The Effect of Embodied Metafiction in Contemporary Performance

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Archival Video of the Performance Work

Access a full archival video of *Spectate* (2017) using this link:

https://vimeo.com/counterpilot/spectatearchival2017

And the password: *evidence*

Throughout this document, examples from the performance work are referenced with timecodes. These can be used to locate and view specific moments in the archival video.

Keywords

Audience, embodied metafiction, immediate present, intermediality, metamodernism, postdramatic theatre.

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Lastly, to the audience. This is for you. It means a lot that you were there. With us. And at the end of all this, I'd like you to remember: I really tried.

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: QUT Verified Signature

Date: 28 August, 2018

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Abstract

This study examines self-reflexive qualities of contemporary performance by appropriating literary notions of metafiction. In order to focus on reflexivity in a Postdramatic paradigm, the study uses *embodied metafiction* to discuss performance that displays intermediality rather than literariness. As practice-led research, this study resulted in the staging of a new performance work – *Spectate* – representing 60% of the examinable output. Reflective practice and semi-structured interviews are used to develop an interpretive framework for understanding embodied metafiction through a metamodernist lens. This study concludes with a set of principles for how embodied metafiction can be employed by theatre practitioners to deliberately shape the audience's experience of live performance.

1.0 Introduction

My rationale as a performance-maker is predicated upon the principle that the audience is the most interesting thing about any act of theatre – the fact that a crowd of people gathers to share the experience with physical and personal immediacy. In a culture dominated by digitised media and technology, the live co-presence of humans in a work of theatre becomes its most significant feature. I aim to interrogate this trait in my work by shifting narrative focus onto the audience members, promoting hyper-awareness of the moment we are sharing in time and space. I recognise this as a broader trend in contemporary performance practice – the self-reflexive tendency to conflate fiction with reality (particularly the reality of the performance circumstances) can be seen in work by Gob Squad (DE), Dead Centre (IRE), Rotozaza (UK), Post Presents Post (AUS), Charlie Kaufman (USA) and Complicite (UK).

This study examines such self-reflexive tendencies of contemporary performance by appropriating literary notions of metafiction. Although the discourse of metafiction sometimes acknowledges theatre, it relies on playtexts and writer-centric approaches to performance for its discussion. Identifying a gap in the conversation, this study discusses reflexivity in a Postdramatic paradigm, where the literariness of performance is superseded by a de-hierarchisation of forms and an emphasis on intermediality. In order to frame such a discussion, this study will define the term 'embodied metafiction' to highlight metafictive traits that exist in dramaturgical logic rather than written text.

These notions are reflected in the broader cultural movement known as metamodernism (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010), which captures the post-postmodern tendency to swing in and out of fictive worlds (engaging with both

reality and fiction concurrently). Metamodernism is located in works that traverse a spectrum between self-conscious reality and romantic fiction (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010), at times tearing down their fourth wall, but not to expose the hollow mechanics of fiction (as postmodernism might have done). Rather, these works invite an audience to indulge in the fiction from an empowered position, using self-awareness to remind them of the construction taking place and using such construction to make sense of a complex world.

The research question that drives this study is:

> What is the effect of embodied metafiction in contemporary performance practice?

This question has been broken down into the following three sub-questions to inform the praxis in the study:

a. Where can the literary notion of metafiction be identified in a contemporary performance work?

b. What tools can be employed in a devising process in order to evoke embodied metafiction?

c. How can the use of embodied metafiction in a performance work heighten the audience's awareness of the immediate present?

These questions have guided the development of a new interpretive framework to articulate embodied metafiction as a suitable term for contemporary performance discourse. This pursuit has been grounded in creative practice,

with the development of *Spectate* contributing to 60% of the research outcomes. The remaining 40% of the practice-led research project is represented in this exegesis.

The following chapters serve to explain embodied metafiction by mapping the associated concepts in existing theory, and demonstrating the application of those ideas in creative practice. The methodology chapter outlines how iterative stages of creative practice have both informed and been informed by theoretical concepts. Chapter Three maps these concepts, drawing links between literary conventions and postdramatic theatre ideologies, before also incorporating associated ideas of embodiment and time perception. This contextual review concludes with analysis of three key case studies, illustrating how this unique constellation of ideas can be made evident in exemplars of creative practice. In one of these cases, an interview with the artists from Dead Centre is distilled into key concepts to inform creative practice.

Chapter Four presents an overview of the creative practice before explaining how theoretical concepts have directly influenced artistic development of *Spectate*. Chapter Five demonstrates how *Spectate* in turn informed the development of theoretical concepts, serving as an exemplar of embodied metafiction. Findings presented in this chapter extend the literature towards practical applications, closing gaps in the interpretive framework.

Chapter Six concludes the study by summarising the most pertinent of these findings, proposing a set of principles that may be adopted by other practitioners working with embodied metafiction.

To begin, the next chapter will position the overall study within a lens of metamodernism. It will go on to explain the methodological approach of practice-led research, introducing the iterative cyclic web as a model for this particular kind of praxis and explaining the study's use of data collection techniques.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Framing the Study

This section outlines the interpretive paradigm and research methods that underpin the project. The significance of the research is framed by considering the burgeoning discourse around metamodernism. My position as a 'performance-maker acting as researcher' directs the focus of investigation towards practice through a metamodernist lens.

To discuss practice as research, conceptual and theoretical frameworks need to be identified (Barrett 2007, 193). Through contextual theory and creative practice, this study will define key dramaturgical concepts in order to better articulate the specific nature of the sub-genre I am working in. This approach is guided by the belief that "often, the contribution to knowledge in creative arts research is the discovery of new methodologies and interpretive frameworks" (Barrett 2007, 193).

My focus for this study is situated within an interpretive paradigm of metamodernism. Over the past decade, metamodernism has emerged as a nascent response to "trends and tendencies [that] can no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern" (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010). Speaking to a contemporary "structure of feeling" (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2015), metamodernism suggests an oscillation between modes of romanticism and cynicism; irony and sincerity (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010). This definition is extrapolated to infer a new mode of thinking that evolves from the existentialism of postmodernism to a "positive, meditative, reflective, logical, active, and proactive" mentality (Baciu et al. 2015). Metamodernism is most

strikingly illustrated with the image of a donkey consensually chasing a carrot, knowing full well that it will never get to eat it (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010). This idea speaks to an engagement with art that is indulgent, but cognizant:

> Inspired by a modern naïveté yet informed by a postmodern skepticism, the metamodern discourse consciously commits itself to an impossible possibility. (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010)

2.2 Practice-led and Performative Research

Practice-led research refers broadly to projects in which creative practice is both the conceptual inquiry and the process of investigation. The original definition articulates these two key components:

> … firstly, research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners… (Gray 1996, 3)

However, for this study I am more inclined towards Suze Adams' approach, where she describes practice-led research as "the active exploration of critical concepts in practice" (2014, 218). In this way, the artwork is not considered an illustration of research, but rather the result of intertwining influences between practice and theory (Adams 2014, 224-6). This calls for a model that allows for "the active dialogue of practice with theory" (Adams 2014, 223).

Such a model is the "iterative cyclic web of practice-led research and research-led practice" (Smith & Dean 2009, 20). This approach acknowledges the duality: that "creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs" (Smith & Dean 2009, 5), but that also "scholarly research can lead to creative work" (Smith & Dean 2009, 7). The latter process is referred to as *research-led practice*. The two, though, are not separate from each other – rather, they are interwoven (Smith & Dean 2009, 2).

Figure 1 – The iterative cyclic web (Smith & Dean 2009, 20)

Adopting the *iterative cyclic web* model as a rough guide, this research project pursues a "cross-fertilisation of associations" (Adams 2014, 223) between contextual theory and creative practice.

Artist researchers typically appropriate qualitative research methods in order to construct strategies specific to their practice (Haseman & Mafe 2009, 212). But Haseman argues that practice-led research validates its own category of approach, which sits outside of conventional quantitative or qualitative methods (2007, 147-151). This study embraces Haseman's proposition for 'performative research,' where knowledge is not just found as a result of practice, but is rather found in the practice – it is performed, rather than extracted (2007, 150-151).

2.3 Overview of Creative Practice Cycles

The following table outlines the schedule of creative practice that was undertaken. This timeline demonstrates the application of Smith & Dean's iterative cyclic web, where space has been allowed for tangential research and reflection between iterations of creative development.

Cycle	Dates & Venue	Description	Persons Involved	Outcomes
1	10 Nov, 2016 – via Skype	Semi-structured interview with co-artistic directors of Dead Centre (IRE), focusing on their recent production of *Chekhov's First Play* – a work that exemplifies qualities of embodied metafiction.	Bush Moukarzel & Ben Kidd	Insight into Dead Centre's practice of staging embodied metafiction. Key terms and concepts used by Dead Centre in engaging with dramaturgy and rehearsal process of such works. These insights influenced the further practice cycles in

				developing *Spectate*. Full transcript.
2	11-22 Dec, 2016 – The Basement @ Metro Arts	Practical creative development for *Spectate*. Started with a half-finished script. Focus on discovering functional attributes of the form and building an intermedial framework. Creative team and 2x performers in the room.	Toby Martin, Cameron Clark, Mike Willmett, Nevin Howell, Christine Felmingham, Sarah Winter	+ Clear choices about technological infrastructure and shape of the form. + Concentric narrative structure & philosophical character arc to demonstrate how the work was to be performed. + Full draft of audio instructional tracks and questions about audience engagement points. + Script draft, journal notes, photos and video snippets.
3	1-10 Jul, 2017 – Sue Benner Theatre @ Metro Arts	Further creative development for *Spectate* hosted in the venue intended for final presentation. Started with full draft script and half-finished audio design. Focused on implementing choices around staging, design, use of headphones, lighting and full video set-up. Bigger creative team and 4x performers in the room. Featured a work-in-progress showing on 10 July, 2017 for	Toby Martin, Cameron Clark, Mike Willmett, Nevin Howell, Christine Felmingham, Sarah Winter, Jaimeson Gilders, Sean Dowling, Elise Greig, Jeremy Gordon, John Felmingham, Daniel Evans,	+ Revised choice to use headphones for audience engagement. + Revised understanding of character arc and dramaturgical rules for the performance. + Full documented video of work-in-progress, script draft, journal notes, photos of process.

		an invited audience.	Benjamin Knapton.	
4	25 Sept – 18 Nov 2018, Studio 110 @ QUT Kelvin Grove & Sue Benner Theatre @ Metro Arts	Extended rehearsal, followed by the premiere season of the work – 10x performances staged as part of Metro Arts' mainstage 2017 season.	All of the above, with the addition of: Brad Haseman, Craig Wilkinson, Nicole Neil, Rebecca Minuti.	+ Revised understanding of symbolic connectivity, simultaneity, physical agency, and 'black hole' ruptures. +Full documented archival video of performance with audience, final script, journal notes, production photos, rehearsal photos.

2.4 Data Collection Techniques

2.4.1 Documentation & Ephemera

The need to apply proven research methods to practice-led studies is problematised by Haseman and Mafe. The suggestion instead is that practitioner-researchers should "take the terms and the technique of their practice and repurpose them into the language and methods of research" (Gray in Haseman & Mafe 2009, 215). In this way, the documentation and ephemera that are created by necessity of creative practice have become integral data for this investigation. This demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between practice and theory in this methodological approach.

2.4.2 Journaling & Reflective Practice

A written journal was employed as a means of prompting reflection-on-action throughout creative practice cycles (Jasper 2003, 5). Reflecting after an experience has taken place involves an active cognitive process, which transforms experience into knowledge (Jasper 2003, 6). The "transformative nature of writing" is therefore a powerful tool for reflection, as it "forces us to impose some sort of order on the content" of our experiences (Jasper 2003, 144-145).

2.4.3 Semi-structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview was conducted with artists from Dead Centre, in order to analyse *Chekhov's First Play* as an exemplary case study. This interview was scripted with open-ended questions, preserving the opportunity to record the "interviewees' own words and ideas" in relation to their practice (Yin 2011, 32). This qualitative approach privileges the participants' "own priorities as part of their own way of describing the world as they perceive it" (Yin 2011, 136). Capturing the artists' words in this way was vital to ensure the study connects with the culture of performance-makers who work in this space.

2.5 Limitations of Scope

Considering my interest in examining the audience experience, there is an argument to be made for the need to capture audience data for this investigation. Although this might offer rewarding insight, such methodological approaches sit outside the scope of the project. Instead, the focus of this study

has been placed on the perspective of practitioners, ensuring that the use of language aligns with the discourse of practice. Further research in this field may seek data from the perspective of audience members, broadening the discourse to accommodate informal descriptions of experience.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the relationship between practice and theory employed for this study, as illustrated in the iterative cyclic web. The following chapter introduces key theoretical concepts used throughout the investigation. This conceptual framework will draw links between literary conventions, postdramatic theatre ideologies, and associated concepts of embodiment and time perception. It will then go on to apply these concepts to key case study works, demonstrating the ways in which this theory can inform creative practice.

3.0 Conceptual Framework – Contextual Review

3.1 Introduction

This contextual review introduces the field of metafiction from a literary context, identifying conventions, defining common themes, and privileging notions that pertain to theatre practice. The review will then go on to employ notions of Postdramatic theatre, intermediality, and embodiment, in order to define *embodied metafiction* as a key term. To address the purpose of this study, these concepts will be linked to the notion of time perception and the immediate present. Key exemplars of embodied metafiction will be explored to demonstrate how these ideas are applied and to identify the existing context for this sub-genre of performance.

3.2 Metafiction

Metafiction is not a particularly new concept – reflexivity has been recognised as a recurring factor in literary discourse (Seed 1991, 36). Theorists deny claims that self-reference is a result of postmodernism (Ommundsen 1993, 101), instead citing classics by Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Austen as having metafictive qualities (Currie 2014, 5).

Metafiction is defined generally as:

> …fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. (Waugh 1984, 2)

To elaborate, the broader field of reflexivity questions the 'ideology of representation' and places emphasis on the relationship between signifier and signified (Woolgar in Ommundsen 1993, 18). Metafiction can therefore be considered the "dominant designation" for what is really a practice of 'reflexive fiction' (Ommundsen 1993, 15), though it is often generalised further as simply "fiction about fiction" (Hutcheon 1984, 1).

3.3 Key Conventions of Metafiction

3.3.1 Integration versus Intervention

Differences can be identified between metafictive moments that originate from the inside of a text, and those that signal an intrusion from the outside of a text (Currie 2014, 4). The first is described as "integrated dramatisation," and could be seen in examples such as a "communication between author and reader" (Currie 2014, 4). The second, however, more likely takes the shape of an "illusion-breaking authorial intervention" (Currie 2014, 4). In context of performance, this distinction has the potential for tangible interpretation, where the line between inside and outside is clearly defined with formal conventions (ie. space).

3.3.2 Allegories & Surrogates

'Mise en Abyme' refers to "an embedded self-representation or mirror-image of the text within the text" (Dällenbach 1989). A Plot Allegory is closely related to *mise en abyme*, but refers to an indirect representation of the text (or general act of creation) rather than a mirror-image (Ommundsen 1993, 10).

A quintessential example can be seen in Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche New York*, when a theatre director constructs a scale model of his city in a warehouse located inside the same city. The scale model includes a version of the warehouse, which contains an even smaller scale model of everything inside (Kaufman 2008).

'Author Surrogates' and 'Reader Surrogates' within texts can function in parallel to the dynamic between an actual author and an actual reader. This causes an echo of the text's behaviour within itself (Currie 2014, 15-17). In the same way, plot allegories may serve as a sort of surrogate for the text itself.

3.3.3 Violation of Narrative Levels

The term 'Violation of Narrative Levels,' (Ommundsen 1993, 8) is used to encapsulate existing notions of of Metalepsis (Genette 1980), Tangled Hierarchies (McHale 1987) and Strange Loops (Hofstadter 1980). Such a rupture:

> …works to destabilise the fictional illusion, calling attention to its fabricated nature… [it] does not exactly destroy the fictional illusion (after all, we knew all along the story was a fiction); it does, however, force us to reflect on the nature of that illusion, and our own complicity in its creation. (Ommundsen 1993, 8-9)

3.3.4 Metafictional Competence

The notion of Metafictional Competence in readers suggests that to some extent the presence of metafiction depends on the way in which a

work is read (Ommundsen 1993, 27-29). Such a competence depends on the reader recognising a "double function or metaphorical relationship" and being able to interpret this as both a "part of the story and something else (comment on the story)" (ibid, 10).

3.4 Applications to Postdramatic Theatre

Existing discussions of metafiction in theatre rely on literary playtexts by artists such as Samuel Beckett (Waugh 1984, 44-46) and Luigi Pirandello (Ommundsen 1993, 23). But working from a Postdramatic paradigm of performance – which is not a negation of dramatic tradition, but rather a necessary progression of the field – there is less of an interest in the playtext holding authority in the process of meaning-making (Lehmann 2006, 21-22). Rather, in this mindset there is more emphasis on the notion of live experience (Lehmann 2006, 85), and of finding meaning located in the *intertext* between forms (Haseman 2000).

3.4.1 Intermediality

The advent of Postdramatic theatre is marked as the emancipation of theatrical discourse from literary discourse (Lehmann 2006, 16). In order to make this leap, the notion of intermediality can be used to illuminate the unique ontology of performance. Intermediality refers to "those co-relations between different media that result in a redefinition of the media that are influencing each other, which in turn leads to a refreshed perception" (Kattenbelt 2008, 25).

Where novels display certain fixed ontological properties and a consistent mediality, performance behaves as a hypermedium, incorporating multiple media without compromising the ontological

properties of each (ibid, 23). Thus, intermediality takes place in the liveness of the performance act, when disparate media interact simultaneously. They are unified, but as a whole made of many discernible parts.

3.4.2 Sites of Meaning

This notion is extrapolated by considering modes of intermediality that are not limited to medial forms, but also relate to the spaces between sites of meaning (Chapple & Kattenbelt 2006, 23). This encompasses not only the range of media and theatrical sign systems but also points to a space between "the bodies and minds of the audience, and the bodies and minds of the performer(s)" (2006, 22).

> We locate intermediality at a meeting point in-between the performers, the observers, and the confluence of media involved in a performance at a particular moment in time. The intermedial inhabits a space in-between the different realities that the performance creates… (Chapple & Kattenbelt 2006, 12)

The audience is therefore directly involved in the act of intermediality, making up one of the core components that interact in the moment of performance. Hypermediacy thus describes an aim to "remind the viewer of the medium by drawing attention to itself in a very deliberate way" (Chapple & Kattenbelt 2006, 14).

3.4.3 The Open Work

This demand for self-awareness reveals the reflexive nature of such performance. The audience traverses sites of meaning in order to read

> the work and as such are implicit in the act of meaning-making. Such an invitation evokes Eco's notion of the Open Work (1962), which celebrates the unfinished quality of postmodern texts. Openness in this way empowers audiences to participate in the co-production of meaning and multiplies possibilities in the delivery of the work (Haseman 2005, 162).

3.5 Embodying Metafiction

The term 'embodied' is appropriated for this study to affirm that it is the "process of staging the body [that] distinguishes theatre from straightforward reading or dramatic literature" (Pavis 2013, 135-6). In this way, the body becomes the site for theatre to take place:

> A focus on the body, its actions, and its cognitive mechanisms identifies … foundational principles of activity that link the three elements of theatre: story, space, and time. The three meet in, are defined by, and expressed through the actor's body. (Kemp 2012, xvi)

'Embodied' is used more specifically here to draw attention to phenomena where the brain and body work in tandem (McCutcheon & Sellers-Young 2013, 2-3). This choice of terminology acknowledges that "the entire body is engaged in the act of consciousness" and therefore the body and mind are "deeply interlinked" (ibid, 3).

Engaging with written text denotes a mental process, whereas engaging with performed texts engages a psychophysiological process. The audient's bodily presence in the space becomes a key contributor to the intermedial make-up of the work, and therefore their engagement relies on more than just a mental reception. With this spirit, the word *embodied* here illuminates metafiction in

performance that is not necessarily written, but rather can be located in consciousness. It occupies a relationship between bodies and minds.

3.6 The Problem of The Immediate Present

Considering that an audient's psychophysiological participation in a performance work becomes an influential force, the ways in which they might perceive their own presence need to be considered. In examining the notion of presence, this study is influenced by the idea that the human brain is incapable of perceiving any given moment with true immediacy (Eagleman 2009). We might think of our senses as a live connection to the world around us, but rather than being a direct feed, this impression is in fact "laboriously constructed by your brain" (ibid.).

The brain has to accumulate, process and interpret data coming from various sense systems at varying different speeds. Our auditory and visual senses, for example, do not obtain data at the exact same rate – the ears can process a signal 40 milliseconds faster than the eyes (Bilger 2011). This disparate information has to be processed and re-synchronised after an event has taken place, in order to deliver "a retrospective interpretation of what happened" (Eagleman 2009).

3.7 Case Study Exemplars

The following works serve as exemplars of embodied metafiction in contemporary performance. Each has influenced my thinking around the development of *Spectate*, helping me to grasp the dramaturgical particularities of this sub-genre.

This section directly addresses the research sub-question a: *where can the literary notion of metafiction be identified in a contemporary performance work?*

3.7.1 Hope Leaves the Theater, by Charlie Kaufman

Charlie Kaufman is best known for metafictional screenplays such as *Adaptation* (2002) and *Synecdoche New York* (2008), but in 2005 he collaborated with composer Carter Burwell to present *Hope Leaves the Theater*. At a glance the work reads as a live radio play, but this staging is what affords the opportunity for two integrated narrative levels to play out simultaneously.

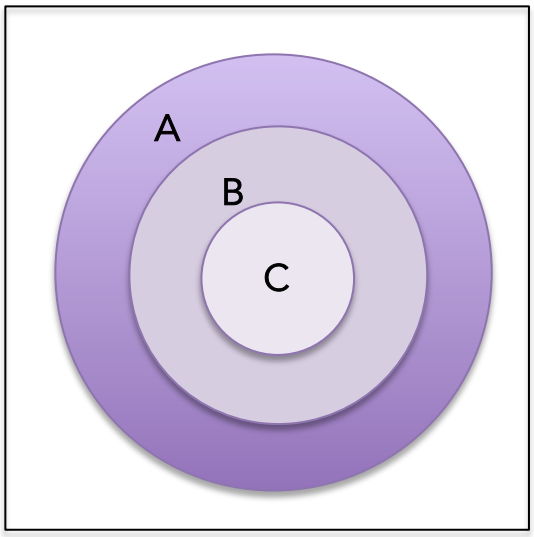


Figure 2 - Concentric circles depict the narrative structure of *Hope Leaves the Theater*

The narrative levels in *Hope Leaves the Theater* could be mapped out as three concentric circles. Level C represents the 'play-within-the-play,' a whimsical narrative about a man and a woman meeting in an elevator, performed by Meryl Streep and Peter Dinklage. This is frequently interrupted by moments from Level B – a fictive version of the real circumstances where Streep and Dinklage play scripted renderings of themselves and Hope Davis plays Louise, a member of the audience.

The 'play' in level C is written with a level of self-satire that speaks to the metamodern sensibility. Straddling the line between sincere poetry and ironic parody, Kaufman employs heavy-handed magical realism that

challenges the audience's reception. For example, the voice that announces each of the elevator's 2,000+ floors starts to reveal a tragic backstory, mourning the loss of her four-week-old son:

> Thirty fifth floor. Non articulate conditions mimicking temporomandibular joint disorders. Robert. I was going to call him Robbie. I had it all planned. Was going to teach him the piano… Thirty-sixth floor, uterine bleeding disorders, which I suffer from. As if losing Robert wasn't payment enough for whatever sins I've committed… (in Kaufman 2005)

These references are suspended between comic absurdism and vulnerable empathy. It feels for a moment that the pendulum is indecisive and our response is unclear. Do we feel for the character or grin at the nonsensical nature of her inclusion? In an intervention from the narrative world in layer B, we hear Louise's reading, decidedly calling out the nonsense:

> Uch. A whimsical absurdist piece, been done to death… This is dumb. God, I need a drink. (in Kaufman 2005)

Louise acts as a readerly surrogate for us, embodying one possible response that an audient could have. Whether or not we agree with Louise, we are positioned to interpret the relationship between her reception in B and the play she is watching in C. As the performance goes on, other interventions of the B world involve Meryl Streep breaking character to berate Louise for a ringing phone, and Louise eventually leaving the venue out of embarrassment.

In this way, *Hope Leaves the Theater* engages its audience in the story of an audient who struggles to encounter a theatre work. This gives dramaturgical relevance to the world of A, which represents the *actual reality* of our given circumstances as an audience and the nature of the real performance encounter. Where A is a real event, B is a dramatisation of that event. The relationship between B and C (ie. Louise leaving the theater) becomes an allegory for the relationship between A and B. By occupying a position as an actual audience member and sharing a hybrid space with a fictional audience, we are made to feel "impossibly fictional" (Stephenson 2010, 52). In this paradoxical state of being, we become hyper-aware of the activity we are engaged in, and must intellectually assert our presence as a genuine receiver of the work. Hence, Kaufman forces our hand as active meaning-makers.

The staging of all narrative worlds is identical: actors seated at stools, reading scripts into microphones and switching characters as needed. The work therefore depends on a psychophysiological engagement from its audience. Here, the fictional realities are constructed most clearly in the minds of those present in the room, and understood in juxtaposition to the physical reality of the space. Jen Stephenson praises the effect of this:

> In this reflective space, we become aware of and take pleasure in the perceptual work undertaken in creating fictional worlds. …our affective connections to both worlds feed each other. Our empathetic affection for Louise is intertwined with our affection for the institution of theatre itself and our role in it. (2010, 52)

In the same way that Kaufman frames Louise as a readerly surrogate for the audience, he uses characters as writerly surrogates throughout the work. Tangents that speak to the difficulty of making art serve to express his own insecurities as an artist and the futility of the exercise we are engaged in. In a B-world tantrum, Meryl Streep accosts the audience:

> Do you? Do you know why you're here, do you get anything out of it?! With your cell phone, and you nodding off… (in Kaufman 2005)

With a consistent metamodern tone, Kaufman goes on to write a tragicomic backstory of his own death (Streep presents her performance as tribute to him). And as a final intervention, all narrative layers are violated in an epilogue where a theatre critic critiques his own presence in the play. This final twisted echo cements Kaufman's challenge for us to navigate the ruptured layers, pre-emptively satirising any attempt we might make to garner meaning or impose criticism on the work:

> And even going so far as to place a fictitious critic in the fictitious audience during the fictitious play and have the whole messy affair end with his fictitious review. It's a play within a play within a play within a – yes, we get it, Mister Kaufman, bravo, aren't you wonderful? And wait, there's more. The critic's daughter is named Louise, also the name of the play's protagonist. (*Coughs.*) And the critic coughs a lot. Does he have lung cancer just like the father of the Louise in the play? Oooo, I'm getting chills, Mister Kaufman. (in Kaufman 2005)

3.7.2 Chekhov's First Play, by Dead Centre

Dead Centre's production of *Chekhov's First Play* begins with an introduction from the director Bush Moukarzel. Standing before the audience, Moukarzel explains the difficulty in trying to adapt *Platonov* (Chekhov's widely criticised first script) for a contemporary audience. Eager to make sure we understand his work, Moukarzel imposes a running director's commentary, where he will explain the significance of moments to us through headphones (2016).

This begins the premise of the work - for the first act, we watch actors staging a naturalistic version of a Chekhovian drama, with anecdotal interruptions in our ear. Occasionally, an actor falters and the whispering director is quick to point it out to us, lamenting his failing vision. A similar narrative structure to *Hope Leaves the Theater* could be recognised here: where A represents the real theatrical circumstances; B represents a fictionally rendered version of the circumstances as we play audience to Moukarzel's writerly surrogate; and C represents the traditional dramatic staging of a Chekhovian narrative.

When I interviewed the Dead Centre co-directors Moukarzel and Ben Kidd, they were quick to problematise this illustration. Even though the play "seemingly [has] multiple planes of reality," Kidd and Moukarzel assured me that their work was always "conceived in a linear fashion," as one holistic event (2016, 11). In *Chekhov's First Play*, one world undertakes a chronological journey of disillusionment, with the nature of reality changing across a narrative arc (2016, 16).

In explaining the approach to characters in the work, Moukarzel compared it to Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* (1982), suggesting that there was never really a moment where the actors would break character and 'become an actor' onstage. Moukarzel suggested that it was all a single linear journey, rather than a layered approach to character consciousness (2016, 11).

For example, one scene in *Chekhov's First Play* sees a performer who appears to have forgotten his line. Here, the actor is not breaking character or playing an actor who has forgotten a line. Rather, his character has momentarily forgotten what he was about to say and perhaps feels a moment of crisis, perhaps starts to wonder if his words were ever really his own. From the actor's perspective, this plays out as a bigger sort-of-existential phenomena, rather than as a satirical reference to the nature of theatre.

Even though the work inadvertently speaks to our experience as an audience navigating a work of theatre, the artists are using embodied metafiction to hint at something larger. The play might begin with an integrated structure where the headphones host one narrative reality and the stage space hosts another, but by the halfway point these conventions begin to break down. A surprising intervention sees a moment where an audience member steps up to play the protagonist for the second half of the performance. Eventually, the production devolves into a series of narrative violations; poetic images and snapshots that move in and out of a recognisably Chekhovian context. By the end, the play has disowned any desire for narrative clarity, opting instead for moments of surprise and pathos, in shared time and space.

Moukarzel describes the aim of such violations as introducing an abyss into the drama, moments of ambivalence, paradox and aporia, "like an impossible thought" (2016, 9). Traditionally, drama is motivated by people who have clear wants and desires, so shattering this illusion creates a black hole where all we have is consciousness, where "actually I don't want anything and my name isn't Hamlet" (Moukarzel 2016, 13). Though dark and existential in nature, Mourkarzel suggests that these subversions also inject a novelty that "pays dividends as a way of honouring the strangeness and originality that people feel… in themselves" (2016, 9).

Though my instinct was to illustrate the structure of *Chekhov's First Play* with discrete narrative levels, Kidd & Moukarzel suggest that it's more of a singular chronological journey with "tonal multitude" (2016, 10). In fact, Moukarzel suggests that in crafting the work narrative is less important than tonal complexity – "it becomes like a musical journey" (ibid). Much like Kaufman's epilogue, these works thrive on violations that are dramaturgically irresolvable. In this way, metafictive complexity transcends narrative and speaks to something more philosophical:

> The art is to make something which transcends the self, or somehow erases the self in its construction. So, this is a long answer, but I think tonally we've tried to make something which can feel as an object, greater and more various than I am capable of feeling… My conscious self is quite simple, like I say, I walk around feeling sad – that's basically it. That's my schtick. But I think unconsciously, I contain multitudes, as Walt Whitman would say. So I think it's tonally trying to search [for]

> something that has that magnitude… a totality that might feel bigger than my subjective mood. (Moukarzel 2016, 10)

3.7.3 The Autoteatro Series (from Rotozaza to Il Pixel Rosso)

Silvia Mercuriali and Ant Hampton collaborated under the name Rotozaza on a series of participatory performance works between 1998-2009. Together they coined the term *autoteatro* to define the style of work they were making – automatic instructional theatre for unrehearsed participants.

In *Etiquette* (2007), two participants seated in a café follow instructions via headphones to manipulate tabletop objects. The resulting gestures, synchronised to a soundtrack, generate for each other an impromptu presentation. In *Wondermart* (2009), a single participant follows instructions via headphones to tour a local supermarket. A voice guides them to engage in the space subversively, performing tasks like following a random shopper or racing to find a single item.

In these works, no additional performers are present. The participants act as both performer and observer for themselves. In this way, Hampton and Mercuriali suggest that an autoteatro work is a "'trigger' for a subsequently self-generating performance" (n.d.).

Such works depend on a metafictional competence, as participants navigate the porous boundaries between the real world and their self-generated arts experience. The act of creation becomes a significant focus in the work, with participants witnessing themselves in process and

employing hypermediacy to recognise when an observable moment has been created.

Mercuriali went on to pursue works of *autoteatro* that employed instructional video, working under the name Il Pixel Rosso with film director Simon Wilkinson. In *And the Birds Fell From the Sky* (2010), participants wear video goggles and are moved around a space to mirror the actions of a first-person short film. Instructions prompt the participant to move their head as the video pans, and raise their hand when this matches the protagonist's actions.

The technology used in this work pre-dates the popularity of virtual reality goggles. More recent VR solutions use complex tracking systems to generate responsive video automatically (Gutiérrez 2008, 107). The key difference in the goggles used by Il Pixel Rosso is that immersion is not automatic – the immersiveness of the illusion depends on the audient's participation. If they don't move their head when asked, the effect does not work.

Though technologically less sophisticated, this empowers the participants in the act of suspending their own disbelief. They are responsible for enabling the illusion of the virtual world. This speaks to the self-aware nature of all *autoteatro* work, where participants maintain awareness of the real world alongside the fictive reality. Such hypermediacy invites a mode of embodied metafiction where the act of construction is always visible and the content often depends on an intermedial relationship between reality and fiction.

3.8 Conclusion

These case studies serve to illustrate the practical links between concepts introduced throughout this chapter. Here, the interplay between ideas points to the effect of embodied metafiction in practice. This also answers the research sub-question, explaining where literary notions can be identified in contemporary performance.

Hope Leaves the Theater demonstrates the use of readerly and writerly surrogates in performance, where the bodies and minds of the audience are used as a paradoxical site of meaning. Kaufman imposes narrative events onto the audience, using a playful metamodern tone to challenge their intellectual position in response to fictional circumstances. The audience is forced to engage their own hypermediacy in order to navigate the co-presence of reality and fiction. The result of this is a heightened awareness of their physical presence in time and space.

Chekhov's First Play begins with a similar use of surrogacy, introduced in an integrated dramatisation. But as the work progresses, Dead Centre violates all narrative levels in the pursuit of tonal complexity. Illusions are ruptured for the sake of a greater philosophical throughline, a linear 'musical journey' rather than a layered narrative arc. What remains after these 'black holes,' is an open work that multiplies possibilities in our reception, privileging our reflexive presence in the event rather than the structural logic of its fiction.

Finally, *The Autoteatro Series* demonstrates the significance of hypermediacy, where participants are left to navigate the intermedial components of a performance work on their own. This gives the audience ultimate responsibility

in the process of meaning-making, but also depends on a necessary level of metafictional competence in order for them to recognise themselves as potential sites of meaning.

The following chapter introduces *Spectate* as the practical component of this study. Here, *Spectate* is offered as an exemplar of the aforementioned theoretical concepts, demonstrating influence from the case study analyses.

4.0 Creative Practice – *Spectate*

This chapter summarises the creative practice cycle components of the study, introducing *Spectate* as the performative research output. It goes on to explore how creative practice was influenced by key concepts identified in the contextual review.

4.1 Synopsis of the Work

Spectate tells a story about an audience. Set in 1926 Michigan, a room full of people watch Harry Houdini's final performance before he passes out on stage and later dies. Using theatrical conventions borrowed from participatory audio works (for example, headphone audio narration and instructional guides) the audience is enrolled as the protagonist in this story – examining what it means to be an audience and how we connect with each other when we watch theatre, performance and spectacle.

Spectate draws on the turbulent relationship that Houdini had with his audiences. A biography by Kalush & Sloman (2006) captures the time in Houdini's life when he was trying to move on from death-defying stunts and desired instead to cement his legacy as an esteemed intellectual. When finally checked in to a hospital, Houdini listed his primary occupation as 'author,' and confessed to his doctor an anxious dissatisfaction with his life's achievements. By 1926, a third of each of his live shows was dedicated to a lecture series, but Houdini frequently fought with audiences who only came to see big stunts (Kalush & Sloman 2006).

Spectate has been developed over three cycles of creative practice. The final cycle culminated in a public season of the work at Metro Arts, from 7th – 18th November, 2017.

4.2 Theory Influencing Practice

Cycles of creative practice took place in between periods of contextual research. This section identifies how key theoretical concepts have influenced the ongoing development of *Spectate* in practical ways. Using the previous case study exemplars as inspiration for how embodied metafiction can be located in performance, the following observations make links between data obtained through reflective practice, and concepts extracted from the contextual review.

4.2.1 Plot Allegories

The narrative structure of *Spectate* is influenced by Ommundsen's idea of plot allegories, with two fictive worlds interwoven as indirect representations of each other. At first, the focus is on a fictional audient in 2017: a young female waiting to see a play performed by Toby Martin (a fictional version of the lead performer). The audient has low expectations, regretting her choice to buy a ticket and considering escaping before the show begins. But once it begins, she becomes entranced by Toby's performance, falling irrationally in love with him and experiencing unexplainable splendour.

In an adjacent narrative layer, the audient is an older male in 1926, waiting to see Harry Houdini live on stage. At first he has high expectations, excited to see a legendary celebrity. But once it begins, he

becomes disenchanted and disappointed with Houdini's performance, eventually experiencing an irrational thrill at the voyeurism of Houdini's near-death.

The following table maps the echoes between these plot allegories.

	Narrative Layer 1	Narrative Layer 2
Time	2017	1926
Space	Sue Benner Theatre, Brisbane	Garrick Theatre, Michigan
Audient	A young female	An older male
Performer	Toby Martin (fictionalised)	Harry Houdini
Expectations	Low, dreading the play	High, thrilled to be there
Result	Falls in love with the performer	Deeply disappointed with the performer
Interventions	Theatrical rebellion: text messages from a girl outside, a figure from the audient's past, distracting from the stage	Theatrical scenes: rupture into Houdini's memory, summoning figures from *his* past, activating the stage as a dramatic space

Other echoes of this story can be extracted from the work. The prologue and epilogue frame the real Toby Martin as an indirect audient to Houdini's legacy. And a surreal tangent towards the end enrols Toby Martin as audient to his own performance in a bad TV drama, *Dr. Hospital M.D.*

4.2.2 Character Consciousness Across Narrative Levels

During the first stages of our creative development, I directed Toby Martin to play two different characters as represented in the narrative layers. In one moment, he was Harry Houdini, and then as the narrative shifted he would abandon that identity to present a version of himself, the actor. After taking inspiration from Dead Centre's dramaturgical approach, we updated our logic to suggest that Toby was only embodying one constant protagonist (personal journal, 15 March 2017). In *Spectate,* Houdini undertakes a chronological linear journey, even as reality distorts around him. Toby Martin confessed to me in one rehearsal that these directions became "easier to play" (personal journal, 20 December 2016). He could embody a sense of identity crisis, confusion, or uncertainty whereas to play "stepping out of character" lacked an emotional core (ibid).

From the audience's perspective though, the meaning of such scenes is still open to interpretation. In the same way that the actor has sustained their sense of self while transcending narrative levels, the audience is not made to reconfigure their relation to the fictive cosmos onstage. Although the logic of the space may have shifted, Moukarzel suggests that this introduces "the mystery of consciousness" rather than punctuating a sudden change of identity (2016, 13).

4.2.3 Violation of Narrative Levels

Dead Centre's explanation of character can be combined with the *violation of narrative levels* (Ommundsen 1993, 8) as a way of

understanding the scene transitions in *Spectate*. Rather than locating a different character on each narrative level (for instance, Toby on one and Houdini on two), we positioned one constant character as subjective to the violations (Houdini in one *and* two). In this way, the metafictive device becomes a driver for the character's crisis. This seems to invite what Moukarzel describes as "a hyper-conscious awareness of trying to understand your place and who you are" (2016, 14).

Daniel Evans, an associate dramaturg, observed that the whole show "occupied Houdini's mental state" (personal journal, 3 July 2017). This suggested that when we perceived a 'performer' in the space stepping in and out of moments, this was always read in the context of Houdini's character arc. We do not perceive a shift between *Houdini* and *Performer Playing Houdini*, but rather a shift between *Houdini Onstage* and *Houdini Offstage*. Noting that Houdini's narrative journey concerns a struggle to perform his role, this became an allegorical link between structure and content:

> And so the 'out of character' Toby is simultaneously Toby Martin the performer and Harry Houdini the man offstage… the idea of being a performer resonates and speaks to our immediate circumstances as much as to Houdini's core drama. (personal journal, 5 July 2017)

4.2.4 Surrogacy

The realisation that "Houdini [the magician] is a character played by the man Harry Houdini" (personal journal, 5 July 2017) helped us to understand the significance of Toby Martin's presence in the work. Houdini was not a genuine man on stage, and his stage persona began

to haunt him. This lent a functional purpose to the relationship between Toby and Houdini.

By adopting the notion of surrogacy in metafiction (Currie 2014, 15-17) it is possible to frame Harry Houdini (the character in front of us) as an authorial surrogate (or perhaps a *performer* surrogate) for Toby Martin, and vice versa. The ways in which we as an audience relate to Harry Houdini (when he is not *presenting* to the fictional audience in 1926) echo the ways in which we might relate to Toby Martin. And the ways in which we relate to the human being in front of us echo the relationship that audiences may have had with Houdini, both as a person and as a concept.

This offers a parallel of the performance's mechanics within the world of the performance, drawing the audience's attention to the relationship between performers and audiences as a theme. Benjamin Knapton, another associate dramaturg, suggested that Houdini's story offered an "emotional catalyst" for the play's choice of form (personal journal, 11 July 2017). This suggests that the application of embodied metafiction here works to serve the specific thematic pursuits of this text, exploring the nature of the relationship between ourselves as performance artists and our audience.

4.2.5 Black Holes for Open Works

Both Dead Centre and Kaufman compound their narrative violations to create moments of abyss, where narrative features are disconnected, but also connected in seemingly impossible ways. These "black holes" in the

narrative become "a sort of painterly expression of the way the mind unravels and wraps around itself" (Moukarzel 2016, 14). The final moments of *Spectate* offer irrational echoes between worlds, as *Dr. Hospital M.D.* recycles actors, characters, themes and real world references. These irrational links force us to "reflect on the nature of… illusion" (Ommundsen 93, 9) and "hopefully allows for theatre to be a place for the sublime" (Kidd 2016, 13).

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated where theoretical concepts influenced the development of *Spectate* during creative practice cycles. Notions of plot allegories, authorial surrogates and integrated narrative levels all informed the structural development and writing of the work. The direction of the work was further influenced by the violation of narrative levels and Dead Centre's rationale for black holes.

In keeping with the methodological approach of the iterative cyclic web, the next chapter identifies where work done in creative practice informed the development of theoretical concepts. As an exemplar of embodied metafiction and a practice-led research outcome, *Spectate* is here used to demonstrate performative knowledge that contributes to the interpretive framework.

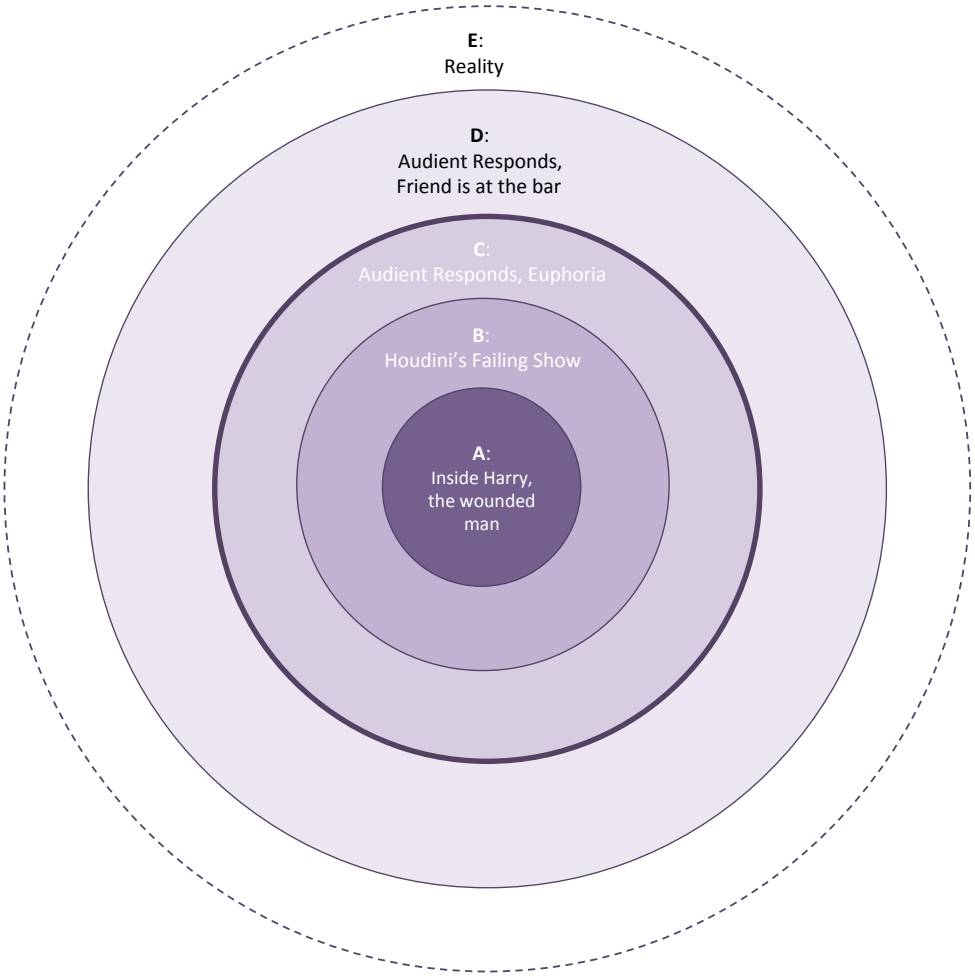
5.0 Practice Informing Theory

As outlined in the methodology chapter, this study adopts the iterative cyclic web as a model for practice-led research that embraces performative knowledge. In this way, this chapter expands on the concepts introduced in the previous sections, by using creative practice to inform the understanding of theory. Here, the interpretive framework for embodied metafiction will be further developed by understandings gathered in reflective practice. Moments from the development and presentation of *Spectate* will inform key ideas, and also serve to answer the research question - articulating the effect of embodied metafiction in contemporary performance. Other sections below will go some way to answering the remaining two sub-questions, naming some potential tools that could be used in a devising process to evoke embodied metafiction; and explaining how the use of embodied metafiction can heighten the audience's experience of the immediate present.

5.1 Reading the Simultaneity of Narrative Levels

Although *Spectate*'s narrative can be understood as taking place in layered fictive realities, the audience experience depends on "theatrical simultaneity of worlds" (personal journal, 15 December 2017). Fictive realities are not discrete or staged in isolation. Rather, the effect of the work relies on worlds being read in conversation – an intermedial exchange. The work therefore depends on the hypermediacy of performance, and the ontological co-existence of fiction and reality that distinguishes an act of theatre.

The narrative levels involved in the work can be seen in the following diagram. These concentric circles were used in early stages of development to explain the structure of the show, and make dramaturgical decisions.



LAYER A:
Flashbacks to various times
Staged with realism
Transition with tight LX & sound, interrupting B
Story of Harry's ambitions/pride

LAYER B:
1926
Staged with visible tech construction
Co-exists with C
Story of Houdini's downfall

LAYER C:
1926
Disembodied instructional voice
Voice of classical male
Transition from D with blackout
Story of past audient's euphoria

LAYER D:
2017
Disembodied instructional voice
Voice of contemporary female
Exists during pre-show and false interval of 'C' (transition with blackout)
Story of current audient's distraction

LAYER E:
2017
The underlying reality outside of the fiction.

Figure 3 - Concentric Circle Diagram used in early stages of script development and devising (2016)

We initially worked under the impression that any one moment in the performance had to take place in a single narrative level. After some reflection, however, we realised that the hypermedial experience of the work depended on multiple levels being active at the same time (personal journal, 12 December 2016).

This principle can be clearly observed in the final performance work. In the conductor moment in scene two (timecode 00:16:48 in the archival video), the image of Cam Clark, playing a conductor, is superimposed onto the image of a table-top orchestra. Here, the method for staging the scene is what makes it intriguing – two live video images being manipulated with synchronicity to create an illusion. We are only interested in the moment in layer B (the Garrick Theatre reality) because of the playful act of construction taking place in layer D (the Sue Benner Theatre reality). Through this mode of staging where both worlds are visible and active, the audience is invited to participate cognitively in the act of creation, and to read meaning in the intertext between layers.

Figure 4 - Blocking the Conductor Moment in Creative Practice Cycle #2 (3 July 2017)

We realised that reading the work in this way would demand a level of metafictional competence from the audience. In order to appreciate the form, they must first recognise the visible acts of construction. A moment in the prologue (timecode 00:01:58) served to pre-empt this, developing metafictional competence by clearly demonstrating a moment of visible construction. While we hear the voice of Toby Martin talking about the challenge of playing Houdini, we witness him observing old Houdini footage. In front of us, Martin slowly and methodically adopts the physicality of Houdini,

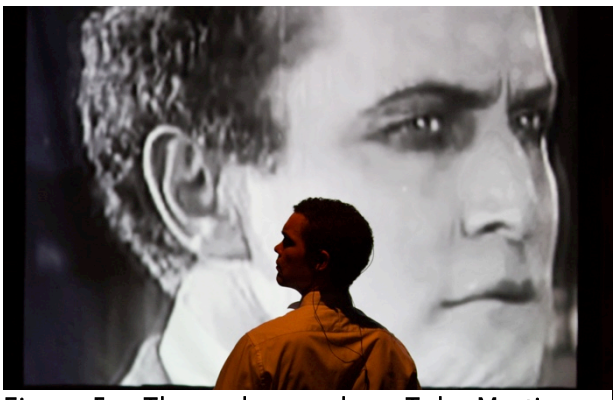


Figure 5 - The prologue where Toby Martin adopts the physicality of Houdini, production photo by Stephen Henry

experimenting with each part of his body to establish the character. In this moment, we are introduced to the act of a person becoming another person, and straddling both identities, between the performer and the performed. This becomes a thread that we are prompted to follow throughout the duration of the work, recognising other moments where something is assembled before our eyes.

Figure 6 - Toby Martin being locked inside a milk can full of water, production photo by Stephen Henry

The simultaneity of worlds reaches a climax in the work, when Toby Martin is locked inside a milk can full of water. This scene takes place in a liminal reality, a black hole between violated narrative levels. We could understand the act as representing Houdini drowning in 1926, but for the first time in the performance, Toby Martin's body is actually being subjected to the material realities of a Houdini stunt: the milk can, water, and locks are all real. The presence of dramatic characters Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Margery Crandon (played by Brad Haseman and Elise Greig) serve to further violate the logic of the narrative context, smashing together features from earlier narrative tangents in Layer A. At the same time, we hear the voice from Layer C, distorted and mixed with the voice from Layer D in a way that betrays all established convention. The circumstances of this moment are not grounded in any one defined reality, instead operating in a sudden abyss, as suggested by Dead Centre (Moukarzel 2016, 9).

In this absence of narrative clarity, the audience is left to navigate meaning on their own terms, invoking the open work's multiplication of possibilities. There

may not be a right way of reading this scene, but the chaos of media and narrative offers a richness, or a tonal complexity instead (Moukarzel 2016, 11).

5.2 Audience Position and Heightening the Immediate Present

One of the research sub-questions suggested that the use of embodied metafiction might heighten the audience's awareness of the immediate present. This was my instinct in beginning this study, and I believe this has now been validated. Further contextual research in neuroscience and philosophy is used here to elaborate, and data from audience members illustrates this effect in two select moments.

The milk can scene described above is a moment that demands hypermediacy from the audience. Meredith Walker, a reviewer, described the show as "suspending audience experience between layers of reality and versions of truth and fiction" (2016). This description highlights the challenge of the work, as audience members must interpret their own position in relation to various narrative levels.

The scene that follows the milk can moment takes us back to the narrative reality of layer D (see figure 2). Despite the shift in narrative context, the material reality of the world persists in this moment and audience members expressed that they were unable to stop worrying about Toby Martin underwater (Regan 2016). The logic of the scene suggests we may have shifted chronology, but in the reality of the room we have seen no evidence to suggest that Martin is not still locked underwater.

For some, this uncertainty caused a state of discomfort. In a personal email, producer Summer Bland described how this affected her experience:

> I could not work out how that happened and I was genuinely concerned for him – brilliant! It did distract me from the texting part of the show though. I couldn't disengage from the realism of the can trick so my replies to the text didn't get a response... I sent "Please let Tony (sic.) out of the can now". So because I didn't get any feedback, I sat there with my headphones on while people around me laughed for what seemed like a really long time.
> (personal correspondence, 24 November 2017)

Bland was hyper-aware of her presence during this moment, indicated by her suggestion that she "couldn't disengage" and that it "seemed like a really long time." Her concern in the moment made her actively involved, enrolling herself into the fictional circumstances as though they were real – though her mention of "brilliant!" affirms that she did in fact understand the safety of the scene after the fact.

In the intermedial composition of the show, our actual reality becomes a significant site of meaning. Playing with the boundaries of this layer during 'black hole' moments is seen to have the the potential to implicate the audience in fictional circumstances. Their presence occupies the layer of actual reality, which is intertwined with the workings of the show. In this way, the audience's immediate presence becomes a significant contributor to the work.

But as explored in the contextual review, our perception of the immediate present is in fact a lie that is told to us by our brain (Eagleman 2009). We are not aware of a moment until it has passed, and therefore cannot truly 'be present' in the immediate present. The closest we can get is to capture the

"feeling of nowness" by naming a moment as 'now,' by circling a moment and somehow filling it with something that can be articulated (Burdick 2017, 26). Burdick expands this idea by saying,

> We can't perceive empty time any more than we can intuit a length or distance with nothing in it.… Look up into a clear blue sky: how far away is one hundred feet? How far is a mile? With no landmarks for reference, one can't say. It's the same with time. If we perceive time's passage it's because we perceive change, and for us to perceive change, the time must be somehow filled; an empty duration alone won't stimulate our awareness. So what fills it? (Burdick 2017, 85)

If the experience of time depends on perceiving change, then *narrative* becomes the human experience of time (Augustine in Cobley 2001, 19). To perceive a moment, we must recognise the narrative circumstances of that moment, to such an extent that we can name it and share it. The immediate present, therefore, becomes not something that we experience passively, but something that "we create for ourselves over and over again, moment by moment" (James in Burdick 2017, 86).

As evidenced in *Spectate*, metafiction plays on the borders between reality and fiction, and therefore has the power to fictionalise our present circumstances. This can be seen in moments throughout the work that draw attention to 'now' and apply narrative qualities to our conscious experience. A clear example can be heard in the first moments of recorded voice in the production (timecode 00:03:56):

> So you've walked into a theatre, and here you sit. It's dim, but not dark. A strange smell. Damp and dust. You shift in your seat, uncertain.

> Time is passing. The person next to you is a heavy breather. (Spectate 2017, 3)

This text serves to exploit the circumstances of our present experience for the purposes of narrative. In doing this, the text is naming the moment and creating the present, with a playful mix of fidelity and creative license. Narrating and transforming the circumstances of our consciousness in this way therefore has the ability to heighten our awareness of the immediate present, enabling us to perceive the experience of time more vividly than before.

This answers the third research sub-question, explaining how embodied metafiction could heighten an audience's awareness of the immediate present. Though quantitative evidence of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study, this application of concepts contributes towards an understanding of the effect that embodied metafiction has.

5.3 Connectivity Across Narrative Levels

This manipulation of the immediate present evokes Augustine's notion that time is the "tension of consciousness" (in Burdick 2017, 89). The work harnesses the collective consciousness of its audience for use as an intermedial site of meaning. However, the layer of *Spectate* that contextualises our conscious presence in the space is challenged by other narrative layers where we are made invisible. Dramatic flashbacks that take place in Houdini's memory deny the presence of the audience, and therefore fracture the narrative of our participation.

Though these conventions keep shifting, echoes between fictive worlds serve to demonstrate the inter-connectivity of all narrative levels. For example, in the world of the Sue Benner Theatre, we are engaged in an SMS conversation with a character in the bar known only as 'the girl in the green skirt.' Towards the end of *Dr. Hospital M.D.*, the doctor meets up with a girl in the bar and she is seen to be wearing a green skirt (timecode 01:35:45).

Figure 7 - The girl in the green skirt after Craig Wilkinson doctored the green to improve visibility

When we filmed this scene, the chosen skirt was poorly lit and in the final footage it actually looked black. Early test audiences, including dramaturg Ben Knapton, failed to recognise the connection here, and as a result the whole scene felt disconnected (personal journal, 4 November 2017). We approached video artist Craig Wilkinson to adjust the colours in the image, ensuring that the green was conspicuous and foregrounded. After this change was made, audiences audibly gasped at the appearance of this image – the recognition was significant, and the connectivity of the moment was exciting. After all, this was a character they had interacted with.

The scene is riddled with other subtle echoes. The actor playing the girl (Anna McGahan) is also the voice inside our heads during layer 1 scenes. The conversation between the girl and the doctor makes indirect comment to a death similar to Houdini's own. But even if these nuances go unnoticed, Knapton suggests that the skirt acts as a blatant symbol, assuring us that connections are in fact there:

> Realising that the skirt is a connection opens us up to the possibility that there might be other connections too. In a way, we become more aware that maybe the whole thing is connected, that it all fits together in some way.
> (personal journal, 4 November 2017)

Considering that our conscious participation in the show is accepted as a key part of its composition, this realisation of broader connectivity implicates our own presence too. If there are conceptual ties between the disparate narrative realities, then our own reality could be just as connected to what's going on.

This logic lends a clearer rationale for our presence in scenes where we may have been otherwise invisible. Our reality is undeniably linked to the fictions. In an earlier moment from *Dr Hospital M.D.*, this is evidenced by a joke that references the real world (timecode 01:34:32). Hugh Parker plays Mr. Weisz, an actor dying of peritonitis. Although connected to Houdini's narrative (this dramatises his real moment of death, and Weisz was his birth name), Dr. Hospital makes a casual remark that ruptures the fiction:

> DR HOSPITAL: You did give something back. I saw you in Much Ado…
> MR WEISZ: Right… Just all seems so trivial now…
> (Spectate 2017, 49)

Hugh Parker recently played the lead role in Queensland Theatre's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* – a fact that is readily recognised by much of Brisbane's theatre-going community. In hindsight, this reference may have been insincere in its effect (personal journal, 15 December 2017). But even so, the allusion to real life helped to ground the show in a real time and place. If we can trust in the inter-connectedness of all narrative realities, then our own fractured narrative is reassured as having a place within the chaos.

5.4 Tools to Evoke Embodiment

An aim of this research project has been to provide other practitioners with useful insight into the process of staging embodied metafiction. This section responds directly to research sub-question B, nominating tools that can be used in a devising process to evoke embodied metafiction. The following tools specifically evoke embodiment, evidenced by reflections of our process in physically engaging the audience.

5.4.1 Headphones

Between the first and second practice cycles, a key decision was made regarding the use of instructional audio. Originally, the work depended on a disembodied voice amplified throughout the room. There was something undesirable about the listening dynamic caused by this use of form, so in reflection we decided to locate the voice within individual headsets worn by each audience member (personal journal, 3 March 2017).

If the use of narrative prompts an awareness of time, then the use of headphones serves to provoke an awareness of space – or at least the physical presence of the audient's body in the space. Worn like a costume, the headphones physically enable the audience to access their identity as a fictional audience member (receiving the internal monologue). They also separate each individual from the collective crowd, causing an uncertainty around whether everyone is hearing the same content.

This dynamic heightens a tension between the individual and the collective. Our production designer Sarah Winter suggested that this "forces them to take stock," prompting the audience to consider their experience and acknowledge the nature of their physical presence in the room at this moment (personal journal, 4 July 2017).

At the end of the work, an epilogue encourages the audience to remove their headphones and hear a live voice for the first time, aurally shared from one sound source (the actor's mouth) as opposed to the two-hundred separate ear pieces (timecode 01:38:45). This contrasts with the individualistic nature of other audio from throughout the show, causing the room to "click together" and offering a renewed sense of communality to the audience (personal journal, 11 July 2017). This shift further serves to highlight the physical co-presence of humans in the room, and the impact of our embodied position in space.

Figure 8 - Toby Martin's epilogue, where the audience is asked to remove their headphones, production photo by Stephen Henry.

5.4.2 Lighting

The audience remain physically located in one space throughout the various narrative layers of the work. Rather than conjuring the different

audience realities in their minds only, a focus on lighting the seating bank implies the use of the audience's bodies as sites of meaning.

Four different house light states define the different audience contexts throughout the work. Festoon bulbs illuminate the actual pre-show as the audience are entering the venue for the first time. Then, a row of par-16 lights softly illuminate the seating bank from behind during a *performed* pre-show state, drawing attention to the audience during the in-ear monologue from the 2017 voice in our head. Chandeliers activate above the seating bank to later evoke a pre-show state in the Garrick Theatre, 1926. And finally, the seating bank is dimmed gently while we are watching Houdini's performance.

A fifth state sees the seating bank entirely unlit during moments when the audience is absent from the narrative, such as the dramatic flashback scenes in Houdini's memory. These subtle cues help to orchestrate the shift between narrative layers throughout the work. Emphasis is placed on defining the audience's physical space, demonstrating the significance of their bodily presence.

5.4.3 SMS Sequence

Despite this physical presence, the role of the audience is mostly passive throughout the duration of the work. The notable exception is in scene fourteen, where audience members are invited to partake in an SMS conversation with the girl in the green skirt, an unseen character located in the next-door bar (timecode 01:21:06).

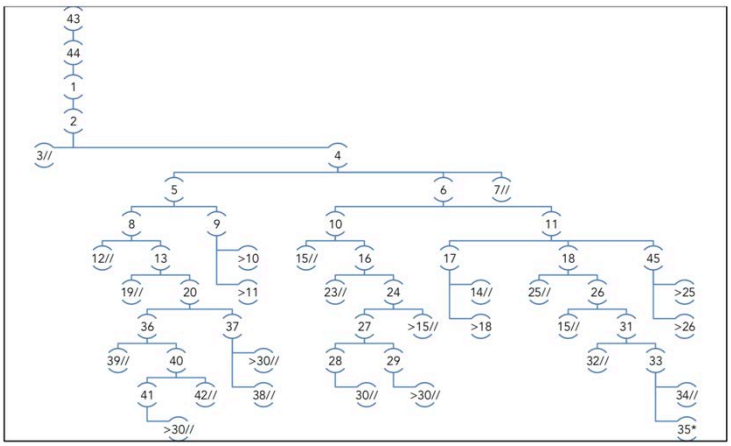


Figure 9 - The scripted SMS flowchart

This scene unfolds with a flowchart structure. The conversation is scripted, but it depends on input from each audience member. The more they contribute to their interaction, the more they will receive from the character.

This becomes the first instance of physical agency in the work. Audience members have been enrolled as characters throughout the narrative, but this is the first time they get a say in how their character behaves. Their bodies have been appropriated for dramaturgical significance, but in this moment they are invited to use their bodies to influence change:

> after we have passively sat through an ordeal where we were positioned antagonistically against a man who was trying and suffering, here were are actively given the opportunity to role play an instance of human empathy. (personal journal, 6 July 2017)

5.5 Related Side-Effects of Embodied Metafiction

This study focussed on establishing the effect of embodied metafiction using contextual theory to devise an interpretive framework. Throughout creative practice, some side-effects emerged as opportunities of the form, rather than direct manifestations. These are included here for their perceived value to other practitioners.

5.5.1 Metamodern Magic

The metafictive staging of this work allowed for a kind of theatrical pleasure that we referred to as 'metamodern magic.' This felt unique to the project, but I realised that it was the result of a broader opportunity present in the form.

We devised the term from a key dramaturgical rule in *Spectate. This* declared that magic tricks were never to be staged in their true form, but rather deconstructed and represented. Scenes involving magic "always removed the virtuosity or sleight of hand, always cheated the bit that makes it magic" (personal journal, 17 Dec 2016). This served to ground the work in irony and self-consciousness, addressing the metamodern sensibility identified by Vermeulen & van den Akker (2010).

In this way, we were subverting one of the key features of stage magic. Usually, audiences are in the dark, with a secret hidden from them in order to create a sense of wonder. But in this work:

> they are never in the dark, but rather experience a renewed sense of wonder by the craft of theatrical magic. A different sort of pleasure is stimulated by being 'in on the trick' rather than a victim of the trick. (personal journal, 17 Dec 2016)

An example can be seen in our staging of a famous Houdini card trick (timecode 00:33:16). A randomly selected card is placed into an envelope, torn into pieces, and then miraculously repaired. The traditional illusion relies on a hidden compartment in a tabletop, enabling an unseen switch of the envelope (Gibson 1961).

Figure 10 - A live composite of Toby Martin's body and Cam Clark's hands, image from archival recording

Our representation of this moment involves a playfully blatant switch of the envelope. The live camera is focussed in on Houdini's torso as the card is set and the envelope ripped. Houdini lifts his arms out of shot, and we see a new set of hands, clumsily overlayed onto Houdini's body. These are the hands of Houdini's assistant, compositing a second live image from the tabletop camera as he rips the envelope into pieces.

At first, the image is ambiguous. It takes a moment before we can cognitively re-assemble the pieces from various sites of meaning to understand that A + B = C. When this does click though, the construction of the image is simultaneously simple and convoluted: simple because it defies the need for any magical secret but convoluted because it over-complicates a simple gesture so much so that the execution reads like a punch line.

The playfulness of this moment, and others like it, depends on the simultaneous layered worlds that are inherent to embodied metafiction. In this way, I suggest that metamodern magic is made possible through metafictive approaches to staging.

5.5.2 Aestheticised Contingencies

Working with metafictive narratives has an unfortunate side-effect when paired with elaborate technologies. The likely event of something not working during a performance produces uncertainty in the minds of those watching. Actual mistakes are difficult to differentiate from performed mistakes.

This caused a lot of stress for our sound designer Mike Willmett during a preview performance. When the audio system was being particularly uncooperative, the sound design devolved into a staticky hiss towards the end of the performance (show report, 8 November 2017). In later discussion, audience members assumed this was an intentional part of the design. Willmett lamented this, suggesting that he would prefer audience members to recognise the error rather than thinking his aesthetic choices had been so crude and unpleasing (personal journal, 8 November 2017).

During rehearsals, we developed a means of capitalising on this unique uncertainty. In the likelihood that something didn't work during performance, we developed contingency scenes with a playfully ambiguous aesthetic to intervene. These would effectively facilitate a show stop without compromising the mood or complexity of the work. Rather than snapping the audience into an actual reality, like a conventional show stop might, these would keep the audience suspended in a performed version of reality.

The same voice that greeted audience in pre-show headphone tests was used here to define the outer-most narrative layer with a metamodern tone:

> We are experiencing technical difficulties. Please stand by and think about how much you've enjoyed the show so far. We're really enjoying having all of you in the space with us. We love this theatre. We can tell that you do too. We're glad that you're sticking with us, and we're sticking with you. (Spectate 2017)

We developed a range of these sequences in response to various technical errors that could have required trouble-shooting mid-performance. Some involved rehearsed performers onstage, but most were scripted audio cues fed to the audience headphones via back-up system.

After preparing for the worst, we only had to use these contingencies during one performance in the season (show report, 16 November 2017). It was relieving in this case to have control over the audience experience in an uncontrolled event. Aestheticised contingencies have since become a staple in our practice wherever technology is used alongside embodied metafiction.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has used reflections from the development and presentation of *Spectate* to further inform theoretical concepts regarding embodied metafiction. Notions of integrated narrative levels have been expanded upon here with the realisation that levels are experienced simultaneously in a live

performance experience. This hypermediality is unique to live performance, and therefore integral to understanding metafiction in a performed state.

The idea that the audience's reality is an intermedial component of the form has also been given further significance. As demonstrated with audience response, 'black hole' moments in the dramaturgical structure can cause an increased emphasis on the reality of the audience as a primary site of meaning. When the narrative layers are violated, the audience becomes the only narrative constant.

Taking influence from ideas in neuroscience, I found that fictionalising the audience circumstances can also affect an increased awareness of the immediate present. Giving narrative significance to the present in this way serves as an elaborate declaration of 'now.' Furthermore, symbolic gestures of connectivity between narrative layers can serve as a reassurance that the audience's reality is intertwined with the performance.

This chapter has also discussed ways of orienting an audience towards metafictional competence using performed moments of visible construction. Some tools for evoking an embodied experience were introduced, and side-effects of embodied metafiction were seen to be the opportunity for a metamodern approach to stage magic, and the opportunity for aestheticized contingencies.

These concepts will be further distilled in the next chapter, to serve as a response to the key research question. To contextualise the findings from this study, some key observed principles of embodied metafiction are offered as advice to fellow practitioners.

6.0 Outcomes & Conclusions

This chapter represents the overall findings from the study, summarising key concepts and providing a response to the primary research question.

6.1 Principles for Evoking Embodied Metafiction

This study was always situated in practice, for the benefit of practitioners. This section provides a summary of observed principles for use by other practitioners embarking on works that employ embodied metafiction.

6.1.1 Declaring the Immediate Present

The role of the audience becomes significant in embodied metafiction. Their contribution to the work is not just as observers, but as a key site of meaning (Chapple & Kattenbelt 2006). In order to emphasise this significance, the audience should be defined through narrative or symbol.

Our involvement in the immediate present may be problematised by neuroscience (Eagleman 2009), but metafiction can manufacture an experience of the present by declaring a moment of 'now' (Burdick 2017). This declaration can take place in a medial or performative gesture. For example, narration in the present tense highlights the 'now' of our experience and draws our attention to our position in time. Appropriating our circumstances for narrative purposes serves as an elaborate declaration of the 'now'. In this way, metafiction can heighten our awareness of the immediate present and increase our capacity to feel 'present' in a performance context.

6.1.2 Connectivity and Simultaneity of Narrative Layers

Embodied metafiction thrives on the awareness of construction. We realise that something is being created, and we have access to both worlds – the one that is producing a fiction, and the one that is contained within that fiction. This position capitalises on the hypermediality of performance (Chapple & Kattenbelt 2006), where both worlds can occur simultaneously.

Embodied metafiction is therefore located in an intermedial space. Intermediality depends on an awareness of the seams between media – elements are not perfectly integrated, but rather interact with each other in a discernible way (Kattenbelt 2008). Highlighting these seams provokes hypermediacy in the audience and therefore invites a more complex reading.

Embodied metafiction has the capacity to introduce a narrative chaos that speaks to the messiness and strangeness of life (Moukarzel 2016). A 'black hole' in the narrative layers can frame irreconcilable tangents as ironic metamodern gestures. The risk of these moments is that they may feel alienating and random in their inclusion, rather than artfully absurd.

Symbolic connections between narrative tangents, even when these are arbitrary in nature, can serve to symbolise the inherent inter-connectedness of fictive worlds. If the audience can be reassured by a clear symbolic link between narrative layers, they may be led to trust in the overall connectivity of the work, and find pleasure in the chaos.

If led to believe that the layers are connected, an audience becomes implicated in the circumstances of each narrative branch as it may relate to the layer in which the audience is actively involved.

A consistent stable protagonist can also serve as an anchor for the audience, even when narrative levels are being violated. Rather than witnessing a performer stepping in and out of characters, following them on a linear journey through changing realities offers more emotional weight (Moukarzel & Kidd 2016). Stable characters in unstable worlds resonate with the human context, whereas the act of performers switching characters tends to evoke a theatrical context.

6.1.3 Developing Metafictional Competence

Where an audience occupies a narrative layer in the work, this can be communicated by defining the fictive time or space that they inhabit. Tools such as lighting, set design or costume can aid this process. Positioning the audience in a specific narrative layer invites them to interpret their own minds and bodies in relation to the work.

Embodied metafiction depends on the capacity for an audience to recognise metafictional layers (Ommundsen 1993). Such a capacity can be developed with gestures that encourage audiences to use cognitive processes of hypermediacy (Chapple & Kattenbelt 2006). This can be achieved with moments that demonstrate acts of construction, drawing our attention to the relationship between fiction and reality rather than solely investing in the fiction.

6.2 Conclusion

This study began with the impulse to define a particular sub-genre of contemporary performance in order to explain the kind of work I was making. I coined the term 'embodied metafiction' to describe a canon of influential practice, and to outline the artistic rationale for *Spectate*. The term 'embodied metafiction' has been used here to discuss self-reflexive qualities in contemporary performance through a metamodernist lens.

Throughout the development of *Spectate*, case study analyses, practitioner interviews and contextual reading have been combined with reflective practice to interrogate the effect of embodied metafiction. The resulting observations have produced a broad interpretive framework for understanding this performance style. As a practice-led research project, the findings of this study are most pertinently available to observe in *Spectate* as an exemplar of embodied metafiction. The knowledge that is performed throughout this production (rather than extrapolated here) speaks to the effect of embodied metafiction in a more direct manner. The conceptual links contained in this exegesis serve to further contextualise the effect of embodied metafiction with literary discourse, performance theory, and associated ideas from neuroscience and philosophy. Examples from *Spectate* are used to demonstrate the application of these ideas in practice.

Spectate makes use of intermediality in order to position the audience between various sites of meaning. Furthermore, *Spectate* makes use of the audience as its own site of meaning. This draws attention to the psychophysiological process of audience members navigating hypermediacy in the moment of

performance. This dynamic also enables a tone of reception that exemplifies metamodern sensibilities, oscillating between sincerity and irony.

The physical embodied circumstances of the audience are appropriated for narrative purposes, playing with a violation of narrative levels and readerly/writerly surrogacy. Playful echoes within the work speak to the real relationship between performers and audience members that exists within the room. Such narrative layers work to heighten the audience's experience of the immediate present by naming their lived experience as a moment of 'now.'

Spectate demonstrates the effect of embodied metafiction by highlighting the most exciting aspect of theatre – the presence and participation of a live audience in shared time and space.

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Appendix A: Interview Transcript

Interview with Bush Moukarzel & Ben Kidd, Co-directors of Dead Centre.

Conducted via Skype, 10 November 2016.

Nathan: ah, what are you rehearsing at the moment?

Bush: We are rehearsing a show called Hamnet and it's very early, it premieres in March, so this is more trying some video techniques, but it will be a solo performance for an eleven year old based around the son of Shakespeare, It's called Hamnet, who was a real, I don't know if you know about that, and he died when he was eleven, and a couple of years later Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, with an L. So Hamnet with an N is the boy's name.

Nathan: right

Bush: So, it's a little curious biographical fact that we'll make something you know, not a sixteenth century biopic but more like this boy, in purgatory, eleven since 1596, wondering why he never grew up. So hopefully a nice depressing show with an eleven year old. That would be the plan, you know?

Nathan: yeah, awesome

Bush: So we're just testing at this stage, we've got a lot of techniques for how to make it seem like it's a monologue by an eleven year old, but you strategically have broken that up so there'll be video work in it, maybe a couple of illusionist sequences, whatever, things whereby the kid himself, it won't feel like he's just standing onstage talking for an hour. You know?

Nathan: yep.

Bush: so we're just working out what might be some of the video techniques.

Nathan: Cool. But it is one rehearsed performer, an eleven year old, it's not like an unprepared child?

Bush: yeah, it will be, it may remain unprepared if we inadequately rehearse them, but…

Nathan: sure

Bush: no that's, yeah we'll go into rehearsals in February. Ah, with the guy we have in mind. And ah, and get that ready for performance and then we'll be going to a few venues next year, so that's the plan. And Chekhov still tours, and we start working on new work as well. So that's the story.

Nathan: Cool. And where are you at with Beckett's First Play?

Bush: um. That is really sort of in a way on hold until after this. That, we'll come back to in April. Where we are with that, is, in terms of our scheduling, we spent a sort of, it culminated in a presentation we did with it in April, June. Okay well middle of last year it culminated in a showing we did where we spoke about this performance with nobody in it. And ah so that remains basically artistically as far as it's gone, but what we've done since is just planning to, we got involved in some, a platform here in Dublin so we'll do a showing, we'll work more on the detail of some of the visual ideas of that in April, just after we open this show – Hamnet – and we'll present that briefly in Dublin here, there'll be a date in April, and then we have a commission deadline to deliver a script to the UK, The National in the UK, and that would be for July I think is the deadline there. So if the culmination of a bit more practical research, the time we spend on the script with the commission opportunity, when we deliver that,

if all that has come together and it will basically be greenlit and become a show I suppose. In the National at the end of next year or early, some point in 2018. So that's it.

Nathan: Cool. So I guess one thing that I'm interested in with your work is, at the Q&A for Lippy you were talking about things being scripted rather than developed, it kind of happens on a page well in advance of it being found in a room, or kind of discovered in time and space... So, is that shifting a little bit? Or when you say that you're rehearsing at the moment for this work, has it been written or are you sort of writing it by playing with form?

Bush: It is I suppose, it's always a bit of both, I mean here but it's always just obviously practically whatever has to happen practically forces your hand, so we're only really here this week because the idea has a big film element in it, that means we wanted to just sort of check out what that might be, and the guy's availability is only this week. So it's simple as that, whereas if he'd been available in the weeks ahead then we probably would have delayed until we felt the script was you know, then that script would dictate the exploration, the formal exploration, whereas it's literally because schedule dictates, we've gotta grab this week while we can. That means yeah, we're sort of more looking at the technique outside of any content, you know? So I would say it's shifting, but then that said, that might have been a bit of a simplistic picture about how we've worked before, in the sense that we did, even with the other projects, like Lippy, when they were still very early on, there were a few development days and things like that where you might road test a few ideas. But I guess the only point was to make that we, in spite of maybe a few development, a few technique try-outs, we just still endeavour to have a completely coherent script

on the first day of rehearsals, although it deviates from, is the attempt, is that that would be the performance, you know the script and I just think, I suppose the only point being that we desire that, we attempt, we endeavour for that to be the case, whereas other performers who might work with a visual language would actively not want that.

Nathan: Yeah. Yeah, totally.

Bush: I suppose that's the difference, we actively want that. Some people might actively think that would hold them back or inhibit them.

Nathan: Yeah, so I did a workshop with Gob Squad last month, they were down here for Melbourne Festival, and they, talking about their own process, described a short process of creative development being sixteen weeks in a studio room, to turn something from a sort of one-page concept into a show. And you know, that strikes me as this distinctly European way of working... is that, if you were given the opportunity for that, if it wasn't a restraint on resources, if you could actually just take a team of people in a room for a duration of time, would you be drawn to that if it was opportune? Or would you still prefer to figure it out...

Bush: you know some people, you can pull some strings? Sixteen week residency, if we say yes? You've got it lined up and can activate it?

Nathan: no no, no stakes, you answer what you like and then we'll see who I'm friends with!

Bush: okay… what would you say to that Ben?

Ben: I think, I like the stuff they make, and I think that the stuff they make, I think the stuff people make always bears the process that you use to make it, do you know what I mean? It depends what the… Because I'd be really interested to know, whenever you're trying to find out how other theatremakers make their work, what everybody always does, sort of curiously because you never know and people always guard their secrets, you're always interested to know well what does that mean? You know, I wouldn't be surprised if quite a few of those sixteen weeks, a bunch of them didn't come in and they were all having fights, I'm sure that's not exactly what happens with those guys, but you know I don't know them… and they sit around and brainstorm ideas and write things down. So I think anybody would benefit from, you say sixteen weeks in a room and go in there and make a show at the end of it, I don't know whether we would actually, if you had to start from scratch, but then I bet they don't start from scratch, I bet they go in there with fairly clearly – we're gunna do War & peace…

Nathan: Are you very familiar with their work?

Bush: I've only seen Super Night Shot…

Ben: I've seen one show. And I've heard of a few on YouTube

Bush: Yeah I've watched, I don't think I've seen any live, I don't think. But I have seen two on video. Ummmm… And I guess to me I just feel sympathetic to them, whenever I hear about them, I follow them on twitter, you know and I feel like this sort of affinity with them.

Ben: I don't know much about them as a company but I feel like there's probably what about four or five people in that company ish?

Nathan: seven.

Ben: Seven?

Nathan: seven core artists.

Ben: And probably all seven of those would be performers or not? Or a good bunch of them would be…

Nathan: No they all perform.

Ben: And I think that's the thing. That's a very different kind of company set up than we have so far. You know, and the company setup, you know, look, if they, if we were people who had six performers who we'd worked with twenty times over twenty years and lived in a weird commune in Germany then who knows maybe the eighteen weeks you know I guess the point being that the work—

Bush: I think it was sixteen weeks, I think you've upped the—

Ben: Okay, sixteen weeks sorry… But you know the work is a direct product of the material conditions which make the work there, often, I suppose.

Bush: I think the thing I'd do with the twenty-five weeks is, I would ah…

Laughing

Bush: I mean you know because as for what actually happens, I'd just put a desk in the corner or something, and write and that would still be made then because of the opportunity to have space and you know maybe once a week something like that spills out to, once a week you start getting on with the technical aspect of it, or trying out stuff that's all at hand and ready to go, so…

Ben: But the other thing that is, it's not like Gob Squad would go into a room for sixteen weeks with fuck all, and make a show out of it.

Bush: yeah yeah yeah yeah

Ben: Which probably is feasible for you if you sat down and… how long is sixteen weeks? Three months?

Nathan: Four. Four months.

Ben: You just wouldn't have that gestation.

Bush: It wouldn't be desirable.

Nathan: Well, they also talk about sixteen weeks as non-consecutive. I should throw that in - it might be broken into chunks, but that's the sort of intensive period

Bush: yeah

Ben: But that contact time with the people who are making, who might be going to be in the show, is not something that we, and is also just not something that we have, we don't have the skillset or a desire necessarily to use techniques that would fall under the banner of the word devising usually… to use techniques to generate material in a room from nothing, which a lot of theatre-makers do, whether they're traditional directors or kind of, you know, Simon McBurney or whatever, but you know, we don't do that, we don't have, and that's not about aesthetic, it's not really about the end result as such, it's just about what are your skills and what are your interests, and what do you, I guess if something doesn't feel very exciting or right, then don't do it, you know what I mean? I suppose.

Bush: I don't know where this is going either way…

Nathan: No, but I guess there's something useful there because it kind of just clarifies that you don't really use improvisation or devising as process, it's so much more a written approach, and it's a conversation I've had quite a few times since you presented at Brisbane Festival with a fair few people, is that I guess the way we're taught performance in Brisbane and the culture we've got around us, there's a lot of devising and we're kind of used to recognising this aesthetic of a devised work and a certain style of performance that looks like it's been devised because it deals so much with moments that feel non-textual, that are kind of, you know, items and brief spectacle and things in the space, and it all feels like it's been found, like it's a very human phenomenal thing rather than a written narrative thing so yeah I'm interested in how that comes across in your work, without that necessarily being the

process, where it actually might start off as something that's never happened before, just an idea that gets written down and then physically manifests.

Ben: I think it's just that the writing, I think there are lots of playwrights who have a visual imagination and can seek it… Robert Holman, a not very well known… a British writer, with famous stage direction, something like the stage turns into a city, or something like that, it reads really poetical stage directions and I think theatre writers often have those kind of imaginations but because they don't, their job is not to render that work onstage, really extraordinarily rare, only two or three work at that…. they stop, they pull back, they stop engaging with how you might realise those things and in that case, some of them will work with quite visionary directors, but it's just a slightly different thing, whereas I think let's say if you can conceive of, like with the Chekhov show there's a bunch of, or let's take the Lippy as a more-- you saw Lippy?

Nathan: Yep

Ben: Did you?

Nathan: Yep

Bush: You're all up in that. He's all up in that.

Ben: Fair.

Nathan: Sorry?

Bush: That was a Sibthorpian ah you know colloquial phrase… all up in that

Ben: Most of the sequences and the visual events that happened in the second part of Lippy, the slightly more visually, much more visually, just Bush thought of them, and I think there's something fundamental about, something important about thinking of them but knowing that you're the dude who's also going to have to make sure they happen. And it just it enters the imagination…

Bush: So maybe it's something of yeah exactly, the thing that it shares with the world of devising is that the job, the practical job of the event, the performance event, you'll have responsibility for that as well. A writer doesn't directly have the responsibility for that and often they don't speak like that either, if you see playwrights, they go, you know, as much as they'd be hoping the show's good and deeply interesting, they would not claim to be involved in that or that they shouldn't be involved in that. Well that's up to, you know Sarah the director, it's up to oh I don't know who Sarah is, but I think she's a good director. Um, but you know what she does with it is up to her and you know, and they also talk about like "I came into rehearsals" and they have this disconnect, whereas I suppose devisors probably take fully the responsibility of like the event, as a whole world, whereas I suppose what we've done is sort of come out of, a version of playwriting where you are involved in the staging of that play.

Nathan: yeah

Bush: So I mean it in a sort of feedback loop way, whereby we've learnt our idea of what writing is, is formed out of me being an actor basically lots, and Ben being a director.

Nathan: yep

Bush: So then we write a play through that lens, so it's sort of a stage play, we write the performed event as that were, so that's why we write more stage directions and language that may be non-narrative, mood-driven, sequences, and then that's our script and we then stage that script. So there's probably, that's probably where it's come from a little bit, you know.

Ben: Yeah 'cos you always give me those, I think, the formlessness, not that I use that word, but the sort of bittiness that you see in a lot of work that's come from a sort of devising process is an in-built problem of that process and actually if you look at some of the more commercially successful people who use that process - Simon McBurney of Complicite fame, he's a dictator. You know he's really good at generating and getting people's ideas but he's also really good at saying no you can't do that. You know, people talk about having their whole part cut before press night, like he's a writer. He is completely and utterly. So often, you know, a devised sensibility, without that dictatorial you know what I mean, can sometimes… But the alternative is that you get the other thing in the mainstream literary theatre so to speak, of that really dispiriting thing where you sometimes go and see something and it's not very good in a mainstream sort of play context, and people say well it was a decent production but it's just not a very good play. Or it's an excellent play but the production didn't quite get it. Know what I mean? And you're like - that disconnect is really dispiriting. Because it's letting everyone off the hook. It's sort of suggesting that like "Ah well, doesn't matter, it's only art isn't it, or it's only theatre isn't it?" you know what I mean? And it's a laugh. It becomes a thing about how people can live their lives as well, at the end of the day, do you know what I mean, like a director who works with new writers all the time

needs to be able to go "nothing I could do with that one I'm afraid, sorry" d'you know what I mean? Like to sort of… But to take on the responsibility of everything, I'm not suggesting that you know, but it does change the way that you conceive of ideas for the stage. But yeah, I think, I don't know, yeah. I think there's brilliant work coming out of people who sit in a room together for 3 months, incredibly honest and strange and provoking and amazing work. People like Nature Theater of Oklahoma. Like those interesting things, if that is your skillset. And if that is your game, you know then. Then play that game. And if it's not, don't. Do you know what I mean? Like I think Bush has always had something quite, because you came quite late to considering yourself a, well your early playwriting career as a younger man, but then you worked as an actor which is kind of one of the most disempowered places to be, albeit in work you admired a great deal. But if you come a little later, you're like well I'm not gunna bother worrying about what you're supposed to do, I'm just going to try and make the greatest work you can possibly make, do you know what I mean, I'm not suggesting that you weren't necessarily doing it, but do you know what I mean? Whereas I think certainly now there is a whole generation of people who kind of know, vaguely or loosely, they use a devising process because it's what they learnt to use on their MA, and they still are convincing themselves, and I know a whole bunch of playwrights who have exactly the same relationship with the royal court young writers scheme, do you know what I mean, they just use the process they've been taught to use because you realise that it's a club and everyone's trying to… anyway, sorry…

Nathan: Yeah, no – that's all good. Uh, to move away from process, because what I really want to ask you about is the style of theatre I guess and what we've talked about previously is my interest in this sort of self-reflexiveness that the work has, and that's kind of what

I see it sharing with companies like Gob Squad, um, this idea of metafiction or metatheatre. So I'm kind of just interested, some of these questions sound pretty simple or you know kind of empty, but I'm just trying to figure out what words you might use to talk about some of these things. So as a really simple question, how would you describe the style that you work in? Do you have any kind of key genre terms that you throw at people?

Bush: No. We don't. We don't sort of set up anything, I mean I'm always interested in, I suppose I do talk about ambivalence a lot, sort of an ambiguity perhaps. But Ambivalence more – ambiguity to me makes it sound like you're just trying to make it as strange as possible.

Nathan: Yeah!

Bush: But ambivalence means like you're torn or something so there's a real sort of, there's actually, so ambiguity is like there's no position anywhere, so it's all sort of murky. Whereas ambivalence is like you're just stuck, it's more like an aporia or a paradox, and so you just feel, you feel…

Ben: What's an aporia?

Bush: Aporia. Like an impossibility. It's a greek…

Ben: A-poria?

Bush: Aporia. Do you know Aporia?

Nathan: No.

Bush: A-P-O-R-[I]-A. Derrida. Derrida's all over Aporia – he's all up in that.

Nathan: right.

Bush: Get into some Derrida. And, but it's ah – and Beckett. Beckett would be mentioning all that stuff. It's ah, It's like an impossible thought where you can't go further. You know? From like Aristotle or something like that. But, um, so I don't know, we definitely don't set out knowing, like I had no idea what Lippy or Chekhov would feel like, you know? No idea really. So that, and the driving force behind that is if we knew, you'd have no reason to make the show. Because you would have a tonal objective and then the four weeks would just be rushing to realise that thing that you've already worked out. Whereas in that sense you are trying to be [on an] honest search to find the tone that seems genuinely surprising or genuinely novel. And I think that usually comes out of formal things, like if you see something that you've never seen before. Or a moment of staging that you haven't seen before. And we're always very sort of, we put it in perspective – we never believe that we're doing anything radically original, all we can do is we say with honesty, all honesty, we've never seen this before.

Nathan: Yep.

Bush: so, we pursue it in earnest and we can pursue it as something – if it surprises us, it probably would surprise somebody else. In the audience, you know? And that experience of novelty and strangeness I think pays dividends as a way of honouring the strangeness and originality that people feel like in

themselves, you know? That sort of… you can share in that division, the fact that we're all divided by our experience of complete individual, you know, sort of idiosyncrasy, but we can share in that and somehow you can communicate and if you realise something that articulates that by virtue of being surprising, that's something to pursue. But I really don't know what tonally, meaning, at the basic point meaning, if Lippy was a downer, Chekhov was kind of invigorating, and you know we don't set out for that to be the case. You know I don't know like. Souvenir the first show we made, people say oh well that's sort of charming. I have no idea until we enter into it you know, in fact sometimes… with Chekhov I was a bit downcast to hear that it was uplifting, you know, I was – for fuck's sake, I was trying to make a bleak, you know…

Ben: You're always trying to make a bleak...

Bush: Yeah but that's what I mean, like my…

Ben: It's okay if they don't all feel bleak.

Bush: My, my personal, tonal default is not very interesting, it's sort of apocalyptic pessimistic, you know, feeling of despair. You know, and that's not very – that's just because I'm a white dude living in the west, who's just… and Trump was elected president, you know so obviously I think the world…

Ben: It's really quite a common urge for a theatre event though, do you know what I mean? Theatre is quite a good place for…

Bush: But it also feels like arts, you know, art has a lot to do with unhappiness and despair. You know? Less to do with happiness. So the default is always to

go okay, well let's, this has got to be, hell. Let's make hell. But I just think, actually the endeavour is always to make a show which is bigger than – it's not a piece of biography, you know? So it's not a, expression, it's transcendence of the, you know like T. S. Elliot says about poetry – it comes from the personality but it transcends personality. It's the, what does he say, it's something like, he says it's something like it's the erasure of personality, you know. And then obviously loads of poets were coming against T. S. Elliot saying what are you talking about, it's an individualistic you know expression of the inner world, to show the richness of consciousness and the soul, and then he was like no it's the, you know, it's, of course everything starts with the self. He's not trying to be a mystic. Well he does later on in his middle career. It starts in the self, and the art is to make something which transcends the self, or somehow erases the self in its construction. So, this is a long answer, but I think tonally we've tried to make something which can feel as an object, greater and more various than I am capable of feeling, when I, in my conscious self, my conscious self is quite simple, like I say, I walk around feeling sad – that's basically it. That's my schtick. But I think unconsciously, I contain multitudes. As Walt Whitman would say. So I think it's tonally trying to search something that has that magnitude, maximilism, total, a totality that might feel bigger than my subjective mood.

Nathan: There's something in there that takes me to a different question, looking at – do you think, do you consider your work to involve multiple narratives, like do you talk about multiple things going on – is it multiple worlds or multiple fictions, do you kind of divide it up that way or is it kind of just one whole thing?

Bush: not really, I think usually, it's got one line, usually quite a set, in fact it's not that, I don't know, what somebody would do with a novel and mapping out

seven storylines as it might be, you know… and then everything comes together. I mean obviously it doesn't have to be as obvious a meaning as that with multiple narratives, but I don't think so, with us it's always sort of been one line, which we then worry is that simplicity, like at the heart of every show you could sort of explain the show with a sort of three-act structure, that we've made. And articulate it like that, like I think it's embarrassingly simple, but what we're trying to do is make every one of those moments contain this tonal multitude, that is if you get it right, richly complex, you know? And if you get it wrong, annoyingly obtuse. And enigmatic and distant. Whereas if you get it right, then it might just be that, it's almost like it erases the narrative, the narrative isn't important. It becomes just like a musical journey, it's like the sequence of tonal complexity. You know?

Nathan: Mmmm

Ben: And I don't know if this is what you mean, but in terms of like the multiple, so obviously both Lippy and Chekhov have, seemingly have multiple planes of reality, on which they operate or something like that.

Nathan: Yeah

Ben: There's the post-show talk, and then there's the thing in Leixlip. I mean on one level, I think Lippy, the easiest way to understand the whole thing, is that the second part is just like a sort of dream sequence that the lip reader enters into at the end of the first part. It's a classic Hollywood narrative really, you know like, you know what I mean, and I don't mean that to sort of belittle the idea, but sort of that's the extent to which it's, it was never conceived as being

an attempt to kind of, it was conceived holistically really, right? Because that would open onto that…

Bush: Yeah and I guess what I'm saying is not even the, I just mean it's conceived in a linear fashion, not even as coherent as 'now we go into his dream' -

Ben: No of course not-

Bush: -because then that would start to close it down or something because it would be clear then we're in his dream and that's what he would be doing and encountering and playing up to, whatever. I think it's more like on reflection-

Ben: yeah yeah yeah yeah

Bush: On reflection. And maybe as a tool to articulate it to performers when we're directing the scene, it might be helpful to latch on to narrative tropes like "Okay well let's just say this is a projection of your fantasy, you know, your involvement and so therefore kind of…" But in the construction, it's simply just like linear in that way, it's kind of like what would – that happens and then where could that go and where would that go and where would that go and what could that flourish if, bloom into…

Ben: So I suppose just then to, where I was going to go, I don't think we're overtly or deliberately just sort of like people admit, "I do metatheatricality" or whatever. I don't think we're overtly or deliberately kind of trying to use these different layers of reality to say anything or do anything. It just feels, it sounds really simplistic and silly to say and maybe it's a simplification, but it just feels

like that's the most interesting and obvious way to for example start this story and it feels like for those two shows we have just been sort of, we feel probably a bit sort of caught in this feeling but you can't just start, do you know what I mean? Like there has to be some sort of, but we don't see it as being a sort of kind of, anything's revealed by the metatheatricality as such.

Bush: No but I guess, but it's two-fold, sort of on the one hand yeah you sort of run through in your imagination what would be kind of surprising and sort of you know like I say in service of a search for tonal idiosyncrasy or something strange. You run through what they might be and some of those might be like beginning with a post-show talk. But then on the other hand, in itself though, it's not a sort of attempt to make some grand comment about the implication of having a meta level within the storytelling. But on the other hand to encounter something that doesn't involve meta level of narrative seems a problem so it becomes a question then of how do you get - something that just smugly involves meta narratives seems equally unhelpful. Something that doesn't involve them at all seems to have a, or there's a question mark hanging over it. I mean all you want to know with any work is, does it know itself – has it considered what it's doing? And if it's not involving a degree of self-awareness, it doesn't feel like a, it doesn't feel right, it just doesn't feel right. You know, it feels like you have to have that level of self-awareness now in work. Like I say without any analytical relationship with the implication of that, why that is historically, why that is the case, there would be answers to those things you know, like historical analysis of where, but I don't think they need to be in the work of art itself so much. It's just like you have to judge- can a piece of theatre not contain any comment on itself now? At any level? And I often would, my instinct would be no, that it's sort of written into the DNA of where, of how to tell a story.

Ben: That's the form, probably I think. I always think theatre's quite, I always think theatre is quite uniquely placed in terms of you know, a lot less not entirely but less interest or you don't see it very often, in like overtly meta-cinematic cinema, I don't know what would be, and I suppose Charlie Kaufman in a way, but also you know it wouldn't, cinema wouldn't be able to sustain I don't think a lot of the horrific metatheatrical things that sometimes theatre-makers get away with – "hi welcome thanks for coming" – like what would that even mean in a film.

Bush: But I always think you know like, whatever metatheatre might mean and like you know, it comes to me in so many different things, I suppose the pursuit, when I keep talking about what feels right, so less about some sort of, when I say the difference between smug or like the interesting pursuit of a metatheatrical tone, is the difference between somebody saying "I'm an Actor and I'm wearing a costume and this is my character and they're called this" which doesn't really do too much for me. Again, no problem I'm sure – it can be fun and whatever, that doesn't really blow my socks off too much. I just mean metatheatre more in a sense that people attribute it to Shakespeare, the way metatheatre really starts to get going in the Elizabethan age, when, in the more interesting way, there were literally characters who go "hello, welcome to the play and now we're going to tell you this" okay there's that level. I mean more that suddenly, it's an expression of consciousness, like too much consciousness, where these characters are so over-burdened by their own thoughts that they break the narrative. So this argument that in Shakespeare that you have characters who don't know why they're in the middle of a play, so this narrative's going along and then they stop the whole thing to do a soliloquy about, which has too much depth in it. The idea is so the break,

suddenly this abyss is introduced into narrative, and so it's – metatheatre then becomes an abyss, these black holes in the middle of something which is supposed to be moving along nicely. Everybody's happy and then these black holes are in the middle of them, which is just it's like consciousness, this thing that wants nothing in the middle of – like narrative is all about who wants what, and then you add these black holes of actually I don't want anything and my name isn't Hamlet. Maybe it's nothing. Maybe my name isn't Richard the second, maybe there's no such thing as kings. Like suddenly it's like, Shut up man, we've gotta get back to the plot. I think that sort of introduction of the mystery of consciousness is the sort of metatheatrical thing which becomes more interesting you know.

Ben: I just think as well, yeah that's really interesting and oftentimes it doesn't or it shouldn't sort of, interact with (let's say in a Shakespeare play) interact with the plot, so to speak, but it shouldn't negate or preclude the plot from carrying on, if you know what I mean. That sort of smug, that sense of "oh I'm an actor" and smug is not like, I'm not meaning to be – "I'm actually an actor, I was born around the corner, I don't actually come from …. It's sort of like, alright man. Like…

Bush: Don't actually come from… what are you referring to there?

Ben: For example, well like I think that in our show, we always feel a little bit less kind of, people always do take this as "oh they become actors and this," and that's fine, you know what I mean? I think it's slightly less interesting because...

Bush: Oh but if you had 65 weeks to develop it…

Ben: Exactly, yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah.

Laughs

Ben: you know, because I think that – so to take Lippy for example. Lippy might well be playing all sorts of games with how you might understand narrative blah blah blah, you know, but it also doesn't, it also allows for a lapse, because it's still hopefully (and this is going to be a ridiculous thing to say) but it hopefully allows for theatre to be a place for the sublime, because it also hopefully says there is a meaning to, I mean you would have said especially that the childish response you had to that Leixlip tragedy when you read about it is just one of horror. And there is a meaning to, and audiences come to a theatre to try and engage with that thing, and I think so a mode of work that doesn't, that sort of seems to suggest oh we're beyond that or we're past that or something just feels a little bit dead. It just feels a little bit well we're just not, you know what I mean? And we're just not, I don't know there's something about, so I think there's a kind of tension between, I don't know - I don't know. You don't use those sort of – heart sinks when you see those shows where it's not very well put together and they're sort of like….

Bush: I was just looking up the term I was, because I remembered I had heard about it – mise en abyme. Do you remember that?

Nathan: yeah!

Ben: What's an abyme?

Bush: Abyss!

Ben: ok

Bush: you know. And so I was just trying to remember what, where have I heard, what is that applied to – but it's like the mise en scene. I mean you have the mise en abyme, like introducing into the scenography and dramaturgy, suddenly an abyss that has no function and no purpose, and it just spirals, you know. And I think sort of David Foster Wallace is obviously trying to do that with some of his meta-narratives. It's almost like when you read David Foster Wallace, you get the impression of, in a sort of psychotic attempt to think through every single possible angle that anybody could have on this. And it becomes not a great comment, but it becomes like a sort of painterly expression of the way the mind unravels and wraps around itself. And occurs through the world. And the way a sort of hyper-conscious awareness of trying to understand your place and who you are, you know. And that becomes the Shakespearean quality of somebody like Hamlet. Knows he's in a play, and then it becomes an articulation of like a political articulation of we know we're just a cog in a bigger system than us, and you try to second guess it but if you know what the plot is that you've been cast in, you might have better agency or you might be able to change it or you know, so it becomes… or you might just be able to be hip to the fact that you're servant six, and you get killed in the second act. You know, so then you can sort of accept that. And you kind of try to learn like what's your role in society and what's your role in the… so I think sometimes it's just all of those like you say those meta devices, they're just a tonal thing that you'd be wondering how, you know, like T. S. Elliot again saying modernism in poetry means poetry has to be difficult now. It has to be difficult. And that was his insistence, he was just, I don't know how, you can't

just have rhyming couplets now and a simple… it's just, that's not the world we're living in anymore. So similarly all these – I guess another way of putting it is I think it's all historically determined, and you can imagine as readily this all sort of moving away in the decades ahead, and not it not suddenly being such a concern, but somehow…

Ben: It's not a concern for, well maybe it is, for the wider selection of mainstream theatre, but maybe it is actually—

Bush: I think it increasingly is, I mean it especially is in more commercial cinema, and things like that you've got this sort of hyper-awareness.

Ben: yeah, yeah yeah.

Bush: And in TV, I mean TV is obviously kind of screwing up all these sort of meta-narratives. So that's why in a way I think there'll be a reaction against it in the avant garde, whereby you know, this Avant Garde thing you can do is just not talk about the plot. You know what I mean? Or just, because it's the anti-HBO or anti-Netflix stance of these hyper-aware narratives – who knows?! All this stuff comes, moves in…

Nathan: Yeah, yeah it's all a bizarre relationship with the notion of fiction and what happens to our reality when it's so influenced by fiction, and how then multiple fictions start to try to represent reality more genuinely – anyway, I guess that's kind of where I'm left, and where this kind of process for me in terms of practice-led research, wanting to make a work that is borne out of it's own kind of artistic impulses but looking to dissect some of these instincts

that I have towards the meta-narratives that are going on. And so it becomes about a dramaturgy, I guess, how then these layers are arranged, even if they are only identified in hindsight, like not treating them as an ingredient so much, but rather trying to craft a work once it's you know got some kind of crude shape, to recognise where that sort of effect might be going on and how it might be best managed. So I guess another kind of broad question is around how do you acknowledge these things in process dramaturgically? Is there a sense of wanting to identify layers, knowing that they're there, is that ever useful to a work's evolution? And something that we talked about briefly back in Brisbane, ah I was asking about the performers and whether the actual identity of the performer was involved in the character they were playing, and whether they were ever a version of themselves onstage. And I guess that's caught up in this question around the dramaturgy, so taking these ideas and once you apply them into the process of crafting the work. So you had some comments on that when we spoke last, and I was hoping I could provoke you to say similar things on record now.

Laughs

Bush: I mean I suppose the question about if I understood, where, how, do we dramaturgically think about um, how do we dramaturgically think about meta devices or things like that, is that the sort of question, is that right?

Nathan: Yeah. Once the work is kind of known conceptually, like it's not about the meta devices being an ingredient that you're

playing with necessarily, once they're there, do you circle them, do you acknowledge them, do you treat them in a certain way – do you use any understanding of that dramaturgically to craft the work?

Bush: I think it's… maybe I'm not answering the question so stop me if I'm not quite answering what you're asking, but in the crafting of it, which let's roughly call the scriptwriting of it, because as we said it involves a little bit of practical things but essentially it's Ben and I going through a script and wondering about how it's going to add up and as a blueprint, for us to start then rehearsing.

Nathan: Yep

Bush: And I think within that there's, sometimes it can be quite formal, so in like Chekhov it was a journey, a very conscious journey, a disillusion from one world to, from the first state to the last state. And that was a chronological disillusion, so in that sense it was quite clear that there'd be things that might happen towards the end that wouldn't happen at the beginning. So there you have. Because a world is, I mean apart from there being a harsh break in between, but there's also, even in spite of the harsh break there is a sort of a breakdown and a disintegration, so in that sense you can then look at the script as we're making it, and judge the pacing of how, okay where do we introduce that now, they start behaving differently, or different language can start entering into the way that they speak, or a different tone, that might mean performatively they start entering a different world. So that's sort of paced in a chronological way, so that's how we might approach that. And in another project so let's say I suppose something like Lippy or Souvenir, maybe, and then Hamnet as we're working on now, where there doesn't necessarily [need to] be a chronological

disillusionment of the world, you're sort of – everything's up for grabs at all times. Then it's, I think more just like musical judgement, I think Ben and I go, as it were it's been about ten minutes, we need something weird happening, or whatever. It's just judging then where it would be good now to introduce something that then upsets the way it's been read for, rewrite the last ten minutes, shift something around, and I think that then it's just like musically judging where it would work, you know?

Nathan: So do you talk about the work being set in a theatre? Or do you talk about the performers as themselves in their identity being characters, does that language translate?

Bush: The second bit about the characters, and I'll let Ben take over, but because I just had a thought on the characters. And briefly I say more about it being a live event rather than in a theatre necessarily. But then this new show might be in a theatre because that's another story, the Hamnet, that's another story. In general, more about it being in front of people, who are coming tonight to see it, rather than in this building and the information to that. The character thing I just wanted to quickly say my thought when you asked the question was far, of course it's complicated, there might be exceptions, but roughly speaking no, it's not based on the performers themselves, roughly, but what is encouraged about them, which seems self-evident, but not everybody does it, is that we do encourage them to use their personalities to unlock the quality of performance. You know? Which seems self-evident, because surely everybody's looking for people to be real, or whatever, but actually no – you go into a lot of plays and they say "act your bollocks off mate, go put on an accent, and go for-" and I'm not, I think that can be very successful too, I'm just saying for our purposes, actually things like peoples' own voices, peoples' own

stance, you know just let them – is encouraged. Because it just seems to be a very helpful mood. So I think in that sense, it's very linked to who the person is, not in the necessarily, I mean there are sort of exceptions if we know ok that dude's going to play it, it might influence it a little bit, but it's not really – they are trying to be real, they're attempts to be written and conceived in isolation of who might be playing the parts.

Nathan: Yeah.

Bush: Sorry Ben. Do you have anything you want to add to that?

Ben: Um I don't think so really, except to say that both the questions in a way, I think you try and set up, hopefully set up an inciting logic, or you try and create some sort of logic for a piece of work and then you hopefully allow that work to just follow out that logic. And the more interesting you make that logic at the beginning, the more interesting the show will be. And of course there will be people who make work that deliberately tries to not follow any kind of – but ultimately you are sort of in a weird way I suppose, why we're kind of – like for the Chekhov show for example, in rehearsals that was quite re-scripted quite a lot. And we would go away for a weekend and write stuff and bring it in and that would sort of change it and stuff. But the logic that it was – but that was I mean partly because we didn't get the script sorted in time, the various practical considerations, but um but the logic of the show was set up, and so I think ultimately as well, that sort of extends to the performers in a way. I don't think we have any, I think we have tastes in terms of performances, but I also think there are people in both, across those two shows, I think that – yeah two things, I think that the performances of the shows are doing quite different things. And because the other thing at work in the performances is every

different performer needs to do different things to get to a certain place, because everyone's quite individual, so I just think with performers it's quite, they can um I don't know Bush you were talking about something Hemingway said the other day, a similar kind of, and it made me think of The Wire, in The Wire she says to Omar in a court, "How can you live like this, you know, robbing from drug dealers….?" "A day at a time, I suppose" And I think it is sort of a day at a time really with performers and what needs to, what is the show asking, what's the logic of the show asking for? And I think with that, especially with this question of like where's it set, is it set in a room? We always made work that enfranchises, not enfranchises in a sort of deliberate attempt to enfranchise, but by its nature, it tries to, again not deliberately – it doesn't hold up as sacrosanct or sacred any element of the process of making it, because the bloke who's going to put together the wrecking ball, the wrecking ball working and being good is just as important as that actor being good, do you know what I mean?

Nathan: Yeah

Ben: And I know everybody if making a play would probably agree with that statement, but nevertheless there are certain ways again, it's all about what are the material conditions in which you do it? Because there are certain ways in which work is sometimes made. But subtly, you do prioritise certain things over other things. And I think performers who work in our stuff really enjoy it actually. Might be because it's good crack to be on the road, but I think they enjoy the work a lot because I think they believe in the work. But it isn't necessarily, you know because I've been in lots and lots of rehearsal rooms before with lots of different types of process, and the way in which actors are for example, indulged – and they know they're being indulged because it's kind

of a bizarre thing because there's a mystification around the craft that they do, whereas the person who's got to make sure that, the person who's got to think through and work out how to make the water come out of the table, is kind of cramming that into the - and our show's on tour – this is all sort of floating around the conversation a little bit, so I don't know if it's any interesting

Nathan: Yeah, yeah

Ben: Our shows for example, the Chekhov show in particular takes almost as big a creative team or a technical team as it does a performance team. And I think something happens which I don't necessarily [think is] deliberate, although on reflection it sort of is in a weird way. Something happens whereby everybody realises that their part of trying to make something happen, a sculpture happen or a piece of work happen, rather than anybody feeling like well you know, do you know what I mean – it's sort of setting up that, so everyone kind of – and I think the other thing to say in terms of performance, all of our shows so far, and we're about to start making things that don't, begin with Bush performing, talking to an audience directly, and I think he has, because he's written it, and we have a sort of fairly good, hopefully shared understanding of what that tone of performance should be like. Such that I don't remember us ever really discussing it or talking about it, I mean you know, detail. And I always think that, in a sort of an actor manager kind of way, that kicks it off for everybody who's going to be involved, in terms of like "alright we've started, that's it, we're off, we're going we're going we're going, so I'll just try and do my best, and then he'll tell me if I'm doing it strangely or wrongly." So you sort of bypass. Which will be interesting to see what happens if we make a show without you in it at the beginning, but I do think it does make a little bit of a difference if the bloke who's gunna be telling you how to

do it is also doing it at the beginning and isn't really going on about how he's doing it, he's just sort of doing it. Then everyone just sort of falls in line and of course some people are better than others, some people don't connect with others, but you sort of – do you know what I mean? Like the logic has been set in motion, and so everyone just sort of falls in line. Rather than spending ages and ages and ages worrying about you know, sort of, there's a kind of, I mean Katie Mitchell always talks about this hangover of amateurism in theatre around acting. Because it's sort of a mystification, because no one really considers it a proper job. So there's a lot of you know, and somebody who builds walls for a living would never spend the amount of time sitting around thinking about how they'll build walls for a living, you know in the same way an actor would sit around talking and thinking about – and a lot of that is useful because you have to talk about it, but a lot of it is a sort of strange sense of like trying to justify myself – why am I here, because I suspect basically that I'm not justified? Whereas the bloke who's built the wrecking ball has a really objective empirical way of knowing if he's done a good job or not – does the wrecking ball work? Anyway, and that's a sort of slightly off-the-topic really, not really about us, just about stuff. Um, yeah. That's all I've got to say.

Nathan: Yeah! Yeah so it's like an unspoken logic is what you're saying...

Ben: Maybe! Which you have to try and speak, but I think subtly you manage to sort of you know what I mean. As well as working with the right people.

Nathan: Yeah yeah. Cool, um. We've gone over 45 minutes guys so I won't ask you any other questions um, but, thank you so much for your time. I think there's heaps of stuff in there and you've kind of

868 talked through a lot of what I was looking for, just incidentally, in
869 terms of you know how you might broach these concepts and what
870 the dramaturgy translates to in your process.

Appendix B: Journal Excerpts

Full practitioner's journal available on request.

From 17 December, 2016:

Mike, Christine and Sarah returned to the room today so we did a show & tell to demonstrate what we've been playing with during the week. We try running the prologue, but the opening text seems flat, distinctly boring in this run-through… we aren't gripped enough – perhaps needs more moments of magical synchronicity with the reality of the room?? More physical things need to happen. Maybe this is about punctuations of sound & music that sync with the text.

We discuss the staging of other sequences so far and agree that we're dealing with acts or sequences of construction, not puppetry. Sarah commented that the aesthetic "is delightfully a bit shit" – this points to the playfulness of construction, building complex sequences out of very simple materials.

We really need to punctuate the shift into 1926 – this layer requires some further symbol to coax us there. How does it feel different to before?

A discussion about the active participatory cues in the voice text. We don't feel inclined to act back in the room, so we are uncertain if an audience will respond. The voice needs to emphasise actions ("Type your reply NOW") with a winky indication to permit the audience to act.

We have identified a rule where we do not ever perform actual magic trickery – the deconstruction of our magic sequences always removes the virtuosity or sleight of hand, always cheats the bit that makes it magic. This is a metamodern treatment of magic. About letting the audience in on the trick. They are never in the dark, but rather experience a renewed sense of wonder by the craft of

theatrical magic. A different sort of pleasure is stimulated by being "in on the trick" rather than a victim of the trick.

Towards the end of the session today we tried to resume devising but end-of-week tiredness and miscommunications impeded us while trying to figure out the fishbowl trick. Our words are conflicting (ie. "it breaks" can mean many different things). We have identified the need for us to establish a clearer structure of language, aiming to build a process glossary to accompany our circle diagram.

We watched a how-to video for the Houdini fishbowl trick. This inspired an argument about whether having the real trick mechanics represented in miniature would be breaking our earlier rule about trickery. This is yet to be resolved.

From 15 March, 2017:

On Friday we have our first tech production meeting and I'm anxious about articulating an artistic rationale for why all of the risk, and expense, and effort. I have been thinking about the same questions for myself. On one hand I'm sticking by the logic versus impulse argument – "I don't really have the emotional maturity to explain how I'm feeling or why I feel that way. If I could explain it, it wouldn't be as interesting or as real because it would have an artificial clarity. Instead because I can't explain it, I'm trying to share it through this means of storytelling, these strange choices which to me feel right even though I can't put my finger on their logic." – But this is a content argument that depends on trusting my own personal vulnerability and I don't necessarily think that will hold up in a production meeting.

My tech-focussed argument has more to do with form and style, talking loosely about magical realism and the rupture of worlds. The work depends on three reasonably logical worlds.
A: Inside Harry Houdini's head, his memories and flashbacks.
B: Michigan 1926, the Garrick theatre where an audience is watching Houdini's last show (and C in our diagram focuses on the audience rather than the stage).
D: Metro Arts 2017, a fictionalised reality where the audience has very particular responses to the work they are watching.

From Dead Centre's influence, I am increasingly interested in the magical spaces between these worlds – the shifts and illogical choices that can transition us from one to another. I'd like to believe that significant moments of the show exist in a liminal space between these concrete realities, where moments of magical realism shatter the concreteness of the immediate reality and take us into a different one.
Each of these moments is punctuated with an illogical event. Playing card rain, fish bowl apparition, suddenness of a real milk can, and of course the character becoming a performer (not dropping out of character but someone suddenly viewing themselves as a different more honest person that they've never properly inhabited before) and then drowning himself in an unexpected apparatus.

These moments are important because they – I need to work on articulating why they are important.

The whole show develops a rule that we don't stage the magic tricks with trickery – we stage them with visible illusions, no secrets, only clever playful compositions. The milk can moment breaks this rule, signifying the destruction

of the visual spectacle and an intrusion of a very different spectacle, something where suddenly we (as was traditional) don't have access to the secret, can't see 'how it's done' but are left to wonder what's real and what's an illusion.
It's important that we reach this place to properly break up the intimate relationship between performer and audience, to reveal the embedded frustrations of the performer, of the Houdini-turned-actor (identity crisis over how he's seen and what he wants to be, what he thinks is important versus what he does for applause).

From 5 July, 2017:

We are adding a layer of Houdini's tensions and conflicts throughout rehearsal – flagging them now to map later. We are treating Toby as Houdini in a real way (believably performing the character) but Cam is perhaps more symbolic in his presence and action. He is at times either with Houdini or against him. Supporting or not. Cam says he is "indirectly representative of the things happening around Houdini."
Characters in 1926 (Cam's personas) only exist when summoned in pockets of acting. So Cam doesn't play a particular characterisation of 'Houdini's Assistant' until he steps into a context where Houdini's assistant is present (ie. The Countdown Speech).
We found the idea to have silhouetted shadows on screen for the prologue. An image of offstage performers.
Exploring Houdini's crisis – could he at times have fleeting visions of being in a small theatre in 2017 – a strange and disturbing future in a shitty little space that demonstrates a loss of grandeur? This could propel moments where Toby turns to the physical audience rather than looking through the screen.

Note on the Heckler scene and timing – Because of the logic of characters appearing in cameras, there was a moment where Toby timed turning a camera light on to the line about a heckler being recognised. This accidentally created the impression that Toby was playing the role of the heckler in this moment. We changed the timing for light to the line "watch Houdini smile" to ensure that Toby's face is associated with Houdini smiling.

Placing the heckler "in camera B" causes Toby's attention to shift from one camera to the other. This places our viewing perspective right in the eyes of the heckler – looking straight into Houdini's face during this manic moment.

A significant dramaturgical realisation today: "Houdini is a character played by the man Harry Houdini" – this changes how we structurally understand the layers of surrogacy.

The logic of our meta-layers shifts slightly. We don't track Toby Martin onstage. Even though he is mentioned in the 2017 prologue, the idea of Toby as a performer is not relevant to the bulk of the narrative. As an audience, we don't look for the man beneath the performance and so we don't register that level of reality with any real consideration. Once we are 'in' the show, we perceive a duality but it's easier to attribute this to Houdini on and offstage. So the presence of Toby Martin therefore becomes the presence of 'offstage Houdini.' Whenever Toby is playing a moment 'out of character' the character he has dropped is Houdini's stage persona. And so the 'out of character' Toby is simultaneously Toby the performer and Harry Houdini the man offstage. As we do not signal these moments with conventional stage focus, the line here is fittingly ambiguous – the idea of being a performer resonates and speaks to our immediate circumstances as much as to Houdini's core drama.

From 15 December, 2017:

A theme of real danger has emerged from audience response. Gemma Regan's review and Summer Bland's feedback email both make reference to the distracting danger of the milk can moment. Here, the implied real danger seems to transcend all narrative levels – in a fictional context we are no longer as a character engaged in the milk can event, but in the simultaneous real world context we as ourselves can't help but worry about Toby. It's hard to tell whether this is a pleasing effect or an undesirable one. It divides the audience nicely between those who stress about reality and those who trust in the construct. For those who are stressing, it also infuses the next scene with a grim extra tension. But in cases like Summer's this can completely undermine the interactivity of the SMS sequence. This is a shame, because this moment represents the first instance of physical agency, using our physical bodies to engage in a way that goes beyond the mental position thrust upon us.

Upon reflection, there are key cues in the work that try to establish the significance of a liminal space between worlds. In the very first prologue, Toby demonstrates a slow act of construction, becoming a character in front of us and pointing to this act of representation. We are caught between realities here, which serves to establish a precedent for the in-betweenness of the work. Symbols of inter-connectivity like the green-skirt girl also hopefully point to the nature of the work, that meaning is tied to the spaces between narrative layers and that somehow everything is connected on a bigger un-graspable level.

A conversation I had after the season pointed to a dramaturgical flaw in Dr. Hospital M.D. The suggestion was that the MUCH ADO joke goes too far and alienates the balance of reality & fiction. After all, it's played for laughs and maybe this self-referential one-liner detracts from the absurd pathos of the scene. My first reaction to this feedback was defence though, because I

thought that Weisz's status as an actor was a direct mirror to Houdini's identity as a performer. But then on further reflection, I realised that this was in fact indirect – if direct it would have seen Weisz as an actual magician. Also, this joke does perhaps push one step too far because no other line ever associates Anna McGahan's characters with the cultural identity we understand of Anna McGahan. Even if we understand Anna to have been a TV personality on network shows, this is something embedded rather than crudely pointed to in a punchline. There is another defence to be made about the overall inter-connectedness, that maybe the link to Hugh's identity helps to ground us in the time and place of the season, and just represents another potential point of connectivity that pulls in our own reality into the quagmire of meaning. But I acknowledge that I may be reaching.

Appendix C: Published Production Reviews

'Counterpilot Cleverness' - Blue Curtains Brisbane

Posted 18 November, 2017

Those who have encountered Counterpilot's collective of interdisciplinary artists previously, know that their theatre is more experience than static show. And "Spectate" is no different. The all- encompassing work is immediately intriguing as, upon entry into the theatre, audience members are met with the sight of velvet red curtains in frame of a black and white film. With sounds of Dixieland-esque tunes soundtracking, it is evocative of a time almost a century ago when Harry Houdini was a marvel amongst men.

Through audience member headphones, we are told that we are at the show of the incredibly famous Austro-Hungarian-born American stage magician and stunt performer. The dimming light makes for a meditative start as an interior monologue is provided, describing the sensation of sitting in the theatre and typical pre-show contemplations, from practical consideration of if we missed getting a program to larger concerns like 'what if I don't get it?' Through this headphoned narration, along with live projection, we are taken to the Houdini's final, October 1926 Detroit show. We are expecting acts of magic, escapism and hopefully his vanishing elephant illusion. So the card ticks and straightjacket escape that follow are almost disappointing.

But Houdini (a beguiling Toby Martin) is looking pale and lethargic, occasionally clutching at his sides as foreshadowing for those familiar with the circumstances of the entertainer's death less than a week later. Indeed, the waters run black

for the master of mystery, worsening as he prepares for his famous Water Torture Cell trick.

Are we about to witness Houdinin's death and how does this make us feel? This is what "Spectate" is really about in its challenge of the nature of audience roles as spectators. In doing so the interdisciplinary work prompts audiences to think, but also to feel in response to the beauty crafted on stage in realisation of Writer/Director/AV Co-Designer Nathan Sibthorpe's ambition to construct a world of contemporary illusion through use of 3D printed performers, live video compositing and immersive audio. The result is both fascinating and entertaining. The layered projections of diorama and live action are not only interesting in themselves, but accompanied by the prompt of the headphoned voice inside audience heads, they assist in suspending audience experience between layers of reality and versions of truth and fiction.

Narrative interjections occur also through cross to conversations with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and alike as Houdini pursues debunking psychics and mediums as part of his desire, as President of the Society of American Magicians, to uphold professional standards and expose fraudulent artists. There is surprise too when audience members are texted in conversation with a show's 'character' and also in a final cameo-filled short film that, although quite hilarious, appears unnecessary and out-of-context.

"Spectate" is a ground-breaking new production that engenders fascination both in experience itself and in recollection afterwards. While the immediacy given to an experience from a century ago is intriguing, its legacy comes courtesy of what it contemplates about audience membership. Even without a

vanishing elephant, it is spectacularly clever on so many levels, in a way probably never seen before.

Source:
https://bluecurtainsbris.wordpress.com/2017/11/18/counterpilot-cleverness/

'Spectate by Counterpilot at Metro Arts' – 4ZZZ & Weekend Notes

Accessed 17 March, 2018

Just when you think you have experienced all tangents of experimental theatre you can be hijacked from behind!

Metro Arts' presentations specialise in shifting paradigms and stretching audience perceptions. Spectate is produced by Counterpilot, a transmedia performance collective, co-founded by Sandra Caluccio and Nathan Sibthorpe. It combines live theatre, film, audio and even SMS to fully immerse the audience in the moment. Spectate is ostensibly a fourth wall audience participation transmedia presentation set in the Garrick Theatre in Detroit during Harry Houdini's final performance in 1929, but it is much, much more!

Before the show, our phone numbers were collected and permission given to be contacted, reminding me of a Penn and Teller magic show I saw recently in Vegas. I was expecting it to be used for some illusionist trick of Houdini's, as we were asked to keep an eye on our phones, but instead, it was to create an

illusion of a different kind.

Each seat had a set of headphones which the audience were instructed to wear on arrival. Black and white Houdini films were playing on a screen surrounded by Vaudeville-style red plush curtains, with a narrative in the headphones. Now each of us had our own part to play as an audience member of Houdini's last act in 1929. This was just after he had been fatally wounded by a punch to the stomach which is suspected to have ruptured his appendix, eventually causing his death days later on 31st October, 1929.

A live feed from two video cameras were set up with one focussing on miniature sets which were changed intermittently and interacted with by the actors. The feed was transmitted to the large screen and combined ingeniously with the second camera's allowing the actors to appear in the sets. The live acting was also combined with pre-recorded film to create a multilayered media presentation. Curtains and moveable walls created new sets which removed the audience from the Houdini stage and placed them into a retrospective excursion into Houdini's life.

The narrative was via the headphones from either an audience member's or Houdini's perspective giving insight into their inner thoughts and worries with voiceovers provided by Hugh Parker, Anna McGahan, Lucas Stibbard, Veronica Neave and Lauren Jackson. Freakily, the predicted thoughts of the narrative were often similar to your own, given great insight into human predictability and which further enhanced the mind reading Houdini experience.

Throughout the presentation you feel dichotomised, as you are in the Houdini audience with interactions from the actors on the stage and the audio steering

your own thoughts with their muses, yet, you also feel isolated due to the headphones blocking out extraneous sounds creating an almost psychedelic emotional experience.

An enigmatic, but troubled Houdini was played by Toby Martin. Cam Clark had various roles, whilst also changing the miniature sets and operating the cameras. As Houdini explored the world of the supernatural he was determined to expose spiritualism as fake and he became friends with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle portrayed in his later years by Brad Haseman. Elise Grieg played the famous psychic Mina Crandon who Houdini had famously debunked as a fraud, despite her alleged contact with his mother.

Throughout the show, an unknown character, alluding to be an interested female in a green skirt from the bar, contacted the audience via SMS asking to meet up for a date after the show creating a totally new "5th wall" dimension to the experience and no doubt titillating some male audience members. Messages included philosophical questions and they appeared to be answering replies from the audience, which was amusing and disturbing. During the pseudo intermission, I received 10 SMS replies from the lady in green and almost (but not quite) stopped worrying that Toby Martin playing Houdini, had been locked into a milk churn full of water a 15 minutes before!

Spectate provides an innovative fourth-wall conceptual experience, acting like pinball for the consciousness causing your mind to ricochet from one perception to the next!

Source:
https://www.weekendnotes.com/spectate-by-counterpilot-at-metro-arts/145932/

Appendix D: Production Program

COUNTERPILOT

Counterpilot is a transmedia performance collective co-founded by Sandra Carluccio and directed by Nathan Sibthorpe. Combining their individual practices in theatre and live art, Counterpilot create interactive performance work that transforms the familiar, creating rich fictional worlds to be explored amidst everyday settings.

Between them, Sandra and Nathan have worked under the tutelage of some of the best international transmedia companies, including Blast Theory, pvi Collective, One Step at a Time Like This, The Border Project, Sandpit, and Il Pixel Rosso. Counterpilot's core collaborators include Software Designer Clinton Freeman, Sound Designer Mike Willmett, and Writer/Actor Toby Martin.

Previous Counterpilot works include *CLARITY IN TRANSIT* (La Boite Theatre Company & Brisbane Airport Corporation for the G20 Summit, 2014) and *THIS IS CAPITAL CITY* (Brisbane Powerhouse, 2015). In 2018, Counterpilot will be developing a new performance work for presentation at Next Wave Festival in Melbourne. This will be co-presented by Metro Arts.

counterpilot.com.au @counterpilot facebook.com/counterpilot

CREATIVES

NATHAN SIBTHORPE
Writer / Director / AV Co-Designer

MIKE WILLMETT
Sound Designer

SARAH WINTER
Production Designer

CHRISTINE FELMINGHAM
Lighting Designer

NEVIN HOWELL
AV Co-Designer

CLINTON FREEMAN
Software Designer

JOHN FELMINGHAM
Contraption Designer

ALISTER MURRAY
Set Construction

OPTIKAL BLOC
TV Production

BENJAMIN KNAPTON
Dramaturgical Consultant

SANDRA CARLUCCIO
Additional Contributor

TOBY MARTIN
Stage Performer

CAM CLARK
Stage Performer

ELISE GREIG
Stage Performer

BRAD HASEMAN
Stage Performer

HUGH PARKER
Recorded Performer

ANNA MCGAHAN
Recorded Performer

LUCAS STIBBARD
Recorded Performer

VERONICA NEAVE
Recorded Performer

LAUREN JACKSON
Recorded Performer

REBECCA MINUTI
Stage Manager

NICOLE NEIL
Stage Manager

JEREMY GORDON
Creative Development ASM

SEAN DOWLING
Assistant Director

JAIMESON GILDERS
Design Assistant

Marketing Imagery by Sean Dowling, Naomi Etri and Nathan Sibthorpe.

Additional equipment supplied by Markwell Presents, Ben Murray and PQI.

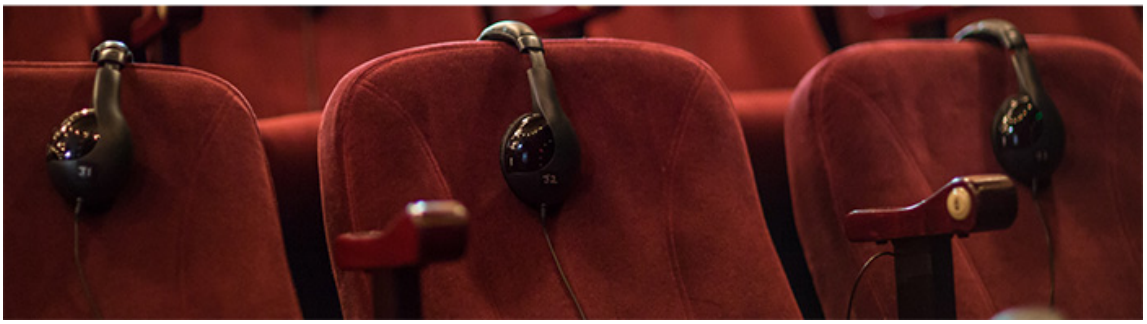
FROM THE DIRECTOR

Thank you for being here, reading this. It means a lot to us that you would come and share this moment of your life with ours. We believe that audiences are the most exciting thing about theatre – that for this brief period of time we all get to share time and space, to merge our lives together in a state of focussed attention.

The first draft of this show had no Houdini whatsoever. It was just an audience. Over two and a half years, the tangents have slowly tangled and untangled themselves, responding to the idea of what an audience is. I became particularly fascinated in the story of Houdini because of the strange relationship he had with his audience. Houdini had developed an enormous reputation with the public, but by this point in time he was struggling to reinvent himself, to grasp back control over how people saw him. And on this evening, Oct 24th 1926, Houdini's audience witnessed a truly life-changing event that challenges the nature of their role as spectators...

This is an incredibly expensive show. Not just because of the equipment used, but because of the many hours contributed by our generous team. For the past 18 months, our interdisciplinary melting pot of collaborators have been chipping away at the ambition of this project. It has taken a lot of work to make magic happen, and the remuneration does not in any way reflect the time or effort that has been offered. I want to thank everyone who contributed to the process, not just for their work or their donated time, but for believing that there was something of value here. For finding the joy in these ideas and for demonstrating that it was all worth it.

I'm also very grateful that others have agreed, and I deeply appreciate all of our stakeholders for stepping in and demonstrating their belief in the value of the work. Metro Arts, for bold risk-taking and an unimaginable level of access to the space; Arts Queensland for making it possible to engage a dedicated team; Brisbane City Council, for supporting creative development; Queensland Theatre, for advice, mentoring and financial support to engage our recorded performers; QUT Creative Lab for space to rehearse and incubate; Dr Don Batchelor and his family, for establishing the research award that enables further support for new work and drama research.



BIOGRAPHIES

NATHAN SIBTHORPE

Nathan Sibthorpe is a contemporary performance-maker and AV Designer. He was previously Queensland Theatre Company's Geek-In-Residence in 2012-14; the Festival Director of Short+Sweet Queensland from 2013-16; and an Australia Council JUMP artist in 2012. Previous works include: *Tyrone & Lesley in a Spot* (QLD Cabaret Festival 2017); *Total Dik* (QTC 2013); and *Some Dumb Play* (Metro Arts 2012). Recent work as an AV Designer includes: *Wireless* (JWCoCA 2017); *Plunge* (Seeing Place Productions 2017); and *Blue Bones* (Playlab 2017). Nathan teaches performance studies at QUT, where he holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts with distinction, and where he is currently undertaking a Masters Degree in contemporary performance.

MIKE WILLMETT

Mike Willmett is a visual/sound artist/composer/designer based in Brisbane. Mike has narrowed down his work to include sound art, installation, sound design, visual art, digital art, graphic design, musical programming, composing, recording and anything else that allows him to mess with peoples' heads. Going under the artist umbrella of MeekSounds, Mike's work frequently revolves around the relationship between sound and space—in particular how sound can be manipulated to control and distort the perspective of an audience. Mike plays in Brisbane-based band My Fiction and currently works at QUT in various capacities.

SARAH WINTER

Sarah Winter is a performance-maker, installation artist and designer with "a refined understanding of visual dynamics and poetics" (Time Off). Her practice focuses on memory and the audience experience in immersive installations and the creation of lived, participatory environments. As a solo artist, Sarah has delivered site designs for Metro Arts, Brisbane Festival, and Queensland Theatre Company. Sarah was an associative artist at La Boite in 2011, presenting her own work *A Dinner with Gravity*. Sarah is one of The Escapists, having collaborated on *Elephant Gun, boy girl wall, Neridah Waters is Dodgy*, and *Suburbia*. With the Escapists, Sarah has received 3x Matilda Awards and a Groundling Award for work on *boy girl wall*.

CHRISTINE FELMINGHAM

Christine has bachelor degrees' in Technical Production and Drama through QUT. She has created lighting designs for Short+Sweet Theatre & Cabaret Festivals (2016 & 2017), Brisbane and Gold Coast; *Splendour,* from Now Look Here Theatre Company (Directed by Kate Wild); *Allen,* from Awkward Productions (directed by Stewart McMillan); *Architects Reborn: Arena Spectacular*, part of Brisbane Festival (from Architects of Sound); *A Slight Ache & The Lover*, from Now Look Here Theatre Company (directed by Kate Wild);

Children of the Sun (Directed by Michael Futcher, for QUT Acting); *Of Little Matter* (Directed by David Morton-Paine) and *Iphigenia 2.0* (Directed by David Sleswick). Christine has worked as an assistant to David Walters, Ben Hughes, Jason Glenwright & Glenn Hughes.

NEVIN HOWELL
Nevin Howell is a passionate young theatre artist, working variously as a director, performer and AV designer. With particular interests in arts education, Nevin has been working for Zen Zen Zo since 2014, involving facilitation in school residencies and workshops. Nevin has worked on theatre projects for Imaginary Theatre, Out of the Box Festival, Terra Nemo Theatre Company, Vena Cava Productions, Dairakudakan (Japan), Shock Therapy Productions, and Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre Company. Training includes a BFA in Drama at QUT, and intensives with Vena Cava, VCA, Qld Shakespeare Ensemble, Dairakudakan, and Zen Zen Zo. Since 2016, Nevin has been working as an artist-in-residence for Markwell Presents, Zen Zen Zo, and independently.

CLINTON FREEMAN
Clinton Freeman is a software developer that inhabits obscure corners of the Internet. With over a decade of software development experience, he has created code for a variety of platforms. Clinton draws upon his industrial experience of creating desktop, web and mobile applications to deliver technical solutions for ambitiously creative projects. His credits include the interaction design and software for *Golden Orbs* (Gasworks), winner of 2014 Queensland IES Award (Illuminating Engineering Society). Clinton's software and control systems can also be found in mobile devices delivering content for site-specific theatre performances.

TOBY MARTIN
As an actor, Toby made his QTC debut in *Oedipus Doesn't Live Here Anymore* in 2015. Before that, Toby toured with the Grin and Tonic Theatre Troupe and with deBase Productions. Other credits include *The Truth About Kookaburras* (La Boite Indie), *Trolley Boys* (Metro Arts), *Some Dumb Play* (Metro Arts), *Inter/nality* (Melbourne Fringe), and *the night, my brother, and me* (Little Big Productions/La Boite) and the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble's productions of *Food of Love, As You Like It* and *Richard III*. Toby often works as a writer or collaborator in performance projects.

CAM CLARK
Cameron Clark is a Brisbane-based, QUT-trained performer and dramaturg who can't seem to settle on a discipline. In the 10 years he's spent working as a professional artist in Brisbane, his work has run the gamut from traditional Shakespeare to Hollywood movies through to touring educational work in the Far North & Torres Strait. His most recent work includes *The Tiger's Bride* at the Australian Theatre for Young People in Sydney, and playing a guest at the 1977 Logies in Channel 9's modern classic, *Hoges*.

ELISE GREIG
Elise is an actor/playwright and has been recognised for her outstanding contribution to Queensland Theatre on three occasions. An acting graduate from USQ and Honors and Masters graduate from QUT, where she was awarded University Medal. Theatre includes: *Swallow* (Metro Arts), *Long Gone Lonesome Cowgirls* (La Boite/QBFM), *The Spirit of The Land* (La Boite), *Secret Bridesmaids' Business* (La Boite/QPAC), *The Year Nick McGowan Came to Stay* (La Boite), *Explosions* (QTC), *The Mayne Inheritance* (La Boite), *Summer Rain* (QTC), *Sweet Phoebe, Two, Clark In Sarajevo* (La Boite) and *Modd Madame Butterfly* (QTC). Her plays include *Crèche and Burn, Hopelessly Devoted, Flood* and *Magpie*.

BRAD HASEMAN
Last year Brad Haseman completed thirty years with the Creative Industries Faculty at QUT where he was Professor in Drama Education. He has been a pioneer of drama in schools and arts education, and is known internationally as an author, teacher and actor (Process Drama), arts researcher (Performative Research) and community engagement practitioner (Applied Theatre and Teaching-artistry).

HUGH PARKER
RADA-trained Hugh Parker's early career in the UK saw him appear in programmes including *Black Books, The Office, I'm Alan Partridge, EastEnders* and *Casualty*. After moving to Australia, Hugh found success with roles in the movies *Crooked Business, Sinbad & The Minotaur, My Mistress, Fatal Honeymoon* and *Bullets For The Dead*. There were also roles in TV shows *Sea Patrol, The Strip, Mabo, Secrets & Lies, Gallipoli, The Killing Field* and *The Family Law*. Theatre for QT, *Twenty Five Down, The Clean House, Betrayal, Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, Fractions, The Pitch, Kelly, Brisbane, The Seagull, Much Ado About Nothing, Tartuffe, Noises Off, Scenes From A Marriage* and *The 39 Steps*. For La Boite, *Julius Caesar, Pale Blue Dot, A Doll's House* and *Straight White Men*, and for Shake and Stir, *1984*. Hugh received Matilda Award nominations for his roles in *Betrayal* and *A Doll's House*.

ANNA McGAHAN
Anna McGahan is an actor and writer, based in Melbourne. As an actor, she has performed for Australian television (*Underbelly: Razor, House Husbands, Anzac Girls, The Dr Blake Mysteries, Picnic at Hanging Rock*), film (*Project Eden, 100 Bloody Acres*) and theatre (*Julius Caesar* – La Boite, *Managing Carmen* – QTC and *Black Swan, The Effect* – STC). She has been the recipient of the Inside Film 'Out of the Box' Award (2011), the Heath Ledger Scholarship (2012), and Matilda Award for Best Emerging Actor (2012).

REBECCA MINUTI
After completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Technical Production (QUT), Rebecca has worked as an ASM for Queensland Theatre on: *My Name is Jimi* (Brisbane Season), *Rice* (with Griffin Theatre Company), *Constellations*, *For the Moment*, *Where in the World is Frank Sparrow?* and *Switzerland*. Rebecca has also worked as an Assistant Stage Manager for Now Look Here Theatre on *The Lover* and *a Slight Ache*.

NICOLE NEIL
Nicole is a QUT graduate with BFA degrees in both Technical Production (2015) & Drama (2012). She has worked professionally as a stage manager with various companies including; Opera Queensland, Queensland Theatre, La Boite Theatre Company, Dead Puppet Society, Brisbane Festival, Shake & Stir Theatre Company & Queensland Performing Arts Centre.

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Metro Arts acknowledge the Jagera and Turrabal peoples, as the custodians of this land, recognising their connection to land, waters and community. We honour the story-telling and art-making at the heart of First Nation's cultures, and the enrichment it gives to the lives of all Australians.
Always was, Always will be.

Images by Naomi Etri and Sean Dowling.

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Appendix E: Production Photos

Production photos by Stephen Henry.


HOUDINI
SECRET SERVICE