experienced Weekly Ticket directly, so they were discussing the idea of Weekly Ticket, using only the information provided by Channel 7 and others on Facebook. I was able to access this conversation, as I was a member of the Facebook page. The progression of this conversation and how it moved from direct to feral to direct again is outlined in section 6.5 of this chapter.

Working in public performance, it is important to have the resilience to embrace and even enjoy the feral conversations, understandings and appropriations of your arts project. David often recounts directly to me conversations he has with audience, or I may overhear or take part in them. It is more difficult for me to get information about what is spoken about in conversations that are twice removed from me, for example between the staff at the station and audience, or conversations between audience members when I am not present. These feral conversations are ungoverned by us; if a conversation we are not part of shares negative or false information (e.g., David is paid by the Council), we cannot change the story to one that we are more comfortable with. A certain discomfort is part of public projects of this nature, in my experience. I try to interrogate them with a sense of enquiry, rather than being disappointed that the audience has “got it wrong.” Instead, this dialogical material is by definition “true,” as participants in Weekly Ticket are creating both understanding of the performance and the performance itself with this complex web of conversations. As dramaturg, I consider this material critical to understanding and shaping

performance. Defining Weekly Ticket as a performance that creates a web of exchanges and connections allows for a recognition of the diversity of reactions and relations created by the performance, but also the type of initial “disruption” by a performer is essential to the nature of the web itself. Being committed to a long-term arts project in public that is generous and playful is our ethos that governs artistic decisions, and this ethos shapes how we invite audience and how we create mutual improvisations. In the next two sections, I describe in more detail two key areas of interest within live feral conversations: conversations about art and audience talking to each other about Weekly Ticket.

6.3.1 Live feral conversations about art – Metro staff and direct audience

Weekly Ticket is experienced by an audience without the benefit of explanatory text or any other contextual information that assists audience in a traditional performance setting. In a theatre or art gallery, a program or written material that is read prior to or during the performance/exhibition may give information about the artist, and even offer an artist’s statement about purpose and inspiration.² Weekly Ticket requires an audience to create their own understanding, slowly amassing information over time via various sources.

Two examples of feral conversations suggest some audience are happy to describe Weekly Ticket as art, and therefore something that you have to try and understand for yourself, or to tell your own story about. These first conversations are with Metro employees, where I asked for information about the dialogue between them and audience in order to illuminate the “Metro staff-direct audience” category of conversations from Diagram 6.1.

Me – Do people ask you about what David is doing?

George – Yes, yes they do, they want to know what he’s doing.

Me – What do you say?

George – I say that it’s art, and it’s.... (long pause)

Me – Do they want more information?

George – Yes, but to be honest, I don’t know how to describe it, so I just say it’s art and leave it at that.

Field notes May, 2019

² A recent example of using an “explanatory statement” as part of a work that explored participation was choreographer Luke George’s piece “Public Actions” at Artshouse 2019 for Dance Massive. The performance included an eight-page essay by Daniel Kok that “constructed a critical framework” for the performance; quoting many theorists on participation such as Bishop, Kester and Rancière, this document was designed to be read by the audience before they experienced the performance. This theoretical framing was unusual, as the performance was not in a research or academic setting. I was intrigued by this focus on written theory in a contemporary dance performance.

A similar attitude of “I think it’s art but I’m confused” came from another station officer I interviewed:

Me – How do you describe what’s happening to people if they ask?

Bill – I just say, to promote arts, and, and yeah, go speak to him, and he’ll inform you what it’s all about, generally just hand-ball the question over ... other than that, it’s good, good to see something different.

Me – Have you taken photos?

Bill – Yeah, the first time I was here I showed my fiancée, I was like – look where I’m working now! There’s a nutjob on the platform throwin’ chairs around! But no, no once I found out what was going on, it’s good, it’s good. And a few people that come in for odd jobs, close friends they always, sometimes come through in the morning and they’ll ring me and say “I can see some geezer with a chair, like, what’s the go with that?” And then you have to explain to ‘em yeah what he’s all about, and no, it’s good.

Me – So you say it’s an art project?

Bill – Yeah, yeah, honestly I don’t even know what youse are doin’ it for. Someone just told me he comes here every day, just let him in [the office], I’m like “no worries” (laughs), so I couldn’t tell you what you’re here for.

Transcription of conversation March 21, 2018.

Later in the same conversation, Bill offers a more specific point of view:

“If you’ve got ten minutes waiting for your train, [Weekly Ticket] gives you something to look at, something to talk about, so, instead of lookin’ at your iPhone, which is good, you know?” This analysis of Weekly Ticket would be sufficient to share with an audience; Bill could say the project “gives you something to look at while you are waiting for a train,” but instead he feels more comfortable to “handball the question” over to David.

In *How to write about Contemporary Art*, Gilda Williams (2014) outlines several reasons why writers create “bad writing” about art. This seems to me to be a concise and useful list, despite coming from a different context. These categories I consider universal reasons why audience may be intimidated by the idea of understanding and explaining art. Williams writes: “they [the writer, or in this case the conversant] are terrified about”:

- sounding stupid
- displaying ignorance
- missing the point
- getting it wrong
- having an opinion
- disappointing their supervisor
- making choices
- questioning the artist
- leaving things out
- being honest (p. 50).

Station staff are often unwilling to describe to audience what Weekly Ticket is in detail or give a personal opinion, they may have any or a combination of the anxieties listed above. I have given our promotional flyer/bookmark to staff in the station office, as they told me they wanted more information to tell commuters. An unwillingness to describe or define the purpose of Weekly Ticket often results in staff telling audience it is up to them to work out what is going on, as illustrated by these comments, particularly “I just say it’s art and leave it at that.” These types of conversations encourage the equality of performer and audience, as outlined in the theory of the emancipated spectator (Rancière, 2007), as staff are encouraging audience to create their own story about their experience. These types of conversations re-told to me point to Weekly Ticket creating a community of storytellers that create stories that “reverberate” (Heim, 2003) both outwards from and back inwards to the performance. These stories retell our performance back to us, and I feel privileged to hear them, as they illuminate both our work and the community we are part of.

In addition to Metro staff describing Weekly Ticket to commuters, the next category of feral conversations I will describe is when audience discuss amongst themselves the purpose and meaning of Weekly Ticket.

6.3.2 Live feral conversations between audience

Another comment I recorded in my field notes suggests a community of audience that are talking about Weekly Ticket and wondering what is “going on.” This category of conversations happens between direct audience members, as illustrated in the following conversation:

Audience member – I just have to stop and say, good on you. People say, ‘What’s he doing?’ I say: He’s just having a go, and just go with it, don’t try and understand it. (He takes a selfie photo with David, documenting this encounter, and moves on.)

Field notes, April 2017.

This audience member has become a type of “translator” of the project, conveying his understanding to others; this understanding contains both a sense that all activity is worthwhile – “he’s just having a go” – and also a more philosophical theory that this particular activity does not need analysis – “don’t try and understand it.” Other conversations I have overheard involve a more specific translation, such as this exchange where a father (in a slightly sarcastic manner that I identify as typical Australian humour) describes David’s dance gesture of reaching upwards:

Small boy (to father) – What’s he doing?

Father – He’s reaching for the stars.

Field notes, January 2019.

Or another person talking on his phone and describing what he sees:

There’s a guy here on the platform. He’s doing magic. He’s dancing. Jazz.

Field notes, April 2017.

One audience member who was watching David discussed what he was doing with me (without realising I was involved in the project), speculating that it was a “tragic story. His partner died and they used to dance together. Now he comes down here in their memory.” We laughed about that idea, and then they changed their mind to “actually I think he is an out of work actor. Keeping his skills up” (from field notes, September 25, 2019).

Another audience was taking a photo of David and I asked her who she was sending it to. She replied: “I was talking to a friend on the phone, then I said sorry I’m very distracted, there’s a guy down here dancing with a chair” (from field notes, September 2019). She took a photo to send to her friend to illustrate what was distracting her. She then told me (as mentioned in Chapter 1) “he’s crazy, he’s definitely crazy. Well it’s Footscray isn’t it? There’s lots of crazy people around here.” Dismissing artistic endeavour as the artist being crazy or on drugs is a common reaction of Australian audiences, and I have experienced this frequently as a performer. It side-steps the difficulty of understanding something unusual and is a type of thoughtless stereotype that doing something

unusual is “crazy,” just like clowns are “scary” or artists are “weird” and musicians are “on drugs.” I think on closer consideration these attitudes would not necessarily be held very strongly by the audience, but they are a way of avoiding engagement. The following section looks at social media discussions that are of a similar nature, in that they have a brutal negativity that we seldom encounter in live conversations as artists.

These instances of conversations between audience point to a vast variety of stories told about Weekly Ticket, most of which remain unknown to the artistic team. They are ephemeral and undocumented. The next section will analyse conversations that have a more permanent record, as they are posted on social media. These conversations are also outlined in the red arrows in Diagram 6.1, and take place between direct and indirect audience, or between several indirect audience members, where nobody has directly participated in Weekly Ticket at the station.

6.4 Feral conversations on social media – Reddit

Our audience who experience Weekly Ticket directly and post about it on social media follow an ethnographic process characterised by Geertz (2008) as observation, writing and analysis: “in so doing, he [sic] turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted” (p. 317). Our audience as ethnographers themselves are creating material that contains their individual analysis and description. These are then discussed by others, with themes emerging around the purpose and worth of performance, and theories as to why David is dancing with a chair expressed and argued with.

A thread I discovered about Weekly Ticket on Reddit from October 2016 illustrates the dialogical style and relations created in this realm, with attitudes expressed and reacted to by audience who have not directly participated in Weekly Ticket and those who have. Reddit is a social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion website, self-described as “the front page of the internet” (Reddit, n.d.). Registered members submit content to the site such as links, text posts, and images, which are then voted up or down by other members. Submissions with more up-votes appear towards the top of their “subreddit” (organised by topic) and, if they receive enough votes, ultimately on the site’s front page.

I am not a registered user of Reddit. A quick scan of typical content reveals a hybrid of today's news, sports, pop culture memes, sexually suggestive material and posts shared from Twitter and other sites. Material relating to Weekly Ticket on Reddit appeared when I did a general internet search using the terms “guy with chair Footscray Station”;

Verbatim thread from Melbourne Reddit, October 2016³:

(deleted user) posted photo:

This guy is dancing with a chair at Footscray Station, platform 6

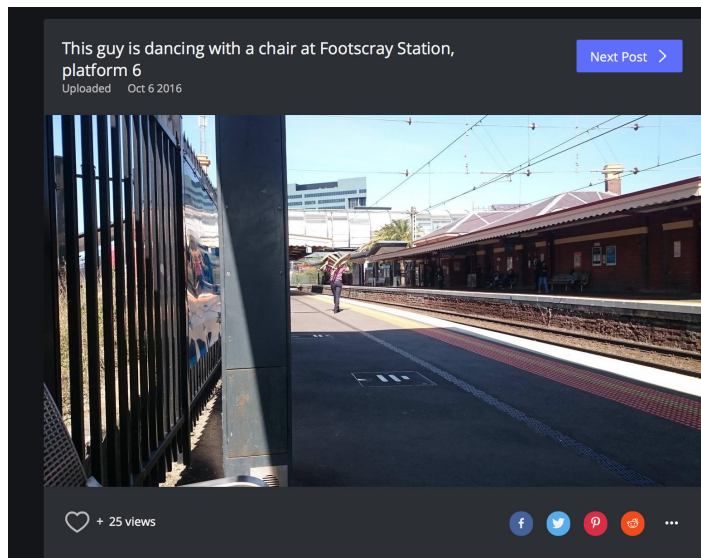


Image 6.5 Screen-shot of Reddit site

Responses (quoted here in their entirety):

[user deleted]

I saw him do this about 4 weeks ago as well, and some bogan on the other side told him to stop doing it because he was being a “perv”

“monkeyboy888”

It's been a long winter.

“megablast”

Is this Melbourne version of punxatowny phil? If he comes out, sees the sun, and keeps dancing we get 4 more weeks of winter?

³ https://www.reddit.com/r/melbourne/comments/562li4/this_guy_is_dancing_with_a_chair_at_footscray/

“dfbowen”

pasted link from Tim and Maddie’s website

<http://madeleineandtim.net/portfolio/weekly-ticket-the-artist-at-the-station/>

“theuser”

Wait, he’s meant to be there? I thought he was just another example of the under-funded mental health resources in this country.

“TheSilentPaladin”

At least he has got something to sit on when the music stops.

“abg123rocks”

Well it was a nice day.

“sandy pants63”

If he’s not hurting anyone just leave him be and respect his privacy. People are too quick to judge or diagnose. I hope he enjoys his dance, I’m a bit jelly [jealous] as my railway station visits are dull!

“ResultsPlease”

I don’t even need to meet the person who came up with this ‘art’ to be certain that they are a complete and utter wanker.

These nine on-line comments are examples of feral conversations; they are “uncontrollable extensions of the work” (Heim, 2003), and include a microcosm of audience reactions from the brutally negative to the curious, humorous and positive. They are a real-world example of Rancière’s theory of the emancipated spectator: “What has to be put to the test by our performances ... is not the capacity of aggregation of a collective but the capacity of the anonymous, the capacity that makes anyone equal to everybody. This capacity works through unpredictable and irreducible distances” (2007, p. 279). There is little sense of collective here within this comment thread, reactions are vastly different, and many are going by others’ descriptions of Weekly Ticket to form an opinion; only the initial post author and the first response seem to have seen Weekly Ticket live. The comments are literally anonymous, the only clue being their user name, which may have some pop culture reference they have used to create an avatar.

A proud sense of personal certainty about an art project they know little (nothing?) about is expressed by “ResultsPlease” with their comment “I don’t even need to meet the person who came up with this ‘art’ to be certain that they are a complete and utter wanker.” Other quotes contain a certain dry Australian humour. In the spirit of play “The SilentPaladin” (the name taken from a YuGiOh! card) refers to the game of musical chairs with their comment, “At least he has got something to sit on when the music stops.” “Dfbowen” has gone to the trouble of finding out more information about the project and has posted a link to an official Weekly Ticket site. They add to the conversation by offering more information about the subject, opening up the discussion to being more informed.

The opportunity for complex dialogue within this forum is limited, as evidenced by the fact that there were no comments replying to other comments, and the thread is a series of short, sharp opinions rather than conversation. It did not receive enough attention/traction to get “voted” up to a higher level of Reddit. To use a Rancière-like paradigm, the story that “ResultsPlease” is acting in may well remain unchanged by the stories of other spectators. However, the opportunity to witness online audience reactions to contemporary participatory artworks seems to me an interesting and complex addition to the materials of modern dramaturgy. The dialogical relationships that are created are very different to the relationships of a live audience, particularly in regard to the anonymity and adversarial nature of some online forums. As a dramaturg, I am obtaining useful material from audience that previously may never have been available to me, and it is a powerful and brutal expression of a small cohort of Australian audience opinions about contemporary art in general and Weekly Ticket in particular from those who have seen it or not seen or participated in it. Being in the public sphere amongst our un-curated audience puts Weekly Ticket in the firing-line to be analysed in terms of our worth and interest and, more broadly, the worth of contemporary art that has historically been derided, defended and considered misunderstood. However, if I define the understanding of our work as that made by our audience, then misunderstanding cannot come from audience, rather from artists who are unaware or uninterested in the stories created by their work. Even within this short Reddit thread, I find inspiration from and a champion in “sandypants 63,” whose comment “I hope he enjoys his dance” is a concise evocation of the positive potential of hopeful relationships and fun that the artistic team strives for.

Perhaps the opportunity within the live audience of Weekly Ticket is that over time participants who may have a negative “ResultsPlease” attitude initially will be changed by repeated encounters. These opinions are rarely expressed directly to the artist at the station, so it is also a useful element of this research to uncover hidden and unpredictable audience reactions.

The next section will explicate a similarly hidden conversation that I was able to access on Facebook, as I am a member of the local Inner West (Melbourne suburbs) site where the discussion took place. This is another example of a feral conversation, created and shared by audience and expressing opinions that may never be encountered by the artistic team.

6.5 Feral conversations – Channel 7 vs Weekly Ticket

A complex inter-weaving of comment and dialogue took place across several media platforms in May 2016. Channel 7 filmed a report on Weekly Ticket that appeared on the 4pm and 6pm news, and also posted on social media in order to advertise their story. The story was: “A street artist is being handed \$80,000 of taxpayers’ money to perform on a chair outside a train station in Melbourne’s West” (see following Facebook post). Without going into a complex defensive argument, every element of that statement is factually incorrect: the financial figure, the idea of being handed taxpayer money, and the performance structure of “sitting on a chair” (this was the lead line in the television story). The resulting flurry of media attention was an excellent example of a commonly expressed outrage at the misuse of taxpayer funding for arts projects by mainstream Australian media and a fascinating media event that prompted a range of responses. Tracking these conversations afforded me rich material to think broadly about dialogical material and how it is created and shared by different audiences, with adamant arguments happening between indirect audiences about the purpose or meaning of Weekly Ticket.



Image 6.6 screenshot image from Channel 7 News report, 6pm May 13, 2016



Image 6.7 screenshot image from Channel 7 News report, 4pm May 13, 2016

A friend and former neighbour of ours shared the Channel 7 News Facebook post, and argued with its negative position, stating “7 News needs to change the title of the article to ‘Melbourne’s West has an exciting new attraction at Footscray Station.’” The following is the majority of the resulting Facebook conversation that I took screen-shots of at the time:



Image 6.8.1 – 6.8.4 Facebook conversation

These examples are of feral conversations generated between audience because they have not experienced Weekly Ticket directly; in fact, their opinion has been mediated by both mainstream and social media (respectively, Channel 7 News and Facebook), leading to a rather surreal landscape where misinformation is being scrutinised and exaggerated. As the Facebook conversation documented above was a local western suburbs page, the members were local, and clearly a few people we know personally responded, as they state things like “all the best David and Merophie” (my name was not mentioned in any of the media stories).

The attitudes expressed in this thread are familiar to anyone who works in the arts in Australia: “true” art happens in Europe (i.e., it is of Western origin, and was created in the 18th or 19th century), arguments about what constitutes a “real job,” and the debate about public money supporting the arts. The Facebook posts have more of a conversational tone, as people are replying directly to others comments; several people disagree with the “European art” comments, citing various opposing positions, stating that in fact in Europe you would find similar art to Weekly Ticket, and disagreeing with a categorisation of “true” art (“Don’t verbally bash someone’s idea of art, just because it’s not the same as yours!”) The economic theme is responded to in several interesting ways: the

idea that some audience cannot afford to go to Europe (therefore have to make do with what is available in Melbourne), the argument that European cities have much larger arts funding so this argument is distinctly Australian, and then the response that this is an argument that has no resolution from the comment “the ‘get a real job’ thing has been around since the dawn of time. And it’s always been boring – and pointless.” This is responded to by a plaintive query that if everyone jumps onto this (seemingly) lucrative taxpayer-funded arts bandwagon, then “who [will] pay for it?”

The following short comment on the same Facebook thread also points to a dialogical cycle, where after engaging in the discussion, someone states “Great idea - I look forward to seeing him live”:



Image 6.8.5 Facebook conversation

If this audience member comes to Footscray Station and looks for a performance, their idea of the station is changed. It has become a site for performance. And if they do encounter David, then they have an idea of performance that precedes their direct involvement, even if it is a slightly strange argument about how much taxpayers should pay someone to sit on a chair. This creates a context similar to a traditional theatre show where you might read a program or a review in the newspaper or similar. Receiving information via an “Inner West Buy Swap and Sell” Facebook feed that is usually concerned with local events and selling old stuff from the garage is a different medium to receive information from. It positions this artistic project in the community, discussed as part of community concerns. Perhaps it lends a sense of community ownership, and this is something that happens at our station. It certainly adds to a sense of residency, as this audience member may have the “idea” of Weekly Ticket in their mind for several years before encountering David directly. The following Diagram (6.2) tracks the possible four stages of this pattern of dialogue. Firstly, the artists speak directly to Channel 7 (purple arrows), then Channel 7 tells a new story to audience (blue), then it is discussed

on social media via indirect audience (orange), and finally is the precursor to a direct interaction with audience and David (green).

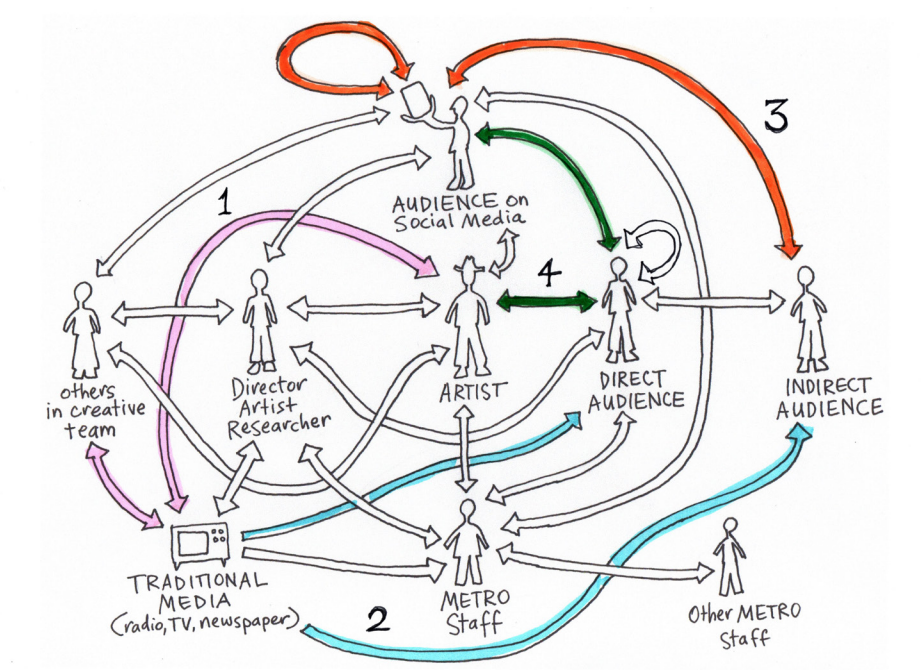


Diagram 6.2 The four stages of this dialogical cycle

The following screen-shot of a film shared on twitter is a similar example where an audience member had heard about Weekly Ticket before encountering it indirectly themselves when they were sent a film of Weekly Ticket. This audience member is participating in Weekly Ticket in a very mediatised way, reflecting the collapsing of “real” and “artificial” as described by Philip Auslander (2008) and of particular interest in this instance, as there may be no direct involvement in what might be considered “real” or “direct.”

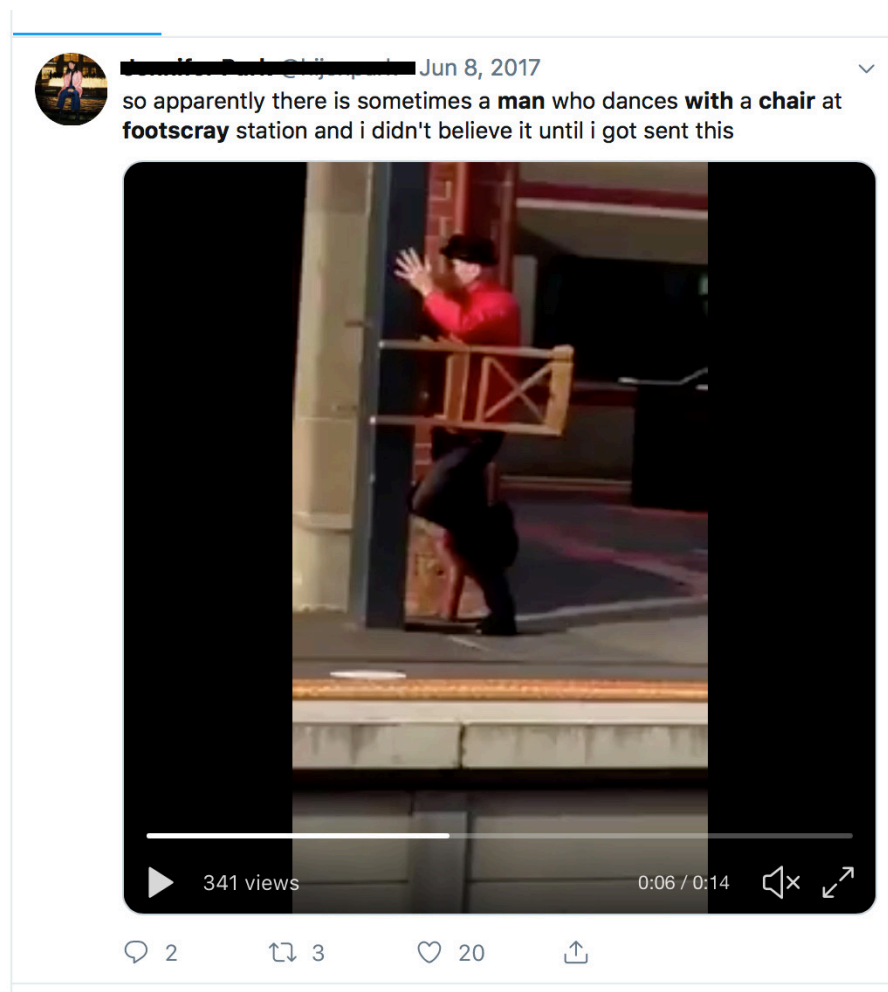


Image 6.9 Screenshot of Twitter film

This audience who posted the film on Twitter is participating in Weekly Ticket via conversations and images shared by others, all who would describe the performance in ways specific to their understanding. These conversations and sharing are hidden to us, the artistic team, as they are in the realm of the audience. In this sense, as a dramaturg, I am beginning to consider ways the audience has more agency in the performance than we do, as our endeavours are as public as possible, but our audience reactions may be secret and unknown. As an artist, my response to this reflects the dramaturgical focus of living a “create life intertwined with others” (Williams, 2010, p. 197), as discussed in Chapter 3. We should do what we enjoy in a way that is sustainable to us, because we have no control on the effects of our work. A sense of humour is also imperative: we have to laugh at descriptions of “wanker” and “nutjob” and other characterisations of wasting time and money or being mentally unwell.

Returning to the cycle of conversations created by the Channel 7 News story, once the media storm blew over, we resumed our normal low-key weekly performance schedule. The week directly after the television story, there was a queue of people lining up to say hello to David at the station. I also documented this short interaction on June 9th, 2016 (three weeks later):



Image 6.10 Talking to the audience, June 2016

Young child waiting to use the lift – What are you doing?

David – I'm meeting people like you.

Child – I saw you on TV. You're famous!

David – Not as famous as you are.

Accompanying Adult – That's good, keeping it modest.

This is an example of how live conversations at the station directly between David and audience generally have a more positive tone. Dialogical art cannot reference only live conversations, as different conversational forums such as social media allows for different albeit anonymous views to be expressed, and I consider these equally valid. The next section discusses the online conversational theme of public money paying for art, and compares the debate around Weekly Ticket with similar conversations and art projects.

6.5.1 Feral conversations about public money

A different Facebook group conversation after the Channel 7 broadcast in May 2016 had a debate (I did not capture it and it is now irretrievable) about exactly how much David was making per hour (this ranged from hundreds of dollars to \$50, depending on various interpretations of a sum of money being annual or over 15 years), and the general sense was that even \$50 per hour was too much to pay an artist. It was confronting to be suddenly and personally thrust into a public debate about the worth of our arts practice, as this is not typically public knowledge, as Bishop describes:

Despite the centrality of economics to delegated performance (where various performers fulfil the 8 hour gallery shift, enacting a curatorial or artistic design), and the impact it has upon our understanding of duration, it is rare for artists to make an explicit point about financial transactions ... contemporary art has until recently been comparatively artisanal, based on the romantic persona of the singular (and largely unpaid) artist-performer. (Bishop, 2012, p. 232)

Equating other types of labour to artistic work has been explored by artists such as Oscar Bony. His *La Familia Obrera* (The Worker's Family, 1968), is an art work that is discussed by Claire Bishop in relation to the ethics of participation, and is described as follows:

First shown in the controversial exhibition “Experiencias 68” at the Instituto Di Tella, the performance comprises a working-class family – an Argentinian man, woman and child – sitting on a platform for eight hours a day. The family responded to a job advertisement in the local paper and were paid to sit on a plinth throughout the opening hours of the exhibition, accompanied by a recording of everyday sounds made in the home of the same family.... The label accompanying the piece, written by Bony, explained that “Luis Ricardo Rodriguez, a professional die-caster, is earning twice his usual wages for just staying on show with his wife and son.” (Bishop, 2012, p. 113)

Bony stated, “It is obvious that the work was based on ethics, for exposing them to ridicule made me feel uncomfortable” (Bishop, 2012, p. 117). Ridicule in this instance is perhaps the vulnerability of the family being gazed at in an unfamiliar environment, and having their personal income made public. The effect of the financial conversation created by Channel 7 about Weekly Ticket had a similar effect on us; we had no control over the way the performance was being represented in this unfamiliar realm (television), and having our financial situation misrepresented and made public was also very exposing, with no opportunity for recourse. The theme of “taxpayer funding” allowed the network to manufacture a controversial narrative.

An international news story from August, 2019, about a similar arts project in a railway station in Sweden, contains the same ideas, almost word-for-word:

Sweden’s public art body has sparked outrage for commissioning an art work which will see £500,000 of public money used to hire an employee to do whatever they like forever, so long as they punch in and out on a time clock each day... Lars Hjälmered, a Gothenburg MP for the centre-right Moderate Party told the Daily Telegraph that the artwork could be ‘devastating for the tax morality of society.... Society can’t fulfil basic requirements: we have a lack of police, more to do to improve school results, and looking at these challenges, I think it is absurd to have artworks like this,’ he said (Orange, 2019, para. 1)

One of the Metro employees who works at the station also chooses to describe Weekly Ticket in a similarly controversial manner; this is a transcript of our conversation in August, 2019:

Me – I just wondered if people ask you questions about what he’s (David) doing?

G – Sometimes, yes, and we just say “he’s got a **lovely** arts grant” ...you ought to see the looks (on their faces)! (imitates a grumpy reaction to this idea)

Me – That’s what you say? He’s got a lovely arts grant!?

G – Yes, he’s got a **lovely** arts grant, it’s paid by the government, if you’ve got any complaints see them!

I have put the word “lovely” in bold to try and give the flavour of how G emphasised with great enjoyment and sarcastic intonation the idea of a “lovely arts grant.” I am not sure where he got the idea, or why he decided to describe the project in this way, but it seems he enjoys the negative response he gets from people based on this description.

After the Channel 7 story, I was anxious about how it might impact our live experience at the station. I wrote in my field notes; “Interesting how camera and reporter presence at the station changed how audience reacted, and I assume we will get some people who will react to having seen us on the news.” In fact, the only change we noticed was a short period of increased interest. The previous week a local newspaper, “The Star Weekly,” had taken photos of David at the station and conducted an interview with David. This article recorded a conversation between David and local arts reporter Benjamin Millar, and focused on the interactive and conversational nature of Weekly Ticket, very different to the tone of the Channel 7 story:

Wells says he didn’t have to think twice about committing to a project that began in February and will run until 2031. “As soon as we talked about it, it was the most exciting thing I could think of doing, it’s such an audacious idea but it’s been a very enjoyable gig for me.” He says he was drawn to both the creative challenge and interactive nature of the project. “The reception I have been getting ... is fantastic, people of all types and all ages have been coming up to me and talking about what I’m doing.”
(Millar, 2016, para. 1)

A last note to add to this particular conversation is that Weekly Ticket did obtain some Federal Arts Funding for the first year or so of performances; we paid ourselves (David and I) \$100 per week to perform, document and organise collaborations at the station. We are currently unfunded, and the entire artistic team are spending considerable time trying to obtain a durational funding structure to support this project. For us, as freelance artists, being paid confers legitimacy on our endeavour, helps to ensure our commitment to Weekly Ticket, pays the bills and serves as an example or working model for others who may want to create durational performance. This research defines Weekly Ticket as “slow theatre” and offers a new way of understanding the complexity of relations created by slow theatre projects. The final chapter of this research outlines specific guidelines for practitioners and researchers working in this field.

The narrative that arts is a waste of time and money is familiar to us as Australian artists. In contrast, we may find ourselves being commodified as agents of positive social change. This contrasting narrative of legitimacy has also been ascribed to Weekly Ticket via feral conversations, where descriptions and “facts” are made up and shared by audience.

6.6 Narratives of legitimacy

This research has also uncovered an alternate narrative in which Weekly Ticket is described by station staff as being a project instigated by either the local council, or Metro itself, to create a positive environment and make the station safer.

I do not know how these stories originate, but there is a sense of staff conferring ownership onto a project they consider successful. Several station officers have communicated to me that they are happy that David distracts passengers from being frustrated about late trains. The following narratives, in contrast to the narrative of “lovely arts grant,” state that David is being paid by the council (also tax-payer money, but from local council rates rather than via the Federal Government), but in this instance, being paid creates a sense of legitimacy and professionalism, rather than “wasted” money. The following verbatim quotes are from three different station officers I have interviewed at different times:

Me – Do you think it’s changed (the presence of Weekly Ticket) how people might think about the station, in any way?

B - Yeah, anything like that improves the station, ummm ‘cos it’s something new. Metro’s got a pretty bad name, in general with a lot of the customers, so you can get something like that, distract them from their train being late, you’re laughing. I don’t get abused (laughs).

K – He’s giving the amusement at the time when they are travelling. At the same time he is passing some important informations [sic] as well about how they should travel, what they do.

P – Most people have been pleasant about him, so, ahhh, no I’ve heard nothing really said about him, some say it’s odd doing this, I say well he’s a paid performer, it’s a question of art, so he’s hired by the council... It adds a different facet to the day, I find it entertaining.... I got nothing negative about it. I get the odd question here and there, [people] say “Is he alright?” sometimes, “Is he ok?” I say “no no, he’s fine,” I say “he’s a paid artist.”

Another more senior station manager I spoke to described another audience, a level of organisation above the station (described as “upstairs,” though there is no literal floor above the office), this is C.C.C., or “Triple C,” who watch all station activity from an office in the city via live footage from security cameras. This station manager re-assures this virtual audience not only that David is ok, and no threat to the workings of the station, but that he is “one of us.”

Me – Do you watch (Weekly Ticket) on CTV monitors in the office?

J – Yes, we do. We even get phone calls, we’ve got the guy from C.C.C upstairs, they monitor (the station) - he goes “What’s that guy?” [we reply] “He’s one of us” (they reply) “Tell him he’s doing a good job.” So, we get guys from town, who watches, we call them Triple C, they watch him, yeah.

Adding to this complexity, another station officer tells interested commuters who ask her what David is doing that he is “coming from the Arts Centre, performing arts.” I clarified with her that she was referring to the local Footscray Community Arts Centre, which is just 200 meters down the road. The way she described Weekly Ticket seemed to be that David is on occasion deployed by staff specifically to keep commuters happy when their trains were delayed, as she said “When I have disruptions I will get David to be up there, it creates a diversion like a distraction, let’s watch him rather than thinking there’s no trains. So, it’s a good thing.” This is unusual, as we have never been told by staff specifically to go anywhere in the station, perhaps she imagines this is a possibility, or perhaps it seems as if David goes to areas where trains are delayed, but this has never been a specific objective of the project. These narratives are also feral, though they have a positive theme; it is unclear where they have originated, or how they may have become exaggerated or reconstructed over time. These feral narratives are part of the dialogical web created by Weekly Ticket and confirm for me how audience tell their own stories or create their own “poem” when participating in art.

Conclusion

Recording and analysing the dialogical material created by participants of Weekly Ticket affords insight both into what kind of relations are created by this performance and also points towards a methodology of understanding what public performance does. The complex web of conversations, recorded material, opinions and theories that are created by an arts project in a public space is a vast and ever-growing network that resists being captured due to its many forms and formations, both live and online. As artists and researchers, we must be aware that some of this material can be captured, but many feral stories, photographs, comments and thoughts remain unknowable to us. Dialogical art will always involve this feral element; it is part of the generative process that is created by an arts project. Recognising this involves understanding our audience as participants, emancipated spectators, ethnographers, critics, comedians and contributing artists. As dramaturg and researcher, I recognise both this process and the specific material created by any singular performance.

In the next chapter, I extend this notion of relations created by a web of conversations into “relational time.” This experience of “long” time (Eno, 1995) is part of participating in a durational performance. I describe Weekly Ticket as Slow theatre and discuss how the connectivity of dialogue and conversations combined with an ethos of play and generosity over time creates duration, sustainability and the importance of the local. Slow theatre relates to other philosophies of “slowness” expressed by movements such as slow food and slow dramaturgy, all of which emphasise long duration and locality.

Chapter 7 Slow theatre

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe and analyse Weekly Ticket as “slow theatre” and relate it to other slow movements and philosophies, in particular referring to the frameworks of “slow dramaturgy” as outlined by Peter Eckersall and Eddie Paterson in their 2011 article “Slow Dramaturgy: Renegotiating Politics and Staging the Everyday.” Eckersall and Paterson draw on analysis of the philosophies of slow living, slow food and slow activism to consider slowness in performance contexts. In this chapter, I articulate how the philosophy of slowness that informs slow dramaturgy is extended in Weekly Ticket to create slow theatre. Weekly Ticket as slow theatre transforms the everyday through durational performance, allowing audience and performer to experience what I call “relational time,” a sense of time that is sensory and personal and is created by relational art. In addition to these elements, I add sustainability and being local to my definition of slow theatre, elements taken from the philosophy of slow living (Parkins & Craig, 2006).

I use Eckersall and Paterson’s (2011) dramaturgical frameworks of “slowness, ambience and connectivity” (p. 179) to discuss three critical elements of slow theatre within Weekly Ticket. “Slowness” is the care and attention of direct relations and the long duration of the performance. “Connectivity” I relate to a sense of time analogous to “kairos” time, time that is personal and sensory, which is created by participatory relations and what I call “relational time” (my term).¹ “Ambience” is the overall philosophy and spirit of play, humour and generosity that is created by slow theatre and paying attention to and making a commitment to audience over an extended time. I re-order these three elements from their original articulation in Eckersall and Paterson (2011) in the following sections. I first outline the philosophy of slowness as it appears within slow food, slow living and slow dramaturgy. I will then present my understandings of relational time and duration and then finally describe the ethos of sustainability and generosity within slow theatre.

¹ Not to be confused with a relational theory of time. Google it and watch your brain explode.

7.1 Slowness

Weekly Ticket is aligned to other durational activities, movements or philosophies that are described as “slow.” The descriptor “slow theatre” came from an audience member at the station, my colleague Dr Anne Harris; her comment compared Weekly Ticket to “slow food,” and it is a descriptor I have adopted and developed throughout this research project. This term compares this durational work with other processes, organisations or philosophies that consider the implications of slowness and locality, such as the “slow food”² movement, described within a larger category of slow living by Wendy Parkins and Geoffrey Craig: “Slow living is a process whereby everyday life – in all its pace and complexity, frisson and routine – is approached with care and attention, as subjects attempt to negotiate the different temporalities that they daily experience” (2006, p. ix). An example of slow living environments are farmers’ markets. These markets, where shoppers are able to buy directly from producers, typically farmers, bakers and apiarists, are described as settings where slow living takes place; “We call such social sites ‘slow spaces’ and farmers’ markets are a good example of the kind of space where a slower temporality is linked to enhanced sensory and affective experience, as well as greater opportunity for sociality and conviviality” (Parkins & Craig, 2009, p. 93). The “sensory and affective” experience of a farmer’s market contains key similarities to Weekly Ticket. Farmers’ markets transform an urban area (perhaps a car park or school playground) into an environment where shoppers take time to talk to food producers, taste food, smell fresh bread and buy vegetables that were growing in soil the previous day. Weekly Ticket also involves direct and intimate conversation with an art producer (me or David). In Chapter 6, I described how David offers an invitation to audience; this may be a spoken or unspoken (using eye contact) message that this performance is “for you.” Similarly, a food producer at a farmer’s market may proudly sell their apples “to you,” having a direct relationship with customers and building on a relationship where they may know the type of produce you prefer. The direct relationships of producers and customers/audience within Weekly Ticket and farmers’ markets are personal and often tailored to the individual, involving the “care and attention” that Parkins and Craig characterise as part of the ethos of slow living.

² “Slow Food seeks to position food as a key constituent in the development and maintenance of community.... Slow Food was officially born as an international organization dedicated to preserving a world of unique flavours, local food customs, and quality food and wine” (Pietrykowski, 2004, p. 309).

Wallace Heim also describes an understanding of slowness that has a focus on direct relations:

The slowness refers not only to the duration of the event and the drift which can be momentary or extend over years, but to its temper. There is a resistance in slowness which responds to the reductive aspects of haste and frenzy. The locus of change is one person at a time, in a process of communication which is dependent on finding enough common meaning between the artist and participant to sustain a dialogue. (2003, p. 187)

David is present, playful and available to talk directly with audience. This encourages a relationship of intimacy, as Heim describes: “The allure and the provisional trustworthiness of the artist can draw one into the pleasure of an ethos of listening, and into feelings associated with care and friendship” (2003, p. 197). David describes how he issues a specific invitation to audience that then becomes a pleasurable encounter:

I say something [to an audience member] like “I’m really getting tired, do you mind if I stop for a sec?” I’m asking their permission, I’m not saying can I talk to you, I’m saying I need a break ... so all of a sudden I’m sort of closer to them than they would think, and I’m sitting down (on the chair), so they’re above me and I’m below, and I’m looking up at them and I’m not trying to be anything but real, so I’m kind of in this vulnerable situation, especially after being seen skipping around with the chair and doing all these other sorts of stuff, and I ask them a simple straight question like “where are you heading today?” ... And it gets more and more deep and more and more personal and you can see this person relaxing and going “this is lovely, this is a lovely conversation.”

Interview with David, February, 2019.



Image 7.1 David and audience in relational time share stories about their lives

The resulting conversation captured in Image 7.1 had the feel of intimacy and friendship, as this audience member talked about travelling in regional Victoria and changing his name to create a new identity. Both David and the audience member had time to talk, the pace was slow and relaxed, allowing the conversation time to find its way, evolving into an intimate and revelatory story. These direct relations and moments of connectivity between audience and performer renegotiate the everyday activity of commuters at the station, creating relational time and slow theatre.

7.2 Relational time

Eckersall and Paterson (2011) discuss how slow dramaturgy brings the ethos of slowness into performance, with a focus on the everyday offering a new sense of time. They argue for “the evolution of the slow and particular – terminology we take from the slow food phenomenon and apply to fresh contexts for dramaturgy” (p. 178). Theatre performances such as Raimondo Cortese’s playtext for “Ranter’s Theatre” (2009) *Holiday*,³ composed as an extended, quiet, free-wheeling and intimate conversation, are described by Eckersall and Paterson (2011) as “a new aesthetic sensibility of slow time” (p. 179). Slow dramaturgy “seeks to renegotiate the relationship between ecology, politics and performance and engages with alternative notions of subjectivity and community amid the global everyday. Slow dramaturgy uses these patterns as a model for performance” (Eckersall & Paterson, 2011, p. 182). The trends or patterns in performance they identify and align with slow dramaturgy include scripts that contain meandering conversations and silences, or dramaturgy that is “slow, inefficient; there is little progression, little drama; moments are small, often funny and banal” (Eckersall & Paterson, 2011, p. 182). Slow dramaturgy celebrates the small, funny and banal moments of everyday activity, using these as a “model for performance” (Eckersall & Paterson, 2011, p. 182). This celebration is extended in *Weekly Ticket* in a new performance context, as the performance setting is an environment where audience actually are immersed in the small and banal activities of catching public transport and shopping. In the works explored by Eckersall and Peterson (2011), “everyday moments measure the passing of time” (p. 184) using “dramaturgies that foreground time and reorient sensory perceptions” (p. 190). *Weekly Ticket* foregrounds time and reorients sensory perception by transforming moments of “normal” activity into theatrical and intimate encounters and by creating aesthetic material that allows audience to become curious, and to literally stop, look and wonder. The analysis and frameworks of slow dramaturgy that emphasise slowness within an indoor theatre context, is expanded by the patterns of a durational and local performance at a train station, creating slow theatre.

³ *Holiday*, 2009, Currency Press, Sydney

Weekly Ticket as slow theatre creates relational time, time that exists outside of the measurement of clock time and is created by mutual play and participation in relational art. Station officer Lisa describes Weekly Ticket as creating a moment in time that takes her away from the rush of her life, responding to requests from commuters inside the station office. Her description of feeling “refreshed” describes a sensory perception of time:

In our stressful life, we go through stress and always rushing, we have to reach on time [sic] to our work, I have to do this, I have to do that, every time our mind is, always like you know, jumbled up, with the thing. From morning to evening we all are running with the target, but when you see something like this [Weekly Ticket] which is beyond, out of the square, it just refresh [sic] you. Don’t you think so? It just refresh [sic] the mind.

From interview, March 21, 2018

This description uses exactly the same words as author James Quek (2020) on the website Quora (a question and answer website) in relation to the difference between *chronos* and *kairos* time: “In *chronos*, we are stressed—in *kairos*, we are refreshed” (para. 2). Though this website is open access and not curated for scholarly accurate information, I was struck by Quek using the same words as Lisa in her description of how she experiences Weekly Ticket, and the different sense of time she feels during participation.

Participating in performance offers a moment of refreshment. In Chapter 5 (Image 5.12), I documented the moment when a commuter walking through the station on her way to catch a train was arrested by the sight of a group of people holding up their mobile phones. This moment of participation is part of a pattern of relations (here I outline a “typical” series of reactions): The audience member stops and follows the direction of attention from the others holding up their phones, she is curious – what is happening? She sees David and wonders what he is doing, she looks for cues amongst other audience: some are laughing, they seem to be enjoying this experience. She looks again at David; he is skipping around with a chair, and he also looks like he is enjoying himself. David moves closer to the watching audience, he speaks to someone directly. There is a sense of connections being made, the crowd change their positions in proxemic space, some move closer to David, others have to leave. There has been a complex set of disruptions and reactions within this square of concrete between platforms 5 and 6. How long did this audience member pause for? She feels like she has watched for a while, she debates taking a photo but decides to move on because her train is arriving. She walks with some of the other people

who were watching David to the same platform to catch the same train. They glance at each other and share a moment of unspoken connection “Did you see that? WTF!” Audience and performer together have existed for a while within relational time. In Chapter 4, I described the key factors of improvisation, dance, and a spirit of play that create relational performance. This is the way that David as a performer brings skills of being “present” and “playful” to interactions with audience, allowing for all involved to become immersed in humour and conversation. When improvising together in a state of mutual play, an awareness of clock time falls away, creating relational time – a particularly pertinent transformation in such a chronos-measured setting as a train station.

In the next section, I describe another key element of slowness within Weekly Ticket – the long duration of the performance. Durational performance consists of more than an accumulation of moments but changes the type of performance itself. Being immersed in a durational performance has created a sense of residency as we develop performance rituals that are familiar and satisfying, creating connections and relations with audience.

7.3 Duration and a sense of residency

Weekly Ticket is durational in terms of the 15-year duration of the project,⁴ an unusual length of performance. This 15-year period is measurable in clock time, and our website illustrates the specific number of performances completed to date. Looking at the website⁵ it is possible to scroll backwards through the last 4 years and see an image from each of the 185 performances completed so far. We are present at the station each week for around one hour. Audience may notice David and move on, stop and watch for a time, or fill an allocated time waiting for a train by watching David. The performance of Weekly Ticket is often in opposition to the environment at the station, where speed, singular purpose and efficiency is the prevailing rhythm. Sometimes commuters run to catch their trains; these sudden bursts of fast footsteps and a desperate, ungainly flurry of trailing bags and flapping clothing punctuates the steady rhythm of medium-speed walking on the overpass that links the six platforms. Other times, a purposeful train-load of commuters walk together across the overpass, steadily moving en masse towards Footscray or other platforms. The artist, stationary, can be seen from a distance, an outstretched arm at an angle sticking up above the crowd, a sculptural disruption to the speed and rhythm of the human environment. This is an example of the “slower temporality” (Parkins & Craig, 2009, p. 93) that creates a sensory experience, a disruption that may be the start

⁴ As explained in Chapter 1, this 15-year time-frame reflects the initial idea of Weekly Ticket being a public performing artist rather than a sculpture, as a sculpture must be designed to last for 15 years.

⁵ www.weeklyticket.org

of a mutual improvisation with audience. When these disruptions are multiplied over time, they change understandings of the performance itself.

Brian Eno coined the term “the long now” to describe a complex understanding of time containing both a moment and also a sense of duration stretching behind and in front of any moment. He describes his understanding of duration and time: “The scale of things makes a difference to how they operate ... I started to notice that the same thing is true of time, duration actually made a difference, not only of degree, but of kind” (Eno, 2010). The kind of performance created by the duration of Weekly Ticket involves repeated encounters that generate a sense of direct and personal relationship. Initially, Weekly Ticket happened every Thursday morning (2016 to mid 2017), but various factors mean that we now perform at more random weekly times. Our regular performance times created strong relationships with audience, as I discovered when I searched Twitter and found this tweet in April 2016: “The disappointment when the dancing guy with the chair isn’t at footscray ruined my day” and this is replied with “he gives me life”:



Image 7.2 Tweet from April 2016

However, despite our now irregular weekly performance schedule, we have maintained a once-a-week commitment and continue to build relationships with audience over time through a sense of residency. Inserting an artist into a non-arts environment and allowing collaborations over time is similar to the ideas behind the APG (Artist Placement Group) who worked in Britain in the 1960s, placing resident artists in industry and institutional settings. Their slogan was “The context is half the work” (Bishop, 2012, p. 166). In other words, the most difficult element of a residency of this nature is finding a non-arts site and getting your foot in the door. However, in order to avoid the idea of “plonking” art into these environments (a word I outlined in the introduction to this thesis), once the context work is done, then the work begins to devise a collaboration. This must be equal to the generosity of the host organisation who is taking a risk by agreeing to an unfamiliar process. Over time, specific performance structures have been created within Weekly Ticket that confer a sense of residency to David. These structures were not pre-conceived by us; some of them were initially pragmatic concerns; for example, “How will we get a chair to and from the station each week?” The solution of using the private staff room to store our chair has become very important, as each performance “begins” with David entering this room and collecting the chair, seeing staff taking a break and having a chat as if he is also a staff member (described in Chapter 6 as creating a “narrative of legitimacy”). The following performance structures are key “everyday” elements that create a sense of residency and duration, and they have been created with staff and audience at the station over time.

- Storing the artists chair in the station office. The artist has to sign in each time to enter the office and collect his chair. The sign in sheet asks for a visitor’s purpose; David writes “artist,” as if this is an official role.
- David develops a repeated ritual of beginning Weekly Ticket, cycling to the station and locking up his bike outside.
- Knowing staff, greeting them by name and building a personal relationship with them. This includes customer service officers, office managers, Metro staff, cleaners, train drivers.
- Becoming familiar with different platforms, waiting rooms and flows of commuters, evolving performance scores that work at different times or for different situations.
- Recognising repeated audience and being recognised and remembered by audience.

- Remembering changes at the station: “when we first started there were no large L.E.D advertising screens”; the station is changing, while the performance continues as a constant.
- Being a local, performing in our neighbourhood. We bump into people we know when we are at the station, and elsewhere in the neighbourhood have conversations about Weekly Ticket.

These repeated activities and encounters over time have become familiar and satisfying. They create a type of performance that consists of more than repetition, evolving into a sense of familiarity and residency. Generating repeated rituals is a useful consideration for practitioners to develop slow theatre projects, and as dramaturg, I outline these in the next chapter, offering advice to potential artists in the field. Being able to sustain a slow theatre project is a creative challenge and must be approached by different artists according to their own priorities. Durational projects become intertwined with the lives of participating artists. The next section describes how the duration of Weekly Ticket has had an impact on us as participating artists, and how considering the “long” of the “long now” creates a focus on sustainability.

The theatre performances discussed by Eckersall and Paterson contain a re-imagined sense of time that is slow and sensory. They describe their analysis as having a “combination of ecological and material perspectives; that is, perspectives of flow and interconnectivity with ones that posit the material relations between forms and contents” (2011, p. 179). The long duration of this performance and research has allowed me to consider the interconnecting flows of relations and dialogue that are created by Weekly Ticket, an extended understanding of stories and participation where the materials of performance are inventing and reinventing themselves with audience.

In the next sections, I describe a different “ecological” understanding of slowness within Weekly Ticket, one that has a focus on sustainability and locality. This understanding comes from being present as artists at Footscray Station over a long period of time, and how this has changed our understandings of ourselves and this performance project.

7.4 Slow theatre and sustainability

Performing locally over time changes both the nature of the performance and also our identities as artists and our understanding of this particular arts project. Curator and art historian Miwon Kwon, who focuses on contemporary art, land art and site-specific art, asks a pertinent question: “If the identity of the community is produced through the making of the artwork does the artist’s identity also depend on the same process?” (2002, p. 117). Weekly Ticket is changing us. As a dramaturg, my decisions regarding artistic scores or collaborations must consider duration, by creating scores and modes of performance that can be repeated and are able to evolve over time. I have begun to consider sustainability not only within Weekly Ticket but in relation to future projects. I have a new interest in embarking on collaborations that take a long time with people I enjoy working with and creating structures for these processes that are sustainable and long term.

Weekly Ticket is the longest project I have consciously undertaken as an artist. This durational commitment places it high on our life priority list. I compare this commitment to other life activities such as raising a child from new-born baby to independent teenager, or establishing a life in a new city, or paying off a mortgage. These are all big and important things, as they take so much time and regular work to achieve. I recorded in my field notes on day one (February 3, 2016) that we (myself, David, Tim and Madeleine) were all very emotional as we gathered at the station together at the start of the first performance. David retold a quote from John Keats that he had read 15 years previously and written on a small piece of paper: “I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart’s affections and the truth of the imagination.”⁶ Embarking on a project with this timeframe, we thought about parenting and being entrusted with something precious, “like fostering a child,” Madeleine said (field notes, 2016).

Fifteen years is the span of childhood; the photos below show David’s niece’s son Peter who lived across the road from the station and who we would frequently encounter when performing.

6 A quote Keats wrote to his friend Bailey. <https://www.poemhunter.com/john-keats/biography/>



*Images 7.3 (Photo Gregory Lorenzutti) and 7.4
David with friend Peter at the station 2016 and 2019*

During the span of 3 years, Peter has gone from pre-schooler to sophisticated primary school student (complete with sunglasses and “coffee”). At the time of writing, his family has just sold their Footscray house, and so in 2031, when Peter is 19, he will be finishing high school, possibly in Castlemaine. The future remains unknowable, but we grasp at it by considering the life trajectories of our friends and family. This is the “long” of the “long now” (Eno, 1995), and being part of the long duration and slowness of Weekly Ticket creates personal discussions of life journeys. The conversations I had with friends who came to the station the morning of our first performance in 2016 (some to see us specifically and others who are local and happened to be there) also referred to other, large time frames of great importance to our personal lives, such as our children finishing primary school, or being in the same job for 20 years and considering retirement. We talked about time and the things that are important to us. As is often the case, we did not talk so much about the art project of Weekly Ticket, but the performance allowed for and created the opportunity for personal conversations about our lives. We were connected together in the “long now”.

Also, on that first day I made a decision to not eat any doughnuts from the famous Footscray doughnut van, due to a long-term commitment to better health outcomes. I wrote, “Would I look different if I ate 1,200 doughnuts over the next 15 years (2 doughnuts per week, average for me of 40 weeks per year, times 15)?” This entry captures perfectly and metaphorically how I was thinking about moments and experiences rolling into the future and affecting me and others in ways we could not yet imagine. Perhaps I will celebrate our final performance in 2031 with a Footscray van doughnut! The sense in 2016 was that we were embarking on an experience that we would become fully immersed in, that would become part of our lives, that would take us through to

retirement age and would encompass the accumulation of our skills and ideas as artists. The sense of time stretching simultaneously behind and in front of every performance moment is the philosophy of Eno's "long now": "Now' is never just a moment. The Long Now is the recognition that the precise moment you're in grows out of the past and is a seed for the future. The longer your sense of Now, the more past and future it includes" (Eno, 1995, para. 5). A sense that time is simultaneously behind and in front seems true of Weekly Ticket. Each decision regarding an element of Weekly Ticket, from performance score to costume to documentation, is weighted with the possibility it will be repeated many times over many years. Conversely, the process of performance-making seems organic when it unravels over such a long time. It is becoming difficult to even remember why or when we made specific decisions about elements of performance, as they are generating and evolving over time in a manner that seems to have its own momentum. The seed of these decisions in the past contains the duration of our lives as artists and the skills and philosophies that we have amassed.

It is important to consider the sustainability of slow theatre projects. To put this simply, if you want to be able to continue for a long time, the performance must be physically and mentally healthy to sustain. One element of this is performing close to where you live, if possible, as this reduces the stress and time of commuting and allows a greater sense of being embedded in the lives of locals and their life stories, as I have described. Performing locally is also an important element of slow movements such as slow food. Measuring the environmental impact of food production by "food miles" (how far produce needs to travel from producer to consumer), the objective is to keep these miles low, to eat local and seasonal. The "art miles" of Weekly Ticket are low, as David bikes to the station and I take the train one stop (or drive the short distance sometimes). The importance of reducing travel miles and the environmental impacts of performance is an important contemporary discussion amongst performing artists. This discussion has been highlighted in 2020 as overseas touring has all been cancelled, and when it will resume is as yet unknown. A new consideration of the local is part of current conversations, and I continue this discussion in the concluding Chapter 8 of this research in answer to the question "What next?"

Weekly Ticket as slow theatre creates a certain "ambience," as Eckersall and Paterson describe of slow dramaturgy. I understand this term as describing the ecology or overall atmosphere of the project. In the last section of this chapter, I will describe how Weekly Ticket as an example of slow theatre brings together participation, mutual improvisation with audience and slowness to create an overall ethos of generosity and humour.

7.5 The ambience of slow theatre within Weekly Ticket

This research has developed the argument that Weekly Ticket creates mutual conversations, relations and performance structures by improvising with audience. Mutuality and connectivity in this context require generosity, and outlining an ethics of generosity and humour adds a final and important layer to the development of what I describe as slow theatre. To embrace generosity is not just “being nice” but involves paying attention to and focusing on mutuality and the diversity of audience. Artist and critic Harry Josephine Giles writes in their⁷ essay “Shock and Care”: “Learning how to care for your audience is actually far more aesthetically interesting and politically disruptive than working out how to shock them” (2016, para. 1). Caring for audience involves creating an ambience where participation is as broad as possible; this is an aesthetic and disruptive challenge, as Giles identifies. Within Weekly Ticket, this involves creating performance with audience who may not typically be involved in contemporary art; relations are created by playful interactions with anyone who is available, and these interactions become contagious for other audience. These structures have been developed and generated over a long duration, and Weekly Ticket as slow theatre has allowed us the time to notice the flows and landscapes created by our performance and the ambience of generosity created by these patterns.

Weekly Ticket is an experiment in generosity: we have been treated generously by staff and audience, and we return this generosity by continuing to turn up each week, by having a commitment to the duration of this project and by paying attention to our audience. Philosopher Marguerite La Caze is quoted extensively throughout Parkins and Craig’s book *Slow Living* (2006). She describes a “wonder at the extraordinary” as having an ethical dimension, but states that generosity is also critical: “The two passions of wonder and generosity have to work together in a complex way to provide the basis of an ethics of respect for difference” (2002, p. 14). Within Weekly Ticket, I describe “wonder” as “curiosity” from audience, and this is matched with the generosity of David improvising with audience, paying attention and creating direct relations. The description of generosity from cultural theorist Rosalyn Diprose (2002) first mentioned in Chapter 4 captures how curiosity from audience must be matched with openness from David in order for relations to be created: “[Generosity] is an openness to others that not only precedes and establishes communal

⁷ Harry’s preferred pronoun.

relations but constitutes the self as open to otherness” (p. 12). Chapter 4 described how creating mutual play with audience is a way of jumping across the “difference” between audience and performer, or between different members of the audience. This activity is available to anyone present at the station who is curious. A sense of playful engagement creates the ambience of slow theatre, and an important element of this is the use of humour. This is particularly important in Australia, as in my experience, being too “serious” about artmaking in this public setting would limit conversations and relations due to a certain wariness about art as being an elitist activity.

Being playful within Weekly Ticket often takes the form of a humorous exchange. The conversation with Declan who works as a signal operator (“worked” actually: he recently told me that he has now retired with a full pension) quoted throughout this research cements relations through gentle teasing and laughter. Gregg Whelan from “Lone Twin”, a UK performance duo whose work also involves improvising in public, articulates a similar philosophy: “Humour and joking, and showing to each other and to them [the audience] that there’s laughter and wit in this, are core components of the social vehicle that these works [such as *Sledge Hammer Songs*] travelled on and used to make connections with people.... We try to allow other people to share a sense that it is both funny and serious” (Williams & Lavery, 2011, p. 192). Humorous conversations and playful exchanges (such as an on-going game of hide and seek)⁸ are activities that create contagious audience: their energy attracts attention.

Reactions to the idea of a 15-year performance often contain both laughter and interest, showing an appreciation of the humour and seriousness of this endeavour, as our friend and sometimes collaborator Paea Leach describes:

I tell them [my friends who ask what I am doing] the premise [of Weekly Ticket], well he’s actually going to do it for a really long time, I’m just visiting, he’s going to keep going – how old will you be when you finish? [David – “I’ll be 71”] ...71, and then people’s [sic] just – delight! That that is an idea, that someone’s going to do that ... it’s incredibly special, and because it’s so humble I think in the way it is in the world, because it’s not a big announcement, it’s this undertaking.

⁸ Early in the time-frame of Weekly Ticket, Tim (an audience member) and David started to play a game of hide-and-seek. The first session happened spontaneously, instigated by David trying to hide from Tim. Tim picked up on this offer and continued the game, disappearing and re-appearing, running behind walls and in and out of waiting rooms. This game has progressed over the years whenever we meet each-other, and we have got to know Tim who works at Bunnings in Sunshine. The game continues.

Interview with Paea and David, April 2019.

Paea describes the duration of Weekly Ticket as a “really long time” that she just visits sometimes. Describing the “undertaking” of Weekly Ticket as not being a “big announcement” points to the everyday activity of turning up at the station each week and getting on with the job of creating a long durational performance. Staff at the station had a similar attitude of humour in response to the duration of Weekly Ticket on our first day:

Signing into the visitor’s book inside the station office for the first time we (David and I) meet two station workers. Both their names are David.

A good omen? We explain what we were doing: “We are starting an art project here for 15 years.” They roar with laughter. “I can’t even think about tomorrow!” jokes one David.

Field notes, February 2016.

This very first reaction to Weekly Ticket contained several key elements of the relations between performer and audience that have since evolved over time. Staff were bemused but also amused. They related the notion of long duration to their own lives and what they are prepared to commit to. The staff did not question why we were beginning such an undertaking; they immediately accepted the idea and found it funny. As time has progressed, we have got to know the staff at the station well, and their cheerful acceptance of us and the stories they have created and share with others are an important element of the dialogical web and the overall ambience of generosity created by Weekly Ticket as slow theatre.

7.6 Conclusion

As I outlined at the beginning of this thesis, Claire Bishop asks: “If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?” (2004, p. 65). This research has documented how Weekly Ticket creates intimate and personal relations with audience that are humorous, strange, interesting and shared in multiple ways by audience beyond our control. As demonstrated by the film of Weekly Ticket, a common reaction to this performance is laughter, and as described in Chapter 4, David and my performance training in techniques that encourage play and joyful encounter are essential elements of this project. My definition of slow theatre extends the frameworks of slow dramaturgy (Eckersall and Paterson, 2011) and the broader philosophy of slow living to analyse performance that has long duration, a focus on direct communication and an overall ethos of play and generosity. Taking care of audience and offering a sensory experience of direct encounter changes the temporal experience of audience and creates slow theatre.

Weekly Ticket creates relational time, time that participants drop into suddenly in the midst of their rushing through the station. Despite being in the midst of their everyday activities an audience member may find themselves talking about visiting their daughter in Bendigo with a man holding a wooden chair. A moment of refreshing time is created together. These refreshing, relational moments become the material of performance, and they are mutually created, remembered and shared in multiple ways.

In the concluding chapter of this research, I will speculate on future implications for arts practice in the area of slow theatre and participatory performance. In order to articulate my understandings, I will offer questions and provocations for artists in the field of participatory performance.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

Introduction

My participation in four years (and counting) of a specific performance project has allowed me to create a new dramaturgical research methodology appropriate for investigating the complex relational patterns created by public performance. My working methods and findings are I hope of use to practitioners and researchers working in this field, and more broadly to those investigating any creative endeavour. Using this dramaturgical framework and a critical performance ethnographic methodology has revealed both the vast landscape and fine-grain textures of Weekly Ticket. In this thesis, I have considered how the artist disrupts typical activity at the local station through spatial analysis using the four-stage schema from Heim, with additions from me to include social media. I have analysed the way in which these offers or invitations might be accepted by an audience member, creating new relations and conversations that can be considered as; surreptitious, hidden, playful asides, direct conversations, or co-performing scores.

I have described the mutual creation of curiosity and intimacy within performance and how this activity becomes contagious, creating audience. The subtle negotiations between performer and audience that I described in Chapter 5 and 6 create conversations and moments of shared activity that are unique to that moment. David brings a playful disposition and an interest in audience to the station, and this is matched by curiosity and audience moving into direct involvement with Weekly Ticket. This is the process of slow activism that is dialogical and creates “relational time”. In addition to this, long duration and locality create a sense of residency and what I describe as slow theatre, encompassing an ethos of sustainability and generosity.

In this conclusion, I ask “What next?” I answer this question in two ways; firstly, I provide an argument about how an ethos of slow theatre could offer an alternative to models of creative practice in the arts during this current pandemic and pandemic-recovery climate (the first half of 2020 in Australia). In order to illustrate this argument, I imagine a future that includes extensive artist in residence projects throughout Australia, an arts model that embraces the long and the local. Secondly, I offer practitioners provocations and principles for their own work; these principles are: create a beginning ritual for performance that you enjoy, be generous, and turn up and pay attention.

8.1 An alternative to current performance models

At the time of writing, the Australian arts community are reeling from loss of income in the first half of 2020 due to COVID-19. Many venues may close permanently and artists falling in between the JobKeeper and JobSeeker¹ criteria are ineligible for the various federal “stimulus packages” that seem to ignore the arts as an area of employment and industry. Typically, (and particularly in Australia) when economies are shrinking then funding to the arts is cut, and many artists in Australia are considering alternative employment, for example retraining in horticulture (I only have anecdotal evidence for this trend, based on my membership of various Facebook sites such as “Australian Artists and COVID-19” and conversations with artist friends). The full impact on the arts over the next decade from COVID-19 is as yet unknown, but a sense of anxiety prevails,² and performers I know who would have been touring to international festivals are now delivering fruit and vegetables. The new 2021 Melbourne Festival called “RISING” that I described in Chapter 4 will program solely Australian works, a departure from the usual international focus. Weekly Ticket, as a durational local performance, offers an alternative model to touring performance and, more broadly, an alternative model of sustainability with a focus on the long and the local.

If international travel remains compromised in the near future, this has implications for current models of arts performance. Even before COVID-19, many artists were considering alternatives to touring due to a desire to reduce their environmental footprint, and this conversation continues. The current model of professional theatre performance relies heavily on national and international touring, as the cost of initially mounting a production is so high that multiple seasons in different venues (with box office income) are required to balance the budget. The other common model in Australia is that a team is assembled for a production, various funding is obtained, a rehearsal process is completed, and one season of the performance at a particular arts venue is achieved before the artistic team is disbanded. In the realm of “participatory performance,” many different models operate, but most commonly participatory projects have one season (that may be in a non-traditional environment, for instance the Botanical Gardens), appear at one festival (for example Melbourne Fringe), or perhaps move to various places to interact with different audiences. A similar structure of requiring extensive funding to rehearse and prepare

¹ Australian government assistance programs administered by Centrelink. These are fortnightly payments equatable to the unemployment benefit, or funds for employees and sole traders to stay afloat. Free-lance artists have been able to access the smaller JobSeeker (anecdotal evidence), but free-lance wage structures may make artists ineligible for more generous assistance.

² The arts sector has lost a quarter of its workforce since March 14, 2020 (Megalogenis, 2020).

a performance followed by one season remains typical. The artistic model is very short when measured in clock time, in length of performance season, and in time for relationships to be forged between the artistic team and between artists and audience. Here I provide a new consideration of slowness and the local, an alternate philosophy and model that I consider critical and relevant to current discussions of how the arts ecology will need to adapt and change in the immediate future.

8.2 A definition of local performance

Any move towards slow theatre requires paradigm shifts in the arts sector. Thinking about these changes brings to light current structures and priorities. Current priorities emphasise large venues, short seasons, funds that go to administrators more than artists, and touring lifestyles for artists that are difficult to sustain. In this thesis, I argue for local performance to become a priority, and define this as a performance that takes place geographically near where an artist or majority of an artistic team lives. The artist might move residence over time and artistic teams may live in different areas, but the category of local requires some of the artistic team to be part of the local environment of the performance if possible.³ This leads to the artists becoming identified with their work in a similar way as the local hairdresser or greengrocer and involved in conversations about local people and their work, demystifying arts practice over time. This locality in combination with duration and residency creates slow theatre and relational time as described in Chapter 7. A model for this type of performance currently exists, generally described as being an “artist in residence.” For example, the Australian Greens political party released a post-COVID-19 arts recovery plan in May 2020 centred around the concept of an artist in residence. The plan notes: “The package, developed in consultation with leading arts organisations, includes a \$300 million project to put an ‘artist in residence’ in every school and library” (Miller, 2020, para. 2). As ideas of residency and adapted models of arts practice are part of current post-pandemic plans, there seems to be broad agreement that new ways of doing art will be necessary. The artist in residence model provides on-going wages and creates connections as I will discuss. In order for locality to become a priority, a philosophical and ethical shift similar to the slow food movement, as outlined in the previous chapter, needs to happen. The emergence of farmers’ markets in most Melbourne suburbs shows some people are prepared to pay a bit more for local and seasonal produce within a slower outdoor environment that

³ I acknowledge that being able to stay in one location is a position of privilege. It is easier if you own your house rather than rent, and do not need to move locations due to precarious work or residency. However, in the alternate reality described in this chapter, if artists were paid to be immersed in local environments perhaps this would help with staying in one place. This approach would not be of interest to all artists of course.

encourages “sociality and conviviality” (Parkins & Craig, 2009, p. 93). A similar re-focus on local artists and local places collaborating over time could introduce a new idea of slow theatre into the arts ecology. Negative attitudes regarding slow food, such as “the supermarket is cheaper and has everything under one roof,” I can imagine transferring to the realm of slow theatre: “this sounds like community theatre which is bad quality” or “international performers are more exciting and sophisticated” or “taxpayers’ money spent on the arts is a waste” or “if I want to see art, I will go overseas or to the Arts Centre not to my local library.” These types of opinions were evidenced in the Facebook discussion of Weekly Ticket, outlined in Chapter 6. A focus on slow and local rejects paradigms that equate the international and exotic with quality, instead placing greater value on relations and conversations that evolve over time. The purpose of slow theatre projects is to provide opportunities for audience and artists to come together in a creative process that is immersed in the “everyday.” These may be durational arts projects that exist where people gather, such as libraries, train stations, schools and sports centres. I outline in more detail an imaginary future that embraces these slow theatre principles in the next section.

8.3 An alternative future

I envisage an alternative future where participatory performance is part of our everyday lives. Local councils would provide long-term wages for artists to be present and respond to local environments. The settings of these residencies could be schools, libraries, transport hubs, aged care facilities, kindergartens, shopping centres, community centres or sports clubs. The outcomes of these residencies are not expected to become epic productions; rather, the focus is on dialogue, communication, creating a moment for people to stop and become immersed in relational time. Artists and funding bodies would respect local environments, offering artists long periods of time to build connections, and realising that the “outcomes” of these artistic explorations will be multiple, varied, and often created by audience themselves. These projects may begin with small outcomes, but these are not dismissed as “banal”: they become the beginning of a lengthy process that is generated over time. The artists are supported by a small team who support the project by providing a different perspective to the immersed artist (or artists), and these roles could be described as “dramaturg,” “director,” “friend,” “documenter” or “support team,” depending on what the project needs. The support team assists in maintaining the sustainable health of the project, tracks the emerging artistic outcomes, and shares them via social media in order to extend the dialogical web of the project. The support team also keeps their eye out for the feral stories created by audience, watching social media and listening to conversations; this material

is considered part of the generative work of the project and feeds back into emerging artistic frameworks. The arts project becomes part of the local ecology, as discussions about the artwork are shared when artists and audience take part in other local activities. For example, at school pick-up time in the playground the artist responds to questions from other carers of local children: “Are you still doing that performance stuff at Highpoint Shopping Centre? You’ve been there for two years!” and the artist can answer “Yes, I’m there every Wednesday, come and have a chat.”

The slowness of these imagined projects is critical; the emphasis is on “slowness, ambience and connectivity” (Eckersal & Paterson, 2011, p. 179) as outlined in the previous chapter. The relationships and artistic outcomes and frameworks will take time to establish. This long clock time of residency then allows for relational time, time when artist and audience are immersed in creative practice that is measured by and compared to our life spans, and enmeshed with our lives.

I have articulated here an alternative model, a provocation for thinking about performance projects embracing the local and the slow. Participation would become the heart of these types of residency projects, as the emphasis is on connectivity, co-created relations, and embracing the audience where they live and within their lives. In order to extend this vision one step further, the next sections offer practical assistance to these (imaginary) artists, using this research to articulate what I have discovered as a dramaturg, and offering provocations and instructions for slow theatre projects.

8.4 Learnings towards practice – two questions

This second part of this conclusion formulates some key principles for slow theatre. These provocations use the theoretical findings of this research to create practical instructions for practitioners. I will first offer two questions for consideration, and then three principles to help practitioners formulate frameworks to generate participation.

This research began with an interrogation of public performance and what it does. This now seems simplistic, as using these words infers a singularity of activity – cause and effect. Participatory and relational art offers the analysis of mutuality, an equity between performer and audience. To embrace a vast diversity of understandings is overwhelming, but this can also become a positive embracing of possibilities. This was articulated recently in a lecture at Deakin

University by Professor of Visual Arts David Cross: “our work is always more than what we think it is” (2020). How is this extended understanding of help then to artists? How do you (the imaginary artist) make specific decisions about exactly what to do? To help you proceed, I will ask two questions:

- 1) What is your art doing to you?
- 2) What is your art doing that you will never know?

The first question could be answered fairly simply, even pragmatically (in response to a hypothetical project): “my art project is helping me learn how to tie a range of knots in order to cover a vast wall with repurposed rope.” As your project progresses over time, other changes to you may become apparent, and these changes should be considered as they will help you work out what to do next. These changes may be deeply personal and difficult to articulate, but they are generating your artwork in ways perhaps you have not yet considered. For example, as I have discussed in relation to slow theatre, during the very first moments of Weekly Ticket, we felt overwhelmed by a sense of long duration, and compared this to other life commitments such as raising children or being dedicated to a job. This sense of embarking on an immersive life commitment became a broad theme of Weekly Ticket, but also conversations about life and time became part of the specific materials of the performance, materials that remain interesting and challenging to this day. A holistic exploration of the self is critical for sustainable duration, and your artwork should not impact your body, mind or spirit in any way that will ultimately force you to stop before you planned to, though this exploration may allow you to change direction within your artwork. I am not saying that durational work should all be along the lines of gentle participatory pilates classes, or ephemeral mandala painting. You might get enormous energy from the physical difficulty of dancing with a chair for 15 years, so think about the impact on you of your art.

The second question “What is your art doing that you will never know?” is more of a kōan (not that I am positioning myself as an enlightened zen monk!), a provocative riddle without a singular answer that is challenging to consider. Through this metaphysical query, I ask you to ponder – what patterns and ripples of conversations and stories is your project creating that have an unknown endpoint? Can you become more aware of and listen to these stories and not dismiss anything as “that person doesn’t understand what I am doing,”?

These reactions are what you are doing. Embracing your activity as mutually created and understood by everyone you come into contact with allows a sense of expanding patterns to be considered. Thinking about these patterns may give you inspiration and energy to continue.

I offer these provocations as a way of communicating the findings of this research. As a participating dramaturg, my exploration of audience, participation and story led me to become particularly intrigued by the feral stories created by audience. The sense that our audience are running off and sharing and talking about Weekly Ticket is strong, and to embrace this notion is to feel strongly the mutual creativity of public art. As artist and researcher, focusing on this complex web allowed me to view this project in a fundamentally different way. This involves becoming comfortable with unknowable outcomes whilst being committed to devising a creative environment where artists and audience can exist together in relational time.

I next articulate the findings of this research by offering specific principles that I hope would be of use to artists exploring participation, and specifically relational encounters within slow theatre.

8.5 Key principles for relational encounters within slow theatre

In developing key principles for slow theatre, I am drawing on my dramaturgical understanding to devise ways to create an environment where play is possible. My role as dramaturg involves considering relational encounters within slow theatre by being “in intimate proximity (in close-up) and at a distance (in long shot)” (Williams, 2010, p. 202), holding the big picture and the momentary encounter together simultaneously. The big picture of Weekly Ticket is an ecology of generosity. Each moment of Weekly Ticket exists within a landscape of mutual improvisation, the importance of every audience member, and a spirit of generosity and play. In order to express some of these learnings, alongside the questions outlined previously, I have created three key principles for participatory performance. These principles offer specific ways to consider sustainability and generosity. I am influenced by the “instructions” for performance created by Fluxus performers such as Alison Knowles (Millman, 1992), by “Oblique Strategies,” a series of instructions to help the creative process written by Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt in 1975,⁴ and also by my own

dramaturgical practice that seeks to facilitate a creative experience for artists, rather than tell them exactly what to do. These principles are: create a beginning ritual for performance that you enjoy, be generous, and turn up and pay attention.

8.5.1 First principle: Create a beginning ritual for performance that you enjoy.

It is the labour of performance to bring broad principles into being through action. For example, in seeking to create relations of generosity, of intimacy, of confession, of antagonism and of co-operation, the participating artists must be available and ready to participate, and at times that does not come easily. Sometimes, a sense of play is forced and inauthentic, but you push it until it arrives. Any performer must find their own way into a creative mode where they are at once aware and fully immersed. For David, as I have outlined previously, it is a physicality that is the key: the biking to the station, the smile and laugh with the staff when he first arrives and collects his chair, and the dancing that “knocks him into” a creative state. A focus on what you need as an artist is critical; it reflects the first question I asked as a stimulus, the importance of considering where you are in the artwork. Making sure your work practices are sustainable will allow you to work longer, and be more available to recognise what is happening, so firstly think about what you need to do to start.

8.5.2 Second principle: Be generous

To my mind, an ethical stance of generosity is imperative for those that work in participatory performance. We must care for our audience. This is a complex endeavour and at odds with an elitist philosophy that artists should shock or teach audience something. To embrace generosity is an ethical stance embedded in slow theatre, as I have outlined in the previous chapter. What I challenge you to do is create an environment that is generous and involves noticing the generosity and perhaps changing attitudes of audience over time. In the example of Weekly Ticket, creating playful and mutually co-created conversations and relations with audience are what I define as generous, and over time noticing the generosity of audience and station staff (also audience) contributes to my understandings of how generosity is manifested within Weekly Ticket. How generosity is manifested within your work may take a different form, but keep an eye out for it.

⁴ Instructions are written on cards to be picked at random; each of these are a “suggestion of a course of action or thinking to assist in creative situations,” and two examples are “not building a wall but making a brick” or “always first steps” (Enoshop, n.d.).

Working in a non-traditional performance environment can be precarious. In creating Weekly Ticket, we are not following a precedent set by other residential performers at Melbourne Train Stations and learning from their mistakes, because no other exists. We are aware that if a few commuters complained about us for some reason, we may be asked politely to leave, or the staff may have enjoyed what we were doing but safety concerns mean our time would have to finish. This precarity is amplified by the difficulty of obtaining support or permission from the higher levels of station management, a glass ceiling we have yet to penetrate. We are relying on the goodwill and, to be specific, good humour of the staff at the station, and their cheerful greetings when we arrive before each performance always settles a slight nervousness that we do not have full official “permission.” As described in Chapter 6, the station staff have sometimes conferred on us an official role, describing the project to others as being “paid for by the council,” for example. Despite this not being actually true, then in this mutual discovery of performance, the story-telling makes it true. If audience believe we are a council-sanctioned project, then they will view us as such. The willingness of station staff to accept our art project, in fact to care for us, is a generous position, and perhaps over time we have won over more negative attitudes, as Kay one of the station officers described to me:

Kay – Before, there were a lot of people they used to just laugh, they just used to laugh, initially, and even our staff member also had the mixed reactions. Some of them used to say, oh that’s really not helping, it’s stupid, it looks stupid enough, like you know, they were very bold with their statements. But if he’s doing it only for the performance sake and the arts sake I think it takes longer to understand and people to understand and accept him.

Me – Over time now the staff are more positive?

Kay – After that, some of them, they are fine as long as people are enjoying, we like it now (laughs). Sometimes something you don’t like it at the beginning, you have to understand because every person is different, how they react to things is different, and doesn’t matter who is performing, even if the best actor in the world, they have critics too (laughs), critics is sometimes better, you get feedback, you can improve on what you are doing ... but for me, personally I liked it.

Interview, March, 2018.

Creating an environment of generosity involves recognising the generosity of others. In order to do that you must pay attention. This is the third and final principle I will outline here.

8.5.3 Third principle: Turn up and pay attention

The first question I offered in this conclusion – “What is your art doing to you?” – encourages you to consider yourself and the changes manifesting in your own understandings as a first step to then considering other impacts of your art.

The first principle I have offered is “Create a beginning ritual for performance.”

Both this question and principle involves considering the elements that will allow your practice to become sustainable; this will then allow you to do the next thing, which is “turn up.” In order to create slow theatre, you must be able to keep turning up, and continuing to define how that will be possible is part of your artwork. Do not ignore any part of this process. The conversation you have with the barista every morning when you order your extra-strong flat white before going next door and making art at the library is part of the work. Once you have turned up, then I quote Laurie Anderson: “works of art are just ways to pay attention to different things” (Stern, 2012). You are in the lucky position of being an artist in a specific place, and if you are part of my alternate reality outlined in this conclusion, you are being paid to do this work; this allows you time and energy to be embedded in your surroundings and not on your laptop applying endlessly for small grants that might pay you for a month or two.

You are in a prime position to pay attention, to notice and improvise with audience. This may be playful to a greater or lesser extent depending on what feels true to you, but, importantly, you are creating the first step of mutual participation, which is paying attention with your audience. If you have followed my first principle and have discovered a way to do this activity over a long time, then you will begin to discover what your artwork is doing.

8.6 Conclusion

This conclusion has articulated the results of this dramaturgical research framework via methods I use as a dramaturg to create artistic processes: these are questions and instructions. I have given them to imaginary practitioners. I will finish this conclusion with my own response to my first provocation: what is this art doing to me? My dramaturgical exploration into Weekly Ticket and participation has allowed me to be present within slow theatre. I have had the time to be immersed in the everyday: I have sat in the cold wind of Footscray Station when nothing much was happening, I watched the birds, I noticed glances, flurries of energy and activity. David would wonder why sometimes I did not watch him performing. I was watching the ripples emerging from performance and wondering what was going on – what I could say was happening as a researcher and how this understanding would inform my work as dramaturg. This time has been a privilege, and this research has allowed me to experience and articulate relational time. I personally experience this as a deeply human connection with others, containing the enjoyment of strange and personal conversations in an unlikely place, the process of capturing a moment I see as theatre with a photograph, and the sense of being involved in artistic activity in public that is at times confronting but other times joyful. It feels worth the time.

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EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

For staff members at Footscray Station

Project: How does a performance change a place? Weekly Ticket Footscray - a durational performance project at Footscray Station

Stacy Holman Jones

Centre for Theatre and Performance Monash
University
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Merophie Carr

Phone : **redacted**
email: merophie.carr1@monash.edu

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

This research is designed to create more of an understanding about what an audience thinks about our public performance art project at Footscray Station - 'Weekly Ticket Footscray', and the impact this project may have on Footscray Station. This research will assist us to improve our understanding of the project, this is useful for us to communicate to stake-holders such as Maribyrnong Council, and also for us to enrich the artistic aspects of our project.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You were chosen as a staff member of Footscray Station

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

This study involves a short interview that will be audio recorded. This will take no longer than 10 minutes. You can finish the interview at any time.

If you agree to being interviewed I will not gather any personal information about you, for example your name. I will ask you to define your role at the station, and any quotes will be attributed to that role, for example "a security guard at Footscray Station said that....."

Storage of data

Data will be stored on my personal ipad and laptop computer. All data will be safely destroyed after I have finished my thesis in 2020.

Results

Please contact researcher Merophie Carr and findings will be made available to you as soon as possible.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Room 111, Chancellery Building E,
24 Sports Walk, Clayton Campus
Research Office
Monash University VIC 3800

Thank you,

Chief Investigator

Stacy Holman Jones



MONASH University

CONSENT FORM

Station Staff

Project: How does a performance change a place? Weekly Ticket Footscray - a durational performance project at Footscray Station

Chief Investigator: Stacy Holman Jones

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

My job description will be identified in written findings but not my name.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
Being interviewed by researcher Meropie Carr. These interviews will be audio recorded.		

Name of Participant _____

Participant Signature Date