THEATRE OF THE 4TH DIMENSION

Making Meaning in a Digital Space

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December 2022

ABSTRACT

This is a PhD thesis consisting of written dissertation and creative thesis. It investigates practices and methods of theatre making in the multimodal environment of internet social media platforms, specifically mediated via 'live-streaming'. Embedded throughout the text, the reader will be guided towards hyperlinks to video content of cited sections from fieldwork and the creative analysis performance outcomes (plays).

Between 2017-2019 I conducted a creative development project with the aim of investigating if and how the various technologies of social media platforms were transferrable and effective in theatre making practice. This research was conducted as an auto-ethnography to capture the complexity of this creative process and the ethnodramatic analysis which resulted. And, as research investigating the complexity of performance behaviour in web-based environments, this emulates a digital humanities perspective "of the plasticity of digital forms and the way in which they point towards a new way of working with representation and mediation" (Berry 2012). This perspective is important to remember because, by its nature, the experience of engaging on social media is a mixture of private and public presentation (Berry, Harbord et al. 2013, Hookway 2014), which emulates the perspective of an actor or performer on a drama. The project is therefore presented as a hybrid written thesis and creative analysis in the form of a recording of a live performance of the ethnodrama, which is derivative of my participant-observer experience.

This research was a valuable exercise in performance theory and media. At the time of fieldwork, I observed a taken-for-granted correlation between my work as a theatre and film maker and web-based performance platforms such as Twitch and YouTube, in that both shared transferable production methods. However, my assumptions that performance techniques were as easily transferable was mistaken. The nearly eighteen-month creative development/fieldwork process deeply investigated these complimentary and opposing practices. The results of these findings were reconstituted into a dramatic narrative for performance, a stage play for a live audience. The plays were derived from conversations with informants, employing colloquial social media communication cues as literary (script) devices. The plays were developed via a script development process with the ensemble informants, then rehearsed and performed for invited audiences over a nine-month period. These performance

outcomes of 'Lunch with Jenna episode 27: Who the Hell is Samantha Deen' and two subsequent sequels, were a valuable exercise in performance analysis using ethnodrama and mixed media.

Key results and findings reveal challenges to assumed theatrical customs and relationships between performers and audience, specifically the notion of the fourth wall. I conclude that this abstract performance convention which is observed across theatre, film, and television, needs to be recalibrated with an adjusted dynamic between audience and performer, which is unique to the live-streaming environment. My account also establishes complimentary features of performance such as acting style, character within narrative, and technical production that required adaptation to spatial and temporal distinctions unique to social media engagement practices.

This work is significant because it contributes to new ways of conceiving social scripts that exist between the actor/audience for 'suspension of disbelief' to occur. Significantly, this grass-roots-style creative practice offers suggestions and questions for further exploration of ethnodramatic research. Anthropologically, the archival material and creative analysis outcome, derived from fieldwork experiences, will contribute to continuing ethnodramatic discourse.

Throughout the thesis, footnotes indicate hyperlinks which are embedded within the text. These hyperlinks connect to fieldwork recordings of creative development, rehearsals, and performances. Readers of digital publications should be able to click on the link within the text to see footage which exemplifies the point being made in the text. If links have become disconnected due to file corruption, or this thesis has been printed on paper, links can be typed into search browsers.

DISCLAIMER: Some content contains sexual themes and representations. The reader is advised to employ their own discretion.

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Declaration of Originality

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my exegesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Signed:

Michael Allen
December 2022

Acknowledgments

This dedication is to family, friends, and the many supporters of my years pursuing ideas and goals that have truly tested your patience with my sanity. This, as all PhD's, was a labour of love. For me it was also a capstone to a 30-year career. This research project is the culmination of, and a tribute to, all those years, all those experiences, and all those people who have influenced me during that time. Onwards.

To Professor Andrew Skuse, and Dr. Dianne Rodger, I am aware of the unconventional approach this project has delivered, which has challenged many conventions, thank you for your support to navigate something different within the norm. Also, thanks to the entire teaching, and leadership team from the school of Anthropology at the University of Adelaide for your continued support and encouragement, with a special acknowledgement for Dr. Susan Hemer. To Tim, Ben, Tamara, friends, and family. Especially to Jasmin and Max for enduring such an epic journey of uncharted territory and staying with me. To Lyliana, Indigo, Ina, Annabelle and Harry.

And a singular dedication to my wife Nicole. This work, this life, and my heart exist only because of you.

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Chapter 1

> For theatre practitioners working in cyberspace, the quest to create new worlds and conceive dramatic content that successfully utilizes the Internet as a performance space has undoubtedly been beset by hurdles
>
> (Dixon 2007, 511).

> While we have been conditioned to regard videos as documents of the unalterable past, the live video evokes at least the possibility of a dynamic, undetermined present
>
> (Tannahill 2014, 10).

Introduction

This is an anthropology research project thesis that will unpack and explore the experience of a long-form creative development process, which applied conventional theatre-making practices to augmented performance spaces in web-based environments. Specifically, this research identifies new socio-spatial relationships between actor and audience that are specific to live-stream broadcasts of narrative drama. Between 2017-2019 I conducted a creative development project with the aim of investigating if and how the various technologies of social media platforms were transferrable and effective in theatre-making practice. This research was conducted as an auto-ethnography of my practice as a theatre-making anthropologist, in Adelaide, South Australia. Auto-ethnography incorporates creative analysis (Dauphinee 2010, Saldaña 2016, Taylor, Namey et al. 2017) used to capture the complexity of the research and the ethnodramatic analysis which resulted. It is therefore presented as a hybrid written thesis and creative analysis in the form of recordings of three live performances, which are shaped by my participant-observer experience.

This research-led performance project is founded in understanding how performances are lived and meaning created, in an interconnected world mediated by social media platforms (SMP's). The research setting (or field) therefore, is of a 'multi-sited' (Marcus 1995, Marcus 2012) nature, being gathered from across various websites and social media platforms. Unlike most fieldwork, this thesis does not seek to explain an already accessible social phenomenon; to observe experience already in existence. At the time of fieldwork (pre COVID-19 and the

'pivot' to more everyday use of livestream) there did not exist much of a web-based community around theatre of this type. This project then, was about re-imagining 'what theatre could be' by creating a self-contained social and culturally artistic event (a web-based play) with a small ensemble of volunteers who were attempting to make it.

The thesis is underpinned by video recordings of three live performances (or plays) and one hour of collated creative development footage. I will therefore use hyperlinks to fieldwork footage[1], as examples of content creation with fieldwork participants, to show how and where research is interlaced in the creative analysis (play), and diminish the 'distance' of experience for future readers. These plays act as creative analysis (ethnodramatic performances), which were presented as experiments in private viewings, using a hybrid of theatre, film and television production techniques developed from fieldwork. These plays are a dynamic representation of the web-based social media environments, and the social performances I observed. They are a record of applied performance practices derivative of my creative development process through fieldwork. The outcome of this creative ethnographic project yielded new knowledge about the 'fourth wall', a taken-for-granted conceptual performance theory, that is reconsidered in a web-based social environment.

Aims, Research Questions and Contributions

Based on the environment of live-streaming theatre at the time, the aim of this research was to better understand what, if any, features of conventional theatre-making process are transferrable when live-streaming a dramatised narrative. I wanted to better understand the unique relationships between performance, performer, and audience, as in Rhee and Bayer's (2021) lay definition of Social Media Platform (SMP) environments. 'Lay' in this case reflects "how users conceptualize social media … to focus on the common motives and practices tied to the
platforms used in everyday life" (Rhee, Bayer et al. 2021, 2). This encapsulates the breadth and vague scope of any web-based interaction with little distinction for specifics regarding values placed on social interaction, media type (i.e., text or image-based), commercialism and more. Specifically, this represents everyday platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, YouTube,

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKHM_7NL9qLfhzHyJWOV0gJ78gnttaNHa

and Twitch, that facilitate real-time performances of actors. My aim was to create a performance outcome which creatively synthesised the lived experience of socialising in these environments and suspended disbelief for an audience in a dramatic narrative.

To achieve this, I put together an ensemble of volunteer actor/participants, to actively engage with popular social networks such as Twitch, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. The aim was to develop knowledge about how ideas, emotions, social performance, and social scripts were communicated using the functionality of each of the platforms we were engaged with during fieldwork (Cole 2010, Friedman 2015, CCSD 2017). By applying performance techniques of character development and improvisation as avatars on these same platforms, we hoped to develop an ethnodramatic performance that resonated with an audience such that the phenomenon of 'suspension of disbelief' was created.

The conditions of the research process in this project were therefore a
1. creative development process,
2. recorded as an auto-ethnographic study; and
3. interpreted via ethnodramatic analysis.

Rehearsals and workshops were conducted form my home studio once a week whilst ongoing character improvisations were performed on social media. This approach afforded both place and space to investigate specific questions:

1. How do affordances of social media shape theatre/performance methods, techniques, and processes?
2. How do actor/audience engagement intersect in new ways to accommodate web-based agency and voyeurism as a simultaneous outcome?
3. If and how is the theatrical (and by extension film or tv) concept of 'the fourth wall' reimagined in this exchange?

The three recorded performances of 1) *Lunch with Jenna Ep #27: 'Who the Hell is Samantha Deen,* 2) *Lunch with Jenna Ep #39: #DMme#playnice#igetboredeasily* and 3) *Lunch with Jenna Ep#: The Void Screams Back,* are the ethnodramatic representation of social experiences from informants and my auto-ethnographic experience of research (Taber 2010, Müller 2016)

during fieldwork. Much of the scripted dialogue between characters is taken from actual exchanges, as were some of the dramatised scenarios. These dramatised experiences informed socially scripted relationships between actor and audience as in a conventional theatre setting. These blended methodologies (Taber 2010) in turn informed a new way of conceiving of place and space as it relates to the concept of 'the fourth wall'. Importantly for future creative researchers in this space, the performance achieved suspension of disbelief in the audience at the time and is a replicable script that can be re-interpreted for future productions. In this way, the recorded performances are a visceral recording of fieldwork, creative analysis, and a new contribution to anthropological performance theory.

As a PhD candidate supported by the University, I performed several subjective positions (or roles) throughout the fieldwork including director, writer, producer, and friend for the actors who volunteered their time to the project over eighteen months. To capture as much as possible from the complexity of this scenario, I undertook an auto-ethnographic-inspired approach (Taber 2010, Saldaña 2018). This method involves creating a portfolio of contributing reflections and creative writing, including regular blog journals, photographs, and video footage, to capture an auto-biographical aspect of the research (Snow 2016). For example, between August 2017 and February 2019, I produced fifty-eight blog entries chronicling different experiences of the research. I also kept a personal journal using online software Evernote, which also allows for collection of mixed media files including images and sound recordings that were relevant. Although I personally did not post much on Twitter or Instagram, I did use these to compliment the blog posts and record some developments. And finally, I developed the three play scripts which were subject to several redrafts and revisions as I sought to refine the creative explanation of the research experience. Auto-ethnography and ethnodrama are research-led creative practices, which place a primacy over representation of informants rather than process-led or technique-driven approaches of strict theatre pedagogy (Hohl 2009, Dauphinee 2010, Kinn, Holgersen et al. 2013, Saldaña 2016, Ingridsdotter and Kim Silow 2018). This was the most appropriate method as a project of self-discovery in a creative development process and a personal journey that cannot often be captured in an academic voice.

The idea for the project was informed and inspired by my career in the performing arts to this point. My academic background of cultural anthropology in performance studies, rests upon

thirty years as a professional actor, director, producer and writer for theatre, film, and television. I first became introduced to the potential of live-streaming and theatre whilst completing my Masters (and previous ethnodrama) on an all-autistic theatre company in 2013 (Allen 2016). In 2016 I produced the play from that exegesis in a public season at the Adelaide Fringe Festival, and, as a novelty, broadcast the first ever live-streamed play from an Adelaide Fringe Festival as part of that run. That successful experience invited a world of creative potential that I had not conceived of before. Creatively this was a new challenge, and I was inspired to apply my previous career expertise to the complexity of this emerging new phenomenon.

This project then, incorporated within me, several different roles and statuses, depending on the focus of activity at the time. To borrow from Goffman's masks metaphor (Goffman 1963, Goffman 1971, Dawsey and Markowitz 2006, Sylvester 2019), in these individual roles/masks, I was operating under the proscribed objectives of each. These co-present roles and responsibilities create personal pressures which inform the creative process. Recording data became creative, cathartic, and an attempt to capture lived experiences which cannot be easily appreciated using other methods (Saldaña 2018). The overarching and integrated positions or 'masks' of anthropologist and theatre-maker are comparable in that they are keen observers of human nature, communication, and representation of human experience. In this instance, the fieldwork/creative development was a comparable journey of discovery for both identities, indeed, they informed each other.

Key results and findings revealed challenges to assumed theatrical knowledge, specifically the notion of the fourth wall. This abstract performance convention observed across theatre, film, and television, needs to be recalibrated with a dynamic unique to the live-streaming environment, incorporating acting style, character within narrative, and technical production. These features do not inherently adapt to spatial and temporal distinctions unique to social media engagement practices or broadcast possibilities.

This process and resulting ethnodramatic presentations, is a contribution to continued moves away from orthodox academic distance between participants and readers, of fourth wall ethnography dissolving into contemporary research (Lindlof and Shatzer 1998, Müller 2016, Boivin and CohenMiller 2018). This position asserts an authority of the academic voice over

the reader/audience and recognises the temporal, spatial and experiential distance between researcher and reader can be so broad as to lose transfer of meaning and become a mere intellectual exercise. Whereas 'co-present' experiences in a shared physical and temporal arrangement (Phelan 1993, Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2015, Taylor, Namey et al. 2017) are necessary for any meaningful experience to occur. These methods, practice and analysis continue to explore the boundaries of creative anthropology.

This introductory chapter will describe and analyse the context and environment of live-stream theatre, that existed at the time research was undertaken. I begin with a description of the commercial space of live-streamed theatre and its dominance by large production companies with global media reach, representing the theatrical canon and established market dominance (Frankel 2010, Williams, Kegel et al. 2015, Fotheringham 2016, Geelhoed, Singh-Barmi et al. 2017, Grandinetti 2019). This discourse and their quantitative data-based findings often masked taken-for-granted assumptions about what a theatre experience is. This is understandable given that not until the emergence of these web-based performances, has there been a challenge to the assumption that all participants in a live theatre experience must be physically and temporally co-located simultaneously. This point is further explored below distinguishing the differences between fictive drama and other broadcast entertainment such as concerts or telethons. This belief continues to muddy long-contested ideas about meaning and co-presence in a heavily meditated event (Turner 1979, Turner 1979, Schieffelin 1985, Phelan 1993, Auslander 1999). These positions also frame a new criteria for the concept of 'the fourth wall' (Boivin and CohenMiller 2018) and its implications for the actors' concept of 'public solitude' (Fielding 2008). The fourth wall, it has been argued, is the underpinning performative dilemma of this co-presence debate (Fielding 2008, Hinckley 2008, Geuens 2015). I then identify the distinctions between these conventions and the emergence of the potential for a new hybrid genre which re-imagines these abstract characteristics of performed drama.

Taking 'live' for granted

Liveness is not a strange concept when considering television events such as a telethon charity or concert, with guest celebrities and performers raising money and awareness for a social cause. These are broadcast live with meaningful topical narratives (such as the 'Fire Fight

Australia' concert in 2020 or even 'Live Aid' as far back as 1985) and create generational cultural touchstones. But they lack "fictional worlds" (Rozik 2008, 88); a literary narrative or a story with character arcs and dramatic tension. One event that had attempted a fusion of this kind was the film 'Lost in London' (Harrelson 2017), which was filmed as a single continuous shot and broadcast simultaneously to selected cinemas in the UK, USA and Canada as a 'live movie' event. In some ways, this project achieved a feature of live performance in that it was only broadcast/performed once and has not, at least not to my knowledge when writing this, been made publicly available since as a VOD (video on demand) recording. This makes it ephemeral, existing only in the moment of shared experience of those present, which is in keeping with the orthodox features of experiencing a play, replicating a conventional relationship of audience and performer using a sense of 'presence' (Ang and Gatt 2017).

My sense was that these projects lacked the impact of a co-present dialogue between performer and audience. This is the unique relationship with an audience, the suspension of disbelief where responses in each participant shape the performance in nuanced and responsive ways; a 'dialogue' which makes the performance more 'organic'. This might be the actor holding back on delivering a line while they wait for the audience laughter to die down, or adjusting the timing of a gag for greater comic effect (Zarrilli 2007). My experience with the projects accessible to me using these streaming services (because often these were price prohibitive, one-off events at far away locations or geo-blocked) was that they often position the viewer as a temporally and physically dislocated unseen mass. This reflects a principle of medium theory whereby a new relationship exists with spectators when personal media rather than mass media redefines audience relationships, and creator content (Jenkins 2006, Jenkins 2006, Luders 2008). Mass media is broadcast as a wide net, despite strategic audience market research to target specific types of people. The emergence of livestream via social media, and its corresponding interactive models, invites more bespoke, or at least personal exchange between audience and performer. Despite the broadcast being live for the viewer in a remote cinema, there is no feedback communication of any kind between actor and audience to indicate a dynamic relationship. Without the agency to have audience response inform the 'dialogue' between actor and audience, a significant component of Phelan's (1993) orthodox fundamentalist 'liveness' definition, predicated on visceral immediacy in a temporal and spatial synergy, becomes a contested claim. And this dislocated augmentation threatens to dilute any 'real' experience. More specifically, this is because the livestream broadcast experience is

passed through gateways of technology, the gatekeepers intrinsically found at these junctures, and the subsequent politicisation of each.

Contemporary theatre companies capitalised without questioning this 'space' of liveness and its transformative power. Often, they muddied this distinction from a 'purist' position of 'representation without reproduction' (Phelan 1993) and claimed these events were essentially highly produced archival films to be enjoyed within an independent and unique experience for those viewers. This is a position that maintains a purity of event (the actual live performance) whilst promoting this same purity in a franchise-like experience. They do this to assert their legitimacy and authority as the purveyors of what theatre is (Auslander 1999, Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2015, Way 2017, Sylvester 2019). Terms such as 'hyper-live', 'without delay', 'live-streaming' are used to legitimise, or at least retain a heritage of, "the audience's temporal presence for the broadcasts" (Way 2017, 394). By doing so they continue to contest what a 'live play' is by using filmed aspects or immersive practices (such as surround sound) which mimic the position of an 'actor' or 'character' performing on a stage.

This background of 'actors' in the livestream theatre space of 2017-19 suggested an objective to research. My aim became to see if it was possible to make a live web-based theatrical experience that created in an audience, a state of suspension of disbelief; whereby they suspend disbelief in the social scripts, environment, and rituals of the manufactured production and instead accept the experience as 'really happening'. The 'live' component was what I considered the most significant idea to investigate, and there are almost as many ways of conceiving the term 'live' as there are plays to perform. An "endlessly contested" (Way 2017, 391) debate seems to be around definitions of shared temporal and physical space, that underpin the taken-for-granted assumption of what live performance is, particularly when 'mediatised' (Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2015) with digital technologies. These mediatised layers of broadcast engagement highlighted obstacles to everyday theatre production, which this project sought to mimic.

Who and how was digital theatre experienced?

In 2017, before the COVID-19 pandemic and at the time of this research, a great deal of 'live-theatre' was already available on the internet. One of the largest providers at the time was

'Digital Theatre' (https://www.digitaltheatre.com) where it was possible to rent or purchase the recording of a play that was performed live somewhere (usually in the UK), sometime in the past five years. It is similar to library-like streaming services such as Netflix, or for that matter, an old video rental franchise such as Blockbuster, where it is possible to watch in comfort of one's own time, place and company. Alternatively, it was possible to visit a local cinema and watch a livestreamed play as part of a 'live audience' in the case of Australian National Theatre Live (http://antlive.com.au/). Many companies and theatrical genres were also available including opera, ballet, or Broadway performances.

These examples are what I referred to as 'catch and release' performances; plays that were recorded using multiple cameras during a live performance in a conventional theatre (sometimes over one but often over several performances) then edited and post-produced like a movie (Way 2017). The productions were of a technological quality that was far beyond the reach of funding available to me for this project. They were also indicative of a web 2.0 model (Boikos, Moutsoulas et al. 2014) which understands personal interaction is mediated via copyright, intellectual property and the layered gatekeeping authority of those platforms and providers, despite the appearance of personal agency in participation. Web 2.0 allows for "information production" (Han 2010, 201) by users that are governed by a host while affording the appearance of "radical inclusion" (ibid). And this certainly appeared to be the case with live theatre streaming examples I experienced at the time. Creatively, I was frustrated by this type of temporal distance. It lacked the visceral sensations and social scripts involved with conventional live performance, sharing the same time and place as others in communal imagination. It was an experience that was transactional, not social. This feeling was underpinned by the volume of statistics and data which was seen as validation (Cooper 2015, Williams, Kegel et al. 2015) of investing in these productions. In my mind, these were not experiences which reduced this distance and created a 'co-presence' of all participants. At this time, because the space was dominated by these corporate-like theatre companies and the lack of access to equivalent production resources, there was little interest or activity from smaller and independent theatre-makers, and therefore the definition of 'live' in this new environment was ceded to these dominant actors. This was observed by contemporary theatre discourse at the time:

the performing arts in the age of mechanical and electronic reproduction have built their core case for survival around an ideology based on the ontological uniqueness and alleged superiority of liveness

(Fotheringham 2016, 5)

Liveness, in the sense of collective social engagement with the performance, was being re-defined for, and by, audiences who gathered at film festival screenings or other broadcast events. Production companies would invite audiences to purchase a ticket to a cinema, where they could watch a livestreamed broadcast of a new production with others at a venue. These events were either broadcast simultaneously, or as part of a proscribed 'season' at different locations and times around the world. There are many similarities between the social scripts and rituals of theatre and cinema audiences with regards to ticket purchasing, seat allocation, spatial relationship of audience to stage/screen and so on, enough to make this at least a simulacrum of attending the theatre. They were marketed as a unique, or at least a 'newish', aspect to the 'authentic' experience. Despite this uniqueness, the broadcast audience is still positioned in a far more distant context to the original experience, which only re-enforces the cultural hegemony over what a live play is, by a definition of who is present.

What is the fourth wall?

Put simply the fourth wall is a theatre convention whereby there is an imaginary wall on the stage, through which an audience voyeuristically observes the action and characters obliviously playing out the drama of their lives. The consensus is that it was born in the 17th Century Renaissance period and is the central tenet of the modern-day film perspective POV (Point Of View) (Geuens 2015). It is a convention whereby the actors are aware of the audience, but the characters they are portraying are not. The audience is simultaneously aware that the actors are performing functions on a stage but suspend their disbelief to afford the characters a 'real life'. When done successfully, we, as the audience "cannot but be emotionally impacted by those around us as well as project toward them the inner workings of our minds" (Geuens 2015, 316). It is a communal magic trick; a weird separation of identities, roles and realities dependent on a multi-dimensional arrangement of social and stratified relationships, in a fragile and delicate balance in order to achieve 'success'. It is the conceptual and invisible idea of a wall which allows some 'distance' to observe behaviour, a window through which to view unnoticed. It

was adopted by the pioneering film and television revolutions of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries (Auslander 1999) and in the production parlance of those examples it has become known colloquially as 'crossing the line' or the '180-degree rule'. It is possibly one of the most fundamental physical and conceptual structures underpinning all modern theatre.

The fourth wall positions an observer in an almost aggregate, or faceless crowd context, and yet independently remains "distinct, each with his or her views, regardless of the particular choices made by the protagonist" (Geuens 2015, 316). Figures 1, 2 and 3 show various orthodox stage configurations that indicate the physical arrangements that enable the behaviours of power and authority to speak, that we are most familiar with. Audiences are arranged to give primary focus to the few performers, while the audience (as individuals) becomes part of a receptive aggregate. Within this configuration, which can be reduced to place, space and activity (Brook 1972), social scripts and rituals take place. And be they ceremonial or fictional, a 'holy' (Brook 1972) experience can occur for attendees. As such theatre is a seductive metaphor for anthropological investigation, not least for its complexity of roles, social scripts, and behaviours. Turner's work (Turner 1979, Turner 1979, Turner 1982) on 'actors' and 'observers' has laid the groundwork for the power of positionality in temporal and physical environments about social and cultural performances. But it has also been a contentious sight of contemporary theatre practice for most of the twentieth century particularly when directors Bertolt Brecht, Artaud, and Piscator began to challenge its assumed necessity (Esslin 1980, Glahn 2014).
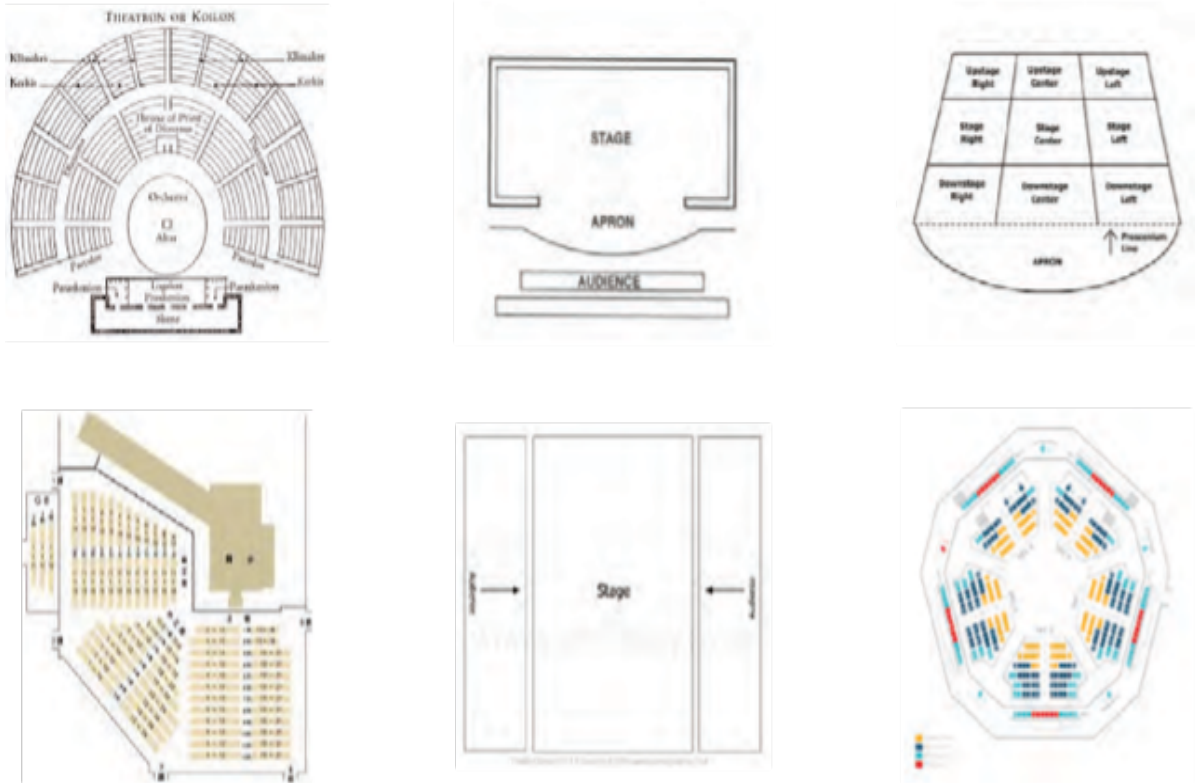
Figure 1 Floorplan schematics of some conventional theatre arrangements

Figure 2 Rock concert configurations reflect proscenium arch stages and highlight power of few over many

Figure 3 Street parades reflect 'traverse' theatre (above)

These Dadaists, futurists, and surrealist contemporaries from Europe, pointed out the absurdities inherent to the fourth-wall convention; implying that the audience who really believes they are watching a series of intimate exchanges might wait until they have left the theatre to applaud. Their political and 'epic' demands of drama demanded a realistic play, including the reality of the audience sitting in a theatre and the actors' awareness of the audience's presence (Glahn 2014). As Davis puts it, we can see how the fourth-wall question becomes a:

> more fundamental ontological struggle between the fantasy of the stage and the reality of lived experience. The fourth wall not only blunts the critical attentions of the audience, but also obstructs the drawing of connections between the plot of the play and events in the real world
>
> (2015, 89).

Debates about contested definitions of 'realism' and 'authenticity' between theatre and anthropology have informed disciplinary schisms that would reverberate throughout anthropology and performance studies from the late 1960's and beyond. Rio and Bertelsen recount the history of this tension in 'Anthropology and 1968; openings and closures' (2018a) wherein they detail a significant moment in the theoretical debate about performance and anthropology. The debate rests upon the fourth wall as representative of the liminal or liminoid concept in Turner's (1974, 1982) work on performance. The essence between the two positions being that social theatre is ritualistic and by defining a fourth wall in aesthetic theatre the transformative experience is not achieved.

What was, or is, at stake in this debate is the transformative power of performance on the audience. Practitioners such as Artaud (Cull and Buchanan 2012, Schrum and Sheedy 2012), Grotowski (1975), Barba (Grotowski and Barba 1975) and Schechner (Dawsey and Markowitz 2006) all pursued an enlightened transformation of the audience via the social and ritual nature of performance as explained by Turner himself. However, Turner rejects this approach as potentially totalitarian because the creators of performance maintain power over the audience (Rio and Bertelsen 2018). They are the ones who construct the experience and the social ritual through which the audience must go to become 'transformed' at the end. They are the ones who determine the success or failure of the audience's transformation. They are the ones within whom the audience must place an enormous amount of trust in order to be 're-born' from the performance.

To achieve Grotowski's ideals meant a disassembling of the fourth wall, removing the imaginary safety barrier that kept at bay the spiritual opportunity of rebirth through performance, instead maintaining illusionary frivolity. Yet, at the time when the term for Artaud's work was 'the theatre of cruelty' (Artaud 1958) it is perhaps no wonder that audiences (at least notionally) would prefer a degree of safety behind the imaginary barrier of the fourth wall, where they can comfortably indulge in a suspended disbelief rather than give over to the Bacchanalian consumption desired by Artaud (Esslin 1976, Martin 1983). These ideas have had some long-term impact, if not somewhat diluted, as the convention has now become self-referential, reflexive, and commonplace amongst modern theatre, television and film (Davis 2015, Charella 2016).

Nonetheless, the idea of breaking the fourth wall is still a meta-theatre convention because it is above and beyond, extra to, and in context of the regular convention of the fourth wall. And it is still bound by the fourth wall anyway, you cannot break something that is not there. Despite any feelings of intimacy that breaking this suspended disbelief creates in an audience, the reality is that it works only in opposition to the convention. It is not necessarily a new phenomenon - Shakespeare is famous for his monologues and ancient Greek theatre was grounded upon the individual orator - however, despite the variant performances of these, the relationship with the audience in the narrative that Brecht and Artaud sought remains elusive. The audience are still watching this moment from the 'other side' (of the character's

consciousness) separated by time, space, and post-production processes. In this sense, Turner is correct in his suspicions of a 'totalitarian' experience in Grotowski's approach (Rio and Bertelsen 2018) because the audience has an illusion of autonomy and yet is subject to the predetermined experience by the creators of it. As such, he advocated for liminal events "contained within certain secular experiences enjoyed in the breaks from 'real society, in the theatre, when attending church or when reading a novel" (ibid). The roles, responsibilities and experiences of both performer and audience, are determined by which side of this fourth wall they inhabit. I doubt a reconciliation between the two is possible in conventional theatre practice. However, the (almost) free exchange of communication, action and reaction between performer and audience in a web-based, social media platform broadcast, suggests that a reconceptualisation of what the fourth wall is and how it is effective needs to be considered.

Cracks in the wall

In web-based experiences, place, space, and time are dislocated where they were once the fulcrum of the experience in a theatrical sense. The relationships between audience and performer, and the process (if there is one) to achieve Turner's 'liminoid' definition, is couched within a new framework of relationships, process, and presentation. This new framework challenges invisible structures and classes of language used by conventional theatre's identifying features; the fourth wall, the stage and what goes on it, the position of the audience and who is allowed to sit in it. Productions and performances are governed by systems of creative authority which determine what is seen through this wall. An example is literally the author's ability to create the universe of the narrative, such as Bakhtins's concept of heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981, Morson 1986, Vice 1997); a linear cause-and-effect hierarchy creating an interdependent constellation of silo languages within a matrix of order and power. And Gibbons' 'stylistic fiction' (a conglomeration of interdependent 'voices' that make the whole) shows how this three-dimensional authorship can be flattened into its own ontology (Gibbons 2013). A web-based theatrical production offers the possibility of a new type of performance, one that is not a physically locked event but is a collective focus, engaged and connected by a digital interface for a specific individual or audience member. This fundamentally challenges almost every aspect of orthodox theatre structure, power, and agency.

This debate over power and authority has historically been part of theatre long before the internet was even conceived. At the core of the debate between Turner, Schechner and Grotowski was the ability, potential and obligation for theatre as an extension of cultural and social performances, to 'transform' or enlighten its participants (Rio and Bertelsen 2018). Their respective positions have become almost part of contemporary theatre-making DNA. Modern responses to this debate of the early 20th Century saw an explosion of theoretical activity with regards to theatre practice, with many plays and playwrights of the era almost canonised as part of actor training even today. Antonin Artaud, for example, was seeking a moment of 'transcendence' in audience and performer akin to that achieved by initiates in Turner's 'rite of passage' model. Brecht sought ideological emancipation, by engaging in a theatrical version of cognitive dissonance. Schechner and Grotowski seemed to be somewhere in between, speaking on behalf of the ideological leaps made by artists including Derrida, Delueze, and others (Esslin 1976, Esslin 1980, Bekavac 2006). Turner rejected these arguments as relinquishing what little power the audience had left. Instead, he expressed an interest in 'flow experience' (Turner 1979) whereby the relationship was measured in an energy transference. Jump ahead to the media scholar Scott Lash in 'Critique of Information' (2002), which prosecutes a change in how we understand and decipher information mediated in the fluid environments of social-web-based exchanges. His digital definition of 'flow' and 'meaning' and Turner's analogue version looks very similar, which implies replicable results based on theory. I posit that the new dimension of web-based lifestyles, and the consciousness of social beings in abstract spaces and places, such as Twitch and other livestream broadcast platforms, offers potential for the liminoid transcendence, to which Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski, and Schechner aspired because,

> The presence of the chat, and the back-and-forth interaction that streamers typically have with their audience, is what gives streaming its "live" characteristic. Indeed, one could choose to watch a VOD recording of a popular stream (even including recorded chat interactions in some instances), but not have the same experience of interaction with both the streamer, and with their fellow audience members.
>
> (Pellicone 2017, 217)

I may be a long way from reconciling that debate, and there is certainly a great deal of broader theatre academia to expand on these assertions, but for the purposes of this research it is enough

to understand how the web, its reconfiguration of dislocated time, space and place and its flattened hierarchies of authority makes for a potential to achieve that vision.

Conclusion

This chapter began by outlining the aims of the fieldwork experience as an autoethnographic analysis and the contributions my findings make for future performance studies. It is an understatement to say that theatre has many invocations from pantomimes to musicals and 'ethnodramas' or 'performance texts' (Allen and Garner 1995, Barone 2002, Conrad 2012, Saldaña 2016). All of them would aspire to transport the audience into an abstract place of imagination, to stimulate some empathic relationship with the subject. To create a suspension of disbelief regardless of genre or function is probably the prime indicator of a performance's success or not for me as theatre-maker. The aims and objectives of this project were to reconceptualise the features of gatekeeping and authority above, as a performing place of layers: a kind of 'webtheatre'.

I then provided background about the field of live-streaming theatre services and events at the time of fieldwork (between 2017 and 2019). At the time the sector of live-streaming theatre was dominated by large institutional theatre companies with global reputations and advertising reach. These 'actors' maintained an authority over defining and retaining the purity of live performance, whilst also recognising the limitations of the experience as 'the real thing' and leveraging market dominance. The limits of these experiences determined temporal and spatial dislocation from the 'live' and the diminished potential for social scripts and rituals that inform the corporeal 'suspension of disbelief' in an audience.

I concluded by identifying that the mediated online spaces of live-streaming on social media platforms replicated the functionality of performance and audience but that their efficacy as social acts which suspended disbelief was not transferable. I demonstrated that new ways of conceiving the concept known as 'the fourth wall' needed to be established, and for an actor/audience relationship that was subject to similar, yet distinctly different means of engagement between people.

The following chapters detail how these discoveries were identified, the impact they have had on core beliefs and taken-for-granted cultural assumptions that exist around performance, and how they must be challenged and reconceived in web-based space. This will contribute to new ways of conceiving established theories and relationships between performer and audience. My work demonstrates that it is possible to create a suspension of disbelief for an audience that has much more autonomy over their experience, but theatre-makers must cede some agency to do this. This ultimately creates a stepping-off-point for future research and practice to explore and expand on the ideas presented here. However, it does go some way to harmonising the schism of the liminoid and liminal experience in dramatic performance.

CHAPTER 2 Settings and Methods
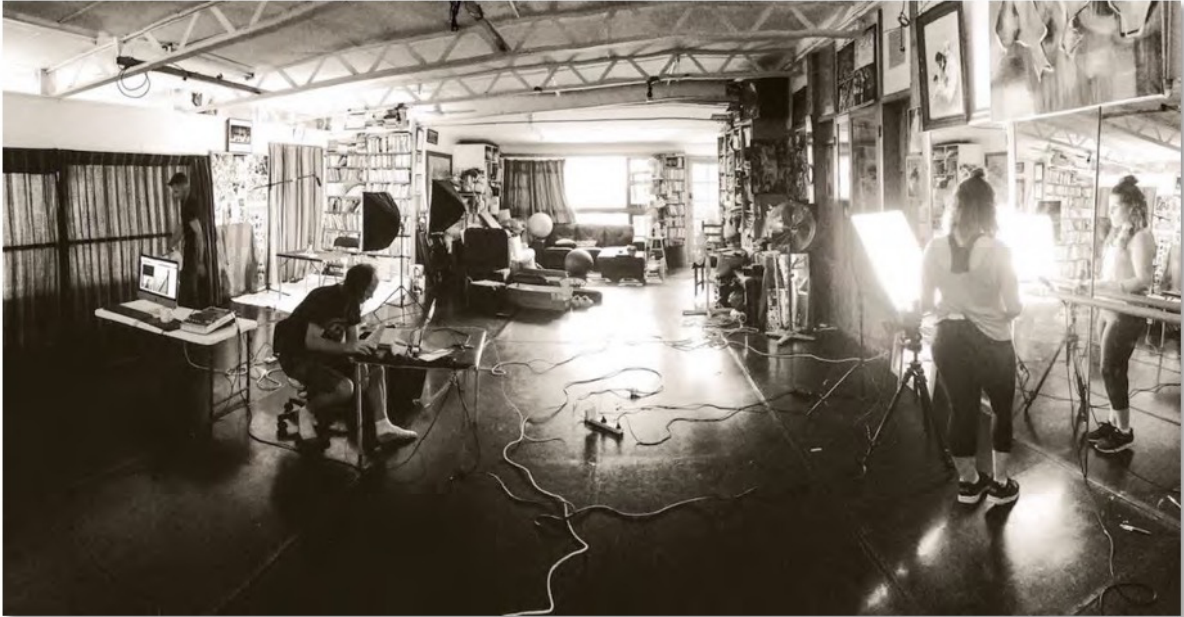
Figure 4 The home studio with equipment and participating actors improvising during an early creative development session.

Ethnodramatists should never forget that our mission is about substance and style, form and feeling, research and art.

(Saldaña 2016, 203)

Introduction

This chapter details the underpinning settings of the research-led creative development. Specifically, this chapter establishes the setting of fieldwork whereby creative development and ethnographic archiving of experiences could occur. To borrow a theatrical parlance, this 'foregrounding' underpins two key questions of this research as identified in chapter one, being:

1. How do affordances of social media shape theatre / performance methods, techniques, and processes?
2. How do actor/audience engagement intersect in new ways to accommodate web-based agency and voyeurism as a simultaneous outcome?

I begin with detailing the parameters of the field which consisted of both 'offline' and 'online' environments (Miller 2012, Miller 2018, Miller and Slater 2020, Rhee, Bayer et al. 2021). Offline fieldwork would be relatively familiar to anyone with passing knowledge of a creative development process with an ensemble of actors working in the place of my private rehearsal studio, based in Adelaide, South Australia. 'Online' fieldwork required members of this ensemble to behave as characters or avatars on selected social media platforms. This work was often conducted outside the rehearsal studio and was observed in the 'public space' of the same platforms. In this sense, the fieldwork was conducted in both place and space, with the binding determinant being the character or narrative experiment being conducted. These experiences were then reflected on, informing the next exercise or script draft.

I then proceed to outline themes and applied theatre approach this research undertook which builds upon the above and included auto-ethnographic field observations to create an ethnodramatic account (Cranston and Kusanovich, Bruscaglioni 2016, Cranston and Kusanovich 2016, Eckersall, Grehan et al. 2017, Ingridsdotter and Kim Silow 2018). Auto-ethnography is considered a fundamental principle to creating ethnodrama from fieldwork and I was working across theory (Dawsey and Markowitz 2006, Ang and Gatt 2017, Boivin and CohenMiller 2018), methodology (Hohl 2009, Gibbons 2013, Williams, Kegel et al. 2015, Geelhoed, Singh-Barmi et al. 2017) and practice (Schrum and Sheedy 2012, Jewitt, Price et al. 2017, Costa 2018) simultaneously including ideas, experiences, resources, and observations. There are also ad hoc, or improvised, and makeshift environmental situations, which are specific (but not unique) to this kind of creative development. These oft-unanticipated developments shaped creative output. In many instances, creative decisions and interpretations were framed by resources that were not available, forcing me to create as a 'grass roots entrepreneur' (Sarkar 2018). In the instance of this work, access to equipment (often dated and incompatible), knowledge of how to use it, restrictions of copyright and licensing or just availability of ensemble members and rehearsal space all shaped and framed the creative process and resultant analysis. In such a fluid space I have tried to isolate where the threads of these influences intersect by way of identifying these as components used in a bricolage process (Kinn, Holgersen et al. 2013, Sarkar 2018), to produce the works of creative analysis that is the three plays.

Establishing a Research (creative development) Setting

The fieldwork was conducted from November 2017 to July 2019 with a small ensemble of volunteer actors and other supporters who worked with me during this time to develop the three plays which form the focus of this thesis. The ensemble met (mostly) one day per week in my home in the suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia. Scenarios and characters were workshopped from each ensemble member's social media use, which was directed by me throughout the process. Many aspects of the creative development, research, and the final production of the performances were also determined by the significant restrictions of technology or our access to it without support from an established production organisation (such as an auspicing theatre company). Our methods, therefore, were developed with the resources of the 'everyday home user' in mind, the purpose being to explore a creative process and framework that replicated many of the amateur or hobbyist identities broadcasting independently at the time.

Throughout the fieldwork there were many different informants, some of whom only contributed to workshops a few times, some who read scripts and gave feedback, some who attended the performances and provided valuable interviews. These were friends and colleagues with diverse experiences of theatre-making; from none to experienced professionals. It was important to get input from a broad range of participants with varying levels of exposure to this kind of performance. Throughout the entire process though, Nicole (my wife) remained a consistent participant, and continued to develop the creative research with me, contributing equally to the final two scripts and their performances. As the central protagonist, 'Jenna' Nicole (Nikki) and I have been working together professionally for over twenty years having run companies and projects together. Her professional writing skills, performances, and commitment to the mutual excitement of discovery in this space proved invaluable. As a participant we shared similar creative approaches and technical language. As a partner, we were able to support each other through, what was at times, a creative minefield. Her contributions as an informant of her own personal experiences, ultimately informed the character arc of the three plays. Although having often worked together on emotionally charged creative projects, the proximity and cross-over of relationships and roles during this process proved emotionally challenging beyond anything we had experienced previously. My recommendation to budding anthropologists seeking to work in a similar collaborative way

with your significant life partner is make sure you can both find ways to separate mentally and emotionally these consistently intertwined experiences when you need to.

Research Setting 1; Home Studio

Volunteer participants consisted of colleagues and friends whom I had known and worked with previously and asked if they would like to contribute to the project. They worked with me out of my home studio (see Figure 4) and later, my own lounge room as the 'site specific' locations (Marcus 1995, Gatt 2015) of the creative development. By way of some remuneration, I would provide lunch and refreshments for the participants. This was the only remuneration participants were offered. The home studio is an approximately twelve metre by six-metre extension built onto my home several years ago. Built as a dance studio specifically, there are barre's and mirrors and what is known as 'tarquet' flooring. It also has basic theatrical stage lighting for effects. As the studio was still in use for other classes throughout the week, this shared usage of the space often made creative development sessions ad hoc, impacting availability of participants and sometimes equipment.

Towards the end of the project, during the development and production of the first performance, the project moved primarily into my home, my lounge room to be precise. This was for several reasons, one of which was the domestic location for the characters and story we were developing. I had observed that 'staging' domestic environments in a rehearsal studio was a redundant feature of conventional theatre-making, creating an imaginary space. However, this broadcast form of performance did not require these traditional staging tricks. Our experience in early workshops showed that 'staging' realities, or creating imagined spaces with a conventional set, turned viewers away, or at least made them more confused about what they were meant to be watching. We eventually did employ some conventional stagecraft in each of the performances, which complimented the 'world' of the play as part of meshing traditional techniques into the performance.

Working so intensively in my home became incredibly burdensome and highly stressful, especially towards the first performance date when rehearsals became daily. Living in my home with two young children in a three-room apartment-style accommodation and daily film

production meant that there was not enough mental or emotional space for me. If the field taught me anything, it taught me to avoid doing this at all costs. Although the remaining two performances we also conducted from my home location, by this time the only remaining participant working with me was Nikki, and so the burden of large crews and production teams made these productions far more tolerable, even bringing the fun back.

Research Setting 2; Social Media Platforms

In terms of online engagements, my informants were other audiences, networks and gatherings around various web-based performances and other users on/in social media chat groups. These events and people ranged from live personalities on Twitch and YouTube to re-broadcasts of live theatre performances by established theatre companies and twitter collectives of fans, technicians, and artists. Likewise, this loose collection of like-minded practitioners was spread across the globe adding complexities of geography and temporal distance. Any data collected by the multiple site traffic monitors that surveil internet activity, such as Google analytics, was never as informative as was the time and energy spent with people (or at least their avatars), yielding meaningful appreciation. Therefore, I journaled my fieldwork notes in multiple ways to capture these moments in a variant of IN THE INSTANCE IAs part of this I kept a blog and regularly journaled my thoughts and observations. This recirculated findings "based not just on events but also on how those events feel emotionally speaking" (Hine 2020, 31), back into the web-based place from which they came. The intent was to generate discussion which would in turn stimulate more creative development stimulating a hermeneutic circle of engagement much like the field generally.

Online, social groupings and engagement can be broadly characterised by the creative input of the users and how they use the architecture of software and platforms (Bingham 2017, Rhee, Bayer et al. 2021). In so doing there becomes an exchange, between the intent of the communicators and the aesthetic curating of that intent within the format of the hardware and software interface (Marwick and Boyd 2011, Underberg 2013). Mobile phones, for example, often come with apps that operate slightly differently to their desktop counterparts. Some platforms, such as Instagram, are designed specifically for the mobile app, with versions frustratingly difficult to use on a desktop-based web browser. The purpose and effectiveness

of communication these apps develop, defines their unique identification 'handles' or style of operation which evolves through social use. This may begin with the use of emoji's or coded anagrams representing other words and phrases. I referred to them as 'site specific accents' and they are in a constant state of flux with the users and software upgrades which may add or delete certain features.

> if you are new to the stream then it is [like] being in a foreign culture. there are turns of phrase and local knowledge well beyond my imagination as to what they might be talking about.

<p style="text-align:right">(Fieldnote 1 Dec, 2017)</p>

Participants involved as actors, were asked to create social media identities as their character to develop a personality who identified as a social media creator and contributor. This created the opportunity to improvise within these 'virtual worlds' (Boellstorff 2015) of Instagram, Twitter and so on, and to discover how their characters might communicate, what their interests might be and engage the communities they would choose to interact with. In essence, this gave the actors the opportunity to flesh out a three-dimensional character, one that was interacting with the 'real' world by being a content creator. The hope was that by being present in these spaces, the actors/characters would attract followers like any other identity. These followers might then become audience members of sorts, intrigued by the real-time drama of the characters. This actor/audience relationship momentum could hopefully be integrated into a more formal script as time went on.

Of the many Social Media Platforms (SMP) available for the participants and myself to explore, we collectively landed on Instagram and Twitter as vehicles for research and performance. Instagram is primarily a visual based platform of images which gave the actors scope to explore how their character might see the world around them, their interests and so on, and what they wanted to post themselves and put out to the world. Twitter gave the actors the opportunity to explore character through the primary medium of text and language. By combining both platforms (mainly visual and mainly textual), actors could more comprehensively explore the potential aspects and features of their character development in real-time and to distinct audiences. These platforms also gave us direct feedback about the

efficacy of these improvisations and the ability for actor/characters to infiltrate other social networks related to their character interests.

Themes and Concepts

> The universe of online social media is as much a foreign cultural environment as any that an ethnographer would encounter. The threads of meaning, power and experiences are being developed and explored as the technology are evolving. This is hardly a fixed cultural space/place.

> (Fieldnote 15 Nov, 2017)

The presentation and performative qualities of social media environments informed, as a first principal approach, the Goffman-inspired concept (1971) of the presentation of the self. Goffman famously outlined his concept whereby social responsibilities and contexts imposed upon someone, in turn inform manufactured presentations of identity. The implication is that behind these 'masks' resides some truer or more pure notion of 'self' (Goffman, 1971). This is implicit in a web-mediated social space, where every account requires the user to create a profile. As users, we are literally being asked to create masks each time we sign up to any new website, devising, constructing, and projecting identities into the world. With the compartmentalised nature of digital identities across multiple sites and spaces, we can potentially end up operating hundreds of web-based 'identities' (or fragments of our identity) concurrently. Yet each of these personality profiles is an extension of the core or root identity and in this sense, the Goffman analogy is clearly a useful starting point.

Adopting this approach created a perspective of many personality representations, which could then be used in a method of 'bricolage', which could be employed to create characters. Bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1972) describes the imagined potential of specific things collected and re-imagined, creating a new thing, like a collage painting made of ephemera and recycled materials. In his native French it is a particularly individual pursuit of cobbling things together "in ways not originally intended" (Sarkar 2018, 433). Other iterations of this 'Bricolage' idea include 'Metasynthesis' (Kinn, Holgersen et al. 2013) and grounded theory (Moore 2010). These are processes derived from methodology across many disciplines, collected, analysed,

broken down into component parts, and reconstituted into something that embodies the original meanings and meta-meaning. To this environmental approach, I also brought the lived experiences of my theatre-making practice which incorporates the adaptation of techniques, styles, and genres such as vaudeville, Commedia dell Arte (Balme, Vescovo et al. 2018), Laban/Malmgren movement psychology (Mirodan 2015, Askew 2017), Linklater (Linklater 1976), Stanislavksy's 'method' (Lewis 1958, Stanislavsky 1961) and its derivatives, and many, many more.

Ethnodrama and Performance Studies

There is naturally a vast amount of crossover between the definitions of performance studies and ethnodramas and all its derivatives (Saldaña, 2016). Both emerge from the middle of the 20th Century and the well-worn theoretical narrative of the four biggest contributors to performance theory, namely Van Gennep (1960), Turner (1974, 1979, 1982), Goffman (1963, 1971), Bateson and Mead (Bateson 1999, Ness 2008). These concepts create opportunity for suspended social realities that can pretty much be traced through every derivation of performance and theatre practice since. Bateson and Goffman particularly contributed to the concept of 'frames' (Rozik 2008) which significantly helps to understand the 'perspective' of what and how an audience observes the action. Indeed, the concept of framing defines the audience by virtue of its existence, instantly positioning them to receive the image or protestation from the actor within it (Brook 1972). For this research, I correlate the concept of the 'frame' with the concept of 'the fourth wall' as a phenomenological edge of that frame. The potential, power, and relationships of these frame borders, between performer and audience, continue to be explored by theatre artists. These frames imagine and inform the structural space of performance and create a dynamic distinction between dramatic performance and lived experience.

The field is well established now and as McKenzie (2005) notes, these approaches have been thought about and built upon such that the field and scope of performance studies incorporates many anthropological theories as well as sociological and political ones.

> [It] draws from the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts including not only theater and dance but also such forms as sacred rituals and practices of everyday life, storytelling and public speaking, avant-garde performance art, popular entertainments, microconstructions of ethnicity, race, class, sex, and gender, world fairs and heritage festivals, nonverbal communication, play and sports, political demonstrations and electronic civil disobedience, sex shows and drag performance—potentially any instance of expressive behaviour or cultural enactment.
>
> (McKenzie 2005, para 1)

Considering ethnodrama as a research methodology aligns well with many artists but terms such as 'verbatim theatre' or 'documentary theatre' (which are scripts transcribed directly from a witness or informant) also weigh heavily on the academic premise of work rather than the first principle of making theatre (Parenteau 2017). Neither do I adhere to an oppositional definition of 'imaginative theatre', (where metaphor and allegory are dominant), despite these same artists preferring the term, as this seems redundant. All theatre invokes imagination, except when it doesn't which is generally referred to as 'unsuccessful' (Schieffelin 1985). Instead, I lean towards 'research-led-practice' (RPL) which at least implies a flow of consciousness through the process which encompasses the above features. And rather than the conventional 'practice-led-research' which aims to explore a creative process and research the efficacy of it (Smith and Dean 2009), research-led-practice seeks to explore first (in this case the socio-cultural behaviour of 'living online') and subsequently shape the process to best reflect that exploration.

How to Consider a Web-based Ethnodrama

> online theater demands imagination simply to exist.
>
> (Lafarge 1995, 421)

This research considers the social event of theatre performance, but when this is co-opted into a web-based investigation, it quickly gets complicated. Web-based 'performances' are generally measured by statistics and 'flow' of communication data, whereas the 'liveness' gauge of established theatre performance is experiential (Phelan 1993, Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2015). As Lash (2002) describes it, the metric for measuring web-based event impact is based on the

'flow of communication' (instead of reactions to publishing or posting information). You can post one hundred articles and have no impact or share one post which attracts thousands of 'likes'. There is an apparent relationship between number of responses and the timeframe within which they happen. The ratio of these, combined with ripple effect interactions from re-postings and sharing of the original, creates the 'viral' appearance of impact. This can be seen in live-streaming chatrooms or 'trending' subjects on Twitter for example. The greater the flow of comment traffic, shares, re-tweets, and so on is often more of an indicator of reach and influence than the original content being shared (Costa 2018), or at least that flow creates its influence (Thomson 2019). The content generates value based on the volume of this flow because there is an 'exchange' associated with it (Lash 2002). The more the content is active in the flow of information, the more that same flow makes the content appear socially important or valuable. In order to consider this impact on making web-based dramatic narrative, it is necessary to consider these ways of thinking. Stuart Hall predicated the adaptation needed in a future of disrupted media and his words are useful to consider the path towards a new theatre-making process,

> What is important are the significant breaks – where old lines of thought are disrupted, older constellations displaced, and elements, old and new, are regrouped around a different set of premises and themes.
>
> (Hall 1980a, 57)

His analysis of structuralism versus culturalism highlights the tensions which can be used when trying to understand web-based activity, or the experience of a play in my lounge room. Where he invokes economic influence in a matrix "as not only a 'necessary' but a 'sufficient' explanation of cultural and ideological effects" (Hall 1980a, 71), he implies measurable units of some kind, which are exchanged and traded. This position is reflected in analysis of SMP metrics in a range of contemporary social research (Marwick and Boyd 2011, Collins, Durington et al. 2013, Costa 2018, Abert, Lunderøy et al. 2019) but also across performance research (Bingham 2017, Dumont 2018, Nguyen 2018). With this basic data, that can easily be collected and coded, it is tempting to consider these new paradigms as more reliable indicators of impact than the meaning of the experience, of the art.

Lash (2002) offers a way of thinking about this when he determines a new environment for performance construction and consumption as part of web-based social life. He argues that cultural works of art such as novels, theatre productions, visual art exhibitions or music, are the product of deep reflexive contemplation experienced in social acts and then digested throughout broader cultural narratives, such as the story of a play and how it becomes part of the theatrical canon (Lash 2002). This echoes a definition of 'carnival' (Vice 1997), a collective social act wherein the audience are participants, and meaning is a collective (if not contested) milieu. It also echoes Hall's (1980, 1980) circuits of media production and Lash goes on to reduce these interconnected components as new media that "are comprised of three main elements: 'content, code and communications'" (Lash 2002, 203). This position allows for his new metric of 'information flow' to validate the impact of a web-based event, one that is not measured in contemplative time but in movement of activity.

This is reasonable when you consider pop culture and 'influencers' commanding huge incomes from access to their channels and the volume of their audience through collaborations and endorsements. A good social media post and example of this process in action can be found by a contemporary web-based artist/influencer here[2] (Spagnola 2021) and although the context is different the model and explanation of this hermeneutic circle and its impact on 'value' is the same. This can also be supported by emerging research about how this happens for gaming and social media celebrity including (Wesch 2007, Wesch 2008, Farnsworth and Austrin 2010, Marwick and Boyd 2011, Geelhoed, Singh-Barmi et al. 2017, Thomson 2019) as well as the creative projects by artists that are trying to tap into the same constellation of influences (Senft 2008, Dumont 2018, Nguyen 2018, Sylvester 2019). Each of these speak of the integrated network of conscious and unconscious relationships of 'content, code and communication' which create the 'flow' of the web-based event 'carnival'.

Lash (2002) argues that this is an environment where value exists in a rapid and short-lived competition for attention on a platform of immediacy. Although I would argue that even these short-lived moments stem from a history of other cultural moments that combine like any other social web of significance (Geertz and Darnton 1973) to form knowledge, gatekeepers, and power unique to them. Using these two examples of dislocated time/space/place and communication 'flow', as a signifier of meaning, it is clearer how there is an emerging

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[2] https://twitter.com/alispagnola/status/1387109866448117763?s=20

structural change from performance as it has been known based on opposing characteristics. The audience do not just sit quietly anymore, this new arrangement and means of communication means their input makes the show.

The case for layers over holding pens

These structural changes to theatre audiences can be understood if we rearrange the abstract conceptions of performance as one of layers rather than pens. I use the word 'pens' as reflective of the holding stations for livestock moving around a yard. The analogy of people (livestock) corralled in designated spaces (theatres) and performing prescribed roles, does not hold in a web environment wherein absent bodies inhabit and share space with almost free 'movement'. It is this absence of body yet the presence of consciousness in an abstract, web-based 'place' that creates a fourth dimension for performance. The absent bodies inhabit the space via personalised layers of technology. For example, I was informed by viewers on several occasions that one may be accessing via an Android mobile device at the local pub while another sits at an Apple Mac desktop in their home office. These are examples of not only different types of devices but different operating systems, codes, and internet access (5G network in the case of a mobile phone or Wi-Fi in the case of a home computer). Everyone appears in the abstract location of the 'online' broadcast via the distinctive layers (see Figure 5) of operating systems, codes, and other enabling technologies.

Likewise, the creators of the content that these participants have come to engage with, are also accessing the web-space using these same interfaces of technologies. However, using vision and sound, they are also engaged in some of the more fundamental and familiar aspects (for the conventional theatre-maker) of experience control; determining what characters speak, what they say and how the story is told. There are limitations on other physical senses of the traditional theatre such as smell and light (specifically stage lighting effects). However, these qualities are replaced (if not replicated) with opportunities for editing and special effects layered over the live broadcast. And so, there are multiple layers of interactivity determined by multiple layers of hardware and software. The result is a structure comprised of layers with porous and shared interactivity.

The 'flow' of communication described by Lash (2002), and the 'intentionality' of algorithms designed to focus, on consumers with particular data or usage profiles, (Han 2010, Han 2011), are also framed by this series of layers which exist only in the lived experience of being web-based. Avatars, profile pictures, profile biographies and connected email addresses can all create the identity of a participant which may be a distortion of the real-life person typing in the information. The number of web-based identities for an individual is potentially endless, creating an opportunity to compartmentalise identities and social lives of 'a' person (Costa 2018). Finally, the efficacy of the web-based event is determined by the feedback from participants back through these same layers to the performer's consciousness. These 'traffic' flows are in turn measured by 'performance analysis' software on websites such as Google analytics. And as Lash (2002) argues, the veracity of this flow back and forth, the volume and engagement reflective of the participants engaged, determines the 'success' of the experience.

Viewer/audience are watching from an unknown location on an internet connected device (i.e. YouTube & Iphone over 5G network)

Social Media Platform (SMP) on which the viewer is watching (may be distinct from comments embedded in the broadcast)

Broadcast platform which may include interaction such as comments

Broadcast software/hardware configuration including video encoder, cameras, microphones, title overlays and other media

Live action performance in a mobile or fixed location. Often in a studio with conventional staging

Figure 5 Pictogram visualising the structure of layers that create a web-based theatre

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the underpinning setting, themes, and methods of the fieldwork research. To address the first two research questions of this work I identified that there were essentially two distinct sites of observation. These can be considered broadly as offline and online environments (Rhee, Bayer et al. 2021). The creative development of the field involved conventional workshops and improvisations with an ensemble of actors working in a dance studio from my home (offline). Actors also engaged in improvisations of characters they developed using accounts created virtually. 'Virtual' (Boellstorff 2015) spaces in this instance included primarily Instagram and Twitter for the ensemble (online). Presentations of script developments were performed live to friends and colleagues in the room (my house), as well as broadcast to the internet and watched by audiences around the world (hybrid). This hybrid place and space was a familiar and recognisable environment for the ensemble to develop and experiment with different styles, genres, and techniques of performance. Complimentary events and experiences of social gatherings around live-streamed events, membership of various audiences for telecast events, and text-based interactions on blogs and in chat rooms all complimented these online environments.

Given the performative nature of identity, particularly in these online settings, I adopted a Goffman-inspired approach of presentation of the self (Goffman 1971), also because of the fractured nature of these identities across social media platforms. This dissection or compartmentalising feature of identity in these spaces invites thinking about how to reconstitute the parts to make a holistic analysis, specifically a dramatic narrative for my plays. Reconstituting the identified 'parts' of the field from this process created opportunity for a bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1972) process to be undertaken, building upon key findings by applying a grounded theory approach to discover the most salient themes to articulate in the plays.

This auto-ethnographic approach then gives way to an ethnodramatic analysis methodology that uses performance techniques to best illustrate the lived experience for any viewer. Given that ethnodrama is also underpinned by conventional theatre methods, this created a seeming tautology for analysis. It begs the question of how ethnodrama can represent a field that is counter-intuitive to the field it is meant to be representing. In summary, I describe new ways

of considering the spatial relationship of the audience to the actor as determined by those same relationships observed online. I suggest that socio-spatial relationships for a type of 'web theatre' as one of layers of interaction rather than pens of positionality. This chapter, therefore, identifies the conditions of the field and the first two key questions of the research. Social media can be observed to shape the way people engage and the social scripts that attend to these performances. This specific type of interaction exceeds the tolerance and acceptability of conventional theatre-making techniques and I suggest a more porous relationship between traditional authority over who is allowed to speak.

CHAPTER 3 New Distinctions

Introduction

The following chapter delves deeper into the structural obstacles encountered during the fieldwork's creative development and the solutions to technical staging problems. This 'staging', as defined by the arrangement of people in place, space, and time is key to understanding the principle of the fourth wall and its implications for web-based theatre. Specifically, this chapter informs the third key question of the thesis: How is the theatrical (and by extension film or TV) concept of 'the fourth wall' reimagined in this exchange? The abstract spaces defined by this invisible wall challenged agency and narrative control for the early practitioners as acknowledged by Dixon (2007), although they never explicitly defined it this way. Dixon's work is a significant resource throughout this research as it seeks to capture the creative environment of early theatre practitioners of web-infused theatre. His book identifies conceptual and practical obstacles to these theatre-makers, obstacles that are replicated in my own research and thus make this work a critical benchmark for comparison.

I will then unpack how I navigated these complications in a formal performance space for the final plays. This included personal communication with popular livestream personality, 'Bajo', which proved a critical turning point for understanding how character and drama can renegotiate this new fourth wall arrangement. His six basic 'pointers' designed for the user group I was engaging with (including amateurs, hobbyists, and aspiring celebrities), helped to understand the relationships between the performer and audience. These people approach livestream performance with a different intention than that of dramatic narrative by applying a performance technique I term 'social intimacy'. This exchange was seminal to understanding and applying these guidelines to drama.

I then move on to re-framing some key terms which further refine the distinctions of genre in web-broadcast live performance at the time. As I move through the different models, it becomes clearer how broadcast platforms, and the way creators use them, become both the stage upon which action is performed but also how they can be used as a narrative device themselves. I show how Twitter plays, and the interactive feature of drama in real time, invites

character-audience and audience-audience exchanges that can embellish narrative rather than undermine it. This includes temporal dislocation as shown by way of 'The Shed', a viral YouTube video prank whereby a type of 'invisible' theatre was performed months before the visible production was released. The Invisible pre-recorded experience was both a private performance for the makers during the filming and created a second wave of performance when it was published and 'went viral'. I conclude with my own suggestion for a new genre that combines the observed features of these findings with my own experience of conventional theatre production techniques into a hybrid performance. I chose to define this new genre as 'webtheatre' and show how I (re)constructed the 'theatre', 'stage', and 'narrative' for the final plays.

Building a stage

One of the earliest equivalences I had calculated about the potential of live-streaming theatre was that of the visual and aural. Live-streaming was, to my mind at the time, essentially as simple as seeing and hearing the performer, a kind of 'catch and release' model. That being the case the equipment should be simple enough; a camera, microphone, and a device of some kind that uploads that content to a website or social media platform. In a digital sense, these were the components of a venue; the ability to capture a performance and present it in a defined space. The access to this space, and the chosen broadcast platforms, could all replicate 'attending' a theatre as a process for patrons including 'venue' (YouTube channel) and ticketing portal (see Figure 6 below). Theoretically, the components existed to replicate a conventional theatre experience or at least a pared-down version of other examples already available. And, in an environment of 'content creators' and the technology developed to encourage them, it appeared on first inspection that any number of devices and platforms could do all these things seamlessly.

In many respects all these assertions were correct. There exists a strange correlation of hardware and software components which at first may seem limitless in their potential, although they were limited in options. For example, a social media platform, such as Facebook, may have the ability to livestream video from its phone application. However, the software functionality is limited to Facebook-specific storytelling; with no in-camera editing or ability

to switch between front and back cameras on a phone for example. Alternatively, using third-party production software (such as 'Wirecast') and then streaming to Facebook was prohibited by the platform's intellectual property protocols. I observed that platforms do this to funnel users into specific usage behaviour, usually integrated with other platforms owned by the same company (Facebook and Instagram for example). At this point it should be noted that these observations are specific to the time of fieldwork (2017-2019). It is impossible to maintain a running account of version upgrades and additional features that may have been added or removed since this work was written. Indeed, during the fieldwork and the writing of this thesis the development of technology and refinement of services delivered changed significantly.

This environment created significant obstacles and regular interruptions to our broadcasts, the most fundamental of which (be they hardware or software) was connectivity. Every manufacturer and nearly every new model or device came with specific connectivity issues either software (PC to Mac for example) or hardware (I had nicknamed my Mac Book Pro a 'donglebook pro' for its endless need for unique plugs and adapters). This made for complicated combinations of hardware, drivers, plugs and cables not to mention programs and their various versions, changes to broadcasting protocols and connectivity flow (internet service) between performance and audience. Often these were made even more complicated by the hardware I was using, which in the case of my first video camera, was some twenty years old. In a fieldwork blog post I equated these fundamental components of accessing the web to a metaphor of construction (a former career of mine) and noted the following:

> As with construction, you need the right tools. Sometimes they need to be top of the range, sometimes they are the old ones inherited from your grandfather. Having the tech that can capture an image, process it, and broadcast it is the equivalent to digging the [foundation] hole. In the end I was digging through dusty old boxes to find one cable for technology that is 20 years old so I can reach the world of the new millennium.
>
> (Fieldnote 14 Jan, 2018)

Another disruption to connectivity and this 'venue building' process was the maze of web-based platforms that did not integrate. For example, ticket websites (see Figure 6) required specific settings to access a YouTube channel, or Facebook might restrict broadcast from third party software. I found there was certainly no shortage of online tutorials, blogs, and

professional consultants to advise on producing the best quality to any platform I might be interested in. However, the equipment was often expensive, not accessible in this country or the technical specifications so complicated that my head would spin with the conundrum of possible configurations (I spent a whole day just researching cables). The essence of all this advice was based around a key relationship; the choice of technology and social media integration was always determined by the desired outcome and purpose of communicating. Basically, what did I want to say and who was my audience; knowing that would determine the other choices.
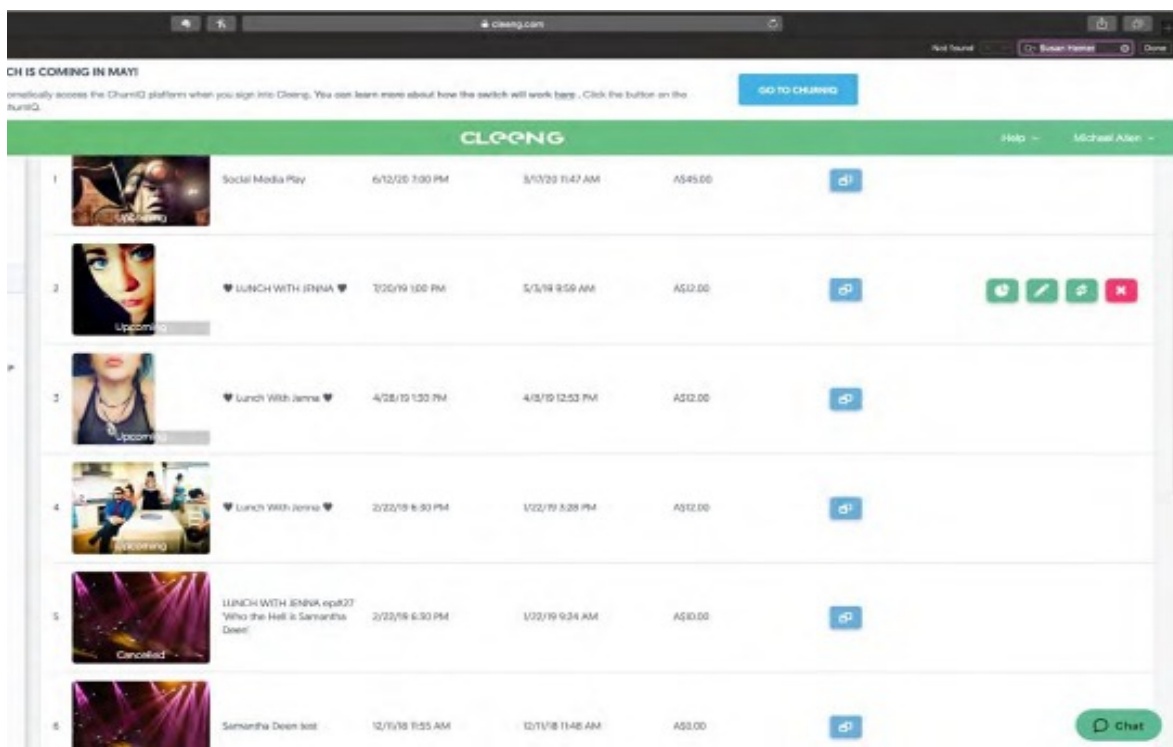
Figure 6 Screen capture of ticket website dashboard cleeng.com The site can accept international currency making broadcast and audience reach universal or geo-locked. This image is linked to the box office for "ep 27"

I had entered the process as of someone with mid-range expertise and access to technology. I wanted to continue in that vein to position myself as an everyday user and I was looking for a combination of resources that represented this, not ridiculously overpriced or over performing resources but neither the museum equipment I had been struggling with. I was totally unprepared for the steep learning curve of becoming a virtual theatre technician, broadcast producer and social media entrepreneur with a clear message to communicate. I was quickly overwhelmed, the metaphor of being 'out of the ground' in this scenario was more complicated than my inherited old tools and some physical exertion.

I observed a constant tension between free access and commercial interests with anything to do in this environment. In the first instance, there was a dilemma of choice between commercial and open-source software. Open-source software is a term used by developers to indicate that the programming code is not copywritten and therefore open for manipulation (with the purpose of enhancement) by users in an egalitarian way. Often these are communities of users not unlike a hobby club of any kind. There are blogs, forums, and shared resources amongst a community of users. They range from the novice to the (often self-taught) expert and seem to share a passion for the culture of live-streaming and the democratisation of the internet.

The alternative is a paid license for software by commercial developers. These are like most commercial web-based software applications in that the user pays for a license with added features and technical support from the developer. These applications are directed more towards professional broadcasters although the distinction is in the marketing alone, as I found professional and hobbyist live-streamers using both. What is more significant is that my choice of software directly impacted my selection of hardware.

After hours/days/weeks of research, my choices of hardware and software combined to create a web-based venue, which was a multi-platform combination. A sixteen-inch Mac Book Pro formed the engine house as it were, where all the components combined. The significant features of video and audio processing were the biggest concerns here. Similar computing power is available in PC format; however, I prefer the intuitive operating system of Mac and comparable models of computing power in PC were approximately the same price. Hence, the deciding factor was determined by my creative process style; intuitive and flexible depending on the purpose. As for broadcast software, I worked with OBS for quite a while, but again the intuitive and professional aesthetic of Wirecast was my preference. Overall, I found that PC and OBS combinations better suited users who were deeply engaged in the coding and 'mechanical tinkering' potential of these more open-source platforms. These were a sub-culture of personality types and users that could frame an independent ethnography of their own. For my purposes, I needed to be free of too much time spent considering these micro-dynamics and instead chose resources that were more intuitive and therefore suitable to my creative environment.

The next consideration was technology to capture the sound and image of the performance. Primary considerations here are cost and connectivity but with the continuing development of smart phone technology and supporting applications, this becomes a more nuanced decision. In terms of cost, professional-grade camera equipment is almost an entry level requirement for their processing power and ability to transfer large amounts of data whilst maintaining quality. However, my iPhone proved an effective and cost-efficient alternative. The camera quality, the ability to connect wirelessly to the Mac Book Pro and supporting software apps for the Wirecast platform made the phone almost an extension of the computer. Aesthetically the phone also captures an image that replicates everyday social media posts with simultaneous access to filters and other functions. As for sound, a small purchase of an external USB condenser microphone was a flexible option applicable to both hardware and software.

Moving on to the delivery platforms and again, my objective was to marry quality with open access. The advantage of the broadcast software (OBS or Wirecast) is that you can livestream to multiple 'locations' simultaneously. This was useful as I did not know where my audience might be. YouTube had a strong foundation in platform technology and integrated audience development marketing options. However, YouTube is so over-populated with content that identifying and reaching a targeted audience was almost impossible. There was lots of community chatter on forums at the time, blaming corporate greed by Google manipulating the platform, such that commercialising content privileged established producers/identities, excluding emerging or smaller producers. However, the access was free, it was an established platform, and my audience (conventional practitioners in my local industry) would be most familiar or at least comfortable watching content on it.

My other consideration for a platform to broadcast on was much more exciting for its community-driven approach. Twitch is a live-stream platform developed for Internet gamers but has grown to include almost any content (Jodén and Strandell 2021, Vandenberg, Berghman et al. 2021). The most significant difference to YouTube is that Twitch is specifically a live-broadcast platform. For this reason, computing power is reflective of the practice; gaming has often guided computing development and similar processing power can easily be redirected to streaming. The community discourse and sub-cultures are intertwined with technology development and a sense of commercial (if not social) independence. This is reflected in the content of producers of Twitch including home cooking, visual artists,

pornography, musicians, DJ's and more. A presenter I came across one evening was simply sitting in her lounge room sewing a pair of pants for a horse whilst engaged with a live web-based audience of over five hundred people. It struck me that surely, I, as a trained professional theatre-maker, could create something that was at least as stimulating and engaging as this.

Twitch also created a business model for serious broadcasters to earn a living within a game-based structure. Earning potential grew as the broadcaster achieved targets or goals based on metrics of viewers, followers, streaming regularity and so on. This is a reward-based system that promotes broadcasters (and ultimately the platform itself) by capitalising on the layers of 'flow' (Lash 2002) from community traffic. Broadcasters could also align with commercial brands based on the concept of audiences built around interests. This approach appeared to create a much broader and more diverse range of presenters (e.g. the lady sewing pants for a horse) and as such, more obscure and dynamic communities of interest. This approach appealed to my sense of performance as part of a community. If I was to try and create a performance narrative that reflected the experiences of people living socially web-based lives, then such a community-minded environment seemed more promising than the commercial competition of YouTube channels. However, when talking with friends and colleagues (potential audiences) I found Twitch was a more obscure format for the 'everyday' user and the dual positive/negative of YouTube was that it was easily recognisable to an audience apprehensive about engaging in the first instance.

Epiphany

It was a cold, wet and wintery day when Nikki and I huddled into the warm embrace of the Adelaide Convention Centre foyer, out of the wild weather and into the Hybrid World. Hybrid World was a conference exhibiting a vast array of integrated new technologies and exhibits including robotics, seminars, products, services, and training programs. Most of these exhibits were adaptations of games, toys, or gadgets in a carnival-esque atmosphere celebrating the exotic and the commercial applications of new technology and media. We had made the journey specifically to hear a presentation by Australian television presenter and now professional Twitch live-streamer, Stephen O'Donnell ('Bajo'). Here was a broadcast media personality who had risen to fame for hosting a weekly video game review show on the ABC

television network. Recently the show had been cancelled and Bajo transitioned to self-produced content on his Twitch channel. In many ways, he encapsulated the 'everyday' user (despite his celebrity status) and the hybrid interests of gaming, computing, live-streaming, and business. He embodied the principles of the subculture in his actions and approach as one of community, celebrity, and passion. His insights on performance would prove a benchmark to implementing the hybridisation unique to webtheatre.

The room was filled with people across all interests from what I could determine. There were young children with their parents, business-types, and cosplayers. There was certainly an air of anticipation about being in the same room as a celebrity of the Twitch/Gaming community. While we waited for the formalities to begin, I noted that Bajo and some audience members seemed to know each other from previous conferences. Some were meeting in person for the first time after knowing each other in virtual platforms for much longer.

He confirmed many of my observations about technology, platforms, and techniques for accessing live-streaming as an outlet. Twitch, he spruiked, was an emerging market and now was the time to break into it. In two years from now, it would also be an overwhelmed platform like YouTube, given the pace of popularity and the search for innovation. Significant features of Twitch's potential included the 'grass roots' community-minded nature of audiences and the idea of 'loyalty' linked to subscriptions. He gave advice on some equipment and producing techniques, although these were again all directed at the open-source broadcast software (OBS) and PCs.

But the biggest breakthrough came from what he had to say about presentation and performance when he kept saying an authentic 'being you' performance was the key. This was a revelation for Nikki as an actor because thus far she felt she had been improvising around a character for hours at a time, maintaining authenticity without the familiar objective of a scripted character, it was an exhausting challenge. However, now she recognised, from Bajo's observations, that this is essentially the trademark characteristic of a live-stream presenter, a difficult (almost counter-intuitive) departure from traditional acting with character arcs and emotional plots structured within the temporal limits of a play.

Normally, I (as a director) rehearse a character to perform their part as a component part of a larger production. The actor works towards genuine authenticity and 'becoming' the role using various techniques, methodologies, and processes. But this process, because of these practices, is fabricated and couched within the limitations of the conventional stage, lighting costume, seating and so on. It is a fiction from the moment you announce the star of the show, and the identity of the actor determines so much of the anticipated experience. Any authenticity is momentary and fractured in a performance predicated on an unwritten social agreement that we, the audience, 'suspend' disbelief' behind a 'fourth wall'. Conversely the key ideas and suggestions for live-streaming were:

- The individualised nature of personal interests seems to generate like-mindedness amongst audiences/followers.
- Community, personality, passion which defines a type of 'authentic attraction' and potential income is derived from personality aesthetics.
- If you embarrass yourself, you 'give up' something. You expose yourself and show vulnerability. Giving a 'part' of you is a good thing.
- Create a community identity, call followers something and create a community name. This creates a kind of solidarity and fan identity.
- Consistency, regardless of how often, always keep elements consistent such as what days and times your audience can expect to hear from you.
- Collaborate and network with other presenters who are friends or share interests, this essentially becomes a form of cross-promotion and audience sharing.
- Good stream title.

These features speak to the actor performing a character. When the actor plays a character that is pre-determined by the story of the script, it diminishes the characteristics of an 'authentic' relationship with the audience as described above. The character is suspended behind the fourth wall by virtue of the story arc. The destiny of the character must be fulfilled. A performance may include audience interaction, but the 'destination' of the characters must always conclude as the playwright determines. The live-streaming relationship model above asks the actor to be open to an unknown story arc. As we discovered in creative development sessions, when we attempted to steer the story, it diminished the opportunity for exchanges as cited above. This

realisation unlocked the obstacles we were facing when trying to engage audiences and maintain the narrative.

Similarly, broadcasts may pursue a target or objective within the time frame of the broadcast. For example, a cooking stream will work through a recipe towards the result. It can be argued that there is some semblance to a story framework inasmuch as a task needs to be completed here, and therefore a 'journey' to its conclusion. However, for the most part, streams are non-fiction and open-ended with the interactions and experiences of the participants (not the story) the primary reason for tuning in or attending. Adopting the broadcast stream itself as a character would be a revolutionary way of solving my problem of creating a fourth wall narrative story in a web-based environment.

This type of acting would require a deeply embodied performance which is maintained for prolonged periods of time, where there are no edits or blackouts to break the actor's work or progress narrative arc. This reflected Nikki's (and the other ensemble members') experience of the immersive nature of live-streamed acting and to a lesser extent the prolonged social media engagement between workshops. These long-term immersive acting exercises were also punctuated by, as Bajo mentioned, constantly 'giving something of yourself,' signified by confession, bloopers, and self-deprecation in a kind of 'performed genuineness'. As the characters were based on closely imagined experiences of the actor, so too the moments of intimacy shared in these vulnerable admissions were also closely imagined. The result: a confluence of imagination, improvisation, technical awareness and functional adeptness across multiple social media platforms, and no script or narrative structure to work with. There is much to be mined for future students of acting in this genre.

A concept of Social Intimacy

> when we step on to the stage we lose our natural endowment and instead of acting creatively we proceed to perform contortions of pretentious proportions. What drives us to do this? The condition of having to create something in public view.
>
> (Stanislavksy 1961, 319)

Conventional theatre is shaped by the physical and imagined structures of stages and fourth walls. This unspoken agreement between participants of a play creates what Stanislavsky termed 'public solitude', a concept articulated throughout his works on actor technique (Fielding, 2008). His techniques were adopted worldwide and revolutionised acting as a practice but inadvertently cemented the idea of a fourth wall between actors and audience. In short, the principle suggests that when an actor focuses on the intention of their character and alters their state of consciousness to that of being alone and unobserved, this reveals an authenticity to a performance without affectation. What can be observed with the emergence of a performed authenticity (as Bajo put it), is the antithesis to this approach. Instead, the live-stream performer engages in opposition to these directions. Whereas public solitude invites voyeurism and distance between participants, a web-based environment is fundamentally about interaction and relationships.

The streamer as a performer is instead engaging in what I call 'social intimacy'. This describes the intent of intimate social engagement with an audience by way of being vulnerable and revealing something of yourself as a sign of genuineness. This performance is not done in public as would be on stage, instead the acts of vulnerability are social, shared and discussed with the audience, as part of the performance itself. What is more, the volume or 'flow' of social communication and activity that is generated is now the measure of success for such a performance, signalling engagement rather than observation is more highly valued.

With a new concept of what a performance for the actor 'feels' like, I and the ensemble were ready to approach a narrative. Initially, the experiences and lessons of the previous twelve months were to be consolidated in a performance that expressed all that we had learned. As it happened, the process required a further two performances to re-work and experiment with the limits of this new performance style. I observed how a conventional performance structure was reimagined in a web-based environment of layers and connections derived from a flow of information. This was very different from established patterns of social behaviour in the converged physical and temporal space of a play. Webtheatre could be defined as a dislocation of these elements, mediated via layers of interactivity, and shaped by different rules of legitimacy creating the 'raw material' as it were for a staged narrative journey. The next phase of the project was to now reconstruct a reflective interpretation, of the experience in a combined theatre and 'hidden' theatre experience that suspended disbelief.

Re-framing terms

> The old rules and languages of theater and video are inappropriate, and simple conversion of traditional forms into virtual environments is pointless

(Dixon 2007, 510)

There are four significant frames, or structural underpinnings, to consider in web-based performance. I have observed three distinct approaches to the use of web-based interfaces for conventional theatre broadcasting and ultimately. Additionally, I define a new frame, which is a hybrid of the previous three. This re-framing is central to the assumptions underlying Turner's (1979) defence against Growtowski (Rio and Bertelsen 2018) and the defining of a new genre entirely that could not have been thought of until now. These are by no means definitive and there is natural slippage between them. Also, they are defined by the time of writing (pre COVID-19). The field is moving, adapting, and experimenting rapidly and it may well be that these observations are a snapshot of activity at this time. However, as a broad scope, they are nonetheless easily observable and have been at the core of developing my own, fourth category.

Web and Theatre

Web as Delivery Service

Theatre plays have been produced for screen almost since the technology was created, so the idea of having a video-on-demand recording of a particular theatrical production is merely a business model as an extension of that practice. These web-based delivery services have existed commercially over the last ten to fifteen years since streaming technology became more easily accessible. Major and established theatre companies, and supporting businesses with resources to develop it, have provided much of the everyday definition of what a live-streamed play is.

Established organisations such as the National Theatre (Way 2017) and Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC 2017) in the UK and in Australia (ANTLive 2017), as well as Operas (Lin and

Williams 2014, Cooper 2015) and Broadway shows (PRnewswire 2015, Paulson 2016) have the greatest profile. There are also other supply businesses (BroadwayHD 2017) as well as web-based theatre networks (Howlround 2017), live event communities (Livestream 2017) and countless YouTube channels and videos by theatre-makers of all kinds which also tap into the broadcast opportunities afforded by live-streaming. These examples seek to essentially expand their market share and/or brand. To do this, they claim the subversive elements of live-streaming as "Digital technologies […] disrupting established practices and creating new opportunities for innovation across the creative economy" (UKtheatre 2017). Although it is often couched in ideas of creating access for/to the masses or "to promote and preserve live theatre" (BroadwayHD 2017) which by their own definition implies an archival approach. These are established hegemonic practices that do not integrate web-based technologies. Instead:

> their business model has, until recently, relegated digital communication to a supporting role only: making potential audience members aware of a live performance taking place at a specific time/place and persuading them to purchase tickets to witness it.
>
> (Fotheringham 2016, 4)

These recordings can be specifically 'staged' for the cameras or captured 'in the wild' (so to speak) of a regular public performance. They are then processed through some form of post-production editing before being compressed into a 'file' which can be shared and made available on whichever platform their business model engages with; be it cinema release, web-based hire and so on. In this sense the web interaction is used as a delivery service or conduit for a pre-packaged product. Regardless of which delivery model is used the captured performance remains fixed and, like a movie, will always be that way without any impact from an audience. Below is an edited account of my experience as an audience member to such an event:

> I hired a version of 'The Crucible' from Digital theatre, a production at the old Vic. It is over 3 hours long.

As a piece of entertainment, it is doing its job. I am enjoying the production and the actors. I can say I'm invested because I want to get back to it and see the conclusion.

Nikki mentioned that it would be good to have a chat thread on the side so you could comment out loud so to speak. We tend to get invested in the shows we watch and like to talk back to the screen and characters. Having a communication thread would facilitate this with others.

<div align="right">(Fieldnote 3 August, 2018)</div>

As mere broadcasts of live recordings therefore, they invite the criticisms of performing arts edifices as perpetuating a kind of cultural citizenry, political membership, or social sophistication (Werry 2012) which seeks to maintain cultural boundaries. It is also reflective of historic discourse (and still much contemporary critique) about web-based theatre, and the re-defining of what 'live' in theatre is. Phelan (1993) and Auslander (1999) famously represent these opposing debates centred on the nuances of time, space, and phenomenological affect (Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2015). For many in 2020, this is a redundant debate in a hyper-mediated and multi-modal connected space. Web-based life is 'live' twenty-four hours a day, it is happening at a visceral level for the receiver and the author, in a 'stream' of coded bits of information dislocated, atomised, and reanimated across time and space.

The recording of 'The Crucible' that we watched reinforced these ideas as a lived experience of the consumer/audience. It maintained a traditional linear approach to production based on a structuralist methodology which maintains the authority of relationships from producer to audience (Hall 1980, Hall 1980). Social media technology's 'convergent' environment (Jenkins 2006) offers a far more disruptive and revolutionary alternative to this model because of its capacity to immediately reassign meaning and anti-meaning to traditional recirculated signs (Bolter and Grusin 1999). Simultaneously though, there are correlations between computational design and literature (as well as other art forms) which suggest an expressive dialogue between creator and consumer is already firmly entrenched within the objectives of both technology and coding (Bogost 2006) In the above example, the web is a link in the supply chain for content. The performance is not responsive to or reflective of, the web environment through which it is transported, rather the only connection between the two is as a complicated postal service and advertising portal. This echoes the perspective of gamification as a sheath

of commercial veneer, or 'bullshit' (Bogost 2015), creating a barrier to "deep engagement" (Crockett 2018).

The web, layered on top of the drama

If web-based theatre is conceived as one of layers (see Figure 5), it follows to consider in more detail the order of those layers, their functions and their impact in not only one but several iterations. At the time of fieldwork, there were some contemporary companies in this space. Below are examples of how these artists described their own work in this space:

> **New Paradise Laboratories**, a theatre company based in New York, is one of the few contemporary theatre companies that have embraced the creative capacity of this mediated form in their work: "We explore the places where live theatre and the Internet intersect. We are constantly wondering: What is theatre? Where does it exist? Who makes it? What are the conventions of theatre and how can we break them?" (NPR 2017).

> **Blast Theory's** Matt Adams have been "using interactive media to create ground-breaking new forms of performance and interactive art that mixes audiences across the internet, live performance and digital broadcasting" (Adams 2017).

> **Raucous**, in the UK, "harness different creative cultures and practices to build and tell stories" (Raucous 2019) as part of the creative hub at the Watershed in Bristol UK.

These and other small to medium independent companies are experimenting with the hybridity of new technologies and platforms its application to established theatre-making models. Part of their remit is to break down (or at least question the definitions of) the relationships between power, authority, and technology in significant ways. As a result, a layered approach to web interaction with performance is beginning to emerge.

In several instances, I observed that web-based and technical elements appear layered on top of effectively orthodox theatre productions. The integrations functioned as a dramatic device

akin to any staging such as set, costume, props and so on. My early ensemble workshops reflected this as I searched for how to tell a narrative as 'dialogue'; relying on projecting pre-recorded images and video footage onto screens behind the action. I experimented in confined space and open studio environments, using a mobile phone and video cameras. Ultimately each of these was simply a variation of set or film location, a physical space within which the actor could perform[3]. This was also the case when using a green screen and chromakey software within the video capture and broadcast software. It did create opportunities for media manipulation which framed the story; for example, an image projected or overlayed within the computer would be out of context with the character, thus creating two conflicted meanings. This means the audience must do some imaginative work as they align their associated meanings and interpretations to a whole (see Figure 7).
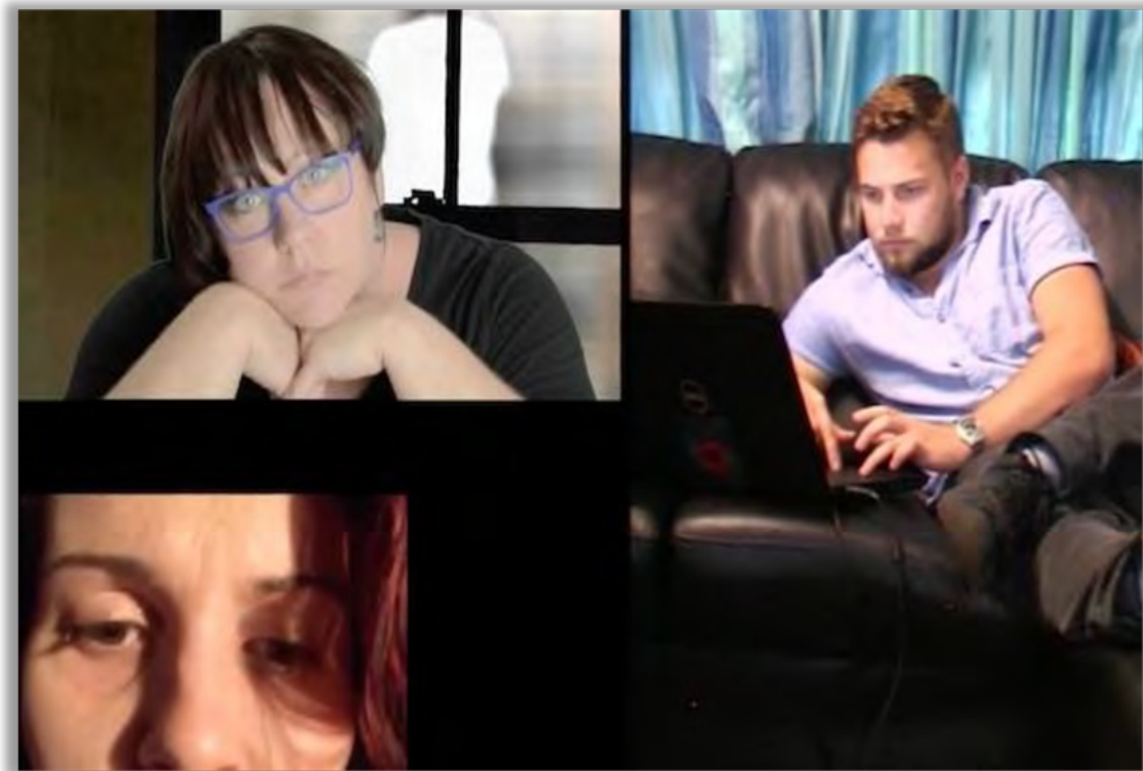
Figure 7 Screen captured image of a creative development of a simultaneous improvisation. Going clockwise from Top left: green screen with overlayed background. Right; couch set with no effects. Bottom left; filmed on iPhone in adjacent room

This juxtaposition of images and meanings can make for drama or comedy in the broadest sense. Ultimately, I found this function within a narrative was best as a backdrop, a more

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[3] https://youtu.be/Cy-rSRHxwDs

technological interpretation of a cyclorama. In this logic it can be understood as a layer behind or underneath the action of the narrative. It did not affect the story of the characters because if it were not there, the action would have continued. The audience would construct different meanings, the director would not have access to a palette of social symbols, but the narrative and story of the characters would go on.

I consider this use of web-based integration as one where it is layered 'on top' of the drama. This may seem conflicting at first if, as I describe above, the integration is behind or underneath the performance. But instead, imagine that the dramatic narrative is the centre of the experience, and these effects are layered over the top to add effect to that drama in the same way a filter is used in a selfie application on a phone. The drama would exist between characters regardless of these production or aesthetic elements because the relationship is at the core. By changing the filter, it is possible to remake dramatic metaphor again and again. In this capacity the web-based input (images, projections and so on) is primarily technical serving the 'public solitude' of the actor within a more dynamic yet familiar fourth wall structure. And in this way, I consider the layer to be on top of the performance.

The below image taken from a workshop which shows how the final image is 'layered' for output to the viewer.

Figure 8 The actor's image is manipulated through the computer software and the background replaced with a 'set'. In this case the background was a looped video of the character's husband working outside in the garden.

The actor performing in Figure 8, shows the layering of the media 'on top' of the drama. Despite the visual effects of the final broadcast shot the function of this on narrative drama is reflective of conventional practice. Actors engage within their 'public solitude' (Fielding 2008) surroundings and are influenced by that, however, there is no comparable exchange back, the actions of the characters do not influence the environment and they are suspended within the frames determined by me as a director. This is therefore the same dynamic relationship that currently exists between director manipulating actor/character in a one-way direction to the audience as seen in theatre, film, or television. [This link](#)[4] observes examples of creative development that explored broadcast technology in the creative development resulting in interesting output but ultimately reinforcing fourth wall distance of this kind.

The drama layered on top of the web

Early research of web-based performative practices led me to two early examples of dramatic writing using the web itself as the platform or stage for drama. John Gable of Philadelphia, USA (Gable 2015, Mee 2015) developed a Twitter play called 'The Fifteenth Line' out of his experiences on the platform. The other significant project in this space was that of 'The Shed' by Oobah Butler (Butler 2018) in which a journalist agitates the social media dynamics of the consumer review website TripAdvisor to promote a suburban backyard as one of the most exclusive restaurants in London. Both are examples of how the drama is created by using the platforms themselves and the audience's participation to create this "hidden theatre" (Mee 2015). Unpacking these two experiences shows how another layer of web theatre is conceived, one in which the drama is layered onto the web experience.

Twitter plays

In what appears to be a first of its kind, author John Gable wrote (and performed) his web-based play on Twitter in 2005. Recognising the platform's succinct and simple interface, as a writer, Gable also appreciated the linguistic demands on the user to create unique language.

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[4] https://youtu.be/WvSoI5mlsPM

To use Twitter is to become fluent in truncated language. Being a text- based service, the limitation for a tweet has always been 140 characters. Therefore, the user learns how to tell a joke, share an observation, or narrate a story in an abbreviated form. Much in the way that a playwright uses the boundaries of the stage to his/her advantage, Twitter's limitations require an added level of creativity. In its own way, Twitter is a stage.

(Gable 2015, 1)

This was the first time I had heard of Twitter, or any SMP for that matter, being referred to as the stage itself. It makes sense though; the restrictions of form and function here require thought and communication to be almost hyper-refined. This is something poets have been doing for years, crafting imagery and metaphor within strict grammatical rules. It is also something the playwright or theatre-maker is aware of. Understanding it in this way shifted my perception of the medium. This was something Gable was able to identify by understanding a significant interactive feature; "a play on Twitter is not an interruption to the audience member's life, but a companion. Therefore, the story needs to feel immediate and accessible" (2015, 3). These last two features are instinctive to me as a conventional theatre-maker, but the idea that the performance was a companion was unique. It is a term I might use regarding a co-performer, not the audience.

For two months Gable sent over three hundred tweets across five different characters' accounts. Audiences 'followed' the characters' avatars and received updates when they posted. The characters were known to each other and shared a common narrative based on a scripted plot that was controlled by Gable. In this example, the Bakhtinian (Bakhtin 1981) lineage of authorial determination is apparent (Emerson 2015). The author, in this case, Gable is the font of the experience. He defines the circumstances of the characters and uses the structure of Twitter engagement as the funnel for telling the story using different linguistic voices. In this sense, the idea of a defined theatrical space takes shape in an abstract 'place'. Gable also 'speaks' (or publishes) in the language of the characters and their intersecting vectors of professionalism, social status and so on. It also appears this is a one-way communication between author and audience, despite the use of a platform that is interactive. It is unclear whether these 'characters' communicated with audiences who messaged them directly, unlike

in a remounting of the production in 2015 by Erin Mee, where she discovered this extra feature of 'performing' when messaging back these followers.

Mee's production of 'The Fifteenth Line' is instructive for its part in the remounting of a play. Performed five years after the original production and "in spite of the brevity of each line, the play itself is durational. It lasts for eight weeks and requires constant engagement and re-engagement with the four characters every day" (Mee 2015, 2). This is instructive because a significant feature of any dramatic text is that it is replicable at least, or inspirational at best. The ability for other performers and artists to remount and re-interpret is one feature that sets apart a play from an ad hoc social performance. Furthermore, the act of remounting the play proved to be an ongoing creative interpretation which made the 'performance' more dynamic and 'original'. Despite following a model of characters, plot, and prescribed times for publishing tweets (or saying the lines), the 'act' of performing the play in this sense was dynamic.

> I had to choose a photo. What kind of photo would each character use for their account, if any? I had to decide what they might say in their bios. I also had to decide what time each Tweet would occur. I imagine that as college students, Seth and Angela have ten or eleven o'clock AM classes. So their Tweets happen on their way to class or late at night. Patrick Hearson, on the other hand, tweets news every morning in time to catch commuters on their way to work. I realized that as the person choosing when each tweet would occur, I was responsible for the rhythm of each day's experience.
>
> (Mee 2015, 3)

This was another first for me, a performance experience that recalled those fundamental features of living and performing a play, adapting to the nuances of performance 'in' the moment, and constructing deep character backstories including memories and psychologies. In essence, a long-form improvisation. This model of creative sensibility in rhythm with an audience is one I am familiar with but had yet to find in any examples I have described thus far. Despite the seeming success of this model on the Twitter platform, I have found few other performances of this nature. This may be due to limitations I observed at the time.

The characters are indicated and then the line, as per reading a usual script. There is very little engagement that I can see in the form of likes and retweets and so on. I also tried to scroll to the beginning to read from the start but after what seemed like ages scrolling back, I still hadn't reached the beginning. So, it is very difficult to engage with the piece after the event. I imagine that at the time it would have been fun to follow. I don't really know what else to do with this.

<div align="right">(Fieldnote 2018)</div>

On reflection now, I can appreciate this because the experience of the play was personal. It was a journey completely within my own experience as an audience member. I imagined the people I was reading from, their lives, what they sounded like and so on. But imagining and following the characters, I also had to imagine the context of how I might have experienced the play 'live' as it were; during my own commute to and from work, checking in on my coffee breaks and so on throughout the day, filtering out the characters tweets from other people I might follow and communicate with. It would have been nice to play in this temporal suspension, months even years after it was 'performed' but comment threads had not been updated since then. It was like walking in on a ghost performance, the shadows of a show long gone. I am left with imagining a solitary experience of the play, disconnected from a communal phenomenon, and coloured by my 'real world' viewing circumstances. Again, the Bakhtian lineage of author authority fits in this scenario; linear, two-dimensional, and one-directional. Ultimately, the movement by New York artists in developing social media-infused plays during the early 2010s has not progressed beyond these early works (Mandell 2015). At the time of fieldwork, many of these companies still existed, but their focus on this integration had diminished, or at least followed a 'web-on-drama' model. However, another significant project would offer an opportunity to explore how the independent experiences of an audience can accumulate into a phenomenon bigger than the sum of its parts.

Fancy Sheds

Over eight months in 2017, UK journalist Oobah Butler (working for VICE media), essentially performed a national prank using the tourist website TripAdvisor. By using the features and techniques he had developed as a freelancing copywriter for TripAdvisor, he created a fake

restaurant which became the most sought-after dining experience in London based entirely on 'gaming the system'. The premise is remarkably simple:

> The Shed at Dulwich was the number one rated restaurant in London, with foodies, celebrities and bloggers trying to get a table. The main obstacle for them, however, was that it didn't exist. Over the course of 8 months VICE's Oobah Butler used an assault of fake reviews to get his 'restaurant' to the hallowed top spot on TripAdvisor. With his phone perpetually ringing, PR agencies begging to represent it and TV crews pitching shows, Oobah decided he had no choice but to open its doors for one night only. Here is Oobah's journey into a false reality that captured the world's attention.
>
> (Butler 2018)

There is much to unpack from this event but for me it combined the two features of the Twitter plays in a much more dynamic experience for the audience. Particularly the narrative journey that unfolded in response to the audience. Though I was aware that there might be some discrepancies in defining this event; journalism, fraud, performance, improvisation and so on, this was not as vital to me as recognising that together they created a lived experience for the audience. This is probably best understood by Mee's term 'hidden theatre' (Mee 2015) which she used to describe the relationship between the characters of the Twitter play and followers who were unaware of and disconnected from the broader performance going on. The line between Butler's prank and Mee's performance regarding unwitting audience members is probably reduced to a value judgement of 'intent' on behalf of each creator. This is something that is worthy of further exploration and was a consideration for the ethics of any future creative development.

The other significant observation from Butler's experience related to the momentum of the story. Looking at the narrative structure of the performance, Butler started with a simple premise and worked on a single platform, TripAdvisor. When he began, he did not anticipate where and how the project would go, he was merely working towards a broad objective. By this I mean he could not anticipate the use or influence of other SMPs to the restaurant's profile/narrative. Nor could he anticipate other 'characters' such as PR executives and TV producers approaching him and using their networks of social media. Therefore, he was essentially improvising continuously with the 'audience'. As the project continued, he refined

both his and the restaurant's identity to reach that objective. Unlike a scripted play though and because of the improvisational nature of the piece, there was no clear resolution as a playwright might have in a script.

Likewise, the audience were not aware of the performance until the prank had ceased and media coverage exposing the prank became widespread. In terms of a theatrical performance, it can be observed that it reverted to using the web as a carriage service for the delivery of [the YouTube video][5]. As a piece of narrative performance, we can all sit back and enjoy the twenty-minute edited report on YouTube, but during the eight months of the prank, the only people benefiting from an audience's perspective were the makers themselves. There was an inversion of who was performing, who was the audience and the change in that perspective over time. It is worth isolating some of the dramatic features that were being used and re-purposed here:

- The audience were the unknowing characters whose actions drove the narrative,
- The performance was almost entirely conducted 'virtually' in web-based forums, skype meetings, text messages, phone calls and so on,
- There were no conventional narrative story elements such as character arcs; and
- The dramatic pinnacle was 'user generated'.

This last point is instructive because it taps into notions of the momentum of the audience-driven agency. This momentum becomes the user's (or participant's) flow of information as Lash might put it (2002). The more people talked about it across various SMPs, shared links, reacted, liked, and commented on others who had done the same, the greater the 'flow' of information and communication around the subject. Butler showed how the matrix of TripAdvisor reviews, consistency when posting, invoking 'homeliness' or intimacy with his menu experience, and maintaining distance (never taking a booking) created a high-traffic flow of communication about the restaurant and re-enforced its ever-evolving identity in relation to that flow. It is as if there was a self-perpetuating and gathering energy created around the prank which eventually forced Butler to 'make the restaurant real' and have actual customers. Regarding the agency of the audience, it shows how social momentum, harnessed by a

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[5] https://youtu.be/bqPARIKHbN8

collective of individuals, can determine an outcome. This is a unique articulation of Dixon's insight about altered hierarchy (2007). In this example the audience were unwitting, but it did give me some insight into how this relationship might work dramatically if, for example, the audience were aware.

Notions of these types of flow-based relationships between audiences and 'performers' are evident in a range of other examples, most notably social media influencers who base their entire product/model/business on them. Recent work in the dissertation by Abert et al. (2019, 81) clearly identifies two types of influencers as "first-person influencer who chose to portrait themselves in their social media channels, and third-person influencer, who chooses not to be connected to the channel in person, but rather on the content with a specific field". This demarcation can be seen in the work of Butler (2018). He was simultaneously the first-person involved, the point of contact, and the creator of the names, identities, images and so on. But he was also acting as a third-person influencer as it was a fictitious character like any other. He kept his home (from which he was running the prank) private, he used a specific burner phone and other misleading information to create the identity and projected to a mass, unseen aggregate audience of potential customers to the restaurant. This is a phenomenon seen by others including Marwick (2011), Geelhoed (2017) and Bingham (2017) who all observed an interplay between aggregate and personal communication designed to swell participation and create an almost self-perpetuating hermeneutic circle, fed by content that is in turn shaped by that aggregate. These ideas, as far as my research at the time suggested, had rarely been harnessed for a live play.

Webtheatre

The categories of web-infused theatre and both examples above crystallise the basic foundations of the "Lunch with Jenna" series of plays and what my analysis of this fieldwork research setting would become. And so, I have used throughout the remainder of this project the term 'Webtheatre' as a hybrid of theatre, film, television, and social media integrated into a fusion of live interaction, improvisation, and narrative. We began with choosing Instagram as our preferred platform, finding it easier for the actors to create characters around images rather than the extra burden of text, tone, and language on multiple platforms.

Actors/Characters experimented and improvised using the Gable/Mee Twitter play method, but I gave authority to the actors to craft individual lines or posts rather than being scripted by me as an author. Instead, I guided them through structured improvisation towards significant dramatic moments. The characters engaged with each other and the wider world with the evolving narrative steering tensions and frictions, in real time, towards a live-stream performance where these intersecting relationships would 'come to a head' during the play. In this sense I was blending Butler's technique (2018) with Gable's format (2015). Over the course of several months, we experimented with content-creation storytelling of digital- social lives and relationships[6], informed by our own experiences. This period of intensive creative development underpinned the first play's storyline.

Below (Figure 9) is a mud map representation of my lounge room as it was configured for the three performances. The total area represented is approximately ten square metres. The layout combines observations made in the last two chapters and integrates them in such a way as to use the unique features of each. Physical staging and audience spaces are determined relative to a conventional theatre set-up. But also, there are cameras facing the audience and fold-back monitors for performers and the audience to see the 'final' performed image. The production desk emulates conventional lighting and sound operation but also operates as the hub of broadcasting and further web-based communication. The position of cameras also allowed for the actors to be 'off stage' from the remote audience's point of view. This creates opportunities for conventional stagecraft practices to be integrated into filming.

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[6] https://youtu.be/zcuNAC1uVlU
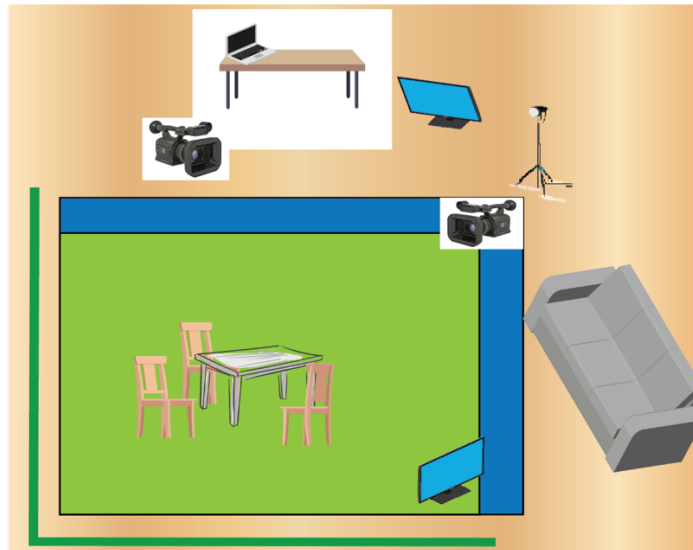
Green screen draped in front of my kitchen acting as the backdrop for the stage

Mainstage - primary performing area

Apron stage - secondary performing area

Video camera on tripods

Lighting on tripods

Production desk - operating broadcast , lighting, sound and SMP's

The set; table, three chairs, soft furnishings and props

Audience

Foldback monitor of broadcast image for actors and IRL audience

Figure 9 This is a mud map configuration of my lounge in the staging configuration for performances. Integrated broadcast equipment facilitates the live-stream via the production desk

Conclusion

This chapter has unpacked features of the creative development and how it was impacted by the physical restrictions of technology, and social scripts existing in live-streaming performances at the time. These experiences inform the third key research question of this thesis; how this environment re-shapes the abstract theatre convention of the fourth wall. I

began by identifying some conventional patterns of theatre-going behaviour (both social and spatial) and my attempts to create a facsimile of them. This involved establishing formal exchanges such as buying a ticket using an online booking system, to underpin a norm of activity for an audience member. These transactions, however, were the only replicable component of experiencing a play, access to the event. When it came to replicating other components (such as formalised performance spaces defined by platforms and available technology), the web-based model quickly revealed the tensions that exist in creating a fictional world in a social media space. This relationship between performer and audience is one of direct address, acknowledging the audience, whereas conventional 'fourth wall' models depend on the 'distance' between them. This in turn creates a conceptual problem for other performance techniques such as Stanislavsky's (1968) 'public solitude', which is dependent on this positioning. To understand these distinctions and other key features of conventional web-based performance relationships, I identified ways in which drama can be seen to be presented via web-based broadcasting.

At the time, current web-based, livestreamed performance models could be observed in three ways:

1) web as delivery service; pre-recorded events are distributed as downloadable or streamed files

2) web on top of drama, and

3) drama on top of web.

As examples, I cited Twitter plays, livestream identities, Bajo and Oobah Butler and the invisible-theatre prank, "The Shed at Dulwich" (2018) which particularly highlighted the potential of a more hybrid form of performance. These examples created breakthroughs in bridging the objective of performance within this new paradigm by developing an acting technique variation I coin 'social intimacy', which helped to define the fourth term for a new genre 'webtheatre'. In the following chapter, I will illustrate the experience of one of these performances, specifically the third instalment of the trilogy which was the most successful example of the features identified in this chapter. The chapter will describe the event as an observer of the experience and primes the reader for deeper analysis in further chapters of how the performance was created.

CHAPTER 4 What does 'webtheatre' look like?

The theatrical device of "breaking the fourth wall," wherein on-stage actors acknowledge the presence of the audience, has come to be seen as a characteristic technique of modernist theatre

(Davis 2015, 86)

This short chapter illustrates the experience of a performance of 'webtheatre'. Each of the three plays investigates multiple convergences of theory, practice, and methodology. However, "Lunch with Jenna ep #51 The Void Screams Back"[7] was by far the closest example of achieving a synergy in performance that responded to the key questions of this research. It reflected the culmination of successes and failures of the previous two attempts. For me, it represented the conclusion of the methodological and theoretical explorations up to this point. While recognising the interlaced positioning of my role as researcher and creator, this illustrative account of the experience is an observer account of the performance, intended as an ethnographic account of experience. This brief description (with complimentary links) will break down key components that underpin the structure of this drama performance and begin the process of dissecting the significant components of conventional theatre that had been rewrought for this web-based play.

My Home Theatre

On the Twentieth of July 2019 a small group of friends and family gather in the loungeroom of my home on a sunny, Saturday afternoon. Along with good humour, anticipation, and some food and wine to share, they sit on the couch and chat heartily. This is not an unusual afternoon gathering with the music and conversation flowing buoyantly. But what is unusual about today is that the lounge-room resembles a film set or a TV studio. There is a temporary green curtain behind a single armchair in the place where the kitchen table usually is and bright photography lamps beating down on it. Microphones, cameras, televisions functioning as monitors and cables seeming to run everywhere (see Figure 10). The guests sit on the remaining spaces (fold-

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[7] https://youtu.be/TQhmhpuYPN8

out seats, couches, and kitchen chairs) positioned in such a way as to watch a performance by whoever will sit in the lone armchair. This was the venue and stage for the premiere of the third instalment of a triptych of plays written and performed specifically for web-based audiences; "Lunch with Jenna ep 51 The Void Screams Back" (Allen 2019).

Figure 10 The above photograph contains a hyperlink to the video file I created as a 'shout out' on Instagram before the performance on July 20, 2019, for the last performance of 'Lunch with Jenna'[8]

Around the room are monitors relaying the images of the live broadcast output, including overlayed images such as a Twitter banner feed scrolling through different posts as well as background music. These transmissions are a hybrid reflecting the captured images and sounds of the room, combined with overlays provided by the software on the computer all being broadcast live to a host website as a livestream event.

Eventually, everyone settles into their seats with a drink and are greeted by the play's lead character, 'Jenna' who is almost glamorously dressed in heels and makeup. Most of the audience have never met 'Jenna' before despite her being totally recognisable as she is being performed by my wife, Nikki. Nonetheless it is clear Nikki is acting as a character/host of this

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[8] https://youtu.be/SsTtmFLsH_c

gathering and the audience plays along. Jenna informs everyone that the performance is about to start, during which they can tweet her live using an identifying hashtag and they are welcome to take photographs, tweet and communicate with other people watching the web-based performance (an example of preparing the audience this way can be found here from 'Lunch With Jenna ep 27').[9] Nikki (the actor who is 'out-of-character') also asks one of the audience members to act as a 'plant' and to read out a prepared question during the show at a moment when Nikki will signal her to do so. Nikki (or is it 'Jenna'?) tells the group that the performance is open to comments and contributions from the audience, as much or as little as they want to involve themselves. Before long I signal Nikki/Jenna that the show is about to 'go live' and press the computer keyboard to activate the first 'cue', the opening show title sequence.[10]

Now, live-streaming to the world, 'Jenna' proceeds to introduce the show proper as a sort of daytime television lifestyle format. The premise being that she hosts a livestream channel where cooking and conversation happens between her and her viewers[11]. She informs us that today she has invited us, as some of her web-based followers, to join her live for a special broadcast. This immediately repositions the audience in the room as characters of sorts within the narrative and an implied background relationship to 'Jenna' and this event. For some this is exciting, and they seem to embrace the invitation to respond and talk back to Jenna whenever they feel inclined. For others, this breach of normal theatre conventions was confronting, informing me later that it made them feel somewhat exposed. Jenna tells the audience that she has invited two other 'online' friends to join the conversation. What looks to be a livestream picture-in-picture of two silhouetted figures appear onscreen (see Figure 11). Nikki as the actor in the room is sitting in the front of the green screen and so seems to be looking into the distance. But she performs in a way that 'Jenna' appears to be interacting directly with the video image; somewhat like a weather presenter reports in front of a green screen.

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[9] https://youtu.be/j1y4uedyLzs
[10] https://youtu.be/5EoCDrDkY5M
[11] https://youtu.be/tE-99BvXfkY

Figure 11 Screenshot from the broadcast performance of Lunch with Jenna ep 51. Staging elements from Figure 10 are all (in)visible in this single shot

After a while, the audience begins to accept this reality and even feel a little uneasy when the show seems to be getting influenced by the other web-based characters/friends Jenna invited to join. The tone and content of the tweets by one character (who is represented by text appearing onscreen as if being typed live)[12] gets quite aggressive and disruptive and Jenna seems to be genuinely upset by the intrusions and threats. Jenna seems to become very emotional and vulnerable suddenly and begins to deliver a monologue that would not be out of place in any conventional play, a private and internal thought expressed seemingly without awareness of the people and the space around her. She speaks her private thoughts aloud[13] and the audience are implicitly 'repositioned' to be voyeurs, watching a moment of public intimacy, as Stanislavsky might say (Hinckley 2008). In the room there is no lighting or set change to indicate a different space; this is an internal rather than external presentation of the character, a shift in the focus and attention of the actor. But through the monitor the background effects (the set on a green screen) have been removed from the broadcast vision to indicate this is 'a different space' for the character and one that does not invite audience interaction, as has been the norm up to now.

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[12] https://youtu.be/Hcli3z9jgwg
[13] https://youtu.be/2yL2s-YQFdI

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Eventually, Jenna comes out of this 'internal moment' having decided how to deal with the conflict caused by these web-based contributors. It is as if the live-time of the show has been suspended and the audience could hear the internal thoughts that flash through the mind in a milli-second. She wraps the performance up by inviting the audience to share a meal with her and some good conversation as a salve for the previous traumas. She says her farewells to the web-based audience as deftly as any television presenter or game show host. And with that, the broadcast ends and Nikki (now out of character although still dressed as Jenna) engages once more as herself with friends.

Later in the day, after the performance was over, Nikki is sharing food, wine, and conversation with the audience, when several people asked why these tweets were allowed to be shown during the performance; 'why wasn't anyone moderating the content?', and commending Nikki on how well she had handled the disruption. At which point Nikki revealed that everything had been scripted and rehearsed, that those moments were part of the story. And with that, a veil between reality and fiction was suddenly revealed to the audience who were in the room. Despite all indications that this was a performance, a staged play with interactive elements in which they were invited to knowingly participate in, there had remained a moment when they realised that their imaginations had been swept up in the reality of this fictional character and her experiences. This is despite also being acutely aware of the paraphernalia of (effectively) a live television studio in their friend's house.

This chapter has illustrated the observable experience of the hybrid performance that was the objective of this research project. Specifically, the capacity for suspension of disbelief in the audience is an exemplar of what I have held as the benchmark of success for any project. I had created a play, a performance that allows an audience to do 'imagination work' and give over to a suspension of disbelief for such a time as they attain an almost altered state of consciousness; lost in the universe of a fictive reality. This was a moment of joy, where I could say I achieved something that twelve months earlier looked to be impossible; to create a play, written about, and performed with the unique features of live-streaming and social media platforms as the 'stage', and achieving a state of suspension of disbelief.

Figure 12 The show poster for the first of the three plays, focussing on the business model of authenticity as part of social media personalities and 'influencer' behaviour as observed in the creative development

The blurring of lines between live acting and real interaction was so interesting it should be compulsory viewing for all media students who are no doubt facing their own identity issues with the web-based world. It is even more fascinating now that I know some of the challenges you faced in putting it all together and understanding the management of the live audience.

Audience response (Fieldnote, 2019)

Introduction

Before I embark on the final chapters of this ethnographic analysis and unpacking the experiences that is the 'Lunch with Jenna' series of plays, it is worth summarising and revising the complement of influences that informed them. These aesthetic choices reflect the field and a synthesis of the questions being explored as an autoethnographic account. In the maelstrom of the creative exploration process, it is difficult to pinpoint a singular moment, thought, or action in the play that is representative of any causal logic that precedes it. This may be easier in the unpacking than the creating. Indeed, the process itself was a 'conversation' between the theories, methodologies, practices, and the lived experiences of each of us involved[14]. The plays are the analysis of these conversations in singular moments of performance.

What follows in words are complementary reflections to reach a deeper and more personal understanding of this research from my own perspective. My research, my art, my autoethnography, are as much metaphors of critical thinking about unorganised and abstract ideas, the frustrations, and emotional upheavals, as any anecdotal tale. The pursuit of research, the effort to create something from nothing, the domestic and professional; all of life is embedded and entwined in a creative process. The following chapters are that coda to the pieces themselves.

Specifically, this chapter unpacks how performance space, the roles, and boundaries of the performer/audience relationship, was achieved for the performance. Despite the re-organising and instruction of social scripts and behaviours, the performance itself dissolved these boundaries and a breach of these proscribed roles nearly derailed the success of the first show. This chapter also describes how observable social dynamics from the fieldwork were used as narrative tools for the characters. This included gossip narrative, performed authenticity, and communities, specifically their tribal nature. Indeed, it may be these social behaviours woven into the staged performance that created the setting for the actor/audience breach to occur.

There is no question that even after twelve months of creative development, the fundamental existence of a recognisable script was still a long way off even hours before the performance on February 22, 2019. The first of the three plays centred on a question that had been nagging

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[14] https://youtu.be/uYEaTxIVft8

at me for months now about how relationships are formed and maintained in a landscape of user-pays streaming service models. Relationships with fans/subscribers needed to show vulnerability to make them seem authentic (Marwick and Boyd 2011). The character question of the play centred around how their performance, or anyone's relationship with them, can be authentic if the interface was predicated on a profit-making model such as seen on Twitch or YouTube. I created a character (Samantha Deen, a vain celebrity YouTuber) that needed to confess an addiction to self-promotion, almost as an alcoholic or junkie might. Someone who had monetised vulnerability with naked ambition of material wealth and fame. Someone who had realised their ambition had hurt people in their lives or at least alienated them from having normal functioning social relationships. We then expanded this personality and created three characters, each exploring a variation of what I call 'performed authenticity' and developed narrative beats with significant lines of dialogue.

As is the high-stakes nature of creating theatre, I put it all on the line, one performance only open to the public, raising the stakes of success or failure on a fleeting ephemeral moment. Raising stakes is the essence of dramatic tension, but like any good magician, the risks are only ever performed with method and process to create the illusion of risk. There was indeed a considerable amount that was unknown, this had never been tried before. There was also a personal investment on the line, trying something so bold and visionary in the halcyon days before COVID-19, when Zoom was a novelty and not a lifestyle. But I was confident in my cast, my process and most of all, my preparation. There would be a risk, but it was within reason, or so I thought.

Beginner's call

As I have discussed above, the primary relationship between actor and audience in a web-based medium is one of direct address to camera. Therefore, the actor must form a relationship with 'you' (the audience) and acknowledge 'your individual presence' even though 'you' may just be watching and not actively engaging with the actor, chat feeds or interactive SMP posts and so on. For the purposes of the remaining observations in the field I may interchange the terms of 'actor' as the 'presenter' of the live-stream. The distinction is subtle, and my choice more

than likely refers to my subjectivity as director, delineating the difference between my instructions.

With respect to the structural narrative of the piece I realised that this unique relationship between viewer and presenter could be used to my advantage. This was a relationship for the audience to cling to in a foreign space. Getting an audience to trust the performance is critical because suspension of disbelief is voluntarily given. This was my critique of Brecht, Grotowski, and Artaud (Rio and Bertelsen 2018), whereby the audience, stripped of its agency, and instructed by the gatekeepers of the performance (the actors) to submit to transcendence, is counterintuitive. If, as I have noted, Stanislavky's 'intention' (Hinckley 2008) is what provides safety for the audience to be voyeurs without retribution (the 'fourth wall') then in a way, it is also created by a bond, or compact, between audience and web-based performer. When the actor/character sees the audience, looks down the camera lens and acknowledges them, and invites them into an intimate (and seemingly genuine under the circumstances) relationship, then it does not so much become a fourth wall as it does a fourth bubble (or dimension) because time is inherent to the performance, not part of the abstract setting of the play.

Using Jenna's relationship with the audience (in the role of Jenna's followers) created this level of comfort and intimacy, this 'fourth bubble', that I could use as a foil for dramatic effect with other characters, particularly 'Samantha Deen', the antagonist friend of Jenna and her fans. My thinking was that if an audience is democratised in this space to be an active collaborator, then, dramatically, I had the opportunity to embed that collaboration as a 'character' within the story, making them protagonists as well as observers. It unfolded that I did not anticipate just how effective this would be and that the loyalty of the audience for Jenna, the melodramatic style of the performance and the inexperience of a young actor combined in such a way that the audience reacted beyond a workable contract between them and the play. But more on that later. More specifically, these 'fourth bubble' connections become component parts of an audience in a cumulative way, and relationships are achieved through these techniques.

Confessional

Our experiences of live-streaming in workshops, and the personalised exchanges with audiences became a kind of self-fulfilling relationship. As characters directly converse with audience members, the actor in the role is simultaneously improvising with respect to the play's performance demands. These are obviously unscripted exchanges and over time, as both audience member, and character, and actor develop history together, there becomes a kind of relationship between them. It is this immediacy over time that creates a direct and personal 'line-of-sight' when character flaws and humility is revealed by the 'actor'. This dynamic can be deployed for dramatic effect such that despite any recognition that you (the audience) is part of a wider experience, when Jenna looks down the lens of the camera[15], she is looking directly at you (as an individual) from inside the monitor. In this way you, specifically, and the audience collectively get to 'know' Jenna in a personal and intimate way, as much as she chooses to reveal.

The play is based on these confessional moments and these revelations stir drama amongst the protagonists. Each scripted character (Jenna, Lachy and Samantha Deen), despite being guilty of similar behaviours, represents different motivations and ethical behaviours corresponding to a 'type' of social media platform user that we had engaged with during fieldwork. These characters, in a dramatic situation that invites revelation, are then observed in responses, which then serve dramatically to inform a character arc of some kind. These experiences endear and strengthen the relationships of the characters to each other, even if the audience are not as convinced. Thus, there is a tension/schism between our loyalty to Jenna, when she forgives characters, we (the audience) do not[16]. In this schism the audience engages their own imagination work, or at least use Jenna's moral compass in reference to their own, to navigate and reflect on their own feelings.

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[15] https://youtu.be/MnwnKbVA1q4?t=114
[16] This unscripted exchange with the audience shows how they 'embodied' the character of Jenna supporters and come to her defence during the performance. https://youtu.be/MnwnKbVA1q4?t=1588

Performed authenticity

It should be noted from the outset, that authenticity is a complex concept in anthropology. Many academics have demonstrated that its meaning is dependent on the socio-cultural context (Filitz and Saris 2013, Theodossopoulos 2013, Cobb 2014). As a colloquial term though, especially for actors, it is a short-hand expression for a convincing performance, one that suspends disbelief. One way of creating the illusion of authenticity in this performance, was to include 'real time' social media posts into the 'dialogue'. Some of these were legitimate audience members tweeting during the show either from my lounge room or remotely, online. Some of them were animations, or overlays, inserted into the broadcast, and still others were fabricated in the moment from improvisations by the actors as a device for moving the story along. It quickly became impossible to tell the real tweets from the fake, creating just enough plausibility in the audience that the play and the narrative were all happening simultaneously and suspending the belief that this must have been rehearsed. It is obvious from the location (domestic kitchen), company (friends and fans) and performance (talkback style) thus far that this is a place to socially congregate and there are no overt signs of profiteering. Product placement is almost non-existent (maybe the wine is strategically placed in front of the camera?), and it is unclear whether any products Jenna praises are her own opinion or paid for. This is not the case for Sam, who is constantly spruiking her brand. Jenna is on public display and so rules of public behaviour apply for her 'guests' (the audience), creating a kind of social behaviour dynamic. Although 'realistic' representations of casual social exchanges ground this in a naturalistic genre, there develops a performance style I refer to as 'performed authenticity', which blends these aspects of direct address conversation in a public place and a live broadcast about personal experiences.

Communities and followers

Within the universe of the play, the character of Samantha Deen has developed her identity into an influencer brand. This brand has a 'legion' of customers/followers from her multiple social media platforms, accounts, and identities. She is supported by 'team members' (unseen) who are authorised to manage sites, streams, and other business enterprises. She has named her community of followers 'DEENIES' (also unseen). For the purposes of narrative these are akin to offstage characters in a script. My intent was to use this imagined fan base as a means of

legitimising Samantha's social status, but this 'off- stage-character' also proved effective to question Sam's authenticity as well. We (the audience) never see them, and when she is revealed as manipulative, the audience (along with the other characters) question the qualities which make her appear authentic, including her fan base. This in turn ideally triggers an internal question in the audience, 'was she making them up'? The ambiguity of the character and the unseen fans can be employed to effect when it exists in the audience's imagination. As a director, activating the audience's imagination is the test of focus on the performance and reflects an untethering from 'reality' into suspension of disbelief (Gabriels and De Backer 2016) when completely immersed.

Gossip narrative

Most plays are self-contained histories of characters involved in a crisis point of behaviours and actions that are revealed during the performance. In this sense, the audience does not have to know anything about a character beforehand. Characters identify these moments of self-reflection during the synchronistic culmination of events within the story that have previously taken place 'offstage'. I utilised this concept and layered it with the social relatedness of ongoing gossip that flows through social media relationships between broadcasters and their followers as the unfolding of the narrative (Solove 2007, Petersen 2010, Waddington 2012, Geraghty 2015, Gabriels and De Backer 2016). This feature of narrative structure echoes Huitsing's (2012) account of how gossip features in secondary education settings and Ellwardt's (2012, 2012) environmental research into gossiping in the office workplace. These authors identify the underpinning institutional framework (commercial office and schools) as the basis for communications between participants (gossip). They also identify the nuances of power, gatekeeping, authenticity of motive and the relationships between them and reputation as "one of our most cherished assets" (Solove 2007, 30). This became a theme of the first instalment of the trilogy identified in the tag line to the play "when friendship becomes a business model, authenticity is key" (Allen 2019).
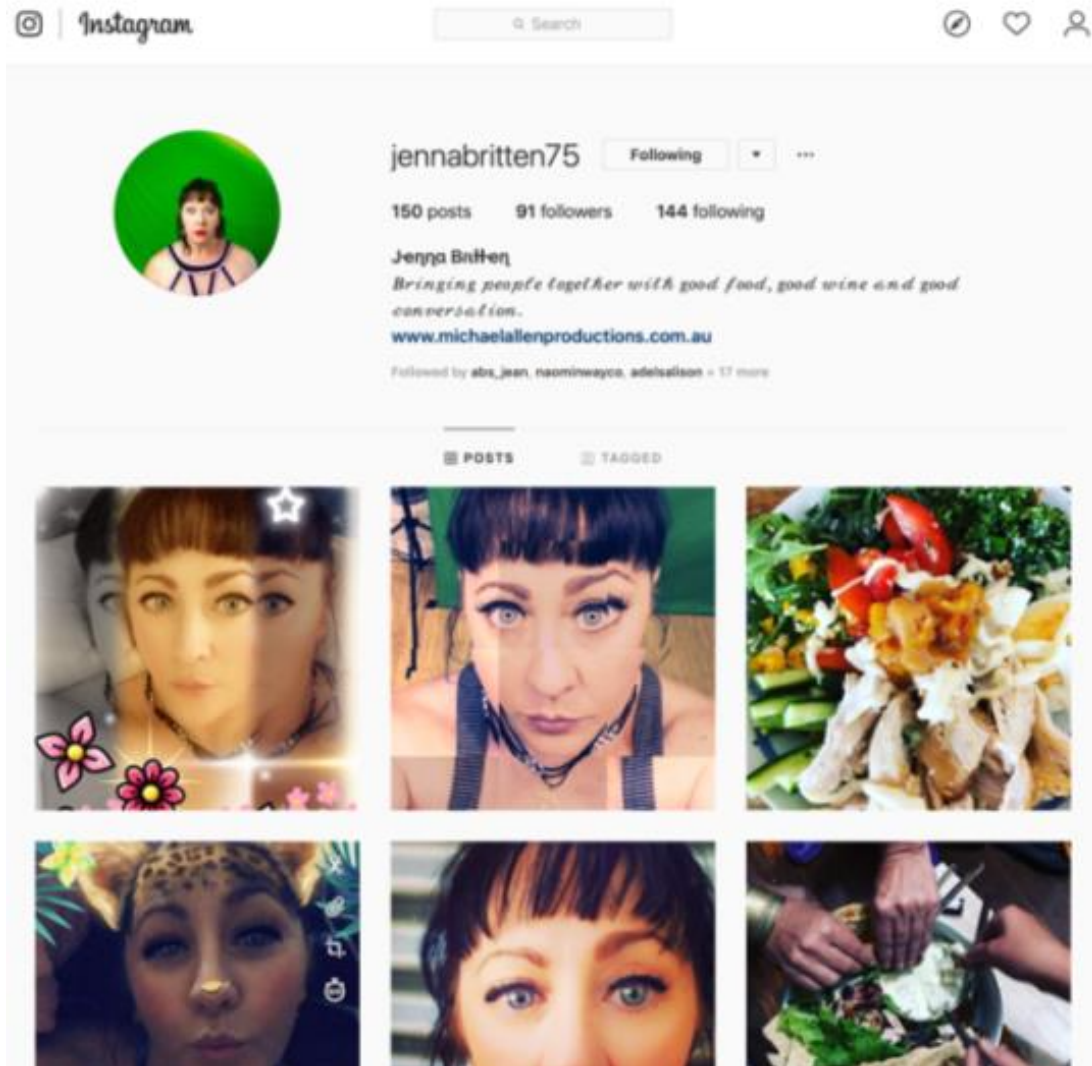
Figure 13 "Jenna" Instagram page

This premise somewhat applies to web-based streamers, where people follow the broadcasters in ever unfolding layers of their broadcast experiences, somewhat akin to a talk-show host. Followers remediate (Bolter and Grusin 1999) in the form of memes and share previous content (ongoing 'chats'), develop shorthand language, sharing history and knowledge and given the idea behind social media platforms is the 'social', this becomes a platform for a shared history of previous broadcasts. These are features that are echoed throughout similar analysis of gossip influence (Petersen 2010, Ellwardt, Labianca et al. 2012, Ellwardt, Steglich et al. 2012, Huitsing, van Duijn et al. 2012, Gabriels and De Backer 2016). I had attempted to create a similar effect with the characters we were presenting. I followed Gable's example of a Twitter play (2015), creating 'dialogue' between characters developed by the contributions of the actors playing them, although we decided on Instagram (Figures 13, 14 and 15) as a platform

for its visual nature and with less need to be textually verbose in characters we were developing. This is a nod to the authority of the author as Bakhtin defines (Matusov 2019) but with flexibility for actor improvisation with regards to image representation, phrasing, or 'tone' their characters might use.
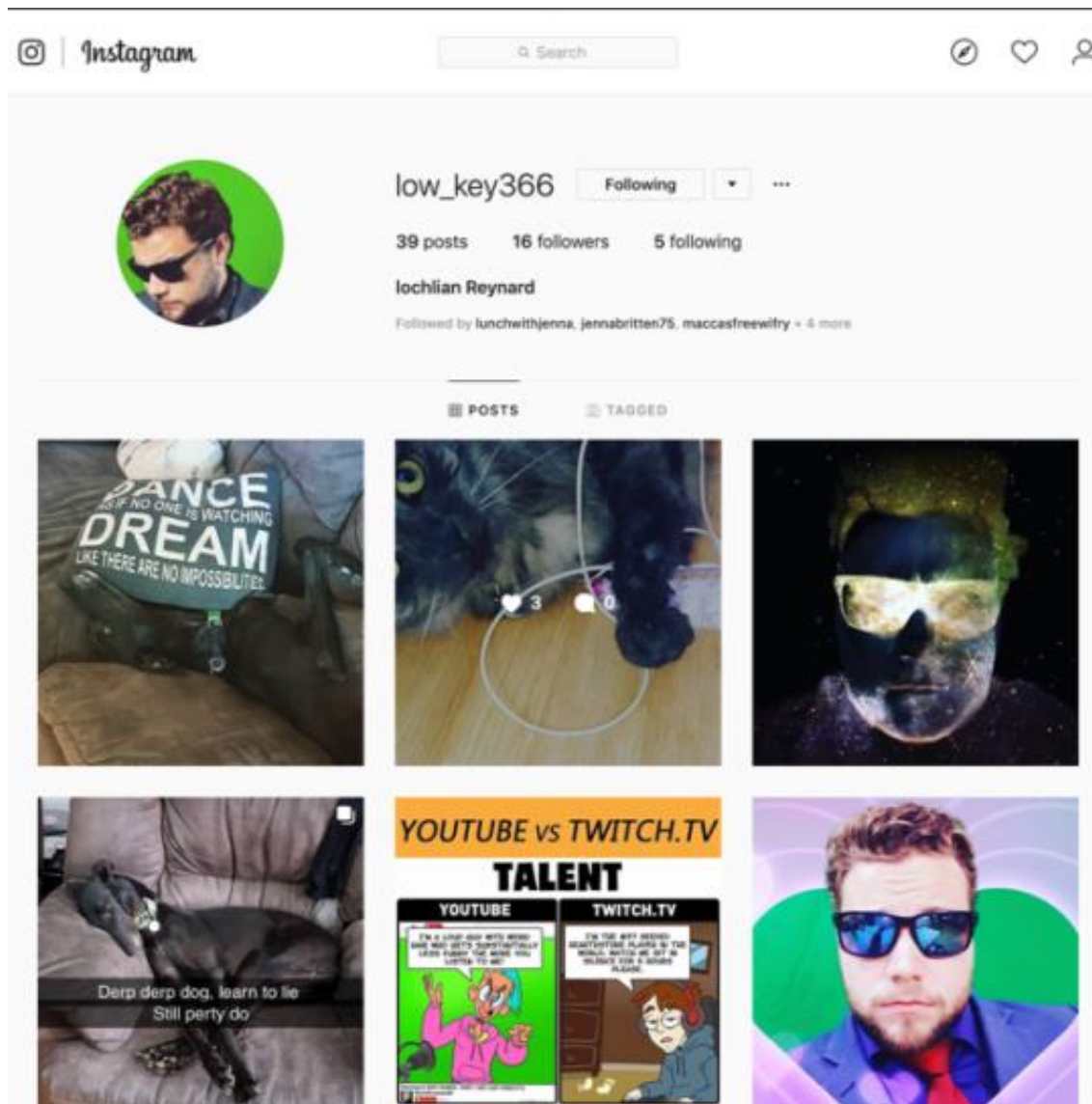
Figure 14 "Lachy" Instagram page

These semi-scripted and tweeted exchanges created a shared history between them which anticipated the dramatic finale for this performance. In this respect I hoped to borrow from Butler's (2018) 'Shed' using anticipation as a dramatic spur. The metaphor we used in rehearsal and script development was as a school yard fight where rumour and gossip fuel the

anticipation of a final conflict. The result was indeed a highly energetic flux of activity and emotions creating 'real' drama, and another layer to the performances.
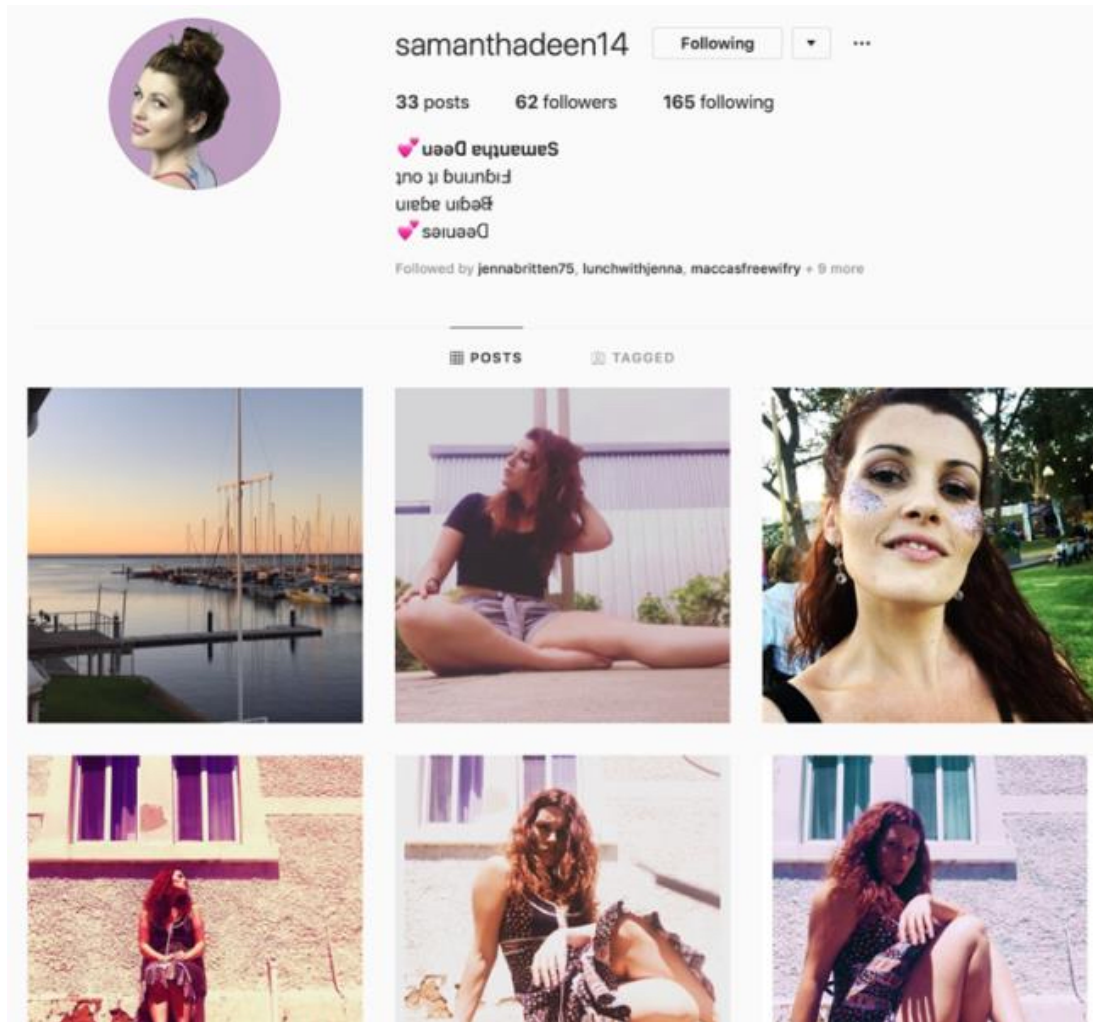
Figure 15 "Samantha Deen" Instagram page

On the day: Being and Experience

Usually on the day of a show, I have an intuitive sense of how things might go. At the very least I am aware of energies in the room. How are the individuals today? Are things falling into place or does every detail have to be wrangled? Is the weather helping or making things worse? Are people easy going or is there a nervous tension in the air? It is a heightened sense of awareness, not that you can do anything about it or have any articulate idea of what will transpire. But at least I am aware and ready for the unexpected such that I deal with it with a

sense of detached perspective. On big production days, when all the moving components of a production come together, the mental and emotional energy is in overdrive.

But on the day of the public performance, I was feeling comfortable. Not overconfident, that is the worst feeling. Overconfidence leads to hubris which leads to mistakes. Feeling too anxious does not help either because that energy catches amongst the group. But I was right in the 'sweet spot' as it were. The sun was out and the energy of everyone was that good kind of anxious. Technically we had a good week of rehearsals where everything worked every time as we had wanted it to. There were minor creative tensions and a tangible sense of imminent culmination and release from a very long process.

As is usual on an opening night, the morning of the show was a long list of things to do; last-minute shopping, cleaning the house and the bathroom; we were performing from my lounge room. This was essentially a public performance in my house and there is nothing like having people over to make you clean so it does not look like you have neglected basic hygiene in the middle of the preceding sixty-hour working week. The stage was set, floors were mopped, food was cooked, everything good to go. There were small personality tensions, again not unexpected. Every actor has their own way of preparing and sometimes that is not compatible with others. Nikki and I did not have the luxury of time to have a moment of contemplative focus with everything else that had to be done. Young (as in inexperienced) actors often do not have a sense of what else goes on to make a show happen.

The audience of a dozen or so people arrived, made up of friends and family, all of whom had been hearing me chatter on about this work for the last twelve months or so and are keen see our results. It was all positive energy from them as well, we had personally invited those who would be most receptive. They had brought refreshments of their own and the conversations were bubbly and upbeat. During this time the cast of Nikki, Max and Jasmin conversed with the audience and each other in the final minutes before the show went live. From my position in front of the computer monitoring the broadcast and social media platforms I could see that the web-based audience was starting to gather. The stream was being broadcast with the place holder pre-show information scrolling over original music that Tim had made earlier in the creative development process, a nod to the early work done on the project. I was doing my final checks, and the unravelling began.

As part of my final checks on all the technical equipment I noticed that the mobile phone we had been using as a mobile camera for a scene in the show, was not broadcasting correctly to the Wirecast software on my computer. This had not happened all week. In fact, the last time it happened had been over a week earlier when we were using Jasmin's phone. We switched to Nikki's phone as it was a newer model with a better camera and the latest operating system. It had proved reliable and consistent because of this for the last few days but now with less than five minutes until we went live it was proving to be a problem by sending distorted signals. The cast had become aware of something going on and, in an attempt, to alleviate a curious and patiently waiting web-based audience, arranged to 'go live' on Facebook to update people[17]. Despite trying several options, I was not able to reconnect the camera. This was an important camera for one of the most important scenes. The shot set up and technical cues would take too long to reconfigure if I tried another phone/camera. The minutes were ticking by seemingly faster now.

The solutions are all failing. Under the last minute now. My blood pressure was rising. The cast and audience had no idea what is going on. I had one last idea which I knew had worked every other time. The old 'turn it off, turn it on again' technique. So, I shut down the Wirecast software and opened it again. Brilliant! The camera was back. But now there was a message 'the stream event has ended'. What! No, that cannot be right, but because I had interrupted the live-stream signal, the web-based ticket box office assumed the event was over and I could not reconnect. The interconnected components of the layered staging network were breaking down.

What now? I could create a new 'event'. But then all the people who were watching online would not have the correct website address location for the new live-stream, because of the need for linked website locations in the broadcast chain. Was there any way I could contact them to let them know? I could not think of a quick and easy way to do that. Shit! Literally seconds left now. My mind has frozen. I am screaming inside. I cannot fix it. I am going to lose it all. That is it, it is time, and we are live now. But not. There is no broadcast stream going out to the web-based audience. The actors do not know and neither do the audience and so the performance moves on and its momentum quickly builds. Even if I stopped everything, I could not get back into that event link. It is closed. The show has started, the ship has sailed and there

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[17] https://youtu.be/uFz95rGT9KA

is nothing I can do to stop it. And just like that, everything I had worked for over the last twelve months, everything I had bragged about to colleagues all over the world, everything, gone. In seconds.

Of course, none of this internal breakdown or backstage catastrophe was obvious to anyone else in the cast or the audience. The web-based audience knew something was going wrong because they were not seeing anything and their messages coming in on various social media platforms were popping up in all my notifications with increased rapidity. And so, the performance ploughed on as it always does in theatre. What can be seen versus what is going on in the background like the analogy of the serene swan above water while below the water line is constant frenetic energy. The next hour of the performance was an all-consuming physical panic attack. I felt like throwing up, running out of the room, throwing my chair. Anything. But I could not do anything. I was stuck behind the bench in the back corner of the room with only one way out, through the stage and the audience. And how would that look, walking out on my own show? I sat there, both consumed with feelings too big to process and somehow completely empty simultaneously. In the fog, I somehow managed to at least record the performance on my YouTube account which I subsequently registered on figshare.com[18], so I did not lose the whole thing to the void of a memory.

The performance itself went as it was meant to, with laughter in the right places and dramatic tension where we had hoped it would be. But even that began to unravel. I anticipated that Jasmin's character Samantha Deen was going to be a villain for the audience. Her character was too shallow to evoke empathy. This was not a problem, like in any melodrama it gave a focus for the audience to project upon and create the hero status of 'Jenna'. But we had no idea just how much the audience would take on the role of defending the hero and 'hissing the villain' bordering on verbal abuse. Audience interaction was always going to be an unknown element in the room. We had learned this from months of experimentation where participants demand the ability to interact even if they exercise their right not to. Maybe it was the bubbling enthusiasm of the friends we asked, maybe it was our unpreparedness for just how fluid the space became with so many new and untested boundaries. Regardless, the event was both a success and a failure and reflecting on the performance and filtering the feedback revealed significant observations.

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[18] https://doi.org/10.25909/5c91916e265f1

Structural Integrity

Structurally, there were two key factors involved in this performance, that of the narrative navigation of an audience's experience, including the degree of their involvement. The other was the technical 'staging' of equipment, as I have recalled above. In this section, I will unpack some of the narrative integrity that was indicative of the effect and impact of the experience. Theatrically, the story hinged on a set piece of conventional stagecraft which triggers an emotional 'gear change' between the characters. It was hopefully a narrative device that would push the audience towards more melodramatic support of the characters. However, the question remained whether this would further involve the audience in a shared suspension of disbelief or alienate them with a theatrical gimmick. It was also an objective of mine to incorporate more traditional stagecraft techniques so as not to rely entirely on broadcast technology and invoke some conventionally familiar action for the actors and the audience. To that end, I scripted and staged a prank between two characters. In the timeline of the play the event happened about a week prior to this 'lunch' around the table. However, rather than rely on pre-recording and editing I decided to stage the prank and use a different technological method of a smart phone device connected wirelessly to my computer to create the appearance of old footage taken outside at night.

I was under no illusions that this set piece would disrupt the 'reality' I had created in the performance so far. Nor was I under any illusion that this breaking of convention would realistically suspend any more disbelief for the audience. For the audience in the room, they were privy to 'backstage' activity of actors dropping character, changing costumes, and rearranging furniture and props. The web-based audience was watching the pre-recorded introduction to the clip which served as a mask and meant, for them, that the set change remained a 'backstage' phenomenon. My hope was that the web-based audience would 'not see' this sleight of hand staging and thus some consistency of narrative remained. I did not expect this same reaction from the audience in the room.

The link embedded within Figure 16 below shows the broadcast footage alongside the backstage activity. At the end, you can hear and see the audience reacting and interacting with the characters. This event triggered a distracted focus under the surface of the actor's

performance that was significantly unforeseen on my part and ours as the ensemble. Specifically, Jasmin, the young actor playing Samantha Deen, was taken aback and 'knocked out of character' by the aggressive intent and reactions from the audience. Open threats of violence and abuse were swift and relentless. One audience member did not take the hints from the actors when they tried to move the story along. And other audience members were starting to feel a little uncomfortable at the sustained attacks. This moment was a break in the suspension of disbelief. It was a moment discussed amongst participants and actors after the play, many became aware of the breach in performance norms. I find it heartening that there was a sense of unspoken norms being breached in a performance where norms were anything but that. This breach of performance integrity, I regard as an unanticipated success. It was curious how a moment that was so obviously staged could be such an emotional trigger for the audience.

Figure 16 Staging the prank involved a combination of traditional stage craft 'magic' and live broadcast editing[19]

After all, there was no streetlight or blood for them, as these were all superimposed as an after-effect, and only seen in the broadcast images. They could see the actors change costume and perform rehearsed stunts before them. For the audience in the room, if there was any residual 'fourth wall' voyeurism remaining in this 'theatre', then it was shattered in this moment when

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[19] https://youtu.be/VpGp0QU9rYc

they were suddenly 'backstage' watching a set change. Whether the suspension of disbelief and investment with the characters overwhelmed their sense of reality, whether they took on the role of Jenna's fan defenders, whatever the reason, the audience interaction after this nearly sabotaged the remainder of the performance.

The scripted narrative was being disrupted by the audience who would not let the actors move on in the story, some of the actors reacted personally and not as the character and for a moment it looked like the script may be abandoned. But supreme effort by the actors in the end to maintain the integrity of the piece meant that the story did proceed and audience responses after the show were full of excitement about that same dynamic tension. For them, that was the rush of performance and so the audience were entertained.

The reviews are in

In the end it was a performance of mixed results and obviously one that highlights the complexities of perspective in an autoethnographic process. Personally, I had put a lot on the line, as I have mentioned. And, I failed miserably, or so I thought at the time. The purpose was to live-stream an integrated performance and without being able to broadcast, it was a failure at this fundamental level. On a personal level, I had never felt as broken mentally and emotionally as I has at that point. In the days and weeks following, I spiralled into an anxiety-ridden depression I could not get out of. Consumed by grief and all the things this failure had meant. My immediate conclusion from self-assessment and reflexive evaluation, was that I had failed in my single biggest objective, to live-stream a performance. I had dragged my family though the hell of financial hardship on a scholarship chasing a fantasy idea. I had put my kids through hell with my focus and interrupted our lives with equipment everywhere. My relationship with my wife suffered not least because she was a co-collaborator but also because she had become influenced by her own unexpected experiences on these social media platforms, taking on a life of its own as realties merged and inadvertently challenging our fifteen-year marriage. My God, what had I done? My mental deterioration was affecting me physically and for the reminder of my candidature I was on medication to stabilise my anxiety and depression. But, as is often the case, my audience were oblivious to the behind-the-scenes drama. They were glowing with praise. The after effect of people sharing food, time and

performance generated a vibrant bubble of social atmosphere. The quote at the top of this chapter was by a colleague who watched the recording of the performance some three weeks later and was still affected by the 'liveness' and immediacy of the performance. In all respects other than technical, the process and the play worked. And even then, the technical issue was human error. I realised the problem could have been easily solved, however my level of stress at the time (seconds before we went to air) sent me into a mental shutdown where I could not process properly. A lack of technical support, and extreme emotional stakes may have contributed there.

In many ways this project ended with this performance as the ensemble drifted apart. Jasmin was consumed with feelings of abandonment, and fear and repulsion at an audience without respect. A few days later, in an email, she told me that she effectively felt abandoned as both an actor and character and for her it was all over. At the time of writing, I haven't spoken to her since; another loss, another failure. Max moved on as well and despite all we had been through, it seemed that I had not invigorated creative energy in actors for a new medium, rather, I had ensured they were so disenchanted with it to never return. But I had, in my own assessment, answered the simple questions I had set out to answer; could a replicable theatre experience born of the unique web 2.0 mediated environment of a democratised audience/performer relationship succeed? The answer appeared to indicate 'yes'. Did I do it effectively? Yes, with several big exceptions.

Conclusion

This chapter unpacked key features which informed the experience of the first of the 'Lunch with Jenna' plays. As the first expression of concepts from the field in performance, it carried the weight of some expectation, albeit more of my own as anyone else's. I have backgrounded some of the significant features of social interaction from fieldwork observations that were incorporated into the narrative. I also showed how the audience/actor relationship and implied social scripts were physically created, and yet the incorporation of social scripts as narrative features undermined the potential 'success' of the performance. This breakdown of convention was indicative of a suspension of disbelief, ironically creating a 'successful' theatre experience, if not a successful play.

Despite having technically completed what I had set out to do I also felt like I had not achieved the potential of this work. Soon, the social media, the avatars, the script writing, and the production would prove the salvation and process of redemption for myself. This performance had indeed unlocked many obstacles to constructing a web 2.0 based theatre experience. And the participant observations were insightful. However, the next stage of the production would take Nikki and I down a much deeper auto-ethnographic rabbit hole, so to speak. In the absence of support characters and the actors who played them, we also recognised there was some fine tuning to be done with the dramatic structure and narrative of these scripts. After a few weeks of licking my wounds of embarrassment, Nikki coaxed me out of my stupor, and we began to develop what would become the second part of the triptych.

CHAPTER 6 Lunch with Jenna ep 39_#dmme #playnice #igetboredeasily

Figure 17 The show poster from the second play. Nicole performed solo while audience members were 'seconded' into perform as characters

Introduction

This chapter reflects on key moments that informed the development of practice learned from the first performance and which were further investigated in the production of Lunch With Jenna_ep39_#dmme #playnice #igetboredeasily[20]. The process refined narrative styles and performance techniques and reduced over-complicated production effects to hone the focus on

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[20] https://youtu.be/np6NrYHdIjQ

these features. This chapter also reflects on the significant qualities that I focussed on as a creator, as well as observations of what improved.

The goal of this project was as much about putting the last failed performance behind me as it was about continued exploration. I had eschewed notions of high-profile presentations, box office revenue or any other career/cultural capital. This performance was about moving on and proving a legitimacy for me and to a large extent, Nikki. We needed to walk away with a win. The live audience was down to three people, namely because we seconded the other three as characters in the play and I recall two people watching live online, as I did not invest much energy in online promotion for this event. This was also about refining the methods and process of production, story, and performance. That said, for both of us this script was also about expressing something about these web-based lives, the people we found there, the sense of personal emancipation, and representing those complex thoughts and feelings.

Technically, the show went without a hitch. Well, a slight delay to the start of the show and some struggles to capture the sound of the guest characters because of lack of equipment but not nearly the stress from the first performance. This chapter continues to build upon the issues learned from the initial performance and how they were adjusted and developed for the second instalment of the trilogy, 'Lunch with Jenna ep #39_#dmme #playnice #igetboredeasily'.

Dixon cites a 1994 production which could have been our experience of the first performance when he recalls an actor noting:

> the unpredictability of the experiment and what he calls the "outrageousness" of some of the responses received during performance … He describes the performers' clumsy attempts to improvise and incorporate the stimuli and how the remote "audience members seemed to enjoy the perceived power over us."
>
> (Dixon 2007, 502)

Where Dixon (2007) refers to clumsy improvisation and the deferment of power to the audience, he neatly sums up our feelings of the experience with the audience in the first play. And to some extent we had replicated some of the outcomes from his cited observations, which may indicate some kind of empiricism in an artistic endeavour; rare indeed. Could these issues

be overcome with modern technology or are there fundamental principles at play (such as the fourth wall) which cannot be breached (Hinckley 2008)? This became the challenge for this next play, to wrangle this performance chaos (Geelhoed, Singh-Barmi et al. 2017, Ingridsdotter and Kim Silow 2018) in such a way as to balance the needs of the performers and the desires of the audience (Kinn, Holgersen et al. 2013). My response was to employ much more improvisation and give the audience as much agency as possible, rather than enforce tighter restrictions on environment and behaviour.

The next instalment of 'Lunch with Jenna' was also as much a personal expression of experiences as it was about refining the techniques, I had developed in the first play. For Nikki, it was as if both she and her character had broken through some invisible barrier or ceiling. They were both somewhat more emancipated by their experiences, with a more subtle grasp on both the nature of living a web-based life and the technical craft to perform. This would inform the next iteration. Our review of the first play revealed that we under anticipated how much the audience would embrace their role, which nearly derailed the show. This was because our previous experiences with inviting audiences to engage was to a web-based-only audience. The more conventional IRL environment and the relationships with the invited audience members were also informing characteristics of the audience involvement. Because the play was being 'lived' in the moment of the performance, the audience (and their democratised presence) meant that dramatic stimulus by them could only be anticipated with a broad range of possibilities beyond any scripted imagination. In this next iteration of the story, the structure of performance needed to be refined in such a way as to keep the raw impulse of audience interaction and maintain more narrative control.

Grasping these key features seemed to be a 'way in' to creating a dramatic narrative. I decided to approach the next phase of analysis and interpretation in a naturalistic way. Taking as my inspiration the early exponents of naturalism in the theatre from a hundred years ago in the likes of Ibsen, Chekov, Strindberg, and the instigator of 'Public solitude', Stanislavsky (Zarrilli 2007, Hinckley 2008), I decide the best way forward was to dramatise a more natural or realistic representation of these observations in the field. In this way I would be creating a piece that was familiar to the audience who lived in similar places. It was obvious after watching live-streams during fieldwork, that this audience would have no relationship to conventional dramatic narrative, because conventional plays tell the stories of lives that do not live and

operate in this digital place, which is an iteration of fourth wall structures being challenged. In order to tell a story to this web 2.0 audience I needed to create a play that was relative to them, to their experience of digitally infused life. Something that was reflective of their social experiences with a shared familiarity of how they are realised in these spaces.

Refracted reflections

Resolving this 'distance' between the fictional characters of the story and the audience watching was informed by the actor and their ongoing character improvisations. Nikki had indeed experienced much of the emancipated capability that informs the Jenna character. She had continued posting as the character on Instagram and, now free of the some of the narrower objectives of the first play, started to explore / create Jenna in far more dynamic ways. Nikki's self-confidence had grown and her ability to navigate her avatar was becoming instinctive and nearly all-consuming, spending several hours a day in a regime of creating and posting content, chatting, and collaborating with brands. By her own admission, the effect was a liberation of many aspects of a teenage personality and lifestyle that had been forgotten or repressed with years of 'adulthood'. The parallel lives of 'Jenna' being a character closely imagined to the actor's experience invites deeper contemplation about consciousness, presentation of the self and performance generally, which is beyond the remit of this thesis but incredibly interesting, nonetheless. In the process she had questioned her own ethical compass, and had it questioned by close friends and family. We decided that these questions and subjects were fertile ground for discussion in this next episode and the 'tension' between different moral positions about web-based behaviour.

[The three invited guests of 'Ash', 'Deanna' and 'Ali' are written as atomised character fragments of Jenna as a whole](21). Ash is a web-based friend that Jenna has a sexual relationship with over the Instagram direct message function. Both platonic and sexual, they have become friends of sorts and Jenna has invited her for this specific perspective in the conversation. The rationale for a character like this at an event like this is possibly the most contrived of the whole scenario. It is highly unlikely that two people who interact with each other specifically because of the anonymity and privacy, would meet in real life, let alone subject themselves to a live-

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[21] https://youtu.be/i4LpwkiQ8vw

stream. This would be counter to the nature of the relationship. We constructed some vague justification for the purposes of the show, and this was the broadest application of creative license in the ethnodramatic performance. The character of Ash represents the wild, carnal, and sexual aspect of Jenna/Nikki. Her behaviour is by no means illegal nor is it the limits of this sort of web-based behaviour, but it is still taboo in the middle-class suburban lifestyle that 'Jenna' heralds from.

'Deanna' is best described as being where Jenna was as a person in the first play. Her background is similar, in a conventionally domestic, monogamous, and long-term relationship with dependants; the quiet rage of the 'housewife' archetype. Deanna is a long-time fan of Jenna and has followed her adventures, finding a similar sense of emancipation as Jenna did with Samantha Deen in the first play. Deanna follows Jenna for her cooking and domestic tips but also because she is a bright and confident personality. For her, Jenna is like an accessible Ellen De Generes or Oprah Winfrey, someone with a local celebrity status. She is not aware of the details of Jenna's other exploits (this would be a revelation) but is also titillated by the exotic and flamboyant nature of Jenna.

Lastly there is the character of 'Ali' who is an amalgamation of 'types' of people and conversations Nikki and I had over the previous months. Hers is the most intolerant, suspicious, and conservative voice on the panel. We decided to make her relationship with Jenna as a sister, arguing that the proximity of their relationship would give the character permission to be more aggressive and ability to challenge Jenna. And because of her position being so opposite to that of Jenna's, the biggest obstacle, she also became the locus for greatest character change and dramatic tension within the piece. If her character was able to change or evolve her position, then this would be the vehicle for a narrative arc across the piece.

When it came to cast the actors to play the roles, it was a case of asking those friends who were planning to come and watch the performance. This was for several reasons, the most functional one being that we did not have anyone else to ask or be able to pay. This was yet another example of the flexibility to re-work creative intention with practicalities and we were able to make it work for us in a way that further informed practice methodology. By asking friends and family we knew not to expect a 'professional' performance, yet we also knew the people we asked were naturally engaging conversationalists and social performers (see Figure 18).

They were in effect 'a plant', a common device used in street and interactive performances where an actor or audience member with prior information about the show and specific instructions to do or say something is cued in the performance. This creates the effect of an improvised, unanticipated moment and is used as a way of convincing the audience of the scenario's reality, until such time as the relationship and 'dramatic twist' is revealed.

Figure 18 These guest actors, selected from the audience, had their scripted lines masked from view on the set and improvised with Jenna (Nicole Allen).

About one hour before we were scheduled to go live, we spoke to the three guest performers/plants and gave them the background for each character as described above. At that time, we also gave each of them a sheet of paper with about eight to ten significant lines of dialogue. The instructions were simply to say one of those lines in the play as part of the conversation if/when it was appropriate (see Figure 19 for an example of the script given to the participants). There was no specific order to when or who said what line, it was meant to be subject to the flow of conversation. For her part, Nikki (aware of all the lines and the narrative arc we wanted to follow in the play) acted as a kind of ring master for the unfolding conversation. As an actor she had all the narrative structure memorised and the significant lines that would trigger the next dramatic gear change. Her script, per se, was still unwritten and would be essentially improvised around known content in unknown exchanges. The result is that no one had any idea where the performance would go, how it would get there or how (if any) tensions may be resolved. Instead of a script as such it was more akin to a game of fifty-two pick up, all the cards of the deck are present, but the order is distinctive. Had we been able to re-present this play with alternate guest actors, the result would have been completely different.

Alison   Played by audience member.
           She has had several DM conversations with Jenna over the past few months of a seductive and sexting nature. She is comfortable with it and all the arousal that comes with it. It is about play. She is aware of the food posts which attracts her to Jenna for her healthy lifestyle but that's about as far as that goes. She is there to #playnice.

Alison   I really enjoy the attention that I get when I play with people online. I love the compliments and the dirty talk. I get off on it. I know Jenna knows exactly what I'm talking about

Alison   Well that's' just stupid

Alison   Well, I have a partner and they know, mostly, what I get up to. Its' something we sometimes share and something I do sometimes do for myself.

Alison   It's about exploring myself and my sexuality. Dicks, pussy sometimes both. I can be dirty in private. Something I can't do in my everyday life.

Alison   It is a bit hard to talk about properly if you don't have any experience of it. It's a bit unfair really.

Alison   Jenna and I regularly chat. But I'll be frank with you, we don't discuss food. I like to play too. I play with lots of people. Its liberating and is seductive. I have never and would never breach the trust of sharing images and videos that we share with each other. But I'm not ashamed either. I love sexting and video chats. Its hot. I really enjoy the attention that I get when I play with people online. I love the compliments and the dirty talk. I get off on it. I know Jenna knows exactly what I'm talking about.

Figure 19 This is a copy of the lines for 'Alison'. The script was written conventionally and then each character's lines were collated as above, then given to the guest actor to read from during the play at their discretion.

This approach to script and text was an attempt to harness the best of the audience interactions from the first play, encouraging them to engage. However, we controlled the environment a little more by giving them more specific identities and even significant lines to deliver. We knew if we proscribed those line deliveries as in a regular call-and-response dialogue (thereby restricting agency), then performance would stagnate, and nuances of timing and emotional poignancy would be lost. To maintain the audience's individuality, we gave them the power to interject whenever they wanted to; at least they would be interjecting with lines of dialogue we could use, and it would not derail us. We did not proscribe the same responsibilities on anyone from the web-based audience, although Nikki used her phone and the attentiveness to new notifications as a device to manage their input.

Truth be told, there were rarely any notifications that Nikki was reading. [Names (or handles) that she mentions throughout the show were a mixture of actual handles we had come across or improvised for effect](22). Just about any combination of keyboard symbols can be a username and Nikki could effectively keep making people up in the improvisation without being questioned. Echoing somewhat of the Butler (2018) approach from 'The Shed' we used this device along with the use of the phone and constant checking of it to perform several simultaneous functions:

1. 'Stage business' in order for the actor to find moments within a performance to mentally recalibrate if needed or emphasise some element of drama,
2. A premise to insert significant narrative 'beats' thus maintaining the narrative arc,
3. Created the appearance that the audience was bigger than it was, and
4. Created the impression the audience was being drawn from across multiple SMP's.

Technically Speaking

Technically I was able to replicate a staged scene as with the previous show. Again, structurally for the purposes of narrative, this was a reflection scene, something that had been 'recorded' earlier in the timeline of the play but was being acted in real-time by Nikki in the room. This

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[22] https://youtu.be/v7gmH67f2bE

required another quick scene change but this time it was simpler in that I merely covered the dining table with a green cloth, thereby vanishing it from the broadcast feed using chromakey and giving me the chance to project a different environment again. In this case it was a photograph of the bed in my bedroom, covered in clothes waiting to be folded and put away. [Nikki was able to simply sit on the side of the table in front of the camera and create the appearance of sitting on the edge of the bed in the photograph](#)[23]. And again, I was intrigued by the effectiveness of this. One of the guest actors, being so involved in watching the scene play out on the foldback monitor, did not actually realise Nikki was performing the scene right next to her in the room and mentioned afterwards that she thought it was pre-recorded. This again reinforced the ability to suspend disbelief by activating audience imagination with a specific focus whether despite or because of the layered staging.

To create the sexting exchange Nikki and I wrote a brief script that was in large part copied from an actual web-based conversation she had with someone on Instagram as Jenna. I created a fake avatar on Instagram and recorded my phone screen as we typed to each other the pre-determined text. The result was a short video file of a real-time Instagram direct message conversation, using the SMP format itself as the performance. This was then overlayed onto the green screen image of Nikki live in the room playing out the scenario (see link above). Combined, this was an effective performance method and proved again that integrated conventional web-based theatre practices can work. This also proved where breaking the fourth wall is a breach of the norm conventionally, the inverse is true in webtheatre.

Thematically

A sense of personal emancipation was becoming a strong theme for the character of Jenna. This was directly inspired by offline experiences Nikki, and I were having as a result of maintaining the Jenna identity on Instagram. Despite the months of creative development, I had not really engaged in any SMPs and was, for the first time discovering a new auto-ethnographic experience to draw from. I realised the potential of multiple avatar identities and using them, explored other identities within specific interest filters. I had my professional identities, but now I explored personal ones with much more specific (and sometimes

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[23] https://youtu.be/3BRSwqGs79I

imagined) interests. Ethnographically and theatrically, this was a vibrant time of exploration. Nikki and I both learned the language, codes, and hidden pathways to sub-cultural groups within the platform. There was no need to go to the depths of the dark web, what we came across was enough to get the idea about how complex the web could be if you chose to fall down the rabbit hole, so to speak.

Among the many experiences, patterns of behaviour began to emerge, the most startling was the gendered environment. Nikki's experience as a woman, particularly one that was sensually flamboyant, attracted types of people including fetishists, businesses looking for representatives, sugar daddies with eye-watering offers, all creating a whirlwind of attention and potential to monetise any adumbration of her character she chose. Initially, the flush of attention, the metrics of 'likes' and 'follows' per post and the lure of easy goods and money is a significant serotonin stimulus. Nikki could effectively pick and choose who she chose to interact with for whatever reason she felt at the time, a smorgasbord of potential fantasy. Her self-confidence skyrocketed. She changed her lifestyle from diet to wardrobe, a complete makeover that re-invigorated her agency and independence in her everyday life. With her web-based personal exchanges significantly influencing behaviour IRL, it drew attention from friends and family with the familiar passive aggressive moral examinations of those closest.

Conversely, as a male exploring similar experiences, there is much that is familiar about male gendered presentation of the self. Far from sitting back and filtering through the swarms of offers and compliments that come from a post, it is more a case of reaching out, initiating conversations by private messaging, returning to profiles repeatedly and trying witty comments in order to stand out from all the other men also vying for the attention of someone. This is not restricted to heterosexual exchanges but also same-sex exchanges. Instagram is awash with broad and vibrant sexual identification sub-cultures, but I always found it curious that despite the political emancipations sought by so many, gendered behaviour roles and expectations remained. The increased effort, only to be rewarded with diminished serotonin returns from few likes and follows, can do more to embed fears of self-doubt rather than liberate them I found. There are characteristics of folk theory hunter/gatherer dichotomy as features of gendered behaviour despite the promoted fantasy of liberation.

This emerging distinction between each of our experiences created, again, real exchanges with people that could not have been imagined prior to living them. They were experiences that were either of the social media platform or in direct response to behaviours stimulated by them. As we examined these exchanges, we recalled significant sentences or phrases that characterised them. We started to reflect on groupings or 'types' of people that responded in particular ways. We collected a handful of key sentences and exchanges that we both agreed would make great lines or ideas in the script. We then assembled them in a loose narrative arc and apportioned them amongst the three character archetypes that would be performed by our friends as 'plants' in the play. And so, because the text in the play was from lived experiences, Nikki had an intimate emotional well to draw on as the character. Regardless of the stimulus given to the character during the performance, she could attune her response in a more deeply reflexive way that allowed for the actor to recalibrate and the character to maintain full embodiment.

Conclusion

At the time I felt we had relinquished too much narrative control with this performance, and that the conversation was too formless, a characteristic of our creative approach generally. However, after watching it again I do not feel this way. The conversation flows smoothly and is not forced or contrived, and I found it near impossible to see where the guest actors were reading prepared lines. The narrative journey sustained itself and the dramatic tension was a good blend of melodramatic archetype and genuine relationships. Overall, the key takeaways were that the character of Jenna was much more grounded in experiences and realities that the actor could draw from. This allowed for a looser narrative structure which could be navigated more seamlessly. It was a considerably rawer experience in its narrative aimlessness but with much more control over the unexpected, because we anticipated it and indeed built it into the story.

Significantly, this performance showed that a more workable relationship between the new idea of 'social intimacy' and a fourth wall can be achieved. The premise, as before, of Jenna hosting a live-stream event, creates the direct line-of-sight connection with the audience as we showed in the first instalment. However, the added feature of characters able to speak with a

prepared and not overly complex script meant that the focus of the actor on the improvised events in the room created a corollary 'public solitude' performance. It was indeed a conversation reflective, where you could be the participant, engaged in a circle of people, following the shifting focus on the speaker. Conceptually, this performance went beyond the benchmarks set by those early practitioners, including Dixon himself, who recognised this same potential:

> In this type of interactive networked theater, the spectator's role is changed from passive viewer to interactive participant. But of equal significance to the event is the fact that the IRC audience is not simply engaged in a dialogue with the performers, but with each other

> (Dixon 2007, 508)

There was more work to be done now, with this refined understanding and given the best features of the first play, there needed to be one last instalment of Jenna to incorporate this new knowledge and hone the process. We instinctively knew that Jenna needed a conclusion. Yet we did not know what that was. Auto-ethnographically speaking, we had not finished living the experience ourselves yet.

Figure 20 The show poster for the final instalment of Lunch with Jenna

I am feeling more comfortable and familiar with directing in this space now which I think is a great thing. I was genuinely excited by todays run and having everything I need set up in a much more intimate space again. It definitely looks the best of the three so far.

Introduction

This chapter unpacks some of the revelations and conclusions drawn from the final instalment of 'Lunch with Jenna'[24]. It is intended to draw a theoretical line of connected methods and practices through the theoretical methodology, the practical application, and the lived experience of creating the triptych. In doing so, I will show how Stanislavsky's 'public solitude' (Hinckley 2008, Zarrilli 2007), and the premise of all fourth wall effect, can be reimagined for the actor and audience relationship in a web-based performance environment. There is still much to be explored in the taken-for-granted social compact of suspension of disbelief and questions remain as to what, and how, these ways of thinking about actor-audience relationships can continue to be challenged.

I began the process of creating this final instalment of the 'Lunch with Jenna' series with a greater sense of spatial awareness and the structures of the 'web-based theatre' than I had previously. This was because of a deeper understanding about the dislocation of "The normal theater hierarchy privileging the actors over the audience [which] was no longer apparent" (Dixon 2007, 508). This is a long way from early creative development with the original ensemble, where I thought the tropes and methods of conventional theatre making models (Turner 1979, Turner 1979, Ang and Gatt 2017) were redundant. For the first time I had a sense of spatial awareness in a conceptual place (and time), with actor/audience relationships mediated through technology. By having a deeper understanding of these organisational frames, I started to re-apply some of those discarded methods from earlier development sessions. In a sense, I had come full circle, the problems of staging drama which hindered progress in the first play, were now useful tools once I had a deeper knowledge about how to apply them in this fourth dimension.

The greatest lasting impression of the period creating the final instalment of this evolving triptych, was that it was all worth it for this concluding show. The only way I can think to express it, is that the process felt familiar, almost comfortable, and when developing the first play I found that my conventional practices were an obstacle to performance, in this play I felt that they underpinned it, solving all the problems that had been encountered in the previous

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[24] https://youtu.be/TQhmhpuYPN8

two plays. In creating this show there was a new purpose. To combine the practices and discoveries of the first two plays and to end the journey for 'Jenna', completing an overall narrative arc across all three plays. As a character, she was beginning to take on a personality distinctly her own. She had 'existed' for almost a year now and in that time, there emerged a correlation between Nikki developing character in synch with learning the technology and 'Jenna' having a history, depth and "private truths in a public space" (Snow 2016, 2) with others. As the writer/creators, this was in part informed by our personal relationship with the avatar and the reflections we had poured into her. Both Nikki and I entered this new chapter with a purpose unlike any of the previous plays. We were not exploring, we were not drifting, we were applying new genre methodologies of 'social intimacy' as a response to 'public solitude' (Hinckley 2008). We were now writing characters that spoke directly to individual viewers yet co-opted them to play a character within the story they were watching. This established a personal quality to the aggregate experience of the audience and reframes the fourth wall as a porous relationship creating a seemingly more focused and target-driven experience.

This focus and intent to communicate was also a full circle experience and an echo of that first fundamental 'question' at the beginning of the technical research; what did I want to say? At that time, I did not have a communicative objective, that essential Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1981, Hirschkop and Shepherd 1989, Emerson 2015) lineage of story. Instead, my experience was one of exploring the potential and abilities of technologies and platforms. My characters, narratives, and analysis were defined in response to discoveries as I made them, the essence of my research-led-practice (Smith and Dean 2009). Now, for this final play, I had a purpose of narrative, something I wanted to say, and I knew exactly how to use the technical tools at my disposal. That knowledge became like a language and with that came the ability to articulate 'the other' of social fieldwork experiences in a creative anthropological analysis.

Focus, in this case, was the need to tell the experience of Jenna but specifically, the experiences of Nikki as the actor in the role, to harmonise the lived/performed experience of identity on SMPs. Until now, Nikki's interactions with others had been benign, friendly, and transient. She had not experienced any examples of negative or abusive behaviour. However, that had changed since the last performance with a brief but shocking encounter that in many ways brought a grounded reality to the dark side of this avatar lifestyle. We had always intended this

performance to be an alternative male perspective from the previous play's focus. However, this one encounter radically changed our intention. The narrative vehicle would be a male perspective but presented through the dramatic device of Jenna's show as the filter. An example of drama on top of the web. This trigger to action and strategic purpose is the embodied creative purpose that I did not have in the first play.

During the creation of the first play (or episode), I was in a very different place mentally and emotionally but also creatively. I was focused on the methods, theories, and abstract ideas of where and how performance existed on, and within, the multiple-layered frames. The ethnographic reflection, the theoretical ponderings, the people, and project management over a drawn-out creative development was a necessary focus but ultimately inhibiting the 'freedom of expression' I felt in more familiar environments of theatres and rehearsal studios. Likewise, Nikki, as the leading protagonist in each story was a much different person from the shy and technologically clumsy actor who reluctantly started using social media. Personally, she was now emancipated, liberated and strong. Professionally she was becoming bolder and more audacious. Friends and family were known to invite her out but to be sure to come as Jenna because she was so much fun. The blurred lines of identity however were brought into sharp focus again with the web-based encounter the play represents.

As a director and a theatre-maker I was now working with a passion for a story to be told and a suite of methods and practices that I could use as tools to construct an expression of that story. As actors and writers, we each understood more intimately the experience of a web-based life. We had opened ourselves up to experiences, explorations of character and questions of morality to understand the 'other'. This will be a contentious point for the ethics and practice of nearly every ethnographer but, I consider, as an actor you must live a life that is informed by experiences broader than your own, otherwise we can never claim authority to represent it. I feel this at least is in keeping with the first principles of any auto-ethnographic discovery.

The Trigger

To understand what a web-based life is like, Nikki and I 'lived' vicariously through avatars we created on the social media platform Instagram. As those avatars, we engaged in experiences

and conversations that were unfamiliar. As observers of human behaviour, actors, and ethnographers, we were deeply embedded in the participant-observation experience. And one of those exchanges particularly evoked the common impression of web-based life, the troll. The troll in this instance identified their specific misogynistic cultural heritage as justification for their behaviour and to project the darkest human motivation towards another, involving threats of physical harm and other damnation. This was an awakening of sorts about the masks of identity, and projected identities.

At the time, Nikki was visibly shaken for days. Her motivations had always been transparent and although obfuscating her identity and family ties, tried to maintain an honesty, dignity, and manners to people. Despite the overt pretence of using social media as manufactured self-presentation, there is an emotional response when that presentation is pierced. It speaks to a complex and intuitive relationship between presentation and authenticity behind Goffman's (1963, 1971) mask.

The details of the experience as dramatised in the play form the emotional trigger for Jenna's journey[25]. It triggered a rollercoaster of emotional responses for her from fear through to shame. Ultimately though, there remained a sense of defiance, a sense of outrage that any one individual can assume control or moral authority over anyone else, especially on a medium designed for the liberation of self-identification as Nikki had experienced. A possible contribution to the shock of this exchange is in part due to its standout behaviour in context of others. Generally, we found people were friendly, direct, polite, and respectful. In the instances when people would communicate at the bounds of common decency, they would back away from the behaviour in question easily when challenged. It is this general community of behaviour that is by far the most common experience we found in the Instagram world. And so, when this specific encounter happened it stood in contrast to 'friendships' that were the norm. It was important to show this as well. Despite the immediate drama of the offensive exchange, it needed to be framed within this safer space to highlight the contrast.

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[25] https://youtu.be/bbcbM82l_DY

Time and Space

This trigger experience, as well as the other exchanges with people that had occurred over several weeks and months, formed a tapestry of 'types' of behaviour (by men specifically). The task was to bring these experiences together in a narrative that occurs over real (and proscribed) time. With only Nikki and I again creating and performing, the issue became how to get other characters interacting seemingly in real time. This story required more narrative control to hit the key dramatic gear changes and so we could not rely on audience plants as the cast as with 'Lunch with Jenna ep 39 #DMme #playnice #igetboredeasily' (although we did include a planted question from an audience member to one of the pre-recorded characters). One option was to record a text-based exchange, as with the flashback scene in the previous play, but we could not achieve that with multiple characters. Also, the narrative anomaly in the previous show was the face-to-face meeting of characters (Jenna and Ali) who would not normally do so in real life. And it was at this moment that some old staging skills came to me as a solution. I would pre-record the other characters and fake it with good old fashioned 'stage magic'. This involved recording the voices in an accent, then layering post-production distortion to mask my voice and create individual sound files for each line. During the performance I would cue the sound-file line, to be played through the audio system in the room. When Nikki said her line, I would press a button on the computer to play the recorded line of the character she was talking to. This is a very practical and analogue process that involves almost acting alongside the performer, as I could add pauses and such to create conversational rhythms in the dialogue.

By pre-recording the other characters, I would be able to 'insert' their lines at the appropriate time. Borrowing from television journalism, as when they mask the identity of a whistle blower with voice augmentation and silhouettes, I could then 'insert' the footage and sound as required.[26] This is an adaptation of the web on top of the drama, creating sound, lighting and visual effects that are actioned by stagehands during a conventional performance. Working this way was, for me, far more familiar ground. I was in a place where I could manipulate 'things' to create affect, which is much more my experience of a stage director, influencing the environment and the perception of time to create that illusive suspension of disbelief.

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[26] https://youtu.be/tv7ii03fP44

I had also learnt from the previous two plays that there needed to be a balance between structured and unstructured audience engagement. The actors needed to have a set dramatic narrative structure to follow. However, this also must be live and organic and so must be responsive to unanticipated audience responses (from none when expecting it to getting more than you bargained for). Learning from the last play, with too much freedom for the audience's characters, it becomes difficult for the principal actor to maintain focus. Allowing freedom to engage (thereby maintaining the 'liveness') and retain the dramatic arc of the character sometimes meant having to 'manufacture' emotional engagement that created an extra workload for the actor. The multiple mental and emotional states, the technical adeptness across multiple devices and the traditional split personality of actor/character in performance was weighty enough. If I could reduce the need for the actor to conduct all these aspects and instead 'live in the moment' of 'public solitude/social intimacy' it would amplify the organic (or at least comparable) experience of a web-based personality.

There was one more significant change to the play's key scene, which propels the narrative to its dramatic conclusion. In the previous two plays, I had used the narrative device of a flashback scene. This performed several functions including the performance of traditional staging for the audience and breaking up the style of talking heads to inject a little physicality and to establish a significant dramatic moment. I still felt the need for this circuit breaker scene but wanted to move away from what was already becoming a tired trope of the flashback. Instead, I established a moment behind a fourth wall for Jenna. I directed a moment of public solitude (Zarrilli 2007), of Jenna being in front of an audience the character was 'unaware' of and using it as a counter device to the norm thus far. The intention was that emotions would be running high after the antagonising posts from the web-based character 'EASY 36'[27]. Jenna would reach a moment of anxiety crisis. Dramatically I wanted to get into the thoughts of Jenna, behind the mask of the host Jenna and deeper into the 'backstage' (Goffman 1971, Sylvester 2019) experience of Jenna the person. So, I created a dramatic device whereby time for the audience and the live-stream paused and in that pause Jenna delivers a monologue of her internal thoughts and feelings. As we so often do in moments of crisis, we can sometimes process massive amounts of contextual information to decide a course of action in a split-second. This was that expanded moment for Jenna.

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[27] https://youtu.be/N4R8Vjs9NjI

The result of this moment in the play was that I had successfully inverted one of the most taken for granted theatrical conventions, thereby proving that webtheatre is capable of being a unique theatrical genre. As discussed in previous chapters, the fourth wall, is embedded as a staging convention based on the self-interested focus of an actor in character to create what Stanislavsky termed 'public solitude' (Zarrilli 2007), the absence of awareness of being watched and thereby creating an invisible wall as part of a spatial arrangement of power. The act of breaking the fourth wall is when the character acknowledges the presence of the audience and indeed confides in them thoughts and feelings that other characters do not have. This is effective only because it contrasts with this convention of the fourth wall in the first place. This scene shows that invoking the fourth wall as an internal monologue is breaking convention of direct address and the idea of 'social intimacy'[28]. Curiously, a monologue is often used as a theatrical device for a character to break the fourth wall. In this case it created one. Jenna had performed her character with total transparency of the working environment she was in, with full acknowledgment and interaction with an audience that operates effectively as another cast member. In the moment of the play when time and space pauses and Jenna speaks to herself, albeit into her phone, these thoughts are apparently hidden, private and not inviting audience interaction. Within that internal monologue she works through her experience and feelings to come to a course of action. Once resolved, she returns to the 'front stage' performance as the host of the show but now enacting her new objective.

This now creates a sense of anticipation for the audience. They are aware of knowledge that the other characters in the room are not (Solove 2007, Ellwardt, Labianca et al. 2012, Gabriels and De Backer 2016). They do not know exactly what Jenna will do but they know she will do something. So, the audience re-enters the scene from where it was also paused for this internal monologue. They come with invested feelings about Jenna and her moment of crisis. Jenna is unaware the audience knows what she has just gone through and so now there is another new dynamic to the audience and their relationship to her. The audience have also been 'taken out' of their role as co-characters in Jenna's broadcast. The inverting of convention means that the audience also recalibrates their identity within a moment and then back again but with new knowledge. Initially I thought this might break the spell of the performance and be too much for the audience to navigate, I was heartened by the fact they seamlessly adapted as the play did. In short, I was able to use the devices and conventions of theatre production as the means

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[28] https://youtu.be/2yL2s-YQFdI

of production itself. This recognition and understanding instructed how to build a performance, starting with a script specifically written for this form of theatre.

Script

The script writing process was obviously informed by the trigger event and in that exchange, it was easy to lift the actual text messages and adapt them as we needed. I could wax lyrical about the ethno-dramatic and verbatim presence of the participant voice, but quite simply, I could not make this stuff up and in that sense, why bother? Characters drawn from reality always ring truer and as I discovered from feedback this proved to be the case with many audience members telling their own experiences and variations of this abusive type of character. However, the two silhouetted characters were, as with the previous play, fragmentations of a more general 'type' of Instagram person or relationship. The construction of them as being from the USA and the UK was based on fieldwork experiences, but this also created dramatic devices that I could leverage. Being from different countries meant that a more distinctive character could be performed (further masking my identity as the performer) using accents, costume, body movement and gesture. This cultural diversity indicated the (perceived) global reach of Jenna's audience and different voices in the room. Cultural identity was a core feature of the trigger event and we both felt it important to represent this as another contextual feature to social media life. Again, some actual messages were incorporated into the script but more because of the detailed turns of phrase or cultural colloquialisms.

The final component of the script, albeit the beginning of the play, was [a journal contribution of my own](https://youtu.be/WoX3-TVSnqk)[29]. Since the trauma of the first performance back in February, I had been recovering from stress related depression and I had turned to Instagram to find/explore identity and maybe find some self-esteem and resilience as Nikki had with her Jenna avatar. In those months of healing and long conversations an observation was made, and theme appeared. My impression was that gendered behaviour was seemingly built into the platform. When I created my avatar on Instagram, I began with an intention to be genderless, I deliberately tried to not engage with typical male behaviour or interact with specifically gendered content. But somehow the system seems to know and progressively, even surreptitiously, my feed would guide predictive

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[29] https://youtu.be/WoX3-TVSnqk

behaviour. Obviously, some of my interests are probably gendered, but talking with Nikki as we explored in parallel with our avatars, we kept observing this almost shepherding behaviour, even when we liked the same post. The letter at the opening of the play and the response from Jenna are thus a distilled conversation around ideas that had evolved over months into a dramatically charged moment to start the story.

We were also able to write a narrative that was more responsive to the different techniques of script and improvisation. As with other scripts there were lines of text that needed to be delivered specifically because they triggered the next moment. By writing sequences of dialogue between characters that would be recorded and then played back this meant that Nikki could learn a script in an almost conventional way. We would then stagger these moments with intentional improvisation with the audience; question and answer or sharing a plate of food and so on[30]. It was only near the end of rehearsals that Nikki developed a methodology for herself as an actor to memorise beats instead of lines here to maintain narrative focus and control within this malleable story. With recorded effects I was also able to use these as triggers if I saw that Nikki was maybe stuck in an improvised conversation with an audience member who might prove stubborn to move on, as we discovered in the first play. For the first time since I had embarked on this journey I felt as though I could write a script with the vision of the theatrical devices available and a knowledge of their dramatic power when used effectively. This included writing a text that can be utilised as a type of instruction manual for other technical aspects of production.

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[30] https://youtu.be/TXS7agFJapg
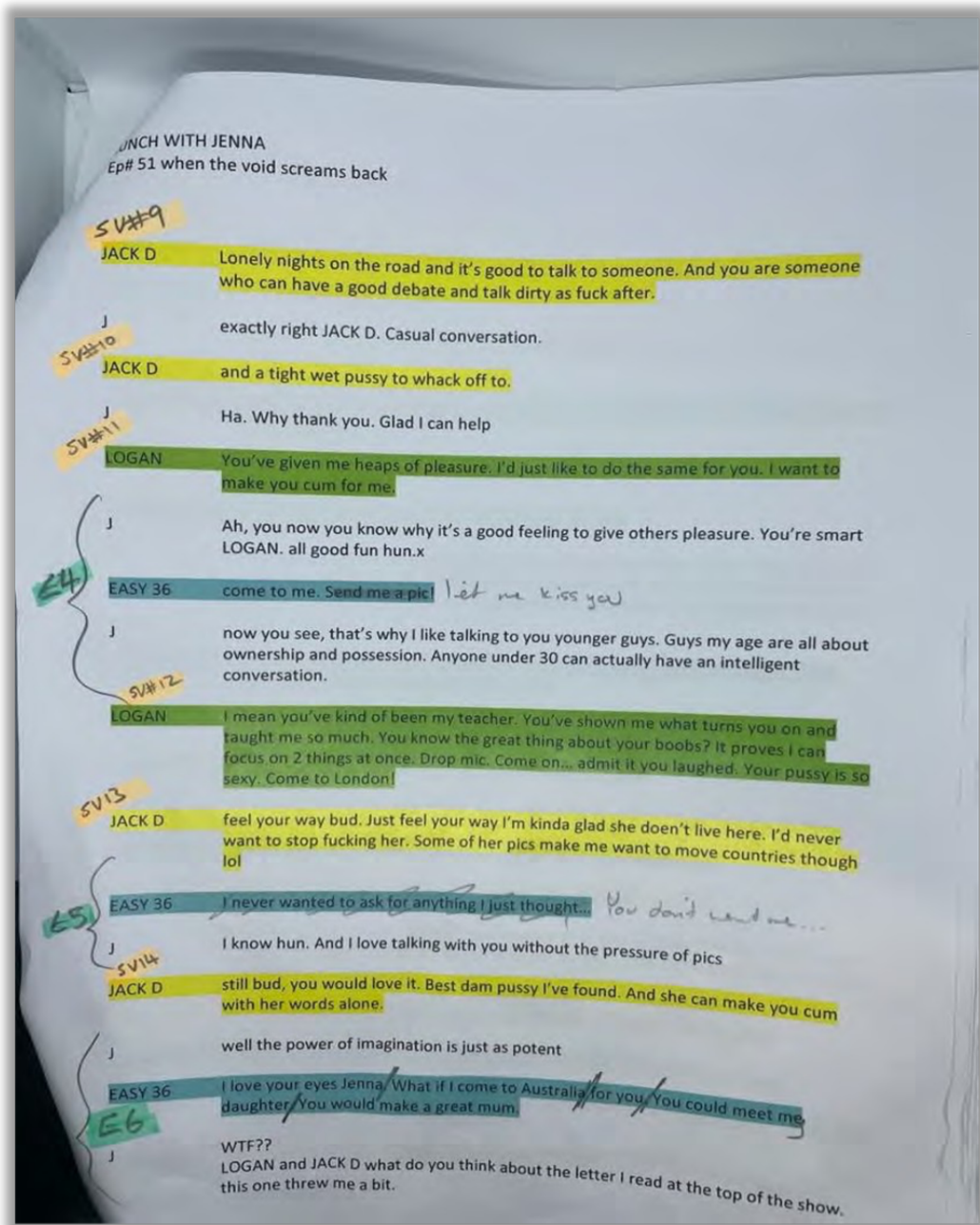
Figure 21 Excerpt of the script with characters highlighted and live technical production notes for effects cuing

Technical

Figure 21 above is an example of how the text of the script can be broken down into component parts. These component parts, or lines, were individually recorded (in my closet as the most soundproof place I could find) and then edited together on Garage Band. The instances such as cue "SV11" indicate there was a single-track sequence of pre-recorded lines from the

characters other than Jenna. I operated these files through my computer to a Bluetooth connected speaker behind the set.

This meant that the audience in the room were hearing the voices at the same time Jenna was, as in a zoom call or conference call. I was able to run one sound cue with a sequence of pre-recorded and edited lines run together. When combined with the looping footage of the silhouetted characters it created the effect that they were speaking in real time. Nikki, as Jenna, would learn the script and pause to wait for the recording of the other characters, then continue with her line. This created the effect of a continuous dialogue. We rehearsed these sequences several times to get a sense of timing to maintain the auditory illusion of organic conversation.

The green highlighted cues (E4, E5, E6) represent the visual recorded media file of the text from the character typing (see Figure 21). These animations were inserted into the broadcast image at the required cuing point, which was relayed back into the broadcast monitor in the room for the audience and Jenna to see what was happening. Like the sound cues, these would be activated to coincide with the rest of the script. There was a delay from activating the cue to it being broadcast and there was a longer delivery time of the scripted line because of the animation. However, this irregular delivery of lines created a more authentic experience, reflecting the actual delays that exist between chat feed comments and action on the formats we were mimicking. This was another case of a happy accident as it were. As with the sound cues above, the appearance to the audience in the room was that the texts appeared as part of the conversation in 'real time'. This created an immediacy which quietly demanded the audience imagine, navigate, and recalibrate the meanings of events as they unfolded.

The practical effect of creating characters as recorded audio/visual media files was that I operated in a more conventional stage manager role. It was a hybrid of multiple roles by virtue of being the only other person in the production. I positioned my broadcast desk behind the in-the-room audience and in direct eyeline of Nikki performing. This mimicked a regular technical production team working from the wings, backstage from audience. At the same time, because I could make eye contact with Nikki while she was performing, I could communicate with her to a degree. Indicating technical problems that needed longer improvisation while I fixed it or moving the story along from improvised moments with the audience by activating the next audio/visual cue. This meant Nikki did not have to worry as much about where she was in the

script if she got distracted with audience interaction. One less thing to worry about and give more mental energy to focussing on the character and the emotional journey of the play. We agreed that an even more advanced model would be a television-type broadcast with a producer 'in the ear' of the on-screen talent. Although we debated about whether that changes the dynamic of the actor in performance, we agreed that such a performance would be more a combined effort and creates a backstage narrative of its own. This would create opportunity to adjust performance qualities with even more refinement based on the audiences' responses in the moment, which are neither anticipated or perhaps not noticed by the actor at the time but can be harnessed to maintain guidance over the audience experience.

Response and Review

There is a unique effect that was created with the audience in every performance and this final show was no different. The technical production was always visible. I made no attempt to make the space look any more authentic than an improvised television studio, set up amongst the domesticity of my lounge room. The set was therefore aesthetic by virtue of its function. This created an opportunity for the audience to more readily 'accept' the drama of the performance. As with the first two plays, there was imagination work being undertaken by the audience by hiding the production values in plain sight. And despite the intricate pre-production described above, the delivery (or activations) of these were done organically 'in conversation' with the performer in a holistic environment invoking all the senses.

As a coda to the significant scene of the internal monologue, we had designed a staging effect whereby the broadcast edit would cut to Jenna delivering this direct to her phone camera. This would then be inserted into the broadcast to create the effect of watching the personal thoughts from behind a literal representation of the fourth wall (from the other side of the screen she didn't know we were watching from). Unfortunately, there was a technical error whereby the connection was not made between the remote camera and the computer. The intimacy effect was not fulfilled in this sense. However, responses from the audience, who were unaware of this technical detail, all suggested a great idea would have been to do something exactly like this. They wanted to 'see' the internal struggles of the character. For me, this was the single most successful moment of the whole creative development and fieldwork experience. An

audience, challenged by the unconventional performance style about people and experiences they had little experience of, were imaginatively engaged and emotionally connected to the character such that they easily adapted to the genre and were able to suggest staging devices that would create an even more complex experience. A seamless immersion into the suspension of disbelief.

This is further illustrated by the illusion of reality that had been established which actively engaged them emotionally. Speaking with the audience after the show, all of them acknowledged they thought the pre-recorded characters were real actors performing live, somewhere. These were people who had known of the work I was conducting, had seen the previous shows and were familiar with the complexity of the technical production. One audience member remarked how well we managed with the text-based character infiltrating the performance, even asking; how and why did we not moderate him out of the performance and let him continue to disrupt the play. Another audience member had no idea the video silhouettes were pre-recorded, that they were performed by the same person (me) or that the lines they spoke were not live or even recognisable as me. As a capstone, it was at this audience member's house that we recorded these videos some two weeks earlier. She knew we were there that day to record them and yet had lost herself within the performance such that she assumed everything was live, real and in the moment. Below is a brief interview transcript which highlights the moment of suspension of disbelief re-calibrating with 'reality'.

> Audience Member (AM): I thought someone else was in a room, because the timing, the timing was spot on… I didn't realise it was pre-recorded.

> ME: What about the video characters?

> AM: Yeah, same. I thought it was all someone in another room, like, listening and responding.

> ME: Wow! I didn't think we got away with it at all.

> AM: yeah, because you knew the magic, right? Oh no, I totally… I assumed everyone else would have as well. I said straight after the show "so, who's doing the voices"? I

thought you must have got live links to someone's houses or something. That was a 'wow' moment for sure.

This effect of a rambling and uncensored conversation is amplified by the Twitter post contributions from audience members in the room, then watching these posts appear within the broadcast. Again, Nikki would read out these comments, reinforcing the real-time interaction, re-creating the live chat room acknowledgement experience and obfuscating the pre-recorded effects in between. This created the opportunity for Nikki to 'read' other comments (which she was improvising on the spot) in order to direct the story if it started to veer off course. By implanting the fictional within the actual it created a holistic sense that this was all really happening 'now'. Once the audience accepted these features of the play (or resigned to not trying to figure everything out and just go with it), they immersed themselves into the story unfolding in front of them and the charisma of Jenna.

Finally, this was the first of the three plays that I had invited a professional theatre critic to 'attend'. They were able to view the performance as a web-based audience member only. They had no reference point to what was happening in the room, save for the picture-in-picture footage and cutaways to the audience within the show. They had some knowledge of my early experiments with live-streaming on my experimental monthly broadcast, but it had been several years since then and we had not been in much contact during this current creative development work. So, he was in a good position to watch with a sense of the higher concept but without detailed understanding of the operational craft and deeper understanding of the form. Considering I never invited someone of this authority to the first performance and witness the public failure of that experience, this was professionally a significant investment in the journey and my self-confidence since then. His review is below (see Figure 22) with a link to the original website where the full text was published[31]. This becomes yet another layer of impact of these plays and performances, which is unique to the transitory nature and longitudinal experience of these 'webtheatre' plays.

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[31] https://theadelaideshow.com.au/reviews/lunch-with-jenna-ep-51-the-void-screams-back/

Figure 22 Screen capture review pictogram from the Adelaide Show Podcast review

Conclusion

This chapter has reflected on the creative development process for the final instalment of the trilogy created from fieldwork experiences. This iteration of the Jenna character and her stories embraced the unique features of direct address to the audience, a style which is common for performers on social media and live-stream broadcasts. With a more comprehensive ability to coordinate the technical aspects of production, this play afforded a deeper exploration of experiences and encounters from the field. Specifically, the story of this play was derived from personal exchanges my lead informant, Nikki, had as the avatar Jenna that she had developed throughout. The focus on this experience, and more mastery of technical production, resulted in a play that resonated with audience watching in the room and online.

The effect on both audiences achieved the goal of suspension of disbelief with surprising efficacy. Despite little attempt at concealing the production mechanics (as a device to create the illusion of another time and place), audiences were convinced that events within the narrative were happening. The review of a theatre critic was informed by a focus on their reflections on the content and emotional journey of the character, rather than the experimental nature of the presentation. Despite some acknowledgment of the technical production, this was seen as a minor feature, without detracting from the core narrative journey.

This performance represented a harnessing of disparate features that were uncontrollable in the first production. I had developed methods for script writing and production that are unique to the live-streaming broadcast. And I had developed these into replicable practices that can be transferred to others. I had effectively developed a performance style that places direct address, or social intimacy, as the primary performance framework, inverting a conventional staging of the fourth wall for dramatic effect. These achievements respond to the obstacles encountered by the examples Dixon (2007) cites, and hopefully create opportunities for further development by others who may follow.

CONCLUSION (Epilogue)

This thesis has been an anthropological investigation into the socio-spatial relationships between actors and audience members engaged in the social act of a theatre performance. Specifically, this research investigated these relationships in the changing dynamic space of web-based broadcasting or live-streaming performances. The research was conducted over an eighteen-month period between 2017-2019, following the creative development process of an ensemble of actors as they negotiated conventions of theatre-making during this time. My re-imagined role in this research was as the director of the creative development ensemble and thus, observation of practice was conducted as an auto-ethnographic account. The creative development, and this thesis consolidate into three performance outcomes (or plays) [Lunch With Jenna ep #27 Who the Hell is Samantha Deen, Lunch with Jenna ep #39 #dmme #playnice #igetboredeasily, and Lunch With Jenna ep#51 The Void Screams Back](#)[32]. With a total running time of just over three hours (or one hundred and eighty minutes) these plays are ethnodramatic representations of the field during investigation of three key questions:

1. How do affordances of social media shape theatre/performance methods, techniques, and processes?
2. How do actor/audience engagement intersect in new ways to accommodate web-based agency and voyeurism as a simultaneous outcome?
3. If and how is the theatrical (and by extension film or tv) concept of 'the fourth wall' reimagined in this exchange?

In the early-to-mid 2010s, I had observed a growing number of contemporaries in my theatre practice, who were exploring the potential of new technologies and social media platforms which enabled livestream broadcasting of their productions. I also observed that established companies and organisations had been leveraging the capacity of web 2.0 (Han 2010, Boikos, Moutsoulas et al. 2014) to broaden their audience and reach (see https://www.digitaltheatre.com). Subsequently, I too had experimented with an independent and 'grass roots' approach with smaller projects during this time. But the lingering questions above, prompted by the observations of Dixon's summary (2007) of creative development of theatre-makers with internet technology, required deeper creative development and reflection,

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[32] https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKHM_7NL9qLdjAblnY9pDTT2G6508NUgW

without the demands of broadcast and revenue statistics as parameters of success (Cooper 2015, Williams, Kegel et al. 2015).

To answer these questions, I embarked on an eighteen-month creative development process with a small ensemble of colleagues. In effect, my home was the location of the research, and this was instructive for the perspective of the methodology I applied. Personal and domestic relationships were informed by the creative research as much as the other way around. My wife, for example, was both a co-participant and creator, especially of the final two plays, and I consider her a co-author of the final two scripts. The complete immersion of this research, creatively, intellectually, and emotionally consumed my physical environment for nearly two years. The intertwining of personal life and creative content became a personal journey as much as an academic inquiry.

A complimentary location for fieldwork was the internet itself, and the breadth of content creators working in live or live-recorded broadcast on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, Twitch and YouTube. The internet incarnation colloquially referred to as web 2.0 was, at the time of fieldwork, a dynamic place of Social Media Platforms (SMPs). These enmeshed web-based spaces of personal identity, public performance, social interaction, self-promotion, and commerce were subject to a diversity of individuals who could now access global audiences from their home and other private locations. Some of these events and the creators behind them, have worldwide audiences in the millions and are part of a celebrity economy (Marwick and Boyd 2011, Bingham 2017, Jodén and Strandell 2021). Participating actors in the physical fieldwork location of my home studio, mimicked these behaviours as part of long-form improvisations on the same social media platforms, namely Instagram and Twitter.

Inter-related features of the field, both web-based and home-based, made for a personal experience in the creative processes which can be seen in the plays derived from them. Because of the reflective nature of exploring human behaviour as theatre-makers, I embarked on an auto-ethnographic methodology. This best reflected the experiences of the field but also positioned me as researcher within established anthropological methods (Johnson, Avenarius et al. 2006, Carter 2011, Ingridsdotter and Kim Silow 2018), that best complimented the creative process under observation.

The conditions of the 'field' in this project were therefore a

1. creative development process,
2. recorded as an auto-ethnographic study; and
3. interpreted via ethnodramatic analysis.

There were several methodological frames which compliment this creative process in an anthropological way. They include the general auto-ethnographic approach, which is to say that the experience cannot be observed within the scope of mere data, but includes emotional and existential implications, and reflections for the researcher (Cranston and Kusanovich 2016, Eckersall, Grehan et al. 2017, Ingridsdotter and Kim Silow 2018). But these are also complemented by concepts such as bricolage (Kinn, Holgersen et al. 2013, Sarkar 2018) and grounded theory (Moore 2010). These thematic underpinnings resulted in the creative outcome of the three plays as a form of ethnodrama (McKenzie 2005, Saldaña 2016, Parenteau 2017, Saldaña 2018).

The application of these approaches to the ensemble's creative workshops, and my observation of various 'online' performances yielded ways of associating familiar physical and social structures of conventional theatre. I observed changes from conventional broadcasting of performed events towards uses of technology that created performance. I identified these as:

1. Web as delivery service

Using the internet as an instrument for file sharing based on conventional purchasing transactions between retailers and customers. This is a conventional use of technology as a commerce delivery system. These services are generally provided by large and established theatre companies with resources to finance the capturing (or recording) of conventional plays and broadcasting (or releasing) them into various markets across the globe. This practice reinforces the hegemony of established cultural authority and gatekeeping, and despite a breadth of research as to the efficacy of these productions, they are a site for contentious debate about what theatre is, based on taken-for-granted assumptions about theatre-making practice.

These examples do not do much to expand the genre beyond reinforcing the social status and cultural elitism of existing institutional theatrical genres. They are used as a revenue source for

producers, complement school curricula and, with the easy collection of simple transaction statistics, as continued justification for financial investment in their socio-cultural status. The works themselves often require the audience to already be accustomed to taken-for-granted practices and literature, hence their use in education. And although some productions incorporate dynamic cinematography embedded within the stage production, essentially, they are archival recordings and performers are not responding dynamically to any future audiences watching.

2. Web on top of drama

This iteration blends the environment of the drama being acted with overlayed production methods including green screen and animation. This approach sets the drama of the play (or story) in an environment that can be manipulated by production technology to complement the acted performances. This process can often involve the actors performing in a sterile studio-type environment, surrounded by a large-scale film crew. The performances require the conventional suspension of disbelief with this environment and continue to 'live' in the world of the drama. The audience, likewise, suspends disbelief in the obvious amount of production which remains 'unseen' or 'backstage' from the performance.

Again, the dynamic ability of modern production here is more an iteration of methods that are already common. This technique has been used in animation and television production and is common in the film industry. It is a method that harks back to the cyclorama of ancient theatre and its contemporary advances of fly galleries and so on. Despite the ability to create visually dynamic and fantastic locations, again they do not determine the dynamic relationship of the characters, performers, and audience because the significant feature of online audience engagement (delf-determination) is absent.

3. Drama on top of web

This iteration uses the web-based social media platforms as the 'stage' for the performance and avatars (or profiles) as the characters, as in the case of Twitter plays. Twitter Plays are observed as an original genre born of the social media space. In this example, the platform itself becomes the performance space or stage upon which the audience 'watch' the show. Characters are avatars, profiles created with a background the author creates for them. These 'character/avatars' (who are of the environment they interact within), are then almost

puppeteered by the author, who writes and posts their dramatic narratives in 'real time'. Audiences can interact with the characters who may reply (depending on the author's choice), or even talk to each other using link threads to posts. In a conventional theatre environment, these are not qualities that fall within the audience's role.

This form gets closer to the audience in that it uses the platform as the stage, one that is shared by audience and performer/character. In this way the performance can be seen to be coming to the audience, rather than the audience coming to see the performance. The audience also has more agency over when and how they 'watch' the performance, according to their personal demands including travel, work, time zones and so on. The format provides opportunity for the audience to directly engage with the characters they are watching, although the authority of the narrative remains with the author, who remains anonymous throughout the drama. It was unclear at the time, whether there was correspondence between character and audience, but the potential for it exists by virtue of the platform (the stage) itself.

4. Webtheatre

Webtheatre uses hybrid production methods incorporating features from each of the above. This is the term I used for a form of theatre, which was derived from the creative development fieldwork of this project. This is an adaptation of elements of the above, and exemplified by the creative component of this thesis, the three plays. Each of the plays sought to refine this new genre which used a combination of traditional theatre staging methods (including costume and set changes), as well as using social media platforms as per Twitter plays, and augmented production effects integrated into the broadcast. There was a live audience in the room, online watching the broadcast, and engaging on social media platforms simultaneously. The character/actors were both scripted, with space to improvise, and have the story determined by audience interaction.

The recognition of these categories, or strategies for staging narrative drama, repositions a foundation of theatre-making structuralism and the term of 'the fourth wall'. The fourth wall is an abstract term created from an unspoken agreement between actor and audience that each will suspend disbelief that the acted drama is a fiction (Geuens 2015). This is a term which describes the dualistic presence of actor and audience, as they suspend disbelief that the operations involved in creating the imagined universe of the play on a stage, are 'real'. As an

actor this concept is experienced within terms derived from theatre vernacular, often known as 'public solitude' (Hinckley 2008). In the case of webtheatre I repositioned this experience for the actor in a term I coin 'social intimacy' which inversely positions the actor/character relationship. The web-based stage is itself made up of integrated television and film broadcast hardware and software, that is customised to the audience members' position be it in the room of the performance or watching via a social media platform. Rather than suspend disbelief in this space, I actively made it part of the drama and stage (as per Twitter plays). In doing so, this convergence of phenomena, technology, and communication stylistics re-positions orthodox theatre into a new genre, 'webtheatre'.

Instinctive definitions of orthodox theatre would include the expectation of simultaneously shared, live, visceral, physical, and temporal location (Phelan 1993, Auslander 1999, Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2015, Way 2017, Sylvester 2019). Broadcast performances of any kind would not assume to be considered within this definition because of the dislocated features of each of the above. However, I believe this research has confirmed this to be plausible now, because the narrative substance of the three plays, the experiences of participants, and the performance of the story successfully produced suspension of disbelief in our audiences.

There were many characteristics of social behaviour that were observed across the social media spaces and broadcast performances I engaged in during research. Broadly, these behaviour characteristics were reflective of the aggregate nature of faceless followers and viewers (Marwick and Boyd 2011). More specifically, there is a confection of community gossip (Solove 2007, Ellwardt, Steglich et al. 2012, Huitsing, van Duijn et al. 2012) which is used as a guide for audiences to gauge what I term, a kind of 'performed authenticity'. This quality of performed authenticity (a fieldwork term) was used by audiences in chat rooms and such, to debate and determine the 'success' of the performance. That 'success' was equally measured by the performer in terms of likes, subscriptions, or income. I considered these qualities to be characteristics of both the environment of performance (social media and groups), and the followers and communities that acted as gatekeepers to the success (or otherwise) of these performances. As such, I was able to use these features to dramatic effect, which in turn created a suspension of disbelief in the audience, because the drama was reflective of their lived experiences.

When this research was conducted, 'live-streamed theatre' was a small but contested space with established organisations leveraging the technology, and term, for greater market share. Independent theatre-makers were few and far between. Despite the relative ease of access to equipment and technology, it was not a creative or business model that was supported by traditional funding bodies, legal frameworks, or the theatre sector generally.

About twelve months after the performance outcomes of this project were presented, Australia entered the first international wave of the COVID-19 epidemic. Borders were closed and cities were locked down. The performing arts sector suffered rolling interruptions ever since, dependent as it is on the co-presence of people in confined spaces. In the early months of this new pandemic environment, there was a surge of live-streamed theatre events as companies desperately tried to pivot their resources and business models and mitigate lost productivity.

As is a common feature of the internet, social media trends and circumstances change at a rapid pace. For this reason, I always anticipated that this work could be perceived as dated by the time it was published, but I always hoped it would become a benchmark, a cairn or beacon moment of theatre ontology informed by deep ethnographic inquiry. Had this work been explored now, in the post COVID-normal, emerging crypto-currency economies, and web 3.0 metaverse, I am sure the experience and the results would be different again. And in this sense, I believe the ontological discoveries about web theatre, the fourth wall and 'social intimacy' can be valuable concepts for theatre as it continues to evolve with whatever the future holds.

The journey of discovery and ultimate production of the three creative volumes that underpin this thesis were a deeply reflexive examination of preconceived notions, new experiences, and emotional challenges. In the spirit of both ethnodrama and creative analysis, the recordings of the three plays and their performances are the summary response to both the lived experience of informants and as an exemplar of new ontologies of practice. I hope this work serves as a base camp for further exploration by theatre-makers and audiences to come.

It should be observed that these chapters are not intended to deconstruct the minutiae of relationships between theory, practice and experience of each individual play or the triptych. To do so would make the performances as creative analysis, redundant. Instead, they are a creative analysis, ethnodramas to be viewed alongside the thesis. Together, these chapters and

the performances combined are designed to give the reader a composite ethnographic insight into the filtered bricolage of creative analysis. And if you happen upon this as a theatre-maker or enthusiast, I hope you read on in reflection of how this experience may inform your practice.

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