MONASH University

The Public Cast: making space for public authorship and activation in participatory artworks.

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Abstract

This Masters thesis is a reflexive examination of the role that open, under-determined and playful imaginative and physical processes play in the creation of large and small scale participatory performance situations. It enquires into the extent to which those open processes can allow these works to become powerful acts of collaboration between artists and the general public. It is focused on both the design of the process that bring such works into being and on the ways that participation might be maximised in the way they unfold in public presentation. The thesis looks at these processes in relation to the many and varied stakeholders in the creation and presentation of such work: the key creatives and producers; the commissioning and funding bodies; the professional participants; the community participants; and the audience. It asks if there are particular strategies and dramaturgies which might increase the participatory reach of such works, and the effectiveness of that participation in allowing a sense of authorship, activation and social connectedness in a community. The thesis also examines the limits of participatory projects in their ability to achieve these ends, and analyses some situations where participatory projects overstate their potential to create outcomes beyond the purely aesthetic. The research concludes that participatory artworks may well have the potential to empower audiences to become makers rather than passive consumers of art. The findings suggest that there are detailed strategies for increasing this effect, which include giving people (and objects) the opportunity to perform elaborate imaginative roles that can transcend the everyday. The research also concludes that, while it is true that there is a turn towards participatory artworks within government and arts funding bodies, the level of understanding and debate about the potential for such work to create strong social good is thin. Which itself suggests that more of this kind of research would be valuable.

The thesis concludes with a coda that, briefly, accounts for the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the Arts sector. This coda suggests there are reasons to be optimistic that, somewhat paradoxically, some of the changes forced on the sector by the physical distancing rules required to cope with the virus might create the conditions for a further surge in participatory artworks and perhaps even a broader understanding of the role participatory, socially embedded artworks can create in rebuilding society post pandemic.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

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Date: 30/3/2021

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This thesis could not have been written without the collaborators, creative, technical and administrative, with whom I made the artworks that inform this reflective research enquiry.

I would like to acknowledge Martyn Coutts, Dylan Sheridan and Travis Tiddy with whom I made *The Rumble* (the subject of chapter 1) for The Unconformity in Queenstown, Tasmania. That festival (a collaboration between the whole town and a posse of game artists) is beginning to be recognised as one of the most interesting in the country.

Jessica Wilson has been a collaborator of long standing and making *Passenger* with her was joyfully challenging. Jessica was also an invaluable sounding board as I began to unpack the ideas that form the basis of Chapter 2.

I am also indebted to Ida Bagus Oka, Ida Bagus (Gus) Antares, Komang Sedana Putra, Cas Charles, Kaz Tanami, Alex Podger and Joseph Picket with whom I have been collaborating on Dark Mofo's *Ogoh Ogoh Burning* project since 2015. This project, perhaps more than any other, has pushed my practice and thinking around the potential for large scale spectacle to transcend Guy Debord's banality and be both participatory and subversive.

I would very much like to thank my supervisor, Dr James Oliver for his critical encouragement and close reading. James, in particular, has been extraordinarily available as this work unfolded and made several important interventions that enabled the research to become broader than it might have been. This work commenced at the Victorian College of The Arts and I would like to thank Dr Veronika Kent who, in a series of key conversations, helped frame the original inquiry.

Finally I would like to thank Susan Giles, Artistic Director of Polyglot Theatre, a powerhouse in the realm of participatory work for children, and the creative instigator of *Ants*, the work that is central to Chapter 2. Susan is also my wife and has been a constant sparring partner as I have tried out various lines of inquiry and arguments over the research period. Her incredible experience, insight and patience has contributed hugely to this work.

Copy Editing

Editorial assistance was also obtained for a focus on grammar, punctuation, paragraph structuring, and minor reference correcting. The editor that I engaged for this project is Jonathan Graffam, whose input was purely related to written expression with no advice on the content of ideas or any of the general discussion throughout my thesis.

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> This apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is the more readers or spectators turned into collaborators.
>
> (Benjamin, 2003, p. 777)

> We have been choosing more and more and creating less and less for some time now.
>
> (Ilyin, 2006, p. 91)

This thesis is about participatory art and is written from the point of view of a practising artist in the field of participatory performance. The thesis focuses on performance works in which a large team of professional artists, technicians and producers work alongside an even larger team of participating publics in what artist/researcher Francoise Matarasso, when defining participatory art simply calls: 'A shared creative act' (2018, p. 19). The word creative is crucial here. These are not simply works about shared experience, or joining in. These are works in which something is made during the shared act. The works under consideration are more often than not held in public places, usually free, with a blurred line between those who are most obviously performing the work (both professional and non-professional), and an audience that is sometimes drawn into a participating role, sometimes to the point where the category of performer and audience completely breaks down.

The complexities of making these participatory, socially engaged works are amplified when the work is created in circumstances that involve multiple institutional stakeholders and occur on a large scale, often involving the sanctioned disruption of a city or town. Many of the case studies that are the spine of this thesis are such works. The majority of the projects under review have either been directed by me or were works in which I was a key creative.

Methodologically, this practice led research is a reflexive and autobiographical account (or reflexive autobiography). It is therefore also a praxis analysis based on a series of completed projects, and situated as a collective and reflective 'case study' of my practice – projects that were undertaken over the five years between 2011–2016. This is situated further through Chapter One. Within my reflexive examination I am asking whether there are ways of increasing both the extent to which a participatory performance work can engage the public as an active co-creator during its execution, and whether there are ways to engage the public in the actual design and creation of the structures within the artwork itself? Nevertheless, it is also written with the why of participation in mind. What is behind the recent flourishing of participatory works across many creative disciplines? In her introduction to her Documents of Contemporary Art compilation, Participation (Bishop,

2017), Claire Bishop notes this upsurge in socially engaged participatory practice is particularly pronounced in the United Kingdom, Australia and North America. She also notes that much of this work has grown out of a tradition of progressive art-making and thinking amongst artists and philosophers in the late 1950s and 60s who saw in participatory artistic practice the potential to disrupt capitalism and to place social relations above consumption and economic activity: ideas that are perhaps most succinctly articulated in Guy Debord's Situationist International manifesto The Society Of The Spectacle (2001).

This thesis is sympathetic to the notion that art may hold the potential to contribute towards the making of a more progressive, fairer and more economically equal society, and that art can create shared experiences that increase the bonds between diverse peoples and communities at a time when our societies are retreating into a polarising tribalism. Several chapters use Bishop, Debord and mid-twentieth century economist Karl Polanyi's thinking to analyse projects from the point of view of their embeddedness in social relations and suggests strategies for increasing this. The final chapter also examines a project which had laudable aims in this regard, but manifestly failed to achieve them. Indeed, there are numerous points in the thesis that point to instances when participatory projects have overreached their missions; or, indeed, become entangled in the contradictions of trying to create an artwork with a public cast who must, at some level, be coerced or perhaps even manipulated into action in an inauthentically manufactured situation.

Participation is flourishing

As this thesis makes clear, there is a lot of participatory artwork about: projects on various scales and across mediums in which artists and non-artists are invited to contribute to the making of a work. Governments on all levels, from Federal down to local council, are commissioning festivals, parades, community celebrations and public art works, for a variety of socially altruistic (though often ultimately economic) reasons, and this is likely to gather momentum in the future. This affords great opportunities for artists to create genuinely interesting public participatory artworks with reasonable budgets and high-profile outcomes.
Remarkably, in my experience, once these works are commissioned, artists are often given an extraordinarily free hand in determining the form and content of the work, and especially the nature and design of the participatory aspects. The commissioning stakeholders often lack the experience, desire or even the vocabulary to have a detailed view on such matters[1].

As I point out in the first chapter, on more than one occasion a festival or political master, having given a green light to an expensive public artwork that may involve street closures and tens of thousands of participants, send me out to make the work with nothing more rigorous than the equivalent of "Don't Stuff It Up." Their Workplace Health and Safety

[1]Sydney City Council states that the New Year's Eve fireworks are something that 1,000,000 people 'take part in' (SCC, 2020) as though it too is some kind of participatory artwork.

departments examine the logistics of the project in extraordinary detail and with great expertise, and—in contradiction to the cliché of the bureaucrat wanting to shut creativity down - are often very helpful and sympathetic to our aims and keen to make the work. Their marketing department engage deeply in how the work will be publicised. Their traffic engineers are keen to understand what closing a road and diverting public transport will involve. But there is rarely anyone to have a nuanced conversation with about creative issues in regard to this work, and almost no one at all with whom to discuss the actual mechanics of participation.

There *are* often directives around the fact that a project needs to have as much participation as possible, however, there is rarely a conversation about why participation is important as a strategy, or how participation might be maximised or made more potent as a positive experience for a given community. This thesis aims at giving a detailed analysis of both the why and how.

The building blocks of participation

The thesis explores the process that the key creatives use in building these works, and makes the case that when well-made, these works can unlock the imagination of a general public audience in such a way that they become *improvising* co-creators. It examines the way in which there is an important transition from unknowing to knowing throughout the making and execution of this work; and that the state of unknowing, far from being problematic, is deeply implicated in the actual *process* design for bringing the work into the world. That is to say, it is crucial for the artist to leave open, for as long as possible, the definition of something even as foundational as the actual *artform* the work might be—especially during the very early phases of a creative process.

The thesis will also discuss the idea that, in a very real sense, a team of artists only acquire the complete knowledge needed to undertake one of these spectacles after it has been made, and that given the bespoke nature of this kind of work (site specific, made for a particular community, often to celebrate a particular narrative or event), large swathes of this knowledge will never be needed again.

The research examines the fact that these artworks do not actually exist until the general public create the large sections of the work that the artists have deliberately not created. Put another way, these artworks can be viewed as inhabiting what Debord calls 'Situations', in which the category of "audience" has been abolished in favour of the Viveur: 'One who lives' (in McDonogh, 2002, p. 46). This kind of open work, as noted by Umberto Eco (1985, p. 161), means that each iteration of the piece (situation) is genuinely unique, often radically so.

As noted above, I will reference a large body of work from the field, with particular reference to my own practice. The thesis will examine these processes in relation to the myriad of "players" involved in the creation of a work. These will include: the directors of such work; the commissioning and funding stakeholders; the professional participants; the community participants; the audience—who often become participants themselves; the physical space within which the work takes place; and the accidental (in some cases unconscious, or unaware) participants and bystanders.

The research will examine several works using the idea that there exists a social contract between an audience and artists and, borrowing a term from the political economist Karl Polanyi, seek to determine the dis-embeddedness of an artwork based on how open (undetermined and embedded) or closed (circumscribed and unembedded) in social relations, as opposed to market ideology, that contract is (Polanyi, 2001). The work will use Claire Bishop's defining characteristics of the potential value of participatory works—"Activation, Authorship, and Community" (2007, p. 12)—as another way of determining the extent to which an artwork is embedded in social relations. The work is also informed by Baz Kershaw's notion that in certain circumstances, this kind of participatory work can actually embody new freedoms and rights, in a way that he defines as art that is not so much *about* something so much as made *of* something (Kershaw, 1995, pp. 77–83).

The thesis also examines the way that participatory works sometimes harness the power of Lefebvre's' 'immediate and mediating level: everyday life' (in Johnstone 2008, pp. 31–32). Note that this power can create a validating sense for an audience that what has been created is authentic, but that this power works both ways; that is, the everyday will mercilessly destroy an artwork if it appears contrived, irrelevant or overblown in its own claims to authenticity.

The thesis draws on thinking from the field of performance studies to examine the ways that performance of many kinds surrounds and supports these projects. It examines how the threshold between performer and audience breaks down, and how it is possible to discern that inanimate objects and places, like streets and cityscapes, can be said to be performing in certain circumstances.

At its heart the thesis seeks to make the case that for any or all of these effects to allow an artwork to grip the imagination of a participating community. Gripping it in such a way that the public become willing collaborators in an act of shared creation, large parts must be left unwritten, spaces defined but not filled-in, and the agency of everyone involved given maximum opportunity to genuinely affect the outcome, even to the extent that in some circumstances the work may "fail."

Thesis Structure

Chapter One: The importance of not knowing what you are going to do, or how you are going to do it

This chapter is interested in the early process of the making of a participatory performance work. It seeks to examine the decision-making of the professional makers and their relationship with a project's stakeholders. Especially those stakeholders who have commissioned the work. At its heart is the desire to describe the process used for making one of these works—from first contact with the commissioning body to cleaning up afterwards—and the crucial importance of keeping as much of the project as open as possible for as long as possible. The artist must leave sections of the work unfinished, available for the participating public to write themselves into. It notes that the creation of a participatory artwork, particularly in the early stages, is not hugely dissimilar to making *any* artwork. Informed methodologically both as a praxis of reflexive autobiography and by the writing of Barbara Bolt (2007), Martin Heidegger (in Bolt 20027), Paul Carter (2004) and Tadeusz Kantor (in Carter 2004), the chapter explores various ways in which the blank parts of an artwork, the unknown sections, through a process of 'knowing through handing' (Heidegger in Barrett and Bolt, 2007, p. 43) come into being. It notes that the art-making process values non-events as much as events, and that at times the process does not appear to be leading anywhere. It finishes by examining the way that trust is crucial in this process: how a director working on these large-scale projects must learn to trust the materials and processes; how the performers and crew must trust the key creatives; and how everyone involved in the creation of the work must trust the audience to create new versions of the show in their minds. At the heart of this trust is faith that the journey from unknowing *will* result in some form of "known", or knowledge-building on the part of the audience (and a material work of theatre).

Chapter Two: Making works in the everyday

Chapter Two, following on from the methodological position of reflexive autobiography, uses the 'case study' of the immersive, promenade theatre work *Passenger* (Wilson, Pidd and Gunn, 2016) to look at various mechanisms for embedding an artwork in the everyday. It is particularly interested in examining the process of enlisting a cast made up almost entirely of 'performers', who are simply the general public with no knowledge they are 'performing.' In the main, they are entirely unaware that there is even an artwork taking place around them. The

chapter attempts to understand why it is that an audience appears to so deeply trust this unknowing cast and the framing of the everyday, and asks ethical and philosophical questions about this device. The chapter takes thinking from Henry Lefebvre, Jorge Louis Borges, Baz Kershaw, visual artist Gabriele Orozco, and filmmakers Peter Fischli and David Weiss, each of whom have useful ideas about the power of the everyday, its ability to test and authenticate creative work, and the way that the everyday can create narratives for humans determined by our desire to construct patterns and meaning around random objects that have proximity as their primary relationship.

Chapter Three: The Social Embeddedness of Art

Chapter Three takes the focus back on the relationship between the artist and the participating audience in two contrasting performance works: Komische Opera Berlin's production of *The Magic Flute* (directed by Barry Kosky) and Australian company Polyglot Theatre's participatory work *Ants*. It seeks to examine those works borrowing Karl Polanyi's notion of embeddedness. By describing these two works using the notions of a strong/weak, open/closed, embedded/unembedded social contract between artist and audience, the chapter attempts to draw out ways that a particular work may create what Bishop defines as participation's gifts to society: 'Activation… Authorship… Community' (2006, p. 12). The chapter explores this aim using Karl Polanyi's ideas about the embeddedness of culture: 'Instead of [an] economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system' (2001, P77). In this phrase we can substitute "art" or "art-making," for 'economy' without any loss of meaning. This chapter closes with a descriptive cast list of the "Characters" that the participating (and unsuspecting) general public "wrote" for themselves over several iterations of *Ants*, noting that it is the carefully constructed, undetermined nature of the work that helps create such agency for the audience. Another way of stating this, with reference back to my central question, is that in *Ants* the artists have left large parts of the work unwritten (unknown) in the (uncertain) hope that an audience will bring them into the realm of the known and that this process is possibly the most important element of the artwork.

Chapter Four: The performance of people and of objects

Chapter Four takes some of the case studies detailed in Chapters Two and Three and re-examines these using the lens of performance studies. In particular, using Richard Schechner's foundational performance studies concept of restored behaviour (sometimes referred to as 'twice behaved behaviour'). This chapter asks the

question: can the undoubted power that an audience takes from the proximity narrative that flows when an artwork is embedded in the everyday (as explored by the discussion of Passenger in Chapter Two) also be understood in relation to performance and performativity? Can we say that almost *all* of the people *and* objects in a large-scale public spectacle are performing actions and narratives that have been "rehearsed"? Are they embodying roles and characters that conform to a roughly predetermined script, in ways that are wild, but not wildly unpredictable? Can we even say the city itself is performing? The chapter closes with an examination of the way that objects can perform powerful dramaturgical functions for a crowd of people.

Chapter Five: The limits of participatory practice

Chapter Five, the final chapter, is a slight detour away from the mechanics of participation (though the mechanics feature) to address a gap between what participatory practice sometimes claims it can achieve and what actually takes place on the ground. It notes several ways in which policy-makers and funding bodies have noticed this turn towards participatory art-making and have begun to ask of artists that they make works that address specific social problems and economic situations.[2] These are issues at the heart of Claire Bishop's book *Artificial Hells* (2012). Bishop's work on the effectiveness of participatory and socially engaged practice is the primary lens for this chapter. The case study for this section is a very large-scale regional Victorian project, with transformational aims written into the very heart of its funding agreement. Importantly, I note the ways in which it simply could not achieve these aims, even as it worked very well as a series of artworks. In a series of final reflections that close this chapter, questions are raised about whether local sporting clubs, with their often decades-long narrative of community ownership, offer models of participation that the arts could learn from. It closes with an idea from Jacques Ranciere: that it is the act of making and participating in artworks (as is the case with sport), rather than the content of an artwork, that has the greatest chance of creating change in society. 'The undecidability of aesthetic experience implies a questioning of how the world is organised, and therefore the possibility of changing or redistributing that same world.' (Ranciere, 2002, p. 137)

Coda:

Part 1: A Pandemic Postscript

A coda was written in the final weeks of the preparation of this thesis and briefly accounts for the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the Australian arts sector. It acknowledges that were this research conducted after the pandemic that its effects would likely have made their way into large parts of the discussion. The

coda concludes with some guardedly optimistic reflections on the potential for the changes that have been forced on venues, arts companies, and especially festivals, which could see a notable surge in small and large-scale participatory arts practice—much of it in non-arts spaces, with a likelihood that these changes will be permanent.

Part 2: A Playful practice-based manifesto

The thesis finishes with a conclusion and a manifesto, which acknowledges the importance of Guy Debord in rooting a social impulse, a subversive turn—an essential niggle—into participatory practice.

Chapter One
The importance of not knowing what you are going to do, nor how you are going to do it

> In established fields of research, making is generally regarded as consequent to thinking – at least in theory. Thus a series of experiments, for example, is carried out in order to test a certain assumption, i.e. to solve a problem or answer a question. In the field of practice led research, praxis has a more essential role: making is conceived to be the driving force behind the research and in certain modes of practice also the creator of ideas.
>
> (Makela and Routarinne, 2006, p. 22)

This research is practice led (as opposed to practice based, see Candy 2006) and is a praxis of reflexive autobiography as 'case study' for analysis. This useful distillation of praxis in the quotation above, and of the central, forensic role of praxis in the field of practice led research is both simple and profound. It makes clear that the practice led researcher, working from a place of unknowing, uses the conceptual and physical tools of a maker and works in the material world to attempt to forge knowledge. It is no accident, of course, that this is also the process that an artist uses to attempt to bring art into the world. It should not come as a surprise therefore that practicing artists, when undertaking research, will use the tools of the studio as well as the tools of the academy in order to increase the sum of knowledge. Or as Frayling (1993) distinguished, the difference between research on, for or through practice.

This chapter, written from the perspective of a professional artistic practitioner in the transition to becoming a researcher (though not one who will abandon his practice), is driven by the desire to both explain and understand this flow of knowledge out of the unknown into the known, and the central role of artistic practice in that flow. Indeed, I contend that it is only out of trusting this state of unknowing and applying certain conceptual tools that the potential discovery of knowledge (and of creation) can be made.

Graham Sullivan describes this movement from unknowing to knowing as 'imaginative leaps made into what we don't know' that can 'lead to critical insights that can change what we know.' (Sullivan in Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 48) Sullivan's use of the word *leap* is important here. A leap is potentially dangerous, a genuine risk. It again underlines the trust that is needed to undertake this kind of inquiry, this kind of practice, this kind of practice led research. His use of the phase, 'change what we know', is also telling. He seems to be hinting that sometimes the creation of knowledge can simply be a change of perspective, a reframing of the familiar, the everyday. This is an example of the kind of knowledge that the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a tool used by select universities in the United

Kingdom in order to determine research quality, has identified for the purposes of distributing research grants, as 'Understanding' and 'Insight' (see Simon Biggs in Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 29).

The chapter also aims to explore, in general terms, the ways in which, as Sullivan has also observed: 'the artist intuitively adopts the role of researcher *and* research' (in Dean and Smith, 2009, p. 28, my emphasis). The artworks and processes explored are from my own work, the focus very much on the practitioner, the aim to reflexively create insight that is applicable in other contexts and to share these findings. The thesis is also a personal attempt to wrestle with the issue of what might constitute actual knowledge in the context of practice led research, and, further, to attempt to track down how and when that knowledge can be said to come into existence.

The first tool is handling

Barbara Bolt's essay 'The Magic is in Handling' (2010, makes a compelling case for practice as the first, most crucial part of the creation of knowledge. Bolt's argument unfolds around Heidegger's insight that 'we do not come to "know" the world theoretically through contemplating knowledge in the first instance. Rather, we come to know the world theoretically only after we have come to understand it through our handling of materials and process.' (Bolt, 2010, p. 30) At the heart of this thought is surely the notion that in our handling of 'materials and processes', the kind of grappling—and I use that word deliberately—that results in the creation of art, is a profound and necessary unknowing.

I would argue that unknowing is itself one of the processes that must be "handled" if knowledge (and art) is to be created. This unknowing is perhaps the first of the material choices which lead us towards knowing. Though I would push Heideggers's insight further and say that sometimes the way for a 'material or process' to yield art (and thus knowledge) is *not* to handle it. But to get out of the way. To *not* handle unknowing. To let this unknowing act on the process of creation.

I can perhaps rephrase this by taking Polish theatre director Tadeusz Kantor's insight into the process of creation as one that "doesn't have to lead anywhere… bereft of any aim other than simply to be perfectly useless and disinterested." (In Kershaw, 1995, p. 74) Artist and academic Paul Carter tells us that when making work he and his collaborators, "value non-events as well as events"(Carter, 2004, p. 179). They value the things that decisions were not made about as well as those that were. Things that are happening out of the control of the artist are as important as those that are in their control. Things that are unknown are as important as things that are known. Furthermore, Carter asserts that artists have 'a gift for ambiguity… for loosening positions that have been fixed'. (ibid.) This is ambiguity born at times of an artist letting go, an insight born of deliberate, creative

inaction. Perhaps another example of Briggs' idea that art can "change what we know' (see Biggs in Smith and Dean, 2009, p.29). What we *already* know. Or what we think we know, but discover, through praxis, that we don't—and this discovery becomes art.

The paradoxes of commissioning

To fully understand the extent that unknowing plays in my practice necessitates a few words about what that practice is. I work in an area that I will identify as *Participatory Spectacle*. The work tends to be outdoors, outside the major cities of Australia (and those overseas), the centrepiece of a festival or commemorative event, the commissioning body (usually a festival or City Council or government body—often all three) hopes the artwork will be highly participatory in its delivery (i.e. to involve a large community cast and production crew), and is supported by a professional team of artists and technicians. The commissioners are usually anxious that the finished work be performed at a professional standard and have very high production values (lights, sound, design). More often than not the work will be free to attend, and will happen only once—in front of, surrounded by, or passing by—a very large crowd. And while financial support for these projects has certainly improved, these works must often be delivered on extremely tight, inflexible budgets, within highly constrained timelines.

The number of contradictions, paradoxes and false assumptions that swirl about in the situation described above are myriad. Take the desire on the part of the commissioning stakeholders for the work to be participatory, performed at a high standard *and* the need for the work to be delivered within a constrained budget and timeline. There is unknowing at the intersections of these three elements. The stakeholder may well wish the project to tick the box marked 'participation' but will not acknowledge—or more likely is unaware of—the extra budget required for the considerable time it takes for this participation to be meaningful.

There are situations where the commissioning stakeholder does have the funds for the artist to undertake the kind of consultation that the best kind of participatory practice requires, however trips-up when as a result of this consultation the "target" participating community are discovered to be uninterested in making the kind of work that the commissioning body wants and so the project is going to have to change.

For instance, I came into the Dookie Earthed project for Regional Arts Victoria very late in proceedings as a "fixer" because there had been a serious breakdown in relations between artists and community. Very quickly I discovered that the community of Dookie had not been consulted thoroughly at the beginning of the process and, though they wanted to be involved in the work, they had in mind something much rougher, much more handmade, much earthier than the extant proposal. They also wanted the process to be freewheeling

and low pressure and pleasurable, and were not so interested in making a highly polished art "product". This project is written about at length in Chapter Five of this thesis.

It is common for the highly complex situations outlined above to be fashioned into a binding contract which the commissioning stakeholder(s) require the lead artist to sign at a very early stage in the process. This contract is, perhaps, the very definition of a knowing document that is unknowing. Words such as "participatory", "high quality", "accessible" are littered through these documents with no acknowledgment of what they mean, what their implications are, or how anyone might actually know if they have been achieved. What usually happens is that once the contract is signed the stakeholders become studiously hands-off except in regard to occupational health and safety, the logistics of street closures and traffic disruption—and, of course, that it is delivered on budget.

Participatory Spectacle – Methods and Techniques

There are a small handful of artists working this way in Australia. Jessica Wilson, Donna Jackson, Joey Ruigrok, Scott Wright (Erth), Alex Podger, Martyn Couttes (Field Theory), Jillian Pearce (Y Space) are some names whose works I have put links to in the bibliography. Although they are all based in Australia, almost all have a significant international practice. On the whole, these artists, if pushed, will call themselves theatre directors, though very few of us present work in physical theatres anymore. More often than not these works take place in public, outdoors – I. actually do direct quite a lot of work in the theatre, but it is more often than not highly participatory too, and many of the learnings of this thesis stand up well when taken indoors.

I must also acknowledge that these projects are highly collaborative. The work is often attributed to a single director, but in almost every case there is a core team of artists—typically a designer, musical director, lighting designer and assistant director—and technical and production people who are involved in the creation of the work. I shall expand on the nature and process of this teamwork below but I will add that, using Paul Carter's resonant phrasing, this collaboration, 'is what begins to happen when artists talk about what they are doing, in that simple but enigmatic step, joining hand, eye and mind in a process of material thinking.' (Carter 2004, xxi) Although, I would change the tense of this sentence to read: 'when artists talk about what they are *going* to do.' For this to-and -fro of talking, reflection, research and further talk *is* the doing, it *is* the joining.

Recent examples of this kind of work from my own practice include the *Ogoh Ogoh* ritual and parade that has closed Dark Mofo in Hobart for the last five years; *The Rumble*, a parade (within the core creative team we called it a "siege") of mining machinery that cascaded through copper mining town of Queenstown on the West Coast of Tasmania in

September 2016; and *Dookie Earthed*, a community spectacle which took place in a large disused quarry in Northern Victoria, that was part of Regional Arts Victoria's Small Town Transformations Commissions in 2015.

These projects routinely involve the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars, with a cast in the many hundreds and an audience in the multiple thousands. They often involve road closures, significant traffic diversion, the suspension of council bylaws, the occasional blind-eye turned to issues of public liability (or perhaps more of a white lie) and a clean-up that takes days. Yet the genesis of these projects, in my experience, is often extraordinarily vague. Often no more than a phone call from a festival director asking, 'can you do something in this quarry?', or 'how can we celebrate the centenary of the ANZAC landings?' There is no talk of budget, form, timeline, scale, creative team, or any specifics. Often even the venue and date are unknown, or at the very least up for grabs.

Figure 1: *Ogoh Ogoh* Finale, Dark Mofo, 2016. Photo: Cas Charles.

This vagueness on behalf of the commissioning body means that commonly I have no real idea of the scope of a project until things are very deep in the process. This lack of knowledge extends from the conceptual aspects of the work. For instance: Is it musical? Is it an installation or a more theatrical event? Might it be a parade? And moves to what Paul Carter might call the call the material choices that lead to 'material thinking' (Carter, 2004, p. xxi): where will it take place? Who is in it? When will it happen? Who is the audience?

What is the budget? If some of those factors are known they prove so provisional as to be no real guide as to what might actually happen, nor where it might be, nor when. And, of course, it is absolutely critical that I don't know. The enemy of this work is the generic (and predictable?). Each project must be bespoke to the community, the site, the times.

It is really common for me to observe with my collaborators in the middle of a project, that 'we won't really know how to do this until we've done it. We'll then be the only people on the planet with that knowledge, and we'll never need to use it again.' I keep a collection of reflective writing, each completed post-project in a folder marked 'What REALLY happened' (which could be the three word description of this thesis). Simply, the only way to gain the knowledge to do a project is to do it. The day after the project is delivered is the day we will have the knowledge to undertake it. The thing to add is that during the project one is often simply trying to solve problems at hand and thus making intuitive leaps and connections. It is not until *after* all this handling of material that one can reflect on what actually happened.

Of course, all artists start out with some sense of unknowing. The novelist and screen writer's blank sheet of paper, the sculptor's block of marble, the composer's silence prove helpful associations. But in the case of the spectacle-maker so much more is unknown about the creative outcome at the moment of commissioning.

Creating The Rumble – As practice-based case study in not knowing what we would do

The Unconformity is an arts festival based in Queenstown, in remote Western Tasmania. Historically the town's economy was built around copper mining, however automation and a falling copper price has seen the town's fortunes slump. The key personnel of the Unconformity took an existing heritage festival and, in a rather unlikely turn, transformed it into a commissioning arts festival, with local and visiting artists creating bespoke artworks that respond to the landscape and culture of the town. The festival describes itself as 'a contemporary arts festival that explores the paradoxes of Queenstown, an art mining community on Tasmania's wild and mountainous western fringe'. (The Unconformity n.d.)

The Rumble[2] is a work commissioned by Travis Tiddy, the director of The Unconformity. Queenstown is almost the definition of a town experiencing all the maladies of a post-industrial slump. In the early part of the twentieth-century the Mt Lyell copper mine supported a population of over 10,000. The town supported five football teams (including one made up of the work force of the smelting plant alone, another of the underground

[2] The Rumble was a commissioned work, created by Martyn Coutts and myself, which opened the 2016 event. It took the form of a noisy, fiery procession of industrial machinery which laid siege to the town into the evening of the first day.

miners), dozens of hotels, and enough sulphur in the air to completely denude all the vegetation from the local hills. (Blainey, 2000) Due mainly to the gradual decline and automation of the mine, the population has dwindled to 1755, one struggling football team, two pubs and one of the highest welfare dependencies in Australia. The median household income is $764 compared to the national average of $2185.00 (Australian census, 2016).

Travis, a fourth generation local, sees The Uncomformity as a vehicle for the West Coast to reimagine itself as a place beyond this post-industrial self-definition. He routinely commissions artists to create large and small bespoke works for the town. In a conversation eight months out from the festival, Travis simply asked if fellow-artist Martyn Coutts and I would be interested in creating an opening spectacle for his 2016 festival. We could do anything we liked and work with anyone we wanted, but he wanted it to have a 'spectacular' outcome and involve lots of people in the town. He had a date, but no budget. It was his intention to apply for funding once Martyn and I had an idea of what we wanted to do. In other words, in a real sense, we had no idea of what the project was.

Carter identifies the need for artists to employ 'Material Thinking' when creating work. Carter insists that 'the creative process is not in the least mystical. The decisions that characterise it are Material decisions.' (2004, xi.) This is not to deny that there is a mystical dimension to art, it is simply to point out that the only parts of the process that are available for the artists to influence are the material ones: 'Where will I work? Who will I work with? How much money is there? If this element is a given, then what happens next?' Beyond such questions as these, Carter says we should leave well enough alone and let the process unfold, trusting that material thinking will yield creative outcomes.

One of the points to all this is that while I do not know the particulars about the project that we are about to invent, I do have the knowledge required to undertake a project when you don't know very much about what is going to happen. You can start work immediately.

The first set of tools that are employed are those which are used to *discover* what the project might be. In the case of *The Rumble* we began by meeting as many people in the town as possible, observing how the town operates, reading the history of the place, talking with the indigenous population of the town, visiting the mine that is the talismanic industry of the area, noticing and admiring the heavy machinery that is used in the mining industry, noticing and admiring the amount of noise that is involved in the mining industry, noticing (and *really* admiring) the nonchalant ease with which the workforce expertly manoeuvre huge pieces of machinery, taking stock of public places, trying to understand the geography —all of which had to be passed through the lens of the commissioning body's paradoxical expectations. I contend that the lack of knowledge at this early point of the process fuels a critical curiosity, an almost insatiable desire to see, understand (and perhaps most importantly) seek patterns and connections that can be turned into art.

This chapter is not intended as a manual or "how to" guide to creating this kind of performance work so I do not provide an in-depth description of each step undertaken. I do, however, describe one common tool that I routinely use by way of illustrating a slight of hand trick for creating a starting point for a project that seems to have little technical foundation. A way to create a foothold to begin the climb on a wall that seems to have no obvious purchase point.

Sometimes to create a work the very best place to start is by saying what it is not; or, perhaps more accurately, what it most certainly cannot be. My favoured method of doing this is to set up regular pitching sessions with one or two trusted colleagues (in the case of the Rumble it was Martyn Coutts, co-director on the project and long-term collaborator). We often start our pitch by *removing* the material choices and imagining the project as if the laws of physics don't apply (and everyone can fly) or that there is an unlimited budget ('at the end Radiohead arrive on a truck in the main street and play Decks Dark…').

It is common for the early pitches to begin with the sentence: 'This is not right, but what if….'. This sentence is followed by a description of a project which is wildly impractical, wholly unachievable, or even criminally unsafe. But it sparks the beginnings of something that *is* achievable and practical and which the audience and participants will love working on and experiencing, so it is an exercise in drawing the *real* project out into the light of day. This is Carter's 'enigmatic step' (Carter, 2004, p. xxi), Sullivan's 'leap'. (Sullivan in Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 48) Artists, armed with praxis, creating something new.

The project that immerged from this process was a large-scale industrial procession, involving mining equipment, trucks, industrial plant and salvaged plant laying siege to the town, with an extremely loud accompaniment of sound and light. Almost the entire event was created and run by current and retired miners, and their families, and it was estimated that 90% of the town came onto the streets to witness it. The event even closed the kitchen of one of the two pubs (see Figure 2 below).

Here a note on what the materials are that go towards making this work. The material that must be handled. Increasingly I understand that the key raw material in the projects that I undertake is the energy and imagination of a large team of people. There are often multiple vehicles and large sets, litres of paint, kilometres of cloth, generators and backstage kitchens—lots and lots of stuff. But ultimately these projects are acts of co-design, in which the collective imaginations of several hundred people (and the collective imagination of a large audience) are corralled into a creative act.

Figure 2: The Railway Hotel, Queenstown. Picture: Ian Pidd.

I end this chapter with a note on the crucial role that trust plays in making it possible for these participatory acts of co-design to be able to reach their potential. By potential, I mean for these works to break free of the original narratives and themes proposed by the initiating artists and become more richly inhabited by the narratives and themes that flow in from their social contexts. There must be a (usually unarticulated) mechanism that allows a flow of trust to move between the artists, the stakeholders and the participating publics.

In the practitioners trust that praxis *will* gain enough momentum to become a driving force for creating something profound—or at the very least yield something relevant, respectful and enlightening. Trust on behalf of the various stakeholders that the many unacknowledged (but probably deeply suspected) paradoxes of their desired event will resolve into something concrete and potentially transformative, or at the very least memorable for the right reasons. Perhaps most importantly, a sense of trust must be fostered in the collaborating community participants. Trust that they have signed up to something that will be worthwhile and possibly transformational on some level - or at the very least fun, with a couple of decent parties thrown in. And finally a trust in the audience that what they are encountering has been made with enough creative and technical skill to allow them to let their imaginations (and sometimes bodies) enter the synthesised world and either transform the work or be transformed by it. Hopefully both.

Chapter Two
Making works in the everyday

> Even and above all, when exceptional activities have created them, they have to turn back towards everyday life to verify and confirm the validity of that creation. Whatever is produced or constructed in the superior realms of social practice must demonstrate its reality in the every day, whether it be art, philosophy or politics. At this level alone can it be authenticated… The human world is not defined simply by the historical, by culture, by totality or society as a whole, or by ideological and political super-structures. It is defined by the immediate and mediating level: everyday life.
>
> (Lefebvre in Johnstone 2008, pp. 31–32.)

In Chapter One I looked at the deep unknowing at the heart of the initial creative process in the creation of collaborative, participatory artworks. It contended that the space occupied by the unknown, which attends the opening stages of making a new work, is a crucial element to that work's success. It examined the important role that material choices and playful hunches have in making creative leaps into this unknown space, thereby opening-up the process for professional collaborators and the participating cast and audience to insert themselves into the work.

Chapter Two dives more deeply into one particular device deployed by artists working in participatory modes that also has a crucial, and contradictory, element of unknowing at its centre. This device is the reframing of the everyday so that it is used as a narrative tool for an engaged audience. It is a process of enlisting a cast made up almost entirely of 'performers' who are simply the general public. These performers are going about their everyday lives and have no knowledge they are 'performing', or even that an artwork is unfolding around them. This chapter will examine why it is that an audience so deeply trusts this unknowing cast and the framed everyday, and examine too some of the ethical and philosophical questions that this burgeoning form of art-making raises.

I take thinking from Henry Lefebvre, Louis Borges, Baz Kershaw, visual artist Gabriele Orozco, and filmmakers Peter Fischli and David Weiss, each of whom have useful ideas about the power of the everyday, its ability to test and authenticate creative work and the way that the everyday can create narratives for humans determined by our desire to construct patterns and meaning around random objects that have proximity as their only relationship.

A number of recent participatory works have deployed these unconscious casts of 'performers' in everyday settings to great effect. *En Route* (One Step At A Time Like This, 2010), *Passenger*, (Wilson, Pidd and Gunn, 2017), *The Loveliness Principle* (Coney, 2013) use large casts of people who are entirely unaware they are performing; and, should they become aware—and thus become (self)conscious—the whole work would collapse. Whilst "performing" in this un-knowing state, these 'actors' are unguarded, vulnerable, available: performance attributes that skilled actors strive for and rarely authentically achieve. To be un(self)conscious when you know you are in the gaze of an audience is extraordinarily difficult. It is clearly an impossible task, and an obvious contradiction, for a performer to create 'reality' for an audience that *knows* the experience is artifice. Our unconscious cast, however, achieve authenticity effortlessly. N.B.: In the following chapter I will bring a performance studies lens to this phenomenon; for this chapter it is the co-opting of the everyday that is the primary focus.

In writing about the logistical and conceptual mechanics of this device I am largely going to be referencing a recent work for which I was a key creative: *Passenger*. A work of immersive promenade theatre, *Passenger* premiered in Melbourne in 2017, went on to a season in London (2019), and in Sydney (early 2020). The piece was co-devised and co-directed by Jessica Wilson and myself, working from a story that Jessica and I wrote, for which a script was commissioned for Nicola Gunn (an artist who also worked very closely with us on the devising process), and a soundtrack by Tom Fitzgerald. However, the vast majority of the imagery, and visual narrative, of the 70-minute play is 'performed' by whatever randomly takes place outside of a bus, which is carrying the audience through a city.

Here, I briefly outline the mechanics of the work. An audience are on an ordinary suburban bus, traversing an urban landscape. In the premier season, the majority of the journey took place in the corporate and commercial areas of Melbourne's recently developed Docklands; in London most of the journey takes place around the financial district of Canary Wharf in London's East; in Sydney we used the financial area in the north eastern sector of the CBD. The audience share the bus with two actors in character who appear to be complete strangers. These actors, indistinguishable from the audience, are on radio microphones. The audience overhears them exchange small talk, and very gradually begin to understand that they have a relationship that proves significant—eventually explosive. There is a sophisticated sound system on board that amplifies the actors' voices and delivers a highly produced, deliberately cinematic soundscape, sounding much more like a classic Hollywood Western film than anything contemporary or urban. (We referenced The Unforgiven and The Proposition when commissioning the score).

The final ten minutes of the show are abruptly filled with high drama, which I describe below). For the majority of the work the audience cannot see the actors terribly well, and they are not doing anything particularly interesting, anyway. They actors perform on a scale

much closer to the intimate mode of screen acting, or an overheard conversation, as opposed to a declarative stage register in a black box theatre. Mostly they exchange small talk, though the man begins telling increasingly bombastic stories of his corporate life, while the woman gives almost nothing away, even as she teases more stories out of the man. The pair are never named. In the script they are referred to as The Woman and The Man.

The final ten minutes sees The Woman force The Man off the bus, in a derelict site, and exact a violent, highly theatrical revenge. By now we understand the man has ruined her family farm through legal, but unethical corporate greed. This final showdown, dramatically stark and cinematic, features an authentic cowgirl from the Hollywood myth of the Wild West, complete with rearing stallion and gun, with the audience enveloped in a loud orchestral crescendo. The bus then whisks the audience away, back into the traffic and bustle of the everyday, leaving the characters alone with the circling horse and a sense of doom.

Immersion

One of the starting points as we began to make work was the concept articulated in Baudrillard's essay *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1987), in which he anticipates the digital era, and posits that a car windscreen would simply be another tv or movie screen, treated by the occupants as though being projected onto the glass. 'The vehicle becomes a bubble, the dashboard a console, and the landscape all around unfolds as a television screen.' (Baudrillard, 1987, p. 47)

Of course, part of what needs to happen for this to be true is for an audience to believe that *everything* they are seeing is a performance; that they are fully immersed in a world which has been curated, rehearsed, edited and now performed especially for them.

The artists making *Passenger* wondered if we could we explore this idea and, by dropping a few hints - an unlikely cowboy on a crowded corner; a suspicious looking drug deal in a secluded park - and adding a filmic soundtrack, get an audience to draw a particular narrative from the random occurrences of unknowing strangers and unpredicted events on the street. We hypothesised that to do so might blur the line between our performance and the "performance" of the world so that the audience could not tell the difference. We asked: Could we get an everyday and unknowing cast to perform our play for us?

Before unpacking the dynamics of what happened and carefully examining the techniques we used to make this happen, I include now an extract from my own director's notes, written within forty-eight hours of the Melbourne season of *Passenger* wrapping up:

I have to write about the incredible performances by the general public. Our unconscious cast. The audience's senses are incredibly finely tuned in one of these shows. They are seeking clues both inside and outside the bus as to what is going to happen. Very quickly they shift their focus outside the bus. Our trick has been to create the least possible distance between what we have clearly planted—a charismatic cowgirl galloping along beside the bus on an aristocratic horse on a main road in downtown Melbourne—and what is simply the everyday—a young family of what appear to be recent migrants wheeling an overloaded trolley down the slope of Costco's concourse. Passenger—once we had the show moving smoothly—seemed to achieve that task really well. On the final day of shows, featuring a pretty quiet Sunday in Docklands, our unconscious cast were absolutely outstanding. A homeless looking man up on the hill in front of the Myer headquarters, hunched over his meagre belongings, ostentatiously blowing out a plume of cigarette smoke as we passed… perfectly timed; a young, sharply dressed business man, briefcase in hand, stalking along the Esplanade as THE MAN lets loose on his sociopathic boss, and (again as though cued) stepped up onto the wooden beam that marked the footpath from the water and almost did a tightrope walk; a huge double-b tanker truck passing in front of us as we slowly turned into the truckstop that led to the derelict industrial site for our finale, music rising stirringly, as the audience braced themselves for what they could sense was a highly charged conclusion to the whole work. All of these public performers characterised by a deep naturalism, un-selfconscious, un-observed. And all of this utterly dependant on them being unconscious of their participation. It's not the genius of the untrained actor (although there is such a thing), it's their availability to be projected on by our audience. And we had a great example of what happens when the general public become aware that they are being observed. Many of the drivers at the truckstop at the end, twigged that we were doing something after seeing our loaded bus drive past them at an earlier show on the day, and in the middle show on the Saturday afternoon a group of half a dozen or so gathered at the concrete barriers which marked the path the bus took under the freeway, and they grinned and leered at us as we went past. And it was a pain. For a second the whole play fell apart. Well it did for me, probably not so much for the audience, but anyone could tell that one of the unspoken conventions that kept the whole work afloat had been broken. I think at the heart of that convention is that the audience begins to feel itself to be un-observed and therefore able to unselfconsciously gaze on other people in a way that is usually taboo. I think that is what people eventually find powerful about this work. We give people a freedom in the city that they rarely, if ever get to exercise. And possibly a freedom that they were unaware existed. Of course this kind of candid observation is what audiences have been given permission to do with professional actors. But we (the audience) don't really trust them (the professional cast). We know that what they are doing is manufactured. Manufactured for us. Which is almost worse in terms of us wanting to really be on board. We can of course be deeply moved and hugely amused, or utterly convinced of an argument by actors. But that is not what happens with an

> audience and an unconscious (amateur) performer. We are not looking to them for a message or effect. We are simply, candidly observing them in a natural state. So we are taking a technique we know from the theatre (and the screen) and have been given permission to apply it to strangers. (Pidd, 2017)

In retrospect, of course this moment when these truck drivers broke the unconscious barrier is a useful lens for us to discern the powerful role that this very unconsciousness was having on the audience's ability to draw narrative from our public cast. The second the unconscious participants become aware of the audience's gaze they cease to be authentic and begin to *really* perform. Even more importantly, the very moment the audience become aware that the unconscious participants know they are being watched by them, they too become self-conscious and stop drawing any other narrative from these everyday events beyond playing out their own embarrassment of having been caught watching strangers.

Apart from the final sequence mentioned above, which was as theatrical and non-naturalistic as we could make it—some might even call it camp—the post-show conversations and published articles overwhelmingly focused on what had taken place outside the bus. Here is an excerpt from a published review of that season:

> *Passenger* transports you into a parallel reality that transforms the normalcy of a home city into a thronging surreal cinema-scape that… blurs the line between reality and fiction, leading you to regard the external world with ecstatic suspicion. (Solarsh, 2017)

When all of these competing vectors of focus, knowingness, unknowingness, self-consciousness and obliviousness all line up, *Passenger* seems to unshackle itself from artifice and a rich series of narratives and images build and build, with the work's makers able to claim only provisional authorship. Lefebvre's 'immediate and mediating everyday is doing the heavy lifting for us. (Lefebvre in Johnstone 2008, pp. 31–32.)

Levels of everyday

> Borges wrote somewhere that all these things that are next to each other, we call the universe. (Orozco in Johnstone, 2008, p. 134)

In his essay *Clearing The Ground*, a quotation from which heads this chapter, Lefebvre (1961) gives us a fairly useful definition of what the everyday might actually be. Lefebvre describes that the everyday is, in part, the things we repeat and are daily familiar with. He contrasts this with what he calls 'exceptional' activities, which he says are the result of praxis, of humans taking the lessons of the everyday and applying them to made works. Here lies the irony. The everyday is both 'contingent' and 'necessary': 'The immediate and

mediating *level*'. It is 'The springboard for sublime actions' (Ibid, 34). So, not a sublime action but the *only* condition from which we might know one.

The concept of those exceptional activities (art) having the need to be "authenticated" at the level of the everyday is, I think, useful in looking at the power of *Passenger's* unconscious performers. I believe that the italicised '*level*', that Lefebvre himself stresses in the quotation, can be read as both noun and verb. When you immerse an artwork in the everyday, the world becomes a measuring device by which you can immediately discern the authenticity of the artwork. At the same time, the everyday, shining a light into art, can have the tendency to *level off* any bits of affectation, sentiment and artifice that the creative process has failed to fully synthesis. This leaves the artwork looking stranded and lame, an inauthentic artifice plonked on the street while the everyday inexorably rolls on.

In the case of *Passenger,* one of the things that we noticed in the reviews of the show and from talking to the audience is that this level became somewhat disrupted because the audience found themselves unable to identify what had been 'performed' (almost nothing apart from context) and what was the everyday. It was very common for us to be asked, 'That couple kissing on the bench outside the football stadium, surely you put them there, right?!' No, we hadn't. We had no idea they would be there for this show and can pretty much guarantee they will never be in the show again. If we take Levebvre's thesis and assume that our audience is making constant measurements of the artwork against the everyday (and vice versa) then the authenticity of the work tends to be confirmed as absolute because there is no way the artists can rehearse the entire city. Or can there be; could they?

I need to point out that this is work the audience does themselves. And for those who make such work the effect is dangerously hit-and-miss. It worked for *Passenger* but only after we had run the show many times. Our opening two days of performances (we were doing three shows a day) were underwhelming. The whole thing refusing to come together as a complete work. The actors, the music and the script stubbornly refusing to become fluidly immersed in the outside world. Our unconscious performers working with our audience to *level* our artwork to the status of unauthentic cliché.

I can honestly admit that I don't fully understand why it suddenly started to work effectively for our audience. However, the creative team do feel that perhaps the most influential change we made over the course of the early performances was to slow the bus down by 10 kilometres an hour, thus rendering the sense in the audience of them being outside the normal dynamic of the city, and therefore able to observe everything from a distance. Thus, ironically, in order for our artwork to become immersed in the real world, we had to ever so slightly decouple ourselves from that world. Interestingly the show worked at its very best when things were relatively quiet outside the bus (with Sunday shows being an example). In

this way, the few people and incidents that took place outside the bus took on extra significance, specifically the way that space and time played out making the journey more cinematic.

Visual artists and filmakers Peter Fischli and David Weiss provide useful insights illustrate Levebvre's thinking: 'Things that passively cross our path, that happen by accident, mean the most to us. They seem to be more authentic than planned activities to show what actually happens in reality' (in Johnstone, 2008, p. 133). Though I do question this phenomenon in the case of film, which is already one layer out from reality, with praxis having more clearly intervened.

By the time the audience has received the work, authenticity has broken down at least somewhat. The audience knows—and the artists admit-that what they are seeing is no longer passively crossing their path, nor happening by accident. They have been curated and edited together by the artists, reproduced in a repeatable form. But in works like *Small Metal Objects* (Back To Back, 2007), *En Route* (One Step At A Time Like This, 2009) and *Passenger* (Wilson, Pidd and Gunn, 2016) the audience and artists experience, unedited and in the same un-curated moment, the everyday activities of the city. Activities that are lost to reproduction the second they take place. They live on only in the mind's eye, a notoriously unreliable record, but a rich one: one which is often wildly different for each witness; personal, subjective, unmoored from "reality" the second they take place. But, undoubtedly of the everyday.

Fischli and Wiesse give us insight into Baudrillard's immersive windscreen with the following observation about the effect of watching a film that has itself been shot randomly through a windscreen during a rainstorm:

> This is not a narrative device. But, as in real life, we almost forget whether the act of travelling is a means or an end in itself, so that all of a sudden we are no longer peering ahead through the rainy windscreen, focusing on some goal out there in front of us, but are instead completely detached and engrossed in the previously "invisible" pattern of drops travelling down the windshield. We have *drifted off*, have been immersed in an entirely different "visible world". (Ibid, my emphasis)

This is exactly what happens in *Passenger*. The audience 'drift off' from our play and become immersed in what is happening outside. We inserted a sequence at about the halfway mark of the show that becomes deliberately, distractingly, technical. The Man begins to talk about the economics of milk pricing. It's a monologue, full of jargon and circular logic. The actor actually struggled to stay on track himself. The music became a drone, devoid of real drama. It was pretty hard to follow, and it was a bit hard for the audience to know what the speech had to do with the play. In fact, one could feel the

audience beginning to settle on the idea that perhaps the play didn't really have a narrative arc and that they should just stop trying to keep up with the dialogue and enjoy the ride—a ride with a soundtrack. This distraction that I am talking about is a distraction from the play itself. We wanted them to stop paying attention to our "work." The "work" that we had "made", and to simply take in the everyday. We wanted Lefebvre's every day to 'level' the art out of the show. To have them "drift off". And on the whole, they did. In these periods of drifting off they encountered, not randomness, not a melange of chance encounters, but narrative. The narrative that humans bring to objects and people encountered in adjacent time and space. They *must* have some correlation.

Another filmmaker who uses the camera as an eye on the everyday and who simply shoots what he sees (but then edits for the audience, so is still at least one, if not two steps—editing and then reproducing—from really presenting the everyday) is Gabriel Orozco. He provides a useful phrase in regard to the pattern we build around adjacent objects, people and events. Orozco states, 'In the films things are related, but by proximity rather than narrative.' (in Johnstone, 2008, p134.)[3]

Because, of course, where humans are concerned there is no real randomness. We look for patterns constantly. To put this another way, we are hyper-alert for random events that do not conform to a pattern, i.e.: the snake in the grass, the police siren, the cowboy walking down a modern street.

In works like *Passenger* we too are giving over some of our creative process to the power of proximity. Humans simply cannot help themselves but look for narrative patterns in proximate objects and events. The massive task for the artists in this situation is placing "made" objects, people, sounds and events in proximity to the everyday. Will they so blatantly disrupt the everyday as to collapse the authentic power that reality can lend the artificial and the entire enterprise fall apart? It is my contention that if, by inattention, inaccuracy or lack of insight, we put something clearly "made" in the midst of a street scene the audience immediately sense it and dismiss the entire scenario, and *level* everything down to inauthentic.

There are, of course, ethical issues at play here. What ethical consideration do the makers of such work owe their unconscious performers? What ethical concerns do we owe the audience in playing a sleight of hand with the everyday? Once again Henri Lefebvre is useful. Lefebvre says that, like play, art is 'transfunctional'. (Lefebvre in Elden, Lebas, Koffman, 2006, p. 89). Transfunctional meaning that it is has lots and lots of uses but is also no use at all. It is simply a technology which can be deployed in myriad ways—unlike the everyday. Of course, Passenger's unconscious participants are the essence of the everyday and yet their

[3] This is a proximity narrative. Known in cognitive psychology as the proximity principle https://www.usertesting.com/blog/gestalt-principles#proximity

role is inherently transfunctional. Perhaps we could call them *transfunctionaries*, with all the baggage that such a clumsy construction implies. For these people are extraordinarily useful, and yet not only are they doing something that they are unaware of, if they did become aware, they wouldn't be able to do it. Yet they have, without consent, been implicated into a task and indeed are the heavy lifters of this task. It is a task for which they will almost never be aware of, nor have any chance of being acknowledged for with accolades or remuneration. We strip these unconscious participants of their individual identities, make of them a symbolic 'other'. They may collaborate with the consciousness of the audience to create powerful, potential subversive or transgressive narratives, but do so without agency, without recourse to demur from their roles or, indeed, to passionately disagree to the narrative their unwitting proximity has involved them in.

It is of course both richly ironic and possibly unconscionable that many artists who work in this way, including myself, are often using this device to make works that are critical of the kind of alienating, free market capitalism that is characterised by an invisible hand enlisting a powerless workforce to do its bidding. A message that, in the case of *Passenger*, was not lost on one of our London reviewers: 'Its central premise – that the underdog can take on Mr Big and win, even if that means resorting to unusual methods – is one particularly appealing at a time in which capitalism is running rampant, making a mockery of notions of fairness in 'free enterprise'.' (Prior, 2019)

The following chapter further explores this chapter's analysis of a participating audience's ability to create narratives of proximity. Specifically, I move onto address what happens when the public cast in a performance are *conscious* of their participation, but are nonetheless only peripherally invested in the work. It uses as a case study that is even less pre-determined than *Passenger*. It also takes up the final point in this chapter, asking, via the political thinking of Karl Polanyi, if certain artworks can speak to the alienating effects of neo-liberal economics by virtue of them being more embedded in the actual cultural life of a society.

Chapter Three
The social embeddedness of art

> …Any art engaging with society and the people in it demands a methodological reading that is, at least in part, sociological. By this I mean that an analysis of this art must necessarily engage with concepts that have traditionally had more currency within the social sciences than the humanities: community, society, empowerment, agency.
>
> (Bishop, 2011, p. 7)

In this chapter, I use as a lens Karl Polanyi's description of the blindly obliterating market economy as a disciplining, alienating 'stark utopia' (2001, p. 3), which is dis-embedded from the social relations from which it has sprung. Using Polanyi's analysis, I make the case that certain artworks can be seen as similarly dis-embedded; seen as an add-on, a luxury item, an experience wholly circumscribed by its own conventions (and made inaccessible by market forces). This kind of cultural economy is neatly illustrated by Natalie Ilya's lament that neo-liberal (modern) societies have moved away from being 'making' cultures to become 'choosing' cultures (2006, p. 77); cultures whose citizen's highest duty to the greater good is consumption.

This chapter relates to my main thesis by illustrating an artwork—*Ants,* by Polyglot Theatre—which I contend exists as an almost infinitely accessible act of collective creation. It is a work embedded deeply in to an unknowing, uncontracted temporary community, and as such is able to illicit a huge range of audience reactions. Significantly, it allows its audience a deep agency, which results in them importantly determining the outcome and narratives of the work. This is a shared economy of knowledge and creativity. I will contrast this artwork with the case of the Australian Opera's celebrated production of Wagner's *The Ring Cycle*, which I argue (even as I acknowledge that it was a magnificent achievement) was a disciplining, wholly pre-determined creative artefact. *Ants* manifests as a subversive act of 'making' in the midst of a market economy; *The Ring Cycle*, a self-endorsing, totemic act of choosing (consumption).

Embedded/Dis-embedded

In Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (Polanyi, 2001) the case is made that the most apocalyptic societal catastrophes of the 20th Century (the First and Second World Wars, incidences of fascism and totalitarian Communism) are in large part due to hard push-back by societies from the 'stark utopia' (Polanyi, 2001, p.68) of the unregulated market economics championed throughout the world from the mid-19th Century onwards. Polanyi

published this work towards the end of the Second World War, warning of the alienating effects of placing citizens at the mercy of an 'unembedded' economic system: 'Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system' (2001, p. 77). To create political and economic systems that ignored this theorem risked a continued cycle of human catastrophes as humans inevitably pushed back hard against the free market's alienating effects. '…labour and land are no other than the human beings of which society consists, and the natural surroundings in which it exists. To include them in the market mechanism means to subordinate the substance of society itself into the laws of the market' (Ibid, p. 75,).

Polanyi identifies Nazism and communism as examples of the 'Double Movement' (p. 79) as society reflexively defends itself against the brutalising influence of reducing everything to economic value (or lack of value). It only makes sense to place the current turmoil around Brexit and Trumpism as contemporary examples of particular societies (ir)rational response to globalism and austerity: the free market orthodoxy writ large.

One of the ideas at the heart of Polanyi's thinking is the notion of positive freedom. A freedom *from* as opposed to a freedom *to.* In other words not the negative freedom championed by capitalism, i.e: the freedom for the individual to act with an absolute minimum external interference. Nor the economic and distributive freedom ostensibly guaranteed by most existing socialist administrations, perhaps most easily summed up by the socialist slogan (popularised by Marx, but actually predating him and from an anonymous source) '*from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.'*

The freedom Polanyi describes is one exercised in a society in which citizens, as individuals and collectively, are able to undertake 'meaningful actions' unhooked from the needs of markets and economy (Cangiani et al., 2019). As Polanyi describes it, such a society is not in a fixed state, but is constantly responding, in a cultural, economic and political sense, to myriad models of organisation as they immerge at local levels. Human relationships and social interaction serve as guiding principles. Polanyi calls the freedom that a society might be exercising 'Social Freedom' (2001, p38).

In search of examples of communities exercising Social Freedom, Polanyi champions unions and workers' cooperatives: 'the independent activity of workers and their advancing self-organization.' (Ibid, p.49) He also gives the example of pre-modern societies as places where we might see 'meaningful actions' upon which we might build a more humane society. Actions, Polanyi maintains, which see 'the maintenance of social ties…as crucial' (Ibid, p. 49).

I contend that in the post-industrial, globalised wasteland of the 'gig economy' (possibly the most disruptive and destructive form of pure market economics so far devised) art might be

a sign post towards the kinds of meaningful actions and ways of simply acting from deep within the human sphere. It might even lead us out of Polyani's 'stark utopia'.

I believe there are ways in which we can identify whether certain forms of art are more, or less, 'dis-embedded' in society than others. These attributes can help us understand if a work is more or less "meaningful" in Polanyi's sense of being deeply connected to the society, to the human-scaled as opposed to industrial, responsive to the local, not the product of free market economics (which I acknowledge is virtually impossible, so ubiquitous is the market's influence). I believe the way of measuring this is to examine the strength (closed, pre-determined), or otherwise, of a conceptual social contract between an audience and a work of art; in which those works of art that have the strongest discernible contract between audience and artist are, paradoxically, the least embedded in the non-market society.

A social contract in art and play

What do I mean when I say that there is a contract between an artist and an audience? Further; what does it mean to say that this contract can be weak or strong? I am using the word 'contract' in this sense as an understanding, a bond, pact or agreement between people. I do not mean the pages of (unread) legalese that (invisibly) attaches itself to the act of buying a ticket to a show. I mean what an audience invests and expects from an artist when agreeing to attend and/or participate in a theatre work, as well as what the artists invest and expect when they invite an audience to experience this work.

You would imagine that a very strong conceptual contract would exist between the artists and audience in a participatory artwork when the audience were going to be the major performers in the show, whereas a less strong contract would exist between and audience and artist where the artists will be on stage for many hours, performing extremely demanding roles, with the audience invisibly sitting 50 or 100 meters away in the dark. I believe the opposite to be true.

Let us take the case of *The Ring Cycle*. What are the elements that make up this contract? On the one side of the ledger we have the audience: each have paid upwards of one thousand dollars for their seat. This seat is situated in The State Theatre, a massive piece of publicly owned infrastructure that cost several hundred million dollars to build and which costs millions more a year to run.[4]

[4] Being refurbished at the time of writing as part of the Arts Centre Melbourne's $240 million-dollar upgrade (ACM Annual Report, 2017/18).

On and around the stage is an approximately one hundred-piece orchestra, an opera chorus of forty, and a cast of internationally renowned opera singers (Opera Australia official program, *The Ring Cycle,* 2016). These people will perform twenty hours of the Wagner's *The Ring Cycle* over four nights. Furthermore, in most cases the audience are already familiar with this work, in some cases intimately. Many may even have seen it before, either live or on film. They may have listened to a recording in the days leading up to the show and they may have read reviews or heard word of mouth testimonials of this particular version of the work. They are not disinterested bystanders; they have arrived with clear expectations. This side of the contract is looking quite hefty. The artists, you can be certain, are intensely aware of these expectations and have invested their reputations and the show's stakeholders' finances in order to fulfil them.

Berlin-based, Australian opera director Barry Kosky, in his Director's Notes for the celebrated production of *The Magic Flute* (made in collaboration with British multimedia company 1927), talked openly about these expectations: 'Everybody knows the music, everyone knows the story, everyone knows the characters… so you start out with some pressure when you undertake this opera' (in Adelaide Festival, Magic Flute Program, 2019).

What we see here is a contract whose terms are absolutely explicit and in which the stakes are high:

> I, the audience member, have invested a large sum of money and my time in the expectation that you (the artists, producers and technicians) will deliver to me an experience as outstanding, but also not too unexpected, as the absolutely idealised one I have running in my head.

Indeed, it might even be argued that the immense expectations around this contract almost guarantee that the artists will be sure to not stray far from the expected and accepted parameters of what Wagner has come to mean in the world of international opera. Every now and then directors like Kosky, Robert Le Page or Peter Sellars will do a reinvention of a major work. Even so, Kosky's *The Magic Flute*, which is hugely entertaining and visually gorgeous, is hardly revolutionary. The production's much-hyped animation elements are no more sophisticated than can be seen at any Fringe Festival.

The Guardian's (2015) review on the Edinburgh Festival production quoted an audience member as saying, 'It's all very interesting, but I prefer the *The Magic Flute* the normal way.' Ironically, one might even argue that this reimagining of the work is almost a double dis-embedding as the work is removed even from those who have found a way in.

There are some elements buried in the detail of this strong contract between the artists and the audience that act as a way of excluding a whole swathe of people from the production,

and in doing so are evidence of the work being dis-embedded in the social relations and the social freedoms that Polanyi highlights. These barriers to embeddedness include: A ticket for just one part of the *Ring* cost over $250. The production of *The Magic Flute*, which the online journal Operawire, in its 2018 review of the work stated: 'If much is debated these days about attracting new audiences to opera, productions like the 1927 *The Magic Flute* have to be the answer', cost me $289. There are also the barriers of convention; the unwritten, but fiercely enforced rules that have grown up around classical music. At *The Magic Flute*, some members of the audience clapped at the point two thirds of the way through the overture, when the music seems to stop and members of the audience who were 'in the know' hissed at their neighbours—thus Kosky's claim that everyone knows this work is turned on its head. Certain people know this work while others, encountering it for the first time, discover there are elements to its social contract that are not instinctual (embedded) and which must be learned; or in some cases, publicly enforced, even at the expense of humiliation.

An open/weak contract vs a closed/strong contract

Ants is a participatory performance work created for families by Australian theatre company Polyglot. The work involves three human sized ants (performed by actors wearing stylized ant suits) who, over a period of thirty minutes, draw an audience into helping them create structures and patterns using soft 'eggs' made from fabric. As the performance plays out, the ants withdraw more and more until they leave the performance site to the families who continue to "perform", often unaware the real performers have left. The work usually continues with greater and greater engagement, until the stage managers gently call it to an end.

I now reference an example of what I feel is a weak (open, under-determined) contract between artist and audience. A family are going shopping and turn a corner into a public square, and discover three human-sized ants rearranging hundreds of ant "eggs" into shapes on the ground (these eggs look and feel a little like round throw-cushions that you might have on a sofa). Furthermore, the kids in this family discover they can actually participate in this activity (performance). There is a gradually building soundtrack that draws more and more children and adults into the public space. The performance builds in such a way that a large audience gathers to watch and then the ants withdraw, and the activity continues with the children now performing the work while the adults look on (Polyglot Theatre, 2015 – 17).

This is a situation, I would argue, where the contract between artist and audience begins as so weak as to be almost non-existent. It begins with the family performing the natural curiosity inherent in humans – which of course the artists exploit by created a work

designed to engage an unsuspecting audience - yet builds to the point where the difference between the artist, the participant and the audience, break down completely.

This work, *Ants*, is a work that I know well: I have directed versions of it in settings in Australia, Poland and the United States. When it works, which is most of the time, the effect on public space is transformational. Almost all other activity in the street/park/mall comes to a halt to watch a group of children perform a work that fifteen minutes earlier they didn't know existed. The weakness of the contract at the start (the audience are unaware that they are even going to see a show; the show is unknown; there is no knowledge of how the work will proceed, nor of its end point) is at least in-part responsible for the effect that this work has on both its audience and the child participants. This weakness is, of course, its openness. Here again a powerful unknowingness. The very lack of definition about what is happening and who might do what creates the agency that allow the general public to write themselves into the show.

This work has characteristics which I would argue meet Polanyi's understanding of embeddedness Perhaps the most important aspect of this embeddedness is the venue—Ants works best when performed in a non-theatrical setting: a shopping centre, public park, town square. Its *public-ness* is crucial to it achieving its participatory agency. This participatory agency is in turn crucial to the actual artwork. For this really is a work that does not exist—cannot actually be performed—unless the audience physically bring it to life. And *this* fact means that each performance is genuinely unique.

Each *Ants* performance is affected by the venue and the surrounding culture: the version in the post-industrial wreck that is Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (a local nightmare, brought on by US steel companies relocating their plants to China and South America and a nightmare that Polanyi predicts) is a very different beast to the version in the main beachside park in Coolangatta, Australia; and again different to the version on the steps of the Palace of Science and Art—sometimes called Stalin's Syringe—in central Warsaw (another political and economic artefact that Polanyi would table as evidence for his thesis).

The general public as the main cast

In this section, I now provide detail about the very rich ways the embeddedness of *Ants* allows an audience to behave (perform) in public. There is a moment that is built carefully into the work when the "audience" move from being slightly interested bystanders with no contractual obligation whatsoever to even stop and watch the artwork, to performing in it.

\For the first few minutes, the Ants quietly build a circular shape from a pile of eggs in the centre of the designated area. They use these up quite quickly and then, with the circular shape unfinished, the Ants quietly look around to see if there are any other eggs. As it happens there are three large piles in view of the audience. The Ants look at the piles but make no move to go to them. They look at the piles and they look at any people who are close to them. There is a perceptible building of tension, especially amongst the children. Some kids even call out: 'There are more over there!' Everyone is waiting. If no-one moves, one Ant may go to a pile and very slowly bring an egg and place it in on the circular shape. The tension becomes unbearable, and inevitably one brave soul, usually a child but occasionally an adult, goes to the pile, takes an egg and places it in the circle. Nine times out of ten the simple movement of this person breaks the tension and a dozen others join in. Soon the space is busy; the rest of the Ants join in and we are away.

It is in this threshold moment in Ants that the participatory work reveals an element that is not present at the Wagner opera. It is in this moment, the moment when a child steps into the void and picks up a crumb, leading to a cascade of other children (individually and collectively) to follow suit, that the work moves from being an act of consumption, of observation, to a communal act, a ritual: the choosing to *create*.

Once again, this is creation written into and from a place of deep unknowing: the audience/participants do not know this work, the first couple of children who break the membrane of audience/artist threshold are often in a state of mild to severe nervous distress in case their act of creation is in error. Yet I have seen this work dozens of times and sooner or later, after two minutes—or seven—someone walks out into that space and the work takes off again. The contract that didn't exist is now being written in real time by the two parties, as they go.

This is a clear demonstration of performance that is in line with Kershaw's memorable phrase: 'of something, not about something' (Kershaw, 2006, pp.77-83). The uncontracted general public proceed to perform a magnificently diverse series of characters in this "play." (I describe some of these characters in a post-script to this chapter.)

These characters did not exist when we made the work. They are written into the work by the audience's participation. This writing into the work by the audience, this moment when

an audience “understands” that there are devices, or ‘characters’, missing in the work and take it upon themselves not just to envision these (utterly crucial), but step into the work and perform these roles, thus *creating* the artwork. The moment these participants cross the threshold from audience to Viveur, the whole situation is brought to life. Everyone can see how much the work is transformed by these new ‘characters’. On most occasions a few others can see that the work needs more characters still and observe a gap in the performance space, and a gap in the shape of the work and they too choose to insert this new character.

Referring back to a concept explored in Chapter One, this public involvement flows in large part as an act of material thinking, of handling materials. The offer of participation is purely physical, purely material. Nothing is required once the realisation is made that individuals simply have to help the Ants move eggs one place to the next. Everything else flows from that.

“What if it doesn't end?” Dramaturgical decisions that create space for participants

There were two crucial dramaturgical decisions during the making of Ants that created the conceptual space for the participating audience. These two moments also underscore the importance of not being too wedded to the original idea of a work, to instead allow yourself to be ambushed by events and to see setbacks as opportunities to explore what you don’t know. Ideas that are investigated more deeply in Chapter One of this thesis.

The original idea for the work (as driven by the artistic director of Polyglot, Susan Giles with a team of designers, musicians and performers) was for a much more elaborate theatrical work. One in which the participating audience had to help the ants find various objects and then work with them to construct a giant nest. As the team began to create complex and increasingly expensive designs for this work Susan became frustrated that the proposed piece was rapidly becoming a ‘hide and seek’ game with a totally expected and centrally directed outcome. Giles recounts in her journal of the process that she was close to abandoning the entire work when a conversation with a producer who was in no way connected to the work led to an exchange that included the phrase: “What if it doesn't end?” (Giles, 2014, p.6) Meaning, what happens if there is no narrative outcome and simply that once the audience is engaged then the “situation” takes over and is completely open-ended? The audience play, then, until the situation is called off.

Figure 3: Indicative Scene, *Ants*. Kids and ant working together. Photo: Ian Pidd.

Figure 4: Indicative Scene, *Ants*. The kids continue the situation even though The Ants have left. Photo: Ian Pidd.

Not only does this open-ended device create space within which the audience become the performers, observers and makers. It has the effect of embedding the work more fully in its social context. As noted above, it is common for the participating young people, and even more common for the adults, to fail to notice the moment when the Ant characters have left the field of the work. The pattern-making and rearranging continues, often until a Stage Manager quietly starts to disrupt the play in order to reset for a later session. Any member of the public encountering the work at this point believes they have come across an elaborate game, or perhaps a particularly anarchic playground, for which they have missed learning the rules. Commonly they stop and look slightly bewildered. “This must be something that people know how to do. Look how confidently even little kids are playing this game.” This bewilderment, quite pointedly, is not the reaction the people bring to the work when the Ants are present. The sense then is, “This is a performance; a show”, which immediately makes it less embedded.

The second key dramaturgical decision happened after this opening-up. Commonly Polyglot conducts exploratory sessions of their new works with groups of children. During the first exploration with the open-ended format, and with prototype Ants, the work kept losing momentum with the kids and Ants becoming caught up in games about the chasing each

other, even melodramas in which the Ants were fierce and potentially dangerous. The minute that director Giles suggested the Ants totally disengage from the kids, to only ever move the eggs around and never accept an egg from a child, the playfulness of the situation moved away from the slightly cartoonish kids-versus-the-Ants trope into something much more intimate and intense, and demonstrably more child-driven. The only allowable interactions for the Ant performers was to give a child an egg and add to a formation that a child has begun.

These two dramaturgical decisions became the bedrock for the work. Both result in space within which the participating audience create their own work.

The multiple characters embodied by a public cast

In *The Radical in Performance* (1999) Kershaw makes a powerful argument for participatory performance having the potential to create radical temporary community responses to complex political problems. Kershaw's arguments are complex, and need not be fully aired here, but the idea I find most useful in the context of this chapter is around a particular excess of meaning that flows when a participant's "character" gets tangled up in a fellow audience's mind with their knowledge of the participant as a member of the community. So, the audience may know the person who is playing a particular role; for instance, their teacher, work colleague, fellow student, mother, car mechanic, etc. This means that no matter what the performance is—an amateur theatre company's stab at Les Miserable, or a large scale community procession—the narratives that stem from the work are likely to be deeply coloured by the narratives an audience already have about the community members on the stage or street. These "excess narratives" are far more likely to flow in participatory works where the audience and the performers may well know each other than in professional performance situations.

Watching an iteration of *Ants* demonstrates this handily. Very few available narratives flow from the professional performing Ants. The actors are utterly anonymous because of their body suits. Even if the actors were visible it is highly unlikely that the audience will know them. *Ants* is most commonly presented as a touring work and rarely in Melbourne where the majority of the Ants actors reside. The narratives that do flow from the Ants are crucial to the success of the work, but they mostly revolve around demonstrating the major task and directing the focus of the event to that task at the exclusion of any other narrative.

The anonymity of the Ants is part of achieving that dramaturgical work. Each child and adult who passes over the threshold and immerses themselves in the play make themselves available to myriad meanings that are well beyond the control of the makers. Participants variously bring their identities as children, parents, siblings, friends, and strangers. They will

also inevitably find themselves projecting narratives around race, gender, disability and class. Even the extent of each participants immersion becomes a narrative point. Are they shy; or is an overprotective parent holding them back? Are they cleverly waiting for an opportunity to open or perhaps disrupt it? I would contend that these excess narratives are further evidence of the embeddedness of the work. The work is not one that is imported into the imaginations of the audience, but in large part flows out of their minds and onto the work itself.

Below is an Appendix that is a lightly edited set of notes taken from a diary entry that I made after the observing several iterations of *Ants*. These iterations took place both in Australia and internationally. It is an illustrative but by no means exhaustive list of some of the "characters" that the participating general public created for themselves. These notes are a useful bridge to the following chapter, which directly addresses the myriad forms of performance that a Performance Studies lens allows us to see in all forms of formal and informal art situations and to the roles we undertake in everyday life.

Appendix
Some common "characters" seen during performances of Ants in Australia and overseas.

- The REALLY Switched-On Child who just gets right into it, moving eggs, building things, initiating new shapes. They often bring more kids along with them. They are not self-conscious; they will fix engineering problems or gaps in the built shapes as they go. Often this child is the first one up. They take care of the little kids, watch what the Ants are doing and have fun.

- The Self-Conscious Kid who is focused on the fact that *they* are doing something, rather than seeing what is being built. Still an excellent person to have in the group, they are nearly as quick as the eager kids to notice a shift in dynamic or in the task. Slightly less likely to look after the little kids.

- The Little Kid who is scared of the Ants, but who walks around doing this and that, solo, quietly enjoying the task. As an Ant comes near, they stop, frown, look away from the Ant, crouch down to make themselves as invisible to the Ants as possible, close their eyes, wait for the Ant to pass and then continue what they are doing.

- The Nerds and Engineering Wonks—often quite young, they move about fixing holes and sorting engineering issues with walls and poor corners. They don't get much involved in actual building or initiating.

- The Small Knot of Disruptive Kids—often a little bit older, they play but play roughly and with a bit of belligerence. The rest of the group puts up with them, but I find them very annoying. They do not notice subtle changes in the task and are slow to see that the thing they are "working on" is no longer the main focus, and that everyone else has moved on. Their disruption often comes from the fact that they insist on carrying as many crumbs as they can, and they ignore what the little kids are carefully building. The best thing about these kids is that they have no stamina and usually lose interest after five or ten minutes, go away.

- The Posse of Stylish Kids—a bit like the disruptive kids, but more self-conscious. They too 'perform' their participation, for each other and (interestingly) for the crowd. They are less disruptive than group mentioned above in that they often do contribute to the main task, but they run over the little kids a bit. Fortunately, they have no stamina either.

- The Kid Who Loves It but Doesn't Actually Get It—they carry crumbs around quite enthusiastically but can't read what is going on, so they put crumbs in wrong places or just hold them while trying to see where something might go. The Switched-On Kids sometimes help them. These kids can inadvertently start something interesting by putting a crumb down in the wrong place at a time when a bunch of other kids are close by with lots of crumbs. This comes as a huge surprise to them and they *still* can't work out what all this local activity is. They are funny.

- Then there are a lot of sub-sets: The kids who just wander around happily without doing much crumb work. Just watching. Sometimes carrying a crumb, but often not.

- The kid who carries a crumb around but really just wants to explore the ants themselves. Can be annoying if they get obsessed with trying to get the ants to take a crumb off them.

- The kid who really loves it but only wants to watch from the side. They truly get it. And don't need to perform in any way to get a huge amount of satisfaction from the thing.

- The adult who just can't help themselves takes two forms. The one who, usually with a child, picks up crumbs and adds to the task. Or the one who starts a crumb fight with their child.

- The really little kid who just potters about for the full half hour doing this and that: sucking on a crumb, dancing to the music, watching the big kids, grinning at their

parents, looking confused, pointing at an ant, pointing at the PA, crying when it finishes.

- The group mind is remarkable. The more random shapes that get made on the ground are so lovely and pleasing on some deep level—they are expressions of nature, of *our* connection to the natural, indeed our connection to the hive/nest mind of ants.

- The group will express certain conservative traits. For instance, if a line starts to stray too far away from the group of parents, either the line starts to bend back, or a branch is made so that the more conservative kids can head back to safety, while the more adventurous can carry on a bit further. On one occasion we tried to get the group to make a wall over the path that ran next to our designated zone. The plan being to disrupt the flow of pedestrian traffic. As the line started to approach the path the frenzied building (a real feature of this iteration—the kids work FAST) began to slow right down and then virtually stopped. An Ant was madly putting crumbs in a line and kids were making holes in the line to let people through. Then the kids bent the line so it ran parallel to the path and then they happily sped up the building and sent it back around into the zone. They just weren't willing to make that disruption. (Though on day two, in our final session at dusk, the group sent a lovely straight line out of our zone, along a nice grassed area where we had tried to get the line to travel but had had limited success. Led by a group of older kids the line zoomed out and took on a defiant energy. As it got further and further away the number of kids contributing dropped off. Eventually, I intervened and turned the line around. It felt bad to do that by it was the right thing to do.)

Chapter Four
The Performance of People and of Objects

> The recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behaviour raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as "performance", or at least all activity carried out with consciousness of itself.
>
> (Carlson, 1996, p. 4-5.)

Chapter Four takes some of the case studies written about in detail in Chapters Two and Three, in particular the promenade work *Passenger* and Polyglot's *Ants*, and Dark Mofo's annual public spectacle and ritual *Ogoh Ogoh* and examines these using the lens of performance studies. Specifically, Richard Schechner's foundational performance studies concept of restored behaviour, sometimes referred to as 'twice behaved behaviour', it asks the following question:

> Can the undoubted power that an audience takes from the "proximity narrative" that flows when an artwork is embedded in the everyday (as explored by the discussion of *Passenger* in Chapter Two) also be understood in relation to performance and performativity?

Subsequently: Can we say that almost all of the people and objects that the audience see out the window of the bus in that show perform actions and narratives that have been "rehearsed"? Are they embodying roles and characters that conform to a predetermined script? Can we say the city itself is performing? Can the same thing be said of the paying audience of *Passenger*, and the participants who tumble unknowingly into a performance of *Ants* (the subject of Chapter Three)? Are they too performing? All of them?

If the answer to these questions is yes—and I argue that it certainly is—can we break down the nature of that performance and its performativity? What is the difference in the performativity of the actors on the bus, who are openly playing characters that have been written for them, and, say, the bus driver who is really just doing his job (albeit in a highly unusual frame)? Similarly, what is the difference between the performance of a band of community musicians in a large scale participatory spectacle and that of the mayor of the council who commissioned the work, and who is sitting on an elevated platform, very much on public view, enjoying the band and making sure she is *seen* to be enjoying it?

While I will be referring back to projects examined in earlier parts of this thesis, much of this chapter centres on the *Ogoh Ogoh* public ritual that closes Dark Mofo in Hobart every year. This event involves the ritual burning of a monstrous effigy within which up to ten thousand

people have deposited fears written on scraps of paper. The highly theatrical and spectacular burning of this creature is proceeded by an arguably even more theatrical procession through the darkened, closed streets of Hobart, during which approximately twenty thousand people run and dance among many large objects, most of which are being carried by the general public who were not expecting to be so central to the event when they turned up on the day. In this event it is arguable that every person—performer, audience, security guard, technician—and every object (including the city itself) is performing. This chapter is anchored around useful definitions from the field of performance studies and provided by Schechner and Marvin Carlson, as well as a dramaturgical instruction about the narrative power of objects from dramatist Anton Chekhov. The chapter also takes account of Baz Kershaw's analysis of the contradictions between the potential freedoms afforded a crowd at large scale participatory spectacle and the extremely hierarchical, disciplining structures that more often than not surround the delivery of such events.

Twice Behaved Behaviour

> Performance studies—as a practice, a theory, an academic discipline—is dynamic, unfinishable. (Schechner, 2013, p. ix.)

As the above quotation makes clear, performance studies is a highly interdisciplinary and at times slippery field. It borrows thinking from theatre studies, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and beyond. The starting point from which performance studies begins its analytical journey might be to say that there are myriad situations in the social and private life of humans in which it is useful, and accurate, to see that the way people and objects are acting and reacting in relationship with each other is a performance. It has in common with a performance that it has been "rehearsed", that there are "roles", that some people in the situation are "performing" and that others are the "audience" (though of course the audience is performing too), and that there are symbolic gestures and shorthand actions and words being used that are familiar to everyone involved. Once you apply this lens to one of the participatory spectacles that are the subject of this thesis, performance is everywhere you look: a large professional and community cast, myriad invested and visible stakeholders, public space theatrically redefined, police and security standing-by, the unsuspecting public nudged into participating. Later in this chapter I analyse the *Ogoh Ogoh* spectacle in detail and easily identify seven different categories of human performers, and a further eight for objects and things that "perform" as part of the event.

For the purposes of this analysis, it is worth asking: what is performance? Schechner offers us a fairly simple working definition. Importantly, it refers to both living things and inanimate objects. These are the modes of behaviour:

> Being: which is existence.
> Doing: is the activity of all that exists, from quarks to sentient beings to supergalactic strings.
> Showing doing: is performing – "Pointing to, underlining and displaying doing."
> Explaining doing: is performance studies.
> (Schechner, 2013, p. 28.)

Schechner also provides some flesh to this definition, later in the same work proposing:

> To treat any object, work, or product "as" performance… means to investigate what the object *(or person)* does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or human beings. Performances exist only as actions, interactions, and relationships. (Ibid, p. 30.)

These relationships are what Carlson is hinting at in his definition at the top of this chapter: 'all human activity could potentially be considered as "performance", or at least all activity carried out with consciousness of itself.' (1996, p. 4-5). This definition makes it possible for us to understand that a human being can perform, individually, in private, for themselves. Amongst this, the many blurred roles that performance studies helps us understand is the foggy division between performer and audience.

Schechner invites us to break the 'showing doing' of performance into sections which he refers to as Restored Behaviours. 'The habits, rituals, and routines of everyday life are restored behaviours.' (2016, p. 35) Actions and gestures which have been learned or rehearsed or culturally implanted and which can be strung together, 'As a film director treats a strip of film.' (Ibid, p. 35.) Of course, humans are not consciously aware of stringing these strips together. At least not always. It would be as unlikely as us inventing words and grammar each time we speak and text and write to each other.

These restored behaviours are a symbolic and loaded shorthand. A shorthand that can be as brief as a wink in a bar, or last as long as an umpire in a five-day test match. Schechner gives us a second definition of restored behaviour as 'Twice behaved behaviour.' (2016, p. 70) In Chapter Five of this thesis I will give an example of a performance which triples and perhaps even quadruples this equation, where it is possible to see that someone has gone from showing doing, to showing-showing doing, to showing-showing-showing doing. The distance from this person simply *being*, to "performing" themselves to an audience has many layers yet it is still very easily decoded by an audience.

For the purposes of this chapter I am also making a distinction between activities that "are" performance and those which can be interpreted "as" performance. Within this distinction certain instances of restored behaviour are understood, in contemporary Australia, to be

performance in the artistic understanding of that word: a play, an event, a show, a piece of theatre, rehearsed, time-limited, a clear action demarked by actors on one side, and observers on another, an audience. This “is” performance. Other restored behaviours and activities that I will examine in this chapter are written about “as” performance. These include truck drivers caught up in processions, technicians working in full view of an audience, audiences crossing from observer to participant in processions, politicians and funding officials observing events that have sanctioned, police and security professionals at large outdoor spectacles.

A script for an unrehearsed performance

Hobart’s Dark Mofo *Ogoh Ogoh* ritual is based on a Balinese year-ending cleansing ritual that involves the procession and burning of a demon animal figure. In what has become the traditional closing event of the midwinter festival, the *Ogoh Ogoh* ritual sees upwards of twenty thousand people process through the city carrying demonised sculpture which has embedded in it the fears of the people of Hobart. The sculpture is then burned in a spectacular ceremony, symbolising the extinguishing of those fears.

The *Ogoh Ogoh* ritual has taken place on the final day of five of the last of Hobart’s Dark Mofo festivals. Dark Mofo is the festival connected to the state’s Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), which has transformed the normally dormant mid-winter period for the city into one that is a busy national and international destination. It would be appropriate to say that for the month of June each year the city becomes the site of a surprisingly loose and hedonistic festival that just ten years ago would have been a performance many felt was beyond the southern capital. As a critic in the Adelaide Review succinctly put it: ‘Visiting Hobart in winter used to be a sure sign of madness. It probably still is, but it is a decidedly stylish version of insanity on display at Dark Mofo.’ (Buxton-Collins, 2019)

Dark Mofo’s *Ogoh Ogoh* ritual is partly based on a Hindu tradition from Bali during which large sculptural demon puppets are paraded through the streets on the day before Ngrupuk parade, which takes place on the eve of Nyepi. Nyepi is a day of silence, cleansing and self-reflection and is a very ancient Hindu tradition. The Ogoh Ogoh parade however is very recent, having begun in the 1980’s as a competitive activity amongst youth clubs held as part of the much more ancient pre-Nyepi parade of Ngrupuk. The purpose of the Ogoh Ogoh is to attract the bad spirits that have accumulated over the preceding year, gathering their energy within the puppets, so that when the puppets are burnt on the edge of town the evil energy is extinguished in the flames.

Even though it is quite a recent ritual, it has been absorbed into the deep mythology of Nyepi and is taken extremely seriously. The master sculptors who lead the teams that create

the large images are treated with a reverence not far from that which attends the shamanic Dalang puppeteers who lead the Javanese Wayung Kulit shadow puppetry tradition. (These are in part the subject of my Honours thesis *From Punk to Punakawan*, Pidd, 2010.)

The *Ogoh Ogoh* ritual at Dark Mofo (which I direct, but which is overseen by Balinese artist/priests Ida Bagus Oka, Ida Bagus (Gus) Antares and Komang Sedana Putra and was initiated by members of Tasmania's Indonesian community in conjunction with the University of Tasmania's Asian Studies department) has simpler, less mythic aims. Over the course of the two weeks of the festival the primary Ogoh Ogoh—a purpose built sculpture based on an endangered Tasmania animal—is displayed in a central location and the public are invited to write their fears on scraps of paper which are then deposited inside the Ogoh Ogoh. This part of the ritual we call The Purging. It is common for ten thousand people to visit the creature in this phase.

On the final day of the festival this Ogoh Ogoh, along with several other large puppets and a number of other parade props (flags, flaming torches, etc.) with a variety of drumming and brass bands, gather at The Winter Feast. This is the centre of the festival's eating and drinking excess, the puppets then parade through the streets of Hobart, accompanied by a large crowd. The sculptures are mounted on platforms made from bamboo and are, on the whole, carried by members of the public. 'Carried' is actually too passive a verb for what these public bearers must do. The Ogoh Ogoh are run, shaken, spun, and skipped down the street, in a performance that is not rehearsed. The majority (though not all) of the bearers are co-opted into position minutes before the procession takes off. This co-opting is done by a "captain" who is rehearsed and understands what is coming.

Figure 5: The crowd carry the Swift Parrot Ogoh Ogoh. Dark Mofo, 2019.

The procession travels through the centre of Hobart towards the docks. The ritual culminates in a noisy fiery conflagration in which the Ogoh Ogoh and the ten thousand fears are incinerated in front of a crowd of twenty thousand people.

I must stress that although the ritual is produced and framed by a team of professional artists, the vast majority of the "theatre" of the event is performed by the general public. Any rehearsal that takes place is logistical, practical, and very deliberately described in un-theatrical terms. It is, however, performance. And the key creative team (apart from the Balinese artist/priests) are artists whose backgrounds and training are in the theatre.

Before analysing the many performance modes seen over the various phases of the *Ogoh Ogoh* ritual I wish to quote from a "script" I prepared two months before the 2017 version of the event. In that year, the Ogoh Ogoh carrying the fears of the people was a fearsome demon Thylacine. This "script" describes the scene in the moments before the procession takes off through the centre of town. In this script the majority of the performers are unrehearsed and unaware of their crucial central role in events. Only the musicians are rehearsed and, even then, only in their musical roles. When it comes to performance they were merely asked to try and stay close together and told their position within the parade elements.

References to Diddier and The Pig (both familiar images from the original Balinese ritual) are to Ogoh Ogoh creatures that are part of the procession but are not burnt. References to The Sirens are to a metal cart draped in a dozen car horns that blast the crowd as it moves down the road.

Pre-Procession:

The key aim of this whole pre-procession is Anti Spectacle. Most of it takes place in public, as the crowd gathers. It should look like several sports teams being made ready for a Grand Final. We'll see and hear people being revved up, bearers and musicians practicing hollered instructions, and call-and-response cues for getting the Ogoh Ogoh down the street. NOT performers about to do a show. Much more physical and overtly practical. But with passion. A ritual.

The Tiger, his bearers (having been dragged from the crowd by the Captain), and the drummers will gather backstage at the Winter Feast. These are the stars and will be hidden from the view of the public, their entrance is the sign that the procession has commenced. But people at The Feast should be able to hear them warming up from over the fence—call-and-response cries from the bearers; the occasional battle tattoo from the drummers.

The Pig and Diddier (in that order), and their bearers (once they have been recruited), will be stationed just in front of the Winter Feast entrance (on the outside of that entrance).

The Sirens will also be gathered here. Behind the Ogoh Ogoh. Every now and again The Sirens making a series of a very short toots – like a posse of very polite, but slightly deranged older drivers letting some others of their tribe know that the lights have changed…

The gathering for the young people to be briefed into making noise with the chang chang instruments will in Parliament lawns. Just get as many people to join in as possible.

The new naughty lady Ogoh Ogoh and the eyeball lanterns and any other stuff that the audience will carry will be on Parliament lawns too.

The Procession:

At 4.55pm (on my cue) we stand EVERYONE by. Those backstage, at the Feast Entrance, Parliament Gardens. At this cue the kids' Chang Chang group get into "formation."

> At 5.00 The Drummers begin, the Tiger is hoisted. The gate that lets the procession enter the back of the feast opens and the Drummers and The Tiger (in that order) begin to make their way down the Winter Feast road.
>
> As soon as the Drummers are moving, the entrance Ogoh Ogoh and The Sirens get up and ready.
>
> Drummers and Tiger pass through the entrance, pass the Ohoh Ogoh and The Sirens, who then join them as they make their way down the street.
>
> The Kids' Chang Chang, eyeballs and the new cheeky Ogoh Ogoh join onto the back of The Sirens… And we are away. (Pidd, 2017)

When I distributed this "script" to the key creative team a few members became very agitated. Their reaction stemming from a feeling that I simply wanted to "Put on a show." "We may as well do a….Play…." With *play* said pejoratively. I well understood their squeamishness but in truth what I describe above is almost exactly what happened. I felt certain that given the structure we were creating for the crowd, the majority would "perform" this work without any need for instruction or rehearsal. The script was never mentioned again, but the sceptics in the team were happy with the outcome. As was I.

I suppose what was lost in translation is that in my florid prose, I was merely describing what I imagined would actually happen. In realtime. Not a rehearsed "play" of the preparations for a procession, but what a large group of people would be like when readying themselves for a huge procession: caught up in the moment, very much in public, effortlessly falling into the restored behaviour of humans, suddenly, unexpectedly plunged into the centre of a large-scale public ritual. And so it came to pass.

Below is an extract from my Director's Notes written the day after the event.

> Well that was pretty good. No pretence at a performance. No hiding that we were simply getting those wonderful Ogoh Ogoh down the street with as much energy and flare as possible. But no hiding the strings attached—the shouted instructions to the improvised teams, the hand signals and loud hailers, the nervous security amidst the chaos, walkie talkies blaring... So, much more like teams at a grand final than a corps de ballet.
>
> The procession is a ripper. We are really nailing that now. The streets fill up (more than 15,000 people…) and folks dance and holler and whistle and clap. The extent of the physical task of those carrying the Thylacine is genuinely honoured by the crowd. Franco brought a team of forty drummers who grew in energy and precision as the parade progressed. The Siren car horn installation was obnoxiously loud and funny with the

> distilled intensity of a Denpasar traffic jam. The streets of Hobart truly transform—a wonderful feeling of chaotic abandon. Even the way that the crowds part when I beseech them with my loud hailer to make space for the Tiger is somehow an act of freedom… a collaboration with a spiritual work, that has a clear physical aspect… by which I mean that everyone can see what they need to do with their bodies in order to participate.

There is much in common here with the physical invitation of *Ants*, discussed in Chapter Three. The invitation to participate is extremely clear and obvious. This is truer now after five years. The audience know what to do. Unlike *Ants* (and in what might perhaps be seen as contradiction of one of my conclusions from that chapter), the contract between the artists and the audience in this work is strong. This is evidenced by the ten thousand or so fears that have been placed inside the Ogoh Ogoh. If the procession has fifteen thousand people in it, up to two-thirds of those people have a physical and psychological investment in the ritual. Here is another embeddedness. Not an embeddedness in the everyday (as we saw in *Passenger*) but in embeddedness in something potentially mythic, possibly transformative.

A loose hierarchy of types of performance for humans and objects

Below is a list of seven reasonably distinct types of performance for humans and a further eight performance modes for objects, as observed in the 2017 *Ogoh Ogoh* procession and burning ritual. Although these are specific to that event, these categories are easily discernible in most of the types of participatory spectacle under examination in this thesis. Several of these prove particularly interesting and I examine each in greater detail later in the chapter. They are listed loosely in an order from the most overtly interpreted as performance, to the most subtle.

Performance modes of humans:

1: Paid professional actors undertaking "performance" in the theatrical understanding of that term. Trained actors, performing fully rehearsed characters based on scripted scenarios. Only the operators of the Siren car horn installation are performing in this mode. This was a small team of actors, who I rehearsed into a series of moves as they raced the extremely loud cart through the crowd. These actors had costumes and make up and were one of the very few groups who were paid for their participation.

2: Professional and community musicians. The procession section of the *Ogoh Ogoh* project is fuelled by an exuberant brass band, a samba drumming band, and a loose collection of the general public "playing" Balinese brass cymbals. Musicians are performing, and a musical concert is called a performance, but it is rare for a musician to

have to play a character other than themselves. Yet all musicians, to a greater or lesser extent, have a stage persona with which this particular twice behaved behaviour is played out.

3: Technical staff involved in the logistics of the shows. We almost never hide our lighting, sound and stage management crew. And I do rehearse them, or at the very least give them notes. There are three rules: 1) Do your task efficiently and with focus. 2) When you are not directly engaged in your job, look to where the focus of the show is. In other words, look at what it is clear the audience is looking at. 3) Remain in this mode from the second the audience is entering the area of the performance until the last person has left.

4: Crane drivers, truck drivers, riggers etc. (The *Ogoh Ogoh* burning ritual almost always involves a crane which lifts the sculpture into position for its final incineration. A lift that happens in full view of the audience and has a carefully composed soundtrack.) These are professional community members engaged to provide essential non-arts logistical support for the show. These people DO get rehearsed, but they would never see it as a rehearsal. Simply a careful logistical run-through of the physical task required for the "show." I always stress to these "performers" that they are not required to perform in any way. That they are to simply go about the task that has been "rehearsed" and *only* do that task. They get the same further instruction as the technical crew: when not engaged in your assigned activity to please turn your attention to what the audience is focused on, and to not look at the audience too much. I will analyse the crane drivers in detail later in this chapter.

5: The fully aware participating public who cross the threshold from audience to public cast. Most notably these are the people who find themselves carrying the Ogoh Ogoh. But gradually, as the intensity of the procession builds, many members of the general public start to dance and jump and call out. We encourage this participation by always referring to the even being a procession as opposed to a parade. A procession of all of us, down the street to the site of the Burning.

6: The public officials who perform civic functions during these spectacles. Most notably the police and security staff, but also traffic wardens, first aid officers, parade marshals. Their function is of support to the "show", but their performance underlines the exceptional nature of what is going on. And some have an amplifying or dampening effect to the participating audience. Especially the police and security. We spend a long time with Security before the procession to try to curb their instincts to limit misrule. Many of the security guards REALLY struggle with this. They are being asked to perform against type. Our instruction to them is that if it is safe and legal, we are happy to let almost any behaviour go. The threshold they find the most difficult to cipher is when a

member of the audience (category 5) crosses from passive watcher to active participant. Leaping onto the road and in front of an image. Or offering to help carry a sculpture half-way along the procession route.

7: The stakeholders that were written about in Chapter One—the Mayors, councillors, politicians, funding and sponsorship representatives, have a duty to show up and support the event, and must be seen to enjoy the work (even if they would rather be at home) and encourage the artists. In the case of the politicians they are often asked by the media to talk about the event and its aims. These people will sometimes even perform a proprietorial, almost authorial role in the aftermath. Especially if it has gone well. More often than not this plays out in personally accepting the thanks of the crowd and other stakeholders.

8: The general public who walk into the path of the work and immediately take on the role of outsider, of the uninitiated. Their performance is totally framed by the dramaturgy of the ritual even though they themselves are likely to be unaware of that dramaturgy. These people can transform their performance into that of the aware public participants by dropping into the crowd and joining in.

As with the human performance noted above, the objects "performance" falls along a line from objects that have clearly been constructed and designed for the *Ogoh Ogoh* ritual, to things that are simply there and will be forever whether the ritual is there or not. Like the weather.

Performance modes for objects and places:

1: Objects that have been designed and constructed for something that IS a creative performance. This includes all the Ogoh Ogoh sculptures and all the processional props.

2: Existing objects that have been incorporated into a performance, but which are "cast" as themselves. This most obviously includes the crane. It's a crane and is doing crane performance. But it is a crane performance specifically designed for this show.

3: The immediate site of the performance. The closed streets that host the procession and the disused industrial park near the Hobart docks that hosts the burning. The streets in particular are very interesting. They are main roads in the city. Most of the audience will have passed through them perhaps thousands of times. Yet there are three elements that allow them to perform freshly for this audience. One is that their usual civic function has been subverted by them being

closed to traffic allowing the audience to flood onto them. This is underlined even more by the second element which is that most of the roads we use are one-way streets and the procession travels in the opposite direction to their usual functioning. The third element is the spectacle and noise of the procession itself. None of these effects would be as strong without the other backing them up.

4: Objects that undertake a civic function at these spectacles. Such as first aid ambulances and fire trucks, temporary toilet blocks and temporary fencing.

5: The area that the public use to gain access to the event. Often these streets are closed or traffic controlled and become sites of anticipated excitement. They have no performance function in the main event perse, but by dint of them funnelling the crowd towards the main sites are lifted out of their usual roles. The "crackle" of the proximate performance, and the hint at coming subversion has lifted these zones into a performance mode.

6: The whole cityscapes and skyline. The *Ogoh Ogoh* procession and burning has become so large that parts of the city well away from the event itself become subject to the narrative of the project. For a period, normal civic and commercial operations are disrupted. But the city and skyline performances become most apparent when photos and videos emerge with the city a backdrop to the spectacle.

7: The sky. We deliberately undertake this even at dusk. The procession begins in daylight, it takes forty minutes to get through to the Burning site. By the time we are there it is almost dark. There is ten minutes of preparation, and by the time the Ogoh Ogoh is torched it is fully dark. The beautiful lighting cross-fade cannot be performed on this scale with theatrical lighting.

8: The weather. In the lead-up to a large event the weather app of all the main creatives and stakeholders of an event are running hot. There is nothing one can do about the weather, but obviously if a large rain event or strong winds are forecast this has an effect on the logistics. However, in my experience, rain makes for a fantastic atmosphere at events. And if we take Schechner's definition of performance as 'existing only as actions, interactions, and relationships,' (2013, p. 30) then the weather is a major player on an event stage.

The performance of these category 1 objects is signalled and mediated by the hand of the creating artist and the utility of the object is circumscribed in the sense that, say, an

audience will fully invest in a prop gun's ability to threaten a character on stage, whilst also feel confident that the gun is not real and therefore they are safe to remain in the theatre.

Even though this chapter has taken performance studies as a theoretical lens, the effect I am describing is directly linked to the central thesis of this work. It is the unknown, provisional, under-determined nature of the structural theatre making that creates the space within which the people and the objects perform their 'twice behaved behaviour." (Schechner, 2016, p.70) The *Ogoh Ogoh* project has a deliberate Hobart city-sized space left blank by the artists, and into this space the real City of Hobart performs; unrehearsed by the artists. It does so by using a twice behaved behaviour that it uses all the time, but within the context of the *Ogoh Ogoh* project those restored behaviours take on fresh meaning. They may be twice behaved behaviours but within the context of the spectacle their meanings are most definitely bespoke and individualised, absolutely specific to this context and not generic at all.

Crane drivers doing the heavy lifting

It is worth examining the role of the crane operators in more detail because the "performance" that we want them to do for us was identical to the task that they undertake on a daily basis as workers. Indeed, during the period of work that I am about to describe the crane crew we were "rehearsing" with was within two blocks of a large construction project, at which the same crane company had a very similar crane doing a very similar thing; that is, lifting heavy objects into high positions, and doing so as safely and efficiently as possible. In this case the nature of these two kinds of twice behaved behaviour is very clear.

The crane operators bring great expertise in lifting the Ogoh Ogoh into its final burning position. The scale of our image-making dictates that we cannot use humans to get the object where it needs to be. As noted above, the crane crews twice behaved behaviour, their default mode, is to look at an object, find out where it needs to be lifted to, work out the best, safest way to get that done and action it. In our spectacles we need these operators to undertake that very utilitarian function. Though we are conscious of the fact that they will do this in full-view of our audience; indeed, in what we would call the hottest of hot spots on that "stage."

Our usual first meeting with these crane professionals is typically at a rehearsal in which we have all of the objects and attempt to work out the logistics of getting the Ogoh Ogoh into its final resting place. Commonly they inform us very early at this rehearsal that what we are hoping to do with the objects can't be done in the way that we want it to be done. It is deemed either unsafe or will take too long—but it *can* be done another way. In their minds

they are playing out the “performance” and can see (because these kind of performances are something they do all the time) that it will not be successful. We then talk to the operators about what we need the whole lift to *look* like: how it must be performed; where we want the crane to be in relation to the Ogoh Ogoh, as well as in relation to the audience; how we would like it to enter (stage left) and at what pace; what the cue will be that triggers the various movements that make up the lift.

These instructions, if viewed through Schechner’s behaviour lens are starting to look like thrice behaved behaviours, possibly more: the crane operators are performing their real expertise; they interpreting that expertise with a layer to make it a real performance; they are ‘on show’ in a way that makes them both slightly uncomfortable but also they revel in their expertise. What is interesting is that the precision that we ask for, and the preparation that we use, is actually not far removed from what happens on a building site. The operating panel of the crane, not unlike that of a sound or lighting desk in the theatre, is perfectly calibrated for the performance task. During rehearsal the operator dials in the speed, angle and precise starting and stopping positions of the task. We put the cues for starting and finishing points of the tasks into the plot sheet and they are called by the Stage Manager in exactly the same way as the lights, sound and performers’ entrance cues are called. The world of performance meets the world of industrial choreography very neatly.

In looking at the various roles and performances in the works we are examining, there is a particularly rich dynamic flowing to-and-fro between the performance of a genuine work of the theatre—a work of *poiesis,* as Clifford Geertz defines it—and the kind of “performance” that is termed thus as a “drama analogy in social science .” (Geetrz, 1983, p. 26)

It is fairly easy to make a distinction between those who are consciously, deliberately “performing” in the “play”, those others who are “performing” in some official or technical function, and those who are “performing” as the audience (with the various clapping and focus functions that the role implies.) As I highlight above, the crane drivers and riggers in the *Ogoh Ogoh* project are critical to the *real* theatre of the event and have been rehearsed (twice behaved); yet I can guarantee that if you asked them if they were performers in the show they probably quite forcefully say: “no, I was just doing my job.” For them the show consists of what was happening around them, the fact that they were in the centre of that stage, and at times the only humans visible to the audience, is still not interpreted by these operators as “performing” in the show.

However, in the *Ogoh Ogoh* ritual there are no other perceived “performers” than the technicians and the crane operators. They *are* the human element of the show. The dramaturgy of the work hinges upon the choreography achieved by the crane movement. I even employ the word ‘choreography’ when rehearsing the lift, usually three days before the event. The fact that the choreography mirrors that of the lifting of a slab of concrete on

the building of the new Hobart Hospital, an industrial dance visible to us from the *Ogoh Ogoh* performance site (the owner of the crane we used proudly pointing out that that hospital crane is one of is too) merely confirms Levebre's 'immediate and mediating levelling' capacity of the everyday. (Lefebvre in Johnstone 2008, pp. 31–32.)

Objects with dramaturgical power

A well-known quotation from Anton Chekov states: 'If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off. If it's not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there.' (Valentine, 1987, p. 38) or the most part, this quotation is used to explain the importance of setting up drama when creating narrative. In the context of this chapter, however, I am interested in exploring the fact that Chekov acknowledges the gun is performing for the audience. It is not something passive, but has a two-way relationship with the audience and a momentum of its own in the work. The gun, through its performance, serves a strong dramaturgical function.

At the 2019 *Ogoh Ogoh* burning there was a nice moment where a series of objects performed a very clean dramaturgical function, a narrative function, in front of a big crowd. In that year the Ogoh Ogoh sculpture was a fairly fearsome effigy of a Swift Parrot. The Ogoh Ogoh had been gathering performance momentum over the two weeks of the festival as people wrote their fears on scraps of paper and placed them inside the beast.

As the audience enter the large area in which the burning will take place, the major thing they notice is the large wooden tree with red draped foliage. There is an oversized nest placed centrally on a bough in the tree—an empty nest. This nest is operating in the way of 'Chekhov's gun.' There is no way the nest will remain empty. The tree is performing. We have been processing through the streets in deep dusk and by the time we all reach the burning site it is fully dark. We have lit the tree with very carefully focused light. There is a massive, sub-bass drone emanating from the speaker stacks. The audience press forward to the crowd barriers that keep the tree within a fifty-metre exclusion zone. The Parrot is hard to spot now, surrounded by the crowd and not in light. Once the entire crowd is into the site (and after a few smallish performance distractions) the Swift Parrot is brought into the exclusion zone, now lit by a 2,000 Watt follow spot of its own. It is presented to the crowd and then placed carefully, full of potential, on a platform to the right of the tree and is still.

The audience has no trouble working out the bird will be getting into that nest—and almost certainly will be burnt. In the stillness of this image you can see this realisation dawning on their faces. Then, very slowly the darkened boom of an eighty-ton crane swings into view. We have used the misdirection of the lights, the tree, the Parrot to virtually hide the very large crane. Within seconds of noticing the crane the audience stir, some grin, others laugh

and there is a little applause. The objects have eloquently communicated the drama. It sounds obvious, and it is, but is no less profound for all of that.

Is an execution any less dramatic or awful for the mute presence of the gallows, the hangman and the condemned? And, not unlike the execution, the drama will only be increased by how long it takes for it to play out. This remained true for the *Ogoh Ogoh* ritual. The crane boom entered slowly and the hook was lowered on a wire. Riggers connected the sculpture and took up the slack. The bird ever so slightly raised on its platform before stopping, waiting, and then rising slowly again into the air. All of the while this action was accompanied by a heroic soundtrack.

The bird flew high, and was rather simply settled into its nest with much applause from the audience. The creature was "performing" its destiny and was then burnt spectacularly. In truth, the performers were the bird, the tree and the crane; none of them puppets in the accepted sense of the word, with only the crane capable of movement. Though the crane was the least lyrical of the objects and the most purely utilitarian, it was still no less eloquent for it. It was the flux, this mediating element, with in its wonderful momentum, fluidity and precision, added a sense that The Parrot had no way of escaping its fate.

Performance or manipulation?

Once again there are ethical considerations here. There is a deep contradiction in the fact that, as my "script" makes very clear, the space that we leave for the audience to write themselves into is mediated by a suggestive and hierarchical superstructure. This is partly enforced and enabled by the presence of uniformed security guards. As Baz Kershaw points out in his analysis of what he calls 'an aesthetic of total immersion' (1999, p. 194), those 'aesthetics deal so obviously and directly in the dynamics of coercion, control, cohesion and collective power…' in which all participants – but most particularly the creating artists must be hyperaware of 'who is empowering whom for what.' (Ibid.)

I cannot hope to claim that the *Ogoh Ogoh* spectacle in any way resolved these contradictions. I do not think they can be resolved, though I assert that the liminal aspects of the ritual—the closed streets, the opposite flow, the hijacking of the commercial civic imperative—at least allow for the possibility of a temporary subversion. In making this work, we make no claims of empowerment beyond an open call to participation, with an extremely low bar to exclusion.

Figure 6: *Ogoh Ogoh*, 2019. Note the crane drivers in red overalls. Photo: Alex Podger.

Figure 7: *Ogoh Ogoh*, 2019. Photo: Alex Podger.

Chapter Five
The limits of participation

What can participatory projects REALLY achieve in community contexts?

This final chapter offers a parallel perspective on this topic, away from the mechanics of participation (though the mechanics feature) to look at the gap between what participatory practice sometimes claims it can achieve compared to what actually takes place. These are issues at the heart of Claire Bishop's book *Artificial Hells* (2012.) Bishop's work on the effectiveness of participatory and socially engaged practice is the primary lens for this chapter.

The case study for this section is a large-scale participatory project that took place in a small town in regional Victoria called *Dookie Earthed*. The project was one of several funded as part of Regional Arts Victoria's Small Town Transformations program. *Dookie Earthed* used embeddedness and conceptual space in a way that is slightly different to the examples of *Ants* and *Passenger* from Chapters Two and Three respectively, and from the *Ogoh Ogoh* project examined in the previous chapter.

The project was entirely embedded in the lived reality of the participating public, as opposed to embedding an original fictional artwork into the existing everyday as was most obviously the case with *Passenger*. Similarly though, the conceptual space which the participants were invited to occupy was not one in which new narratives were written (as in *Ants*) but one in which the participating community were given permission, alongside the tools, to explore existing narratives from their own lives and histories. Thus, it was something closer to a kind of documentary or social history project (albeit a highly theatrical, often comedic one) than a fictional participatory artwork.

Perhaps more importantly, this chapter raises difficult questions about such an approach. Many of these questions flow from the fact that the project was a large-scale, one-off event with a very small community, unused to working in a participatory way, and one in which the funding body had asked the artists to attempt to create outcomes beyond creating artworks. The problem is there in the title: 'Small Town Transformations.' How much transformation can one reasonably expect to achieve in a once-off arts project?

In Claire Bishop's introduction to her Documents Of Contemporary Art compilation *Participation* (2017) she notes that many of the artists that have explored participatory art making have done so out of a desire to bring about social change: to create societies that are more democratic, more just, more egalitarian. She identifies three motivations that have been at the heart of the turn towards participatory art making since the 1960s.

‘Activation; authorship; community” (Ibid, p. 12). Of these it is activation that is the most overtly political and cited as having the most potential as a catalyst for progressive change.

> Activation concerns the desire to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation. The hope is that the newly-emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality. (Ibid.)

In *Artificial Hells* Bishop is highly critical of participatory projects that lay claim to being able to achieve these effects in community settings, but in which there is no evidence that such effects have actually occurred. Bishop wryly notes the way that many artists claiming a progressive or even radical agenda buy into government policy aims about the kind of outcomes that the work might be able to achieve. As Bishop sceptically notes, a report to the British government from the artist and researcher Francoise Matarasso, which offers “proof” that participatory arts projects, ‘reduces isolation by helping people to make friends, develop community networks and sociability, helps offenders and victims address issues of crime, contributes to people’s employability, encourages people to accept risk positively, and helps transform the image of public bodies’ (Bishop, 2012, p. 14).

Matarasso is a genuinely interesting and realistic artist and writer, who is a great champion of open ended creative processes. His blog post “A Dead Good Life” (Matarasso, 2020) is a description of a community process in which a group set out to make a theatre work and finished up making a film.

In my experience, Bishop is correct to be sceptical of these kind of open-ended statements. As I highlight in Chapter One, governments and arts funders large and small are awakened to the potential for participatory projects to engage marginal communities, and increasing amounts of arts funding have been set aside for such projects. It is common for funders in this realm to ask artists what they intend to achieve beyond the creation of an artwork. The Australia Council of the Arts “Community Arts and Cultural Development Grant” guidelines ask, among other criteria that projects demonstrate how the work ‘will increase the capacity and skills of the communities and how this will lead to the communities being able to continue their artistic and cultural development after the completion of the project’ (Australia Council of the Arts, n.d.).

Consequently, in recent years there has been a blossoming of socially engaged arts projects with “marginalised” or “at risk” communities. There is a precinct of housing commission flats embedded in the $1.5 Million terraces of Fitzroy, in inner Melbourne, which has hosted dozens of participatory projects over the last ten years. I’ve completed two myself. Each of these projects will have been the subject of funding proposals, which would have had several written pages of desired outcomes similar to Mattasorro’s breathless list. The list is

likely to have been repeated and addressed on post-project acquittals. However, the fact that these communities have multiple projects over multiple years that often claim to be helping to fix the same problems again and again points to a definite problem with the projects stated aims. My argument is not that these projects should be defunded, but rather that we question certain expectations.

Bishop makes a forceful argument that too much socially engaged practice actually seems to fulfil a deeply somewhat conservative agenda that suggests that the task of coping with the alienation engendered by capitalism the responsibility of suffering communities themselves. Cultural theorist Paola Merli articulates that, 'none of these outcomes will change or even raise consciousness of the structural conditions of people's daily existence, it will only help people accept them' (in Bishop, 2012 p. 14).

Personally, I feel that Merli's argument is harsh on artists. Short of bringing about lasting structural change the same criticism can be levelled at teachers, doctors, social workers, politicians—anyone working for a change in people's lives that is not revolutionary. It is also arguable that communities have agency in regard to these works. No-one is forced to participate in an artwork. And in my experience poorly designed and badly executed participatory works, particularly in "troubled" communities, get very little traction and even fewer invitations to return.

In the context of this thesis (and my own work as a participatory artist) I am not arguing against the funding or undertaking of these projects. I am simply emphasising the importance of realistic outcomes for such projects. Here, I think it is useful to acknowledge the 'mission creep' that Mammalian Diving Reflex's director Darren O'Donnell pointed out in his 2016 keynote address to the Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM) in Brisbane. In his talk, he pointed out that by reading some grant applications for socially engaged participatory works one could be forgiven for thinking that the project was for a team of psychologists and social workers to go in to a community and stage a crisis intervention, rather than for artists to work with the community to make an artwork (O'Donnell, 2016).

I also note that well-to-do communities are showered with well-funded, well-executed creative projects, some of them participatory and socially engaged, but with no expectations other than the project be entertaining (be that funny or moving), perhaps beautiful, possibly inspirational and, tellingly, proof of that community's well-to-do-ness.

The case study I wish to analyse here is one which the artwork was extremely well received, by both the people of the town and the visiting public. It was a work in which the participatory mechanics of openness and embeddedness in both the creation and content of the works was observed, but *Dookie Earthed* had symptoms of the problems outlined

above. Especially in regard to over promising what could be delivered, particularly around the legacy of the project.

Can an arts project "transform" a "struggling" town?

> Dookie Earthed was a multi-arts, socially engaged project from 2015/16. It took place in Dookie, a town of 300 people in far northern Victoria. The various projects saw more than 50% of those 300 people engaged in one or more of the artworks. Dookie Earthed culminated in a single day and night of activity around the town and the district, with audience numbers of over 7000. The project was part of Regional Arts Victoria's Small Town Transformation program which saw 6 regional Victorian town receive one-off grants of $350,000. (Regional Arts Victoria. 2020 a.d.)

Regional communities in Australia have quite generously funded creative and cultural programs targeted at them, almost all of which have criteria that go beyond the purely artistic. Australia has an almost unique class of "disadvantaged" community, defined as anyone who lives outside the major cities. That these communities are marginal, or disadvantaged, in the first place is surely open to question—though there most certainly is regional-based marginality—especially in Indigenous communities and some areas with chronic lack of employment through post-industrial dislocation, agricultural automation and environmental degradation.

Over many decades state and federal governments have allocated funds and created policies aimed at addressing 'disadvantage' as defined by distance from the major cities. Two of the regionally targeted federal funds are The Regional Arts Fund, and Festivals Australia. The Festivals Australia website states: 'Regional artists, arts workers, and organisations can apply for arts and cultural projects that encourage community participation and audience engagement from people living in regional and remote communities in a festival or community celebration.' (Festivals Australia, 2020)

As well as these federal programs, administered by the federal government, each of the Australian states has a series of regional cultural programs too. One of the most generous of these regionally targeted funding streams was Regional Arts Victoria's aforementioned Small Town Transformations program, which ran between 2015 and 2019. (Regional Arts Victoria, 2020) As part of this initiative several small towns across the state were awarded $350,000 (increased to $400,000 in the second of two rounds) towards creating significant artworks that celebrated the town in some way, and which were site specific and locally driven. To be eligible, a town must have had a population of less than two thousand and demonstrate they had an original arts project that addressed a local need for transformation. As the website declared, in almost Matarasorian rhetoric: 'Creativity and

collaboration have the power to transform – they enrich people's lives, strengthen community connections, increase economic possibilities and provide opportunities for greater access and inclusion for everyone.' (Ibid, 2020)

Dookie, a small town in northern central Victoria was successful in securing one of these grants. The town, with a population of less than four hundred people, has for thousands of years had an economy based around a micro geological feature that saw the indigenous population trade stones for tools throughout mainland Australia and which has allowed for a highly fertile soil allowing canola seed farms and vineyards to flourish.

The project, *Dookie Earthed*, proposed that local (non-professional) artists and the general community of Dookie would create a series of artworks that would culminate in a single day and night event celebrating the towns cultural, geographic and geological heritage. The transformational aspect was aimed at establishing the tiny local hall and the local quarry as regular performance venues and thus give a boost to the town's social amenity and to tourism (Dookie Arts Council, 2015).

The whole Dookie project became problematic after a split occurred within the organising group about the delivery of the project, and after a number of locals criticised taxpayer expenditure on cultural activity. I heard someone in the front bar of the town's only hotel suggest that the most transformational way he could think of to spend $350,000 would be to buy himself a new canola seed harvester.

These ructions caused the local artists who had written the original application to lose confidence in the project. A small group of outside artists, including myself, were brought into the project by Regional Arts Victoria in an attempt to find a way to bring the project to fruition, and especially to find a bridge between the project and the "non-arts" community.

Over a month of working closely with the original artists, and after a series of conversations with as many locals as possible (including the jaundiced farmers in the pub), a series of new projects began to take shape that were generally agreed to be relevant and achievable. All the projects were seeded using the original provocation—the geology, the soil, the way the district is so geologically and geographically distinct from the rest of the area (and most of the rest of the country).

Though, the new *Dookie Earthed* was a distinctly different set of projects. There were a lot more smaller scale projects than the original proposal, across a much wider range of genres: shadow puppetry, animation, a series of science-based installations and performances. The projects featured lots of participation, including explicit communications for ways that locals could contribute in non-arts ways; the project needed a great deal of technical expertise,

vehicle and accommodation support, and there were projects that needed heavy machinery.

Much of *Dookie Earthed* was centred on and around the Dookie Quarry. This was an abandoned basalt quarry that supplied bluestone to Melbourne for a century and within which is laid bare the irrefutable evidence of the genuinely mind-boggling seismic events that led to the district's unique geological footprint. For a series of theatrical events for a night in the quarry the outside artists brought theatrical expertise. The evening featured large-scale projections, shadow puppetry, animation and a professionally-prepared series of soundtracks and audio works, all in the service of allowing the locals to tell their local stories. Below I will outline two aspects of the processes we used to prepare and present these stories are relevant to this thesis. While these techniques certainly worked in terms of creating an event that both the locals and visitors felt was a great success, they also contributed to my eventual misgivings about the project's legacies. Especially as those legacies pertain to Bishop's exhortation to artists to create projects that champion the participating public's authorship and activation. (2017, p. 12)

One technique was that we tried to bring a mythic quality to our storytelling. By this, I mean that whether we were referencing the story of the geology, the stories of the local Indigenous population (who were drawn to the area for much the same geological and geographic reasons as the settler community), or the stories of the settler community themselves, we attempted to bring a simple, epic narrative to bear. As though telling foundational stories, stories that were instructive and somehow inevitable. Often told comically or even in a cartoon fashion. They were sometimes told as fragments, as if the details were lost to time. In curating the stories, we pounced on 'tall-tales': exaggerations, scurrilous rumours and playful local arguments on the details of events. In transferring these stories for the quarry event, we scaled every image up. Many characters, whether rendered as drawn or photographed projections, or shadow puppetry characters, were twenty or thirty meters tall. These co-existed with the soundtrack and voices, which were amplified by a very large sound system and the cathedral-like acoustics of the quarry itself.

The second technique we decided was useful was that as much as possible, we had the locals tell their own stories, or the very least each story was narrated by someone who had some kind of genuine connection to it. Three examples illustrate this.

1: We had a local geologist lead a series of talks and walks through the quarry describing what could be seen and how it came to be there.

2: We had a local family, the mother and father of which are academic scientists, host a Live Art happening that involved citizen scientists probing the landscape and bringing

natural and manufactured objects to the family's perusal for (sometimes completely bogus) analysis.

3: The very local stories told in the quarry, though as noted above dramatized via shadow puppetry, animation or live performance, were narrated in real time by the actual people who were the subjects of the story.

Thus, in the terms defined in this thesis, there was a real embeddedness to each story. No person was asked to "perform" a character or story that was not known to them. More often than not a story was being told within a short physical distance of where the real (or at least the near universally misremembered) events took place. This is not the embeddedness of *Passenger* in which a fictional artwork achieves a kind of embeddedness by being submerged in the everyday, helped in this emersion by the use of various theatrical devices and the proximity narrative (See Chapter Three). Instead, this is taking stories about events and people which are already deeply embedded in the physical and cultural landscape and reframing them in a way that dials them up to sit between Schechner's definition of things that 'are performance' and can be interpreted 'as performance' (2013, p. 38).

Perhaps here I am talking about conceptual space and openness in a different way to most of the other examples in this thesis. Here I am focusing less on an idea of space left empty for a participating public to write themselves (or each other) into, and more about giving permission to occupy an already available space—a space understood by the participating public as already *theirs*. When I say 'available to the participating public', I mean both the community members who "performed" these stories and perhaps half of the audience as well, because in most cases the stories told were known, at least partially, to all. (The example of Queenstown public collaborating on *The Rumble* from Chapter One is also much closer to this kind of embeddedness and space.)

The emotional centre piece of these stories involved a prominent local family—mum, dad and 10-year-old son—proper multigenerational locals. They were well-known in Dookie, and even further afield. They were eccentric, generous, gregarious, but also a little reserved. In the weeks leading up to the event I worked with this family and identified six short stories that fitted the format of the Quarry show: short, foundational moments from the family's history, but not necessarily entirely true.

On the evening, the family stood, well lit, on an elevated dirt stage, front and centre for all the crowd to see. Here they told stories of their family life directly into a single microphone. While these stories were based in truth, they had been scripted and were littered with embellishments and exaggerations that accompany most families well-worn stories. In the many informal 'rehearsals', I had asked the three of them to not act them out in any way

but to treat the occasion as if they were performing a radio play. I even asked them to read the stories from scripts to try to keep them from acting the stories out too much. At the same time as the audience were seeing and hearing them speak, shadow puppetry versions of the family (and the other characters in the stories, which include an unruly dog and an army tank) “performed” behind them on the high on the walls of the quarry.

The quality of Schechner’s twice behaved behaviour of this family in the quarry that night is extended out by several layers. A large number of the audience knew the majority of the stories we chose to tell about this family, and even larger number at least knew the family and some of their history and circumstance. They also, of course, knew that the family were not performers. As actors they were a little wooden and they stumbled over the script. However, they could also see that—clearly—they were performing, and the audience’s reaction to the performance was very warm, with plenty of laughs and applause.

The day at *Dookie Earthed* was also, in performance studies terms, a case study of the whole town performing. They were ‘on show’, and this occurred on many levels. The

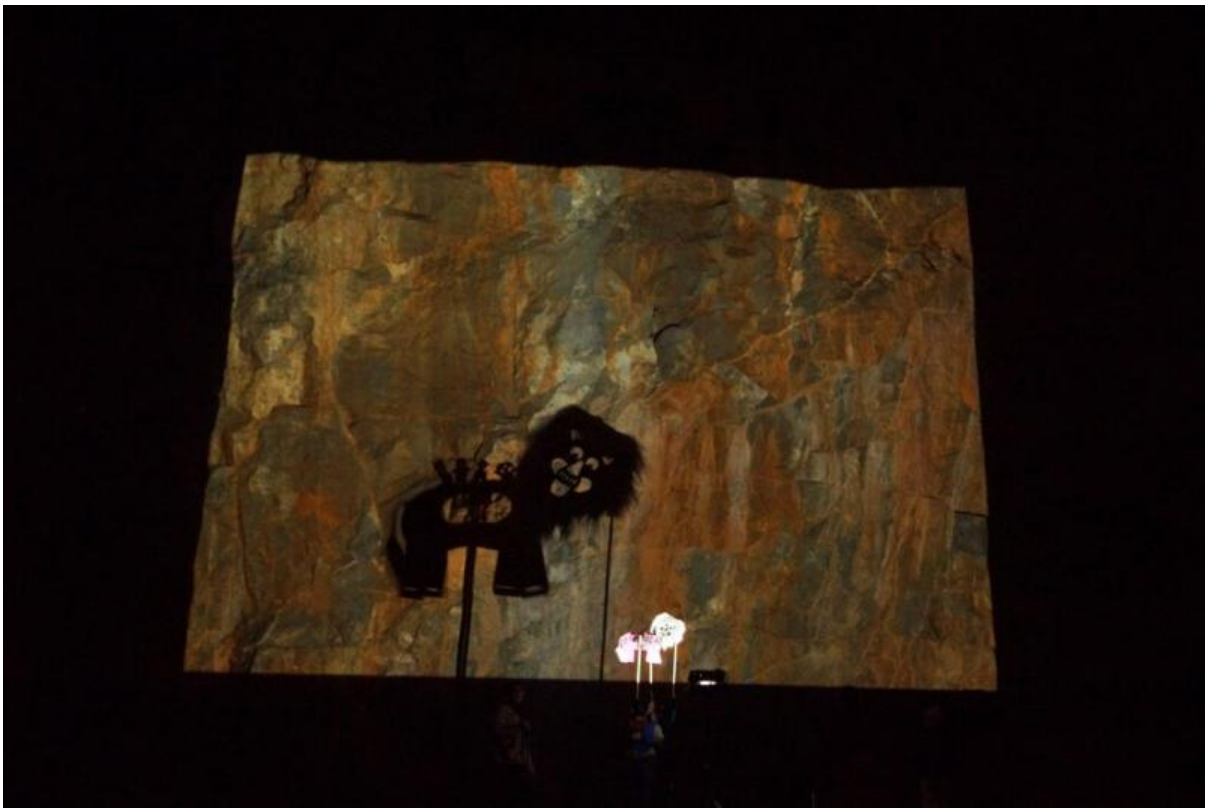

Figure 8: *Dookie Earthed*, 2014. Photo Serana Hunt-Hughs.

Figure 9: *Dookie Earthed*, 2014. Photo: Serana Hunt-Hughs.

community performed for each other, for the many visitors, for the staff and board of RAV[5] who had provided the funding, and for the unprecedented number of politicians—local, state and federal—who visited for the occasion. The town had also been mown, painted, pruned, washed and swept; not just the civic space, but across the several roads of houses, and the bowling and football clubs.

Reflections

It is in regard to Bishop's lens of 'Activation; authorship; community.' (Bishop, 2012 p.12) that *Dookie Earthed*'s flaws become apparent to me. We were working with a cast made almost exclusively of non-performers. After the setbacks in the early phase of the process, we were working much faster than would normally be the case for such an intimate set of stories. The outside set of artists had skills that allowed us to make the quarry show really impressive to look at, with an epic soundtrack and a budget allowing us to use high-quality sound, light and projection gear. Rather than creating works of local authorship, works deeply-embedded in an authentic 'everyday' and history we were displacing individually

[5] In regards to the presence of the RAV funding body, the locals were always concerned they would withdraw funding at the slightest misstep—in fact, much of the turmoil during the project was caused by the local organising group second-guessing RAV's attitude to certain elements of the project and certain members using that to curb the enthusiasm of other members of the group.

remembered stories with an agreed, spectacular version. Rather than an act of activation, authorship and community, it moved closer to an act of consumption; closer to Debord's spectacle which demands 'Passive acceptance' (Debord, 1992. p.15).

What did the project achieve in terms of activation? Especially in regard to any chance of fulfilling a funding body's stated desire to see projects that 'increase the capacity and skills of the communities and … lead to the communities being able to continue their artistic and cultural development after the completion of the project.' (Australia Council for the Arts, 2020) For *participation* to have meaning, it is must be engaged in an ongoing project. Not just that a community has many opportunities to undertake participatory activities—artistic, political, recreational, educational, even entrepreneurial—but that a community has many opportunities to have input into the actual mechanics of participation. In the course of writing this thesis that idea has loomed larger and larger in my thinking.

Dookie Earthed was most definitely well-received by its stakeholders. It engaged almost everyone in the town, it was spectacular, it was achieved safely and on budget. In the weeks after the delivery no-one in the pub spoke to me about wishing the money had been spent on farming equipment. It even fulfilled Kershaw's description of good participatory artworks being less *about* something and much more made *of* something. (1995, pp. 77 – 83) However, it was like the once-in-a-generation storm which has an immediate effect but leaves very little trace even a year later.

A (Non) Foot (ball) Note
Do sporting clubs have something to teach the participatory artist?

Perhaps for a more-long lasting project of activation, authorship and community we should be looking more closely at the Dookie Football and Netball Club. This a one hundred year-old institution, improbable for a town who at the 2016 census had a population of 328, have fielded three football teams and five netball teams, year in year out, drawn from right across the district. Totally local run, its history owned (and created) by the players and the crowd, creating stories large and small that live in both the individual and collective imagination. There is also an admirable flow of respect at sporting clubs between amateur and professional levels that is rarely seen in the arts.

As I note in an Art Hub article from 2018 titled Get Over It: Straddling the Art Sport Divide: 'You will not hear professional sports people looking down on their amateur colleagues with the disdain that I recently heard when an actor friend of mine publicly dismissed amateur theatre with the refrain, "I don't know what they are doing, but it is not art."' (Pidd, 2018) Indeed, many professional sports stars, especially in sports like cricket and AFL, retire from their professional careers and play on in an amateur league. It is virtually impossible to

imagine actors making a similar transition such is the fetishing of the professional in the Australian arts sector. This surely is as good an indicator that art is treated both by the general public and the professional arts practitioners as something outside the everyday. It seems to indicate an understanding that *real* art is for the trained, the highly skilled—the chosen.

The forms of participation at a sports club are circumscribed, arbitrary even, and have historical and contemporary blind spots around racial, gender, sexuality and disability. But I find it hard to argue that the creative processes that we used for creating the works in Dookie Earthed were fully inclusive, or at least as inclusive as they might have been. Certainly the processes we used and the outcomes achieved were novel and exciting—and for some in the town, incredibly liberating. There was a liberation and a glimpse of some kind of alternative future in seeing the main street closed to traffic for a long table lunch, and to see the industrial quarry full of people and of moving art, and to watch the school kids front and centre on stage in front of a big crowd. But was it transformational?

For a project like Dookie Earthed to be transformational it would need to be repeated annually. Actually, of course, not *Dookie Earthed* repeated but creative participatory processes repeated so that the social muscles that such projects exercise in a community are strengthened, extended and made more flexible in the long-term. Only in this way will these kinds of projects begin to fulfil any chance of achieving the kind of activation and authorship that Bishop calls for in participatory, socially engaged work. Only through repeated processes and projects will a community begin to more effectively have a say in the form and content of the works, and more importantly develop the skills and confidence to deeply influence a project's initiation, design and legacy.

In this regard the ongoing projects in Queenstown and Hobart (*The Rumble* and *Ogoh Ogoh,* analysed in Chapter Four) seem to have a greater opportunity to create some kind of (subtle) shift in the public. A shift that might even be genuinely measurable as these multiple projects become more and more embedded and co-designed by their communities.

Form over content

While dwelling on the sporting club I have been thinking about content, as it might relate to participatory art. On paper, the improvised narrative—the dramaturgy—of a sporting match is in some respects an extremely limited affair. An arbitrary set of rules, often unchanged for decades or even centuries, are played out again and again, year in year out. Yet the real life, human narratives that flow from this limited dramaturgy are undeniable and often epic—able to be tragic, comic, farcical, noble. But the *game* is none of those things. It is simply *form*.

I think Jaques Ranciere can be useful in building a bridge to art from this idea. The central Ranceirian idea that helps here is his dismissal of the didactic in favour of trusting that the mere *act* of making art, and the striving for an artistic voice that is both open and readable, whilst also opaque and unreadable, is political enough. I n participatory terms, perhaps in process. In this *shared act of creation*, it might not be what is created that is doing the heavy lifting, but the sharing of the act of creating it. Ranciere champions the *experience* of art—the way that an audience is called upon to perhaps suspend reason and knowledge whilst experiencing a work. He further suggests that in providing experiences that are inexplicable, confusing, unfathomable, unresolved it is by extension subversive and political because, 'the undecidability of aesthetic experience implies a questioning of how the world is organised, and therefore the possibility of changing or redistributing that same world.' (2002, p. 137) It is not the content of the art that makes it subversive, but the form.

This is similarly true of music. Music is profoundly participatory and democratic. As Andrew Ford and Anni Heino point out in their 2019 book *The Song Remains The Same*: 'When we sing a song, we make it ours, at least for the duration of the singing…. Sharing a song is like sharing a meal. Even when the experience of songs and singing isn't communal it is still participatory.' (p. 6) The authors move on to point out that, in the majority of cases, it is not the literal meaning of a song that gives it participatory heft, but the noise it makes. They highlight too record producer Brian Eno when he suggests, 'Often it is better to stick with the nonsense that emerged with an initial burst of musical originality… rather than attempt to produce a profound set of words, because if you are trying to have a hit, the most important aspect of a record is how it sounds.' (Ibid, p. 5). In Anwen Crawford's review of the year in Music for the December 2019 issue of *The Monthly* notes, 'Even as an audience member at a gig, you are part of a shared undertaking… A band suggests that there are things you can do about loneliness.' (p. 86)

Conclusion

This is a timely conversation

Over the course of researching this thesis there have been noticeable shifts in the ways that participatory work is regarded in Australia. I note in Chapter One that local, state and federal arts organisations and funding bodies are increasingly looking to large and smaller scale participatory works to fulfill policy obligations beyond those of an arts imperative. This stems from a desire to increase the reach of their funding dollars out of the ghetto of the arts community, and as ways of invigorating cities, towns and regions. I also note that much of the resources for many of the newer regional festivals have not come from arts funding organisations but from tourism bodies. Many of the projects that are the subjects of this thesis have been largely funded in this way. The *Ogoh Ogoh* project (Chapter Four) and *The Rumble* (Chapter One) were both funded largely by Events Tasmania, whose primary task is to increase visitation to the island. I also note in the opening chapter that, more often than not, conversations with these funders were unsophisticated at best and unrealistic at worst. These bodies are much more interested in spectacle and the one-off marketing bang of an event and less interested in actual strategic engagement, let alone the kind of embeddedness and agency of various publics that is the subject of this thesis.

Even in the situation where funding bodies have stated intentions of using participatory works to 'enrich people's lives, strengthen community connections, increase economic possibilities and provide opportunities for greater access and inclusion for everyone (Regional Arts Victoria, 2015), there is not yet much sign of a strategic commitment to fund shared creative experiences for diverse communities over decades. If arts funding had the kind of decade long funding commitments of infrastructure or health funding this might take place.

However, a series of developments over the summer of 2019/2020 which sparked a mainstream debate about the purpose and symbolism of large fireworks displays has given me the sense that the conversation may be becoming more nuance. There is a possibility that the opportunities afforded by empowering the public through participation are beginning to be understood at a funding and commissioning level, and even that shift in thinking might happen more quickly than one might imagine.

Each year The City Of Sydney produces the annual New Year's Eve fireworks. These fireworks, which according to the Council website cost $6.5 million (City of Sydney, 2020), are claimed to be a 'uniquely Sydney celebration, in which everyone can take part,' and which 'plays live to more than 1 million spectators along the Sydney Harbour foreshore, and reaches a global audience of more than 1 billion.' (City of Sydney, n.d.)

The event is the major task of the City's Event Team. This same team commissioned an iteration of *Passenger* (a show which I direct and the primary case study of Chapter Two), so I have some familiarity with their operations. As a participatory artist I find little to celebrate in the proliferation of fireworks as a marker of the end, or as the beginning of anything. The idea that Sydney's New Year's Eve fireworks is something in which people "take part" seems a stretch, nor is there any way that this is a 'uniquely Sydney' celebration. The audience have no input at all in its content or form, and the event would look, sound and feel no different if nobody show up. Also, fireworks are so globally generic to a New Year's Eve celebration that it is surely unremarkable to the rest of the world that Sydney would let a large quantity of them off, the presence of the Harbour Bridge and Opera House notwithstanding.

I quote the entirety of Debord's 13th manifesto point without comment:

> The spectacle is essentially tautological, for the simple reason that its means and its ends are identical. It is the sun that never sets on the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire globe, basking in the perpetual warmth of its own glory. (Debord, 1992, p. 15)

I also find it really unlikely that one billion of the world's citizens would be much interested in the spectacle, beyond possibly recognizing the Opera House in the background of a five second grab in a montage of similarly extravagant firework displays across the globe. I also note that after looking at the City of Sydney website and reading several media releases the number of claimed live spectators varies between 1 million and 1.7 million people. These numbers are a fiction, a guess, a quick glance at a map coupled with a Googled look at the population numbers for Sydney.

These fireworks are delivered by the same team of producers and programmers who drive the Art and About program. This program is a highly innovative, curated series of participatory arts projects, which sells itself as being about commissioning 'bold and original ideas to temporarily transform public and unusual spaces.' (City Of Sydney, n.d.) Here is a much more realistic statement of intent than the permanent "transformation" promised in the RAV program outlined in in Chapter Five. The program is run by a small team of experienced arts administrators with an unusually sophisticated understanding of ways that participatory artworks can be harnessed to create physical and cultural opportunities for cities and communities. They also oversee the NYE fireworks. I am unaware of the precise percentage of the events team budget that goes to the fireworks but it would be a very high. Well over fifty percent. I would also speculate that there would be internal debates at a high level about so much arts and events expenditure being burned up in under an hour in such a banal and obvious event.

I speculate too that such a debate would not find fertile ground in which to take root. I can imagine, at a political level, it would be countered with the view that the general public and, perhaps more importantly, the city's famously reactionary media would not stand for even a minor tweak to their annual dose of gunpowder and light.

I had been sourcing the above research while undertaking visits to Sydney in the spring of 2019. It had been my intention to use the New Year's Eve fireworks as an example of a major institution claiming a participatory impulse for an event that was patently passive at its core and perhaps to illustrate the difficulty in shifting such thinking. Then over the course of late November and December of that same year many parts of Australia were engulfed in out-of-control bushfires. One of the effects being that in the lead-up to the fireworks Sydney was blanketed in a thick pall of smoke. Suddenly, as the New Year Eve fireworks approached, a genuine and heated debate about the appropriateness of holding the display took-hold. It was a debate that seemed to cross normal political boundaries. The conservative deputy premier of the state of NSW, John Barilaro (2019), called for the fireworks to be cancelled, saying the calling off the event would be 'A very easy decision' (Barilaro in Guardian Staff and Agencies, 2019).

This was all the more surprising because the larger debates about the fires had become tangled up in Australia's culture war about climate change, with progressive voters seeing the fires as evidence of the country needing to dramatically decrease the country's carbon emissions. At the same time, the conservative Deputy Prime Minister of Australia Michael McCormack denouncing such calls as, 'The ravings of some pure, enlightened and woke capital-city greenies' (McCormack in Holden, 2019).

I am not suggesting that the passive spectacle of the event was at the heart of these calls for a rethink. However, the opportunities for us to debate the nature of the large-scale community events are increasing and this is significant.

This opportunity for influencing debates about the importance of participation in a fractured society is one of the most important things that writing this thesis has brought home to me. We have a window in which there is a general agreement at a government and policy level that the arts have a usefulness beyond the aesthetic and recreational. This is particularly true of participatory artworks. It does not matter whether, as this thesis notes, the institutional imperative is purely economic (to bring tourism or economic activity to a place) or if the aim of the funding has a more social focus, as in Small Town Transformations or Festivals Australia. The effect is the same: more funding is being spent on original artworks, many of which have a participatory bent. It is incumbent on those artists who work in a participatory way to research their practice and identify ways of increasing the range and power of participatory work and use this research to help fuel a more informed conversation at a policy and funding level.

The form of participation is more important than the content

At the end of Chapter Five, when writing about *Dookie Earthed* I noted that sporting clubs have an innate understanding that it is the act of playing sport that gives meaning and value, as opposed to the content of the game itself. A cricket match or netball game is not, of itself, didactically about anything beyond seeing who has the skills and determination to win. With some help from Jacques Ranciere I suggested that the greatest potential for participatory art in creating shared experiences. Its potential to be subversive and potentially radicalizing is less caught up in the narrative content of any given work, but in the actual form of participation itself. To paraphrase the final line of that chapter, in this *shared act of creation* it might not be *what* is created that is doing the heavy lifting, but the *sharing of the act of creating it*.

As has been a recurring theme in this thesis, I would argue that the *process* of creating a participatory work has similar disruptive potential. Those community participants who work on Dark Mofo's *Ogoh Ogoh* (Chapter Four), or The Unconformity's *The Rumble* (Chapter One) discover, temporarily, a novel shape to their working week, new places in which their expertise can be practiced, a wider community of interest, a slightly altered lens with which to view the familiar.

Claire Bishop, who has probably informed this thesis more than any other academic, uses Ranciere to interpret this potentially radicalising disruption in a slightly different but no less useful way. 'Ranciere has informed my thinking with his attention to the effective possibilities of art that avoids the pitfalls of a didactic critical position in favour of rupture and ambiguity. Good art, implies Ranciere, must negotiate the tension that (on the one hand) pushes art towards 'life' and that (on the other) separates aesthetic sensoriality from other forms of sensible experience….' (Bishop, 2012, p. 30).

This is crucial; art *must* be seen as art, even as it seeks to embed itself in the everyday. *Passenger* works as an experience for the audience because the everyday looks like it is performing—yet it can't be. This is the tension. Ranciere calls this a situation where elements are, 'capable of speaking twice: from their readability and from their unreadability' (in Bishop, 2012, p. 30). As I noted in Chapter Two, there is no doubt that *The Magic Flute* performs this double speak, but *Ants* speaks multiple times: once in the situation that the professional artists offer the participants, and many times more, as the audience crosses the line from spectator to collaborator, and to lead character. As I discussed in Chapter Two, in the case of *Ants* it is not impossible that on the day that a family became a collaborator in a public artwork, they may have left home with the simple intention of going shopping. This family prove an antidote to the lament of Natalia Ilyin,

with which I opened the introduction to this thesis: We have been choosing more and more and creating less and less for some time now. (2006, p. 91)

Promote and demote the professional participatory artist

If participation means anything it means opening-up creative opportunities to as broad a range of publics as possible. The more people to be makers not choosers, 'the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is the more readers or spectators turned into collaborators' (Benjamin, 2003, p. 777).

In order to do this, I am arguing for the simultaneous promotion and demotion of professional participatory artists. A promotion in the sense of those artists taking their specialisation seriously. Professional artists working in this field need to undertake much more research and discussion and honest reflection on strategies and models that work and those that don't work. They should more forcefully make the case to policy and funding bodies about why participation is important and what it can achieve and why it is useful. Artists ought to make the point to the same bodies and the general public that one-off participatory programs, no matter what high language they are draped in, have limited social power. And artists working within participatory practice need to truly understand that it is in *their* power to create the space in design and execution of participatory processes which will make possible a genuine act of shared creation. A demotion is necessary only in the sense that professional artists must cede ground to the amateur, the vernacular, the dilettante, the beginner. Participation is democratic and anti-hierarchical, whilst also being in favour of expertise and specialisation, but that expertise and specialisation must extend to a participating public.

In order for this to happen we must make more works that fully engage the everyday, works that have weak public/artist contracts, that are not over-determined but open. Works that are co-designed and built with the audience, a public cast, with a collaborating crew of professionals, subcontractors and volunteer expertise. Perhaps, most importantly in this regard, we must push to bring about the situation where we can make work with communities whose expertise in making participatory artworks has been exercised and strengthened by them having helped create and execute socially engaged projects using a variety of different models, on a variety of different physical and time scales, with as diverse a range of publics as possible.

I end with one final point. Working in this way can be empowering, as they challenge economic orthodoxies and create social capital in a world atomized by tribalism and polarity (ironically much of which is caused by the "participatory" models of social media). Yes, there are circumstances when an artwork can create positive change through authorship and

activation. Yes, making these works, while demanding, is great fun and forges friendships and partnerships and creates personal and civic narratives that can remake people and places. In looking at the works under review in this thesis, another fact becomes clear: working in this highly collaborative way often creates interesting new art. Perhaps not every time; but what creative process does? Look at the myriad characters performed by the public in Polyglot's *Ants,* the rich landscape of performance by people and objects in Dark Mofo's *Ogoh Ogoh,* the chaotic siege of Queenstown performed and embraced by the people of Tasmania's West Coast in The Unconformity's *The Rumble*, even the uncanny unconscious performances of the unaware general public in *Passenger*.

In each case we see evidence that these participatory artworks operate, simply, as art. They hold themselves on an equal level to artworks created for passive consumption in darkened theatres or silent galleries. Their quality, however, flows directly from their participatory impulse. It is not that a good work of art pre-existed and simply had components of participation added on. Participation is an integral reason that these works have resonance and power. This participatory potential flows directly from the idea that the originating artists leave space for a collaborating public, ceding control of the artwork to the public's brilliant imaginations: an act of shared creation.

Coda
Part 1: a pandemic post script

‘Pandemics reverse hierarchies.’ (Megalogenis, 2020.)

This thesis was all but completed by the time the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns occurred in the first half of 2020. I have no doubt at all that were I starting this research today, the transformational nature of the pandemic and its social, cultural and political effects, would become an integral lens for the work. However, it is simply not a practical process at this late stage to do the kind of revision that would be required to fully account for the pandemic. Time and space for reflection is also needed. However, this postscript is an acknowledgment and brief note describing some of the ways that the pandemic—and more importantly the attendant economic shutdown—is impacting the arts industry. The notes are also reservedly optimistic about some of the changes that have been forced on festivals and venues by the pandemic; changes that look to be necessary for twelve to eighteen months, likely deep into 2021. It also canvases some ways that this research might be leveraged to have some effect on the way that the arts rebuilds after the economic carnage that the cultural sector has suffered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown.

The COVID-19 virus spread outwards from China, into the Asia-Pacific region, before causing a crisis across Europe, and going on to rapidly become a global pandemic. The key medical crisis was not so much the deadliness of the virus, which was less than 1%, but that the new infection sweeping through a population with no immunity at all had the potential to overwhelm intensive care departments with those who *were* vulnerable. (Swan, 2020.)

This medical crisis was almost immediately accompanied by an economic crisis as central governments attempted to slow the spread of the virus by enforcing the physical distancing of citizens. The simplest method of doing this was to require all but essential workers to stay at home. Thus, effectively, shutting down huge swathes of the economy, provoking a global economic shock that the head of the US federal Reserve Bank called “a crisis without modern precedent.” (Powel in Smialek, Rappeport, 2020) Entire sections of global and local economies have been massively disrupted, with the attendant rises in unemployment and bankruptcy.

The arts and cultural industries were one of the first sectors to be affected. In Australia, weeks before a fully enforced shutdown, virtually every festival, arts centre, cinema, live music venue, art gallery and museum closed their doors. In the week of the 13th of March, 2020, my entire roster of projects, extending deep into 2021, was either cancelled or

suspended with no future date set for a resumption. A slew of performance work made its way online. The kind of work that I make, the work that is the subject of this thesis—larger scale, highly participatory, often requiring the transformation of civic space and time, provoking performances from people and objects many of whom fall accidentally into the physical proximity of the work—will never belong, let alone thrive, online. Even documentary footage of this work rarely succeeds beyond being a thin documentation, or a self-serving proof that simply proves that something happened. This is work that is made live and can only really exist live, further proving the work's embeddedness in social relations rather than being consumed within an arts economy.

It seems to me that a lot of what *has* made its way online is either not far from the "documentary/proof" model mentioned above, or is made useful as a way for disparate people to briefly connect, but perhaps no more useful in that regard than a social media post. As art, the work has very little life once one leaves Zoom.

Even as I write this, as Australia tentatively reopens from almost complete shutdown and a slow opening-up of the economy takes place, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that over 50% of arts organisations and businesses are shut. (ABS, 2020) The Grattan Institute (Grattan Institute, 2020) has also estimated that there has been a 50% fall in employment in the arts. The major issue for the arts is brutally simple: the theatres, concert halls and music venues have become off-limits. Until there is a vaccine the process of making them safe in the times of a pandemic make them uneconomic. Even if the economics could be made to work, physical distancing requirements do not work for the viewing of artworks in that form. Theatres that are two-thirds empty do not "cook" for an audience, music venues even less so.

That this crisis for the arts is triggered primarily because dedicated arts venues are unavailable, or at least uneconomic, is surely cause for concern in and of itself, and in ways related to what this thesis has already outlined: that the creative and performing arts is not actually as embedded in social relations as we would all like to think. Rather, it has become dis-embedded, operating as a sideshow, too often an act of consumption and often inaccessible to other than a knowing elite—too professional, self-isolating in an arts ghetto. Most importantly, this might suggest that such work is not created in collaboration with its audience, is not participatory enough, too predetermined, and has no space left for the community to write themselves and their stories into the work.

Nevertheless, in this postscript rather than push that critique, I want to propose optimism and recognise the green shoots that are emerging as artists, venues, and perhaps most interestingly, festivals, begin to chip away at the conundrum of what comes next.

The Rebuild

As the rebuilding and revitalising of the Arts sector happens, there is every chance that the loudest voices will attempt to take things back to what Karl Polanyi (whose economic theories are a significant lens for Chapter Three of this thesis) would recognise as business as usual: the market protected first and foremost, the "needs" of the economy treated as the priority, society (social relations) left to rebuild in its wake (Polanyi, 2001). It is telling that the Australian Government's JobKeeper program, part of a stimulus package designed to ward off redundancies, was a payment primarily sent to private companies, to then distribute to workers—as opposed to a payment to citizens. As happened during the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-09, the most immediate response, within hours of a near global shutdown beginning to look inevitable, was massive injections of taxpayer funds into the banking and market systems. As a headline in the hardly radical Washington Post called it: 'It's socialism for investors, capitalism for everyone else' (Pearlstein, 2020).

In the world of festivals something particular is happening. As I noted in Chapter One, and early in the Conclusion, a huge amount of cultural activity is now funded by tourism. Visitation and economic activity are the key performance indicators. Festivals count airplane seats and hotel registrations as proof of their success. Festivals are 'tent poled' by spectacular events, the majority from international artists (The German Magic Flute from Chapter Three an example). Marketing departments are spending far more money spreading the word outside of the city that the festival will take place, than to the local community.

However, the virus does appear to have given us a gift; perhaps even several gifts. For the next year to 18 months—until there is a vaccine—festivals, as Felix Previl, Artistic Director of Darwin Festival recently said, 'Must be hyper-local'. (in Marsh, 2020) International work has been taken off the table as borders are closed. Artistic Director of the new Melbourne festival *RISING*, Hannah Fox says, 'It challenges us to champion local artists without being parochial.' (Fox in Ibid.) *RISING* has backed this up with a fund of $2 million dollars aimed solely at Victorian artists who have been invited to 'put forward bold and ambitious ideas for what art can be'. (RISING, a.d.).[6] In private conversations with festival insiders I have been told that this is not window dressing. The directors have scrapped the entire festival that they had booked pre-pandemic—which *did* feature many large-scale spectacular events from International artists—and fully intend to build this new festival around the new works

[6] Ironically, Rising grew out of a merged Melbourne International Festival and White Night and was driven by Visit Victoria. Whose remit is: Visit Victoria is the primary tourism and events company for the State of Victoria in Australia. We inspire people to visit Melbourne and Victoria through captivating stories and amazing events." The events are secondary to the visits. An event is only as useful as its ability to inspire a visit from another place. See: https://www.visitvictoria.com/

that are commissioned from the call out. This seems to be an almost unprecedented act of trust in local artists.

There is also a potential second gift. To comply with physical distancing rules, the festivals' programs will need to be smaller scale, with smaller audiences, with almost none of it taking place in the arts venues that have dominated programming in recent years. As the *RISING* website's artist call-out page hints: 'We are particularly interested in ideas that may not work within more conventional arts environments. (RISING, 2020) Much of this work will be outside: on the streets, in parks, on beaches, perhaps in shopping malls, in sporting venues. This seems like an almost unprecedented act of trust in the audience. It is an act of trust that is participatory in nature. It is the festival making space available within which "their" artists and "their" audiences have been ask to act.

In order to spell this out: this change to the way that festivals operate (and all sorts of other programming and the guidelines around the funding of the work) has not come about through choice. For a brief window—possibly for one year up to eighteen months, or until we have a vaccine and it has been distributed throughout the community—we get to have a real-time experiment. Does anyone imagine that the board of Melbourne Festival (of which RISING is the latest incarnation) would have agreed on a program that places such trust in artists and audiences if the circumstances were any different?

The opportunity to enhance social embeddedness has, in a sense, come about naturally and as a necessity. It need not be argued for, and therefore is not for counter-arguments. In terms of this thesis, this is a temporarily uncontentested space that has opened up. It is an openness that is unusually evident, visible to artists and audiences, producers and funders alike. It is a space into which, for a significant time, artists and programmers can write. I am hopeful that this space will remain open for long enough so that this experiment in openness, in a more democratic, local, participatory form of artmaking will take hold enough to become more of a permanent siege.

The timing is fortuitous. As this thesis notes, this trend towards participation is well under way. At the risk of pushing this potentiality too far, I will highlight the recent observation by historian Dan Snow, who has said that pandemics tend to cause an acceleration of what was happening anyway. Snow noted that the Black Death did not cause the Renaissance; in fact, there was an exciting avant-garde movement in Europe in the early 14th century that is now thought of as the basis for the Renaissance. However, the chaos and inventiveness and anarchy that surrounded the Black Death amplified this cultural movement, fuelled its rise (Snow, 2020).

During the month of May 2020, as festivals and venues look to program works for 2021, my personal conversations with Artistic Directors across four states leave me optimistic that

significant commissioning resources will be spent on new and existing participatory works. We need to write into this new space with maximum rigour, energy and care. We need to take the time to document it well, to undertake as much research as possible into what happens and identify important trends. It would prove greatly surprising if the art that gets made in this time is in any way inferior, less accessible, less interesting, or less varied than the work we have seen at major festivals in recent years. I expect it to be *more* of all those things, because in the terms of this thesis, the contract between artists and audiences has opened up; the everyday is much more likely to be invited in, the city more likely to be invited to perform, the community to have become makers rather than choosers.

Part 2: A Playful, Practice Based Manifesto

In the process of the research activity that led to this thesis, especially during the many informal conversations that I had with fellow practitioners as my thinking, reading and reflection started to gel, certain practical pieces of foundational advice began to emerge. They are gathered here as an executive summary, a highly biased and at times contradictory "How To": a manifesto, if you like. It is primarily positively focused, in the sense that it is a call to action, but in the spirit of its playful nature, and as an acknowledgement of the influence of Guy Debord on my thinking and writing, I offer the following negative touchstone:

> A firework display is not a participatory artwork. The audience is not taking part. It is an act of passive consumption. *The spectacle is essentially tautological, for the simple reason that its means and its ends are identical. It is the sun that never sets on the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire globe, basking in the perpetual warmth of its own glory.* (1992, p. 15)

- Participatory acts of shared creation, between professional artists and communities, have the potential to create positive social/cultural outcomes that move beyond the aesthetic. This is especially so if the artworks offer opportunities for authorship, activation and shared experiences between diverse publics and individuals.

- The ability for such projects to achieve their social/cultural outcomes is only partly in the control of the makers. When making a work that is truly participatory, and therefore more capable of achieving aims beyond the aesthetic, the professional artists must cede some control of their projects over to the public, thus making all the outcomes of such projects unpredictable.

- In genuinely open participatory performance works the show does not exist until the audience finishes it. In this way these works need to conform to what Debord calls

"Situations" in which the category of audience has been abolished in favour of the "Viveur" - one who lives (in McDonogh, 2002, p. 46). This kind of open work, as noted by Umberto Eco, means that each iteration of the piece (situation) is genuinely unique, often radically so. (1985, p. 161)

- Each step of the *creation* of a participatory work must itself be considered a situation for participatory intervention. The key creatives should find regular periods during the design of a situation of shared creation for input from a participating public. Participation is best when it is not reserved simply for the presentation stage of the event.

or

- The making period for a participatory process is the entire time that the project is live—from its earliest discussion to the bump-out and debrief.

- This permanent siege of participation does not negate the need for rigour, expertise, skill, experience, talent, specialisation, interest and desire. Arguably these works need more design and layers of specialisation in order not to collapse into generalisation or to become generic through the will of the popular imagination (i.e.: a Grand Final parade; the triumph of the firework displays; siege by pop anthem etc.)

- Each stage of the creation of the work requires a slightly different set of conceptual tools. The tools used to make each stage of the situation are also used to make the tools to achieve the next stage. These new sets of tools then make the tools needed for the *next* stage, and so on.

- The entire team of key creatives and participants only have the complete set of tools for making a large scale, bespoke participatory work once the work is completed. The majority of those tools (and much of the knowledge) may never then be needed again.

- Works which present to the world as open-ended and under-determined have the greatest chance of being overwritten by both a participating and observing audience and, therefore, are more likely to become embedded in their social context. This embeddedness significantly increases the chance of these works disrupting the interests of capital and embodying the radical.

- It is not in any way necessary for the works themselves to carry a radical didactic narrative. The physical act of participation and the ability of the participants to alter the course of the work will do much of the heavy lifting.

- For a situation to work in a participatory way attention must be given to the dramaturgy of the situation – the objects, the setting, the offer. It must be immediately obvious to a participating public what the first step must be. Even if there is a drama to them taking that first step. That drama is the dramaturgy that marks the work as participatory as opposed to something to be merely watched. It is a drama that seeds action on behalf of the audience as opposed to identification. The audience are the subject of the dramaturgy. The audience are deeply implicated in the unfolding of the narrative.

- Value making over choosing (consuming).

- Create unique playful UNEXPECTED participatory situations and embed them in everyday settings as opposed to having them in art institutions attended by art audiences. On the street not in the theatre.

- It is good if these situations are set up so that, dramaturgically, they have no endpoint, in the sense that the narrative endpoint is not discernible by the general public, thus inviting their further curiosity and (hopefully) intervention. This lack of an endpoint might arguably be called the space into which an audience's authorship and activation is made manifest.

- Street/shopping district closures are good examples of projects which are both embedded AND disrupting.

- Transience is not enough. In order for participatory works to achieve lasting change in a community or individual they must take place regularly, on multiple scales, over multiple and varied timelines, with the public able to have input into their content and design. Input is likely to becomes more confident and more bespoke if it is a skill that is regularly exercised.

- Avoid Mission Creep. Be cautious of creating expectations that projects can achieve outcomes beyond the scope of art. Be wary if your project description reads like an intervention into a community in crisis. Even if the project is funded by a government program which makes claims for the remarkable positive power that participatory projects can have in communities.

- Sporting clubs have models for participation, activation and inclusivity which can be very useful when looking at the design of participatory art projects and programs.

- Celebrate the amateur, be cautious of fetishising the professional. Such fetishisation is a likely sign that art is being quarantined for the trained, the highly skilled, the elite.

- Never waste the opportunity (space) that is created by a global pandemic. Strike! Write into that space. Invite as many others as you can into that space. Write as individuals, write as collectives. Do not wait for permission.

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Yes We Dance (Everybody Now, 2017, Gold Coast, April 2018)

Web Links

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http://www.martyncoutts.com/

http://jessicawilson.com.au/

http://madeinnatimuk.com/space-and-place/