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## Entanglements with Time: Staging Stasis, Repetition and Duration in the Theatre

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**UNIVERSITY OF  
WOLLONGONG**



**Entanglements with Time: Staging Stasis,  
Repetition and Duration in the Theatre**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the  
award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy  
from

**University of Wollongong**

By

Deborah Pollard (BCA, UOW, 1989)

School of The Arts, English and Media  
2015

## **Thesis Certification**

I, Deborah Pollard, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Creative Practice), in the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualification at any other academic institution.

Deborah Pollard

October 30 2015

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## Abstract

*Entanglements with time: staging stasis, repetition and duration in the theatre* examines the historic and contemporary function of time as a compositional tool in the theatre medium in order to further the conceptualisation of developments in performance practice that counter and reflect upon the underlying temporal dynamics of mediatisation. The project is informed by my extensive history of practice as a theatre maker and proposes the term time-based dramaturgy in its analysis of work by Forced Entertainment, Back to Back Theatre, practitioner case studies, and the development of a twenty-four hour performance, *Yowza Yowza Yowza*. It asks: What is the aesthetic and political significance of compositional temporal strategies based on duration, repetition and stasis to the theatre medium in an era defined by accelerated perceptions of time?

The thesis argues that time-based aesthetics and specifically duration, repetition and stasis directly counter two dominant perceptions of time: firstly the developmental time of drama and its adoption within mediatised technology, specifically television and film, and secondly the acceleration of time as defined by mediatisation that renders information immediate and the pace at which life is now lived as one of increasing exhaustion and economic and social exclusion. As a result the thesis deploys foundational drama and theatre theory; Lehmann (2006), Halliwell (1987, 1998), Weber (2004), Szondi (1983) and Benjamin (1939), seminal nineteenth- and twentieth-century dramatists including Zola, Strindberg, Maeterlinck and Stein and recent theoretical developments; Lehmann (2006, 1997a), Fuchs (1996, 2007) Kattenbelt (2007), Boenisch (2009) and Ridout (2009) in order to re-think how forms of theatre engage with historic modes of

performance and the notion of collective 'liveness' that has defined the medium.

*Entanglements with time* seeks to advance recent theoretical conceptions of a shift in time as a representational tool to a central aesthetic concern of the theatre medium (Lehmann 2006, 1997b) and provide insight into the temporal strategies that underpin the practitioner's work and that of other contemporary practitioners in the field. It does this firstly, by interrogating examples of contemporary performance that exemplify time-based compositions informed by the dramatic framework and secondly, by examining the artistic processes deployed in the creation of three works, including a performance that directly engages with the theoretical proposition of time-based dramaturgy as well as offering invaluable insights on future possibilities of time-based applications.

In doing so, the thesis sets out to address a gap in scholarship on contemporary Australian performance and offers the perspective of artist-observer in its analysis of the compositional strategies intrinsic to the development of forms of theatre.

## Chapter 1. The field of temporal aesthetics in theatre: an introduction

### A fascination with time

Outside of me, in space, there is never more than a single position of the hand and the pendulum, for nothing is left of the past positions. Within myself a process of organization or interpenetration of conscious states is going on, which constitutes true duration.  
(Bergson, 2001: 108)

'Time' as a thesis is complicated and fascinating. The many ways in which time has been perceived can appear unwieldy and far-reaching, a testimony to its allure. To name just a few, 'time' can be experienced as a measurement of past and future, as chronology, as cycles of nature and the cosmos, as mathematical equations and as tempo and rhythm. French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) perceived time in yet a different way again. In the opening quotation to this chapter he argues time is a bodily experience, a phenomenon that exists as part of consciousness. Bergson's notion of *true duration*, first introduced in his 1889 essay *Time and free will: an essay on the immediate data of consciousness*, offers a radical alternative to what he saw as the dominance of the mechanical measurement of time by the clock. Is time a quality, as Bergson argues, an indivisible interior experience beyond the rationality of thought and words or is it an abstract quantity dictated by the invention of the clock? Others too have opened up profound insights on the experience of time. Phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who is often seen as complementing the work of Bergson, argues that the *essence* of time is subjective experience rather than an absolute and universal system as Isaac Newtown (1643–1727)

had proposed.<sup>1</sup> Artists have proposed alternative relationships to time that, like Bergson's and Husserl's conceptions, foreground time as a subjective experience. Composer Hans-Peter Kuhn (1997: 109) posits that the temporal underpinning of music can be perceived differently according to the frame of mind and location of the listener in a given context. In his book *Silence* (1978) John Cage (1912–1992) draws on his experiences of Zen Buddhism to explore the subjective experience of duration, a time frame, he posits, that when consciously observed over ever increasing increments shifts from an experience of boredom to one of new encounter.

However, as an everyday understanding, linear development and chronology arguably remain the dominant conception of time. Robert Hassan and Ronald E. Purser point out that even the sweeping shift in physics, from Newton's theory of Absolute Time (1687) to Albert Einstein's 1905 ground breaking theory of Relative Time, barely impacted on the way in which time was perceived in the everyday sense (2007: 8). As the clock regulates life into hours, minutes and seconds it shapes a particular understanding of time that has real world impacts on how life is structured and measured, an understanding that can be reductive. As Kevin K. Birth argues, its simplicity as a concept and a mechanical device reduces complex mathematics, astronomy and mechanics to a simple representation of time. According to Birth, this simplicity potentially limits desires and even capacities to seek out less transparent perceptions of time (Birth, 2012: 9).

It is well established that clock time as a notion is aligned with technological development. For Edward Palmer Thompson (1967), the current understanding of clock time has its roots in late eighteenth-century industrialisation. More intuitive preindustrial perceptions of

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<sup>1</sup> See Hassan and Purser, 2007: 5.

time such as those aligned to the cycles and tasks of agriculture changed with industrialisation and the synchronisation of the labour workforce. Thompson ruminates on this historic relationship to time with a brief historical overview of the precision and purpose of the wristwatch. The importance of early versions of the wristwatch, he notes, lay less in its accuracy and more as a display of wealth; they were not commonplace items. However, with increased industrialisation and labour synchronisation, being on time became an imperative and the wristwatch became increasingly accurate and commonplace. 'Time' became a commodity and punctuality became a necessity to increase efficiency and productivity, and the ubiquity of the clock with its metering of life, as Hassan and Purser note, 'seeped into our consciousness and suffused our cultures' (2007: 8).

In the current climate of electro optical technology (Virilio, 2000) and networked technology (Hassan and Purser, 2007, Tomlinson, 2007), the perception of time and its impact on how life is lived has again radically shifted in response to technological change. For Paul Virilio screen-based technologies' distortion of time and space, creates an illusion of ubiquity and presence (2000: 7). For John Tomlinson (2007) and Hassan and Purser (2007) this shift amounts to a greater emphasis on immediacy and availability. 'Time' is no longer perceived as a mere dictate of when to start and finish work but a dilemma of how to create enough time to achieve everything that needs to be done. For those who can participate in this acceleration, (there are of course those marginalised groups who are left behind), contemporary life is filled to capacity and operates at an increasingly accelerated pace.

Within this culture of speed and spatial temporal disconnection, the question might be asked: does the seemingly antiquated institution of the theatre still have a place beyond that of a museum relic? In this

environment the theatre cannot help but appear anachronistic. It takes up time, it requires going to a venue and, as Hans-Thies Lehmann points out, it is now undeniably 'no longer a mass medium' (2006: 16). The theatre as Nicholas Ridout notes in general terms, is a social art form known as a place that represents historically specific social situations (2009: 13–14). Given the changed circumstance how might the theatre now reflect on its surroundings?

How time is understood and the ramifications it has on the way in which life might be experienced at the level of the individual, the social and the cultural and how the theatre might reflect, comment and present this situation is a discussion this thesis seeks to explore. To do this it takes up the question: what is the aesthetic and political significance of compositional temporal strategies such as duration, repetition and stasis to the theatre medium in an era defined by accelerated perceptions of time?

To address this question the thesis presents a two-tiered argument. It firstly argues that temporal dramaturgies of duration, repetition and stasis counter historical modes of theatre and its temporal structures — specifically Aristotelian-derived temporal arrangements of 'beginning, middle and end', 'surveyability' and 'unity' that render the time and place of theatre as fixed and meaning and perception of performance material as self-contained. Further to this it argues that these staging strategies create a distinctive response within a media-saturated environment by rethinking the theatre medium's engagement with collective liveness. As a consequence theatre positioned as postdramatic claims a significant point of distinction to the contemporary mediatised situation.

In doing so the thesis argues that time-based aesthetics directly counter two dominant perceptions of time: firstly, the developmental

time of drama and its adoption within mediatised technology, specifically television and film influenced by late nineteenth century illusionary drama; and secondly, the sense of immediacy and acceleration of time as defined by mediatisation. Mediatisation, the thesis argues, influences the pace at which life is now lived and the states of increasing exhaustion and economic and social exclusion that underpin the contemporary condition. As a consequence examples of contemporary theatre that employ temporal dramaturgies forge a distinctly different response to and reflection on the complexities of twenty-first century living, its temporality and technology-induced ubiquity. The following sub-categories of this chapter act to expand upon the key terms and concepts employed in the thesis argument as outlined above.

### Time, mimesis and theatre

When the term 'theatre' is used what exactly does that term refer to? Furthermore when referring to 'time in theatre' what precisely does that mean? The etymology of the term 'theatre' is derived from the Greek word *theaton* meaning 'a place of seeing' (Scott and Liddel cited in McAuley, 1999: 37). In emphasising the physical designated space of the spectator, the very definition of theatre makes apparent that the collective presence of both the spectator and the performers is foundational to the way the theatre communicates. The live environment is considered to be what fundamentally distinguishes theatre's mode of communication from that of other art form mediums. Rather than create an object that exists beyond itself such as a painting or communicates via electronic media from another time and place, the theatre conjures up imaginary worlds right in front of the spectator. The theatre experience is determined by what takes place between a particular gathering of people in a specific time

and place. Or in other words the theatre is 'a place where a unique intersection of aesthetically organized and everyday real life takes place' (Lehmann, 2006: 17).

Communication, in this sense, as Lehmann argues, is not necessarily limited to spoken dialogue between the players or between the players and the audience. Instead, it is predicated upon processes that are both visible and hidden to the practice of theatre (Lehmann, 2006: 17). This involves all aspects of presentation, including the presence of the mechanisms of its staging. They are an accepted part of the theatre experience and how it presents performance material and communicates ideas. What the theatre chooses to foreground or inversely mask of its mimetic apparatus and the live environment can fundamentally change the nature of its engagement with the spectator. The notion of time is one such process fundamental to this idea. Whether or not collective presence or the duration of an event, for instance, are in some way made apparent or inversely masked by the immersion that the fictive world creates, can greatly distinguish the way in which the performance is experienced. This distinction of temporal engagement in the theatre is a central concern of this thesis. The research seeks to demonstrate how theatre practitioners have employed the temporal conditions of the collective live environment of theatre as a strategy to both rethink its mimetic traditions and capitalise on the possibility for effecting different kinds of reception. The historical positioning and understanding of the term mimesis is key to this idea.

Mimesis is a difficult term to succinctly define. As Stephen Halliwell (1998: 51-52) observes, this is largely due to its varied application throughout western art history informed by the differing opinions of Plato and Aristotle. For Plato, according to Patrice Pavis (1998: 213), mimesis refers to 'a copy of a copy', an imitation concerned with

outside appearances. In contrast, Aristotle, writing directly about Tragedy and its composition in *Poetics*, defines mimesis as a mode, for example, an 'imitation of a thing and the observation of narrative logic' (Pavis, 1998: 214). This thesis concerns itself with the historic conflation of Plato and Aristotle's viewpoints that first came to prominence in seventeenth century neoclassical drama as the representation of a believable dramatic plot to which the representation and composition of scenic time is key. Consequently, the thesis concerns itself with alternative engagements of time other than traditional understandings of time as a representation that underpins dramatic literature.

The staging of dramatic literature arguably still dominates understandings of the term 'theatre' within the broader community. As Lehmann points out, despite theatre offering different aesthetic experiences since the 1970s, the vast majority of spectators still expect enactments of classic and modern drama texts that will without question offer 'comprehensible story, coherent meaning (and) cultural self affirmation' (Lehmann, 2006: 19).<sup>2</sup> Given this preferential positioning of historic literature-based theatre, when referring to time in the theatre, the dramatic model's particular temporal composition becomes paramount to discussions and understandings of the way in which the theatre is most commonly thought to structure time.

Drama has a very specific relationship to time. David Barnett explains that at its most fundamental the dramatic model is characterised by two key processes: 'it represents and it structures time' (2008: 14).

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<sup>2</sup> This situation also has resonance for an Australian context as evidenced in Rosemary Neill commentary on the programming choices of the major state theatre companies. While Neill's argument is largely about the distinctive lack of Australian playwrights represented on Australian stages her account also indicates that classic and modern plays still dominate state theatre company programming (see Neill, 2013).

This model is derived from the dramaturgical composition of tragedy as proposed by Aristotle in *Poetics*. For Aristotle (1987), a tragic plot is composed of a developmental framework of 'beginning, middle and end'. Within this structure all aspects of the plot must be unified so that they make sense as a whole. The duration of a tragedy, he claims, is determined by the length of the plot, a length that should remain *surveyable* and able to be held in the memory. Aristotle's composition, Halliwell explains, is inseparable from the causation and motivation of the dramatic action itself (1987: 99). In other words, how the events of the plot are structured within drama, and how time is structured, is foundational to how the dramatic model creates meaning. This notion positions temporal composition as a powerful strategy in shaping spectator perception and reception in the theatre medium.

The French neoclassicist introduction of the three unities of time, place and action is a key example of the significance of temporal composition to reception in the theatre. As discussed in chapter two, translated adaptations of the *Poetics* within neoclassical France introduced rules intended to enhance the verisimilitude of a dramatic plot by restricting the story to a single action, place and duration of time (Gilbert, 1940: 309). In effect, the unities were underpinned by the political agendas of the church and French State. They provided a means to contain the creative imaginings of the dramatists and consequently the spectators by limiting the performance material to what was thought to constitute a 'believable' and acceptable story.<sup>3</sup>

A believable narrative underpinned by realistic fictionalised time frames has remained an enduring aim of dramatic theatre. The Naturalist theatre, for instance, in the interests of creating a more

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<sup>3</sup> Phillip Zarilli argues that the neo-classical unities were born out of an era in search of rules and regulations that would 'safeguard' particular values such as class decorum. The theatre was enlisted to serve the interests of both Church and state (Zarilli et al, 2006: 165).

truthful reflection of late nineteenth-century life returned to the three unities as both a writing and staging principle. As discussed in chapter two, the representation of an uninterrupted passing of time and the verisimilitude of the representation of its passing became of paramount concern for the Naturalist dramatists and directors. Despite their experimental developments in staging, and their innovative position on what and who the late nineteenth-century stage should represent, the Naturalists, as Peter Szondi (1929–1971) remarks, in fact maintained a ‘conservative dramaturgical position’ (1983: 210), in how they structured their works as a development of action. However, this is not to suggest that all modern drama subscribed to this dramaturgy. Modernist experiments in twentieth-century drama indeed countered and resisted the temporal structure of developmental action, particularly in response to the Naturalist model.<sup>2</sup> Szondi argues playwrights such as August Strindberg (1849–1912) and Maurice Maeterlinck’s (1862–1949) experimentation of the temporal conditions pertaining to plot threatened the developmental time of drama with stasis (1983).

But do these playwrights unsettle the fundamental teleology of drama in the way Szondi proposes, that of a reception shaped by a central story? Bertolt Brecht (1896–1956) is another case in point. In attempting to interrupt the linear flow of action with strategies such as direct address, visible technology, placards and so forth (see Brecht, 1978a), Brecht brought to the fore the relationship between temporal structuring and spectator reception. In his essay on Brecht, ‘What is Epic Theatre?’ Walter Benjamin argues that ‘interruption’ ‘is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring’ (1968: 327).

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<sup>2</sup> The focus on nineteenth century Naturalism is by no means meant to position Naturalism’s representation of time as a ‘straw man’ to postdramatic experimentation. Naturalism is positioned as a significant historical precedent that established a specific temporal composition that the postdramatic reflexively draws upon and expands out of. See Chapter 5 for a more in-depth discussion of postdramatic’s inclusivity of linear narrative as exemplified by the work of Back to Back Theatre.

Brecht's 'quotable gesture', that of recounting an event as a strategy that cites and in turn comments upon the action, is intended to interrupt the action. But, as argued by Benjamin, this strategy does not operate at the level of content but is a formative interruption. It is a temporal interruption intended to bring about a particular shift in spectator engagement to one of action over empathy (see Brecht, 1978b).

Benjamin's formalist reading of this Brechtian device is a useful tool for comprehending how a work of theatre might rethink temporal composition via devices that interrupt as a means of generating experience and meaning in and of itself. In other words, it presents an opportunity to rethink the temporal arrangements of theatre in order to create an entirely different understanding of content in relation to form, and indeed the shaping of audience reception as central to this reconfiguration. The modernist playwrights that Szondi referenced above did not set out to interrupt the reception of their works in this way. They, like Brecht — regardless of his radical interruptions (*Verfremdung*) — ultimately maintained the 'story' as the central mode of engagement.

In light of the role temporal composition appears to have in shaping spectator perception and reception in the theatre, this thesis is interested in the possibilities that can arise if the theatre medium abandons the developmental composition of story as its central mode of expression. What other types of engagement then become possible? And in turn what perceptions of temporality in the theatre other than representation also become possible? Writing in 1997 Lehmann posits that over the past twenty years theatre developed a 'particular and original tempo, and with it, a plurality of *aesthetics of theatrical time*' (Lehmann, 1997b: 33 [emphasis in original]). This idea becomes possible if 'time' in the theatre is no longer the scenic

time of the dramatic plot.

In his seminal work *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), Lehmann argues that the centrality of story (*muthos*) within theatre is the defining difference between drama and what he terms postdramatic theatre, specifically experimental theatre practice that took place post-1960s. However, as Lehmann notes, postdramatic theatre does not exist beyond drama, but rather in relation to it and 'should be thought of as a dismantling and deconstruction within drama itself' (2006: 44). Lehmann describes such practice as having created a different understanding of performance text other than 'the presentation of a fictive and simulated text-cosmos' (2006: 55). He cites the shift from the representation of time of the dramatic model to time operating as an aesthetic within the theatre medium as one of the fundamental aspects informing postdramatic practice (Lehmann, 2006: 153–162).

This research enquiry aims to further Lehmann's analysis of temporal aesthetics within postdramatic practice by directly drawing upon my experiences of time-based experimentation within theatre as both a theatre maker and dramaturg. It does this firstly through a creative process undertaken as part of this research. The process directly responds to and elaborates upon theoretical understandings of temporal aesthetics as explored within the work by providing access to first-hand accounts of process and documentation of findings. Further to this my experience in the field also underpins the analysis of time-based strategies observed in the work of other practitioners explored within this thesis as well as providing first-hand accounts of the rationales and processes underpinning existent examples of my time-based experimentation. This allows the research to delve deeply into the creative rationales informing time-based exploration and the diverse findings that each different example of practice offers in

terms of how the theatre responds to the current cultural and political context through diverse and unexpected experiences of time.

Within the current instantaneous digital culture and its shaping of everyday experience of time, the thesis examines how time-based dramaturgy gives the theatre an alternative mode of engagement within this accelerated culture of communication. By destabilising the temporal structures that underpin the mimesis of dramatic theatre, the theatre medium is able to reflect upon the contemporary condition through an experience of time that directly references the changed temporal dynamics that for many now shape how life is lived. In so doing it also resists and rebels against the habitual receptions that mediatisation now engenders, receptions directly informed by the long history of Western theatre tradition that, as Samuel Weber argues, offer a fixed and self-contained comprehension that positions the spectator as an observer who can watch the action from a safe remove (Weber, 2004: 3). As a consequence the thesis demonstrates not only the aesthetic impact on historic form within theatre but the political potential of time-based dramaturgy as a strategy that can both challenge centuries-old patterns of reception and still offer relevant considerations and commentary on everyday life situations.

### Time as an aesthetic and dramaturgical strategy

The term 'temporal aesthetic', as used in this thesis, draws upon the etymological understanding of the Greek word *aisthestai*, 'to perceive', an understanding, Peter M. Boenisch argues, that extends beyond the usual associations of the sublime and the beautiful to something that actively affects perception (2007: 104). That given, if 'time' is positioned as an aesthetic act, a staging strategy, within the

theatre medium, the experience of time becomes crucial to the way in which performance material is experienced and perceived. This idea is closely intertwined with time-based dramaturgy; a crafting of spectator experience through the way in which time is structured and composed.

As this research seeks to demonstrate, in aesthetic terms, theatrical time within postdramatic theatre can be experienced as both a measurement, specifically a foregrounding of its own duration, and as a quality, such as the example offered by Bergson (1889), that of a different experience of time that exists beyond the rationales of linear representations of time and belongs to consciousness. Temporal experiences like these become possible via dramaturgical strategies that seek to make apparent the time of the actual performance itself. Lehmann argues that in examples of experimental practice time is no longer represented as it is within a dramatic story, but rather is presented as a visible and central aesthetic of the theatre experience (1997b: 35). Time is no longer separate to the spectator who sits within his or her own time watching the time of the fiction; instead it has become 'the object of attention, reflection and composition in the aesthetics of the theatre' (Lehmann, 1997b: 33).

Into the existing discourses offered on time in the dramatic theatre, such as compressed scenic time that aims to represent the time span of a plot and developmental time that progresses the action of a story through a casual linearity, this thesis introduces an understanding of 'time' as a staging and dramaturgical strategy of the theatre. This reflexive dramaturgical approach is informed by my initial training in dramatic theatre, which has remained a significant frame of reference

for my practice.<sup>3</sup> Conceptual traces of the historic dramatic framework even within works that are now devoid of story or character continue to be a reference and point of departure that inform my experimentations with time as a dramaturgical tool, often employed to interrogate the historic mimetic aesthetic of theatre and the reception it can invite.

Dramaturgy of time is a useful term borrowed from Lehmann (1997b: 39) and is key to this research enquiry. The term 'dramaturgy' itself according to Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt in their critical overview, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (2008), is a 'slippery term' and one that shifts accordingly with various changes throughout the history of western theatre. Central to its contemporary usage is its historical relationship with dramatic plot. Aristotle's *Poetics*, suggest Turner and Behrndt, is arguably the first example of dramaturgical writing in Europe. Derived from the Greek *dramaturgia*, meaning composition of the play, dramaturgy is exemplified in *Poetics* through Aristotle's discussion on the composition of the events (pragmata) that make up the structure of a play.

The shift from an analysis of the play as literature to its context in relation to staging (most notably through Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) and Brecht) marked a radical change in dramaturgical engagement.<sup>4</sup> However, the difference in its contemporary usage stems from a departure from story-based narrative as the central focus. Composition as a term is still widely employed within scholarship to explain dramaturgy within experimental performance, but it is, as Turner and Behrndt observe, a very different

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<sup>3</sup> I initially trained in drama as a part of an undergraduate degree at the University of Wollongong 1986–89 and before this was actively engaged in amateur theatre productions of plays and musicals in Canberra.

<sup>4</sup> The role, as opposed to the concept, of dramaturg has its roots in Germany, which stem largely from Lessing's critical engagement with literary texts to Brecht and others instigation of a more practical engagement of a 'production dramaturg' (see Turner and Behrndt, 2008: 7).

compositional logic to the concerns of the events that make up a plot (2008: 31). Terms such as visual dramaturgy and indeed my own use of the term *time-based dramaturgy* connote the shift in emphasis on different staging concerns. For Turner and Behrndt:

All of these [terms] describe the turn from a compositional logic based on the primacy of the verbal text, to a logic according to which primacy is not assumed, so that other elements (visual, sonic, physical) may be equally significant, or may dominate, or may combine to create as Lehmann puts it, 'a mutual disruption between text and stage'. (Turner and Behrndt, 2008: 31)

As outlined above this thesis focuses on three pivotal dramaturgical strategies that seek to distinguish temporal aesthetics from the developmental time of drama; they are duration, repetition and stasis. Although not the focus of this project, Robert Wilson and composer Phillip Glass' six-hour long opera *Einstein on the Beach* [1976] is a seminal example of the way in which duration, repetition and stasis are employed as dramaturgical strategies central to the experience of the work and spectator perception. These temporal strategies counter developmental time in a number of ways. In *Einstein on the Beach*, the spectator, free to come and go from the auditorium, constantly interrupts the Aristotelian derived notion of a unified and surveyable whole, while the slow and repetitious choreography and music score presented over the six hour duration of the work creates a sense of slowness or stasis that is further compounded by glacial paced movement and tableaux vivant. The performance creates a unique experience of time unto itself that seems to be amplified the moment one momentarily exits the theatre and enters the quotidian time of the foyer. In describing the work, Lehmann also observes the distinctive quality of time, noting that the

work's slowness creates the impression that performers 'store time' and are like 'kinetic sculptures' (Lehmann, 2006: 156).

Time in *Einstein on the Beach* is experienced as a 'continuous present' (1992) to use the term Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) coined in her 1925 essay 'Composition as Explanation'. Stein, Bonnie Marranca argues, was interested in creating a different experience for the reader of her text and for the spectator at the theatre (1994: 3), which in part was a reaction based on Stein's experience of the temporal structure pertaining to modern drama. For example, in her lecture entitled "Plays" (1934) Stein speaks of a different understanding of theatre from the syncopated time of drama that she claims made her nervous. Instead she envisaged theatre as a landscape.

Stein's compositional proposition, elaborated upon in chapter 4, counters linear developmental action and replaces it with stasis. Landscape aesthetics offer an experience of time through a spatial composition that in turn creates a temporal stasis. Stasis in the context of theatre presents a fundamental departure from the etymological definition of the term drama derived from the Greek *dram*, 'to do, act, perform'.<sup>5</sup> The absence of action, dramatic dialogue and narrative development as such in *Einstein on the Beach* is resistant to this definition. Theodore W. Adorno (1903–1969) similarly addresses this idea in relation to Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*. For Adorno the absence of developmental action in Beckett's dialogue is fundamentally and consciously antagonistic to the structuring of meaning as understood by drama. Its lack of meaning, Adorno notes, becomes meaning in *Endgame* (Adorno, 1982: 136–145). Likewise Wilson also notes a similar shift in comprehension. He claims *Einstein on the Beach* does not need to tell a story or illustrate Einstein the

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<sup>5</sup> See Etymology dictionary online, 2015.

man, this story is already known. Instead it is a 'poetical interpretation of this man' (Wilson qtd in Verges & Obenhaus, 1984).

### Time back in the spot light

Recently there has been a renewed interest in the employment and ramification of time within performance. Indicative of this is Performance Studies International (PSI) 2013 conference 'Now Then: Performance and Temporality' and Performance Research special edition 'On Duration' (vol. 17, no. 5, 2012).<sup>6</sup> Scholarship in this area for the most part, however, tends to focus on duration and time within Performance Art, a practice Simon Shepard and Mike Wallis argue began during the late nineteen-sixties and seventies and developed out of a rejection of the conventional approaches to representation within both visual arts and theatre (Shepard and Wallis, 2004: 83). Within the field of performance art Adrian Heathfield notes there is a long tradition of 'the artist exploring and testing their self through performance' (Heathfield, 2004: 93). Time is an evident strategy of this testing. The employment of inordinate lengths of duration in this context is often couched in terms of endurance; an activity or task that over time creates states of heightened psychological and physical duress aimed at emphasising the presence of the artist via their corporeal limitations or heighten the ramifications of their actions carried out over time.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing Stuart Grant, Jodie McNeilly, & Maeva Veerapen's (eds) *Performance and temporalisation: time happens* (2015) was also published. This work stands in addition to the publications listed. It focuses on the emergent field of performance philosophy and consequently employs varying philosophical traditions in relation to perception of time as it underpins a variety of different art form practices and everyday life activity. This differs to the focus of this thesis on the compositional structuring of time within theatre as a dramaturgical aim to change the experience of time and reception in the theatre medium and how such shifts might address the shifting temporal dynamics at play within contemporary life.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of practice that employ duration as endurance see the collection of artists' statements collated in the special edition on 'Endurance Art' *Performing Arts Journal*, 1996 vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 66–70. In addition see Marla Carlson's (2010) writing on Marina Abramović's endurance practice.

From recent activities it would appear that durational performance has made a fashionable comeback. For example, in 2014 Tehching Hsieh's year-long durational performance *Time Clock* (1980–81) was given a major exhibition at Carriageworks in Sydney. The exhibition took the form of film and photographic documentation taken by the artist during his year-long self-incarceration in his New York Studio. In addition, high profile events such as Kaldor Art Projects Sydney presentation of *13 Rooms* (2013) that featured durational works by celebrity contemporary artists such as Damien Hurst, Santiago Sierra, Marina Abramović among others, and the release of Abramović's film (2012) *The artist is present* are all testimony to this current interest in durational practice within Performance Art. As a consequence of this resurgence of durational practice, the concept of *time* is now at the forefront of scholarship and has produced a number of partnerships between artists and scholars; of note is Adrian Heathfield and artist Tehching Hsieh (2009) *Out of Now: The lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* and Edward Scheer (2010) and artist Mike Parr *The infinity machine: Mike Parr's performance art 1971–2005*.

In relation to the work of these two performance artists both Heathfield and Scheer have embraced the notion of the aesthetics of duration alongside Bergson's proposal of subjective experiences of duration as frameworks for analysis. Heathfield argues that since Peggy Phelan's (1993) far reaching theory on the ephemeral nature of live performance, Performance Art has principally been interpreted as a model of time predicated on the singular time of an event, and the performance an 'echoing intrusion that disrupts and renders forever incomplete the structures of consciousness, memory and representation' (Heathfield and Hsieh, 2009: 13). Aesthetics of duration, he argues, offers new insights into talking about time in

performance, as it highlights experience over structure. In omitting structure from his discussion Heathfield omits discussions of temporal composition and its relationship to aesthetics of reception, an omission that is perhaps in keeping with the work of Hsieh that was for the most part performed without an audience present.

Heathfield's omission, however, disregards how the spectator might now engage with the temporal arrangement as evident within the much publicised and exhibited documentation of the work.

The focus of his argument instead emphasises the subjective experience of the performer. In the case of Hsieh, Heathfield argues, the artist's first-hand experience of the slow passing of time is brought to the fore, an experience that in and of itself constitutes a form of resistance to the accelerated time of late capitalism (Heathfield, 2000: 111). This distinction of a Bergson-inspired analysis of subjective experience of time as that of the artist's experience is the fundamental distinction between recent scholarship on durational aesthetics within performance studies and the research interests of this thesis, which seeks to analyse the ways in which the theatre medium's composition of time might impact on spectator reception.

Scheer, on the other hand, does address the structuring of time in relation to perceptions of time. He argues that Parr's engagement of time does heighten perceptions of temporal experience in varying ways across the artist's broad body of practice (2009: 4). However, he positions this visual artist's aesthetic exploration, not in relation to the temporal composition underpinning dramatic history (albeit noting briefly that Parr's intent is not to produce stimulating entertainment), but instead as a critical intervention into the visual art world, and 'the symbolic system it both represents and reproduces' (Scheer, 2009: 5). He goes on to explain that the artist is

returning the experience of duration to the artwork, which in turn makes apparent 'sense perception as the fundamental aesthetic experience' (Scheer, 2009: 10).

By comparison to the amount of scholarship investigating time within the fields of Performance Art and Live Art in relation to visual art theory, it would appear similar research into the aesthetic implications for time-based experimentation within the theatre medium is less prolific. However, this is not to overlook the important contribution that Lehmann's (1997b) *Time structures/time sculptures: on some theatrical forms at the end of the twentieth century* (2006) has contributed to this area, nor the work of Gay McAuley's (1999) writing on spatial aesthetics, an area which although related, is beyond the specific scope of this research enquiry.<sup>8</sup> Michael Kirby's early 1969 *The art of time: essays on the avant-garde* is also a noteworthy examination in its focus on the temporal historical contexts that informed avant-garde theatre and performance practice. In addition Jonathan Kalb's recent publication *Great lengths: seven works of marathon theater* (2011) directly addresses temporal aesthetics in relation to the aesthetic practices of the theatre medium.

Written from the perspective of a spectator, Kalb's examination traverses eight case studies that include examples of drama and experimental theatre such as that of Robert Wilson and the UK theatre company Forced Entertainment. Its premise is to examine

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<sup>8</sup> In her publication *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (1999) McAuley examines the various employments of spatial reality in the shaping and communication of meaning within the theatre medium. While the interrelationship of time and space within theatre creates common ground in regards to audience perception, as seen in the example of Stein's landscape analogy, McAuley's emphasis on space offers different points of entry into discussions on theatrical perception that do not extend to temporal composition and dramaturgy.

why certain theatre productions of inordinate duration create such intensely satisfying and unique experiences in the theatre, including those that do not engage with a singular story, a situation Kalb admits to as very surprising (2011: 22).

In terms of an analysis of aesthetics of time in the theatre Kalb goes some way to comparing the difference between the representational compression of time employed in the narrative of Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* [1985], for example, to the resistance of such narrative development in Forced Entertainment's relentless question and answer game *Quizoola* [1996]. However, he does not discuss in any depth how these two vastly different engagements of time within theatre — the representation of time and the presentation of time — operate at the level of production, and differ at the level of composition. Nor does he engage in a discussion of the impact compositional difference can have on spectator perception and reception in the theatre except to acknowledge that both Wilson and Forced Entertainment's work resist a singular understanding of the performance material.

Rather than analysing historic traces of dramatic convention within new practice as a reflexive dramaturgical approach to discerning the distinctive aesthetic underpinning of these works, Kalb's analysis often reverts to a comparison of experimental theatre practice with drama as a means of measuring a work's ability to deliver meaningful content. For example, he equates Forced Entertainment's endless information overload in *Quizoola* as 'a strange twist' on drama's temporal compression, that of 'the impression of living through an entire life in a single day' (Kalb, 2011: 141). *Quizoola*, he concludes, evokes 'drama as a longing, a locus of pathos and regret' (2011: 144). Similarly with Wilson, Kalb addresses examples of content as a means of comprehending the meaning of *Einstein on the Beach*,

observing that apart from a few notable references to controversial figures and events of the time, the work reverts back to its usual 'meditative reverie and determined political vagueness' (2011: 113). While his discussion acknowledges the possibility that physical imagery bereft of understandable text can convey political issues, it stops short of engaging the politics inherent to the formal structure of both *Einstein* and *Quizoola* that resists the habitualised teleology of the dramatic model via temporal compositions that consciously interrupt such readings. However, Kalb's writing on duration in the theatre does raise an interesting question about the theatre medium's continued significance within a mediatised environment and the role its relationship to time might play within this context. According to Kalb marathon length theatre creates a rare sense of the communal not readily available in an era of mediatised disconnection (2011: 17).

### Time, theatre and mediatisation

Shifts in temporal perception, as industrial history has proven, can radically change the way in which the world itself is perceived at the level of the individual, the social and the cultural. The ramifications of different perceptions of time, as this thesis discusses, are often reflected in theatre of that time. For Émile Zola (1840–1902) the Naturalist stage offered the possibility to reflect with verisimilitude on the difficulties faced by the bourgeoisie during the late nineteenth century. He wrote: 'Naturalism alone responds to our social needs' (Zola, 1992: 359). Discussed further in chapter two, this particular era, as Innes points out, was informed by radical developments in social economics, natural sciences and physiology (2000: 3–6). Within the contemporary environment of mediatised speed, discussed

earlier in this chapter, the theatre has a new set of circumstances to respond to.

Mediatisation has inevitably brought up many discussions on the continued significance and possible distinction of theatre as a medium in this changed environment. Theoretical discussions about the impact of mediatisation on the theatre's continued viability are certainly not new. In citing theatre's collectivity as its point of distinction, Kalb like many others, enters into a common theoretical understanding of theatre as constituted by a unity of time and space. Virilio similarly cites this situation as being theatre's distinction from the temporal and spatial distortion of mediatisation (2000: 3), while Susan Sontag (1996) notes that theatrical presence is the only true distinction between film and theatre. For Phelan (1993), as previously noted, this manifests as live performance's resistance to mechanical reproduction, a situation she claims as a distinction of being live and as such *real*, a claim refuted by Phillip Auslander (1999) who argued that live performance, in attempting to stay relevant, adopted recording technology within its staging and absorbed 'a media derived epistemology' (1999: 33). For Auslander (1999) along with Chiel Kattenbelt (2007: 3) theatre essentially lost its cultural currency with the advent of film. In contrast to the immersive technology of the filmic medium Kattenbelt posits that the collective time and space of the theatre has become both its limitation as well as its potential to forge a different kind of engagement with the live environment. However, he goes on to note that to continue as a medium of realistic illusion the realisation must be made that film technology is simply better at creating this effect (Kattenbelt, 2007: 3). If temporal composition could actively resist, reject and rethink habitualised teleology which, as Weber (2004) reflects, has permeated societal thinking beyond the realm of theatre to the media at large, it is then possible, as this thesis seeks to argue, for the theatre to be distinct

within this environment. This possibility begins by questioning the traditions the theatre has upheld for centuries.

Is unity of time and space still considered to be theatre's sole point of distinction in more disparate forms of theatre? The theatre that Auslander and Sontag refer to above does not take into account the different responses the theatre is making in response to the mediatised environment. Kattenbelt for instance offers an alternative thinking in response to this known dilemma. Rather than bemoan the demise of theatre at the hands of film he proposes that the theatre rediscover the potential that is inherent to *liveness*: the absolute presence of the here and now (Kattenbelt, 2007: 33).

### Interrupting presence

Kattenbelt's proposition is in essence a rethinking of theatrical mimesis as theatre's central mode of expression, that of the actor representing actions in the collective time and space of theatre. By rethinking theatre's traditional relationship to collective presence, time-based dramaturgy becomes a strategy to destabilise meaning in the theatre in order to bring about new readings and responses to performance material. For Elinor Fuchs (1985) the notion of absence is key to this destabilisation. While there are many ways to create an aesthetic of absence — including strategies that destabilise, as Fuchs points out, the presence of the performer and the notion of character — absence, as this thesis seeks to illustrate, can extend to destabilising the physical presence of the spectator in the act of watching as well. For example, inviting the spectator to physically come and go from the auditorium is a strategy already observed in the work of Wilson that interrupts presence. With technology such as film, video and now networked media the potential to interrupt the

collective time and space of the theatre has taken the notion of absence somewhere else yet again.

Theatrical intermediality, the staging of different media within theatre, is currently at the fore of theoretical discussions of presence in the theatre. It is often framed as a strategy to interrupt notions of collective presence in order to destabilise known pathways of meaning, such as mimesis. Staging the very same media that threatens to usurp the theatre has become a common aesthetic within postdramatic practice. Gob Squad (UK and Germany), La Fura dels Baus (Spain) and Heiner Goebbels (Germany) to name but a few have embraced technology in their staging, not to replicate dominant tropes of media, as Auslander (1999) has suggested, but as a strategy to interrupt conventional comprehension of time, space and presence. Whether that media be, for example, contemporary technologies such as live video or the internet or something as simple as a mirror that reflects the actions of offstage performers onto an apparently empty stage, the notion of presence itself, as being physically present or as a mediated presence or absence, is emphasised. But, as Patrick Primavesi (2009) posits, such staging is not about ontological oppositions of the *real* and reproductions as fake, as Phelan (2003) had proposed, 'but rather the threshold between different kinds of mediation and liveness' (2009: 104).

Primavesi's distinction, as outlined above, raises important discussions on the nature of communication within the theatre medium itself. Peter Boenisch's discussion on aisthetic and aesthetic in the theatre medium proposes that intermediality is about spectator perception (aisthetic) (2007: 105). His analysis, like others (Lehmann, 2006, Kattenbelt, 2007) makes known that theatre is primarily a semiotic medium rather than only a medium of mimesis. Theatre, he argues, turns all objects into signs to be perceived. They

are signs of signs (Boenisch, 2007: 115). In rupturing unity of time and space through intermedial staging traditions of presence, representation and presentation are no longer a given and instead prompt a questioning about the activities being presented. For example in *M.T.M.* [1994] by La Fura dels Baus, the theatre company in this early controversial experiment with live video feed employed prerecorded footage of audience members apparently being tortured in an assumed other room. Later in its reveal as a fiction, a prerecorded enactment, it raised many questions for the spectator and offered no answers as to the apparent ethical conundrum that this intended unsettling of time, place, reality and fiction had created.<sup>9</sup> However, what it did raise was that the aesthetics of reception within theatre could constitute a work's meaning in and of itself, an idea that is the focus of Nicholas Ridout's (2009) discussion on ethics and theatre.

### A shift in the notion of politics in theatre

The interruption to the formal structures of dramatic theatre can create a different understanding of political content. For Ridout politics in theatre can manifest as an ethical spectatorship, that addresses the political not via represented action, as is the case of the dramatic model, but by bringing into question the act of watching itself. The audience, as Amelia Kritzer reminds us, is a powerful part of the generation of meaning in the theatre (2008: 11). Audience response is part of a complex dialogue formed through 'various kinds of informal and formal orientation to theatre practices' (Kritzer, 2008: 11). Whether or not the theatre delivers upon these expectations or challenges them can, as Kritzer argues, 'affect the political dynamics

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<sup>9</sup> *M.T.M.* premiered on the 10 March 1994 at Lisboa94 in Portugal. The brief description of this work is based on my attendance of MTM at the Adelaide Festival in 1996.

of the dialogue' (2008: 11). Time-based dramaturgy in postdramatic practice destabilises assumptions of theatrical form. In so doing it accesses alternative dialogues between the spectator and performer that query what might constitute politics within the theatre medium. Instead the formal interruptions these situations create can reflect upon politicised social phenomena. Time-based aesthetics become political, to paraphrase Kritzer's description of what constitutes political theatre, when its effect aims to make apparent controversial or political social occurrences, when its aesthetic reinterprets or creates comparisons and challenges existing power dynamics (Kritzer, 2008: 12).

#### A practical exploration of time

As a theatre maker and dramaturg with a history of practice that spans more than twenty-five years, I have been exploring time as a dramaturgical device in a range of contexts often described as experimental practice. Informed by the structures of drama, as noted previously, I have over many years actively engaged in experiments that would allow for a variety of expressions by countering historic aesthetics of text and character based representation. The notion of time is key to such experiments. For example, early time-based works from my practice took the form of task-orientated site works that firstly engaged repetition as a structure to heighten the mimetic act and secondly utilised natural and cultural cycles specific to the site to determine composition and impact upon potential perceptions of the performance material beyond that attributed to its mimetic devices. *Badai Pasir Bondi* [1995], a work described as a performance of incidental chance for eleven performers comprised of cycles of performed activities associated with the sea. These included singing sea shanties, sunbaking, fishing and references to sea mythologies

among others. Presented on a beach the timing and structure of these activities was determined by the rhythm and timing of the waves at Bondi Beach. Another such work is *Postcard* (1996), a collaboration with Javanese farmers performed in the village of Mendut in Indonesia. The performance comprised choreographed farming tasks presented in a rice field. The repetition of these actions again highlighted the fiction of this conceit while at the same time drawing focus to the laborious nature of the farming tasks. The end point of this work was determined by the naturally occurring sunset and the Islamic 'call to prayer'. These elements would literally stop the performance as the farmers automatically finished work as they normally would and headed off to pray at the village mosque.



Figure 1

The initial focus of these early works was on task and choreography, but it was the experience of time that brought different understandings of the performance material beyond what the tasks represented. In this instance the rhythms of nature and culture that underpin the cycles of a day became apparent and palpably experienced.<sup>10</sup> My interest in time has created a diverse array of performances over the years that differ greatly in form and thematic. More such examples are explored as part of this research.<sup>11</sup> However, these early examples of practice already point to the potential of what time-based strategies can bring to performance and as such my fascination with this particular staging focus. In destabilising historic structures of representation, temporal dramaturgies invite indeterminate outcomes and receptions. Time operating as an aesthetic can address nuanced understanding of social and cultural phenomena through the lens of time itself, as such it has the potential to address a broad spectrum of human experience at a number of levels, as was the case in *Badai Pasir Bondi* and *Postcard*.

In her introduction to the 1997 edition of *Theaterschrift* which is dedicated to the issue of time, German dramaturg Sabine Pochhammer points out that regardless of the major conceptual and historical shifts that influence the sense of time there remains one inevitable relationship that we categorically cannot escape: 'the inertial system of an absolutely and fatally elapsing lifetime' (1997: 9). This alone irrevocably links us to time and drives many of the attempts to control and understand the experience of time. Time is

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<sup>10</sup> During a series of arts residencies in Java, Indonesia from 1994 to 1997 'time' as a cultural experience became a prominent concern of my practice. The idea of a 'slow time' or 'rubber time' (jam karet) that underpins life in the tropical climate of Java, inspired my interest in staging durational event based works such as *Post Card* whose cycles and duration emphasise this experience. This influence has continued to infuse my practice in different ways.

<sup>11</sup> I am part of a community of artists and theatre makers based at the Performance Space in Sydney, a multi-arts venue dedicated to experimental performance practice. At the time of writing, works that came out of the Performance Space community of independent practitioners post 1993, have yet to be the focus of extensive research. This thesis aims to address this gap by analysing examples of work from my practice.

an invisible abstraction, mysterious, metaphysical sometimes threatening and if watched always present. It cannot be avoided and how it manifests and impacts upon contemporary existence is political. Temporal aesthetics enables the theatre medium to access these complex notions by the way it structures and attends to time. Consequently, it is this interest in the political and aesthetic possibilities of 'theatrical time' that has led me to this research project, a scholarly thesis and a new twenty-four hour endurance performance entitled *Yowza Yowza Yowza*.

The performance *Yowza Yowza Yowza* was presented at FCA Gallery at the University of Wollongong on March 6–7 2014 as well as via webcast.<sup>12</sup> It was inspired by the 1930s dance marathons, a phenomenon born out of the economic crisis of the Great Depression. These events, sometimes lasting up to six months, were considered to be a cheap form of entertainment that catered to the out-of-work or lowly paid masses of the depression era (see Carol Martin, 1994: 41). *Yowza Yowza Yowza* is a creative response to this historic event.

The practical component underpinning this research enquiry *Yowza Yowza Yowza* is not separate from the theoretical concerns of the written dissertation but informs it.<sup>13</sup> The creative process sets out to explore the aesthetic potential of time by constructing a performance of extreme length (twenty-four hours) in order to consider the ramifications of duration on the staging and reception of this work. The performance consists of a durational action. Two performers recreate photographic and film imagery taken during the 1930s marathons as tableaux vivant and slow dance sequences. The static posing, the slow movement along with its repetitious scoring, counter the perception of time as developmental to highlight the aesthetics of

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<sup>12</sup> The website and webcast channel is accessible at [www.yowzayowzayowza.tv](http://www.yowzayowzayowza.tv)

<sup>13</sup> See Candy (2011: 35) for a discussion on the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice in practice-based research.

slow time, of boredom and of emptiness akin to the temporal experience of the 1930s unemployed masses of that era. In addition, the durational aesthetic of this work seeks to interrupt and destabilise the work's mimesis by exhausting the performers to the point where making it to the end begins to overshadow any attempts to maintain a lifelike imitation of the imagery they have been recreating. Instead the task of mimicry itself becomes an increasing challenge. In undermining its own mimicry the work aims to bring into question notions of engagement, reception and possible resonances of this historic event and its spectatorship within a contemporary context.

*Yowza Yowza Yowza* presents a situation that is ambiguous. What is the spectator actually watching and why is this simple task-based performance so inviting to watch? In essence, like the work's historic counterpart, it is the performers' exhaustion and inability to cope with the physical and psychological demands of the durational action that becomes its point of attraction. This idea was emphasised by the online webcast, a finding not previously considered by the practitioner.

The webcast heightened the temporal aesthetics at play in this work by challenging the historic recognition of collective presence that is attributed to the theatre medium while at the same time making apparent the temporal dynamics inherent in networked technology. In this instance the laborious duration of the performance was compressed and made convenient with the click of a button that enabled one to engage '24/7' with the performers' 'journey' throughout the night. With people repeatedly tuning back in at all hours of the night to watch the work and offering words of encouragement to the performers via social media this device made apparent translations of the material beyond what was initially conceived of by the practitioner.

To assist with a clearer comprehension of the importance of duration to the work's compositional structure and reception, two video files of documentation of the performance accompany this dissertation. The first file is a five-minute edit. It aims to give an overview of the entire twenty-four hours by showing excerpts that illustrate the performers' journey from the beginning through to their triumphant finish. The edit utilises both web stream footage and documentation filmed at the gallery to achieve this. The second file is ten minutes long. It shows a section of the web stream footage that has been left unedited to give a sense of the slow occurrence of time that underpins the experience of this work and to give an idea of the difficulties the performers endured (see Appendix A).

#### A dramaturgical and theoretical approach to methodology

The methodological approach to this thesis draws substantially upon theatre studies and its discourses because its primary focus is on compositional dramaturgy, mimesis and spectator perception. The reflexive dramaturgical analysis of theatre's compositional history and its aesthetics, as offered through postdramatic theory, provides substantial analytical support for this specific investigation. Further to this the term theatre is employed to encompass a broad spectrum of performance activity, with the understanding that the term, as outlined earlier, etymologically, refers to the spectator's perception; the act of seeing. In addition the research draws upon my first hand experience of experimental performance practice which continues to be fundamentally influenced and framed by my past training in drama and theatre disciplines. This is elaborated upon more fully in chapter three.

In response to this practical and scholarly examination of the aesthetic and political importance of temporal composition to the theatre medium, the scholarly dissertation in addition to the exegetical analysis of *Yowza Yowza Yowza*, examines four recent Australian and international theatre works that exemplify different time-based dramaturgies distinct from developmental time. They are: *And on the Thousandth Night...* [2000] by Forced Entertainment (UK), *small metal objects* [2005] by Back to Back Theatre (Victoria), as well as my own work for the theatre, *Shapes of Sleep* [2003] and *Blue Print* [2007]. To examine these case studies the project has adopted a two-fold approach to analysis. As outlined above it utilises the first-hand experience of the theatre practitioner while also critically engaging foundational historic theory, seminal nineteenth- and twentieth-century dramatists and recent theoretical responses to the field.

This dual methodological approach is reflected in the choice of case studies that combine existent examples of the practitioner's work as well as the work of other practitioners.<sup>14</sup> *Shapes of Sleep* (chapter three), a development of the earlier site works described above focuses on repetition as a compositional strategy to heighten mimesis but additionally employs a durational aesthetic to undermine collective presence, thus making the rules of engagement uncertain and the act of spectatorship its ethical content. It does this differently to the mediated disruption to collectivity that *Yowza Yowza Yowza* presents for discussion. *Shapes of Sleep* also enables an interrogation of a very different engagement with time; that of the timelessness of sleep and its politicisation within a culture dominated by speed. *Blue Print* (chapter four) presents a different understanding of temporal aesthetics again through its employment of a multi-focal composition

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion on the capacity of case study methodology to enlist subjective experience as an effective tool of analysis please see Meyrick (2015: 8).

that is elaborated upon through Stein's landscape analogy. It also offers another relationship to time that sits counter to acceleration, the slow and altered experience of the time of grief and trauma in relation to natural disaster.

The works by Forced Entertainment and Back to Back Theatre bookend this dissertation with two distinct engagements of time-based dramaturgy within the field of postdramatic practice. Forced Entertainment's (chapter two) overt dismantling of the theatrical form presents an opportunity to examine the historic temporal structures of the dramatic model. Here the importance of time is discussed in relation to the politics of habitualised reception. The discussion of Back to Back's work concludes this research with an example of postdramatic practice that engages dramatic composition. This enables an examination of the historic positioning of text and logos as paramount to theatrical communication. In addition the work's exploration of preconceived ideas of people considered to have a disability promotes discussion on the potential of time-based dramaturgy to significantly address ethically charged situations through the politicised positioning of marginalised groups as a consequence of mediatised acceleration.

The notion of a shift from time as a tool of *representation* to a conception of time as an *aesthetic* is fundamental to the practical and theoretical frameworks informing this project. As a consequence, the thesis proceeds on the basis of literature foundational to drama theatre theory and elaborates upon this by examining the following lines of enquiry: the historic temporal composition of dramatic theatre; seminal historic shifts to drama's temporal frame; theoretical propositions that rethink theatre's engagement of the live environment; the role technology can play within this; technological shaping of sense perception and the broader societal consequences of

historic and contemporary experiences of time. The following description details these theoretical underpinnings.

The thesis explores the shift from time as a representational mode in the theatre by firstly looking at the foundational concept of the construction of unity as intrinsic to representational content through Halliwell (1987, 1998); Weber (2004); Lehmann (2006) and Benjamin (1939) and then the historic challenges to developmental structure undertaken by twentieth-century dramatists as discussed by Szondi (1983), Lehmann (2006) and Fuchs (1996). The thesis further notes that despite such modernist challenges as Halliwell (1998) and Lehmann (2006) argue, Aristotelian-derived dramaturgies remain the presiding model that informs expectations and reception of the theatre experience in the broader community.

Positioned in response to late nineteenth-century illusionary Naturalism, the thesis examines the historic contexts that have informed the postdramatic deconstruction of time as a tool of mimesis. It details the historic challenge that film presented to illusionary theatre through Kattenbelt (2007) and Auslander (1999) and how in response postdramatic temporal experiments focus on destabilising historic illusionary traditions fashioned by the circumstances of the live environment discussed through Kattenbelt (2007) and Lehmann (1997b, 2006). The thesis explores how excessive durational aesthetics make time 'present' by undermining dramatic structures of surveyability, unity and wholeness. These time frames aim to exhaust and expose performers in order to confuse and blur understandings of fictional enactment with the *real*.

The thesis details how different temporal aesthetics can enlist an aesthetic of absence (Fuchs, 1985). This notion undermines the very foundation of the mutual presence of the actor and spectator in the

act of theatrical communication, or makes present things that are absent through devices that gesture towards an absence of presence. These theoretical conceptions stand in reference to the effect of theatre as a medium of appearances as discussed through the ghost analogies of Alison Rayner (2006) and Jacques Derrida (1994).

The thesis explores the shift in mimetic reception to semiotic process by looking at the altered sense perception time-based experimentation invites, firstly in landscape aesthetics through Fuchs (1996), Marranca (1994) and Lehmann (1997a, 2006), and then through the role technology/ intermediality can play within this through Boenisch (2009), Primavesi (2009) and Benjamin (1936). Further to this, the thesis discusses how the temporal experience becomes content through Adorno (1982) and how reception itself can constitute ethical content as discussed through Ridout (2009).

To elaborate upon the different experiences of time that the case studies present, the thesis examines the impact of temporal dynamics of late capitalism through Virilio, Hassan and Purser (2007) and Tomlinson (2007). It specifically addresses the thematic concerns of sleep, through Jonathan Crary's discussion of the politicisation of the sleep act within this current climate, a situation informed by advancements in industry and technology; the slow anomaly of the grief state, positioned here as an inconvenient consumption of time that is counter-productive to accelerated living as discussed through Thomas Bottomore (1985), and the situation of people perceived to have a disability within a society driven by speed. This is discussed through Virilio's (2000) theorisation of technology driven acceleration and commodification of time in late capitalism and Helga Nowotny's (1994) theoretical reflections on the different tempos that can now define and divide society. The thesis additionally uses material from an interview conducted with the artistic director of Back to Back

Theatre Bruce Gladwin on August 23 2012. This material is employed to elaborate on Back to Back's creative rationales in response to the concerns expressed by the ensemble regarding the positioning of people perceived to have a disability.

### Anecdotes and Chapter Outlines

In between each of the following chapters of the thesis is an anecdotal account of the performance/case study under discussion. This device seeks to share an experience of these works from different perspectives. The first anecdote is told from my own perspective as a spectator attending the work of Forced Entertainment, the second aims to capture observations of the spectator reaction to *Shapes of Sleep*, while the third anecdote depicts a glimpse of the moments and concerns leading up to the opening of *Yowza Yowza Yowza*. From the viewpoint of the theatre maker the fourth anecdote describes the dramaturgical shaping of the first scene in *Blue Print*, an insight into how the theatre maker thinks through the dramaturgical structuring as a means of making sense of the material for the spectator. The final anecdote is a bookend to the first. It describes my experience again as a spectator at the performance of Back to Back's *small metal objects* that foregrounds spectatorship as central to its reception. The anecdotes are employed not only in order to convey something of the spectator experience of time within these diverse examples of practice, but to also introduce the way in which the dramaturgy of each work employs time differently, a distinction that underpins the theoretical concerns outlined above.

Through an analysis of Forced Entertainment's improvised storytelling game *And on the Thousandth Night...*, the second chapter of this

thesis acts to introduce the temporal composition foundational to dramatic theatre and the way in which these constructions of time profess to control spectator perception and reception. Forced Entertainment's postdramatic durational game is positioned as a response to the influence of late nineteenth-century dramatic theatre, both in terms of the actual duration of theatre and its shift from a play to an event and in terms of its temporal logic, a comparison intended to establish the historical lineage of the company and its positioning as postdramatic.

Originally conceived of as a diptych, the choreographic installations *Shapes of Sleep* (eight hours) and *Yowza Yowza Yowza* (twenty-four hours) are the focus of chapter three. Here duration and repetition are deployed to accentuate the temporal experience specific to sleep and prolonged exhaustion. In this framework sleep is positioned as political within a context of late capitalism and the commodification of time. As such time-based dramaturgy is shown to shift the notion of form in relation to content by destabilising the historic conception of collective presence as fundamental to theatre communication. In this instance the experience of spectating is positioned as content, an idea discussed in relation to the shift from mimesis to semiotics that occurs as a consequence of time-based aesthetics and the altered perception of time and space inherent in staging networked technology.

The focus of chapter four is *Blue Print*, a multi-modal and multi-focal work about the loss of my family home in the Canberra bushfires in 2003. It introduces the notion of stasis and spatial composition as a means to counter the reception shaped by developmental time, to which Stein's landscape aesthetics are key. Further to this, it offers another approach to enlisting traditions of 'presence' inherent to theatre through an exploration of *Blue Print's* conjuring of ghosts as a

retrieval of memories. In this instance the slow time of grief, an experience not easily accommodated within a climate of acceleration, is the focus and dramaturgical stasis is defined as theatre's seminal point of distinction from mediatisation. This idea is further explored through broadcast media's portrayal of bushfire catastrophes as accelerated dramatic spectacles.

Chapter five brings the thesis back to dramatic theatre and its developmental temporal composition. Through an analysis of Back to Back Theatre's *small metal objects*, (a presentation of a 'play' in an unpredictable city site), the theoretical notion of historic logos and the positioning of text within the theatre medium is the focus. In this case the fluctuating time of the city is engaged to disrupt the central focus on narrative to shift its reception beyond the meaning contained within the drama. Here the innate conflict between logos and staging is employed to destabilise traditional reception. In decentralising the focus to include all aspects of the city as part of the performance, it is seen to be 'poly-logic' (Lehmann, 1997a). The performers' perceived disabilities along with all activities at the site become signs of the theatre, turning Back to Back's theatre experience into a multi-perspectival encounter. In this instance within the accelerated environment of late capitalism the vulnerability of people perceived to have a disability is heightened and the challenges they face within these now everyday dynamics of time are made apparent.

## Anecdote #1

Once upon a time a group of friends and I travel to see Forced Entertainment's *And on the Thousandth Night...* at the Adelaide Festival. Eight performers sit on chairs in a row at the front of a small proscenium arch stage. They are bare foot and wearing crude cut-out cardboard crowns and red cloaks. Their clothes remain clearly visible underneath. Once the audience have settled the performers begin to play a storytelling game:

Once upon a time there was a king...

One performer says and he continues to tell his story until another player calls:

Stop!

This performer then takes over creating a new story.

Once upon a time there was a hotel in the middle of the desert...

Stop!

*After the first five minutes...*

It becomes apparent that this is all the performance will be, a simple children's game where improvised tales are cut short before they can conclude. It is also clear that the game will be repeated like this again and again over the six-hour duration of the work. At this point I find myself asking: 'is this all it will be, surely not? We are in a theatre with seats after all. There must be more otherwise this will quickly become tedious'. As if in acknowledgment of this, I note,

Forced Entertainment advise in their program: 'the audience are free to come and go as they please'.<sup>15</sup>

*After Twenty minutes...*

One of my friends, along with a few other members of the audience accepts Forced Entertainment's invitation and exits the theatre.

*After another twenty minutes (approximately)...*

I also exit very conscious of the oddity of leaving a show before it has finished. Even with many years of experience of attending and making experimental theatre, the act of getting up from my seat while the show is still going feels enormous and inherently wrong. Outside the theatre I find my friend who had left earlier having a cigarette, he tells me that he is not coming back in as he had worked out what was happening and felt no need to stay. Another friend in direct contrast took it upon himself to stay for the entire six-hour duration and not leave; it became his own private challenge. As for me, I took a number of leisurely breaks as the repetitive structure and slow accumulation of stories started to play with my ability to concentrate. At one point I even ducked away to my hotel to have a quick shower and freshen up before returning. It felt so curious knowing back at the theatre the players were still performing. What would happen if everyone left the theatre including my enduring friend? Would the performers stop or would they feel some kind of loyalty to the audience and to the idea of the game and decide to keep going regardless. But I digress; let me get back to the story.

*In the fourth hour...*

As I return to the theatre I notice a shift in atmosphere, the work has begun to resemble a failing comedy review or variety act. The audience, now confident of the rules, are regularly coming and going.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.forcedentertainment.com/page/145/And-on-the-Thousandth-Night.../83>

That initial hesitation of leaving the theatre has completely vanished along with the need to even wait for a pause in the action despite the creaky seats and floor boards that loudly herald each new arrival or departure. It had by all accounts fallen into chaos; some spectators went for drinks in nearby pubs, others chatted in the foyer or went to dinner, while some simply decided not to return at all.

*In the fifth hour...*

The atmosphere turns from one of playfulness to a gentle desperation, the audience has dwindled in number and some have even fallen asleep in the theatre. The exhausted players appear increasingly dishevelled and by this late stage visibly struggling to come up with new material. As for my enduring friend he is still sitting there, still attentive, laughing at the performers' jokes that are by now failing as much as they are succeeding. It is as if he is buoying them on, attempting to help them make it to the finish line.

*During the sixth and final hour...*

At this point I must confess due to exhaustion I have very little memory of how the work ended. I do remember thinking: 'what is the time? OK it can end now guys — let's applaud and move on'. In order to provide some kind of conclusion to my story however I searched an online revue (Festival Freak, 2004) that described the ending. An ending that I think I missed or have since forgotten. Maybe like others I dozed off only to be awakened by the end applause.

The final story and the end of the show apparently went something like this...

*Once upon a time there was a mouth that wouldn't stop talking; ears  
that wouldn't stop listening; eyes that wouldn't  
stop watching ....*

*Stop!*

*Applause...*

Exhausted but strangely satisfied the remaining spectators and I exit the theatre. I sense we have survived something together and feel an unexpected bond with these strangers. Entering the outside world again I notice a very evident temporal clash as the slow plodding atmosphere that accumulated over the long six-hour duration of the work dissipates and the time of city takes over once again.

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## Chapter 2. An unsurveyable duration: Forced Entertainment's *And on the Thousandth Night...*

The preceding anecdotal account of *And on the Thousandth Night...* was based on the experience of watching this work at the Adelaide Festival at the Royalty Theatre, March 13, 2004. British company Forced Entertainment was, at that time, well known to the community of theatre and performance makers in Sydney who travelled to Adelaide on this occasion specifically to see the company perform live.<sup>16</sup> Forced Entertainment's work is and remains of great interest to these practitioners because, like the Sydney-based artists, Forced Entertainment have a clearly articulated self-reflective dramaturgical approach to theatre making that questions and reworks the conventions of text-based theatre in order to create different modes of theatrical engagement. The above anecdote aims to capture the unorthodox experience of theatre that the company's work creates, an experience that highlights the passing of time as central to its distinction.

The performance was indeed an endurance to watch, it was at times mind-numbingly boring, frustrating and exhausting, while at other moments it was very funny and rewarding. There is so much that is familiar about the work — such as its modes of storytelling, complete with bad jokes — but at the same time as a work of theatre it is a completely unfamiliar experience. How can this game constitute a work of theatre? There is not much to hold one's attention, no scenery or well-made costumes to enhance the fiction, let alone an engaging story that both immerses and satisfies with its believable,

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<sup>16</sup> The community of performance makers referred to are closely affiliated with the Performance Space in Sydney. An organisation dedicated to the experimentation of live performance. On this occasion members of the company version 1.0 known for their mediated performance experiments travelled to Adelaide together specifically to see two works by Forced Entertainment, *And on the Thousandth Night...* and *Show Time* (1996).

albeit fictitious, rendering of world problems. Instead there is only the playing of a seemingly frivolous game and the players who over time fail even to engage as storytellers due to exhaustion.

However, these same challenges and failings are also the work's point of intrigue and ultimately its meaning. *And on the Thousandth Night...* is like a cheeky provocation given to the audience to challenge and question their expectations of what a night at the theatre might entail. Ultimately *And on the Thousandth Night...* invites the audience to ponder what is informing such expectations. What is this work being measured against and how can it create such a sense of frustration and confusion when expectations are not met? As this chapter goes on to discuss, Forced Entertainment's overt resistance and indeed exploration of these expectations makes *And on the Thousandth Night...* a rebellious act. The company purposely challenges expectations informed by historic models of dramatic theatre; the truthful renderings of stories of life that underpinned drama within French neoclassicism and the influence of late nineteenth-century Naturalism's attention to the verisimilitude of action and staging on the contemporary stage. Against these now centuries-old legacies of the dramatic stage Forced Entertainment's strategic destabilisation of the dramatic model's mode of reception is highly provocative and as such political. As this chapter argues their engagement of *time* as a strategy employed to destabilise comprehension within the theatre medium positions *time* as a significantly political tool of new theatre practices.

Forced Entertainment is a theatre company based in Sheffield in the United Kingdom and was founded in 1984 by a group of ex-drama students from the Exeter University (see Benecke, 2004: 27). Core members of the ensemble, Tim Etchells (artistic director) and the performer/makers Robin Arthur, Richard Lowdon, Claire Marshall,

Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor conceived and devised *And on a Thousandth Night...* along with guest performer Jerry Killick.<sup>17</sup> The production premiered in September 2000 at the Festival Ayoul in Beirut and has its origins in the performance *Sing a song to Unfrighten Me* [1999], a twenty-four hour durational performance within which a storytelling game appears in one section.

Forced Entertainment's postdramatic durational game is positioned as a response to late nineteenth-century dramatic theatre, both in terms of the actual duration of the performance, the slowness the work's lack of action engenders, the temporal structures of repetition and rhythm they employ and in terms of its shift from a play to an event. The dramaturgical analysis of Forced Entertainment's performance seeks to illustrate how the work employs duration and repetition as dramaturgical strategies to 'interrupt' the temporal construction of drama by countering unity and surveyability and as such interrupt the comprehension informed by the composition of dramatic plot. It does this by firstly examining the foundational concept of unity in relation to mimetic/representational content through Halliwell (1987, 1998), Weber (2004) and Benjamin (1998a).

Further to this, through Lehmann's analysis of time as a dramaturgical strategy within the postdramatic (2006) the chapter examines the way in which Forced Entertainment's engagement of time is rendered aesthetic rather than mimetic as it manifests within dramatic theatre as a believable representation of time fundamental to immersion within the fictive world of the story. It does this by examining how 'time' in Forced Entertainment's performance is presented and as such present. The materiality of time itself, its

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<sup>17</sup> Guest Performers for this production have also included: Tamzin Griffin, Tobias Lange, John Rowley, Ruth Ben-Tovim, and Bruno Roubicek. The direction of the work is credited to Tim Etchells, text is credited to Etchells and the company, and design and lighting is by Richard Lowdon (see Forced Entertainment, 2013).

duration, rhythm and tempo becomes a mode of communication, and with this the theatre as a medium becomes apparent, an idea further explored through Lehmann's analysis of time as a translation (1997b, 2006). In so doing the chapter discusses how Forced Entertainment's formal interruption to temporal composition creates a more malleable perception of the performance material that is neither transparent or self-contained as it is within drama, but open-ended. Developing upon this, the chapter introduces the notion of a politics of theatrical form, firstly as a self-confessed act of resistance by the artists to the historic temporal construction of reception of the theatre medium and secondly the way the aesthetics of slowness operating within this work counter acceleration and immediate gratification associated with the technological present.

### Theatre as an act of rebellion

Forced Entertainment's durational performance *And on the Thousandth Night...* is a truly unusual night at the theatre because, as its sole focus, it presents a simple story-telling game improvised live over a six-hour duration. In their theatre there are no characters and every story started is left unfinished. The lack of resolution in Forced Entertainment's game fundamentally opposes the aim of drama as argued by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), whose dialectical theory and writings on drama, Loren Kruger argues, still infuse if not dominate understandings of the notion of both modernism and modern drama (2000: 545).<sup>18</sup> For Hegel dramatic action is progressive and developmental; the 'collision of circumstances, passions and characters' leading dialectically to 'actions and reactions that require a resolution [...] of conflict and

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<sup>18</sup> Kruger argues Hegel's emphasis on subjectivity and the constraints of state and tradition is more in keeping with modern drama than Aristotle's emphasis on the aim of the plot over character (2000: 544).

discord' (Hegel qtd in Kruger, 2000: 544). This understanding of what motivates conflict and its resolution is arguably, as Kruger points out, now a given of the kind of action that drives dramatic content in modern drama' (2000: 545).

It would appear Forced Entertainment deliberately set out to negate this understanding of structure. However, by assuming such an oppositional stance, rather than rupture their association with this dramatic lineage, they instead position themselves in direct reference to it by engaging plotlines that never reach a conclusion. Spectator and performer alike are denied resolution, they are left waiting for the never ending unwinnable game to be won, waiting for the multitude of unfinished stories on offer to conclude, and waiting for the performance to finally end — that is, if you make it to the end of the performance. Instead of resolution to any given story all that is offered is a series of beginnings that continually interrupt the temporal flow and any notion of immersion in the story by repeatedly bringing the spectator back to the present time and space of the theatre where time, now a conscious and central player in this work, passes extremely slowly. It seeps off the stage, past the proscenium arch and infects the entire auditorium as spectator and performer alike grow *time weary*. This situation becomes even more pronounced over the six-hour length of the work.

The duration in Forced Entertainment's performance makes excessive demands on the spectator. The performance becomes exhausting and almost impossible to watch in its entirety without taking intervals. This stands in contrast to August Strindberg (1849–1912) Naturalist project. Strindberg deliberately eliminated the interval and reduced the duration of his play *Miss Julie* [1893] from the standard three hours to ninety minutes in order to eradicate all elements that he thought might distract the spectator from the illusion set up by his

play. A fundamental consideration for Strindberg's choice of a shorter duration included the effect of fatigue on the spectator's ability to remain attentive and concentrate on the work.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to Strindberg's aims, 'exhaustion' and 'distraction' are central to *And on the Thousandth Night...*, a situation that raises many questions about the possible reasoning behind such dramaturgical choices. Why exhaust the theatre spectator to the point where they can no longer focus on the work? And why disrupt any sense of immersion in the stories they set out to tell? 'Our aim', says the company of their entire practice 'is to make vital interventions in the form of culture, reflecting on the world that surrounds us, asking necessary questions, engaging audiences in compelling and provocative ways' (Forced Entertainment, 2011: 3). Given this, can Forced Entertainment's overt act of undermining all that is familiar in the theatre be considered, to use their words, a 'vital intervention' in and of itself, and if so an intervention into what? The answers to these questions lie within the cultural and technological changes that have influenced and impacted upon the theatre medium since the late nineteenth century and the relevance of continued interest in realistic portrayal that mirror life, an influence informed by the staging experiments of Naturalism. Forced Entertainment, like theatre practitioners before them, are responding to the changed conditions of the present in order to create work that is responsive, provocative and relevant to the contemporary condition. This was the same impetus that prompted the

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<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Strindberg was interested in creating an immersive illusion onstage by making the scenic action as believable as possible. The length of the fictional time of the plot became an important part of this experiment. An ideal responding to the Naturalist's provocation that all staged actions should mirror life as realistically as possible. For example, Strindberg's one act plays written between 1888–1892 aimed to match the scenic time of the drama to the event from curtain up to curtain down in order to replicate the experience of time passing as experienced in everyday life (see Strindberg qtd in Egil Törnqvist and Birgitta Steene, 2007: 6–16).

dramaturgical ideas of the nineteenth-century Naturalists, also considered unorthodox in their time.

In his 1881 manifesto "Naturalism in the Theatre", French writer Émile Zola (1814–1902) wrote of a need for a new theatre that spoke of and to the social needs of his time. 'The future is with naturalism' (1992: 365) he proclaimed and went on to say:

The formula will be found; it will be proved that there is more poetry in the little apartment of a bourgeois than in all the empty, worm eaten places of history; in the end we will see that everything meets in the real: lovely fantasies are free of capriciousness and whimsy, and idylls, and comedies, and dramas. Once the soil has been turned over, the task that seems alarming and unfeasible today will become easy. I am not qualified to pronounce on the form that tomorrow's drama will take; that must be left to the voice of some genius to come. But I will allow myself to indicate the path I consider our theatre will follow. (Zola, 1992: 365)

The theatre, Zola argued, must change in response to the needs of each new era (1992: 359). The late nineteenth century was, as Innes points out, greatly informed by three major theories; 'Darwin's evolutionary theories of biology (*On the Origin of Species*, 1859), Claude Bernard's scientific observation of human physiology (*Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, 1865) and Karl Marx's economic analysis of society (*Das Kapital*, 1867)' (2000: 6). Inspired by such thinking of the time, Innes argues, the Naturalist theatre presented characters/subjects on stage akin to scientific case studies whose behaviours could be explained by elements that were both hereditary and informed by a specific economic circumstance (2000: 3–6). Hence the Naturalists were interested in presenting examples of *real* people, in *real* situations as realistically as possible. This notion was the antithesis to the presiding dominance of romantic

theatre, whose overt fakery for Zola no longer corresponded to the 'spirit of the times' (1992: 359). The artist perhaps best-known to have brought Zola's ideals and indeed his plays to the stage is André Antoine (1858–1943) and his Paris based Théâtre Libre (1887–1896).

Renowned for their radical and innovative changes to style of scenography, lighting, scripting and acting, the Théâtre Libre aimed to enhance the believability of the illusion of their staged realities (see Chothia, 1991). This attention to verisimilitude remains a dominant aim of dramatic theatre even today. As Michael Kirby writes, while the Naturalist plays may not hold the same relevance for a contemporary audience as cultural and scientific discourses shift with each new era, the 'theoretical naturalistic standard of absolute verisimilitude has remained unchanged' (1969: 64), albeit the style of acting, he notes has altered as film embraced more realistic styles (Kirby, 1969: 64). Kirby's argument is further expanded upon in the analysis of *Yowza Yowza Yowza* in chapter 3.

### The New Naturalism

Over a century after Zola's manifesto was written the artistic director of Forced Entertainment Tim Etchells (2007a) also speaks of a need for change. He claims that theatre is now at a point where it can be responsive to anything and respond in any form it chooses in order to make work that is relevant to the changed circumstances of the current mediatised culture. Before Etchells, in the 1980s, the New York based company The Wooster Group embraced the tropes and structures of electronic media within their work to create a practice that was not only responsive to the immediate mediatised environment but also distinct from it. For Elizabeth LeCompte the 'new naturalism is electronic and filmic' (1994: 203). She goes on to

say that unlike the naturalistic model where actors must face each other in dialogue, with the filmic medium they are rarely in the same frame yet alone in the same room at the time of filming, the editing creates the illusion of face to face dialogue (1994: 203).

LeCompte further notes 'we learn to make logic out of such fragmented connections; it is more real than old style theatre' (1994: 203). The theatre that most corresponds to the twenty-first century, as exemplified by the work of The Wooster Group, embraces electronic media by staging it and engaging its temporal compositional underpinnings of simultaneity and fragmentation in order to rupture the developmental temporal structure of nineteenth-century drama. LeCompte's task-based dramaturgy seeks to distinguish itself from the Naturalistic model, which as she implies has lost its currency as a realistic rendering of life to the 'new naturalism' of screen-based media.

The theatre is no longer the prevailing cultural presence it was in the nineteenth century. Phillip Auslander argues it lost this stance with the arrival of film. He notes while television dominated in the second half of the twentieth century, the impact on theatre began in 1910 when cinema adapted the language and goals of theatre but with new and more effective means (1999: 12). For Chiel Kattenbelt (2007) theatre was subsumed by film because of the fundamental difference between the two mediums' relationship to *liveness*; that of the absolute presence of the spectator and performer in the same time and space. Film, he argues, succeeds where drama cannot because it is a projection, it does not require that the performers be in *the here and now*, and its mechanisms, for the most part, remain invisible (2007: 37). By contrast the theatre as it unfolds in the present time, right before the audience makes 'present the reality of illusion' (Kattenbelt, 2007: 37) and as such limits it as an immersive medium.

This creates a considerable hurdle for theatre that aims to mirror life on stage as realistically as possible via a fictive story.

Despite radical experiments such as those presented by The Wooster Group, drama remains intent on maintaining an illusionary mimetic model and responds to the technological present, as Auslander argues, by merely adopting screen-based media's tropes and methods of production (1999: 27–28). This practice is clearly evident in certain examples of Australian main-stage drama, where live video feeds, screens and even film and television celebrities appear not to distinguish theatre from film but to replicate it. For example, the 2013 production of Jean Genet's *The Maids* presented by Sydney Theatre Company cast film celebrities Cate Blanchett and Isabelle Huppert in the roles of Claire and Solange. Dee Jefferson in her review of the production makes note that the celebrities were the main draw card to the production and the use of cameras and indeed close-ups made direct reference to this celebrity. She writes:

This staging mechanism has practical advantages (even more so when you have three screen actresses who can work a camera and deliver a devastating close-up) but the live editing of the footage needs some finessing in order to be truly effective. (Jefferson, 2013)

Could the lack of finesse of the live editing that Jefferson refers to be a problem of the live theatre environment? Here the editing becomes noticeable rather than transparent as it would in the cinema, for no matter the quality of video production employed in the live environment, it begins to function differently and cannot achieve, as Kattenbelt points out above, the same level of immersion afforded by the absence of its illusionary mechanisms (2007: 37). Etchells, as outlined below, similarly discusses the problematic practice of staging

and indeed representing mediatisation within text-based theatre. He argues:

And if these things, and a million others do not change the theatre it will not survive, and I personally couldn't care. I don't mean change in the way of content — like the three or four people I speak to each year now who want to write a play about virtual reality. (I mean, really, why would anybody do that?) And I don't mean necessarily that theatre should embrace new technology and bring it onto the stage — I can imagine the question 'Where shall we put the Apple Macs?' getting every bit as dull as 'Where shall we put the televisions?' — in fact it's the same question, pretty well. (Etchells, 1999: 97)

For Etchells, like LeCompte before him, mediatisation has created a pervasive mode of perception that is fundamentally temporal and primary to any response the theatre might now make. He argues new technologies have essentially rewritten understandings of bodies, narratives, places and culture, as well as understandings of presence (1999: 97). The example of LeCompte and The Wooster Group outlined above indicates how experimentation in the theatre might employ the conditions of presence to create a very different approach to the dramatic model and thereby a very different engagement with the temporalities at play within mediatisation. It does this not as a means to replicate these modes as Auslander has suggested, but as a means of reflecting upon them while at the same time presenting an experience that is fundamentally distinct from them. As Kattenbelt argues, film should not be considered the theatre's demise but rather an opportunity for the theatre medium to reclaim its point of distinction by (re)discovering its *liveness*, its relationship to traditions of presence founded in the notion of collectivity (2007: 38). This notion positions time-based dramaturgy and its rethinking of temporal composition as a significant strategy in postdramatic theatre's pursuit of distinction and relevance to the changed

conditions it now finds itself within.

Live drama risks remaining in the shadow of its televised counterparts if it aims to compete with them by adopting, as Auslander argues, its structures, devices and tropes (1999: 27–28). Forced Entertainment's staging consciously seeks out the opposite aesthetic. The slick and immersive temporal conditions of absence employed by the silver screen prove to be the antithesis of Forced Entertainment's theatrical foregrounding of the medium. In their enactment nothing is absent. Instead they make apparent the theatre in its full unglamorous glory by making present the backstage and onstage ridiculousness of theatre's illusionary mechanisms. In their performances costumes are changed in full view or clearly worn over the top of the performers' own clothes, scripts are sometimes read and sets are sometimes visibly constructed or in certain instances deliberately fall down. All of these devices make apparent the temporal architecture of the live environment, that of the manufacturing of illusion in front of the spectator in the here and now. That which is normally hidden is instead exposed in order to foreground this given of theatrical illusion. Forced Entertainment's long and prosperous career has largely been built upon defining their difference to text-based dramatic theatre by directly referencing and undermining the temporal structures of story (*muthos*) and style of *mimesis* inherent within the dramaturgy of late nineteenth-century Naturalism.

From their humble beginnings as drama students back in 1984 Forced Entertainment are now internationally regarded for their radical approaches to theatre making. *Time Out Magazine* cites them as 'an enormously influential creative force' (Forced Entertainment, 2011: 8), while Phelan writes that Forced Entertainment 'has produced a remarkable body of work that pulses with the blood of different

genres, aesthetic categories, and political philosophical dares' (qtd in Etchells, 1999: 9). They are indeed a seminal company whose self-interrogation of the theatre form has created a unique aesthetic that has inspired many practitioners, particularly young and emerging artists from as far afield as Australia. Companies version 1.0, Team Mess, Brown Council and Post for example have all grown up with Forced Entertainment's works either viewed as video documentation, live at international festivals or referenced in the work of their peers with its origins now forgotten.<sup>20</sup>

Forced Entertainment's work has also garnered much attention from the academic community. In the context of Britain's performance scene as well as internationally, Caridad Svich (2003: 31) argues, the company are considered unique. This, he notes, is because they stand in stark contrast to the ongoing dominance of script-based theatre within the United Kingdom (2003: 31). But despite this acknowledged connection to drama along with the company's overt emphasis on temporal aesthetics, of time as a central presence apparent within their durational performances, little of the theory on the aesthetics of Forced Entertainment's work extends to a more in-depth analysis of the temporal composition of drama and its mode of reception that the company so openly reference and reject. For Judith

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<sup>20</sup> Malcolm Whittaker, an independent performance maker and founding member of Sydney based Team Mess, often employs the amateur theatrical aesthetics of Forced Entertainment. For example, he donned a bear suit in his performance *Jumping the Shark Fantastic* [2014] while also holding up signs and staging clichés of the dramatic stage such as death scenes with overtly fake devices. Forced Entertainment's *Showtime* [1996] *Bloody Mess* [2004] and *Pleasure* [1997] all featured shoddy animal suits ranging from bears to gorillas and dogs, while Hidden J [1994] among other performances has utilised hand written signs describing character traits. Another notable example of their influence in Australia is Sydney based girl ensemble Brown Council whose performance works play with the aesthetics of theatricality. Like the skeleton costumes worn in Forced Entertainment's *Who can Sing a Song to Unfrightened Me* [1999] they have also utilised such costumes (*Night Time #1*, Performance Space, 2007). They have also performed task based durational experiments that emphasise aspects of the theatre medium. *The One Hour Laugh* [2009], for example, featured Brown Council performers attempting to laugh for one hour as they stood in a row wearing badly applied clown make up and poorly made conical hats. An idea closely reminiscent of Forced Entertainments durational smile in vaudevillian attire featured in *First Night* [1996], which toured to the Adelaide Festival in 2004. *Quizoola* [1996] also featured scantily applied clown makeup.

Helmer the exhilarating and exhausting nature of their durationals constitute a very important part of their large body of work (2004: 13–16). She observes briefly that their defiance of causal relationships and the narrative structures of beginning and end highlights the very foundation of theatre itself (Helmer, 2004: 13–16). This discussion, however, does not extend beyond a passing acknowledgement of their interruption of the dramatic structure and does not directly address the implication of this temporal composition and the importance of time as a dramaturgical strategy within their work.

In his interview with Etchells, Adrian Heathfield also addresses the structural compositions at play in Forced Entertainment's earlier collage approach to staging (2004: 77–99). However, this discussion is not made in reference to modes of reception or to the processes intrinsic to Forced Entertainment's performances indebted to drama. Heathfield, like Helmer, largely focuses on the durational practice of the company and while he acknowledges that the length of time employed in these works is unorthodox in terms of expectations of the theatre, he avoids unpacking this idea further in terms of the historic compositional relationship of duration to text-based theatre. However he does importantly lead Etchells in a discussion on the aesthetics of duration and its impact on the performer and spectator experience, a topic that this chapter returns to below.

### Shaping an audience response through temporal composition

The members of Forced Entertainment are very conscious of the importance of 'time' within their experimental approach to theatre making. Etchells notes it took the company many years of working together to realise that above all other aspects of theatre making the

structuring of time, 'the unfolding of actions over duration, the economy of events in the frame of hours, minutes, seconds and split seconds' (Etchells, 2009: 76), was fundamental to any shift in its communication with the spectator. As discussed in chapter one, meaning within drama is self-contained, to use Lehmann's phrase, its structures work together to 'hermetically seal off the meaningful form' (Lehmann, 2006: 40). Its form, its temporal structure and content are interrelated to guide a particular mode of spectator perception of the performance material. This interrelation between temporal structure and mimetic content is, as Halliwell argues, the crux of Aristotle's notion of unity and beauty. He argues:

[A] unified tragedy dramatises a connected sequence of actions which lead to a single, sharply focused conclusion. The sense of what will make a fitting 'beginning, middle and end', therefore, cannot be separated from the understanding of what is entailed in the causation and motivation of the dramatic action itself. Unity, in other words, is tied to the requirements of mimesis — the portrayal of a possible reality and appreciation of unity (and hence of poetic beauty) is part of the perception of a work's mimetic or representational content. (Halliwell, 1987: 99)

Forced Entertainment's postdramatic game, at its most obvious, negates the temporal structure of drama's narrative unity by interrupting it. The main rule of *And on the Thousandth Night...*, says Etchells, is that 'no story is ever allowed to finish, since any performer who is speaking may be interrupted at any moment by another player, who'll use the word "stop" to halt the narrative and claim the stage for their own story' (Etchells: 2009b). The rule shapes an entirely different mode of spectator perception to that invited by drama by undermining the very foundation of how drama generates meaning through its composition. For example, Weber argues in Aristotelian terms that the story (*muthos*) structure of

beginning, middle and end is essentially a structure of a meaningful and intelligible whole, each section follows on from the other, the beginning is linked to the end by remembrance. Therefore 'the end', he argues, 'is understood not just as cessation but as conclusion' (Weber, 2004: 194).

Akin to Benjamin's (1939) analysis of the Brechtian *interruption*, as outlined in chapter one, Forced Entertainment's cessation of narrative is an interruption to the flow of time. It functions like a gesture that points towards the temporal architecture of meaning within drama; the developmental scenic time of the narrative as enacted by performers on a stage. Further to this strategy is the effect of the work's duration on its surveyability as a comprehensible whole.

The central importance of Aristotle's unity of time, argues Lehmann, is to assure the unity of its action so that the plot is comprehensible as a whole (2006: 156). Through a comparison between the size of a plot with the size of an animal Aristotle poses: 'a beautiful body or creature must have some size, but one which allows it to be perceived all together, so plot structure should be of a length which can easily be held in the memory'. Too long or too short a duration, Aristotle says, makes it impossible 'to derive any sense of unity and wholeness from our perception of it' (1987: 39). Forced Entertainment's temporal dramaturgy of duration and repetition as employed in *And on the Thousandth Night...* is intended to be unsurveyable, it aims to interrupt any notion of the content of its stories being a comprehensible and unified whole in order to forge a different mode of communication for the theatre medium, a self-reflective mode that questions how comprehension of performance material itself is constituted in the theatre.

The continual interruption to focus and continuity married with the

extreme duration that this work employs creates a situation where the audience need to leave the auditorium for rest breaks. As they continue to come and go throughout the performance their action becomes a further interruption that foregrounds the very notion of spectatorship and enactment determined by collective presence. The absent spectator now in the foyer or even further afield, knows that the work continues on regardless. Their presence in this new temporal arrangement is no longer necessary in order to understand the work. For Etchells, durational performance creates 'open ended' reception. He notes spectators' comings and goings from the theatre is an intentional strategy aimed to disrupt collective presence and traditional structures of beginning, middle and end (Etchells qtd in Svich, 2003: 33). Instead, as he says, it lets 'people determine their own shape of start(s) and end(s)' (Etchells qtd in Svich, 2003: 33), or in other words encourages multiple perceptions of the performance experience. On another occasion Etchells further elaborates on this idea as a relinquishing of control of meaning. He explains:

I get excited about theatre and performance work that is brave enough to surrender control — trusting its audience to think, trusting that they will go useful places when they're left off the leash of dramaturgical control, or even trusting that a trip through the ostensibly not so useful places (boring, drifting, free association) can be more than useful or constructive in the longer run. (Etchells, 2007a: 29)

Time, in drama, Lehmann points out, is homogeneous. It is entirely focused on the conflict (Hegel) between characters. It does not acknowledge any notion of time beyond this, whether that be world time, or the subjective time of the individual (Lehmann, 2006: 154). As such all focus is channelled on the present time of the story. To assist this the story must be as credible as possible, which includes taking into account a sustainable belief in the action being presented,

its length and its location of plot. This ideal can be traced back to the French neoclassical employment of renaissance interpretations of Aristotle's *Poetics* and is crucial to understanding the dramaturgies underpinning Naturalism's specific engagement of time as representation.<sup>21</sup>

As discussed in chapter one Renaissance interpretations of the *Poetics* taken out of the Ancient Greek context were imbued with the rationalist thinking of the neoclassicists who introduced 'rules' for the poetic arts derived from translations of the *Poetics* (see Zarilli *et al*, 2006: 165). As Halliwell argues it is important to draw a distinction between the 'legislative aspirations of the neoclassic critic and the philosophical detachment of Aristotle' (Halliwell, 1998: 304), particularly when considering the historic employment of the *Poetics* and its ongoing influence. The *Poetics* is a pragmatic text, Halliwell notes, but this is deceptive as there is nothing to substantiate it was ever used by the dramatist of Aristotle's time, it is more a response to the poetic achievements of the past and in many regards his 'theory was designed to codify the dynamics of those achievements' (Halliwell, 1998: 304).

Aristotle's preoccupation with mimetic content and structure, argues Lehmann, is an integral part of his overarching philosophical interest in tragedy and extends beyond concerns of form. According to the *Poetics*, Lehmann reasons, 'drama is a structure that gives a logical (namely dramatic) order to the chaos and plenitude of Being' (2006: 40). For Aristotle, mimesis is a form of learning rather than imitation. However, within neoclassicism the various interpretations of the *Poetics*, to borrow Lehmann's phrase, turned Aristotle's 'description into prescription' (2006: 160) and the focus on mimesis as a tool of

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<sup>21</sup> Halliwell notes there were many different translations of the *Poetics* available in neoclassical France, including Dutch scholar Heinas and the Italian scholars Scagliar and Castelvetro (1986: 286–323).

learning shifted to the verisimilitude of form and content. This shift proves to be a key historical moment for the way in which late nineteenth-century Naturalism and its contemporary onscreen and onstage counterparts employ scenic time to guide reception. Neoclassicism's 'three unities' are fundamental to this shift.

The 'unities' were prescriptive rules introduced in neoclassical France as a means of increasing the verisimilitude of fictionalised time, place and action.<sup>22</sup> They foreground, as Halliwell argues, the rationalist belief underpinning neoclassical verisimilitude and demonstrate the radical difference between neoclassicism and Ancient Greece (1998: 305.) A key example of this can be found in the 'unity of time' the origins of which date back to an interpretation of the Aristotelian phrase 'one revolution of the sun'. Aristotelian scholar Elizabeth Belfiore argues that this phrase within the context of Ancient Greece is most likely a referent to metaphorical understandings of the ephemeral nature of life (2001: 29). However, in neoclassical France it ignited debates as to whether Aristotle was referring to the represented action taking place over twelve or twenty-four hours.

Playwrights such as Pierre Corneille (1606–1699) for example, as Phillip Zarilli observes, were condemned for breaching verisimilitude. His *irregular* play *Le Cid* (1637) was publically damned not because he broke the unity of time but because he attempted to fit too many events into the twenty-four hour time span of the plot (2006: 184), which made it unbelievable.<sup>23</sup> The unity of time, as Lehmann argues,

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<sup>22</sup> Castelvetro's colloquial translation of the *Poetics* was a dominant translation employed within neoclassical France. It prescriptively outlined ideas of time, place and action of plot that make up the three unities (see Halliwell, 1998: 292). For an English translation of Castelvetro's reference to the unities see (Gilbert, 1940: 309).

<sup>23</sup> *Irregular* drama was considered not to be in keeping with the three unities, because it mixed genres such as comedy and tragedy and employed outside devices. The Académie française and Cardinal Richelieu orchestrated the public debate on *Le Cid*. It is argued Richelieu used the

was ultimately about the containment of spectator perception; without such controls on scenic material, the spectator 'could let himself run wild, reflect, occupy himself with reasoning or else dream' (2006: 161). Such freedoms can only interfere with the belief that the fiction is credible and as such *real*.<sup>24</sup>

These now distant theatre histories, while seemingly innocent, still have considerable sway and ramifications for the contemporary stage and expectations of its reception. While the unities may no longer be as strictly considered within contemporary drama, as Lehmann further posits, the traditions of Aristotelian-derived temporal composition remain a powerful legacy and constant reference for the contemporary stage (2006: 161). In order to break the stronghold of neoclassical influence, the medium of theatre needs to radically rethink its dramaturgy. As Halliwell argues, what is needed is a far more radical change even beyond the more brutal experiments of modernism (1998: 286). In light of the ramifications of this history on the contemporary stage Forced Entertainment's seemingly innocent game of temporal interruption begins to take on seriousness. Their postdramatic game when viewed in the context of these histories constitutes a rebellious act that intervenes in the stronghold structures of time and perception in the theatre medium. In *And on the Thousandth Night...* the company both reference and undermine the temporal sequences of storytelling in order to effect change to the model of reception encouraged by the dramatic theatre.

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*Le Cid* controversy 'to position the monarchy as the public arbiter of French culture'. (Zarilli et al, 2006: 182–84) The *Le Cid* controversy is also thought to have legitimised the neoclassical rules.

<sup>24</sup> The neoclassical three unities readily met the needs of Naturalism's interest in a truthful mirroring of everyday life on the stage. This is exemplified in Strindberg's one-act plays, which strictly utilised the unities of time and place to the extent where scenic time matched the playing time in order to render life on stage as realistically as possible. See Törnqvist and Steene (2007: 16).

Forced Entertainment play upon and reference common patterns, tempos and rhythms to destabilise the reception these temporal patterns would otherwise engender. This destabilisation is the *raison d'être* and mode of translation of the production. For example their game of interruption ironically attempts to maintain the familiarity of continuity. Performers fight to outwit the restraints of the game by developing strategies that create some semblance of storyline, (albeit fragmented) for as long as possible and where possible even give a sense of conclusion. Further to this they employ a myriad of narrative forms such as jokes, fairy tales and myths all of which tap into unconscious structural recognition, a fundamental part of engagement within the theatre medium. As Lehmann argues, temporal sequences, whether they are the sequence of a story or choreography, for example, create *translations*. The stage 'presents us with a transportation of images and scenes of our — unconscious — desire in sequences of events' (Lehmann, 1997b: 31). Constantly interrupted and growing in abundance the temporal sequences crafted in *And on the Thousandth Night...* point not to their content for meaning but to the prevalence and familiarity of this structure as a mechanism that determines communication and its comprehension.<sup>25</sup> Etchells' description of *And on the Thousandth Night...* stands testimony to this, describing the work as an 'invitation to watch us try to play a game of telling all the stories in the world for six hours' (Etchells qtd in Heathfield, 2004: 88).

In the following description of *And on the Thousandth Night...* Forced Entertainment construct and draw upon temporal sequences and familiar rhythms that despite the game's simplicity and fragmentation prove to capture and hold the attention of the spectator. The rapid exchange of stories between players enables narrative fragments to

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<sup>25</sup> This is not to suggest that a unified spectator comprehension of performance material is achieved but rather recognisable patterns become a communicative mode.

progress through performers' reinterpretations of them. Like a football match where the game moves up and down the field as players pass and intercept the ball, the performers in *And on the Thousandth Night...* intercept and pass on aspects of stories, whether they are theme, character or location of a previous tale. They build up fragmented narrative sequences that are easily followed over time and draw upon familiar tempos and rhythms to give a sense of dramatic tension, and conclusion. Given that *And on the Thousandth Night...* is improvised live and no two performances will ever be alike, the following analysis of the performance utilises a video excerpt (Forced Entertainment, 2010) of one particular show to examine the ideas as outlined above.

The video excerpt begins with stories of kings, queens and princesses, a familiar referent to fairy tale fodder and the makeshift cloaks and crowns that the performers wear. The first tale by Terry O'Conner is of 'a melancholy lonely sad prince'<sup>26</sup> who is cut short by Etchells with a tale of 'a queen who had very long legs ... so long that they stretched from the palace all the way to the edge of the city'. This tale is again stopped and taken in a completely different direction by Richard Lowdon who draws upon a number of familiar tales. His story seems to reference in part the *Judgment of Solomon* mixed in with 'the riddle of the Sphinx' or is it *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* or even perhaps *Cinderella*? Rather than dividing a baby in two as in the biblical story of *King Solomon* his story instead is contemporary; the dividing of a plumbing business between 'three stupid and very ugly sons'. The son who can answer the father's question will win the business; O'Conner dramatically and comically cuts the story short just before the question is revealed.

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<sup>26</sup> This text excerpt has been transcribed from the video excerpt of the performance (Forced Entertainment, 2010). All further quotes from the performance are from this transcription.

The theme of 'division' in this story is then co-opted by O'Conner into her next tale: 'Once upon a time there was a king of a divided kingdom', she says, 'and the king came from one race and the other half of the kingdom was people of another race...' 'STOP', calls Etchells who seizes upon the theme of 'divided kingdom' and turns *it on its head* to great comic effect with a tale of 'a king who had himself been divided in two'. With each new positioning of characters, themes and location along with familiar structuring of tales and jokes and reinterpretation of known stories from elsewhere, the audience laughter seems to increase in recognition of the skilful way previously established material is revisited, incorporated and further developed despite the rules. As reviewer Keith Gallasch writes, although the option to take breaks is offered to the spectator the more time spent 'away the further out of the loop you felt and the more technical the appreciation became when you returned, as opposed to the shared delirium as waves of stories broke over each other' (2004: 29).

Continuing with themes of princes and kings and the like, Jerry Killick tells of a princess who is to be married to a handsome prince in a neighbouring kingdom, however her father the king is too old to travel so he entrusts the princess with 'his most trusted knight...' Pouncing at just the right moment Etchells as interloper calls 'STOP' to quickly revisit and capitalise on his previous joke 'Once upon a time there was a king', he says, 'who was divided himself into four parts...' The audience laugh, 'STOP', calls Killick, as if to silently acknowledge both the success and mock embarrassment of Etchells' ridiculous joke. Killick then attempts to reinstate his previous narrative 'Once upon a time there was a trusted knight and a princess...' 'STOP', calls Cathy Naden cutting him off after only one line. She then tells a story that perhaps trumps them all bringing the narrative thread to a conclusion.

Once upon a time there was a wedding due to take place between a prince and a princess from neighbouring kingdoms and the king was too weak to take the princess to the prince so the princess said 'it's ok I'll take the car'.

Naden's classic punch line draws upon a sequence of events told earlier to create a comic twist through the introduction of something completely incongruous to the story, a strategy that is met with rapturous laughter. It is an unspoken rhythmic full stop, the joke that is virtually impossible to *trump* or at least not immediately. Naden is unable to flesh out and build narrative within the constraints of the game so instead resorts to a structure that will give her a short sharp strategy and, through well-placed comic timing, some sense of conclusion. The story of the pending marriage however could very well return in another storytelling genre and context later in the work. All of these strategies employed by the storytellers in *And on the Thousandth Night...* make the composition of time present rather than transparent by dismantling the flow and development of the fiction.

### The reception aesthetics of duration and repetition

The palpable experience of time in *And on the Thousandth Night...* is central to spectator experience of the performance material. Time made visible is rendered as an aesthetic. Time is no longer represented but presented and the event itself becomes a focal point. As Etchells observes, the live environment becomes apparent in their durational works:

You get to see that that guy's falling asleep, or that one's laughing all the time, or that one looks engaged. You don't talk to them but in a way you make friends with people. So there's a weird heightening of

the liveness thing. (Etchells qtd in Kalb, 2008)

*And on the Thousandth Night...* undermines the temporal conditions of mimesis, that of the actor enacting a fiction in front of the spectator in the collective present of the theatre assembly. It does this by utilising strategies designed to expose the collective presence of the theatre situation such as directly addressing the spectator, improvising live, remaining constantly on stage despite exhaustion and by continuing to perform even if the spectator leaves. As Lehmann (1997b: 35) observes the collective assembly of spectators was always present but time-based dramaturgy foregrounds collectivity by exposing it. The theatrical event itself he argues 'has become empathetic, reflected, conscious' (1997b: 35). The act of performing/playing and watching Forced Entertainment's game of endurance is made conscious and empathetic by the pressures the extreme temporal situation put on the performers. For example, the struggle to keep playing and pushing through personal limitations despite mounting exhaustion is a clearly recognisable situation akin to sport and one that can even enlist spectator empathy with the players' predicament.

In the now exposed temporal architecture of Forced Entertainment's postdramatic game there are no characters to hide behind just their skill and wit as storytellers. The 'dramatic journey', the company says, is no longer strictly fictional but 'the journey of the performers as they make their way through the task or project of the piece' (Forced Entertainment, 2011: 8). Draped with reminders of dramatic characters, crude cut-out crowns and cheap red robes worn visibly on top of their own clothing, it is the performers rather than characters that are visible. In her analysis of shifts in the perception of character enactment within new performance forms Elinor Fuchs posits postmodernism's 'erasure of psychological character and refusal of

unity' (1996: 63) has created a different mode of enactment in the twentieth century. The performers, she states, now exist in 'non-linear spatial structures, and are concerned not with individual character or temporal progression but with a total state or condition' (1996: 97). The state of the performers in *And on the Thousandth Night...* is exemplified in Etchells' recollection of performing this work, he notes that all the performers, himself included, are 'pretty much brain-fried after six hours spent telling stories on stage' (Etchells, 2010).

The impact of improvising for six hours pushes the performers to the point of exhaustion. At the start of the performance they are very much in control and masters of their improvisational craft. In the first hour all eight performers sit upfront on chairs and the exchange of stories is fast and energetic. But as the performance continues, rest breaks and lying on the floor become more frequent while the storytelling becomes more sporadic in tempo of exchange and level of skill and sophistication. 'Time' has become the enemy as its toll undermines their energy and skills. Etchells recounts his experience of performing in these long works:

The durationals put the performer in the public gaze for unreasonably long amounts of time, and in structures where whatever you have planned can't really sustain or cover you for very long. You see people in durationals silent or stumbling, not playing, annoyed, or just sitting there thinking. (Etchells qtd in Heathfield, 2004: 96)

In the context of staging the game as a work of theatre, 'exhaustion' becomes another temporal interruption that gestures towards certain expectations of enactment. The stumbles Etchells describes above counter the meaningful whole of drama made manifest via a skilful translation of the script to the stage. The theatre medium, once made

transparent by the skill of the performers is instead clearly present through the *medial labour* of the performers whose own fallibility takes centre stage rather than an enacted fiction. For the dramatic stage this situation can be the ruin of a play. As Shakespeare indicates with Hamlet's advice to the players, if the actor over-acts, stumbles on his lines or laughs, all is destroyed and this for Hamlet creates a situation so offensive that it warrants the poor player be punished by whipping (Shakespeare, 1982 III.ii).

In Forced Entertainment's postdramatic game the opposite appears to be true, the more cutthroat the game appears and the more it throws the players off guard from their purpose, the more riveting the experience of watching can become. The interruption to the temporal flow jolts the spectator out of the story to focus on the actor. It offers a glimpse into a very human condition, that of failing, and this can stir up empathy for their plight. For example, near the end of the night a single performer was left out front stranded and fumbling to maintain an interesting story, while the others lay wasted on the ground behind him. As with any onstage mistake the passing of time became palpable, and as the performer continued to fumble his situation became increasingly amusing and difficult to watch. Was he victim of a playful but cutthroat strategy on the part of the other players to make apparent his inadequacies? Or was it simply a result of exhaustion on the part of everyone, of just giving up because what has been set up is just too hard to do anymore?

### The spirit of the times in which we now live

*And on a Thousandth Night...* wallows in exhaustion. Inefficient, difficult and tiring, the work is arguably out of step with the contemporary mechanisms of speed and efficiency of the mediatised

present. Cultural theorist John Tomlinson (2007) argues from *technology driven velocity* comes a culture of *immediacy*, an argument that blends together the implication of media, communication technology, and the delivery technologies of consumerism on the way in which modern life is now lived. Immediacy in terms of time, he notes, translates as rapid delivery, constant and ubiquitous availability and instant gratification (Tomlinson, 2007: 74). If that is a given, then the concept of waiting for anything has become an anomaly. In contrast Forced Entertainment's six hour long waiting game is at odds with this perception of immediacy because the work has undermined the contained and concrete terms in which dramatic mimesis communicates. Its *unsurveyable* duration and lack of unity is purposely incapable of immediate and easy comprehension. It is, as Etchells describes of all of the company's durational performances, intended to challenge habitualised patterns of reception of the theatre and relationships to time. He argues:

If people are used to the idea that what they're going to go watch will last an hour and half and in that time it will serve them up something nicely packaged with a bow on top, then making something that is sprawling in time makes out of the ordinary and difficult demands. I mean, if you want to see the whole of a twelve-hour piece that makes an unreasonable demand. Engaging with the time-frame knocks you into a different kind of relationship to the work. (Etchells qtd in Kalb: 2008)

This performance contradicts the dominant temporal experience of mediatisation by relishing the act of waiting. As convoluted narrative fragments slowly unfold to culminate in something that is far from an obvious conclusion or solution but may be a satisfying rhythmic full stop *And on the Thousandth Night...* when viewed in this context

stands distinct from the contained receptions of mediatised narrative and accelerated information technology because it is a work that celebrates 'achievements' made possible when developed slowly over time.

As this chapter demonstrates, Forced Entertainment's dramaturgical applications of duration and repetition rebel against historic perceptions of time in illusionary-based theatre and its adoption by screen-based technology. These specific temporal strategies are employed to disrupt the mimetic developmental time of drama and as such the fixity and transparency of its reception. They do this by undermining the self-contained meaning of drama by interrupting its temporal unity and surveyability. 'Time' in *And on the Thousandth Night...* is no longer a representation but an aesthetic to be experienced and its temporal arrangements act as a translation that is no longer contained but open-ended. As Kattenbelt has proposed, the theatre medium is now primed to prove its point of distinction from screen-based technology by reviving and rethinking the conditions of its *liveness* (2007: 38). Forced Entertainment's improvised game makes apparent the conditions of *liveness*. Reception in their theatre is informed by the direct relationship to the passage of time, which is neither accelerated nor immediate. The company's time-based dramaturgical approach to theatre making, as exemplified in this work, has forged a unique and politically significant experience that breaks with the habitualised patterns of engagement shaped by historic dramatic traditions while staking out a distinct territory markedly divergent from the technological present.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This is not to suggest that Forced Entertainment's compositional strategies translate to an act of political activism intended to bring about revolutionary change. The political, in this sense, is couched as a 'politics of form' and framed as an act of aesthetic resistance to historic conventions of theatre.

In the following chapter the analysis shifts to one that involves direct participation in the creation of the works. It examines the existent work *Shapes of Sleep* and *Yowza Yowza Yowza*, the creative process undertaken as part of this research. The analysis continues its focus on the potential of duration and repetition as dramaturgical strategies but this time draws upon the artist's process and findings. It examines how these works employ differing structures of time to destabilise understandings of presence within the theatre medium in order to shift the engagement with the performance material. As a consequence these works make apparent differing experiences of time to that of linearity. Further to this it explores how these new temporal arrangements shift historic terms of engagement based on collective presence to present the spectator with a situation that is ethically precarious bringing into question what might now constitute political content within the theatre medium.

## Anecdote #2

Within an airy gallery five performers lie on single beds on top of crisp white sheets to enact the movements made during sleep. They wear light silk pyjamas in hues that range from magenta to dark blue. There are no coverings so their bodies are exposed. In the silence a series of voices sound out from hidden speakers embedded in each of the mattresses. They instruct the performers how to move into different positions reminiscent of the shapes the body might make during sleep. As a spectator intimately weaves past one of the beds a calm female voice can be heard offering instructions to the performer. It says:

Lie on your back, let the weight of your toes fall outwards so that your feet are splayed, slowly turn your palms to face upwards and roll your head to the right.<sup>28</sup>

After the instructions have finished the performer lying on the bed moves into the position as explained by the voice. With eyes closed all performers interpret the instructions they hear as best as they can. Once they complete a movement they then lie still in that position as if asleep. Over the eight-hour duration they follow a repeated cycle of twenty-eight recorded instructions. Akin to a strange dance their movements are sometimes synchronised or random or there are long periods of no instructions and stillness ensues. With little to do other than follow the instructions over and over again the performers often lose concentration and doze off or completely fall asleep. The recorded instructions in this moment continue to sound out while the sleeping performer in contrast lies perfectly still as if having abandoned their body and gone elsewhere, blurring the boundaries between choreographed and everyday

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<sup>28</sup> Excerpt from *Shapes of Sleep* transcript created in 2004 in Sydney.

slumber and creating a tension between a fictitious rendering of sleep and the so-called *real*.



Figure 2

In the corner of the same gallery is a video monitor embedded into a miniature sculptural bed, it plays a prerecorded sixty-minute video loop of two people sleeping. They toss and turn occasionally punctuating the stillness of sleep. Along the gallery walls is a line of forty miniature sculptural pillows. Mounted onto each pillow is a small photograph, a 'still' of the two sleepers taken from the video. As photographs, they capture moments that emphasise the odd shapes bodies might make during sleep. The shapes of sleep depicted in these photographs are the same shapes being recreated on the beds by the performers. They act as a visual score connecting the mediatised elements of the installation to the choreographic display on the beds.

Although presented in a number of different venues the presentation of *Shapes of Sleep* at Arnolfini in Bristol (2006) was the first time the

work was presented in a gallery that was accessible to a passing audience straight off the street. Situated near a picturesque wharf in Bristol, the weekend crowd of tourists and locals along with artists attending the 'Inbetween Time Festival' at Arnolfini mixed together in the gallery.

The viewing arrangement in *Shapes of Sleep* has always garnered unpredictable reactions from spectators. As at an exhibition, they are free to stay as long as they like and sit or stand wherever they choose to in the space. However, at Arnolfini reactions to the work appeared more unusual than in other venues. As often happened some sat on the floor and watched the performers for hours on end while others headed straight for the line of sculptural pillows on the wall and at first avoided looking directly at the performers. But at this venue, perhaps because of its accessibility to a passing public, many appeared at first shocked by the encounter and halted at the entrance to the gallery as if hit by an invisible wall. In this instance some watched momentarily in disbelief and then left shaking their heads, while others after an initial hesitation confidently strode over to the beds to watch the performers up-close in their own way.

With no prior knowledge of the work and no certainty as to whether all spectators had experienced live performance of this kind before, the situation at Arnolfini heightened the unpredictability of the reactions this work can engender. In one curious moment as a performer fell asleep a man sat by the bed on the floor and focused on the performer's back. He began to visibly breathe in time with the performer, not in a way that appeared to ridicule the work or draw focus to himself, but more as an act of simple curiosity. Even more curious was the instance of a man who stood very close to one of the beds watching over a female performer. His closeness immediately directed the attention of all in the room to the vulnerability of the

performer lying exposed and unconscious before him. Upon realising he was being observed by the other spectators, he backed away from the bed and sheepishly made for the exit.

As with other presentations of this work, spectators at Arnol Fini reacted in a variety of ways. Some cried, many smiled, some yawned and looked as tired as the performers and some appeared to fall into trance. All of these reactions were not anticipated during the process of the work, they were a complete surprise that further reiterated that these simple task-based performances can never be completely determined nor understood until they are staged. Their possible meaning only makes itself apparent when the spectator comes into the equation and this can change again with each time the work is presented anew.

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### Chapter 3. Staging sleep and exhaustion in an era of accelerated living

The act of creating a work of theatre within the current instantaneous digital culture is undeniably challenging. It is now neither new nor revelatory to point out that in light of the abundance of mediatised modes of entertainment the theatre medium is no longer a mass medium. As a director, deviser and dramaturg of experimental theatre this situation, while not always consciously at the forefront of what motivates creative research, inevitably informs the broader research concerns underpinning creative experimentation. This includes questioning ways in which to best respond and reflect upon the present digitised environment. The emergence of networked technologies, to quote Hassan and Purser, has seen 'a revolution in the temporal dynamics of both our personal lives and society as a whole' (2007: 2). To respond to this experience within the framework of theatre becomes a question of how the theatre might now address this shifting temporal experience. From the perspective of a practitioner strongly informed by the dramatic framework, a reflexive dramaturgy focused on the mimetic mechanisms of dramatic theatre directly informs and shapes such enquiries, to which the notion of 'time' is paramount. For example, the relationship between the structuring of time and how a work might inform spectator reception and respond to the present environment has underlined much of my creative research. The foregrounding of differing temporal frameworks, for instance, has proved an effective strategy in shaping diverse and unexpected experiences of time that correspond to the temporal dynamics that now underpin everyday life.

This chapter examines two works drawn from this history of time-based experimentation within my practice and as such is structured in two parts that address each work in turn. Part one examines the

performance *Shapes of Sleep*, described in the anecdote preceding this chapter. *Shapes of Sleep* focuses on the act of sleep by exploring the temporal experience of this familiar daily ritual. Part two is comprised of an exegetical analysis of the work *Yowza Yowza Yowza*, the creative component of this research enquiry. This work is based on an exploration of the dance marathons of the Great Depression. It investigates the extreme temporal conditions of these historic events by restaging its timetable in order to explore how the experience of its temporal aesthetic and the reception this aesthetic creates might in some way resonate with the contemporary experience. These findings act to further contribute to understandings of the aesthetic and political importance of time-based dramaturgy to the theatre medium.

The two parts of the chapter chart a development of the way in which time-based dramaturgy in each work is employed to counter and reflect upon the traditional temporal structures of comprehension and reception in the theatre medium. It specifically focuses on the developmental time of dramatic mimesis and collective presence of both spectator and performer in the same time and place. To destabilise these fundamental understandings of theatre communication the chapter details how the works employ duration and repetition to create different experiences of time and presence in the theatre. To do so the chapter continues to explore how different sequences of time offer, as Lehmann suggests, different translations of temporal knowledge, such as the story or choreographic pattern (Lehmann, 1997b: 31).

In *Shapes of Sleep* the aesthetic impact of its repetition heightens the erratic and suspended experience of the altered time of sleep, while *Yowza Yowza Yowza* employs tableaux vivant as a staging device that inherently enlists the static time of the image to detail the exhaustive

states of the 1930s marathons captured in historic photographic imagery. The chapter further utilises Lehmann's analysis of temporal aesthetics in postdramatic practice to elaborate on these different temporal structures, this time through his analysis of 'repetition' and 'image time' (Lehmann, 2006: 156–57).

Further to this, the chapter explores the possibilities of each work's aesthetic of duration to effect a situation that radically shifts how the spectator might engage with the performance material by heightening the notion of mimesis. By way of explanation both works stage a durational action that is primarily movement based and requires that the performers follow a choreographic score. The extreme durational length of each work is intended to exhaust the performers so that they can no longer attend to their mimetic task with any level of accuracy or verisimilitude. In *Shapes of Sleep* the performers fall asleep and in *Yowza Yowza Yowza* the performers are exhausted by the relentless demands of the marathon timetable. In this instance the duration both reinforces the verisimilitude of their mimetic act while also undermining it by making evident the medial labour of the performer.

The disruption to collective presence in the theatre is also central to both works' exploration of potential receptions. As the performers in *Shapes of Sleep* fall asleep they create a curious situation where they are bodily present yet also unconsciousness and as such absent. This situation alters the rules of theatrical engagement by heightening the presence of the sleep act through the impact of a perceived absence. An aesthetic of absence, as Fuchs (1985) argues, is a strategy employed to destabilise meaning in the theatre. Her writing is utilised to elaborate on the play of absence that underpins the unusual viewing arrangement that this work creates, an arrangement that renders engagement itself unfamiliar. The uncertainty of this viewing

arrangement, the chapter argues, stands in direct reference to expectations shaped by historic understandings of the theatre medium.

How does the spectator engage with the act of mimesis when presented with sleeping bodies? The chapter explores how the work aims to enlist this ethical conundrum as a possible reception, a shift that directly counters the idea that theatre engages in ethics primarily through mimetic action. To expand upon this understanding the chapter enlists Ridout's (2009) investigation of the relationship of ethics to theatre. The intense focus on the sleep act that this situation creates directly reflects upon personal experiences of sleep and its positioning as a complicated and politicised activity within the current environment of speed and availability.

The time-based aesthetics at play within *Shapes of Sleep* emphasise the sleep act, an act that appears increasingly problematic in the accelerated environment of everyday experience. Its emphasis on the altered temporal experience of sleep and its slowness made apparent through its long duration and minimal action are anachronistic to the accelerated encounter of time within everyday life. The chapter engages Jonathan Crary's (2013) writing on the politicisation of the sleep act within late capitalism to further examine and understand the political potential of *Shapes of Sleep*'s engagement of time-based aesthetics in relation to its thematic material.

For *Yowza Yowza Yowza*, as this chapter discusses in part two, its examination of collective presence, ethical engagement and the possibility of these strategies to reflect upon contemporary everyday experience are developed through its engagement of networked technology. By webcasting the performance the work opens the theatre medium up to the temporal dynamics of the internet. It

compresses the medial labour of the work's twenty-four hour duration and counters the collective time of the theatre experience through its remote viewership. This not only heightens the possible reception that this historic event once engendered but also reflects upon the nature of networked technology and its impact on sense perception. To expand upon this understanding the analysis employs Benjamin's (1936) observation of the impact of technology on human sense perception and Boenicsh's (2007) analysis on intermediality in theatre, specifically the impact 'staging' different technologies can have on sense perception in relation to the semiotic processes that underpin the theatre medium.

## Part 1. Sleep

*Shapes of Sleep* is a choreographic installation created in 2003. It combines video and photography with live performance to present sleep as an activity. The work opened at Performance Space in Sydney, Australia on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2003 and was first performed by Martin del Amo, Kelvin Lim, Katia Molino, Gail Priest and Monica Wulff.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The performers for the first presentation of *Shapes of Sleep* are colleagues that I have worked with over the years on various projects that are often presented or produced by Performance Space. This history of collaboration enables a shared working 'language' that privileges temporal, spatial, visual and physical modes of communication over conventional text-based theatre processes. In addition to its presentations at Performance Space and Arnolfini, *Shapes of Sleep* has been presented at Omeo Studio, Sydney, Australia 2006, Tramway, Glasgow, UK, 2006, Greenroom, Manchester UK, 2006 and Theatreworks 72–13, Singapore, 2008. Each time the work is presented in a different location five new performers are sourced locally for the performance by the presenting venue. Different performers do interpret the choreographic instructions differently. The work, however, is not intended to reproduce the same choreography every time. Like Forced Entertainment's improvised game, *Shapes of Sleep* offers a stable and unchanging framework but the way the work operates within that framework is improvised and therefore open to change.

Performance Space was established in the 1980s by Mike Mullin and constituted in 1983. Its focus, as an organisation, is on experimentation within performance and visual arts. (See Performance Space Historic overview at <http://performancespace.com.au/history/>). Performance Space as Mullins notes was committed to new forms and new ways of making live performance 'beyond known frames of reference for art and performance making' (Mullins qtd in

*Shapes of Sleep* and *Yowza Yowza Yowza* could be considered as examples of performance art given the works' location in a gallery and focus on installation and visual media. However, as a practitioner, the dramatic frame has remained intrinsic to all of my creative processes even when the work is located in a gallery. A number of commentators including Rose Lee Goldberg (2011) in her seminal text on performance art also point to the blurred definitional boundaries that counter definitive distinctions between practices of theatre and performance. As Goldberg notes, even the historical roots foundational to what is now termed performance arose out of theatre's mimetic traditions, albeit as a rejection of them. For example she notes, the rebellious acts of the twentieth-century practices of the Futurists, Dadas and Surrealists, whose manifestos and performances clearly stood as an attack on the dominance of modes of representation and reception of text-based theatre, are foundational to what is now referred to as performance (Goldberg, 2011: 7).

Further to this, what has come to be termed avant-garde theatre and performance art have for many years been adopting various tropes and strategies from each other. In the case of the theatre a notable example, as Roselee Goldberg observes, is Robert Wilson's larger scale works including *Einstein on the Beach* that drew upon casts largely comprised of artists and dancers as well as Wilson's own background in art and architecture (2011: 185). Another example she cites is Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre. Foreman's work reflected the preoccupations of performance art along with

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Gallasch, 2010: 38) This commitment claims the 2013 co-directors Jeff Khan and Bec Dean is something that is still central to the ethos of Performance Space (see Gallasch, 2013: 24–26). The space remains an important infrastructure for independent practitioners and small independent companies. Performance Space was originally located at 199 Cleveland Street in Redfern, Sydney until 2007 when it moved to the Carriageworks Arts Centre in Eveleigh, Sydney.

concerns of avant-garde theatre (Goldberg, 2011: 185). While it is tempting, as Ridout and Joe Kelleher argue, to define all experimental practice under the broad banner of 'performance' such practices can still have a historical relationship with the concerns of theatre (2006: 3).

Given that so much cross over has taken place between performance and theatre, as Lehmann (2009) suggests, attempts to make an ontological distinction between theatre and performance, as is often the case in performance analysis, is perhaps now less interesting than an analysis of the strategic interruption to habitualised modes of reception that these works aim to create.<sup>30</sup> My creative practice is a case in point. It has often involved processes that explore the formal languages of other art form mediums such as video, photography and installation within all stages of its development from initial research through to presentation. This approach, to borrow Lehmann's (2009) description, enables an opportunity to reflect upon those habitual modes of reception aligned to dramatic mimesis and to strategise ways in which to destabilise such habitual responses to performance material. In the context of this project I am reflecting on the temporal structures purported to underpin dramatic reception. The following description of *Shapes of Sleep*'s research process outlines these reflections further.

The process for *Shapes of Sleep* spans the period from 2000 to 2003. It began with a research project in Yogyakarta with long-term collaborator Regina Bimadona, a painter, sculptor and performer from Java, Indonesia.<sup>31</sup> This specific 'research and development' focused

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<sup>30</sup> This reference is taken from a podcast of a seminar Lehmann gave to students at AGRFT in Lubjiana (see Lehmann, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> I have created a number of large-scale performance installations in Indonesia in collaboration with installation artists and performers in Java. Regina Bimadona has been involved in many of these projects. Works include *Waterfall* [1995], a looped choreography staged in a waterfall in Pekalongan in Java, *Postcard* [1995], a collaboration with Sutanto a painter and installation

on experimenting with different mediums with the aim of creating material that could potentially transcend the reoccurring theme of cultural difference that had often characterised this particular collaboration. A video camera was employed, not with a view to make a video work, but to see what this medium that was unfamiliar to both of us might inspire. The process focused on performing a series of performance tasks specifically for camera. One of the tasks involved simply lying down on a double bed mattress for a nap. As the nap took place a video camera recorded the sleep activity from above. This task created a very unusual result that revealed as much about the complexities of the video medium and how it engages with time in the production of its mimesis, (that of a recording from a another time and place), as it did about the strange temporal phenomenon of sleep.



Figure 3

artist and the local farming community from Mendut in Java and *Badai Pasir Baron* [1996], a work that explored cultural difference through different attitudes to the sea. *Girt by Sea* [2002] was the partner project to *Badai Pasir Baron*. It was presented at Manly Cove in Sydney. Indonesian artists involved in *Badai Pasir Baron* collaborated with Australian artists to make this site-specific performance inspired by Australian perceptions of the sea.

The video captured an unexpected choreography of twisting and still bodies highlighted against the white sheet of the bed (see figure 3). Although instantly recognisable as 'us', these little mediated figures were also strangely alien in the shapes they made and as such completely unrecognisable. Roland Barthes (1981) similarly describes this phenomenon in his reflections on photography. The photographing of an unaware subject, he argues, consists 'less in traumatizing than in revealing what was so well hidden that the actor himself was unaware or unconscious of it' (1981: 32). The experience of being an onlooker of one's own body in sleep made noticeable the sense of timelessness experienced during slumber. Each unrecognisable movement stood as testimony to a period of time that could not be recounted while at the same time the long periods of inactivity brought to the fore the real-time duration of the time spent sleeping, where the body appears to be left abandoned and exposed in the present time.

The act of recording or presenting sleep has been the subject of many art works, perhaps a testimony to its intrigue. For instance, presenting sleep live or filming sleep in real-time is arguably very familiar terrain particularly in the contemporary arts world. Andy Warhol's 1963 film *Sleep*, where he filmed his then-love interest John Giorno asleep is a seminal example of this. Other prominent examples include Cornelia Parker's 1996 *The Maybe*, a performance installation featuring Tilda Swinton asleep in a glass cabinet at the Serpentine Gallery in London and the more recent video portrait *David* [2004] that features a sleeping David Beckham by Samuel Taylor Wood. All of these works stage or make apparent the duration of the sleep act and as such enable a prolonged exposure to a body at rest. What this makes clear is in part determined by the production of mimesis specific to each medium.

Catherine Fowler argues Warhol and Taylor Wood's mediated works are powerful because the extreme close-ups can emphasise different aspects of the body in minute detail. This, she claims, confronts the spectator with the realities of sleep, of actual bodily secretions and the lack of control experienced during sleep (2006: 248). Parker's live performance, she notes, is different again because it is 'performative', the body is so present that it discourages the viewer from looking too closely just in case the sleeping Swinton might wake up and catch the viewer watching her (Fowler, 2006: 247).

The distinction Fowler's comparison makes between these mediated and live works is a distinction between the absence and presence that constitutes the temporal structures of filmic and theatre modes of communication. As discussed in chapter two, the filmic medium, Kattenbelt reminds us, excels as a captivating illusion because the mechanics of its reproduction are hidden. This renders the medium "transparent" creating the optimum conditions for a spectator to become fully immersed in the illusion presented (2007: 34).

The example of the extreme close-ups of the sleepers' bodies employed in Warhol and Taylor Wood's works illustrate this point well. They, as Fowler notes, capture the 'realities' of sleep (2006: 248), or in other words the filmic medium can offer such minute and realistic detail of its recorded subject that its onscreen manifestation appears to be actual and not just a representation. In the case of *The Maybe* the opposite is true. Swinton is very present in her glass case and the spectator is very conscious of watching her. The medium is not transparent and immersive but rather very visible. Her celebrity further heightens this situation; not only is this 'star' of the screen right in front of the spectator but she is also asleep, an act that seems to point out the very distinction between a mimetic rendering

of a Swinton on screen to this strangely intimate and private encounter with her in the live environment. This situation raises so many potential questions. What is it we are now watching? Why is it so enticing to watch her asleep? While at the same time why is it, as Fowler (2006: 247) intimates, also so problematic to watch this act? *The Maybe* raises such questions because it arguably undermines the usual understanding of mimesis most commonly associated with the theatre medium.

The rationales governing how Western theatre is watched and understood are for Weber now an unquestioned expectation that dates back to Plato (2004: 3–8). Plato's Cave, he posits, depicts a particular kind of theatre, a 'defined limited place' (Weber: 2004: 3) that defines a particular perception and viewing arrangement as a scene played to the spectator from a 'safe remove' (Weber: 2004: 3). The inherent danger of Swinton's sleep act is that her action no longer neatly corresponds to the notion of mimesis. She is both present as a representation of a sleeper and as herself actually asleep. This fissure makes conscious the act of watching. The fixity and certainty of the viewing arrangement are now rendered uncertain, as the spectator is made aware of their own act of spectating in the present time. The video footage of the sleeping Beckham by contrast reinforces Weber's understanding of the 'safe remove' (2004: 3). The viewers watch on from a place of fixity, their position in the act of watching remains relatively forgotten as its convincing mimetic rendering of a *real* moment in the life of a celebrity absorbs the viewer. Fowler, for example, observes the video rendering of Beckham is *so real* it creates the impression of spending time with a celebrity to the point where it feels like an intimate experience even when one knows Beckham is not really present (2006: 252).

As previously discussed the video footage taken during the *Shapes of Sleep* research also afforded a very convincing and intimate rendering of the so-called realities of the time spent sleeping. The sense of unease made conspicuous by the video footage became the inspiration for the live performance. For example, the strangeness of a time unaccounted for, of a body left abandoned in the present time and of the shapes those bodies made during that time were all ideas explored within the performance. In addition the footage also highlighted the self-consciousness of the task itself, the awkwardness of setting oneself up to be watched while asleep. This created a curious tension between an awareness of the camera, the setting up of poses and pretending to sleep, to the moment of relaxing and actually drifting off to sleep. Many of the staging strategies used in the live performance such as staging sleep as choreography and playing upon an enactment of sleep that slips into actual slumber were ideas directly informed by what was captured in the video footage. However, when these ideas were translated to the live environment the work created a radically different spectator engagement to that of the intrigue created by the 'sleeping task' video. This again was largely a distinction between the relationship to time and space specific to each medium, a distinction that makes clear the potential of 'presence' within theatre.

Like Kattenbelt (2007), Susan Sontag also argues that the notion of presence is the fundamental distinction between theatre and the filmic medium; theatre's logical and continual use of space is the elementary distinction between theatre and film. The theatre actor, she argues, when onstage is constantly visible and when offstage remains visualisable (Sontag, 1966: 29). However, Sontag is ultimately presenting a conceit upheld by a text-based theatre model that has for centuries maintained a very specific understanding of presence in relation to representing fictional enactments of life on the

theatre stage. Fuchs' study of presence in theatre furthers this observation. She posits that since the Renaissance, understandings of theatrical 'Presence' have comprised only two elements: 'the unique self-completion of the world of the spectacle, and the circle of heightened awareness flowing from actor to spectator and back that sustains the world' (Fuchs, 1985: 163). The theatre spectator is arguably aware of the presence of the actor and themselves in the theatre, but their focus can be directed, as Fuchs intimates, on to the presence of the fictional world of the play and its characters.

The actors' job in the dramatic theatre is to fundamentally make present the characters and the story. The presence of the actors themselves or the theatre building or the very act of watching the performance is not the intended focus.<sup>32</sup> The more emphasis placed on the verisimilitude of the staged illusion the more transparent the medium of theatre should become, as was the aim of the staging experiments of late nineteenth-century Naturalism.<sup>33</sup> If its illusion is convincing, albeit as Kirby points out within the context of pretending, this is never completely possible (Kirby, 1969: 68), the medium itself should dissolve as all become captivated by the story being recreated before them. However, if the theatre chooses to make the mutual presence of spectator and performer a conscious experience this can create a very different kind of engagement with the performance material.

Forced Entertainment as illustrated in their work *And on the Thousandth Night...* like many other practitioners have openly challenged the very definitional given that theatre is predicated on the spectator and performer being present in the same time and

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<sup>32</sup> This idea is complicated by celebrity as in the example given of the casting of Blanchett and Huppert in the *Maids* in chapter two

<sup>33</sup> For example, Antoine famously hung real sides of beef on stage in his 1888, production of *The Butchers* by Fernand Ingres. They were apparently very pungent (see Barnes, 2007: 36).

place. As discussed in chapter two, the exhausting duration along with the repetitious game structure make this work untenable to watch as a whole and in fact is not intended to be watched as a whole. Instead the exhausted spectators are encouraged to take breaks and can come and go from the auditorium as they please. In so doing they forge a different experience of time to that of a fictional representation of time integral to one central story, and consequently they raise the possibility for a different engagement with their performance material.

*Shapes of Sleep* also aims to create a distinctive experience of time and presence. While this case study focus shows *Shapes of Sleep* clearly shares similar strategies to Forced Entertainment's *And on the Thousandth Night...*, such as staging a single durational action that leads to an extreme state of exhaustion and a structure that enables the audience to come and go from the work as they choose, it also offers something different again to this discussion on temporal aesthetics and the political potential of time. For instance, *Shapes of Sleep* focuses on the phenomenon of sleep: its dramaturgies of duration and repetition aim to heighten the temporal experience of sleep by composing the temporal suspension experienced by the sleeper as well as highlighting the real time duration of the sleep act itself. An act that when watched makes the slow passing of time very visible, as if time itself has become dilated. It does this in order to heighten and bring into question relationships to sleep. This is a very different kind of engagement to the dilated experience of time in Forced Entertainment's game of endurance, as are the reflective dramaturgies that underpin *Shapes of Sleep's* exploration of temporal structure and presence, dramaturgies that are further detailed in the following analysis of *Shapes of Sleep's* composition.

*Shapes of Sleep* employs a particular temporal sequence in order to

theatricalise and heighten the act of sleep. Based on the physical shapes made by the sleeping figures in the 'napping task video' the choreographed durational action of this work literally aims to replicate the various bodily shapes depicted in the video as realistically as possible. The scoring of time is vital to this. For example, the score consists of twenty-eight recorded instructions that describe to the performers how to physically reconstruct one position of sleep after another. In between 'poses' of sleep there are long pauses of stillness that require performers to hold positions for varying amounts of time similar to the act of sleep itself, an act that is generally static over long periods of time and only occasionally punctuated with a movement as the body shifts to another position. After the twenty-eight movements have been completed the score then loops.

In order to heighten the sense of strangeness that comes with watching what 'we' do during that unaccounted time of sleep, the performance score overtly theatricalises the movements by playing with the timing, tempo and rhythms of the performers' scores in relation to one another. To do this each performer's score over time becomes slightly different. For example, in the very first cycle of instructions (see Appendix B) the pauses between instructions are synchronised in a regular pattern that rarely deviates from intervals of fifteen and sixty seconds. However, as the cycle repeats, the pauses in each of the performer's scores become increasingly random and longer ranging anywhere between fifteen seconds and ten minutes in duration. The timing between instructions is carefully planned so that they oscillate between moments of complete synchronicity and randomness and complete stillness, which in turn oscillate between what appears to be a more realistic portrait of sleep to a much more surreal rendering of the sleep act through its synchronised repetition. For example, long periods of stillness are randomly broken as all performers suddenly roll over at the same

time or at other times the scores are slightly behind one another causing repetitions of the same movement to cadence across the beds. Or after a long period of stillness just one performer comes into focus as they raise their body up before falling back down on the bed again.

Temporal sequences, as discussed in chapter two, offer a translation. These moments of synchronicity, cadences or solos act as a temporal translation unto themselves. They offer a similar sense of satisfaction to that which one enjoys when watching a group of dancers moving randomly in a space and they all suddenly start doing the exact same movements at the same time. Temporal patterns such as these are immediately recognisable. However, the work is not intended to create continuous and up-tempo choreographic displays. These heightened choreographed moments happen in between long periods of silence and stillness which, along with its repetition and continual looping, emphasises the slowness of this work. Not a lot appears to happen quickly. The looping literally halts time as if it is stuck, a situation that invites a number of different responses. Is it ok to drift off and lose concentration or to be bored with the work? How long should one stay in order to understand it? Such uncertainty raises questions about the nature of the engagement this work appears to invite.

Repetition in the theatre can be an alien experience. For Lehmann, repetition as a temporal structure is essential to any aesthetic form — for example poetry, the composition of an image or the melody and rhythm of music composition — yet within 'new theatre languages' it is employed to counter the temporal structures that constitute meaning in the theatre, that of a unified and meaningful whole (2006: 156). The repetitious composition of *Shapes of Sleep* offers a translation of the experience of sleep itself rather than, for example,

a performed narrative or illustrative choreography of someone's experience of sleep. And it does this by emphasising the experience of time, by attending to its structure as a central dramaturgical strategy, as illustrated by its repetitious scoring. This focus on the sleep act is further emphasised by the work's length of duration.

For the performers the eight-hour duration of the work makes the task of performing the choreography exhausting. The seemingly endless repetition and random gaps of stillness turn their choreographic task into a fight to stay awake. Without a means of measuring time they literally become lost in this excessive length of time and out of sheer boredom or exhaustion they begin to drift in and out of sleep. This situation destabilises the mimesis by making uncertain the *usual* understanding of mimicry. The performer enacting sleep turns into an actual sleeper and the lines between fiction and the so-called *real* blur. This disruption is temporal. It literally stops the durational action and in so doing makes clear the temporal structure of its fiction by pointing to the work's medial labour, that of the performers' exhausting task of making present the fictional illusion of sleep. This situation creates a satisfying ironic twist not lost on reviewer Mary Anne Mancio who observes 'the performers are no longer just performing sleep, they are physically exhausted by it. It's a witty reversal of the notion of sleep as something that revives' (Mancio, 2006: 4). Such irony points to the sometimes tenuous relationship to sleep, that for some, might not be such a restful or easy relationship but instead just hard work.

The length of the duration of the work and its engagement as an aesthetic is a crucial strategy in effecting this situation. For example, the first trial run of *Shapes of Sleep* in 2003 at the Performance Space was only two hours long, the equivalent of two cycles. This duration was not long enough to exhaust the performers; it remained

only a choreographic display of the movements of sleep. However, by extending the duration to eight hours, as described above, the temporal structure underpinning the production of the choreography became visible and materially present through the performers' exhaustion. For example, as the performers tire they become less careful with the choreography. What starts off as fresh and considered movement becomes smaller and less precise over time or completely altered for comfort. In this decay of the formal aspects of the choreography 'time' is made present, an idea that Andre Lepecki also observes: 'we don't perceive time directly, but only the by-products of time's actions upon the bodies that it envelops and traverses' (Lepecki, 2006: 124). These visible traces on the performers' actions in *Shapes of Sleep* mark a shift in the function of time; it is presented as an aesthetic to be experienced and seen. A situation further heightened the moment the performers give up all altogether and drift off to sleep.

*Shapes of Sleep* creates a precarious spectator engagement by emphasising the temporal experience of the sleep act. Rendered curiously present of body but absent of mind, a phenomenon familiar to sleep, here the time of consciousness is brought to the fore. Like Bergson's (1889) notion of duration cited at the opening of this thesis, the experience of time that belongs to consciousness is distinct to the experience of the clock that underpins everyday understandings of time. This distinction in *Shapes of Sleep* creates a complex situation. The performers are literally experiencing a different sense of time to the onlooker, but it is an experience that is deeply recognisable, one so familiar it is unnerving in what it invites. The spectator is offered the opportunity to watch the undisclosed activities that occur during the usually unaccounted time spent sleeping in a public setting.

A fundamental condition of theatre communication, McAuley reminds us, is predicated on live actors and live spectators being 'present to each other within a given space' (McAuley, 1999: 4). The unconscious performers in *Shapes of Sleep* destabilise this notion. Yes they are bodily present but somehow their unconsciousness puts this understanding of theatre communication on unstable ground. Now the spectator must contend with a performer who is both curiously present yet absent at the same time. In her discussion of the histories informing what constitutes presence in the theatre, Fuchs argues the aesthetic of absence has been employed as a staging strategy since the 1970s within experimental theatre practice. Absence, she argues, is employed to destabilise 'habitual expectations of bodily presence and actor audience contact' (1985: 164).

A 'theatre of Absence', according to Fuchs, seeks a very different kind of theatre, one that 'disperses the centre, displaces the Subject, destabilizes meaning' (1985: 165). This, she argues, differs again even to the 1970s experimental focus on presence once championed by practitioners such as Peter Brook and Richard Schechner. The participatory and improvised experiments of these practitioners focused on self-revelation, which they claimed was more 'authentic' than the written word that they sought to counter. According to Fuchs, their experiments only reinforced the same logocentric claim to 'authority and authenticity' that they sought to reject (1985: 165). *Shapes of Sleep's* employment of absence, or rather performers rendered absent by their state of unconsciousness, seeks to engage the spectator in a very different kind of 'truthful' performer presence. The performer's failure to stay awake in a sense heightens the mimesis; now they are really asleep and not only pretending. They are a representation of sleep and actually asleep at the same time. And with this realisation 'expectations of bodily presence and actor

audience contact' (Fuchs, 1985: 164) are not so easy to define and bring a certain hesitation to the act of watching. How do you now engage with this mimetic rendering of sleep? The answer to this question can in part be found in an understanding of the specific conditions pertaining to theatre communication.

For Boenisch the theatre as a live medium has the potential to create a number of different understandings of its staged material because it is primarily a semiotic practice and as such is dependent on the perception of the spectator to complete its meaning (2007: 110). He argues:

Compared with other media that transmit objects to another space/ and or another time, or store them to make worlds out of them there and then, theatre processes these objects into worlds here and now, while simultaneously leaving them as they are. Thus, theatre multiplies its objects in a remarkable way on stage that are present and representations at the same time, and — above all — they are presented to someone who is perceiving and observing them. (2007: 114)

This, he goes on to say, creates the effect of multiple understandings of its staging. In addition to semiotic layers of presence, presentation and mimesis it also draws on a multiplicity of other sign systems and as such has the capacity to enlist a broad variety of perspectives (2007: 114). However, as discussed in the previous chapter, if believable mimesis is the intended outcome the reception is more guided. Within the presiding logic of 'standard' understandings of representation, these semiotic layers Boenisch notes are contained in 'a single closed and coherent final product of representation' (Boenisch, 2007: 114), as in the example of the meaning of a written script. As duration and repetition in *Shapes of Sleep* exhaust the performers it makes 'an untidy mess of meaning' (Boenisch, 2007:

114).

Once staged, the bodies of the exhausted performers in *Shapes of Sleep* inhabit many layers of sign systems. Yes, they are representing someone asleep but at the same time they are in effect falling asleep. So who is this person? And is it ok to watch them sleep regardless? Without the definitional narrowing of this body to that of a character or in their absence even an actor, the temporal strategies accentuate a new mode of communication predicated on complex understandings of the staged situation. Central to this is the presence of the performers' bodies in the *here and now*, the collective time and space along with the spectator. Within this temporal architecture where collective presence underpins communication what does the presence of sleeping bodies now communicate to the spectator?

Lehmann argues that in the theatre bodies operate as signs of signs, as 'inbetween bodies' that exist between the performer and the spectator. They connect directly, he observes, with spectators' own corporeal experience (2006: 171). This notion is apparent in *Shapes of Sleep*. As time progresses the more elemental bodily aspects of sleep become increasingly pronounced and recognisable for the spectator. For example, Mancio observes: 'by the final hour, there is a haze to the space; it even smells of people sleeping (2006: 4). Over the eight-hour duration the performers in *Shapes of Sleep* become a palpable bodily accumulation of all that it means to sleep. Abandoning control they give in to the unsightly realities of sleep. They sometimes drool, pyjamas become twisted up, body parts are exposed and hair turns to 'bed hair' matted and standing on end. This is a dishevelment familiar to most, one that looks back in the bathroom mirror every morning but is usually confined to the privacy of one's home and bedroom. Staging real-time sleep purposely exposes this once private state turning all of its unsightliness into an

object to be observed within a public gallery.<sup>34</sup>



Figure 4

The vulnerabilities inherent in sleep and as such the vulnerability of the performer are heightened in *Shapes of Sleep* by staging the corporeal realities of sleep. The strangeness of sleep, of being bodily present yet unconscious or 'dead to the world' according to the common expression is made ominously present by its public positioning. Rendered unconscious or even if pretending to sleep with eyes closed, the performer is left exposed and vulnerable and the spectators are left with a less than clear contract as to the rules of this peculiar engagement. This is exemplified in Mancio's (2006) first-hand response outlined below in which she notes her difficulty in watching spectators get too near to the beds as if they are

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<sup>34</sup> The act of 'staging' as fundamental to *Shapes of Sleep*'s reception marks a radical distinction from the historical positioning of plot and the written text as central to the constitution of meaning within theatre. See Lehmann (2006: 41) for further discussion on the influence of Aristotle's hierarchy of text over staging in relation to this.

encroaching upon some unspoken ethical responsibility.

[A] man stands too close to the dark-haired girl's bed; I suddenly realise how vulnerable she is (not surprising that Cornelia Parker's 1995 *The Maybe* installation placed sleeping Tilda Swinton in a glass case. (Mancio, 2006: 4)

The theatre is often considered a place where ethical situations can be enacted. Nicholas Ridout argues this creates a dilemma. Theatre, he notes, is a known place of make believe, so how is it possible to create a true ethical situation through representation and enactment. The truth, according to Ridout, lies less with enactment and more with the spectator's response. The *truth* in theatre, he argues, lies in an ethics of spectatorship (Ridout, 2009: 15). Within *Shapes of Sleep* the impact of duration and repetition on the performers is vital to the ethical conundrum the work now presents to the spectator. Further to Mancio's expressed concerns for the performers, Thomas Frank in his observations of the work similarly speaks of the performers' vulnerability. He writes:

The spectator is turned into a guard of living bodies, whose minds are temporarily absent. The installation emanates a great calmness — tender, pacifying and very contemplative. 'Shapes of Sleep' subtly says a lot about the vulnerability of bodies without having to expose the wounds. (Frank, 2006:4)<sup>35</sup>

The performers are unable to protect themselves and in turn rely on this sense of ethics, trusting that whoever enters the gallery will respect them, or guard them from the unknowable circumstances that this now-ambiguous viewing arrangement creates. Or with their

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<sup>35</sup> This quote comes from an unpublished essay by German dramaturg Thomas Frank that was commissioned by Performance Space as part of the *Breathing Space Tour* of the UK in 2006 in which *Shapes of Sleep* was presented.

eyes closed and in the peaceful state of sleep are they lulled into the strange temporal experience of sleep that consumes them and makes them blissfully unaware of any dangers that might be a threat to them back in the *here and now* of the gallery where their slumbering bodies lie?

The act of sleeping and dreaming is in itself symbolic of a very different relationship to time and presence. The sense of time when sleeping is not the experience of time when awake, it is like another realm that one enters where time is rarely chronological and events rarely logical. Dreaming is used in this way to great effect in the music theatre work of Christoph Marthaler. Marthaler often depicts people in waiting rooms of different kinds, fated to carry out repetitious cycles of behaviour. His temporal stagings counter developmental time to arrive at a very different engagement with time, one that is also potentially experienced by the spectator. In his performance *Murx den Europäer! Murx ihn! Murx ihn! Murx ihn! Murx ihn ab!*, Marthaler presents a group of what appears to be office workers caught in a repetitious cycle of running to and fro between their desks and a washroom.<sup>36</sup> A large clock hanging on the back wall appears to have stopped. Dramaturg Stephanie Carp (1997: 69) notes that the performance creates a timeless world with no escape for the people depicted in Marthaler's fictitious world except in dreams and memories. In her analysis of time in relation to dreams in Marthaler's work, Carp draws on Benjamin's notions of 'Empty' and 'Filled' time to examine the different relationships of sleep to the present: 'Empty time is the present sequence, a serial time without history. Filled time is time charged with a past and a future' (Carp, 1997: 69). The unconscious time of sleep she notes refuses to be

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<sup>36</sup> *Murx den Europäer! Murx ihn! Murx ihn! Murx ihn! Murx ihn ab!* (Kill the European ! Kill him! Kill him! Kill him! Kill him off!) was directed by Christoph Marthaler and premiered at the Berliner Volksbühne in 2003.

fixed in time. It is akin to Benjamin's 'Empty' time. This idea is pivotal to the over-arching concerns and compositions of Marthaler's work:

When people sleep in Christoph Marthaler's productions, it means more than merely a dramaturgical device. Sleep refuses to be fixed in time. Sleep relieves the strain of meaning. In sleep and dreams, the figures on stage can express a different possibility of their existence which does not occur in their present now: what else people could be, if they could be, if they could. Sleeping, dreaming, day dreaming, these defensive, persistent activities are in Marthaler's theatre emblematic states of people. Sleep relieves the burden of intentional speaking: it has no goal: it dilates time. (Carp, 1997: 69)

*Shapes of Sleep*, like Marthaler's performance, also points to the distinctly different temporal experience of sleep from that of everyday life where time is most commonly understood, as Hassan notes, by the tempo of the clock that beats out days into blocks of twenty-four hours and allots allocations of time for particular activities (Hassan, 2007: 42). Sleep is a case in point. *Shapes of Sleep* is intentionally performed for an eight-hour duration, the length of time recommended for a 'good night's sleep'. However, its repetitious and erratic temporal score, as described earlier in the chapter, is akin to the erratic temporal experience of sleep itself, an activity that refuses, as Carp points out, to be fixed in time. Aesthetics of duration and repetition create a strangely lulling experience. They noticeably distort the perception of time. As Lehmann notes 'a crystallization of time occurs in repetition, a more or less subtle compression and negation of the course of time itself' (Lehmann, 2006: 156). Stay too long in the dormitory world that *Shapes of Sleep* creates and run the risk, like the performers, of falling under its hypnotic spell. For example, Mancio notes 'I become infected by the hypnotic repetition; start to yawn, not out of boredom but tiredness (Mancio, 2006: 4), while Frank (2006: 4) recounts that the work's stillness creates a

sense of great calm. As if to gesture to this calm once every cycle the performers are instructed to murmur the line:

*No, no it doesn't matter, none of it matters anymore.*

Intended as a comic moment this line reflects the suspended time of sleep or in Carp's words: 'a different possibility of their existence which does not occur in their present now' (Carp, 1997: 69).

In a contemporary climate where time is of the essence and 'productivity' and 'aims' seem to be the driving motivation for how one is expected to live and work, a performance that emulates the aimlessness of sleep in both form and content for an interminably long eight hours, might sit ill at ease for some. The work's stasis is starkly different to the temporal acceleration (Virilio, 2000) experienced by many in the course of a day. To slow down one's sense of time and just 'be' with the calm that *Shapes of Sleep* invites can either be challenging or a welcome respite. Away from the busy environment of the *Inbetween Time Festival* at Arnolfini in Bristol where *Shapes of Sleep* was presented, Mancio describes the atmosphere of the performance as: 'an effective oasis of tranquillity' (Mancio, 2006: 4). In this fictitious 'oasis of tranquillity' sleep becomes an ideal. The performance emulates the eight hours of sleep, a respite away from everyday concerns because in sleep, as the performers remind us, 'none of it matters anymore'. But this ideal of sleep is perhaps far from the reality of many. With not enough hours in the day to complete everything that one must achieve, who has time for sleep? In his analysis of the impact on industrial advancement on sleep Crary argues:

Over the course of the twentieth Century there were steady inroads made against the time of sleep — the average North American adult

now sleeps approximately six and a half hours a night, an erosion from eight hours a generation ago, (and hard as it is to believe) down from ten hours in the early twentieth century. (Crary, 2013: 11)

At the core of this erosion of sleep time that Crary outlines above is a shift in emphasis of the value of work over leisure brought about by advancements in industry and technology. In his analysis of the origins of the eight-hour working day in pre- and post-World War One in France and Britain, Gary Cross argues the ideal of the 'three eights' industrial movement, that of eight hours for work, eight hours for leisure and eight hours for sleep was 'an expression of a growing popular desire for time liberated from work and available for new leisure opportunities and family centred values' (Cross, 1989: 129). While this ideal as Virilio (1995: 96) argues was later co-opted by employers to place a monetary value on time in the workplace, the 'three eights' industrial action illustrates how the long-fought-for eight-hour working day has in current times been somewhat eroded, along with the eight hours recommended for a good night's sleep.

Networked technology has further shifted attitudes towards sleep, leisure and productivity. Crary argues it has created a culture where sleep is now a 'state of low powered readiness' akin to the computer's *sleep mode*. 'It supersedes an off/on logic so that nothing is ever fundamentally off and there is never an actual state of rest' (Crary, 2013: 13). Hassan and Purser argue that the mobility, flexibility and accessibility of portable and networked technology further compound this attitude towards sleep. They argue:

We may find ourselves working on a networked computer at midnight, communicating with someone half a world away, then stopping for a break to go to the local all night supermarket to buy milk for the coffee we need to stay awake. (Hassan and Purser, 2007: 2)

The *anywhere anytime* availability of networked technology has also radically changed engagement with leisure activity. Social networking and various other online distractions appear to stimulate and fill our every waking hour. Hannah Betts writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald* observes that technology not only stops us from going to bed but also has invaded the bedroom. Whether for work or leisure there are many who are taking portable technology to bed to which the market has responded accordingly. Betts writes:

This bad collective habit has spawned a generation of regrettable accessories, from laptop cushions to beds with various sockets. The American brand Reverie boasts beds with built in wifi that can be adjusted using an iphone. (Betts, 2012: 19)

While it can be argued that this shift in attitudes to sleep has escalated since the advent of networked technology, debates around the necessity of sleep have existed for much longer. Even heads of government from Churchill to Thatcher and more recently and closer to home Australian ex-prime minister Kevin Rudd, have all claimed that *three hours sleep* is more than adequate. Suzanne Moore of the *Guardian Weekly* points out that such claims position sleep as 'if [it] were a weakness' (Moore, 2013: 48). In an exposé of her own sleeping disorder she cites that eight hours is no longer the standard measure for sleep, 'doctors are quite strict, saying that most of us can function on five or six hours' sleep and we exaggerate the hours tossing and turning' (Moore, 2013: 48). With sleeping disorders on the rise she argues:

Lots of scientists are studying sleep right now as there is money to be made from our general fatigue (...) While I accept technology has possibly made my sleeping patterns worse, I am thrilled to hear that scientists are now developing masks and probes that they can stick

straight into my prefrontal cortex, which will induce the best kind of sleep. (Moore, 2013: 48)

All of these diverse attitudes towards sleep, the histories and contemporary advancements that have changed the circumstances that now erode the time and quality of sleep and what this means on contemporary standards of health and well-being, indicate that sleep is now for many an extremely politicised activity. *Shapes of Sleep* as a work of theatre offers a distinctly provocative encounter with this now-complex everyday experience, in ways that other mediums and traditional notions of representation in theatre cannot. The experience this work offers is distinct for a number of reasons discussed throughout this chapter. Instead of enacting an ethical situation, as Ridout (2009) argues is often the expectation of theatre, it draws upon spectators' own experiences of sleep, one that is viscerally experienced in order to communicate the potentiality of material that is ethically and politically charged. It does this by highlighting theatre's distinct historic relationship to presence, that of the mutual presence of the actor and the spectator in the same time and space.

The aesthetic of duration and repetition in *Shapes of Sleep* intensifies the awareness of this mutual presence by making visible the temporal structures: of the cyclic and repetitious structure of its durational choreographic score, of the medial labour of the performer's body who over time cannot stay awake, and of a perceived absence that occurs when they do fall asleep, that leaves the spectator and performer in a precarious position of mutual compromise. Left exhausted, vulnerable and on the continual brink of sleep the performers' presence and the mimetic act they present are heightened by the uncertainty that comes into being through the challenges this work presents to the viewing arrangement most

commonly associated with the theatre, that of watching a 'closed and coherent final product of representation' (Boenisch, 2007: 114) that enables it to be observed and understood from a 'safe remove' (Weber, 2004: 3). Instead questions of how to engage with this staged act of sleep can arise, an act that can hold complex associations for the individual who finds sleep difficult. As Crary (2013) argues, the temporal dynamics of the everyday have made it so.

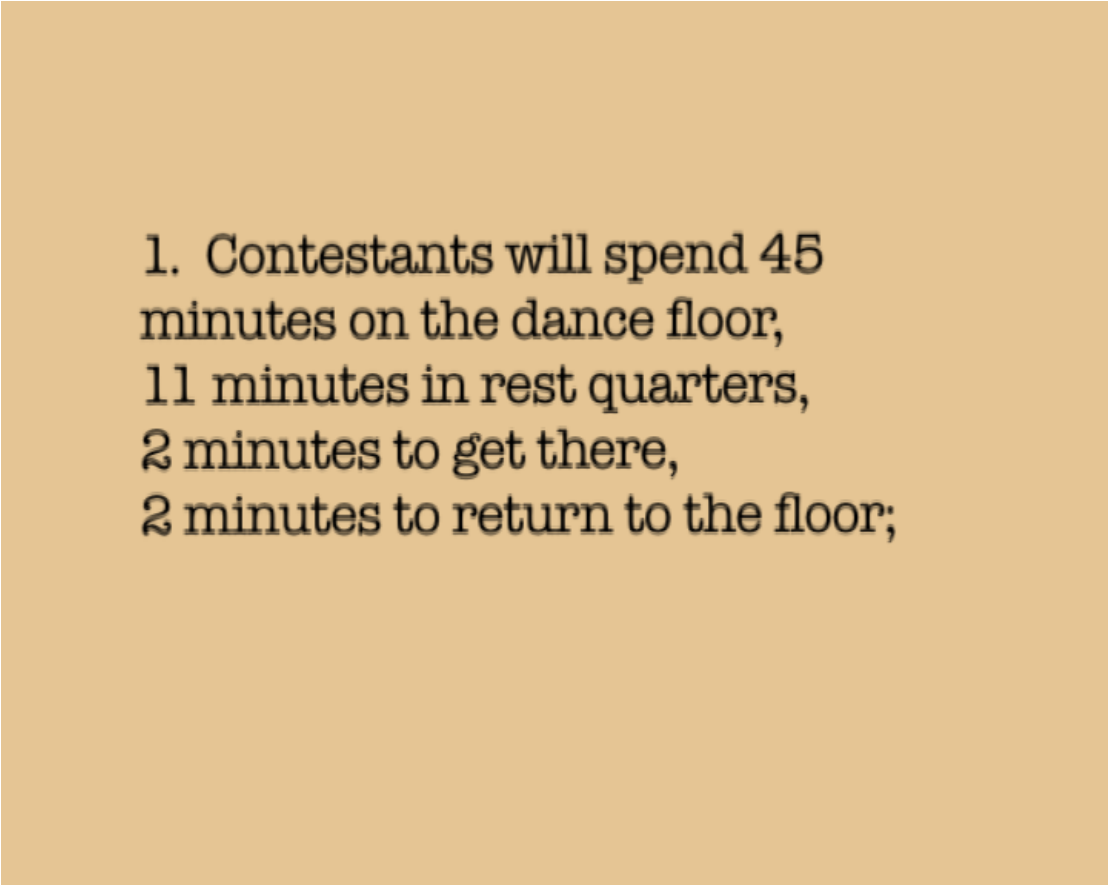
While *Shapes of Sleep* foregrounds the complexities of sleep, part two of this chapter focuses on *Yowza Yowza Yowza*, a performance made in response to the 1930s dance marathons that aimed to deprive people of sleep as a form of cheap entertainment. As the practice component of this research, the creative process *Yowza Yowza Yowza* enabled the opportunity to experiment with compositional structures of duration and repetition and to observe first-hand the kinds of reception these strategies suggested. These findings extend to the unexpected involvement and impact of the internet as a device that became integral to the politics of engagement that the work invites.

### Anecdote #3

The performer Carly Young enters the gallery to prepare for the arduous task ahead, the twenty-four-hour durational performance *Yowza Yowza Yowza*. With her hair clipped up neatly and sculptured into finger curls Carly is barely recognisable. To add to this transformation she also wears an original beige 1930s crepe dress cut off the bias, a fashionable style of the day. The dress was sourced from Ebay, and while it shows some signs of age, now around eighty years old, it is as the seller described 'in pretty good condition for an antique'. Her shoes on the other hand are not so authentic, cheap replica T-Bar Mary Janes made in China but they look the part.

Jackson Davis, the other performer in this work, is already in the gallery waiting. Unlike Carly, none of his costuming is original. His beige trousers with light pinstripes were borrowed from a friend who threw in a pair of braces to make the costume appear more 1930s. The beige shirt that Jackson wears was found at a local op-shop along with a red tie to match. In keeping with the era, Jackson shaves off his beard and as he sits waiting on the camp bed, (an original WW2 stretcher also purchased from Ebay), he removes his pierced earrings and puts them in a container by his bed. His now clean-shaven unpierced face makes him appear very dapper and a world away from the fashions of today. Together Carly and Jackson appear very similar to a 1930s couple ready to embark upon a marathon. To complete the look they each wear a black 'number bib' on their backs that displays in large white numerals the number '43'. With this finishing touch they look just like couple number '43' in a photograph from the 1930s marathons sourced online. The photograph, now an arrested moment in time, captures the couple in mid dance-step smiling at the audience.

The small gallery space where *Yowza Yowza Yowza* is presented is filled with an odd array of objects, a strange mix of the old and the new. In the centre of the gallery is a small circle of Edison globe foot lights. They demarcate a miniature dance floor that illuminates the centre of the space. Pointing ominously at the dance floor and slightly out of place is a camera on a tripod and another small camera mounted on the wall. In the back corner of the space are the antique army camp beds neatly laid out with grey blankets and cream-coloured pillows. On another of the walls is a small video screen; it slowly flicks through a series of black-and-white photos of 1930s marathon contestants. Another small screen shows images of medical staff attending to weary contestants. On another wall a large animated projection systematically types out 17 of the 'rules' of a 1930s marathon in an old typewriter font. At the very top of the list is the rule outlined in figure 5.



1. Contestants will spend 45  
minutes on the dance floor,  
11 minutes in rest quarters,  
2 minutes to get there,  
2 minutes to return to the floor;

Figure 5

This rule, the '45-minute rule', above all others dictated how the original marathon contestants would operate day in and day out for sometimes months on end. Aware of this stipulation Carly and Jackson know that like the 1930s contestants they will also submit to this rule and its temporal intrusions on their sleep and their lives. On the back wall, presiding over all is a LED scrolling sign that reads 'Hours danced'. At midday this sign will begin to count the hours as they pass by until midday the following day when it will stop at twenty-four hours.

At 11.30 a.m. the performance is almost ready to begin. As the performers do a few preparatory stretches, they become a strange mixture of an actor waiting to perform and a sporting contestant waiting to race.

At 11.40 a.m. dressed as a 1930s nurse, (costume authenticity very much in doubt), I wheel in the performers' first meal on a silver trolley. There is a bowl of soup, a salad, cottage cheese and two slices of buttered bread; an 'authentic' meal as was served at the dance marathons, well at least that is what a historic source book claimed that included an example of a menu and times of service used during one of the marathons. Running short of time, Carly and Jackson quickly eat their meals. As they eat they shuffle from side to side in accordance with another of the marathon rules that states contestants must keep moving even while they eat.

At 11.55 a.m. a modest crowd has gathered at the gallery door. They stand behind a red ribbon that stretches across the doorway and peer in to watch the performers before they begin. At 11.59 a.m. the performers step over the footlights and enter the dance floor. They stand waiting in nervous anticipation. The clock strikes 12.00 p.m. and Sarah Miller, (head of the School of the Arts, English and Media at the University of Wollongong), momentarily abandons her own duties to become a stand-in mayor. Holding a tiny pair of silver scissors she cuts the red ribbon. At this cue, it all begins, a siren sounds, the excitement mounts and then... it all comes to a grinding halt as Carly and Jackson strike a tableau vivant, the first of many to be performed over the next twenty-four hours. They mimic a photographic image that appears on the screen beside them. It is a black-and-white photo from the 1930s of a smiling couple posing for a publicity shot with their right knees raised in the air and their arms out stretched. The only movement in the gallery space is the slight trembles of the performers as they struggle to hold the pose.



Figure 6

The audience enter the gallery. Some stand near the dance floor, others wander around looking at the small screens and the projections on the walls, some sit on a bench provided while others migrate to the corners of the space and lean or sit against the walls. In addition, an unseen online audience joins them as a camera operator focuses on a mid-shot of the couple and the performance goes live to air via a webcast. It will stream the performance across the globe day and night for the duration of the work. It is a domestic set up of *handy cams* and patched together cables but it works. The static image of a smiling Carly and Jackson flickers to life across the screens of many laptops, tablets and mobile phones. Over the long duration of the performance this webcast will document the performers' slow demise. Like the marathoners they seek to represent from the 1930s they will become exhausted and succumb to sleep deprivation under the watchful gaze of the spectator.



Figure 7

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## Part 2. Exhaustion (*Yowza Yowza Yowza*)

Inspired by Horace McCoy's 1935 novel *They Shoot Horses Don't They* and Sydney Pollack's 1969 film of the same name, the choreographic installation *Yowza Yowza Yowza* takes as its starting point the USA dance marathon phenomenon of the 1930s. The global economic crisis known as the Great Depression forced many people into extreme economic hardship. In the USA the unemployed, desperate to find food, shelter and a chance of winning cash prizes sometimes valued in excess of \$1000.00, signed up for dance marathons in their hundreds. Marathons were long and slow events that lasted a number of months. According to historian Frank M. Calabria the longest recorded marathon apparently lasted nine months (1993: 28). The extreme duration of these events married with the physical endurance of having to dance day in and day out with little time to rest pushed many contestants to the brink of physical and psychological breakdown.<sup>37</sup> The bizarre temporal intrusion these events must have had on the lives and sleep patterns of the contestants and the politics underpinning the allure of these events for the spectator was immediately appealing as material for an experimental research project examining the significance of temporal aesthetics in the theatre.

*Yowza Yowza Yowza* is the creative research component to this project. This exegetical analysis of the performance process details its working structures and creative methodologies in order to substantiate its findings and draws upon both historic and contemporary scholarship to provide a context in which to better

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<sup>37</sup> Fuelled by media reportage of scandals, injuries and even a death, along with religious commentary that deemed the marathons immoral, the marathons were eventually outlawed in the USA around 1935 (see Calabria, 1993: 41).

understand how this work is positioned and what legacies historically underpin its creative enquiries and methods. The creative process intentionally aimed to explore the impacts of temporal aesthetics on the performance material and its potential reception. More specifically *Yowza Yowza Yowza* examines how an aesthetic of duration and repetition might bring the historic phenomenon of the dance marathons to the attention of the spectator while also creating material that could resonate with the accelerated conditions of mediatisation underpinning contemporary life. It does this by experimenting with temporal structures, specifically the timetable and the extreme durations that underpinned 1930s marathons. These historic frameworks are employed as a means to recreate the conditions of the intense exhaustion of the marathon experience.

In adopting the structures of the marathons, time became the central focus and material of the performance. The temporal composition of the work aimed to guide a response consistent with the historic reception of the marathon culture itself; that of the intrigue and ethical precariousness that comes with watching the endurance of another. This shift in the notion of what constitutes content no longer accords with the habitual reception Weber (as cited in part one) attributes to Western theatre tradition, a self contained object that can be watched in its entirety from a distance (Weber, 2004: 3). With this change to mimetic composition the work in turn encourages a sense of engagement with the personal plight of the performer rather than the fictionalised predicament of a character.

This realisation was further developed by webcasting the performance live for its entire twenty-four hour duration, which encouraged viewers to keep on engaging with the work by simply turning on their networked technology at any time and from anywhere. This particular strategy not only made the work more accessible to a wider audience

but also raised clear questions about the possibilities of time-based dramaturgy not previously considered by the practitioner. It created the opportunity to reflect upon the ways in which networked technology could both challenge historic understanding of collective presence attributed to the theatre medium, and utilise this situation to create different relationships with its performance material. The webcast, for example, opened up the possibility of an intense engagement with, what Patrick Primavesi terms, in his observations of staging screen-based technology, 'a mediatised presence' (2009: 105). This situation counters the historic understanding that the performer and spectator must be physically in the same time and place for the theatre to effectively communicate to the spectator.

The dynamics of temporal and spatial disconnection that inform everyday experience are made part of the theatre experience in *Yowza*. The webcast makes apparent the way in which this work can relate to and ruminate on the structures of time that, as Hassan and Purser (2007) argue, now have real world ramifications on the way life is experienced as speed, immediacy and availability. The connection between the altered sense perception of this current technology and the different understandings of staged material that *Yowza's* use of networked technology presents has much that resonates with Benjamin's 1936 analysis of the impacts of mechanical reproduction on human sense perception and its impact on changing the perception of originality and aura in art.

The *Yowza* webcast initiated a deeper examination of the unique conditions underpinning traditions of sense perception in the theatre and the historic relationship theatre has with technological advancement. The interface between the live and mediatised environments in *Yowza* is key to this idea. To discuss this understanding of *Yowza's* material further, the analysis employs

Boenisch's (2007) writings on *intermediacy*: the staging of technology and its impact on perception within theatre. It also employs his writing on remediation: the assimilation of different technologies into the structures of theatre communication.

*Yowza Yowza Yowza* was conceived as the partner project to *Shapes of Sleep*. This new work builds upon processes and thematic interests first trialled in the 2003 work. For example, *Yowza* is also a choreographed durational action that employs duration to exhaust its performers. In *Shapes of Sleep* the exhaustion enables an exploration of the experience of sleep; by contrast, in *Yowza* the exhaustion of the performers explores the effects of enforced sleep deprivation. Both works arrive at this relationship to their staged material by heightening the operations of mimesis, an effect achieved by drawing attention to the notion of theatricality and its historical connection to verisimilitude.

As discussed in part one of this chapter *Shapes of Sleep* destabilises understanding of performer presence in the theatre as it blurs the boundaries of what now constitutes a convincing and truthful representation of the sleeper. *Yowza*, as discussed later in the chapter, employs the exhausting effect of its duration and repetition to both reinforce the credibility of this portrayal of the marathons while at the same time undermining it. To elaborate on this idea the analysis utilises Michael Kirby's (1969: 63–73) writings on the historic contexts of the verisimilitude that underpinned late nineteenth-century Naturalism and the shift in understanding within what he terms 'New Theatre Practice' of what might now constitute verisimilitude in a post filmic environment.

As illustrated in the opening anecdote, the performance is comprised of two performers who, over twenty-four continuous hours, attempt

to foreground the conditions of the marathon events by recreating photographic and filmic documentation of the exhausting conditions of the marathons. They do this by staging tableaux vivant and a task-based choreography. The work was presented at the FCA gallery at the School of Arts, English and Media, University of Wollongong. It was open to the public from 12.00 p.m. on March 7, 2014 to 12.00 p.m. the following day. In addition to this *Yowza* was simultaneously webcast live.<sup>38</sup>

To assist with this exegetical analysis of *Yowza* and to help substantiate and understand its findings two video files documenting the performance have been included with the written thesis. The first is a five-minute edit of moments of the performance. It aims to provide an overview of the twenty-four hour event by capturing the cumulative effect of the duration over the course of the performance. It does this by highlighting moments of the performers' struggle and their own methods for dealing with their exhaustion. It also presents the end of the work and the feeling of celebration this end creates. It combines footage taken from the live event with the webcast in order to give a sense of how the work looked to the live and online audience. The second video file presents ten minutes of unedited footage. This documentation is of a lower quality, as it is web footage. It was captured at around the twenty-two hour mark of the work and is intentionally left unedited to give a sense of the slow time of its temporal aesthetic and to show in detail the extreme state of exhaustion that the work created (see Appendix A).

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<sup>38</sup> The performance was available as a live stream at [yowzayowzayowza.tv](http://yowzayowzayowza.tv). The last minutes of the performance are still accessible at this site. It also had an event page on Facebook for viewers to comment on the performance. To assist with the technical production of these aspects, other artists were invited into the process. Additional collaborators include Ashley Scott (Sound and webcast design) and Dara Gill (Webcast and website design).

As a subject for performance the 1930s dance marathons make for fascinating material because of the extreme and ridiculous conditions the marathon managers forced upon contestants. This situation was illustrated by Pollack's film drama *They Shoot Horses Don't They?* cited at the beginning of this analysis. Its plot highlighted the extreme physical and psychological lengths people were pushed to and the corrupt and exploitative environment surrounding the marathon business. It also focused on the depressive and desperate mood that such events engendered. Watching people endure having to dance day in and day out for months on end was in essence, as Calabria argues, nothing short of gladiatorial (1993: 52). The exploitative conditions of these events, fellow historian Carol Martin (1994) adds, were reflective of the economic desperation that people faced during the Great Depression as they became more willing to do anything for food and shelter.

The Great Depression (1929–39) was an era of extreme economic hardship. Old black-and-white newsreels from the 1930s are now a reminder of the effect mass unemployment had on people's lives during that time. The newsreels capture evocative images of long lines of people waiting in the street for food at soup kitchens and unwashed men in worn out clothing sitting idle in front of make shift shantytowns.<sup>39</sup> In 1933, according to Lall Ramrattan and Michael Szenberg, the unemployment rate peaked at 24.9 % (2014: 4). Closer to home in Australia this figure peaked at 29 % (Broomhill, 1979: 2). How these dry statistics and scratchy newsreel images now translate to the contemporary affluence and high employment of today is perhaps, for some, difficult to comprehend. For example, America's unemployment rate in February 2014 stood at a mere 6.7% in contrast to the Depression figures (United States Bureau of

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<sup>39</sup> See Lauro, J et al 2009, *The panic is on: the Great American Depression as seen by the common man*, (DVD), Shanachie Entertainment, Bronx.

Labor Statistics, 2015) while in Australia the February 2014 unemployment rate was 6.1% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

Martin posits that the marathons arose out of conditions of poverty. 'They relied on an out of work audience and on contestants who were willing to work for very little' (Martin, 1994: 41). For Calabria the absurd conditions of the 1930s dance marathons, of pushing people to the brink of collapse, encapsulated the circumstances and general feeling of hopelessness of the time. He notes that it was once a frivolous fad of the roaring twenties, but in the 1930s marathons turned into serious money-making ventures for opportunistic entrepreneurs who soon realised the more absurd the spectacle the more people came to see them (Calabria, 1993: 5-9). Of particular note was the introduction of the '45-minute rule' in the 1930s as described in the anecdote preceding this analysis. Calabria observes that the introduction of this rule was a conscious device intended to deprive people of sleep because sleep-deprived behaviour proved highly entertaining (1993: 193). He goes on to explain that deprived of sleep, the 'marathoners periodically act out the irrational behaviour found in the nocturnal nightmare. They go "squirrely" and hallucinate' (Calabria 1993: 135). Such outbreaks of irrational behaviour were said to be absolute crowd pleasers to the point where contestants would sometimes fake going 'squirrely' in the hope they may win the favour of the crowd and have some coins thrown their way (Calabria 1993: 135).

The aim of *Yowza*, as a work of theatre, is to bring the bizarre nature of this historic phenomenon to the attention of the spectator while at the same time creating a situation that might also have some resonance with a contemporary situation. In the first instance it engages the rules of the historic marathons to create a situation emblematic of the extreme temporal conditions of those events. But

at the same time it uses the temporal structures of the marathons to heighten its own theatricality. It reinforces the notion of mimesis in the way it attempts to replicate in detail the imagery of the marathons and the exhaustion of such events, while at the same time it undermines the mimesis by setting up a situation that over time becomes impossible to maintain. The aim of this strategy is to open the work up to a broader understanding of what this performance material might be other than just an historic re-enactment of a bizarre phenomenon. The following analysis of the performance illustrates how the work's engagement of time seeks to explore this possibility.

Tableaux vivant constitutes the central durational action of *Yowza*. The two performers recreate ten different poses based on historic photographs of the marathons shown on a small screen mounted on an adjacent wall. After forty-five minutes has passed the ten poses are completed and the performers then take fifteen minutes for rest as per the marathon rules (see Appendix C). After resting they return to the dance floor to repeat this action. The photographic images that the performers mimic aim to capture the underlying mood of hope, hopelessness and exhaustion that underpinned the marathon events. Despite their grainy quality the black-and-white images, as historic documents, are very revealing of the underlying tone of the marathons even eighty years on. For instance, smiling couples pose for publicity before the marathon starts, their poses are playfully directed straight to camera and their young faces peer out from the photos full of excitement; images taken later document more desperate moments of the marathon, of strained bodies and vacant faces, of people who have been deprived of sleep for months on end. These historic photographs are now a temporal suspension, the subjects they depict are rendered a representation of people and a time that no longer exists. In this sense the photograph can be

likened to the function of theatre as Barthes observes: 'the photograph is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of tableaux vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made up face beneath which we see the dead' (1981: 32).

Staging tableaux vivant acts to bring these historic ghosts into the here and now of the theatre in the fictive sense, or at least make this historic phenomenon known to the spectator. It arrives at this situation by committing fully to manufacturing a realistic illusion by mimicking the historic photographs as faithfully as possible and this includes attending to details such as sourcing period costumes and historic props and researching era styling. This strategy is initially intended to arrest the spectator's attention with the historic imagery: when presented live it engages the spectator's imagination more intensely in these now forgotten people's stories.<sup>40</sup> But at the same time the skill of its execution, the manufacture of the imagery, is also very present and intriguing, particularly if the poses are complicated, or if they put the performers off balance for instance, or make them hold an impossible expression caught by the speed of the camera. These fine details are emphasised by the performer's ability or in fact inability to replicate them. They inherently heighten its theatricality. The gallery context also acts in a similar way.

Arguably *Yowza's* overt theatricality starkly contrasts with the culture of the gallery. While it employs real-time duration and task, its interest in staging illusion differs again to the performance artists interest in staging 'the real' or, as Marina Abramović calls it, a 'true reality' (Abramović in O'Hagan, 2010). These ideals are often couched in terms antagonistic to theatre's mimetic traditions. Her public declaration outlined below illustrates this.

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<sup>40</sup> Static imagery within a performance context can evoke narrative compositions. It can highlight a moment of time and can create for the spectator, as Lehmann argues, 'their own sense of time to produce the movement latent in the image (Lehmann, 2006: 157).

To be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre. Theatre is fake: there is a black box, you pay for a ticket, and you sit in the dark and see somebody playing someone else's life. The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real. It's a very different concept. It's about true reality. (Abramović qtd in O'Hagan, 2010)

Abramović reinforces the very conditions of theatricality that *Yowza* consciously explores. Yes, the performers do represent other people; however, with each pose the illusion they seek to create is intentionally exposed. For example, in between recreating the poses the performers drop all notion of artifice; they interrupt the illusion by adjusting themselves in preparation for the next pose. This slipping between acting and non-acting is in essence a temporal interruption aimed to expose the mechanics behind the creation of the images. As its 'fakery' is laid bare the concept of theatricality, of 'actors acting', is clear and like *Shapes of Sleep* their medial labour is the intended focus. This idea is further emphasised by the extreme duration employed to exhaust the performers.

The length of duration in *Yowza* becomes key in activating an entirely different understanding of the performers' action. Standing still in a pose for any length of time is a very difficult task. Holding poses based on actions captured in mid motion is harder still. Repeating those poses for twenty-four continuous hours raises the stakes to an almost unachievable level for the performers and as a consequence aims to heighten the spectator's engagement with the work. *Yowza* takes the temporal structures of the 1930s Marathons and turns them into dramaturgical strategies to explore aesthetic outcomes and their potential impact on the work's translation to a contemporary context.

In *Yowza*, psychological and physical exhaustion craft an aesthetic of duration. As in *Shapes of Sleep*, time is made visible, it is present and presented by the visible toll it has upon the performer's physical and mental ability to cope with the strain of this extreme temporal condition. For example, as the hours pass, marked by the large LED sign on the back wall, the performers increasingly shake as they attempt to hold the poses. After many hours the poses bear little resemblance to the photographic images they attempt to mimic. Exact mimicry at this stage exists as a mere trace of the still and precisely executed poses created in that very first hour. Now even getting back on the floor is an act of endurance. They are physically and emotionally worn out. They sweat, experience mood swings, their muscles cramp and their backs spasm. As such the performers begin to emulate the same kind of exhaustion evident in the strained bodies and faces depicted in the photographs.

The work's verisimilitude has shifted from its association with skilled mimicry and real to life replication to a state of exhaustion. Kirby argues that the notion of verisimilitude in theatre shifts as the technologies and the cultural frameworks through which we watch change. The understanding of verisimilitude established by the Naturalist theatre, he offers, 'has varied through recent history and we no longer accept that which was once considered to be absolutely convincing' (Kirby, 1969: 64).<sup>41</sup> He goes on to say 'Only by breaking the form — by becoming more naturalistic than naturalism — can they exploit it' (Kirby, 1969: 72). In other words, by explicitly acknowledging the structures of illusion — or as Kirby notes, its limitations (1969: 72) — another kind of reception becomes possible.

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<sup>41</sup> Kirby outlines that the 'naturalistic style of acting embraced by naturalists was influenced by Delsarte System, that predates Stanislavsky more known scientific analysis of acting techniques. Delsarte, he notes, categorised a broad variety of physical responses to emotional states. His scientific and systematic approach made it appealing as a methodology to the naturalists. However, its translation as a credible acting style to a contemporary audience may no longer be considered believable in light of more recent examples of film (see Kirby, 1969: 65).

As with *Shapes of Sleep*, fiction and actuality are both comprehensible and the spectators as a consequence begin to engage not only with the work's representational intent but also with the performers' physical and emotional challenge in the same way that a spectator engages with a sporting contestant.

Akin to the contestants of the 1930s Marathons, the performers' exhaustion in *Yowza* proves increasingly captivating as time passes and their behaviour becomes more erratic. This too was evident in the example of *And on the Thousandth Night...* where the performers' breakdown and failure to remain convincing storytellers invited a variety of spectator responses including one of empathy for their plight. The performers in *Yowza* similarly garnered empathy and support the more they struggled with their task. For example, during the final ten minutes of the performance the gallery was full with spectators who by all accounts had turned into 'fans' of the two intrepid 'tableaux vivant dancers'. The fact that they had made it through the night and were still going in some form or another seemed enough to elicit shouts of encouragement and loud supportive cheers. As the last ten seconds of the performance were counted down, the crowd in the gallery rose to their feet and with loud applause showered the performers with the streamers provided. It was a scene similar to a hero's welcome home. But does this reception created by the work's temporal aesthetic also hold true for remote online viewers? Their engagement with the work is largely with a static image on screen, viewed and watched from a multitude of different places physically removed from the collective time and space of the gallery.



Figure 8

The webcast was initially introduced during the process of *Yowza* as a means to encourage spectators to engage with the work over its entire twenty-four hour duration, an idea in keeping with the twenty-four hour access, which as Hassan and Purser argue is now an unquestioned part of the culture of networked technology (2007: 2). In addition the webcast was also a strategy to increase the work's reach beyond the small gallery space in regional Wollongong by taking advantage of the latent 'viral' effect of internet communication. With seven hundred unique views recorded by the webcast host from all over Australia and as far reaching as the USA, the Philippines, France and Denmark, this strategy proved to be a success.<sup>42</sup> But by webcasting the work did it diminish the experience of the live performance by rendering it not only mimetic but


<sup>42</sup> The webhost Ustream offers webcasting at a commercial and domestic level. As part of their service they gather statistics on unique and repeat viewers as well as geographic location of the viewers.

something once more removed from the *real experience*, a digitised copy of live mimesis?





In 1936 Benjamin famously argued that the introduction of 'mechanical reproductions', of particular note photography and then film, made traditional understandings of originality and aura of an artwork problematic in that it could no longer be considered an authentic original if it was a reproduction. This effect, adds Boenisch, was exponentially multiplied by the internet, which creates multiple copies at the click of a mouse thus eradicating all notion of an authentic 'original' (2007: 112). Now akin to film, the mediated performers in *Yowza* are no longer present but absent, and as such are the perfect illusion in this transparent medium. The mechanics of its creation are hidden making its representation of the effect of film, as Benjamin describes it, incomparably superior to other mediums such as painting that aim to mimic life (1999b: 234). The mediated imagery may be a copy of a copy but it appears to be as *real* as the *real*, or as Umberto Eco (1987) has argued of mediated imagery, more *real* than *real*, it is *hyper-real*. In contrast *Yowza's* webcast aims to be open and ambiguous.

owzaYowzaYowza.tv&src=typd





ial Se | Inbox – Outlook Web | Create Your Free Web | PSi19 Home | Perform | Library @ UOW


#YowzaYowzaYowza.tv  Have ar

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 **Steph Walker** @el\_stepho · Mar 6  
There is something a bit perverse in being able to lie in bed and watch people dancing over 21 hours now for art: [yowzayowzayowza.tv](http://yowzayowzayowza.tv)  
Expand  Reply  Retweet  Favorite ... More





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 **Jeff Khan** @hellojeffkhan · Mar 6  
Ok folks I'm turning in for the night/morning but you can still follow [#yowzayowzayowza](http://#yowzayowzayowza) at [yowzayowzayowza.tv](http://yowzayowzayowza.tv) or the YYY Facebook page!  
Collapse  Reply  Retweet  Favorite ... More





RETWEET  
**1** 

10:48 AM - 6 Mar 2014 · Details





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 **Clare Grant** @ClareGrant19 · Mar 6  
[@hellojeffkhan](http://@hellojeffkhan) [@pspace](http://@pspace) at 4.30am or so I felt like a voyeur, a cheerleader and a mourner! At least.  
Expand  Reply  Retweet  Favorite ... More

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 **Jeff Khan** @hellojeffkhan · Mar 6  
[@ClareGrant19](http://@ClareGrant19) [@pspace](http://@pspace) it's extraordinary here! a room full of exhaustion, disbelief, determination, will  
Expand  Reply  Retweet  Favorite ... More

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 **AdelaideR** @Adelaide\_\_R · Mar 5  
hey [@YouAreHere\\_Fest](http://@YouAreHere_Fest) check out 2 of your festival artists Carly and Troy performin' all day for Yowza!Yowza!Yowza! [yowzayowzayowza.tv](http://yowzayowzayowza.tv)  
Expand  Reply  Retweet  Favorite ... More

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 **Ika Willis** @doessheek · Mar 5  
It is weirdly compelling. Will go over and gawp in person later.

Figure 9

Like the spectators at the live event, the online viewers — if the response on social media is any indication — proved to be captivated by the performers' struggle to the point where they kept on coming back for more. They tuned in to watch the couple's progress at all hours of the day and night. Their *Tweets* and *Facebook* posts simultaneously illustrate the strangeness they felt watching the event

from the comfort of their own homes, and at the same time indicate their captivation with the event and a compulsion to be actively participating as spectators (see figure 9). In the final minutes of the performance, like their live counterparts, their participation became more vocal. The virtual viewers watching *Yowza* began to post messages of support. For example, Datu Arellano (2014) from the Philippines wrote "19 minutes to go Yowza!" Roman Berry (2014) from London wrote "Cheering you on!" Younghee Park (2014) from Brisbane wrote 'I am sending my ultra mega power to both of you'. And so on. Their messages among many others were read out loud to the performers and audience at the gallery, which in turn generated even more excitement from the live crowd. The direct connection of the webcast to the live theatre environment seemed to transcend the physical disconnection of the online viewers.

For Boenisch, *intermediality*, the staging of media as part of the theatre is about spectator perception because the theatre is largely a semiotic process that relies on its spectators to complete its meaning. Therefore any media once staged is affected by this situation, it becomes a sign of a sign. It is both itself and the representation of itself, and as such the 'usually transparent viewing conventions of the media are made palpable, and workings of mediation exposed' (Boenisch, 2007: 115). This is apparent in the online response to *Yowza*. The internet, now part of the work's staging interrupts the fundamental understandings of communication constituted by collective presence. It does so by purposely enlisting the latent spatio-temporal disconnection of networked technologies. For Virilio, real-time *teletechnologies* have eradicated present time 'by isolating it from its here and now in favour of a communicative elsewhere that no longer has anything to do with our concrete presence in the world' (1997: 10). By purposely positioning the internet's temporal and spatial disconnection in relation to the collective experience of

theatre, the aesthetic of absence comes into play and 'meaning' as constituted by collective presence, to quote Fuchs, 'is destabilised' (1985: 165). As indicated in the examples of spectator response outlined above, the mediatised version of *Yowza* remains just as captivating for the spectators whose engagement is very much contingent on the event being live.

Patrick Primavesi points out a similar effect of *intermedial* staging in relation to presence, absence and *liveness*. He argues, the UK /German based Gob Squad's live projections of absent performers in their work *Kitchen*, highlights not so much 'the ontological differences between staged reality and fiction but rather the threshold between different kinds of mediatisation and liveness' (Primavesi, 2009: 121). He goes on to argue that Gob Squad's *intermedial* staging is in essence an experiment between 'live absence and mediatised presence' (2009: 122). Primavesi's observations make clear the now ambiguous positioning of the spectator. As conventions of presence become questioned and the theatre's comprehension destabilised, the act of watching is brought to the fore. It is no longer just a question of how a work's content might be comprehended, but rather what kind of spectatorship *intermediality* might engender. Or are these two ideas one and the same? As demonstrated by the curious engagement *Shapes of Sleep* invites, discussed in part one of this chapter, the experience of spectatorship itself can constitute comprehension through the ethical conundrum the performance material creates.

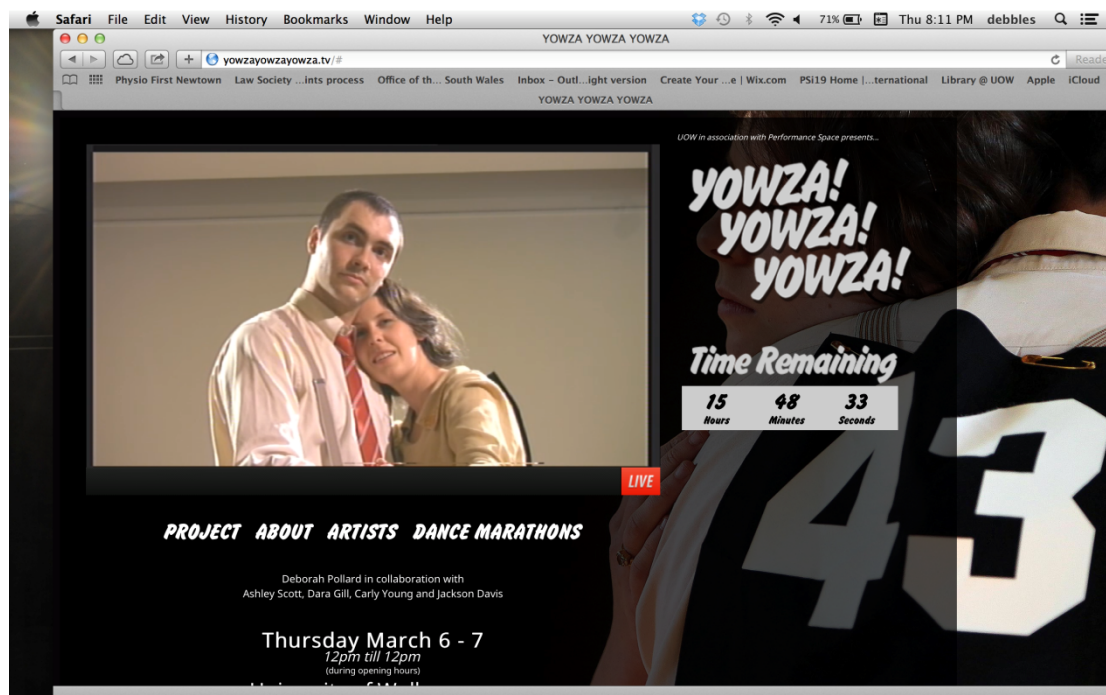


Figure 10

In *Yowza* the *intermedial* effect aims to make apparent the culture of online spectatorship, a culture defined by the temporal and spatial disconnection of networked technology where the viewer can engage with the world in real-time from a completely different place. As discussed in chapter one, over the centuries technological advancements have impacted upon the perception of time and consequently the temporal structuring of how life is lived. This has been clearly theorised by Virilo's (2000) arguments of temporal acceleration, a shift in perception concurrent with technological advancement brought to its radical extreme by speed of light technology. Further to this, Hassan and Purser argue networked technology has claimed yet again an unprecedented shift in temporal perception. The clock time of the industrial revolution, they argue, is now compressed by high-speed computerisation to the point where new time fractions are continually being created in order to calculate new understandings of speed. This abstract mathematical calculation has real world consequences on concepts of availability, on how life is now structured and how time is experienced, no longer as a whole

but through the multiple individual networked technologies that together manifest as an accelerated temporal ecology (Hassan and Purser, 2007: 2–11). Benjamin, writing in 1939, speaks of a similar connection between technological advancement and shifts in sense perception but his focus is specifically on how these technologies impacted upon the perception of art. He writes:

During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well. (Benjamin, 1999b: 222)

Benjamin's observations are clearly exemplified in the impact of screen-based technology on sense perception. He notes the difficulty this created for the theatre, 'One is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusionary' (1999b: 233). Film by comparison, he argues, hides its mechanisms. It is the perfect vehicle of illusion, 'the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology' (1999b: 233). What would Benjamin now make of the altered sense perception of the internet? The internet, now the dominant mode of communication, is a new challenge for all other entertainment forms. The *real time* and the *slow time* of the theatre, with its demand that one firstly leave the house and then give up time once again positions theatre as a museum relic when compared to the wide usage and accelerated convenience that the internet as entertainment can provide. No longer a mass medium, does this render the theatre medium an ineffective mode of reflection on the world and its events?

The theatre as a time-based medium has the capacity to experiment with the temporal dynamics that now underpin both the personal and

broader societal experiences of time. Staging networked media is one such strategy able to effect this change. Postdramatic practice can reflect on the contemporary condition by bringing into focus the disconnected temporal and spatial dynamics specific to the technology of today. It does this by remediating the technology as part of its staging.

As Boenisch points out, the theatre has always been a medium capable of remediating technologies. Just as it adapted the phonetic alphabet in Ancient Greece into a script to present ideas to an audience, the theatre repeatedly turns into a new medium as different technologies become dominant (2007: 110–113). This is because it has always utilised other media as part of its communication while simultaneously highlighting the ‘process of processing information’ (Boenisch, 2007: 113).

Webcasting the performance of *Yowza* *remediates* the internet making it now part of its communication. In doing so it employs the theatre’s *liveness* to stress the temporal realities of internet spectatorship. No longer actually having to be present at the same time and in the same location in order to experience the theatre, staging networked technology makes known the politicisation of the instantaneity and accelerated life styles that now alter our sensory perception of everyday experience.

The *Yowza* webcast enables the online viewer to watch the performance at an accelerated speed. As they tune in at any time and from anywhere, taking breaks at their leisure, the online perception of time, in effect, compresses the real-time duration and labour of the work and as such juxtaposes the temporal experience of the performers and the historic era they represent. As argued by Martin the mass unemployment of the Great Depression marked it as a time

of idleness and boredom. As a consequence the marathons proved to be a very popular 'time filler'. The low cost entry fee of fifteen cents enabled the spectators to stay as long as they wanted (Martin, 1994: xix), an idea that for the contemporary spectator may be at odds with the current valuing of time as a scarce commodity to be spent economically.

The *intermedial* effect of the webcast in relation to the work's *liveness* aims to make these temporal differences evident. It seeks to offer a reflection on the complexities of the prevailing influence of the internet by hijacking this technology and using it for what it does best, making accessible a continuous digitised flow of information available '24/7'. The work becomes political by heightening the experience and impact of 'networked time' as a tool of late capitalism open for business '24/7'. It aims to acknowledge the fundamental changes network technology now makes possible and the impact of such changes on the speed at which life can now be lived. This speed now defines this era, one that is literally a world away from the slow pace of the 1930s. *Yowza's* engagement of the internet, like Boenisch argues of *intermedial* experiments, rather than creating more of what is expected of these technologies such as propaganda, advertisements, news and so on manages to perforate its meaning (2007: 114).

*Yowza* is a performance experiment that set out to explore the potential of time-based aesthetics to effect a layered understanding of its material that both embraces its mimetic rendering of this intriguing and cruel historic phenomenon while also reflecting on the politics underpinning its possible translation within a contemporary environment. By focusing on the experience of time, its duration and how it is structured, the work aims to create a situation both emblematic and experiential of the exhaustive marathon conditions.

It does this by inflicting an act of endurance upon the performers, which in turn makes apparent the ethical and empathetic spectatorship associated with endurance events. This is the work's point of intrigue. The webcast, as this analysis reveals, intensifies this response via its remediation into the semiotic system underpinning theatre communication and its interface with the live event. Able to be observed, day or night at one's convenience, the Internet accentuates a different experience of time to the performers and intensifies the medial labour of this live event. This situation makes the act of watching this performance and understanding its intent ambiguous. .

After reflecting upon these two gallery-based works through the lens of a reflexive dramaturgical analysis of the temporal mimetic structures historically determined by the dramatic model, the following chapter heads back into the theatre to focus on another example of my practice. The performance *Blue Print*, a multi-modal, multi-focal theatre work created in response to the 2003 ACT bushfires is the focus of the next chapter. The chapter continues to explore the impact of stasis as an aesthetic on the developmental time of mimesis. To examine this idea further the chapter utilises Gertrude Stein's landscape analogy as an historical precedent. In the performance 'stasis' is employed as a dramaturgical strategy to explore the slow and altered temporal experience apparent in times of significant loss. Its staging forges a theatrical response shaped by stasis and slow time, strategies that distinguish it from the accelerated tropes of televised news reportage of natural disasters.

## Anecdote #4

The audience for the performance of *Blue Print* sit in a large industrial space that has been converted from a railway workshop into a theatre. As they wait for the performance to begin they look onto a dark cavernous void. The space has been entirely blacked out, the floor is black and the walls are covered with black drapes. It is empty except for a cream telephone, circa 1970s, that sits alongside an old battered answering machine. Dimly lit and positioned centre stage on the floor, these small domestic machines are dwarfed by the enormity of the space.

As the house lights dim and the audience settle a quiet hiss becomes audible. It could at first be mistaken for static until it slowly builds in its intensity. As if in dialogue with the building static, the onstage lights also begin to gently pulse. Over time sound and lights build to an overwhelming ferocity, which at its peak becomes a blinding flash that illuminates the space until it abruptly cuts out. A pause in darkness follows; it is an uncomfortably long pause that is eventually broken by a series of sentences that are projected faintly in the distance. Line by line the sentences appear:

After a firestorm  
 There is silence  
 (Pause)  
 There is no wind  
 No birdsong  
 No lawn mowers  
 Just silence  
 (Pause)  
 No houses  
 No fences  
 No landmarks

No boundaries  
 No feeling  
 No taste  
 No sense  
 Just silence<sup>43</sup>

The words fade and after another extended pause recorded voices are heard; a woman, a man, an old woman, and a young girl appear to be describing, from memory, different rooms in a house. The text is fragmented and sentences are cut short.

A woman says: So if you go up the stairs and you turn left...

A man recounts: When you go up the stairs you would turn left to go into the lounge room...

An elderly woman notes: Then you go into the lounge. Well there are a lot of things in there...

These voices continue to describe different rooms and the nooks and crannies of a home only known to those who have lived there for a very long time. With each new room a pool of light appears and highlights a different part of the empty theatre floor, as if indicating the area in the theatre where the room would be located if it was in this space. As the voices continue to build up a picture of a home, the cream telephone occasionally rings. It goes unanswered. Eventually the answering machine starts to play. Its cycle of repeated beeps and screeches indicating a number of missed calls. Meanwhile the voices continue to conjure up mental pictures of the different rooms while the telephone continues to ring intermittently.

Ten minutes into the work a man dressed in bright yellow firefighting protective gear and helmet runs diagonally across the space and

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<sup>43</sup> All text excerpts are transcribed from the *Blue Print* script compiled for the performance.

through the areas so intricately described by the voices. It is an abrupt moment that breaks the focus. The enormous size of the space allows him to run at 'break neck' speed and once he crosses he disappears again into darkness. Fifteen seconds later another fireman runs across the space and then a third. As the last fireman speeds past a distressed woman is heard through the answering machine, she is screaming and sobbing. In the distance a dimly lit fireman starts spinning on the spot, he spins and spins for an unbearably long time until he loses balance and falls over. The answering machine finally stops, the voices have stopped and there is silence again. Pause. The fireman fumbles with his helmet strap until he finally removes it; he looks visibly sweaty, pale and disorientated as he sits on the floor to recover.

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## Chapter 4. The experience of time structured through space: staging the stasis of grief

The above account describes the opening scene of the performance *Blue Print* (2007), a work that I devised, directed and performed in. The performance premiered at Track 20 at Carriageworks in Sydney on twenty-sixth of October 2007. It was presented and co-produced by Performance Space.<sup>44</sup> *Blue Print* is partly an autobiographical performance made in response to the experience of losing a childhood home in the 2003 Canberra bushfires. In the context of this research it provides another example of my practice and interest in time-based experimentation as well as introducing a distinctly different understanding of time. While *Shapes of Sleep* and *Yowza Yowza Yowza* focus on an aesthetic of exhaustion, *Blue Print* explores the altered temporal experience of grief as its thematic. The performance poetically depicts the chaos and confusion of the mind as it grieves and comes to terms with catastrophic loss.

This depiction points to another example of a time that belongs to consciousness, an idea as discussed in chapter one that is elaborated upon in the work of Bergson (1889). While *Shapes of Sleep* emphasises the altered temporal experience of sleep, in *Blue Print* the focus is on the retrieval of memories of a house before its destruction; a dramaturgy intended to foreground the timelessness and stasis of grief. There is no progression in staging the act of memory, instead like the state of grief itself, time moves slowly as the mind comes to terms with the enormity of what has happened. The work responds to these thematic concerns through a multi-focal

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<sup>44</sup> Carriageworks is a performance venue that opened in 2007 in Sydney. The building was originally a railway workshop but has since been converted into a contemporary performance venue that has a number of large-scale performance and exhibition spaces. Track 20 is one such space. In 2007 Performance Space moved their office to Carriageworks from their original home in Cleveland Street, Redfern. In the first year at their new home at Carriageworks, Performance Space regularly programmed performances in into Track 20.

and multi-modal approach to staging, all of which generates performance material emblematic of my family's experience of recovery in the aftermath of the bushfires.

*Blue Print* explores the first-hand experiences of my family as its material. Over the period of 2005 to 2006 the family agreed to participate in a series of conversations and exercises that were recorded. They were each asked to recount the experience of the bushfires and to describe from memory each room of the house as if they were walking through it. Initially these exercises were a means of enabling the family to talk through their experience of loss. They later formed the starting point for the performance *Blue Print* and excerpts are played in various different scenes throughout the work.

*Blue Print* creates a complex visual, sonic and performed pastiche of activity in response to this experience to which many artists contributed. For example, additional performers on stage include David Buckley, Daniel Fenech and Louis Fitzpatrick in the role of the firemen. These young men were engaged in a number of physically demanding tasks that aimed to exhaust and disorientate them in order to access a sense of the fatigue and powerlessness that the bushfire experience engendered. Their exhaustion, as in the performances of *Yowza* and *Shapes of Sleep* was achieved by deliberately employing set durations that would push them beyond their comfort and into actual states of exhaustion, however unlike these durational choreographed works, this approach to staging is one of many performance modes that make up this work. All the different artists that collaborated on this performance directly contributed to the multi-modal aesthetic of *Blue Print*.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> These artists include: Sam James: Video Design, Gail Priest: Sound Design, Neil Simpson: Lighting Design, Katia Molino: Costume Design and Martin del Amo and Katia Molino: Movement consultants. Other instrumental people involved in its creation include John Baylis as dramaturg and Stephen Klinder as production manager. The *Blue Print* creative team, like the

While each practitioner had a discrete role in the making of the work, as long time collaborators who understood the aesthetic interests of my practice they also contributed to its dramaturgy through discussions about the types of engagement each medium could bring to the work. The notion of 'time' was key to these discussions. In response to the thematic of grief and memory, artists focused on how their mediums might best translate the experience of timelessness that occurred during the aftermath of bushfire experience. By way of explanation lights, video, sound, text and performed actions consciously aimed to embody a sense of empty time or slow time. For example, at one point video footage of pine forests slowly pans across the large screen as disembodied voices falter in their attempts to describe in detail the contents of a room. Or as outlined in the opening anecdote, firemen run across the large performance space at full pace, a run that emphasises the enormity of the space through the time it takes to traverse it. *Blue Print* as described in the program notes is 'a meditation on grief'. It is an intentionally slow work that invites the spectator to also slow down and to experience a state that is contemplative and static as it sifts through memories of a home now absent from the world but made present once again, if only for ninety minutes in the space of this theatre.

*Blue Print* offers a distinctly different dramaturgical strategy to previous case study examinations. In this instance time is structured through spatial composition which manifests as an experience of stasis. In order to contextualise current engagements of stasis within postdramatic theatre the chapter points to seminal historic moments in Western dramatic practice that address the notion of stasis as a

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artists involved in *Shapes of Sleep* are reflective of the tight knit community of artists that have been making work at Performance Space since the late 1980s (see chapter three). They work across a number of different mediums and collaborate across a variety of live performance events. Specifically they create and are involved in contemporary performance and theatre as well as contemporary dance.

way to counter dramatic developmental composition. To expand upon this historic context the chapter employs Lehmann's (2006) and Fuchs' (1996) writing on dramatist Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1942) and his interest in stasis and contemplation, and Szondi's (1983) analysis of compositional shifts within modern drama that threatened developmental structure. Further to this, the analysis employs Marranca's (1994), Fuchs' (1996) and Lehmann's (2006) reading of Stein's analogy of landscape to address how contemporary works of theatre such as *Blue Print* engage stasis as an aesthetic experience essential to theatre communication.

The chapter also introduces the notion that time can be experienced through the composition of space. It does this by exploring *Blue Print*'s emphasis on spatial composition as a time-based dramaturgy. Stein's notion of landscape is a useful aesthetic analogy that corresponds to this staging strategy. Like *Blue Print*, Stein's proposition, Marranca notes, negates the temporal and spatial fixity of time and place of dramatic plot (1994: 3). In *Blue Print* clarity of location, characters and story is replaced by an indeterminate timeless location that is inhabited by a dispersed visual and sonic field of different activity. Devoid of dramatic action and conflict the compositional space is experienced as static; here time turns into space and space is experienced as a time of stasis.

In addition to this, the chapter offers a different dramaturgical engagement of presence to that of the previous case study explorations of an aesthetic of absence through mediatisation in *Yowza* and the ambiguous presence of the unconscious performer in *Shapes of Sleep*. In *Blue Print* the thematic of 'memory' brings into question how and what is being made present by the theatre medium. It both negates and references the tradition of fictional

characters made present by an actor by drawing upon theatre's innate potential for making things present that do not exist in actuality. It does this by turning the theatre into a kind of *séance* for conjuring up the dead. A house now absent to the real world returns as a ghost house made present through the act of memory. To elaborate on this the chapter utilises Jacques Derrida's (1994) writings on spectre in relation to the absence of presence inherent to the notion of ghost, and Alice Rayner's (2006) analysis of ghost as an analogy for theatre communication.

By staging the incompleteness inherent to the notion of ghost, an idea further reinforced by the work's dispersed multi-focal landscape composition, the chapter examines how *Blue Print's* dramaturgy of stasis counters inclinations to either sensationalise trauma or hide its long-term messy consequences; both familiar responses to such events. Within a climate driven by market forces, socialist thinker Thomas Bottomore argues there is simply not enough time for death and grief because it halts productivity (1985: 248). This idea is reinforced by broadcast media's accelerated packaging of trauma, shock and grief as a quickly consumable spectacle that as Lehmann (2006) and Weber (2004) argue of broadcast media offers a reception of detachment. As such *Blue Print's* emphasis on stasis and refusal to provide the spectator with a coherent spectacle offers a distinct alternative to far reaching mediatised portrayals of bushfire disasters, a long familiar feature of Australian summers. In so doing the chapter seeks to demonstrate that stasis as a temporal dramaturgy of the theatre offers a fundamental and significant point of distinction between theatre and mediatisation, in this instance, it explores this idea through the example of televised news media.

### The role of stasis in the radical practices of turn of the century dramatists

The notion of 'stasis' has long been a consideration of dramatists as a means of challenging how modern drama might represent the world around it. Consequently these playwrights are an important prehistory to postdramatic employment of a dramaturgy of stasis. Belgium playwright Maeterlinck is a seminal example of this historic shift. Reacting against Zola and the Naturalist theatre Maeterlinck, in his 1896 essay 'The Tragical in Everyday Life', wrote of the benefits of a 'static theatre' that was devoid of developmental action. He wrote:

I have grown to believe that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or 'the husband who avenges his honour'. (Maeterlinck, 1900: 106)

In his one act plays Maeterlinck sought to foreground a contemplative state amongst his characters over dramatic action. *The Blind* [1890], as Fuchs (1996: 95–96) argues, is an allegory of the human condition. There is virtually no action in this play. Instead twelve blind figures (unaware of their priest who lies dead amongst them) merely wait as the slow recognition of their own fate becomes apparent. Maeterlinck was interested in uncovering the tragic in everyday life but his notion of tragedy, as Vassilis Lambropoulos notes, 'is neither material (as in Naturalism) nor psychological (as in most of Symbolism) but ontological: it pertains to the tragedy of just being' (Lambropoulos, 2006: 85). At the level of its thematic, he was interested in notions of being at the mercy of a higher entity, an idea as Lehmann (2006: 59) points out, that corresponds to Japanese Noh. However, regarding composition Lehmann posits that

Maeterlinck's notion of 'static drama' renounces the classical idea of 'progressing linear time in favour of a planar "image time" of time-space' (Lehmann, 2006: 58).

Certain turn-of-the-century dramatists were experimenting with the nature of how time was represented in drama and were radically challenging its composition of developmental action. For Szondi (1983) Maeterlinck, along with Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), Anton Chekhov (1860–1904), and Strindberg had all, in varying ways undermined this foundational composition. He argues that as a consequence drama had been plunged into a state of crisis to which the notion of stasis was key (Szondi, 1983: 196). For Szondi the inter-subjective dialogue, so essential to dramatic progression, was replaced with 'monologic responses framed as conversation' (Szondi, 1983: 206). Szondi's observation, as argued in this instance, emphasises that historic circumstances are impacting on the construction of dramatic plot.

Arguably these dramatists, as outlined above, were at one level responding to the changed circumstances of their time. The historic moment in which they were writing was a time of great change in all spheres of cultural, technological and scientific life. In response to Szondi, Lehmann argues Szondi's 'crisis of drama' was fundamentally a 'crisis of time' (2006: 154). The shift in world image from the scientific enquiries into relativity and quantum theory alongside philosophical shifts in subjective temporal experience (Bergson) to the accelerating time of the city, industry and economy, to quote Blumenberg, 'intensified the dissociation of world time and life time' (Blumenberg qtd in Lehmann, 2006: 154). With these changes a focus on reflection and consciousness had become an important investigation for these dramatists. However, despite these more radical modernist practices, they did not move theatre away from its

central focus on the written word, nor did their experiments with time offer an alternative to enacted illusion and to time as representation.

### Stein's proposition

Stein, in her writings on plays as landscapes (1967), while still orientated towards the written word is also self-reflexive about the compositional structure of drama and as such offers something different to Maeterlinck's representations of stasis. Stein's writing by contrast is an aesthetic proposition brought about by her compositional experiments. For example, Marranca observes Stein was constantly questioning the dramatic form, by referencing it and rearranging its structure to interrupt its linear flow and the comprehension necessitated by this structure (Marranca, 1994: 6). For Stein the problem with the dramatic form, specifically linear plot driven drama, was its temporal syncopation, a temporality that she claims made her nervous.

In the first place at the theatre there is the curtain and the curtain already makes one feel that one is not going to have the same tempo as the thing that is there behind the curtain. The emotion of you on one side of the curtain and what is on the other side of the curtain are not going to be going on together. (Stein, 1962: 59)

Stein's theory of landscape is in essence a rebellion against developmental time of conflict. Her observation as outlined above highlights the division between the *scenic time*: the projection of the past and future to the *present time*: the time of the spectator. Rather than maintain this division of time Stein proposes a composition akin to a landscape that aims to create a state of contemplation. Stein, as Marranca argues, was not interested in representing an event but in

creating an experience. Her proposition is essentially a shift in the way theatre might be perceived (1994: 3). To paraphrase Marranca, landscape aesthetics offer not one fixed focus but multiple and simultaneous points of activity and focus as would be found in a natural landscape. The onus is placed on the spectator to complete its meaning and make their own relationships between the different points of focus (Marranca, 1994: 3). Stein wanted to negate the necessity of memory that underpins dramatic progression in order to create a sense of time as a *continuous present* (Stein, 1992), or in other words a stasis, a time of contemplation rather than a nervousness born from the tension inherent to temporal development. Stein's aesthetic proposition is important to understanding compositional shifts within experimental theatre practice because, as Lehmann observes, landscape acts as 'a productive provocation' (Lehmann, 2006: 63).

Landscape staging, as Fuchs notes, has become a 'signature style' within contemporary performance (1996: 92). Seminal and influential examples of this are American directors Wilson and Foreman who claim Stein's notion of continuous presence and landscape composition has directly inspired their own staging compositions. Both practitioners engage with the notion of landscape and presence in very different ways. While Foreman's multi-modal staging operates, as Fuchs notes, as a *mindscape*, 'a state of moment to moment awareness of the contents of a mind' (Fuchs, 1996: 202), Wilson in response to Stein's proposition creates entire worlds on stage made up of people, buildings, space ships and elements of nature (Fuchs 1996: 99). Diverse engagements of multi-focal landscape compositions such as those employed by Wilson and Foreman are evident in the work of practitioners seeking to create theatre outside of the compositional models of plot and character. For postdramatic theatre, as Lehmann argues, Stein's aesthetics are

significant but outside of America they perhaps operate at a more subconscious level (2006: 63). At a theoretical level Stein's writings provide a language that enables an elaboration of the aesthetic logic of a number of works. *Blue Print* is a case in point.

### Landscape aesthetics

*Blue Print* corresponds with the aesthetic compositional concerns of Stein's multi-focal landscape proposition. It simultaneously stages performed actions, recorded anecdotes, direct address monologues, projected text, moving lights, soundscapes, live feeds and video imagery. It is comprised of a landscape of different fragments of memories that engender a state emblematic of the altered temporal experience of grief, and as such focuses on making these memories present as performance material. It does this by capitalising on the theatre's innate capacity to make things present that in actuality do not exist.

As the creative process focused more and more on staging the recorded family interviews, it became apparent that any attempt to stage these 'memories', to bring them into the present and the physical realm of the theatre in whatever mode they manifested was akin to conjuring up ghosts. The work, in essence, conjured up a 'ghost home' now absent from the physical world into the present time and space of the theatre. In this respect Alice Rayner's (2006: xiii) conception of ghosts and the phenomena of theatre is a useful tool through which to expand upon the staging strategies employed within *Blue Print*. 'Ghost', as a theoretical idea, Rayner argues, inhabits all the elements that underpin theatre's complex perception. The theatre, she notes, has always been a place where the living encounters the dead (Rayner, 2006: xiii), or in other words where the

spectator is presented with a fictional rendering of something that does not exist. However, different understandings of time within the theatre medium impact greatly upon how ghosts might manifest and be perceived. For example, within the dramatic theatre 'ghosts', as Rayner notes, have a long history of 'symbolic representation' (2006: xiii), or in other words ghostly characters are prevalent within dramatic theatre history as in the famous example of the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

The performer, in this example of a ghostly character, to use Rayner's words, operates as a 'conduit for a character' (2006: xiii), and with this, as discussed previously in chapter three, complex relationships between perceived understandings of absence and presence inherent to theatre's mimetic traditions come into operation.<sup>46</sup> But, as Rayner intimates above, dramatic mimesis is not the only understanding of presence possible in the theatre medium. The theatre likened to a ghostly apparition can animate the dead by various engagements with the notion of time, which as Rayner notes can happen by 'producing a visible material and affective relationship to the abstract terms of time and repetition, sameness and difference, absence and presence' (2006: xiii). *Blue Print's* theatrical *séance* utilises the ghost-like communication of theatre to make present what in actuality is absent from the world. The following description illustrates this approach to staging.

Not very long into the performance the recording of my mother's reflections on the house is played. Her disembodied voice, a recording from another place and time, now recounts to the present audience the very moments before the fire. She talks in detail of a house that she had just cleaned and of flowers she had watered only

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<sup>46</sup> For example, the actor in this instance is present, but in the event that disbelief is sufficiently suspended and enactment sufficiently convincing then the actor should be perceived as absent and the character made present.

that morning in the kind of detail one creates when attempting to retrieve something in its entirety. It is akin to a shopping list, an attempt not to forget anything. But at the same time this act of listing has no definitive outcome, no causality and no development. It can never create or function as a complete representation of the house.

Her act of remembering instead conjures up a mental image into the empty space but what it conjures is odd and fragmented. Its details are recognisable as a home but at the same time its tragic demise is also known. It presents a confusion of time, a presence of absence, of the past mixing with the realities of the present, an occurrence akin to the perplexing experience of grief and trauma. What is this thing that has been conjured up? Jacques Derrida argues the spectre, the thing that gives flesh to the dead, is perplexing because it is recognisable yet not. He posits: '[T]his non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least to that which one thinks one knows by the name knowledge' (Derrida, 1994: 6). The dispersed focus of *Blue Print's* spatial and model composition adds to the sense of ambiguity inherent to the notion of ghost that Derrida speaks of in *Spectres of Marx*. Nothing is ever fully manifest as a unified whole made present in the space. It remains, dispersed and framed by memory, and as such offers only a suggestion of presence, or as Derrida calls the spectre a 'non-present present' (1994: 6).

By way of another example of this spectral analogy, the house is also conjured back into being through the durational action of drawing up the floor plan of the house with a chalk line marker onto the theatre floor. Sometime into my mother's recollections the drawing begins. It is done with painstaking accuracy and takes up most of the performance to complete. Every time a mistake is made it is returned

to and rectified. Like a fading memory, with each recollection it becomes less clear and mistakes and exaggerations start to appear no matter how many times one tries to remember the details. This situation is heightened by the inaccuracy of the domestic chalk line marker. It is the kind that is used to draw up the straight lines of a private tennis court, not the intricate detailing this floor plan demands. It makes the task difficult and mistakes easy to make. They interrupt its development and make it frustratingly slow as an action. This is further exacerbated by the sheer enormity of the task. While not to scale, the floor plan is still large and very present in the space as it grows over time. But as a ghost it is stubborn, refusing to make an instant or complete appearance, instead like the disembodied voice it unfolds slowly over time as its lines traverse the enormous space.



Figure 11

### Shaping the experience of time through space

Blue Print's staging of memory operates in a void space. The scenic material may focus on memories of a home in Canberra, but they do not locate the work there or even focus on the house per se as its content and meaning. The work instead, as the above descriptions of the scenic material illustrates, aims to emphasise the experience of what it is to remember this home. In this sense Stein's landscape is again a useful analogy. Stein's proposition, to quote Marranca, replaces 'the conventional nineteenth-century time-bound and fixed setting of the drama' (1994: 3). The dramatic theatre, as Marranca argues below, utilises scenic information to ground and frame its action in time and space. She argues:

Setting entraps a play in historical time; it is mere scenery, information, the dressing that frames a play in a set of gestures, speech styles and moral values. That static view of space encourages closure, preoccupation with causality, motivation; it is possessive of dramatic characters, reducing all their gestures to a specific time and environment, as if there were no world beyond the fourth wall. It separates the human being from the world, forcing the two into oppositions. (Marranca 1984: 197)

In contrast to the dramatic theatre's creation of a separate world that exists in another time and place, *Blue Print's* indeterminate space acts to foreground the perception and experience of the present time or as Lehmann describes it, 'as the time used here and now by all collectively present' (Lehmann, 1997b: 35) as its material. It achieves this by employing space to foreground the experience of time. For example, as described earlier the audience hear the elderly woman's disembodied voice. Her physical absence, along with the stasis inherent in the act of recollection refuses to be fixed in time. She is not concerned with retelling the story of the demise of her

home, of recounting an elsewhere, but rather making present, if only through her memories, all the little details that for her constitute a home. In *Blue Print*, to borrow Marranca's description of Stein's analogy, 'there is only a continuous sense of becoming in space' (1994: 4), and in this case it is the continuous becoming of the memories that this absent woman's voice now conjures into being in this collective time and space. As such the work has turned space into a temporal experience that is static.

The act of drawing the floor plan also makes apparent the merging of space with the experience of time. As the lines traverse the space and consume time slowly, time is understood in terms of space and in turn the perception of space is experienced as a temporal stasis. Nothing develops here in this timeless and placeless void. In this instance, like Beckett's negation of developmental action, its form has become its content. As discussed in the introduction, Adorno argues that the circular conversations in Beckett's *Endgame* are fundamentally antagonistic to the very definition of dramatic action as progressive development. Form, in this instance, he observes, goes beyond what is expressed and alters its intention. Therefore the negation of meaning in *Endgame* becomes its meaning (Adorno, 1982: 136–145). In the case of *Blue Print*, the lack of development and sense of stasis inherent to the retrieval of memories becomes the central experience that now constitutes its meaning. Its reception is like Stein's landscape, to paraphrase Marranca, where experience is privileged over the representation of events (1994: 3).

### Landscape reception

Multi-focal staging offers a different understanding of time-based dramaturgy in the theatre than has been previously addressed within

the case studies presented in this thesis. For example, Fuchs observes this approach to staging has created a very specific kind of viewing and reception that she refers to as 'the Landscape response' (Fuchs, 1996: 99). Such compositions, she notes, invite the spectator to view the work as they would a landscape in response to the spatial relationships that the staging presents (Fuchs, 1996: 107). This type of viewership is expressed in Stein's observation of how one observes and makes sense of a natural landscape. Stein wrote that the formation of a play must be based on the relationship between its elements, just as one views a landscape 'the trees to the hills the hills to the fields the trees to each other' (Stein qtd in Fuchs, 1996: 107). The viewer's gaze in response to this natural composition moves and makes relationships between the varying objects in the field. This analogy can be likened to *Blue Print's* mise-en-scène. The following description of *Blue Print's* staging illustrates how its dispersed field of activity sets up relationships between different staging modes and the ideas they play with.

Within a chalk-drawn room of the floor plan a story is recounted live to the spectator. It recalls an image of a brother sitting in his bedroom endlessly listening to the 1970s rock group Led Zeppelin while studying for school. At the conclusion of this anecdote a portable CD player is turned on and reckless dancing ensues. Its *thrashing* unconsidered movements disturb the chalk lines of the floor plan. This action is mirrored by the performers dressed as firemen who appear in a number of different locations off in the distance. They also turn on a CD player and dance to the same song. It becomes a disjointed cacophony of noise and movement. After reaching exhaustion point I stop dancing and exit the space. The distant figures keep dancing for seven more minutes.



Figure 12

Over this duration the association of the dance to the story begins to shift and pull apart to create new relationships to other visual and sonic performance material in the space. The eye is invited to shift from one focus to the next in this now spatial composition that unfolds in the present time. The spectator, in this instance, is invited to form his or her own association between the various performance materials unfolding in the space. For example, pushed to their physical limitations, the performers' exhaustion is made apparent. The lapel microphones they wear emphasise this. Their amplified breath surrounds the spectator through an array of speakers. This device turns the performers' breathing into movement and makes their exhaustion intimate. The performers continue to dance wildly until it becomes physically impossible for them to keep going at which point two leave and one is left lying on the floor to recover. During

this sequence a projection of a line drawing of a door is also present and can be seen on the back screen. It slowly turns from an animation of lines to a photograph of a front door to a house (see figure 12).

Through this complex unfolding of different images, sounds, actions and story, layers of association and relationships between different modes are offered up. Performers are simultaneously identifiable as themselves, exhausted by the dance and as an image of overwrought firemen, while at the same time they carry a resonance of the memory of a brother in a bedroom listening to loud rock music. Lehmann describes such examples of dispersed fields of focus and modes as operating like a scenic poem. Like a poet, he notes, 'the director composes fields of association between words, sounds, bodies and movements, lights and objects' (2006: 111). The intent of this particular mise-en-scène in *Blue Print* is to create an experience of the confusion in the aftermath of the bushfire event by conjuring up a thought process caught between the past in relation to the realities of the present.

As a work of postdramatic theatre *Blue Print* invites understandings of its staged material that no longer conform to the teleology of dramatic theatre. Yet as exemplified by the *Sun Herald* review of *Blue Print*, habitual receptions shaped by the development of story within drama can be a dominant framework by which works are still judged. Reviewer James Blake writes of the work:

Although it is visually and sonically interesting and steers well clear of disaster documentary cliché, *Blue Print* engages intermittently at best... Pollard's storytelling is inadequate. Then again, given the scale of the disaster, words can only fail. (Blake, 2007b: 12)

What employment of words is Blake referring to? Or more to the point how do these words have to be composed to become engaging? *Blue Print* fails in this instance because the reviewer has positioned it as a work of failed drama. With its lack of linear time, *Blue Print's* landscape composition, like Stein's is no longer safe terrain in terms of the perception it aims to invite from the spectator. As Marranca argues, landscape aesthetics leave it up to the viewer to discover what is there. It is 'a kind of conceptual mapping in which the activity of thought itself creates an experience' (Marranca, 1994: 3). This radical proposition now offers an intriguing alternative to the more mainstream forms of mass entertainment, specifically screen-based media such as film, television and now the internet.<sup>47</sup> As discussed in chapter three screen-based media operates as a mediatised presence, its mimesis is complete, it is concrete and fixed and as such coherent, while its transparency as a medium offers an illusion that is 'hyper real' (Eco, 1987). As such screen-based media is the antithesis of a multi focal staged environment, which in Steinian aesthetics, deliberately sets out to negate any fixity of its meaning by employing the experience of time as it unfolds in the present.

### The potential of the static moment within an era of mediatisation

Landscape's challenge to the developmental temporal composition of the dramatic model offers a clear point of distinction between theatre and mediatisation. As Lehmann (2006: 63) argues, the innovative potential of Stein's proposition only becomes fully apparent in the current mediatised climate. In a time of perceived temporal acceleration (Virillo, 2000), stasis becomes a powerful device through

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<sup>47</sup> Mass entertainment or alternatively mainstream entertainment as I am using it here, to quote Linda Jean Kenix, is that which is largely 'driven by consumptive capitalism' (Kenix, 2012: 154) and refers to media that appeals to a broad demographic of people, such as Hollywood films or televised news broadcasts.

the contrast in reception it aims to invite. The potential of stasis as an innovative measure in defining a different mode of experience is no longer limited to diverse aesthetic shifts in theatre reception but is now a potentially provocative and innovative tool to counter widespread mechanisms of mass communication.

Accelerated developmental tropes of broadcast media shape and reinforce limited understandings of life occurrences or, as Weber suggests, through the detached viewership inherent to this media they produce and define their audiences rather than even shape their expectations (Weber, 2004: 118). Given this now-habitualised reception the withdrawal of complete and concrete information becomes increasingly paramount to theatre's potential effectiveness and distinction as an alternative expression. An example of this distinction can be found in *Blue Print* where exploration of the slow and altered temporal reality of grief is directly informed by dramaturgical questions pertaining to the work's potential distinction from mass media's representation of natural disasters. For example, at the beginning of the performance process dramaturg John Baylis offered a provocation. He asked: Given the personal nature of the family interviews how do we avoid replicating what is already known of the bushfires as experienced within the public domain?<sup>48</sup> Baylis was referring to the many personal accounts of bushfire victims televised on nightly news shows or presented on autobiographical confessional style television shows such as the ABC'S popular 'Australian Story'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> John Baylis was a founding member of the Sydney Front (1987–1993), an experimental theatre company based in Sydney (see Hamilton, 2011 pp. 55–87). Baylis' notes are paraphrased from the process journal notes of *Blue Print*.

<sup>49</sup> *Australian Story* as described by the ABC presents 'stories (...) "narrated" by the subjects themselves. The program aims to present a varied and contrasting picture of contemporary Australia and Australians from many different perspectives'. See ABC, Australian Story, <http://www.abc.net.au/austory/aboutus.htm> [2 May, 2013].

Televised accounts of Australian bushfires have become increasingly frequent appearing every summer during the bushfire season. These reports often follow a particular formula intended to intensify the experience of the bushfires by adopting fast-paced editing, dramatic voice-overs and atmospheric music.<sup>50</sup> ABC TV's documentary feature *Inside the firestorm* about the Victorian Black Saturday bushfires in 2009, for example, opens with dramatic music and fast-paced footage of fires engulfing homes. It then introduces fragments of survivor stories. A young woman for example recounts her fear saying: 'I remember holding Matilda in my arms and I just thought she's just got to keep breathing ' (Maclaren *et al*, 2010). Next, a man explains: 'Everything was on fire around us, literally everything in all directions...' (Maclaren *et al*, 2010). The following interview snippet presents another man whose emotional voice says: 'I didn't know how long I could hang on you know...' (Maclaren *et al*, 2010). This account is followed by two more survivor reports in a similar vein. As the report builds to a climax with more footage of fires and music, a voice over dramatically declares:

This is the story of Australia's most devastating bush fire, a day of disaster as it unfolded to those who were there, the eyewitnesses caught in the path of the firestorm that would rewrite history and change all the rules. (Maclaren *et al*, 2010)

Despite this particular program's claim that this fire is the worst fire in all of Australia's history, such statements appear in abundance in relation to these types of news stories.<sup>51</sup> Headlines in broadcasting

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<sup>50</sup> Martin Montgomery for example, in his examination of structures of broadcast news notes that the pace and presentational style of this news media aims to dramatise and personalise the facts. The use of close-up and contrapuntal employment of different voices bring the human element to the fore. For example, he notes that reportage on the 2004 Tsunami, rather than present facts and statistics aimed to dramatise 'distant suffering' to effect a sense of the personal (see Montgomery, 2007: 26).

<sup>51</sup> When researching online archival footage many examples of bushfire reportage used this type of language. For example, ABC Catalyst report on the Canberra bushfires declared: 'The fire defied the known rules of bushfire behaviour, and exceeded all expectations of the damage

terms, Montgomery argues, are used like film trailers, intended to entice the viewer to keep watching (Montgomery, 2007: xxxii). They turn the news into dramatic fictions rather than offering the plain facts. As such they add nothing new to a fuller understanding of the social impact of the fires beyond their initial devastation. Such broadcast formulas instead encapsulate the disassociated reception that Weber claims is now habit (Weber, 2004: 3). By blurring the lines between devices of fiction and fact televised news reportage turns these real life experiences into a spectacle and the spectator into a passive observer. In reference to Weber's account of the effects of the dislocation of televised reportage Lehmann argues mediatisation has eroded the act of communication by isolating the viewer from what is signified and the object itself (Lehmann, 2006: 184). This division, he claims, is the real reason why the often questionable merging of fiction and reality within such reportage can occur. He argues: 'We find ourselves in a spectacle in which we can only *look on* — bad traditional theatre' (Lehmann, 2006: 184).

Landscape aesthetics by contrast offer ideas and images to be completed by the spectator rather than finished visual reproductions. The domain of the dramatic, its conflict and violence, to paraphrase Lehmann, are left to the media while postdramatic theatre learns to embrace the calm and static that is inherent to its withdrawal from such reproductions (Lehmann, 2006: 184). Interestingly, there were two research photos that remained in the process folder for *Blue Print*. They were of the house before and after its destruction. Intuitively a decision was made to never see them, to keep the spectre of the house as open to the artists' imagination as it would be to audience. To show them, it was decided, would complete the picture and give us no-where to explore and nothing more to offer.

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they can unleash' (ABC, 2013), while in 2013 presenter Ben Knight for the ABC's 7.30 report introduced the story on the Tasmanian fires with the line 'This was no ordinary bushfire!' (ABC, 2013).

The performance, after all was focused on the process of grief rather than on the drama of the event itself.

### The time tabling of grief

*Blue Print* through its staging composition invites the spectator to reflect upon the grieving state, a condition that is not easily addressed within the broadcast formulas of mass communication described above nor, as John Reynolds argues, with everyday life schedules (2002: 247). The bereaved individual, he argues, is often marginalised in society because of its incapacitating nature (2002: 247). In her published memoir 'The Year of Magical Thinking' (2005), for example, Joan Dideon notes the grieving state is an irrational and slow time where nothing progresses as the mind takes the time it needs to come to terms with the enormity of the change these events create (2005: 3). Grief often renders the bereaved individual unable to participate as they would normally in life and work. Such incapacitation, as Reynolds argues, has shaped a particular response to grief predicated on a quick recovery time. Market forces in conjunction with the fear that irrationality and lack of control over one's life can engender, he argues, largely drive this response. (2002: 247).

Grief can be a very confronting idea that does not easily fit within the temporal structures informing everyday life. In writing on grief in relation to victims of natural disasters, Peter Read observes the psychological difficulties experienced by those who lose their homes. The needs of the victims he notes are often misunderstood by official agencies during the recovery process (Read 1998: 197). For Read, there is an overemphasis on practicalities and quick recovery and far less consideration given to grief counselling for victims (Read 1998:

197).<sup>52</sup> Instead the griever is encouraged to get 'back into the swing of life' as the expression goes and to normalise their situation as quickly as possible.

This strategy, whether conscious or not, fits in with structures of market productivity, a system whose sole focus is on profit born of speed and economy. The slow anomaly of grief, like the notion of sleep discussed in chapter three becomes an inconvenient consumption of time that is counter-productive to accelerated living. To control the grieving phenomenon with the least amount of disruption to the work force, recovery is tightly timetabled. The Australian Federal Government Fair Work Ombudsman website (2015)<sup>53</sup> exemplifies this point by stating that all employees are entitled to a maximum of two days bereavement leave upon the death of a relative or loved one. For Marxist socialist, Bottomore writing in 1984, the positioning of grief in society, as he outlines below, is directly informed by capitalistic economic structure.

[We] do not have time to deal with death because we are busy producing and consuming, and unless we are personally affected by a loss, we can function efficiently and without hindrance because death is hidden from sight. And when all else fails, we can take medication to overcome our weakness. (Bottomore, 1984: 248)

*Blue Print's* dramaturgical engagement of stasis creates an environment in which an anachronistic and consequently marginalised experience of life can be expressed and given time for reflection. In its resistance to creating a unified and coherent dramatic spectacle of the bushfire events, a representational style that, as Lehmann notes,

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<sup>52</sup> Joan Dideon's (2005) memoir 'The Year of Magical Thinking' and Peter Read's 'Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places' were influential books that informed the research process of *Blue Print*.

<sup>53</sup> Australian Federal Government Fair Work Ombudsman 2015, *Compassionate Leave*, <http://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/compassionate-leave> [06/06/15].

is now the domain of media broadcasts (Lehmann, 2006: 184), *Blue Print's* alternative reflection on the state of grief as experienced through the static perception of time seeks to become a political act because it offers a different understanding of these summertime disasters that cross our screens. To reflect in any depth on grief and trauma, as Derrida claims, is vital to a better understanding of the truth of our situation by understanding the ghosts, whatever they may be, that haunt us.

If he loves justice at least, the 'scholar' of the future, the 'intellectual' of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back their speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, spectres, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet. (Derrida 1994: 176)

The following chapter continues to explore the potential of landscape and the static moment within the accelerated present but this time it returns to a presentation of a dramatic play. Australian company Back to Back Theatre present their drama *small metal objects* in a busy city site. The analysis of this work examines how the company employ the acceleration inherent to this site to destabilise the unity and logocentrism of its dramatic text. In doing so they draw focus to the actors themselves who comprise of people considered to be living with a disability. In the 'real time' city landscape, as this case study shows, Back to Back present another landscape of bodies deemed anachronistic to the accelerated life styles that inhabit the city space of their 'play'. Consequently this case study offers another distinct example of time-based aesthetics and its political potential to reflect upon the personal and greater societal concerns influenced by the dynamics of time, as they exist in very day life.

## Anecdote #5

Sitting on a raised bank in the middle of a busy city location the spectators watch the crowd go by. We are given headphones that play a soundtrack akin to a film score which, despite the noise and activity, provides an immediate disconnection from the reality of being in a live environment. Instead everything takes on a film-like quality. A cityscape of different people walking by unfolds before us; suited people in a hurry, tourists who stroll, and fringe-dwellers who hide in the corners leaning against walls also watching the world pass by. A little while into observing this filmic vista a dialogue unfolds intimately through the headphones, two male voices say:

*Gary: I cooked a roast last night.*

*Steve: What sort?*

*Gary: I think it was Chicken. You'll have to come over and I'll make it for you.*

*Steve: I love chicken.*<sup>54</sup>

This conversation feels very familiar. It is trivial and funny, the kind of banal conversation that any one of us could easily have with a friend. With this sense of the familiar comes an understanding that maybe this film is about each of us, about the tiny individuals amidst the speed of the swarming city caught up in their own thoughts.

As pedestrians continue to parade by two small figures appear far off in the distance. They stand stock-still facing each other contrasted against the fast moving crowd. As they slowly come forward and into view it becomes apparent that they are the ones who have been speaking so intimately in our ears. The voices have owners and with this realisation the aloof filmic detachment dissolves and we plummet

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<sup>54</sup> This script excerpt has been transcribed from the DVD of the performance.

into the here and now where space and time have reconnected. This is the live theatre! The one place left, as Virilio argues, where there is still a unity of time and place (2000: 6) and where a collective gathering of audience and performers come together to communicate and reflect upon the world.

However, this particular theatre feels very strange. It is not performed in a conventional theatre space but is exposed to the goings-on of a busy city location that continually threatens to interfere with the dramatic action. Further to this strangeness there is also something different about the performers. They look slightly different, they don't move very much and the way they deliver their lines does not seem to flow naturally. It is too measured and there are pauses where pauses should not be. With time it becomes apparent the performers have an intellectual disability and with this realisation comes another realisation, that this work is indeed about the spectators, it is about the *strangeness of their own thoughts* when confronted, albeit very gently, with the so-called 'other'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> 'The strangeness of my own thoughts' is a reference from the Artistic Rational sourced from the Back to Back website (see Back to Back, 2012). They state: 'Our theatre is an analysis of the biological, psychological and social dynamics that simultaneously unify and separate our audience. We want people to think about the strangeness of their own thoughts' (<http://backtobacktheatre.com/> [1/08/ 2012]).

## Chapter 5. Site specificity, logos and time: Back to Back's unique approach to representing disability

The preceding anecdote reflects upon the experience of watching *small metal objects* by Back to Back Theatre when it played opposite Circular Quay train station at the 2007 Sydney Festival. It aims to capture the intriguing and unexpected experience this work creates as it breaks with habitual expectations of watching a work of theatre, through the location and the impact of the city on the performance and also the fact that the cast is comprised of actors with and without a perceived disability. 'Driven by an ensemble of performers considered to have intellectual disabilities' (Back to Back Theatre, 2015), this Geelong based company, as Bree Hadley notes, has garnered much attention both here and overseas due to their often unorthodox use of site, form and spectator /performer interfaces (Hadley, 2014: 82).

Under Bruce Gladwin's artistic directorship the company have created a number of different performances including theatre, site-specific works along with installations and participatory video projects.<sup>56</sup> This diversity, as the company notes, has arrived out of a questioning of representations and perceptions of the disabled, which extends to addressing notions of representation and perception within the theatre medium. As they say, their work not only addresses 'the assumptions of what is possible in the theatre, but also the assumptions we hold about ourselves and others' (Back to Back Theatre, 2015). *Small metal objects* is one such example of this exploration into the perception of the disabled and the possibility of

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<sup>56</sup> Bruce Gladwin took over the artistic directorship of the company in 1999. Prior to that he was a freelance actor and theatre director (see Schmelzer, 2013). Notable works of the company include the ongoing community film-based project *The Democratic Set* [2009–] to theatre shows such as *Food Court* [2008] and *Ganesh Verses the Third Reich* [2011] to *Soft* [2002], a performance that enclosed the spectators and the performers in a giant white fabric 'cell'.

the theatre medium to express the company's concerns.<sup>57</sup> This chapter examines the ways in which this situation is underpinned by dramaturgical strategies that both address and counter historic temporal aesthetics of theatre.

Back to Back's work presents another distinctive approach to time-based dramaturgy that differs from the previous case studies employed in this research. While the other examples of practice have countered historic temporal traditions of dramatic mimesis through durational game playing, durational choreographic actions and multi-modal staging, Back to Back presents a one act dramatic play. In this regard *small metal objects* offers a unique example of experimental time-based dramaturgy that does not necessarily conform to the so called signature style more commonly attributed to postdramatic theatre, that of a work devoid of a causal linear narrative. As Lehmann argues, polemical positioning of text-based theatre as distinct from more visual and physical modes of performance is a position often taken by the avant-garde (Lehmann, 2006: 145).

In actuality works positioned as postdramatic practice can employ text in a variety of manners. But how the text is employed within such practices always stands counter to the *telos* of dramatic communication and its developmental temporal composition. This distinction is what makes *small metal objects* so interesting as a case study employed to explore the possibilities of temporal aesthetics to effect a different kind of engagement with performance material. Back to Back's dramaturgy not only displaces the developmental time of dramatic theatre but also employs it.

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<sup>57</sup> *small metal objects* premiered at the International Melbourne Arts Festival at Flinders St Station in Melbourne in 2005 and has since gone on to tour nationally and internationally to a variety of outdoor sites usually located near a public transport hub. For example, in Singapore (2008) the work was presented at the Vivo Mall near Sentosa Ferry terminal, in New York (2008) it was presented at the Whitehall Ferry Terminal. And as outlined in the opening anecdote preceding this chapter in Sydney it was presented in front of the circular Quay transport hub.

As outlined above the work is staged in a city and this creates a very different kind of engagement with dramatic content than would normally be expected of a play presented in a theatre space. The random actions of the people in this real-time environment inadvertently interfere (at times literally) with the dramatic action and consequently with the spectators' focus on the action. *Small metal objects* is exposed to the fluctuating temporal dynamics that underpin everyday experience. But the randomness of the city, rather than destroy the work, is an important part of the experience of watching *small metal objects*. Through its staging of the so called *real* and the overtly fictitious, the company create a platform in which to address the often ambiguous perceptions, and uneasy associations made of people living with disabilities. This is a consequence of the effect of the theatre communication that Back to Back cleverly craft and bring to the fore.

The unusual experience that Back to Back's theatre creates is elaborated upon in a number of different ways in this chapter. To further understand how the company's approach to staging destabilises the text as its central focus and mode of communication, the chapter employs Lehmann's (1997a, 2006) discussions of logos and the historic privileging of dramatic logos over staging. Further to this, to elaborate upon the way the city site contributes to the experience that Back to Back present, the chapter engages Mike Pearson's (2010) writings on the unpredictable environment of site-specific engagement and its potential to engender different understandings of performance material.

In *small metal objects* every little activity that occurs in the city can be read in relation to the staged fiction. As such the work becomes multi-focal. In this instance Stein's notion of a play as a landscape is

further employed as an analogy to explore this compositional aesthetic approach to staging in Back to Back's city landscape. To further elaborate on this, the chapter employs Lehmann's (1997a, 2006) reading of Julia Kristeva's Chora. For Lehmann the notion of Chora, when thought of in relation to experimental theatre practice, is not about the destruction of language but theatrical deconstruction (Lehmann, 2006: 146). *Small metal objects'* mode of articulation is no longer limited to that of the drama but is instead made polyphonic through the multiple points of activity within the work. This idea is elaborated upon through Lehmann's theorisation of a *choric space* (Lehmann 1997a, 2006). In this analogical approach to analysis the real-time pedestrians in *small metal objects* are likened to a chorus that is perceived to be in constant dialogue with all aspects of the performance including the spectators. Observed by the pedestrians, the spectators momentarily are positioned as 'the Other', the ones who look out of place amidst the passing parade of unaware people who have inadvertently stumbled into the time of the theatre. The experience of time itself in this instance becomes multi-layered as the real-time activity of the city contrasts and clashes with the represented developmental action of the play. In addition it also clashes with the time of the theatre event that the spectator inhabits, a time usually defined by the theatre auditorium, as an uninterrupted time where one can experience the performance.

Within this unruly temporal environment the performers' disability also adds complexity to the comprehension of the performance material. They are the characters that inhabit the time of the play but they are also disabled performers who are in actuality positioned in amongst the random real-time activities of a city. Their stillness juxtaposes the rush of this real-time landscape and makes apparent their vulnerability in this haphazard environment. This collision and collapse of the 'real' and the fictitious aspects of Back to Back's

staging renders clear comprehension of their performance material uncertain. Lehmann's (2006) writing on the staging of the *real* within postdramatic practice and Ridout's (2007) writing on the inherent 'ironic doubling' that the theatre effect creates is employed as a starting point to further theorise the effects of Back to Back's staging of not only a real-time city but their own disability within their fiction and within the fluctuating time of the city.

Through time-based dramaturgy, *small metal objects* makes apparent the disenfranchised position of the disabled within a contemporary world of speed. By employing the real-time activity of a site as an aesthetic to inform and impact upon its reception, *small metal objects* operates in a similar way to works positioned as site-specific, whose reception, as Pearson argues, can be both a consequence of the aesthetic and political (2010: 12). Pearson notes site works are consciously open to unpredictable occurrences that not only destabilise the formal concerns of the auditorium but also accentuate the globalising tendencies inherent to a real-time site. These tendencies, he posits, become apparent via a performed opposition that opposes 'questionable ideologies and political power' (Kwon in Pearson, 2010: 12). In the example of *small metal objects* as outlined above the contrast of the different speeds of the city and the performers defines a complex divide between those who can participate and those who, by circumstance are excluded from participating. The chapter discusses how Back to Back's work engages time to foreground the politics of participation inherent to speed and the casualties, such as the disabled, that accelerated living creates. To develop upon this understanding the chapter employs Virilo's (2000, 2006) extensive body of writing on temporal acceleration and late capitalism along with Helga Nowotny's (1994) social study of time.

While the company does not consciously define their staging aesthetic as temporal in the same way that practitioners such as Etchells do, the function of time in *small metal objects* manifests as an aesthetic. It directly shapes the experience of the work by heightening the *here and now* of Back to Back's theatre situation. The spectator, the performers and all who happen to be at the site in that moment are implicated within its actions just by being present. Time within this environment is not fixed and controlled but fluctuates with every unpredictable action that arises. In so doing the company open their work up to understandings of the disabled beyond positioning them as a fixed spectacle to be observed from a distance. In this regard, time is indeed a political dramaturgical strategy in their work and, as such, exemplifies the aesthetic and political significance of time to the theatre medium.

#### Back to Back theatre's 'staging' of a dramatic play

By all accounts Back to Back present a historically familiar aesthetic: the dramatic play. Its causal linear narrative conforms to the Aristotelian dramaturgy of a simple yet successful plot. In accordance with this formula all of its events are *plausible and necessary* and 'unified in the requisite way' (Halliwell, 1998: 97). The plot also adheres to the neoclassical three unities, as discussed in chapter two, with its singleness of time, place and action, which enables the scenic time to unfold within its one-hour duration as plausibly as possible. The dramatic play presents an accessible, funny and easy to follow scenario of a drug deal that takes place (or rather does not take place) at a busy transport hub. In summary two friends, Gary (Sonia Teuben) and Steve (Simon Laherty) are hanging out at a transport terminal talking about life and 'stuff' when Gary gets a call on his mobile phone from a stranger called Alan (Jim Russell). Alan, a high-

powered busy law executive is hoping to score drugs from Gary and Steve. He needs the drugs for an industry awards night at which Alan has been nominated for three awards. However the drug transaction is not so straightforward. Steve is not co-operating and seems to be having some sort of 'metaphysical melt down'. It looks like the deal will never take place or at least not in time for Alan to get home, have his shower and be back in time for the awards, which start in one hour.

While the plot is engaging it is not the only element that defines meaning in *small metal objects*. In effect Back to Back 'stage' the play as part of a broader situation in order to extend understandings of this work beyond the meaning of the story. When interviewed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2012 Gladwin explained that he, along with the ensemble, devised the script through improvisation and conversations. It reflects the ensemble members' interests while at the same time it is kept very simple so it can still be understood within a busy outdoor environment. But as he further notes the script is also a vehicle for another understanding. *Small metal objects* is a means, he says, of addressing perceptions of the disabled by bringing to the fore the averted gaze. This response, he claims, is common when people are brought face to face with the disabled.

In a way I think the show is about putting two characters like that in front of you. You just are asked to look at them for the whole time (...) the pay off is you get an access to their humanity, and you get a sense of who they are. (Gladwin, 2014, pers comm. August 23)

This shift in perception of the disabled that Gladwin attributes to the work is brought into being by disrupting the developmental framework of the drama to make apparent other modes of

articulation in the work other than the text. This is achieved by allowing the activity of the city to interfere with the dramatic action.

### The temporal aesthetics of site specificity

The impact of the city location on *small metal objects'* dramatic framework can be clearly seen through a straightforward observation. If *small metal objects* were to be staged in a theatre space it would remain a dramatic story but instead its location in a real-time city landscape purposely counters the temporal unity of its story. The time of the city and the fictional representation of the time that the drama takes place in literally collide in this work and often to great comic effect. For example, a well-dressed Alan, complete with suit, tie and fashionable *Crumpler* bag appears in the crowd; he is searching for Gary so that he can score drugs. Amidst the many suited executives at Circular Quay he at first appears to be just another pedestrian until he stops an unsuspecting passer-by and asks:

Excuse me mate, you're not Gary are you?

To which the pedestrian without hesitation or suspicion answers:

No.

The audience laughs at the clash of these two worlds. He asks another:

Excuse me are you Gary?

Again the newly recruited performing extra answers

No.<sup>58</sup>

At last he finds the character Gary in amongst the *real* crowd at the site and re-enters the now not-so-closed fictive cosmos of Back to Back's drama.

While the company does orchestrate some of its interactions with the passing pedestrian traffic such as the above example, the randomness of the site also offers up situations that are beyond the control of the company. As Gladwin notes, 'each individual performance will be different to the last because it can be affected' (Gladwin, 2012, pers comm. August 23). He goes on to say that when the environment is very unruly he sometimes fears for the actors' safety. But as a rule the production crew tries not to intervene if random occurrences happen because this is all part of the experience of the work. In this regard the work operates in a similar way to a site-specific performance, which, as Pearson argues, activates the conditions inherent to its site in order to shift perception (Pearson, 2010: 1). As Pearson outlines below the containment of the auditorium offers a very different reading of the stage setting to that of the site environment. He argues:

If the stage is essentially synecdochic — in which limited resources stand for a complete picture, as when a table and chair suggests a domestic scene — site is frequently a scene of plenitude, its inherent characteristics, manifold affects and unruly elements always liable to leak, spill and diffuse into performance. (Pearson, 2010: 1)

As the city's randomness disrupts the temporal frame of the story other elements at the site become part of its staging and as such the performance takes on other meanings. *Small metal objects* openly

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<sup>58</sup> This script excerpt has been transcribed from the DVD of the performance (Back to Back, 2008). All further quotes from the performance are from this transcription.

invites such intervention into its temporal containment in order to interrupt this singular coherent focus. Collisions, leakages and spillages between the fictional and *real* worlds literally disrupt its structural flow to make apparent all that exists in the shared time and space of the site now staged as theatre. The characters, the actors, the story, the pedestrians, the architecture and the spectators all start to take on meaning in relation to each other. The inherent threat of the city to the disabled performers that Gladwin describes above is a case in point.

Forging new understandings of performance material through the traditions of text in theatre.

By challenging such entrenched understandings of theatre's communication, Back to Back politicise the work's aesthetics by bringing into question what might now constitute a work's comprehension outside of its text, which in turn might then shift understandings of what constitutes a successful and affecting work of theatre. But despite their dramaturgical attempts to destabilise this historic positioning of text, as evidenced by theatre critic Alison Croggon, such traditions remain an ingrained understanding of what constitutes a work of theatre. She writes:

I did consider how much more powerful the show would have been if it had employed a writer who could pull together a really strong text from the material offered by the Back to Back performers; but the script they have serves their purpose perfectly adequately. (Croggon, 2005)

Croggon's observation suggests a particular standing and power that text and indeed the author have within theatre as well as pointing out that Back to Back's aim is perhaps not in keeping with this particular

positioning of text.<sup>59</sup> Text, as Lehmann argues, has traditionally been considered the dominant focus and mode of communication in the theatre. In Aristotelian terms, a work's logos — the structure, order and aim (telos) of the text (as a representation of action) — gives it the highest ranking importance in classical theatre, while staging (opsis) threatens its logos and as such is deemed as the least important aspect in this hierarchy (Lehmann, 1997a: 55–56). As Lehmann argues there is already a latent conflict between a work's logos and its staging within theatre (1997a: 56). Aristotle's theorisation of logos is incompatible with the act of physically staging a text because logos is not only concerned with the 'word' as Lehmann (1997a: 56) points out but with structure and this implies that some kind of activation or realisation of this structure is necessary. Even at the level of reading a script, Lehmann notes, something else comes into play beyond the meaning attributed to its words (Lehmann, 1997a: 56). *Small metal objects* plays upon this latent conflict between the logos of its text and the uncertainty of its city based presentation to undermine the structure that purports to guide dramatic reception.

### Back to Back's city landscape stage

As *small metal objects* has multiple points of activity, the aesthetic and perceptual concerns of Stein's landscape play becomes a useful analogy through which to better understand the reception this work now seeks to invite. The work's composition is decentralised and the experience of this composition, to use Fuchs' words, is now 'static and spatial as opposed to temporal and progressive' (1996: 75). This

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<sup>59</sup> Eddie Paterson also employs Croggon's review in her writing on *small metal objects*. Paterson leverages this review to highlight the different significance of the writing process to Back to Back's overarching dramaturgy. She notes writing becomes a significant tool of the company for making voices and subjects otherwise unheard present within Contemporary Australia (Paterson, 2013: 78).

shift in temporal structure seeks to invite reflections on the myriad activities that continuously come into being in the present time of the city site. This makes perception of the performance material potentially multifarious. The focus has shifted from a representation of a drug deal, to the spectator's experience of the situation Back to Back create. For Lehmann (2006: 145–46) such shifts from text-based logos to landscape within new theatre practice offers a space that can be conceptually elaborated on through the theoretical understanding of Plato's Chora as analysed by Julia Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974).

Kristeva theorised Plato's conception of a pre-logical space called Chora, a conceptual space where the foundation of language remained counter to logos except at the level of its poetry, its rhythm and sound. Lehmann notes that according to Kristeva the notion of Chora makes apparent the semiotic as distinct from the symbolic.<sup>60</sup> This, for Lehmann, presents a theorisation of the deconstruction of the theatrical as opposed to the destruction of the meaning of language within new theatre practice. As with landscape aesthetics, its meaning is dispersed. Space and speech in this practice exist without telos or unified meaning (Lehmann, 2006: 145–46).

*Small metal objects* communicates through many modes. To further elaborate on this idea Lehmann's conception of Chora as *chora-graphic*, a 'polylogic space of articulation' (Lehmann, 1997a: 57) is helpful. As he notes, this notion reinforces an understanding that theatre is never far removed from chorus (1997a: 57). In the case of *small metal objects*, the text and its mimetic enactment, while still followed by the spectator, is now one of many interfaces. The entire site of the performance has a voice in as much as it begins to inform

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<sup>60</sup> For an elaboration on Kristeva's understanding of the distinction between the semiotic and symbolic please refer to Kristeva, J 1986, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

the generation of meaning in relation to the text. This is because the entire city site, including the pedestrian traffic is actively 'staged'. Once elements are staged in the theatre, to paraphrase Boenisch (2007: 114) again, and as discussed in chapter three, they are understood as both a representation of the object and the object itself. Claudia Castellucci of the Italian company Società Raffaello Sanzio similarly speaks of the multiple readings inherent to the theatre medium but frames it in terms of understandings of the *real*. She observes:

The sheer fact of entry into the space of theatre condemns all reality to duplication, inversion and deceit. In the theatre it's all make-believe. (Castellucci qtd in Ridout, 2007: 183)

Castellucci's observation provides a useful perspective from which to elaborate on the theatrical effect Back to Back activate through their specific 'staging' of the 'real'. While Back to Back and Società Raffaello Sanzio have very different aesthetic approaches to their performance works, they similarly present performers who challenge understandings of enactment and fiction within the theatre medium. For example, in *Giulio Cesare* [1997] Società Raffaello Sanzio engage two anorexic twins, a morbidly obese man and another man who has undergone a tracheotomy. Their presence on stage, a place traditionally reserved for imitations and not the *real thing* can be quite shocking. Arguably, it is not only the disfigurement of the performers that is arresting but the reflexive way in which their presence is employed. Lehmann argues that within postdramatic practice staging the *real* becomes unsettling because of the ambiguity it presents as an effect of theatre, or in other words it brings into question 'whether one is dealing with fiction or reality' (Lehmann, 2006: 101)

Similarly in the case of Società Raffaello Sanzio, Ridout argues that what is taken as *real* in their work 'is in actuality an effect of their theatrical pretending' (Ridout, 2007: 177). However, Ridout's analysis does not extend to an understanding of the impact structures of fictionalised time within dramatic practice can have on this effect of the theatre, a consideration that offers a fundamental point of difference to Back to Back's engagement of the *real* and its reception to that of Società Raffaello Sanzio's particular relationship to temporal structures of comprehension in the theatre. For instance, Castellucci notes that the company's cycle of works *Tragedia Endogonidia* [2001–2003] creates worlds and theatrical forms unto themselves. This, she notes, enables 'total freedom as regards theatrical language. Communication was not the issue' (Castellucci qtd in Castelluci *et al*: 253).

In contrast Back to Back invite the comprehension that comes with drama's temporal composition, but they unsettle this mode by presenting actors considered to have disabilities. Yes, they are the characters that inhabit the fictional time of Back to Back's play but they also exist as people perceived to have a disability. When positioned amidst the fluctuating activities of the city it is the vulnerability of their disability that is amplified. They are co-players in the drama but also in the city now staged as a fiction. Who are these people in relation to the characters they play? And what do these bodies suggest within this real-time landscape of the everyday? What is the perceived reality and fiction at play in *small metal objects*?

The aesthetics of its landscape composition, for example, heighten the multiple understandings of *small metal object's* staged material. The identity of the performers now manifests in multiple ways, as character, as actor, as a disabled person and as a person. Back to Back's aim is not about imitating true to life realism of a drug deal

nor about offering up the disabled as a spectacle to shock but about generating a situation to challenge preconceived understandings of the disabled. The situation of their fringe dweller characters begins to morph with the perceived limitations of disability, while at the same time the real threat of the indiscriminate activity of the site, to paraphrase Lehmann's words, becomes another 'co-player' in this fiction/reality (Lehmann, 2006: 101). This situation in turn heightens the reality of staging this fiction with these players in this site and makes apparent the difficulties of the fluctuating events of everyday life that for some can be 'taken in their stride' as the saying goes, while for others presents an enormous obstacle to full participation.

The performance uses this situation to create irony and tension. Like Società Raffaello Sanzio, to quote Ridout, they create a situation where everything is 'contaminated by doubleness or irony' (2007: 178). In Back to Back's theatrical landscape the ironic is brought to the fore when the fictional and the *real* activities of the city stand in critical juxtaposition to one another. As previously discussed, one prominent focus in the city landscape is the passing parade of pedestrians whose actions and unaware interactions with the performance create multiple ironies and complications of the drama's meaning. Their voice in this sense can be likened to a Greek chorus in that the irony they create through their actions constantly comments upon the staged material. One such example of this is their unintended relationship to the spectators, which ironically makes apparent the complications of Back to Back's invitation to openly watch the disabled.

Sitting in the middle of the city, uniformly wearing headphones, facing forward and seemingly staring at nothing, the spectators now exposed and out of their theatre context are turned into a spectacle to be observed. There are no dim lights to hide in and separate them

from the action. And while the performers carefully maintain the temporal containment of the fourth wall, it is shattered by the pedestrians who cannot help but glance or in some cases stop and stare in bewilderment at this situation. With this simple act of curiosity the spectators are positioned as the 'Other', the ones who look out of place while ironically they themselves have been given licence to freely observe the disabled performers. Further to this irony the players in *Back to Back*, for the most part go unnoticed by the pedestrians when compared to this en masse spectacle. This situation was very pronounced in the Singapore season (2008), where despite difference of race and their disability the players still remained largely invisible to the passing crowd whose gaze was instead (albeit politely) turned towards the spectators.<sup>61</sup>

At Circular Quay the interaction with the audience was different again. In this case certain pedestrians, perhaps with more time on their hands than others, found a captive audience too good an opportunity to pass up and began to perform for the spectators. A young man presented tricks on his skate-board, a drunk serenaded the spectators with a song, while perhaps strangest of all, a man wearing a latex pig mask and police hat began to dance, making not one but two repeat appearances until he was escorted away by the *real* police. This strange parade of would-be performers seemed ironically and inadvertently to heighten the notion of freak, a behaviour that seemed on that day in Circular Quay to quickly surface once an audience was there to watch.

The New York season (2008) of *small metal objects* offered another example of interaction between the spectators and the

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<sup>61</sup> I have seen *small metal objects* on two occasions, firstly at Circular Quay in Sydney as described in the opening anecdote and again in 2008 in Singapore where it was presented as part of the Singapore Arts Festival at Vivocity Sentosa Concourse: a ferry terminal attached to a large shopping mall.

pedestrians. Gladwin explains that in response to a man who randomly began reading poetry in front of the audience certain spectators started passing notes back to the technicians operating the show, requesting that they stop the interloper, while other members of the audience began to intercept the notes as if to encourage this behaviour (Gladwin, 2012, pers comm. August 23). This division between the spectators brings to the fore the shift in reception that *small metal object's* dramaturgy creates. In exposing the dramatic action to random interruptions another type of engagement with the material comes into being. As Gladwin notes again, randomness is all part of what *small metal objects* is (Gladwin, 2012, pers comm. August 23).

In this regard the spectators are no longer just detached spectators but an active part of the multiple articulations that now constitute the work's layers of understanding. The work, as Gladwin notes below, really puts the onus on spectator reactions, which ironically sometimes reflects the same kinds of attitudes directed towards the disabled. He notes:

There's a kind of power shift that exists between the audience and the general public and that can be the audience holding the power (...) inadvertently someone goes to catch the train to say Sandringham, they walk across and there's something kind of odd about their walk and two hundred people laugh *under their breath*. (Gladwin, 2012, pers comm. August 23)

### The static time of 'the Other'

The above interventions, responses and shifts of power accentuate the complex politics of 'looking' in relation to perceptions of people considered to have a disability. They foreground what it is to be different from the so-called status quo. This is further articulated in the work by the very presence of the disabled performers who, in amongst the everyday 'norm' of the city, appear incongruous. Often standing still and facing forward or side on in dialogue, the performers' stillness, along with how they look and who they enact contrasts with the accelerated tempo inherent in the city location. For example, the characters Gary and Steve who are dressed for comfort in their 'trackies' and are content to just 'hang out' as the colloquial saying goes, appear very insignificant and out of place amidst the well-heeled suited commuters who speed by talking on their mobile phones, multi-tasking and rushing to their next location. This stark opposition to the activity of the site, to paraphrase Pearson's words, accentuates globalised tendencies and the questionable politics already at play (Pearson, 2010: 12).

The contrast Back to Back create points to the impact temporality within late capitalism can have on those who are unable to participate in its speed. Here the politics of participation and its connection to wealth and power is made patently clear. This understanding is further reinforced by the script, written from improvisations that reflect the concerns and desires of the Back to Back ensemble. Bruce Gladwin (2012, pers comm. August 23) notes the relationship between economics and human value is of paramount concern for the members of Back to Back. He goes on to say many members have no control over their financial affairs, instead financial control falls to the parents, or as in one particular case, is controlled by the government. The impact economics has on their independence is:

[A] pertinent one for the actors but at the same time relates to everyone in the audience (...) The company wanted to create a personal story that might reflect a different value system, the story of someone prioritising friendship over profit. Another way of defining success is not about accumulation of capital or how much you earn but about your capacity to maintain and develop relationships. (Gladwin, 2012, pers comm. August 23)

In the script a more subjective value system is made apparent when the two fringe dwellers encounter two fictional executives. The fringe dwellers are in actuality played by the two disabled performers, while the executives do not have a disability. This distinction in turn sets in motion an irony between what they represent as characters alongside what they represent as people when framed together in this way. The scripted meeting illustrates a distinction in lifestyles, appearances and values. While Gary and Steve are more concerned with the value of their friendship over a quick profit, Alan and his colleague Carolyn (Genevieve Picot) have no time for such behaviour. The contrast between these two groups can be argued in terms of time and its connection to wealth and productivity.

For Gary and Steve time is abundant. There is time to stand still and contemplate the world. But for Alan and Carolyn, the exact opposite is true. Time for them has a high economic value and as such cannot be wasted. As Caroline points out in the scripted dialogue her time is worth \$400.00 an hour. As a consequence the characters also physically operate at different speeds. Gladwin notes that although time was not a conscious theme in the work, he can see that there is a definite temporal contrast between the fringe dwellers and the executives. He notes: 'it's like a film rate, Gary and Steve are going through the projector eighteen frames a second and (the executives),

they're going through it at thirty-five frames per second' (Gladwin, 2012, pers comm. August 23). This distinction between different experiences of time relates to theoretical understandings of the impact of technology and economics on time. Nowotny argues that:

Society runs the risk of moving at two speeds (...) The fast group are doing it right. They are from a technological point of view, up to date, ahead of the competition. They are rewarded for it in material terms as well. (...) the slow group are those who have been left behind. (Nowotny, 1994 p: 32–33)

For Virilio the speed at which life is now lived has created many casualties and sacrifices (qtd in Courtois and Guerrin, 2008), to which it could be argued the slow and marginalised of society are one.<sup>62</sup> As noted in chapter two, Virilio (2000) posits that the contemporary experience of time as acceleration is a perceived distortion predicated on an increasingly globalised dependence on speed of light technology. If time is money, he argues, then speed has come to equal power and its currency is wealth (Virilio qtd in Armitage, 1999: 35). Events such as the 2008 Global Financial Crisis he argues are one of many 'integral accidents' that accelerated living creates. He claims: 'we have moved from the stage of the acceleration of History to that of the acceleration of the Real. This is what 'progress' is: a consensual sacrifice' (Virilio qtd in Courtois and Guerrin, 2008). Inevitably these sacrifices extend beyond affecting only those engaged in acceleration to those whom Nowotny describes as the slow group (Nowotny, 1994: 32–33) and who, for whatever reason, cannot participate in its technology-induced speed.

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<sup>62</sup> Originally published as 'Paul Virilio : "Le krach actuel représente l'accident intégral par excellence"' in *Le Monde* 18.10.2008, interview by Gérard Courtois & Michel Guerrin translated by Patrice Riemsens and accessed through the website <http://cryptome.org/0001/virilio-crisis.htm> [9 August 2012].

For these marginalised groups the experience and value of 'time' is different. It is, as Nowotny observes, experienced as a 'standstill' that is anachronistic to mainstream society (1994: 33), a situation illustrated by the characters Gary and Steve but also true for the disabled performers who devised these characters. Their societal positioning in the accelerated cityscape is made very apparent by this ironic parallel between who they are and represent in the play. This parallel continues to be made apparent through their dialogue. The questioning of identity and ways of being or the 'metaphysical meltdown' as they call it in the script appear anachronistic and out of step with the ideas of speed and productivity that surround them. They never move on, instead like two Beckett clowns they stop and contemplate the world, appearing always to be the ones left behind.

Steve: Are you scared of dying?

Gary: Yeah but in some ways there would be no more feelings just peace.

Steve If I lost one of my things I don't think I could go on living. That is what my life is about. Keeping things that are valuable for as long as I can. Thirteen stubby holders, a collection of gemstones and a fake key ring in the shape of a shoe.

Gary: You're addicted.

Steve: I've seen a counsellor.

Gary: That's why I want to get into the self-storage business because now days people do not get to throw things away. Self-storage and child care now that's where you should invest your money.

Steve: Everything has a value.

Gary: Everything has a value.

Steve: Everything has a value.

Gary: Everything has a value.

Steve: Every thing has a FUCKING value!

Gary: Everything has a FUCKING VALUE!!

Within an environment dominated by people constantly moving to the next place or activity at a rapid pace such contemplative conversations appear incongruous, as do the people who have the time to stand there and reflect on such matters. Virilio argues changes in tempo change thought at a fundamental level. When there is speed there is no time for reflection only reflexivity (Virilio qtd in Dufresne, 2005). For Steve and Gary who are otherwise not engaged in productive acceleration there is little else to do but reflect upon their situation and the world at large, a reflection that continues to be contaminated with double meanings. For example, as Steve and Gary continue talking about seemingly nothing of value they inadvertently comment on the consequences of *accelerated living* as they ironically reflect upon possible solutions for people short on time but big on consumption; self-storage for accumulated consumption and childcare for the necessary outsourcing of family. Much of the dialogue continues in this vein to question *values* that operate beyond the nexus of money. For instance 'the drug deal transaction' becomes a pivotal device employed to further explore value and its different currencies within an accelerated environment. As per the script, law executive Alan has done 'a whip around' with his colleagues and raised \$3000.00 to buy 'the gear'. The transaction should be simple. Alan will hand the money to Steve who will count it and all three will go to the lockers to get 'the gear'. Just as all seems

to be progressing and they begin to head towards the lockers Steve announces:

I'll stay here. You go ahead.

The deal comes to a grinding halt. Gary refuses to leave his friend Steve alone as the value of their friendship cannot be measured in terms of a quick profit even when Alan in desperation increases the amount to \$3500.00. Much to Alan's horror Steve is stuck to the spot and deep in reflective thoughts about his life. Beyond the context of the plot these questions, although hilarious become poignant insights into the humanity of the characters and by implication the actors.

Steve: I've started being aware of myself.

Gary: Is that a good thing?

Steve: I'm missing something, a feeling.

Gary: A good feeling?

Steve: It's a feeling that I've felt, sensed and known that I've always had.

Gary: Yeah.

Steve: It is my task to be a total man.

Gary: Yes.

Steve: I want people to see me. I want to be a full human being.

What the character Steve values most is brought into stark relief by the actor Simon Laherty, a performer perceived to have an intellectual disability and who within this place of speed and participation is literally passed by as the parade of pedestrians rush on. 'How long do you think this is going to take?' asks the time scarce Alan as Steve continues to stand still, face forward and contemplate his worth as a human being. Steve simply replies 'It could be hours' (Back to Back, 2008).

The stakes of the work become higher still as the characters continue to reflect on fundamental human concerns. For example, unable to move the deal along Alan calls Carolyn, a business psychologist who helps people be 'productive and more efficient'. Enter Carolyn. She offers to help Steve and is prepared to discount her exorbitant hourly rate if Steve will co-operate and go to the lockers to get 'the gear'. But no matter what advice she offers Steve will not go to the lockers. 'Everything has a value' but the currency of Carolyn's offers has no value for Steve and his desire 'to be a full human being'.

Carolyn: I will seriously make it worth your while. What are you? Lonely? Yeah you're lonely aren't you. You don't have a sex life. I can organise someone to suck your dick. That's what you want. Isn't that what you want?

(Steve stares straight ahead and doesn't move)

Carolyn: Clock is ticking. You are standing here dying you could be living.

(Pause, he doesn't move, Carolyn gets angry)

Carolyn: Oh come to the lockers and I'll suck your fucking dick!

This scripting raises significant concern around sex and sexual identity for those living with an intellectual disability. Steve's desire to be considered 'a full human being' visible to all, and not an excluded and devalued 'Other' left behind in the slow lane without identity, sexuality or acknowledged desires, ironically highlights the exclusion of this character and as such the performer.

*small metal objects* is indeed a powerful work when considering the challenge it presents to understandings of the way people with disabilities are perceived and expected to function within the current environment. It does give a certain privileged access to their experience but not as something couched within a theorisation of the *real* or a concrete imitation of their situation but by creating a situation that enables self-reflection of one's own preconceptions of the disabled through the mechanisms of a fiction. And this is made possible through their considered crafting of the spatio-temporal reception of theatre. In this regard Back to Back's engagement of temporal structures inherent to the theatre medium is what distinguishes their work from current theoretical discussions on time-based aesthetics within performance. In response to durational artist Tehching Hsieh Adrian Heathfield reflects:

[T]he end of time in the twentieth century is a time of estrangement from time, a time in which a deployment of altered time within a performance aesthetic gives access to time as it might otherwise be felt and lived. (Heathfield 2000: 111)

For Heathfield Hsieh's extreme durational work *One Year Performance*, as discussed in chapter one, presents an 'exemplary cultural intervention' (Heathfield, 2000: 108) that responds to industrialised notions of time.<sup>63</sup> Back to Back, it could be argued, also

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<sup>63</sup>As discussed in chapter one, the artist Tehching Hsieh punched a time clock on the hour,

intervene and respond to the temporal condition of late capitalism but through a different aesthetic means that positions their engagement of time as political in a very different way. Operating within the aesthetics of theatre *Back to Back* instead capitalise on the currency of *make believe* which is a distinctly different engagement to an aesthetic of endurance and its real-time effect on a specific performer's well-being. In so doing they make very clear the work will never give direct access to, or an actual experience of, their lives but can create a vitally important shift in the way the theatre audience has learnt to perceive not only the theatre but broader societal situations such as perceptions of the disabled.

In this regard *small metal objects* exemplifies how time is both a significant aesthetic and political strategy in the theatre medium's capacity to remain an affecting and relevant medium for reflection on contemporary circumstances. By engaging dramatic text as central to its staging, *Back to Back* brings into question the reception inherent in dramatic illusion and how it shapes perceptions of the world as a resolved spectacle. When compared to Forced Entertainment's *And on the Thousandth Night...*, the case study that opened this thesis, *small metal objects'* focus on a dramatic play enables a very different and complicated understanding of the significance of temporal aesthetics for the theatre medium. While Forced Entertainment makes conscious the way in which its reflexive dramaturgy interrupts and references the temporal frameworks underpinning historic dramatic representation and its reception, *Back to Back*, rather than abandon any notion of dramatic plot and the way it represents, actively embrace it and stage it.

The political significance of time-based dramaturgy in this case study

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every hour over the duration of one year. The work, *One Year Performance* was performed from 1980 to 1981 in the artist's apartment in the city of New York. For more details see Heathfield and Hsieh, 2009.

operates in a different way. The interrelationship the work creates with the live time of the site is intended to rupture the dramatic frame and destabilise its meaning. It does not make conscious and evident the dismantling of historic aesthetics as polemical act of resistance to the dramatic form as is the case of *And on the Thousandth Night...*, but rather presents the consequences of such dismantling on the way in which its players, the plot and the context of the city renders its material ambiguous and open to different reflections beyond the story of a drug deal gone wrong.

Time-based dramaturgy enables Back to Back the necessary ambiguity and slippage that this type of reflection needs because what they offer to the spectator is equally ambiguous terrain; the spectator's own perception or misconception of people living with disabilities. By debunking 'the postulates of unity, wholeness, reconciliation and sense' (Lehmann, 2006: 44) Back to Back position the theatre medium as a radical space to engage with entirely new modes of thinking that can address any aspect of society it so chooses including, to quote Lehmann again, 'the disparate, partial, absurd and ugly' (Lehmann, 2006: 44), or in Gladwin's words, 'the strangeness of our thoughts' (Gladwin qtd in Schmelzer, 2013). On all levels (both its form and content) *small metal objects* challenges historic aesthetic understandings of how perception might be shaped and understood and it does this by employing a different experience and shaping of perceptions of time.

## Conclusion

As the opening of this thesis notes, Bergson (1889) proposes a different understanding of time to the dominant linear perception of time as determined by the clock. This thesis on the political and aesthetic significance of time to the theatre medium also examines how the theatre might reflect upon a variety of temporal encounters that do not necessarily align to linearity, such as the altered time of the grief state and the timelessness experienced during sleep. In emphasising these specific experiences of time, as the thesis demonstrates, a broader reflection of temporal dynamics and politics underpinning the accelerated time of late capitalism becomes apparent through the contrasts they create. This situation becomes possible by positioning the sense of time as central to the theatre experience. This is achieved by experimenting with time-based composition, a shift that sees new forms of theatre question its mimetic communication.

As discussed in chapter two the representation of time as a causal linear narrative is foundational to the dramatic model. Aristotelian-derived structural principles of unity and surveyability brought to prominence in neoclassical France and again in late nineteenth-century Naturalism remain a dominant influence on the theatre medium. As Lehmann posits, while the neoclassical principles of time may no longer be as strictly considered within contemporary drama, Aristotelian composition continues to be a powerful legacy and remains a reference for the contemporary stage (Lehmann, 2006: 161). This traditional composition presents theatre as primarily an illusionary mimetic medium, an understanding that reinforces a number of different temporal conventions thought to constitute the self-contained comprehension of dramatic theatre. It maintains the notion of *logos*, that of the movement of text as primary to its

understanding (Lehmann, 1997a). In addition it reinforces the notion of collective presence, that of the presence of the actor who conjures up fictional worlds in the presence of the spectator as foundational to theatrical communication.

In following on from Lehmann's proposition that forms of theatre, post-1970s, have developed 'a unique plurality of aesthetics of theatrical time' (Lehmann, 1997b: 33), this dissertation examines how examples of theatre positioned as postdramatic counter the dramatic composition of developmental time, unity and surveyability by rethinking how time might be structured and experienced in the theatre medium. In so doing postdramatic practice creates different understandings of its performance material other than that proposed by the contained and fixed understanding of mimetic developmental action. This shift in its mode of communication enables the theatre medium to distinguish itself from the dominant reception now imposed by various screen-based technology which, since the advent of film has threatened, as Kattenbelt (2007) and Auslander (1999) posit, theatre's continued relevance and viability as an effective medium of illusion.

By dissecting its own centuries-old temporal composition, the theatre medium capitalises on what has been perceived as its point of weakness, its *liveness*, as Kattenbelt (2007: 33) notes. But it does this not as a means to further enhance the verisimilitude of its illusion but to expose the temporal architecture that underpins illusion. It disrupts its represented developmental composition, its collective presence and the mechanisms of enactment along with its duration which is made present rather than masked by a well rendered illusion. In so doing comprehension in the theatre is no longer unified and self-contained but multifarious as theatre shifts from a fundamentally mimetic medium to one that is primarily a semiotic

medium. As such it opens the theatre up to a variety of different modes of communication with the spectator.

As illustrated by the five case studies analysed in this thesis when duration, repetition and stasis are employed as dramaturgical strategies, time is rendered as an aesthetic. In other words, the experience of time is made conscious and employed to inform and impact upon possible understandings of performance material. Each case study analysed illustrates how temporal aesthetics activate a diverse array of engagements and reflections on the contemporary condition. They demonstrate how such strategies challenge habitual and fixed patterns of reception underpinned by dramatic mimesis by focusing on the experience of time in all its different manifestations, an experience, as previously noted, that actively invites comparisons to the now-politicised accelerated temporality. In this regard the impact of time-based dramaturgy on theatrical reception and the situations and ideas it emphasises positions time as a highly political aesthetic device within experimental theatre practices. This is made clear through the diverse array of practices examined in this thesis.

Forced Entertainment's *And on the Thousandth Night...* illustrates how duration and repetition as dramaturgical strategies 'interrupt' the temporal construction of drama by countering unity and surveyability and as such invite a different engagement and comprehension of their performance. One that is malleable rather than fixed and ambiguous rather than coherent. Further to this, the theatre production under analysis introduces the notion of a politics of theatrical form, firstly as a self-confessed act of resistance by the artists to the historic temporal construction of reception of the theatre medium, and secondly by the way in which the aesthetics of slowness operating within this work counter acceleration and immediate gratification associated with the technological present.

Chapter three's examination of *Shapes of Sleep* and *Yowza Yowza* employs a two-fold approach to analysis. It both theoretically elaborates upon the case studies and at the same time demonstrates how time operates as a dramaturgical composition through the first-hand experience of the practitioner. In so doing the thesis engages with work that is representative of a unique sector comprising specific examples of Australian independent experimental theatre practice that has previously not been addressed within the field of academia.

In part one of this chapter the production *Shapes of Sleep* exemplifies how structures of duration, repetition and stasis activate an aesthetic of absence by exhausting the performers to the point where they fall asleep. The sleeping performer rendered curiously absent yet still physically present and as such vulnerable undermines the notion of collective presence to create another type of engagement with the performer. Instead the spectator-performer relationship becomes an ethically precarious encounter. Left with a body at rest this situation invites associations of the familiar corporeal experience of sleep. By heightening the sleep act and presenting its curious consumption and experience of time, *Shapes of Sleep's* temporal aesthetics foreground the politicised positioning of sleep in an age of temporal acceleration.

The creative research project of this thesis, *Yowza Yowza Yowza*, demonstrates the possibilities inherent in time-based constructions and what they enable the practitioner to achieve. It demonstrates how stillness as a dramaturgy invites multifarious understandings of its material by bringing into focus both the image the performers represent and the act of its creation. Or in other words, it illustrates how its composition creates instability in the comprehension of its mimicry by heightening the mimetic act and the medial labour involved in that act. Further to this it illustrates how the aesthetic of

duration compounds this situation by making the task of mimicry impossible to sustain over time.

In making the work accessible both live and online over its twenty-four hour duration the potential allure that this staged ordeal creates becomes apparent with the repeat return of the spectator. While spectators returned to re-engage with the action at the gallery at all hours of the night this situation was even more pronounced online. Webcast statistics collected from the webcast host indicate there were in the vicinity of seven hundred unique and return visits to the webcast (see chapter 3). This was an unexpected finding of the process.

The webcast enables a specific kind of engagement that invites potential comparisons between the endurance of time experienced by the performers and the 1930s economic depression represented by the work, to the compression of time afforded by the internet. The medial labour and slow experience of time emphasised by the durational action is compressed and made convenient to the point where it is no longer necessary to be at the performance to appreciate the live experience. This comparison heightens the accelerated temporal dynamics of internet engagement; the shaping of perception of time and space and the impact this has on the tempo at which life for many now operates. Here the process demonstrates how experience is emphasised over representation in this example of postdramatic practice.

Chapter four's analysis of the performance *Blue Print* presents another example of the practitioner's experimentation with time-based dramaturgy. It illustrates how the work's multi-focal and multi-modal composition counters temporal development through the experience of stasis inherent to its dispersed perceptual field. This

examination illustrates how *Blue Print* interrupts notions of theatrical presence to engage different understandings of its thematic exploration of the grief state. By drawing on memories it focuses on making present a house and a home that no longer exists in the *real* world but through the temporal mechanisms of theatrical illusion is conjured back into existence through the imagination. *Blue Print's* temporal composition demonstrates the political implications the aesthetic of stasis creates by resisting the unified dramatic structure and tropes adopted by broadcast reportage of natural disasters. By staging the retrieval of memories intrinsic to the grief act, it presents the slow and illogical altered state of time that belongs to grief and consciousness, not the everyday experience of speed and productivity. This anachronistic experience stands counter to the accelerated time of productivity. Its contrast invites reflections on the difficulties underpinning human conditions within a contemporary culture focused on participation and market productivity.

The final chapter returns the thesis to the question of causal linear narrative and fiction as the core of dramatic communication. As a consequence it illustrates the diverse application of time-based aesthetics within postdramatic practice that extends to explorations of dramatic text as part of experimental interrogation of the dramatic frame. It exemplifies how Back to Back's production *small metal objects* engages the random temporal dynamics of a city site to interrupt the developmental action of a dramatic play. This staging creates a dispersed perceptual field of multiple focuses and activities that exist in parallel to the presented drama.

The work analysed undermines the self-contained understanding of its dramatic action to invite multiple understandings of the performance beyond that illustrated by their dramatic play. All the activities present at the site become signs of the theatre. Like the

situation of the disabled actors, in this context, everything takes on an ironic double meaning that heightens both the reality and fictional nature of Back to Back's theatrical conceit. This situation encourages reflections on the positioning of people considered to have a disability within an environment underpinned by speed that excludes them from full participation. As such the final case study demonstrates the scope of political engagement temporal aesthetics can enlist. Back to Back's strategic interruption to the form and structure that underpins the historic aesthetics of the theatre medium illustrates how shifts in composition can heighten the existing power inherent to accelerated experiences of time through the contrasts these shifts invite.

#### The current environment in which we make art

At the time of writing this dissertation independent artists along with small to medium arts organisations in Australia nervously await the short and long term implications of the recent shift of \$105 million from the Australia Council to the Ministers own National Programme for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA).<sup>64</sup> While there has been little response by the government outlining the rationale for this move it is arguable that, in part, the reason for this radical change is underpinned by misunderstood aesthetics along with the adverse political views these new aesthetic forms can pose to 'mainstream' thought as illustrated in the following journalists' accounts. Jeff Sparrow of the Guardian, for instance, notes that as far back as 2006 the *right leaning* journalist 'Andrew Bolt was denouncing artists for "living in ghettos of hate" and demanding they be "assimilated" into the mainstream' (Sparrow, 2015). Bolt's sentiments are not uncommon if recent articles published in the press are any indication. For example, *The Telegraph* in response to NPEA immediately wrote a

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<sup>64</sup> The proposed \$105 million would be implemented over four years (Sparrow, 2015).

feature aimed to ridicule the seemingly absurd works of artists funded through taxpayer money (see Blair, 2015). Like Bolt, Tim Blair argues for the assimilation of dissident artistic voices. He writes 'arts minister George Brandis has discovered a brilliant way to convert unconventional creative types into timid, pleading defenders of the status quo' (Blair, 2015).

As this thesis demonstrates, in countering the historic traditions of temporal composition in the theatre medium, works positioned as postdramatic intentionally resist and reflect upon historic traditions that still influence understandings of theatre today. To paraphrase Weber, the self-contained teleology of illusion is both encouraged and expected of the theatre and art in general (Weber, 2004: 24).

Resistance to this expectation immediately politicises experimental practice because such practices bring into question the political nature of spectatorship and reception itself. The status quo that Bolt and Blair demand that artists return to is in essence a return to the more traditionalist model of reception that Weber addresses. This is further re-enforced by the Minister's positioning of traditional art forms as the funding priority. The little that Minister Brandis has said in the lead up to NPEA does suggest that misunderstood aesthetics is indeed at the core of his decision. In an interview with the Australian he is quoted as saying

Frankly I'm more interested in funding arts companies that cater to the great audiences that want to see quality drama, or music or dance, than I am in subsidising individual artists responsible only to themselves. (Minister George Brandis qtd in Boland, 2014)

The exemption of main stage organisations such as the ballet, opera and state theatre companies from this shift of funds to NPEA has positioned these traditional models of 'excellence' as a safer, more

palatable model of cultural development. For example their excellence is now quantifiable. Virtuoso skills, production levels and their positioning as 'high culture', arguably complete with the glamour of a champagne foyer event, has become a visible measure of quality, regardless of the politics of exclusion that such an elite framing of art can present.<sup>65</sup> Through these terms of reference the traditional art forms can be qualified as better value for money particularly when they can double as part of Australia's cultural diplomacy to assist in relations with Australia's major international trading partners (see Taylor, 2014).

In light of the recent changes theatre makers in Australia now face, numerous experimental theatre practices appear likely to be defunded. The arts sectors most affected by the proposed cuts, to quote Tamara Winikoff (executive director of the National Association for the Visual Arts), are 'the new generation of artists and the small to medium arts organisations which are the engine room of experimentation, innovation and critique' (Winikoff qtd in Evans, 2015). The potential of aesthetic experimentation as a strategy of political engagement comes to the fore in this circumstance. This thesis on the aesthetic and political significance of time to the theatre medium offers a foundational understanding of how temporal composition, (to borrow Kritzer's analysis of political theatre) engage structures and thematic concerns that 'invite comparison with political power, challenge existing systems of power, (and) provoke reinterpretation' (Kritzer, 2008: 12). In reality a large proportion of the artists that will be impacted by the change if NPEA's shift of funds is fully realised are the Australian theatre practitioners referred to

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<sup>65</sup> Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop is quoted as saying that cultural diplomacy would be a part of Australia's foreign policy. She also revealed that she had been Senator Brandis' date at the opening night of the ballet in Melbourne, which she said was a "fabulously glamorous affair" (Taylor, 2014). See <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/double-act-julie-bishop-joins-george-brandis-at-australia-council-launch-20140818-105cva.html#ixzz3fpA0gM8I>.

directly and in passing throughout this dissertation, including the final case study Back to Back Theatre.<sup>66</sup>

The featured case studies, as this thesis demonstrates, in varying ways resist understandings of virtuosity as the measure of a work's 'excellence' by questioning the temporal architecture of theatrical mimesis, its enactment, its casual linear composition and its meaning as constituted by collective time and space (liveness). In so doing they occupy formal territories that can express ideas not easily assimilated within the main stage historic terms of reference and virtuosity.

### Future research

While ramifications of Government decisions on the arts and indeed the ethics of cultural policy are beyond the scope of this specific dissertation, this thesis on the effect of temporal aesthetics on reception lays the foundation for a wider study of the politics and ethics made possible through temporal aesthetics beyond just a misunderstood formal aesthetic. As Lehmann argues:

While the arts, each after its manner and in its diversity are in process of realizing complex and complicated unusual and unsettling experiences of time, this function is aesthetic only at first glance. Upon closer examination, this function reveals its political, its ethical dimension. (Lehmann, 1997b: 33)

This foundational research into temporal aesthetics and its significance to the theatre medium now strongly indicates the need

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<sup>66</sup> For a comprehensive list of organisations considered to be at risk from the proposed shift of funding see Ben Eltham's article at <http://www.crikey.com.au/2015/06/15/the-145-arts-companies-gutted-by-brandis-swinging-cuts/>

for future research of the application of temporal aesthetics as a strategy to address the concerns of marginalised groups and expose politicised situations otherwise kept to the margins of mainstream media coverage. There are many Australian practitioners and companies such as Urban Theatre Projects who, under the directorship of John Baylis strategically explored alternative forms and aesthetic concerns.<sup>67</sup> The company's adoption of temporal dramaturgy for instance provided diverse platforms for marginalised groups in western Sydney within a growing climate of increased political conservatism that arose during the years of the John Howard Government (1996–2007). These works are diverse in their structure, thematic and community engagement. Among others they include *Speed Street* [1998], a site specific work in a suburban street in Liverpool, and *Palais* [2000], a promenade performance at Parramatta Town Hall performed by retired and older musicians of western Sydney, and *Asylum* [2001], a performance presented in an old wall-paper factory in Liverpool that featured performers from the Middle East who had come to Australia seeking asylum.

This research enquiry also points to needed investigations further afield to encompass the opportunities temporal aesthetics present artists living with political censorship and poverty within the so called developing nations. This was a situation experienced first-hand when living in Indonesia during 1996–1997 under the Suharto Government. At that time it was clearly apparent misunderstood aesthetics enabled certain experimental practitioners of performance and visual arts such as Dandang Christanto and Heri Dono a nuanced political voice that went comparatively unnoticed by the Suharto regime. While these practitioners found a place for their art within international arts markets, activist playwright Ratna Sarumpaet and painter Djoko Pekik who worked with more unified and direct reproductions of their

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<sup>67</sup> See Stumm, 2013.

social and political situation found themselves under house arrest.<sup>68</sup> Other examples include the fragmentary approaches to theatre making by Jakarta based companies Theatre Sae and Theatre Kubur.<sup>69</sup> All of these circumstances outlined above indicate that the field of temporal aesthetics in relation to models of reception within the theatre medium is indeed a rich field that necessitates further research.

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<sup>68</sup> See Mulyadi, 2008.

<sup>69</sup> See Varney *et al*, 2013: 59.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

Video documentation of the work

To access the video documentation please follow the links and enter in the password as outlined below

Link to five minute video edit of *Yowza Yowza Yowza*.

<https://vimeo.com/144249036>

Password: Yowza

Link to ten minute video excerpt of *Yowza Yowza Yowza* webcast footage.

<https://vimeo.com/144250357>

Password: Yowza

## Appendix B

### *First cycle of Shapes of Sleep*

/10 sec / lie on your back / 15 sec / let the weight of your toes fall outwards so that your feet are splayed, slowly turn your palms to face upwards and roll your head to the right /60 sec / roll to the right so you come to rest on your side with your knees bent /18 sec / place your right arm out in front and curl your wrist under, your left arm is relaxed on top of your body /15 sec / hook your right foot over your left foot /60 sec / curl your head down slightly towards your chest and cover your face with both hands /15 sec / unhook your feet and curl your knees up to your chest /60 sec / roll to your left so you lie on your back and roll your head to the right /15 sec / left leg is out straight, slide your left foot along the inside length of your leg up to the knee, relax in this position /60 sec / rolling to the right, lie on your belly with your face in the pillow /15 sec / put the weight on your forehead so you can still breathe /15 sec / slide both hands up and hug the sides of the pillow /15 sec / your toes are facing the mattress and pointing to the wall behind you, spread your legs so that each foot touches an edge of the bed / 60 sec / turn your head to the right and bring your arms out straight so that your hands hang over either side of the mattress /15 sec / bring your big toes together so they are touching and you are pigeon toed /60 sec / slide your nose towards the pillow and slide it all the way till your head faces left /15 sec / repeat the action to face right /15 secs / repeat this action 10 times increasing the pace /15 secs / if you are facing your right follow your nose again to face left /15 sec / roll over to lie on your right side /20 sec / push your chest out, stretch arms back and stretch arching the full body, freeze the stretch for a count of 10 then relax in that position /60 sec / roll your head so your face faces the ceiling and murmur: 'No, no it doesn't matter, none of it matters anymore' /60 sec / cough and straighten your body so that you lie on your back with legs straight /15 sec / walk or shuffle your feet to the left until your body is diagonally angled across the bed, your feet are pointing to the far left corner of the bed and your head is pointing to the far right corner /15 sec / place your hand on your left breast and your /60 sec / sit up and adjust yourself to the centre again then fall backwards onto the bed to lie on your back /15 sec / place both hands around your neck /60 sec / roll to your left side, splay your legs like you are running so your left leg is bent behind and right leg is bent in front, roll your head to the right /60 sec /

*Start next cycle.*



## Appendix C

The tableaux vivant score –*Yowza Yowza Yowza*