

**THE HORIZONS OF RURAL TOURING:
RE-IMAGINING THE RURAL TOUR**

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**Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

2016

ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is the UK rural touring theatre sector, and the possibility of formal innovation for rural touring. My research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of their Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme, and has come about as a result of a partnership between The University of Nottingham and New Perspectives Theatre Company, which has enabled a combination of theoretical and practice-based research. In the rural touring sector, companies like New Perspectives tour productions to village halls and other community venues, where work is programmed by volunteer promoters. This area of the UK theatre ecology is thriving, but overlooked in academic studies of theatre. I argue that rural touring is distinct from theatre taking place in non-rural contexts in its audiences, places of performance and distribution model. Audience members tend to know each other, and their reasons for attendance often include a wish to socialise with fellow members of their community instead of, or as well as, a desire for a particular artistic experience. Rural touring venues are usually multi-purpose community spaces, used for exercise classes and social groups alongside their use as performance venues. Staff at regional touring schemes act as intermediaries in the distribution model, brokering the booking process between companies and promoters, whose programming choices may be governed by their role as members of the audience community. This thesis expands on scholarship related to theatre audiences and places of performance by highlighting these differences and their implications.

The practice-based aspect of my research focuses on the possibility of formal innovation for rural touring, in particular interactive and site-specific work, thus contributing to both scholarship and practice in these areas. Through an examination of existing theory and practice of interactivity, alongside a discussion of New Perspectives' reasons for investigating interactive work, I lay the groundwork for a practical research project exploring interactivity for

rural touring. My approach is informed by Gareth White's frameworks for analysing audience participation and in particular his proposal of an 'horizon of participation' and an 'horizon of risk'. *Something Blue*, a pilot performance I created for a rural audience, revealed a specific rural horizon of risk, shaped by the fact that rural audience members tend to know each other, and that their willingness to interact is governed by their perception of the risk of the loss of social capital.

My second practical research project explored site-specificity. My examination of existing theory and practice in this area reveals a lack of attention paid to the existing relationship an audience has to the place where a performance occurs. This is a significant factor in rural touring where audiences are drawn from communities of location. I draw on theories of place from geographers including Doreen Massey and Gillian Rose in order to propose an 'horizon of place' as a framework for understanding an audience member's prior experience and knowledge of place. Building on this framework and considering New Perspectives' reasons for exploring site-specific work, I set out the intentions of my second pilot performance. This performance, *Homing*, tested ways of engaging with place in a rural touring context. The results of this second pilot revealed a significant difference between the rural audiences' insider horizons of place, and the company's outsider horizon of place. My research demonstrated that this difference needs to be taken into account when creating place-related work for rural touring.

Alongside my two pilot performances, I discuss interviews I conducted with several practitioners working in the rural touring sector. In my final chapter I consider current changes to the wider sector and potential future models for rural touring. My study reveals rural touring as a thriving and ambitious component of the UK theatre industry, and one deserving of scholarly attention.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council and New Perspectives for the funding that has enabled me to do this PhD. I would also like to thank my supervisors Jo Robinson and Gordon Ramsay for their initial encouragement to undertake the research, and for their guidance, support, patience and rigour during the last four years. I am grateful to Daniel Buckroyd for his generous support for this PhD, and for the warm welcome into the New Perspectives family which provided fertile soil for the development of both my interest in rural touring and my career as a theatre-maker.

I am indebted to those who have participated in my research: the theatre-makers I interviewed, the actors and creatives who collaborated with me on my pilots, and the audience members who attended performances and offered their feedback. Particular thanks are owed to promoters Susan Rowe, Anne Cowan and Jacky Hoare.

Finally I would like to thank the friends and family who have provided unwavering support during the last four years. I could not have done this without them.

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The Horizons of Rural Touring: Re-imagining the Rural Tour

I feel that as a promoter, your role is to widen people's choices, and [...] expose people to something they wouldn't otherwise – well – to put it bluntly, a lot of people are prepared to spend eight or nine quid on something they might not like, whereas if it's on at the Theatre Royal or the Playhouse they're not prepared to spend fifteen quid, and the cost it takes us to get into town [...] And I think also it's a fairly safe environment, isn't it? They know where the pub is if they really can't stand the play, they can always just walk down the road can't they?

Susan Rowe, volunteer promoter at the Thomas Cranmer Centre, Aslockton, Nottinghamshire, and New Perspectives Board member.¹

Nice hall, everyone very welcoming, food amazing. Unfortunately the fire alarm battery was failing, so assistant stage manager had to sit in the kitchen cupboard during the show pressing the reset button every twenty minutes. Lots of help with the get out, so we were back on the road by 10.40 pm.

Stage manager's show report for The Honey Man, New Perspectives 2012 rural touring show.

French Fancies, Maplebeck Village Hall, Saturday 16th April 2011. An actor in the first New Perspectives show I worked on has directed this piece. I drive over from Nottingham with a friend. It's one of the smallest village halls I've seen. We park on the village green and join the queue at the door. As we pay for tickets, two men take our interval drinks order. When I look bemused at the absence of any visible bar, one explains that they're off to the village pub with the orders and will bring drinks up on trays ready for the interval. Clearly clocking my outsiderhood, he also can't resist telling me that the Beehive is the smallest pub in Nottinghamshire. The hall is set up cabaret style and we sit towards the back. At the interval, the couple at the table in front of us win chocolate body paint in the raffle and it seems that friends and neighbours on every side join in with the joking and laughing. We're included too – we're certainly not ignored – but it's clear that most of the other audience in the room that night know each other well.

A personal memory of attending a rural touring show.

Welcome to the world of rural touring.

¹ 'Interview with Susan Rowe', Aslockton, 6th October, 2014.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Welcome to the world of rural touring

The subject of this PhD is the UK rural touring theatre sector. In this thesis I firstly argue that UK rural touring sector has its own distinct audiences, places of performance and distribution model, which differ in significant ways from theatre taking place in other contexts. I then present the findings of my practical research into innovation in form for rural touring, considering the implications of these differences in these performance case studies.

This PhD has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council through their Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme, and a partnership between the University of Nottingham and New Perspectives, a theatre company working in the rural touring sector, has enabled me to combine both theoretical and practical research.

According to François Matarasso in his 2004 report *Only Connect* – one of the only existing studies of rural touring – the rural population of the UK numbers between eleven and fourteen million.² According to the 2011 Office for National Statistics Census, over eighteen per cent of the population of England and Wales are classed as rural.³ The UK rural touring sector consists of a complex and established infrastructure of theatre companies, artists and musicians, touring schemes, volunteer promoters and rural audiences (some of whose voices are represented in my opening quotes). The work of these parties results in thousands of performances staged in village halls and other rural community venues throughout the country every week. The National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF), an umbrella organisation for the sector, found

² François Matarasso, *Only Connect: Arts Touring and Rural Communities. A Comedia Report for the NATIONAL RURAL TOURING FORUM*. (n.p.: Comedia, 2004), p. 10.

³ Office for National Statistics, '2011 Census Analysis: Comparing Rural and Urban Areas of England and Wales', 2013, p. 1.

that there were 2407 promoting groups across England and Wales, and 5515 rural touring events during the year covered by their 2012/2013 audit, with an estimated combined audience of 308,967.⁴ Despite these statistics, this area of the UK theatre ecology has been mostly overlooked in scholarly discourse. In this thesis I address that gap.

I argue that there are three main categories of difference that distinguish the rural touring sector: the audience, the place(s) of performance, and the distribution model. These unique features mean that writing about theatre that focuses primarily on work happening in cities is often not applicable to the rural touring sector. I suggest that alternative models and/or modifications to existing models are required in order to discuss and analyse this area of practice. By discussing these unique features of rural touring, and examining them in the context of theory that focuses on theatre in urban contexts, I argue for further acknowledgment and inclusion of rural touring, its audiences, places of performance and distribution model in the discourse about theatre, theatre audiences and places of performance. This is not to deny the usefulness of established work in these areas to my discussion of rural touring. Theoretical frameworks provided by scholars examining audiences and places of performance, including Susan Bennett's analysis of audiences through the lenses of horizons of expectations and inner and outer frames, and Gay McAuley's taxonomy of spatial function, are applicable to the context of rural touring. I engage with these frameworks, which usually take urban theatre as their subject, and apply them in a rural touring context, thereby pointing to both gaps in the theory and differences in practice.

It is possible to interpret the lack of attention paid to rural touring in academic debate as an undervaluing of that work. However, I start from the position that rural touring is of value and should be examined and discussed.

⁴ NRTF, *Rural Touring Scheme Information Audit 2012 / 2013*, 2014, pp. 4–5
<www.ruraltouring.org/resources/rural-touring-scheme-information-audit-2012-2013> (sic)
[accessed 6 May 2016]. It is important to note that these statistics include live music and film screenings as well as theatre.

I aim to avoid falling into the trap of positioning theatre happening in cities as superior and/or more advanced than the work touring rurally, and therefore concluding that theatre-makers need only emulate existing urban models and deliver them to rural audiences.

When considering experimentation and innovation in form for rural touring it would be possible to begin with formally experimental work happening in urban settings and to propose simply parachuting it into a rural environment, asking will this work here? Instead, I began my research with the question: what would formally experimental work created specifically for rural touring – for its audiences, places of performance and distribution model – look like? This is an important distinction which sits alongside my central argument that the unique features of rural touring must be taken into account when creating new work for the sector.

The collaboration with New Perspectives and the practical nature of this PhD have enabled me to ask questions about the future of rural touring and the form(s) of work being made for the sector, and to create and trial pieces of theatre with rural audiences in order to answer them. I consider how New Perspectives might make work that is more experimental and innovative in form for rural touring, and argue that each of the three areas discussed above, audience, place and distribution model, present challenges which must be taken into consideration.

My practical research explores two key areas of formal innovation, chosen specifically because of their links to audience and place: interactivity, which relates particularly to audience, and site-specificity, which relates particularly to place. The unique nature of rural audiences and rural places of performance, as well as the rural touring distribution model, create particular challenges and opportunities when making interactive and site-specific work for rural touring. My findings contribute to the developing theory on both interactive and site-specific theatre by highlighting how these forms of

theatre operate in this particular context.

In this chapter I introduce New Perspectives and outline the origins of my research, including my experience working in the rural touring sector. I give an overview of rural touring, explaining what it is and how it works, and introduce the rural audience, places of performance and distribution model. In order to illustrate the practical implications of these key aspects of rural touring, I discuss two New Perspectives productions: *Entertaining Angels* (2013, touring), which I present as an example of a 'conventional' rural touring show, and *The Falling Sky* (2010-2011, touring), a production created prior to my research and which strayed from this conventional form and serves as a prologue to this PhD due to its experimentation with form. Finally I introduce the structure of the thesis and the contents of each chapter.

Introducing New Perspectives

New Perspectives has existed for over forty years, originally founded by ex-Bretton Hall students as Perspectives Theatre Company, and later becoming Key Perspectives, based in Peterborough. The company subsequently changed its name again, and after a period in Mansfield, moved to New Basford, Nottingham in 2006. While the company has had different objectives historically, a core element of the work for the last twenty years has been touring theatre to rural community venues. In 2012 Arts Council England (ACE) changed its funding model from Regionally Funded Organisations (RFOs) to National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), since when New Perspectives has held NPO status. As an NPO it has been funded to deliver a programme of rural touring work and also to run the rural touring scheme Northants Touring Arts (NTA), alongside delivering a programme of talent development opportunities for emerging theatre-makers and writers in the region.⁵ NPO funding for 2012-2015 also came with encouragement from ACE

⁵ I discuss the nature and purpose of touring schemes in more detail below.

to 'fulfil a sector leadership role within the field of rural touring theatre production'.⁶

New Perspectives has habitually created between three and five touring shows annually. Past productions have included new writing, adaptations, musicals, and children's shows. More recently, the company has staged productions at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and toured work nationally to theatres and arts centres, sometimes as well as and sometimes instead of community venues. Three New Perspectives productions have been staged as part of the annual Brits Off Broadway festival in New York.

New Perspectives is a Limited Company and a Registered Charity, and is governed by a Board. Staff include a full-time Artistic Director and Chief Executive, an Executive Director, a Production Manager, and a Marketing and Administration Officer. In 2011, two new part-time freelance positions were introduced: a Fundraising Associate, and an Associate Director. Having already worked for the company as an assistant director and on project work in 2009, I was offered and accepted the position of Associate Director, leading on talent development and audience engagement initiatives.

Origins of the PhD

The questions at the core of this research were initially posed in conversations with then Artistic Director Daniel Buckroyd in 2011. Rural touring was still new to me, and I was excited about the vitality of the sector. The atmosphere and energy at village hall events was unlike anything I had experienced in an urban theatre environment. At the same time, as a theatre-maker and audience member I was focusing more on experimental work: shows I was seeing at festivals that involved taking instructions from a stranger on a mobile phone as I wandered through a city discovering hidden

⁶ Daniel Buckroyd, Artistic Director of New Perspectives between 2003 and 2012, (2011), taken from documents discussing the application for AHRC funding for this research.

tunnels and passages, theatre taking place on the top of mountains at night, in disused buildings, or via Skype, shows where I and my fellow audience members were invited to influence or take part in the action, and the lines between performance and audience were blurred.

I felt as if I had parallel tracks stretching in front of me: the world of rural touring I was experiencing through my role with New Perspectives, and the innovative work I was seeing and wanting to make elsewhere. Looking ahead, it seemed unlikely that these tracks were destined to meet. New Perspectives' work from the previous decade was for the most part conventional in form. The architecture of a theatre auditorium was temporarily replicated in community venues with the performance and audience occupying their own designated spaces and accompanying roles: we perform here, you sit there and watch. However, a conversation with Buckroyd led to a discussion of the ethos underlying the rural touring sector: equality of access to high quality professional theatre.⁷ We concluded that this equality should include access to innovative and experimental work. But what would innovative and experimental theatre made for rural touring look like? Given New Perspectives' ambitions to be a rural touring leader, we asked how the company might develop and share models for creating formally experimental and innovative rural touring work.

To place my research with New Perspectives in the wider context of the current UK rural touring ecology, I make reference throughout to my experience of the sector, as well as to interviews I conducted with other rural touring companies in September 2015 including Pentabus, Forest Forge and

⁷ It is important to acknowledge the subjectivity of the term 'high quality', however it is frequently used to refer to the rural touring sector. Here I give two examples among many: '[NRTF] exists to [...] deliver high quality art experiences that strengthen rural and other communities' ('NRTF website' <www.ruraltouring.org> [accessed 5 March 2014]); 'Promoter and performer networks exist to ensure that even the most isolated communities can access high quality artistic performances' (Jo McLean, 'Theatre That's a Breath of Fresh Air: The Force of Rural Touring', *Guardian Stage Blog*, 8 November 2015 <www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/nov/08/theatre-the-force-of-rural-touring> [accessed 11 November 2015]).

Cartoon De Salvo. It is important to note that the very nature of conducting research into an area of the current UK theatre sector means studying something that is changing and evolving during the period of the research (and continues to do so). The organisations, companies, promoters, audiences and others who constitute the world of rural touring are not fossilised in a period of history. During my research the whole arts sector has undergone significant changes including nationwide cuts to funding. The wider rural touring sector has been in flux: rural touring companies have lost funding, undergone structural and personnel changes, and rebranded and refocused their work, and touring schemes run by county councils have been handed over to independent organisations. Creative Arts East (CAE), an organisation that runs touring schemes in East Anglia, has conducted a three-year research project funded by ACE's Strategic Touring Fund, investigating new ways of making work for rural audiences. The findings of CAE's research were shared at the 2015 NRTF conference, and are described in *A Wider Horizon*, a recent publication by Matarasso which also compares the current status of the sector to the results of his 2004 research.⁸ NRTF has been working to raise awareness of rural touring within the theatre industry as a whole and with arts funders and the media: *Guardian* theatre critic Lyn Gardner attended the 2015 NRTF conference and a number of recent columns and articles about rural touring have been published.⁹ Additionally, the series of events organised by *The Guardian* and Battersea Arts Centre under the

⁸ François Matarasso, *A Wider Horizon: Creative Arts East and Rural Touring*, Regular Marvels (Wymondham: Creative Arts East, 2015); this research is also discussed by Karen Kidman, CAE Community Touring Manager, in my interview with her.

⁹ This initiative was discussed by members of NRTF's team at the NRTF conference held in Wymondham, Norfolk in July 2015; see for example Lyn Gardner, 'Not Cosy, Not Safe, No Tractors: The Plays Redefining Rural Theatre', *Guardian Stage Blog*, 8 March 2016 <www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2016/mar/08/a-nations-theatre-rural-touring-forum-farnham-maltings> [accessed 5 June 2016]; Lyn Gardner, 'What We Can Learn from the Wandering Stars of Rural Theatre?', *Guardian Stage Blog*, 21 July 2015 <www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/jul/21/rural-theatre-touring> [accessed 5 June 2016]; Catherine Love, 'Village Halls, Village Voices', *Exeunt Magazine*, 20 November 2014 <<http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/village-halls-village-voices/>> [accessed 21 January 2015]; Nell Frizzell, 'The Pentabus Guide to Rural Touring', *Ideas Tap Ideas Mag*, 11 November 2014 <www.ideastap.com/IdeasMag/the-knowledge/pentabus-guide-to-rural-touring> [accessed 21 January 2015].

heading 'A Nation's Theatre' recently included a debate specifically about rural theatre.¹⁰

Alongside these industry-wide developments, there have been significant changes at New Perspectives during the period of my research, and the company has therefore been in flux for the duration of my work. Buckroyd left shortly before my research began and Jack McNamara took up the position of Artistic Director in the month that I began the PhD. The Executive Director left and was replaced shortly after. This overall change in leadership has had a significant impact on the direction and aims of the company. McNamara arrived at New Perspectives with a background working in theatre in non-rural touring contexts, and there was a subsequent shift away from an emphasis on rural touring as the core strand of the company's work in publicity, branding and recruitment information. While I set out on this journey with a sense of direction and a research focus co-created and agreed by one artistic director, I have been required to adjust my course to ensure my work remains relevant to the new version of the company that has been taking shape and evolving concurrently with my research. While this has at times presented challenges, changes in leadership are only one of a number of factors which influence the focus of theatre companies like New Perspectives. Audience demands, industry changes and funding requirements are other significant factors which may influence a shift in practice, for example the need to generate more earned income and attract more national press were existing reasons why New Perspectives had sought to produce more work in non-rural venues prior to this change in leadership. Again, researching a subject area which is constantly shifting and changing is a consequence of both the shifts at New Perspectives resulting from changes in leadership, and the very nature of investigating a living, breathing area of current practice. I further discuss the recent changes and developments in the rural touring sector and their implications in my final chapter.

¹⁰ 'Guardian Live, A Nation's Theatre Conversation: "I liked it but I couldn't book it"', held at Farnham Maltings, 3rd March 2016.

Ongoing conversations with the current leadership team about the company's aims have shaped my research alongside the original ideas conceived with Buckroyd, and both the scope of my theoretical research and the subjects of my practical pilots have evolved in discussion with the current leadership team. I include material from interviews I conducted with McNamara and Executive Director Sally Anne Tye throughout the thesis.

It is important to contextualise my research within the timelines of the developments I have outlined here. My interviews with other companies working in rural touring took place after I had conducted my practical research; as such, some of the work discussed in these interviews was taking place at the same time as my pilot performances. I refer throughout to these interviews, as well as to my continued involvement in the rural touring sector in the last twelve months. This has included directing productions, attending events and conferences and working in an advisory capacity with companies exploring formally innovative work for rural audiences. I pay particular attention to these more recent developments in Chapter Seven, where I discuss the future of the rural touring sector as a whole.

Placing myself within the research

My thesis incorporates practice-based research and interrogates and builds upon my background in rural touring. This approach requires self-reflexivity and the ability to draw on personal experience while simultaneously critically engaging with it. Estelle Barrett describes practice-based research as comprising 'personally situated, interdisciplinary and diverse and emergent approaches', noting that

The innovative and critical potential of practice-based research lies in its capacity to generate personally situated knowledge and new ways of modelling and externalising such knowledge while at the same time,

revealing philosophical, social and cultural contexts for the critical intervention and application of knowledge outcomes.¹¹

My prior and 'personally situated' knowledge and memories of rural touring form a vital part of my voice within my writing. I have a history as a member of the New Perspectives team. I have been an audience member at rural touring shows, as illustrated in my opening quotes. I am a director, and have spent several years making theatre prior to writing and reading about it in an academic context. In this thesis my 'interdisciplinary and diverse and emergent approaches' include: theory drawn from the disciplines of theatre and performance studies, cultural studies and geography; current and historical theatre practice in both rural and non-rural contexts; my practical research creating and trialling work for rural touring; and interviews I have conducted with promoters, practitioners and leaders of theatre companies making work in this context.

Throughout my practice-based and interdisciplinary research I have found myself straddling and blurring lines between insider/outsider, practitioner/researcher, urban/rural, theory/practice. Rather than attempting to resolve or ignore these blurrings and overlaps, I acknowledge and engage with them as part of the very nature of practice-based research. Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson, in the introduction to their collection *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* argue that

[D]welling in the ambiguous space between binaries invites inventiveness. [...] [I]ntuitive messiness and aesthetic ambiguity are integral to researching theatre and performance, where relationships between the researcher and the researched are often fluid.¹²

¹¹ Estelle Barrett, 'Introduction', in *Practice as Research : Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry (1)* (London, US: I.B.Tauris, 2014), pp. 1–14 (p. 2).

¹² Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson, 'Introduction: Doing Methods Creatively', in *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 1–15 (p. 2).

My occupation of an ambiguous space between the urban/rural binary provides one such example:

*I have spent some of the time researching and writing this PhD in the city where I live, Nottingham: either in my own home in a residential suburb, in an office at New Perspectives' base on an industrial estate in another suburb, or in a library at the heart of Nottingham City centre. This library is just metres away from the busy market square whose sounds frequently bleed into the silent reading room: sirens, buses, marches, trams, the screeches and tinny music of temporary fairground rides during the summer and the carols and familiar festive hits of the Christmas market during winter. Sections of my thesis have also been written at a family home in rural Northumberland, in a hamlet a few miles from the small market town where I grew up. This hamlet consists of some fifteen houses and a pub. Wherever I work in the house I am surrounded by nature and countryside: the beehives and birds outside the study window, the familiar sight of a pheasant or partridge waddling across the lawn, the cows and rabbits in the field opposite the kitchen window. Since leaving home at eighteen I have only lived in cities: Birmingham, Nottingham, Vancouver. In contrast, both of my parents have moved to rural hamlets and my mother and stepfather, since retiring, have bought a small piece of woodland where they graze sheep and ponies, plant wildflowers, and hold regular bonfires to which friends and family are invited in order to celebrate the traditional pagan fire festivals of Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain. Just as in this PhD rural and urban are intertwined and mutually constituted, so I experience the blurring and straddling of rural and urban in my own life and identity.*¹³

Throughout I draw on my memories of rural touring, and include anecdotes and experiences shared with me by colleagues. I use italics to differentiate

¹³ The notion of the rural/urban binary is discussed further in my second chapter.

these voices as distinct from quotes from theorists and from my formal research data. However I do consider these inclusions as evidence alongside other components of the research. While memories and experience may be subjective, anecdotal and unsupported by documentation, I believe that this evidence is valid and forms part of the blend of theory and practice at the heart of practice-based research. This is a collaborative PhD and for me the collaborative nature extends to collaboration in this thesis between the different forms of evidence, research data, voices and material on which I draw.

What is rural touring?

This is a question I often encounter when I tell people about my work and/or my PhD. Over time, I have become better at explaining the logistics of what rural touring is and how it works, but the point at which words are inadequate is when I attempt to explain what rural touring feels like, and what it is that makes it seem – for want of a better word – special. In *Theatre/Archaeology* performer and researcher Mike Pearson argues that

For performer and spectator alike the performance event exists as a locus of experiences – spatial, physical and emotional – preserved in the bodies and memories of the varying orders of participants: touch, proximity, texture.¹⁴

Consequently, the embodied memories of any performance event are hard to describe using words alone. However I want to attempt to give a flavour of the locus of experiences that, for me, constitute rural touring performance events. The idea that rural touring is special is not mine alone. It is a notion I encounter frequently when talking with audience members and promoters, along with actors and directors working in the sector. As part of writing this thesis I recorded a number of conversations I had with friends and family

¹⁴ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 54.

about my subject area and my central arguments, and this is how I described rural touring during one such conversation:

There is something enchanting, something charming that's really hard to explain or describe about being in an audience where everyone knows each other. [...] You're there witnessing an audience that feels like an entire community, and not in that kind of abstract way that you can talk about an audience for any piece of theatre or performance becoming a community for the duration of the performance, but that they actually are a community, that these people know each other, live next door to each other. [...] People are there to socialise as well as to watch the play. [...] There's an awareness as well that it's a member of the community who's put it on, that someone has been ringing people up, knocking on people's doors, putting flyers on the local noticeboard, putting an advert in the parish newsletter. [...] If the evening is a success, that's a personal success for them. [...] There is a kind of warmth and conviviality, and good will towards the promoter [...] and the other thing that makes it special is seeing high quality professional theatre realised in a non-theatre space, and knowing that the company have turned up that day, they've had a few hours, and it will have been the actors who've rigged the lights, who've built the set.

I will return to some of these features of rural touring throughout this thesis, in particular: the audience as a community, the notion of a play in the village hall as a social and community event in a non-theatre space, and the role of the promoter in the distribution model.

Defining key terms: 'rural'

While I examine different theories and uses of the term 'rural' in more depth in my next chapter, it is useful in this introductory chapter to draw attention to the complexity of different uses of the term within the rural touring sector.

The constellation of different theatre companies, arts organisations, volunteer promoters, audiences and stakeholders who make up and contribute to the sector may employ the term 'rural touring' while utilising varying and conflicting definitions of 'rural': there is no singular or fixed rural. Theatre companies and organisations like NRTF do not offer definition or clarifications of how they are using the term when they use it in publicity, funding bids or online, and their usage may change over time or in different contexts. As such, for the purposes of this research, it is necessary to examine some parameters and definitions of the term, while acknowledging that these are not fixed within the context in which my research is located.

Significantly, as part of the subsidised arts sector, organisations like New Perspectives and NRTF are the recipients of ACE funding. In the 2015 *Rural Evidence and Data Review*, ACE specify the Rural-Urban Classification – an official government statistic – as 'the national standard for defining rural and urban areas'.¹⁵ This classification of areas into five categories (rural town and fringe; rural village and hamlet; urban major conurbation; urban minor conurbation and urban city and town) distinguishes between each according to population density.¹⁶ In their *Rural Evidence and Data Review*, ACE examine the balance of funding between rural and urban areas against the numbers of people living in urban and rural areas, using the Urban Rural Classification.¹⁷ Given that the work of many rural touring organisations including New Perspectives and NRTF is funded by ACE, it can be seen that a definition of rural based on population density is significant for the sector.

Alongside this, NRTF highlight that the rural touring sector exists because of a 'desire to overcome social, geographic, economic and psychological barriers

¹⁵ Jonathon Blackburn, Jonathan Brant, and Eloise Poole, *Arts Council England Rural Evidence and Data Review: Analysis of Arts Council England Investment, Arts and Cultural Participation and Audiences*, 2015, p. 3.

¹⁶ DEFRA, *The Rural-Urban Classification for England*, 2013; DEFRA, 'Rural & Urban Definitions' <www.defra.gov.uk/crc/documents/rural-urban-definitions/> [accessed 24 May 2013].

¹⁷ Blackburn, Brant, and Poole.

that have historically inhabited the enjoyment of arts by people in rural communities'.¹⁸ These barriers might include the additional time and costs like fuel and parking that people living in rural areas face when travelling to a nearby city to see a theatre performance. It is important to note that this ethos of equity of access to the arts for people living in rural areas does not necessarily take into account the intersection of multiple different barriers to engagement in the arts, or the significant differences in the different rural locations to which companies like New Perspectives tour. The extent to which people living in rural areas face barriers to accessing the arts may vary according to age, occupation, access to public or private transport, economic status, social class, and other social factors. These factors will, in turn, vary within the population of any single rural locale. The presence of a rural touring performance within a rural town or village does not in itself remove all barriers to accessing the arts for the people who live there.

How rural touring works

The distribution model

The distribution model for rural touring in England and Wales is based on a system of (usually) county by county touring schemes, and networks of volunteer promoters based in the various communities the work tours to, which are often villages but sometimes small towns or hamlets. Theatre companies offer their work, along with potential touring dates, to touring schemes, who in turn offer it out, normally at a subsidised cost, to their network of promoters. This usually happens in the form of online communication, a paper brochure or 'menu' and/or at showcase events organised for promoters to hear about the work on offer for a particular season; or through any combination of the above, depending on the operation of each touring scheme. Promoters bid on the work they wish to programme in their venues, and each touring scheme then co-ordinates

¹⁸ 'NRTF Website'.

which company performs in which village on which night. Companies wishing to tour across regions will liaise with several different touring schemes, offering specific sets of dates to each scheme.

Promoters are responsible for marketing and selling tickets, usually with the support of both the touring scheme – who may provide advice on selling events, especially to new promoters – and the company, who provide further information about the performance, along with posters and flyers. (See Figure 1.1, below).

New Perspectives' rural touring productions are rehearsed at the company's base in Nottingham. The touring company in most cases consists of the cast and one stage manager. The company owns a van and sets are designed in order to be dismantled and transported between venues. Rural tours almost always consist of one night bookings, meaning that the actors and stage manager arrive at rural venues on the day of the performance, and spend the afternoon doing a get-in (unloading the van, constructing the set, rigging and testing lighting and sound equipment). Usually, promoters provide an evening meal for the team, frequently in their own home. After the performance the get-out is the reverse process: de-rigging, deconstructing, re-loading the van, then driving back to base or to hotel accommodation (depending on the next show's location).¹⁹

¹⁹ Of course it is not only in the rural touring sector that actors are responsible for get-ins and get-outs: the same duties are often undertaken by the casts of touring Theatre in Education productions, and in amateur theatre.

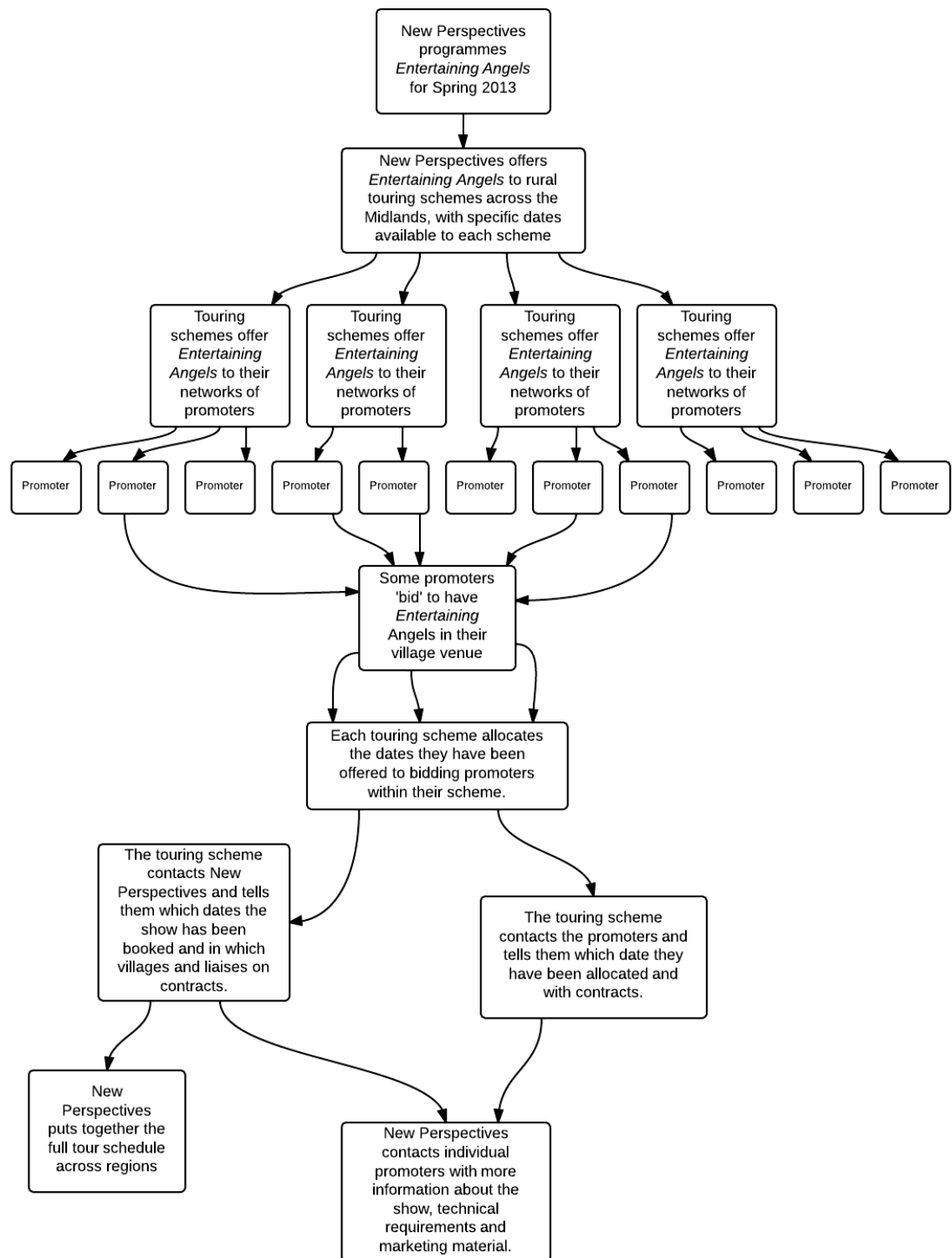


Figure 1.1 Diagram of booking process for a New Perspectives rural touring show



Figure 1.2 (top left) New perspectives van. Figure 1.3 (top right) Actors unloading van, *Due Course* (2013, touring), Thurgarton. Figure 1.4 (bottom left) Actors and promoter during a meal break in Glentworth village hall, *Goldfish* (2012, touring). Figure 1.5 (bottom right) Actors rigging lights for *Goldfish*, Thomas Cranmer centre, Aslockton. Photographs author's own.

Within this model, there is significant variation as individual companies, touring schemes and promoters do things differently and/or are working in different contexts. Not every company provides the same level of support or marketing print, and companies may use different marketing strategies for different shows. Some companies book shows directly with venues rather than via a touring scheme. Some touring schemes are run by county councils, while others exist as independent, ACE funded organisations. A number of touring schemes have rules about the work promoters can book: insisting on variety in the types of work booked with a balance between theatre, music and dance, for example, or preventing promoters from booking the same company twice in a row.

While 'rural' is a useful term in distinguishing between this sector and theatre taking place in cities, it masks a wide variation in the places of performance visited on a tour, which can range from small ex-mining towns to 'idyllic' commuter belt villages.²⁰ The venues to which productions tour include school and church halls as well as village halls, and promoters may work independently or as part of a village hall committee, church committee, school staff, or town or parish council. Some promoters put on several events per year, while others only book one.

The rural touring sector is not comprised of theatre alone: much of the work programmed consists of music, comedy and work for children. As my research focuses on the work of New Perspectives, I concentrate on theatre for adult and family audiences, in line with the company's main output. I also focus throughout on the ways in which New Perspectives has tended to make work for rural touring, while acknowledging that other companies working in the sector may tour a higher proportion of shows booked outside of touring schemes or have a history of more formally innovative work.

Touring schemes and promoters

The rural touring distribution model, with its networks of touring schemes and volunteer promoters, can be seen to have both advantages and disadvantages. The additional layers in the model created by the touring schemes and the promoters create the potential for gaps, delays and inaccuracy when it comes to bookings, marketing and communication. Additionally, touring schemes may provisionally pencil in dates with a company planning a tour, and then find themselves unable to fulfil these dates if promoter interest in a show is lacking. However the touring schemes also provide an infrastructure for the sector, financial subsidy for volunteer promoters, and invaluable support to promoters, artists and companies.

²⁰ The contested nature of the term 'rural' and its multiple different applications in different contexts, including the notion of the 'rural idyll', is discussed in more depth in my second chapter.

Currently, rural touring relies heavily on the work of volunteers. NRTF estimates in their 2012/2013 sector audit that volunteer promoters 'gave 97,347 hours to rural touring schemes'.²¹ Their absence would require the schemes' small staff teams to undertake programming and hosting events across whole counties with all the time and travel involved; or a significant financial investment in order to pay people to do the hours currently given for free.²² NRTF flag up the importance of the role of promoters in their guide for theatre companies new to the sector, *Rural Touring in a Nutshell*:

Remember that the vast majority of promoters are volunteers and give their time for free. They may not therefore be as knowledgeable about your work and your requirements as arts venue staff. In return for your cooperation/flexibility you'll be given a very warm welcome and hospitality [...] You're the guests of the local village community. At the end of the night it's therefore far more appropriate to say 'thanks for having us' instead of 'thank you for coming to see the show'. Don't forget to thank the promoters and anyone else who's been involved in making the event happen and helping you feel at home.²³

As NRTF highlight, promoters are local residents who select and book the work for their own communities, and then promote and sell tickets, often through personal networks of friends, neighbours and other organisations (including clubs, societies and the Church). They could be described as cultural gatekeepers in their communities: they make decisions about programming and influence which members of the community attend. However at a recent debate on rural theatre hosted by *The Guardian* and Battersea Arts Centre at Farnham Maltings, several people working in the sector objected to the use of the term 'cultural gatekeeper', instead

²¹ *Rural Touring Scheme Information Audit 2012 / 2013*, p. 4.

²² I discuss the absence of volunteer promoters in the context of alternative models for the future of the rural touring sector in more detail in my seventh chapter.

²³ 'Rural Touring in a Nutshell - a Brief Overview for Companies and Performers' (NRTF, 2015), p. 3 <www.ruraltouring.org/resources/rural-touring-in-a-nutshell-a-brief-overview-for-companies-and-performers> [accessed 6 May 2016].

emphasising the importance of empowering promoters and recognising the work they do in order to enable and facilitate access to arts and culture for members of their community.²⁴

A disadvantage of this model is the potential for conservative programming in response to a perception of both the social and financial risk of putting on a piece of work deemed disappointing or even offensive. It is crucial to not only appreciate the role of the volunteers in the infrastructure, but to understand the reasons why they volunteer, and to recognise their concerns. As Alex Murdoch of Cartoon De Salvo suggests (quoting NRTF Chair John Laidlaw), volunteer promoters may see themselves as either artistic activists, or community activists, or both.²⁵ That is, some promoters may consider themselves as having a responsibility to bring their community together, some may see their role as providing their audience with a variety of artistic experiences, and some may consider both of these tasks part of their role. The implications of this distinction for those making work for rural touring are discussed in more depth throughout this thesis.

The rural touring audience

Like any audience, every rural touring audience is different and made up of individuals. However, Matarasso's research into the rural touring sector in both 2004 and 2014 reveals some significant defining characteristics of most rural touring audiences. Firstly, the majority of people in the audience at a rural touring event are likely to know most if not all of the other people in attendance:

The power of village performances arises from a unique sense of shared experience, where the audience know each other.

²⁴ 'Guardian Live, A Nation's Theatre Conversation: "I liked it but I couldn't book it"', Farnham Maltings, 3 March 2016.

²⁵ 'Interview with Alex Murdoch of Cartoon De Salvo', National Theatre, London (23rd September 2015).

An urban audience mostly don't know each other and disperse after the show. A rural audience, by contrast, includes people who know each other well, or at least by sight, and so there can be an almost palpable sense of community as people greet one another and chat while they wait for things to begin.²⁶

Secondly, the reasons for attending may include a desire to support the promoter and to come together socially as a community, alongside or instead of a desire for a particular artistic or cultural experience.²⁷ This feature of rural touring audiences is also highlighted by NRTF:

In the main, audiences attending rural touring venues are local community members. They might therefore be attending for social reasons, whether or not they have an interest in live performance (which doesn't mean they won't engage with and enjoy the show!).²⁸

I discuss the significance and implications of an audience who already exist as a community and who attend at least in part in order to take part in community-building throughout this thesis. While acknowledging the particular nature of rural touring audiences described by Matarasso and often noted by those working in the sector, it is important to note that of course it is not the case that every member of the audience at every rural touring performance knows every other person present. Additionally, it is useful to highlight that the audience for a rural touring performance is not the same as the community of a particular rural location. While the reliance on volunteer promoters within the rural touring distribution model may increase the likelihood of audience members being drawn from social groups and circles that the promoter belongs to, this same unique feature of the sector may decrease the chances of some people living in an area of attending. Taken to

²⁶ *Only Connect*, p. 76, see also p11, p70, p72; *A Wider Horizon*, p. 68; Jo Robinson, *Theatre & the Rural* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p 67.

²⁷ *Only Connect*, pp. 11–12; *A Wider Horizon*, p. 21; 68.

²⁸ 'Rural Touring in a Nutshell', p. 1.

an extreme, if a promoter only invites people they already know, a rural touring event may be far from inclusive for some rural residents. In addition, it would also be naive to assume that members of an audience knowing each other is a wholly positive thing. In an undated New Perspectives show report, a stage manager noted:

With regard to the company everything fine, although they report that 'village politics' going on publicly in bar/kitchen/changing area prior and post show made them feel uncomfortable'.²⁹

Throughout this thesis I discuss both positive and negative implications of rural touring audience members knowing each other. I also acknowledge that while used frequently with reference to rural touring, the term 'community' is problematic and does not have a singular fixed definition. While it would be possible in this context to conflate a rural population, a rural community and a rural audience, it is important to note that these three groups can overlap to differing extents. Not all people living within a geographically defined area attend rural touring events, and people identify themselves and others as belonging or not belonging to different communities according to interest and social status as well as geography. I discuss the nature of community in a rural touring context and Kershaw's framework of intersecting communities of location and communities of interest in more detail in Chapter Two.

Rural touring places of performance

Rural touring theatre first and foremost takes place in rural locations.³⁰ The work is most often staged in village halls, but venues can include churches, community centres, schools, and small purpose-built theatres. Significantly,

²⁹ New Perspectives show report, undated, New Perspectives archive, held at New Perspectives' offices.

³⁰ There are some exceptions to this. Black Country Touring sits alongside other rural touring schemes under the umbrella of NRTF, working on the same model and booking similar work. However the work tours to urban locations in the Black Country and West Midlands.

the building in which the performance takes place is a community space, often belonging to, or in the guardianship of, those attending the performance. Village, school and church halls are often multi-purpose community spaces, serving as polling stations, wedding venues, and hosting activities and organisations including choirs, Brownies, Guides, the Women's Institute, village shows, toddlers' groups and exercise classes, alongside their use as performance spaces.



Figure 1.6 Hulland Ward Village Hall noticeboard with posters for activities including a baby and toddler group, a bowls club, an art group, yoga classes and monthly dance nights. Photograph author's own.



Figure 1.7 (top left) Noticeboard outside Lowdham Village Hall with posters advertising activities in the hall including three concerts, an Easter fair, a horticultural society spring show, a square dance hosted by the bowling club, a May Day scarecrow competition, an antique fair and a film night. Figure 1.8 (top right) lamppost sign for Epperstone Village Hall and poster for 'Core Strength and Stretch' class in the hall. Figure 1.9 (bottom left) Hulland Ward Village Hall in use as a wedding venue. Figure 1.10 (bottom right) Woodborough Village Hall in use as a polling station. Photographs author's own.

Again, the implications of multi-use community venues serving as places of performance for theatre are discussed throughout.

A conventional rural touring performance: *Entertaining Angels*

New Perspectives' Spring 2013 production *Entertaining Angels* is an example of a 'conventional' rural touring show for the company. This provides a useful counterpoint for discussion both of conventional non-rural touring shows and of formally innovative or experimental work for rural touring. *Entertaining Angels* was a new play by Brendan Murray, a writer and director who from 2003 to 2008 was Artistic Director of Oxfordshire Theatre Company (OTC), another company that largely creates work for rural touring. It was commissioned for New Perspectives' by Buckroyd in 2010. During his Artistic Directorship, Buckroyd maintained a policy of mounting plays that examined some aspect of rural life, and he approached Murray with the idea of exploring the role of the church in rural villages. The play tells the story of a Vicar in a rural parish and his struggles with his job, his marriage and the local parishioners. While researching and developing the play Murray spoke to many people living in rural areas including Vicars and their spouses, churchwardens and lay preachers.

Entertaining Angels had a cast of five, and I directed the production. The show rehearsed for four weeks at New Perspectives' base, before a production week and opening at Lakeside Arts Centre in Nottingham. It then toured for one month to villages across the East and West Midlands. The touring company consisted of the cast and the stage manager, visited and supported by me and by New Perspectives' Production Manager. Although the tour visited some small theatres and arts centres, the show was designed mainly with village hall venues in mind, and in each venue was presented in an end-on configuration.



Figure 1.11 *Entertaining Angels*. Photograph Pamela Raith.

From its earliest stages, *Entertaining Angels* was conceived as a 'conventional' New Perspectives rural touring production, following the model of content with a clear link to rural life, and a design based on performances taking place at one end of a hall and an audience seated in rows of chairs all facing in one direction. The dramaturgy of the script was fixed and the narrative remained the same at each performance with the audience unable to contribute to or influence the outcome of the story for the characters.

An unconventional rural touring performance: *The Falling Sky*

Described as an 'audio promenade drama', *The Falling Sky* toured to rural communities in the form of a pre-recorded audio drama loaded onto MP3 players, which audience members listened to while completing a walk mapped specifically for their village. The piece was created and trialled in five villages in 2010, and then offered to East Midlands villages via touring schemes in 2011. *The Falling Sky*, also written by Murray, centred on five village characters and covered contemporary and political issues including fox

hunting, changes to farming methods, the decline of the rural economy, and the influx of people moving to rural areas and commuting to work in cities. The play was originally staged as a conventional rural touring show by OTC in 2007, and Murray was commissioned to adapt the script for an audio version for New Perspectives.

This commission emerged from questions posed by the staff and board of New Perspectives: would it be possible to cast a 'star name' in a rural touring production given the requirement for actors to load and unload set from a van, rig lights, and share driving duties?; was it possible to find cheaper ways to tour and re-tour new writing on the rural circuit?, and how could digital technology be utilised in the production and distribution of work? ³¹ While these questions differ from those at the heart of my research, in diverging from the form of the 'conventional' rural touring production described above, the production serves as an example of a precursory attempt to 're-imagine the rural tour'.

Each village that booked *The Falling Sky* hosted the play for five days. Prior to this, a New Perspectives team member visited in order to map the walk that would accompany the play. Shortly after starting my role as Associate Director, I took on this responsibility and met with promoters in each village to explain how the play worked. I would then ask them to show me around the village, and on return to the New Perspectives office I would plan a walk to accompany the recorded audio tracks, write instructions, and use mapping software in order to document this and print it onto the back of the programmes given to each audience member. The week before the production was booked for a specific village, a member of New Perspectives staff would deliver a box to the promoter containing ten MP3 players pre-loaded with the play, headphones, and the printed programmes containing the maps and directions for the walk. Instead of a production taking place in

³¹ Daniel Buckroyd, *A Sound Approach to Rural Touring*, originally published on New Perspectives' website, 2010, New Perspectives archive, held at New Perspectives' offices.

the village hall on one evening only, promoters were able to offer as many daytime and evening slots as they wanted while they had the equipment.



Figure 1.12 View from *The Falling Sky* walking route in Thurgarton, Nottinghamshire, taken during planning visit. Photograph author's own.

Audiences for both the 2010 pilot of *The Falling Sky* and the 2011 tour were asked to rate and/or give feedback on aspects of the experience including how it made them feel, the clarity of instructions and the usability of the equipment. The majority of responses were positive and, significantly, there were several positive comments describing the form of the work as new, interesting, different and exciting:

Walk really brought the play to life.³²

³² *The Falling Sky* 2010 pilots, audience feedback, New Perspectives archive, held at New Perspectives' offices.

A unique experience which I shall treasure. When is the next one?

The play and walk together was a wonderful combination.

Totally absorbing. Would like to do again.³³

The promoters taking part in the pilot were also asked for their feedback about the experience of hosting *The Falling Sky* in comparison to a standard New Perspectives show, and the audience reactions they witnessed. One commented that the show was featured in Lyn Gardner's Theatre Picks in *The Guardian*, resulting in a higher than usual proportion of audience members coming from outside of the village.³⁴ It is interesting that given that the production was created in order to test a new way of making work for rural audiences, in so doing, new audiences were attracted to come and experience the work in a rural setting.³⁵ The promoters noted that despite the information circulated explaining the nature of the experience, many people enquiring about the show did not fully understand how the performance and walk would work. This confusion is a potential downside of presenting work that varies from the conventional model for rural touring.

When considering the future potential of innovative forms of work for the rural touring sector, it is also significant that much of the feedback from promoters focussed on the additional time and effort required on their part. They noted

³³ *The Falling Sky*, 2011 audience feedback, New Perspectives archive, held at New Perspectives' offices.

³⁴ *The Falling Sky* 2010 pilots, promoter feedback, New Perspectives archive, held at New Perspectives' offices; Lyn Gardner, 'What to See: Theatre', *Guardian (The Guide)*, 31st July – 6th August 2010.

³⁵ *Entertaining Angels* was also mentioned in Lyn Gardner's Theatre Picks (moved online as part of the *Guardian Stage Blog* in the intervening period), however she only made reference to the performances at Lakeside Arts Centre in Nottingham, and did not highlight the opportunity to see the show on its rural tour. Indeed, in my experience as a regular reader, it is unusual for her to highlight opportunities to see rural touring work in her Theatre Picks. This suggests that the unusual nature of *The Falling Sky* was part of what drew her attention to it in its rural setting: Lyn Gardner, 'What to See: Lyn Gardner's Theatre Tips', *Guardian Stage Blog*, 26 April 2013 <www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2013/apr/26/what-to-see-theatre-tips?CMP=tw_t_fd> [accessed 24 May 2013].

the time they spent on the process of booking different groups and individuals for performance slots across a week; the welcoming of each individual or group; the explanations as to how the performance and equipment worked, and the collection of the equipment at the end of the walk.³⁶

In 2011 promoters who wanted *The Falling Sky* in their village had to contact the company directly to book, rather than bidding via a touring scheme, thereby diverging from the conventional rural touring distribution model. This was partly because it was possible to offer the show much more cheaply than a conventional show, which meant there was no need for the touring schemes to subsidise it to make it affordable for the villages. In addition, once the show had been booked, rather than having a fixed week of dates on offer, the promoter needed to liaise with more than one member of New Perspectives staff in order to book not only the days on which the show would be in the village, but also the staff visit to map the walk. It was easier for this liaison to happen directly with the company rather than via a touring scheme. Consequently, *The Falling Sky* is an example of formally innovative work for rural touring that sat partly outside the rural touring distribution model. The aim of my research is to investigate models for making work that exist within this model. I return to *The Falling Sky* when I discuss the role of place in rural touring; here I offer it as part of the context from which my research into innovation in form for New Perspectives emerges.

Outline of the PhD

I frame my arguments and findings about rural touring with reference throughout to the three features of rural touring I discuss above: audience, place and distribution model.

In the next chapter I discuss the theoretical context for my research. I look to the field of audience studies and highlight how rural touring audiences are

³⁶ *The Falling Sky* 2010 pilots, promoter feedback.

absent from the dominant discourse. I particularly refer to audience theorist Susan Bennett and her concepts of inner and outer frames and an horizon of expectations to demonstrate how the experiences of rural touring audiences differ from those in urban theatres.³⁷ I discuss place, and cite theories on the rural from the field of geography, particularly the recent work of Michael Woods, to indicate the problematic and contested nature of the term.³⁸ I highlight how rural touring venues differ from the urban theatre buildings on which many theatre theorists examining places of performance focus. I employ Gay McAuley's taxonomy of spatial function to highlight key differences.³⁹ I examine how current theory on theatre overlooks the unique distribution model of rural touring and the role played by touring schemes and promoters.

In my third chapter I discuss interactivity, examining some of the reasons for New Perspectives to explore interactive work, drawing on examples of interactive theatre practice in order to consider strategies for creating interactive work for rural touring. I use Gareth White's 'horizon of participation' as a lens through which to examine what audiences bring to the experience of interactivity.⁴⁰ I illustrate how my examination of theory and practice forms the foundations for my practice-based research which tested models for interactive theatre for rural touring.

In my fourth chapter I discuss my first pilot performance. *Something Blue*, an interactive piece created for rural touring, was trialled in a Nottinghamshire village hall. My findings included unexpected discoveries regarding the centrality of risk. I use White's notions of horizons of participation and risk to

³⁷ Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 1997).

³⁸ Michael Woods, *Rural*, Key Ideas in Geography (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

³⁹ Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, Theory/text/performance (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

⁴⁰ Gareth White, *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

discuss my findings about how interactivity works with a rural audience and make suggestions for developing further work of this nature.

In my fifth chapter I discuss place, theatre work that engages with place, and the challenges of specificity and engagement with place in a touring model. I note the problematic nature of the term 'site-specific' with reference to current and historical practice, and theory drawn from both theatre studies and geography, particularly geographer Doreen Massey's conceptualisation of place as socially constructed and as dynamic intersections in networks of connections.⁴¹ Developing my use of horizons as frameworks for understanding theatre events and their audiences, I propose an horizon of place to take into account the different experiences of place audiences bring to rural theatre events. I consider how my analysis informs the second phase of my practice-based research.

In my sixth chapter I discuss my second practical pilot. *Homing* was a production designed to engage with place for rural touring, presented in two East Midlands villages. I present my findings, using the notion of an horizon of place to understand the way in which rural audiences respond to work that attempts to dramaturgically and formally engage with the places where they live. I discuss a key dynamic revealed only in practice: the significance of the difference between an insider and an outsider horizon of place. I discuss the difficulties presented by this finding, and of creating a feeling of specificity in touring work. I conclude by making recommendations for future formal experimentation in this area for rural touring.

In my seventh chapter I present my conclusions, reiterating my central arguments that the unique nature of the rural touring audiences, places of performance and distribution model must be taken into account both by theorists examining the subject and by those involved in formal innovation in this field. I further examine my research findings, in particular the significance

⁴¹ Doreen Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', *Marxism Today*, 38, 24–29.

of empathy, care and relationship at the heart of the rural touring model. I discuss how these concepts create particular responsibilities for companies working in the sector. I discuss the future of the rural touring sector, drawing particular attention to developments that have been concurrent with my research. I examine recent discussions and discourse related to theatre outside the rural touring sector, and argue that theorists and practitioners involved in audience engagement and development in a non-rural touring context could look to rural touring for examples of successful practice.

CHAPTER 2

Searching for Rural Touring in the Library: The theoretical context

Rural touring schemes are a quiet triumph of the British arts world. For thirty five years, these small, independent organisations have brought [...] performing arts to villages across the country and found enthusiastic local audiences. They have offered life enhancing experiences to people who, because they live far from cities, have limited access to the arts. [...] Night after night, gifted artists perform at the invitation of the local community in halls, schools and churches from Cornwall to Cumbria. [...] The atmosphere is electric because there's nowhere to hide if the show isn't working – and that can be as uncomfortable for the audience as for the artists. But such occasions are rare, partly because touring schemes are skilled at finding good shows, and partly because local promoters decide which ones to put on in their community. It is a joint enterprise with shared risks. And when it works, which is very often, audience and artists share a joyous experience, life enhancing and even, sometimes, life changing: regular marvels, indeed.¹

Introduction

In this chapter I examine how rural touring can be situated within a theoretical context. I highlight that, despite the longevity, success and geographical spread of rural touring in this country described by Matarasso above, the present-day rural touring sector is largely absent from academic discourse. I interrogate the nuances of this theoretical gap, considering the different ways in which the 'quiet triumphs' of rural touring have been overlooked, and how this relates to perceptions of the rural. I then consider rural audiences, places of performance and the rural touring distribution

¹ Matarasso, *A Wider Horizon*, p. 2.

model in turn, discussing how each sits within and/or challenges existing theoretical models within theatre studies, including scholarship that examines audiences, and the places and spaces in which theatre is staged.

Finally, I consider the implications of this theoretical context for my investigation into innovation in form for rural touring, discussing the reasons to explore this area given by both previous and current New Perspectives leaders. I conclude this chapter by outlining the rationale for the two specific areas of formal innovation chosen as the subjects of my practical research.

The theoretical absence of rural touring

At the outset of my PhD I did what most postgraduate students do: I scoured the shelves of the university library and online journal databases for material in order to find what had already been written on my specialist subject. I discovered that the current rural touring model of theatre with which I had become familiar was largely absent from discourse on theatre. I argue that this absence is manifested in three key ways: firstly, cases where rural touring and indeed the rural in general is invisible; secondly, instances where theatre happening in rural contexts is made peripheral, and thirdly, discussions of theatre happening in rural contexts which are out-dated and do not reflect the contemporary rural touring model.

The invisibility of rurality is evident in unqualified references to theatre in an urban context. For example, in his *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies*, Christopher Balme repeatedly refers to theatres in urban contexts, with no mention of the rural:

[A] theatre building is part of the cognitive cartography of a town or city. Thus, a place of performance is determined by its integration into the wider referential system of the urban environment. This position in

the urban system influences, in turn, the construction of receptive codes.²

The absence of any reference to theatre in non-urban settings indicates a tendency to discuss the city as the primary site of theatre, either implying that theatre does not happen in rural areas, or that discussions of theatre in urban contexts are applicable to rural contexts. The existence of the current rural touring sector and the unique nature of its audiences, places of performance and distribution model are evidence that both of these assumptions are incorrect.

Elsewhere, theorists adopt a position of 'urban as default', referring to theatre happening in rural contexts as peripheral. It seems that rural is to urban as footnotes are to a text. For example, Ric Knowles, proposing a materialist semiotic mode of performance analysis in *Reading the Material Theatre*, states that '(t)he geographical location of the space in the city *or elsewhere* is therefore significant for the understanding of theatrical production and reception alike'.³ He describes theatre happening in cities, 'or indeed far away from urban centers in idyllic or commercialized festival towns or isolated pockets of regional culture'.⁴ Again, the rural is presented as the exception to the dominant default urban model of theatre. The suggestions of theatre happening away from urban centres offered here do not resemble contemporary rural touring. Indeed, the use of the word 'idyllic' (a term I return to later) positions the rural as 'other', otherworldly, even.

While Susan Bennett acknowledges in *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* that theatre takes place '(o)utside the larger urban centres', she refers to 'non-traditional' and 'alternative' theatre, making

² Christopher B. Balme, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies*, Cambridge Introductions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 58.

³ Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, *Theatre and Performance Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 79 (emphasis mine).

⁴ Knowles, p. 80.

reference to participative theatre involving community members, and political theatre companies working directly with unions.⁵ Bennett's assertion that theatre taking place in non-urban contexts is 'clearly different from that available in the urban centre' is true; however her descriptions of companies based in rural locations, performances taking place at non-traditional times, and the involvement of community members, often as part of a political aim, do not correlate with the contemporary rural touring sector.⁶ Similarly, in *The Politics of Performance*, Kershaw's focus is on community theatre in the seventies and eighties and his research centres on artists and theatre companies whose remit was political. The 'coherent, but very thinly spread [...] rural community theatre movement' he cites is markedly different from the professional rural touring sector I have introduced.⁷ Where references to theatre in rural contexts do exist in the theory, the examples given are frequently of alternative and sometimes out-dated models. The contemporary rural touring model of professional performances made and performed without the involvement of community residents remains absent.

The rural/urban binary

The presence of the urban is inescapable in any examination of the rural. It is therefore helpful to consider both what is meant by 'rural' in the context of this research, and how it relates to the notion of 'urban', and to examine how perceptions of this binary may have implications for how rurality is perceived within theatre theory and practice. In contrast to theatre studies, there is much debate within the field of geography regarding the rural. In his recent publication examining the concept of the rural, geographer Michael Woods notes that:

⁵ Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, p. 102; 101–103.

⁶ Bennett, pp. 102–103. It is worth noting that historically New Perspectives did take part in such community, participatory and political theatre models, particularly in its original incarnation as Perspectives Theatre Company.

⁷ Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 4.

The varied functions and meanings that have been attributed to rural space have made the rural into an ambiguous and complex concept. The rural is a messy and slippery idea that eludes definition and demarcation.⁸

The slipperiness of the idea of what or where is classed as rural extends to the rural touring sector. While 'rural touring' is used to describe the entire sector, behind this term lies a wealth of diversity in the communities involved, from small hamlets to towns and in some cases urban areas. In *Only Connect*, Matarasso highlights the problematic nature of defining 'rural' in the context of touring arts: '(i)t is difficult to say what exactly what we mean by rural because non-urban Britain is so varied'.⁹ He suggests that difficulties in defining what is meant by 'rural' stem from rapid changes in social and economic life in recent decades, and that other complications arise from different uses and definitions of the term by industry, government and charitable organisations.¹⁰ Woods too notes that there is no singular rural, and that the term is a social construct:

An imagined entity that is brought into being by particular discourses of rurality that are produced, reproduced and contested by academics, the media, policy-makers, rural lobby groups and ordinary individuals.¹¹

The rural is frequently represented in these discourses of rurality in binary opposition to the urban, and Woods argues that this has an historical linguistic basis:

The distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' [...] is one of the oldest and most pervasive of geographical binaries. The terms may have

⁸ Woods, *Rural*, p. 1.

⁹ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, p22.

¹⁰ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, pp. 22–24.

¹¹ Woods, p. 9, 31; see also Paul J. Cloke, 'Knowing Ruralities?', in *Country Visions* (Harlow: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2003), pp. 1–13, p. 31.

originated as a way of differentiating between the enclosed and defensible spaces of early towns, and the open and uncontrollable spaces that lay outside, but they soon acquired greater symbolic significance as they became embedded in language and culture.¹²

I too utilise this binary. When defining rural touring and describing its unique features it is useful to compare and contrast it with urban theatre. However, one problematic consequence of this urban/rural binary is a difference in perceptions of both, which offers one explanation for the ways in which the rural is overlooked in theoretical writing about theatre. When considering how different discourses of rurality have led to varied representations of the rural, including the idea of the 'rural idyll', Woods notes the prevalence of a perception of the rural as simpler, less developed and less modernised, in contrast with cities as sites of industrialisation, development and sophistication.¹³ This is not new. Raymond Williams, writing in 1973, argued that

On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light; [...] on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times.¹⁴

I propose that the prevalence of such deep-rooted associations is linked to the lack of critical attention paid to rural touring, the relegation of the rural to the margins in theatre discourse and to the notion of rural areas as less sophisticated than urban centres.

¹² Woods, p. 3.

¹³ Woods, pp.3-5, 21-22; see also Cloke; Michael Bunce, 'Reproducing Rural Idylls', in *Country Visions* (Harlow: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2003), pp. 14–30; David Matless, 'Doing the English Village, 1945-90: An Essay in Imaginative Geography', in *Writing the Rural: Five Cultural Geographies* (London: Paul Chapman, 1994), pp. 7–88.

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 1.

Since working in rural touring I have encountered misconceptions about the work on multiple occasions. Several people, on hearing that I work in rural touring, have immediately started speaking to me about amateur dramatics and/or community theatre, and I have had to explain that rural touring is created by professional theatre companies and casts. I do not recall similar assumptions or associations with amateur or community work ever having been made when talking about my theatre work in urban locations.

This is not to say that amateur and community theatre are without value, indeed amateur theatre is also often overlooked by academic discourse.¹⁵ My experience does however suggest an assumption that theatre in rural contexts is not performed by professional actors. My interviews with people in the rural touring sector revealed a desire for rural touring to be recognised and valued alongside theatre taking place in cities:

Rural touring should be seen as a part of mainstream arts provision, ensuring access to high-quality professional productions by people who live in rural areas [...] Rural touring is not a poor substitute for the kind of experience offered by urban arts venues.¹⁶

Whenever I talk about rural touring to people and they don't know about it, I describe it as having a combined audience of around 300,000 a year [...] which is the equivalent of the Barbican. And that makes people think 'oh, right, okay'. So it's a national institution.¹⁷

¹⁵ Hilary Ramsden and others, *The Role of Grassroots Arts Activities in Communities: A Scoping Study* (Third Sector Research Centre, 2011), p. 4 <www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/working-papers/working-paper-68.pdf> [accessed 17 July 2016]. This report also notes that 'distinctions between amateur and professional are flexible, blurry and open to contestation' (p37). Rural touring, which relies on the work of professional theatre companies alongside volunteer promoters, is an example of this.

¹⁶ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Ed Collier, 'Interview with Ed Collier of China Plate', St Pancras, London (23rd September 2015).

What the hell is up with the idea that artists cut their teeth out in the sticks and then later on they'll graduate to the main stage?¹⁸

In contrast to perceptions from those outside the sector, rural touring audiences comment on the quality and high standards of the work they experience:

You know the quality's going to be high. They're world-class performers you get, in your village hall.¹⁹

We enjoy a wonderful range of entertainment of a very, very high standard, and it means a lot to us.²⁰

Despite these voices from the world of rural touring speaking up for the sector, the lack of attention within academic discourse remains. It is my hope that highlighting this gap and its implications will lead to an increase in theory which does acknowledge rural touring, and in turn, challenges these perceptions of theatre happening in rural contexts.

It is important that any study of rural touring considers the limitations of viewing the rural and the urban solely in opposition to each other, and instead considers the ways in which the two are connected and related. Woods outlines how a relational approach leads to an understanding of how the urban and the rural are bound up together in social and economic networks:

¹⁸ Alex Murdoch, 'Interview with Alex Murdoch of Cartoon De Salvo', National Theatre, London (23rd September 2015).

¹⁹ 'Ian', audience member in *Out In The Sticks It's Wonderful: A Film about Villages in Action* (Villages in Action, 2016) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7p5XUFbjwM&feature=youtu.be> [accessed 8 April 2016].

²⁰ Unnamed audience member in *Highlights* (Highlights, 2012) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=yefFs2OcULM> [accessed 8 April 2016].

The rural has always been defined and imagined in relational terms, as relative to urban space and society. At the same time, actual social and economic relations – the networks and flows of people and goods, capital and power – have always transgressed the discursive divide of urban and rural [...]. The relational approach [...] permits us to recognize the diverse networks and flows that criss-cross rural and urban space and the hybrid forms that result as being part of the very constitution of both the rural and the urban.²¹

The rural touring sector is an example of this urban/rural relational dynamic, encompassing cultural as well as social and economic relations. While the theatre created by New Perspectives and others may be classed as 'rural touring', there are several ways in which the company straddles the urban and the rural and highlights the inextricable links between the two. New Perspectives' base is located in a city, and the company mostly rehearses here. It is not uncommon for productions to open at or visit urban arts centres or theatres as part of a tour, and in the last five years there have been several co-productions with city theatres.²² Matarasso describes increased interaction between the urban and the rural as part of the context for the contemporary rural touring sector: 'the interdependence of artistic life in town and country is so pervasive that [it] is often impossible to say where one begins and the other ends'.²³ While I draw attention to the differences between theatre in rural settings and in urban contexts, it is useful to remember throughout the complexity of the relationship between the two (and indeed my relationship to both).

Studies of rurality drawn from geography highlight the origins of some perceptions associated with the rural/urban binary, and demonstrate the social construction of rural in relation to urban. If theatre scholarship

²¹ Woods, p. 43.

²² Recent co-productions include *The Butterfly Lion* (2012, touring) with Curve, Leicester and Derby Theatre, and *The Honey Man* (2012, touring) with Derby Live.

²³ Matarasso, *A Wider Horizon*, p. 44.

overlooks rural touring, answers to the questions: Who goes to the theatre? Where does theatre take place? and How is theatre produced? are at best incomplete, and at worst, inaccurate. Below I discuss each of these questions in turn, examining how the audiences, places of performance and distribution model of rural touring sit within existing theory, and continuing to highlight where theatre in rural contexts is overlooked. These three features of the rural touring model do of course overlap. For example, the volunteer promoters who form a key component of the distribution model are also audience members, and are also frequently committee members of the community venues that serve as places of performance.

Who goes to the theatre, and why?

Recent work in the burgeoning area of audience studies emphasises the need for more empirical research into who audiences are, why they attend, and how they experience theatre. Audiences have traditionally been viewed primarily through the eyes of critics and those making and performing theatre. Helen Freshwater, in *Theatre and Audience*, states that 'almost no-one in theatre studies seems to be interested in exploring what actual audience members make of a performance'.²⁴ Radbourne *et al* highlight the need for more research focusing on 'audience engagement' because of its importance to arts funders:

Although slow to become the subject of academic study, audience engagement is a leading research concern of contemporary arts industry and funding bodies, such as [...] the Arts Council of England.²⁵

Their 2014 Australia-based research led them to propose an 'Arts Audience Experience Index' for measuring the success of arts organisations with regard

²⁴ Helen Freshwater, *Theatre and Audience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 29.

²⁵ Jennifer Radbourne, Hilary Glow, and Katya Johanson, 'Knowing and Measuring the Audience Experience', in *Audience Experience* (Bristol, GB: Intellect Ltd., 2014), pp. 1–14 (p. 4).

to audience experience.²⁶ This index identifies 'four key attributes of the audience experience [...]: knowledge, risk, authenticity and collective engagement'.²⁷ The two that have most relevance for rural touring are collective engagement and risk. I will return to their notion of risk when discussing the rural touring distribution model. The concept of collective engagement, while applied to urban arts in their study, is clearly applicable to rural touring audiences and their reasons for attendance:

We use the term *collective engagement* as a way of describing the audience's sense that there are communal meanings; that they value the relationship to performers, the shared enjoyment with other audience members, and the sense of social inclusion that can accompany the experience of attending the live performing arts.²⁸

While Radbourne *et al* found that collective engagement varied in its importance depending on context and individuals in an urban setting, Matarasso highlights how significant socialising and community is to rural touring audiences:

People want the evening to go well because they know who has arranged it and how much effort is involved – and also because they have an idea of community life, which in fact may be the main reason why they have come out on this damp November night. They are interested in what their friends feel about an evening that will, in time, become another layer of the local memory that is part of what makes people feel they belong somewhere.²⁹

Alongside this description of community-building, it is of course important to acknowledge that a rural audience is not a homogenous group, and that there

²⁶ Radbourne, Glow, and Johanson, p. 10.

²⁷ Radbourne, Glow, and Johanson, p. 8.

²⁸ Radbourne, Glow, and Johanson, p. 9.

²⁹ Matarasso, *A Wider Horizon* p. 68.

is considerable variation in the experiences of audience members. As Freshwater warns:

The common tendency to refer to an audience as 'it' and, by extension, to think of this 'it' as a single entity, or a collective, risks obscuring the multiple contingencies of subjective response, context and environment which condition an individual's interpretation of a particular performance event.³⁰

However, Matarasso's view of rural touring audiences above is based on empirical research in 2004 and 2014, and his description matches my experience at the countless rural touring events I have attended since 2009. He also echoes the defining features of audiences for rural touring that I introduced earlier. A key distinction is the tendency for attendees at rural touring events to know most other people present.³¹ This differs from Bennett's description of audiences as usually being made up of small groups of people who know each other: '(t)heatre audiences [...] tend to consist of small groups of friends, family, and so on'.³² While this may be true for urban theatres, rural touring audiences are more likely to resemble an entire group who know each other. This is in part because there is a significant correlation between rural audiences and rural communities.

In his investigation into performance efficacy and community theatre, Kershaw describes how communities can be defined according to location and interest. He states that these 'communities of *location* and communities of *interest*' intersect, proposing that communities of interest lack geographical boundaries, while communities of location 'are created through networks of relationships formed by face-to-face interaction within a geographically bounded area'.³³ Rural audience members often attend events in the village

³⁰ Freshwater, p. 5.

³¹ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, pp. 11, 78; *A Wider Horizon*, pp. 66–68, 87.

³² Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, p. 165; see also Knowles, p. 74.

³³ Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*, pp. 30–31 (emphasis in original).

hall because they offer opportunities for the community to come together socially, as revealed by Matarasso's research into the sector: 'the audience [...] often come for reasons unconnected with an interest in the arts'; these may include 'the promoter's persuasion, [and] a commitment to supporting community events'.³⁴ The rural audience is motivated by, and involved in, community-building:

The idea that village shows both belong to the community, and help strengthen it, is reflected in a widely and strongly held belief among those involved [...]. What is meant by this is not just the literal gathering of people in the same space, but something more complex, to do with the processes by which a group of individuals come to see themselves as having a degree of common identity.³⁵

Indeed there are clear links between Matarasso's description of rural touring bringing communities together, Kershaw's communities of location and interest, and Woods' examination of the importance of community and belonging in rural life:

Belonging works in rural communities in two ways. First, it is exhibited in the sense of belonging that members of a community feel towards each other – that they share a common identity, participate in the same practices, support one another, and thus *belong to the community*. Second, belonging is also articulated in terms of a sense of belonging to place – that is the association of a particular community with a particular territorial expression.³⁶

In considering New Perspectives' rural touring, it is evident audiences are defined by membership of both a community of location relating to a village or town, and a community of interest in attending community events.

³⁴ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, pp. 11–12; 61.

³⁵ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, p. 18.

³⁶ Woods, p. 169, (emphasis in original).

Matarasso's findings about the reasons that people attend rural touring events suggest that the community of interest may in fact be defined by an interest in community, instead of, or as well as an artistic interest in theatrical experiences. While an urban audience may form a temporary community for the duration of their attendance at a performance, this community is likely to disperse, and therefore cease to exist, at the end of the performance event. In contrast, rural touring audience members frequently comprise a pre-existing community that continues after the touring company leaves.

Where does theatre take place?

Well, that was an interesting day! We arrived on time to find a playgroup in residence, who weren't due to finish until 3.30. Couldn't we work round them, they said? No. It was a small hall, with a pillar in the middle, which was another surprise. [...] The front door is also narrow, with a 90 degree turn in the porch. Taking into account the bar, toilets, fire exits, the pillar, and the floor being carpet round the edge, metal joint and tiles in the middle, there was insufficient space for the floor cloth and the back wall of the set. The ceiling was too low for the normal LX goalposts, so we relit with 1 IWB on short scaff poles from front centre... And it all worked beautifully.³⁷

The words above, from a stage manager, highlight the unique challenges companies like New Perspectives face when touring to rural venues. In considering the distinct nature of rural touring venues, the gap in existing theory is again revealed, as theatre happening in buildings in urban centres is the primary subject. In *Places of Performance* Marvin Carlson utilises a semiotic approach to interrogate the historical relationship between theatre and the locations where it happens, including those 'which may or may not be

³⁷ *The Honey Man* show report, 2012, New Perspectives archive, held at New Perspectives' offices.

traditional theatre buildings'.³⁸ His focus however is primarily on theatre taking place in urban contexts. He highlights the significance of a theatre building's location within a city, and notes the placement of many theatres as 'highly visible signs of civic dedication to the arts' that tend to be 'located in major squares of urban parks near the centers of large cities'.³⁹ He states:

[T]he physical matrices of the theatrical event – where it takes place within the community, what sort of structure houses it, and how that structure is organized and decorated – all contribute in important ways to the cultural processing of the event.⁴⁰

While this statement applies to rural touring, in his conclusion he describes the audience's reading of spaces in which theatre takes place with repeated reference to cities and urban contexts.⁴¹

In her study of space and performance, Gay McAuley similarly examines the physical matrices of theatre venues, and her work provides a useful taxonomy with which to interrogate some key differences between these spaces in rural and urban settings. McAuley builds on the work of Anne Ubersfeld to offer a framework for analysing space and theatre.⁴² She notes the limitations of a semiotic analysis of theatre space, given its literary origins and its focus on a textual approach rather than on practice and actual performance.⁴³ Her argument that theatre space constitutes part of an audience's experience of a performance parallels Bennett's analysis of production and reception. Bennett proposes two frames which surround a performance for an audience: an outer frame made up of 'all those cultural elements which create and inform the theatrical event', and an inner frame which 'contains the dramatic

³⁸ Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 2.

³⁹ Carlson, p. 10; 88.

⁴⁰ Carlson, p. 204.

⁴¹ Carlson, pp. 205–206.

⁴² McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p. 18.

⁴³ McAuley, pp. 6–12.

production in a particular playing space'.⁴⁴ Bennett's notion of frames also provides a useful lens for considering the differences between urban and rural places of performance.

McAuley proposes a 'taxonomy of spatial function' for the analysis of places of performance, stating that a building housing theatre may be a 'purpose built edifice used exclusively for theatrical performance or a building originally designed for some other purpose that has been adapted for theatre'.⁴⁵ She outlines categories of space including 'theatre space', 'audience space', and 'practitioner space'.⁴⁶ I apply these categories to village halls, and to New Perspectives' nearest building-based urban producing theatre, Nottingham Playhouse, to highlight the contrast between the spaces and frames in operation in the building-based urban model of theatre which tends to dominate academic discourse, and the rural touring sector and its venues.

McAuley describes theatre space as follows:

The building, as it exists within or outside the urban space, in relation to other buildings and the activities associated with them, the connotations of its past history, its architectural design, and the kind of access it invites or denies, are all part of the experience of theatre for both practitioners and spectators, and affect the way performance is experienced and interpreted.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Bennett, p. 139.

⁴⁵ McAuley, p. 24.

⁴⁶ McAuley, pp. 25–26; 29.

⁴⁷ McAuley, pp. 24–25.

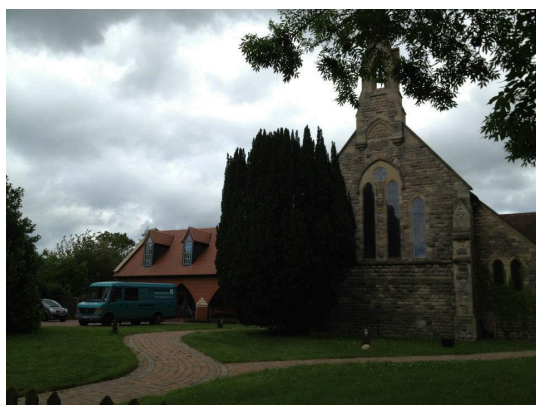


Figure 2.1 (top left) Nottingham Playhouse exterior with surrounding office buildings.

Figure 2.2 (top right) Nottingham Playhouse exterior and bar. Figure 2.3 (bottom left)

Thomas Cranmer Centre and adjoining church, Aslockton. Figure 2.4 (bottom right) Hulland

Ward Village Hall sign and surrounding fields. Photographs author's own.

Nottingham Playhouse is purpose built, and city-based. An audience member's experience is affected not only by its urban location, but also by the city area in which it is found, with the surrounding outer frame of office buildings, gated green spaces, bars, restaurants and what they connote. Village halls are located in the rural landscape and are framed by both countryside and other buildings including churches, houses and pubs. As multi-purpose spaces, they might within a week host theatre, a wedding reception, Zumba and Brownies, as well as accommodating meetings and serving as polling stations, thus inviting access to a range of different community members. They often belong to, or are in the guardianship of the community from which the audience is drawn. Rural touring theatre companies are outsiders visiting for one night only, and their audiences are

people with connections to and memories associated with the venue.⁴⁸ As Matarasso argues:

[T]he village hall is seen by most people (though not necessarily all) as a common space they are entitled to use – not something that can always be said for arts venues. [...] This is a space where, as one actor put it, the artists are the guests of the audience, the reverse of the situation in a theatre or arts centre. The character of the interaction is changed fundamentally by this shift, and the difference is felt on both sides.⁴⁹

Using McAuley's terms, I argue that this fundamental shift in the character of the interaction is defined by the access invited or denied by these particular theatre spaces: rural touring venues are accessed by members of the community for a wide range of activities independently of their use for theatre. Theatres such as Nottingham Playhouse may only be accessed by audiences when they are attending to see a play, and even then many areas of the building are not accessible to the audience. Just as social, cultural and psychological barriers may exist which prevent some people from attending theatre venues in cities, the village hall however is not necessarily seen as a community space for all village residents. There may be some who do not feel that the village hall is a welcome or familiar place, and who consequently do not attend New Perspectives productions.

McAuley's next category is audience space:

For the spectators theatre is a social event, their reception of the performance is part of a social experience, the areas within the theatre space to which they have access, which can be called *audience space*, facilitate (or discourage) types of social behaviour and social

⁴⁸ Bennett, p. 126.

⁴⁹ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, p. 68; 80.

interaction. The point of access to the building, the foyers, stairways, corridors, bars and restaurants, the box office, and of course the auditorium are all parts of this space, and the way we experience them has an unavoidable impact upon the meanings we take away with us.⁵⁰

The audience spaces of the purpose-built Nottingham Playhouse, unsurprisingly map closely onto McAuley's description: two bars, an outdoor patio, a box office, and several foyer spaces linked by corridors and stairways. These areas surround, but are separate from, the auditorium, containing the inner frame for any particular performance. These features are not part of the architecture of most village halls, though may be temporarily created: a trestle table by the entrance serves as a box office, a hatch to a kitchen space becomes a bar. Significantly, these usually take place within the same space that functions as the auditorium, creating a blurring between other types of audience spaces and the auditorium, and between the inner and outer frames of a performance.



Figure 2.5 Cast bar at Nottingham Playhouse. Figure 2.6 bar inside main hall, Hulland Ward Village Hall. Photographs author's own.

Bennett notes that the work of an audience takes place within such frames, and 'perhaps most importantly, at their points of intersection'.⁵¹

⁵⁰ McAuley, pp. 25–26 (emphasis in original).

⁵¹ Bennett, p. 149.

It is the interactive relations between audience and stage, spectator and spectator which constitute production and reception, and which cause the inner and outer frames to converge for the creation of a particular experience.⁵²

In the context of rural touring venues however, this intersection and convergence of inner and outer frames is enacted spatially, as well as in the work of the audience, as the hall serves as foyer, box office, bar and auditorium.

While some village halls have stages, New Perspectives, like most rural touring companies, either tours staging, or performs on floor level.⁵³ As performances therefore tend to lack an architectural division between auditorium and stage, there is also a blurring between McAuley's audience space and practitioner space. She notes that practitioner space is the least examined of her categories. She states:

What I will call *practitioner space* includes the stage door access, the whole backstage area with its dressing rooms, its hierarchy of comfort and discomfort, green room, corridors and stairways, and the stage itself.⁵⁴

McAuley emphasises that practitioner space is typically separate from audience space, however this is rarely the case in rural touring venues.⁵⁵ This is evident in Kershaw's description of *The Poacher* (1980-1981, touring), which toured the East Midlands: '[i]n village venues, the familiar rural setting reinforces the intimacy of the general layout, undermining any sense of

⁵² Bennett, p. 149.

⁵³ This is in order to provide consistency on a tour to venues whose stages vary in width, depth and height. By requesting a 5m x 5m flat playing space directors, designers and production managers are able to create productions that are suitable for touring into venues of different shapes and sizes.

⁵⁴ McAuley, p. 26 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁵ McAuley, p. 26.

separation between stage and audience’.⁵⁶ In the case of most rural touring venues, there is no fixed seating or proscenium arch, hence the meaning or ideology communicated by these ‘formal’ frames in a theatre building is either absent or different. New Perspectives may choose to arrange staging and seating differently as part of the frame for any touring production, however this is still constructed in a venue within which theatre, audience and practitioner space are configured very differently from the urban equivalents.



Figure 2.7 *Entertaining Angels* staged on floor level with raised staging as part of design.
Photograph Pamela Raith.

Backstage practitioner space reveals further differences. Members of the public do not have access to backstage areas at Nottingham Playhouse. This highlights the separation and inaccessibility of practitioner space in this urban theatre: there is a boundary in operation. In village halls, this boundary does not exist permanently within the architecture of the building. Along with

⁵⁶ Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 159. While Kershaw's comments about village halls here are applicable to village halls as contemporary rural touring place of performance, this production is an example of versions of rural theatre which, while present in the theory, represent historic models of touring which do not resemble the current rural touring sector in their purpose or distribution model.

temporary staging, backstage practitioner space may be temporarily created for a performance: a smaller meeting room becomes a dressing room, flats and set create backstage and/or wing spaces. The blurring of backstage practitioner space and audience space can be seen most clearly when considering toilets. Whichever ways rural touring companies find to occupy separate spaces from the audience within a village hall, actors and audience will inevitably share toilet facilities, so that actors, sometimes in costume, queue alongside members of the audience during an interval. A rural touring audience's proximity to these aspects of practitioner space are part of a very different outer performance frame than that in operation in most urban theatre buildings.

Moving from audience experience to company experience, it is clear from the show report quoted earlier and the anecdote below that staging theatre in non-theatre spaces presents particular challenges for rural touring companies. A degree of flexibility and adaptability is required.

Jeremy Rowe, a colleague who has stage-managed many tours for New Perspectives (including Entertaining Angels) shared a memory of a particularly small village hall, where the only place for him to set up the lighting and sound operating desk was in the serving hatch between main hall and kitchen. The promoter, intending to serve a meal after the performance and with no space for anyone else in the kitchen, gave him a list of tasks and timings for the meal. Jeremy described how, in trying to simultaneously operate lighting and sound cues and turn sausages, he ended up pushing the sound desk 'go' button with kitchen tongs.⁵⁷

While stage managers multi-tasking as chefs may be unusual, New Perspectives consistently works with creative and production teams to ensure that shows are designed and lit in order to function in non-theatre venues.

⁵⁷ This anecdote is recounted here with Jeremy Rowe's permission.

The company tour technical kit, including lanterns, lighting stands, dimmers, speakers and lighting and sound desks. Touring shows have previously utilised sets which can expand and contract depending on hall size.⁵⁸



Figure 2.8 *Entertaining Angels* set. Juliet Shillingford designed the three circular staging sections so that they could overlap to a greater or lesser extent depending on venue size. Photograph Pamela Raith.

In my experience, however, it is not uncommon to arrive at a hall for the first time and discover a pillar in the middle of the space, or a narrow entrance that the promoter has not thought to mention. Volunteer promoters may not realise the implications of these features for a theatre company in the way a member of technical staff at a theatre venue would.

All rural touring companies are faced with the challenges of staging work in non-theatre spaces. Kirstie Davis, Artistic Director of Forest Forge, notes that

⁵⁸ For example, the sets created for *The Honey Man* (2012) and *Entertaining Angels* (2013), both designed by Juliet Shillingford, each contained several separate staging rostra which could be placed alongside each other, or overlap each other to various degrees depending on the space available.

in her experience this often leads to an emphasis on the quality of writing and acting:

[T]he sets are usually quite non-naturalistic because they have to take us to a variety of places, and also you're in a very naturalistic setting, so why would you put a village hall in the village hall? [...] I think that's why the actors and the words become by far the most important thing, because it has to hold up in whatever space I'm taking it into.⁵⁹

Elizabeth Freestone, Artistic Director of Pentabus, also discusses how rural touring companies are faced with a choice between embracing either the challenge of transforming a village hall or the domesticity and familiarity of the setting for the audience. She explains that Pentabus have developed a reputation amongst audiences for transforming familiar spaces:

We try to make choices about how we set up the hall that mean that it feels very different. Of course when you're going into a village hall you're going into a space that for the majority of the audience is a familiar space, they've had a fortieth birthday party or baby yoga or a council meeting [...] in that space. So one of the very simple things we try and do is make the familiar feel unfamiliar. And we might do that by bringing the audience in through a different door for example, or we've put in fake walls before.⁶⁰

In creating the feeling of unfamiliar space, Pentabus are manipulating both inner and outer frames of the performance. By disguising the architecture of a venue so that it is no longer recognisable, they bring an audience's theatre-going experience closer to that within in an urban theatre building that does not invite access for non-theatre purposes.

⁵⁹ Kirstie Davis, 'Interview with Kirstie Davis of Forest Forge', Skype (14th September 2015).

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Freestone, 'Interview with Elizabeth Freestone of Pentabus', Ludlow, Shropshire (15th September 2015).

How is theatre produced?

Within the rural touring sector, the model of touring is one in which productions normally take place in different locations every night, with set and lighting transported to each venue. This is distinct from theatre productions which open in building-based theatres and are performed in the same venue every night, or those which transfer to a small number of venues for week-long runs after an initial period in one theatre. In my experience working within and outside of the rural touring sector, touring is an increasingly common model for theatre companies making work in this country, as evidenced by ACE's provision of funding and networks. The Strategic Touring Fund was established in 2011, and awarded £34 million in grants to fund touring work in its first funding cycle, according to a 2015 evaluation report.⁶¹ In 2015 ACE also launched and funded a 'Regional Touring Network', bringing together '[n]ine regional venues [...] in a three-year project that aims to deliver a legacy of sustainable theatre touring'.⁶²

Some theory discussed here was published long before these developments. Nevertheless, theory that takes urban building-based theatre as its primary subject not only relegates the rural to the peripheries, it also marginalises touring as a model for producing and staging theatre, creating a double gap in the case of rural touring. As David Overend notes in his article about a 2013 international tour, '(t)raditional scholarship tends to be limited to only one iteration of an individual performance, which is all too easily considered exemplary of increasingly far-reaching and diverse touring schedules'.⁶³

⁶¹ Annabel Jackson Associated Ltd, *STRATEGIC TOURING PROGRAMME: FINAL EVALUATION REPORT TO ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND*, 2015, p. 4 <www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ST_Evaluation_Report_final_small.pdf> [accessed 6 May 2016].

⁶² Christy Romer, 'ACE Launches The Regional Touring Network with £800k Grant', *Arts Professional*, 2015 <www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/ace-launches-regional-touring-network-ps800k-grant> [accessed 19 July 2015].

⁶³ David Overend, 'Dramaturgies of Mobility: On the Road with Rob Drummond's Bullet Catch', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 35.1 (2015), 36–51. While Overend notes the lack of critical attention paid to touring, he focuses on an international tour with up to

Bennett writes in 1997 that 'taking a production on tour is increasingly an almost prohibitively expensive option' when discussing the life of productions, considering touring a secondary outing for a play produced by a building-based theatre. She overlooks companies for whom touring is the primary form of work.⁶⁴ In the case of contemporary UK theatre, this view of touring is no longer applicable.

Knowles refers to productions that tour, and to 'nomadic companies' who face problems as a result of a lack of permanent space in which to work.⁶⁵ Again, his position does not allow for companies who have a base, are not nomadic and who make work primarily for touring. John McGrath references touring theatre (including his company, 7:84 Scotland) and rural settings in his 1979 talks on working class theatre and audience, but as part of an ideological attempt to engage working class theatre audiences regarding particular social and political issues of the time.⁶⁶ Recent writers who refer to touring – for example Fiona Wilkie and Kirsty Sedgman in their discussions of the work of National Theatre Wales and Paula Śledzińska in her examination of National Theatre Scotland – do so in discussions where touring is not the main focus.⁶⁷

Kershaw's study of community theatre pre-dates the contemporary ecology of UK theatre touring, however he includes a diagram (Figure 2.9 below) to clarify some of the different approaches involved.

fourteen performances in each venue, and the production being reworked for each location. As such, many of his observations are not applicable to rural touring.

⁶⁴ Bennett, p. 116.

⁶⁵ Knowles, p. 91.

⁶⁶ John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form*, Second Edition (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996).

⁶⁷ Fiona Wilkie, 'Site-Specific Performance and the Mobility Turn', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22.2 (2012), 203–12; Kirsty Sedgman, *Locating the Audience: How People Found Value in National Theatre Wales* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016); Paula Śledzińska, 'Revisiting the Other: National Theatre of Scotland and the Mythologization of the Highlands and Islands', *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 39.1 (2015), 118–41. Wilkie's article focuses on mobility and site-specificity, Sedgman's work is an empirical analysis of the audience experience of two different (non-touring) NTW productions, and Śledzińska concentrates on the mythologisation and representation of the Gaidhealtachd region.

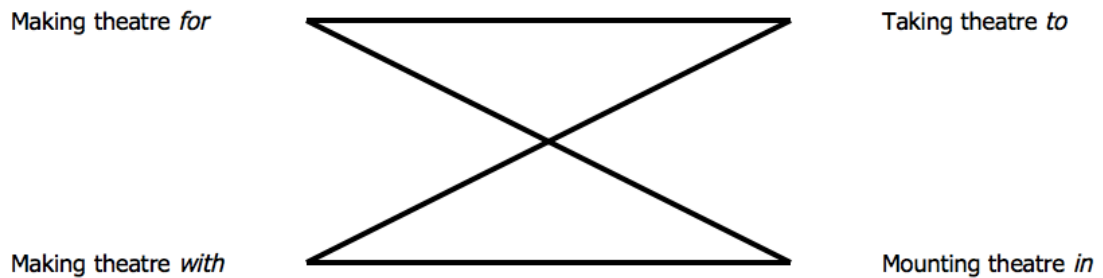


Figure 2.9 Kershaw's diagram showing '[t]he range of relationships between company and community'.⁶⁸

He notes that the community theatre he discusses is principally situated on the bottom line of this diagram. New Perspectives' rural touring sits on the top line of the diagram: a professional theatre company making theatre for audiences, and then taking that theatre to the locations where those audiences are based. This again highlights how the rural touring distribution model is not represented within existing theory. For Kershaw's diagram to be accurate it is necessary to incorporate the touring schemes and volunteer promoters essential to the process by which New Perspectives takes theatre to rural audiences, as in Figure 2.10.

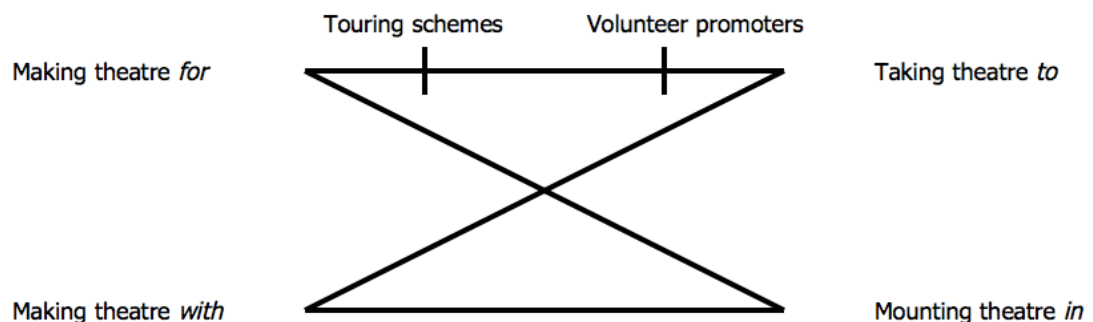


Figure 2.10 Diagram of rural touring company/community relationship.

Rural touring volunteer promoters may be absent from theoretical discourse, but their work is pivotal for those working within the field:

[Forest Forge] have some amazing promoters who will absolutely get us an audience regardless, and they will equally be vocal if they don't

⁶⁸ Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*, p. 244.

like something. [...] They will go out of their way to knock on every single door in their village to get us an audience.⁶⁹

It's largely voluntary and is about people having a passion for something and being producers at the most instinctive level, making things happen that they believe are right with often not a great deal of support or training or education, but because they believe in it. [...] Actually the heart of the whole thing is thousands and thousands of people across the whole country who believe that having an artistic experience [...] in their village, is important enough to do something about. And they don't get anything for it.⁷⁰

Volunteer promoters perform many of the same functions as paid staff in programming, marketing, box office, technical and front of house roles in urban theatres and arts centres. As independent volunteers, however, their programming and marketing choices are not governed by the artistic ethos or mission statement of a theatre organisation. Rural touring programming choices and marketing strategies are therefore in the hands of a diverse group of individuals, each of whom may be guided by an equally diverse range of reasons for selecting work. This, and the layer created by touring schemes, can challenge companies like New Perspectives. While a building-based producing house can communicate directly with audience members about work they are programming and creating, the relationship between New Perspectives and rural audiences is initially mediated both by touring schemes and volunteer promoters. The company is reliant first on the touring scheme to select and offer a production, and then on promoters choosing to book it, all before audience members decide whether to see it.

New Perspectives rely on touring schemes to communicate the desired messages about the production to promoters. Once a production has been

⁶⁹ Davis, interview (14th September 2015).

⁷⁰ Collier, interview (23rd September 2015).

programmed, New Perspectives rely on promoters communicating these desired messages to potential audiences. While the company works hard to ensure this, audience members may still be disappointed that a production did not meet their expectations because a promoter has advertised it as something it was not. New Perspectives' Production Manager Mandy Ivory-Castile shared this example:

*A promoter decided that they did not like the company's posters for The Long Way Home in 2004, and so designed and displayed her own. These advertised the production as a show for children and families. Audiences came expecting a gentle, comic show suitable for children, rather than a drama, and were consequently surprised by the actual content of the show.*⁷¹

Bennett identifies selection as an important part of the relationship between audiences and productions, describing how availability, economics, geography and marketing all 'clearly apply, albeit in different ways, both to those producing and to those attending theatre'.⁷² In the context of a building based producing house this is simpler: a theatre selects a production to produce and markets it, and then audience members decide whether or not to come. With rural touring, there are additional stages, all affecting the relationship between New Perspectives and its audiences.

Matarasso touches on the idea, introduced in the previous chapter, that promoters volunteer for community as well as artistic reasons: 'becoming involved in rural touring and local arts activity often springs from a commitment to community, rather than a dedication to the arts'.⁷³ Indeed, for Matarasso, this aspect 'may be its most important quality', empowering promoters and rural communities:

⁷¹ This anecdote was shared with me in conversation in the New Perspectives office, and is recounted here with permission.

⁷² Bennett, p. 124.

⁷³ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, p. 29.

The rural touring approach enables people to shape the artistic life of their community and shows how creative decisions can be made by people working together.⁷⁴

Volunteer promoters programme work for their own community, often with the goal of bringing the community together, and this has an impact on their selection of work. In an urban theatre or arts centre, programming a piece of work which is unpopular – because it is controversial or judged to be lacking in taste or quality – can result in a disgruntled audience who do not return, and financial consequences from lost future ticket sales. It is unlikely however that the person programming the work will meet members of that audience. Here the notion of risk highlighted by Radbourne *et al* is particularly relevant to the rural touring sector and its volunteer promoters.

A rural promoter is surrounded by their audience: they are neighbours and often friends. This means both financial and social capital are at stake. Financial risk is significant. Village hall committees need to break even by balancing the cost of a show (subsidised by the touring scheme) with ticket prices, attendance, hall capacity, and income from food, drinks and raffle tickets. I believe however that it is the risk of losing of social capital, unique to this model, which has a greater impact on the choices made by promoters when selecting work. This view is echoed by other rural touring practitioners:

Our promoters who only book things once or twice a year and that's the only thing they have in their village hall would not book it [a show about suicide and depression] because they would be so worried about upsetting someone.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Matarasso, *A Wider Horizon*, p. 3.

⁷⁵ Karen Kidman, 'Interview with Karen Kidman of CAE', Skype (22nd September 2015).

A promoter is unlikely to want to put a group of people who are close friends and colleagues through an experience that they feel is going to be unnecessarily challenging.⁷⁶

I went to a [touring scheme] meeting this week and they were offering their village hall promoters a new deal which is basically that [they] were saying “we’ll give you a guarantee against loss, any loss at all, we’ll soak all of it up”. And I was there going [...] “that’s amazing, everyone’s going to take loads more risk on the programming, that’s really brilliant”. And, to a man, the village hall promoters all said [...] “but it’s about our reputation, it’s not about the money in that way”.⁷⁷

Staff members responsible for programming and selling a piece of work at an urban theatre may be anonymous to their audience, however a rural promoter who programmes an unsuccessful piece of work is likely to come face to face on a daily basis with the audience members whose doors they knocked on or houses they telephoned to sell tickets. This notion of social capital and its place in the rural touring distribution model is absent from the theory because it is unique to the volunteer promoters who, as we have seen, are also missing. Although Radbourne *et al* identify risk as a ‘key attribute’ in their Arts Audience Experience Index, there is a significant difference between the risk experienced by audiences, and that encountered by rural promoters. Radbourne *et al* present the ‘various forms of risk that performing arts audiences experience’ under three headings:

Economic risk (Have I wasted my money?)

Psychological risk (Will I feel okay about the experience?)

Social risk (Will I fit in?).⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Collier, interview (23rd September 2015).

⁷⁷ Freestone, interview (15th September 2015).

⁷⁸ Radbourne, Glow, and Johanson, p. 8.

The risk for rural touring promoters is different, but can be presented similarly:

Economic risk (Will the village hall make a loss?)

Psychological risk (Will my audience/community feel okay about the experience?)

Social risk (How will my community feel about me if I programme something they do not like?)

The risks faced by rural promoters are particularly pertinent when considering work that diverges in form from the conventional model for a rural touring show. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the reasons for New Perspectives to explore formally innovative and experimental work, and explain the selection of interactivity and site-specificity as the two areas of focus for my practical research.

Investigating formally innovative work for rural touring

I have highlighted how my research focus emerged from conversations with New Perspectives' previous artistic director about both my personal interest in formally innovative work and New Perspectives' ambition to be a sector leader. The rural touring sector is founded on the principle of equality of access to the arts. It is clear to me however that ensuring arts experiences are geographically accessible to rural areas is not enough to meet this aim. It is vital to also examine the range of different arts experiences on offer. Prior to beginning this research, living in a city and visiting festivals like the Edinburgh Fringe, I was aware I had access to a range of theatre which experimented with form. The theatre I was seeing in a rural touring context however, tended to be – like *Entertaining Angels* – conventional in form. While, as noted, the leadership and direction of New Perspectives has altered since the conversations I had with Buckroyd from which this PhD originated,

both McNamara and Tye have still expressed a desire for the company to explore different forms of work:

Everything in our programme now is committed to exploring and pushing things [...] to greater and lesser extents, but everything is. I can't think of a single thing coming up where I feel like "Put your feet up, I know where this is going to go".⁷⁹

During conversations at the outset of my research, McNamara communicated on several occasions his interest in challenging existing perceptions about what rural touring theatre could be, in other words, challenging the existing notion of a conventional rural touring production. Freestone's vision for Pentabus echoes this:

What we've always believed is that we should be part of the ecology that is always questioning what theatre is, what it can be, who it's for, what form it can take. And not to assume some kind of inherent conservatism about the audience just because they live in villages [...] That doesn't necessarily mean that they're not aware of and intrigued by and part of a wider arts ecology.⁸⁰

Tye's view that exploring alternative forms for work is also linked to audience engagement and its significance for funders confirms the emphasis placed on engagement highlighted by Radbourne *et al.* She states:

Across the sector we're all actively encouraged all the time to deepen engagement. [...] What [is possible] beyond repeat attendance to a company's work? [...] So I suppose in terms of deepening engagement, it's looking at what form of relationship audience members have with the company beyond the performance. [...] Is

⁷⁹ McNamara, 'Interview with Jack McNamara and Sally-Anne Tye', New Perspectives, Nottingham (24th October 2014).

⁸⁰ Freestone, interview, (15th September 2015).

there an opportunity to look at how a relationship can be deepened through the form, that isn't just a performance arriving in a village, being delivered, and then leaving again? If there are different forms that can be used that help [create] a stronger affinity or connection with a particular company?⁸¹

While benefits such as challenging expectations and audience engagement may result from creating formally innovative work, it is necessary to consider the risks of presenting work that departs from the conventional form familiar to promoters and audiences. These result from the unique features of rural touring, in particular the make up of audiences, the reasons they attend and the role of promoters as members of the audience community.

As well as embracing New Perspectives' reasons for creating formally innovative theatre for rural touring, it is essential to examine the experience and expectations of rural audiences. Bennett draws on literary theory and particularly Jauss' concept of a 'horizon of expectations' in her framework for analysing theatre audiences. Writing in 1982, literary theorist Jauss advocated for a shift in focus in literary criticism in order to pay more attention to the reader, as situated in history.⁸² He coined the term 'horizon of expectations' to describe the cultural expectations and assumptions of readers which could change over time.⁸³ Bennett utilises the term as a frame through which to examine theatre audiences, and the cultural and ideological preconceptions and experience they bring, and which inform their reception and interpretation of a performance:

Whatever the nature of the performance, it is clear that established cultural markers are important in pre-activating a certain anticipation, a horizon of expectations, in the audience drawn to any particular event. Multiple horizons of expectations are bound to exist within any culture

⁸¹ Tye, interview, (24th October 2014).

⁸² Bennett, p. 88.

⁸³ Bennett, p. 90.

and these are, always, open to renegotiation before, during, and after the theatrical performance. The relationship then between culture and the idea of the theatrical event is one that is necessarily flexible and inevitably rewritten on a daily basis.⁸⁴

Throughout this thesis I use 'horizon of expectations' as a way of considering the cultural and ideological assumptions and expectations that rural audience members may bring to their experiences of theatre performances, and ways in which a rural audience member's horizons of expectations may differ from that of an urban audience member. One significant factor is the different types of performance to which they have access. Freestone notes:

I think that's about geography, and your particular touring scheme, and [...] where other work has been, and what you've seen, and are other innovative companies touring in your area? [...] I think there's a whole range of reasons which mean that people are exposed or not exposed to different kinds of work.⁸⁵

As Freestone describes, a rural touring audience's horizon of expectations is shaped not only by their previous experience of theatre, but also by the reasons they attend rural touring performances. These components form part of what Robinson terms 'the theatrical social culture – the intertheatrical mesh – out of which the individual spectator [emerges]'.⁸⁶ While the theatrical social culture accessible to rural audience members may include formally innovative work in urban or festival contexts, I argue that a rural touring audience's horizon of expectations for a performance in their village hall is shaped by the type of theatre conventionally staged there, and the fact that they attend at least in part to socialise within a known community.

⁸⁴ Bennett, p. 114.

⁸⁵ Freestone, interview, (15th September 2015).

⁸⁶ Joanne Robinson, 'Mapping Performance Culture: Locating the Spectator in Theatre History', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 31.1 (2004), 3–17 (p. 14).

As Bennett notes, it is possible for an audience's horizon of expectations to change: '[it] is never fixed and is always tested by, among other things, the range of theatre available, the play, and the particular production'.⁸⁷ Formally innovative work can therefore alter the rural touring audiences' horizons of expectations. I argue however that it is essential to approach this possible testing or altering of horizons of expectations with an understanding of and respect for how the rural touring sector operates and the risks highlighted above. I therefore decided to take the unique features of rural touring as my research starting points, and through them invoke both the familiar and the unfamiliar in my pilot performances. I sought to avoid a patronising approach whereby existing models of formal innovation were taken from urban contexts and parachuted into rural settings. Such an approach would risk perpetuating the trope of the rural as poor substitute for, or less progressive and advanced than, the urban. While my desire to explore formal innovation for rural touring does stem in part from an observation of such work happening in urban contexts, in selecting areas to explore I embraced a relational approach to the urban/rural binary, examining how unique features of rural touring mapped onto trends for formal innovation happening in non-rural contexts.

When considering the unique nature of rural touring audiences, I was interested in how trends for interactive theatre happening in non-rural contexts related to the reasons people in rural communities attend events in the village hall, and the unique make up of the audience as an existing community. This led to the question: What would interactive theatre created specifically for rural touring look like? When contemplating the unique nature of rural touring places of performance, I wanted to interrogate how trends for site-specific theatre happening outside the rural touring sector related to the use of multi-use, non-theatre community spaces in the rural landscape, often owned by and/or familiar to audience members, as venues for rural touring. This led to a second question: What would site-specific work created specifically for rural touring look like? These two questions led inevitably to a

⁸⁷ Bennett, p. 98.

third: How does the rural touring distribution model, with its reliance on touring schemes and volunteer promoters, offer challenges or advantages for the introduction of formally innovative work? I presented these areas of investigation to McNamara and Tye as having the potential to meet their aims to challenge expectations and perceptions surrounding rural touring and to discover new ways to engage with rural audiences and communities.

In the following four chapters I consider these questions and present the context for and findings of the two pilot performances I created for my research. I further interrogate the ways in which my research addresses gaps in existing scholarship by examining theoretical models specifically relating to interactivity and site-specificity.

CHAPTER 3

Imagining interactivity for rural touring

What we've seen over the last ten years are young companies looking at how they might make theatre in entirely different contexts, and that means theatre that often completely smashes the fourth wall, which is interactive, which is immersive, and which has a very different relationship with its audience than the traditional theatre-going experience where you go into the theatre, you sit in rows in the dark, and someone does theatre to you.¹

Watching a performance in the dark cocoon of an arts centre can be a powerful experience as all the venue's technical resources focus the audience's attention on the stage. Seeing the same show in a hall that also serves for basketball and wedding receptions is very different. The seats may not be very comfortable, the sightlines less than ideal, and the blackout patchy. But such shortcomings are balanced by the closeness between performers and audience, and the shared experience it nurtures.²

Introduction

In this chapter I consider interactivity and rural touring. My opening quotes – the first from Lyn Gardner, speaking as part of a BBC Radio Four programme about interactive theatre, and the second from Matarasso – serve as a reminder of the ways in which rural touring already diverges from what is seen as a 'traditional', or conventional, model of theatre happening in urban contexts. Because rural touring is largely absent from theoretical discourse,

¹ *Guardian* theatre critic Lyn Gardner, speaking as part of 'It's Fun, But Is It Theatre?' (BBC Radio 4, 4 January 2013) <www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01j5fwn> [accessed 5 March 2014].

²² Matarasso, *A Wider Horizon*, pp. 66–68.

and because it differs from theatre in non-rural contexts in significant ways, it cannot be assumed that theory about interactive theatre is transferrable or applicable. In this chapter and the next I examine how interactivity works in a rural touring context, and New Perspectives' reasons for exploring this area of formally innovative practice. Here, I establish the context for my practical research, discussing what New Perspectives' leadership team hopes to achieve by creating interactive work, and examining existing theory and practice. In so doing I interrogate how contemporary and historical interactive work and theoretical frameworks for analysing it relate to rural touring's unique audiences, places of performance and distribution model. I argue that these unique features of rural touring both give rise to opportunities to experiment with interactivity and necessitate different practical and theoretical approaches.

'Interactivity' in theatre is a potentially vast concept to analyse, covering a broad spectrum of different forms of work. I begin by setting out the focus of my enquiry, the terms I use, and the parameters of the work I have chosen to include in my discussion. I then discuss the reasons to create interactive theatre that have emerged from my conversations with New Perspectives, and from my own research and experience in the sector. I draw on examples of work from non-rural contexts, and consider each in light of the unique audiences, places of performance and distribution model of rural touring. I examine how interactivity works in different performances: what type of interaction is invited, and how the invitation to interact is made. Based on these analyses, I draw conclusions about how interactivity might work in a rural touring context. These discussions form the basis of the research questions, parameters and design for my first practical pilot, the subject of my fourth chapter.

Defining key terms and parameters

Theatre critics and academic scholars have noted a recent increase in interactive work and its popularity. For example, Freshwater states that 'contemporary British performance [...] has seen an extraordinary increase in the use of audience participation since the turn of the millennium'.³ This is not to say that contemporary interactive work does not bear similarities to, or draw influence from previous periods of theatre history, including the avant-garde movement, environmental theatre, performance and live art, as well as earlier forms including Greek and Medieval theatre.⁴ Both current and historical work highlight the differing ways in which terms such as 'interactive', 'audience participation', 'co-authored' and 'immersive' are applied by theatre makers and theorists. These differing applications of terms both historically and contemporaneously illustrate that the definitions of such terms are not fixed or uncontested. Indeed, it is neither possible nor appropriate to impose one definition of such a term across scholarly and industry use. Theatre companies, marketing departments and theatre scholars are writing for different audiences, and the connotations of terms like 'interactive' are different for academic theorists, theatre professionals and ticket-buying audiences.⁵ Just as Josephine Machon highlights the difficulties of defining the term 'immersive' given the broad range of such work and the tendency for definitions to shift and change, I acknowledge my use of 'interactive' in this

³ Freshwater, *Theatre and Audience*, p. 4; see also Sophie Nield, 'The Rise of the Character Named Spectator', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18.4 (2008), 531–35; Matthew Reason, 'Participations on Participation: Researching the "active" Theatre Audience', *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 12.1 (2015), 271–80; Astrid Breel, 'Audience Agency in Participatory Performance: A Methodology for Examining Aesthetic Experience', *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 12.1 (2015), 368–87; Matthew Reason and Kirsty Sedgman, 'Editors' Introduction: Themed Section on Theatre Audiences', *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 12.1 (2015), 117–22; Dennis Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴ See for example Steve Nelson, 'Redecorating the Fourth Wall: Environmental Theatre Today', *TDR (1988-)*, 33 (1989), 72–94; re Greek theatre: Bennett *Theatre Audiences*, p. 3; re Medieval theatre: Peter Ramey, 'The Audience-Interactive Games of the Middle English Religious Drama', *Comparative Drama*, 47 (2013), 55–83.

⁵ Of course, the boundaries between the roles suggested here are in reality porous, and many people fit into more than one.

chapter as one of a number of possible applications of a term whose definition is subject to shifts and changes.⁶ Machon states that her purpose is to 'embrace the fuzziness around the edges in engaging in the debate about what immersive theatre is'; and to 'give it a name in order to interrogate and celebrate the range of work the term embraces'.⁷ I too interrogate interactive theatre while drawing attention to its status as a category with 'fuzzy edges'.

I make a key distinction between theatre that involves the audience in the process of creation prior to a scheduled performance, and theatre in which the audience is given a more active role in the end product. Astrid Breel makes a similar distinction between audience involvement in 'processes' and 'outcomes' in her recent analysis of audience agency:

Performances with a participatory process involve the participants in the creation of the work and tend to reside within the socially engaged or applied sphere. [...] In contrast, performances that offer participation in the outcome are constructed by the artist, but need the audience to execute the work fully. Here, participants respond with individual behaviour whilst the performance as a whole remains within the original parameters established by the artist.⁸

My focus is on the second of Breel's two categories, however I utilise terms differently: I use participatory/participation to refer to her first category, and interactive/interactivity to refer to the second. While there are similarities between these two types of practice, the former frequently comes under the heading of participatory or community arts: projects where members of a community of location or interest participate in the processes of writing, devising, directing and acting in performances that often explore the history of the community involved, and where involvement in the work is its primary

⁶ Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. xvi–xviii.

⁷ Machon, *Immersive Theatres*, p. xviii.

⁸ Breel, p. 369.

value.⁹ Since participatory and community art is an existing category of practice, often taking place in rural settings, and since there is the potential for confusion between this and rural touring (as previously noted), I use the term interactivity rather than participation to refer to the work I examine here. This distinction in terminology and practice is further illustrated using examples of productions in Figure 3.1 below.

	Participatory project	Interactive theatre
Production	<i>The Last Inspector</i> (2009, Nottingham), Hanby and Barrett	<i>A Small Town Anywhere</i> (2009-2012, London), Coney
Process	Members of a school community worked with professionals from the company to research stories about the school. The play was then written by a member of the company.	The professional theatre company created the performance. Audience members were invited to attend/take part in scratch performances to test out the interactive procedures during the development of the show.
Product	The production was performed by a cast made up of professionals and members of the school community.	Audience members were invited to create their own roles prior to the production, and played these roles during the performance. Members of the company facilitated the production, giving prompts and information for the audience to respond to in role.

Figure 3.1 Example of participatory project and interactive theatre¹⁰

While the reasons for creating participatory and community work may at times overlap with the reasons for creating interactive work, I view it as

⁹ Notable examples of this work include the work of Ann Jellicoe's Colway Theatre Trust, Living Stage Theatre Company and Bread and Puppet; a contemporary regional example is Excavate (formerly Hanby and Barrett). Historically, a core strand of New Perspectives' work (prior to the artistic directorship of Buckroyd and subsequent focus on the current rural touring model) consisted of participatory and community arts projects across the rural East Midlands.

¹⁰ 'Hanby and Barrett Website' <www.hanbyandbarrett.com> [accessed 4 May 2014]; 'Coney Website' <<http://coneyhq.org>> [accessed 17 January 2014]; *Lifting the Curtain: Contemporary Theatre Requires an Audience That Co-Authors the Event* <www.theargumentroom.net/argument_room.aspx> [accessed 3 March 2013].

distinct from interactive theatre. Plans to create these kinds of participatory and community projects are not part of New Perspectives' current aims, nor part of the rural touring distribution model, therefore I have not included them in my discussion.

What is meant by interactive in the context of theatre is not always clear: who is interacting, with whom or what, and to what end. For the purposes of my research, a conventional performance is one in which an audience group all attend a theatre space at the same time, are seated in a specific area which is separate from the performance area, and in which their behaviour does not significantly affect the outcome of the performance on stage. In contrast, interactive theatre may include audience members playing a fictional role in the drama, sharing the performance space with the company and being given the freedom to explore, place themselves in close proximity to performers and choose their own viewing angles or strategies, and making decisions as individuals or collective groups which determine the outcome of the performance.

I have discussed the New Perspectives show *Entertaining Angels* (2013) as an example of a conventional rural touring performance. While the venue, audience and audience reactions were different for each performance, dramaturgically the piece ended the same way for the characters on stage each night, and audience members were not invited or expected to actively interact with characters, take on roles, or occupy the performance space. This is not to say however that these audiences were passive.

The totally passive audience is a figment of the imagination, a practical impossibility; and, as any actor will tell you, the reactions of audiences influence the nature of a performance.¹¹

¹¹ Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*, p. 16.

Of course, as Kershaw makes clear, audiences are always active in their reception, and their receptive activity can affect a performance. Laughter, clapping, and walk-outs do affect the performers on stage, but in conventional performances the narrative or plot will end the same way no matter how the audience behaves. By referring to performances such as *Entertaining Angels* as conventional I am not discounting the active nature of theatre spectatorship, or the diversity of responses contained in a group of audience members. The central focus of my research however is formal innovation, and therefore my attention here is on work where the rural touring audience is active and involved in ways that break with, or challenge convention.

In considering the notion of convention, I acknowledge the involvement of the audience in forms like pantomime or improvised comedy. The established nature of these types of performances means that the type of audience involvement expected is contained within the existing horizon of expectations for most audience members. In these forms of performance, familiar to urban and rural audiences alike, audience members may join in with song and dance routines, or get up on stage to take part in comedy sketches. However, in both of these examples, there remains within the event a divide between audience and performance, often represented by a physical divide between performance space/stage and audience space/auditorium, and extending to the different expectations of roles and behaviour of audience and performers. Machon articulates this divide in her description of conventional theatre:

[R]ules and conventions can be understood to be in place in any spectatorial, theatre production where the audience/actor (us/them) relationship is defined by the delineation of space (auditorium/stage) and role (static-passive observer/active-moving performer).¹²

¹² Machon, *Immersive Theatres*, p. 27.

McAuley's categories of space can be applied here too. Machon distinguishes between the actors who are actively performing on the stage (practitioner space), and the seated audience observing the action in the auditorium (audience space). In pantomime, improvised comedy and other similar forms, occasionally audience members are invited to cross this divide, travelling from the audience space/auditorium to the practitioner space/stage, and/or moving from a static-passive observer role to an active-moving performer role. Audience members at a pantomime may be invited to physically enter the ludic space and take part on stage. At an improvised comedy performance, the invitation may be to cross a dramaturgical divide when a suggestion provided by an audience member is incorporated by the performers into the content of the performance. Significantly, the divide remains: the audience member crosses it as the result of an invitation which is usually temporary. The pantomime audience member is shown back to their seat after their involvement, and the improvised performance develops and moves on from the audience suggestion.

In the case of New Perspectives' conventional rural touring productions, this delineation remains in place, and here I focus on work in which the divide is removed or reconfigured, as opposed to temporarily crossed, therefore challenging existing horizons of expectation for rural touring audiences. The delineation between audience and performance may be altered by removing the physical divide between audience and performance with all present occupying the same space; by inviting the audience to take on fictional or task based roles within the piece and become performers themselves; by offering the audience opportunities to become co-authors of the piece by making decisions and contributions that influence the outcome of the performance, or a combination of all of these strategies.

Challenges of writing about interactive work

Some of the work described here draws on several different art forms including dance, film, video gaming and installation art, and is in its nature hybrid, genre-defying, and boundary-blurring. This varied spectrum of work can be challenging for those attempting to analyse and understand it, as highlighted by Susan Kattwinkel in the introduction to a collection on audience participation:

The reasons why artists have chosen to [...] make their work interactive are as varied as the styles of work they encompass. [...] Audience participation may not be something that can be theorized as a whole; it may require a set of theories that can be combined to examine individual experiences.¹³

There are inherent difficulties when writing about any live performance work, and when considering interactive work, a number of other factors must be taken into consideration. These include secrecy surrounding the work, variation in individual experiences of performances, and audience input influencing the dramaturgical content and narrative.

Some companies encourage mystery and secrecy surrounding their interactive work, and reviewers and audience members writing about the work are aware that to give away what happens would take away something central to the experience of the show for others:

¹³ *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*, ed. by Susan Kattwinkel, Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies, no. 101 (London: Praeger, 2003), p. x.

With all [Shunt's] shows, there should be a feeling that you want to tell other people to go and see it, but you can't tell them why because the not knowing was one of the key interests of the performance.¹⁴

So what happens? I can't reveal much because everyone who sees [*You Me Bum Bum Train*] is sworn to secrecy, Mousetrap style.¹⁵

For the researcher seeking to write about these productions, finding sources of information about the work can prove difficult.

In addition to the complicit secrecy around the work, many interactive performances are structured to give each audience member a unique experience. In the work of Punchdrunk, for example, the audience is free to roam around a large space, interacting with and observing different parts of the site and performance. Spectators are encouraged to experience shows alone, separating from anyone with whom they have arrived.¹⁶ Consequently, audience members arriving together for a performance at the same time and location may nevertheless watch entirely different scenes. In such cases, whether I rely on my own experience as audience member or another individual's account, each provides only a partial picture of the performance.

In some interactive theatre, audiences are asked to make choices which influence the narrative of the performance. For example, in *3rd Ring Out* (2010-2011, touring) audience members were asked to vote on emergency

¹⁴ David Rosenberg, Artistic Director of Shunt, quoted in Dominic Cavendish, 'The Greatest Fringe Show on Earth', *Telegraph*, 29 June 2004
<www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3619822/The-greatest-fringe-show-on-earth.html> [accessed 19 January 2014].

¹⁵ Lyn Gardner, 'You Me Bum Bum Train Theatre Review', *Guardian*, 6 July 2010
<www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/jul/06/you-me-bum-bum-train-review> [accessed 19 January 2014].

¹⁶ 'Punchdrunk Website' <<http://punchdrunk.com>> [accessed 19 November 2014]; Gareth White, 'Odd Anonymized Needs: Punchdrunk's Masked Spectator', in *Modes of Spectating* (Bristol; Chicago, Ill: Intellect Books : University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 219–29; Jan Wozniak, 'The Value of Being Together? Audiences in Punchdrunk's The Drowned Man', *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 12.1 (2015), 318–32.

scenarios related to climate change. Their votes altered the narrative content of the performance as the company responded 'live' to the decisions made.¹⁷ The audience's input therefore had the potential to lead to different outcomes and narratives for each iteration of the production. Consequently any record of one occurrence of the performance is limited and incomplete.

Throughout this chapter I draw on my own experience as an audience member alongside descriptions of interactive work written by academic theorists, theatre reviewers and bloggers while acknowledging the limitations of these accounts.

Reasons to investigate making interactive work for rural touring

Below I discuss reasons for investigating interactive work for rural touring, including those suggested by New Perspectives and those that arise from my identification of the unique nature of rural touring audiences, places of performance and distribution model. These reasons include the community-building potential of work that involves the audience, creating new forms of work as a way of challenging the accepted notion of what rural touring theatre looks like, and exploiting opportunities that arise from the nature of rural touring places of performance. These reasons intersect and overlap, and the distinctions I have drawn between them for the purposes of analysis are artificial. Equally, the selected examples of practice I use should not be taken as existing in isolation, or as representing only one of these headings.

It is important to note that a theatre company's reason(s) for creating interactive work cannot be assumed to be identical to audiences' reasons for attending. This is particularly relevant in the rural touring sector where, as I have highlighted, the nature of the artistic experience on offer may be of less importance than the opportunity to come together with other members of the community. It is also noteworthy that in focusing on reasons to create

¹⁷ '3rd Ring Out Website' <www.3rdringout.com> [accessed 26 February 2014].

interactive work that emerge from the world of rural touring I, for the most part, exclude discussions of interactivity as a means to offer audiences increased agency, and to challenge their (perceived) passivity. These ideas are central to analyses of the intentions behind both historical and contemporary interactive theatre companies and practitioners. For example a desire to offer audiences increased agency and/or challenge their passivity is discussed in reference to, historically, Piscator, Meyerhold, Grotowski, Richard Schechner's Environmental Theatre, and Happenings, and more recently Punchdrunk, Coney, Shunt and Ontroerend Goed.¹⁸ While I do discuss these areas where relevant, the desire to explore audience agency and activity/passivity has not been highlighted by New Perspectives or by my research into rural touring. This in itself is a further reminder of where rural touring diverges from theatre happening elsewhere.

The community-building potential of interactive theatre

I begin with community because it is the reason that emerges from what audiences want from rural touring, as well as from New Perspectives' interest in investigating innovation in form. It goes without saying that any research into new forms of work for rural touring must negotiate a balance between the needs and wants of both parties. New Perspectives' McNamara recalls noticing the level of audience discussion and debate taking place during the interval and in the post-show period at the company's rural touring shows. This led to his interest in incorporating this audience activity into new forms of work:

¹⁸ See for example Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*; Richard Schechner, 'On Environmental Design', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 23.4 (1971), 379–97; Dennis Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre from Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*, Fourth Edition (London: Routledge, 1989); Machon, *Immersive Theatres*; Josephine Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); 'Punchdrunk Website'; Maddy Costa, 'Ontroerend Goed: Are You Sitting Uncomfortably?', *Guardian*, 7 November 2011 <www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/nov/07/ontroerend-goed-theatre-audience> [accessed 5 March 2014].

I'm just remembering when we did *Hitchcock* [...] people in the doorway going "Ooh well that's given me a lot to think about" and then going "Bye" and walking off, [...] and there was no mechanism for [them] to think about it. [...] They'll go home and think about it but [...] interactivity I guess gives the space for that [...] debate.¹⁹

As highlighted, rural touring audiences are existing communities and attend events in the village hall in order to socialise with other members of their community. Attending existing conventional rural touring shows like *Entertaining Angels*, or *The Lovesong of Alfred J Hitchcock* (2013, touring), which McNamara references above, provides opportunities for community-building and socialising pre and post show, and during the interval. New forms of interactive work for rural touring have the potential to incorporate audience discussion and debate dramaturgically into the work itself, thus expanding the ways in which rural touring contributes to community-building.

Alongside community-building, McNamara is interested in drawing on the creative and imaginative potential of rural touring audiences: 'there's something for me in harnessing [and] exploring [...] the creativity of that community and that audience'.²⁰ He discusses the potential pleasure for an interactive theatre audience in feeling that they have contributed to creating something together:

There's a way of creating interactive work [...] that serves to warm people, bring them in, give them the pleasure of knowing they contributed in their small way [...] and so what comes from it might also be pleasure but it's that sense that "We have made this". [...] As opposed to what happened, what appeared? I'm interested in that.²¹

¹⁹ Interview (24th October 2014).

²⁰ Interview (24th October 2014).

²¹ Interview (24th October 2014).

The idea of a sense of community and a positive feeling of communal co-creation between audience members is evident in the work of companies making work in non-rural touring contexts. Theatre company Coney cites 'loveliness' as a central principle of their work, which includes productions where audience members have to work together in small groups or as a whole to take discuss and make decisions about the performance.²²

As with all of Coney's work the audience of *Let Them Eat Jam* [2012, West Cumbria] were invited to co-author the experience of the show, making choices about which path a character should follow and interacting with the story.²³

However, the fact that rural touring audiences tend to know each other is significant here. Both theatre critics and audience members frequently describe an experience of connection and community with a group of strangers as a positive benefit of interactive performances. An example is non zero one's *The Time Out* (2011, touring) which directly questions what makes a group of people into a team:

The premise of the show is that you enter the theatre as strangers and leave as a team who are fired up and ready to win.²⁴

[*The Time Out*] turn[s] a nervous bunch of individuals into a temporary unit, convincing us that together we will triumph.²⁵

In the case of rural touring, interactive work has the potential to contribute to the community-building that is already happening, as opposed to creating

²² 'Coney Website'.

²³ 'Coney Website'.

²⁴ Lyn Gardner, 'New Edinburgh Act of the Day: Non Zero One', *Guardian Stage Blog*, 17 August 2011 <www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/aug/17/new-edinburgh-act-non-zero-one> [accessed 29 January 2014].

²⁵ Lois Jeary, 'Review of The Time Out at Forest Cafe', *Exeunt Magazine*, August 2011 <<http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/the-time-out/>> [accessed 5 March 2014].

community where there is none. It is useful also to consider what risks may arise in interactive work in a rural touring context specifically because the audience is an existing community. As part of my pilot, therefore, I wanted to explore whether members of the audience knowing each other might inhibit interactivity, and how interactivity could be designed in order to accommodate existing community relationships.

New Perspectives is also interested in investigating interactivity as a way of developing different relationships between the company and audiences, as evidenced by Tye's emphasis on the importance of audience engagement to arts funders. As highlighted, building a relationship and therefore deepening engagement with audiences outside their attendance at performances is particularly challenging to theatre companies working in the rural touring sector because of the additional layers in the sector's distribution model in the form of touring schemes and promoters, and the tendency for tours to consist of one-night bookings. However, Tye notes that there is a noticeable desire on the part of audiences to interact and engage with the company:

Beforehand, the interaction has come from the audience to the company in a way we know from get outs, [when] the audience are wanting to interact and engage with companies, so at what point, at what level, how far can you push that through interacting through the performance?²⁶

Creating work in which the audience is more actively involved has the potential to contribute to an audience's engagement with New Perspectives through the form of the work itself, instead of attempting to overcome obstacles to building a relationship with an audience outside of performances. In performance itself, the connection can be made directly with audiences, without the layers of touring scheme or volunteer promoter.

²⁶ Interview (24th October 2014).

Challenging convention, pushing boundaries and innovation

McNamara wishes to engage in artistic enquiry into new forms of work in order to challenge the existing conventions and perceptions of what theatre in a rural touring context can be, and to act as sector leaders. While historically the company's work has incorporated elements of audience participation, in its current incarnation it has not presented the type of interactive theatre discussed here in rural settings.²⁷ Creating interactive theatre for rural touring serves these purposes. Experimenting with work that diverges from the conventional model for rural touring by incorporating the audience in new and more active ways not only allows the company to interrogate and challenge previously existing convention, it also positions New Perspectives at the forefront of the sector, leading the way for other companies by discovering and sharing new ways of making theatre in this context.

Some companies and practitioners who have created interactive theatre in non-rural touring contexts have done so at least in part in order to investigate and test the boundaries of both theatre and spectatorship. The environmental theatre movement of the sixties sought to explore new possibilities in the relationship between theatre and audiences through reconfiguration of theatrical space and a move away from the centrality of text: '[o]nce one gives up fixed seating and the bifurcation of space, entirely new relationships are possible'.²⁸ Contemporary interactive shows have also originated from questions about the possibilities of theatrical practice. For example Coney's *A Small Town Anywhere* originated from a challenge posed by the National Theatre Studio and Battersea Arts Centre to make a show that told an

²⁷ Historical examples include *Flight* by Bryony Lavery (1991-1992, touring) and *Thank God for God* by Kevin Dyer (2002, touring). Both of these productions contained sections where audience volunteers were asked to complete tasks on stage, including reading scripted lines from cards/clipboards. In *Flight*, the audience voted between two possible endings of the play. Scripts for both are contained in the New Perspectives archive (box NPT2), currently held by The University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections.

²⁸ Richard Schechner, '6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre', *The Drama Review: TDR*, 12.3 (1968), 41-64 (p. 49).

existing story without the presence of actors.²⁹ The company investigated narrative and formal structures which would allow them to do so, which resulted in a performance where audience members were cast as residents of a fictional town and collectively made decisions about how to respond to an emerging situation, revealed through provocations and events set in motion by the company behind the scenes.³⁰

In much of their work, the artist collective Blast Theory sets out to investigate the theatrical and performative possibilities of new digital modes of communication. For example *Day of The Figurines* (2006, touring/SMS messaging), in which audience members took part over twenty four days via SMS messages, explored how boundaries between ludic and quotidian spaces became blurred during a performance which involved audience role-playing, but with participation taking place during everyday life.³¹ With *Rider Spoke* (2007, London), a performance in which audience members rode bicycles around London guided by handheld computers, seeking hidden locations where they could record their own secrets and listen to the secrets of others, the company set out to explore 'hybrid social spaces in which the private and the public are intertwined', and in so doing to pose 'questions about where theatre may be sited and what form it may take'.³²

Blast Theory's use of interactive strategies in the process of testing the possibilities offered by innovations in technology also serves the function of offering audiences theatrical experiences which are novel. In a consumer culture, newness is a highly profitable and marketable concept, and this applies to theatre too. Offering audiences theatrical experiences which feel novel and innovative can generate excitement and ticket sales. However it is

²⁹ 'Coney Website'.

³⁰ Coney director Annette Mees, speaking at *Lifting the Curtain*.

³¹ 'Blast Theory Website' <www.blasttheory.co.uk> [accessed 17 January 2014]; Matt Adams, Steve Benford and Gabriella Giannachi, 'Pervasive Presence: Blast Theory's Day of the Figurines', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18.2 (2008), 219–35 (p. 29; 33–34).

³² 'Blast Theory Website'.

unclear from existing research how much 'novelty' is a marketable concept for rural touring promoters and their audiences. As we have seen, audiences often cite socialising and supporting the community and the promoter as reasons to attend rural touring events, but existing research does not highlight a desire for novel artistic experiences as a factor in their decision making. Additionally, there is a danger that any theatre company which tries to offer audiences unconventional experiences gets caught in a paradox where audiences expect both continued innovation, and the familiarity of what they have come to expect from the company. Punchdrunk, for example, have established a format for immersive performances for which they are well known and which audiences have come to expect, and yet the company faced criticism of *The Drowned Man* (2013, London), because there was a sense that the novelty of the form had worn off. For some people who had attended previous productions, there was nothing new on offer.³³ This is an important consideration for New Perspectives. Creating interactive performances which offer village hall audiences new theatrical experiences may help serve the company's aims to be sector leaders and to challenge the existing conventions of rural touring theatre. However if the purpose or appeal of the work is solely its novelty, this may not be sustainable for repeated use, or be taken up in the first place.

It is significant that the interest in interrogating existing formal conventions for rural touring theatre discussed here originates with the company and with funders, as opposed to from audiences. It is crucial that considerations of how to incorporate interactivity balance the company's desire to push boundaries with the rural touring audience's reasons for attendance. I therefore wanted to discover through my pilot how audiences felt about interactive theatre and its departure from the conventional form of work they were used to seeing from New Perspectives.

³³ Lyn Gardner, 'Does Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man* Live up to the Hype?', *Guardian*, 13 July 2014 <www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2013/jul/19/punchdrunk-hype-drowned-man-lyn-gardner> [accessed 19 January 2014].

Use of space

Experimenting with interactivity offers the opportunity to capitalise on the lack of a fixed spatial or architectural divide between audience and performance in a rural setting. This angle of enquiry is of interest to New Perspectives:

I'm interested in [...] making dramaturgical use of the division or lack of division, really, [between the performance and audience]. Using that as a tool. [...] Is that division ever as complete as it is in the theatre where the audience are in pitch black with a big gap between them?³⁴

McNamara – perhaps unconsciously – is echoing pioneers of twentieth century theatre, Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski, who both sought to manipulate space as part of interactive performances which forged non-conventional relationships with audiences. Artaud states his intention to unite audience and practitioner space in order to bring about direct contact between actors and audience:

We intend to do away with stage and auditorium, replacing them by a kind of single, undivided locale without any partitions of any kind. [...] Direct contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience, from the very fact that the audience is seated in the centre of the action, is encircled and furrowed by it.³⁵

Similarly, Grotowski saw the stage as a barrier creating distance between actor and audience, preventing the possibility of physical proximity or touch:

It is [...] necessary to abolish the distance between actor and audience by eliminating the stage, removing all frontiers. Let the most drastic

³⁴ Interview (24th October 2014).

³⁵ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. by Victor Corti (London: Calder, 1993), p. 74.

scenes happen face to face with the spectator so that he is within arms reach of the actor, can feel his breathing and smell the perspiration.³⁶

The reconfiguration of theatrical space in interactive theatre with the intention of offering audiences increased freedom and/or physical proximity to performers can be seen in the work of contemporary theatre companies. Promenade shows like the work of Punchdrunk, Shunt and dreamthinkspeak often encourage audiences to find their own path through a performance environment. Brighton-based company dreamthinkspeak include the following descriptions of their productions on their website:

The Rest is Silence (2012, touring): Enclosed on all four sides within a multi-reflective structure, the audience is free to roam and spy on the action as it unfolds around them.

Who Goes There? (2001, touring): Each venue was transformed into the court of Elsinore, allowing the audience to promenade through corridors, galleries, basements and performance areas, witnessing and eavesdropping on the action around them.³⁷

Productions such as these where audience members explore theatrical environments are increasingly termed 'immersive'. Machon describes immersive theatre as offering audiences embodied experiences, and states that such work 'exploits sensory elements or incorporates corporeal aspects'.³⁸ The possibility of haptic and/or sensory contact between audience and performance is present in other interactive work too. For example, theatre reviewer Maddy Costa describes how, in Ontroerend Goed's one-to-one performance *The Smile Off Your Face* (2007-2013, touring), audience members were blindfolded and pushed in a wheelchair and 'had each of their

³⁶ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. by Eugenio Barba (London: Methuen), pp. 41–42.

³⁷ 'Dreamthinkspeak Website' <www.dreamthinkspeak.com> [accessed 17 January 2014].

³⁸ Machon, *Immersive Theatres*, p. 70.

senses teased before a final, unsettling moment of intimacy with a performer'.³⁹

Machon argues that a contemporary interest in physical touch and intimacy stems from a culture in which digital and online culture has reduced the frequency and altered the nature of human interaction:

The increasing desire for this kind of practice and growing fan-bases have come about due to a desire for genuine physical connection. [...] Technologically driven forms of communication, so predominant in work and socialising today, mean that the opportunities for sentient human interaction have been greatly reduced. [Audience responses] suggest there is a genuine wish to make *human* contact, often with another human as much as with the work itself. [...] The alienation from real intimacy in our workaday lives, via such forums as Facebook, can be addressed by immersive practice, which demands bodily engagement, sensually stimulates the imagination, requires tactility.⁴⁰

Through my pilot I wanted to discover whether there was a positive response from rural audiences to opportunities for 'genuine physical connection' as part of interactive performances. However when considering interactive work for rural touring it is important to remember that because of the small size of most rural touring venues, and the shared and overlapping nature of audience and practitioner space, intimacy and close physical proximity between audience and performers may not be unusual or even noteworthy for rural audience members. As we have seen, the delineation between audience space and practitioner space is porous and fluid in most rural touring venues. Practitioners in non-rural contexts have sought to remove or alter the physical distance between audience and performers in order to create interactivity and offer audiences increased freedom of movement and

³⁹ Costa.

⁴⁰ Machon, *Immersive Theatres*, pp. 25–26.

a more direct and/or embodied connection with performance and performers. In contrast, New Perspectives are interested in creating interactive theatre partly as a way of exploring what is made possible by the lack of division that already exists in rural touring.

Creating interactive work for rural touring

I now consider how interactivity might be created for rural touring, thus laying the groundwork for my research pilot. I begin with theoretical frameworks that are useful in considering how interactive theatre achieves its aims. I draw particularly on the recent work of White who, in his 2013 book *Audience Participation: Aesthetics of the Invitation*, provides a number of helpful critical frames and terms for interrogating the work I examine.

Framing interactive work

When a performance diverges from convention by incorporating interactivity, it can present a challenge to an audience member's existing horizon of expectations. It is important therefore to consider how an audience member encountering such a performance comes to understand the rules and conventions at work. As noted, Bennett observes how both outer and inner frames related to a performance influence audience reception. It is equally possible to consider the framing of an interactive performance as a way of introducing an audience to its rules and conventions. White draws on Erving Goffman's model of Frame Analysis, and Antony Jackson's application of this model to the field of Theatre In Education, in order to examine how theatre-makers can use 'outer' and 'pre-theatrical' frames to prepare audiences for interactive performances.⁴¹

Coney often contact audience members online in advance of performances to introduce them to the fictional world of the piece and their role within it:

⁴¹ White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, p. 32.

An advance interaction with the Small Town Historian, online or in person, gives audiences the opportunity to cast themselves into the Town and make their own history – including their filthy secret, which may or may not be discovered.⁴²

It can be seen that this online communication, taking place when people book tickets for the performance, is a way of utilising a pre-theatrical frame to introduce the audience to the conventions of the production they are going to see and their role within it. In this act of framing, Coney are influencing the audience's horizon of expectations prior to attendance. White builds on Bennett's framework, proposing an 'horizon of participation' as a way of examining the potential of interactive work in relation to its audience:

The horizon of participation, like the horizon of expectations, is a limit and a range of potentials within that limit, both gaps to be filled and choices to be made. Unlike the horizon of expectation, these gaps and choices are about action rather than interpretation. [...] Horizons, in this sense, are [...] arrived at through the interaction of all the contributing elements of the process as a perception of the audience participant.⁴³

White's horizon of participation is a valuable framework for interrogating how interactive theatre works. I have rephrased it, however, as an 'horizon of interactivity', not to alter White's definition, but in keeping with my use of 'interactivity' rather than 'participation'. Coney's communication with audiences in the pre-theatrical frame is a way of introducing them both to the limit and potential range of activity expected of them in *A Small Town Anywhere*, and therefore a means of shaping their horizon of interactivity prior to the performance.

⁴² 'Coney Website' (description of *A Small Town Anywhere*).

⁴³ White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, pp. 59–60.

With the rural touring distribution model and its reliance on touring schemes and promoters, it is important to consider how much control the company has over the pre-theatrical frame of the event. *New Perspectives* arrives in a village on the day of a performance, and online contact between the company and audience members is rare. Most of the company's communication happens directly with the promoter; the promoter in turn communicates with their audience, frequently via word of mouth. Attempts to engage with a rural audience's horizon of interactivity in a pre-theatrical frame may be limited and/or uncertain.

White argues that 'sometimes the nature of a frame needs to be introduced explicitly, to make clear when interactivity is invited and what kind of activity is wanted'.⁴⁴ This need to explicitly introduce the unfamiliar conventions of an interactive performance is often present when companies and practitioners seek to challenge existing conventions for audience behaviour. In an historical example, Schechner describes experimenting with different ways of introducing the 'ground rules' for an environmental performance of *The Tooth of Crime*, (1973, New York) using '[s]pecial techniques' including advising the audience on the best way to move around the performance space in order to help them 'learn the conventions of the production'.⁴⁵

The explicit introduction of conventions can help avoid situations where audiences are left unclear about what the rules of a performance are, leading to negative consequences for audience members. For example, at a 2012 performance of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (2010-, New York) an audience member was ejected for embracing a performer:

There is a scene [...] when the mad Lady Macbeth [...] stands up in the tub and raises her arms towards the audience gathered around

⁴⁴ White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, pp. 39–40.

⁴⁵ Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, Revised and expanded edition (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 81–82.

her, inviting them to pass her a robe. One evening a few weeks ago, an audience member didn't understand the cue [...] Confused, [they] returned the gesture and moved to embrace her. The performer playing Lady M broke character, screamed, and a group of black-masked crew materialized to escort the spectator from the show.⁴⁶

Just as audiences can misunderstand the rules of an interactive performance, a theatre company can use framing as a way of wilfully misleading an audience and manipulating their horizons of both expectation and interactivity. In Ontroerend Goed's *Internal* (2009, Edinburgh) the audience were deliberately not informed of the conventions or rules at play, and the creation of a frame resembling a date led people to reveal intimate details about themselves to performers. These details were shared in front of other performers and audience members in a later section of the performance when the frame appeared to change to one of a group therapy experience.⁴⁷ The lack of clarity and misunderstanding of the conventions at work resulted in discomfort and embarrassment which, controversially, became part of the experience of a piece described by critics as 'unethical' and 'manipulative'.⁴⁸

Other interactive productions do not explicitly introduce the conventions at work, so that discovering the conventions of the performance and testing the limits of the interaction invited becomes part of the audience's experience of the performance. Machon notes that in many immersive theatre performances, 'the rules of play may be [...] inferred by the audience as they experience the work moment-by-moment'.⁴⁹ In his analysis of video games,

⁴⁶ Agnes Silvestre, 'Punchdrunk and the Politics of Spectatorship', *Culturebot* <www.culturebot.org/2012/11/14997/punchdrunk-and-the-politics-of-spectatorship/> [accessed 30 April 2014].

⁴⁷ Andrew Dickson, 'Internal: The Ultimate Test for Edinburgh Audiences?', *Guardian Stage Blog*, 17 August 2009 <www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2009/aug/17/internal-edinburgh-audiences> [accessed 19 January 2014]; Matt Trueman, 'Going Back Inside: Internal Revisited | Matt Trueman', 2009 <<http://matttrueman.co.uk/2009/09/going-back-inside-internal-revisited.html>> [accessed 19 January 2014].

⁴⁸ Dickson; Trueman.

⁴⁹ Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres*, p. 28.

Ian Bogost makes use of Janet Murray's definition of 'procedural', proposing the term 'procedural rhetoric' to refer to 'the practice of authoring arguments through processes'.⁵⁰ According to Bogost, in video games '[p]rocedures (or processes) are sets of constraints that create possibility spaces, which can be explored through play', and it is through play and engaging with the procedures at work that players 'encounter the meaning of games'.⁵¹ The company Shunt have staged shows including *Amato Saltone* (2006, London) and *Money* (2009, London) in spaces transformed into environments through which audiences journey, interacting in activities including answering phones, completing allocated tasks, and joining in with singing and games.⁵² Shunt describe their work in a way which echoes Bogost:

Rosenberg [...] is intent on giving audiences as little instruction as possible, insisting during rehearsals that the performers should not be telling the audience what to do, but instead the shape of the piece should guide their behaviour and interaction. In this way, paradoxically, the more controlled the environment, the freer the audience feel.⁵³

In these performances, Shunt created a possibility space, with its rules and conventions to be discovered by their audience through play. A possibility space does not have to be physically realised. I attended *A Long Distance Affair* (2013, Edinburgh), a performance in which each audience member took

⁵⁰ Ian Bogost, 'The Rhetoric of Video Games', in *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games and Learning* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), pp. 117–40 (p. 125).

⁵¹ Bogost, p. 122; 121.

⁵² Dominic Cavendish, 'Shunt's Money at 42-44 Bermondsey Street, Review', *Telegraph*, 5 October 2009 <www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/6261296/Shunts-Money-at-42-44-Bermondsey-Street-review.html> [accessed 19 January 2014]; Andrew Eglinton, 'Mischa Twitchin on the History of SHUNT and Their New Show Money', *London Theatre Blog*, 2009 <www.londontheatreblog.co.uk/mischa-twitchin-on-the-history-of-shunt-and-their-new-show-money/> [accessed 19 January 2014]; Jonathan Gibbs, 'Amato Saltone, Shunt Vaults, London', *Independent*, 29 January 2006 <www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/amato-saltone-shunt-vaults-london-525045.html> [accessed 19 January 2014]; 'Shunt Website' <www.shunt.co.uk> [accessed 29 November 2013].

⁵³ Shunt Artistic Director David Rosenberg, quoted in Catherine Love, 'Shunt's The Architects', *Exeunt Magazine*, 2012 <<http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/shunts-the-architects/>> [accessed 19 January 2014].

part in three Skype conversations with performers located in different global locations. *Before the performance we were told it was our decision how much we interacted. I interacted very little with the first performer, and he continued with his scripted performance when I did not respond to questions. With the second and third performers I responded more fully and asked the performer questions and realised that the actor incorporated my contributions into the dramaturgy of the piece.*

In considering my practical research it is clear that the ways in which a performance is framed and the mechanisms by which its rules and conventions are communicated to an audience is crucial. Where it is not possible to reliably engage with a rural audience's horizon of interactivity in a pre-theatrical frame, it is possible to introduce the rules and conventions at work explicitly, or to create a possibility space in which they are discovered by the audience. In my pilot I set out to test these different methods and discover risks and implications specific to rural touring.

Procedural authorship

It is also necessary to consider how audience contributions are invited and dramaturgically incorporated. White proposes the term 'procedural authorship', like Bogost, borrowing from Murray's writing on computer game design and procedures.⁵⁴ He suggests that:

Interactive work is prepared so that it has gaps to be filled in with the actions of participating audience members, [...] a significant part of the work of an interactive work consists of creating the structure within which these particular gaps appear, and the work of the interactive performer consists of repeating this structure and allowing

⁵⁴ White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, p. 31.

the participants to fill the gaps in different ways in each fresh iteration of the work.⁵⁵

White uses the term 'procedural authorship' to refer to the creation of structures in which there are gaps to be filled by the contributions and decisions of the audience. In Ontroerend Goed's *Fight Night* (2013, Edinburgh) the subject of elections was explored through interactivity. Audience members were introduced to a set of fictional candidates played by actors who were questioned on various subjects. At regular intervals audience members voted for their preferred character using digital consoles, with a candidate eliminated after each round of voting. The company were the procedural authors of the structure of the piece, but the audience were given the freedom to make decisions about how they responded to the unfolding situation and for whom they voted.⁵⁶

Gob Squad's *Kitchen (You've Never Had It So Good)* (2007-, touring) provides an alternative model of procedural authorship, and one which is strategic in its gradual introduction of interactive elements in order to build from familiar conventions to a form in which the audience is significantly involved. Audience and practitioner spaces and roles initially remain separate, with the actors on stage and the audience seated in the auditorium. However, one by one the performers select members of the audience to take their place on stage, so that by the end of the performance none of the actors remain there. Each character is instead played by a member of the audience, told what to do and say via earpieces which pick up the performers' radio microphones.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, p. 30.

⁵⁶ 'Ontroerend Goed Website', 2014 <www.ontroerendgoed.be> [accessed 3 May 2014].

⁵⁷ 'Gob Squad Website' <www.gobsquad.com> [accessed 30 April 2014]; Lyn Gardner, 'Gob Squad's Kitchen', *Guardian*, 23 July 2008 <www.theguardian.com/stage/2008/jul/23/theatre1> [accessed 30 April 2014]. Coney's *A Small Town Anywhere*, Kaleider's *The Money* (2013, touring) and emeraldBLUE's *Silence in Court* (2011-2013, Edinburgh) are all further examples of procedural authorship whereby a company creates a structure with gaps to be filled by the input of the audience.

Procedural authorship provides a theoretical framework with which to explore how New Perspectives can create theatrical performances which provide structures which are dramaturgically completed by the debate and discussion of rural audience members. I therefore wanted to use my pilot to test models of procedural authorship for rural touring.

Invitations to interact are also important to White's model. He focuses on the concept of the invitation and its link to existing or familiar conventions. He highlights the difference between implicit invitations, 'where a convention does exist for participation and nothing has to be described to the audience' – for example pantomime audiences shouting "He's behind you" – and overt invitations, 'where the performers make clear to the audience what they want them to do', as in the case of improvisational performers asking the audience for suggestions.⁵⁸ Interactive productions may make use of overt invitations, prior to or during the performance, in order that audience members clearly understand what is expected of them. This is particularly relevant when theatre-makers are aware that an invitation to interact presents a move away from familiar conventions and therefore may challenge audience members' horizons of expectations and interactivity. Through my practical research I sought to test different types of invitations to interact in order to discover which are best suited to interactive theatre procedurally authored for rural touring audiences.

Communal experience

In some interactive performances, audiences discuss, make decisions, and/or create something together. For example, in Kaleider's *The Money* an audience discuss how best to spend a sum of money with the aim of reaching a

⁵⁸ White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, pp. 40–41.

unanimous decision.⁵⁹ Cardboard Citizens' *Glasshouse* (2014, London) used Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre techniques to enable audiences to debate the homelessness faced by the characters.⁶⁰ As an audience member at Look Left Look Right's *You Wouldn't Know Him, He Lives in Texas* (2011, Edinburgh) I took part in a discussion with other audience members about how a character should respond to conflict between an ex and a current partner.⁶¹ These forms of interactivity have the potential to create feelings of community. However, when considering the creation of interactive work for rural audiences, strategies used by companies working in urban settings where audience members are often strangers to most of their peers may lose their potency when employed with rural audience members who already know each other. The fact that rural audiences have a desire for connection with other members of their community indicates that interactive performances that contribute to community-building could be successful; however it is important to acknowledge that the existing model of rural touring already provides communal experience for rural audiences.

Contemporary and historical practice provide examples of how not to unite people or create feelings of community. For example, it would seem sensible to avoid the tactics of companies such as Punchdrunk, who actively separate audience members and in some cases facilitate unequal access and competition between them. In Punchdrunk's productions, individual one-on-one interactions with performers, which are considered the highlight of the show for many audience members, usually take place after an audience member has been selected and led away to an area inaccessible to other spectators, and it is solely up to the performers upon whom they bestow

⁵⁹ Lyn Gardner, 'The Money – Review', *Guardian*, 22 November 2013 <www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/nov/22/the-money-exeter-guildhall-review> [accessed 2 December 2013].

⁶⁰ Kate Tempest, 'Kate Tempest: How I Handed My Play over to the Audience', *Guardian*, 20 February 2014 <www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/feb/20/kate-tempest-glasshouse-forum-theatre> [accessed 21 February 2014].

⁶¹ 'Look Left Look Right Website' <<http://lookleftlookright.com>> [accessed 29 November 2013].

these. For *The Drowned Man*, Punchdrunk introduced a premium level of ticketing, which further divided audiences by allowing audience members prepared to pay more to view selected additional scenes and benefit from certain one-to-one encounters.⁶² The ways in which Punchdrunk's tactics have the potential to jeopardise rather than build community are discussed further below in relation to anonymity and audience behaviour.

Interactive theatre that sets out to be confrontational or manipulative also runs the risk of creating divisive and antagonistic experiences for audiences, rather than the feelings of community, or indeed the 'loveliness' that Coney cite as a central principle of their work.⁶³ Theatre critics and audiences have accused Ontroerend Goed of bullying and manipulating audiences in both *Internal* and *Audience* (2011, touring):

The audience [...] is manipulated into behaving in certain ways. [...] *Audience* [...] has already attracted complaints for the way a selected member of the audience – always a young attractive woman – is bullied every night by cast members making outrageous demands.⁶⁴

Internal's not as seductive, sly and charming as it makes you think. It doesn't need to be, because it preys upon the weak and that, for me, is problematic.⁶⁵

Members of the company have defended the work against these accusations, admitting that that they employ manipulative tactics, but claiming that their strategies are justified and necessary in order for their work to have the

⁶² Wozniak, p. 326.

⁶³ 'Coney Website'.

⁶⁴ Lyn Gardner, 'Audience: Witchhunt in the Aisles', *Guardian Stage Blog*, 10 August 2011 <www.theguardian.com/culture/theatreblog/2011/aug/10/audience-ontroerend-goed-witchhunt-aisles> [accessed 19 January 2014].

⁶⁵ Trueman.

desired effect. However, it is clear that such tactics would be counterproductive in achieving the desired effect of community-building for rural touring audiences.

Audience roles and anonymity

Allocating audience members fictional roles to perform as part of a show, either collectively or individually, is used both historically and contemporaneously to engage audiences by locating them dramaturgically in the world of the performance. Marco de Marinis discusses how both Grotowski and The Living Theatre used this tactic in the sixties '(i)n order to maximise the spectator's involvement on an emotional and intellectual level'.⁶⁶ Contemporary productions which use this method include non zero one's *The Time Out*, in which a small audience group is cast as a water-polo team, and *You Wouldn't Know Him, He Lives in Texas*, which cast its audience as guests at the central character's party.

Elsewhere, audience members at many Punchdrunk performances are required to wear identical anonymising white masks.⁶⁷ White examines both the freeing and inhibiting power of wearing masks, claiming that by challenging the habitus of conventional performance, the mask both inhibits interaction between spectators, and creates freedom for audience members to interact with performers.⁶⁸ While some have described audience members at Punchdrunk shows behaving co-operatively to ensure others see elements they might otherwise miss, others have observed that the use of anonymising masks and the desire to get the fullest experience possible of fragmented performances which exist on such large scales can lead audience members to behave in anti-social ways, for example pushing others out of the way to get the best viewing position in a crowd or to get as close as possible to

⁶⁶ Marco De Marinis, 'Dramaturgy of the Spectator', *Performance ; Vol. 2*, 2003, 100–114 (pp. 105–106).

⁶⁷ For example *The Drowned Man, Sleep No More*; 'Punchdrunk Website'.

⁶⁸ White, 'Odd Anonymized Needs'.

performers.⁶⁹ This behaviour, which I experienced when I attended *The Drowned Man*, suggests that anonymity in some interactive performances can actively work against creating connection and community. Indeed Wozniak argues that *The Drowned Man* encourages 'individualistic and competitive behaviour in a way that conflicts with the ideals of community and co-operation often claimed to be the result of theatrical performance'.⁷⁰

The allocation of fictional roles and the use of masks to create anonymity are both ways of freeing audience members to interact in performances by distancing their activity from their identities outside of the performance frame. This is particularly pertinent when considering rural audience members who know each other. In a rural touring context, it is unlikely that masks would provide anonymity in the same way that they might in an urban context. As Matarasso argues,

The power of village performances arises from a unique sense of shared experience, where the audience know each other, and may be conscious that how they react to something will colour how they themselves are seen: the village hall has none of the anonymity of an urban theatre.⁷¹

Allocating fictional roles may be a productive strategy for inviting a different kind of interaction amongst members of a community who know each other. However it may be also the case that the lack of anonymity highlighted by Matarasso above is an obstacle to this strategy. It is possible that for an urban audience the presence of strangers who are unlikely ever to be encountered again facilitates a release of inhibitions in work in which individuals are asked to take on roles and become performers themselves.

⁶⁹ Myrto Koumarianos and Cassandra Silver, 'Dashing at a Nightmare: Haunting Macbeth in Sleep No More', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 57.1 (2013), 167–75; Gardner, 'Does Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man* Live up to the Hype?'.
⁷⁰ Wozniak, p. 320.

⁷¹ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, p. 78.

The presence of friends, acquaintances and neighbours may have the opposite effect in rural settings. Through my pilot, I set out to test whether this was the case.

Additionally, I wanted to discover whether it is possible for interactive theatre to have the same community-building effect if audience members taking part are interacting in role, rather than as themselves, particularly when taking part in discussion and debate. White (again, borrowing from Goffman) uses the term 'resource continuity' to refer to 'the ways in which individuals bring aspects of themselves to different roles and maintain a connection across various activities'.⁷² He argues that someone's 'ability to construct a role or character [...] depends upon [...] the cultural and personal resources that are available to them', with personal resources including knowledge and experience.⁷³ Blast Theory's *Ulrike and Eamon Compliant* (2009-2015, touring) is a performance in which the reliance on audience members' cultural and personal resource continuity, in my experience, caused confusion. *Having been asked to choose between 'being' Ulrike Meinhof or Eamon Collins (both real people) I was given instructions, directions and tasks via a mobile phone, and asked my responses to questions, all while walking alone around a city. The performance culminated with an interrogation conducted by a performer, in which it was not clear whether I was supposed to be giving answers as myself, drawing on personal resource continuity, or drawing on cultural resources to answer as my chosen character.* Given that socialising and community-building is of importance to rural touring audiences, it is important to consider whether the allocation of roles to enable interactivity simultaneously obstructs audience members making contributions that draw on personal experiences and opinions. In my pilot I aimed to investigate whether audiences were able to employ resource continuity in order to make personal contributions to discussions and decision making while maintaining fictional roles.

⁷² White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, p. 37.

⁷³ White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, p. 47.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified and discussed reasons for New Perspectives to create interactive theatre for rural touring, ways of creating it, and strategies to avoid. I have considered the challenges and opportunities presented by the particular nature of the audience, places of performance and distribution model of rural touring in relation to interactivity.

In designing my pilot performance it is essential to take into account the rural touring audience's horizons of expectations and interactivity, and how they are shaped both by previous experience of conventional rural touring work and their reasons for attendance. It is also important to consider the extent to which New Perspectives is able to influence Pre- and outer-theatrical frames. Of particular concern when creating interactive theatre for rural touring is the social risk created by the fact that most members of the audience tend to know each other and the promoter.

Indeed, given the rural touring distribution model, it is essential to remember that volunteer promoters are often seen as the public face of theatre in a rural community. Risk averse promoters may choose not to book interactive work if they are fearful that such experiences have the potential to jeopardise rather than contribute towards community-building, for example by separating audience members or being divisive or confrontational in tone. It is therefore vital to consider how interactive work for rural audiences might be procedurally authored in order to offer invitations to interact within a structured possibility space. In addition, it is necessary to think about how the work is framed and introduced to both promoters and audiences in order to manage their horizons of expectations and interactivity and to communicate what degree and type of interaction is invited. In my next chapter I introduce the specific design, parameters and research questions for my interactive theatre pilot, which follow from the discussions in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Interactivity and Rural Touring: A Rural Horizon of Risk

[E]ach procedure of audience participation will produce, in the landscape of possibilities available to its participants, a challenge to their abilities and to their desire to remain safe from loss of face. The topography of each horizon of participation presents different risks generally, and different risks to each participant, and whether an invitation is accepted and how it is navigated will depend fundamentally on the perception of these risks. [...] The simplest strategy available to the procedural author is to anticipate a general *horizon of risk* and make sure that all interactions are contained within it in a way that is comfortable to most of the audience.¹

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the practical research I conducted into interactive theatre for rural touring. I introduce my research questions which build on my discussion in my third chapter. I present the key findings from my interactive pilot performance, which relate to the concept of risk, highlighted by White above. I continue to draw on White's theoretical framework, in particular his introduction of a 'horizon of risk', which he describes as a 'dimension' of the horizon of interactivity.² While any interactive theatre work is layered with risk, my pilot study highlights that there are unique nuances in the way that risk is manifest in interactive work for rural touring. In examining the distinct nature of the horizons of interactivity and risk in a rural touring context, I therefore propose a 'rural horizon of risk' as an addition to White's model.

¹ Gareth White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, p. 78; 83. (Emphasis mine).

² White, p. 83.

Something Blue: An interactive pilot performance for rural touring

Research questions

I began with the question what might interactive theatre for rural audiences look like and how might it work? A more detailed interrogation of New Perspectives' interests in interactive theatre, and an investigation into contemporary and historical practice led to particular areas of focus for my research. Here I demonstrate how the analyses in my previous chapter led to several research questions (grouped by theme, but inevitably with some overlap) which were the starting point for my pilot.

Framing and conventions

I have noted that creating interactive theatre for rural touring presents a departure from convention for New Perspectives in its current incarnation, and argued that it is essential to consider how the conventions of interactive work are introduced to audiences via the framing of the performance. Using the work of both White and Bogost, I discussed the ways in which the rules of the possibility space of an interactive performance can be introduced via the use of outer and pre-theatrical frames, or be discovered by the audience in the process of interacting. I also noted the potential difficulties for rural touring companies wishing to control messages in the pre-theatrical frame due to the lack of direct communication with audiences. This led to the following questions:

- How can performances which incorporate interactive strategies which break with the conventions of recent work produced by the company be framed so that audiences learn or discover the new conventions at work?

- Is it possible for invitations to interact to take place prior to the performance in outer or pre-theatrical frames? If so, how do audiences respond to these invitations?
- How might volunteer promoters be involved in the framing of new forms of performance, given that they are responsible for programming and selling the work?
- How can the framing of interactive work be used to manage any fears or perceived risks associated with interactivity on the part of rural audience members?

Procedural authorship and invitations

As highlighted, the presence of audience discussion and debate at rural touring events can be seen as evidence of rural touring audiences' desire for community-building. However, in conventional rural touring performances this is kept separate from the work, occurring during the interval and post-performance. Interactive theatre presents the opportunity for this audience activity to be dramaturgically incorporated in performances which are procedurally authored to contain invitations to interact, and gaps to be filled by audience input. Considering procedural authorship, the following questions arise:

- In what ways can audience discussion and debate on issues of rural concern be incorporated dramaturgically into the work?
- How can work be structured in order to leave gaps to be completed by the contributions of audience members?
- What types of invitations to interact are successful in encouraging rural audience members to interact and contribute?

Casting the audience in role

I have discussed the use of fictional roles and anonymity in interactive theatre happening in non-rural contexts, suggesting that both provide audiences with protective distance between their activity during and outside a performance. I also introduced White's notion of resource continuity. Considering the allocation of roles and audience use of resource continuity in an interactive performance for rural touring audience members who often know each other leads to the following questions:

- Can audiences be invited to interact through the allocation of fictional roles?
- How do rural audiences respond when tasked with discussing and debating issues as part of the performance when allocated fictional roles rather than interacting as themselves?
- Are rural audience members able to use personal resource continuity in order to participate in debate and discussion while performing in role?
- How do rural audiences respond to interacting in role with each other as opposed to with performers?
- How does a rural audiences' familiarity with each other and the resultant lack of anonymity affect their ability or willingness to interact in role or as themselves?

Use of space

Much of the interactive work I have discussed relies on sharing and/or reconfiguration of practitioner and audience space, as well the possibility for physical proximity and/or touch between audience members and performers/performance. My pilot provided an opportunity to experiment with the reconfiguration of space in rural community venues, therefore addressing the following:

- To what extent can spatial relationships between performance/performers and audiences be reconfigured in ways that can operate efficiently within a variety of community spaces?
- What is the impact of close physical proximity and/or haptic experience in spaces where there is no existing architectural divide between performance space and audience space, and where the limited size of the venue means that close physical proximity is not unusual?

Practicalities of touring

Finally, it is essential to remember that for New Perspectives, any new models for making work that arise from my research must be practically and financially feasible for future touring via the distribution model, with its reliance on touring schemes and promoters. By testing and discussing interactive work with audience members and promoters, as well as with New Perspectives staff, my pilot provided an opportunity to address questions regarding the logistics of the company making interactive work in the future:

- In what ways does creating interactive work for rural touring create new logistical or economic considerations for New Perspectives? For example, does it demand longer rehearsal periods, more audience testing during its development and/or actors with different skills like facilitation or improvisation?
- Is it possible to create interactive work for rural audiences that is tourable within the current distribution model?

It was with these questions in mind that I began developing the first pilot project, described and evaluated in the remainder of this chapter.

Developing content for the pilot performance

In Spring 2014 I recruited Beccy Smith, a playwright and dramaturg with experience of creating interactive work for a variety of audiences and settings.³ We discussed my research questions for the pilot, and I tasked her with creating dramatic content that would allow me to address them. I also set practical parameters: the content needed to work with a maximum of three actors and one stage manager, and needed to be tourable to a variety of rural community venues, in order to meet the requirements of a standard New Perspectives rural touring show.

After initial conversations about the use of familiar conventions in order to frame interactivity, invite interaction, and manage risk, Smith proposed setting the dramatic content she was creating at a wedding reception taking place in a village hall, with the audience 'cast' as guests. We both thought that using an event that would often take place in a rural venue would immediately place the audience in a frame in which certain conventions – for example sitting at tables in groups, dancing, toasting the bride and groom – would be familiar. We therefore believed we would be able to draw on these conventions in order to invite interaction, as well as to establish the audience's role within the drama. We felt that the wedding reception frame provided a celebratory communal context as well as a variety of opportunities for different types of interaction for the audience.

Based on feedback from rural promoters passed on by New Perspectives staff, we decided against structuring the content explicitly around a specifically 'rural' issue – for example farming or social migration – but to address instead what we felt were universal issues that had specific nuances in rural settings in order to invite audience discussion and debate.⁴ The conceit of a young

³ The brief used to recruit this playwright is included as Appendix 1.

⁴ This feedback was shared with me by Tye. She emailed a number of promoters and asked them whether they were interested in productions where the content focused on issues of

couple getting married allowed us to explore issues which all audiences could relate to: marriage, relationships, life choices and milestones. Characters who had grown up in a rural setting, left and returned, but were now contemplating their futures in the village additionally highlighted some specifically rural areas of interest including the ageing population, limited employment, and lack of affordable housing for first-time buyers in rural locations.

In the weeks before the pilot performance, Smith and I liaised regularly to share ideas and discuss script drafts and characters. We aimed to find a balance between including formal constructs that allowed for the testing of specific research questions, and content that was entertaining and dramaturgically sound. I initially envisaged that the pilot would consist of a number of sections created specifically to test certain types of interaction and/or invitation. Smith found, however, that because the form and content of the piece were closely intertwined, she created a complete piece with a narrative structure that allowed for the inclusion of multiple different types of interaction and invitation. These were ordered so that the level of interaction and therefore risk for the audience increased as the evening went on, thereby following White's description of work that is procedurally authored in order to build from lower to higher risk activities: 'broadening the horizon from the inside rather than challenging it straight away'.⁵

A synopsis of the piece is below. I have included the script as Appendix 2.

rural concern, and if so, which issues were relevant to them. The majority of replies indicated that promoters did not feel that a rural theme was necessary for them to book a production.

⁵ White, p. 84.

Something Blue - synopsis

Something Blue was set at a wedding reception in the village hall in which the performance took place. The characters are Jax (the Bride), Bernie (the Bride's aunt, also Maid of Honour), and Jason (Best Man). The stage manager took on the role of the wedding DJ. Early on it is revealed that the wedding has not happened, but that Jax has insisted on the reception going ahead. It is implied that the Groom, Edd, did not turn up at the church. The three characters attempt to host the reception, while also considering the life choices that have led them to this point. Bernie reveals mixed feelings about leaving the village as a teenager to live and work in London and only returning briefly since then to look after Jax, after Jax's mother (Bernie's sister) died. Jax shares her mixed feelings about returning to live in the village where she grew up with Edd, her childhood sweetheart. While there are positive aspects to village life for them, she is unable to work in the field she is interested in or use the degree for which she left to study. She and Edd are unable to afford property in the village, despite her estate agent job. Jason reveals his romantic feelings towards Jax and his intention to leave the village and start a new career after the wedding. As the evening progresses the audience is invited to interact in multiple ways including dancing, karaoke, discussing their thoughts on marriage, which form the content of the Father of the Bride's speech, and talking to the characters to offer advice about the dilemmas they are facing. Later, Jax is overheard confessing to Bernie that she called off the wedding and told Edd not to come. She then reveals this to the audience and explains that she felt like getting married was an ending, not a beginning, and she is feeling uncertain about the future to which she has committed. Edd is revealed to be waiting in his car outside, and a note from him arrives and is read aloud. In it he communicates his love and support for Jax, and desire to be with her whether they get married or not. Jason invites Jax to leave with him instead and, seeing her indecision, Bernie suggests the audience vote on what she should do. Jax questions people after this vote, and then makes her choice based on the audience's opinions.

Cast, creatives and rehearsals

In September 2014 I assembled a creative team of three actors, a designer, and a production/stage manager. I knew that I would need performers who were comfortable taking part in a research and development process leading to the presentation of work in progress and, perhaps more importantly, able to interact with audience members as part of a performance. For this reason, I chose to work with actors Adam Horvath, Imogen Joyce and Kitty Randle, who all had experience of improvisation and of creating and taking part in interactive work. A workshopping and rehearsal week took place in September 2014, at New Perspectives' base. This culminated in the pilot performance on the Friday evening of that week.

The performance

The performance took place in Aslockton Village Hall on Friday 26th September and was attended by an invited audience of twenty-seven people.⁶ For the findings of the research pilot to be useful, it was essential to test the work with a rural audience. However, as I have highlighted, touring schemes and promoters are involved in programming work in the rural touring distribution model. For this reason, I worked with the New Perspectives team to invite touring scheme managers and other rural promoters from across the East Midlands. Susan Rowe, a Nottinghamshire promoter who is on the New Perspectives Board of Trustees agreed to host the pilot and to invite an audience from Aslockton. I invited each promoter to bring two audience members who were not involved in promoting work at their venue with them. Unfortunately, none of the scheme managers were available on the given evening, and several of the promoters invited were unable to attend or felt that it was too far for them to travel.⁷ Every effort was made to make sure we

⁶ New Perspectives staff and members of the creative team were also in attendance.

⁷ It is worth noting, however, that the majority of the promoters who contacted me to say that they were unable to attend also communicated their interest in both the research and the idea of interactive work for rural touring.

had as many rural promoters and audience members attending as possible. I also invited a number of professional associates and colleagues with experience of making interactive work, or rural touring (or both). This was in order to ensure we had the numbers required for the interactivity in the piece to work successfully, and so that they could offer a different perspective on the work in the post-performance questionnaires and discussions.

Members of the audience who filled in a post-show questionnaire comprised:

Promoters: 4

Rural audience members: 11

Other audience members: 4

A group of six audience members from Aslockton had to leave early and did not complete post-show questionnaires.

Research methods and data

In order to address my research questions I used the following methods of gathering data:

1. My observations and research journal from the rehearsal and workshopping week and the test performance
2. Video documentation of the performance
3. Audience post-show questionnaires
4. Audio recordings of audience post-show discussions⁸

⁸ Because I had received feedback prior to the test performance from a rural promoter that audience members she had invited were enthusiastic about seeing the performance but nervous about giving feedback in a post-show discussion, I chose to let the audience remain seated at their tables for small group post-show discussions, rather than conducting a discussion where the whole audience were asked to give their feedback publicly. Each table was given a list of prompt questions about interactivity and a Dictaphone to record their responses. This in itself is an example of my procedural authorship of the research event in order to manage the perception of risk!

5. Reflections on the test performance written immediately afterwards by the actors
6. Audio recordings of debriefs I conducted with the actors and creative team, the writer, and New Perspectives' Artistic Director and Executive Director.
7. A follow up interview with a rural promoter.⁹

All audience members completed consent forms regarding their involvement and all research methods and data gathering were approved by the University of Nottingham Faculty of Arts Ethics Officer.

Interactivity and risk in rural touring

Below I discuss the key findings of my pilot, and show how these relate to my research questions. Inevitably, further questions emerged as a result of the research process. Additionally the outcomes highlighted key themes that I had not previously considered pivotal, including the centrality of risk, which underpins all the findings discussed here. White writes at length about the nature of both risk and the perception of risk, and the ways in which the procedural authorship of interactive work is a key tool in managing risk and offering reassurance to audiences. This suggests that interactive work involves risk for any audience: the risk of losing face or humiliation by doing something wrong, or not performing a task or role well.¹⁰ White states that it is 'the perception of the risks by the individual that leads to conscious and unconscious choices about how and whether to participate', introducing an 'horizon of risk' as a way of understanding this perception.¹¹ The perception of risk might indeed be the main inhibiting factor in any audience member choosing not to attend an interactive performance, or refusing an invitation to

⁹ Copies of the consent form, audience post-show questionnaire, audience post-show discussion prompt questions, and actor post-show questionnaire are included as Appendices 3, 4, 5 and 6.

¹⁰ White, pp. 78–9.

¹¹ White, p. 81.

interact. White acknowledges that both size of audience and cultural differences in behaviour can affect the horizon of risk and discusses how the risk presented by the invitation to interact is linked to the potential loss of social capital and a threat to an audience member's social self.¹² However, because he does not examine the particular context of rural touring, he does not discuss the way that an audience made up of people who mostly know each other creates a specific and different horizon of risk.¹³ Below I examine the findings of my pilot and consider how they point to a horizon of risk specific to interactive work in a rural touring context. I discuss the strategies employed to manage risk and the perception of risk for the pilot performance. Just as the different opportunities to interact in the performance overlapped, it is important to note that these strategies intersect and are not discrete.

Framing

White draws on Jackson's application of Goffman's model of frame analysis, considering the procedural authorship of interactive work 'as the manipulation of frames of interaction'.¹⁴ He outlines how the way in which interactive work is framed, including the use of familiar episoding conventions, helps to let audience members know what kind of interactions are invited:

The procedural authorship of audience participatory performance anchors itself to the common experience of its participants, grounds itself in the frames that they use in the rest of their lives. The idea of episoding conventions can be used to describe how people are invited to take part in an interaction.¹⁵

When planning the pilot Smith and I decided to anchor the dramaturgical frame of the play to the familiar frame of the village hall, and chose a

¹² White, p. 103; p. 113.

¹³ White, p. 81.

¹⁴ White, p. 32.

¹⁵ White, pp. 38–39.

wedding as an event that would take place there and would contain familiar episodic conventions. We hoped that as a result, the initial invitation for the audience to accept their role in the fictional world of the drama was less demanding, and would therefore help to manage the perception of risk, while offering familiar conventions to help them understand their role and the type of interaction being invited. Additionally, by setting the dramatic content of the performance in the reality of the village hall, using the hall itself as set, and casting the audience as the rural residents of the village, it meant that this performance could only happen in a rural setting.



Figure 4.1 (top left) top table. Figure 4.2 (top right) drinks table by audience entrance. Figure 4.3 (bottom left) cake table and bar. Figure 4.4 (bottom right) Audience table. Design and photographs Emma Pegg.

While site-specificity is discussed in detail in the next chapter, there is a useful parallel that can be identified here between this way of framing a performance in a village hall and Mike Pearson and Clifford McLucas' model of the 'Host' and the 'Ghost' which they apply to site-specific work.

The Host site is haunted for a brief time by a Ghost that the theatre makers create. Like all ghosts, it is transparent and Host can be seen through Ghost.¹⁶

Cathy Turner notes that in this model the Host and Ghost are sometimes seen to be in conflict with each other:

The event of the performance is seen as the rewriting of space through a new occupation of site in tension with what precedes it. The 'host', including its other previous and current occupations, can offer resistance to this rewriting. It remains distinct from the 'ghost' and cannot be ultimately identified with it. Indeed the 'ghost' is transgressive, defamiliarizing, and incoherent.¹⁷

In contrast, our procedural authorship involved utilising the 'here and now' frame of the village hall to invoke the Host – the history and present of the venue and the audience's relationship with it – in order to situate the audience within the dramaturgical construct of the play while maintaining a link to the reality outside of the play. This differs from much of New Perspectives' conventional rural touring work, in which a designer may be sympathetic to the nature of rural touring venues, but designs a set that sits inside those venues which have been configured in the same end-on theatre style found in many traditional building-based theatre spaces. It also contrasts with the work of some companies making interactive work in non-rural contexts, who may attempt to prevent the audience from making links between the outside world and the fictional world of the performance that has been created. Punchdrunk for example, seal off and disguise their performance spaces and cover any windows: 'we're always trying to keep the

¹⁶ Clifford McLucas, quoted in Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 128.

¹⁷ Cathy Turner, 'Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 20 (2004), 373–90 (p. 374).

lid closed so no light from the real world enters in'.¹⁸ Unlike Punchdrunk, in our framing of *Something Blue* we actively allowed the real world (the Host) to enter, using familiar conventions to anchor the fictional world of the play (the Ghost) to a recognisable frame for the audience in order to manage risk.

The rural touring distribution model and the pre-theatrical frame

As noted, the rural touring distribution model means that New Perspectives does not always have complete control over the messages that reach audiences about the nature of the work. I have highlighted how companies like Coney make contact with audience members prior to a performance – in the pre-theatrical frame – as part of preparing them for the nature of the work they are to experience, and noted the difficulties for rural touring companies in attempting to do so.

For the pilot performance, we explored the use of the pre-theatrical frame to set up the rules of the piece. We communicated through an email designed to look like a wedding invitation that the performance would be set at a wedding reception in the village hall and that the audience would be invited to interact. This invitation asked guests to come prepared to join in with karaoke, dancing and speeches. While I have previously noted that it is unusual for New Perspectives to be in direct email contact with promoters, for the purposes of this pilot and owing to budgetary and time constraints, email was the most appropriate form of contact. In the case of a full touring show it would be possible for the same framing information, still in the form of a wedding invitation, to be created as printed marketing material to be sent to promoters. In the case of the pilot, the invitation we sent out about the work was of course accompanied for rural audience members by messages communicated by the rural promoters who had invited them, and this is a

¹⁸ Felix Barrett, Artistic Director of Punchdrunk, quoted in Machon, *Immersive Theatres*, p. 161.

realistic reflection of how this work would be marketed in a rural touring context in the future.¹⁹



Figure 4.5 Header for invitation to pilot performance. Design Kayleigh Hunt.

Much of the evidence gathered from the pilot pointed to rural audience members' and promoters' concerns that rural audiences would need to be fully informed if they were coming to see an interactive performance, suggesting the need for the interactive nature of the piece to be flagged in its pre-theatrical framing. This is illustrated in promoter responses to the post-show questionnaire and in my follow-up interview with a rural promoter:

I would be extremely careful how I promoted it. People need to know what to expect.²⁰

I think it would work, actually, in a rural setting, but you'd have to be incredibly careful with the promotion, and I'd actually go as far as to say when people are asking me for tickets, I think I'd feel it would be necessary to say well you do realise it is an interactive performance?

¹⁹ It is also important to point out that in the context of the pilot the invitation was also accompanied by messages from me about the nature of the research in order to ensure the audience attending were aware of the nature of what they were coming to see, and to fulfill the terms of the University of Nottingham's ethical approval for the research.

²⁰ Comment from post-show questionnaire.

[...] I feel as a promoter, I really would have to make it very very clear what they were doing.²¹

This finding from the pilot contradicts those from Pentabus' interactive production *Every Brilliant Thing* (2013-, touring).²² This play explores depression and suicide and involves audience members playing characters in the story and reading out items from a list of 'brilliant things' created by the main character. When I interviewed Freestone, she explained that during the play's two-year development period in which different versions of the work were trialled with rural audiences, the company explored to what extent they warned audiences and promoters about the level of interactivity involved. In the version that went out on tour the marketing material did not reveal that the play was interactive:

It certainly wasn't on the poster or flagged in advance, they only knew because Johnny was walking around going "At some point in the show if I asked you to say that is that all right, can you say that out loud?" [...] So they didn't know before they came in.²³

It is clear that the play relied on the work of the actor in the outer-theatrical frame to prepare audiences for the interactivity involved and to manage some of the risks of their taking part. Pentabus' findings suggest that it is possible to manage the risk of interactivity for rural audiences without explicitly labelling the work as interactive, despite the concerns of promoters present for my pilot performance. While it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from these two examples, it is certainly possible that because my pilot drew attention to interactivity as the focus of the research, promoters felt cautious

²¹ 'Interview with Rural Promoter', held in the promoter's home, Nottinghamshire, September 2014. This follow-up interview took place after the pilot with one of the promoters who attended; I have kept their name anonymous according to the ethical permissions of the pilot.

²² This production first toured rurally during the same year I conducted my pilot and I spoke to Freestone about it after having completed all of my practice-based research.

²³ Freestone, interview (15th September 2015).

about the risk in ways which they might not have otherwise. The marketing of interactive performances for rural touring is discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Framing and theatrical conventions

In discussing how interactive theatre could challenge the existing conventional form of rural touring theatre in preparation for the pilot, a question arose as to whether interactivity limited the use of other theatrical conventions. In a more conventional piece of theatre, whether in an urban or a rural context, doubling of actors to enable the inclusion of more characters, flashbacks, 'private' conversations or internal monologues being audible to the audience might be familiar and unquestioned. Smith and I considered whether our decision to make use of the real here and now of the rural venue to frame the dramatic action of the pilot limited the use of such dramatic and narrative conventions. We included scenes which tested whether the audience would accept actors doubling, a 'flashback', a conversation happening outside the hall made audible to the audience, and an internal monologue voiced aloud. We were interested in whether these conventions would be problematic or jarring for the audience once they had accepted that the piece was taking place in the reality of the here and now of the village hall.

In a scene featuring a flashback with Jax and Jason reminiscing about their teenage years, the actor playing Bernie put on an additional item of costume to double as Edd.

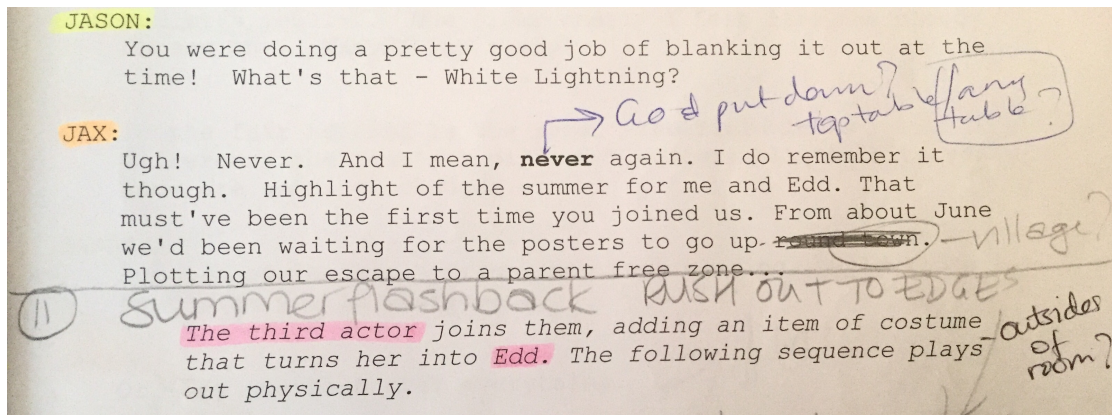


Figure 4.6 *Something Blue* script: flashback section and actor doubling.

In a later scene, Jax and Bernie were 'overheard' having a private conversation in the toilets of the hall via a microphone which picked up their speech and relayed it via speakers into the hall where the audience were seated.

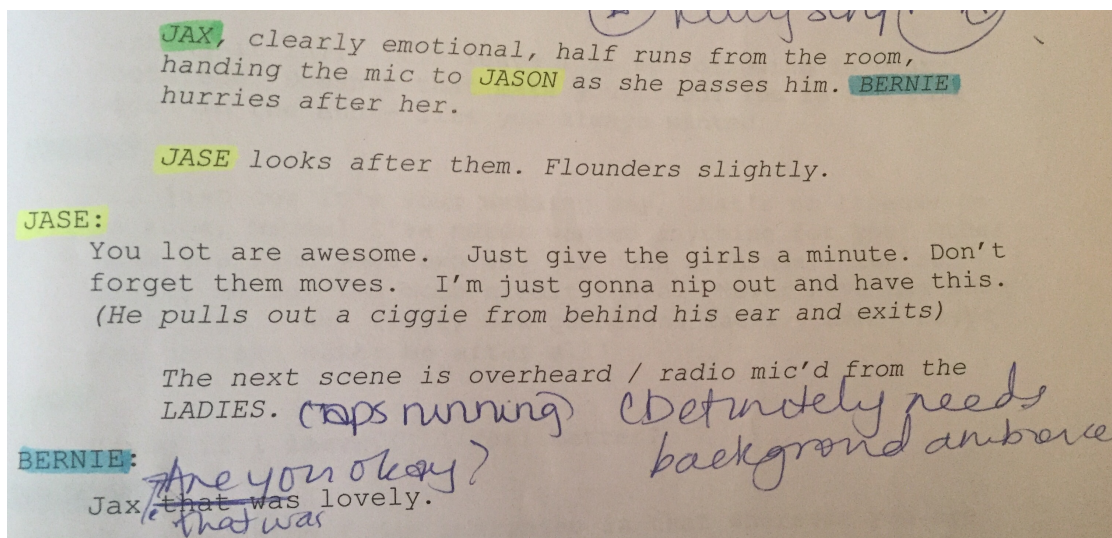


Figure 4.7 *Something Blue* script: toilet scene.

Finally, we included a scene in which Jason delivered a monologue depicting his internal thoughts both about riding his motorbike and his feelings for Jax.

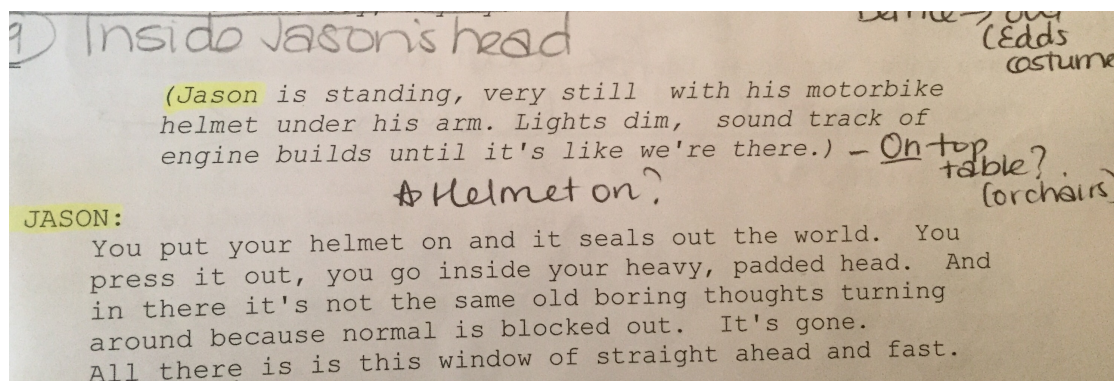


Figure 4.8 *Something Blue* script: Jason monologue.

The audience response to the pilot suggests that they were willing to accept these conventions, even without the full technical/production elements that would have been used in these scenes in a fully realised performance. Despite this Smith and I felt that an actor doubling to play another character was the least successful of these endeavours and jarred most with the frame and rules we had established for the piece:

I felt like that didn't work as well in the end, that [...] what you rely on is the reality of who these performers are being in this space with you.²⁴

My research does however suggest that if New Perspectives is to create interactive work as a way of challenging the existing conventions of form for rural touring theatre, other familiar dramatic conventions can still be utilised within such work.

Procedural authorship and a structure of interactions

White indicates that enabling audience interaction is not solely conditioned by the types of interaction invited and the way that the invitation is made, whether overt, implicit or explicit. Building interaction and structuring a performance to manage the audience's perception of risk and subsequent

²⁴ Beccy Smith, 'Debrief with Beccy Smith', Barbican, London (9th October 2014).

willingness to interact are important components of procedural authorship. The pilot performance demonstrated that this is the case for interactive work in a rural context.²⁵ Actor and audience feedback noted that the audience needed some time to relax into the setting and to warm up before feeling comfortable to interact.

I think it got easier at the end. I felt much happier as we got used to it. Because you are apprehensive aren't you at first, if you don't know what form it's going to take.

It took me a few minutes to get into it, I have to say, very near the beginning they said "Will you get up and dance?", and none of us did [...] Whereas I think half an hour later I think I would have danced.²⁶

An early invitation for audience members to dance with the characters was not successful. This was a high risk activity for them. It came early in the piece, and would have involved joining the actors on the dance-floor, interacting with two characters by whom they had only briefly been addressed at that point, and doing so in a very public and physical way. In fact, this interaction was included to test the structure of the performance and while we suspected that the audience would not be prepared to accept this invitation, it enabled us to compare whether they would accept a similar invitation later in the performance, which they did. The audience's response at this moment, and to the later invitation to dance, suggest that performances that are structured to gradually move from lower risk interactions to higher ones, while allowing the audience to 'warm up', are more likely to be successful.²⁷

²⁵ White, pp. 94–95.

²⁶ Audience comments from post-show discussion.

²⁷ Of course it is also the case that, as at a real wedding, people are more likely to dance later on at an event, and perhaps after consuming alcohol!

Ooh - I love this one. Does anyone fancy a dance?

Bernie tries to get some audience members on to the dance floor. JAX and JASON come over and join her. If no audience members dance, this sequence is cut short.

The sounds of Agadoo is the cue to break up the party and encourage everyone to return to their seats.

Figure 4.9 *Something Blue* script: early invitation to dance.

This leads to a consideration of which types of interactivity were particularly effective at warming up the audience at the pilot performance, therefore enabling further, higher risk interactions. In the scene following the unsuccessful invitation to dance, the audience were invited to interact by talking to characters in smaller groups. The characters sat down at tables and engaged audience members in conversations about the particular dilemmas each were facing. They solicited contributions by asking specific questions, and facilitated discussion and debate based on the answers given.

After the dance, the actors each go to one table and explain they'll be back in a few minutes (don't leave the room), encouraging people to sign up for karaoke and fill in the cards on the table.

They then go to their 'second' tables and these three conversations go on simultaneously. The actors can improvise to incorporate responses around the questions and comments in their speeches. The sequence is repeated with their other table.

Figure 4.10 *Something Blue* script: table conversations introduction.

At the pilot performance all audience members took part in this scene, and it was agreed by actors and audience members alike in their post-show feedback that it was this moment that enabled the audience to relax, understand their role, and begin to interact in a way that suggested that they felt more comfortable and at ease.

[Asked about most successful interactions] The tables, to have time to talk with 'the guests'. Once they were cast they went with it and really revealed personal thoughts.

[Asked if the performance felt different after that scene] I think it changed then. [...] Some lady got hold of me and went "Ah you, how are you?". And it wasn't a table that I'd visited but after that interaction with all the other characters they felt able then to talk to you in character, [...] they seemed more willing to talk to you, or to make contact with you.²⁸

Accepting the invitation to interact in this scene was lower risk: the audience remained seated in groups, with music playing in the background and other tables engaged either in conversations with characters or tasks for later in the performance (choosing karaoke songs and offering their thoughts on marriage for the Father of the Bride speech). Any contributions they offered were therefore audible only to the character and audience members at their table. The characters led these discussions and we rehearsed and discussed strategies to encourage people to participate, for example asking open questions, requesting that people expand on their answers, and asking others at the table whether they agreed with what had been said.

Other ways in which we procedurally authored *Something Blue* to facilitate audience interaction was the use of forms of interaction that were familiar to the audience. While the inclusion of karaoke and a game of Pass the Parcel was not intended to enable interaction in a way that meant that audience contributions became part of the dramaturgy of the show, they did serve other functions.

²⁸ Kitty Randle, post-show questionnaire; 'Actors Debrief', Quad, Derby (30th September 2014).

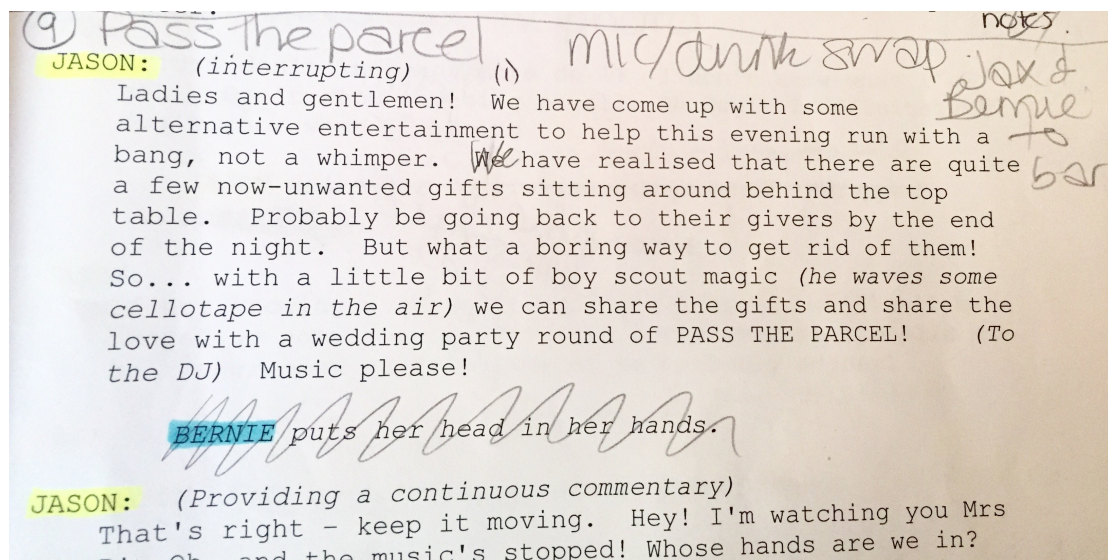


Figure 4.11 *Something Blue* script: pass the parcel.

They confirmed the audience's role as wedding guests and their presence within the fictional setting of the drama; they also drew on familiar conventions in order to make both overt and implicit invitations to interact. Overt invitations included being asked to submit karaoke songs to perform, while implicit invitations included singing along and clapping in the karaoke scene, and joining in with a game of the Pass the Parcel. These enabled the audience to interact in activities for which the rules were known and familiar. They therefore provided both low risk opportunities to interact for audience members who may have been reluctant, and warm up activities for other audience members, altering their horizons of risk in order to encourage and/or enable them to interact in higher risk ways later in the performance. Part of the procedural authorship of Smith, the actors and myself was the consideration of the order in which interactions happened, and of the things that the audience might be prepared to do by the end of the performance that they would not have done at the outset, as a result of altered horizons of risk and interactivity. While the performance did not contain like-for-like scenes to compare between the beginning and end, it was noted by audience members and the actors and creative team in their post-show reflections that the audience did seem to 'warm up' during the evening. They engaged in higher risk activities by the end of the evening, with all present standing up to

join in with a dance routine (twice), and with some publicly explaining their thoughts on what Jax should do at the end of the show.

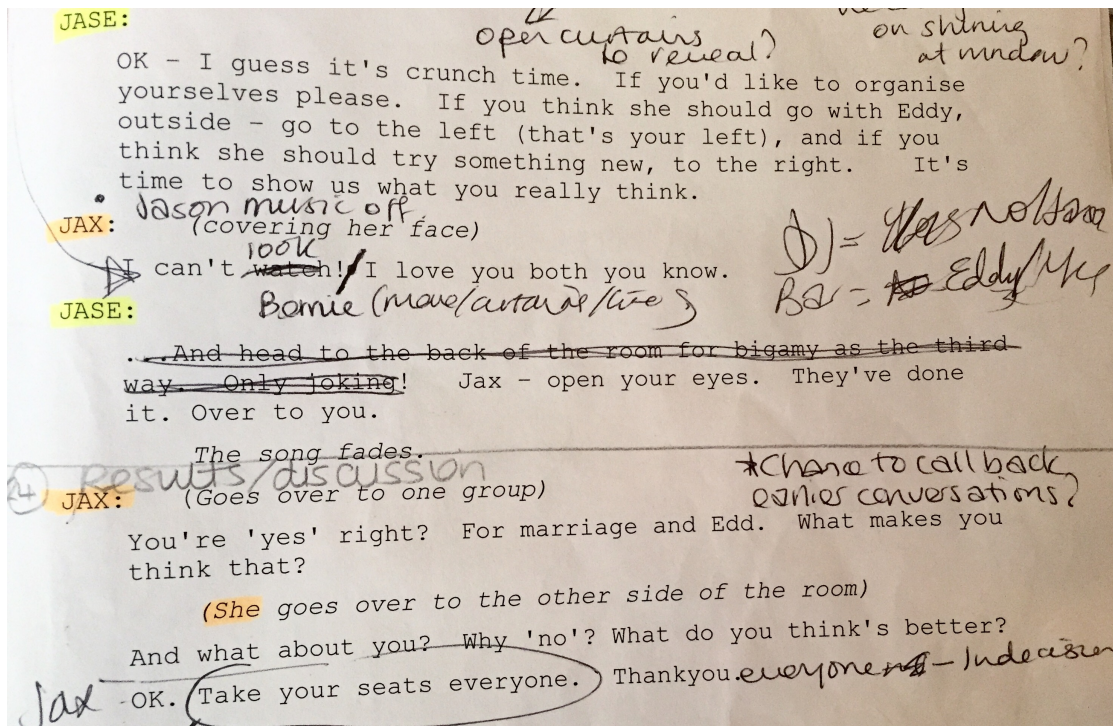


Figure 4.12 *Something Blue* script: audience vote.

I think that you chose very bravely this morning and that was probably what you really meant.

I think the world's a big place, there's a lot out there to see.

I think it can be easy to stick with something safe just because you know it.²⁹

Considering the types of interaction, designing the ways they are invited, and deciding the order in which they are offered are important ways in which procedural authors of interactive performances can manage the risk and perception of risk for rural audiences.

²⁹ Audience responses to Jax' questioning them about what she should do, taken from pilot footage.

Casting the audience: roles and resource continuity

The pilot utilised three different levels of casting the audience in role. I have termed these 'collective audience roles', 'assigned relational roles', and 'specific character roles'. This use of roles led to discoveries about the risks presented by each and how these were managed, as well as how audience members were able to make use of resource continuity by bringing together their interaction in a fictional frame and their real life existence outside it.³⁰

The first level of role was achieved by casting the whole audience as guests at the fictional wedding reception. I refer to this as a collective audience role. The offer for the audience to interact by accepting this role was made in the initial invitation sent to attendees, which included the invitation to dress up for a wedding reception, although it was stressed that this was not compulsory. On arriving, the audience were greeted by the character Bernie, given a drink and invited to take a seat within the hall, which had been decorated for a wedding. This reinforced their casting in the collective audience role of guests at the wedding. This role confirmed the audience's place within the fictional world and their reason for being there, while still allowing them to be themselves: they were not invited or expected to improvise or take on fictional characters.

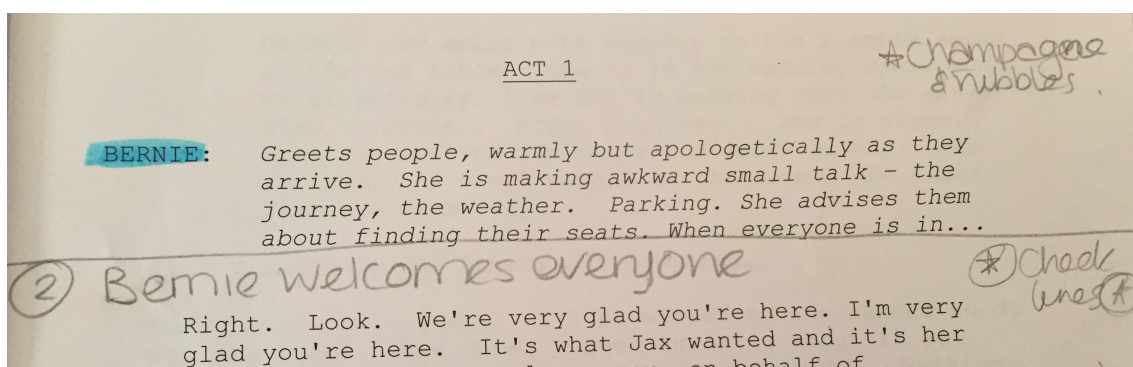


Figure 4.13 *Something Blue* script: audience greeting section.

³⁰ White, p. 47.

Casting in assigned relational roles occurred early on in the performance when the characters sat down at tables and initiated conversations on the themes and questions at the heart of the piece. With six tables and three characters, each character had a conversation with two different tables. We wanted to discover whether there was a difference between how rural audiences interacted depending on whether or not they were given a further level of role within the piece. At some tables, the characters addressed the audience members as guests at the wedding, but did not offer any further information on who the audience members were or their relationships to the fictional characters. At the other tables, the characters used their initial greeting to cast the audience members in a role in relation to the fictional characters, for example "You must be Jax's workmates from the estate agency", "It must be awkward for you to be here, being Edd's family" or "We don't get to see your side of the family often, since you all moved to New Zealand". The decision about which tables were cast in which roles was made during rehearsals in the venue, prior to the audience's arrival. Thus during any conversations later in the performance, all three characters were able to ad-lib interactions specific to these roles with the tables who had been cast, to reinforce this casting and test whether the audience continued to accept the role.

The audience groups offered assigned relational roles were given further information about their relationship to the fictional world of the play and the characters. However within these parameters they had the freedom to improvise and to choose how they performed the role, including choosing whether to give fictional or honest answers to the characters' questions. We were testing whether audience members would accept an invitation to take on a fictional role within the drama and interact in role, and if so, whether they would still be able to contribute meaningfully to the discussions taking place. Feedback from the audience and actors demonstrated that the groups who were given this additional level of casting all accepted the invitation to

interact in this way, improvising answers and questions within the given fictional roles.

I think if you are in a different character, you can create the character as you go along, so everything you say is fine, it doesn't matter, you can be controversial, biased, you can do anything you want in character, can't you? [...] It could be a welcome change to your everyday life really, couldn't it, because you could play-act.³¹

If you're being spoken to by a cast member, and you haven't been assigned a role, you don't know really how to react. [...] But once you've been given a role, you can put yourself into it, and go for it!³²

Recordings of the conversations and feedback from interviews and debriefs show that these audience members were able to contribute as themselves to the discussions in question, while maintaining the fictional role they had adopted. For example an audience member who started talking about their career at the BBC then corrected themselves to say "Of course I mean the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation".³³ Randle noticed how, when addressing a group cast as friends of her character's mother, they moved seamlessly from answering her question about remembering her mother: "Of course we do darling", to speaking of their own experiences choosing careers in order to advise her on her dilemma.³⁴ This ability to maintain a fictional role and draw on personal opinions and experiences to offer advice to fictional characters is evidence of the audience making use of their resource continuity, by bringing specific knowledge of their lives as members of a rural community into the performance experience.

³¹ Rural audience and promoter comments from post-show discussion.

³² 'Interview with Rural Promoter' (September 2014).

³³ Kitty Randle, 'Actors Debrief' (30th September 2014).

³⁴ Kitty Randle, 'Actors Debrief' (30th September 2014).

Audience members who were not given assigned relational roles felt more uneasy about interacting with characters. They gave feedback about their confusion when they were asked to interact with characters, as a result of uncertainty about who they were supposed to be: was the expectation that they would be honest, or make up characters for themselves within the fictional world? They spoke afterwards of wishing they had been given roles, and of contemplating creating roles for themselves and giving fictional answers to the characters' questions, but feeling inhibited and prevented from doing this by concerns about the rules of the performance, and the exact type of interaction being invited in this moment, and by wondering what other people at the table were doing.

When Jason came to talk to us, I really weighed up, do I answer this question as me, and I had a little thought in my head that I could say because [someone else at the table] had said "Oh we all do the same job", but I didn't know if he was being genuine or whether he was starting a bit of play.

I felt like it would have been rude to not say the truth, even though he's obviously acting.³⁵

This suggests that audiences in this context found it easier to interact when given a role to perform that further clarified their position within the fictional world. Even though these roles are fictional and involve some improvising and role-play, the audience were able to join in with the discussions and offer their contributions, which were incorporated dramaturgically into the piece when actors referred back to them in later scenes. The rural audience observed afterwards that being given these assigned relational roles freed them up to play along. It can be seen that this level of casting the audience in role was therefore another way of managing the rural horizon of risk and the particular circumstances of an audience consisting of people who mostly know

³⁵ Comments from audience post-show discussion.

each other. By interacting in role rather than as themselves, the rural audience members perceived a lesser risk because if they said something 'wrong' or controversial, they were able to keep this performance separate from themselves, and therefore avoid loss of face in front of an audience made up of a community of which they are part. Despite taking on roles they were still able to engage with the subject matter and contribute to discussions with characters and fellow members of their communities as themselves through the employment of resource continuity.

The final level of casting I describe as specific character roles. This occurred when one audience member was singled out to play a specific and planned role within the drama. An additional level of risk was incurred as it involved standing up in front of others, taking on a specified character within the fictional world, and delivering lines: here, in particular, the role of the Father of the Bride, who delivered a speech comprised of opinions on the best and worst things about marriage, contributed by the audience.

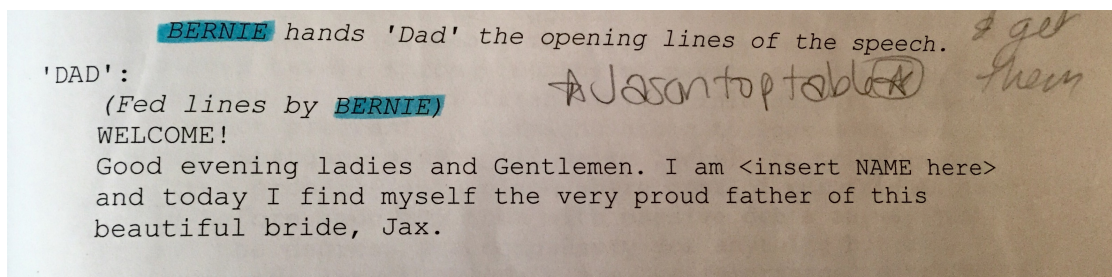


Figure 4.14 *Something Blue* script: Father of the Bride speech.

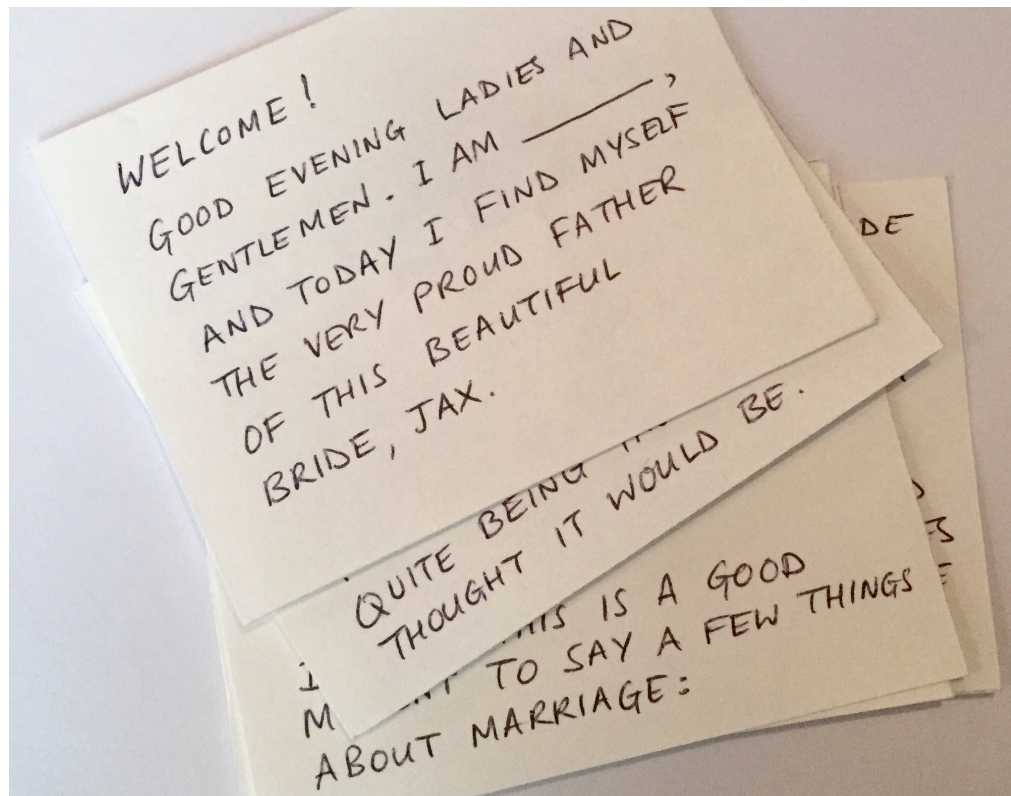


Figure 4.15 Father of the Bride prompt cards. Photograph author's own.

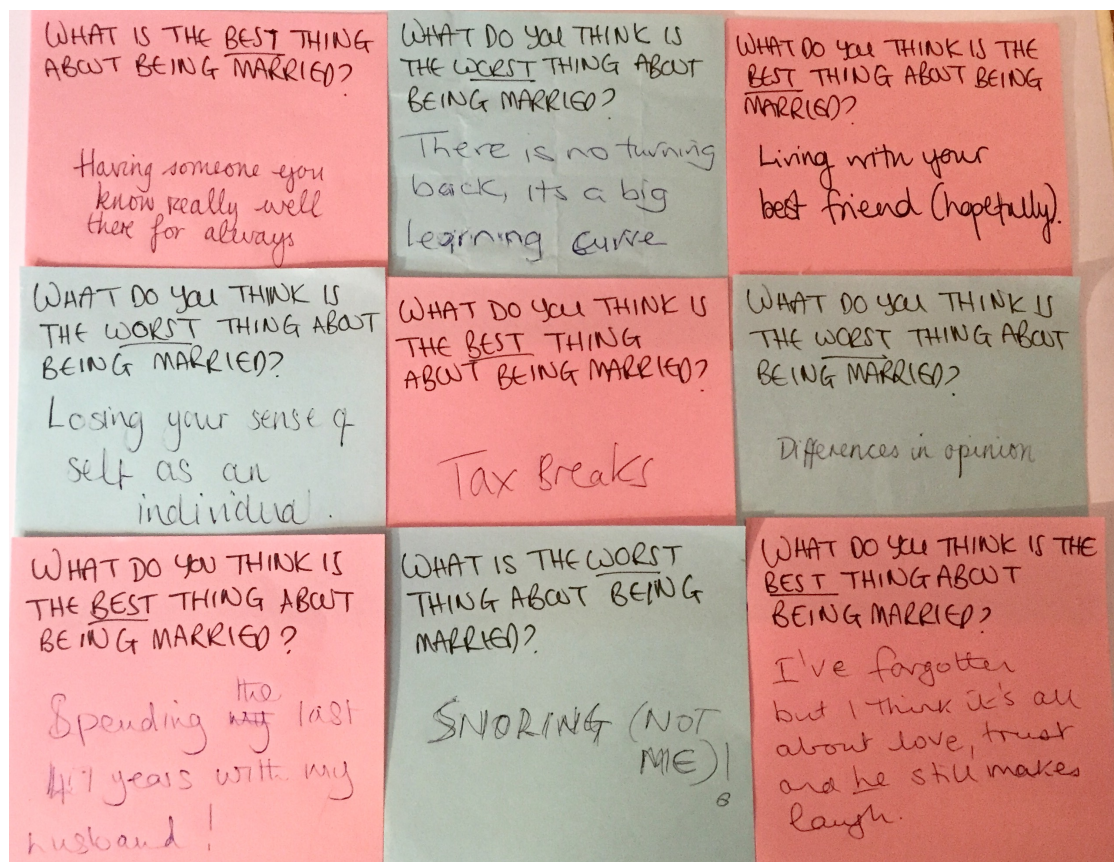


Figure 4.16 Audience thoughts on marriage. Photograph author's own.

We used early scenes and interactions with the audience for the actors to select those who they thought suitable to take on roles. We also tested two different ways for the audience member to be given their lines: either by reading them from a cue card or having them read aloud by a character for them to repeat. We therefore knew there were viable back-up plans should a selected audience member have difficulty with either method. However, this preparation was not visible to the audience:

I can feel a bit concerned when the gentleman over there, I don't know whether he was pre-primed about reading that letter out but I work with dyslexic people and you don't know what your audience is and what their reading skills are.

That's not easy for everybody is it?³⁶

The fact that rural promoters and audience members discussed their concerns about this element potentially going wrong demonstrates the level of concern that they had about someone else losing face. It also illustrates that while the strategies we had in place to manage risk in this scenario were effective, we could have done more to manage the perception of risk: that is to reassure the audience that we had put thought into ensuring no-one was put in a position where they felt uncomfortable or unwilling to interact at the level on offer to them. At the pilot performance we did not successfully make clear that the fact that this did not happen was not just a case of good fortune.

Use of space

The hall was set up with a top-table for the wedding party, several tables spread around the room for the audience, and space for a dance floor in the

³⁶ Comments from audience post-show discussion.

middle of the room. The stage manager's desk was set up as a wedding DJ booth at one side, and the bar (run by the promoter's husband) was set up at the other side.



Figure 4.17 Hall set up for the pilot, with top table (right), stage management/DJ table, and central dance floor. Photograph Emma Pegg.

This was simultaneously realistic for a wedding in a village hall space and cabaret-style seating in theatrical terms. As I have highlighted, the removal of divisions between audience and practitioner space has been described as a way of facilitating interaction and offering unconventional theatrical experiences for audiences. Rural promoters at the pilot however commented that they frequently used cabaret-style seating for musical acts. What might be an unfamiliar and noteworthy or powerful experience for an audience member used to attending conventional theatre in non-rural, building-based settings is much less noteworthy for rural touring audiences who are both used to seeing theatre in intimate spaces in which any divide between the audience and performance is not a permanent architectural feature, and who have other experiences of varied uses of the space in which the performance

takes place. This is borne out by the fact that while I identified an audience sharing space with performers as a prominent feature of interactive work in my third chapter, rural audience members questioned after the pilot had little to say in either post-show discussions or questionnaires about sharing the space of the village hall with the performers.

Practicalities of making and touring the work

A key research enquiry for this pilot was whether making interactive work for rural audiences creates new practical, logistical or financial considerations for the company. White's 'procedural authorship' denotes a creative process specific to interactive work whereby those involved in creating the work author a structure containing gaps to be filled by the audience. The piece of work created via this process thus consists of this structure, the ways in which the interaction is invited, how risk is managed, and indeed the contributions of the participants themselves.³⁷ This also applies to the creation of interactive work for rural audiences. The authorship of the event is a result of the work of the playwright and director creating a dramaturgical structure that contains gaps for the audience to fill. In rehearsing the work and preparing for multiple possible audience responses to invitations to interact, considering the management of risk and perception of risk, and performing the show and realising these aspects, the actors too are involved in the procedural authorship of the event. Finally, in filling in the gaps that have been left for them, and having their creative contributions incorporated, audience members become additional procedural authors of that iteration of the piece.

This presents several implications for companies considering making interactive work for rural touring. The first is the need for a different way of rehearsing and making the work. Many conventional theatre performances open with one or two previews, which are the company's first chance to put

³⁷ White, p. 30; 60.

the work in front of an audience and assess reactions. However, when an audience's contributions form part of the work, the presence of an audience is required before previews or an opening night. According to White's model, the audience's input in interactive work is part of the 'aesthetic material' from which the work is constructed.³⁸ He argues that it therefore needs to be part of the rehearsal process, in the same way that technical and design elements like lighting, set and costume are incorporated into a conventional rehearsal process.

All involved in the pilot felt that were the company to make interactive work in the future it would be crucial to hold at least one test performance with an audience as part of the rehearsal process.

[You need] test audiences so you can [...] improvise around a planned version to a few different small groups of people so you can gauge how different bits work and what bits people listen to.³⁹

The pilot performance acted as a first test performance for *Something Blue*: afterwards cast and creatives immediately reflected on potential changes having witnessed how an audience responded to the invitations to interact. Organising test performances for interactive work could create additional demands on New Perspectives' time and budget during the rehearsal process. They could however be advantageous to the company. Giving parties involved in the selection and promotion of the work the chance to experience the nature of interaction involved could enable them to sell it more effectively to promoters and audience members, and to reassure them about what to expect. Test performances could therefore be utilised as another strategy for managing aspects of the horizon of risk specific to the rural touring distribution model. They could also provide opportunities for New Perspectives to extend their relationship with promoters (who are of course

³⁸ White, p. 11; p. 14.

³⁹ Adam Horvath, 'Actors Debrief' (30th September 2014).

also audience members) outside performances, potentially contributing to the audience engagement identified by Tye as a goal for the company.

The process of procedural authorship results in a different kind of script being created. Because a playwright creates a structure with gaps to be filled, the script may have sections that resemble traditional scripted dialogue and stage directions, and other sections that resemble a non-linear flow-chart, where different options are written depending on how an audience responds to invitations to interact. The script for my pilot included sections written for situations where audience members did not accept invitations to take part in karaoke or dancing.

JASON:
Oh. OK. Maybe today's not the day for it.
Um. (to DJ) Anyone else lined up?
DJ:
Yes - it's _____ / Nope.
JAX: (if 'No')?
Really? No one? Aw - go on - make my day better!
JASE, BERNIE & JAX encourage an audience member to come forward. This should be an invitation and not a coercion, hopefully someone will show a chink of interest or be proposed by a friend.
BERNIE: (if no one answers)
OK - I'll step up. But I'm going to pick something that I you'll all sing along with. (she consults with DJ and sings 'Thankyou for the Music')
JAX:
Thankyou so much! I will literally never forget that! I
... there in the audience have got space ... favourites...

Figure 4.18 *Something Blue* script: karaoke scene, different options depending on audience response.

Other sections of a script for an interactive performance might take the form of suggested content to include in improvised conversations with audience members. The conversations characters had with groups at tables in *Something Blue* illustrates this.

JAX:

- Aw - thankyou for coming! I'm so glad you're here.
- I can't believe you've come so far / how long has it been since I've seen you?
- Questions about journey / life in NZ / obscure family members.
- I need all the support I can get today.
- I don't want to talk about Edd. Sorry. I just can't
- Could you help me? - mebbe we could pool our collective life experiences as we're all together.
- Do you think there are just some things you have to do with you life? Like a vocation?
- Do any of you feel like you have a vocation? What do you do?
- Being a stay at home Mum can be a vocation. My mum

Figure 4.19 *Something Blue* script: Jax bullet points for audience conversations.

My pilot revealed that making interactive work of this nature relies on actors who are comfortable improvising and interacting and this has to be taken into account when casting. Additionally, the timeline of a playwright's involvement in creating work of this nature may differ from a conventional new writing process, where the majority of their work takes place prior to a script being handed over to a director, with limited time spent in rehearsals. Making interactive work may involve a writer being present in more rehearsals and more of the piece being authored collaboratively with other members of the creative team.⁴⁰

All these factors would need to be taken into consideration by New Perspectives when appointing cast and creatives for interactive work. However, the unique nature of rural touring means that the company already needs to ensure that potential employees understand the particular demands of creating, touring and performing work in this context. The company is therefore already familiar with the need to ensure that potential actors and creatives understand the specific requirements of their work.

⁴⁰ This in turn raises the questions regarding the intellectual ownership of such work, and it would be advisable for the company to consult with the Writer's Guild and/or legal advisors on this subject.

Marketing and promoting the work

The rural touring model is unique in its reliance on volunteer promoters, and on audiences drawn largely from existing communities of location. This has implications for marketing and promoting interactive work. Feedback from the pilot highlighted several key points. Firstly, because the term 'interactive' does not have a fixed or uncontested definition when applied to theatre, it may be interpreted differently by audience members, rural and otherwise. In post-show questionnaires from the pilot, people's responses to the question 'Did you interact with the performance and performers? If so how?' revealed a variety of interpretations and applications of the term. Some audience members whom I had witnessed joining in with karaoke, dancing, improvised conversations, debate and decision making only described themselves as having interacted when characters spoke directly to them.

While rural audience members and promoters present stressed that if they were to book or attend interactive work they would need to make sure people knew it was interactive, it is important to consider what interactive means to different people. It may not be beneficial to describe every instance of interaction in advance of the performance in the pre-theatrical frame, as highlighted by Freestone when discussing Pentabus' *Every Brilliant Thing*. However, whether audiences are told in advance or discover during the show that the piece is interactive, it may be important to reassure people that they do not have to join in with anything if they do not wish to. As I have discussed, inviting promoters and scheme managers to attend test performances so that they can confidently communicate to their audiences about the production could strengthen this reassurance. Rural promoters already make use of face-to-face interactions and the trust and existing relationships they have with their audience when promoting work, so this element is not unique to interactive work, but in the case of interactive work it can be used to manage the perception of risk.

In the case of rural touring the messages communicated in the pre-theatrical frames may not be entirely in the control of the company because of the involvement of promoters. However, rather than this being a disadvantage, the company can utilise the promoter's knowledge of their audience base, and the trust the local audience may already have in them in order to reassure them and manage the perception of risk. I have highlighted that a unique challenge of the rural touring model is that touring schemes and promoters mean that New Perspectives is in some ways at two removes from their audiences. It is also the case however that the relationship between many promoters and their audiences is closer than that between a theatre company and their audience in a non-rural setting. They do much of their promoting face-to-face, and they have existing relationships with many of their audience members as members of the same rural community who may also be friends, neighbours, or mutual members of interest groups. There is therefore the potential for the promoter's knowledge to be used to help manage risk. When the audience is arriving, if the promoter is aware of attendees who are either particularly reluctant or particularly enthusiastic about interacting, they can indicate them to actors so that individuals can either be avoided or targeted for invitations to interact. If a promoter is open to being involved, they could be invited to interact in order to encourage others. If community members see them as a leader and/or as knowing more about the performance, witnessing them joining in and responding positively to an invitation to interact may alter their perception of risk and encourage them to follow suit.

Given the voluntary role of promoters, it is essential that New Perspectives consider their responsibility to them. Interactive work which presents a level of risk which feels uncomfortable or unsafe, or work in which the audience feel manipulated or coerced into taking part, work that deliberately incites conflict or humiliation, or work that does not deliver what is promised is likely to result in a loss of social capital for the promoter, and has the potential to jeopardise their position and relationships in their community. While this is a

danger when promoting any work, with a non-interactive show, the risk is that the work is not as described in terms of quality or content, or that it offends. However in the case of interactive work, there is much more at risk for rural audience members and the consequences for them, the promoter, and the whole community are more significant.

Conclusions

A rural touring audience member's attendance at a performance is likely to be motivated by a desire to see and spend time with a community of people they know and to support the promoter, as well by the desire for an artistic experience. These factors lead to a particular horizon of risk for interactive work, precisely because community and social capital are at stake. The audience in a rural touring context are an ongoing rather than a temporary community, and subsequently real relationships are involved. Even in interactive performances that do not set out to be divisive or antagonistic, in an urban context an invitation to interact might come with the (explicit or implied) reminder that "You will probably never see these people again". For a rural audience this is not the case. What happens during an interactive rural touring performance, including performances and contributions that might be made by audience members, becomes part of the community memory for that audience. A key finding of my research is therefore that theatre-makers must be aware of the nature of the rural audience's horizon of risk (which includes both risk and the perception of risk), and what is at stake when making work in this context. Interactive performances must be framed and procedurally authored in order to manage risk.

In my third chapter I discussed interactive work which sets out to challenge and shock audiences and to create discomfort, as well as companies who split up audience members so that they experience the work alone or with strangers. The sociable nature of rural touring and the care and concern that rural promoters and audience members demonstrate towards their fellow

audience members and fellow community members – highlighted in the quotes below – suggest that this kind of work would not be appropriate for rural touring.

If think they need to know it's interactive. [...] I think if you don't say that, you might get people who feel awkward when they get here.

You've got to make sure people know what they're coming to. [...] You can say "This is interactive, if you'd like to join in please do, but don't feel like you have to".⁴¹

I was talking to someone about interaction, interactive theatre, and she was saying [...] she doesn't like going to see Punchdrunk because she's scared, because you get separated from the people you know, and then you are made to do things.⁴²

Indeed it is possible that interactive work that had these effects – whether deliberately or because an intended moment of interaction went awry – could have a lasting impact on the rural community and on the rural promoter's position within that community.

My research suggests that it is possible to create interactive work in which opportunities for the audience to socialise and interact with each other, and to debate and comment upon the themes and questions the work presents, are incorporated dramaturgically into the piece, rather than only happening during the interval and pre and post-show periods, as is the case at conventional rural touring performances. This still relies, however, on the audience's perceptions of risk being managed. The evidence from the pilot suggests that for a rural audience this can be achieved with a number of strategies: making use of familiar frames and conventions to invite interaction

⁴¹ Rural promoter comments from post-show discussion.

⁴² Randle, 'Actors Debrief' (30th September 2014).

and allow the audience to discover the rules at work in the performance; using assigned relational roles to allow audience members to interact with characters and each other; making adequate preparations for any specific character roles, and procedurally authoring the structure of the work in order to warm up the audience and build the level of risk in the interactions invited.

While these findings are significant, and will be useful to any rural touring company seeking to make interactive work, the limitations of the pilot should be acknowledged. *Something Blue* did not replicate a full rehearsal and production process or a full tour. While attendees were aware that they were watching a 'work in progress' performance as part of research being conducted, some aspects of this may have had an impact on their willingness to interact. For example, the actors performed for the most part with scripts in hand, and while the scripts themselves were written to take into account the possibility of different audience responses, and much of the content on the night was semi-improvised, for some audience members the visibility of the scripts acted as a deterrent to interact, because of a fear of sending the actors 'off course'.⁴³ Additionally, it is impossible to completely separate the dramaturgical content of the script from the invitations to interact, and there are instances in which the audience's reluctance to interact or confusion over their role in the piece may result from scripting or dramaturgical issues as well as the type of interaction being invited or the way the invitation was made.

My findings highlight that while the management of risk and the perception of risk has been identified as a key feature of the procedural authorship of interactive work, the way in which risk is manifest in a rural touring context is different from a non-rural context, resulting in what I have termed a rural horizon of risk. It is crucial that any companies making interactive work for rural touring have an understanding of this rural horizon of risk and of exactly

⁴³ Feedback from post-show discussion and rural promoter interview.

what it is that is at risk in the rural touring context. This is underlined by Freestone, discussing Pentabus' work on *Every Brilliant Thing*:

We'd wanted to make a piece about isolation and depression and suicide because it's a big rural issue [...] so we were looking to find a way of talking about that in rural communities. But obviously everybody knows each other, it's incredibly close to the surface, it's a very vulnerable thing to ask people to do in communities that aren't used to being vulnerable in front of each other. [...] How can you take responsibility for it? [...] We're always quite interested in this idea that you turn up in a community, you let off a bomb, and then you fuck off. And actually you have a responsibility to deal with whatever it is that you've set off in that environment.⁴⁴

Since rural audiences exist as communities outside of the performance event, and since community-building is often a reason for attending rural touring theatre, interactive work that provides interactions that are likely to contribute to community-building rather than jeopardise it are far more likely to be successful. Interactive performances that fail to take into account the unique nature of rural touring audiences and the distribution model's reliance on volunteer promoters drawn from the community not only have the potential to jeopardise community, but also run the risk of undermining the infrastructure of the sector, because without volunteer promoters the current rural touring model would fail to operate. This indicates a particular duty of care and professional ethic required by theatre companies making any work in this context, but particularly interactive work in which the audience's contributions and performances form an essential part of the work, and in which real relationships in real communities are at risk of being damaged in the fallout of a bomb going off.

⁴⁴ Interview (15th September 2015).

CHAPTER 5

Engaging with Place: Digging down into local soil

It's a blessing to be able to come from just up the road [...] to this beautiful place and to have some real arts and culture happen, it's fantastic!¹

We come here and it's lovely because we can have a cup of coffee or a glass of wine and meet our friends that we know in the village and then afterwards we go across to the pub!²

Inherent in the local is the concept of place – a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar. Most often place applies to our own “local” – entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provoke and evoke. Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there.³

Introduction

In this chapter I consider the second of two areas of formal innovation highlighted in my second chapter, site-specificity. I consider how investigating theatre which formally engages with place addresses New Perspectives' aims,

¹ Rural audience member, speaking as part of *Arts Alive - Film of Our Work* (Arts Alive, 2012) <<https://vimeo.com/28410680>> [accessed 8 April 2016].

² Rural touring audience member, speaking as part of *Arts Alive - Film of Our Work*.

³ Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997), p. 7.

including McNamara's interest in 'digging into the soil' of rural communities.⁴ There are two central aspects of the rural touring model which dictate the parameters for my research in this area: first, as a community of location, the rural touring audience has an existing relationship to the places where performances take place, and second, the work needs to be tourable. The key research question that emerges from these factors is: in what ways is it possible to make place-related work feel specific to an audience familiar with a particular place to the extent that the engagement with place feels telluric, and yet still tourable to multiple rural locations within the existing rural touring distribution model? I consider how existing frameworks for analysing site-specificity take these factors into account, noting that while theoretical models including Pearson and McLucas' Host/Ghost/Witness, Turner's palimpsest and potential space, and Joanne Tompkins' use of Michel Foucault's heterotopias all offer useful ways of analysing and understanding the relationship between a performance and the place in which it is located, the relationship between the audience and the place has been the subject of less attention. I argue that in the context of rural touring it is essential to create a theoretical model in which the audience's relationship to place, and the work's tourability, are central. In seeking to develop such a model I examine theories of place put forward by geographer Doreen Massey and others which offer ways of understanding places as multi-dimensional, dynamic and as much socially constructed as physically located.

Combining a multi-dimensional conception of place with Bennett's horizon of expectations, I therefore propose an 'horizon of place' both as a framework for analysing an audience's relationship to a place, and as a lens through which to consider work that engages with place. I use this framework to further interrogate New Perspectives' aims in exploring work that engages with place and to consider ways that these aims could be achieved. Throughout I examine a range of theatre practice both by way of illustration, and in order to build the foundations for my second pilot: a practice-based

⁴ McNamara, Interview (24th October 2014).

research project exploring ways of making formally innovative place-related theatre for rural touring with a consideration of the audience's relationship to place at its heart.⁵

Defining key terms and parameters

I use the term 'place-related' as an alternative to 'site-specific'. Much like my choice to use 'interactivity' rather than 'participation', I use the term to draw attention to some of the key issues that arise when discussing work that engages with place in a rural touring context, as opposed to non-rural and/or non-touring settings. Nick Kaye notes that site-specificity originated 'in the minimalist sculpture of the 1960s'.⁶ Fiona Wilkie states that the term began to be applied to theatre and performance taking place outside of theatre buildings in the 1980s: 'the term 'site-specific' only really began to have currency in theatrical (rather than sculptural) terms in the mid- to late-1980s, with companies such as the influential Welsh-based Brith Gof popularizing the form'.⁷ Several scholars have noted the difficulty of fixing a definition of the term as a result of it being applied to an area of practice with slippery boundaries: '(a)lthough the search for a practicable, encompassing definition of site-specific performance has long claimed scholarly attention, it remains slippery'.⁸ Turning to the context of rural touring, while the term 'site-specific' is certainly familiar, bringing with it recognisable connotations of the types of work being described, it is inconsistently used and defined by theorists, theatre-makers, audiences and funders. Kidman notes that CAE used the term

⁵ Once again, my intention here is not to provide a complete survey of the field, or to fix definitions and impose boundaries, but instead to be selective in order to draw on existing theory and practice that has particular relevance for the unique context of rural touring, and for the particular angle of my research enquiry.

⁶ Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 2.

⁷ Fiona Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain: A Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 18.02 (2002), 140–60 (p. 141).

⁸ Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 7; see also *Performing Site-Specific Theatre: Politics, Place, Practice*, ed. by Anna Birch and Joanne Tompkins (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain'; Turner.

to refer to a performance precisely because it was known to appeal to funders:

We did a piece we called site-specific last year, it wasn't created specifically for that site. [...] It's a term that's useful in conversations with funders, because 'site-specific' for a local authority for instance, which is what funded primarily that work, is of course exactly what they want to be quoting and saying because they're talking about their area.⁹

As well as the term 'site-specific' being used differently by various stakeholders, it is applied to a broad range of work that, like interactive theatre, has edges that are fuzzy or slippery, as noted by Tompkins:

The form continues to provoke questions about what both performance and site convey. [...] The specific nature of this increasingly popular genre is not as easy to isolate as many other forms of performance for several reasons, the most significant being the propensity for the boundaries of both 'site' and 'performance' to slip.¹⁰

In addition to Tompkins' observations about 'site' and 'performance', I suggest that the definitions and application of the term 'specific' are equally open to question, and I discuss the notion of specificity in further detail throughout this chapter. I propose that 'specificity' is a concept that is experienced subjectively by both theatre-makers and audiences, and it is one of the notions I interrogate here and explore through my practical research. Consequently its presence in the term 'site-specific' remains problematic for my purposes.

⁹ Kidman, interview (22nd September 2015).

¹⁰ Joanne Tompkins, 'The "Place" & Practice of Site-Specific Theatre and Performance', in *Performing Site-Specific Theatre: Politics, Place, Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1–17 (p. 1).

In addition to turning away from 'specific', I use 'place-related' to draw attention to my use of theories of place as multi-dimensional and socially constructed. This approach to place, highlighted in Lucy Lippard's quotation at the outset of this chapter, is useful in opening a discussion about how formally experimental rural touring work might engage with the places it tours to, and create feelings of specificity. Some theorists and practitioners, including Balme and the collective Wrights and Sites, discuss site-specific performances with reference to how inextricably linked they are to particular physical sites, therefore problematizing the notion of work that tours or transfers (discussed further below). However, like Tompkins above, other theorists acknowledge the complexity of defining 'site' and draw on theories of place put forward by geographers. Indeed Pearson, in *Site-Specific Performance*, utilises Massey's conception of place in order to present 'an expanded notion of site' as 'a function of the social'.¹¹ This social dimension of place is essential to my research and speaks to both the rural touring audience's existing relationship to place, and to the tourability of work. These two factors are not unique to rural touring: there are a number of theoretical models that address the possibility of place-related work touring.¹² Additionally, there are theorists who highlight the fact that audiences at place-related performances may be familiar with the places in which they are staged. For example, Pearson's autobiographical promenade performance *Bubbling Tom* (2000, Hibaldstow, Lincolnshire) was attended by audiences familiar with both the village it was set in, and the artist himself.¹³ Pearson advocates asking questions about the audience's relationship to place when making site-specific work:

¹¹ Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, p. 16; see also pp. 13, pp. 108-109.

¹² For example Turner, 'Palimpsest or Potential Space?', p. 373, discussed further below.

¹³ Mike Pearson, *In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), pp. 21-22; D. Heddon, 'Performing the Archive: Following in the Footsteps', *Performance Research*, 7.4 (2002), 64-77.

What the audience brings may come from many different places and may from time to time exert different pressures. [...] The audience may be other than an essentially anonymous 'general' public: [...]

Are they on home turf?

Do they know more about this place than I do?¹⁴

However, where my research differs from those who do consider the possibilities both of place-related performances touring and an audience's familiarity with the place in which a performance is staged is that for theorists and practitioners working outside of the rural touring sector these factors are variables, questions to be asked. For my research, they are fixed: they are existing features and parameters of the rural touring model. It is for these reasons that, while drawing on theoretical frameworks examining site-specificity, I argue that it is necessary to create a new framework for considering place-related work in a rural touring context, and useful to use the term 'place-related' instead of 'site-specific' in order to do so.

Despite my decision to use the term 'place-related', the term 'site-specific' is familiar. While there may be arguments about what types of work can and should be described as site-specific (discussed further below) for most it at least evokes a notional sense of the nature of the work being described: theatre and performances taking place outside of theatre buildings – perhaps outdoors, or in non-theatre spaces such as abandoned factories and warehouses – and in which the location of the work has some kind of significance to the performance and/or the experience of it for the audience. That is to say, the work in question engages with its location in some way in its form. While there is a lot of work that engages with place or site solely through its content – stories about particular sites, or set in particular places – my research is about formal innovation for rural touring, so I focus particularly on work that is innovative in its formal relationship to where it takes place, and this frequently means that it takes place outside of

¹⁴ Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, p. 177.

traditional theatre venues: as Pearson notes, when working with a broad definition of place or site, the conventional auditorium becomes useful as a 'control [...] against which to extrapolate the particularities of site work'.¹⁵

Of course, in the context of rural touring, the conventional theatre venue or auditorium (in all but a few cases) is not a purpose-built theatre, but instead the village hall or equivalent community space. Therefore, here I primarily focus on the possibility of making work that takes place outside of the village hall and consider the rural locations in which these venues are found.¹⁶ It is important to remember that there is a significant amount of variation in these rural villages and small towns.

Reasons to investigate place-related work for rural touring

Rural places of performances are one of the unique features of rural touring. Consequently, one of the initial questions leading to my second practical pilot was whether it was possible to make place-related theatre that utilises the rural locations in which rural touring takes place. Returning to the ethos of equality of access to high quality professional theatre which is at the heart of the rural touring model, it was apparent from my own experience of theatre in both rural and urban settings that place-related work was frequently on offer in the cities and city-based theatre festivals where I was seeing theatre, but such work was rarely available to rural touring audiences. While there are frequent examples of place-related working taking place in rural locations, including some made by rural touring companies – for example Pentabus' audio drama *In This Place* (2013, Shropshire) which audiences experienced through headphones while following a walk in the Shropshire hills – there is an absence of such work touring rurally.

¹⁵ Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, p. 16.

¹⁶ While it would be possible to 'dig into the soil' of a village hall and create a piece of place-related theatre staged inside, I questioned whether this would have maximised the potential for innovation presented by this research opportunity and/or created the challenge to convention aimed for by New Perspectives.

Conducting research into work that engages with place meets New Perspectives' desires to find new ways to engage with both rural audiences and their places of performance as creative and inspirational resources for the company's work. In addition, I have discussed the company's ongoing desire to experiment and challenge the conventions of the theatre currently being made for the sector, driven both by the artistic interest of the current Artistic Director, and by an ambition to act as a sector leader. These ongoing aims are also reasons to conduct research into work that engages with place and, as with the reasons to experiment with interactive work that I discussed in my third chapter, they overlap and intersect.

The rural touring distribution model presents particular challenges for companies like New Perspectives 'deepening engagement' with audiences because the infrastructure of touring schemes and promoters prevents direct and frequent contact between the company and individual audience members. However, creating work that engages through form with the locations toured to has the potential to offer the company new ways of engaging with a rural touring audience as a community of (that) location, and to extend the company's presence in rural places beyond the existing conventional model of a day and an evening spent inside the village hall. Similarly, if through the creation of place-related work rural places become sources of artistic inspiration for New Perspectives, then this too extends the current relationship the company has with its rural audiences (while simultaneously achieving the aim of sourcing artistic inspiration from rural locations).

In initial discussions with New Perspectives' leadership team about my second phase of practice-based research, both McNamara and Tye questioned whether it would be possible to create a performance that created 'meaningful engagement' with a rural location while still being tourable:

If we're talking about a *tour* tour, which is fourteen dates at least, how do you genuinely and deeply interact with the site itself on a fourteen date tour?¹⁷

When considering what was meant by 'meaningful' and/or 'genuine' and 'deep' engagement both McNamara and Tye rejected what they termed 'superficial' engagement in the form of a limited number of local references being made during a performance in each location, a strategy they compared to those used by stand-up comedians:

It's on a card, 'must mention St Ann's, say that there's no street lights in Mansfield and make a jibe about Derby or the East Midlands', do you know what I mean? [...] It's kind of like three things that are written on the back of a hand and I just think that's really disingenuous.¹⁸

Instead of this 'disingenuous' strategy, McNamara and Tye emphasised the need for New Perspectives to create place-related theatre that feels specific to its touring locations in order both to create meaningful engagement and to make use of rural settings as creative sources:

We're talking about these villages as creative sources in some way, so [...] when we bring it back again to that question of how is it useful for New Perspectives, [...] if it magically makes people feel like it's specific to them or their space, that would be useful, but also useful for me, is well, we've got these resources, we've got these places, and what is there that we can dig up?¹⁹

This imagery of 'digging into the soil of [...] places' challenges whether it is possible for a touring company to counter a superficial model of engagement by creating place-related work that is telluric in its engagement with place,

¹⁷ McNamara, interview (24th October 2014).

¹⁸ Tye, interview (24th October 2014).

¹⁹ McNamara, interview (24th October 2014).

originating from a metaphorical excavation into the earth of a rural location.²⁰ This then raises the question of how this quality of engagement is assessed: in particular, how specificity is experienced and measured, and by whom, bearing in mind that within the rural touring sector it is usually the case that the audience has an existing relationship with the place of performance while the company do not.

It is clear that the rural touring distribution model does not allow for fourteen completely distinct pieces of theatre to be created for the fourteen locations visited on the hypothetical rural tour referenced by McNamara above. Therefore to develop a model for place-related work that can exist within the rural touring framework there needs to be a dramaturgical structure that remains in place for each touring location, and tailored content that creates a feeling of specificity within each of these places.

Addressing this challenge, my second practical pilot also provides an opportunity to build on the learning from *The Falling Sky* discussed in my first chapter. This production departed from the conventional form for a rural touring production in taking place outside of the village hall, and engaged with place by using the villages themselves as backdrops for the audio drama. Audiences, while responding positively to the unconventional form of the work, expressed disappointment at the lack of specificity in the relationship between place and performance.²¹

Site-specific and site-generic

Because the notion of specificity is key to the type of deep and meaningful engagement with place that New Perspectives wish to create, it is useful to consider how others have approached this concept. Some theorists and

²⁰ McNamara, interview (24th October 2014).

²¹ *The Falling Sky* 2010 pilots and 2011 tour audience feedback, New Perspectives archive, held at New Perspectives' offices.

practitioners have argued that the term 'site-specific' should only apply to work that is inextricably linked to one location. Balme states that:

Site-specific performances utilize natural features or historical spaces and buildings to provide a spatially determined semantic frame for the actual performance. They use the properties and meanings found at a given site, be it a landscape, a city, a building or a room. [...] Needless to say, the defining aspect of site-specificity is its rootedness in a particular place and hence the impossibility of transferring such performances to other locales.²²

In *Theatre/Archaeology*, Pearson and Shanks define the genre similarly:

Site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations. [...] They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible.²³

With these definitions, the idea of exploring site-specific work for touring is an impossible task. There is a plethora of recent examples of place-related work created specifically for one place. In the case of Katrina Palmer's *The Loss Adjusters* (2015, Dorset), created for the Isle of Portland, the work was a result of Palmer moving to and living 'on-site' since being commissioned to make the piece, which is about Portland:

She's been tramping Portland's pathways thinking about its history [...] Palmer regards this *Loss Adjusters* project as working with a found object. She wants to point up the holes in Portland, the gradual

²² Balme, pp. 60–61.

²³ Pearson and Shanks, p. 23.

absence of the stone, a beautiful, natural, sculptural material. The island itself is being hollowed out. It's being sculpted from within.²⁴

Work of this nature, in its engagement with a single location, is bound up with that place to the extent that it would be impossible for it to transfer or tour.²⁵ In such models, artists or companies do source creative inspiration from the places in question, however they are required to engage in long-term research and deep excavation in order to do so. Such long-term research would not be feasible for New Perspectives for the multiple locations on a rural tour.

As noted by Tompkins above, boundaries and definitions of what constitutes site-specificity are subject to slippages and contestation, and theoretical discussion of place-related work does include analyses of performances that are not limited to one site alone. One attempt to address the slippages in the boundaries of what is classed as site-specific is proposed by performance group Wrights and Sites, in the form of a continuum of alternative terms for work dependent on the relationship between the performance and the site. This continuum is reproduced in Figure 5.1 below:

In theatre building	>	Outside theatre e.g. Shakespeare in the park	>	Site-sympathetic existing performance text physicalized in a selected site	>	Site-generic performance generated for a series of like sites (e.g. car parks, swimming pools)	>	Site-specific performance specifically generated from/for one selected site
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Figure 5.1 Wrights and Sites continuum of place-related work.²⁶

²⁴ Miranda Sawyer, 'Katrina Palmer: The Artist Who Has Mined a Rich Seam of Nothingness', *Guardian*, 26 April 2015 <www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/apr/26/katrina-palmer-artist-mined-nothingness-artangel-open> [accessed 26 April 2015].

²⁵ Other contemporary examples of such work include several National Theatre Wales productions: *The Persians* (2010, Brecon Beacons), *For Mountain, Sand & Sea* (2010, Barmouth) *The Passion* (2011, Port Talbot); and Graeme Miller's *Linked (M11)* (2003, London).

²⁶ Wrights and Sites, cited in Fiona Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain: A Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain', (p. 150).

As Wilkie notes in her survey of site-specific practice in which this continuum is featured:

This scale reserves the label 'site-specific' only for performances in which a profound engagement with one site is absolutely central to both the creation and execution of the work (these performances work with and from one site, do not tour, and do not perform pre-existing scripts), and suggests new labels to distinguish other theatrical experiments with non-theatre spaces.²⁷

Within this continuum, work that engages with place but that tours to 'a series of like sites' is termed 'site-generic'. An example of this type of place-related work is Grid Iron's *Decky Does a Bronco* (2000-2002, 2010, touring), which has been staged in multiple playgrounds, including as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and on a three-month UK tour.²⁸ While it toured to different playgrounds, the scripted dramatic narrative, including the drama's setting on a Scottish council estate, remained the same in each location, and therefore the interaction between the performance and each place was limited. For audience members at any performance, *Decky Does a Bronco* may have been framed by the particular playground on which it was staged, however the company did not research or engage with each specific playground in the creation of the piece.

New Perspectives could create a touring model using similar principles to this example of site-generic work by considering rural villages and towns as 'a series of like sites'. However there is significant variation between the rural locations toured to and treating them as like sites would be problematic. More importantly, it would be questionable whether this approach would lead to the creation of work making the kind of telluric, meaningful engagement with places and audiences that the company is aiming to achieve. Indeed, it could

²⁷ Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain', p. 150.

²⁸ 'Grid Iron Website' <www.gridiron.org.uk> [accessed 29 November 2013].

be seen that this approach would resemble the 'parachuting' of work from outside into rural contexts that I have stated I wish to avoid.

The role of the audience in place-related theatre

Given the limitations of a site-generic model, it is helpful to examine other frameworks for place-related performances. Specifically, it is useful to consider what it is about a place that is being engaged with, and the significance of the audience in this exchange.

In his definition of site-specific theatre Pearson makes a distinction between 'two basic orders: that which is of the site [...] and that which is brought to the site'.²⁹ In the model developed with his Brith Gof colleague McLucas, these two orders are named as Host and Ghost, and are joined by the audience as Witness:

The Host site is haunted for a brief time by a Ghost that the theatre makers create. Like all ghosts, it is transparent and Host can be seen through Ghost. Add into this a third term – the Witness – i.e., the audience, and we have a kind of Trinity that constitutes The Work.³⁰

In this model, the place of performance is a constant present, temporarily hosting the temporary and transparent performance. The audience as Witness is able to experience both at the same time. However, what is not interrogated is whether the audience is 'of the site' or 'brought to the site'. Clearly in some place-related work the audience is brought to a location to which they may not otherwise have access, for example Brith Gof's *Gododdin* (1998-1990) initially took place in a 'disused Cardiff car factory'.³¹ In other

²⁹ Pearson and Shanks, p. 23.

³⁰ McLucas, quoted in Kaye, *Site-Specific Art*, p. 128.

³¹ Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 43. National Theatre Wales' *The Persians* (directed by Pearson) also took place on a site ordinarily inaccessible to the public, as did Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man*.

work the performance may take place in a location which is publicly accessible but which audience members might not have visited before, for example Robert Wilson's *Walking* (2012, Norfolk) which was part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival and took place at the Holkham Nature Reserve.³² Other performances, including those taking place on the streets of London like the 'audio-walk' *And While London Burns* (2007, London), might be experienced by some audience members who have an existing relationship with the location in question and by others who do not.³³

Audiences for rural touring are drawn primarily from communities of location and made up of local residents who live in the rural villages in which the work is staged. Just as most rural touring audience members have existing and ongoing relationships with each other, they also have relationships to the places where they live which precede the presence of a place-related performance, and continue after it. I argue therefore that in this context Pearson and McLucas' Host/Ghost/Witness framework does not place enough emphasis on the existing and ongoing relationship between the Host and the Witness, a relationship that has an existence outside of the temporary haunting by the Ghost. Indeed, I argue that the audience's existing and ongoing relationship with the places where they live may be an essential component to the meaningful engagement and specificity which New Perspectives hopes to achieve within a touring model where each individual encounter between a performance (Ghost) and its touring locations (Hosts) is relatively brief. This then raises the question of whether it is possible to propose an alternate model for making place-related work in which a rural audience's relationship to place is actively involved, or co-creative, in the production of meaning in its encounter with the Ghost performance.

³² Louise Owen, 'Robert Wilson, *Walking* (Holham Estate, 2012)', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23.4, 568–73.

³³ Tompkins, 'The "Place" & Practice of Site-Specific Theatre and Performance'; see also National Theatre Wales' *For Mountain, Sand & Sea* for which audiences were made up of both residents of Barmouth and tourists.

In her discussion of different terms and vocabulary used to refer to site-specific work, Turner notes the prevalence of palimpsestic images of sites and spaces as layered and written over by performances:

Each occupation, or traversal, or transgression of space offers a reinterpretation of it, even a rewriting. Thus space is often envisaged as an aggregation of layered writings – a palimpsest.³⁴

She also notes the use of language of archaeology, including by Pearson in both his performance work and his theoretical writing: 'archaeology offers theatre a vocabulary of strata, fragments, ruins, narratives, traces, monuments, past and absence'.³⁵ Turner proposes an addition to these existing lexicons, borrowing the term 'potential space' from the field of psychoanalysis.³⁶ She argues that this liminal concept of potential space, existing between fiction and reality, avoids the view that what is of the site and what is brought to it are in conflict:

We could suggest, therefore, that rather than offering a fractured space, where site-specific performance takes place in the clash or dynamic between what is 'of' the site and what is brought 'to' it, this theoretical framework places the event within a 'potential space', where these elements are envisaged as co-creative. Temporarily, we create a space where we do not need to ask which elements we have invented and which we have found there.³⁷

In the context of rural touring, it is possible to see the audience as being 'of' the site and the theatre company and performance as being brought 'to' it. In a situation where the audience already exists as a community with relationships to both the site and to each other, it may be harder to occupy

³⁴ Turner, p. 373.

³⁵ Turner, p. 377.

³⁶ Turner, p. 379.

³⁷ Turner, p. 382.

the liminal potential space Turner proposes. However in considering how to make place-related work which tours to multiple rural locations within the existing rural touring distribution model, it has already been established that it is not possible for the company to spend time researching and excavating the layers of history of each location. An attempt to blur the boundaries between the reality of the place – known to the audience – and a fictional dramaturgy – brought to the place by the company – may create a new model for place-related work for this context. Additionally, the company must consider how any performance taking place in the rural locations toured to creates an additional palimpsestic layer of writing which remains after the company's visit ends. Once again, it is helpful to consider how site and performance are in dialogue with each other, but in the context of rural touring, it is also essential to consider the audience's ongoing relationship to the rural locations in which work is staged.

In order to do so, it is useful to interrogate the notion of place and, drawing on theory from the field of geography, examine the way in which it can be seen to be socially constructed and dynamic, as opposed to a fixed and bounded physical location. Lippard suggests that a multi-dimensional notion of place moves away from thinking about fixed locations and instead opens up place as a way in which we see and think about the world in collective and personal ways.³⁸ As such it offers an alternative framework for considering specificity and the potential intersecting relationships between place-related performances, places and audiences in a rural touring context.

Place as socially constructed

As with 'rural', 'interactive' and 'site-specific', the definition and application of 'place' is contested. In his 2004 examination of the notion Tim Cresswell notes that while the word 'place' is in everyday use, implying a common sense understanding of what it means, there are actually a variety of different

³⁸ Quoted at the outset of this chapter.

and conflicting ways in which the term is used, including by different scholars within both geography and cultural studies.³⁹ In her paper *A Global Sense of Place*, first published in 1991, Massey challenges the idea of places as having fixed and/or singular identities. Writing in the context of growing discussion of the perceived effects of globalisation, she argues for a new 'progressive sense of place, one which would fit in with the current global-local times and the feelings and relations they give rise to'.⁴⁰ Her proposed sense of place still allows for places to be unique, but conceives of them as intersections in networks of connections which are dynamic and exist within both temporal and spatial dimensions:

In this interpretation, what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus, [...] each 'place' can be seen as a particular, unique, point of their intersection. [...] Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings.⁴¹

The emphasis Massey places on social interactions and relations as part of what constructs place is useful when considering place-related work for rural touring. Her proposition that the specificity of places arises from 'particular constellations of social relations', when applied to New Perspectives making place-related work for rural touring, allows for the possibility of the feeling of a performance being specific to a place being generated as a result of social relations, including the presence of a local audience. As opposed to models of site-specificity where the emphasis is on the relationship between a performance and a particular physical location, engaging with a notion of

³⁹ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, Short Introductions to Geography (Malden, Mass. ; Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 1; 12. Included in his examination of contested definitions of place are the different and overlapping uses of space and place in cultural theory and philosophy, including by de Certeau and Lefebvre.

⁴⁰ Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', p. 26.

⁴¹ Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', p. 28.

place as socially constructed allows for a consideration of the audience and their relationship to a place as part of how a piece of work is in dialogue with the location where it takes place.

Gillian Rose's work on place and identity complements this consideration of place as socially constructed. She examines the notion of 'a sense of place' as another factor in the conceptualisation of place.⁴² She highlights that the way we understand and think about places is in part linked to the experiential and our emotions and feelings about those places.⁴³ According to Rose a sense of place is bound up with the social relations that govern places as well as the inequalities of power held in those social relations:

A sense of place is more than just one person's feelings about a particular place; such feelings are not only individual but also social. All places are interpreted from particular social positions and for particular social reasons.⁴⁴

She describes how a sense of place can contribute towards a feeling of belonging by highlighting differences with other places:

One way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by feeling that you belong to that place. It's a place in which you feel comfortable, or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place [...] [A sense of place] may explicitly refer to one place, but at the same time implicitly also be making arguments about another place. [...] Identity and place are [...] structured in relation to perceptions of other groups and places as different.⁴⁵

⁴² Gillian Rose, 'Place and Identity: A Sense of Place', in *A Place in the World?: Places, Cultures and Globalization*, The Shape of the World : Explorations in Human Geography, 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 87–132.

⁴³ Rose, pp. 88–89.

⁴⁴ Rose, p. 89.

⁴⁵ Rose, p. 89; 96.

If the way place, and particularly a sense of place are constructed depends partly on distinctions drawn between those who do and those who do not belong to a place, this highlights a particular challenge for New Perspectives who may be perceived by rural audience members as different and/or not belonging. The company occupies a different social position to rural audience members, and as such a different sense of place relating to each of these locations. In addressing this challenge, I sought to discover whether specificity and meaningful engagement with place could be created in a performance which set out to acknowledge and incorporate a rural audience's sense of place.

Combining Rose's notion of a sense of place with Massey's views on specificity of place is particularly useful in offering an alternative approach to the models of site-specificity which insist on non-touring performances emerging from detailed research into singular locations. Massey states that 'the specificity of place is continually reproduced, but it is not a specificity which results from some long, internalized history'. It may be possible for New Perspectives to create place-related touring theatre through which specificity is produced (or reproduced) in the moment of performance itself, via the incorporation of the audience's sense of place.⁴⁶ Just as Massey's conception of place challenges the idea that the specificity of a place is derived from its 'long, internalized history', applied to place-related theatre, this understanding of place contests the view that specificity and meaningful engagement can only arise from a deep excavation into the soil of a place.

Bringing together the ideas of places as socially constructed, and specificity as continually reproduced, leads me to propose an alternate way of considering how New Perspectives could create telluric place-related theatre which offers a meaningful engagement with place and uses rural places as sources of creative inspiration. Rather than conducting a deep excavation into the soil of a place, I propose that New Perspectives makes theatre which acknowledges

⁴⁶ Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', p. 29.

and allows for the fact that a rural audience arrives with the soil on their shoes. That is, they bring the place to performance with them. In order to interrogate this proposition further, I propose a 'horizon of place' as a means for understanding what it is an audience contributes to place-related theatre.

An horizon of place

Returning once more to the models horizon of expectations and horizon of participation, I now propose the addition of an horizon of place as a way of conceptualising what audience members bring to their experience regarding place, drawing on Massey's re-thinking of place as 'a meeting place, the location of the intersections of particular bundles of activity spaces, of connections and interrelations, of influences and movements'.⁴⁷ An audience's horizon of place also encapsulates a range of intersecting and interacting dimensions. Like horizons of expectations and participation, someone's horizon of place is not fixed: it is always being modified and adjusted as a result of experience. Just as 'place' can be thought of as both applying to specific places and as a way of understanding the world, the horizon of place encapsulates both the general and the specific. It covers both how an individual thinks about place generally as well as their senses of place for specific places.

As with an horizon of expectations, an horizon of place is not solely dependent on a personal connection to or experience of a place, but is shaped by personal experience, including the emotional and experiential. For example, someone living in the Rutland village of Manton may have a specific horizon of place that differs from mine: I, as someone who is not local to the village, have a horizon of place based on my knowledge and ideas of the place as an outsider. My 'outsider' horizon of place may be formed by memories of visiting (these include cycling through the village as part of the

⁴⁷ Doreen B. Massey, 'The Conceptualization of Place', in *A Place in the World?: Places, Cultures and Globalization*, The Shape of the World : Explorations in Human Geography, 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 45–85 (p. 59).

Rutland Water cycle route, stopping for lunch in the pub in the village, and visiting with rural touring shows as part of my work with New Perspectives); geographical notions of where the village is located in relation to my own home (I can picture where Manton is on a map, I have images and memories of the journey there from my home, as well as a concept of how long it takes to drive there, I am conscious of it sitting within a different county, and the three counties I would drive through to reach there), and an awareness of the defining features of the landscape, in particular Rutland Water.



Figure 5.2 View of Rutland Water from Manton. Photograph author's own.

In contrast, for someone living in the village, their horizon of place may be more fully fleshed out by their day-to-day experience of living in the village, their ideas and feelings about it as their home which constitute their sense of the place, and the 'networks of social relations' formed by relationships and friendships that are connected to the village, which may include involvement

in social and community activities or groups.⁴⁸ They are likely to have more memories to draw on, and their sense of the place may be formed by a view of themselves as an insider who belongs, while mine is shaped by visiting on a limited number of occasions and viewing myself as an outsider. And again, someone who has never visited Manton before and has limited knowledge of the village may still have an horizon of place, possibly based on their senses of similar places they have visited, or knowledge and ideas they have about Manton drawn from other sources. In these ways the horizon of place reflects the bundles of connections and intersecting activity spaces described by Massey in her conception of place: connection to and experience of a place is not limited to physical location.

While this horizon of place offers a framework for understanding a person's relationship and engagement with place generally, I am interested here in how this dimension operates in the context of theatre and place-related performances. By considering people as having individual multi-dimensional horizons of place, it is possible to locate the audience – McLucas and Pearson's Witness – and their relationship to place at the heart of an examination of place-related work, and to ask: what is the relationship between the audience, the performance, and the place as read through the concept of the horizon of place?

The horizon of place, potential space and heterotopias

Combining the horizon of place with Turner's concept of potential space, the audience become one of the co-creative elements she describes as being active in the liminal, dynamic potential space of place-related performance, along with the Host physical location and the Ghost performance 'brought to' the place by the theatre company. This view allows for a touring production that creates and operates in a potential space and incorporates the audience's horizon of place to be specific, because the combined sum of these elements

⁴⁸ Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', p. 28.

is unique in each iteration of a performance. Tompkins' linking of heterotopias and publics in her performance analysis echoes this combination of potential space and horizon of place. The concept of heterotopia was originally proposed by Foucault as a way of describing places in which real spaces were both represented and contested:

Real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society— which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.⁴⁹

Tomkins builds on the work of Kevin Hetherington in order to apply the concept of heterotopia to the imagined spaces that exist in a theatrical context, and in particular theatre that explores site.⁵⁰ She describes heterotopias in her framework as 'imagined spaces in dialogue with real ones'.⁵¹ She cites 'the function of the audience attending/surrounding the event' as one of the two factors which are 'usually necessary for successful site-specific work', thereby acknowledging the importance of an audience and what they bring to place-related work.⁵² She applies a version of Michael Warner's theory of publics and the concept of heterotopia to *Suitcase* (2008, London), a performance about the Kindertransport which took place in Liverpool Street Station. She uses the concept of heterotopia to describe the dialogic relationship between the performance and place and, like Turner, refers to a productive liminality between performance and site:

Suitcase pointed to a space where more takes place than the quotidian, helping, nevertheless, to define both the quotidian and what

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22–27 (p. 24).

⁵⁰ Joanne Tompkins, 'Theatre's Heterotopia and the Site-Specific Production of *Suitcase*', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 56.2 (2012), 101–12 (pp. 105–106).

⁵¹ Tompkins, 'Theatre's Heterotopia and the Site-Specific Production of *Suitcase*', p. 106.

⁵² Tompkins, 'Theatre's Heterotopia and the Site-Specific Production of *Suitcase*', p. 102.

this more might be: what the possibilities of this particular location reveal as the imagined space of production engages with real bricks and real mortar to create the in-between space of heterotopia.⁵³

She uses the concept of publics to discuss the ways in which the experience of the performance was different for members of the audience who had some knowledge of the Kindertransport, and those who were themselves Kinder who arrived on the trains:

Suitcase suggested at least one additional form of public that contributed greatly to its affect: the now-elderly children who had been on the trains in the 1930s, some of whom were in the audience. [...] We watched them watching the performance, observed their reactions, and these reactions inevitably affected our own.⁵⁴

However these differences could also be analysed through the lens of an horizon of place, considering how audience members' various connections to the location in question influenced the heterotopic dialogue between performance, place and audience in the potential space opened up by the performance. My research provides an opportunity to consider how it might be possible to structure the dramaturgy of a touring performance which is able to invoke a heterotopic potential space between rural touring locations and the performance itself, in which the audience's horizon of place is incorporated.

In the remainder of this chapter I thus turn to consider a range of examples of place-related work, evaluating the strategies at work for engaging with place/horizon of place and considering what each has to offer my research in pursuit of this aim.

⁵³ Tompkins, 'Theatre's Heterotopia and the Site-Specific Production of *Suitcase*' p. 104.

⁵⁴ Tompkins, 'Theatre's Heterotopia and the Site-Specific Production of *Suitcase*' pp. 106–107.

Other place-related work that tours/transfers

The implications of touring or transferring work that engages with place are significantly shaped by the relationship made between the performance and place and whether touring or transferring was part of the original conception or aim of the piece. Misha Myers' *Way From Home* (Plymouth/online, 2002-2008) invited refugees to map 'a remembered home in a present landscape'.⁵⁵ Audiences were then invited to complete these walks with downloaded audio of each route being described by the refugees who took part, in order to interrogate the transferability of place and 'provoke thought and offer a structure for a meditation on different notions of home and displacement'.⁵⁶ In contrast, Harvie discusses the transfer of Brith Gof's production of *Gododdin* (1988-1990) which was not part of the production's original conception. *Gododdin* was first staged in a disused Cardiff car factory and later transferred to sites in Europe. Harvie notes that the performance was originally conceived for the Cardiff site, and in transferring to other locations meaning was both altered and lost:

The meanings produced by *Gododdin's* site-specific performance in Cardiff were, of course, altered when it moved to different sites throughout Europe [...] *Gododdin* lost some of the Rover car factory's particular references and acquired some new – and sometimes unwelcome – ones. The biggest loss was the original show's references to a recent past marked by labour and post-industrial decline, key elements of the version of contemporary Welsh identities which the show aimed to remember and which it triggered so effectively by situating itself in a decommissioned car factory.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ 'Misha Myers | People | Creative Economy | British Council', *British Council | Creative Economy* <<http://creativeeconomy.britishcouncil.org/people/misha-myers/>> [accessed 17 July 2016].

⁵⁶ Misha Myers and Dan Harris, 'Way from Home', *Performance Research*, 9.2 (2004), 90–91 (p. 91).

⁵⁷ Harvie, pp. 50–51.

One way of understanding what happened when *Gododdin* transferred from its original location is to consider the gap between the horizons of place of the Welsh audience for which it was initially conceived, and those of the audiences in the new locations in which it was staged. It is therefore necessary for New Perspectives to consider how it is possible for work to be dramaturgically and formally structured in order to be in dialogue with several rural touring locations and the horizons of place of rural touring audience members in each of these places.

Physical engagement with place

One way of a touring performance creating a specific engagement with place in each location on a tour is by dramaturgically incorporating opportunities for sensory engagement with places in the present moment of performance. As noted by geographers including Cresswell, Massey and Rose, place is embodied and experienced physically as well as being part of how we think about the world. Some place-related performances engage with place at least partly in order to offer audience members a physical and embodied experience of performance. This kind of work can both engage with and alter an audience's horizon of place, as I experienced at NVA's *Speed of Light* (2012, Edinburgh). This was a walking performance originally conceived for Arthur's Seat as part of the Edinburgh International Festival (although it has since been staged in other locations).⁵⁸

In August 2012 Edinburgh's Arthur's Seat was the stage for an extraordinary public art performance. The iconic mountain was brought to life in a mass choreographed act of walking and endurance running.

⁵⁸ 'NVA: Speed of Light' <<http://nvaspeedoflight.org.uk>> [accessed 5 January 2015]; NVA, 'Speed of Light Programme'. Of course it is worth noting that the Edinburgh International Festival is an event which invokes very specific horizons of both expectations and place. Indeed as the whole city of Edinburgh in August plays host to the International Festival, the Edinburgh Fringe, (with its history and reputation as the world's largest arts festival), and multiple other events and festivals, several specific horizons of expectations and place (and often interactivity) come into play for audience members.

[...] Nightly audiences walked to the summit carrying energy-harvesting light staffs, and become part of the work. A mesmerising set of patterns unfolded below as hundred of sequenced runners activated the path networks in remotely-controlled light suits.⁵⁹

With no narrative to speak of, much of my experience, and my memories of being an audience member for *Speed of Light* are sensory and physical. Being familiar with Edinburgh since childhood, the view of Arthur's Seat from the city was familiar to me prior to my experience as an audience member. However the physical experience of climbing it at night, along with the visual and auditory experiences of the light staff, the noises it produced, and the runners on the hillside below were completely new experiences, and now form part of my horizon of place relating to Arthur's Seat. Reflecting on the experience just days after the performance I took part in, I wrote:

I hadn't climbed Arthur's Seat before [...] but I had an awareness of its presence from my experiences of [...] walking around a city that is overlooked by it. This was altered after taking part in Speed of Light, especially climbing up it in the dark, as looking up at it the next morning it was almost hard to believe that seven hours earlier I had been standing on top of it at one AM with a group of strangers. Part of the experience of Speed of Light was being above the city and looking down on it in a way that made being back in the city the next day feel different. I had a bodily engagement with the place and I could feel the physical effects the next day.

Corporeal engagement with site is a means of engaging with both place and horizon of place that does not necessarily rely on an inextricable tie between one performance and one place: it is phenomenological and happens in the moment of performance. As part of my pilot, therefore, I wanted to explore whether it was possible for New Perspectives to make forms of work for rural

⁵⁹ 'NVA Website'.

touring that invited audiences to engage with a haptic experience of place as a way of creating a feeling of specificity produced in and by the performance.

Place and authenticity

In some cases, work staged in a particular place (as opposed to a conventional theatre space) replaces the mimesis and representational space of theatre design and staging by using a real place as setting. I was aware of this as an audience member at Nutshell's *Allotment* (2011, Edinburgh) which was staged at the Inverleith allotments as part of the Fringe festival. The show took place on one allotment and during the early evening performance I attended other allotment holders were clearly visible arriving and working on their own plots as part of the backdrop for the performance, which created a sense of the reality of the allotment as a place, and of its function and meaning as related to the drama.

Common Wealth Theatre's *Our Glass House* (2012-2013, touring) also drew on authenticity of place for its exploration of domestic violence based on real testimony. The production was staged in disused houses in both Edinburgh (as part of the Fringe Festival) and in five communities to which it later toured. In this case the authenticity of the venue served as a reminder of the truth of the words being performed, as the reality of the house acted as a symbol for the reality of the issue of domestic abuse:

The use of a whole, real house lends a nasty ordinariness to proceedings – you can't forget such events have really occurred. [...] Our Glass House is immersive theatre that truly opens a door into another world. But it's one that, it also reminds us, is depressingly common, an everyday reality for many.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Holly Williams, 'Edinburgh 2013: Our Glass House - Common Wealth's Potent Exploration of Domestic Violence', *Independent*, 15 August 2013 <www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/edinburgh-2013-our-glass-house--common-wealths-potent-exploration-of-domestic-violence-8763621.html> [accessed 5 April 2015].

While the audience for *Our Glass House* may not have visited the particular houses where the production is staged before, it is clear that the sense of the house as a real place activates connections with the wider world which shape the interpretation of the piece. In the case of New Perspectives creating place-related rural touring work, I wanted to explore whether it was possible to create performances in which the authenticity of the real rural places where the work is staged contributes to understanding for audiences. Because audiences are more familiar with these places than the company, however, it is possible that the work may create connections and associations which are not useful. For example, a rural audience's detailed knowledge of the place in which they live may conflict with the fictional aspects of a performance; alternatively a performance may unintentionally invoke an association with something negative to do with that place for an audience. The contrast between the horizons of place of rural audience members and that of the company presenting work has the potential to be advantageous too: an outsider is sometimes capable of pointing out things which have been taken for granted.⁶¹ However, here again I believe there is a duty of care which rural touring companies like New Perspectives need to extend towards rural audiences and promoters in considering their existence as a community with a relationship to place which exists before and after the company visit with a performance. Through my practical research I wanted to explore whether using the concepts of heterotopia and potential space discussed above could create a productive blurring between the authentic real place and the fiction of a piece of theatre, and a dialogue between the company's perspective as outsiders and the rural audience members' horizons of place.

Challenging or expanding an horizon of place

There are several examples of place-related performances which seem to aim explicitly to provoke audiences to see places in new ways or through fresh

⁶¹ This dynamic is often experienced when a visit from friends or family who live elsewhere prompts us to visit local attractions which we ignore in our day-to-day lives.

eyes. McMcArts promised audiences for their production *BLINK Margate* (2011, Margate) 'a celebratory event that will re-imagine not only the seafront but also the sea and sky beyond'.⁶² Pilot Theatre's publicity for their promenade community production *Blood and Chocolate* (2013, York) stated that it would 'transport you to new places and show you the city of York in a new light'.⁶³ Pentabus advertised *In This Place* as 'a thrilling new way to explore the Shropshire Hills', and Black Country Touring sold *Bandstand* (2013, West Midlands) as an opportunity to 'inhabit these spaces afresh'.⁶⁴

These productions were all created for and staged in specific places and, although not always explicitly stated, seem to have been created with local audiences in mind, whether in a town or city as in the case of *BLINK Margate* or *Blood and Chocolate*, a particular area of the rural landscape in the case of *In This Place*, or selected bandstands in West Midlands parks in the case of *Bandstand*. As such, these local audiences will have horizons of place relating to each of these locations, and in describing the work as offering audiences a new perspective on these places, there is a challenge to an audience member's existing horizon of place, but also an assertion that such an horizon of place exists and is part of what the audience member brings to the performance. Here the audience's horizon of place is a crucial component of the relationship between the performance and place.

In her work on the sense of place and its links to identity Rose highlights how a drive to challenge or change a sense of place can be part of a marketing or rebranding effort, with the aim of presenting a place as a desirable place to live and/or work.⁶⁵ *BLINK Margate* can be seen as an example of this process,

⁶² 'McMcArts – Press Release // BLINK: MARGATE' <<http://mcmc-arts.com/press-release-blink-margate/>> [accessed 5 April 2015].

⁶³ 'Pilot Theatre: Blood and Chocolate' <<http://pilot-theatre.net/?idno=1183>> [accessed 4 May 2015].

⁶⁴ 'Pentabus Website' <www.pentabus.co.uk> [accessed 24 February 2014]; 'Black Country Touring Website' <www.bctouring.co.uk> [accessed 24 February 2014].

⁶⁵ Rose, pp. 100–102.

with its aim to present Margate in a more positive light referenced in both press material before the event and reporting afterwards:

'Leader of Thanet District Council, Councillor Bob Bayford says that the impact of an event like this on the town cannot be underestimated: *'We welcome the spotlight on Margate. [...] It's our time and certainly our turn to give something celebratory and lasting to the community and to visitors'*.⁶⁶

People were excited. It was a lovely experience for local people, it gave local people a feeling that great things happen here.⁶⁷

In a 2013 journal article Jason Price discusses this relationship between place, performance and urban renewal in the case of *BLINK Margate*, noting the deterioration of the town that preceded the project and the possibility for such projects to act as 'agents of *perceptual change*':⁶⁸

Public arts events like *BLINK* which locate themselves within and temporarily transform public spaces by actively engaging local people and their institutions can be useful companions to community regeneration. Central to this argument is how we conceive of and come to know a *place* and the ways in which this may be reconfigured through encounters with live performance.⁶⁹

While the terms he uses are different, Price's argument here maps very closely on to my notion of the horizon of place, and its pivotal role in performances which seek to change the way that audiences think and feel

⁶⁶ 'McMcArts – Press Release // BLINK'.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Lynch of McMcArts, quoted in 'Arts Council BLINK Margate Legacy' <www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/funded-projects/case-studies/exploring-legacy-summer-seafront-spectacular-blink-margate/> [accessed 5 April 2015].

⁶⁸ Jason Price, 'BLINK Margate: Urban Renewal, Place and Performance', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23.3 (2013), 411–20 (p. 417), (emphasis in original).

⁶⁹ Price, p. 217 (emphasis in original).

about places. He notes that analysis of the palimpsestic relationship between performance and place must also take into account the role of the audience's imagination and memory:

Regardless of how the 'writing over' process is theorised, the point is that in the writing over of spaces that may have been grown to be associated with the place's misfortune more positive or imaginative possibilities for the space are revealed [...]. [S]imply practicing spaces in different ways does not bring about perceptual change. The event and the way it embeds itself in our memories is also crucial for this to occur.⁷⁰

The imagination and memory at work here all form part of the audience's horizon of place. While *New Perspectives'* aims in creating work for rural audiences may not include explicit intentions related to the renewal or rebranding of places, these examples highlight that the horizon of place that a local audience brings to a place-related performance is a significant part of how meaning is made and interpreted, and needs to be examined alongside both the performance and place and any analysis of the relationship between them.

Conclusion

The work of geographers including Cresswell, Massey and Rose presents ways of understanding the complexity and hybridity of how place as a concept is constructed, conceived and understood. Theory discussing site-specific theatre and performance contributes a range of examples of different relationships at work between performance and place, as well as a number of frameworks for analysing and understanding these different dynamics and dialogues. While some theorists and practitioners pay attention to the role of audiences in place-related work, I have argued in this chapter that often their

⁷⁰ Price, p. 418.

experience is not the focus of examinations of the relationship between performance and place. I have proposed an horizon of place, not as singular or superior way of interrogating place-related work, but as an alternative lens through which to view the field – one which brings the audience more sharply into focus.

Focusing on the audience is particularly important when considering the ways in which New Perspectives might make place-related work for rural touring, because the audiences for rural touring work are for the most part defined by their relationship to the rural locations in which the work will be performed. This highlights a significant distinction between the audience as insiders and the people involved in the performance as outsiders in terms of knowledge and experience of the place(s) of performance. However it is possible to see this particular set of circumstances as an opportunity in which the audience for the work has a rich horizon of place on which to draw. I propose that a possible way to make place-related work which creates meaningful engagement with each place it tours to is to invite and invoke audience members' horizons of place as part of the structure of the work itself. In the same way that the interactive work discussed in the previous chapters was structurally authored in order to leave space for the interaction of the audience to contribute to and complete the dramaturgy of the piece, in my second pilot I wanted to investigate whether it is possible for place-related work to be structured so that all that the audience brings to their experience of spectatorship as a result of an existing relationship with the place in question forms part of the dramaturgy and form of the piece.

The frameworks for thinking about place and place-related performance I have put forward potentially offer alternative ways to create a meaningful and telluric engagement with place in order to create performances that feel specific in each of the places to which they tour. When contemplating the parameters of the rural touring model that New Perspectives operates within, particularly the ubiquity of one-night bookings, it is useful to move away from

the association of specificity with the idea of long periods of research conducted in order to dig into the soil of a particular site. Instead, considering specificity as subjectively experienced, 'continually reproduced', and created as the result of 'constellations of social relations', enables the interrogation of the different ways that a performance can interact with audience members' horizons of place in ways that might lead to feelings of specificity.⁷¹ I propose that the specificity of place-related performances for rural touring can arise from the dramaturgical incorporation of the audience's horizon of place. It is this hypothesis that I set out to test in my second practical pilot.

⁷¹ Massey, *A Global Sense of Place*, p. 29; p. 28.

CHAPTER 6

The Rural Horizon of Place: Insiderhood and Outsiderhood

'I thought the play was very well written in its relationship with the village'. (Lowdham audience member).

'The planning considerations were very relevant to our village – as different people get heated about new planning applications and proposals'. (Manton audience member).

'As a local resident I felt that my knowledge of the area spoiled my ability to believe the story'. (Lowdham audience member).

'But that's the type of thing they would think, in Nottingham [...] it was very much a townie's view of a village'. (Manton audience member).¹

Introduction

In my previous chapter I discussed the challenge of making tourable place-related work that feels specific to a rural audience familiar with a particular place. Here I discuss *Homing*, a pilot place-related performance designed specifically for rural touring which I created in April 2015. This performance drew on the contextual research set out in the previous chapter, and on my proposed model of a horizon of place. I set out to discover whether creating a dramaturgical structure in which the rural audience's horizon of place was incorporated could lead to specificity and meaningful telluric engagement with place in a tourable model. Below I discuss the research questions I sought to answer, and describe how the pilot was developed and delivered. I present my findings about the potential to create place-related work for rural touring, highlighting how these speak to the presence of a rural audience's horizon of

¹ Audience comments from pilot post-show discussions and questionnaires.

place. Finally I consider the implications of my findings for companies making this kind of work for the rural touring sector.

Homing: a place-related pilot performance for rural touring

Research questions

My consideration of New Perspectives' interests in investigating place-related work, and an analysis of a range of different strategies for engaging with place and frameworks for interrogating such performance, set out in my fifth chapter, led to a number of particular areas of research enquiry for my second pilot performance. Below, I present my research questions for this pilot. As can be seen, these overlap and intersect, however I have separated them here and grouped them by theme for clarity.

Specificity

A key question arising from the discussions in my previous chapter was how a piece of work designed to tour to fourteen or more villages could feel specific to audiences in each one. This leads to the following:

- In what ways can a performance be made to feel specific to the places to which it tours?
- What different ways are there of creating a feeling of specificity via both the form and content of a performance?
- Is it possible to establish an identifiable measure of how tailored a performance needs to be in each touring location in order for it to feel specific (or specific enough) for the audience in that place?

Creating engagement with place

Much of my discussion in my fifth chapter focused on strategies that could be employed in order to shape a performance that 'dug into the soil' of a place in order to create meaningful and telluric engagement for audiences. This presents a number of questions regarding different ways of creating engagement with place in order to achieve the specificity discussed above:

- Is it possible to create a formal model whereby engagement with place happens through the incorporation of the audience's horizons of place?
- How can engagement with place be created through the audience's immediate bodily and haptic engagement with place during the performance?
- How can research conducted in advance about each place be incorporated into the performance in each touring location in order to engage with place and the audience's horizons of place without compromising the requirements of rural touring?

Heterotopia/potential space

In my discussion of work by Tompkins and Turner I questioned whether blurring the fictional and the real and inviting the audience to be interlocutors in a heterotopic dialogue could create an engagement with place which incorporated an audience's horizon of place:

- Is it possible to create a performance which invites the audience into a heterotopic or potential space which exists in between the fiction of the play and the reality of the rural location and deliberately blurs the lines between the two?
- What strategies might help to create this space and blurring of the ludic world of the play and the quotidian place of the village or town?

- Will a rural audience accept this blurring of a real place they know well and a fictional world brought to the place by the theatre company?

Dramaturgical form

The nature of the research questions being asked and the strategies being discussed also lead to questions about the form of the work being created. Some of the audience responses to *The Falling Sky* suggest that New Perspectives' previous attempt to create a performance that combined a fictional dramaturgy with an experience of place was not successful in the integration of formal elements to create a coherent whole. For this reason, I wanted to address the following:

- Is it possible to develop a model in which content and elements that are fixed for every place on a tour are integrated with content and elements which are specific to each village or town?
- Is it possible to create a workable touring performance model where advance research about touring locations is incorporated into the content of a piece in order to generate specificity?
- Can strategies for creating specificity and engagement with place through form and content be integrated?

Audience engagement

Finally, in my fifth chapter I stated that one of the reasons to create place-related work for New Perspectives was to develop engagement between the company and its audiences. I noted the company's desire to investigate rural communities and locations as sources of creative inspiration both as a means of audience engagement and as an artistic endeavour in its own right. I discussed the ways in which the rural touring distribution model's touring schemes, promoters and one-night runs present particular obstacles to

audience engagement, and suggested that place-related work could offer a way of overcoming these obstacles.

- Does creating place-related work for rural touring offer ways for New Perspectives to investigate rural communities as sources of creative inspiration?
- Does creating place-related work for rural touring offer new or alternative ways for New Perspectives to engage with rural audiences beyond conventional rural touring shows?

In addition to these questions it is important that any work created is tourable within the existing distribution model, and within the company's existing means for making work. Therefore, in my analysis below I also discuss the logistical considerations of making, marketing and touring place-related theatre.

Developing content for the pilot

Having established a successful working relationship with playwright Beccy Smith through my first pilot, I chose to work with her again for this second research project. We had a productive shared creative language and she understood the nature of my research and the rural touring context. I discussed with Smith the brief and research questions, as well as the parameters for the pilot. These included the need for the piece to take place outside of the village hall, using a maximum of three actors and one stage manager, and to be tourable within the conventional model with the company being in each village or town for one day only while on tour (while allowing for research about specific places to be conducted as part of the pre-production period). The piece would be trialled in two rural villages, with the possibility of two performances in each depending on audience take-up. This would allow me to test whether the performance could work in more than one rural location. I spoke with Smith about the findings and audience feedback

from *The Falling Sky* and the possibility of repeating elements of this piece's approach which were successful and received positively by audiences.

Smith proposed a draft structure and outline for *Homing*, combining recorded audio and live actors with scenes staged in the village hall and in various locations in each rural town or village. We agreed that focusing on a mystery allowed for gaps in both content and form to be filled by the audience's horizon of place. This led to the idea of an absent character, a young woman who had gone missing, but who was present via audio recordings played to the audience. As this fictional character had supposedly visited the village or town in question to investigate a story about land ownership, this allowed for the inclusion of invitations for the audience to consider the land they were standing on, the place where they lived, who owned the land, and what might happen to it in the future. While the budget and development time available for the pilot meant that it was not possible to create a complete script, Smith worked on scenes which would provide enough narrative continuity for the audience, and which would address my research questions.

Homing's form was based on a provisional model for a longer tour whereby a company member would conduct advance research about the communities to which the piece toured in order to provide local references and to source appropriate locations for the different scenes in the play, similar to the model used for *The Falling Sky*. One aim of my research was to discover how much advance research was required and how much time this took, and therefore whether it would be feasible within New Perspectives' budgetary and time constraints for making and touring work.

I also aimed to discover whether feelings of specificity and telluric engagement with place could be produced in the moment of performance through haptic experience, and whether dramaturgical content that remained fixed could be successfully integrated with content tailored to each location as a result of advance research. In the recorded audio content in *Homing* an

absent character spoke about the place from an outsider's point of view, often making reference to her sensory and bodily experiences – the views, the sounds she could hear, breathing in the air, and how she felt being there – all without ever specifically naming the village or town.

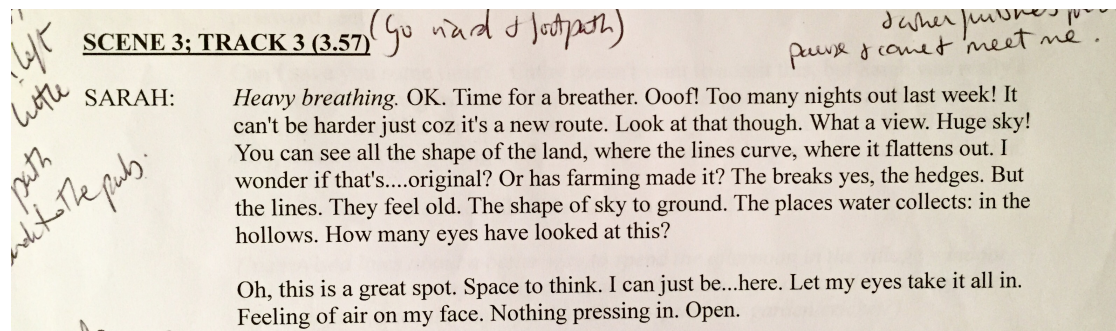


Figure 6.1 Homing script: Sarah's sensory observations.

In contrast, the live actors were able to adapt their lines to make specific references to each location, for example pointing out views, referring to local pubs or shops, or mentioning issues of concern including church fundraising initiatives and recent local news stories.

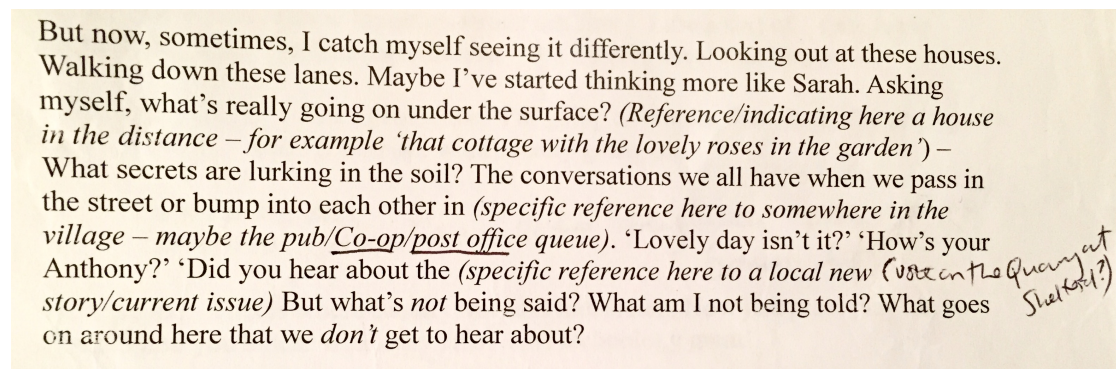


Figure 6.2 Lowdham Homing script: places to insert local references. Annotation reads 'vote on the quarry at Shelford', a recent news story in Lowdham.

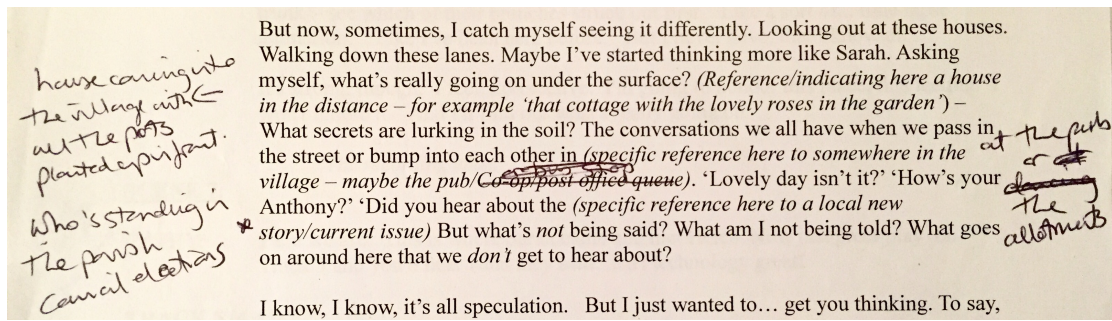


Figure 6.3 Manton *Homing* script: places to insert local references. Annotations (left) read 'house coming into the village with all the pots planted up in front' and 'who's standing in the Parish Council elections'. The elections were taking place in Manton the week after the pilot performance.

Below I have included a synopsis of *Homing*. The complete script is included as Appendix 7.

Homing: synopsis

Arriving at the village hall, the audience is greeted by Cathy, who addresses them as local residents who have responded to a poster advertising a new book group. Before explaining the nature or purpose of the meeting, she gives them MP3 players and plays a recording of a young woman speaking. In the recording, Sarah is heard explaining her job as a reporter and how a series of anonymous emails led to her coming to the village/town to investigate a story. She alludes to some kind of conspiracy or cover-up happening there. Cathy reveals to the audience that the book group posters were a ploy, and that instead she would like their help to solve the mystery of what happened to Sarah, a reporter who visited three years ago to investigate a story and rented a spare bedroom in Cathy's house. She describes how she found the audio recordings hidden in Sarah's bedroom after she disappeared, and how having listened to them she now wants help to investigate what might have happened to Sarah and to decide whether or not to go to the police. As Cathy continues to explain this situation to the audience she leads them to different locations where they hear further recordings Sarah made during her stay. Throughout, they are interrupted by Jim, Cathy's partner, who suggests that there is no mystery to investigate and that instead Sarah left of her own accord. The audience discover that Sarah was investigating a local planning application for land in the village/town. The involvement of both the local vicar and a Parish Council clerk are revealed as the audience hears Sarah's meetings with them. Throughout, Cathy urges the audience to question what might have been going on in the place where they live without them realising. Back at the village hall, Cathy reveals that she has been doing her own research since finding the recordings and now thinks that the story that Sarah was investigating was about plans for fracking to take place. She plays a final recording in which Sarah pleads with whoever finds the recordings and listens to them to protect the land on which the place where they live is situated.

Locations for the pilot

Once promoters for Lowdham in Nottinghamshire and Manton in Rutland had agreed to take part in the pilot, I visited each village.² This served two purposes: firstly, I met each promoter and explained the nature of my research; secondly, I sourced locations that would work with the scripted content and researched local issues of concern. I had used the script to create a list of the locations required in each village and the order in which the audience would visit them. These included the village hall, a peaceful spot with views of open land, the church and churchyard, and a house that could serve as the home of the fictional Parish Clerk. Given the need to develop a workable touring model, and my previous experience visiting locations for *The Falling Sky*, I limited the time I spent researching each village to one day. In actuality, this also included the time I spent speaking to the promoter about the nature of the research, but during my meetings I was able to ask promoters about local issues of interest and locations which met the requirements of the script. On each research visit, as well as spending time with the promoter, I drove and walked around the village to look for the required locations and potential walking routes, and to take photographs. On my return, I continued my research online, using Google Maps to plan a definitive walking route, and searching local newspaper sites and Parish Council minutes for news stories and issues of interest. This research was then combined into both maps and 'information digests' for the actors relating to each village.³

² While both of the locations used for my pilot are villages it is important to remember that rural touring places of performance also include hamlets and small rural towns. It is also worth noting here that Manton and Lowdham vary significantly in size and population, which was useful for testing the flexibility of the pilot performance model.

³ These digests are included as Appendix 8.

Cast, creatives and rehearsals

In April 2015 I cast three actors and assembled a creative team consisting of a sound designer and New Perspectives' Production Manager. We had six days of rehearsal, scheduled to allow for audio recording and rehearsal of the live scenes, seen in Figure 6.4 below.

	Morning	Afternoon
Weds 8th April	Manton visit: promoter meeting/location research (TB)	Manton online research/mapping, actor digests (TB)
Fri 10th April	Lowdham visit: promoter meeting/location research (TB)	Lowdham online research/mapping, actor digests (TB)
Sat 11th April	Recording day 1 – TB, RDS, AM Venue – Derby	Recording day 1 – TB, RDS, AM Venue – Derby
Mon 13th April	Rehearsal/recording – New Perspectives TB, RDS, AM, AB, JF, MIC	Rehearsal/recording – New Perspectives TB, RDS, AM, AB, JF, MIC
Tues 14th April	Rehearsal – New Perspectives TB, AB, JF (MIC)	Rehearsal – New Perspectives TB, AB, JF (MIC)
Weds 15th April	Rehearsal – New Perspectives TB, AB, JF (MIC)	Rehearsal – New Perspectives TB, AB, JF (MIC)
Thurs 16th April	Rehearsal – New Perspectives TB, AB, JF (MIC)	Rehearsal – New Perspectives TB, AB, JF (MIC)
Fri 17th April	Rehearsal – New Perspectives/Nottinghamshire villages (TBC) TB, AB, JF, MIC	Rehearsal – New Perspectives/Nottinghamshire villages (TBC) TB, AB, JF, MIC
Sat 18th April	Rehearsal – Lowdham TB, AB, JF, MIC	Dress rehearsal/performance 1 – Lowdham TB, AB, JF, MIC
Sun 19th April	Rehearsal – Manton TB, AB, JF, MIC	Performances (x2) – Manton TB, AB, JF, MIC
TB – Tilly Branson (Director/Researcher) AM – Adam McCready (Sound Designer) MIC – Mandy Ivory-Castile (Production Manager) RDS – Rebecca D'Souza ('Sarah') AB – Alison Belbin ('Cathy', 'Parish Clerk') JF – Jim Findley ('Jim', 'Vicar')		

Figure 6.4 Pilot 2 rehearsal schedule

The sound designer worked on the audio recordings immediately so we rehearsed with them from Tuesday. On the first day of rehearsals I gave the actors playing Cathy and Jim the information digests I had produced so that they could familiarise themselves with each village and include local references. I produced maps of each village with the walking routes marked

and printed photographs of each location to display on the rehearsal room walls.



Figure 6.5 (top left) Lowdham map, route and locations on rehearsal room wall. Figure 6.6 (top right) Lowdham map and diagram of route. Figure 6.7 (bottom left) Manton map and provisional route. Figure 6.8 (bottom right) Manton map, route and locations on rehearsal room wall. Photographs author's own.

As the rehearsal week progressed the actors and I quickly discovered that, given the nature of the piece, working in an indoor studio space felt limiting. By Wednesday we had chosen to rehearse outside, using the residential and industrial areas surrounding New Perspectives' base as the locations for the play and the walk. On reflection, this can be seen as the result of the play

having been written in a way that demanded the incorporation of place, particularly in terms of physical engagement: taking in the views, breathing in the air, feeling the ground beneath one's feet. In my analysis of the first pilot I noted how an interactive performance designed to incorporate the input of audiences dramaturgically needed to be rehearsed with audiences present; similarly this piece demanded the presence of a particular engagement with place that was not possible in an indoor rehearsal space.

On Friday I took the company to Nottinghamshire villages in order to rehearse in rural locations. While we were unfamiliar with these villages and therefore unable to include local references or plan walking routes in advance, the model I was testing was based on the idea of being able to turn up in a village on a tour and perform the piece that same day with only the advance research as an aid, and for that reason I wanted to make sure that the actors had not visited Lowdham or Manton before the days of the pilot performances.

Dress rehearsal and performances

The Saturday after rehearsals we travelled to Lowdham and rehearsed using the village locations for the first time. This was followed by a 'dress rehearsal' with New Perspectives staff members and associates, and then a pilot performance with an audience of local residents. The final pilot day was on Sunday in Manton. There we rehearsed once without an audience, and then conducted two performances in the afternoon for two groups of Manton residents. We used the MP3 players New Perspectives purchased for *The Falling Sky*, and as each audience member and the actor playing Cathy all needed their own MP3 player, each performance was limited to a maximum of ten people. In total twenty-three audience members took part across three performances, including the promoters for both villages.



Figure 6.9 (top left) Lowdham *Homing* dress rehearsal. Figure 6.10 (top right) actor Alison Belbin (Cathy) in *Homing* opening scene, Manton Village Hall. Figure 6.11 (bottom left) actor Jim Findley in Manton field. Figure 6.12 (bottom right) Alison Belbin in Manton church. Photographs author's own.

Research methods and data

I used the following methods of gathering data:

1. My observations and research journal from the rehearsal and workshopping week, the 'dress rehearsal' and all three performances

2. Photographic documentation of the rehearsal process and performances
3. Audience post-show questionnaires
4. Audio recordings of audience post-show discussions responding to a set of questions I provided
5. Reflections on each performance written immediately afterwards by the actors
6. Audio recordings of a debrief I conducted with New Perspectives' Artistic Director and Executive Director.⁴

All audience members completed consent forms regarding their involvement and all research methods and data gathering were approved by the University of Nottingham Faculty of Arts Ethics Officer.⁵

Place-related work and the rural audience horizon of place

Below I discuss in more detail some of the strategies for engagement with place employed in *Homing*, and how they worked in practice. I consider the implications of these findings, on the basis of which I propose an alternative model for future place-related work for rural touring.

Corporeal engagement with place

When planning the pilot, I was interested in investigating whether it was possible to create engagement with place by offering the audience opportunities to turn their attention to haptic and sensory experiences of place happening in the present moment. Drawing on Rose's argument that a sense of place is experientially shaped, I wanted to test whether this would produce specificity in the moment of performance, as an alternative to a deep

⁴ Copies of the audience questionnaire, audience discussion questions and actor questionnaire are included as Appendices 9, 10 and 11.

⁵ A copy of the consent form is included as Appendix 12.

excavation into a place's soil conducted through long-term advance research.⁶ For this reason, the script for *Homing* included several invitations for the audience to reflect on their physical and sensory experience of place, paying attention to what they could see, hear and feel. Often these were implicit invitations: the audience heard Sarah describing what she could see, hear and feel, with gaps left to consider their own corporeal experience.

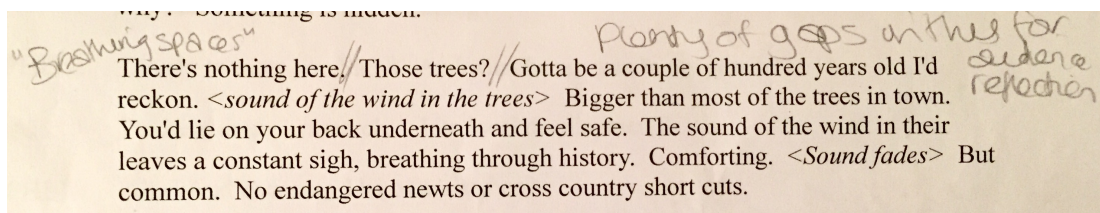


Figure 6.13 *Homing* script: Sarah audio with references to sensory experience.

Observing, I noted that these moments appeared to be successful, with audience members particularly engaged with looking at the views from the locations chosen. Audience comments support my observations:

I liked the use of the views and the different areas of the village.

I did look at the views more objectively and thought the village looked like a lovely place to live.⁷

I have suggested that in the case of corporeal experience of place, the specificity and connection to place is produced in the present, rather than arising from prior research. It is also intimate and personal. Indeed Alison Oddey, discussing walking performances, notes that:

Walks involve the spectator making some kind of connection to the landscape [...] and enable [them] to experience their surroundings imaginatively, via their unconsciousness, and through their sensory [...]

⁶ Rose, pp. 88–89.

⁷ Audience comments from post-show discussion and questionnaires.

connections to the particular environment. [...] The place of performance resides within the spectator's senses and memories.⁸

In my notes I observed the physical sensations created by different aspects of the performance: *the different haptic sensations when walking on pavement, grass and mud; how my breathing changed when walking up a steep hill and when pausing to look at a view; the different sounds heard when leaving the village hall and going outdoors for the first time; the quiet and cold experienced inside the church.* These embodied sensations were both part of the experience of place and of performance.

Blurring of the fictional and the real

Tompkins uses the concept of heterotopia to describe the 'imagined spaces' between a site and a site-specific performance, describing site-specific performances as opening up a heterotopic dialogue between performance and place.⁹ Similarly, Turner uses the term 'potential space' to describe the liminal space between fiction and reality in which a site-specific performance operates, and where there is a blurring between what is of the site and what is brought to the site:

[T]here is no need to make a distinction (though there may be differences) between what belongs to the site, to the audience, or to the performers. In fact, part of the point of the performance is temporarily to trouble all such distinctions. All participants are players in the game and aspects of the site. This is not to say that all are congruent or identical in their view or playing of the game, but all are involved in the exchange.¹⁰

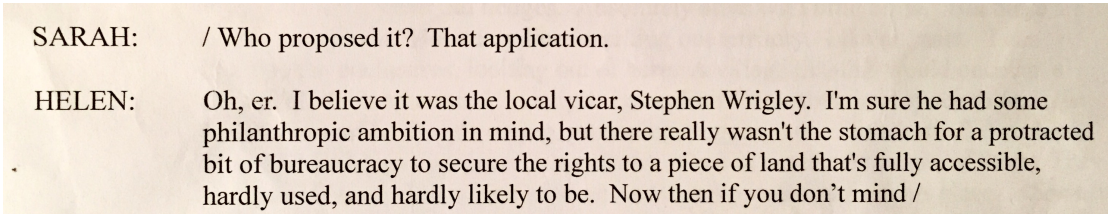
⁸ Alison Oddey, 'Tuning-in to Sound and Space: Hearing, Voicing and Walking', in *Modes of Spectating* (Bristol; Chicago, Ill: Intellect Books : University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 133–45 (p. 134).

⁹ Tompkins, 'Theatre's Heterotopia and the Site-Specific Production of Suitcase', p. 106.

¹⁰ Turner, p. 385.

However the findings of my pilot suggest that in a rural touring context where the audience is a community of location who pre-exist the performance and continue after the performance, the distinction between what is of the place and of the audience, and what is brought to the place by the company is not always easy to dissolve.

In planning the pilot I set out to create a blurring between the ludic fiction of the piece and the quotidian real places in order to invite the audience to occupy a heterotopic potential space while experiencing the performance. The strategies I used included the mention of named characters, clearly fictional, referred to according to real positions in the village.



SARAH: / Who proposed it? That application.

HELEN: Oh, er. I believe it was the local vicar, Stephen Wrigley. I'm sure he had some philanthropic ambition in mind, but there really wasn't the stomach for a protracted bit of bureaucracy to secure the rights to a piece of land that's fully accessible, hardly used, and hardly likely to be. Now then if you don't mind /

Figure 6.14 *Homing* script: named characters 'Helen Goodman' (Parish Clerk) and 'Stephen Wrigley' (Vicar).

By assigning the characters of the Vicar and the Parish Clerk names, we made clear that they were fictional, not the actual Vicars and Parish Clerks for Lowdham and Manton. However, within the dramaturgy of the piece they were referred to as occupying those positions in the villages, by characters who were presented as being from the village. They were also linked to real places in the village: the audience listened to an interview with the fictional Vicar while sitting in the church, and listened to Sarah's conversation with the Parish Clerk while looking at a house in the village which Cathy told them was where she lived. These fictional references were combined with references to real places in the village and issues of local concern (illustrated in Figures 6.2 and 6.3 earlier).

The audience were also invited by Sarah's voice on the audio recordings to consider the geography, history, present and future of the village where they lived:

TRACK 10 (1.09)

SARAH: Thank you for listening, whoever you are. And thank you for having me, in your village.

I hope when you're finished, that you look around here, and you see how precious it is. It's worth your protection. It can't protect itself.

You're the lucky ones. To have space and to have care. Be part of something. It's the closest I've ever felt to a home – that can't be mad, surely? I've had it for such a short time. And now I think it's over.

This place, this land, is all of ours. It's our birthright.

So cherish it. Coz I can't do this on my own.

Figure 6.15 *Homing* script: Sarah's plea to the audience to look after the land in the village.

Another strategy used to blur the lines between the real villages and the fictional world of the play was displaying posters for a new book club with a mysterious email address. These were put up in various locations in each village on the morning we arrived, and taken down after the performance.



Figure 6.16 (left) book group poster. Figure 6.17 (right) book group poster on door of Lowdham Village Hall. Photographs author's own.

In deliberately creating these blurrings between fiction and reality, my intention was to open up an invitation to the audience to occupy the potential space described by Turner as an imaginative arena where it is possible to let go of the distinctions between what is real and what is fictional.¹¹ I hoped that the piece would create the opportunity for the audience to engage in a heterotopic dialogue in which they could compare the fictional version of their own village to the real village they knew. Furthermore, I was building on the model developed for *The Falling Sky* whereby a performance combined content created for a series of like sites and elements specific to each place, thus offering the possibility of a new category to sit between 'site-generic' and 'site-specific' on Wrights and Sites' continuum. Certainly some audience members commented on how they had been able to consider the relationship between the fictional world of the play and the village where they lived:

It made me think of underlying problems that must be present in Lowdham.

Some local stuff which dovetailed really well into the storyline (can't go into details here!...).

Did think a bit about what might be going on re planning etc. – but then always wonder who pulls strings re decisions made about development. Will certainly pay more attention to the fracking issue!¹²

Additionally, one audience member commented that they looked at the village 'more objectively', and 'thought [it] looked like a lovely place to live'.¹³ It seems that *Homing* enabled this person to attempt temporarily to adopt an outsider horizon of place, altering their insider horizon. In this case, momentarily looking at the village through 'fresh eyes' resulted in a positive

¹¹ Turner, p. 385.

¹² Audience comments from post-show discussions and questionnaires.

¹³ Audience comment from post-show questionnaire.

evaluation of a familiar place as a result of the blurring of the fictional dramaturgy with the real village.

In both villages the use of the book group posters was also successful in blurring the fictional and the real: I observed audience members in both Manton and Lowdham commenting on having noticed the posters before arriving for the performance and being intrigued about the new book group, and then enjoying the realisation that these real posters were part of the fictional architecture of the piece. In a full version of the performance it would be possible to consider other opportunities to place objects and artefacts from the fictional world of the play within real locations as a further blurring of the fictional and the real.

As well as intentional blurrings, there were serendipitous links between the fictional dramaturgy of *Homing* and the host villages/Hosts. Turner notes that some of the potential that is created in place-related work is for coincidental links between the fictional and the real:

Site-specific work frequently treads a line between the play-world and reality, sometimes provoking conflict, sometimes providing moments where the two seem uncannily coincidental. It looks for the chance intrusion that becomes the chance discovery.¹⁴

By way of illustration, there was a noteworthy chance intrusion during the performances of *Homing* in Manton, where the gravestone that Jim showed the audience while they listened to an audio recording of Sarah was underneath a tree. I had selected the gravestone when researching in Manton the previous week, and the photographs I took that day show that it bore hardly any of the blossom that covered its branches when we arrived in the village days later for the pilot (Figures 6.19 and 6.20 below). It was only during the afternoon performances, and not in the morning's rehearsal, that it

¹⁴ Turner, p. 382.

became apparent that the tree was full of bees, whose activity was audible even over the audio played through headphones. In this audio track, Sarah refers to the trees 'singing'.

She walked along these roads. She heard these trees.....*singing*. And she saw this stone and she named me after it. Her precious place. Her peace.

Figure 6.18 *Homing* script: Sarah's reference to trees singing.



Figure 6.19 (left) tree during Manton research visit with sparse blossom. Figure 6.20 (right) tree during Manton performance with blossom. Photographs author's own.

Both actors and audience members noticed and enjoyed this moment, although at least one audience member did not realise that this was serendipitous (and mis-remembered the scripted dialogue):

What I liked actually was the characters were actually bringing in little local bits as well so when we were by the tree he said we could hear the buzzing in the tree which we could all hear the buzzing as well, that was quite nice.¹⁵

However, for some audience members, their insider horizons of place served to underline the conflicts between the ludic fictional place and the quotidian

¹⁵ Audience comment from Manton post-show discussion.

real place in ways which detracted from their ability to occupy the potential space:

Lowdham is a busy village; not quiet and peaceful as the piece suggested.

Knowing about Lowdham and villagers possibly a bit distracting from the story

I suppose if you know people's names it kind of pulls you out a bit so, you know the parish clerk, well we all know [her].¹⁶

These responses suggest that it is more challenging for a place-related performance to occupy a heterotopic potential space in a rural touring context due to the audience's insider horizon(s) of place. It appears that for some audience members the potential space created in this context is particularly fragile and porous when surrounded by a real place which is very familiar, with the combination of generic and specific elements causing confusion rather than productive dialogue.

Additionally, I, the audience and the actors all noticed that the audience were particularly at risk of losing a connection to the fictional world of the play in the gaps between scenes and audio, where a track's length was shorter than the walk from one location to another. During these gaps I observed the audience talking to each other about real life events in the village (supporting the evidence both that rural touring audiences tend to know each other and that one of the benefits of attendance for them is the opportunity to socialise). It seemed that in gaps where there was no audio and they were not being addressed directly by an actor, the audience perceived that the performance was on hold and so were no longer engaged in any suspension of disbelief. The gaps in the pilot performances were unintentional and were

¹⁶ Audience comments from post-show discussions and questionnaires.

the result of the limited time and budget available to create the pilot. With a full script, more rehearsal time and more time with a sound designer it would be possible to ensure that gaps were either filled with non-dialogue audio tracks, or dialogue from the live actors; or that any discussion taking place served the performance and the continuation of the potential space created, rather than working against it.

Insiderhood and outsiderhood

The 'dress rehearsal' of the pilot in Lowdham was initially planned because of the limited number of MP3 players available. It gave members of the New Perspectives team an opportunity to experience the performance without taking the place of the local audience members whose presence was required in order to address my research questions. However, because this rehearsal was shortly followed by the first performance with a local audience, what became clear to me was how different the performances felt as a result of the first audience not being familiar with Lowdham, and the second audience consisting of people who lived there. In a research journal entry from the first performance to Lowdham residents I noted audience members pointing out real features of the village to each other while walking, and at one point someone attempting to take a different route than the one suggested by the character Cathy. I wrote *'there seems to be a push/pull insider/outsider dynamic going on, i.e. "this is our place, we'll go the way we want"*.¹⁷ Reflecting on the pilot in light of all three performances in both villages and all of the audience responses, I think it is this insider/outsider dynamic which is the most significant finding, an element acknowledged but not fully developed in the model set out in the previous chapter.¹⁸

¹⁷ Observation notes from my research journal.

¹⁸ Of course it is important to note that insider- and outsiderhood form opposite ends of a possible spectrum of familiarity with place. Some rural audience members may be less familiar with the place of performance either because they are new to the area, or because they have travelled from another place in order to attend, in which case they may be closer to the company in terms of knowledge.

In initial discussions about the concept for the pilot Smith and I had discussed the importance of the character of Sarah as someone who came to the villages as an outsider and could therefore offer an outsider's point of view, which might confront or provoke responses from local audiences as a way of bringing their own horizon of place into the performance. However we created Cathy and Jim as insider characters: they were written as being local to each place where the performance occurred. The actors playing these characters were required to address the audience as if they were insiders familiar to them, who shared their horizon of place, in order to establish the blurring of the fictional world of the play and the real place. The conceit of *Homing* was that the character Cathy presented herself as being from the village, and addressed fellow residents of that village with the message: these events happened here, help me to understand what went on.

My observations and the reflections of the actor playing Cathy reveal that the audience did not accept Cathy as a resident of the village:

There were a couple of times when an audience member chatted to me as a performer telling me about the village as we were walking along not listening to a track. They weren't accepting me as a member of their community.¹⁹

In both locations I observed there was something quite uncomfortable about arriving in the village and performing to a local audience while claiming to be from that place, and this only became apparent when a local audience was present for the first time. While some audience members said that they could see links between the fictional characters, the story and the place where they lived, others picked up on inaccuracies in the piece as it related to their village, and these seemed to distract them and/or prevent them from engaging with the fictional narrative:

¹⁹ Alison Belbin, actor post-show questionnaire.

I think the introduction of fracking was a mistake here because the geology is wrong and the lake makes it almost impossible.

As a Parish Councillor – the inaccurate comment about the Parish Clerk voting on ‘Village Green’ application. Parish Clerks just record the meeting – they do not vote.

We know a lot and therefore were not suspicious of real people in the community.²⁰

In *Homing*, we created characters who immediately had to persuade the audience to believe in them as fellow insiders. This presented a significant challenge for the actors and would do in a full version of the piece: while the rehearsal period would be longer, they would also have more places to visit on a full tour. Considerable rehearsal time was spent discussing how much local research to incorporate. There was a temptation to include as much as possible to demonstrate that we had done the research, but we realised that if the characters lived in each village, they would not make constant references to facts about the place they lived, as this would be unnecessary. For example, if arranging to meet at the pub, a local character speaking to another local resident would be more likely to say ‘see you at the pub’ and point vaguely in the direction of the pub in question, rather than giving the full name of the pub and detailed directions.

²⁰ Audience comments from post-show discussions and questionnaires.

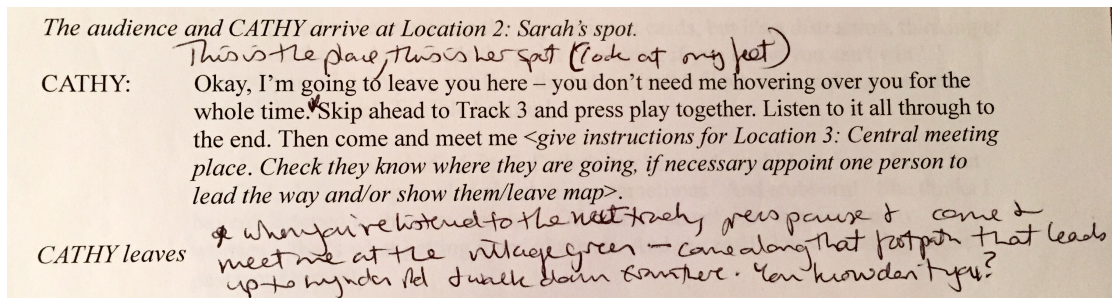


Figure 6.21 *Homing* script annotated with direction specific to Manton. Annotation (bottom) reads 'When you've listened to the next track, press pause and come and meet me at the village green – come along that footpath that leads up to Lyndon Rd and walk down from there. You know don't you?.'

During rehearsals I gave the actors multiple notes about avoiding slipping into what I called 'tour-guide' mode: addressing the audience as outsiders and pointing out features of the village in which they lived, because these details had been learned as part of their preparation. In my directing practice, if I have to repeatedly give the same note to an actor I trust that this is because there is something unresolved about what it is I want them to do: perhaps the note I am giving contradicts another note, or the text. Here, I observed that despite giving this note several times, there was something about the form and/or the content of the piece which seemed to result in the actors slipping into this mode. On reflection this seems to suggest that the company and actors attempting to emulate an insider horizon of place in order to position themselves as insiders alongside a local audience is not the right strategy for making place-related work in this context. It was evident that the characters did not have a sense of place that matched that of audience members, and that they did not belong.

Local research and references

The question of how much advance research is required in order to make a piece of work feel specific to a place, and whether the required level is feasible for a touring company was central to my discussions prior to the pilot, and indeed to many of the arguments of theorists discussing site-

specific work. It is worth noting that for the audiences of the pilot, some of the local references which were included were sources of pleasure:

Jim's joke about the local cricket rivalry with Gunthorpe got a huge laugh.

Lots of chuckles at the mention of raising money for the church floor.

There was sometimes a sense of thrill when there was mention of village details.²¹

I have discussed how using local references which could be researched online or on arrival before the performance could be seen as superficial. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that it works: it is a source of pleasure for the audience as these references confirm their insider horizon and therefore belonging and shared sense of place. However, one of the actors also questioned whether the recognition of local references mentioned in the piece felt more like a novelty than a way of creating a connection between the place and the performance for the audience:

Maybe it's not possible to get past the 'novelty' factor of seeing and hearing details of their village included. Maybe you have to embrace that and use it?²²

Consequently, it is necessary to consider the extent to which surface-level or superficial research into specific touring locations is still a valid strategy for audience engagement, alongside alternative ways of creating deeper, more telluric connections with places. Discussing the notion of 'localism', McGrath considers different levels of engagement that theatre companies and performers can make with local people and places:

²¹ Observations from my research journal; Belbin and Jim Findley, actor post-show questionnaires.

²² Belbin, actor post-show questionnaire.

[L]ocalism, not only of material, but also a *sense of identity* with the performer. [...] Even if coming from outside the locality, there is a sense of not knowing his or her soul, but a sense that he or she cares enough about being in that place with that audience and actually knows something about them.²³

McGrath's argument seems to suggest a continuum of 'knowing': between knowing an audience's 'soul' and knowing something about them. What is therefore of interest for New Perspectives is at what point on this spectrum place-related work is successful in creating the engagement with place sought by both company and audience. The findings of my pilot suggest that such a hypothetical point is in all likelihood the result of a combination of different types of knowledge of place being demonstrated simultaneously and to different degrees.

Audience members who were distracted by seeing the incongruity between the fictional version of their village suggested by the pilot performance and the real version of the place familiar to them suggested that more research was required in order for the piece to feel specific to their village:

The scenes could have fitted better but it would be just a case of some research into different sites to get a closer fit.²⁴

There is an interesting comparison to be made here between playwright Murray's research when writing *Entertaining Angels* and *The Falling Sky*. In both cases Murray conducted extensive research speaking to many people living in rural areas.²⁵ He then wrote, in both instances, plays set in fictional rural villages. Murray notes in his introduction to the collection containing both scripts that when Oxfordshire Touring Theatre staged *The Falling Sky* in

²³ McGrath, p. 58 (emphasis in original).

²⁴ Manton audience comment from questionnaire.

²⁵ Brendan Murray, *Big Theatre in Small Spaces* (Twickenham: Aurora Metro, 2013), pp. 8, 10.

its original conventional form, audiences perceived it as specific to the places in which they lived:

I was asked after one performance if we changed the script every night. 'No,' I replied, 'why do you ask?' 'Because that was about *our* village. I know those people. They live here'.²⁶

Entertaining Angels received similar audience responses: *visiting the production on tour, I remember several occasions when audience members told me how relevant and real the play felt, and shared their feeling that it could have been set in the village where they lived.* In contrast, when *The Falling Sky* was adapted as an audio piece to accompany a walk, New Perspectives made no claims that the play was based on or set in each village to which it toured. However, some audiences expressed disappointment that the piece was not more tailored or specific to the place they lived. I argue that this discrepancy in feedback is in part due to a particular horizon of expectations relating to place-related work.

An horizon of expectations for place-related work

Using Bennett's concept of an audience's horizon of expectations, it is possible to argue that any familiarity an audience has with place-related work sets up expectations about future performances of this nature. This might include expectations that relate to the model whereby companies or artists spend time researching and/or resident in one place in order to create a piece of work that can only exist there.²⁷ Responses to my pilot also suggest expectations that place-related work will lead to learning something new

²⁶ Murray, p. 8 (emphasis in original).

²⁷ While I am aware of the need for work to tour to more than one place, this is not necessarily true for audiences. Indeed rural audience feedback for *The Falling Sky* stating that the piece should have been tailored to each location suggests that some audiences are unaware of the challenges of creating a piece of work that is bespoke while remaining tourable.

about a place and/or its history, whether the place in question is familiar or unfamiliar:

If you'd gone on a specific journey to a historic village for something, and you were there anyway and that would then enhance the village experience wouldn't it?

About the Newark one, I'd be really keen to go and do that one having done this, [or] if [...] there was another one in another village [...] and you perhaps went to that village because there was a piece of history to go to.

I might have looked at a village I didn't know more carefully. Being familiar with the village made me lose focus slightly.²⁸

These comments support Bennett's proposition that an audience's horizon of expectations is shaped by previous experience, and demonstrate that this is just as applicable in the case of place-related theatre. It is interesting to note the association that some audience members made between place-related theatre and history, suggesting that their horizon of expectations for this form may include the 'long internalised history' that Massey argues is not the source of specificity of place.²⁹

There is also a parallel to be drawn between my research findings and Sedgman's analysis of audience responses to two National Theatre Wales productions in *Locating The Audience: How People Found Value in National Theatre Wales*. Examining responses to *For Mountain, Sand & Sea* (2010, Barmouth), a place-related work created for and staged in a Welsh coastal town, she proposes a distinction between two categories of audience response, Curious and Evaluative:

²⁸ Audience comments from questionnaires and post-show discussions.

²⁹ Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', p. 28.

People who exhibited an Evaluative orientation participated in *For Mountain, Sand & Sea* because they expected it to offer an information-led version of Barmouth's history. By 'information-led', I mean that these audiences attended specifically because they hoped to see known stories performed in familiar settings, or to learn new facts about the history of the town. The stronger people's investment in this expectation, the more likely they were to articulate unease. This contrasted with Curious respondents, who entered with few preformed expectations and were therefore happy to take the event as it came. While Curious respondents tended to engage with the performance as a playful re-imagining of the town, Evaluative audiences sought an understanding of what, more concretely, the performance was signifying about Barmouth.³⁰

The difference in expectations and responses in this case can also be seen to be the result of the fact that audiences were aware that Marc Rees, the creator of the performance, engaged in a period of research in Barmouth similar to the deep excavation methodology discussed earlier. This was possible because the performance was intended for Barmouth only and was not designed in order to transfer or tour. Also, *For Mountain, Sand & Sea* was staged in a seaside resort during the summer, and was therefore made for and attended by touristic as well as local audiences. Despite these differences, Sedgman's Evaluative/Curious distinction offers another lens through which to consider the audience responses to my pilot and the significance of their horizons of both place and expectations. It seems some people were able to engage in the 'playful re-imagining' of the places where they lived offered by *Homing*, and drew on their horizons of place in order to do. For others, however, the overlapping and blurring of the fictional and the real caused unease. Like the Evaluative audiences that Sedgman describes who 'came away from the performance worrying about the "authenticity" of the history portrayed' in Barmouth, some of my audience members came

³⁰ Sedgman, p. 78.

away concerned about the authenticity of the versions of Lowdham and Manton portrayed in *Homing*.³¹

With *Homing*, Evaluative audience members who focused on authenticity were concerned with truth, facts and details about the place, which they perceived to be correct or incorrect in the performance: they lifted up their shoes to point out how the soil found there was different to the theatrical soil the performance used. In contrast, Curious audience members felt able to use their imaginations to respond to the fictional version of place presented. In so doing some experienced the subjective, felt sense of specificity and engagement with place that I had intended to invoke: they enjoyed seeing the soil on their shoes mixed with the soil we brought. While this approach – locating the experience of specificity with individual audience members, as opposed to in the relationship between the place and the performance – allows for new approaches to place-related work, it also draws attention to the significance of the horizons of expectations audience members bring.

Bennett suggests that an audience member's horizon of expectations is not fixed, and is altered as a result of new experiences:

Multiple horizons of expectations are bound to exist within any culture and these are, always, open to renegotiation before, during, and after the theatrical performance. The relationship then between culture and the idea of the theatrical event is one that is necessarily flexible and inevitably rewritten on a daily basis.³²

This raises the question of whether it is possible to frame place-related work for rural touring in a way that encourages audiences to arrive with Curious rather than Evaluative expectations. Additionally, it is useful to consider whether new forms of place-related work could in turn lead to a renegotiation

³¹ Sedgman, p. 103.

³² Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, p. 114.

of the rural audience's horizon of expectations regarding place-related work. Responses to both authentic and imagined elements of my pilot also suggest the need for future research to establish whether there is an optimum combination of proximity and distance between a real place and fictional dramaturgy in order to minimise distractions and enable audiences to maintain a Curious orientation.

An alternative model for place-related work for rural touring

For successful rural touring place-related performances, the company either needs to conduct enough research to avoid any factual inaccuracies; or a model is required where a factual inaccuracy does not undermine the whole conceit of the piece. If the touring company's status as outsiders is inevitable, then based on my research, I propose acknowledging this within the dramaturgy and form of the work, along with the audience's expertise on the places where they live.

Sedgman notes the significance of local audience expertise in her analysis of audience response:

One of the most critical findings from this research has been the operation of two kinds of expertise:

1. **Professional.** The expertise of the practitioners: the sense that they are *trying to do something particular*, which audiences may not have understood.
2. **Local.** The expertise of the locals, whose memories and histories had been gathered by Rees during his Story Shops and which were creatively interpreted in *For Mountain, Sand & Sea*.³³

³³ Sedgman, p. 85 (emphasis in original).

Sedgman observes the significance of 'the interplay between these two kinds of expertise, and the way they can rub up against each other to produce strong tensions'.³⁴ In the case of rural touring I argue that is necessary to find ways for both of these forms of expertise to be acknowledged and included in the form of the piece.

With *Homing*, I suggest that this could have been achieved by re-framing the mystery and the central question of the piece as: 'could this have happened here?'. If the play's characters arrived in the village to investigate the disappearance of a journalist who had been investigating a rural area, they could have played the same recordings and asked the audience 'could she be talking about this village?' instead of telling them 'she is talking about this village'. This would have invited a discussion about which aspects of the story seemed to match with the village in question, and which did not, a debate which clearly was already happening between audience members in discussions during and after the pilot. However, because we presented the story of *Homing* as having happened in Lowdham or Manton, for those Evaluative audience members who saw the discrepancies, this undermined the whole performance rather than encouraging them to engage with the characters to explain why this was not the place where Sarah disappeared.

This alternative model, inviting audience input, relies on the interactivity and procedural authorship discussed in my third and fourth chapters. By creating place-related work which is structured with gaps to be filled by the expertise of the audience with their insider horizons of place, the audience literally become interlocutors in the dialogue between place and performance, and their contributions become one of the performance's component parts which is unique in each iteration, thereby potentially contributing towards its perceived specificity. In addition, in Massey's terms, their contributions both

³⁴ Sedgman, p. 85.

emerge from and contribute to the intersecting networks of social and cultural relations that constitute place.³⁵

Practicalities of making and touring place-related work

The goal of my research has been to test models of formally innovative work for rural touring which would be repeatable and deliverable through the existing rural touring distribution model within which New Perspectives operates. In the case of place-related work, there are logistical demands which need to be taken into account when considering creating and touring work of this nature.

Conducting advance research is potentially time-consuming depending on how much local knowledge is demanded by the form the work takes. In the model tested in my pilot the research I was able to conduct in the time allotted proved insufficient to enable the actors to successfully emulate an insider horizon of place in each village. Additionally, I was concerned that the task of digesting specific research on a daily basis while on a full tour in order to arrive in each village or town and adapt the content and walk would be too demanding a task for actors. However I have suggested an alternative model for place-related work for rural touring in which the company's outsiderhood is acknowledged. In this model, there would be less need for the company to conduct, and for the actors to digest, advance research.

The pilot performances were also limited by the use of the MP3 players owned by New Perspectives, which required each audience member to understand the operating system in order to play tracks at the correct locations and times. New Perspectives' Production Manager and I helped pilot audience members who struggled with the technology. However in a full production based on the model we tested, the actor playing Cathy would be solely responsible for helping the audience. An alternative would be to invest

³⁵ Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', p. 28.

in new technology to avoid these difficulties: Pentabus' *In This Place* used headphones that connected wirelessly to a central unit carried by a volunteer with each audience group.³⁶ With this method, the person carrying the central unit is in control of playing tracks and this removes the need for the audience to learn to operate any technology, as well as avoiding audience members pressing play at different times, resulting in tracks finishing at different times. This technology could be operated by an actor, or by a performing stage manager: in a model similar to the incorporation of the stage manager in Pilot 1 as a wedding DJ, a stage manager for this model could be given a role within the fictional dramaturgy which justified them being in control of the audio content. This technology would also allow larger audience groups to take part in each performance.

Other practicalities to take into account with work taking place outside of the village hall include weather conditions and accessibility, and these were raised as concerns by both audience and promoters when discussing the pilot. I have therefore considered these concerns below, alongside issues related to marketing and promoting the work.

Marketing and promoting the work

As we have seen, the rural touring distribution model depends on volunteer promoters, and this creates a situation where social capital is at stake if a promoter books work which is unpopular or unsuccessful with their audience. Because some promoters see themselves as community activists, programming a performance which provides a safe and risk-free opportunity for the audience to come together for the purpose of community-building can take priority over programming formally experimental or innovative work.

³⁶ Chris Eldon Lee, 'Theatre Review: Pentabus Theatre's "In This Place"', *Virtual Shropshire*, 2013 <www.virtual-shropshire.co.uk/events/theatre-review-pentabus-theatres-in-this-place/> [accessed 24 February 2014].

Interestingly, when audience members were asked if they would attend work of this nature in the future, despite critical comments in their other feedback, all but three people responded that they would. Two people said that they would not, and one person said that they were undecided, however the rest of the responses to this question were very positive:

Yes, it was thought provoking.

Yes, really enjoyed the inclusion of actors.

Yes definitely.

Yes it was interesting and thankfully a lovely day!

Yes. I thought it was very good and I can see this working in a number of different contexts. It has given me ideas!

Definitely I would. With a few tweaks on location it made for a good entertaining afternoon.³⁷

When participants were asked whether, if they were promoters, they would book work of this nature, the responses were more mixed:

I would worry about booking an event like this as I feel that not everyone would go with it.

It may need more explanation to a potential audience. Weather and technology hiccups could be an issue on the day.

Probably not. Too risky as far as weather and general level of take up.

I think it would need to be very specifically about this village.

³⁷ Audience comments from post-show questionnaires.

Not much take up – weather dependent; not many people might want to spend 1 hour plus walking etc.³⁸

People were particularly concerned about the unpredictability of the weather for an outdoor performance (we were lucky to have warm dry weather on both performance days). In light of this feedback, McNamara noted his experience of festivals which were blighted by rain, but which audiences enjoyed nonetheless:

I think that's valid feedback, I can't help wanting to pull away from it a tiny bit, I was at a festival the other day which is not reflective, but it was pouring and muddy and there were just hundreds of thousands of people and they just went with it, and I know that's not the same as Lowdham village but how much does rain kill you? You know in this country in the summertime it's probably quite a gentle rain. [...] Walking around Edinburgh [Fringe Festival] most people are drenched and Edinburgh's not a reflective audience, but is there something in handing out, if one were to publicise each person having an umbrella?³⁹

We had let both promoters know in advance that the pilot performances would go ahead whatever the weather, and had planned to have umbrellas for the audience had it been raining. However post-show feedback suggests that bad weather would have been off-putting for this audience, and perhaps highlights an important difference between the horizons of expectations of the festival audiences referred to by McNamara, and rural touring audiences coming to see a performance in their own village. In the case of a festival people have often travelled in order to attend the event as a whole, and potentially several different performances as part of that event. As such there is a commitment to attendance at the event which may lead to an investment

³⁸ Audience comments from post-show questionnaires.

³⁹ McNamara, 'Interview with Jack McNamara and Sally-Anne Tye', *New Perspectives*, Nottingham (26th June 2015).

in enjoyment, despite adverse weather. In contrast a rural audience may not feel the same commitment to or investment in spending time outdoors in bad weather to take part in a performance in the place where they already live.

Both Tye and audience members raised concerns about the accessibility of a place-related performance.⁴⁰ The walking routes used in both villages included uneven footpaths and steep hills and might have been difficult for audience members with impaired mobility. In developing the model further it would be necessary to consider alternative routes and/or ways of engaging with the performance. Because *The Falling Sky* only used recorded audio it was suggested to promoters that audience members with limited mobility could listen to and enjoy the performance in their own homes without taking part in the walk. In attempting more integration between form and content in *Homing*, we removed this option. Creating work which is not accessible to everyone living in the village has the potential to jeopardise community in the same way as interactive performances which separate audiences. Further research is therefore needed to explore ways to ensure place-related work in rural contexts remains accessible, and it is important for New Perspectives to consider this as a concern for rural promoters when selecting work.

Conclusions

An analysis of my second practical pilot reveals that within the form of place-related work trialled, the company members' horizon of place is as significant as the audience's. For the performances of *Homing*, the difference between the rural audience's insider horizon of place and the touring company's outsider horizon of place became problematic. I have suggested this dynamic was problematized because the piece we created involved the company as outsiders attempting to emulate an insider horizon of place. My research suggests that it is not possible to 'fake it' as an insider in a model which is

⁴⁰ Tye, interview (26th June 2015); pilot post-show discussion.

feasible for touring within the current rural touring distribution model, where the company only visit each rural village on the day of the performance.

Instead, I have proposed a dramaturgical form which allows the audience to be the experts and makes use of their insider horizons of place. In this alternative model the company are able to acknowledge their outsiderhood and lack of specific expertise, while the audience's expertise is required to fill dramaturgical gaps within a repeatable structure, thus offering opportunities for audience engagement and for rural communities to be part of the creativity of the work.

This model builds on the findings of my first pilot regarding interactivity in a rural touring context. In creating and delivering my two pilot performances, partly due timing, I set out to keep both separate. With hindsight, I believe that combining the learning from both could lead to more successful and robust formally innovative work for rural touring that achieves New Perspectives' aims. Audience feedback for my first pilot suggested it was possible for audience members to be engaged in a willing blurring of the ludic and quotidian: in *Something Blue* they were able to accept fictional events and characters who were presented as being 'of' as opposed to 'brought to' the village in which they lived. For future research it would be useful to apply the learning about procedural authorship, the use of fictional roles and structuring invitations to interact in order to consider how to incorporate the audience's input and insider horizon of place into a model for place-related work in which the expertise regarding place is located with the audience.

My pilot revealed that attempting to emulate an insider horizon of place has the potential not only to distract audience members and rupture any heterotopic dialogue or potential space that has been created, but also to cause offence. In a piece of work set in a fictional place an actor may get a line wrong without the audience noticing; in the piece we presented as being set in each village, a word or a detail being wrong potentially undermined the

whole piece for the audience. Additionally, there was a danger of audience members being offended by unsavoury aspects of the piece. For example, Sarah and Cathy's suggestion that something suspicious may have been happening behind closed doors could be interpreted, particularly by Evaluative audience members, as the company communicating that 'as outsiders, we think you're like this'. Work that intentionally or unintentionally causes offence to rural promoters and audiences not only runs the risk of upsetting people, it has the potential to disrupt the entire distribution model because of the potential loss of social capital for promoters, and subsequent damage to community relations for an audience who attend in part for the opportunity to socialise and take part in community-building. It remains vital for care to be taken when developing new forms of work for this context.

Audience responses to *Homing* suggest that creating opportunities for corporeal and haptic engagement with place in the present, and incorporating local references, provide recognition and pleasure and were successful in creating engagement with place. The feedback revealed an audience that was willingly receptive to the formal innovation in principle, suggesting that conducting further research into forms of place-related work for rural touring would be worthwhile and productive. In addition both the successful and problematic aspects of this pilot point to the existence of a unique rural touring audience horizon of place which has the potential to inform future study and practice of place-related work.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions: Re-imagining rural touring

I learned how much new, sometimes unusual experiences were appreciated. I learned about the value of shared memories in rural communities. [...] And I learned how planning, advertising and hosting a visit means months of mutual effort, knitting relationships and enacting a sense of community that people repeatedly said was vital to them. The show was the tip of the iceberg. Its enjoyment rested on what lay beneath the surface.¹

Rural touring and relationship

The knitting of relationships that Matarasso identifies above is at the heart of the rural touring model. This is not to say that relationships are not central to theatre happening in non-rural contexts. I argue, however, that relationship, along with its associated quintessential qualities of empathy and trust, is present in rural touring in ways that must be taken into account in order to develop a full understanding of this model of theatre. In some respects the unique audiences, places of performance and distribution model I have emphasised throughout this thesis are the tip of the iceberg, and the relationships, trust and empathy involved in the sector are what lie beneath the surface of my research.

As I argued in Chapter One, rural touring audience members will often have existing and ongoing, if varied, relationships with each other, and rural touring events provide opportunities for community-building, thus developing and strengthening these relationships. The village hall or community venue where rural touring events take place is (for some, not all) a familiar place used for multiple community activities. Audience members may feel at home

¹ Matarasso, *A Wider Horizon*, p. 3.

and comfortable there, and indeed feel ownership of a place with which they have a relationship outside their attendance at theatre performances. The rural touring distribution model relies on the work of volunteer promoters who, in programming work for their own communities, risk social capital and trust.

In my introductory chapter I made reference to a 2016 debate about rural theatre that took place at Farnham Maltings as part of a series of talks called 'A Nation's Theatre Conversation'.² Much of the discussion at the event centred on the relationships between rural audiences, promoters, touring schemes and theatre-makers, in particular, the significance of trust. Gardner, host of the event series, noted in her write-up:

The issue of trust seems key. When trust is won, it means opportunities for artists to take contemporary theatre to new audiences in new settings, and for those audiences to see exciting theatre without the cost and transport issues of leaving their own location.³

Rural touring audiences put trust in promoters to programme work that facilitates community-building, and promoters put trust in touring schemes and theatre companies to deliver work that is of a high quality, meets expectations and does not jeopardise community-building. If this trust is broken – anywhere in the chain – there may be financial losses for both the promoter and the theatre company. More significantly, however, relationships and social capital are at stake. As my research has demonstrated, the consequences of this are so significant that the perception of potential risk for the promoter may govern their programming choices. It is therefore essential for theatre companies making work for rural touring to demonstrate empathy towards audiences and promoters in order to understand their reasons for

² 'Guardian Live, A Nation's Theatre Conversation: "I liked it but I couldn't book it"', Farnham Maltings, 3 March 2016.

³ Lyn Gardner, 'Not Cosy, Not Safe, No Tractors'.

participation and what is at stake for them. The evidence from my research strongly suggests that theatre companies wishing to innovate in form and challenge conventions for rural touring need to consider the benefits of such work for the community, alongside any artistic reasons for experimentation.

Current theory on interactive work takes risk into account but, because it overlooks the particular circumstances of rural touring, does not examine how risk is uniquely manifest in a rural touring context. My first pilot revealed a rural horizon of risk for promoters and audiences, and suggested that interactive work needed to be structured with this in mind. If theatre companies take this rural horizon of risk into account when planning interactive performances then it is possible to use the form to incorporate the audience's socialising, community discussion and debate dramaturgically into the work. This can potentially provide unique and memorable theatre experiences which may help theatre companies like New Perspectives develop new ways of engaging and developing relationships with rural audiences and rural communities.

Existing theory on site-specific or place-related work offers multiple ways of examining the relationship between a place and a performance, but fewer frameworks for considering how the audience's relationship to place plays a significant role in the ways in which such work creates meaning. I proposed an horizon of place as a framework for considering this relationship in the context of place-related work. My second pilot revealed that in a rural touring setting, the contrast between the rural audience's insider horizon of place and the touring company's outsider horizon of place is brought to the fore. My research suggests the need to create forms of place-related work where this distinction is acknowledged and utilised. The model I propose combines the learning from both of my pilots in order to structure the dramaturgy of place-related work with gaps to be filled by the input of the audience. Future research developing and testing this proposed model has the potential to contribute further to both theory and practice.

While it could be argued that the relatively small numbers of rural promoters and audience members that took part in my pilots limit the validity of my findings, the challenges I faced in conducting my practice-based research underline some of the defining aspects of rural touring that I have emphasised throughout. My communication with audiences and promoters was mediated via New Perspectives, which led to delays and misunderstandings that may not otherwise have occurred. Recruiting promoters to host both pilots I was conscious of the demands I was placing on their time, and of the voluntary nature of their role. Promoter and audience responses to my invitations to attend the pilots highlighted both a reluctance to travel long distances and wariness of risk. While the opportunity to take part in research shaping New Perspectives' future work appealed to some, it is possible that others chose not to attend because the pilots were not framed in a way that emphasised the socialising opportunities that were on offer alongside the research enquiry taking place. The budget available for the research limited my ability to trial the work in more rural locations, and opportunities to tour Pilot 1 in particular to more venues would be beneficial in assessing its tourability as a model.

The future of rural touring: what's on the horizon?

In this thesis, as well as focusing on the work of New Perspectives, I have considered the implications of my findings for the wider rural touring sector. These considerations have been informed by my interviews with rural touring theatre-makers. Significantly, wider changes to the rural touring sector as a whole are beyond the scope of my research, or one theatre company. As Murdoch and Freestone point out, a wider re-imagining of rural touring must involve all stakeholders:

I think if the schemes can entertain the idea of a more flexible model, then it's going to thrive because actually it is a thriving sector, there's a plenty of data to back that up. [...] I don't really see what's going to

happen to quality [or] access to all kinds of art and new work if we don't have a better conversation that goes three ways between the artists, promoter and the schemes. There has to be a way of changing the conversation. [...] I love it, I love doing rural touring, I think it's definitely our favourite place to take shows is to village halls, and it frustrates me beyond belief so there needs to be a different kind of conversation.⁴

I feel like we're all wrestling actually with those ideas and how we as a movement try and resolve it because there [are] so many ways that the rural touring circuit is thriving and is incredibly resilient and is genuinely producing some of the most exciting, forward-thinking work. [...] And the joy of village hall touring has always been its eclecticism and its variety. [...] So I sort of feel really positive and proud about it but I also feel really concerned, mostly financially about how it's sustainable long term [...] because touring is only getting more and more expensive. [...] So I feel like there should be a change in the model somehow, there's a moment now where we could all go "Hang on, if we were designing this from scratch now what would we do?". And I'm sure that if we talked about all of those big questions together then we'd find a slightly better way of doing it.⁵

Matarasso's description of changes to the sector between his research in 2004 and in 2015 back up Murdoch and Freestone's above claims that the rural touring sector is thriving:

The number of promoting groups in England has increased by 44% to 2,407. Audiences have risen by 43% and now number 278,000. Even

⁴ Murdoch, interview, (23rd September 2015).

⁵ Freestone, interview (15th September 2015).

the take up of tickets (i.e. the proportion sold) has risen, from 67% to 76%.⁶

I stated in my opening chapter that the sector is in flux, and indeed during the three years I have undertaken this research there have been significant developments. These include NRTF's objective to secure more press and PR for the sector, discussed at the most recent NRTF conference and evidenced by a number of articles and blogs published by national publications, as well as the recent event discussed above.⁷ It is my hope that this increased attention being paid to rural touring within the theatre industry, the imminent publication of a new book, *Theatre & the Rural*, and the sharing of my research findings will pave the way for further critical attention to be paid within academia.⁸

Recent writing on rural touring outside academia draws attention to an increase in formally innovative work being delivered to rural audiences: 'ambitious shows challenging the stereotype that rural touring work is just armchair theatre'.⁹ Indeed, organisations like Black Country Touring and Forest Forge have been making interactive and place-based work specifically for rural audiences. Kali Theatre and Black Country Touring's co-production *My Big Fat Cowpat Wedding* (2014-2016, touring) cast its audience as guests and included interactivity.¹⁰ Forest Forge's *Bloom* (2012, Hampshire) was a year-long project which included participatory work with community groups and the development of gardens at six different venues in Hampshire, culminating in a promenade performance through the gardens at each.¹¹ After speaking about my research findings at the 2015 NRTF conference, I was

⁶ Matarasso, *A Wider Horizon*, p. 23.

⁷ See for example Gardner, 'Not Cosy, Not Safe, No Tractors'; Gardner, 'What We Can Learn from the Wandering Stars of Rural Theatre?'; Love, 'Village Halls, Village Voices'; Frizzell, 'The Pentabus Guide to Rural Touring'.

⁸ Jo Robinson, *Theatre & the Rural*.

⁹ Gardner, 'Not Cosy, Not Safe, No Tractors'.

¹⁰ 'Black Country Touring Website'.

¹¹ 'Forest Forge Website' <www.forestforge.co.uk> [accessed 25 February 2014]; *Bloom As It Happened* (Forest Forge, 2012) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TsqhSUUBGo> [accessed 20 June 2016]; Davis, interview (14th September 2015).

approached by theatre company Anonymous Is A Woman who were seeking to make their first production for rural touring and wished to incorporate interactivity. In Spring 2016 I acted as consultant for them on a three-week research and development phase for *Think of England*, advising them on interactivity and strategies for managing risk based on the findings of my first pilot. The dissemination of my research results, including via NRTF, has the potential to support more companies in developing formally innovative work for rural touring.

The challenging of stereotypes about what work is suitable for rural touring also includes initiatives to present work that has been successful in non-rural settings to rural audiences and promoters. For example, the aims of Cheshire Rural Touring's Cutting Hedge Scheme are presented in the scheme's Spring 2015 brochure:

Cutting Hedge aims to nurture and develop new audiences for contemporary theatre outside the usual urban landscapes where risk-taking in performance-making usually resides. Cutting Hedge branded shows are part of a new partnership between Cheshire Rural Touring Arts and Axis Arts Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University in Crewe to tour artistically challenging and unusual work to rural venues.¹²

Similarly, London-based theatre producers China Plate have been working with NRTF for the past four years on initiatives which aim to broaden the horizons of expectations of rural promoters and their audiences.¹³ Co-Director Collier notes the importance of challenging people's expectations and broadening horizons in a generous way that creates excitement, rather than shock, echoing the conclusions I have drawn in the analyses of my pilots:

¹² Cheshire Rural Touring Arts, 'Cheshire Rural Touring Arts Spring 2015 Brochure', 2015.

¹³ Collier, interview (23rd September 2015).

We had a very specific brief around introducing new artists to the schemes and broadening people's horizons and challenging them but challenging them in a way which offered a range of opportunities. [...] We don't want to shock people away from what's exciting, we want to lead people towards what's exciting.¹⁴

Alongside these developments, there has been an increase in companies like Pentabus making work designed to work with both rural and non-rural audiences: *Every Brilliant Thing* has to date successfully toured to village halls, theatres and arts centres, the Edinburgh Fringe, and New York.¹⁵ Murdoch noted that her company, Cartoon De Salvo rely on project (as opposed to NPO) funding, and because of this it is now almost impossible for them to create a show solely for rural touring. The company now increasingly makes shows for touring to both urban and rural locations.¹⁶ These developments all contribute to the interdependence between urban and rural theatre sectors and therefore exemplify the relational nature of the urban/rural binary which I discussed in my second chapter.

A new model for rural touring?

In this thesis I have explored new forms of work which could exist within the current rural touring model in which New Perspectives operates. In light of discussions about the future of the sector, it is also useful to examine some of the companies currently operating outside that model, and consider whether a move outside of the existing rural touring model offers alternative ways to re-imagine the rural tour. The people working in the rural touring sector whom I interviewed all offered different perspectives on the future of the sector. Speaking about the work of Forest Forge, Davis believes that village hall touring, one night stands, and the promoter model are dying out, and

¹⁴ Interview (23rd September 2015).

¹⁵ 'Pentabus Website'; Freestone, interview (15th September 2015).

¹⁶ Murdoch, interview (23rd September 2015).

that companies need to consider hiring village halls directly, and/or considering alternative venues and touring models:

I think there are possibly two solutions. [...] One is that you take the promoter out of the equation, so you hire the village hall just like anybody else and you take ownership of it. [...] Because it's only the promoter who's saying yes or no, [...] they're the decision-makers. Then [...] I think it needs to be about other spaces, I think rural touring needs to not think it's about village halls. I think it needs to be about just wherever you are. It might not be about touring, [...] or touring to fewer places. It doesn't have to be one night stands, [...] that's the old model.¹⁷

During the same period in which I conducted my research, CAE completed their own three-year research project about making new work in order to attract new rural audiences in East Anglia, funded by ACE.¹⁸ In contrast to the views held by Davis, Kidman, who led CAE's research project, feels that the volunteer promoter model is the only way for the sector to succeed. Their research supported the view that audiences often attend in order to support the promoter or promoting group:

They're our most valuable asset. [...] I think for the future of rural touring to be successful the model needs to stay as it is, because those communities, a lot of them [...] feedback that they wouldn't have even gone to see that show if it wasn't at their local venue, and that's partly because of locality but it's also partly because they want to support their local venue, and they wouldn't do that if we were putting the shows on in the village halls. The fact that they know the person who

¹⁷ Interview, (14th September 2015).

¹⁸ Kidman, interview (22nd September 2015). Matarasso's book *A Wider Horizon* accompanied and documented this research.

programmed it is important to them, because it is their community's event and that's absolutely crucial I think.¹⁹

The results of CAE's research did however suggest new ways of touring work rurally, including to different places of performance. In setting out to reach new audiences and therefore new promoters, CAE worked with pub landlords to promote performances in pubs. This model proved successful, and revealed new considerations to take into account regarding risk: in the case of rural pub landlords, they undertook promoting in order to bring new people into their venues, but had to manage the risk of excluding or offending their existing regulars.²⁰

CAE's research, like my findings, points to the importance of empathy and relationship at the heart of the rural touring model and the key relationships between companies, touring schemes, promoters and audiences. In an attempt to understand and mitigate what is at stake for their promoters, CAE have begun discussing whether it is possible to subsidise social risk in equivalent ways to their current subsidy of the financial risk of putting on an event.

It's one of the things we've started talking about in the office now we are an NPO and we're having our work assessed, we need to make sure that we are challenging [audiences]. We were talking this morning about [how] it's not just about us subsidising it financially, it's also about minimising that personal risk our promoters take, and we need to find a way of addressing that if we want them to take more challenging work.²¹

One of the ideas currently under consideration in this attempt to subsidise social risk is a 'Mystery Night', whereby a promoter allows CAE to suggest a

¹⁹ Kidman, interview, (22nd September 2015).

²⁰ Kidman, interview (22nd September 2015).

²¹ Kidman, interview, (22nd September 2015).

performance and markets it to their local audiences as having been chosen by the scheme rather than them personally.²² This recognition of the need to consider social risk for rural promoters is an approach that starts from an empathic understanding of what is unique about the rural touring model and the importance of relationship and trust.

Many of the conversations and initiatives discussed here are very recent, and they demonstrate that possible alternative models for the future of rural touring are very much a current topic of conversation. At the recent 'A Nation's Theatre Conversation' event there was disagreement from the artists, touring schemes and companies present about whether the rural touring distribution model was no longer fit for purpose, and whether it required some modifications or a radical overhaul. Despite not reaching a consensus, it is significant that these conversations are happening, and the strength of opinions expressed demonstrate the vitality of the sector and the level of care about its future.

The relationship between rural and urban theatre

In my opening chapter I argued that the perceptions of rural touring theatre as of lesser quality and/or lesser status than its urban counterpart stemmed in part from an historical view of an urban/rural divide in which the rural itself was seen as inferior to the urban, as well as less sophisticated and less advanced. I stated that I sought to avoid an approach based on the assumption that rural touring simply needs to 'catch up' with theatre in urban contexts, and that parachuting work from cities into village halls would address any inequality in the types of work on offer. Like Robinson, I am wary of 'the danger of simply re-staging or re-stating that [urban/rural] divide from a reverse perspective'; however I believe that a number of recent publications indicate that there are lessons that those working in urban

²² Kidman, interview (22nd September 2015).

theatre could learn from the rural touring sector, and from my research into it.²³

In a 2014 publication, Hilary Glow discusses 'Open Stage', a three-year project undertaken at the Theatre Royal Stratford East (TRSE).²⁴ In this project, volunteers from the local community were involved in both curating and marketing work for the theatre.

Open Stage began with the theatre company recruiting twenty-five 'co-programmers'; volunteers from the community whose jobs were to develop relationships with local residents.²⁵

Glow describes these volunteers as 'cultural intermediaries', based on the fact that 'their role is not confined to either the arena of production or consumption', but instead straddles and incorporates both.²⁶ She argues that

By turning to their community and asking them what they want to see in the theatre, the TRSE are turning on its head the traditional cultural authority of the arts organization and the role of its creative leadership.²⁷

However, as we have seen, volunteer promoters have been operating as 'cultural intermediaries' in the rural touring distribution model for over twenty years. Jonathan Gross and Stephanie Pitts, describing another recent audience research project which centred on contemporary arts in Birmingham, highlight '[o]pportunities to volunteer: to be actively involved in helping put on the event' as a key condition that 'facilitate[s] or encourage[s] people' to attend any arts event, but particularly 'work that is new, unknown,

²³ Robinson, *Theatre & the Rural*, p. 40.

²⁴ Hilary Glow, 'Challenging Cultural Authority: A Case Study in Participative Audience Engagement', in *Audience Experience* (Bristol, GB: Intellect Ltd., 2014), pp. 35–48.

²⁵ Glow, p. 41.

²⁶ Glow, p. 45.

²⁷ Glow, p. 40.

unfamiliar, or unpredictable'.²⁸ Again, the methods being advocated for urban arts organisations are those which the rural touring sector has made use of for a long time.

At the 2014 'No Boundaries' conference, described as a 'symposium on the role of arts and culture', Istanbul based curator and writer Vasif Kortun gave a talk about the purpose of museums and their relationships to their communities.²⁹ He illustrated this talk by using an analogy of town squares and monasteries, arguing that cultural institutions need to emulate town squares by considering models of co-ownership, as opposed to resembling isolated monasteries.³⁰ Gardner applied this concept to civic theatres in cities:

The town square is a place for arts, ideas and dialogue, in the heart of the community, and it's a place to which everyone has access. [...] Regional theatres will thrive when they are democratic open spaces, where communities gather to share ideas about the lives they lead and aspire to. [...] Those running theatres [...] [need to realise] that the arts bring people together, can reframe the way that a community sees itself and reinvent the narrative that it tells about itself.³¹

As Pentabus were quick to point out on Twitter following Gardner's blog post, '[v]illage halls are another example of "where communities gather to share ideas about the lives they lead & aspire to"'.³² Rural touring is an existing and well-established example of the arts successfully working on a 'town square'

²⁸ Jonathan Gross and Stephanie Pitts, 'Audiences for the Contemporary Arts: Exploring Varieties of Participation across Art Forms in Birmingham, UK', *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 13.1 (2016), 4–23 (p. 11).

²⁹ Vasif Kortun, 'Can We Exercise Freedom of Expression?' (presented at No Boundaries 2015, Manchester, Bristol and online, 2015) <<http://nb2015.org/#vasifkortun>> [accessed 30 September 2015].

³⁰ Kortun.

³¹ Lyn Gardner, 'Theatres Should Be the New Town Squares, Not Monasteries', *Guardian Stage Blog*, 19 October 2015 <www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/oct/19/a-nations-theatre-shopfront-belgrade-no-boundaries?CMP=twl_a-stage_b-gdnstage> [accessed 24 October 2015].

³² @PentabusTheatre, 20 October 2015 <<https://twitter.com/pentabustheatre/status/656424397994094592?refsrc=email&s=11>>.

model. Rural touring events only happen because of the relationships between community volunteers, theatre companies and touring schemes, and the events programmed and hosted by promoters successfully bring rural communities together. While the rural touring sector may be proof of this approach working as a successful model for the arts, it is nonetheless vital that theatre companies like New Perspectives do not become monasteries, cut off from their audiences and failing to listen to what it is that they want from their rural touring experience.

The recent research discussed here further underlines the need for the recognition for the rural touring sector that I have argued for throughout this thesis. In my first chapter I argued that there is an absence of critical attention paid to rural touring within academic writing on theatre. It is clear that rural touring is not a niche corner of the theatre ecology, and deserves critical attention. I consider my research as a call to any theorists writing about theatre to acknowledge and address this gap.

I began this thesis with a quote from Susan Rowe, the volunteer promoter for the Thomas Cranmer Centre in the village of Aslockton, Nottinghamshire, who also sits on New Perspectives' Board. She has been involved in rural touring for over twenty years and has been a source of inspiration and knowledge throughout my time both working in and researching the sector. It therefore seems fitting that the last word goes to her too:

When you think about the people who sit on local councils and even on the Arts Council Board, *do they realise the wonderful resource they've got in this thing called rural touring?*³³

³³ Susan Rowe, interview, (6th October, 2014).

APPENDIX 1: Playwright recruitment brief

New Perspectives Theatre Company seeks playwright for experimental rural theatre research project

We are looking for expressions of interest from playwrights with an interest or knowledge in interactive theatre to work with director Tilly Branson on a practical theatre project based in the East Midlands.

New Perspectives has been creating touring work for 40 years and is a sector leader in the field of rural touring. The company is committed to experimenting with form and exploring the limits of traditional rural theatre. In 2012, New Perspectives and the University of Nottingham were awarded AHRC funding for a collaborative PhD titled 'Re-Imagining the Rural Tour' to be undertaken by Tilly Branson. The PhD consists of both theoretical and practical research into how experimentation in form can work within the model of rural touring within the UK (in which professional work is distributed via regional touring schemes and booked by volunteer promoters for community venues including village halls, schools and community centres).

The first practical research project will be looking at different modes of interactivity that can be used in performance in order to generate discussion and debate with audiences and incorporate this dramaturgically. Having examined the trend for interactive theatre evident in urban areas and festivals, we are interested in exploring how different interactive techniques and strategies might work in a show for rural audiences in order to facilitate discussion on issues affecting the rural landscape and population. These techniques might include drawing from areas including forum theatre and game mechanics; and giving the audience roles to play and decisions to make collectively and individually. Audiences at our rural shows are often largely made up of people who already know each other, and who attend in order to support a community event as much, if not more than because of the production itself, and we are interested in whether this affects the efficacy of different interactive strategies.

We are looking for a writer to take a key role in this project, working with the director to develop the research and writing content which will be tried out with audiences. We are looking for someone who is enthusiastic about being involved in research of this nature, and who has experience of creating interactive work; as well as ideally some understanding of UK rural touring. The research will be split into planning, writing, and practical phases which will take place over the next six months. The work will involve working responsively to create content in an iterative research process, and is not a commission to write a full play, but rather to be part of a collaborative process with a director.

To discuss this opportunity further, please contact Tilly Branson on tilly@newperspectives.co.uk, or 0115 973 9120. The fee for this work is up to £1,200.

If you are interested in this opportunity please email tilly@newperspectives.co.uk, or write to Tilly Branson at the below address, outlining your experience and why you are interested in being involved in this research project. Closing date Friday 25th April 2014.

New Perspectives Theatre Company, Park Lane Business Centre, Park Lane,
Nottingham, NG6 0DW
www.newperspectives.co.uk



The University of
Nottingham



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



APPENDIX 2: *Something Blue* script

SOMETHING BLUE. BY BECCY SMITH

ACT 1

1. Arrivals/greetings

BERNIE greets people, warmly but apologetically as they arrive. She is making awkward small talk - the journey, the weather. Parking. She advises them about finding their seats. When everyone is in...

2. Bernie welcomes everyone

First thing's first - it's all going to be fine! It'll all be fine! We're all just going to... work it out as we go along. I know it's a bit strange. Especially those of you of Edd's family and friends. It's what Jax wanted and it's her day. But most of us have known each other for such a long time! *(Pause)* So it's great we're all here, making the best of it.

It's amazing actually, to see so many of you again, all together! When I think about the last time...

Anyway. Weddings are days all about choices. Sharing your choice in public. Getting the rubber stamp from your family and friends. Supposed to make it a damn sight harder to change your mind two months later! *(Not that I'd know)*. But just coz it wasn't the choice we were expecting at the Church today... there's still something to mark, actually. A life change. It's happened, sort of. And it's not often that we're all together. So...

But, listen, before the guest of honour arrives I think there's something I'd better tell you...

3. Jax arrives, Jax and Jason talk

JAX clatters through the front doors. Gathers herself and walks with dignity to the 2 empty seats at the top table. She is in her wedding dress and walks steadily, like she

is walking down the aisle. Step, together. Step. Together. She is alone. When she arrives she stops and looks slowly, very seriously at every person in the room. She looks like she might cry. Suddenly JAX bursts out laughing.

JAX:

Sorry everyone. Sorry! I just wanted the chance to do it, you know? Just once. Been thinking about it so long. I've had bloody dreams about that walk! Walking down a long, long tunnel. God. Makes it sound a bit like dying! And hey, I didn't trip over my dress, or turn up half naked, so it's not gone as badly as it could've done, has it?!

JASON: *(makes his way over. Aside, awkwardly)*
Are you alright Jax?

JAX:

Course I am. I'm here aren't I?

JASON:

It was just... At the door of the church... watching you standing there... It was horrible! I mean, not you! You looked... perfect. But seeing you just standing there, on your own, looking at your phone. Cars coming past, slowing down, not stopping. Just waiting. That was horrible!

JAX: *(Pause. To the room)*

Can I just say right now - I don't want you to feel sorry for me. So if you're thinking that, can you stop it. Please. I wanted this party still to happen. I'm really glad you're here. Yes, OK it might not be exactly what we'd planned, but this is my story so I get to decide what the ending is. And it's not over yet! C'mon - some of you must remember! It's what Mum always said: whether a story is sad or happy all comes down to where it is you stop telling it. Er, Prince Charming the morning after the night before? Uh-uh. Seven Dwarves with an axe to grind having lost their best ever housekeeper? It's hardly like a wedding guarantees you a happy ever after. *(Picking out an audience member)*. In't that right, Uncle Fred?

JASON: *(stage whisper)*

I don't feel sorry for you! I just feel... bad. I feel bad for you.

JAX:

And that's different how?

JASON:

But don't you? Don't you feel sad? I mean, what are you doing here?

JAX:

Oh, listen everyone. Dunno if you remember from the invites but we really want you all to get involved - to help with the party. And help with a few other things now. There will still be karaoke - oh yes! There's a song list on the table - have a look through later and pick out your favourites. It'd make my night to see some of you singing! You've probably seen the cards and pens on the table - there'll be time for those later.

JASON:

Stop it. You're acting crazy.

JAX:

It's not crazy. I'm here, at my own wedding reception! It'd be more weird not to be here!

JASON:

Yeah, if you'd actually got married!

Pause

JAX:

Can we get some music going over there please? Something upbeat - this room's dead! (to JASON) Jason - what is it you want me to say? This day's been rough enough without you giving me a hard time over it.

JASON:

Me giving you a hard time?? I'm here, doing like you asked. Making this party happen despite how... mental it all is! Despite not even knowing where my best mate is, or what the hell's going on with him. I feel like the kid in some messy divorce, already having to pick sides. And you didn't even get married!

I just don't get how he could do it. To you! All these years he's never said there was a problem. And this was always it, always where you guys were gonna end up. On the cards since we were kids. And then boom, he blows it. Right in front of everyone. I don't get it.

JAX:

Well boom, maybe it was already blown. Just because we live in each other's pockets Jase, doesn't mean you know what's going on. In private.

JASON:

What?! He never.../

JAX:

/No! Edd's never been like that. God! You do know us. You just don't know everything. And really, I don't want to talk about it. Not tonight. It's not the time.

JASON:

But...

JAX:

Will you just shut up and invite me to dance?
Everyone. Is. Looking. And I need to have a good time
- I've paid for half of this!

They hit the dance floor. Bernie watches JAX & JASON dance. It's a 70s disco classic. After a while they go to the bar.

4. Bernie talks about Jax and Cathy

BERNIE:

Look at her. Spit of my sister, don't you think? Course, she's her own woman, Jax - well, hardly surprising is it? When our Cathy was her age she was quiet as a mouse. Never even knew how boys heads turned when she came into a room. They were always trying to find an excuse to look - a quick glance when your back was turned, over your shoulder. She genuinely had no idea. Thought she was having me on at first. But how do you compete with that?

When I stayed with them - afterwards - Jax was always asking - would Mum have liked this? Do you think this is what she'd've wanted? Instead of getting a chance to break away, it was like she had to channel her or something. So I played a little game, to try to help. I said the opposite. When she came downstairs with a bleach blonde barnet or some wild Eurotrashy bodysuit I smiled sweetly and said 'She'd've loved it'. I wanted to help her break free. Define herself, not be defined by that horrible loss.

Presentation you see. PR. That's my business, and it's far more than superficials. How the world sees you – more often than not, that's who you are. Or who you become.

Can I tell you a secret? She'd've hated it. That dress. Not Cathy's style at all. Too showy. I'm proud of that.

Ooh – I love this one. Does anyone fancy a dance?

5. Dancing

Bernie tries to get some audience members on to the dance floor. JAX and JASON come over and join her. If no audience members dance, this sequence is cut short by the DJ switching to the next track – Agadoo. This is the cue to break up the party and encourage everyone to return to their seats.

6. Table conversations

After the dance, the actors each go to one table and explain they'll be back in a few minutes (don't leave the room), encouraging people to sign up for karaoke and fill in the cards on the table.

They then go to their 'second' tables and these three conversations go on simultaneously. The actors can improvise to incorporate responses around the questions and comments in their speeches. The sequence is repeated with their other table. At some of the tables the audience members are addressed as themselves, at others they are addressed/'cast in role' as the following groups: estate agents who work with Jax, Edd's family, distant family from New Zealand, women from the village who knew Jax's mother (Cathy).

BERNIE:

- Are you alright? I know this is a bit of a strange one.
- We can't ignore what happened – but let's focus on moving forward.
- I think Jax is doing okay. I think Edd's alright too, for what it's worth.
- A big day: makes me think about those big crossroads moments – you know, when you know your decision could change everything.
- Have you ever had a moment when you've felt that? Applying for a job? Leaving home?

Kissing someone for the first time?

- Or, simpler questions: how old were you when you left home? Who would you say has had the biggest influence on you?
- For me it was the day I left home- that was the first time I really stood up and said "This is me." And you've gotta do that, one way or another.
- Reminder about table tasks and thanking them.

NB For Edd's family table - playing on: wanting to check if what she's heard about the stag was true.

JASON:

- Hey guys. I'm Jason. I don't think we've met.
- How you doing? It's all a bit of a shock eh? Keeping us all on our toes.
- What do you all do? Do you like it?
- When did you decide that was what you wanted to do with your life?
- I always thought someone else would help me work it out. Just say to me - mate, you're good at this. This is what you're meant to do. Nobody says that about care work!
- TA guy - Perth. Lots of work. Beaches. Blue skies.
- But when it came down to it, couldn't do it. Didn't sit right, going so far away. Didn't feel like it was for me.
- Started to think maybe I'll never know for sure. Do you know what I mean? Is anyone here not sure? Does it bother you?
- I need to make a plan. I've started actually.
- Thanks for help in thinking about it. Nice to meet you. Enjoy yourselves. Reminder about cards / karaoke / bar,

NB for specific table add in **estate agent** banter.

JAX:

- Aw - thank you for coming! I'm so glad you're here.
- I can't believe you've come so far / how long has it been since I've seen you?
- Questions about journey / life in NZ /

obscure family members.

- I need all the support I can get today.
- I don't want to talk about Edd. Sorry. I just can't
- Could you help me? - mebbe we could pool our collective life experiences as we're all together.
- Do you think there are just some things you have to do with you life? Like a vocation?
- Do any of you feel like you have a vocation? What do you do?
- Being a stay at home Mum can be a vocation. My mum did. Though home was our business of course - Dad always behind the bar.
- Do you think there's a time limit on when you can do the stuff you have to do? Before having kids probably. Before settling down?
- Thanks. Thanks for talking to me. See, this was one of the reasons I knew keeping today on was a good idea! You can't beat friends and family for giving good advice.
- I'll think about it. I've got some time to think about things now!
- Now have at look at those song sheets - no excuses, I really wanna see you singing later....

When the separate conversations have finished JASON goes to the bar and JAX leaves.

7. Bernie's speech

BERNIE: *On mic*

As many of you know, I haven't lived here for a long time. They're funny things, dreams. Slippery buggers, if you'll excuse my French. You live here, don't you? How do you feel about being here still? Don't you get...bored? I couldn't wait to get away. 7 0 levels burning a hole in my pocket; 2 years' savings; 1 way ticket. God, I can still remember the inspector's face. He looks at my ticket. Looks me up and down(massive bag, tiny skirt and I had pins to be proud of in them days. No coat coz I'd decided none I had was smart enough. Bloody freezing!). And I said 'London': not a question, more a statement of intent.

What a rush! He knew, we both knew, that when he turned the train round to haul back across the same familiar tracks, back to some mucky red brick

terrace, an over cooked dinner and Family Fortunes, I'd be shooting away, taking my first steps into wide streets, bright lights gleaming in a dark river. Possibility. That's what that ticket meant. A whole new life.

'Course things never pan out exactly as you plot them. There was I, all smug to be escaping, into everything, 8 jobs in 18 months and thinking Cathy mad to be staying here and settling. *(To audience member)* 'No Offence'. I was free! But 5 years on and it was her with the smiling, beautiful daughter and the totally doting husband (and the house. And the bloody dog!) And it felt like it was me, the big sis in the big smoke who'd really got left behind.

Took me years to find a toe hold, make my own space, whilst Cathy was born to be here - weaved in the weft of this place. Funny, when she got sick, it never felt urgent. Besides, I could barely get away. Business was booming - it was the 80s and don't believe our Maggie - making it was no easy option for a woman on her own.

I had this idea that the place would take care of her. Everything in her life seemed so natural here I couldn't believe it would falter, expel her like a foreign object. So quickly.

Moving back, in the end, was a sort of penance. The prodigal daughter! Not quite empty handed but too bloody late.

Life, I have started to learn, is rather a lot like yoga. You can contort yourself into feeling virtuous, but in the end, if it's really painful, you're doing something wrong.

Coming home, looking after Jax, felt more right than anything I'd done for ages, despite myself. But I couldn't be her Mum, not really. Another competition I was preset to lose. No, not a competition. You know what I mean. Anyway, I'm not built for here. I had to fight for my own future. Two glorious years as a far-from-fairy stepmother was in no way enough and far more than I could handle.

It was all a long time ago. I left, back to London. Life went on. Jax has forgiven me at least. We visit. And here I am, Maid *(cough!)* of Honour *(cough cough!)*.

JAX returns to the room - JASON clocks her. (BERNIE doesn't)

Decision time. Jax's moment. Is she getting on that train or stopping here?

And in the end, God! - what do I know? I'm the world's worst expert at making good choices. Just gotta hope that's not something Jax has inherited....

So let's raise a glass to absent friends. To Cathy!

JAX examines the decorations at the back of the room.

8. Jason and Bernie talk

JASON: *(Bursting over. Interrupting)*
Bernie! This doesn't feel right. What are we doing here?

Look at everyone - all dolled up like it's been a proper wedding. *(He gestures at an audience member)* Paulie's already cracked out the whiskey! But no groom! No groom! And he's not answering his phone. It just rings out. What if something's happened? What am I saying? Something has happened! We're at his wedding... without him!

BERNIE:
And what about Jax, eh? What's she supposed to do? Standing at the church, dress of her dreams, moment of destiny and then Dun Dun DUNNN... just say a polite goodbye to everyone "Thanks for trying, but not today ta." Not on my watch!

JASON:
So this is your doing? All of us here still?

BERNIE:
Well, no. But Jax wanted it and as her Maid of Honour, I'm here to back her up. That's my job for today. Scratch that - it's my job every day! I promise you Jason - Edd's fine.

JASON:
But don't you think it's a bit... weird? *(Looks around room)*. I mean, I don't even recognise some of these people...

BERNIE:

Well, that's weddings for you! Look whatever's happening, it's the way Jax wants it so can you just pull your finger out and start making this party happen? They don't want to listen to an old bird like me all day. For her? Isn't there supposed to be a quiz or something?

JASON:

Yeah - an all star (well, all party) Mr and Mrs. But we can't really do that now.

BERNIE:

I'm sure you'll think of something. I've always been convinced there's a sharp mind in there somewhere Jason - albeit slightly misshapen on account of its constant squashing into that motorbike helmet!

9. Pass the parcel part 1

JASON goes to the gift table and starts unwrapping presents then goes round to the tables and gets people to help unwrap/rewrap.

10. Father of the Bride speech part 1

BERNIE talks to JAX outside the room (father briefing) and then comes back in and circulates around tables. JAX talks to an older male audience member cast in the part of her Dad. She explains to him that she'd like him to try and make a speech for her and that she wants it to make everyone feel a bit more comfortable despite there not having been a marriage. She might also ask him what he preferred drink is. She stands up when he agrees.

BERNIE:

Oh Christ! She's trying to convince her Dad to do a speech anyway. He'll never cope. Excuse me! (*BERNIE rushes over, checks the 'Father' is definitely happy to do the speech and that it's what JAX wants.*)

BERNIE:

Maybe I can help? (*BERNIE reassures him*)

JAX brings over a small microphone.

JAX:

Jason - can you get my Dad a _____ (drink)?

BERNIE feeds the audience member the lines of the speech one at a time, he repeats them into the microphone.

"DAD":

Thank you all for joining us today on this ~~happy~~ eventful family occasion.

JAX has asked me to say some words but the speech I had prepared seems wrong now. Could you all help me? You might have seen the cards on your tables - can you fill them in for me? You don't have to be married and it doesn't have to be based on personal experience! But they'll help inspire my speech later. Be as honest as you like.

Thank you!

JAX presents the audience member with a drink of his choice.

JAX: (to "DAD")

That was brilliant - thank you. Don't worry - it's not really the time now for speeches. We'll come back to you later.

JAX gives JASON the microphone. JAX goes to the bar with BERNIE.

11. Pass the parcel part 2

JASON:

Ladies and gentlemen! We have come up with some alternative entertainment to help this evening run with a bang, not a whimper. We have realised that there are quite a few now-unwanted gifts sitting around behind the top table. Probably be going back to their givers by the end of the night. But what a boring way to get rid of them! So... with a little bit of boy scout magic (*he waves some sellotape in the air*) we can share the gifts and share the love with a wedding party round of PASS THE PARCEL! (*To the DJ*) Music please!

That's right - keep it moving. Hey! I'm watching you Mrs D! Oh, and the music's stopped! Whose hands are we in? (*He rushes over with microphone!*) What's your name sir? Sid! Lovely unwrapping work Sid, but... bad luck, it's just another layer of paper! And off we go again! Music maestro!

Round and round we go. Where it stops, no one knows! Aha! You know though, madam, don't you! And what's your name? What do you do, Sheila? Lovely! Unwrap away. Careful now. Aaahh. Another (excellently taped)

layer of paper. Better luck next time Sheila. Off we go again!

Keep the tunes coming Lady GooGoo! Right then. Who have we here? And would you like to unwrap? Oh! Oh! Ladies and gentlemen we have a winner! What's your name please? Pauline. And what's the prize, I mean, er, present Pauline? A toaster! Truly original! Do you have a toaster, Pauline? *(If yes)* Oh shame / *(If no)* Let me just check with the bride. Jax? Jax! Have you got a toaster?

JAX:
Of course we have. We...I had.

BERNIE:
Jason Brown! Put down that microphone! *(she takes the toaster, puts it on the top table, then goes to tidy up the gift table)* This isn't a bingo hall! I'm sorry everyone - we will make sure all presents find their way back to their rightful owners.

There is a look between JASON and BERNIE (and the gift table).

That's if Jason can remember which tag came off which paper! *(to JASON)* Nice work, Jason.

JAX has the toaster and is upset. JASON goes to her.

12. Jax and Jason talk; photo gift

JAX:
I just don't know any more do I? I don't know what I've got. Don't know anything at all. Oh God! I definitely don't know what I'm doing.

JASON:
If not knowing what you're doing's a crime, we'll all be banged up sooner or later! *(He looks over at the pile of half unwrapped stuff)*. Some of us probably sooner!

JAX:
Ha.

JASON picks up a small, square wrapped present.

JASON:
So this sort of fell into my hands when I was going through the pile. You got a lot of...toasters you

know? Not from me though. Who wastes hard earned cash on designer kitchen-ware??

JAX:
You're quick enough to waste it on that bloody Suzuki bike. Petrolhead.

JASON:
Head. Girl.

JAX:
Soft. Mudder.

JASON:
Mudderfucker! Anyway, yes, it was for both of you, but I want to give it you anyway. Now's the right time.

JAX:
You've always been good with that Jase. Knowing the right thing, right time.

JASON:
Jokes.

JAX unwraps the present. It's a small framed group photo.

JAX:
Ha! Is this down Goose Fair? Oh my God. When was this? We can't be more than...14 there?

JASON:
2001. I was 11. You guys 13.

JAX: *(realising)*
Aw Jase. That year. What makes you think I want to remember, that year? If I could blank out the whole thing - just leave a thick black line right across my brain I would! That'd be fine.

JASON:
You were doing a pretty good job of blanking it out at the time! What's that - White Lightning?

JAX:
Ugh! Never. And I mean, **never** again. *(Puts down photo)* I do remember it though. Highlight of the summer for me and Edd. That must've been the first time you joined us. From about June we'd been waiting for the posters to go up. Plotting our escape to a parent free zone...

13. Fairground flashback

JAX and JASON move to edges. The third actor joins them, adding a jacket/hoodie that turns her into Edd. The following sequence plays out physically.

JASON:
Picture the scene.

EDD:
Jax: scrawny-beautiful in a bookworm and death metal phase, running this summer obviously, thrillingly off the rails.

JASON:
Edd: their charming, gobby leader crowned by a hoodie, anointed with Barcardi decanted by stealth from his parents' basement boozier.

JAX:
Jason: their pre-teen protégé. A young scallywag with more mouth than trousers but extremely relaxed parents at work all weekend, and a visionary left strike.

JASON:
Off school.

JAX:
At large.

EDD:
And then. (*Actors MOVE*) The fair! Bright lights exploding on your brain.

JAX:
Music screaming out. Jingles blaring from the slot machines.

EDD:
Hot candyfloss kisses. Can of cider in my pocket.

JASON:
And the best girl (*actors MOVE*) in the world on your arm. My first time out with you lot. The older ones. I felt like the bloody chosen one. Man, I was ready!

JAX:
In the fair nothing is the same. The field looks different, the town's a different colour. All the bits you know are gone, or changed.

JASON:
Popcorn on the air. Crappy pop tune blaring. Wild
rides that slam you in your seats.

JAX:
Or lift you high over everything.

ALL MOVE

EDD:
Amazing shadowy corners for sneaky swigs and holding
hands, darker than town, quiet in amongst all that
noise.

JAX:
I swear I felt like I could actually fly in there.

EDD:
Do you remember the eggs?

TOGETHER:
Floats like a Ferris wheel, swings like a beast!

JASON:
They were supposed to be for the grownups. Like we
cared!

EDD:
You used to put your mum's heels on under your
combats and pull them really low so you'd pass the
height test.

JASON:
Bloody death traps looking back! Locked inside those
metal cages.

JAX:
Holding on with your knees! To nothing! And then when
it started to spin.... (*ACTORS MOVE*) total freefall!

JASON:
Everything round your neck - door keys on a shoelace/

JAX:
Mum's ring/

JASON:
...suddenly round your face! All the bits from your
pockets rattling around the car.

EDD:
Face feeling like it was being peeled backwards.

JAX:
Stomach somewhere round your ears.

JASON:
White lightning somewhere round **your** ears! Nothing where it was supposed to be.

EDD / BERNIE slips away out the door. JAX comes back to centre.

14. Jax and Jason talk; Jax's uncertainty

JAX:
Pretty much how that whole year felt to me.
Fundamentally upside down.

JASON:
I just wanted to give you something to remember the beginnings. To see how far you've come?

JAX:
Have I? But here I am exactly where I started.

JAX sits at the top table and goes to eat cake.

JASON:
You went off. You got the degree. You came back home to your family and fella - makes sense to me!

JAX:
I went off. Couldn't cope. Ran back to my Dad's with my tail between my legs. Back to my childhood bedroom with the rude words about Dad's first girlfriend still scratched on the inside of my wardrobe! Or to the rented flat I could barely afford where Edd crashed out if he couldn't be bothered going home after we'd been out in town.

JASON:
He was younger then. You live together now. You're making a home.

JAX:
Until the landlord hikes the rent again. It's not ours and it never will be. Specially not now.

(To the room) How many people here could afford to buy their own homes now? If you're our age, you don't

get a look in - that's the new rules. Not unless you've some posh job in management. Not even if you're an estate agent - though I'd've never found the flat otherwise - rentals come up round here once in a blue moon. Oh the bloody irony! I spend half my waking life walking managers round the stylish converted 'bijou' cottages no miner'd ever recognise. The other half's spent wondering what the hell happened to the girl who went off to Leeds full of optimism. Some future I scratched out for myself, with that degree. History?! Yeah, it feels like I am now.

JASON:

Bloody hell. How long have been you been building that up?

JAX:

You know I studied the history of round here. This region. Heart of the lace industry. 25,000 people employed at the peak. Skilled. Valued - in those day, you could earn regular, have a family, feel confident in the future.

JASON:

Not that confident - where are all the lace jobs now? Look at what we've got today - we live longer, there's a million things you can do with your free time, we invented... the internet! Amazing - all the knowledge in the world at your fingertips. Life is better now.

JAX:

Is it? Coz I don't know what to do with myself when I'm not working. I'm so worn out from worrying about trivial stuff - have I exercised enough, what am I going to wear to Ned's wedding, what shouldn't I miss on TV tonight - I've no energy left for anything else. And it's all rubbish - it's fiddling while Rome burns. I feel like my heads full of...fluff and there's no room to think about the important stuff. And it's happening, it's going on all the time. Life is slipping through my fingers. Mum was only 8 years older than me now when she was diagnosed. Eight years! It's not enough time to do it all. I can't get my head straight enough to know if I'm doing the right thing.

JASE:

Do you think that's how Edd felt? That's why he didn't show up today? Because I know it wasn't coz of you. He loves you Jax. Totally.

JAX:

Oh God. Edd. Maybe. I dunno. I s'pose a wedding is one of the few days that really does make a difference - you're actually doing something with yourself. Standing up. Making a choice. That's pretty scary when you think about it. There's not many days in your life when you've the chance to change everything. Make a promise to the death!

JASE:

I think you're putting too much pressure on yourself. Not everyone's switched on enough to think that much about every second. Maybe we can't be. There's no way you can make the right choices all the time.

Do you think I planned to be a weekend terry without the cojones to join up properly? You gotta just keep driving forward. You're going forward anyway, whether you like it or not. When I run, the really long races, I have to think about every step. That's what you learn. You think you're gonna be focussed on the ending, where you're going, but really, you gotta focus on each step. Only that next step. When you focus like that, that's when you'll make it to the end.

JAX:

Jesus - who died and made you Claire Rayner?

JASE:

Sorry. Would you like it better if I said 'If he's chickened out, I'll kill him. How could he do this to you?'

JAX:

Point taken. When'd you get so wise, our kid?

JASE:

Less of the kid, please!

JAX:

Point taken! *(Pause.)* Thank you. I don't know what I'd be doing here without you. You're my best mate, you know, not just Edd's. Have I told you that?

JASE:

Maybe once or twice. *(Pause)* But what's it mean? You're gonna leave here now aren't you? We'll be friends who catch up once in a while. Friends on Facebook, Christmas cards saying 'I can't believe it's been so long.' No matter how good the friendship is, it's not like a partner is it. Is it?

JAX:

Come on! Friends is who you go to when it's all gone tits up. Friends is the safe place you can't break. Friends is home wherever you're living. Maybe we're all in too much of a rush to partner up and settle things. Maybe friends even know us better? You've known me almost as long as Edd has, and you're the one who's here today aren't you - helping me pick up the pieces?

You made a quiz didn't you?

BERNIE comes back in around this point.

JASE:

The Mr & Mrs quiz? Yeah, but there's no Mr and Mrs here, is there.

JAX:

I think we should do it. I think we should all do it!

JASE:

What do you mean?

JAX:

Let's see who knows us best - friends or partners. Is there anything in it? Let's see who really listens, which relationship brings the closest connection.

15. Mr and Mrs quiz

She grabs the mic.

Right everyone, I'd like you to get into pairs. We'll do this like a pub quiz. Pair up either with a friend or with your partner.

BERNIE and JAX start to hand out paper, moving round the room.

Does it work out? Is anyone left out? We could have a few threes (I meant of friends, but hey if that's the way you like to swing it, I'm not one to judge!).

If you don't know anyone, pair up with someone random and just guess the answers. Coz maybe we'll find out the whole thing's completely random. Or you might just find your soul mate!

Jase, have you got your questions ready? Has everyone got some paper?

Okay - let's start.

During the quiz, JASE is at top table with microphone. JAX and BERNIE are circulating. JASE Reads out questions, but also writes on a piece of paper.

JASE:

An easy one to start with. What is the date of your partner's birthday? And let's not be mean - I'm only after day and month, let's leave out the year!

Question 2: What is their favourite hobby? What do they love to do most in their spare time? And try to keep it clean please, ladies and gentlemen, remember this is a family event!

Okay - let's get to the juicy stuff. Number 3: If the house was on fire and they could save just one item, what would it be?

And question 4: what is their secret, or not so secret dream job?

And finally, question 5: what is your partner's biggest regret?

So, now let's swap papers - swap and mark please - don't be afraid to get the red pens out.

There is some time for the audience to discuss their answers.

Now then, let's have a show of hands - who got just one right, just one? Gonna have some making up to do later, eh? And who got two? Still pretty shameful I'm afraid. What about three? Who did three? Fairly respectable, but let's go for the serious stuff now. Four out of five - who managed that? Great! And how many of you are friends, keep your hands up if you're friends. And partners? Ooh - that's an overwhelming majority for the friends / partners camp. And how about fives. Any fives in the room?

JAX walks up and finds JASONs answers.

JASE:

And are you friends or partners? *[ad lib]* Well this is awkward! It looks like, in this room at least, the friends / partners have it / nobody really knows one another at all!

BERNIE and JASON comment on the results (ad libs).

JAX:

Hey - how did you know about this? All these are right Jase: about saving my Mum's ring, and I never knew you knew about the journalism. But what does this mean - question 5 - biggest regret - 'Today'? Why've you just written 'Today'?

'We Have All the Time in the World' by Louis Armstrong starts to play

That's the music for the first dance. Why's she put this on?

They look at each other as the music plays. There is a moment between them.

16. Father of the Bride/"first" dance

JAX breaks it and goes to ask 'Dad' to dance. JASE invites someone else from the audience, maybe 'Dad's partner so she isn't left behind. BERNIE encourages others to come up and dance and, after the first verse, JAX also calls up the rest of the audience to join in the dance.

DJ:

Ladies and gentlemen - the bar is now open for the next fifteen minutes. I'll keep the tunes coming, feel free to make use of the dance floor!

Now's also your chance to bring up you karaoke choices and pop them in the box on my table. The bride has also asked me to remind you about the cards on your tables to help with her Dad's speech.

If you need them, the toilets are

_____. Now, this one's for the lovers out there... (Whitney Houston 'I Wanna Dance with Somebody' plays)

17. Interval

During the first 5 minutes of the interval:

JAX goes to toilet / mirror and looks at herself in her face, marking tiny lines and signs of aging. Silent. Worried.

BERNIE is behind the bar on her phone, aggressively trying to cancel thing, get refunds etc for the honeymoon.

JASON is pacing, possibly outside in smoking area if one is used by the audience, muttering possible approaches to JAX under his breath. He may nick a cigarette off someone.

ACT II

18. Flashmob dance part 1

JASE:

Hey! Everyone. I've had an awesome idea. You know what would really cheer up this party? A flash mob. You know - where everyone suddenly gets up and does a dance together. Like in 'Love, Actually'? Only that was a song. But I'm thinking a super simple dance routine. Okay - everyone on your feet. Let's try this.

He teaches the audience a sequence of actions. They are just about to try it with music when JAX & BERNIE return....

JAX:

Er. Why is everyone standing up? (to JASE) What you doing?

JASE:

Nothing! (He signals DJ to stop music. Stage whisper to audience) Sit. Down. And act. Normal.

19. Karaoke

JAX:

O-Kaay. Anyway. Hope you're having a good time. The time has come for something most of you know is my favourite. Has to be part of the day for me (despite Dad's thoughts on the matter!). It's KARE-OKE! As you know, there are some song lists on your tables and

really, not to emotionally blackmail you or anything,
but I need this.

Jase, um maybe you could do the first number, warm
them up a bit?

JASE:

Yeah, alright - I can think of the perfect song as it
goes...

*JASE and the DJ set up the machine/get the music playing.
The opening riffs of Billy Idol's 'White Wedding' kick
in. Jase starts to sing, not brilliantly.*

JASE:

Hey little sister, what have you done?
Hey little sister, who's the only one?
Hey little sister, who's your superman?
Hey little sister, who's the one you want?
Hey little sister, shotgun!

It's a nice day to start again
It's a nice day for a white wedding

*BERNIE gestures at the DJ to cut the music. JASE is left
singing, awkwardly on his own.*

It's a nice day to start aGAAAAIINN....!!

JASON:

Oh. OK. Maybe today's not the day for it.

Um. (to DJ) Anyone else lined up?

DJ:

Yes - it's _____ (2-3 audience songs) / Nope.

JAX: (if 'No')

Really? No one? Aw - go on - make my day better!

*JASE, BERNIE & JAX encourage an audience member to come
forward. This should be an invitation and not a coercion,
hopefully someone will show a chink of interest or be
proposed by a friend.*

BERNIE: *(if no one answers)*

OK - I'll step up. But I'm going to pick something that I think you'll all sing along with. *(she consults with DJ and sings 'Thank you for the Music')*

JAX:

Thank you so much! I will literally never forget that! I hope you people out there in the audience have got space left for one more. This was one of my Mum's favourites...

Fleetwood Mac's You Can Go Your Own Way plays. Jax does a heartfelt performance. Perhaps the other two cast members dance a number to part of it / lead the audience in clapping / bit of collective choreography?

JAX:

Loving you
Isn't the right thing to do
How can I
Ever change things that I feel?

If I could
Maybe I'd give you my world
How can I
When you won't take it from me?

You can go your own way
Go your own way
You can call it
Another lonely day
You can go your own way
Go your own way

Tell me why
Everything turned around?
Packing up
Shacking up's all you want to

If I could
Baby I'd give you my world
Open up
Everything's waiting for you

You can go your own way
Go your own way
You can call it
Another lonely day
You can go your own way

Go your own way.

JAX, clearly emotional, half runs from the room, handing the mic to JASON as she passes him. BERNIE hurries after her. JASE looks after them. Flounders slightly.

JASE:

You lot are awesome. Just give the girls a minute. Don't forget them moves. I'm just gonna nip out and have this. *(He pulls out a ciggie from behind his ear and exits)*

20. Jax and Bernie overheard in the toilets

The next scene is overheard / radio mic'd from the LADIES.

BERNIE:

Jax that was lovely.

JAX:

Ha! I don't think 'lovely's exactly the style Lindsey Buckingham was going for!

BERNIE:

Wasn't he in love with Stevie Nicks?

JAX:

So the story goes - it's a funny sort of love song.

BERNIE:

Unlike most of your pop songs, love's got no formula. You're right - it was one of your Mum's all time hits. You know - she sung it down the phone at me once or twice.

JAX:

After you'd left?

BERNIE:

Aye.

JAX:

Did you ever regret it, Aunty B?

BERNIE:

Leaving? No. Yes. No. *(Pause.)* I've always lived by the rule you should only regret things you've *not* done. And that was the biggest thing I'd ever done! Couldn't regret that. I wouldn't be who I am I'd stayed here.

JAX:

God - is here really so bad?

BERNIE:

You tell me - you're the one jacking it in aren't you?

JAX:

Jacking it in?! If I leave I'll be following in your footsteps! Doesn't that make you proud? You're the role model in the end - like you always wanted.

BERNIE:

Er, just coz it's your wedding day, that's no license to be rude, Madam! I've never wanted anything for you! Other than you find your own way (to coin a phrase). You're giving me far too much credit there. Never have had much of a plan. Act first, ask questions later. Hmm - maybe you do take after me after all!

JAX:

Maybe if I leave I'll feel better?

BERNIE:

The one thing I can guarantee is that wherever you are you're going to feel the same. Can't go far enough to leave yourself behind, I'm afraid.

JAX:

How did you know?

BERNIE:

Oh I didn't - not til today. But I could see it in your face this morning, when you were waiting in the porch

JAX:

I wasn't waiting.

BERNIE:

I know. When did you tell him?

JAX:

This morning. Dead early. I just told him not to come. He couldn't believe it at first. Thought it was a joke. I felt like a total bitch. I think I broke his heart.

BERNIE:

And how's your heart?

JAX:

Still going. Just about.

BERNIE:

So, it sounds like you've made a decision. But I have to say Jax - it doesn't look like it. This feels like anything but a clean break!

JAX:

You never married.

BERNIE:

Well spotted, Sherlock. Sorry. But what's that got to do with anything?

JAX:

Was my Mum happy?

BERNIE:

Oh God Jax, how do I know? She loved you, I know that. You made her happy. But I don't think repeating her choices, or mine is going to do that for you. You have to stand up and make your own call.

JAX:

I do love him you know, but he's part of everything here. Woven in to everything I've done. It's starting to feel like a net.

BERNIE:

Well you're not in a net. You're in a village hall. And you need to start thinking about what you're going to do about that.

JAX:

Maybe it's time for a speech?

BERNIE:

A speech? Oh heavens, okay. If that's what you want.

*BERNIE and JAX return to the room, JASON soon after.
BERNIE goes over to 'Dad' and starts to brief him.*

21. Father of the Bride speech part 2

JAX:

Okay everyone, I've decided it's time for a speech. Hopefully you've all filled out these cards on your

table, so can each table have a look at them together and pick out your favourite two from each table? One pink, one blue? We'll come round and collect them for my Dad here - he needs all the help he can get!

Music while this is happening. JAX & JASON collect the cards and give them to BERNIE, then they go and sit at the top table. BERNIE produces a pile of cards with the speech on for 'DAD'. She reassures/helps him throughout the speech.

'DAD':

WELCOME!

Good evening ladies and Gentlemen. I am <BERNIE whispers 'Say your name'> and today I find myself the very proud father of this beautiful bride, Jax.

On behalf of all the family, I would like to welcome you all and thank you for coming to this very special occasion to celebrate with us, and for staying despite it not quite being the day we thought it would be.

Your presence here today is what makes this event special and your help is what is going to make this speech memorable!

I think this is a good moment to say a few things about marriage:

What are the good things that a marriage can bring?
(he reads out the list of 6 - 10 pink cards)

But of course, as we've all seen today, marriage isn't always a bed of roses.
(he reads out the list of 6 - 10 blue cards)

Jax - whatever you decide to do with your future, I'm sure it'll continue to be full of surprises. You make me very proud.

If you would like to stand please and raise your glasses ladies and gentlemen. I give you... the bride! Thank you.

JAX comes over and gives him a hug.

22. Jax's speech

JAX:

(Taking the mic) Blimey! That was pretty emotional!

Thanks Dad. And thanks to all of you for sticking with me today. I suppose I owe you a bit of an explanation. I'm sorry Edd isn't here with me, enjoying these bubbles. I'm sorry I couldn't go through with it.

But when I woke up this morning, all I could see was this straight line ahead of me. *(Jax unties a bit of ribbon from the decorations and starts to walk forward through the space, pulling out the ribbon as she goes)*.

One line straight down the aisle that just kept going... Through... a sympathetic upgrade by a holiday rep to the honeymoon suite (probably the only really swish holiday we'd ever have), through months of payslips and scrimping and saving to have our first baby *(Bernie gasps)*. No Auntie B, I'm not pregnant.

Straight along to lock down in a job I hate, mortgage slaves (if we're lucky) to bring up our children properly in a place where most of our friends have left *(JASON gets up and leave the room)* before saddling them with massive debts anyway just to get the degrees now compulsory for anything but a minimum wage job *(BERNIE receives a text message and leaves the room)*. In middle age, we re-mortgage to try to help them get on the property ladder, but it isn't enough, *(she starts to twist and tangle herself in knots in the ribbon)* and we have to spend our twilight years watching them struggle through a world only getting more vicious.

And we start to resent one another, for not doing better, for holding ourselves back. For going along and along this line, but finishing up exactly where we started off.

That's if we haven't been flooded out of this whole valley.

JAX lets the ribbon drop and wriggles out of it.

All I've been trying to do for years is make things feel settled - secure. And I've done it. But I don't.

What if there's some other line? What if there's a way I can get off the line completely? I don't want everything settled. I suddenly realised getting married didn't feel like a beginning, it was feeling like an ending.

BERNIE returns.

BERNIE:

I've got something for you. It's from Edd.

She hands JAX a folded up piece of paper.

JAX:

How?

BERNIE:

He's outside. He's fine. But he wanted me to give you this.

JAX:

I dunno. I don't think I can... Jase should be here... Where is that boy, anyway?

JAX heads to the bar, looking for JASON. BERNIE leaves the room.

23. Jason's inner thoughts

Motorbike revs. JASON re-enters, wearing his motorbike helmet and steps on to chairs at the top table. Soundtrack of engine builds until it's like we're there.

JASON: *(Taking his helmet off)*

You put your helmet on and it seals out the world. You press it out, you go inside your heavy, padded head. And in there it's not the same old boring thoughts turning around because normal is blocked out. It's gone. All there is this window of straight ahead and fast.

All three of us 'experimented' for a bit. Pills in the back room at the Bulls Head. Skunk up the quarry. It's nothin' compared to this. Tearing up a B road, just you and the bike 6.30am after a long run. Pure rush.

Starting to shout over the engine revs

Washed out fields, splattered; grey sky gone; crap driver doing 50 in the middle of the road, gone; dead badger, sacked off; pointless road stripes disappearing...disappearing.... GONE!

And sometimes, you go too. You get started and for a few minutes your head's not full of... anything.

You're at the centre. Nothing but speed and air and blood. No more standing on the sidelines, waiting. No more worries about the future. No more running in circles to stop you feeling useless, powerless to make something of your life.

War games. They're just that. I don't want to fight a war. I just want to to use myself, feel strong, make something happen. Feel like I've made some choices.

Instead I'm running in great big muddy circles and crawling about in the dirt under pretend enemy fire so I don't have to hang around home at the weekend and watch my best friend making love to the best girl in the world.

Don't you even. Don't... go there. I am not that kind of bloke. You can nix that thought right now, because I never would. Not while she was his. Fifteen years we've been buddies. When the little scrats at school tried to do me over, he stood ground for me. For why? No reason. Coz we played footie together? It was always me and him, no why about it - makes sense in the end we'd go for the same girl.

(Stepping down) So I do nothin'. Nothin'. And watch the happy ever after unfold. And then somehow, while doing nothing...this.

24. Jax and Jason's heart to heart

JAX:

(Coming over. Waving a hand in front of JASON's face)
You in there, Rambo?

BERNIE has re-entered but stays at the back of the room.

JASE:

Yeah, sorry. Miles away. *(Putting helmet on top table)*

JAX:

I think people are having a good time.

JASE:

Is this about your Mum?

JAX:

(Pause) I've got to get it right, for her. She never had the chance. But I feel I've got no chance either. Everything stacked against me. Massive student debt. Crappy job. A relationship I've been in since I was 13! 13!

JASE:

Come away with me Jax.

JAX:

What?

JASE:

I'm going. Bag's packed. I'm done here.

JAX:

What do you mean? What about your job? You can't just leave them in the lurch - they're vulnerable people.

JASE:

I'm not. I've handed in my notice. I've been planning to go for ages. After this.

JAX:

After the wedding? (Pause) Where? Not to the army...?

JASE:

The open road! Wherever I lay my hat! Well, Birmingham. My brother's down there - he said he'd help me get fixed up. I've been thinking about getting some proper training. As a roofer. When you've got a trade....

JAX:

...You'll always have a job. Yeah, I remember your Dad saying.

JASE:

Thing is, you could come too (He hands her his helmet). A fresh start. For both of us.

JAX:

What would I do in Birmingham?!

JASE:

Are you telling me they don't need estate agents there? What, they got no knock off conversions to pimp out?

JAX:

...

JASE:

There's a good uni in Brum - you could finally do something with that history degree. Or maybe they do journalism?

JAX pauses. She puts down the helmet and holds up the letter from EDD.

JAX:

He's outside. I can't read this.

JASE:

And you think I can?!

25. Edd's letter and Jax's indecision

BERNIE walks over and takes the letter from JAX's hand. She looks around the room, picks a youngish guy and gets him to stand up. She gives him the jacket/hoodie she wore to play EDD earlier. Then she gives him the letter.

BERNIE:

Do you mind?

The DJ leaves the room during this reading.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (as 'EDD' reading the letter):

Dear Jax.

So I've been sat outside in the car park for the past hour, wondering what I can say to you.

If I came in there, in front of all those people, I know I'd fluff it, so I've writ it down instead.

When you called me this morning I wasn't totally surprised. Though you've not said anything, I knew you were getting nervous about the wedding - about what it meant.

What I wanted to say is...Yeah there's a ceremony and a church, and all this...hoopla. But our marriage can be just like our life - our own thing. Something we've scrapped over and worked at.

It's always been you and me, but there's nothing I take for granted. I don't even care if we're married or not. I just want to keep going on this mad adventure with you, wherever it takes us.

I love you.

BERNIE:

(Thanking the reader)

Look Jax, this... today isn't a choice you have to make only once. Don't be scared that it has to be forever. A marriage is something you re-make over and over, every day.

JAX:

And what do you know about marriage Auntie B?

BERNIE:

I know that relationships get to be worked into. You don't just inherit them. I know that now, only 15 years too late!

JAX:

Oh. You did alright. I was glad to have you/

BERNIE:

/Really? Well if you trust me, listen to me now. Making a decision is nothing to be scared of. All you have to do is work out what you really want. And hey, I bet you're not the only one here with an opinion. We've got a whole room's worth of good brains and hearts who can help scope out your options.

JASE:

But....! You can't ask them! This is Jax's decision! Besides - people **hate** being asked that stuff, being put on the spot./

JAX:

/Being made to feel responsible.

BERNIE:

Well someone has to make a choice - this reception's halfway between somewhere and nowhere.

JASE:

You don't Jax. You don't have to decide yet.

BERNIE:

I think we should have a vote! FOR, says that Jax should give it another go - stick to her commitments and go for this marriage malarkey - see if she can make it work with Edd. (He's waiting outside in the car. Jase, he says your phone's off) AGAINST says let it go. Try something different. Start something new.

JAX:

Let's do it. I trust you all. Let's face it - I need your help. I'd like to know what you think.

JASE:

Wait! Don't.... er.... Let's make it more interesting. C'mon Bee, don't just put them on the spot. This is supposed to be a party. We could [buy a little time] make it fun!

Crosses to DJ booth.

26. Flashmob dance part 2

Everyone - this is the moment. Come down to the dance floor. Yes - even you! Remember the moves earlier? The lawnmower? The toilet flushing? We'll do it like a drill. A dancing drill. And at the end you can cast your vote, if you have to.

Here we go! *(He starts the music)*

Bucks Fizz, Making Your Mind Up starts to play. The DJ has moved the car to the front window and turned on the headlights during this section. JASE talks the audience through the dance routine from earlier. Everyone dances.

When the audience have completed a full sequence round, BERNIE nudges JASON to wrap things up.

27. Audience decision and discussion

JASE:

OK - I guess it's crunch time. If you think she should go with Eddy, outside - go over to the bar side of the room, and if you think she should try something new, come over to the DJ table. Or there's the third option - back of the room for bigamy! Only joking! It's time to show us what you really think.

Once everyone has made their decision, JASON cuts the music.

JAX: *(who has covered her face)*

I can't look!

BERNIE: *(opening the curtains to reveal headlights)*

He's still out there: Edd. In the car.

JAX:

I love you both, you know.

JASE:

Jax - open your eyes. They've done it. Over to you.

JAX: *(Goes over to one group)*

You're 'yes' right? For marriage and Edd. What makes you think that?

(She continues to discuss the audience's opinions, then goes over to the other side of the room)

And what about you? Why 'no'? What do you think's better?

(Again, asking question to find out more about the audience's opinions/reasons for voting 'no')

OK. Thank you.

BERNIE: *(seeing JAX looks lost)*

Take your seats everyone.

JAX stands on her own in the centre of the room.

28. Jax's decision

BERNIE:

Look. Maybe I am guilty of expecting too much from you. Wanting you to get it right - not make the mistakes I made. But you can't do that for me. Not making mistakes... that's no way to live. It's the mistakes that make us. And you have to make them yourself.

JASE:

And nothin's final Jax. All we've got is now. You just gotta grab it, and see what happens. I made a dance routine for you!

JAX:

I know! And it was... unforgettable. This whole night has been. I thought I'd avoided all the heavy stuff. But there's been a lot of love in this room! (Sorry!)

OK. Deep breath. This is my story. And I have to decide what the ending will be. For now. Thank you - all - for your help. This is what I choose.

JAX stands up.

She either walks over to JASE, takes the motorbike helmet and leaves with him or runs out the door to the car, which moments later can be heard revving up and driving off. OR, if the audience convince her otherwise, she could leave on her own.

BERNIE sheds a little tear and heads to the bar. Drink in hand, she looks back at the quiet room.

29. Bernie's closing speech

BERNIE:

Well, don't just sit there people! Have a drink! Have a dance. You never know - your future might be in this room! And it is a party, after all!

The music plays.

THE END

APPENDIX 3: Pilot 1 consent form

Something Blue: Consent Form

This pilot forms part of a PhD project entitled *Re-Imagining the Rural Tour: New Forms for New Audiences*. The research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and New Perspectives Theatre Company in order to investigate innovative ways of making work for rural touring. This pilot study has been set up to investigate interactive forms of theatre designed specifically for touring to rural audiences via regional touring schemes and volunteer promoters.

The event will begin with some extracts from a work-in-progress interactive performance called *Reception!* This will be followed by the opportunity to discuss the performance in focus group discussions, and a questionnaire to fill in about your experience of the piece. Both the performance and the discussions will be filmed, photographed and recorded on Dictaphones. The data taken from these recordings, along with the questionnaires, and my own observations and research notes, will be used solely for my own reflection and analysis for the purposes of this research, and will be stored according to the guidelines set out by the University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics. Any data used in published or public research resulting from this study will be made anonymous.

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. I can be contacted on the details below.

Mathilda Branson, PhD Researcher
mathilda.branson@nottingham.ac.uk
0115 973 9120
New Perspectives Theatre Company,
Park Lane Business Centre, Park Lane,
Basford, Nottingham. NG6 0DW

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained and that I have understood it. |
| YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | I have had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been successfully answered. |
| YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without consequence. |
| YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | I understand that all data are anonymous and that there will not be any connection between any personal information provided and the data. |
| YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | I understand that there are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in this study. |
| YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | I consent to audio/video files and photographic records of my participation to be created and understand that these will only be available to the researcher and will not be used publically. |
| YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | I consent to my data being transcribed from audio and video files and understand that it will only be referred to anonymously |
| YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> | I confirm that I have read and understood the above information and that I agree to participate in this study. |

Participant's Name AND Signature
Researcher's Signature
Date

APPENDIX 4: Pilot 1 audience post-show questionnaire

Something Blue Rural interactivity pilot: AUDIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for coming this evening. I'd be very grateful if you could take a few minutes to fill in this questionnaire. Please be as honest as you like – your responses will only be used for the purposes of my research.

Mathilda Branson
PhD Researcher

Name
Are you: <input type="checkbox"/> A rural promoter <input type="checkbox"/> A rural audience member <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Did you interact with the performers or the performance? If yes, in which sections? If no, why not?
Did you interact with other audience members during the performance? If yes, in which sections? If no, why not?
Did you feel that you influenced Jax's final decision? Why/why not?

If you are a promoter, would you book interactive work like this for your village hall? Why/why not?

If you are an audience member, would you come and see work like this? Why/why not?

Do you have any other comments on the interactivity of the piece?

APPENDIX 5: Pilot 1 audience post-show discussion prompts

Discussion questions

- **How did you feel about sharing the space with the performers and performance?**
- **If you interacted with performers or other audience members, did you feel you were being yourself, or playing a character?**
- **Did you feel you knew what the rules were about when you could interact?**

APPENDIX 6: Pilot 1 actor post-show questionnaire

Actors: Questions to consider after the performance

Most successful interactive moment(s)
Least successful interactive moment(s)
Any unexpected interactions?
Any other immediate reflections?

APPENDIX 7: Homing script

HOMING – updated version by Beccy Smith

SCENE 1:

CATHY enters – perhaps she has brought the last of the MP3 players for the audience with her.

CATHY: Gosh! There's more of you than I imagined! I'd no idea if anyone actually read the local noticeboards! Now, um. I'm sure you have some questions. But I think we should do it this way round. Just bear with me. Take one of these <*hands out an MP3 player*>. There's one for each of you. Have you used one before? Well, take a second to familiarise yourself. It's not too scary - even I can manage them now Paul's talked me through it! The triangle button – that's how you 'play'. The volume should be set up right for you already <*point out volume controls, and buttons to skip back and forward through tracks*> Don't worry – if I can do it anyone can! Try on the headphones. Are they comfy? Bearable?

Splendid. So. Are you all sitting comfortably? Oh dear. I sound like some sort of 50s housewife! I know this is a bit strange – I know! But there's method to it, I promise you. Please just... trust me, just for a little while.

Now, I think it might be good to try closing your eyes – so you can really listen. Oh! Um, but open them so you can see the play button first! And now lean back... Press play on Track 1... and listen.

TRACK 1 (3.15)

SARAH: Hello. Hello world. You brute. I hope you can hear this. I mean... I hope someone's listening. This is important. 'Background.'

My name is Sarah Kirby. I'm twenty seven years old. Born in.....well.... Brought up in Nottingham. East Midlands lass through and through. The date of this recording is 11th April 2013. I'm recording in the home of Cathy Underwood – that's the place I've been staying. I don't think Cathy's involved. She's a kind person. I like her. <*pause*> It's uh it's a lovely Spring day – there's a good view from up here right across. I should know. I have to keep checking. You can see most of what's going on out this window: this is the kind of place where people wave back.

But you can't see everything. Seeming so friendly and open is a good way, isn't it? A good way of hiding things. Coz no one would expect anything was even hidden.

That's my job. To dig things up. Be suspicious. Look for what's being held back. Been writing for the Post for a year and a half now. Most of the time news comes to you. People send you things: press releases, begging emails. Everyone wants to be in the paper. Always stuff you can nose out though. Juicy details. Read between the lines. Most PR, there's another story nestling just behind them glossy turns of phrase. But when I got an email - anonymous email at that! - asking me to do some digging, naming this place. 'Something was awry' it said. That was exciting. Awry! Nice word. That's what I'd thought journalism would be. Anonymous tip offs! Felt like Naomi Klein or something! So I came here. Thought I'd do a bit of doorstepping. Nothing too tabloidy, don't get me wrong. But talking to people's part of this job and it usually works better face to face. See the whites of their eyes. Thought I'd be here a couple of days – a week tops.

That was the beginning. But if you're listening to this recording then... *(deep breath)* then it means. I suppose that this is the end. Of the road. That I'm gone. They won. *Pause.*

And if you're listening at all, they haven't won completely. Because I've made a record of everything. Every little thing. Never thought of that, did they? Never realised this place would look after me. All you have to do is hear it.

The recording ends.

CATHY: Okay. All done? Take the headphones off for now. You won't need them for a bit.

So, obviously, I have a confession to make. *(Pause)* This isn't a new book club. Though a keen interest in detective fiction will certainly be relevant! I'm sorry to have misled you. But I could hardly put up a notice in public saying ...I think there's a crime been committed. Probably by someone I know. Certainly by someone in this village. Oh heavens, it sounds horrible when you say it like that! But it's what I think. *(doubtful)* I think. I think... I need some help. 12 good men (and women) and true! That's you!

<*sigh*> Where are my manners? I know some of you know me, but I haven't even introduced myself properly have I? It's Cathy – Cathy Underwood (though soon to be Thompson! But that's not important). I'm 'C.U.'. I put up the posters. And I must say I'm touched, well, impressed really, there's been so much interest. I thought I might be sitting here on my own today. Good job Paul helped me load up all these player-thingsies.

Do you know Paul? He's my son. He's... not around much. But we Skype! And he's talked me through it. Even made little on-screen demos for me! 'Dragging me in the early 21st century', he calls it. Apparently 'mp3's are very 2005. Things are better between us now,

after that...rough patch. He was the first one who believed me really. I didn't know who to talk to at first.

I found these recordings. Afterwards. After she'd gone. Taped to the bottom of the desk in Paul's room. Well, her room at the time. Left over Christmas tape with holly leaves on it. God knows where she'd found it. It was like getting a Christmas present from beyond the grave. In June.

She just vanished, you see. 'Doing a flit', Jim calls it. And I didn't worry too much at first. She'd paid up the rent. I assumed it was a work thing, had to rush off back to town. Thought I'd hear from her soon enough – she had a secretive streak, even though I'd say we'd become friends. With her background, no surprise I suppose. But then, a few weeks later, the boyfriend turned up. Funny, she'd never mentioned him before. Nice looking lad. <deliberately> And he said she'd never gone home.

Work was looking for her too. And I knew that was strange, because she'd told me she thought work was going well. Hot on the trail of something important, she'd said. That's when I thought I'd look again at her room. More carefully. But then, when I found these recordings I wasn't sure what to do. Took me months just to work out how to get them off the memory thingie. See, he'd told me the police weren't interested. The boyfriend. It's not treated as suspicious when a grown woman goes missing, apparently, unless there's evidence of foul play. And is this evidence? I'm not sure. Jim thinks....well, he thinks she wasn't well and I don't want to embarrass her, humiliate her in front of the authorities. But me? I don't know what to think.

So, that's where you come in. That first recording – well, it was one of the last actually. She was always around the village with her device, taping people's voices – maybe you saw her [*Possible places in each village*]. 'Live quotes', she called them. And, once I'd figured out how to listen to it, it turned out she'd recorded almost everything. I've listened to it, and now I want you to. Help me decide what I should do.

Oh, I know it's not a book club. But it'll be worthwhile, I promise. You're going to have to believe me that she was a good girl – a lovely young woman. And her turning up here - in some ways it felt like a sign... like it was meant... I just want you to hear about it all, especially about....

There is a oddly rhythmic knock at the door. CATHY jumps. JIM enters, with tea and biscuits – during the following, he puts tea down on table, and ad-libs re people helping themselves, while he passes around the biscuits.

JIM: The ducks are sitting on the pond. I repeat, the ducks are sitting on the pond. Afternoon all. Tea's up.

CATHY: What are you talking about - 'The ducks....'?!
 JIM: It's the code words – didn't I tell you? Every secret meeting needs a code phrase.
 CATHY: I thought this was your cards afternoon.
 JIM: I've just taken a hand out to bring you some tea. Biscuit, anyone?
 CATHY: Jim! We never talked about all this! It's supposed to be a secret!
 JIM: Oooh – come on now, light of my life. You've got no secrets from me! Anyhow, I'm the caretaker of this building, and I wouldn't be taking care of you if I didn't bring in some refreshments! I'm not stopping. *(Passing round the biscuits, conversationally)* Now then, rich tea or ginger nut? Has she told you the story so far?
 CATHY: I'm sorry everyone, this is my...partner. Jim.
 JIM: Tsk – you know I like it better when you call me 'the boyfriend'. At my age!
 CATHY: *(Carrying on, through gritted teeth)* And Jim, these are some friends of mine.
 JIM: Indeed! And will you be joining Cathy for the full CSI experience? Or merely dipping in for the 15-minute Sherlock super-break?
 CATHY: You are not helping! I appreciate the tea, but please, can you just leave us to it?!
 JIM: *(to the room)* Apologies. It's not my intention to put anyone out. I am merely the vehicle of refreshment....and a little fresh perspective. Because I know that this wonderful woman, our very own Miss Marple, has her mind all made up. But I wouldn't want anyone's time to be wasted.
 CATHY: Nobody feels like they've wasted their time. *(Worried, to the room)* Do you?
 JIM: I'm going! I'm going! Just...for what it's worth, there are some questions you should be asking about Sarah. She was.... vulnerable, shall we say. And for whatever reason, this place got right under her skin – it don't surprise me at all she had to get out quick. And somebody here might've gotten a bit over-involved, what with her only son storming off mere weeks before.
 CATHY: Out! No, leave the biscuits! This is my thing Jim, these people are my guests. I'll ...just...we'll talk about this later.

JIM: *(to the room)* Think about it.

He leaves. CATHY ad-libs to make sure everyone has tea.

CATHY: He's right about one thing, I suppose. It didn't feel like home with Paul gone. It was good to have another young face around the place. But I'm not some vulnerable old coot, no matter how much he'd like to look after me. If I can't tell what really happened, well then, neither can he. Besides, he's not listened to all of this. This was left between me and Sarah. Jim only knows the outline – not the details.

Here, have a look at this. *(She brings out a photo, audience to pass around)*. I persuaded her fella to leave me a copy when he came here looking. Do you remember her? Sweet looking girl, eh – yes, I know the journalistic schtick could feel...abrasive. But it's easier to imagine what someone's really like, isn't it, when you look into their face.

So let me tell you about her. She was twenty seven, be pushing on for thirty now. Landmark birthday – not one to spend on your own. Nottinghamshire girl, right through. Brought up all over. In care, sadly. Her mum wasn't too well. In and out of hospital. Mental stuff, you know. So, from about age 6, that was it, shunted about from pillar to post. Can't have been easy: never getting settled. But it didn't stop her. She went to uni - trained in journalism. That was what really drove her. She said she'd known for ages that was what she wanted to do. She liked making stories – seeing patterns in things, chasing them down.

And it seems she had this boyfriend, you know, she was getting herself sorted. Making something of herself. Yes, she was a bit of a lost soul, but she was getting settled. I think you can see that in this photo – in her eyes. Do you know what I mean? You shouldn't just....write people off.

Anyway. You don't need me rattling on - you can hear about her in her own words. She's all in here, and I want you to hear it properly, see the things she saw.

In a minute, we'll leave here and head out to a particular place that Sarah felt – well, you'll hear for yourself. I'll lead the way, so you can just listen. Don't want to overload you. We'll take this one step at a time. Have you had enough tea? Just leave all the cups here – but you're welcome to take a biscuit for the road!

Gathers everyone together, makes sure tea drunk, coats on etc and leaves the village hall. Once outside/or at the starting point for the track.

Okay, so I want you plug back in, you're going to listen to track 2. In a minute, we'll all press play together. We're in this together now. You'll be hearing Sarah's thoughts and looking through her eyes. Okay, is everyone ready? Press play now.

CATHY leads the audience to Location 2: Sarah's spot. As they walk

SCENE 2; TRACK 2 (1.40)

SARAH: March 26th, 2013. First morning here. Morning jog.

We hear her footsteps and breathing. Every so often, a brief, breathless word from SARAH.

Oof! Bit different to Mapperley here. Fresh air! Should make this easier! (*huffing*).

No cars to contend with. No people either.

Where've you brought yourself now, girl?

Daffodils up. Flowers on the hedges – first sign of Spring. Very picturesque! 'Bout time too.

Wonder how much it costs to live somewhere like this? Is it as fancy as it looks, or is all the same struggling, just a bit more genteel here?

Oh, er “Morning!”. God! Everyone's going to know everyone's business. It's just going to be like that. So how do you keep a secret here, then? A secret of something gone 'awry' ?

The audience and CATHY arrive at Location 2: Sarah's spot.

CATHY: Okay, I'm going to leave you here – you don't need me hovering over you for the whole time. Skip ahead to Track 3 and press play together. Listen to it all through to the end. Then come and meet me <give instructions for Location 3: Central meeting place. Check they know where they are going, if necessary appoint one person to lead the way and/or show them/leave map>.

CATHY leaves

SCENE 3; TRACK 3 (3.57)

SARAH: *Heavy breathing.* OK. Time for a breather. Ooof! Too many nights out last week! It can't be harder just coz it's a new route. Look at that though. What a view. Huge sky! You can see all the shape of the land, where the lines curve, where it flattens out. I wonder if that's...original? Or has farming made it? The breaks yes, the hedges. But the lines. They feel old. The shape of sky to ground. The places water collects: in the hollows. How many eyes have looked at this?

Oh, this is a great spot. Space to think. I can just be...here. Let my eyes take it all in. Feeling of air on my face. Nothing pressing in. Open.

So let's do it. Let's summarise. I'm one day in. Turns out, no rooms at the pub. But I've got digs set up. Landlady's a bit over-friendly but I'm nothing if not someone who can assert her own boundaries! And she might be useful. Got a lot of chat. Cathy Underwood, 51, divorced. Son recently departed under some sort of cloud. Teared up when I asked! Well, his loss is my gain for now. I'll get to the bottom of it, but it's just some breed of domestic.

First feelings about the place? Quiet. Dead quiet! All I could hear last night was foxes at it somewhere outside. Horrible noise. But more than quiet. Closed. Even Cathy weren't forthcoming about the village goings on. Seemed mystified that I'd be here as a reporter. Bloke in the pub wants to know all about me, but giving nothing away about his business, his background. It's going to take time to get under the skin. I'll have to email Dom and warn him it might be a longer assignment. If I can find any reception! Hope it's worth it. I hope there's something to find.

I know, I know, day 1 only. But I feel like there is something. I feel it. There's something here. Waiting for me.

Look at it. Look out over it all. Just look and breathe it in. This view is like this village. On the surface so calm and tranquil, but what's underneath? What's being kept hid? Journalism 101 isn't it? Everyone's got a story. Everyone's got something to hide.

SCENE 4:

JIM arrives behind them, slightly uncanny, interrupting.

JIM: Lovely, ain't it. Best view from round here. You know, it's a distant relative of mine owns all of that. But I'm more the black sheep of the family. Oh, sorry to interrupt. I didn't realise you were 'plugged in'. Take those things off for a minute.

I'm supposed to be trouncing the opposition at cards, but it's a distraction, thinking of you all out here. And what's the point of playing if you know you can't win? I spotted you all, tramping out from the hall. Can't believe she's making you trek around the village! Terrible hosting!

Can I give you a word of advice? Cathy's my 'partner'. And I love her - I do! But my God, she's wrong headed about things sometimes. And stubborn! She thinks I haven't listened to those recordings. Of course I have! Her worries are my worries – that's what getting married means. And she really knows nothing about password security.

Can I save you some time? Cathy doesn't want to admit this, but Sarah was really a very troubled young woman. Like mother, like daughter, that's what they say, isn't it? And her troubles drove her away.

Completely away in this case. You'll trek about here, listen to it all, getting cold and frustrated and end up with the same conclusion.

Put it this way – afternoon like this – if it was me I'd...

(Improvised lines about a better way to spend the afternoon in the village – indoor and outdoor options depending on weather. Manton – get out on the water/get the bike out/go and see the ospreys; Lowdham – pub/beer garden/cricket?)

Of course it's up to you. But don't feel you need to indulge her – that's all I'm saying. Got you here under false pretences, didn't she? So you don't owe her anything. By all means, listen to it if you must, but take it with a pinch of salt, eh? That's what I'd advise. Then nip home, have a cup of tea and forget about this whole thing.

Anyway, I'll get back to my cards now. Cathy's waiting for you *(description/instructions of Location 3: Central meeting place; check the audience know where they are headed)*. Think about what I've said. It's just a bit of friendly advice. I'll be seeing you.

SCENE 5:

(At Location 3: Central meeting place. The audience arrive and are greeted by CATHY)

CATHY: Oh – *there* you are! I was getting worried! Did the recording work? So you've had the groundwork laid. She got summoned here you see – by an email from a funny address. 'Disposable', she called it. I guess that's how it works in journalism. And she got down to finding things out. At the beginning, she was just everywhere round the village asking questions. But you know – we're a pretty close knit place. We don't just go blabbing about everything. One of the things I used to love about here. After Paul left - I never caught anyone, *whispering*. People keep to themselves – it's respectful.

But now, sometimes, I catch myself seeing it differently. Looking out at these houses. Walking down these lanes. Maybe I've started thinking more like Sarah. Asking myself, what's really going on under the surface? *(Reference/indicating here a house in the distance – for example 'that cottage with the lovely roses in the garden')* – What secrets are lurking in the soil? The conversations we all have when we pass in the street or bump into each other in *(specific reference here to somewhere in the village – maybe the pub/Co-op/post office queue)*. 'Lovely day isn't it?' 'How's your Anthony?' 'Did you hear about the *(specific reference here to a local new story/current issue)* But what's *not* being said? What am I not being told? What goes on around here that we *don't* get to hear about?

I know, I know, it's all speculation. But I just wanted to... get you thinking. To say, maybe it's not all as picturesque as it seems. Not behind closed doors anyway. There are ugly souls, grubbing around in the dark at the bottom of any pond. Paul was always saying we were too inward looking. Without going too Midsomer Murders on you, I think Sarah was threatening to shine some light on something... on this place. And what if.... what if some people didn't want her to? What then?

What I think was her first proper clue came from something Helen said – you know – the Parish clerk. And I want you to hear their conversation. But we should go there. To Helen's – so you can set the scene. It's only a 3 or 4 minute walk. I'll walk with you, but there's another track to listen to on the way – Track 4. So, if you'd like to follow me. And press play.

Off we go.

SCENE 6; TRACK 4 (2.22)

As they walk to Location 4: Parish clerk's house

SARAH: *(breathlessly)* Ah, this view, this view. Why can't everything be as clear as you are, eh?

March 30th 2013. People here do talk. Just no one says anything important. Plenty to say about the weather. Yes, it is cold for the time of year. Do I look like I care? And the past! My God – you'd think some of these lot were cast in local loam. Some of them have been here for generations - that is interesting I suppose. How many familiar faces have looked out on this view and felt like it was theirs? How many pairs of eyes, likenesses passed between the generations? But why does no one want to talk about what's happening here now?

Well, nice try, secret village, but I have technology on my side. And today I tracked down the IP address of that not-so-disposable email - and it was the PC used by the Parish Council! Narrows it down a bit, wouldn't you say? So, later today - interview with Parish clerk. Most likely candidate for my mole. She had something she wanted to say to me once, let's see if she's still up for disclosing.

Pause.

It's weird - looking out here, I do feel something. Like.... nostalgia! I look at those trees and I can imagine them, I can *see* them as saplings – see the young arch of the trunk – see which of their branches struck out first. Like a sort of... time lapse animation. Like I've been here before. But I never have, that I know of.

It's strong, though. I feel....protective. I'm going to honour this place, this feeling. I won't ignore it. And I'll find out what's really going on.

The recording ends.

SCENE 7:

CATHY: Here we are. This is where Sarah came and met Helen. Now just press play on Track 5 and you'll hear what they said. Isn't technology great!

TRACK 5 (4.45)

Knocking. A beat. The sound of a door opening.

SARAH: Helen Goodman? Hello my name's Sarah Kirby. I'm from the Po/

HELEN: /I recognise you - you're staying with Cathy aren't you? From the Post, did you say?

SARAH: That's right. I'm looking into some unusual activity here in the village.

HELEN: Here? We're all unusual here! *(laughs)*

SARAH: Well, a bit more unusual than normal, shall we say. Could I come in for a minute? It's about the Parish Council.

HELEN: The Council? Well, yes, I suppose you better had.

Sounds of moving through the house.

HELEN: Have a seat.

SARAH: Thanks. Now /

HELEN: /Do you want a cup of tea?

SARAH: Uh. No thanks. I'd like to talk about some recent decisions made by the Council. Say, over the past 3 months or so?

HELEN: What's that? On the table?

SARAH: Oh, it's my microphone. I record conversations to make sure I get all the details right in my reports. Just as people have said.

HELEN: Don't you have to get my permission to record me?

SARAH: Well, not strictly speaking, as I won't be broadcasting. But....do you mind me recording this conversation?

Beat

HELEN: No. I suppose not.

SARAH: Right. So, I'd like to ask you if you feel there has been anything *awry* in recent Council meetings.

HELEN: Something *awry*? What a quaint turn of phrase! No, there has been nothing *awry* to my knowledge – it's all been rather standard business. Is there something specifically you're interested in?

SARAH: Er, no, nothing specific. Just if anything has seemed *amiss*.

HELEN: Look Miss Kirby, I don't want to be rude, but unless you have something specific you want to ask me about, I really don't think there's much for us to discuss here.

SARAH: The minutes! Do you have copies of the minutes here from the last couple of meetings I could have a look at?

HELEN: Of course. They're a matter of public record. You can download them online

SARAH: It would be a huge help if I could just go through them with you.

Beat.

HELEN: If you insist. I have print outs around here somewhere. We only meet quarterly so the last three months should all be in this set.

Sound of rummaging.

Here you are.

Pause.

SARAH: What's this section about? Are there always this many requests for planning permission discussed?

HELEN: I'd say tabling three at a quarterly meeting is around standard, yes.

SARAH: Can you tell me what they're for?

HELEN: Hmm – there's one here for an extension, you have to be careful about protecting the views, you know. One for a change of use – I believe it was a garage being turned into a granny flat. And an application for village green status, for a plot of land on the edge of the village

SARAH: And were they all approved?

HELEN: *(reading)* Not all, no. The village green application was denied – we're really not short of common land round here so it was deemed not to respond to genuine need.

SARAH: And do you think that was right?

HELEN: 'Right'? Of course I do. You can see the motion here: carried 8 to 1. I was one of the 8.

SARAH: And who was the 1?

HELEN: I'm sorry, those records are anonymised. It's more democratic that way – can't have councillors being personally attacked for their professional judgements. Now, if there isn't anything else /

SARAH: / Who proposed it? That application.

HELEN: Oh, er. I believe it was the local Vicar, Stephen Wrigley. I'm sure he had some philanthropic ambition in mind, but there really wasn't the stomach for a protracted bit of bureaucracy to secure the rights to a piece of land that's fully accessible, hardly used, and hardly likely to be. Now then if you don't mind /

SARAH: /Thank you Helen. You've been really helpful.

HELEN: *(suspicious)* Have I? If I might say....for the record - I think you're barking up the wrong tree entirely. You won't find anything for the pages of that rag round here. Most of us don't even read it! Talk to Stephen, if you must. There's nothing 'awry' about his intentions, I can assure you! He's a good man.

SARAH: Well, thank you. Ms. Goodman. Thanks for your time.

The recording ends.

SCENE 8:

CATHY: All done? Well, don't mind me. I'm just going to walk with you to the church. I think it would be good to look in there for a moment. But there's another recording to listen to – Track 6. I'll lead the way, you just press 'Play'.

TRACK 6 (3.32)

Sarah is breathless. She's been jogging.

SARAH: April 2nd, 2013. Scene setting: 'A village of characters cast in the eternal landscape.' Nice. Has it changed much this view, down the years? My view. This strong sweep of land here, those are elemental, those contours. The sort of thing Brunel would've had to cut his way

through. The way that curve cuts into the sky, that's always been the same, seen by moonlight, seen by lamplight. Something people here could rely on – a familiar boundary to their world. God! I'd've loved view like this, growing up. Somewhere you could just...get some perspective on things.

So what's it worth? What value do you put on that? Because this is the place, isn't it – where permission was turned down. Not to be enshrined for common use. But why? 'Something is hidden.'

There's nothing here. Those trees? Gotta be a couple of hundred years old I'd reckon. *<sound of the wind in the trees>* Bigger than most of the trees in town. You'd lie on your back underneath and feel safe. The sound of the wind in their leaves a constant sigh, breathing through history. Comforting. *<Sound fades>* But common. No endangered newts or cross country short cuts.

There are some great old hedges. Absolutely alive with little birds. But those are newer inventions. Boundary lines marking out territory. Like animals. I can imagine the enclosures, looking out of here. A village like this would once have farmed all the land around, in strips. I can almost hear them. *<A space to hear the imagine sounds>* People crying, protesting, begging not to be taken off their land. They had nothing – no proof it was theirs. Couldn't even write most of them. They just knew it was – it was part of them and that they were part of this place. *<Sounds fade>* Brutal.

But now? This. Quality not good enough for arable. Not even mentioned in the County plan. Might have made a nice spot for a kids park. Or a bird hide. Or whatever you put on village greens. War memorial. Maypole!

Why block people from this land? Wrenching them from it all over again. *This* land. It's mine too now. Like I'm part of this history. I won't let them have it.

The recording clicks off. Soon, they arrive at the church.

SCENE 9:

CATHY: Here we are. It should be yes, it's open. Go on in, have a seat. I'm going to leave you be for a bit. I'll see you back at the village hall – there are a couple more tracks to listen to on the way back. When you're ready – it's Track 7 you want in there.

TRACK 7: (3.23)

In the Church (Location 5). Sound of a creaking door opening. The echoing, hushed ambience of a church. Sarah's voice echoes, slightly.

SARAH: *(tentative)* Hello?

Pause. Her footsteps.
Hello?

STEPHEN: *(from a distance)* I'll just be with you!

Footsteps.

Oh! Hello. I don't think we've met.

SARAH: My name's Sarah. I'm here doing /

STEPHEN: Lovely to meet you Sarah. And what brings you to my parish?

SARAH: I'm here doing...research. Into local development?

STEPHEN: Aha. And how may I be of assistance?

Pause

SARAH: I've been looking at the Parish Council minutes and I gather you applied for village green status for a piece of land in the village. On the edge of town.

Pause.

STEPHEN: *(Cooler)* Well, I suppose it is a matter of public record. Yes, I did, but my application was turned down.

SARAH: Why...?/

STEPHEN: /Deemed not to offer enough benefit I suppose. Oh, I don't know. I was at the meeting, and in the end I thought they were right. Stupid idea, really. I don't know what I was thinking /

SARAH: / No, I meant, why did you put in the application?

Pause

STEPHEN: What exactly is the nature of your interest in our putative village green? It's hardly worth writing an article on: 'edge of village plot of land retains its status'.

SARAH: I think it's a special place.

STEPHEN: I see. I'm sorry to be short. But I have to admit, I don't really know what inspired my one-off foray into local planning! Misplaced zealotry perhaps? Some ridiculous sense of posterity? Sunstroke? I thought it might have been worth saving /

SARAH: / Saving? From what?

STEPHEN: (*Nervous laugh*) Apologies. A poor choice of words. I like the view. I liked the idea of it belonging to the village. But everything changes eventually, of course. Change is the only constant, as they say.

SARAH: But to 'save' it.... sounds important.

STEPHEN: You said it was a special place. What makes you feel that?

Pause

SARAH: The perspective. Sense of space. It's peaceful. I feel at home there.

STEPHEN: Well, there you go, that's something worth saving, surely.

SARAH: What I'm interested in, on behalf of my paper, is what you feel it's under threat from.

STEPHEN: Oh, really? Your paper. There's nothing here for the Post to worry about. An over-anxious cleric with a love for his local area..../

SARAH: / I never mentioned I was from The Post.

STEPHEN: Oh. Aha! Lucky guess! The County news scene is rather undernourished, I think you'll agree.

Pause.

SARAH: It was you, wasn't it?/

STEPHEN: /Oh, er, me?!

SARAH: From the Council PC? 'Something is awry'? What is it, Mr. Wrigley?

Pause

STEPHEN: I think you must be mistaken. In fact, I think you'd better leave. Urgent clerical business to attend to, you know.

SARAH: You wanted me to come here! What's changed? What did you want me to find out?

Sound of being hustled out.

STEPHEN: If I reached out to you in some way, I was mistaken. There's nothing newsworthy here. I don't think you're seeing things straight. I, of all people, have the best interests of everyone in this village at heart. And I really think you should just make your way back home. To Nottingham.

Sound of a door closing, heavily. Sarah sighs with frustration.

SARAH: But.... *you emailed me!!*

The recording ends

SCENE 10:

JIM: *(Opening the door, loudly)* Oh good! Thought I might find you in here. Listened to it all now, have you? All projection and poppycock of course. Hopefully you're coming round to my way of thinking. If you're still not sure, there's something I just have to show you. Quite convenient you're here actually - if you'd like to follow me.

He holds the door open for the audience, leading them back outside. They walk together towards an old grave (Location 6).

JIM: This one. This is it. She showed it to Cathy, and Cathy showed me – not that Cathy wanted to look at it properly. But now you'll see – she wasn't thinking right. This is not the response of a right thinking young woman. Have a listen - I think it's Track 8 on there. Have a look, and have a think. And then we'll see where we are.

TRACK 8 (2.50)

In the graveyard

SARAH: I came back to the church. To try to speak to Stephen Wrigley again. But it's all locked up. I'm not sure if he's based here permanently. Or maybe he saw me coming. Impossible to keep secrets round here.

But I found something else. And it really makes sense of things. Oh, yes, everything's falling into place now. I've been thinking and thinking - it's hard to sleep, it's so quiet. Really, there are two stories for me to unravel here not just one.

Why is everything so familiar? Why do I look out from the edge of the village and feel like, no, *know*, that I've seen it before?

Why do I feel like I've come home?

This stone. This relic. Here in the churchyard.

Sarah.

My namesake. I think this is my actual namesake.

My name. One of the only things Mum ever gave me. She said it was precious to her. Reminded her, she said. And I know she spent some time in the country. There was somewhere she liked to go to clear her

head. It was here. I know it. It just feels right. It's so bloody quiet. Of course your head would be clear!

She walked along these roads. She heard these trees.....*singing*. And she saw this stone and she named me after it. Her precious place. Her peace.

But what I've realised. What I've pieced together now, is that, I think her family were from here. What am I saying? *My* family! Maybe this Sarah even *is* my real ancestor! I'm one of the local loam people! So when I look out on that view, whose eyes am I looking through? That beautiful landscape, I don't just see it as it is, but as it was. This is real. It's gene memory, blood memory. It's my roots. It's who I am.

Sarah, are you my Sarah? Are youme?

The recording ends.

JIM: See what I mean? This stone could be anybody, it's that old. I'm no expert, but it runs in families don't it, so they say? *That* was her inheritance. Not this place!

Pause

Don't be thinking I didn't feel sorry for her. It's sad for a young woman, feels like a waste. But now Cathy's wasting her time – our time! And yours too. On this wild goose chase. There's no big conspiracy here. Sarah wasn't well and she's obviously taken herself off somewhere - hopefully to get the treatment she so clearly needs! And probably far too embarrassed to come back and explain.

Now then. You need to head back. You've seen it through this far – may as well finish it off. You can return that kit as well – it's not cheap that stuff, but I reckon we can get a decent re-sale price online. I'll be glad to see you let this go. She's had a tough couple of years, our Cathy, and this isn't helping. It's time for us all to move on.

Cathy's waiting for you back at the village hall. You know the way don't you? (*If necessary give the audience directions/lead them to the footpath back to the village*). You can listen to the next track on the way. Number 9. It's a cracker.

SCENE 11; TRACK 9: (2.53)

As the audience walk back to the village hall.

SARAH: (*Breathless*) Two hundred and twenty one, Two hundred and twenty-two, Two hundred and twenty three ...(*Big exhalation.*)

Made it! One thousand, two hundred and twenty four steps from Cathy's place. It's not far. But enough distance to change everything. Everything is different when I look out here! That house....it's doing my head in. Cathy's just into everything! All the constant questions! Do you want to have a bath? What was it like, being in care? Will we be eating together tonight? *Why does she want to know?!*

She's already smothered one child and I'm certainly not falling into the same trap. I look after myself.

Sarah Sarah Sarah, what have you found out?

I'm not sure Cathy'd want to know, even if I told her! If she had any idea what was going on underground. Under her nose...

And here! Here..... They call it mother earth for a reason, you know. She holds you, she grows you, she rocks you.

She comforts me. She comforted my Mum. This earth – this patch of earth right here, is my home. This view is what my eyes have been hungry for years. Years! And I never ever knew! I've been starving inside. I feel so thin now. Like paper.

But I'm strong. They won't burn me up, blow me away. Because I've got writing on me - the writing of the truth. I know what's going on here now. And they can't scare me off of writing it. Do they think standing outside my window at night is going to frighten me? I grew up in Nottingham! He wanted me to see him. Just out of the light of the streetlamp in the rain. Face all in shadow. He doesn't. Scare me.

What they're doing – what they want. That scares me. This poor earth. Poor view. My mother. Innocently waiting. Not giving anything away. But he wants her. And he could get her.

But I can stop it. Because if people knew.... if they knew..... I'm going to get the world to stand up for this place.

Oh! It's you! Did you follow me?! What are you doing here?

The recording ends.

SCENE 12:

The audience arrive back at the village hall. CATHY has been waiting and keeping an eye out for them. She gets everyone back and seated/settled.

CATHY: Welcome back. Thanks for sticking with it. With me! Have a seat. We're nearly there now. Nearly at the end.

Did you listen to it all? Did you understand? I've been thinking about this for a long time. And I know she can sound a bit....obsessive. But maybe you need to be in her line of work! Coz I think she was really quite good at it. A gift for nosing things out. I don't think we should write her off.

See, I've been doing some research. It's taken a while. And maybe she did find something.

The Edale Basin and the Widmerpool gulf. Geologically speaking, that's where we're sitting right now.

They've changed the law since then. Did you know? Not long afterwards, as it goes. The Growth and Infrastructure Act. Gives landowners a year to contest if they want to try and put together a case against community use. And they might round here you know, because some of that land might stand to make a lot of money.

Oh, isn't it obvious?! Fracking! That's where it all points. Even two years ago someone - maybe some people – had eyes on those fields – the possibilities. Not for us, not for the community, for private profit. See, Village Green status used to protect the land against development – it was one of the few tools a community had for defending itself. But they've changed that now. The Edale Basin and the Widmerpool gulf: shale deposits right across the county. And plans are brewing. It all moves very slowly, and very quietly, but licenses are being granted now. To 'explore'. Now, that doesn't mean it'll happen – there's nothing to protest against yet. But there's possibility: the possibility for profit sucked out from under us. You can't do that on a village green. To make it all possible, you need open access: privately owned brownfield sites are the best.

Then, if the licenses are granted, and they find anything....? Well, we all know what would happen. To our home.

Oh, Stephen never admitted it to me, but I feel he was intimidated. Always aims to keep the best interests of *all* his parishioners at heart. Well, that kind of approach can leave you vulnerable. Vested interests, asserting their claims. You might even argue it was good for the community – extra taxes – fix the church roof (*Possibly mention other fundraising associated with the church in each place*)

What really scares me though is the thought that she stumbled on this....while it was all still brewing...and somebody wanted to keep her quiet.

JIM bustles in, interrupting.

JIM: Last call for gingerbuns! With a free slice of conspiracy on the side!

CATHY: Jim!

JIM: You've held these poor people hostage long enough.

CATHY: I was just finishing.

JIM: Well I'm glad to hear it. I hope she hasn't led you too far down the garden path?

CATHY: (*with dignity*) I have shared with them everything I know, and have discovered.

JIM: Discovered...?

CATHY: You're supposed to be on my side, Jim Thompson. Will you stop trying to show me up?

JIM: I'm sorry.

CATHY: You didn't even really like her when she was staying here. And don't deny it! You told me so yourself. 'Too needy', you said.

JIM: I just meant.../

CATHY: / Well guess what – some people do need things, they need love, and support and a home to feel safe in. And I thought she'd found that here. I thought we all had! But now I 'm not so sure.

JIM: What are you talking about?

CATHY: I want you to go home Jim. Go into the back cupboard and pull out that posh bottle of gin your brother gave us last Christmas. Mix me a G & T, and I'll meet you on the patio in 10 minutes. It's time we had a big talk, I think.

JIM: I thought you might come with me now.

CATHY: No, I'm finishing here. I'll tidy up and I'll see you at home.

JIM: (*very reluctantly*) Okay. Don't be long though. And just don't...throw it all away, Cathy. We've a good thing going here!

JIM leaves.

A pause.

CATHY: Undermining , they used to call it. When digging in for coal they'd accidentally affect everything above ground. Danger of sudden collapse. I feel that.

Let me pick up these cups. I asked you here, in the first place, because I wanted your opinion. You've heard now what I heard, and you know what I know.

And you know what he thinks too.

What I want to know is....do you think I've got a case? Are these tapes suspicious enough that I should take them to the police? Or just leave well enough alone? Do you think... Sarah's okay?

I don't want to embarrass you though - it's fine if you don't agree with me. And I won't go on about it after today. In fact, I don't want you to feel I'm putting you on the spot. So I got you this. Thought you could do it like a proper jury, in private.

She pulls out a correspondence kit, with pen.

CATHY: Have a chat about it, and then write me your verdict. Together. Like a letter. If you put it (*specify location*) the top drawer over there, I can pick it up tomorrow. Is that okay? Here you are. As long or as short as you like. Just....be honest. Tell me what you *think*.

I'll take these cups through, and those sound players and then I'll be off. I really am so grateful to you for coming. I won't forget it. It's knowing I'm part of a community like this, who.... take an interest, that makes me feel so at home, here.

Thank you.

Oh, and one last thing. I didn't put this one on your players. It felt too personal, somehow. But you might like it. It might help.

See you around.

CATHY leaves, as she does she presses play on her MP3 player which she has attached to some speakers.

TRACK 10 (1.09)

SARAH: Thank you for listening, whoever you are. And thank you for having me, in your village.

I hope when you're finished, that you look around here, and you see how precious it is. It's worth your protection. It can't protect itself.

You're the lucky ones. To have space and to have care. Be part of something. It's the closest I've ever felt to a home – that can't be mad, surely? I've had it for such a short time. And now I think it's over.

This place, this land, is all of ours. It's our birthright.

So cherish it. Coz I can't do this on my own.

Goodbye.

The recording ends and the audience are left with their letter writing kit. When they have written and deposited their letter, they are free to go.

APPENDIX 8: Pilot 2 actor information digests

Village Information: LOWDHAM

The Basics

- Population 2800
- 4 pubs: Magna Charta, World's End (recently taken over by new owners – Mark, Karen and Charlotte), The Railway and The Old Ship
- The Epperstone Bypass dual carriageway runs through the middle of the village, splitting it in two
- Post office, school, pre-school, Co-op
- There is a history of frame-knitting. In 1844 there were 94 stocking frames in the village
- Also history of fruit growing/orchards

Church

- St Mary's
- Kept locked
- Grade 1 listed
- Part of a group parish with Caythorpe
- April 19th elections for church wardens

Information from the promoter:

- She describes the village as vibrant, active, friendly, and community-spirited; small enough to feel like you know people
- She says there is the feeling of always lots going on, and opportunities for everyone (including children), even if not everyone chooses to get involved
- Redevelopment in village: Station Rd – used to all be orchards, houses there now built in 70s. Another bit of estate built on Station Rd in 80s. New estate on Main Rd opposite Magna Charta – built 10 years ago.
- What makes Lowdham different from other local villages/places? The fact they still have all 4 pubs and a post office, takeaways and a Co-op is a big deal. This is probably because they are bigger than other local villages (Epperstone, Gunthorpe, Hoveringham, Woodborough). But Lowdham a lot smaller than Burton Joyce (between Lowdham and Nottingham).
- The biggest local issue is flooding. The village gets flooded by the small beck running through it – it fills really quickly because other higher villages drain into it. £4 million is needed for the flood relief scheme but the village doesn't have the money to pay for it
- The Co-op flooded (flash-flooding) 2 years ago, 2 weeks after it had been closed for a re-fit. It was then closed again from July – Oct. People were distraught.
- Another issue is affordable housing – there is a generation who can't afford to buy in the village – the children of people who live there currently. No shortage of families/children, but no flats, and houses expensive – tough for generation looking to buy first place before starting a family.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been moves for affordable housing – local landowners were asked if they had any land to spare where houses could be built.
<p>Current/recent news stories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 2015 smash and grab raid at a local car dealership – someone stole a bike being used for a Children in Need charity ride • March 2015 – stolen garden ornaments • March 2015 – Children’s book festival event – Mad Hatter’s Tea Party/Alice in Wonderland theme • January 2015 earthquake – epicentre Oakham – felt in Lowdham • In June 2006 a prisoner from Lowdham Grange escaped by hiding in a shipment of chef’s hats (manufactured inside the prison). (Can’t find out online if he was ever found/caught!)
<p>Notable places/buildings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bookcase on Main St – independent book shop, founded 1996. Linked in to book festival, run lots of events, book groups, talks • The land behind the village hall is looked after by the hall and registered as Village Green. But people think of the village green as the triangle of land by the Magna Charta with the war memorial on it • Lowdham Grange prison is 2 miles away. It was one of the first ever borstals (the promoter remembers seeing the boys in their blue uniforms), but is now privately run Cat B men’s prison. Operated by Serco since 1998. A custody officer at the prison resigned shortly after its reopening under Serco after it was revealed that he had been a security guard for Reggie Kray
<p>Notable people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the Gardener’s World cameramen is from Lowdham – he has written a book and appeared at the book festival • Apparently a couple of millionaires in village • There are rumours that the piano in the village hall plays itself... • There is a blue plaque on the side of The Ship for Harold Cottam (1891-1984). Text: 'Unsung Hero'. Wireless operator on RMS Carpathia. On April 15th 1912 received Titanic’s call for help. Born in Southwell, retired to Lowdham in 1958. • Richard Whitehead – Gold medal winner at London 2012 Paralympic Games Men’s 200m. Gold post box outside post office on Main St.
<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual book festival – big event. Has been running for 15 years and they get big name authors • There is an active horticultural society – they run Spring/Summer shows and Apple Day • Active local history society • Local Am Dram/Panto group • WI • Food festival (Feb 2015) • Lots of activities for children • Some people (including village hall) trying to start film nights – the first was Sing-Along <i>Frozen</i> and it was packed

- The promoter and her husband have put on concerts in the village hall for years – well established and a good reputation. The hall is nicknamed 'Lowdham Arena' – they get some well-known names because they are a decent size and well-established/have a good reputation (Toyah Willcox, T'Pau, China Crisis)
- Football field heavily used. Local team = Colts
- Car Boot Sale on bank holidays
- Several mum & toddlers groups including one at the church
- Yoga & yoga for men
- Line dancing/square dancing
- Bowling club
- Zumba
- Taekwondo

Local politics:

- The Parish Council meets at the Southwell Road Community Room. Until recently (January?) they met at the Women's Institute on Main Street
- A flood relief scheme has recently been brought forward by 5 years. An online poll about it was split 50/50 about whether people were in favour or not.
- There are upcoming Parish and District Council elections
- Plans for a quarry in Shelford (4 miles away) have been in discussion since 2009 – in Feb 2015, 3000 people objected. Nearby villages that would have been affected include Lowdham

Village Information: MANTON

The Basics

- Population 364
- 1 pub. No post office/shops/school
- Located on southern side of Rutland Water, on a ridge overlooking the water
- No longer any farms in the village

Church

- St Mary's
- Unusual in that it has no tower, but a double bell-cote
- The churchyard has older graves in it, there is also a cemetery with more graves (and more recent ones) on Cemetery Lane
- Church is left open
- Part of a group parish with other villages around the water

Information from the promoter:

- She describes the village as a caring community, very social with lots of activities.
- There is a balance between the benefits that tourism brings and fears about it changing the character of the village. However Manton is less at threat from this than other Rutland Water villages because of being on the nature reserve side of the water.
- Rutland County Council are quite protective of the views of the water as this is what brings tourists to the area
- There have been a number of babies born in the village in the last 12 months – this is new as over the years the number of children in the village has decreased
- She says not much has changed in the village in the last 30 years – only a few new houses built and buildings converted to houses
- There was a school in the village 60 years ago – where the village hall is now. Still some people living in the village who went there.

Current/recent news stories:

- The Times listed Manton as one of the best places to live in the countryside in 2014
- There was an earthquake in January 2015 with the epicentre in Oakham (3 miles away)

Notable places/buildings:

- The pub – the Horse and Jockey is the only pub on the Rutland Water cycling route-often very busy, especially in summer. The owner has recently opened an additional pub in a new village. He is also getting some caravans to rent out in Manton – this is/has been a contentious issue
- There are allotments and a children's playing area on the eastern edge of the village along Lyndon Road – run by Parish Council
- The Parish Field (on Lyndon Rd at western edge of village) is a piece of land donated to the village by a farmer in exchange for planning permission to build some houses

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a railway tunnel running under the village, built 1875. Some houses can feel a rumble when trains pass through. There used to be a station in the village which closed in the 1960s • There is an abandoned village – Martinsthorpe – ½ mile west of Manton along Lyndon Rd • There are 27 listed buildings in the village
<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycling/water sports at Rutland Water • Birdwatching – Ospreys at Rutland Water – breeding programme for 13 years, 2015 predicted to be a record year. • Book clubs, safari suppers, line dancing, music, Village Ventures (rural touring) • Mobile library visits village
<p>Local politics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several resigning parish councillors, imminent elections for new people – a hope for new blood • Village hall used for polling station and parish council meetings • Recent proposed changes to waste/recycling sites • In 2013 the County Council reviewed the Limit of Planned Development in the village and made no change. The existing western boundary was endorsed unanimously as part of the refusal of a planning application. This was welcomed by the Parish Council. • In 1973 there was a process whereby the ownership of the village green was officially given to the Parish Council – no record of any ownership prior to that point.

APPENDIX 9: Pilot 2 audience post-show questionnaire

Homing PhD Pilot: AUDIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for coming along to this pilot performance. I'd be very grateful if you could take a few minutes to fill in this questionnaire. Please be as honest as you like – your responses will only be used for the purposes of my research.

Mathilda Branson
PhD Researcher

Did you feel there was a connection between the characters and/or the play and Lowdham/Manton? If yes, what made you feel that? If no, why not?

How did your knowledge and experience as a local resident affect your experience as an audience member for the play?

Did the play make you feel or think differently about Lowdham/Manton? If so, how?

As a local audience member, would you come to see work like this in the future? Why/why not?

If you are a promoter, would you book work like this for your village? Why/why not?

Do you have any other comments on the relationship between the piece and Lowdham/Manton?

Discussion questions

- **What did you think the relationship was between the fictional world of the play and the real world of Lowdham/Manton?**
- **How did your knowledge and experience as a local resident affect your experience as an audience member for the play?**
- **Did the play make you think or feel differently about where you live?**
- **Can you imagine the play working in other rural villages?**

APPENDIX 11: Pilot 2 actor post-show questionnaire

Pilot 2: Homing

Actors: reflections on the performance. Questions to consider:

- Did the performance feel specific to the location and the local audience?
- Did it feel like the audience accepted the interplay between the fictional place and the real place?
- Were there any notable audience responses?
- Having done the performance with an audience, do you have any further thoughts about ways to make it feel specific to each place?

LOWDHAM – performance 1

MANTON – performance 1

MANTON – performance 2

APPENDIX 12: Pilot 2 consent form

Homing: Consent Form

This pilot forms part of a PhD project entitled *Re-Imagining the Rural Tour: New Forms for New Audiences*. The research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and New Perspectives Theatre Company in order to investigate innovative ways of making work for rural touring. This pilot study has been set up to investigate site-specific forms of theatre designed specifically for touring to rural audiences via regional touring schemes and volunteer promoters. This research consists of **three sections**.

1. The event will consist of a **work-in-progress performance** of a play called *Homing*, which will take place at various locations during the village and which will include sections recorded on an MP3 player to be listened to via headphones. The performance will be photographed. If you wish to watch the performance but do not consent to your photograph being taken, please inform me before the performance begins so that I can ensure you do not appear in any pictures.

2. The performance will be followed by the opportunity to discuss the performance in **focus group discussions**. These post-show discussions will be recorded on a Dictaphone. The data taken from these recordings, along with my own observations and research notes, will be used solely for my own reflection and analysis for the purposes of this research, and will be stored according to the guidelines set out by the University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics. Any data used in published or public research resulting from this study will be made anonymous.

3. You will also be given the opportunity to fill in a **questionnaire** about your experience of the piece. The responses given on the questionnaires will be used solely for my own reflection and analysis for the purposes of this research, and data will be stored according to the guidelines set out by the University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics. Any data used in published or public research resulting from this study will be made anonymous.

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. I can be contacted on the details below.

Mathilda Branson
PhD Researcher
mathilda.branson@nottingham.ac.uk
0115 973 9120
New Perspectives Theatre Company,
Park Lane Business Centre, Park Lane,
Basford, Nottingham.
NG6 0DW

General: the following statements apply to your participation in all sections of the research (performance, discussion, and questionnaire):

YES ☐ NO ☐ I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained and that I have understood it.

YES ☐ NO ☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been successfully answered.

YES ☐ NO ☐ I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without consequence.

YES ☐ NO ☐ I understand that all data are anonymous and that there will not be any connection between any personal information provided and the data.

YES ☐ NO ☐ I understand that there are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in this study.

YES ☐ NO ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the above information and that I agree to participate in this study.

The following statement applies to your participation as an audience member for the performance:

YES ☐ NO ☐ I consent to photographic records of my participation being created and understand that these will only be available to the researcher and will not be used publically.

The following statement applies to your participation in a post-show focus group discussion:

YES ☐ NO ☐ I consent to my audio recordings being made of my contributions to a post-show discussion, and this data being transcribed from audio files. I understand that this data will only be referred to anonymously

The following statement applies to the post-show questionnaire:

YES ☐ NO ☐ I consent to my questionnaire responses being used as part of the research and understand that my answers will only be referred to anonymously

Participant name	
Participant signature	
Researcher signature	
Date	

Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one for your records and return the other.

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