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What is Interactive Theatre? An analysis of the nature of the work, its making, its audience and its artists

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What is Interactive Theatre?

**An analysis of the nature of the work, its making, its audience
and its artists**

by Justine de Mierre

Clore Leadership Fellow, 2005/6

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Section 1. Introduction

Part 1: Context

Interactive theatre has existed in Britain for many centuries, from the strolling Mummers of the Middle ages, interacting with crowds to drum up trade to our modern museum actors and Murder Mystery events. Despite the persistence of its existence and its popularity with audiences – as the hundreds of successful Murder Mystery businesses alone are testament to - very little is written about Interactive Theatre. Much of the research that has been carried out has looked at museum actors' work and their effectiveness in enhancing the visitor experience, rather than considering the art form itself ¹. Indeed there is much argument as to what constitutes Interactive Theatre, even amongst practitioners. As Gary Izzov, an American practitioner says “There are many styles of theatre that are on some level inclusive of the audience. Many people confuse one with another or simply lump them into one category.”² This research will look at the key factors which remain consistent across different forms of Interactive Theatre in an attempt to find the defining elements of the form.

Part 2: Methodology

In September 2006, I carried out a survey of the Independent Theatre Council (ITC) membership. This organisation tends to represent small to mid-scale companies, in which most interactive work is produced. This was in order to get a sense of how many people were making this kind of work and their reasons for doing it, in order to contextualise my case studies.

In the next phase, I undertook three in-depth case studies: Desperate Men – a street theatre company founded in 1980, The Killing Game – a murder mystery company founded in 2000 and my own work at Ladder to the Moon from 2000 – 2005.

As a key practitioner in the field, I felt it important to look at my own work and bring my expertise and experience to this research. Additionally, it was important to make my standpoint transparent and subject my work to the same analysis as the other case studies. I wanted then to look at contrasting companies to Ladder to the Moon. I chose Desperate Men because of their focus on

¹ See for example, Jackson, Johnson, Rees Leahy & Walker (2002), *Seeing It For Real: an investigation into the effectiveness of theatre and theatre techniques in museums*, Centre for Applied Theatre Research (CATR), University of Manchester. See also Bicknell, S. & Mazda, X. (1993), *Enlightening or Embarrassing: an evaluation of drama in the Science Museum*, London, National Museum of Science and Industry.

² Izzov, G., (1997) *The Art of Play: the new genre of interactive theatre*, Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann.

street performance, and the fact that they had been long-established with a good reputation for challenging work. I chose a Murder Mystery company because I felt a commercial company would be a good contrast to a charitable arts organisation. I was particularly interested in the Killing Game as it had been set up by actors interested in the artform, rather than as a purely commercial venture. I considered looking at museum acting companies, but discounted this due to time restrictions and the fact that much research had already been done in this area.

My analysis of the case study companies was in three parts:

1. A detailed e-mail survey: This looked at what defined the work, how it was made, who it was made for, why it was made, where and when it was made, and the artists' reflections on their work. This gave me an initial sense of the company, its views and values. (I also completed this for my own work)
2. Observation of the work: I went to see Desperate Men's *The Man with the Bear's Heart* at the Thames Festival in September 2006, and The Killing Game's *The End of the Line* in Alton, Hampshire in October 2006. This allowed me to put these answers into context from first hand experience.
3. Face-to-face interviews: I met with the Artistic Directors of the companies, videoing interviews with them based on the e-mail survey and going into more depth in each of the areas. These interviews allowed me to get an in depth view into the companies' work and be able to compare and contrast it with my own experience of making this type of work.

Part 3: Case Study Biographies

Desperate Men (DM) was founded in 1980 by Richie Smith and Jon Beedell. Smith had studied theatre as the main component of a B.Ed Degree and Beedell studied at the Bradford School of Art. Both seemed to reject 'establishment' notions of theatre and were inspired by companies like Welfare State International and The People Show and the idea of street theatre as activism. They met and began working together in Amsterdam. Beedell says of that time:

"We used to go and improvise on the street, literally improvise with no script, no costumes nothing, it was just completely open...there were certain places in Amsterdam where you could just do weird shit and improvise on the street."

The company is now run by a core team of four, Smith, Beedell, Richard Headon (Associate Director) and Shirley Pegna (Musical Director). The company's work now includes street shows:

such as *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, about the end of the world where fish rained down on the audience; street animations - i.e. walkabout style performances such as *The Rubbish Heads* – characters who by turns throw litter and clear it up, shocking and entertaining passers by into thinking about their environment; and various education projects.

The Killing Game (KG) was founded in 2000 by Nicholas Cross and Robert Turner. They met when they joined a local amateur dramatics group, initially as technicians, but were convinced to get involved as actors. One project involved setting up a Murder Mystery event for a youth group and both enjoyed performing in this and decided to investigate the possibility of producing this kind of work themselves. While neither had a great awareness of interactive work before this, Turner had been involved in organising Dungeons & Dragons type role playing events. KG's work now includes public events and private hires, which are either evening or weekend events. For an evening event the murder (or murders) take place during a dinner. For example, in one scenario, guests are attending an awards ceremony, where rivalries become apparent and lead to dire consequences. For weekend events the story unfolds over an afternoon, evening and the following day. For example, *The End of the Line* was a 50th birthday party, bringing together family and business colleagues with conflicts that surfaced throughout the weekend, leading to the deaths of more than one of them.

I founded Ladder to the Moon (LttM) also in 2000, having worked as an actress for five years. My inspiration to set up the company came primarily from working with Solent People's Theatre (SPT) and as part of the Museum of the Moving Image Actor's (MOMI) Actors company. With both companies I was inspired by the way people responded to interactive work. People would come back again and again to see interactive performances, revealing personal stories and fully engaging in the world of the characters. A registered charity from 2002, LttM began as a commercial company, primarily creating characters for shopping centre and local authority events. One example was the rivalling wannabe rowers *The Oxford Oars and Cambridge Coxes*, rollerblading through Putney for the boat race. While this work continued throughout my time at LttM, in 2002, inspired by suggestions from the actors, we created the first of our hospital projects. These involved characters who visited bedsides, day rooms and play rooms, interacting with patients and staff, enlisting their help with their particular dilemma and running 'activity' type sessions. These projects were set in either children's or elder's wards. Examples of the projects include: *The Princess and the Sprite*, where a spoilt Princess had to make 1000 smiles before being allowed to return to her kingdom; *A Tooting Triumph*, where a time travelling couple from the 1930s needed elder's help in piecing together the 20th century to get back to their own time. Street, shopping centre and health care projects remained the core of Ladder to the Moon's interactive work throughout my time there and it is this work I will be focussing on in this research.

Section 2: Findings

Part 1: The scope of the work – E-mail survey of ITC members

The survey was e-mailed to all ITC members on 16th September with a deadline of mid October, by which time 54 responses had been received. The respondents included 47 Theatre Companies, 1 Opera Company, 1 Sound Designer and 5 Dance companies. While it is interesting that non-theatre companies show an interest in interactive theatre, this research is designed to look specifically at theatre and therefore my comments below refer to the responses from Theatre Companies. A summary of the results can be found in Appendix 1.

The survey showed that 66% of the companies responding made some interactive work. For 49% of respondents it was the majority of their work. Even given that those making this type of work are more likely to respond, these figures still seem to suggest that the use of interactivity in theatre is a fairly widespread practice³.

The survey asked if those practitioners making the work felt that it reached a wider audience. Here, 55% answered 'yes', with a further 11% saying 'possibly' depending on the circumstances. These respondents were then asked to say which wider audiences interactive theatre reached (multiple answers were allowed). Here, 46% of respondents mentioned young people. This was the highest figure, followed by non-theatre goers (35%) and then children and those with special needs equally (23%). Other mentions included the general public in shopping centres, community and BME audiences and various socially excluded groups. From these results it seems that interactive work is tending to reach those that are not often associated with attending more traditional theatre – and indeed, are targeted by many audience development initiatives⁴.

Practitioners were then asked why they chose this form of work. The question was multiple choice with multiple answers possible. Hearteningly from an artistic point of view, 90% chose artistic purposes as one of the reasons why they made the work. The next highest figure was for education followed by access, 'other reasons' and finally funding. The 'other reasons' listed were primarily to do with giving audience more ownership and involvement. These findings suggest that the prevalence of interactive theatre is primarily artist led rather than being about a quest for money or audience figures.

³ The survey explicitly stated that negative responses were as useful as positive ones, in order to try to make some allowance for the increased likelihood of those already practising the work to respond.

⁴ For examples, see the Audience Development & Participation Projects section of the Arts Council's website at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/projects_for_subject.php?sid=4 (visited 6.3.07)

Some respondents chose to make additional comments which revealed a real breadth to the kind of work that was taking place, for example:

“The interactive events we provide vary from events geared to schools to working with journalists for Tourism organisations. We offer a whole range of interactive theatre from supplying historical or literary characters for heritage sites to providing murder mysteries for hotels. The only constant criteria is the interactive element.” Val Williams, Chance Encounters

It also revealed a passion for the form and a belief in its power, for example:

“Interactive Theatre is a great learning tool. By allowing the participant and performer distinction to be less defined, the theatrical experience becomes a more organic process, one that we feel is both more interesting and accessible for a younger audience (who learn better through an experiential approach), and results in more vibrant theatre.” Miranda Thain, Konflux Theatre in Education

The vibrancy of the final product is certainly a passion that the case study companies share and I shall begin looking at their work in more detail below.

Part 2. The Case Studies

2.1 What is the work?

In the e-mail surveys I defined Interactive Theatre as “Theatre in which characters have direct, two-way, meaningful conversations with their audience” and for all of the case studies this was true of all of their work.

The actual mechanics of the events varies quite widely across the three case studies:

For KG, a typical event will involve guests coming to a hotel, meeting the characters at an initial session, with subsequent sessions taking place over dinner and, if it’s a weekend event, the next morning, finishing with a chance for guests to guess who the murderer is. This is followed by a session where the murderer and motives are revealed and prizes given out for whoever guessed

most accurately. Sessions involve characters interacting with individuals and groups of guests interspersed with two-handed 'scenes' involving conversations between the characters that could be 'overheard' by guests. Guests have either booked themselves to attend through KG's website or have had the event booked for them as part of the entertainment at a function (corporate or personal).

DM's work is typically performed on streets or in shopping centres and can happen on its own or as part of a festival. Audiences can therefore either be those specifically attending the festival with the intention of watching some street theatre or passers by simply doing their shopping. Their static shows have a more traditional 'stage' space and audience space which is then broken into during interactions. The street animations will typically involve characters with no set who move around the street, interacting with passers by. The interactive installations (like *The Man With the Bear's Heart*, which I observed) will involve a fixed set – in this case a Yurt and a van, which the characters will move in and out of interacting with passers by outside and inviting them into these spaces for more interaction. In this research I will be focusing primarily on the street animation and interactive installation work, as the static show work shares less of the key elements of Interactive Theatre as I shall go on to describe it.

LttM's work (in the five years I'm focusing on here) was performed typically either on the street or in shopping centres or healthcare settings. The street and shopping centre work was the same as DM's street animations in terms of structure. The healthcare setting work would typically involve characters visiting a fixed number of wards each day and playing out their 3-week narrative through interaction with patients at their bedsides and in day room activity sessions. Audiences in this situation would then include patients, staff and visitors – most of whom would have had some awareness of the project through either consultation or prior information provided by the company.

Each company varies as to what they call the unit of work: DM talk about street animations and interactive installations; KG call it an event; LttM talked about projects. Certainly, unless there was a fixed stage, the unit of work wasn't called a show or play as it is in traditional theatre.

Equally, the way those attending the event were referred to differed, although less so. All three companies used the term audience on occasion – although KG and LttM only used this when referring to sections of work where the group of people behaved like an audience – e.g. KG's two handed scenes or LttM's set pieces in street work that were designed to be played to a crowd. Other terms used included guests, passers by, the public and patients, if that's what they were.

2.1a Before the interaction

For all three companies, there is great care taken into 'hooking people' in, catching their initial interest and holding it long enough to build on. In traditional theatre, this is done by the building – people turn up, sit in their seats and the curtain opens. They have already made a commitment to watch (at least initially). In interactive work, this interest and commitment has to be earned. This is done in several ways, which I discuss below.

2.1a i Hooking

I define 'hooking' as the means by which the audience's interest is sparked before they have met the characters. There are three main types of hooks.

1. Pre-information:

Where there are fixed audiences, e.g. LttM's hospital patients or KG's paying guests, companies tend to set up pre-information that raises a question in people's minds. For example in LttM's *The Princess and the Sprite*, a week before the characters entered, the first chapter of a story book appeared on a large board outside the playroom of the children's ward. This described – in true 'Once Upon a Time' fashion – the princess' story up to the point she enters the hospital. Playworkers were given copies for children that couldn't make it to the playroom and encouraged to talk to the children about the story and what they thought might happen next. For KG, an information pack is sent out to each guest before the event with an 'invitation' from whichever character's event it is e.g. in *The End of the Line*, we were attending Tony's 50th birthday party. It also give's information on any rumours that are circulating – in Tony's case, that he might announce his retirement – and what the guest will be assumed to be e.g. a work colleague, a relative etc. The idea of this is that when the guests/patients first meet the characters, there will already be some sort of intrigue, some questions for them to ask, some reasons for them to want to engage with or watch the characters.

2. Visual hooks:

With audiences of passers by or shoppers – I will refer to these as 'fluid audiences' - this question raising has to be done in-situ. This can be done visually, with set or costume, e.g. the placing of a Yurt for DM's *The Man with the Bear's Heart*, or the use of costume e.g. a very large, unusual purple hat in LttM's *Ebe and Sent* for Black History Month. Design then is used here to intrigue passers by into thinking 'What are they doing?' 'What's going on there?'

3. Activity hooks

Another type of visual 'hook' is activity. All three companies use this type of hook, where characters are 'busying' themselves with something that adds to those questions e.g. The father in *The Man with the Bear's Heart* (DM) sewing and cutting up the cheese outside the van; The family in *The End of the Line* (KG) exchanging whispers before putting on a smile; *The Procrastinating Pirates* (LttM) pouring over their treasure map and pointing in possible directions. This type of activity is really important in initiating the first interactions. It allows people to feel safe, that these characters have a life outside of their observing it, and therefore they will not be 'trapped' into interacting. I will look at the importance of the interaction being a free choice further in Section 2.1c

2.1a ii Assessment

After these 'hooking' activities there is generally a certain level of assessment which the actors playing the characters carry out to assess who is willing to interact with them, to 'play'. This tends to be done instinctively as Beedell (DM) describes:

"You see somebody walking down the street and you go 'they're up for it, they'll play', and other people you can go 'no' just by their body language, he's on his way to the bank he doesn't want to be bothered. Within seconds you can say, 'Those people, I'm not going to interrupt their day', whereas other people you can say 'they're up for an interruption of their day, they'll stick around for five minutes'."

While this is an essential part of street animations, it can also be a useful tool for actors in fixed audience performances. It allows them to engage those most willing to, in the first instance, to illustrate to those less willing that it is 'alright'. For example, KG say that it is often the wives in couples that have booked the event that are most engaged to begin with, with the husbands becoming the most engaged later on. This happens once the husbands have established that:

"...they're not going to be 'told off' for not getting involved, but if they want to, they can... basically they don't want to look stupid." (Turner, KG).

This relates to the five levels of involvement which I will discuss in Section 2.1c, below.

2.1a iii The opening question

Once the initial assessment has been made of who to interact with, characters or scenario will often use a question to open the interaction. This will usually be a question that pushes reality or is unusual in some way, for example 'Would you like to try some Bear's Cheese?' (DM) or

'Excuse me, have you seen my mermaid?' (LttM). Characters ask these questions as innocuously as if they were asking the time, treating the request as entirely normally. It is that assumption of normality in the unusual that sets up the intrigue that makes the passer by wants to know more. Passers by are 'hooked in' then because *they* initiate the subsequent interaction – they do not feel cajoled or embarrassed into interacting. For KG this is slightly different in that their opening question will often be along the lines of a character appearing and asking 'Are you here for the Tony's birthday?' to waiting guests. Equally though, it lets people know that they are entering a different reality, that of the piece.

2.1a iv The 'Rules of the Game' (part 1)

There is then a stage which involves letting people know 'the rules of the game'. For both LttM and DM, this is done through the first interactions and the opening discussion, and therefore properly belongs to section 2.1b below. KG, however, take the unusual step of having one actor drop out of character to welcome the audience and explain what's going to happen. Cross (KG) explains how this came about:

"The scenes would start up and some people would say 'oo has it started yet, is that real?' [...] so we thought okay, lets drop a little introduction in so people know, they've got a clear delineated beginning for the evening. Although the actors are all there and in character they can say 'oh right it has started now, I know' they're comfortable."

Turner develops this theme:

"It also means we are real people. I think some people aren't happy with the idea that you're pretending but you're not going to let them know you're pretending. If you stand up and go okay this is what's going on, these are the rules, this is the game, off we go, hurray they're all happy."

In my experience it is very unusual in this work for actors to drop character, as the 'reality' of the characters is all important in building trust (see Section 2.1c below). However, having experienced this out-of-character introduction myself in observing KG's work, I have to say that in this instance it appears to work. My belief is that this is because of the intention behind it. It is done with the intention of making the audience feel less confused and more comfortable and therefore more able to interact and this is what makes it work.

Ladder to the Moon also experimented with out-of-character introductions and endings after I left the company. This was motivated by helping the actors feel less like they were 'tricking' people

when building up relationships in character. For me, when I observed this, I felt it was quite confusing and didn't assist the interaction.

My conclusion is that dropping character only really works when it is intended to serve the audience in engaging more fully with the characters, during the piece.

2.1b Starting the interaction

Once audience are hooked from the pre-interaction methods described above, characters then move on (consciously or otherwise) to the start of the interaction, beginning once an audience member has responded in some way.

The purpose of these initial interactions is to establish trust and rapport, they give the audience a sense of 'the rules of the game' and the situation of the characters. They also serve to build in additional 'hooks' to keep people engaged beyond the initial interaction. This is achieved both by the content of what is said and the manner by which the characters interact.

2.1b i The 'Rules of the Game' (part 2)

Interacting with a stranger - character or otherwise - can be a fearful experience for some people. One of the biggest barriers to overcome is people's pre-conceived notions about 'people dressed up'. Usually the feeling is that they will want to embarrass you, get you to do something or sell you something. Most work is therefore designed so that interactions begin with the opposite of those expectations, starting with something familiar or comfortable, requiring little initial input from the audience member. For example in DM's *Bear's Cheese* the offer to try food is made. People are familiar with this scenario from supermarket stalls offering samples and so they know the basics of how to interact⁵. LttM's characters always needed help in some form – the Pirates, for example, needed to be given directions, another familiar scenario, and one which puts the audience member in the position of authority and control. Where relationship needs to be built between character and audience for longer interactive pieces, this is also about re-assuring the audience that they're not going to be made fools of. KG characters, for example, will normally start by going to sit with a group of audience members and asking how they know the person whose event it is. In the work I saw it was Tony's 50th birthday party, so we were asked how we knew Tony. This was information we had been given in the pre-information pack, giving us an

⁵ *The Man with the Bear's Heart* is one form of a multi-faceted piece. In the interviews, Headon and Beedell often refer to the forms of this piece that involve talking to the public about milking bear's to make cheese as *Bear's Cheese*. I shall also use this title when talking about the piece in this wider sense.

easy route in. Actors then facilitate interactions to support the information that the audience is giving them, reassure them and start to build back story, as Turner describes:

“You get ones with several people saying they work at Head Office and I say ‘Oh really I work at Head Office, I’m Business Development Director there, where are you based?’ ‘Legal’ ‘Oh I’m in legal, oh it’s you, you’re all glammed up, I didn’t recognise you’ and between the two of us we know exactly that they’re making it up, and we’re making it up, but between the two of us we’re okay, that’s the situation, bingo we’ll move on. Between the two of us we’ve created something together. We’re not going to make them look foolish.”

This quote also illustrates the role of the compliment in facilitating interaction. This was something LttM would use regularly as a route into interaction. Complimenting someone’s outfit, for example, is an unthreatening way of engaging, and also draws attention to the character’s own unusual attire, thus sparking interaction.

It is also important to note that not all interactive characters need to be ‘nice’ and rapport can still be built up in the same way using characters that are combative with the audience. It is still just as much about letting people feel comfortable with what is going on. For example, in LttM’s *Cambridge Coxes and Oxford Oars*, one character would accost smiling people saying “What are you smiling about, we just lost!” and burst into tears – eliciting lots of laughter and comforting from passers by. DM regularly work with combative characters, as Beedell says “Our Pirates are very threatening but amusing at the same time.” KG often set up characters so that the audience will dislike them – either to help or hinder their solving of the mystery. Such characters build trust and rapport in a different way: audiences are comfortable with someone being ‘the angry one’ ‘the baddie’, and again, they know how to interact with this. As an actor, it is a more risky choice to play, particularly in a public situation as there are people who may take it the wrong way. However, these types of characters are clearly important to ensure that interactive work can have depth and dimension. Clearly though, this is where the assessment I discussed in Section 2.1a.ii is very important, as Beedell comments:

“You judge it individually... if you’re an aggressive character you’re not going to go up and pick on a big burly skinhead with tattoos, you’re not going to go and frighten an old lady, so you modify your performance to suit the person you’re dealing with”.

2.1b ii Introductions and back story

The second part of initial interactions involves filling in some back story and introducing yourself, as the quote from KG's Turner, above, illustrates. With LttM we found it was very important not to do this first. Approaching somebody and starting with 'Hello I'm Sam the Sailor' presupposes that that person is interested and that they're going to stay with you and interact long enough for names to matter. These are assumptions that people find off-putting and normally led to people walking past saying they were too busy, or patients saying they didn't want to talk. It is important therefore to establish the hooks and intrigue as described previously. However, once the guest/audience member is comfortable and dialogue is flowing, it's important – particularly where building relationship is part of the piece – for introductions and back story to be brought in. At LttM characters would do this by interrupting themselves with something like 'I'm terribly sorry, here's me gossiping on and I haven't even introduced myself...' At this point, rapport is normally well enough established that people freely give their name. I will refer to the use of names in building relationship in Section 2.1c below.

Giving some of the back story is important for two main reasons: firstly, it allows people to further establish what the 'rules of the game' are i.e. how they might interact or get involved; secondly, it provides additional hooks to prolong the interaction and keep people interested. For example, in LttM's *Dance with Me* at Springfield Hospital in Tooting, the character's first entrance to the day room would involve asking patients if this was where the auditions were. This instantly gave patients a sense of the territory they were in, and the kinds of things they might expect. With DM's *The Man with the Bear's Heart* characters would elaborate on how the Bear's Cheese was made and describe the milking of the bears etc. This pushed reality and provided hooks for people to engage further by going into the van to meet the bear and hear more stories.

2.1b iii Meeting the 'reality challenge'

There are normally some audience members in every piece of work that feel the need to challenge the characters about the reality of their situation and try to get them out of character, before they feel comfortable to play. This seems to happen more often with fixed than fluid audiences – presumably because if they are going to suspend their disbelief for any period of time they want to know that the illusion is going to hold so that they won't be made a fool of, and because this kind of person would normally just walk away in a fluid audience situation. This then is a necessary part of the initial interaction for some people. An anecdote from Cross (KG) illustrates this:

"On the last weekend we did, I was at the bar and somebody turned to me and said 'So do you do these murder mysteries often?' and I said 'I'm sorry? I don't really like murder

mysteries' and someone further down the bar said 'I asked one of them earlier and you don't get anything – it's great isn't it!'"

It is interesting that a common choice among actors/directors in this work is for the characters to respond to questions like this with a professed dislike of what they're engaged in. For example, in my time at the Museum of the Moving Image, characters would often respond to questions about acting with 'Actors? God no, hate them, never shut up, always talking'. I think this is popular because it illustrates to the audience member the sense of play that's involved and acknowledges the situation without dropping character, thus making them feel comfortable and further engaging them.

2.1b iv The Temenos

The initial interactions described above draw people into what Izzov calls the Play-Space or 'Temenos' as the ancient Greeks called it, which he describes as:

"a space marked off beforehand, either physically or mentally, deliberately as a matter of course. [...] it is a sacred spot cut off and hedged in from the "ordinary" world,... within which special rules obtain"⁶

These initial interactions are the process by which the 'Temenos' is mentally marked off and the rules which will apply are set out.

2.1c Building the Interaction

Once the audience or guests are hooked and the Temenos established, the interaction can then be built on and developed, involving the audience more deeply in the themes and scenario of the piece. The length of time this development takes varies hugely across the three case studies. For DM's street animations this might not be more than ten minutes, with KG's work this is over a weekend and for LttM's hospital work this can be up to three weeks⁷.

⁶ Izzov, G., (1997) *The Art of Play: the new genre of interactive theatre*, Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, Pt 1 Ch 1 'What is Interactive Theatre?'

⁷ Although I have set out these as sequential stages, the length of LttM's pieces means that the process in these cases is somewhat iterative, particularly in a situation where new patients may join at any point. For this work then, the method of building – as well as those listed - must involve actors being flexible enough to switch between - or even combine - hooking and starting interaction styles for new patients and building for those they've already established relationship with.

Building is done through responding to what the audience and environment give you (consciously or otherwise) in the context of the characters and scenario you have. As Richard Headon (DM) comments:

"The best work responds to the now and to what's happening and to the noises that go on and the people that come in."

Building the interaction tends to work by characters building relationship with and between their audience in order to build/bring out more of their scenario. Some techniques focus more on relationship and others more on scenario. Below, I discuss the five key techniques for building interaction:

2.1c i. Using pre-prepared building tools & techniques

Interactive pieces are normally structured such that there are several possible levels of involvement for the audience. This allows individuals to choose the level at which they are most comfortable. At LttM I articulated this in to five levels of involvement. These were: observing, engaging, participating, influencing and directing. For example, in *Dance with Me* at Springfield Hospital in which 1930s characters making a Hollywood musical, we addressed the five levels in the following ways: for the 'observers' the costumes were visually and texturally rich and stimulating and the songs entertaining; for the 'engagers' there were opportunities to clap or sing along with familiar tunes; the 'participators' could be in charge of the camera, the megaphone, or the clapperboard to shout action; the 'influencers' could make suggestions about camera angles or dance steps, and the 'directors' could suggest their own songs and even become the star of the scene.

These levels, while not explicitly articulated by KG or DM, are apparent in the way they discuss and make their work. For example, Cross (KG) when talking about the initial 'How do you know Tony?' type question (see Section 2.1b.i above) says:

"There are some people who you go and ask them a question and they're 'I don't know, I don't know'They're watchers."

Equally, Headon (DM), talking about their Rubbish Head characters, highlights how important creating visual imagery for those who wish to observe can be:

"When they see us throwing the rubbish, people don't do that with rubbish, and it presses people's buttons [...] and it's a portal into the theme of recycling [...] it's a very visceral, gut reaction."

These levels also apply to the earlier stages, and indeed the entire process of interaction can be seen as moving people 'up' these levels to that which they're comfortable with. However (as KG are very clear about), it is important in this work never to force or coerce people, as Turner elaborates:

"If you start forcing people to do things, they're unhappy, they won't interact and, because of the social contact, that mood spreads throughout the audience [...] you have to be able to interact as much as you want to [...] so you don't have to, but you can if you want to."

Clearly then, the way these levels manifest themselves in the work is more like a series of doors that people are shown and can choose to go through, rather than it being suggested they should go through them. This aspect of the work is about accepting exactly where the individual audience member is, while making them aware of the possibilities. The tendency in audiences is that once their reticence is accepted, they are more able to overcome it at some level.

In the building stage in particular though, actors can use the preparation by themselves and other artists as a means to build the interaction. This works by actors noticing what people are responding to - which may be costume, a particular prop, a song, a set piece - and using that as a basis for the building of interaction, either to ask more about the audience member's own experience or bring in more of the scenario behind that item.

It can also mean that if actors have a sense that some people want to just, for example, 'observe' then they use more of the pre-prepared visual activities, without pushing verbal interaction at all. An example of this would be LttM's Ebe, a black history month character noticing someone looking sad at a bus stop; throwing some glitter confetti for them to watch; watching it fall with them; and moving on without words.

It is worth saying that the 'higher' levels of involvement tend to happen more readily with longer pieces, where people build up trust with the characters to go to the next level. For instance, a clear example of group directing was at the end of one of LttM's hospital projects, when the patients arranged for the Hospital Chaplain to come and marry the characters at the end, having followed their love story over the three weeks. However, where space is created for it to happen, often with younger audiences, they can 'take over' in a much shorter space of time, as Headon (DM) relates:

“Sometimes we do our bits and then kids become involved and take over and we sit down and they do what we were doing, so they may take the pole that we’ve been dancing round and we give them the pole and they run the show and four of them will dance around it, they take over.”

2.1c ii. *Responding to the environment*

Izzov firmly believes that interactive characters are inseparable from their environment, because they are extensions of that environment. So for him, a Wild West character (for example) requires a Wild West setting. He goes so far as to say: “I would not try to represent interactive theatre without the environment... However, if you enjoy a good theatrical disaster, try it.”⁸ He uses the example of a 1940s Hollywood scenario created for Disney in downtown Orlando, saying “There is nothing so bizarre as watching a 1940s starlet in a modern down town area trying to get work from a passer-by, or watching people’s reactions as a cop writes them a ticket on the cracks of the sidewalk.”⁹.

While I believe Izzov’s conclusions are wrong, the point he makes is very important. When interactive characters work well, they are not pretending to be somewhere they’re not, they are where there are and respond to what is going on around them. This is why Murder Mystery events set in the past work best in hotels of that period. It is also what allows interactive museum characters to stay in their own period. If a period character goes out on the streets as Izzov describes and doesn’t respond to what they actually see, then it does stop making sense and can be a ‘disaster’ as he sees it. However, if they do respond to what they see, even if they don’t understand what it is, then that lack of understanding can spark interaction through asking those around them. This sharing of knowledge is what then becomes the theme of the piece. Most of LttM’s work was based on this, i.e. putting characters that were innocent to the environment, out into it, with a task to complete (e.g. finding the lost treasure of Balham, making 1000 smiles). The pieces created space for the audience to be the expert and help characters out in understanding the environment and completing their task within it.

As Beedell (DM) puts it:

⁸ Izzov, G., (1997) *The Art of Play: the new genre of interactive theatre*, Portsmouth, NH. Heinemann, Pt 1 Ch 5 ‘The Performance Environment’

⁹ Izzov, G., (1997) *The Art of Play: The new genre of interactive theatre*, Portsmouth, NH. Heinemann, Pt 1 Ch 5 ‘The Performance Environment’

“On the street, you're inventing another reality but you accept that the real reality, the street stuff that goes on, can totally interfere with what you've set up and you have to bounce off that.”

This is equally true of any public environment be that a school, hospital or park. So lorries going past, the features of the building or shop you're in front of, pigeons landing etc. are all acknowledged and used as a springboard to develop character or scenario further.

This is not to say that characters can't make false assumptions about where they are. For example, LttM's 1930s Hollywood characters, which I mentioned earlier, assumed that the hospital was Springfield Film Studios. They therefore assumed that each of the wards were the different filming 'lots'; so we had 'Damson Lot', 'Poplar Lot' etc. These were valid assumptions for those characters as one was entirely new to Britain, and another entirely new to the movies, so they both assumed this was just the way it was done. This illustrates the point that it is important when choosing to have characters make false assumptions about their environment, that their innocence of the facts is believable. It is also important that the characters still believe anything audiences tell them about the environment. So, for example, a reply to 'But this is a hospital' would have been something like: 'Really? How strange – they must think the patients are pretty special to make a movie here', thus keeping the reality of the scenario without refuting the information. In reality though, it was rare that the audience ever enlightened the characters, as the strong scenario and other elements meant that they wanted to play along without challenging this reality.

2.1c iii. Responding to people

This is probably the most important of the building tools since interactive theatre is primarily about the interaction between people and characters. In interactive work, the content of the performance and how it is performed is wholly or partly determined by what the audience say and do. That means that without their interaction the work isn't possible and therefore they are, in a very genuine sense, co-creators of the experience. As Headon (DM) commented:

“They're playing with us, they're inspiring us to go on [...] and improvise into new territory.”

By responding to people, characters deepen their relationship with audience members to whatever level is possible or appropriate for the length and site of the piece. As that relationship deepens, it becomes more appropriate for more of the characters' story to be shared (and often more of the audience's stories too) revealing more of the narrative and thus engaging the

audience more deeply with the piece, and allowing them to find their own personal links with it. The actors' job then is about being sensitive to all that their audience say and do, finding the connections and building on them. This can be done from various angles which I will discuss below:

Taking inspiration from what people do/who they are:

It is important, in the context of the levels of involvement discussed earlier, to note that the inspiration is not just from what audience members say, it can be from what they do or who they are. For example, Headon talks about how audience behaviour can be used to bring a new angle to the theme of a piece:

“We were doing the *Rubbish Heads*, and there were a lot of older people and the streets and we got into this discussion with this pensioner that was chewing a toffee and I said ‘Of course it’s you lot that are causing all the trouble with your Werther’s Original wrappers dropping them everywhere and your bingo cards’, and that became the theme of the day, that it’s not the young people dropping the rubbish it’s the pensioners ‘Get them back in their homes’ and all that sort of stuff, and the pensioners really enjoyed that gag [...] and we wouldn’t have found that theme on our own.”

At LttM, the length of the hospital pieces meant that responding to the audience was even more important since the relationship with them was so much longer. We therefore developed methods of ensuring that people could be responded to appropriately (which also helped actors new to the work to find easy ways into it before they developed their own instincts – see Section 2.2). For example, characters would use the form React, Inquire, Relate, Build, Request to initiate an interaction, an example of which is in Appendix 2.

Linking people to the scenario/characters using names:

The importance of names in building relationship cannot be underestimated. Turner (KG) also comments on this:

“If you can possibly use their names at all in conversation then you do. If I go round a group I’ll try to get a good portion of them [...] cause you can then go ‘you’ and they’re ‘oo you know who I am’.”

In LttM’s hospital work it was even more important, particularly on wards where staff struggled to remember people’s names. Simply learning and using people’s names and remembering the conversations that had taken place the day before was a hugely powerful tool in building

audience relationships to engage them in our scenario. It was so important that we created systems of recording this information so actors could refresh their memory each day before going out on the floor. I shall describe these systems in Section 2.2e, when I discuss the ‘behind the scenes’ work.

Once learnt, names can also be used to link people into the scenario, as Turner again describes:

“ [In *The End of the Line* at Alton] there was the guy Mike who foolishly who linked himself to an important clue fairly heavily, so I was able to wander round and whenever anyone mentioned the clue I was able to say ‘ooh yeah, Mike lives near there he might know something about that’”.

This also relates to making links between audience members, which I will discuss below.

Allowing stories:

A very important part of responding to people is allowing the stories and conversations that emerge to happen, regardless of how they might initially seem to relate to the scenario or otherwise. Depending on the person and situation, these stories may come through either: building up of trust over time (e.g. a patient on LttM’s Springfield hospital project bringing in photos of her days as a professional dancer in the 1930s); responding to a particular prop or set piece (e.g. Headon mentions a Latvian taxi driver who responded to the Lada car that was part of the show and wanted to talk about “the fact that it was a Number 6 engine and they were really good”); or it can just be that people are willing to talk to characters and do so out of the blue. The latter can lead to some very bizarre conversations. LttM’s Christmas tree characters being told in great detail about the delivering of a prominent politician’s baby by her midwife is just one example. This type of occurrence was so common that it felt to me that streets of people were almost waiting for an opportunity to tell certain stories, and the characters simply provided a release for that – a place of no consequence, where a story could be shared without judgement¹⁰.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that some audience members can be confused by ‘off-script’ conversations, particularly when there is a strong scenario. My own experience of KGs *The End of the Line* was that some lovely conversations with characters were had at dinner about non-plot related items. However, my fellow guests at the table, while having enjoyed the conversation, commented after the character had left ‘I think he was a bit out of character there’. I raised this with Cross (KG) who acknowledged the problem:

“When you’re talking about things outside of the plot, people don’t necessarily whether you’re talking in character or not. [...] but we don’t want to stop the actors from talking about things outside of the plot, because that makes it unnatural.”

My own experience is that so long as characters bring the conversation back to the scenario or plot at the end, that most people enjoy and are not confused by these detours. Admittedly, the obvious non-reality of LttM’s characters supports the actor in doing this and informs their angle on a conversation anyway, so it may be an easier thing to do for a ‘magical’ character.

DM's experience of performing in Stockton leading up to the International Festival seems to back this up, as Headon relates:

“On the Monday we had a chap who came in in *Bear's Cheese* to the back of the truck and we were talking to him and suddenly he burst into tears and he sat with us and he was a Gulf War veteran, who'd seen all his mates killed in front of him and he was obviously having huge issues and difficulties at the moment, and he sat two hours with us, and then he came back the next day and came out in the Karaoke taxi, and came back the next day with a bunch of flowers and thanked us.”

From my own experience at LttM and as an interactive performer prior to this, this depth of involvement and sharing of personal stories is not uncommon. However, it often leaves actors struggling with the ethics of the situation as Beedell (DM), again about Stockton:

“Part of me felt like ‘God, I’m really cheating these people, I’m really lying to them, because they think we really are a Gypsy family selling Bear’s cheese, but part of me thinks that’s really valuable to challenge people’s perceptions, for them to think, well is this real or not.”

Ethics and personal issues:

The quote above illustrates one of the key challenges in this work with regards to this area of ‘Responding to people’: the ethics of building a relationship for theatrical purposes and the impact that that can have on audience and actors.

For my own work at LttM, our characters and scenarios were normally not of this world or time, so there was less of an issue around people thinking they were ‘real’. However, it was something we gave great thought to with the 1930s and 1940s characters hospital work with elders. In the end we felt that so long as the characters were consistent and clear about their endpoint (see Section 2.1d) then we were not ‘damaging’ people, no matter how they took them.

Sometimes, however, the issue that arises is a personal one for the actors. In LttM's hospital projects, actors would build up quite close relationships with patients (as their characters) over the three weeks and therefore the end of the project was emotionally difficult for them as this was the end of those relationships. The difficulty of this was intensified by the fact that it was not possible for them to go back to visit patients as themselves i.e. out of character, although all the actors I worked with on these projects expressed the desire to do this if it were possible. It was not possible because if the patients did recognise the actors it could be both confusing

(particularly in mental health environments) and, moreover, break the 'magic' of the piece. DM describe their experience of this when doing characters in a school and then coming back as themselves to do a workshop. They explained to the children that they had been 'just pretending'. This proved quite difficult for the children, who then considered their experience of the work as having been 'lied to'. Beedell says of this experience:

"As soon as I'd told them I felt 'oh know I've blown it' I should've just kept the pretence up, because they're so disappointed, because they really want to believe."

As Turner (KG) relates, there can also be a level of emotional difficulty for the actors at the end of shorter term work:

"Sometimes you leave on a Sunday and you think, oh I'm never going to meet some of these people again and they're a really nice bunch... and you feel like you've known each other for ages."

2.1c iv Linking audience members

Making links between audience members (or supporting pre-existing links) is a key part of the work, although it is not always an explicit intention. While it clearly relates to responding to people, as described above, it is worth mentioning separately as it distinguishes this work from that which happens as a one-to-one experience between an individual and a performer¹¹.

For both LttM and KG's work, making links between audience members is intentional and the means of doing this is carefully worked out. For KG, this starts even prior to the audience arriving with the pre-information discussed earlier, as Cross elaborates:

"There are between four or five different sets of information that we have, different sets of clues and that helps to encourage interaction between the audience members because they are like 'ooh right we don't know what everybody else knows so we'll try and find out.'"

Giving different guests different information carries on throughout the performance, with different paper clues being left on each table at dinner, requiring audience members to swap and share these clues in order to get the full picture.

¹¹An example of this might be Kabosh Theatre's *60 Seconds*. This is not work I have seen but they describe it as "A one-minute, location-specific, piece of theatre performed to an individual audience member."

In addition to this, both LttM and KG would use the technique of linking people through their connection with the story - the audience member, Mike, referred to earlier being a good example. LttM characters would create scenarios for individuals to work together, refer to shared experiences or likes/dislikes to link people, or simply check that everyone in the ward had met each other. This linking of people was particularly powerful in the hospital work as it gave people in beds next to each other something to discuss without having to reveal personal information or discuss medical conditions. This helped to create some firm friends in Children's and Elders Wards alike, thus having an impact long after the characters left. Cross (KG) also refers to the power of the work to link people beyond the immediate experience:

"It's amazing how many times we hear as people are going away, 'oh I've got your e-mail address now and I'll let you know next time we're coming to one of these and see if we can meet up' [...] It's interesting how the murder mystery breaks down barriers between the audience, they become friendly quite quickly, whereas they wouldn't necessarily if they were just away for the weekend [...] There's a sense of shared purpose, they're trying to solve the mystery together."

In DM's work, the creation of links between audience members seems less intentional, but nonetheless happens and can be quite subtle. In my own experience of *Bear's Cheese*, cards with quotes on them in the Yurt were given to one audience member by a character and, as audience, we chose to share them around between us. In DM's work it is more that the space is created where these links can be made, rather than any intentionality – again Headon relates their experience at Stockton:

"On the Monday morning, the only people to play with were the homeless, the drunks, the prostitutes, a transvestite, and suddenly we became a magnet for them because they could go round the town in the Karaoke taxi and sing through the speakers on the roof [...] and they were going round and singing Dancing Queen and YMCA and they had such fun and they were going 'Dave, Dave, look at me in this car' and waving."

2.1c v Delivering set pieces

In most interactive work there are some 'set pieces'. In these, the work becomes more like traditional performance, in that there are things pre-planned and rehearsed that do not require interaction (although don't necessarily exclude it either). These set pieces can be used to get across important plot or character points (e.g. KGs two-handed scenes I described earlier);

provide a 'break' from the interaction in longer pieces (e.g. LttM's Hollywood characters' song and dance numbers); or can be the finale of a piece (e.g. the fight at the end of DM's Film Crew). Unlike the rest of the work, they do normally require a gathering and focus from a group of audience members, as can be overpowering if played to just one or two people. I will not go into great detail about how these work as the basic dynamic is very similar to traditional theatre. Getting into and out of these set pieces without breaking the naturalness of the interaction can be problematic, however. The minimum that characters do is simply raise their voices to a more theatrical level and position themselves in such a way as to draw focus. This simple technique is what KG use for their two-hander scenes. They are not introduced in any way since they are meant to be 'overheard' conversations, but the audience entirely accepts the theatricality of the situation.

LttM characters, on the other hand, would always introduce set pieces and ask directly for people's attention. For example, if the 1930s Hollywood filmmaker characters were about to do a dance routine, the 'Director' character might say 'Right we're going to practise the final number now' (or indeed get one of the patients to make this announcement). Another example from LttM's street work would be the Black History Month character Ebe, telling people that she was about to turn her fellow character into a great leader from history, thus drawing a crowd to watch this particular set piece. The transitions into and out of set pieces were carefully prepared such that those who had been interacting before the set piece did not feel abandoned, and that, once it had ended, there were easy routes back to one-to-one interaction. For example, coming out of a set piece, a character might say a nervous 'What did you think?', thus handing back control to the audience.

DM's *The Man with the Bear's Heart* began with quite a high level introduction, including musicians playing and some aggressive cheese offering! This felt like a set piece as, although it was quite loose in structure, it was performed to an audience that had gathered. It thus set up a 'stage-and-audience' type dynamic between the characters and their audience. This introduction involved a general invitation to the audience to choose either to come into the van or the yurt for different types of experience. The audience was initially reticent, but this was broken by characters breaking off from the 'stage-and-audience' dynamic to address individuals in the audience directly, who then went with them into the chosen space. In my experience, a 'show like' introduction, such as this, can put people off interacting, precisely due to it setting up the stage versus audience dynamic, which then has to be overcome. Therefore for me, the best work starts with individual interactions and then builds to this. However, in the case of this particular production, this type of 'set piece' introduction was necessary, since the 'stage-and-audience' dynamic had already been set up by the fact that there was a start time advertised in the Thames Festival programme and so the crowd had gathered expecting a show. This therefore needed to be addressed by the characters before it could be broken. It is a credit to the skill of the

performers that they managed to address this, explaining the nature of the piece in a very characterful and entertaining way, and still draw people into interacting after it.

2.1d Ending the Interaction

The way an interaction comes to an end varies greatly depending on the type of work. For example, Beedell (DM) talks about his first experiences creating work on the street:

“We used to just run everywhere [...] people would be shopping and would be boring and then suddenly something comes out of nowhere and disturbs the equilibrium, and then you run away again!”

In fluid audience situations this is a wonderfully simple and entertaining way to end an interaction.

For LttM characters, since normally they required some help from the public, the easiest way to move on was to thank people for their help and go off to take their advice. Sometimes this was quite literal as, for example, with the *Procrastinating Pirates* searching for the ‘Lost Treasure of Balham’, who would often be given directions by the public and simply take them.

With fixed audiences, the narrative nature of the work means there is usually a clear end point. In KG’s work, when the final murder takes place the remaining actors come out of character, tell the audience that it’s the end and give out the sheets for people to fill in and say who they think did it. Interestingly, the actor playing the dead character remains ‘dead’ throughout this, until just before the audience leave to fill in their sheets. The end point is made explicitly clear by the drop of character, and the announcement.

In LttM’s hospital work, it was always very important to us that from the start there was a clear end point to the narrative, when the characters would leave (e.g. when the film was made for the Hollywood characters, when 1000 smiles had been collected for The Princess). This was necessary for the narrative journey, but I also felt it was ethically important that, when dealing with vulnerable people, we were clear from the beginning that the relationships we were building would not be long term. It also allowed us to maintain that ‘space of no consequence’ that I discussed earlier, which is so important in allowing stories to happen. Endings of our hospital work normally involved a final denouement or resolution (e.g. the characters got married, the Princess received a telegram to say her banishment was lifted) and plenty of time for goodbyes. Also, we usually created some kind of follow up from the characters a week or so afterwards in

the form of a letter or a postcard, which helped to finalise the interactive element of the work. In addition, it gave the audience an impetus to carry on the conversations between themselves that had started when they were with the characters.

Ending interaction then, is clearly as important as the other elements in the crafting of the impact that it is intended the piece will have. Below I will talk about that process of crafting and the different ways it can be viewed.

2.2 How is the work made?

While the work clearly has similar key elements in performance, how the work is made varies significantly across the three case studies. In this section I will look at: the type of practitioners involved in the creative team; how character and scenario are created; how performers are selected and prepared; how the non-actor elements of the performance are decided upon; what 'behind-the-scenes' processes are necessary before and during the performances and finally, at the business models the companies operate to support the work.

2.2a The creative team

In all three companies, a collaborative approach is taken to the creation of the work - from the first idea to the final performance. This work is a team effort. Also, roles are not distinct within the team, with each member bringing in whatever skills and ideas they have. For KG and DM, the characters and scenario are created by the two directors of the company, who also, direct, produce, administrate, stage manage, and act in the work. In KG's case, they also write the story for the piece and chose any necessary costume and props. DM also occasionally work with a musician at this stage of creation. For LttM, the same was true in the early years, but roles became more defined later on, thus a creative team for a hospital project would usually include a director, designer, project manager and, for elders work, a reminiscence consultant. The director and project manager would share the producer role and at least one member of the team would have experience of acting in the work. However, the creative team for LttM's non-hospital work remained much more like those of KG and DM. The separation of roles therefore came about to meet the additional demands of the hospital environment, which I will discuss this further in Section 2.2e.

While the role of director in each of the three companies varies - which I will discuss further in Section 2.2c - having a director with experience of acting in the work seems an essential element to the creative process, as Cross (KG) elaborates:

“We find that you write it and you go along and do the first performance of it and then we’ll come away and we’ll want to tweak it, and you’ve got to be there to do that, and if you’re not acting in it you’re not going to be there.”

Cross’s attitude here, also seems to extend to directors taking on other roles in addition to acting, for example, producing, stage managing and administrating the work, and is to a certain extent, shared by DM. In an interactive piece there are many things that cannot be discovered before it is actually shared with an audience, so I understand this attitude in that there is a need to ‘be there’ to understand the requirements of the piece and its audience. However, I also believe this attitude can be due to the business models by which the companies operate, which I will look at further in Section 2.2f.

2.2b The creation of characters and scenario

The starting point for characters and scenario may either be a response to a particular brief or issue (e.g. DM’s *Rubbish Heads* created in response to environmental issues); in response to a creative consultation process (true of all LttM’s hospital work); or simply a creative desire (e.g. KG’s wanting to end with having someone’s throat cut!).

Following on from the initial impetus, the creation of ideas for characters and scenario seems to be, for all three companies, an entirely organic process. The process involves very little formal structure, and involves lots of discussion, with ideas being ‘thrown around’ and tried out. The teams act as a whole unit rather than having specific roles within the process, with each idea being treated on its merits. LttM’s process for hospital work involved the entire team (include ‘non-creative’ roles such as reminiscence consultant and project manager) brainstorming ideas over a week in response to the interests, personalities and schedules of the patients and staff. Turner and Cross at KG will brainstorm ideas based on their own creative impulses and their experience of what works in performance. They then craft this into a detailed written story, including plot and motives and the two-handed scripted scenes described earlier, with additional character information being created for the actors. Turner and Cross both describe themselves as writers of the piece, which might be thought unusual in an interactive work. However, this is perhaps because the plotting is much more detailed than in LttM or DM’s case, and does involve

some scripting. LttM's process would also end in a specific written scenario, though less detailed in plot than KG's, with an initial character outline as a starting point for the actors in rehearsal. While not generating written information, the process seems to be similar for DM, with the aim being, as Headon puts it, that

"Each piece gives [the actors] a grounding, be it a character or a situation, such that they feel confident that they can, with that grounding, go in and improvise."

Beedell, with characteristic humour, describes the process of getting to that point:

Beedell: "We smoke a big joint, we have a silly idea and we go 'let's give that a go' that's how we used to do it"

Me: "Has that changed over the years?"

Beedell: "Yeah, we don't smoke big joints anymore!"

2.2c The selection and preparation of performers

Probably the biggest area about which opinions differ (both within the case studies, and from my own experience, more generally in this field), is whether you can train actors to do this work or whether it is something a performer can simply do or not do. The stance taken on this clearly influences whether one believes that the rehearsal process and director are either essential or largely a waste of time. In this section I shall initially describe the differences and briefly look at the issues I believe that lie behind them.

2.2c i Differences in approach to selection and preparation of performers

DM are definitely at one end of the scale with regard to their opinion on this issue when it comes to their animations, as Headon elaborates:

"We took a week's rehearsal for the Pipe People and the Film Crew, [...] which is something we never do, we normally just put on the costumes and just go out there and do it, and it was a disaster, we couldn't rehearse it [...] we tried to rehearse set gags that could happen [...] but on the street you seem to have to create stuff that is in the now, that is honest, that isn't flown in from some studio where you've rehearsed it."

DM therefore tend to select actors who they've worked with before, or whose work they know from other companies, who are enthusiastic about this type of work. When more actors are required from outside this 'pool', they will hold auditions that involve a prepared piece, some improvisation games and workshop exercises. They also look for people that have other skills such as driving, and who they believe will get on when on the road, and focus when they need to both on the performance and more practically on loading and unloading the van. This is important to them, since touring can mean many hours spent with fellow performers when not actually performing. They do give some guidance to new actors, as Beedell explains

"We let them find their own way a bit, we're not very prescriptive really, but we do talk about it a bit, but we don't direct, we say 'go out there and try doing it like this and see how that feels, and does that work for you?' "

There is not really a director, then, in the traditional sense of someone working with actors to shape the piece artistically.

However, this does generate some issues for them, firstly as Headon relates:

"I don't see much progression in the people we work with, I think you've either got it or you haven't, the performers we work with for ten years, they were either good then and are still good, or they're not so good."

Secondly, Headon relates that one of the problems they face is finding young actors who can improvise on the street well, and at the appropriate level for the street and the piece, which is why they still end up doing it themselves.

KG have a similar attitude to DM in terms of what they believe about performers, and share their belief that professional stage actors are rarely good at this type of work, as Cross notes:

"It's interesting that some people who are very good on stage just cannot do this type of work, it just terrifies them, so much that they won't do it and the converse can be true as well."

I will discuss in Section 2.1c ii why I believe this might be. This observation, however, leads KG work with a variety of actors from pure amateurs to professionals, selecting actors on the basis of their ability to absorb the fairly complex plot and character information and improvise inventively without derailing that plot. Turner elaborates:

“They’ve got to be able to work within a framework, they’ve got to be able to retain that information, to know ‘I can’t invent that’, ‘that would be bad’, or ‘I could invent this’.”

However, despite falling on the ‘actors can just do it/not’ side of the scale, the structure of the Murder Mystery format means that they find it does require a rehearsal process. Obviously rehearsal involves practising the scripted two-hander scenes, but it involves more than that, since as Turner says, problems can arise “If you haven’t gelled as a unit, and don’t know how each other think”.

Rehearsals therefore involve actors playing guests for each other, allowing them to practice describing themselves, how they describe other people, and answering the type of questions that may get asked. Experienced performers are therefore able to bring realistic situations into the rehearsal room to be dealt with at that point. As Turner says:

“We can’t rehearse every single question you’re going to throw at us, but [we can practice] many of the common ones, especially once we’ve done a plot, once we know the basics or where it’s possible to go wrong.”

Character work, however, is left to the individual actor, as Turner relates:

“ [We write] enough to make the plot work, but the rest within that bit, so long as it doesn’t contradict the skeleton, the rest is theirs, it’s got to be.”

The role of the Director in rehearsals, then, is about setting up the exercises and running the rehearsals, but not so much in the artistic shaping of the work.

LttM’s selection and preparation of actors comes from the opposite end of the scale. My own experience suggests that while some people will have more natural flair and understanding for this work than others, there are ways that those others can be taught techniques and tools, which they can practice through rehearsal, to enable them to become highly proficient in this field. Moreover, through practice and using these techniques and tools, those with natural flair can also develop a greater understanding of what they ‘naturally’ do and through this, go on to create even better work for the benefit of the audiences. I will discuss the importance of this skills development in Section 2.1c ii, below.

Given this different stance, LttM's selection was more about looking for strong characterisation skills and good improvisational skills, combined with a sense of understanding, openness and enthusiasm about the work. I would also look for actors who supported other actors in the workshop and improvisation exercises we ran as part of auditions – rather than looking to 'steal the glory' with an entertaining line that nonetheless threw their fellow actor. In my experience, this sensitivity to others, along with good interpersonal skills, underlie a lot of what goes on in the work, and I would therefore look for those actors that were able to bring those personal qualities through in their characters.

The role of the Director, then, in our work, was a much more traditional one, working with actors to shape and develop their characters physical and emotional landscape, through research and exercises. As with KG, rehearsal would also involve people playing the role of audience. In the initial rehearsal stages this would mainly be the Project Manager. The Project Manager would consistently have been involved in the audience consultation and therefore have a good understanding of the type of people actors were likely to meet in character - and, in the case of some hospital work, the actual people. They would then be able to bring that knowledge into the rehearsal room. (It helped that our Project Managers usually had some background in performance). Other techniques included using cuddly toys to stand in for people, to enable actors to practice 'working a room'. Towards the end of rehearsals we would often bring in volunteers to play audience members, finishing with a final 'dress rehearsal' where we would arrange a session with a group similar to the target group – e.g. a playgroup for a children's piece, an elders lunch club for an elders' hospital piece. For all of these 'practice interactions' the Director would watch as a more traditional theatre director watches a scene, and give notes and areas for development. This facilitated actors developing their own instincts about what worked and didn't in interactions, and in what different directions they could develop them. Set pieces such as dances, songs, and activity sessions were also rehearsed.

In practice, an equal amount of time would be spent in rehearsals working on practicing techniques of interactions as was spent on development of character and set pieces. This occasionally could lead to frustration for the actors when some were new to the field and some very experienced – an issue that KG and DM avoid by simply 'putting people out there' – and therefore this needed to be well managed. However, the development of techniques to enable the practicing of interaction meant both that our pool of actors was less limited, and that there was room for those actors who already excelled, to develop their talents further.

2.2c ii Issues behind the differences in approach to selection and preparation of actors.

I believe that the main reason that opinions differ in this area is that most actors training simply doesn't prepare them for this type of work. Interactive work requires the actor to really 'become' the character, because responding to people instantly requires the actor's and the character's thought processes to be one and the same. There simply isn't time to think 'What would my character do?' before responding. On stage, however, an actor only need perform such that the audience *believes* that he is and thinks like that character – and this can be done through the craft of understanding and delivering lines effectively, rather than necessarily through 'embodiment' of the character. It is my suspicion that the former craft is taught well in UK drama schools and the craft of 'embodiment' less well. It is the stage actors who do their stage work by 'becoming' the character, and have been trained in this way, that, in my experience, tend to have a 'natural' flair for the work. Moreover, those that perform through the understanding and effective delivery of lines, are those that both struggle with, and can be 'terrified' of this work (as Turner's quote in the previous section is testament to). This is because it does not involve the processes that they use to give a performance.

This, however, is not the end of the skills issue. Even those stage performers that work through the 'embodiment' described may still lack the skill of dramatic improvisation, which is essential for this work. Again, in my experience, dramatic improvisation is rarely taught with any level of sophistication. Most who train in improvisation do so after formal drama school training, but few practitioners teach dramatic, as opposed to comic, improvisation. (Chris Johnston and Andrew StJohn in London are two notable exceptions who continue to develop and experiment with the form).

I also believe that part of the reason some practitioners believe these performance skills cannot be taught, is because their business models are such that there is rarely time to sit back, observe and reflect on this part of their work¹². This lack of time, I believe, stems primarily from the way the funding behind the companies works. I will discuss this in more depth in Section 2.2f, but in brief: funds are generated primarily through delivery of performance, and there is rarely any money for research and development that isn't related to a specific performance. Indeed, when funding does become available for company development, it is usually targeted at organisational development and marketing rather than artistic practice, as was DM's experience with their first Arts Council grant in 2001.

¹² The fact that some believe that interaction is largely common sense may also mean there is not a desire to reflect on this part of the work. E.g. Beedell (DM) says that interacting as a character is "like you do with anybody you're talking to in the street or in the pub, the only difference is you've got a costume on and you're pretending to be somebody else."

I would suggest that the issue of skills development is an important one for the sector. Indeed DM's expression of their difficulty in finding younger actors to do the work, which I mentioned earlier, is testament to this. My impression from the companies involved in this research, is that there is an increasing demand for interactive work. If this is the case, then the training of performers must be addressed by the sector with some urgency, to ensure that this demand can be met, while maintaining quality.

2.2d The non-actor elements of performance

In Section 2.1a, I discussed briefly how set, costume and props can be key in the initial audience 'hook', and also how pre-information can be used. In Section 2.1c i, I discussed the importance of costumes and props in providing opportunities for the first two levels of involvement: observing and engaging. Primarily then, the non-actor elements of performance are created or chosen – by the designer or members of the company - with these roles in mind. This means that design is (and has to be) integrated into the development of character and scenario from the outset. This is why, for LttM, the designer is part of the initial consultation process, and for KG and DM, the design is primarily created by those involved in that initial 'brainstorm'.

For LttM costume and personal props were always an important element, establishing characters clearly as characters, not of the environment they were in, and providing the initial visual impact to spark interest in our audience, which DM also talk about. Clearly, it was also very important, within a working hospital ward, not to be mistaken for healthcare professionals. Equally in our street work, we felt it important to clearly be characters, and not be mistaken for members of the public. This was both because we did not intend to make 'invisible' theatre, but also to ease interaction. In this, LttM's attitude was similar to that described by Beedell (DM)

“The thing about putting a costume on, whether it's bizarre or whatever, is you've got something to hide behind, it gives you the permission to go and talk to strangers.”

DM also use props to create the illusion of reality. For example with *Bear's Cheese* the claim of making cheese from milking the bears was backed up by publicity leaflets and t-shirts, to give the illusion of a real enterprise.

For KG, since much of their work is set in present day, they prefer their actors to use their own clothes so that they are comfortable. However, they do provide costume when it directly affects the plot as in, for example, their fashion show scenario. The only props used also tend to be

those that directly impact on the plot and provide clues or red herrings. For example, in *The End of the Line*, which I attended, a wallet was discovered on the floor with potential clues in it.

A key non-actor element in the creation of the work is the setting. While the setting is normally fixed, apart from minimal set dressing (e.g. balloons and table centres for the birthday party in KG's *The End of the Line*), it can often be integrated into the design effect of the overall piece. For LttM, the setting would always be part of the inspiration for the characters. For example, the tower on top of Aarding & Hobbs in Clapham Junction was Ebe's home in the Black History Month characters, and her costume was designed to echo the architecture. For KG, setting is important in terms of meeting their guests' expectations, and indeed getting bookings in the first place, as Turner elaborates:

"They want Gosford Park - some kind of mansion house, even though all these places are conference centres anyway and the old house is just the reception bit, and then they go into the identikit corporate bit, it doesn't matter, they feel they've gone away."

The setting is less a key element in the creation for DM, since much of their work is designed to tour. However they do mention that their animations clearly vary depending on whether they are moving around the street or in a fixed place that people come to.

There are also some practical rather than artistic issues around setting which I will discuss in Section 2.2e below.

It is worth mentioning food and drink here as this is a key element in KG's work and can be pivotal in both LttM's and DM's. For KG, the food has to be right and appropriate to the setting and the scenario, otherwise it can distract attention from the piece. Additionally, they ensure that audience can get drinks as and when they want to, stressing the importance of their work as a social occasion as well as a performance. As Turner says of their weekend work, at the most basic level it can be described as "a weekend away with actors thrown in".

For LttM, characters involving themselves in the serving of tea was used as a way of facilitating relationships in elderly care wards in hospitals. We found that knowing and remembering how somebody took their tea could be a key starting point for interactions and helped to build trust in the relationship. Also, we found catering staff only too happy to interact and join in with characters. This helped to ease interaction by allowing those patients initially less comfortable to watch others interacting. It also helped to strengthen relationships between patients and catering staff, meaning that the characters were able to have impact long after they had left.

DM also tend to use food in different ways in their work. In *Bear's Cheese*, the offer to try the cheese is the key opening hook for the audience. As Headon describes:

“We do use food quite a lot when we want to bring in something their not expecting [...] In Holland, we were going round in Superhero outfits and we had a suitcase that we were opening and showing to people and I thought what can we put in this suitcase, so we filled it full of gherkins.”

2.2e The 'Behind the Scenes' work

For each of the companies, there is some level of work 'behind the scenes' at the performance site that facilitates the performance, some happening before the event and some during it.

The liaison with the performance site is key in this work since it invariably happens in space that belongs to other people, unlike traditional theatre. Also, unlike site specific work, the usual workings of that site continue while the characters are in the space performing: the hotel still serves its guests, the hospital doctors still do their rounds, the shoppers continue shopping. The depth of liaison that takes place depends on the nature of the site.

For street/shopping centre work, for both DM and LttM, the liaison consists mainly of being booked, the nature of the characters agreed, and where the characters will be, when, and for how long. For LttM, where work was commissioned and created specifically for a particular client, e.g. *The Wandsworth Superheroes* for the opening of a heritage trail, there would inevitably be more consultation with the client.

For KG's work, the liaison with the hotel will obviously involve ensuring there is suitable space for the main parts of the performance. In addition, however, they need to check that there are places where bodies can be discovered without being disturbed by hotel staff, or other hotel guests. Most importantly, they make sure that the hotel informs all of its staff that the murder mystery is taking place to ensure that no one is traumatised by discovering a dead body – or actually calls the police! As a fail safe, this is the one time during the performance that KG allow their actors to drop character to explain the situation to those not involved in the performance.

For LttM's hospital work, a full two week consultation takes place. This serves two purposes: Firstly, it is a creative process, involving getting to know staff and patients in the hospital,

understanding their likes, dislikes, interests and passions, and using that as inspiration to create characters. This is why with elders work, a reminiscence consultant is used. Secondly, this process ensures that all staff feel involved in and confident about what is going to happen, and assured that it isn't going to disrupt their work caring for the medical needs of their patients. The support and understanding of the staff is essential in ensuring the success of the project. It was the realisation of this that led to the roles of the creative team in LttM became more separate than in the other two companies, since the following issues became apparent that impacted on it:

Firstly, in a working hospital, situations change on a daily basis and information about this would need to be transferred to the actors to ensure the necessary sensitivity. However, this is not something that could be done in character and therefore an on-site Project Manager was necessary to transfer this information to the actors prior to them going onto the wards. It was essential that the on-site Project Manager could be met by the staff during consultation to build trust and ensure the smooth running of the project during performance. Secondly, during pilot projects, staff found it hard to speak to someone in character who they had met as themselves during consultation. This could potentially disrupt the project, so this, again, led to the creative team not being involved in the acting.

During the performance, the amount of 'behind the scenes' work again varies depending on the site.

For all three companies, there will be a private space that the actors can return to between performance sessions. Actors will use this time both to rest and recuperate, but also, importantly, to discuss what has worked and what hasn't worked and what they will try next time out. For KG and LttM working with fixed audiences, this is also a chance for actors to share what they have discussed with different members of the audience and to check that their stories tie up and fit with the overall narrative – and how they're going to fix it if they don't! For LttM there was a large wallchart in the dressing room with a space for each session for actors to note the names of the people they had spoken to and the things they'd spoken about. This was used as a reference for the next time they went back to that ward, to be able to pick up where they left off, and use names as appropriate. This process then facilitated the building of relationship that I discussed in Section 2.1c above. Uniquely to LttM, where actors were going back to interact with the same people over a three week period, there would often also be research and design work go on between sessions. For example, the discovery in one hospital project of an elder who used to work in the local gas works led to the actor involved researching and bringing in photographs of that to the next session, all of which was kept within the overall narrative of the piece.

As a final point regarding behind the scenes work, it is worth mentioning safety. Risk assessments are clearly important in any project and perhaps even more so for this work where so much is unpredictable. While this is not something that came up specifically in my discussions with KG or DM, it may be more of an issue for LttM since clearly it was important to work within the hospitals health and safety guidelines. In addition, for all our work, LttM would have a 'get out' phrase that could be used inconspicuously in character in order to indicate that actors and on-site Project Manager should return to the dressing room immediately. This allowed us to deal with any potentially dangerous or difficult situations calmly and quickly – although in my time there we never had occasion to use it.

2.2f The Business models

All three companies operate without any form of regular funding, and of the three only LttM was able to pay regular salaries for any period of time. Below I will describe the business models and look at the issues that these give rise to.

2.2f i The models

KG's work is entirely self-financing and the business runs purely from earned income, either directly from guests booking for public events, or from corporate firms or hotels who hire them in for the evening. It is, however, something that neither Cross nor Turner rely on for income, each having other full time careers – they describe it as a hobby that became a business.

DM estimate that 25% of their work is project funded, with the remainder being primarily shows that are bought in by public sector bodies for shows or events, with the occasional corporate buy in. They describe their business model as 'Say yes to everything' – which, in my experience, is not uncommon in the sector. The office is run by Beedell and Headon and, in the past, they and the other directors would work through the winter for nothing, only being paid when the work came in. Although currently they are able to pay themselves a very small monthly salary (only a few hundred pounds a month), they describe this as the 'squeezable amount', which is where they take things like van repairs from. Indeed, it is only in their most recent project that they have actually charged for their work on a full cost recovery basis. This, however, only came about because the funder encouraged and supported them in doing so.

LttM was mostly project funded by the time I left it in 2005, with only about 20% of the work public or private sector buy-ins. However in the first three years of the company, the model looked much

more like DM's. Although LttM was able to support two salaries, we regularly were not able to guarantee that salary past the next quarter, as it was dependant on project funding coming in.

2.2f ii The factors and issues behind the models

I believe there are several reasons why the companies operate these particular business models. Firstly, there is a feeling, within the companies, that this work is not mainstream theatre. While all three companies are immensely proud of the work they create, there seems to be a lack of organisational confidence, either in the professionalism and importance of the work, or in its appeal to mainstream funders. This means that either they do not consider looking at applying for funding (e.g. KG), or they don't really want to engage with the whole system of funding, because of the time consuming nature of funding applications to funders where they feel there is little support (e.g. DM). For all three companies, there are other ways of making money which, while they may not enable full cost recovery, still allow the work to be made, and it is these they concentrate on.

Certainly, I would share the sense I get from DM that mainstream funders in particular do not fully understand the work, which I will discuss in Section 2.3a below. Indeed, LttM's only major funding came for the hospital work – presumably because this fitted the 'Arts in Health' agenda that has some support amongst mainstream funders.

Secondly, the models reflect the fact that it is possible to make this work on a very small budget, and because those involved, in my experience, love what they do. There is therefore an entirely understandable desire to simply 'get out there and do it', and not worry about getting a living wage from it. This is clearly not sustainable in the long term however, and is restrictive to the development of practice, as Headon relates:

“The good people who we've known over the years have gone off and got 'proper' jobs, because they can't, we can't sit around and do this stuff for nothing anymore. We've all got mortgages and what not, so we know a dream team we'd like, but they've all gone off and got other jobs now.”

Not only do these models force some performers to leave the industry, they also restrict the time available for those still in it to create work. As I discussed in Section 2.2a, company directors and performers also take on administrative and production roles. While there is some advantage to this with regards to the understanding of the work by the administration, it restricts the amount of time available to the artists to reflect on, develop and create the work. This I believe leads to some of the issues regarding training and skills development I discussed in Section 2.2c.

These haphazard models are therefore only sustainable as long as there are artists who are willing to spend a considerable amount of time in non-creative activities and have made lifestyle choices that allow them to work in for virtually nothing. I believe that neither of these things are conducive to the on-going development of interactive theatre as a form.

Equally, the willingness and ability to do the work at this personal cost can make it difficult to make the case to funders that their support is necessary, since they see the work carrying on without it. I also suspect there is a concern amongst funders (and others) that if people are willing to do it part-time or for so little money, then it is more of an 'amateur hobby' than a professional art-form - that it is somehow not 'proper' theatre.

I think the reason why artists are willing to do this is most usefully answered by considering why mainstream theatre artists don't. It is my belief, that when you have a venue or a planned tour, a production with a large cast, music, lights, a set, front of house staff, a certain number of seats to fill, it is really necessary to sit back and consider your work, create structures and training to ensure the company is a going concern, and can meet its overheads and reach its audience. Interactive theatre has none of those considerations, an artist can simply go out and do it and so they do. My argument is that if mainstream theatre companies could do this and still exist, they would too, since it is in the nature of performing artists to simply want to perform. Therefore, the reason interactive theatre artists work at such personal cost and for so little money is not because they are more amateur. It is because the structures (business and otherwise) that are necessary to create mainstream theatre simply do not exist in our work.

With hindsight, I would say the reason that LttM spent more time considering the work than the other two case studies, was because we were creating longer, larger projects in highly sensitive environments. This meant that planning and structures, parallel to those described above for mainstream theatre, became necessary for the work to happen at all. This meant that more thought was required regarding what was necessary to make it work e.g. what funding and administrative support were needed to make it viable. It also meant that we thought more about how we might prepare actors for the work, hence addressing the training issue I raised in Section 2.2c.

2.3 The Audience

For all three companies, an event can involve characters interacting with 10s to 100s of people over the course of the piece, depending on its site and nature.

The age range of those interacting is from babies to 90 year olds and beyond (although KG's tend to have a lower limit of about 11 for their events). Some work does have a target age range e.g. LttM's hospital work created for children or elders. However all interactive characters are able to interact with anyone. For example, The Princess in one of LttM's children's ward pieces struck up a conversation with a handcuffed prisoner in a lift about the shortage of handsome princes, who told her she had 'made his day'¹³.

2.3a Who responds well to the work?

All three companies expressed a feeling that all kinds of people responded to the work well, except, according to DM 'drunk corporate clients' a sentiment echoed by KG. However, there was a general feeling, explicitly from DM and LttM, less so from KG, that non-theatre goers tended to respond better, as Headon relates:

"It's sort of theatre for the unjaded really, people who see art or theatre all the time sort of bracket it like 'I'm going to the theatre now' and actually it has more of an impact on people that don't go to the theatre and actually come across a piece of live stuff going on and it can hit them in a very visceral way."

My own experience echoes this, in that when 'theatre literate' people come across this work they tend to stand back and watch others interacting, not choosing to interact themselves. There is a lack of understanding that the performance is in the interaction, and if you just choose to just watch then you don't get the full experience on all the different levels discussed in Section 2.1c. Interestingly, the 'non theatre literate' (children, teenagers, shoppers etc.) understand this instinctively. This may indicate that the 'standing back' response to theatre is a learned one, and might need to be unlearned before these people can fully engage with this work. Frustratingly for companies, funders are often in the 'theatre literate' category, which perhaps further illuminates some of the funding issues I discussed in Section 2.2f above.

¹³ This was a real prisoner who was attending the hospital for treatment, handcuffed to the prison guard who was attending him.

KG's description of their audience equally doesn't fit what one would think of as a traditional theatre audience

"It tends to be parties of mixed couples, we do get birthdays, girl's nights and quite a few hen nights, so for that reason it's slightly more weighted towards women... In terms of occupation we've had everyone from builders and labourers to Finance Directors."

2.3b What do people get out of it?

2.3b i Ownership through interaction

At the end of every KG event, guests fill in a feedback form, and as Turner (KG) says:

"The most popular comment of what they liked... five times more than any other comment will be the actors, and the fact they don't come out of character...they like the interactivity."

DM and my experience at LttM would echo that. People enjoy the fact that these are characters and that they can talk to them, engage and steer things the way they want it to go. As Headon (DM) relates:

"They have an ownership... and they can intervene and interact and it can be gently turned to where they coming in, so it's not this finished thing that's just put in front of them, they can influence it, and I think the interaction gives it a power, a theatrical edge over artificially rehearsed pieces."

I think Headon is right in that it is about ownership, the fact that it is not a fixed piece gives them a sense of control. They have the choice to interact or not, to stay or go without embarrassment – even in a fixed audience situation. This, I believe, allows people to relax and engage more with the themes of the piece than if they feel 'trapped'. This feeling of 'choice without consequence', which the 'temenos' allows, is something audiences are unlikely to experience in everyday life. The freedom of it may be part of why it appears to be enjoyed so much. Certainly in LttM's hospital work, patients often experience very limited choice in what they do, and perhaps this is why the hospital work is so successful.

2.3b ii Social interaction

As I mentioned in Section 2.1c, engineering interaction between audience members is often a key part of the work, and this is something that people seem to enjoy about the work. Again, KG's feedback backs this up, with many audience members saying that they like the fact that they can make friends. In the feedback from LttM's hospital work as well, staff told us that friendships formed during projects often last long after the characters have left, giving support to each other through the difficulties of a hospital stay. Often it is the sense of shared purpose that LttM and KGs work generates (i.e. working together to solve the mystery/help the characters) that facilitates the strengths of friendships that it forms. The shared purpose can also break down social barriers very easily in street situations. For example, our Black History Month characters had a shop security guard and a gang of teenage boys working together to help them discover 'greatness'. Even in DM's street work it can be the social interaction generated that people enjoy, as Headon relates:

"People enjoy bringing their friends back to be fooled [on *Bear's Cheese*], they enjoy looking at their friends interacting."

Turner (KG) discusses why he feels this is unique to this work:

"If you go out or you watch TV, you're all sitting there being entertained in parallel, and you can sit and talk about it afterwards but if you talk during, you're interrupting it, but with this you can...Some people like going to the theatre because of the sense of social occasion, and it's that kick, only more so because you're in it and you can discuss it."

2.3b iii Role play

In this type of work, audience members, particularly in KG or LttM's work, will sometimes choose to play a role, to implicate themselves as part of the scenario. This often happens some way into the interaction, when the 'rules of the game' have been established and they are confident of their assertions being accepted. KG say they regularly have an audience member claim to be the 'Uncle George' of the family in the scenario. This is a character that audience members spontaneously create by themselves – and, interestingly, use the same name¹⁴. The actors, of course, entirely accept this assertion and respond to and refer to that audience member as 'Uncle

¹⁴ I find it fascinating that audience members with no prior knowledge spontaneously choose to be 'the same' character with the character name 'Uncle George'. I believe it is unsurprising, however, as the characters created in much of this work are very archetypal e.g. mother, father, mistress, trickster etc. Certainly Izzov looks at this in some depth in his book 'The Art of Play' that I have referenced earlier. The regular appearance of 'Uncle George' I therefore believe reflects the subconscious understanding by the audience of the archetypal nature of the characters. They therefore choose to become another archetype from the range they feel is being presented.

George' from then on. In LttM's work this is an even greater leap of faith since all characters are fantastical in some way. For example, an 87-year-old Moira, having built a relationship with our superhero characters Astron and Zetron, decided she was Moiratron from the same planet. The taking on of another role can also be more subtle than taking on a character, as KG describe:

"They can say things to the actors that they'd never say in 'real life' and get a similar reaction in a safe environment, with none of the usual drawbacks of being unspeakably rude and nosey."

Thus for some people they can gain a sense of possibility, of trying out who they could be, trying different aspects of themselves, again, as discussed above, without consequence. This is made possible by the safe space which the 'Temenos' creates.

2.3b iv An experience in their 'own' environment

For both LttM and DM's work, the majority of it is something that people 'happen upon' rather than specifically go to see. This work is brought to their own environment, whether that be a shopping centre, a street or their hospital bed. DM believe that the unexpectedness of that can allow the piece to have more impact, particularly if it is something challenging, as their work can be. I also believe that taking work to people opens up possibilities of seeing their environment in different ways. For example, our creation of a character who lived in the tower at Aarding & Hobbs in Clapham Junction, means there are people who met her who now associate her with it whenever they see it, even though the character is long gone. Of course, part of what maintains the work's unexpectedness and impact and people's willingness to engage with it in their own environment, is the fact that it is free. As Beedell relates, this work reaches those who might not make the effort to engage in other experiences, theatre or otherwise, but...

"Because it's in the shopping centre they'll give it five minutes, and they might actually go 'oh that's quite interesting that is there something happening next week' and they'll come back and check it out."

The things described here that an audience gains from the work are, for some of the artists involved, the *raison d'être* for making it, and I shall look at this in the section below.

2.4 Why is the work made?

All three companies exhibit real passion, both for the enjoyment of performing in this type of work and for the need they believe it meets in people and society. These seem to be the two driving factors behind making the work.

2.4a The artists' benefits

Cross (KG) relates why he enjoys performing in this work, something I would wholeheartedly agree with:

"I wanted to have more of a response from the audience than just them looking at me and clapping to have a more immediate interaction with them."

As Beedell (DM) relates, it is for him also, about that connection between people:

"Sometimes it's really unrewarding doing a street theatre... but then there are times when it's really brilliant and you make connections with ordinary people, who maybe aren't that sophisticated, but you really touch them in a special way and that's a very special reward."

Another factor that inspires the artists involved is the unpredictability of the form, as Beedell (DM) relates:

"It's exciting because you never know what's going to happen, whereas in a theatre you can predict pretty much your audience is going to sit there, you're going to start at the beginning of the play and you're going to get to the end, nobody's going to jump up and say 'you're a bunch of wankers', a bus isn't going to drive across the back of the stage, they're aren't going to be a bunch of snotty kids in pushchairs falling out and screaming, there isn't going to be a bunch of jobs storming the stage or alcoholics or schizophrenics, you're not going to get arrested, you're not really going to upset or annoy anyone - you are but they accept it because they've paid to be annoyed."

For me, it is these 'interruptions' which can make the performance so special, and while they may be different in a hotel or hospital setting they can, nonetheless provide inspiration. For example, before founding LttM, I did an interactive performance called *Sitelines* with State of Space

theatre, performing in train stations across South London. In one performance, a very drunk ex-station master happened to turn up, just as my character was sharing stories about steam trains, and started joining in and sharing his own stories. This worked so well the audience assumed he was another character!

It is probably important to mention that none of the three companies see their work as a replacement for traditional stage-and-audience theatre as Rob (KG) relates:

"I don't think interactive theatre in anyway replaces traditional theatre, I love going to see a play... where I can just sit down and say 'I'm going to focus on this' - this is more the social side of things, you can interact and the story is going on around you."

2.4b Meeting a need

All three companies appear to have an underlying belief in people's need to connect with something, to actively engage, and this drives their making of the work. As Turner (KG) relates:

"It's active entertainment, not passive, you're thinking about what you're watching. People seem to want more interactivity, they want to affect the outcome. They gain a feeling of control, a feeling of being part of something bigger... They aren't just a spectator - even if they're just sitting amongst us not necessarily engaging, they feel part of the event."

All three companies feel their work relates to everyone, although there is a strong sense of this being theatre for the non-theatre goer, as indicated in Section 2.3a above. Moreover, it seems that the desire to reach that wider audience is one of the prime reasons for making the work. For LttM and DM in particular, it is often about reaching those at the edges of society: "The disadvantaged, those on the fringe... Homeless people, drunks, drug users, prostitutes, 'hard' kids," as DM put it in their e-mail survey response.

DM also make this work as a means of disturbing the status quo. I also believe this is important, although I believe that all interactive performance does this to an extent, whether that is its intention or not. As Beedell (DM) relates:

"Peter Brook talks about the basic thing of theatre is disturbing people, and some people have problems with that word disturbance, but it's perturbing people as much as disturbance, it's upsetting the status quo, it's turning things on their heads, it's upsetting

people's expectations, it's transforming the spaces that we're in... You can surprise people in their normal everyday lives, you can bring in an element of fun or anarchy or surrealism or absurdity or theatrical mayhem or whatever."

I also believe that the 'disturbance' of having this work in people's 'own' spaces can have a lasting impact on the way they think about themselves and their space, as I discussed in Section 2.3b.

This seriousness of purpose can, however, sometimes be missed by those who have not experienced it directly, as Beedell (DM) relates:

"People who don't know our work or haven't experienced it see pictures of it and say 'oh you're just putting costumes on and messing about', but what we're doing is doing accessible stuff, bringing people in with the humour and likable characters... but actually we're talking about migration, we're talking about death, about people who disappear, we're talking about refugees... so people are there going 'oh yeah' aren't they silly and then actually yeah, I've read that stuff in the papers too.. and so it's a sort of subversion of people's expectations."

Such a political perspective can also present a challenge as Headon (DM) relates:

"For some bookers we're not easy... shopping centres want to push a positive message they don't want a negative theatre company being horrible on the street, so it's all becoming a bit clean and a bit nice."

There seems to be a driver in all three companies' work about meeting a need in society for a 'real experience', that the artists involved feel is missing from everyday life. Headon (DM) explains:

"All these characters are being cleaned up from the high street, you don't get so-and-so in Dixons who's a bit unusual, they're just very bland people now, not individuals that run their own business... all high streets are becoming the same, so when something unusual throws up in that environment it does have an impact."

Beedell picks up this theme:

"I think people are hungry for real experiences, I don't think they have enough real experiences. We're divorced from the soil, the elements, the countryside... you don't say hello to your neighbours anymore or say hello to people on the street... you don't have shared experience anymore, everything is an individual experience - i pods, mobile phones, - but collective experience you don't have anymore."

2.4c Evaluation

The impact of this work is very clear to those involved in it, and indeed, provides the inspiration for making it. Capturing that however is another matter, as Beedell (DM), in typical style, relates:

"People's lives do get transformed by this work, sometimes only for five minutes but sometimes permanently, for life, because they've seen something that's amazed them or intrigued them...okay it's a small transformation and it's not going to change the social fabric of society ...but we're not social workers and we're not there to change the fabric of society, we're there to chuck ideas around and stimulate debate, and if you want to evaluate that then you need armies of people with clipboards and evaluation forms talking to people as soon as they've seen a show, and you don't expect the artists to do that.. if they [The Arts Council] want to do that then they should go and do it."

I would only disagree with Beedell on two points: 1. I like to believe that enough of those small transformations will change the fabric of society and 2. I don't think any number of people with clipboards and evaluation forms could truly capture what goes on in this work.

While obviously, for projects where public or trust funding is involved, companies carry out evaluation based on the funding criteria, evaluation for the companies' own purposes is much more informal. Generally, it will be based on talking to people about what they thought of it, where possible, and from their own experience of performing in it. The actors' experience of performance is key to evaluation in interactive work. An actor will have spoken to perhaps 100 people in character over the course of a piece, and will therefore have a strong sense of what has worked or not for their audience.

KG tend to base their success criteria both on how they felt it went, but also on how many people sign up to their mailing list and subsequently return to future events. Interestingly, even though they are a commercial company, they don't base their evaluation on profit, as Turner relates:

"We can sit and talk about profit or loss on an event but that doesn't judge the event it judges our ability to sell it ... You can sell out, and still be awful, so we judge the performance by how much people come back."

For DM, it is about assessing the work as it goes along, evaluating for themselves what has and hasn't worked in each performance and adjusting accordingly. Most of this is between the actors, but they will also talk to bookers, if they have seen the show. However, as Headon relates, some bookers often book them without knowing the work: "They're not that interested in art, they just want to know how much and how long."

For LttM, we tried to capture some of that informal evaluation as we went along. This would involve our on-site Project Manager noting down 'magical moments' that happened and noting some of the conversations that happened back in the dressing room after a session out on the street or ward. These would be the kind of things that I've mentioned anecdotally throughout this piece of research. As a non-performing artist in this work, it was these notes that I would look at to assess how well the project was going. I would be looking for both the kind of 'magical moments' that were happening (e.g. did they show real engagement and creativity on the part of the audience) and the frequency with which they happened.

Section 3: Summary and Conclusions

Part 1: Summary and Conclusions

The scope of Interactive Theatre

The survey of ITC members suggests that the majority of companies in the small to mid-scale sector are making some interactive work. Moreover, it constitutes the primary output for almost half the companies surveyed. Most of those making the work believe it reaches a wider audience than traditional work. The most widely cited reason for making this work is for artistic purposes, followed by education and access purposes.

What is the work?

From my findings, several key elements can be drawn which I believe define Interactive Theatre:

1. *Interactive Theatre is a live encounter, in person*

It is clear from all the elements discussed in Section 2.1 that Interactive Theatre is an experience that happens live and in person. The elements require such subtlety, in terms of both awareness and performance, that I do not believe they could happen through any mediated form¹⁵.

2. *Interactive Theatre has fully interactive characters*

Interactive Theatre is an encounter with characters, not actors. The actors stay in character for the entire performance. Indeed, as I discussed, the impact of audience members meeting the actors out of character is, in most cases, detrimental to the work. This refusal to drop character, despite the 'reality challenges' discussed, means that characters are necessarily fully rounded. They respond not only to their audiences' reactions to the scenario, but also to any issue the audience wishes to raise – whether related or not. In this way, audience member's own stories become part of the performance.

¹⁵ This is not to say that this work could not involve new technologies. At LtM the discussion was had of characters that could be texted and DM's *Bear's Cheese* involved the use of video in picture frames in the yurt. However, these elements work in much the same way as any other hook or pre-prepared building technique, and do not substitute for the essential human interaction.

3. Interactive Theatre has clear scenarios

In all the companies' work, the characters have a scenario to play out. The scenario may be a full story line, as in KG's work; it may be an objective to achieve, as in LttM's work; or it may be a situation or theme as in DM's *Rubbish Heads* or *Film Crew*. LttM's characters always had an objective, but the work often included a story line (e.g. the love story between the 1930s Hollywood characters) or theme (e.g. the Black History Month characters). DM also produce work which spans this range of scenario types. The important point is that these characters do not simply exist – as, for example, a clown might. They have a 'reason to be' and this distinguishes this work from the walkabout characters or street clowns that do not have such a scenario.

4. Interactive Theatre has definable performance elements

This research shows that very different forms of Interactive Theatre can be broken down into key elements which can be defined:

- *Pre-interaction*: All the work involves some kind of 'Pre-interaction' including hooks, assessment, opening questions and establishing the 'Rules of the Game'.

- *Opening interactions*: There are similarly techniques for the initial interactions and establishing the 'Play-space' or Temenos, as I have described.

- *Building interaction*: The building of interaction probably involves the most diverse range of methods and techniques. I believe this is due to the necessity of being able to tailor the performance to whoever is there. Since people's needs and desires are so different, the performer must have a range of options in order to ensure their audience is engaged and connected. For me, probably the most important elements are those I discussed regarding responding to the environment and responding to people. However, I do believe that work which links its audience members to each other in some way has a great strength artistically, and allows the work to have a clear impact beyond its performance.

- *Ending the interaction*: There are clear choices that artists can make regarding how interaction is ended, which tend to be dictated by the depth to which the relationship has been developed through interaction. There are clearly some personal ethics involved in this, as I have discussed.

I believe there are parallels in these to the experience of going to see a traditional piece of theatre. The *Pre-interaction* parallels the marketing received, ticket buying, entering the theatre building and the curtain going up; the *Opening Interactions* parallel the opening scene and any exposition; the *Building interaction* parallels the playing out of the play; and the *Ending the interaction* parallels the fall of the curtain and the curtain calls. In Interactive Theatre, however, all of these elements are part of the narrative of the performance.

5. *In Interactive Theatre, character and scenario are made manifest through interaction*

While Interactive Theatre has clear characters and scenario, the way those manifest themselves is through interaction with the audience. Even the 'set piece' elements are described as primarily initiated through some interaction which the actors use as a 'springboard' to get into that set piece. The performance, therefore, is primarily *in* the interaction with the audience. Any interaction between characters that the audience are not involved in, has either been initiated by the audience, or is being used as a hook or technique to bring about interaction.

6. *[In general] The normal business of the performance site continues throughout the performance*

In my findings above, I discussed this as part of how the work was made. However, I believe it is more properly considered as part of what defines Interactive Theatre. I have clarified this point by saying 'in general', since I do believe it would be possible to make Interactive Theatre at a performance site where this was not the case. However, I believe that some of the real 'magic' of this work happens because of the unexpected elements that performing whilst the everyday life of, for example, a hotel, a shopping centre, or a hospital, continues. That is not to say that a different kind of 'magic' could be created by the focus of making this work in a performance space dedicated purely to the performance. As a practitioner, it is certainly something I would like to experiment with.

How is it made?

The way the work is made has some similarities across companies, although in one area there are great differences in approach.

Similarities:

1. *There is a creative team*

This work is created in collaboration. It is rare that a piece is the sole brainchild of one individual. Moreover, there is no hierarchy in the creative teams, ideas are 'thrown around' and treated entirely on their merit.

2. *The creators are, or have been, performers*

There is a sense amongst the case study companies that it would be impossible to create this work without having performed in it. In most cases, the creators are still involved in the performance. This form of theatre is very much an actor's form.

3. *Characters and scenario are created organically*

The process of creating characters is an entirely organic one, primarily involving the creative team (and anyone else involved at this point) airing thoughts and ideas in an open minded way.

4. *Setting, props and costume are considered as part of the creation process*

The non-actor elements are considered early on in the creative process. This is necessary as the kind of interactions that can happen can be facilitated or prevented by these elements. In addition, setting can often be part of the inspiration for the characters, as in LttM's hospital work.

5. *There is 'Behind the Scenes' work before and during the performance to facilitate it*

There is considerable 'behind the scenes' work prior to the performance, largely involving liaison with the performance site and its staff. There is also 'behind the scenes' work during the performance, primarily involving actors discussion of the performance session. This leads to the next performance session being refined and altered to meet the new understanding of the audiences needs such discussion brings about. Changes can involve delivering specific information to certain audience members, altering the manner of the playing or even finding and bringing in new props and costume.

6. In general, the companies operate without regular funding and their administration is financially supported by other jobs or personal sacrifice by the artists.

In all three case-study companies, income is generated primarily through 'sales' of the work, be that a booking for a 'gig' or a successful project grant application. In none of the companies is there significant additional income for non-project related research and development. Regular salaries are the exception and financial security is often only achieved by artists taking work outside the field. It is my assertion that this is not conducive to the development of Interactive Theatre as a theatrical form, or to ensuring that the quality of the work is maintained as its popularity grows. It is also my assertion that such business models lead to a lack of time for contemplation of the work, which I believe is, in part, what generates the differences I describe below.

Differences

1. Companies differ in their attitude to the necessity or otherwise of rehearsals, and hence to the selection of actors.

Some practitioners believe this work cannot be rehearsed since rehearsal means the spontaneity of interacting in the moment is lost e.g. DM. Others believe that there are methods through which the techniques of interaction can be rehearsed and possibilities for interactions explored e.g. LttM. All agree, however, that the precise content of the interactions cannot be rehearsed, as this is dependent on the audience.

Those who are 'against' rehearsal tend to also believe that actors either have a natural flair for this work, or cannot do it at all. They therefore select actors on this basis, which often means that they work with performers who already have experience in the field. This can lead to difficulty in finding new actors, as it restricts the pool from which talent can be drawn.

Those who are 'for' rehearsal also tend to believe that actors can be taught how to interact in character. They therefore select actors with strong characterisation and improvisation skills, and good interpersonal skills. The rehearsal process is then used to train actors in interactive technique, alongside the development of character and scenario.

It is my assertion that the reasons for these differences in belief, and therefore in preparation techniques, arise primarily from:

1. The type of training actors tend to receive in the UK – with few actors being trained in the skills necessary for this type of work

2. The companies' business models – in the rare cases where companies have business models that allow space for contemplation, or the structure of their work requires a more considered model, training and rehearsal techniques tend to be developed

Its Audience

Practitioners feel that their work is accessible to and enjoyed by all, since in the interaction it can be tailored to meet most needs and preferences. However, it seems that most describe their core audience as 'non-theatre goers'. Often, practitioners find that those who are 'theatre literate' struggle with the work, preferring to maintain the usual stage-and-audience relationship with the characters, thus missing the central element of the performance. In particular, many practitioners feel their work reaches those who could be described as 'socially excluded'.

Practitioners report that audiences enjoy this work for many reasons. My findings suggest that in addition to what they might get out of a traditional theatre experience, audiences also gain:

1. A sense of ownership and control, through the interaction
2. An opportunity for social interaction with other audience members
3. Opportunities to try out different roles and personalities for themselves
4. A new perspective on their own environment (when the performance is in 'their' space)

Why is it made?

The artists choosing to make this work do so for the enjoyment of the performance, because they want to reach certain groups and because they believe it meets a need in people or society.

- *Enjoyment*: Artists express their satisfaction in the tangible connection with audience members, and in the unpredictability of the form.

- *Reaching audiences*: Many practitioners get involved in this work because they want to reach precisely the type of 'socially excluded' groups that seem to respond well to it.

- *Meeting needs*: In this area, the following seem to be the key drivers:

- Practitioners believe that people have a need for connection and active engagement, and that this form meets that need

- Some practitioners feel that today's society lacks opportunity for 'real' experiences. They believe that in a society in which high streets are homogenised and people don't talk to their neighbours, Interactive Theatre can meet the need for the sort of 'real' encounters that are no longer part of everyday life.
- Some practitioners believe it is important that the status quo is 'disturbed' and that ideas and beliefs are challenged, and that this form provides them with the opportunity to do that.

Given these aims, evaluation of the work tends to be largely informal, based primarily on the sense the actors have from the interactions they have been involved in. However, some practitioners have sought ways to capture this sense in more formally, as I have described.

Conclusions

Interactive Theatre is made by practitioners who enjoy the performance of the work and believe in its impact on people. Its audience is primarily non theatre goers who enjoy the sense of ownership, the social interaction, the new perspectives and the role playing opportunities it gives them. Its creation is a collaborative, non-hierarchical process often involving the creative team taking on multiple roles, including significant work 'behind the scenes'. Funding for the work is limited and the company's existence is usually financially supported – in kind or otherwise – by the artists.

While these are the elements that lie behind Interactive Theatre, my primary purpose in this research was to define it. I believe the six elements I described above are the key factors in identifying a piece of work as Interactive Theatre. To reiterate, Interactive Theatre:

- is live and in person
- has definable performance elements paralleling traditional theatre
- has fully interactive characters and a clear scenario which are made manifest through interaction
- in general, takes place while the normal business of the performance site continues.

I am, of course, aware that there are other theatrical forms which can claim to be both 'theatre' and 'interactive' for example Forum Theatre and Playback Theatre. However, I believe that the body of work that I describe in this research has the strongest claim on the phrase 'Interactive Theatre', since in this work, the interaction *is* the theatre. The interaction is not an added extra, banter over the footlights, or something that happens when the actors stop acting to take suggestions. It is my belief then that the following is the most useful working definition of Interactive Theatre, as it is practised in the UK today:

Interactive Theatre is theatre in which the performance *is* the interaction between audience and characters, with the themes and narrative being made apparent through that interaction.

Part 2: Further Research

It is apparent from my research that Interactive Theatre is a highly accessible form that practitioners firmly believe reaches a wider audience than traditional work. I would therefore wish to carry out a second phase of this research to look at Interactive Theatre in the context of the changing needs and desires of today's cultural consumer. Many commentators have described a number of trends in contemporary life which impact on all consumers and their choices¹⁶. The challenge to the arts these trends present and how to meet them is a live debate across many artforms with 'personalisation' in the form of interactive art being heralded as a potential way forward^{17 18}. In particular, I would wish to look at whether Interactive Theatre provided a theatrical form that was able to answer those realities of contemporary life that provide a challenge to more mainstream theatrical forms.

¹⁶ See for example Yeoman, Brass, McMahon-Beattie (2006) *The Authentic Tourist* Visit Scotland Research Vol 1 No 4 March 2006; M Wilmott & W Nelson (2005) *Complicated Lives: The Malaise of Modernity* Wiley & Sons.

¹⁷ J Knell for Arts Council England (2006) *Whose Art is it anyway?* Accessed at 17th January 2007 http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/documents/projects/whoseartisitanyway_phpblPQaf.doc

¹⁸ Interview with Carsten Holler accessed on 17th January 2007 at <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/carstenholler/interview.shtm>

Appendices

APPENDIX 1. Summary of e-mail survey of ITC members, Sept – Oct 06

54 responses: 47 Theatre Companies, 1 Opera Company, 1 Sound Designer, 5 Dance Companies

Figures below relate to Theatre Companies only

How much interactive work is being made?

1. If Interactive Theatre is defined as "theatre in which characters have direct, two-way, meaningful conversations with their audience", how much of your work would you say is interactive?:

- | | |
|--|------------|
| a. every project | 28% |
| b. 50% or more of our projects | 21% |
| c. some, but less than 50% of our projects | 17% |
| d. none of our projects | 34% |

Does interactive work reach wider audiences?

2. Do you think Interactive Theatre provides a theatrical form that enables you to reach a wider audience than traditional theatre would?

- | | |
|--|------------|
| a. Yes | 55% |
| b. No | 32% |
| Possibly/Depends (<i>option added by some respondents</i>) | 11% |

If yes, please say which types of additional audiences you are reaching:

Audience	No. of mentions	% of those who said Yes mentioning
<i>Young People</i>	12	46%
<i>Non theatre goers</i>	9	35%
<i>Children</i>	6	23%
<i>Special Needs</i>	6	23%
<i>General public in shopping centres</i>	3	12%
<i>Community audiences</i>	3	12%
<i>Black and Ethnic Minority audiences</i>	3	12%
<i>Those in criminal justice system</i>	2	8%
<i>Visitors to Heritage site</i>	2	8%
<i>Socially excluded/disadvantaged</i>	2	8%
<i>Refugees & Asylum Seekers</i>	1	4%
<i>Elderly</i>	1	4%

Cont.

Why are people making interactive work?

3. If you answered a, b or c to Question 1, please say why you chose to make theatre interactively (select as many as apply):

- a. For education purposes – i.e. for use when trying to convey information
61%
- b. For artistic purposes – i.e. it's the form you choose to express yourselves artistically
90%
- c. For access purposes – i.e. to reach audiences that other theatre forms don't
55%
- d. For funding purposes – i.e. it helps you meet certain funding criteria
10%
- e. Other purposes – please state
32%

Other reasons	No of mentions
<i>Giving audience a voice</i>	3
<i>Encourage engagement with issues</i>	3
<i>Consultation/research</i>	2
<i>Better quality of audience engagement</i>	2
<i>Enjoyment of artists</i>	1
<i>Creating genuinely public form of theatre for all</i>	1
<i>To do things too risky for traditional theatre</i>	1
<i>Keep performances fresh</i>	1
<i>For education/training work</i>	1

Additional comments

4. Please feel free to add any additional comments you would like to make (selected quotes)

“Interactive Theatre is a great learning tool. By allowing the participant and performer distinction to be less defined, the theatrical experience becomes a more organic process, one that we feel is both more interesting and accessible for a younger audience (who learn better through an experiential approach), and results in more vibrant theatre.”

“The interactive events we provide vary from events geared to schools to working with journalists for Tourism organisations. We offer a whole range of interactive theatre from supplying historical or literary characters for heritage sites to providing murder mysteries for hotels. The only constant criteria is the interactive element.”

“We make promenade theatre in nature reserves, but also use paradigms from the computer gaming design world to make theatre that can be fundamentally controlled by our audience.”

APPENDIX 2. An example of the RIRBR model (React, Inquire, Relate, Build, Request)

The RIRBR model was one I created to help actors find their way into appropriate interactions. This was a particularly useful model for those entirely new to Interactive Theatre and therefore had yet to develop their own instincts. It is best illustrated with a simple example. The example below would be one for The Princess in LttM's *The Princess in the Sprite*, who had to make 1000 smiles before she could return to her kingdom

REACT	Wow, you have a really great smile, that's beautiful
INQUIRE	Are you any good at making other people smile too?
RELATE	I know what you mean, I find it so hard.
BUILD	I was trying to make Snow White smile last week and she just looked at me blankly – mind you she was in a glass coffin at the time but I don't think that's an excuse. Still I've got to make 1000 smiles before they'll let me go home to the castle.
REQUEST	Hey, would you mind, now I've spoken to you, if I counted your smile, as then I'd only have 999 to go?

In this example, I'm assuming very little response from the audience member. However, the model is such that at each stage in it there is space for the audience to respond, and space for the actor to add questions to encourage further interaction or bring out more narrative/back story, if they feel that is appropriate for the person they are talking to.

To explain each stage further:

REACT	involves expressing a reaction to something the person says or does, or something the actor observes about them
INQUIRE	involves asking them a question based on that
RELATE	involves making a personal link to the answer they give
BUILD	involves using that personal link to build narrative, back story or relationship
REQUEST	involves asking the person for help that (usually) links the narrative/back story to what has been discovered in this interaction.

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