

**Creating Safer ‘Unsafe’ Spaces: An Augmented Care Ethics Approach to Recontextualise
Risk Management for Audience Handling by Production Staff in Immersive Theatre**

MELISSA BONDAR

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Greenwich
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2025

DECLARATION

I certify that the work contained in this thesis, or any part of it, has not been accepted in substance for any previous degree awarded to me or any other person, and is not concurrently being submitted for any other degree other than that of Doctor of Philosophy which has been studied at the University of Greenwich, London, UK.

I also declare that the work contained in this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise identified and acknowledged by references. I further declare that no aspects of the contents of this thesis are the outcome of any form of research misconduct.

I declare any personal, sensitive or confidential information/data has been removed or participants have been anonymised. I further declare that where any questionnaires, survey answers or other qualitative responses of participants are recorded/included in the appendices, all personal information has been removed or anonymised. Where University forms (such as those from the Research Ethics Committee) have been included in appendices, all handwritten/scanned signatures have been removed.

Student Name: Melissa Bondar

Student Signature:
Date: 27 August 2025

First Supervisor's Name: Professor Jorge Lopes Ramos

First Supervisor's Signature:
Date: 16th September 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a thesis grounded in care ethics has often reminded me of the deeply connected nature of life and the many people who have cared for me and influenced this work in countless ways.

I begin by thanking my supervisory committee. Professor Jorge Zisels Lopes Machado Ramos has championed the potential of this inquiry from the very start, and Dr. David Hockham has patiently read more drafts than anyone should have to, serving as both a sounding board and a sympathetic ear over the past four years. I am also grateful to the third supervisors who stepped in along the way: Professor Andrew Knight-Hill, Dr. Natasha Oxley, Professor Misha Myers, and finally Professor Andrew King, whose sharp editing and encouragement I especially appreciate.

I am thankful as well for the PhD cohort and staff in the theatre department at the School of Design, whose support has been constant, whether in academic discussion, jumping through administrative hoops, help with teaching responsibilities, or over the occasional pint or dinner. Particular thanks go to Carlos Eduardo Andrade Pires, Orsolya Nagy, Fakhar Raza, Persis Jadé Maravala, Ed Currie, Ryley Pennycard, and Hope Freeman.

This thesis could not have been completed without the generous cooperation of the case study theatre companies and my workshop participants, especially the teams behind ZU-UK's *Within Touching Distance*, ROLL THE BONES' *Dead Letter No. 9*, and Coney's *1884*. I am also grateful to the Association of British Theatre Technicians, the British Stage Managers' Association, and the Production Managers' Forum for their help in recruiting participants. Thanks are due as well to The Irvine Foundation, WolfBrown, and Alan Brown for granting permission to reprint the image in Chapter 1.II.

I would also like to acknowledge the lasting influence of several academics earlier in my career, each of whom helped shape my thinking about care, immersive theatre, and stage management:

Dr. Mark Mallett, Mr. Dan Niccum, Dr. Jones Kaleli, and Dr. Rachel Zerihan.

Thanks to the excellent committee of friends who helped me practise for my viva: Mark, Justin, Orsi, Dan, Pat, Cadu, Raza, and Lane. Few things are less thrilling than reading a doctoral thesis, so I am especially grateful for your time and good humour.

A heartfelt thank you to Michelle Ginfida, Pam Dopart, and Meranda Bondar for crossing the Atlantic to visit me, sometimes repeatedly, over the last four years, and to Samantha Kenney, who not only made the journey but also joined me at one of the strangest immersive performances I've ever attended (thank you for *not* assaulting that actor). Your visits always gave me a good excuse to take a break and explore my adopted country.

The greatest thanks go to Sean Abbott, who has supported me since just six weeks into this journey and who has truly been its best outcome. And finally, to God, for providing *my* foundation of care.

This research is dedicated to my mother, who taught me how to believe in myself, and my father, who taught me how to be tough enough to never give up.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ethical and practical challenges of audience risk management in immersive theatre from the perspective of stage and front-of-house managers. It examines how production staff can establish safer environments for audiences without compromising artistic integrity, integrating care ethics into risk management to reimagine care as an essential element of risk communication and a broader safety culture. Key tensions include: balancing the aesthetic of secrecy, central to much immersive theatre, with the need for informed consent, managing risk communication between production staff and performance makers, and navigating the complex relational dynamics between performers and audiences whose diverse socio-cultural backgrounds shape their perceptions of risk.

This research develops a care ethic of immersive theatre, building on Joan Tronto's (1993) four stages of care: caring about, willingness to care for, caregiving, and care-receiving. By integrating care ethics into risk assessment, the study reframes risk management in immersive theatre as a practice that not only mitigates harm but also supports the positive risks that contribute to the medium's artistic impact. This approach advances a more nuanced safety culture, one that preserves the unique aesthetic of immersive theatre while ensuring that, when boundaries are inadvertently crossed, care remains central to the audience experience.

Using an exploratory, multi-method qualitative approach, the study employs case studies and a Practice-as-Research workshop to investigate how stakeholders perceive and communicate risk and care for immersive audiences. The work develops an approach that allows practitioners to refine risk communication strategies, address common misunderstandings between creative and production teams, and evaluate existing safety tools, highlighting the absence of prior training opportunities as a major stressor for production staff. This research proposes a change to risk communication design, asking practitioners to clarify the language used in safety discussions. This creates new modes of transmission for training through the workshop and improves message distribution techniques to ensure clearer and more effective communication across all stakeholders.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
ABSTRACT.....	5
FIGURES.....	13
TABLE OF ACRONYMS.....	14
Chapter 1 - The Risky Business of Immersive Theatre: Exploring the Intersection of Care and Risk Management.....	17
I. Audience Safety and Liability: Addressing Legal and Financial Concerns.....	20
II. Defining Immersive Theatre: Navigating Boundaries of Space and Interaction.....	22
III. Defining Audience Handling: The Evolution of Immersive Audiences.....	30
IV. Defining Production Staff: Cultivating Safety Within Immersive Theatre.....	33
V. Defining Performance Makers: Establishing the ‘Why’ in Immersive Theatre Creation.....	37
VI. Crafting Safe Spaces: Judging Acceptable Risks in Immersive Performances.....	40
VII. Defining Acceptable Risk: How Formulaic Models Shape Theatre Safety.....	42
VII. Exploring the Role of Production Staff in Audience Safety and Care: Multi-Methods Research for Immersive Theatre Risk Management.....	46
IX. Build Your Own Cult(ure) of Care: Outcomes from this Research.....	49
X. Cultivating Safer Spaces: Mapping the Chapters of this Thesis.....	51
Chapter 2 – Augmenting Immersive Risk Management with Care Ethics: A Conceptual Overview of Risk in Immersive Theatre, Care Ethics and Care Tools.....	57
I. Risk in Immersive Theatre: Creator-Centric Perspectives.....	60
II. Audience Risks in Immersive Theatre: Physical Risks.....	67
III. Audience Risks in Immersive Theatre: Psychological Risks.....	69
IV. Audience Risks in Immersive Theatre: Social Risks.....	74
V. Typology of Audience Risks in Immersive Theatre.....	77
VI. Risk Perception and the Immersive Audience Experience.....	79
i. Subjectivity, Socio-Cultural Factors and Risk Perception.....	82
VII. Trust as a Mechanism for Encouraging Acceptable Risk-Taking.....	86
VIII. Defining Care: The Paradox of Protecting Audiences.....	90
IX. Recontextualising Care Ethics as a Bridge to Manage Acceptable Risk in Immersive Theatre.....	92
a. Attentiveness: Noticing the Need for Care.....	95
b. Responsibility and Competence: A Necessary Partnership to Successfully Provide Care.....	98
c. Responsiveness: Informed Reflections on the Care Provided.....	100
X. Towards Care Craftsmanship for Production Staff: Utilising Care Aesthetics.....	102
i. Content Warnings: Empowering Audience Choice Pre-Ticket Purchase.....	104
ii. Orientations: Informing Audiences of Performance Boundaries Pre-Show.....	106
iii. Consent: Balancing an Aesthetic of Secrecy with Informed Consent.....	108
iv. Safewords: Aiding Audience Consent During Performances.....	110
v. Decompression Spaces: A Place for Care Post-Performance.....	112

vi. Appropriate Staffing: Sustaining Audience Care from Arrival to Exit.....	113
XI. Recontextualising Risk Management: Towards A 'Careful Art' of Audience Management in Immersive Theatre.....	114
Chapter 3 - Understanding Individual Perceptions of Risk in Idiographic Immersive Performances: A Multi-Methods Phenomenological Approach.....	117
I. A Case Study Approach: Exploring Individual Lived Experience Through Interviews, Observations and Questionnaires.....	123
<i>i. Case Studies: Sampling Selection and Key Challenges.....</i>	<i>125</i>
<i>ii. Case Studies: Interviews.....</i>	<i>127</i>
1. Interview Schedule Design: Balancing Artistic Vision with Safety Protocols.....	129
2. Case Studies: Limitations of Interview Design.....	131
<i>iii. Case Studies: Questionnaires.....</i>	<i>133</i>
1. Case Studies: Questionnaire Design.....	134
2. Case Studies: Limitations of Questionnaires and Adjusting the Project Design....	136
<i>iv. Case Studies: Observations.....</i>	<i>136</i>
1. Case Studies: Observation Design.....	138
2. Case Studies: Limitations of Observations.....	140
v. Case Studies: Document Analysis.....	142
1. Case Studies: Documents Analysed.....	142
2. Case Studies: Documents Analysis Limitations.....	143
<i>vi. Case Study Data Analysis Method.....</i>	<i>144</i>
1. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.....	144
2. Thematic Analysis.....	145
<i>vii. Case Studies: Pilot Study.....</i>	<i>146</i>
II. Practice-as-Research (PaR) Workshops: Revealing Tacit Knowledge Through Collective Dynamics.....	150
<i>i. Immersive Safety Cult(ure): Cult Building as a Metaphor.....</i>	<i>155</i>
<i>ii. Practice-as-Research: Workshop Design.....</i>	<i>157</i>
<i>iii. Practice-as-Research: Data Collection.....</i>	<i>161</i>
1. Practice-as-Research: Surveys and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).....	161
2. Practice-as-Research: Artifact Collection.....	163
3. Practice-as-Research: Observations and Reflective Practice.....	164
4. Practice-as-Research: Limitations.....	166
<i>iv. Practice-as-Research: Workshop Pilot.....</i>	<i>167</i>
III. Case Studies and Practice-as-Research Workshops: Synthesising Data.....	170
IV. Ethical Considerations.....	175
<i>i. Research Ethics: Epoché Statement.....</i>	<i>177</i>
IV. Towards a Care Ethics Approach to Audience Handling.....	178
Chapter 4 - Case Study #1: ROLL THE BONES' Dead Letter No. 9.....	180
I. The Interview Participants.....	182

i. <i>Primary Risk Creator: Taylor Myers, Director and Artistic Director (Performance Maker)</i>	183
ii. <i>Primary Risk Manager: Ellery Brown, Stage Manager (Production Staff)</i>	183
1. <i>A Brief Note on UK vs. US Stage Management</i>	184
II. <i>The Performance: Dead Letter No. 9</i>	185
i. <i>Observations and Document Analysis: Dead Letter No. 9</i>	185
1. <i>Document Analysis</i>	185
2. <i>Observations</i>	187
ii. <i>Identifying Risk Factors</i>	189
1. <i>Physical Risks</i>	189
2. <i>Psychological Risks</i>	191
3. <i>Social Risks</i>	191
III. <i>Embracing the Collective and Imperfect Nature of Care: Applied Care Ethics Principles in Practice at ROLL THE BONES</i>	192
i. <i>'You would never be allowed to do this as a psychological experiment': Building Ethical Foundations at ROLL THE BONES</i>	193
ii. <i>'Percolating': The Tempo of Care at ROLL THE BONES</i>	199
iii. <i>'Really listening to where people were': Developing Active Listening for Care</i>	203
iv. <i>'Seen but not noticed': Production Staff Invisibility and Audience Care at ROLL THE BONES</i>	206
v. <i>'How can I check in at multiple stages with the audience member and pivot away from going deeper if that's not what's wanted?': Communicating Risk Without Breaking Immersion</i>	210
vi. <i>'What are we going to do about this?': Embracing the Messy Nature of Care</i>	213
IV. <i>Carefulness in Action: Tools for Competent Immersive Audience Handling</i>	215
i. <i>'Here's how you gracefully, acrobatically maneuver resistant, sceptical, aggressive audience members into a place of receptivity': Playtesting</i>	215
ii. <i>'It really is meeting people where they're at to try and support them into the space': Orientations</i>	221
iii. <i>'I think it was not unusual for... there's going to be somebody crying at some point during the night. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. That's them having a reaction to the piece': Responding with Emotional Intelligence</i>	223
iv. <i>'Antenna up': Post-Performance Feedback and Care</i>	226
V. <i>Dead Letter No. 9: Care and Connection As Guiding Factors</i>	229
Chapter 5 - Case Study #2: Coney's 1884	231
I. <i>The Interview Participants</i>	233
i. <i>Primary Risk Creator: Rhianna Ilube, Writer and Project Director (Performance Maker)</i>	233
ii. <i>Primary Risk Manager: Marie Klimis, Producer (Production Staff)</i>	234
iii. <i>Supporting Risk Manager: Brent Tan, Stage Manager (Production Staff)</i>	236
iv. <i>Supporting Risk Manager: Jenni Sinclair, Venue Duty Manager (Production Staff)</i>	236
II. <i>The Performance: 1884</i>	237
i. <i>Observations and Document Analysis: 1884</i>	239

1. Document Analysis.....	239
2. Observations.....	242
ii. <i>Identifying Risk Factors</i>	245
1. Physical.....	245
2. Psychological.....	246
3. Social.....	247
III. Audience Care in Coney's 1884.....	248
i. <i>'What do you need to do your best work?': Comprehensive Care Communication as Company Philosophy</i>	249
ii. <i>'How do you play well?': Understanding audience types and setting appropriate boundaries</i>	252
iii. <i>'You're on top of things, you know what's happening': Invisible Care Through Behind-the-Scenes Pre-Planning</i>	255
iv. <i>'It's always about the communication part': Communication Practices Grounded in Care in Coney's 1884</i>	256
v. <i>'A willingness to plan and keep learning throughout': The Processual Nature of Care and Acceptance of Imperfection</i>	263
IV. Pre-Performance, In-Performance and Post-Performance Tools for Managing the Audience.....	264
i. <i>'In watching it over and over again, you learn all the ways that audiences might play': Playtesting as Preparatory Practice</i>	264
ii. <i>'What's gonna happen? What are the themes?': Advance Information and Content Warnings</i>	266
iii. <i>'Shall we throw fruit?': Setting Boundaries Through Orientation</i>	267
iv. <i>'Prepared to deal with situations': In-Performance Escalation Plans</i>	270
v. <i>'When did you play in a way that surprised you?': Post-Performance Feedback and Aftercare in 1884</i>	272
V. 1884: Mapping Care Frameworks through Coney Practices.....	275
Chapter 6 - Build Your Own Cult: A Practice-as-Research Approach to Studying Immersive Audience Risk and Care	277
I. Revealing a Risk Language through PaR Insights: Iterative Design and the Need for Translational Communication in Immersive Performance.....	280
i. Adaptations to Workshop Design in Response to the Pilot Study.....	282
ii. Adaptations to Workshop Design in Response to Workshop One.....	284
iii. Adaptations for Future Workshops.....	288
iv. Reflection: Revealing the Two Languages of Risk Through Workshop Iterations.....	289
II. Towards Defining Care Ethics in Immersive Performance.....	292
i. Workshop One Data.....	293
ii. Workshop Two Data.....	298
iii. Reflection: A Call for Explicit Ethical Frameworks and Deliberate Strategies.....	300
III. Nuancing Immersive Theatre's Languages of Risk: Communicating Consent.....	300
i. Workshop One.....	300
ii. Workshop Two.....	303

iii. Reflection: Carefully Speaking the Language of Risk Through Examination of Consent Practices.....	305
IV. Reimagining a Toolkit: Designing Immersive Theatre with Care Ethics at the Core.....	306
i. Workshop 1: Where Did Participants See the Need for Tools?.....	307
ii. Evidence of Gaps: Responsibility, Feasibility, and Training.....	308
iii. Workshop 2: Deepening the Design Through Introduction of Ethics.....	310
iv. Reflection: Toward a Care-Centred Toolkit.....	313
V. Toward Safer Unsafe Spaces: From PaR Discoveries to Reimagining An Augmented Care Ethics Approach to Reconstitute Risk Management for Audience Handling in Immersive Theatre.....	315
Chapter 7 – Recontextualising Risk and Care Ethics in Immersive Theatre.....	321
I. Defining Care Ethics in Immersive Theatre.....	323
i. Care as a Philosophical Foundation: From Rigid Procedural Regulation to Adaptable Guiding Principles.....	323
1. Caring With: How Care Can Function for Production Staff at an Institutional Level.	324
2. Attentiveness: Recognising the Needs of the Audience through Active Observation.....	329
3. Responsibility: Comparing Formal and Informal Responsibility Structures.....	332
4. Competence: Planning for the How of Responding to the Audience.....	336
a. Temporal Ethics: Time as an Aesthetic, Preparatory and Responsive Dimension of a Competency and Care in Immersive Theatre.....	338
5. Responsiveness: Determining the Success (or Lack Thereof) of Care.....	340
ii. Toward a Care Ethics Philosophy of Immersive Theatre.....	342
II. Positioning Production Staff as Caregivers in Immersive Theatre: Care Ethics and Invisible Labour.....	345
i. The Invisibility of Care: Labour That Disappears.....	346
ii. Preparatory Care and the Emotional Load of Readiness.....	350
iii. Structural Conditions and the Causes of Invisibility.....	352
iv. Toward a Shared Ethics: Bridging Artistic and Production Cultures.....	353
IV. Introducing the Two Languages of Risk.....	354
i. Communication as a Form of Care.....	354
ii. Dissonant Languages of Risk.....	356
iii. Bridging the Gap: Toward Translational Practice.....	360
V. A Redesigned Toolkit for Immersive Theatre Audience Handling Built on Care Ethics...	361
i. Pre-Performance Tools.....	361
1. Playtesting: Rehearsing Uncertainty.....	362
2. Content Warnings: Tools of Trust and Transparency.....	363
3. Orientation: Pre-Performance as Ritual and Relationship.....	365
4. Consent: Beyond the Ticket Purchase.....	366
ii. In-Performance Tools.....	368
1. Active Listening.....	368

2. Embodied Attentiveness, Emotional Intelligence and Active Observation.....	369
3. Audience Typologies.....	370
4. Clear Escalation Plans and Role Separation.....	371
5. Environmental Supports: Quiet Spaces and Decompression Spaces.....	371
iii. Post-Performance Tools.....	373
1. Revisiting Environmental Supports: Quiet Spaces and Decompression Spaces	373
2. Post-Show Check-Ins, Audience Feedback and Observation.....	374
iv. Limitations of Care.....	375
VI. Methodological Reflections and Researcher Insights.....	376
VII. Recontextualising Audience Risk Management through a Care Ethics of Immersive Theatre: How Production Staff Can Contribute to Establishing Safer Spaces for Immersive Audiences.....	380
Chapter 8 - Creating Safer ‘Unsafe’ Spaces: Reflections on this Research and What Comes Next.....	382
I. Contributions to the Field of Immersive Theatre: The Aesthetic Practice of Care.....	387
II. Contributions to the Field of Risk Management.....	389
i. A Dual Language of Risk.....	390
ii. A Typology of Audience Risk in Immersive Theatre.....	390
iii. Making Invisible Labour Visible.....	391
iv. A Practice-as-Research Workshop Model.....	391
v. A Reimagined Care-Centred Toolkit for Audience Management.....	392
III. Contributions to Care Ethics.....	393
i. Communication as the Foundation of Ethical Action.....	393
ii. Embedding Care in Theatre Design.....	394
iii. Revisiting Invisible Labour.....	394
IV. Contributions to Communication Design: Translating Risk and Care Communication...	395
V. Limitations of the Research.....	396
VI. Suggestions for Future Research.....	399
VII. How can production staff contribute to establishing safer spaces for immersive audiences while still supporting artistic boundary-pushing?.....	401
Reference List.....	403

APPENDICES

Appendix A - <i>Dead Letter No. 9</i> Performance Maker Transcript, Taylor Myers	422
Appendix B - <i>Dead Letter No. 9</i> Production Staff Transcript, Ellery Brown	436
Appendix C - <i>1884</i> Performance Maker Transcript, Rhianna Ilube	457
Appendix D - <i>1884</i> Production Staff Transcript, Marie Klimis	487
Appendix E - <i>1884</i> Production Staff Transcript, Jenni Sinclair	526
Appendix F - <i>1884</i> Production Staff Transcript, Brent Tan	542
Appendix G - Production Staff Interview Question Schedule.....	567
Appendix H - Performance Maker Interview Question Schedule	568

Appendix I - Workshop Activities Running Order	570
Appendix J - Approved University Ethics Forms including Participant Information Sheets ..	574
Appendix K - Workshop Cult Example Sheets	587
Appendix L - Workshop 1 Mentimeter Responses	597
Appendix M - Workshop 1 Survey Responses	609
Appendix N - Workshop 2 Mentimeter Responses	612
Appendix O - Workshop 2 Survey Responses	623
Appendix P - A Redesigned Toolkit for Immersive Theatre Audience Handling Built on Care Ethics	627
Appendix Q - IPA Analysis Spreadsheet from Interview Data	630

FIGURES

Figure 1 - Audience Involvement Spectrum from Alan S. Brown and Jennifer L.

Novak-Leonard's Getting In On the Act report (2011) *Reprinted with permission* 27

Figure 2 - Typology of Audience Risks in Immersive Theatre 77

Figure 3 - Research Design Flow Chart 170

TABLE OF ACRONYMS

ABTT – *Association of British Theatre Technicians*: A professional organization providing support, advocacy, and training to technical and production theatre staff in the United Kingdom; referenced in relation to industry standards and best practices for production staff and immersive theatre safety.

DLN9 – *Dead Letter No. 9*: An immersive theatre performance by ROLL THE BONES that functions as the first case study in this research.

DSM – *Deputy Stage Manager*: A stage management role primarily tasked with preparing the prompt book and calling cues during a performance, serving as a key operational link during live shows.

FoH – *Front of House*: The management team responsible for audience-facing operations in theatres, including safety oversight, audience care, and risk mitigation, particularly critical in immersive theatre where audience-performer boundaries blur.

GDPR – *General Data Protection Regulation*: European Union regulation on data protection and privacy.

H&S – *Health and Safety*: General term referring to workplace health and safety responsibilities.

HSE – *Health and Safety Executive*: The UK government agency responsible for regulating and enforcing workplace health, safety, and welfare.

IPA – *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*: A qualitative research approach used to explore how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, emphasizing detailed examination of personal perceptions and meanings.

MHFA – *Mental Health First Aid*: A training and support approach that teaches individuals how to identify, understand, and help someone who may be experiencing a mental health issue or crisis.

OH & S – *Occupational Health and Safety*: A multidisciplinary field concerned with the safety, health, and welfare of people at work.

PaR – *Practice-as-Research*: A methodological framework that reveals tacit knowledge by making it explicit through creative practice, especially useful in understanding experiential aspects such as risk in immersive theatre.

PMF – *Production Managers’ Forum*: An industry network representing production managers, focused on facilitating best practices and professional development in theatre production management roles.

PSM – *Production Stage Manager*: A senior stage management role common in U.S. theatre practice, overseeing stage management staff and responsible for both technical coordination and artistic integrity throughout the production run.

PTSD – *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*: A mental health condition triggered by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event.

SM – *Stage Manager*: A trained specialist responsible for managing, facilitating, and safeguarding a theatre production throughout its lifespan, including coordination, communication, safety, and artistic leadership; often subdivided into Company Stage Manager (CSM), Deputy Stage Manager (DSM), and Assistant Stage Managers (ASMs) in UK practice.

UK – *United Kingdom*: Geographic region referenced in legal and procedural contexts.

US – *United States of America*: Geographic region referenced in legal and procedural contexts.

'I'm convinced that when our dog dies, he'll run straight from our arms in this world to my mother on the other side. I need to be there to whisper that he must bring her all our love.' I quietly share this deeply personal thought - a story I have never spoken aloud before. I'm sitting in a brightly lit treehouse, surrounded by strangers who, like me, have been drawn here by the promise of an immersive theatre experience.

The space feels both intimate and exposed, a curious blend of safety and vulnerability. Yet, as the words leave my mouth, I wonder how I've reached this point. How did this performance coax such a raw truth from me? And what will the others, my fellow audience members, do with it?

Have I disrupted the fragile connection we've been building, perhaps even risked being quietly ostracised for my candor? In this moment, an unexpected risk of immersive theatre reveals itself, the unpredictable, unspoken social consequences of baring one's soul.

(reflections from Dead Letter No. 9, 29 December 2023)

I sit at a table with five others, the air heavy with unspoken tension as we face a series of demands from an unseen, oppressive regime. Each request, renaming our home, surrendering our potted plants, seems trivial on the surface, but to me, they carry immense weight. I push back every time, intent on resisting, but I'm overruled by the group at every turn. The themes of the performance, rooted in colonisation and the 1884 Berlin Conference, amplify my uncertainty. Am I standing up for what's right, or am I hindering us all?

Though this is only a performance, the emotional toll feels all too real. I leave the table wrestling with a deep sense of failure and self-questioning, unsure whether I stood for my values or simply alienated myself. This moment underscores the psychological risk inherent in immersive theatre: the ability to provoke raw, unfiltered introspection that lingers far beyond the story's end.

(reflections from 1884, 20 April 2024)

I stand in the corner of a crowded room, stage managing an immersive theatre performance. My job is to keep everything running smoothly, protecting the performers, coordinating the team, and ensuring the audience's safety. Tonight, the two lead characters weave their flirtation down a narrow hallway, and nearly fifty audience members rush to follow them. It's a crush of bodies, some moving politely, others shoving past. I watch as a woman is jostled hard into the wall and falls. I notice she is bleeding. Crouching beside her, apologising, I radio an Assistant Stage Manager for a band-aid. The performers I should be protecting run ahead, unguarded, and the crowd is pressing closer. Moments like this underline the physical risks of immersive theatre, risks I can't always mitigate, no matter how much I try.

(reflections from Ziegfeld's Midnight Frolic, 13 June 2015)

Chapter 1 - The Risky Business of Immersive Theatre: Exploring the Intersection of Care and Risk Management

As a professional stage manager for immersive productions in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), where audience participation is central, I have had the opportunity to observe performers and audiences across multiple performances. Over time, I became intrigued by the varying responses from audience members. While some audience members thrived in the immersive environment, others seemed to struggle, appearing frightened, confused, or hesitant to engage. This led me to question what could be done to support those who faced these challenges. Furthermore, as an audience member myself who enjoys this form of theatre because of the pleasantly thrilling ways it can often push me beyond my usual boundaries, I have personally encountered productions that posed unexpected risks to me, highlighting the social, psychological and physical hazards that can arise in immersive performances. The social and psychological risks are illustrated within the first two vignettes above, emphasising a critical research gap: how can production staff proactively manage audience risk without compromising artistic integrity?

The physical risk vignette, the third, is from Speakeasy Dollhouse's *Ziegfeld's Midnight Frolic* (2015), a show I worked on as a stage manager, and one of several immersive performances I worked on that left me distressed about the relationship between audiences and care. Drawing from my personal experience as an audience member in the case studies and from my professional experience in the development of a Practice-as-Research workshop, both presented in the following chapters of the thesis, this thesis examines the ethical and practical challenges of

immersive theatre risk management in the UK and US, particularly from the perspective of stage and front-of-house managers.

Despite the increasing popularity of immersive theatre, research on audience risk management remains underdeveloped and the perspectives of those who manage these risks, the stage managers and front of house managers, are absent from the literature. This thesis addresses that gap by investigating how production staff, specifically stage managers and front-of-house managers, can contribute to establishing safer environments for immersive theatre audiences. Recognising that immersive theatre is inherently risky and that existing scholarship inadequately addresses this issue from the perspective of production staff, my research question is: **How can production staff contribute to establishing safer spaces for immersive audiences while still supporting artistic boundary-pushing?**

The study examines how audience care is currently addressed, evaluates the effectiveness of existing risk mitigation strategies, and considers how these practices vary across theatre companies. Additionally, it explores how integrating care ethics can enhance risk management practices and identifies tools that can improve production staff competencies.

Upon investigating this topic, I discovered a significant gap in scholarship concerning the role of production staff as audience handlers in immersive theatre. By audience handlers, I mean the skilful management of audience behaviour by actors and production staff in immersive theatre, balancing safety with the creative team's aesthetic intentions, a term expanded on later in Section III of this chapter. Even more striking is the scarcity of research that directly engages with individuals performing these roles, underscoring the need for focused inquiry in this area.

This thesis seeks to address that gap through interviews with production staff to ascertain how audience risk management is currently considered in immersive theatre and how the concept of care influences their work. This research also explores how care ethics can serve as a philosophical foundation for audience handling. Finally, this study aims to impact industry through development of a workshop for production staff on risk management for audience handling in immersive performances.

In this introduction, I will share examples of shortfalls in risk management of immersive performance evidenced through recent lawsuits brought against immersive theatre companies to help illustrate the urgency of the research. Before delving into to the key focus of the investigation, which is the tensions, complications and potential compatibilities in *risk* and *care* for handling audiences in immersive theatre, this chapter will introduce the arena of the research, immersive theatre, and then define the key participants in audience care: the performance makers and production staff, as well as what is meant by the term audience handling in this research, before moving into discussion of the core theories in risk management and care ethics that influenced this study in Chapter 2. After establishing the working definitions of those terms for this thesis, I will provide a very brief overview of the traditional risk management practices employed by most theatre companies to better illustrate the existing gap the subsequent chapters seek to address. Further investigation of theories of risk and risk perception, specifically in immersive theatre, will then be explored in depth in the literature review found in Chapter 2. In this thesis, care ethics is defined as a relational, performance-sensitive, and embodied moral framework centred on responsiveness to others' needs and the ongoing practice of care. This description is developed from Tronto's (1993; 2015) politics of care and further emphasises

Hammington's (2024) focus on listening as a core skill for communication and relationship development. These concepts and the influence of other notable care ethicists on my definition of care ethics are also discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

My research does not seek to limit the provocative nature of immersive theatre but aims to develop a safety culture that ethically supports audiences through its challenges. Accordingly, in this thesis, the term 'safer "unsafe" spaces' is in reference to the aspirational goal of the artwork without compromising the inherent risk in immersive artistic encounters. Theatre intimacy training experts Laura Rikard and Amanda Rose Villarreal (2023) advise that a 'safe' space is a theoretical concept, and they challenge practitioners, and I argue this challenges the production staff, to reframe their thinking to 'creat[e] spaces of acceptable risk' (p. 2). The notion of 'acceptable risk' is well aligned with the intentions of this research and a concept that will be explored further in the case study chapters.

For the production staff, who function as the performance's safety managers, poor risk management results in three kinds of consequences: moral, legal and financial (iosh & RB Health & Safety Solutions, 2018, p. 10). While the core of this thesis is heavily focused on the moral, or ethical, consequences of poor risk management and the lack of care that is often pervasive in immersive theatre culture, it is also noteworthy that this research also has the potential to impact legal and financial consequences as outlined in the next section.

I. Audience Safety and Liability: Addressing Legal and Financial Concerns

As early as 2013, Gareth White argued that participatory performances have their own unique ‘horizon of risk’ (p. 81) that requires special consideration. In the same year, Mary LaFrance (2013), an American-based entertainment lawyer, discussed audience-centric risks in her article ‘The Disappearing Fourth Wall: Law, Ethics, and Experiential Theatre,’ which focused on the works of several popular international immersive theatre companies that are still creating work.

LaFrance immediately highlighted questionable environmental hazards in Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More* (2011-present), which closed its New York location in 2025 but remains running in Shanghai (Feldman, 2024). From uneven floors to heavy fire doors and dark corridors, the potential for injury to audience members has been exacerbated by immersive scenic design choices. A fight scene that occurred in close quarters resulted in a lawsuit when an actor kicked an audience member in the head during the choreography, knocking her unconscious (Marsh & Rosario, 2016). It is easy to find supplementary anecdotal evidence for the common occurrence of wounds in Punchdrunk fan groups on Facebook where several threads are focused on injuries sustained among experienced audience members. Without improving safety protocols in immersive spaces, audience members will remain vulnerable to preventable harms.

Although LaFrance’s (2013) notable article is now more than a decade old, several of these theatre companies are still performing the same shows. One Step at a Time Like This’ *En Route* (2009-present) was highlighted by LaFrance as a performance fraught with litigious potential. It is a solo audience experience that occurs on busy streets, requires the audience to walk through doors that may not be clearly marked and to graffiti a wall. While *En Route* has avoided lawsuits so far, the same is not true of a similar performance in New York. *Accomplice* (2004-present), in

New York City, has only grown over the last decade since LaFrance wrote her article, branching out to additional neighbourhoods of New York City while still retaining its original combination of walking tour/adventure theatre/scavenger hunt. One element of *Accomplice* involves use of a bicycle, which resulted in an injury lawsuit (*Michael Sarafolean v. Accomplice New York*, 2010) when the brakes allegedly stopped working for an audience member on the Brooklyn Bridge.

These legal and financial concerns raise important questions about the current level of safety for immersive audiences and begs the question: **How is audience care currently considered in immersive theatre by the theatre companies creating it?** Examining this question revealed how inadequate risk management in immersive performances can lead to significant legal and financial consequences. My research therefore explores how production staff can mitigate these very tangible negative consequences by actively contributing to the creation of safer environments for immersive audiences. The next section will define the use of immersive theatre in this thesis, highlighting the unique elements that generate these challenges.

II. Defining Immersive Theatre: Navigating Boundaries of Space and Interaction

The word *theatre* carries a multitude of meanings, referring to a building, an activity, an institution, or an art form (Balme, 2008, p. 1). Focusing here on theatre as an art form, theatre has its origins in religious ritual (Schechner, 2003), which is in itself a kind of participatory theatre, and its definition has been a topic of debate for millennia. In the fourth century B.C.E., Aristotle (2000) provided one of the earliest recorded discussions of theatre, emphasising imitation, narrative structure, and the goal of eliciting catharsis, a purging of negative emotions, in the audience. Over the ensuing centuries, theatre theorists have expanded and contested these elements, adding layers of complexity to what constitutes theatre. Willmar Sauter (2000), in *The*

Theatrical Event, asserts that ‘the idea of theatre is too wide to be caught in a single statement or in some recipe-like descriptions,’ (p. 1) before focusing on the connective moment between the audience and the performer as the theatrical event. Similarly, David Hockham (2022), in his thesis on technical theatre, describes theatre as ‘a relationship between the audience, the performer, and the stage’ (p. 31). While these perspectives highlight the breadth of theatre as a concept, the distinction between mainstream and experimental theatre from the twentieth-century onwards provides a more focused lens into immersive theatre.

Mainstream theatre, as Richard Schechner (2000) notes, includes performances such as regional theatre, and commercial theatre (pp. 5-6). It includes major productions on Broadway or the West End which typically adhere to traditional conventions and appeal to a wide audience. Innovative experimental works like Coney’s *Telephone* (2020-2025), performed during the COVID-19 pandemic, utilised several of these traditional conventions expected by mainstream audiences such as prologues, opening music, stage curtains, and a theatre bar to remind audiences they were in a ‘theatre’ even when watching the performance through their computer screen (Chen, 2022, p. 27).

In contrast, experimental theatre pushes boundaries, often prioritising the conditions of performance over the narrative. Theodore Shank (2014) highlights experimental theatre’s focus on the performance itself, exploring the role of performers and the circumstances of their work (p. 356). Similarly, in his PhD thesis on *The Construction of Skill in Contemporary Experimental Theatre*, Giacomo Giuseppe Belloli (2018) identifies recurring themes in experimental theatre, such as an emphasis on themes of risk and failure, as well as a resistance to text-driven approaches (p. 1).

Immersive theatre, which began as a form of experimental theatre, is increasingly moving toward mainstream acceptance, reflected in its rapid growth. The Immersive Entertainment Industry's annual report indicated that immersive experiences had become a \$52 billion industry in the United States (Brigante & Elger, 2020). By 2025, the global market for immersive entertainment has grown to just over \$96 billion U.S. dollars, with projections suggesting a 26.3% annual growth rate from 2025 to 2030 (Grand View Research, 2025). A 2019 report from the United Kingdom identified the existence of 4,500 immersive companies with 58% reporting growth (Belo & Gustavo, 2024). Additionally, the British government allocated £18 million in funding towards immersive experiences in 2019 through UK Research and Innovation (Innovate UK et al., 2019).

As the immersive entertainment industry continues to expand, so too does the diversity of practices within immersive theatre itself. Unsurprisingly, given its experimental roots and evolving nature, a singular definition of immersive theatre does not exist. In order to delimit this thesis, however, I shall start to define immersive theatre as disrupting the modern theatre experience by utilising pervasive *found* and *made environments* that place the audience physically into the story rather than viewing it from the outside. This definition is based on my professional experience plus the synthesis of discussions from Josephine Machon (2013), Adam Alston (2016a), Gareth White (2013), Jason Warren (2017), Joanna Bucknall (2016a) and Terry Lee Dickson (2025), which is further unpacked in the following paragraphs. Many of these shows also have a strong focus on *resituating the performer-audience relationship* in an attempt to build a genuine, though fleeting, connection through ergodic, or non-trivial, interactions.

Various scholars and practitioners have offered definitions that highlight these different aspects of immersive theatre. Josephine Machon (2013) described immersive theatre as a form that

‘embraces a fused sensory experience’ (p. 104) featuring cohesive environments designed to engage the audience’s senses fully. Adam Alston (2016a) emphasised the physicality of the performance space, noting its role in creating intimate and exploratory experiences (p. 2). Meanwhile, Gareth White (2013) focused on the role of the audience during the performance, suggesting that immersive theatre frequently asks them ‘to make choices that structure their experience’ (p. 2).

Additionally, Jason Warren (2017) referred to the performance environment as a ‘first cast member’ (p. 20), underscoring its foundational role in shaping the audience's experience. Joanna Bucknall (2016a) highlighted the use of ‘games, rules, and tasks’ in immersive theatre, which often guide audience participation and frame their engagement with the work (p. 53). Across these definitions, what is most frequently emphasised is the re-imagined relationship between the audience and the performer within intentionally multi-sensory environments.

Given the above I can further specify immersive theatre as a form of performance that intentionally blurs the boundaries between audience and performer within a carefully constructed multi-sensory environment. This environment incorporates not only traditional elements such as sound, light, and scenic design, but also might engage the senses of taste, touch, and smell, creating a fully immersive experience. For example, DARKFIELD's *Coma* (2019–present) invites the audience to swallow an actual pill, engaging the sense of taste, while *Rumble in the Jungle Rematch* (2023) features a street market setup and food reminiscent of Zaire in 1974, appealing to sight, taste and smell. Touch is a key element as well, with productions like Swamp Motel's *Saint Jude* (2023), where audience members physically interact with objects in a cubicle, and Ontroerend Goed's *Funeral* (2023), which involves tactile engagement with a wooden log. Scent design often plays an essential role, as demonstrated by Punchdrunk, known for creating

environments that mimic real-world smells, such as the scent of medical wards or boudoirs (Verlander, 2023; Spence, 2021). In this way, immersive theatre invites audience members to engage through exploration, decision-making, and physical interaction, thereby fostering unique artistic and emotional experiences. The above examples help specify the importance of the physical space (what I called above the ‘found and made environments’) in immersive theatre and highlight the dynamic, constantly resituated relationships between audience and performer, elements that are central to understanding the distinct opportunities and risks inherent in this art form.

The physical environment in immersive theatre frequently includes non-traditional ‘found’ spaces such as abandoned buildings, warehouses, or public streets. These settings enable audience members to roam and explore, crafting their own narrative experience while interacting with performers in close proximity. This interaction, coupled with the multisensory design of the environment, transports the audience into what Machon (2013) calls an ‘in-its-own-world-ness’ (p. 93). But while the re-imagined relationship between audience and performer fosters connection and engagement, it also introduces unique psychological and social risks. These risks, which are more commonly associated with interpersonal relationships than with traditional theatre, form a key area of investigation for this research.

Beyond environmental immersion, the culture of immersive theatre places a strong emphasis on audience dynamics. The UK Stage Management Association’s recently released immersive theatre guidance claims that ‘occupation of a common space by cast and audience’ (Dickson, 2025, para 2) is the defining element of immersive theatre, which points to the key differentiator between immersive and traditional theatre for production staff. In the style of immersive theatre that this research focuses on, audience participation is a key element that creates unique risks and

redefines the role of production staff. While Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) argued that all audiences are inherently participatory through the ‘autopoietic feedback loop’ (p. 47) between performers and spectators; immersive theatre, by contrast, requires a higher level of audience engagement, whether through simple choices or more complex participatory tasks, ergodic choices that can affect the performances in numerous ways. Rose Turner and Hayley Kasperczyk (2022) note in their article focused on the serendipitous interactions unique to immersive theatre, that ‘audience subjectivity is integral to the piece, which moves away from mainstream theatre’s treatment of the audience as a mass entity’ (p. 104). The sliding scale of participation in immersive theatre, as noted by immersive theatre academic Gareth White (2013) in his book *Audience Participation in Theatre*, can vary widely, but the essential idea is that audiences help shape the outcome of their experience.

Participatory arts, arts practices in which people actively engage through making, doing, or contributing ideas, regardless of skill level, are a way of working that emphasises the audience’s creative expression and involvement (WolfBrown, 2011). Often situated in applied contexts outside of traditional theatre settings, participatory arts offer a useful lens for examining how audiences are invited to interact in immersive work. This is particularly relevant because both forms centre the audience’s agency, though in differing ways, with participatory arts focusing more often on community involvement and immersive theatre often taking a more commercial approach. Participatory arts have undergone a significant evolution since the turn of the millennium, as highlighted by the James Irvine Foundation's *Getting In on the Act* report (WolfBrown, 2011). This significant report maps emerging trends in participatory practices and equips arts organisations with tools to navigate these shifts. Central to the report is the Audience Involvement Spectrum, a model that articulates varying degrees of audience engagement. While

originally designed for participatory arts more broadly, the spectrum offers a valuable framework for understanding audience roles in immersive theatre, which can range from passive spectating to active involvement. Immersive theatre often aligns with the spectrum's Co-Creation level, where audiences make non-trivial choices that shape the experience, even if they were not involved in its initial development.

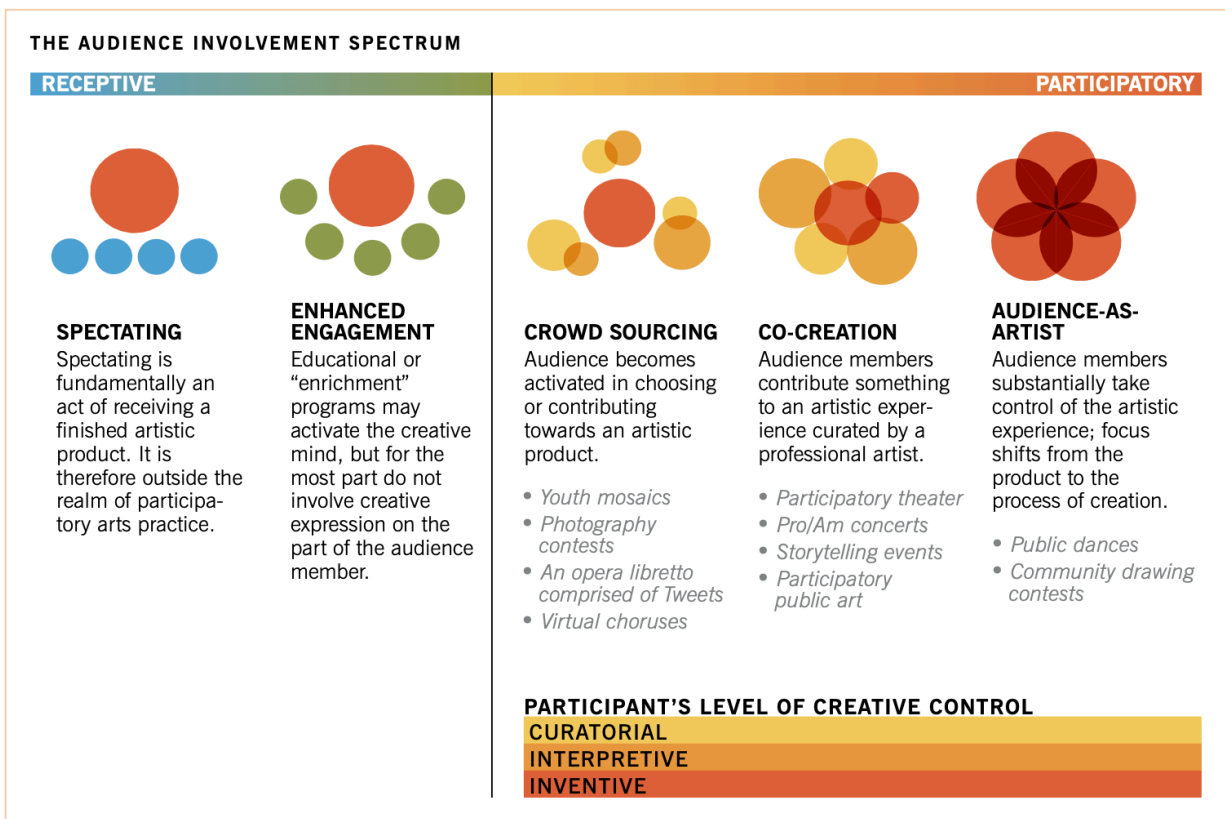


Figure 1 - Audience Involvement Spectrum from WolfBrown's *Getting In On the Act* report (2011). Reprinted with permission from WolfBrown, The Irvine Foundation and Alan S. Brown.

However, it is important to note that immersive theatre spans a wide range of participatory intensities, and not all performances align perfectly with the spectrum's definition of Co-Creation, which amalgamates participatory theatre all into this single category. For instance,

Punchdrunk productions, which are often characterised by non-linear narratives and audience freedom to explore, rely on active engagement but do not necessarily allow audience members to make choices that meaningfully alter the performance outcome. This underscores the challenge of applying any one framework universally to immersive theatre that I have sought to avoid with my own definition. While the Audience Involvement Spectrum offers a foundational lens for examining participation, more specific models, such as Brigante and Elger's participation scale, may provide additional clarity for contemporary immersive practices.

Immersive experience creators Ricky Brigante and Sarah A.S. Elger (2020) proposed a participation scale from Level 0 (minimal engagement) to Level 3 (intense interaction). At Level 0, such as in haunted houses, the audience is immersed but not required to influence the narrative. However, immersive theatre typically operates at a higher level of participation where audience members' decisions such as where to go, what to watch, and how to interact affect the outcome of the performance. This requires a willingness to engage in a process of choice, often without full context. As a result, the relationship between audience and production staff is reshaped: responsibility for audience safety and experience becomes less clearly divided than in traditional theatre, where stage management and front-of-house teams have distinct roles. In immersive contexts, care must be negotiated in real time, and audience behaviour introduces an element of unpredictability that complicates established protocols. This heightened emphasis on participation forms part of the cultural identity of immersive theatre, where active engagement is not just encouraged but expected.

Immersive theatre is also defined by several aesthetic choices that set it apart from the mainstream. Here aesthetics are not limited to the consideration of the artistic form and experience, but also draw on elements of Nicolas Bourriaud's (2002) relational aesthetics, as

well as definitions of aesthetics as a sensory and affective encounter in the natural and everyday world (White, 2015, p. 29-30), which are specifically highlighted through Josephine Machon's (2009) discussion of (syn)aesthetics.

Machon (2009) expands on the nature of the audience's active engagement by discussing immersive theatre's (syn)aesthetics, where these audiences experience performances viscerally through both mind and *body* (p. 4). These synaesthetic experiences, intentionally designed to engage the senses, foster a deeper emotional and psychological connection to the performance. As mentioned above, Punchdrunk's meticulous and deliberate scent design evokes the smells of specific spaces, such as medical wards or boudoirs, immersing audiences in environments that feel strikingly authentic. By engaging multiple senses simultaneously, immersive theatre intensifies the audience's sense of presence and investment in the narrative. This embodied participation reflects the broader cultural shift towards more dynamic, interactive forms of art and entertainment in the 21st century, as audiences increasingly seek experiences that involve them on multiple sensory levels. The emphasis on relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002), where the audience-performer encounter becomes the heart of the artistic experience, further ties immersive theatre to a culture of connection and interaction. Because the audience now become, in many ways, part of the performance, this resituating of the audience-performer relationship requires a new consideration of how audience handling is done.

III. Defining Audience Handling: The Evolution of Immersive Audiences

Audience handling is the skilful guidance employed by actors and production staff to shape audience behaviour in immersive theatre productions. Audience handling has two primary goals: to ensure the safety of the audience and staff and to encourage the audience's actions to

contribute to the aesthetics of the piece in the manner intended by the creative team. Here, *aesthetics* (which I have already defined above) refers to what Gareth White (2015) describes as ‘a particular kind of heightened experience of moment of perception’ (p. 26). For example, in immersive theatre company ZU-UK's *Within Touching Distance* (2023-present), audiences are greeted in a quiet and calm manner and brought into a serene room, where they are either seated or directly handed over to a performer who will guide them. This handling reflects an aesthetic world of guided, intentional interactions, where the quiet atmosphere is deliberately mirrored in the way the audience is managed. Historically, audience handling has been the province of front-of-house management; however, in immersive theatre, performers and stage management, roles less experienced with direct audience contact, must also adopt this skill to align audience behaviour with the creative vision.

Arguably, elements of audience handling begin before the audience reach the performance space: websites, social media, reviews of the show, and pre-performance emails, texts or phone calls begin to set the expectations of the audiences’ role in the production and the tone of the company and performance ethos. While this may be handled by employees such as the marketing¹ or PR staff in a larger company, these elements can influence the eventual interactions between the production staff (discussed in Section IV below) and the audience. Audience handling subsequently permeates all aspects of the performance from audience arrival to departure, for the production staff evidently at the beginning and end of immersive experiences. The moments when the audience members first arrive, before they enter the performance space, often contain a

¹ This reference to marketing provides an appropriate moment to acknowledge the presence of financial risk within the arts, and how perceptions of risk can influence perceived value. While this dimension of economic risk is primarily negotiated at the level of producers and investors, roles that are not audience-facing and therefore fall outside the scope of this research, it remains a relevant consideration within the broader ecosystem of immersive theatre. For further discussion of economic risk, see Adam Alston’s (2019) analysis of the insolvency process of differenceEngine.

moment of orientation. Jorge Ramos (2015) calls this orienting the first stage of a ‘dramaturgy of participation’ (p. ix) and sets the tone for how performers and audience should expect to interact during the engagement. Audience handling continues during the performance through monitoring and providing guidance as needed. It concludes as the audience exits. These exit strategies sometimes contain intentional spaces for decompression and care, though these have received significantly less attention in immersive theatre literature.

Audience handling from the perspective of actors during the performance has been explored by scholars such as Ramos (2015) who looked at how actors re-construct their relationship to the audience in immersive theatre with a heavy focus on orienting techniques, Jason Warren (2017) and his ‘systems that allow you to plan for the apparently unpredictable nature of an audience’s free will’ (p. 53), and Joanna Bucknall (2022) in her interviews with immersive performance makers. However, audience handling in immersive theatre from the perspective of production staff is an unexplored area. Despite being unexplored, the interviews in the case studies later in this thesis indicate that front of house management and stage management are keenly aware and interested in the ways that their relationship with the audience is reconfigured and the ways it affects their role in immersive theatre.

Audience handling has evolved over time with the changing nature of immersive audiences as the art form has risen in commercial popularity. In her article on audience participation gone wrong, Kelly Jordan (2019) introduced the concept of ‘expert participant-spectators,’ skilled audience members who actively seek out immersive, participatory experiences. While early immersive performances largely catered to this niche group, the current audience makeup is

more diverse. For experienced participants familiar with the genre, open-ended structures can foster exciting opportunities for collaboration. But for newcomer audiences, an assumption of tacit understanding by the performance makers can often result in confusion or disengagement, as such audiences are sometimes expected to intuitively grasp the rules of the experience without adequate guidance.

In the early days of immersive theatre, audiences built a near cult-like following around these experimental works, learning the tacit rules through word of mouth and underground networks and thereby building skills. Popular early immersive companies like *You Me Bum Bum Train* encouraged audiences to avoid researching the performance to heighten the sense of exploration (You Me Bum Bum Train, n.d.). Speakeasy Dollhouse, another immersive company formed in 2011 and based in New York City, relied heavily on word of mouth to attract audiences.

However, as immersive theatre has moved into the mainstream, inexperienced audiences often struggle to understand these unspoken rules. Productions like Speakeasy Dollhouse's *Ziegfeld's Midnight Frolic* (2015) left its more mainstream audiences confused due to a lack of guidance, undermining both the safety and aesthetic goals of the performance (Collin-Hughes, 2015).

The shift in audience composition clearly demands more intentional audience handling to ensure all participants, expert and non-expert, feel safe and engaged while navigating immersive experiences. As a result, incorporating the audience experience into risk management planning becomes essential, with production staff playing a critical role in mitigating potential risks and guiding audience behaviour to align with the aesthetic and safety goals of the performance.

IV. Defining Production Staff: Cultivating Safety Within Immersive Theatre

This research defines *production staff* as stage management and front-of-house management teams. With lines between audience and performer significantly blurred in immersive theatre, front-of-house managers and stage managers play vital roles. As safety stewards, stage management and house management teams serve as the primary enforcers of risk mitigation, balancing artistic intent with audience well-being. Their decisions, ranging from emergency protocols to real-time interventions, play a crucial role in shaping (or should play a crucial role in shaping) the safety culture of immersive productions. These specific production staff roles, the stage managers and front-of-house team, were chosen as interview subjects because they are tasked with maintaining the daily safety of performers and audience. They watch every performance for the duration of the run. They also indicate a gap in the research, as there has been minimal academic research focused on stage managers and even less on front-of-house managers.

Although production management lies outside the primary scope of this thesis, it warrants brief mention due to its significant responsibilities in relation to health and safety. For clarity, *production management* here refers to a set of roles and responsibilities, rather than to a specific individual, typically involved in the logistical and administrative coordination of a production. These roles often include oversight of safety planning. On productions where a designated production manager is present, they frequently lead the compilation of risk assessments and oversee implementation, often delegating audience-facing safety duties to stage management or front-of-house teams (Gillett & Sheehan, 2023, pp. 107–123).

However, in smaller-scale or lower-budget productions, a formal production manager may not be present. In such cases, production management duties may be distributed across other roles, particularly stage management and front-of-house. On the other hand, in large-scale or

institutional settings, production management may be a distinct and specialised person or team to whom stage and front-of-house management report safety concerns for further assessment or escalation. Crucially, while production management plays a substantial role in planning for safety, they are often office-based and are not expected to attend or oversee each performance. In contrast, stage and front-of-house management typically hold active, performance-facing safety responsibilities as part of their core duties. For the purposes of this research, which focuses specifically on safety management during performance and in direct relation to the audience experience, the emphasis remains on those production staff roles, particularly stage and front-of-house management, that are present during every performance.

In her doctoral thesis tracing stage managers' evolving roles and tasks, Jennifer Leigh Sears Scheier (2021) defined stage managers as 'trained specialists who prioritise and advocate for the production/production process itself. Stage managers lead, facilitate and safeguard the production from pre-production to closing, adhering to the following types of labour: interdepartmental collaboration, idiosyncratic administration, artistic leadership and bookkeeping/archival work' (p. 78). This sweeping definition highlights the involvement of stage management from early on in the performance process through the final day, as well as indicating a broad responsibility including elements of internal communication, administration, and leadership, as well as paperwork, all focused on enabling a successful production. Of particular interest to this thesis is the way that immersive theatre stretches the interdepartmental collaboration between stage management, front-of-house management and performers, as well as the idiosyncratic administration required to risk assess many elements of immersive performances, and the artistic leadership necessary when making audience handling decisions during live performances. These modes of stage management, administrative, managerial and

creative, are also echoed in Michael Smalley's (2024) definition of stage management, where he notes that most stage management is approached through some combination of theories grounded in these three styles, as he highlights that 'the best stage management practice can be found at the intersection of these models' (p. 77).

The primary focus of traditional stage management is then everything that happens to get the production on stage. However, as discussed above, the 'stage' of an immersive performance is often very different from traditional performance. The demarcation between the stage as the performance space and the house, where the audience resides, is intentionally and consistently porous. Because these boundaries are so permeable, immersive stage management cannot be studied without consideration of immersive front-of-house management, as elements of these previously clearly divided roles are no longer distinct. In deference to this pervious line between the front-of-house (the audience's space) and back-of-house (the performance space), this thesis will use the term 'house management' rather than front-of-house management going forward, though industry literature related to the field often favours the term front-of-house.

With that in mind, it is a challenge to find more than a brief mention of 'front-of-house' or 'house management' in theatre literature in general. Mike Callaway echoes this sentiment in the only book devoted solely to house management, noting 'there's nothing at all on theatre-based patron service' (Callaway, 2021, p. iii). While that is, in part, hyperbole, as there is significant literature on arts administration, the various business and marketing elements of the arts often gloss over the artistic elements within the role of house management teams and the skills they utilise to care for audiences. Those skills are the focus of Callaway's (2021) book, where he

describes house management tasks as including significant consideration of the aesthetic goals of the production. Responsibilities he assigns to house managers include resolving patron issues, training ushers, accessibility assistance, safety and responding to emergencies, keeping the audience environment comfortable, dealing with late arrivals, and potentially managing additional services like food and beverage, gifts shops and security.

In immersive theatre, as we have already seen, the house management team plays a crucial role in orienting and setting expectations for audience members, helping them transition between the real world and the immersive experience. House managers also aim to maintain audience comfort within the immersive environment. For example, in the leading immersive theatre company Punchdrunk's *The Burnt City* (2022-2023), ushers from the house management team provided hospitality-related information such as venue temperature, rules about cell phone usage, and directions for emergencies. As audience members moved through the preshow entry and bar space, additional ushers were available to answer questions, while a final usher gave a brief speech to small audience groups before entering the performance space, offering tips on how to engage with the performance and outlining boundaries. In immersive theatre, where the line between audience and performer is blurred, house and stage managers play a critical role in balancing safety in the performance space with the show's aesthetic.

V. Defining Performance Makers: Establishing the 'Why' in Immersive Theatre Creation

Within the scope of this research, a *performance maker* is anyone behind the artistic conception and execution of an immersive performance. Performance makers decide where and how to present performances. They decide on the production's source materials, inspirations, and narrative. They decide the structure of how audience interaction will occur. This definition has

been synthesised from traditional definitions of the role of directors and devisers and further influenced by Joanna Bucknall's (2016- 2023) *Talking About Immersive Theatre* podcast where she interviewed different immersive theatre makers in each podcast. This umbrella term, 'performance maker,' is an amalgamation of more traditional definitions.

The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing explains the history of the role of the director, evolving from choreographing ancient Greek choruses to overseeing the expanding complexity of medieval stage productions, including shaping action and guiding actors. By the Renaissance, playwrights often assumed directorial duties, advising on line delivery and casting. During the Enlightenment, actors began organising scenic elements and staging plays by others, with British actor David Garrick the first to be referred to as a 'director' (Innes & Shevtsova, 2013, p. 7-19). This history of the Western stage has strong ties to the playwright and the role of the written word, the text which the performance is based on. However, in her book on devising theatre, Alison Oddey (1994) notes, 'devised theatre can start from an infinite number of possibilities, such as an idea, image, concept, object, poem, piece of music, or painting, and the precise nature of the end product is unknown' (p. 7). Devising, then, is a different style of creative journey which is often found in immersive theatre. While texts can be involved, they are not a prerequisite, and the narrative path is not often as clearly mapped out as when a director engages with an existing theatrical text. While their path may be less clearly marked from the outset, devisers also make decisions about the shape of the performances, guide the performers, and provide input on design elements during the development process for the performance.

Many performance makers interviewed stated that they had a traditional theatrical background (see Bucknall, 2016b, 1:15; Bucknall, 2016c, 1:20; Bucknall, 2018, 1:33; Bucknall, 2021, 3:06 for some examples); however, Bucknall (2020) also noted that she ‘hasn't met anyone involved in immersion who hasn't had... a past of many different jobs or coming from a slightly different discipline, [there's a real] interdisciplinary intersector kind of convergence in immersive theatre' (3:13-3:33). This combination of traditional theatrical director combined with work experience in other fields is also reflective of the performance makers interviewed in the case studies in this thesis.

Speaking with performance makers aids in identifying what stage management theorists Lisa Porter and Narda E. Alcorn (2020) would consider the production's various 'why's' (p. 9). These why's create the framework that provides the limiting parameters that production staff work within. The term limiting parameter is not negative, despite the connotation that limiting may carry. Porter and Alcorn argue the performance maker creates a framework for the production through the creation of these parameters, which influences all creative, administrative and managerial choices made to bring the performance to fruition. In *Risk Management for Events*, Julia Rutherford Silvers and William O'Toole (2020), also refer to the ‘why’ as the goals and objectives, noting ‘goals and objectives [of the event] must be specified and prioritised so that the [production] decisions will maintain the integrity of the event purpose when alternatives are examined to provide a less risky option’ (p. 20).

In each case study within this thesis, interviews with performance makers establish the why, or the goals and objectives of the production. This is established before moving into discussion with

the production staff to examine their ‘how’ (Porter & Alcorn, 2020, p. 9), forming the framework of this research methodology. Porter and Alcorn limit their discussion of the ‘how’ to stage managers. My research into immersive theatre affirms the value from stage management, while also expanding the scope to include the house management team due to the way immersive theatre shifts responsibility for areas of audience management and safety in idiosyncratic ways for each performance. This concept of utilising both the ‘why’ and ‘how’ is found in Michael Smalley’s (2024) study of communication design within stage management where he utilises Peter Maccoby’s explanation of the ‘why leading to the how’ (Maccoby, 2004, p. 11) as a cornerstone of theory-driven method for improving stage management training.

VI. Crafting Safe Spaces: Judging Acceptable Risks in Immersive Performances

Fred A. Manuele (2013) defines safety as ‘that state for which the risks are judged to be acceptable’ (p. 58), a definition adopted in this thesis. This framing aligns with the consensus among safety professionals that absolute safety, being entirely ‘free from’ danger, is unattainable. Instead, safety is better understood as a condition managed through acceptable or proportionate levels of risk.

This perspective is especially pertinent in the context of immersive theatre. As Rikard and Villarreal (2023) note, immersive experiences are inherently variable and shaped by individual audience encounters. This renders eliminating all risks unrealistic. The focus, therefore, shifts to what constitutes *acceptable* or *good enough* mitigation, recognising that risk can be minimised, but never wholly removed. This thesis adopts that approach, arguing that performance cannot be risk-free, but that risks can be managed in ways that are ethically and practically appropriate.

This approach can also be found in risk and safety literature in the terms ‘So Far As Is Reasonably Practicable’ (SFAIRP), ‘As Low As Reasonably Practicable’ (ALARP), or ‘As Low As Reasonably Achievable’ (ALARA) (HSE, 2023b; Möller et al., 2018, p. 2). This subjective concept of *reasonableness* is an important one to consider, as it is the crux of risk management and will be revisited in the literature review in Chapter 2, in discussion of the subjective nature of individual audience members’ perceptions of risk. Additionally, it is worth noting that a completely risk-free performance is not a desired outcome, as this would mitigate many of the desired ‘why’s of the performance.

Engaging with risk in theatrical performance indeed provides unique benefits, not only to the artistic goals of the work but also to the personal and emotional experiences of participants. Nicolás Núñez’s (2019) concept of High Risk Theatre exemplifies how responsible risk-taking can serve as a catalyst for ‘personal transformation’, fosters deeper connections between participants and the sacred, thereby enabling transformative experiences. Núñez’s own artistic journey demonstrates how risky paths can lead to profound self-improvement, even if the process involves ‘good pain’ (Núñez, 2019, p. 271), or discomfort, as part of the growth.

Similarly, Michael Larkin and Mark D. Griffiths (2004) identified the concept of ‘risky-but-rewarding activities’ (p. 215), noting that individuals often weigh risks against the potential pleasure and personal development those activities provide. Rachel Briscoe of Fast Familiar shared that in developing their immersive performance of *Invisible Treasure*, ‘I felt like negotiating risk was central to the show’ (2022, para. 2), highlighting the value of risk for self-discovery. Briscoe (2022) continued:

It [risk] challenges our foundations of what we think we know, and how we approach things. And our expectations of how we see the world and how we see the others - it shifts the assumptions that we have about what people can do. If you add an element of risk, they're having to consider what they're willing to do, what they're willing to try, what they're not willing to try - and actually that's a really important way of knowing more about yourself (para. 4).

It is clear from the above that makers believe that within immersive theatre where participation and interaction are integral, risks, whether physical, emotional, or psychological, enhance the depth of engagement and the audience's sense of achievement. The aim must be to ensure that these risks remain within a framework of safety while allowing the performance to challenge and stretch its participants.

At both macro and micro levels, the judgment of acceptable risk allows for the *creation of spaces* where risk-taking is encouraged as part of the artistic and experiential design. These judgments are shaped not only by safety legislation but also by the creative team's intentions and the company's safety culture. By embracing reasonable levels of risk, immersive performances achieve a delicate equilibrium where participants feel safe enough to engage fully while still navigating an environment that challenges them to grow and connect.

VII. Defining Acceptable Risk: How Formulaic Models Shape Theatre Safety

In the context of immersive theatre, managing risk effectively involves a balance between ensuring safety and preserving the artistic integrity of the production. Historically, the concept of risk has been heavily influenced by Enlightenment-era ideas that framed it as something quantifiable and controllable. This has led to the development of a mathematical approach often

referred to as ‘a calculus of risk’ (Mythen, 2004, p. 55). By the mid-20th century, this formulaic understanding of risk ($\text{Risk} = \text{Probability} \times \text{Consequence of Risk}$) had become a standard tool for assessing and mitigating hazards across industries, including the performing arts (HSE, 2023a).

Such a mathematical approach simplifies risk into two components: *probability*, the likelihood that an event will occur, and *consequence*, the potential severity of the event’s outcome. For example, in theatre production, the likelihood of a hazardous event might be assessed using scenarios like an open trapdoor on stage. According to the 2018 *Managing Safely for Theatre and Production* workbook, the version still utilised as of a July 2024 training session, an open trapdoor during the day, when surrounded by sufficient lighting and barriers, poses a low probability of someone falling. However, if the trapdoor remains open after a performance under dim lighting, the probability of an incident significantly increases (iosh & RB Health & Safety Solutions, 2018, p. 16).

The *consequence of risk* measures the potential harm resulting from such an event. In the case of the trapdoor, consequences might range from minor injuries, such as sprains, to severe outcomes like fractures or even fatal injuries, depending on factors such as the fall's height and the landing surface's material (ibid.).

The risk becomes a calculation by assigning a numerical scale of severity to both likelihood and consequence of risk. The numbers are then multiplied and a mathematical risk factor is determined. If the number is low, it is likely no additional effort needs to be made to mitigate the risk. Medium and high outcomes require further evaluation. In some cases, a decision may be made that these risks are acceptable. A good example of this can be found in circuses, where the risk may still be very high for the performers, but the decision is made to perform anyway,

because this risk is considered *acceptable* in the context. However, in most cases, further risk mitigation plans may be added to reduce the likelihood and/or the consequence if the hazardous event were to occur. In some cases, the risk may be so extreme it is necessary to remove the hazardous event altogether.

Consider the example above of the trapdoor. During the day, with good lighting and barriers in place, the likelihood of falling through the trapdoor is a 1, on a scale of 1-3. It is unlikely the event will happen. The distance between the stage and the floor under the trapdoor in this imaginary theatre is two metres. There is a concrete floor below the trapdoor. The consequence of falling through the trapdoor would numerically be a 2, on a scale of 1-3, meaning that the injury would likely require further medical assistance for broken bones or stitches, but unlikely to result in death. The risk calculation would then be a 2, since the likelihood (1) is multiplied by the consequence of the risk (2). On a matrix where the lowest risks are 1 and the highest are 9, a 2 would be a low risk event.

Under different circumstances, the same trapdoor could have a very different risk rating. If the trapdoor is left open at the end of the day, on a dark stage, with no barriers, the likelihood that someone will fall into moves from a 1 to a 3, because it is likely that this event will eventually occur. The consequence would remain the same. The risk calculation would then become a 6, since the likelihood (3) is multiplied by the consequence of the risk (2). This is on the higher end of a medium risk event and would require consideration of potential mitigations to lower the risk rating. This example also evidences how basic safety protocols, such as lighting levels and barriers, can have a large impact on a risk rating.

These formulaic risk assessments are valuable to any risk management repertoire, and, in many cases, a legal requirement for running an event. However, this research argues that in immersive theatre, many of the psychological and social risks have been overlooked in part because they do not fit neatly into these formulaic assessments. In many ways, it is much easier to risk assess the likelihood of falling through a hole in the floor than the likelihood of a traumatic impact from telling a personal story about grief. This may help explain that while it is not uncommon for immersive theatre scholars to mention that there are risks in immersive performance, few choose to specify them.

There has been even less discussion in the literature related to risk mitigation during the development and run of immersive productions. On this practical front, there are varying degrees of engagement with the topic in Gareth White's (2013, pp. 73-113) *Audience Participation in Theatre*, Jason Warren's (2017) *Creating Worlds: How to Make Immersive Theatre* and Nandita Dinesh's (2018) *Immersive Theatre and Activism*. Each of those resources discusses, from the performer's or performance maker's point of view, the importance of an awareness that immersive theatre requires a more robust style of risk management than traditional theatre because the audience are asked to contribute more to participatory performances. Kelly Jordan's (2019) journal article, 'The Ethics of Participation and Participation Gone Wrong,' noted a changing makeup of the audience in recent years. She shared a story about an audience member getting rudely heckled by another audience member as they participated in the performance, which she perceived to be the mismanagement of an audience experience in immersive theatre, noting that perhaps this change in the type of audience requires a more robust orientation or

better management and questioning the ethical implications of allowing audience mistreatment to occur in the name of art.

As discussed above in relation to audience handling, the changing demographics of the audience from more experimental theatregoers to mainstream audiences means that audiences enter immersive theatre productions with only a casual understanding of their role in the performance, as well as the risks they may encounter. This expansion of popularity in the art form speaks to the urgent necessity for this research. The following section outlines the methodology used to address these questions which informed the findings of this thesis.

VII. Exploring the Role of Production Staff in Audience Safety and Care: Multi-Methods Research for Immersive Theatre Risk Management

My research seeks to improve safety in immersive theatre by focusing on how production staff, particularly stage and house management, perceive risk and determine acceptable levels while managing the audience experience. Given that both risk and its acceptability are variable, the research was structured as an exploratory, multi-methods qualitative inquiry. Through interviews, observations, document analysis and a Practice-as-Research (PaR) workshop, this project explored how production staff contribute to creating safer environments for immersive audiences.

The research combined semi-structured interviews with performance makers and production staff and observations of immersive performances. The interviews provided insight into how production staff perceive and manage risks, while observations helped verify those findings by allowing the researcher to engage with the immersive environments firsthand. Additional

document analysis aided in understanding the way information was conveyed to audience members prior to and after performance. The interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand how production staff and performance makers perceived their roles related to safety and care during performances.

IPA was well-suited for this research because it allowed for an in-depth examination of personal reflections on these experiences, enabling the identification of themes related to safety, care, and risk. The double hermeneutic approach in IPA also facilitated the interpretation of participants' perspectives while acknowledging the role of the researcher's interpretation in shaping the analysis. Additionally, some questions expanded beyond the scope of phenomenology and into more general discussion, such as the discussion of tools that are most useful to production staff, there were analysed with thematic analysis. By employing these interview and observation methods, the research utilised a series of case studies, which demonstrated how audience safety and care are currently approached, how effective existing risk mitigation strategies are, and how they vary among theatre companies.

This thesis draws on two case studies. The first is *Dead Letter No. 9* by ROLL THE BONES (2023-2024), an immersive performance that relies heavily on inter-audience interaction and presents significant psychological and social risks. The second is *1884* by Coney (2024), an immersive game-theatre piece that explores potentially distressing themes such as colonisation, cultural misrepresentation by academics, and the rewriting of history, also involving substantial psychological and social risks. Both theatre companies prioritise care in their practice and place a strong emphasis on performance ethics, making them ideal case studies for examining how immersive productions can manage audience risk while maintaining their artistic integrity.

To examine a potential new foundation for approaching the development of safer spaces, this research turns its attention to ‘care ethics,’ a relational, context-sensitive moral framework that reframes ethical decision-making not as solely rule-following, but as the ongoing, situated practice of meeting the needs of others, discussed in detail in Chapter 2. It raises the question: **Can care ethics contribute a useful framework for audience risk management to achieve more successful outcomes?** In her doctoral thesis, Zsuzsanna Soboslay (2019) focused on the potential applications of care ethics in participatory theatre in community settings, suggesting that ‘deep care’ a systemic and culturally aware approach to care that considers identity, culture and the history of the participant is necessary to create ethical performances (p. 53). Though her work focused on community settings that allowed participants to co-create together from the outset, which removes a significant portion of risks for audience members who do not know what they are agreeing to do, and does not address the role of production staff at all, Soboslay’s work still supports the potential of drawing from care ethics to help bridge complex moments of uncertainty in participatory performances. Care ethics, as defined by Maurice Hamington (2024), involves ‘humble inquiry, responsive action, and inclusive connection’ (p. 32), emphasizing relational responsibility. Notable care ethicist, Joan Tronto (1993) broke down care ethics into four interconnected phases of caring. The attentiveness required to recognise risks (*caring about*) fosters a sense of responsibility (*caring for*), which necessitates competence in implementing safety measures (*caregiving*) and responsiveness to audience needs and feedback (*care-receiving*) (pp. 5-6). These principles were explored both in interviews and in the PaR workshop, where academics, production staff, and performance makers engaged in discussions on risk management and audience care. This iterative process, based on Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean’s (2009) framework of research-led practice, ensured a cyclical development of theory

and practice. The workshops not only facilitated an exchange of ideas but also helped refine techniques for improving safety in immersive theatre.

It was important to consider what the best approach might be to provide maximum industry impact regarding the findings of this research, as academic writing alone seemed unlikely to appropriately influence the industry professionals. Therefore, a final subquestion to nuance the main research question was asked: **What tools can impact competency among production staff regarding audience care and risk management?**

The findings of this research led to the collection of practical tools and training methods designed to enhance the ability of production staff to manage audience safety more effectively, including a workshop, practice exercises and a self-assessment for risk propensity for risk managers. By integrating the principles of care ethics into risk management, the research reimagines care not just as an ethical imperative but as an important element of a broader safety culture within immersive theatre. This approach promotes a collective mindset among production staff that prioritises care and attentiveness in audience handling. The proposed strategies provide a toolbox to improve immersive theatre safety, creating a more thoughtful and secure environment that allows audiences to engage with challenging or 'unsafe' topics in a careful and supported manner. The next section will present an overview of the research findings, demonstrating how they address the core questions surrounding risk management in immersive theatre before moving on to outline the thesis chapters.

IX. Build Your Own Cult(ure) of Care: Outcomes from this Research

A key finding of this research is the understanding that production staff and performance makers have been professionalised to understand risk differently. However, as the terminology is often the same, the fact that the meanings behind the terms are different may be overlooked in risk communication between the two roles. Discussions during the workshop, when participants focused on their consideration of risk as potential audience members, aligned closer to the production staff usage of risk and safety terms rather than the performance makers.

These misunderstandings around risk communication also speak to the invisibility of caregiver labour. This research posits that the production staff often take on the role of caregivers in the development and production of immersive performances. Existing systems of management highlighted by academics such as Michael Smalley speak to the historical bias in roles like stage management that the work of a successful stage manager should be invisible. Smalley (2024) also notes that this invisibility of labour has done the profession a disservice as many outside the profession do not understand what those within it do. Stage manager Natasha Marich shared, ‘The thing is, what I’ve very, very slowly come to realise is, that it doesn’t matter how experienced an actor or a technician or a touring staff person might be, the understanding of the scope and depth of the role of a stage manager is poorly understood and underappreciated’ (Smalley, 2024, p. 180).

House management also echoes this with much of its work appearing managerial and administrative as well, though even less has been written in academic literature concerning their contributions to the field. As stage management and house management are responsible for the majority of safety planning for a production, the function and terminology of risk that they utilise

is often invisible to performance makers who have not undergone occupational health and safety training.

However, along with this expertise in occupational health and safety, production staff require further adaptation specific to immersive theatre that focuses on psychological and social risks that are heightened by the artform. Managing these elements requires the integration of care. Noted care ethicist, Maurice Hamington (2024), identified the skills of care as ‘learning, connecting and responding’ (p. 30). This parallels the artistic goals of immersive theatre, and just as the artistic craft requires adaptation for immersive performances, so does the approach to health and safety, with an amplified focus on these psychological and social risks. This in turn calls for developing risk management guidelines that exist in a space between rigid rules and a complete void of structure, looking to care ethics to guide this development is a logical space and can begin with the simple move of adding one more step to traditional risk assessments, asking how production staff could care for the audience to both help prevent and respond to negative risk events.

One final consideration highlighted through the literature and examined during the workshops was the potential to impact the industry in self-evaluations for those conducting the risk assessments as a reflexive tool to consider how risk-adverse or not they may be. This could allow any production staff who fall into extremely risk-averse or non risk-averse to reconsider how they approach their risk mitigation strategies and potentially encourage collaboration with those who may have different risk perspectives in the development of their risk mitigation plans.

X. Cultivating Safer Spaces: Mapping the Chapters of this Thesis

This chapter has established the pressing problem of audience care in immersive theatre. After providing definitions for key terms necessary to understand the work of this thesis, including immersive theatre, audience handling, production staff and performance makers, the chapter continued on to provide a brief introduction to standardised concepts of safety and risk. I have also highlighted the current relevance of the research by indicating the increased popularity and changing audience makeup in immersive theatre, as well as recent lawsuits that evidenced the financial and legal consequences of inadequate audience risk management. I noted that, although risk has been a topic of discussion in immersive theatre literature for the past decade, there has been little focus on how to manage it more effectively. I also identified a gap in the research, observing that the role of production staff, who are key to managing risk, has been largely overlooked.

This thesis investigates how production staff in immersive theatre can improve safety outcomes for audiences, particularly through a more nuanced understanding of risk and care. Across the following chapters, the thesis explores three key areas of inquiry: how audience care is currently practised in immersive theatre; how care ethics might be integrated into existing safety strategies; and what tools or frameworks might support improved competency and communication around risk for production staff. Before addressing these areas, the next two chapters lay the conceptual and methodological groundwork.

Chapter 2 presents a conceptual review of existing literature on risk and care in immersive theatre. It begins by examining the limitations of current occupational health and safety (OH&S) practices in the context of immersive performance, highlighting that much existing scholarship

centres on the artistic function of risk rather than its potential harms. While Adam Alston (2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2016a; 2016b) provides valuable insight into psychological and emotional responses, these reflections often remain focused on the aesthetics of performance. This chapter expands the discussion by developing a *typology of risk*, physical, psychological, and social, which is used throughout the research to help identify and classify different forms of audience vulnerability. Drawing on Paul Slovic's (2010) psychometric paradigm and the cultural theory of risk from Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky (1982), the chapter also explores how subjective factors such as identity, background, and emotional history shape how risks are perceived and experienced. This subjectivity highlights a gap in standard risk assessment processes, which assume uniform responses across audiences.

To address this gap, the chapter introduces care ethics as a complementary framework. With Joan Tronto's (2015) definition of care as the effort to 'maintain and repair our world' (p. 3), care ethics offers an approach that foregrounds attentiveness, responsibility, and relational understanding, qualities that can help guide risk management beyond checklists and toward more ethically attuned practices. The chapter concludes by exploring James Thompson's (2023) notion of care aesthetics, proposing that immersive theatre is not only a site of potential harm but also a space where the aesthetics of care can be crafted and studied.

Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative, phenomenological methodology employed to explore these ideas in practice. The chapter details the rationale for using a multi-method approach, combining two in-depth case studies with a Practice-as-Research (PaR) workshop series. The case studies involve interviews with performance makers and production staff, as well as observational fieldwork and document analysis, offering insight into how care is understood and implemented within different immersive theatre organisations. The PaR workshops were originally conceived

as a method of disseminating research findings back into the industry but ultimately emerged as a generative research method in their own right. They provided a space for participants, composed of both production staff and performance makers, to explore the concepts of risk, consent, and audience care through the co-creation of fictional cults and initiation rituals. These activities helped surface assumptions about risk and offered an iterative process for refining care practices.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the two case studies that inform the first major area of inquiry: how audience care is currently handled in immersive theatre. Chapter 4 examines *Dead Letter No. 9* (2023–2024) by ROLL THE BONES, focusing on how the performance design engaged psychological and social risks. Drawing on interviews with performance maker Taylor Myers and stage manager Ellery Brown, the chapter explores how audience care was embedded in both the dramaturgical structure and backstage systems. The company's ethos emphasised adequate development time and responsiveness to audience needs, aligning with the principles of care ethics. This chapter also introduces the concept of invisible labour in risk management, the often-unseen efforts of planning, anticipation, and emotional intelligence that make care possible during performance. Strategies such as playtesting, audience orientation, and post-show feedback are examined as practical tools for enacting care.

Chapter 5 builds on these insights through a case study of *1884* (2024) by Coney, an anti-colonial game-theatre piece exploring collective agency and historical violence. Interviews with performance maker Rhianna Ilube, producer Marie Klimis, venue duty manager Jenni Sinclair, and stage manager Brent Tan reveal how the company cultivated a culture of care through comprehensive preplanning, access manifestos, consent protocols, and robust internal communication. The chapter illustrates how occupational health and safety knowledge, when integrated with creative planning, can foster an immersive environment that centres

psychological safety and community well-being. Coney's emphasis on audience observation and feedback loops reflects an ongoing commitment to relational care, reinforcing the conceptual connections made in Chapter 2.

Chapter 6 turns to the PaR workshops, constituting the third major area of inquiry: how tools such as workshops and reflective practice can enhance production staff competency around risk.

The workshops revealed tensions between artistic and logistical understandings of risk.

Performance makers often framed risk as a desirable artistic condition, while production staff were more focused on mitigating potential harm. This difference in perspective underlined the need for clearer communication and shared frameworks. The workshops also demonstrated how immersive theatre often lacks clarity around in-performance care; despite progress in pre-show orientations and post-show aftercare, the moments during performance remain ethically complex. Participants stressed the importance of time, adaptability, and reflective language in fostering trust and managing risk, echoing earlier arguments for the importance of care ethics in risk communication.

Chapter 7 synthesizes the findings from the case studies and PaR workshops to develop a care ethic of immersive theatre and examine the tools suggested for caring for audiences. This ethic includes a commitment to time, flexibility, and humble inquiry, as well as the cultivation of shared language and mutual understanding across production teams. The chapter addresses the dissonance between how performance makers and production staff talk about *positive* versus *negative* risk, and how these differing goals, artistic challenge versus harm prevention, must be translated and aligned through ongoing collaboration. It introduces a safeguarding toolkit organised across three phases of caregiving: *pre-performance*, *in-performance*, and *post-performance* with particular attention paid to the in-performance phase, which was

identified during the workshops as the primary area of caregiving struggle. This toolkit builds on Tronto's and Hamington's models of care, offering production staff a concrete means of embedding ethical responsiveness into their practice.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by summarising the key contributions of this research. It reflects on how the findings advance current conversations in immersive theatre, risk management, care ethics, and communication design, while also acknowledging the study's limitations. It suggests further areas of inquiry, particularly around the audience's role in co-producing safety and care during performance, and calls for continued collaboration between artistic and technical teams in building safer, more inclusive immersive environments.

Turning now from this introduction, which established the foundational concepts of 'safer "unsafe" spaces' and the necessity for fostering an ethical safety culture in immersive theatre, the next chapter will dive into a comprehensive review of the literature on audience risk and care ethics. This literature review will critically examine existing research on the physical, psychological, and social risks that arise within immersive performances, emphasising why these risks differ from traditional theatre settings. In doing so, I will also introduce a typology of risk, which will frame the discussion moving forward. Furthermore, the chapter will explore how care ethics can offer a framework for managing these risks. This review sets the stage for developing an augmented care ethics approach that addresses the gaps in current risk management practices for immersive theatre.

Chapter 2 – Augmenting Immersive Risk Management with Care Ethics: A Conceptual Overview of Risk in Immersive Theatre, Care Ethics and Care Tools

In the previous chapter, I introduced the field of immersive theatre, its growing popularity in the UK and US, and the unique risks it presents for audiences. I identified a significant gap in existing scholarship concerning the role of production staff in managing these risks, despite their critical behind-the-scenes contributions. This gap framed the thesis's central research question: how can production staff contribute to creating safer immersive theatre experiences without diminishing the artistic integrity of the performance? Key terms such as immersive theatre, audience handling, production staff, and performance makers were also defined.

This chapter serves as a conceptual overview rather than a comprehensive literature review, due to the limited scholarship specifically addressing risk in immersive theatre. Where relevant, available literature is discussed, but the chapter's primary aim is to clarify and develop the conceptual terrain underpinning the thesis.

The first section briefly surveys the existing, heavily artist-centred, work on immersive theatre and risk, and identifies three core areas of concern: **physical**, **psychological**, and **social**. I then develop these categories into a working typology of risks for immersive audiences that is utilised throughout this research. While physical risks, such as tripping or collision, have received some attention and are often addressed through established health and safety protocols, psychological and social risks are frequently overlooked. This imbalance reflects broader trends in formal risk management structures, which have traditionally focused on tangible, physical hazards.

For instance, the Health and Safety at Work Act of 1974, a landmark piece of legislation in the UK, has been credited with reducing work-related deaths by 79% and non-fatal injuries by 75%

since its inception (Employer News, 2024). These regulations, often described anecdotally in workplace training as being ‘written in blood,’ were developed in response to workplace deaths and severe injuries and remain rooted in a physical understanding of risk. Yet, as MHFA England has pointed out, no comparable frameworks exist for psychological wellbeing in the workplace, revealing a lack of structural guidance for addressing mental and emotional harm (McIntosh, 2024). This absence is mirrored in immersive theatre risk management.

While physical risk is easier to predict and mitigate through pre-planning, psychological and social risks are more subjective and therefore harder to manage uniformly. To help explain this challenge, the chapter turns to Paul Slovic’s psychometric paradigm (2010), which examines how individuals perceive risk differently based on personal and socio-cultural factors. This subjective variability complicates risk assessment in immersive theatre, where the audience is diverse and responses to risk are unpredictable. This is further complicated by the diverse makeup of the production staff, whose views on risk innately influence what risks they identify and their perceptions of how severe those risks are. Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky’s (1982) work on the cultural theory of risk further supports this by suggesting that cultural background, social values, and lived experiences shape individual risk tolerance, meaning that no single approach can account for all audience members.

These subjective responses to risk underscore a key conceptual distinction, the difference between *positive* and *negative* risk-taking. As we have seen in the previous chapter, within immersive theatre, risk-taking is often a deliberate aesthetic strategy, enhancing participation, pleasure, and personal growth. As Gareth White (2013) notes, the reward for embracing risk is an experience ‘even more ephemeral and unique than most live performance’ (p. 74). Stephen Lyng’s (2005) concept of edgework similarly positions risk-taking as a form of liberation from

everyday norms, which Alice O’Grady (2017) builds on to argue that risk-taking can be positive and allows audiences to explore ‘vulnerability, self-actualisation, and agency through playful participation’ (p. 3). These positive outcomes are integral to the immersive form and must be protected alongside efforts to reduce harm.

To help support positive and manage negative risk outcomes, this chapter next examines how traditional risk management frameworks can be augmented through the lens of care ethics, a variant of my research subquestion articulated on page 45, with a focus on how the works of Joan Tronto (1993; 2015) and Maurice Hamington (2010; 2024) can support the development of a care ethic of immersive theatre. Grounded in relational responsibility and attentiveness, care ethics offers a more holistic and responsive approach to audience welfare. This section considers how adopting a care ethics ontology could complement existing occupational safety approaches, supporting positive risk-taking and moving risk management beyond regulation into a more embodied and values-driven practice.

Following this, the chapter introduces care aesthetics, a concept rooted in the *craft* of care, focused on *how* care is expressed, communicated, and felt in embodied spaces. I propose that immersive theatre may benefit from a more conscious integration of care aesthetics. This leads to a brief reflection on existing care tools used by production staff, adopted from other fields such as content warnings, orientation techniques, consent protocols, decompression spaces, and appropriate staffing, as many of these tools are during interviews and the workshop discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Many of these tools prioritise communication, such an essential skill for stage managers that Casey L. Sammarco (2025) just published a book on the topic, *Communication for Effective*

Stage Management. In immersive theatre, I argue this responsibility is shared with house staff and others tasked with guiding the audience journey. The chapter concludes by introducing Michael Smalley's (2024) discussion of the relationship between communication design and stage management scenography, utilising McKinney and Butterworth's (2009) definition of scenography which is the manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment to shape the audience's experience (p. 4). Given its centrality to audience experience, particular attention will be paid throughout this research to communication design as a key method of implementing care. This prepares the ground for Chapter 3, which outlines the methodology used to investigate these ideas in practice across two contemporary immersive productions.

I. Risk in Immersive Theatre: Creator-Centric Perspectives

Risk is frequently acknowledged in immersive theatre scholarship, yet definitions of the concept remain highly theoretical. While many scholars reference the presence of risk in these performances, discussions have overwhelmingly been framed from the perspective of creators, with occasional input from creators of their experience as an audience member in other immersive productions, focusing on how risk can be leveraged to achieve aesthetic and emotional outcomes rather than how it should be managed for audience safety and well-being. This creator-centric view often prioritises the intentional design of risk to heighten engagement, sometimes with questionable power dynamics that emphasise persuasion over care. The gap in these discussions, the absence of meaningful engagement with occupational health and safety techniques in how risk is managed for audiences, underpins the motivation for this research.

For more than a decade, Adam Alston has been at the forefront of discussions on risk in immersive theatre, his work having significantly shaped how scholars understand the role of risk as a defining aesthetic and a marketable element of these performances. Alston (2013a) argued that risk perception is integral to immersive theatre's appeal, aligning it with a neoliberal ethos that frames risk-taking as an individual responsibility and a pathway to reward. His analysis of Lundahl & Seidl's *Rotating in a Room of Images* illustrated how navigating a pitch-black space intensifies feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty, psychological states that, in turn, become part of the immersive experience (Alston, 2013b). Similarly, in his discussion of Half Cut's *Half Cut*, Alston (2012) explored how seemingly trivial risks, such as plucking a performer's hair, provoke heightened emotional responses in the audience, drawing attention to power dynamics and how socio-cultural identities affect risk, consent and participation within these performances. His work also highlights the unpredictable nature of immersive theatre, particularly in outdoor settings, such as in his discussion of Coney's *Adventure 1*, where environmental factors in found and urban performance settings can create risks outside of the control of the performance makers, evidenced by an unintentional detour to the wrong phone box which, for Alston (2016b), only added an extra layer of serendipitous enjoyment to the performance.

Alston's (2013c) most significant theoretical contribution is his concept of a 'politics of participation,' in which an audience member's ability to act within an immersive environment is deeply intertwined with their emotional responses to risk. His work has been instrumental in identifying many physical and psychological risks in immersive theatre, as well as in articulating the value of *positive* risk as a core aesthetic. However, even within Alston's extensive

scholarship, the question of how to manage risk for audiences to avoid *negative* outcomes, rather than how to harness it for positive artistic effect, remains largely unexamined.

This omission reflects a broader trend in the literature. Gareth White's *Audience Participation in Theatre* (2013) is one of few works that explicitly discusses the 'real and actual' (p. 73) risks of harm to audiences in participatory performances. He notes that while characters may be fictional, the individuals playing them are not, and thus the risks they encounter, particularly psychological risks such as embarrassment or reputational harm, are genuine. However, White's discussion remains rooted in the perspective of the 'procedural author' (p. 73), a role aligned with performance makers in this research. His argument that it is the creator's responsibility to ensure both the safety and perception of safety for participants (p. 74) is complicated by his subsequent discussion of how to 'persuade and cajole' audiences into participation and 'overcom[e] their inhibitions' (p. 75). His phrasing, particularly the notion of 'protecting participants into involvement' (p. 94), suggests a power dynamic in which the creator's vision takes precedence over audience autonomy, reinforcing concerns about manipulation. Again, while White's research acknowledges the potential presence of *negative* risk, his focus is strongly on how to get the audience to engage with *positive* risk in performance. My research, in contrast, seeks to offer a counterbalance to such perspectives by centring production staff as advocates who can help mediate these power dynamics and prioritise audience care, to focus on removal and reduction of negative risks, while supporting the positive risk aesthetic.

Similar concerns arise in Jason Warren's *Creating Worlds: How to Make Immersive Theatre* (2017), which introduces the concept of 'Voids,' spaces within immersive environments that

discourage engagement due to feelings of exposure or intimidation for audiences. Warren highlights the ways in which spatial design can inadvertently alienate audiences, particularly those unaccustomed to immersive conventions. However, his discussion is framed again around optimising audience participation rather than mitigating potential distress. Tellingly, he refers to spectators as ‘the problematic audience’ (p. 22), a phrase that echoes a common attitude in immersive theatre discourse: audiences, though central to the art form, are often treated as unpredictable elements that disrupt the controlled intentions of the creators.

Nandita Dinesh’s *Immersive Theatre and Activism* (2018) introduces another crucial dimension to risk discourse: the ethical implications of casting audiences in particular roles. In politically charged immersive works, audiences may be positioned as either oppressors or the oppressed, a framing that can carry significant psychological consequences. Dinesh’s discussion underscores the necessity for considering not just the performance’s intent but also its potential impact on audiences, an aspect sometimes overlooked in discussions focused solely on artistic outcomes. She also highlights the issue of duration in immersive performances, particularly those lasting multiple days, which demand heightened psychological and physical stamina from participants. From a production staff perspective, Dinesh’s work reinforces the need for more robust strategies to assess and mitigate the *negative* psychological risks associated with audience role-play and extended engagement.

Further expanding the discussion of social risks, Kelly Jordan (2019) examines the precariousness of inter-audience interactions by recounting instances where spectators have been heckled by fellow audience members. She builds on Nicolas Ridout’s (2012) concept of

‘mis-spectators,’ those who misunderstand the performance’s participatory expectations and etiquette, and Adam Alston’s (2016b) notion of ‘errant spectators,’ those who he suggests may become overly emboldened and cross unintended boundaries due to their understanding that immersive performances are often exploratory performances. Jordan introduces a new category in the ‘dis-spectator,’ who deliberately disrupts the performance. Her identification of four stages of dis-spectatorship, testing, playing, disruption, and sabotage (Jordan, 2019, p. 205), provides a valuable framework for production staff to identify and address problematic audience behaviours.

While much of the academic literature on risk in immersive theatre has been framed from the creator’s perspective, which emphasises discussion around how to develop *positive* risk-taking opportunities for the audience as an intentional aesthetic rather than identifying and managing potential *negative* risks, there is one notable exception: Adrian Howells’ *Footwashing for the Sole* workshops, documented by Helen Iball (2012) at the University of Leeds. Howells, known for his highly intimate performances involving acts such as washing and feeding audience members, was deeply invested in fostering what he described as an ‘accelerated friendship/relationship between two initial strangers’ (Iball, 2012, p. 41).

In 2010, Howells conducted a series of workshops at Leeds, observed by psychologists and applied ethicists. The outcome was a rudimentary checklist for ethical considerations in intimate performance, which notably prefigures several of the concerns central to this thesis: consent, content warnings, audience orientation, and care. Of particular relevance was the workshop’s engagement with the concept of informed and continuous consent, an emerging concept in the

immersive theatre landscape in the early 2010s. The discussions raised critical questions that remain pertinent today, such as whether existing pre-show materials constitute sufficient disclosure for audiences to fully grasp what they are consenting to before purchasing a ticket (Iball, 2012, p. 53). More than ten years later, it is still questionable if the information provided at the point of sale is inadequate to grasp the commitment from the audience for many of these performances. Highlighting the continued relevance of discussions around audience expectations in her thesis exploring hospitality and site-specific performance, artist-researcher Alison Judith Graeme Andrews (2022) shared post-performance feedback from an audience member who was scared of being a ‘bad guest’ (p. 66) because they did not understand the parameters of their commitment.

Howells’ approach stands in stark contrast to many other creator-driven discussions of risk, which instead often focus on persuading audiences to engage with risk rather than ensuring they are genuinely informed before consenting. His work represents a rare example of a performance maker actively collaborating with ethical scholars to interrogate audience care, rather than assuming the audience’s willingness to take risks as a given. However, despite this valuable contribution, discussions of risk management in immersive theatre have largely remained on the periphery of academic discourse, with the dominant focus continuing to privilege the needs of creators over the well-being of participants.

Most recently, Joanna Bucknall’s *Talking About Immersive Theatre* (2022) also acknowledges a critical gap in the field: ‘there is little resource that offers insights into how this work is made or how audiences experience it’ (p. 1). While Bucknall does briefly touch on risk, primarily in

relation to financial uncertainty, a recurring concern for producers and artists, this falls outside the scope of the current research. Her central focus remains on demystifying the creative and production processes behind immersive theatre. She argues that in gamified and pervasive dramaturgies, such as immersive theatre, audience participation is not optional but integral, bringing with it a degree of unpredictability and shared authorship that implicitly involves risk. However, this is, again, framed more as an artistic condition than a safety or welfare concern. Bucknall highlights the scarcity of accessible 'know-how' surrounding these processes, which is often withheld due to commercial pressures, legal limitations, and the need to protect creative intellectual property (pp. 19-20). Her volume is primarily concerned with broadening access to the voices of makers, aiming to illuminate the artistic labour behind immersive work. Yet, even as the scholarship expands, the distinction between the desired, aesthetic risks embedded in performance and the often-unacknowledged negative risks faced by audiences remains largely unexamined. Bucknall's contribution is therefore characteristic of an artist-led discourse that centres creative strategy, but does not extend into frameworks for managing audience wellbeing or risk mitigation.

As the methods of research in this thesis, discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, involved significant discussion with industry production staff, performance makers and audiences about risk, it also became evident that those discussions would benefit from a more structured approach to guide the discussions around risk, particularly when deviating from creator-centric discourse. The following section develops a typology of risk for audiences in immersive theatre, expanding upon existing categories of physical and psychological risks while adding a third category: *social* risks. This typology provides a foundation for considering how production staff can play a more

active role in managing risk and fostering audience care, an essential yet largely overlooked aspect of immersive theatre practice.

II. Audience Risks in Immersive Theatre: Physical Risks

Physical risks evident in immersive theatre literature primarily stem from three key areas:

environmental factors, physical contact, and stamina. While all forms of theatre involve some level of physical risk, immersive theatre's unconventional settings and interactive nature create additional hazards that are often overlooked by formal risk assessment frameworks. Furthermore, the physical risks in traditional theatre are primarily undertaken only by the performers and staff, not the audience. Occupational risk assessment methods tend to focus narrowly on environmental dangers, such as slips, trips, and falls, with some attention given to darkness. However, other significant risks, including audience-performer touch and the physical endurance needed for durational performances, have received little structured consideration.

The **environmental** risks in immersive theatre are largely shaped by the use of found spaces, which are often abandoned or repurposed sites chosen for artistic or budgetary reasons.

Performances may take place in old warehouses, disused theatres, private homes, or even public streets, exposing audiences to uneven terrain, narrow walkways, low ceilings, and overcrowded spaces. Darkness, potential for trespassing, and extreme temperatures further compound these risks.

Darkness and low-lighting are frequently used as scenic elements; however, they also heighten existing physical hazards. Adam Alston (2016b) discusses Lundahl and Seidl's pitch-black

theatre, where disorientation and heightened sensory awareness create aesthetic tension but also result in ‘the first of many stumbles’ (p. 84). Even with good lighting, Alice Saville (2019) noted reports from Sean Rogg’s *Barzakh* of trips and falls specifically related to the slipperiness of the custard smeared floor that was part of the performance. Similarly, Jason Warren (2017) highlights the potential dangers of *trespassing*, particularly when audiences are encouraged to search for hidden objects in public spaces. Much like the lawsuit that occurred on *Accomplice* described in Chapter 1, Warren warns that even seemingly harmless activities, such as retrieving an item from a pavement, can present legal and safety risks, stating that ‘having them [the audience] ferreting around on a narrow pavement by a busy road is a recipe for disaster’ (p. 105). Finally, *extreme temperatures* can be a deliberate part of a performance’s design, as seen in *Barzakh*, where audience members were required to switch to shorts and t-shirts in near-freezing weather (Saville 2019).

Unlike traditional theatre, immersive performances often involve direct **physical contact** between performers and audience members. Adrian Howells’ work exemplifies this, using touch as a core aesthetic principle. His performance *Held* explored non-verbal communication through prolonged physical proximity, with Howells (2012) observing that ‘confessional information can be communicated non-verbally’ (p. 128). Similarly, Machon (2016) describes touch as activating a ‘sensory intellect’ that exists beyond cerebral reasoning (p. 46).

A specific subcategory of touch risk is *being fed*. Immersive performances have experimented with food as an artistic device, sometimes pushing audience boundaries. Alice Saville (2019) recounts experiences of being force-fed jelly and custard in *Barzakh*, raising ethical questions

about consent in such scenarios. Personally, I have experienced being force-fed dry popcorn during a production of *Bloodbath* (ScreamWorks, 2023) that immediately made me concerned about choking. Even when voluntary, food-based participation adds risk, as seen in Rachel Gomme's (2015) account of being offered and rejecting a cupcake at the end of a performance. These interactions with food create a space for negative risks, such as choking and allergies, that need to be managed effectively.

The physical demands of immersive theatre can also be a risk factor, particularly in long-duration performances requiring increased **stamina**. Unlike conventional productions, which last a few hours, some immersive experiences unfold over extended periods. Nandita Dinesh (2018) highlights this in her two-day performance *Detention*, noting that prolonged engagement requires a different kind of physical and mental stamina (p. 40). Many Punchdrunk performances, such as *The Masque of the Red Death*, *Sleep No More*, and *The Burnt City*, typically last around three hours and require the audience to walk, climb stairs, and explore the space throughout the performance (Murray and Keefe, 2016, p. 127). Audiences may be expected to walk long distances, remain standing for extended periods, or navigate physically challenging environments, increasing the potential for exhaustion or discomfort.

III. Audience Risks in Immersive Theatre: Psychological Risks

Psychological risks are the primary focus of this thesis, as they are often overlooked in formal risk assessments despite their prevalence in immersive theatre. Unlike physical hazards, we have established that psychological risks are subjective; what one audience member finds thrilling, another may find distressing. Immersive theatre's participatory nature increases the potential for

discomfort, confusion, or unintended emotional consequences. Four primary categories of psychological risk emerge from the literature: **delusions**, **emotional response**, **regretful actions**, and **reactivated trauma**.

A key concern in immersive theatre is the potential for audience members to lose sight of the boundary between performance and reality. Mary LaFrance (2013) notes that some productions demand such deep emotional investment that certain individuals may develop **delusions**, believing their interactions with performers are genuine. This has led to cases of harassment and stalking, where audience members mistake the performance's intimacy for real-world connection.

Amber Jamieson (2018) reports firsthand accounts from *Sleep No More* performers who have felt unsafe due to audience members misinterpreting scripted interactions as invitations for personal or romantic involvement. As mentioned above, Ridout (2012) describes such individuals as 'mis-spectators,' while Jordan (2019) introduces the more troubling concept of 'dis-spectators,' who intentionally exploit the immersive setting to create problems. Regardless of intent, these blurred perceptions can be psychologically harmful to both audience members and performers.

Immersive theatre frequently evokes strong **emotional responses**. While some experiences are designed to provoke positive discomfort and self-reflection as an intentional *positive* risk to encourage growth, others may induce unintended stress, fear, guilt, or embarrassment and warrant a careful examination of intention. While some enjoy the darkness that Adam Alston (2016b) describes and view it positively, others may experience genuine fear. Similarly, Nandita

Dinesh (2018) critiques immersive theatre's attempts to generate empathy through role-playing, arguing that placing audiences in the roles of either the oppressed or the oppressor can induce psychological stress rather than enlightenment. She compares such performances to Milgram's infamous prison experiment, once called 'the most notorious of all psychologically stressful research studies' (Nicholson, 2011, p. 738).

Some productions intentionally use *guilt* as a tool for social awareness. David Bisaha (2019) describes how *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music* employs guilt to confront audience members with issues of privilege. However, not all guilt-inducing moments are positive. *Sleep No More*, as analysed by Alston (2013c), deliberately aims to sever 'guilt-ridden social conventions' (p. 189), yet audience members must still reckon with their actions once the performance ends. Asher Warren (2018), in his discussion of performance research ethics boards, describes lingering emotions (guilt, shame, regret, and self-loathing) as 'sneaky feelings' (p. 87), which may affect participants long after the performance is over.

Audience participation inherently carries the risk of *embarrassment*, particularly when individuals are put on display in unfamiliar ways. White examines how embarrassment functions in immersive theatre, noting that while some productions mitigate this risk, others actively provoke it. For example, *Post Porn Modernism* required audience members to closely examine another person's genitals, a scenario that may provoke varying levels of discomfort (White, 2013, p. 179).

Immersive theatre's intimate settings can encourage participants to engage in **regretful actions**. Intimate performance structures can create an atmosphere where audiences feel compelled to *overshare private information*. Rachel Gomme (2015) shares her experience in *Eating Secrets: M.E.S.S.*, where she had prepared a minor confession in advance but found herself revealing far more due to the performer's skillful engagement. Such moments, while powerful, can leave participants feeling exposed or vulnerable once the performance ends.

Some performances intentionally push audiences to *engage in actions they later regret*. Adam Alston (2013c) once again highlights *Internal* by Ontroerend Goed as a production that plays on audience trust. Participants willingly share intimate details, believing the space to be private, only to later realise those details are publicly exposed. LaFrance (2013) adds 'in the excitement (or pressure) of the moment, the audience participant is unlikely to have thought about the possible consequences of the disclosure' (p. 534). White (2013) recounts an incident where an *Internal* audience member happily accepted a kiss from a performer, only to later reveal he had been in a committed relationship for 25 years, potentially causing personal turmoil to a very real relationship (p. 80-81). Rosemary Waugh (2015) shared a story of attending Raucous' *The Stick House* where she was cast in a role she did not expect from the performance marketing:

Thus it was that completely inadvertently I spent part of my Friday night pretending to be a Jew about to be shipped off to certain death. I feel about as uncomfortable being a part of a room of – and I make a complete assumption here based on the cultural makeup of Bristol – predominantly non-Jewish people pretending for the sake of an evening's entertainment to be a Jew in the Holocaust, as I would if someone asked me to

impersonate a black African about to be put on a boat in the slave trade in the name of audience participation (para 6).

Certain immersive performances can unintentionally create or reactivate **traumas**. Responding to a report from an audience member who claimed to feel traumatised by attending Badac's *The Factory*, clinical trauma psychologist Dr. Matthias Schwannauer shared, 'The extreme noise causes the brain to feel confused and I know people who would be tipped over the edge from this show. Your reaction has been similar to that of a trauma victim' (LaFrance, 2013, p. 524). While some productions include content warnings, others fail to account for how specific interactions may affect individual audience members. Penelope Cole shared a story about her experience at Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man*:

As I was making my way down, a male performer grabbed my wrist and started dragging me down an empty hallway. He actually grabbed my wrist and started pulling me along. At that moment I dug in my heels and refused to go with him. I'm a 'yes, and ...' kind of person, but (in my memory) this happening in a dark hallway; it was narrow, I didn't know where exits were, and I was being pulled away from where I could hear the crowd was... At which point I, yet again, felt judged as the performer threw up his hands, sort of pushed me, and said, 'Go back to the crowd.' I have very little recollection of what really happened in that final piece of the performance because, as a woman alone in a situation where I felt negated as a human being, I felt like I had just escaped a highly dangerous situation (Aviles-Rodriguez et al., 2019, p. 182).

While moments involving touch, such as being grabbed or physically guided, are often classified as physical risks, they may simultaneously carry psychological and social consequences, especially when they evoke fear, confusion, or trigger past trauma. This hybridity is central to how the typology of audience risks in immersive theatre used in this research is conceptualised: not as a rigid ontology, but as a tool for alerting both production staff and performance makers to the kinds of risks that might emerge in practice. For instance, Hailey Scott (2024) describes a moment in *Sleep No More* where a performer pulled her into a room, barricaded the door, removed her mask, and kissed her forehead. Although she personally found the encounter exhilarating, she acknowledged that others might perceive it as a ‘violating encounter’ (para. 1). Such examples illustrate how immersive theatre’s unpredictability can lead to divergent audience responses, underscoring the importance of consent and nuanced risk management.

IV. Audience Risks in Immersive Theatre: Social Risks

Social risks, though closely related to psychological risks, warrant distinct consideration in immersive theatre. Unlike traditional performances where audience members are passive observers, immersive experiences often require them to engage with both performers and each other. While existing risk assessments largely ignore social risks, immersive theatre amplifies and complicates them by making audience interactions unpredictable and often public. Existing literature highlights interactions that can expose individuals to **damage to reputation**, **embarrassment**, and **rejection**, risks that persist beyond the performance space and influence real-world social dynamics.

Melissa Herburg (2023) identifies inter-audience interactions as the highest-risk element of participatory theatre. While performer-audience exchanges are at least partially guided by the production's intentions, audience-to-audience interactions lack this structure, increasing the likelihood of misunderstandings. As exemplified in Rosemary Waugh's unfortunate experience in *The Stick House* shared in the previous section, Dinesh (2018) highlights how immersive theatre designed to foster empathy can inadvertently create harmful power dynamics, positioning participants as either oppressors or the oppressed. Though these roles may be fictional in the moment, they can shape audience members' perceptions of one another long after the performance ends, potentially leading to **damage to reputation** if actions taken during the performance are judged negatively outside the theatrical context.

These reputational risks can, in turn, lead to strong emotional responses, most notably, **guilt**, **embarrassment**, and **shame**. June Price Tangney (1999) distinguishes between these: guilt tends to arise in response to a specific action the individual regrets and is generally experienced as a private, internal discomfort. Shame, by contrast, is deeply social and often more psychologically damaging. It emerges when an individual believes they have violated the norms or expectations of their social group, such as the audience cohort or wider cultural context, and is marked by feelings of exposure, humiliation, and the desire to hide or withdraw (Tangney, 1999, pp. 544–546).

Importantly, Tangney (1999) notes that shame can actually impair empathy, undermining one of the intended emotional outcomes of many immersive performances (p. 547). Rather than fostering connection, shame may provoke defensiveness, withdrawal, or even hostility, counterproductive responses that diminish the transformative potential of immersive work. Even

when a misstep within the performance is relatively minor, the social nature of immersive theatre can amplify its consequences, turning awkward moments into emotionally charged ones.

While embarrassment is typically viewed as a less intense emotion than shame, it too poses a barrier to audience engagement. Both emotions involve self-consciousness, perceived social failure, and fear of negative evaluation. However, embarrassment usually stems from more trivial incidents, awkward interactions, or perceived faux pas, and is generally less damaging to one's sense of self-worth. It may be accompanied by gestures such as nervous laughter or apologising. Yet, even embarrassment can hinder participation, especially for audience members who are already hesitant or uncertain about engaging.

Even when performers facilitate an interaction, the public nature of immersive experiences magnifies the potential for reputational harm. Gareth White (2013) underscores how **embarrassment**, missteps, or involuntary exposure in front of an audience can cause lasting social consequences:

They have reputations nevertheless, which can really and actually come to harm in performance. In everyday life, the risk of embarrassment has a disciplinary effect on people... when participatory theatre invites performances from the audience members, it presents special opportunities for embarrassment, for mis-performance and reputational damage (p. 73).

White (2013) also notes that all forms of audience participation involve a performance of the 'social self' (p. 90). He connects consideration of the social self to the need for ethical guidelines

in social science research, which consider non-physical risks such as embarrassment and reputational harm, and claims it sets a precedent for acknowledging these risks in immersive theatre. White identifies two particular hazards: significant public embarrassment and the revelation of private materials (p. 90). Similarly, Jason Warren (2017) defines social fear as the anxiety of ‘drawing attention to oneself in an embarrassing way’ (p. 25). Richard Talbot (2017), discussing Ontroerend Goed’s *Audience*, emphasises the risks of ‘loss of face’ and ‘humiliation’ (p. 173) in participatory performances.

V. Typology of Audience Risks in Immersive Theatre

The risks identified in the literature informed the development of a simplified typology of audience risk in immersive theatre, which was later used in the audience questionnaires and workshop discussed in the next chapter. While this typology does not capture the full complexity of risk, it serves as a tool to broaden the discussion beyond traditional physical environmental factors. It also acknowledges that risks rarely occur in isolation. For instance, tripping over uneven terrain in an abandoned building with low lighting may result in a skinned knee (a physical risk), trigger embarrassment (a psychological risk), and be further amplified as a social risk if the fall happens in full view of other audience members.

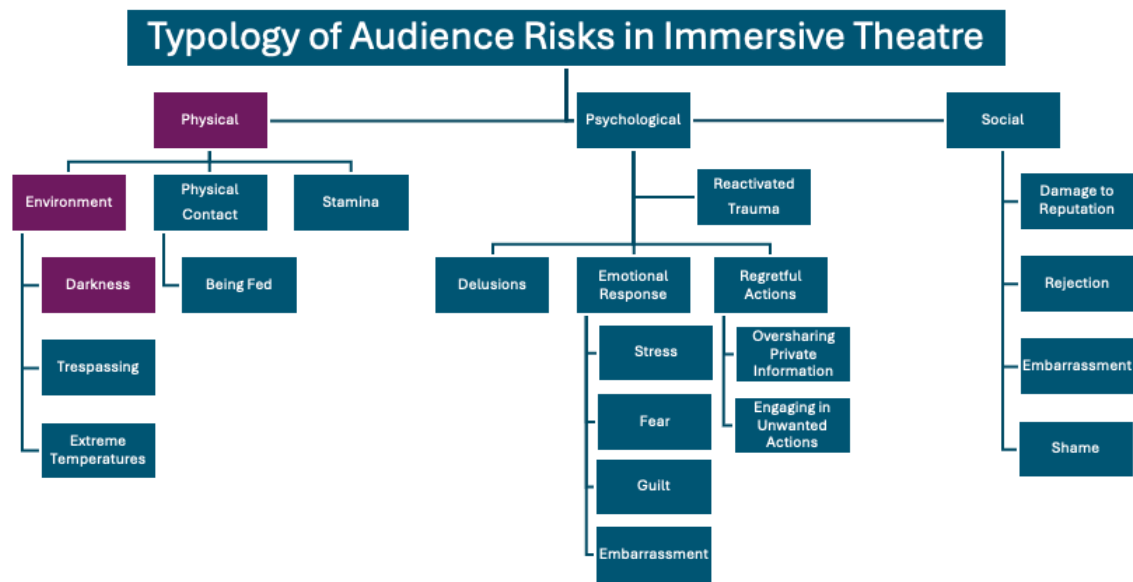


Figure 2 Typology of Audience Risks in Immersive Theatre

From this exploration of physical, psychological, and social risks in immersive theatre, it becomes clear that audience risk extends far beyond environmental hazards traditionally covered by existing occupational health and safety frameworks. While physical risks, such as unexpected terrain, darkness, or potential trips and slips, are the most visible and commonly addressed (highlighted in purple in Figure 2), this overview has shown that psychological and social risks, particularly those related to shame, regret, and reputational harm, can be both more insidious and less understood. The typology used here does not function as a rigid categorization, but as a flexible tool to alert performance makers and production staff to the kinds of risks that may arise in practice, especially when risks intersect across categories, such as physical touch triggering psychological trauma. Perhaps most importantly, this section has demonstrated that immersive

theatre's capacity to provoke strong affective responses, its aesthetic strength, also makes it uniquely vulnerable to producing unintended emotional harm.

Beyond individual psychological impacts, immersive theatre also carries significant social risks, particularly in productions that rely on audience interaction. Inter-audience dynamics are inherently unpredictable, meaning social risk mitigation must be a key consideration in designing safer and more ethically responsible experiences. Recognising this highlights the need to treat risk not only as a matter of safety, but also of care, an idea that will be further developed in the following sections. However, before discussing the role of care ethics as a possible way to augment traditional risk assessment methods, the next section explores the science of risk perception, drawing on the work of Paul Slovic to examine the complications of assessing how different production staff, audience members and performance makers assess and respond to risk.

VI. Risk Perception and the Immersive Audience Experience

Risk perception is inherently subjective, shaped by emotional states, personal experiences, and contextual factors. In immersive theatre, this subjectivity is intensified by the art form's emphasis on individualised experiences; audiences may follow different pathways, engage in one-on-one interactions, or co-create moments with performers. These elements make each audience member's experience unique and directly affect how they perceive and respond to risks within the performance environment.

To better understand how these subjective elements function, it is useful to turn to the work of Paul Slovic, a leading theorist in risk perception who has been studying the field since 1959. Slovic's research focuses on how emotions influence decision-making, particularly through what

he terms affect heuristics (Slovic, 2010). These heuristics describe how emotional responses bias an individual's assessment of risk: when a situation or object is associated with positive feelings, its risks tend to be underestimated. Conversely, prior negative experiences lead to heightened perceptions of danger. Slovic's early research into public attitudes toward nuclear power illustrated this clearly. Individuals with negative emotional associations often exaggerated its dangers, despite evidence to the contrary (Slovic, 2010, pp. xx–xxi).

The psychometric paradigm², developed by Baruch Fischhoff, Paul Slovic, Sarah Lichtenstein, Stephen Read and Barbara Combs in 1978, offers a framework for understanding this subjectivity. The psychometric paradigm is a research approach in risk perception studies in which participants rate a range of hazards on multiple scales (e.g., severity, familiarity, controllability), producing quantifiable patterns that reveal how risks are perceived and compared. Although its name indicates a quantitative approach, Jana Uher (2021) notes that psychometric studies of risk perception really rely on comparative language rather than direct measurement, focusing on how people rank risks in qualitative terms. The model suggests that personal risk assessments are shaped not only by individual psychology but also by social, institutional, and cultural contexts (Slovic, 2010; 2020). Expanding this view, Amanda Ripley (2009) introduces the Dread/Optimism factor, which explains how people assign risk based on emotional responses: dread amplifies perceived risk, while optimism diminishes it. In immersive theatre, this raises a practical challenge: how can production staff encourage optimism and mitigate dread without compromising the artistic integrity of the work?

² While influential, the psychometric paradigm has faced notable criticism, including Lennart Sjöberg (2003; 2006; 2007), who argues that its emphasis on 'dread' and severity reduces the emotional complexity of risk perception, often conflating attitudes with actual emotions and relying on correlational data without establishing causation. Critics also point to its neglect of factors like mood (Watson & Clark, 1998), personal knowledge (Marris et al., 1997), and social context (Sjöberg, 2006). Nevertheless, the paradigm remains widely applied, for example its conceptual framework was cited in the 2024 UK Supreme Court case *Rukhadze and others v Recovery Partners GP Ltd and another*.

This concern aligns with Slovic's broader interest in risk communication, where the key issue is not just what is being communicated, but how it is received. Slovic (1987) emphasizes that risk communication should be a two-way process, where both experts and the public contribute valid insights (p. 285). The public's, or, in this case, the audience's, richer conceptualizations of risk include concerns often omitted by experts, so mutual respect and dialogue are essential for success. Without this, risk communication and management efforts are likely to fail. Similarly, immersive theatre staff must consider how audiences interpret both explicit and implicit cues around risk. Slovic argues that people process information in two main ways: analytically and emotionally. For lay audiences, those outside professional risk industries, which in this case could include the immersive audiences, risk is most often processed through feelings. Two key emotions influencing risk perception are fear and anger. Fear intensifies perceived risk, making it feel external and uncontrollable, whereas anger leads people to view the same risk as manageable and within their control, even if it is not (Slovic & Peters, 2006). Ripley (2009), rather, suggests optimism in the place of anger in this framework, suggesting that optimistic individuals may similarly underestimate risk, though this may also work to encourage participation when a risk is, in fact, reasonable.

In immersive theatre, this internal weighing of risks is ever-present. Audiences subconsciously assess whether the risk of missing out on part of a performance outweighs the discomfort of participation. These might include the risk of embarrassment during a participatory scene or the fear associated with navigating dark or confined spaces. In this way, the psychometric paradigm is not just theoretical but plays out in every immersive performance, as audiences continually rank and respond to risks in real time.

Slovic identifies four primary factors that shape the perception of fear: voluntariness, controllability, lethality, and fairness (Slovic, 2010, p. 26). In the immersive context, lethality is rarely relevant, and the experience is technically voluntary. However, perceptions of voluntariness and control can be undermined by social dynamics. Audience members may feel pressured to comply with actions to avoid disrupting the performance or disappointing others, making it difficult to assert personal boundaries. This blurring of voluntary participation increases feelings of fear or discomfort, reinforcing the importance of clear, ongoing consent frameworks within immersive design.

Risk perception also intersects with phenomenology, which, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, centres on lived, subjective experience. Because audiences bring their own emotional histories and embodied responses into the performance, no two participants experience risk in the same way. Additionally, no two production staff or performance makers identify and navigate risks exactly the same way. Slovic's affect heuristic and Ripley's Dread/Optimism model highlight how emotional states shape perception, underscoring the need for immersive theatre practitioners to account for more than just physical hazards. Psychological and social risks, although harder to quantify, are central to consider when assessing how risk is perceived and navigated in immersive spaces. Designing with these dimensions in mind not only enhances audience safety but also supports more ethically responsive and emotionally attuned performance-making.

i. Subjectivity, Socio-Cultural Factors and Risk Perception

In immersive theatre, where experiences are uniquely personal and often shaped by variable pathways and interactions, perceptions of risk can differ markedly between individuals. The psychometric paradigm, which recognises risk perception as subjective and emotionally driven,

has important implications for understanding these differences. This becomes especially relevant in a field that has historically lacked diversity (Ramos et al., 2020), making the so-called ‘white-male effect’ a critical consideration. As identified by Finucane et al. (2010), white men consistently perceive risks as lower than women and non-white individuals, with non-white women reporting the highest risk perceptions across a range of hazards (p. 137).

Audience reactions to Punchdrunk’s *The Drowned Man* demonstrate this disparity. Rand, a male participant, recalled that he ‘never encountered any aggressive behaviour’ (Aviles-Rodriguez et al., 2019, p. 184) during the performance. In stark contrast, Penny, a female attendee whose story was discussed earlier in this chapter, described being forcibly grabbed by the wrist and dragged into a dark corridor, later stating, ‘I felt like I had just escaped a highly dangerous situation’ (Aviles-Rodriguez et al., 2019, p. 182). What one audience member perceives as innocuous, another may experience as threatening or traumatic. Such examples underscore the need for risk mitigation strategies that consider a broad range of perspectives, rather than relying solely on the experiences of privileged performance makers or production staff who may unintentionally underestimate certain forms of risk. While it is not feasible to tailor safety practices to every individual’s specific frame of reference, greater awareness of differing social and cultural experiences is essential to improving existing risk assessment frameworks.

This variability in perception is closely tied to cultural and social values. Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky’s (1982) cultural theory of risk suggests that factors such as gender, race, sexuality, class, religion, education, and profession all shape an individual’s lived relationship with risk. Their research found that people with hierarchical or individualist worldviews tend to be more risk-tolerant, whereas those aligned with egalitarian or communitarian values often exhibit greater risk aversion. While cultural theory has been criticised for its limited empirical

applications (Tansey & O’Riordan, 1999) and for potentially downplaying individual agency or structural conditions (Dake & Wildavsky, 1991), it remains useful for explaining why individuals interpret the same scenario differently. In immersive theatre, this appears through the concept of cultural interactivity, which considers how an audience member’s background shapes their behaviour and responses during performance (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004; Biggin, 2017, p. 69).

Salen and Zimmerman (2004) liken this to a poker game, where participants' decisions are influenced not only by logic but also by personal and cultural histories, for example being labelled a ‘card shark’ or recalling a past loss, may override rational judgement. A card player might wish to live up to the ‘card shark’ status and play in a heightened risk-tolerant fashion. Alternatively, they may exhibit more risk-averse behaviour despite holding good cards if they have recently suffered a significant loss in a similar situation. This parallels the notion of introjects discussed by Deirdre Heddon, Helen Iball, and Rachel Zerihan (2012), who describe them as internalised expectations about how one ought to behave in a given situation. These introjects often pressure participants to conform, at the expense of comfort or potentially even their own safety. Zerihan provides a telling example from a performance in which she was offered a strawberry, something she strongly dislikes. Despite her discomfort, she accepted and pretended to enjoy it, driven by her internalised desire to ‘give good audience’ (Heddon et al., 2012, p. 124).

Among the various socio-cultural factors influencing risk perception, gender receives the most sustained attention in both the risk literature and immersive theatre scholarship. Alice Saville (2019), for example, examines how gender was actively manipulated in the immersive experience *Barzakh*:

In particular, this is an experience that might stir up a lot of uncomfortable feelings for women and non-binary people. One person I spoke to described the whole experience as ‘weirdly gendered,’ for the way that people were divided and assigned a ‘guard’ of a different gender to their perceived one. They raised the point that your gender has a massive impact on how you respond to physical touch from a man, to being shouted at, and to how comfortable you are running around half naked, covered in slimy liquids (para. 8).

Saville’s observation underscores the uneven distribution of psychological risk. While the performance intentionally provoked discomfort, the reported impact focused almost exclusively on women and non-binary participants, with little commentary on male experiences. This raises important questions about whether the same immersive performance can create vastly different risk landscapes for different individuals, and how production teams might account for such disparities in their reception.

Ultimately, immersive theatre practitioners must acknowledge that risk is not an objective or universal condition, but rather a culturally and personally mediated experience. As performance maker Persis Jadé Maravala aptly puts it, ‘Just as God created Adam in his own image, White middle-class men shape audiences in theirs.’ Reflecting on her own assumptions, she adds, ‘I have been guilty of thinking of this audience as this so-called kind of ‘everyman,’ and it doesn’t exist. I think this neutral audience member doesn’t exist’ (Maravala in Bucknall, 2022, p. 482). Maravala’s insight serves as a call to move beyond privileging dominant perspectives in production. Instead, responsible risk management must involve active, ongoing engagement with diverse audiences to ensure that the risks being identified, and where necessary, mitigated, reflect the realities of all participants, not just those who hold institutional or cultural power.

While this discussion has primarily focused on how immersive audiences perceive and navigate risk, these same frameworks must also be applied inwardly by production staff when conducting their risk assessments and planning for audience care. Before effective risk management for audiences can take place, practitioners may benefit from interrogating their own positionality toward risk, examining which affective biases, cultural assumptions, or introjects may be influencing what they perceive as safe or unproblematic. What feels innocuous to the creators may register quite differently for a diverse audience. Recognising and addressing these internal dynamics is a critical first step in developing more responsive and inclusive immersive environments. Central to this process is the concept of *trust*, which becomes the foundation not only for audience engagement but also for ethical, collaborative risk negotiation between creators and participants.

As discussed earlier, within the psychometric paradigm, audiences constantly weigh the risks of participation, such as embarrassment, fear, or discomfort, against the potential rewards of engagement. The challenge, then, is how to foster optimism and encourage audiences to take these risks willingly. Research indicates that trust plays a central role in shaping perceptions of voluntariness, controllability, fairness, and, ultimately, the willingness to participate.

VII. Trust as a Mechanism for Encouraging Acceptable Risk-Taking

Trust plays a crucial role in risk perception. When audiences trust performers and theatre companies, they are far more willing to engage with risks; without trust, participation becomes significantly more difficult. Ulrich Beck (1999) argues that we live in a ‘risk society’, a consequence of what he terms ‘second modernity’. Unlike first modernity, which was characterised by relative stability and predictability, second modernity is defined by uncertainty,

shaped by globalisation, individualisation, shifting gender dynamics, economic instability, and ecological crises (Beck, 1999, p. 2). As a result, society has become increasingly focused on *negative* risk, meaning risks that lead to undesirable outcomes, driven by a general sense of unpredictability and fear.

To function within the second modernity, Beck discusses trust as a crucial mechanism for navigating these conditions, suggesting that modern societies attempt to make the incalculable calculable through systems such as insurance, thereby creating implicit social contracts between individuals and institutions. Trust thus becomes essential for societal functioning, serving as a stabilising force in an unstable world. Gabe Mythen (2004), a researcher focused on public reception of risk, defines trust as involving the ‘delegation of responsibility, investment of faith, informational credibility, and confidence to perform’ (p. 66). Yet trust is not static, it varies according to individual, social, and contextual factors. In a cross-disciplinary review, Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) describe trust as a ‘psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another’ (p. 395). This framing aligns with the unspoken contract between audience and performance: spectators place themselves in a vulnerable position, trusting that the experience, while not necessarily comfortable, will be handled ethically and be worth the risk.

Rousseau et al. (1998) also differentiate between relational trust, built over time through direct experience, and calculative trust, which is based on prior encounters and anticipated outcomes. Relational trust is more resilient, grounded in perceived good intentions. This trust is often based on assumptions, such as the belief that aesthetic spaces are inherently harm-free, which Adam Alston (2013a) echoes, arguing that, correct or not, many audience members enter performances assuming ‘aesthetic space [is] safe space’ (p. 136). In contrast, calculative trust is more fragile,

shaped by expectations rather than relationships. Timothy C. Earle (2010) reinforces this distinction, noting that ‘knowing whether the intentions of the other are good or bad (relative to oneself) is more important than knowing what the other can do’ (p. 542). In the realm of participatory arts, Alice O’Grady (2017) similarly emphasises knowledge as a cornerstone of trust, describing it as fundamental to audience engagement with risk (p. 51).

In immersive theatre, where few companies have the visibility or longevity to establish strong relational trust, most audiences rely on calculative trust. This echoes Alston’s (2013a) argument that audiences often believe artistic institutions are inherently safe spaces. However, this assumption can be exploited. As previously discussed, Ontroerend Goed’s *Internal* played with this dynamic, offering intimate engagement only to subvert expectations and betray audience trust. The emotional fallout from this betrayal highlights the precarious nature of calculative trust in immersive settings.

This fragility is reflected in broader cultural examples. When asked whether they would rather encounter a bear or an unknown man while alone in the woods, many women selected the bear, not because it is less dangerous, but because ‘the bear has more predictable intentions’ (Murray, 2024). This underscores how perceived intention, rather than objective risk, can shape trust.

Technology also influences trust in immersive environments. In EXTANT’s *Flatland*, audience members navigated a dark space using a handheld haptic device called the Animotus. Some found the experience heightened by trusting the device, with one participant stating, ‘trusting the [Animotus] is the most dangerous thing there rather than trusting yourself. So that makes it more exciting’ (Wiseman et al., 2017, p. 8). However, as a prototype, the device sometimes failed, leading users astray or stopping entirely. These failures disrupted the audience’s calculative trust

and risked undermining their overall experience. In many ways, this example is reflective of the role the production staff often plays in preparing the performance space for audience members. If necessary elements are missing or malfunctioning, it can begin to erode trust in the performance from the outset.

For production staff, understanding how to establish and maintain trust is vital. Risk communication scholar David Ropeik (2012) argues that effective communication, grounded in respect and empathy, is essential for building trust. He notes that establishing trust through respectful, effective communication that understands and respects the audience's feelings is emphasized as vital. This kind of dialogue, he explains, helps close what he terms 'the perception gap' (Ropeik, 2012, p. 1222), the difference between how risk is objectively measured and how it is subjectively experienced. Closing this gap makes audiences more likely to engage with risks constructively, rather than resist or avoid them.

These examples illustrate the complexity of trust in immersive theatre. Whether nurtured or disrupted, trust plays a crucial role in shaping how audiences perceive and respond to risk. For production staff, understanding the dynamics of trust, how it is built, sustained, or eroded, can support more ethically attuned and engaging performance design. In particular, trust influences whether audiences feel safe enough to take *positive* risks that foster growth, curiosity, and emotional engagement, or whether *negative* risks, such as physical and psychological injuries, dominate the experience and lead to disengagement or harm.

Trust, then, does more than simply manage fear; it enables vulnerability, which in turn makes positive risk-taking possible. This connection between trust and growth is echoed in Jessica Ruth Hartley's (2013) work on education, where she argues that 'the student is seen' when trust is

present (p. 31). Hartley notes that it is within a trusted environment, created through attentiveness and recognition, that learners can safely explore unfamiliar or challenging experiences. This insight has clear parallels to immersive theatre, where production staff must also create spaces in which participants feel secure enough to engage meaningfully with risk. The role of the educator and the immersive production staff intersect in their responsibility to frame risk not only as something to be managed or mitigated, but also as something that, when appropriately supported, can lead to growth and transformation.

Hartley (2013) further describes the relationship between trust, curiosity, and tact, defining tact as ‘a skill of prediction, judgment, social understanding, trust, moral and ethical propriety, negotiated in the moment’ (p. 29). This capacity for in-the-moment ethical responsiveness mirrors the foundational qualities of care. In this way, trust and care are not separate domains but intimately connected: both rely on attentiveness, sensitivity, and the ability to respond with ethical intention. Care theorist Maurice Hamington (2024) refers to this as a process of ‘humble inquiry, responsive action and inclusive connection’ (p. 32), highlighting care as an active, relational practice.

It is through this lens, of care as a framework that underpins trust and risk navigation, that we can begin to understand how immersive theatre might develop more responsive, inclusive, and ethically grounded approaches to audience experience. But what exactly constitutes care ethics in this context, and how might it function alongside risk management in immersive performance?

VIII. Defining Care: The Paradox of Protecting Audiences

Gareth White (2023) identifies relational *interconnectedness* as a foundation for care in immersive theatre (p. 92), emphasizing that audience-participant relationships are intentionally

shaped by performance makers. This interconnectedness carries both tangible and emotional weight, influencing how audiences experience and interpret risk.

While this discussion argues that care ethics can complement legal obligations around health and safety, it also acknowledges a formal link between care and legal responsibility. In legal contexts, the term *duty of care* arises from negligence law, signifying an obligation to avoid unreasonable harm rather than a proactive responsibility to nurture (Nolan, 2013). In immersive theatre, however, this duty has expanded to prompt a more philosophical question: what do we owe our audiences, not just in terms of avoiding harm, but in fostering trust and emotional safety? Helen Iball (2012), in her analysis of Adrian Howells's work, observes that 'caring itself carries inherent risks' (pp. 50–51). Thus, integrating care into risk management introduces a paradox: while care is critical, it can also expose both participants and practitioners to new vulnerabilities.

American entertainment lawyer Mary LaFrance (2013) explores these tensions, focusing on Ontroerend Goed's *Internal*, where the ritualized seduction between performer and audience generated powerful emotional responses. In the performance, each audience member was paired with a performer in a one-on-one 'date,' exchanging secrets. While the performer's disclosures were scripted, the audience was encouraged to respond authentically, creating a heightened sense of intimacy. As Radosavljević notes, 'everything seems real, including the seduction' (in LaFrance, 2013, p. 531). Many participants later reported feeling betrayed upon learning the interaction had been orchestrated. Director Alexander Devriendt responded, 'I should have seen that one coming... it wasn't my intention to be mean' (Costa, 2011, para. 7). His remarks suggest

a failure to anticipate the emotional impact of designed intimacy, a recurring issue in immersive theatre's relationship with care.

A similar lapse occurred in *Barzakh*, where audience members reacted negatively to a disorienting light sequence. Although creator Sean Rogg defended the sequence's intentional design, claiming that participants had the option to shield their eyes, multiple reports contradict this. Some even alleged that performers prevented such shielding (Saville, 2019). If accurate, this reflects not only an implementation failure, but a troubling safety culture in which intended safeguards are inconsistently enforced.

These examples reveal that immersive companies often privilege *positive risk*, that is, risks that heighten aesthetic impact or personal transformation, without fully accounting for the potential *negative risks* that may emerge alongside them. But how can care be better integrated to protect those positive risks while better managing the negative ones? Once again, this thesis does not argue for disregarding legal standards but for augmenting them. Meeting legal obligations establishes a baseline, yet it does not ensure actual care. Immersive theatre companies should go beyond compliance and ask: *Have we not only fulfilled our duty but also meaningfully cared for our audience?* To do so, care ethics may provide a framework for bridging this gap, fostering a more responsible approach to risk in immersive theatre.

IX. Recontextualising Care Ethics as a Bridge to Manage Acceptable Risk in Immersive Theatre

Care ethics offers a powerful philosophical lens through which to reframe safety and responsibility in immersive performance. Emerging in the 1980s³ as a response to dominant, justice-based moral frameworks, care ethics emphasized relational and context-sensitive decision-making over rigid, rule-bound models. Carol Gilligan (1982) challenged prevailing moral hierarchies, showing that ethical reasoning could be relational. Nel Noddings (1984) similarly emphasized the dynamic between the ‘one-caring’ and the ‘cared-for’ (p. 9), laying the groundwork for care ethics to grow across disciplines.

In the context of immersive performance, where audience experience is inherently subjective and often emotionally charged, care ethics offers a way to augment compliance-based risk management and toward a more holistic model of responsibility. But applying an abstract ethical theory to the vocational realities of theatre-making requires what David Guile (2019) calls *recontextualisation*.

Guile defines recontextualisation as the process of transforming theoretical knowledge so that it can be meaningfully applied in practical contexts. Rather than viewing theory and practice as separate or oppositional, Guile argues they are inherently connected through ongoing, mediated activity. Recontextualisation is not a one-time translation of theory into practice, but a dynamic and iterative process, shaped by the purposes, norms, and interpretations of those involved.

³ While this thesis does not intend to provide a comprehensive discussion of the history of care ethics, and does draw heavily from later authors who build on the concepts developed by Gilligan and Noddings, it feels careless to not note that much of the discussion around ‘care ethics’ has been developed by global North scholars (Raghuram, 2016; Hamington, 2024) and focused heavily (though not exclusively) on the lived experiences and perceptions of white, middle-class females (Raghuram, 2021). Outside the global North, notable philosophers have theorized on care without explicitly calling it care ethics, such as María Lugones (1978) dissertation on the impersonal nature of moral rules, while other academics such as Thaddeus Metz (2013) have noted that Western care ethics is just the standard of morality in many African communities.

Three principles underpin Guile's concept. First, the **purpose principle**: how a person understands the goal or 'problem space' of their activity influences how they engage with theory. In this thesis, the problem space is the immersive audience experience. Those working within it, performance makers and production staff, bring different forms of expertise and intent. Second, recontextualisation always occurs within a **normative context**: knowledge is not neutral but guided by values, standards, and justifications about what one ought to do. Finally, **inference** plays a key role because people infer meaning and intent from the actions of others, which shapes how knowledge is interpreted and adapted in practice.

By applying this concept to immersive risk management, this thesis proposes recontextualising care ethics not simply as a moral ideal, but as a *usable* framework that can guide how production staff think about, design, and evaluate care. It offers a way to bridge the gap between ethical intention and concrete practice, helping practitioners reflect on their responsibilities not just to avoid harm, but to cultivate spaces of mutual respect, attentiveness, and support.

Joan Tronto is central to this reframing. She defines care as 'everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world' (Tronto, 1993), and insists that taking care seriously demands a transformation of both moral values and social structures (pp. 2-3). Her work resists the idea that care is a private, feminine domain, and instead positions it as a foundational civic and political practice. According to Tronto (1993), 'to be a morally good person... a person strives to meet the demands of caring that present themselves in his or her life' (p. 126).

Together with Bernice Fisher, Tronto identified four interconnected phases of care: *caring about*, *caring for*, *caregiving*, and *care-receiving*, later expanded to five with *caring with* (Tronto, 2015). Much of this research examines the competencies Tronto aligned to her initial four phases

of care: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness (Tronto, 1993, pp. 127–136). Tronto's (2015) fifth stage, *caring with*, though less explored in this research, discusses the interconnected nature of caring environments and the influence of the political and social structures that support (or do not support) those caring for and being cared for.

a. *Attentiveness: Noticing the Need for Care*

Attentiveness is a foundational element of care ethics, marking the initial step in recognizing that care is needed. Tronto (1993; 2015) defines it as the capacity to suspend one's own priorities in order to perceive the needs of others. Within immersive theatre, this principle is complicated by competing aesthetic goals and the diverse needs of audiences. Yet, developing attentiveness, particularly to psychological and social risk, is essential for good audience care.

Klaver and Baart (2011) argue that although attentiveness is widely referenced in care ethics, its practical functions remain underexplored. They conceptualize attentiveness as a multifaceted disposition involving observation, devotion, and responsiveness to others' comfort or vulnerability. They emphasize that attentiveness is not merely a first step to care, but also a form of care in itself, enabling relational connection. When attentiveness is practiced for its own sake, fostering empathy and inclusion, they call it *beneficent attentiveness*. This type aligns with the relational ethos of immersive theatre, as discussed by Machon (2013), who highlights the aesthetic value of reciprocal, embodied encounters between performers and audiences. Beneficent attentiveness contributes to a socially inclusive environment and supports the ethical and artistic intentions of the performance.

Alongside this, Klaver and Baart (2011) identify *instrumental attentiveness*, goal-oriented, task-specific care, often exemplified in professional healthcare settings. In immersive theatre,

this form of attentiveness is particularly relevant to production staff, whose functional oversight ensures the physical and emotional safety of participants. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this approach begins to extend the limited scope of risk assessments, which have historically prioritized physical safety over psychological or social wellbeing. Elvira Crois (2020) also highlights the important role of attentiveness for performers of interactive productions, noting that a better understanding by performers of their own discomfort will help highlight moments of unequal power dynamics (p. 406). I argue that this practice of attentiveness would benefit production staff as well. Production staff, by exercising instrumental and beneficent attentiveness, can actively contribute to a wider aesthetic of care, enhancing both the ethical quality and immersive depth of the performance.

However, attentiveness is not always positive. In some cases, it takes on harmful forms. Returning to the typology of audience risks developed in Section V of this chapter, one psychological risk category, *delusions*, illustrates this point. Drawing on Amber Jamieson's (2018) and Alexis Soloski's (2018) reporting on *Sleep No More*, several performers described experiences where audience members misinterpreted staged intimacy as genuine connection, leading to stalking outside of the performance or even instances of sexual assault. Klaver and Baart (2011) describe this as *violent attentiveness*, a negative, intrusive form of attention that can manifest as surveillance, coercion, or obsession. In immersive contexts, this risk is exacerbated by the blurring of fiction and reality, making it a critical area of concern.

Another important but complicated element of attentiveness is highlighted by Tronto (1993) is the importance of *self-care* as a foundation for attentiveness toward others, referencing Thomas Kitwood's notion of 'psychological free space' (p. 131). Kitwood (1990) describes 'free attention' (para. 7-8) as the ability to be fully present with another person, without projection,

distraction, or judgment. This state of ethical presence creates what he calls a ‘moral space’ (Kitwood, 1990, para. 1), in which authentic interaction can occur. Yet, for production staff to cultivate this capacity, they must be adequately supported.

Existing research suggests this is rarely the case. Though a limited study (79 participants) by a Master’s student, Dennis Ngoc Ho (2019) identifies systemic issues affecting American stage managers that undermine self-care, including overwork and employer misunderstanding of job duties, the cultural myth of being ‘superhuman,’ job insecurity, and insufficient union support. These challenges compromise their ability to maintain free attention. McGraw’s (2024) larger study of 1,403 stage managers reinforces this concern, with 31% reporting dissatisfaction with work/life balance. Respondents cited issues such as ‘the need to be “on-call” all of the time’, ‘lack of adequate support for SMs especially in light of increasing needs of the theatre process’, ‘when working on a piece of theatre everything else stops, no friends or family, no cooking, no cleaning the house, there is only time to dissolve into the show schedule and commitments’, and ‘continued additions to my job description given that I pick up the slack for others and then those duties get added to me because clearly I can’ (p. 58), all of which are conditions that undermine the *free attention* necessary for ethical care.

This concern links to Tronto’s (2015) later addition to her framework: *caring with*. This fifth phase reframes care as a collective, democratic responsibility. It acknowledges that care is not just interpersonal but institutional, requiring structures that support both caregivers and care receivers. In immersive theatre, this implies that while production staff may carry ethical responsibilities, they cannot fulfill them without broader organisational commitment. The invisibility of care, particularly within backstage labour that is not always understood or seen by the employing company, makes this support all the more urgent.

These findings raise important questions about how immersive theatre institutions support their staff. Without adequate self-care, production teams may struggle to offer either instrumental or beneficent attentiveness, limiting their ability to mitigate risk or foster relational care. Moreover, the lack of research into the well-being of house managers, though not addressed in this study, further underscores yet another gap in understanding existing capacity and attentiveness across all levels of immersive production. Overall, while self-care is a personal responsibility, this also suggests a systemic issue that needs to be addressed at the company level in some ways to allow production adequate ‘free attention’ to care. This issue will be examined further in the interviews presented in the following chapters, which ask: *Are production staff sufficiently supported to care for others? And, if so, what does that support look like?*

b. Responsibility and Competence: A Necessary Partnership to Successfully Provide Care

Tronto’s (1993; 2015) second phase of care, *caring for*, shifts from awareness to action, centring on the concept of *responsibility*. Unlike obligation, which is formal and externally imposed, Tronto (1993; 2015) defines responsibility as relational and context-specific, emerging from one’s position within a network of social connections. Maurice Hamington (2010), in his article on what motivates people to care, similarly critiques passive or sentimental expressions of concern, emphasizing that ethical care demands meaningful action rather than symbolic gestures, terming passive gestures ‘performances of care’ (p. 677).

Responsibility is already embedded within the professional ethos of production staff, particularly among stage managers. In their chapter describing the key characteristics of a good stage manager, Lawrence Stern and Alice R. O’Grady (2016) describe stage management as

fundamentally active, noting that one of its core attributes is the readiness to assume responsibility (p. 3). This alignment suggests that immersive theatre practitioners may already be predisposed to certain elements of care ethics, even if unconsciously.

Tronto's (1993; 2015) third phase of care, *caregiving*, builds directly on this by requiring *competence*. Responsibility alone is insufficient if the care provided is ineffective or harmful.

Tronto is especially critical of professionals who adhere to formal ethics while delivering substandard care. This mirrors current limitations in legalistic risk management within immersive theatre, which often focuses on physical safety at the expense of psychological wellbeing. Within such frameworks, a company might meet technical compliance yet still fail to deliver adequate care.

Tronto acknowledges that competence is constrained by available resources but argues that when those resources exist, their proper use becomes a moral obligation. She identifies self-knowledge, reflection, and judgment as essential caregiving skills (Parra Jounou & Tronto, 2024). Hamington (2010) adds that care should be guided by shared community standards, though immersive theatre still lacks consistent norms for ethical practice.

Some efforts have been made toward greater consistency. Brigante and Elger's (2020; 2022) *Immersive Industry Reports* advocate for standardised onboarding processes, accessible ticketing systems, and clearer exit protocols to enhance audience trust and accessibility. While such practices may reduce uncertainty and help mitigate certain risks, Brigante and Elger commented that they are often met with resistance because some creators fear that standardisation may compromise the genre's creative fluidity.

However, care ethics offers a more flexible and context-sensitive approach. Rather than enforcing rigid procedures, it supports the development of thoughtful, responsive practices grounded in particular situations. As Hamington (2017) notes, care ethics prioritises particularity over universality. This feature aligns with the idiographic nature of immersive theatre, suggesting that care can be a valuable tool with an adaptive nature, capable of fostering trust and safety without dulling the form's innovative edge.

c. Responsiveness: Informed Reflections on the Care Provided

The final stage in Tronto's (1993; 2015) care ethics framework is *care-receiving*, which centres on *responsiveness*, the ability to attend to and act upon the feedback of those receiving care. Responsiveness is especially important because care relationships often involve power imbalances. This means that ethical care depends not only on good intentions but on how those intentions are perceived and experienced. Hamington (2010) also stresses this, describing care as a negotiation between intention and reception. In more recent work, he expands this by linking good care to emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and a willingness to engage in humble inquiry. Care must be empathetic but also grounded in a realistic understanding of one's limitations. For Hamington (2024), attuned empathy is central: it requires both emotional resonance and practical knowledge. Responsiveness thus serves as a safeguard against paternalism, requiring caregivers to listen carefully and adjust their approach based on the care-receiver's lived experience. It is similar to Sammarco's (2025) emphasis on the importance of 'listening stage management' (p. 46), which utilises active listening and suggests using tools such as repeating back what has just been said, attentive body language, and asking politely for a moment to attend to distractions rather than attempting to multi-task mid-conversation. Notably,

Sammarco (2025) calls the skill of active listening ‘one of the most challenging to learn’ (p. 46). Elvira Crois (2020) also draws on Tronto’s discussion of responsiveness to help describe how she believes performers should create a cyclical practice of listening and acting that supports what she calls ‘guiding’ (p. 418). While Crois’ article also focuses entirely on performers, this concept of guiding the audience, specifically grounded in Tronto’s care ethics, may also be of use to production staff.

This idea of responsiveness is also highly relevant in immersive theatre, where the audience is more than a passive observer. They are sometimes part of the performance. Yet historically, audience feedback has been underexplored. Helen Freshwater (2009) famously observed a lack of theatre scholarship that engages directly with audiences’ experiences. Since then, researchers such as Matthew Reason (2008; 2010), Astrid Breel (2015), and Kelsey Jacobson (2023) have begun addressing this gap, particularly within participatory and immersive contexts.

These developments resonate with earlier discussions in this chapter, such as the example of the director of *Internal*, who was unaware of the negative psychological effects his performance was having on audiences. A more responsive practice, one that actively sought and incorporated audience feedback, might have surfaced these concerns earlier. This highlights how responsiveness in care ethics could usefully inform immersive theatre: not just through post-show surveys, but through deeper practices of listening and adapting in ways aligned with Hamington’s notion of humble inquiry.

This section explores how recontextualised care ethics, drawing on Tronto’s theoretical framework, can serve as a bridge between theoretical insights and the practical management of acceptable risk in immersive theatre. By applying Guile’s concept of recontextualisation, which

sees theory and practice as dynamically interconnected through mediated activity, this thesis proposes care not as a static checklist but as an ongoing, relational, and responsive practice. In future chapters, tools identified in case studies and workshops, such as company care and support philosophies and audience feedback mechanisms, care ethics, even when not explicitly identified as such, appears embedded in the fabric of immersive theatre. The question then becomes, is it good care or bad care? Building on this ethical foundation, the next section turns to James Thompson's concept of *care aesthetics* to explore how care functions not only as a practical framework but also as an artistic and sensory experience, offering a new lens for evaluating care in immersive performance beyond the limits of conventional risk management.

X. Towards Care Craftsmanship for Production Staff: Utilising Care Aesthetics

Care aesthetics, an emerging field rooted in the ethics of care, examines how moments of care or neglect manifest in the world and analyses their aesthetic and sensory qualities (Thompson, 2023, p. 153). Thompson (2023) argues that care is not something that merely enables art but 'is part and parcel of the art experience itself' (p. 77). This perspective resonates with Michael Smalley's (2024) claim that 'for an artistic stage manager, the goal is not simply to be unnoticed but also to contribute to what the audience *is* noticing' (p. 106). Smalley contrasts the artistic model with more administrative or managerial approaches to stage management, though acknowledges most skilled stage managers utilise skills from all three models, yet Thompson's work reframes these care-focused roles as equally artistic in nature. The ways production staff perform care, through attention to environment, timing, and atmosphere, have an aesthetic function that shapes the audience's experience.

However, a central tension in immersive theatre is the belief that disruption is necessary for engagement. Thompson (2023) critiques this as the ‘aesthetics of scare’ (p. 100), questioning the assumption that audiences begin from comfort and must be provoked to feel. In a world already marked by instability, he suggests that a more radical artistic gesture might be one of collaborative support, introducing the concept of ‘careful art’ (p. 100). This directly challenges Gareth White’s (2023) suggestion that ‘to take care of people we need to provoke and destabilise them’ (p. 133), a framing that risks conflating care with discomfort and mischaracterises the ethical foundation of care. Instead, care aesthetics invites us to critically reflect on what constitutes ‘good’ care in performance contexts.

To begin to define this ‘good’ care, Thompson (2023) points to elements such as tempo, ‘the quick and the slow, the calm and the rushed’ (p. 135), highlighting how time can manifest in an embodied sensation, such as ‘the pressurised and the relaxed’ (p. 135). Using examples from healthcare to exemplify care aesthetics, he also notes physical considerations such as ‘the smallest needles, comfort of beds and linens... heating and light systems’ (Thompson, 2023, p. 133), which in immersive theatre could translate into environmental factors often managed by production staff, like temperature control, water availability, and seating.

Beyond physical comfort, care aesthetics also foregrounds listening, empathy, and responsive action as central to holistic ethical care. Nel Noddings (2003) encourages ‘listening to believe’ (p. 21), while Hamington (2024) emphasises ‘humble inquiry’ (p. 33), the need for reflexivity about one’s own biases (p. 37), and the importance of a ‘dynamic mix’ of emotional and intellectual connection (p. 40). Crucially, these principles reinforce that care must be based on the terms expressed by the care-receiver. Thompson (2023) acknowledges that ‘there are many

forms of good and bad care, that are often hard to perceive from within certain contexts’ (p. 2), underscoring the need for responsiveness and contextual understanding. Yet immersive theatre often lacks structured mechanisms for audience feedback, which risks making assumptions about what care looks like without consulting those it’s intended to serve. Care aesthetics, therefore, not only offers a framework for understanding the aesthetics of care but also demands critical assessment of what ‘good’ care is and how it is practiced.

To undertake such assessment, the next section of this thesis turns to the identification of existing tools used to support audience care and risk management in immersive theatre, including practices such as content warnings, orientation techniques, consent protocols, decompression spaces, and appropriate staffing, as reflected in the case studies and workshops discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

i. Content Warnings: Empowering Audience Choice Pre-Ticket Purchase

Before attending an immersive production, audience members should be able to identify initial markers of a company’s commitment to care through the transparency of pre-show information. Content warnings (sometimes called trigger warnings) are one method of demonstrating this care, providing advance notice of potentially distressing material or practices. Originating in feminist online spaces, these warnings initially focused on topics like sexual violence but have since expanded to include broader psychological and social triggers (George & Hovey, 2020; Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015).

Despite their widespread adoption, the efficacy of content warnings remains contested.

Psychologists Payton J. Jones, Victoria M.E. Bridgland and Benjamin W. Bellet (2023) question their efficacy, noting that there is little empirical evidence for them providing useful support that encourages audiences to engage. Some argue they offer vital accommodations for vulnerable individuals (e.g. Carter, 2015) and provide people with the opportunity to prepare to engage with discomforting material (e.g. Manne, 2015). Empirical studies suggest content warnings rarely lead to avoidance but, rather, may heighten negative responses such as anticipatory anxiety (Jones et al., 2023). This is because content warnings do not tend to appear without any guidance on how to process the content, resulting in increased anxiety rather than mitigating distress (Bellet et al., 2018).

In immersive theatre, we can see the beginning of a debate about how to provide content warnings initiated by Mary LaFrance (2013), an American lawyer focused on entertainment law, who suggested immersive performances adopt a voluntary rating system, though she noted that ‘a mere rating system, without more, may be inadequate to inform audiences of specific risks’ (p. 578). A rare attempt at risk categorisation comes from *No Proscenium*, a widely recognised immersive theatre forum. Their risk classification system, which influenced the initial meta-categories of my own typology of audience risks in immersive theatre in Section V of this chapter, divides risks into two broad categories: physical and psychological (Nelson, 2018). To be listed on their platform, theatre companies must disclose the risks present in their productions and outline their mitigation strategies. Elger and Brigante (2022) suggested a more comprehensive rating system akin to the current British Board of Film Classifications (BBFC) or

Motion Picture Association (MPA), that includes categories such as work type, interaction levels, age appropriateness, and team size (p. 3).

Critics, including actor Matt Smith, argue that such warnings sanitise artistic risk (Akbar, 2024). However, this conflates the warning with the content itself. As Akbar (2024) observes, content warnings do not alter a production but empower audiences to make informed choices. However, arguing from a different viewpoint, care ethicist and performance artist James Thompson (2023) wrote, ‘the assertion that disturbance leads automatically to positive insight feels like a somewhat tired reformulation that suffering is needed for great art’ (p. 100). Theorist Jack Halberstam (2017) argues that content warnings can also appear to reflect a ‘paternalistic normativity’ (p. 52) in which production staff make assumptions about what might harm others (the audience) who are not able to make that choice for themselves. Alternatively, content warnings can serve as value signals, fostering a care aesthetic by reassuring audiences that their well-being is considered (Bruce & Roberts, 2020).

For immersive theatre, I suggest that a nuanced approach is necessary. Rather than generic warnings on promotional materials, companies could invite audience members to seek out specific information. This shift acknowledges individual agency while reducing the unintended anxiety sometimes linked to content warnings (Saville, 2019). Ultimately, the value of content warnings to caring immersive experiences lies in how they can enhance audience trust and signal a commitment to ethical engagement.

ii. Orientations: Informing Audiences of Performance Boundaries Pre-Show

Orientation is a process that helps audiences transition into the world of a performance by establishing boundaries, clarifying expectations, and signalling how to engage. Performance studies scholar Richard Schechner (1985) describes theatre as a ritual process comprising seven phases: training, workshop, rehearsal, warm-ups, performance, cool-down, and aftermath. While performers often, though not always, engage with most of these stages, audiences are usually introduced only at the point of performance. In immersive theatre, however, orientation can help bridge this experiential gap by incorporating elements of the earlier phases, particularly training and rehearsal, that are otherwise inaccessible to audiences. For example, in *Hotel Medea* by ZU-UK, audience members were guided through an orientation led by an in-character performer who taught them dance steps and chants they would use throughout the evening (Ramos & Maravala, 2017, p. 155). This served not only as a welcome and contextual introduction, but also as a form of participant training and rehearsal. Jorge Ramos (2015) describes this as the first stage of a ‘dramaturgy of participation’ (p. ix), establishing a framework for interaction between performers and audience members. Such preparatory steps not only clarify the limits and expectations of participation but also enhance engagement, allowing audiences to enter more fully into the immersive experience.

This function of orientation becomes even more significant when considered in relation to the diverse backgrounds and prior experiences of immersive audiences. Drawing on Hans-Robert Jauss’s concept of the ‘horizon of expectations’ (Jauss, 1982, p. 23 in White, 2013, p. 58), the idea that spectators interpret performances through the lens of their previous encounters, Gareth White introduces the concept of a ‘horizon of participation’ (p. 59), shifting attention from interpretation to action. This recognises that audience members may bring widely varying assumptions about what participation entails. Orientation serves to align these horizons by

offering clear guidance about roles, boundaries, and available forms of support. It thus becomes not just a practical step in immersive theatre, but a dramaturgical tool that helps audiences navigate unfamiliar forms of engagement with confidence and clarity.

iii. Consent: Balancing an Aesthetic of Secrecy with Informed Consent

Clear expectation-setting in immersive theatre often clashes with the genre's emphasis on secrecy. Machon (2013) and Bucknall (2022) highlight that secrecy is often an intentional design element, adding intrigue but also hindering some elements that would help audiences make better engagement decisions. Many companies closely guard their methods, with employees at large commercial companies like Punchdrunk bound by non-disclosure agreements. Similarly, audiences are often encouraged to embrace the unknown, entering performances with little prior knowledge. *You Me Bum Bum Train* requires the audience to sign non-disclosure agreements before attending their performances, forbidding them from discussing the experience afterward with anyone who has not also participated.

Some productions push consent to the extreme, requiring audience members to grant broad consent for anything to happen in the performance without specifying what that may be in an effort to maintain an aesthetic of surprise. For instance, *Bloodbath* (ScreamWorks, London, 2023) required participants to sign a consensual non-consent form, what they called a metaconsent form, allowing performers to interact physically in unpredictable ways. Pre-show orientation plays a crucial role in consent frameworks. Enthusiastic consent, defined as explicit, affirmative agreement, is beneficial in immersive theatre, ensuring clarity between performers and audiences, yet at times may be counter to the aesthetic intentions of the performance.

Josephine Machon (2013) noted that the ‘tacit guidelines’ (p. 40) set by performance makers are generally understood by audiences, creating a safe place for engagement. However, relying solely on ‘tacit consent’ (nonverbal or assumed agreement) can lead to misunderstandings, as performers and production staff may misinterpret audience reactions (Jordan, 2019, p. 191). To balance the artistic needs around consent in performance, this thesis advocates for *explicit consent*, a clear, affirmative agreement before engagement, and offers a more reliable standard, ensuring that audience participation is intentional and informed: in short, explicit consent should be the default, with any deviations carefully considered and justified.

While performers are often trained to recognise and respond to nonverbal cues indicating consent or distress, such training has been largely overlooked for production staff. Yet, the external vantage point of production staff allows them to monitor audience reactions with critical distance. Persis Jadè Maravala’s (n.d.) seven stages of one-on-one performance encounters (performance moments with one performer and one audience member) emphasise the importance of ongoing consent, guiding performers to assess audience comfort throughout an interaction. To extend this awareness beyond performers, production staff should be equally equipped to interpret verbal, as well as nonverbal signals, ensuring ethical engagement.

Affirmative consent, based on the ‘yes means yes’ principle, aligns well with immersive theatre (Gruber, 2022). The FRIES model, **F**reely given, **R**eversible, **I**nformed, **E**nthusiastic, and **S**pecific, provides a structured approach (Stryker et al., 2017, p. 22-23), with ticket purchase establishing initial consent and pre-show orientation ensuring informed participation. However, consent must remain flexible and reversible throughout a performance.

Immersive theatre also has strong parallels with the field of Live-Action Role-Playing (LARP), which offers useful consent management theories, particularly regarding reversibility. While LARP is co-created by all players within a more equal power dynamic than the performer-audience relationship, and often involves advance study by the players before the actual LARP, their engagement with high-risk content and the unpredictable nature of human interaction mirror many immersive performances. Michał Mochocki (2020) shared the tacit approach to consent in LARP, which he termed ‘telegraph your intent’ (p. 191), which involves an open approach and starting with low-intensity interactions before increasing gradually. However, these methods are not foolproof. Simo Järvelä (2019) notes that unexpected developments duringLARPs may require intervention. Returning to immersive theatre literature, Jorge Lopes Ramos’ micro-events from his dramaturgy of participation (2015) can be utilised to create a framework for analysing aesthetic beats to identify key moments for check-ins (Bondar, 2025). However, audience expectations and social pressure can make revoking consent difficult. Introducing safewords provides a potential tool for these challenges.

iv. Safewords: Aiding Audience Consent During Performances

Safewords originated as a critical consent mechanism in BDSM communities, which emphasise Safe, Sane, and Consensual (SSC) practices (Beres & MacDonald, 2015, p. 418). They serve as a tool for reversible consent, allowing participants to stop an activity at any time. Traditionally, safewords include predetermined phrases like ‘red’ for stopping immediately, while others, such as ‘yellow,’ signal a desire to slow down without halting completely (Dunkley & Brotto, 2020, p.

664). While such phased consent can be difficult to manage in large-scale immersive theatre, it may be more applicable in one-on-one performances.

Silent ‘safewords’ have also been incorporated into theatrical settings, as seen in Punchdrunk’s *Viola’s Room* (2024), where audience members could raise a hand to be escorted out. LARP communities offer additional consent suggestions, such as ‘tapping out,’ where a participant taps another’s arm twice to disengage, or ‘see no evil,’ where covering one’s eyes signals withdrawal from an interaction without the need for explanation (Mochocki, 2013, pp. 191-192). These alternative mechanisms could be adapted for immersive theatre to provide more flexibility in consent management.

Safewords also shift accountability to the audience, reinforcing their agency within a performance. As Annie, a participant in Beres & MacDonald’s (2015) study, noted, safewords encourage individuals to take ‘responsibility for [their] own emotions and responses’ (p. 427). However, their effectiveness depends on clear audience orientation. For instance, in *Bloodbath* (ScreamWorks, 2023), audience members were given the safeword ‘pineapple,’ yet orientation was limited to a brief confirmation of having read the consent form. When an intense scene involving physical restraint occurred, one participant panicked and nearly injured a performer, later admitting they had forgotten about the safeword. While it is unclear whether a verbal reminder would have changed their response, the lack of reinforcement raises concerns about safety in high-risk performances.

Safewords are particularly prevalent in extreme haunt experiences, where fear is central to engagement. Eliot Bessette (2020) discusses ‘thinking through fear’ as a way to analyse emotional and sensory reactions created during fearful interactions that may actually prompt a unique expression of freedom (p. 1). In *Heretic: Devil*, he used a safeword to exit but later regretted the decision (Bessette, 2020, p. 116). This highlights a key issue: is consent truly *reversible* if using a safeword results in permanent removal from a performance? However, Bessette later realised that testing his limits reassured him that he could and would use a safeword when necessary. Ultimately, safewords help rebalance the power dynamic between performers and audiences. Performers have full knowledge of the experience, while audiences enter with uncertainty.

v. Decompression Spaces: A Place for Care Post-Performance

As discussed in the section on orientation, Richard Schechner (1985) identified seven phases of performance, many of which are absent in participatory audience experiences. One key missing phase for the audience is the *cool-down*, a liminal period that helps audiences process their emotions before re-entering daily life. This we may also call ‘decompression spaces.’

A decompression space serves as a transitional area between the performance and the outside world, allowing audiences to relax, reflect, and socialise. These spaces may either retain aesthetic elements of the performance or take on a neutral atmosphere. Performers are sometimes present, engaging with audiences to discuss the experience.

Many immersive theatre productions incorporate a bar as their decompression space, also functioning as a core income stream for many immersive theatre companies, necessitating their presence; however, discussion of the economics of immersive theatre are beyond the scope of this research (though bars are not without their own risks: for a comprehensive treatment on the subject of alcohol and immersive theatre see Edmonson, 2018). Bars offer seating for audiences who may need to rest, especially after physically demanding performances. They also provide an opportunity for attendees to converse with others who shared the experience. Additionally, performers may join the audience, easing any lingering concerns about their choices and actions within the performance. Beyond social benefits, decompression spaces also serve a practical function. Trained production staff can use this time to observe audience members for any visible signs of distress, ensuring their well-being before they leave the venue.

vi. Appropriate Staffing: Sustaining Audience Care from Arrival to Exit

Creating a care-focused environment for audiences relies heavily on the production staff. LaFrance (2013) identified appropriate staffing as a key area for self-regulation in immersive theatre (p. 580), but what defines appropriateness in this context?

One factor is the number of staff available to monitor audience well-being. LaFrance (2013) highlighted this issue during *En Route*, where she observed that the limited staff made it impossible to oversee all audience members along the promenade route. Similarly, in *Sleep No More*, she questioned whether staff could adequately monitor audience members in crowded spaces, particularly given the aesthetic choice to mask the audience, which made it more difficult

for production staff to notice if audience members were struggling. These examples underscore the need to ensure sufficient staffing levels tailored to the specific demands of a performance.

Beyond numbers, appropriate staffing also requires competency. Connecting back to concerns around tacit consent, LaFrance (2013) also emphasised the importance of training staff to ‘recognize signs of extreme distress, identify patrons who pose a risk to bystanders and performers, and intervene to prevent further harm’ (p. 580). In their article on developing a risk culture for strategic decision-making, Altaaf Osman and Charlene C. Lew (2021) argue that competency, defined as the right experience and qualifications, is essential for making sound risk-related decisions (p. 1076). A key focus of this research is studying how to address this gap in production staff competency related to audience care and risk management.

XI. Recontextualising Risk Management: Towards A ‘Careful Art’ of Audience Management in Immersive Theatre

The literature discussed in this chapter provides a conceptual overview, demonstrating that while risk is frequently acknowledged in immersive theatre, discussions remain largely creator-centric, focusing on how risk enhances artistic and emotional engagement rather than how it should be managed for audience well-being. We have seen how scholars such as Alston (2013c, 2016a) have positioned risk as a core aesthetic element, often aligning it with neoliberal notions of individual responsibility. Similarly, White (2013, 2023) frames risk as something to be strategically leveraged to encourage participation, reinforcing power dynamics that prioritise creator intentions over audience autonomy.

A central contribution of this chapter has been my development of a typology of audience risk in immersive theatre, offering a necessary shift from creator-focused discourse to an occupational risk management framework more accessible to production staff. By categorising audience risks into **physical**, **psychological**, and **social**, this typology enables a more comprehensive approach to risk identification, while still stressing the interrelated nature of these risks, highlighting gaps in existing risk assessments. Current industry practice predominantly focuses on environmental and physical hazards while neglecting emotional manipulation, audience-performer boundaries, and inter-audience risks. This research proposes that integrating occupational health principles with immersive theatre scholarship can foster a more sustainable, ethical approach to audience care, balancing creative risk-taking with a duty of care.

Furthermore, this chapter has engaged with two research questions: *What can care ethics contribute as a useful framework for audience risk management for more successful outcomes?* and *What tools can impact competency among production staff regarding audience care and risk management?*

By addressing the first, it has illustrated how care ethics offers a relational and context-sensitive model that supplements risk management strategies beyond conventional frameworks.

Traditional models prioritise physical safety and regulatory compliance, whereas a care ethics approach foregrounds attentiveness, responsiveness, and relational understanding (Hamington, 2024; Tronto, 2015). Furthermore, this chapter has critiqued the prevailing assumption that audience destabilisation is necessary for engagement (Thompson, 2023), aligning this research project instead with ‘careful art’ that fosters collaboration and emotional well-being. The

integration of care ethic principles into audience risk management can support a shift towards ‘careful art’ that fosters collaboration and emotional well-being. By embedding these principles within immersive theatre practice, this research advocates for the development of more ethically sustainable and audience-sensitive methodologies.

By critically engaging with existing scholarship on immersive theatre, risk culture, and audience participation, this review has explored what tools production staff can use to ensure audience care and risk management. It identified key mechanisms that contribute to best practices in audience safety. Content warnings, pre-show orientations, consent frameworks, safewords, decompression spaces, and appropriate staffing structures were highlighted as essential tools.

It will be clear now that effective audience care and risk management necessitate a multi-layered approach, integrating pre-show preparation, in-performance interventions, and post-show support. While immersive theatre presents unique challenges due to its participatory nature, the frameworks explored in this review offer a robust foundation for ethical and sustainable practice by production staff. The next chapter will explore the research methodology utilised in this study to examine how these theoretical frameworks are operationalised in practice.

Chapter 3 - Understanding Individual Perceptions of Risk in Idiographic Immersive Performances: A Multi-Methods Phenomenological Approach

In this chapter, I will outline the methodological approach taken in my investigation of how production staff contribute to establishing safer spaces for audiences in immersive theatre. In Chapter 1, I set the scene for this enquiry by highlighting the ethical and practical complexities of immersive performance where audiences move into active participation. I argued that this shift introduces unexpected forms of risk, psychological and social, along with the expected (and sometimes uniquely amplified) physical risks, that require more than standard procedural safety. My thesis responds to a gap in existing research by focusing on the production staff responsible for holding these spaces.

Chapter 2 developed the conceptual framework that underpins my research. It examined how conventional risk management strategies fall short in immersive settings and introduced care ethics as a relational, context-sensitive approach to safety and responsibility. The chapter also highlighted how perceptions of risk are highly subjective, shaped by individual experiences, expectations, and roles, both for audiences and for those tasked with managing their safety. This ethical lens, concerned with attentiveness, responsiveness, and the dynamics of care, shapes how I approach both the subject matter and the research process itself.

Building on these foundations, this chapter sets out the qualitative, multi-methods strategy I designed to investigate how production staff contribute to establishing safer spaces for immersive audiences. A multi-method approach is a research design that combines multiple qualitative methods within a single study to examine a phenomenon more comprehensively (Palakshappa & Gordon, 2006, p. 390). Through case studies that utilised observations,

interviews and document analysis, and a Practice-as-Research (PaR) workshop, I examine how production staff navigate risk and care, and how their expertise might inform more ethically grounded approaches to audience handling in immersive theatre, this research is guided by the following primary research question: **How can production staff contribute to establishing safer spaces for immersive audiences?**

The following inquiries helped clarify the approach to answering the primary research question:

1. *How is audience care presently considered in immersive theatre by the theatre companies creating it?*
2. *What can care ethics contribute as a useful framework for audience risk management?*
3. *What tools can impact competency among production staff regarding audience care and risk management?*

A phenomenological approach informs this study, centring on the participants' perceptions of risk in immersive theatre environments; therefore, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse my data, which is discussed later in this chapter. Phenomenology, as defined by Husserl (1913/1983), examines the 'essence of the "consciousness of something"' (p. 67), emphasising first-person experience. While this phenomenological basis was adequate for discussions around their own perceptions of risks and experiences they themselves have had while managing audiences, at times the analysis also strayed into a more general thematic analysis of tools and what their strengths and weaknesses are, as well as areas where production staff still struggle to find appropriate tools. This still connects phenomenologically to the topic as it aligns to the way Porter and Alcorn (2020) discuss *how*, noting that there is not only a 'how to'

for production staff, but that ‘how to’ is inextricably linked to ‘how you’ (p. 4) do the thing, coloured by the lived experiences of that particular production staff making a decision on how to do something in that moment. This also aligns with stage manager Casey M. Sammarco’s stance on the individual influence each stage manager has on the production process. In *Communication for Effective Stage Management*, she explained that each person will bring their own personality and lived experience to the production process, which influences creatively how a stage manager works to complete their tasks (Sammarco, 2025, p. 9). However, immersive theatre complicates Husserl’s internal focus, as Smalley (2024) notes that the style of production influences methodologies and audience experiences. Heidegger’s (1927/1962) concept of Dasein, or ‘being-with’ (p. 156), further underscores the relational nature of immersive theatre, supporting the necessity for a methodological approach that acknowledges intersubjectivity. Undeniably, at times, discussion did move into a territory removed directly from the interviewee’s internalised understandings of the essence of risk into a more detached, evaluative discussion.

This research employed two core methods to capture both the individual and collective dimensions of audience care and risk management in immersive theatre. The case studies provided in-depth accounts of how production staff and performance makers articulated their experiences, perspectives, and strategies for handling audiences. The Practice-as-Research workshop, by contrast, offered the opportunity to observe stakeholders interacting directly, generating insights into collective dynamics, tacit knowledge, and the negotiation of care practices in action.

Integrating case studies with a Practice-as-Research (PaR) workshop also ensured methodological triangulation (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Different sub-questions required different methods: interviews, observations and document analysis were well suited for examining existing audience care practices, but less effective for testing how competencies might be developed among production staff. The workshop addressed this gap by facilitating real-time engagement with risk management strategies, thereby complementing the case study findings and extending the scope of the analysis.

The case study approach enables an in-depth exploration of risk and audience care in immersive theatre. The selection criteria were based on:

1. The immersive nature of the production.
2. The presence of explicit physical, psychological and/or social risk.
3. Accessibility for data collection.

Platt (1992) argues that single or small numbers of case studies are valid when they ‘describe something intrinsically interesting’ (p. 30), while Yin (2015) emphasises that even a limited number of cases can be useful in establishing the existence of a phenomenon.

Initially, post-show audience surveys were considered, but immersive theatre companies declined participation, limiting direct audience data. This gatekeeping, examined in more detail in Section II.a of this chapter, presented an unforeseen access issue, requiring adjustments to the data collection method. To ensure the study still incorporated audience insight, observations were used as an alternative, allowing for at least one audience perspective, my own, to be included. This method also aligned well to phenomenology, focusing on my perceived experiences of risk

and care in the performance. My observations were also nuanced by document analysis of the ticketing websites, company websites, emails and any additional documents a typical audience member would receive from the theatre company after purchasing a ticket. Each of these items were scoured for evidence of information about the performance I was about to attend, any risk-related warnings (commonly found through content or trigger warning notices), as well as any useful information that could be construed as audience care.

The case study interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a data analysis method where participants interpret their own experiences, and the researcher then interprets those interpretations, creating a double hermeneutic approach (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2022). Fortunately, to analyse the interviews when they deviated from strict phenomenological discourse, the same thematic analysis style of IPA was applicable; however, it is notable that these discussions all fell into what IPA describes as descriptive statements.

Statements about tools and their limitations and benefits naturally came together as groups while uncovering themes and merely required slightly less in-depth translations as such statements did not necessarily indicate or reveal deeper truths. In this regard, the compilation of tools was more a curated collection of tools identified across the six interviewees, nuanced through discussions in the workshop, to consider identified strengths and weaknesses by those who had used or experienced the use of them.

The interview framework was structured following the methods described by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2022, pp. 59-66), also echoing the seven-stages for interviews developed by Kvale (1996, p. 88), discussed in more detail in Section I.ii. The central themes explored how

production staff contribute to safer immersive audience experiences, with subtopics covering risk, care, ethics, and practical tools. This approach ensured that interviews moved beyond a narrow focus on risk, incorporating broader audience management and care concerns.

To explore tools for competency-building, a PaR workshop was designed around the question: *What tools can impact competency among production staff regarding audience care and risk management?* Initially conceived as a research output, the workshop evolved into an iterative praxis where participants practiced risk communication strategies while I observed them, as well as creating an opportunity to further refine and reflect on my own risk and care communication. The development and execution of the workshop mirrored several aspects of stage management, allowing for an immersive examination of audience care practices.

Three key methods were used for data collection within the workshop:

1. Mentimeter and post-workshop surveys
2. Observations and reflective practice
3. Artifact collection (worksheets created during workshop activities)

IPA was also employed to analyse workshop data to consider any recurring themes, supplemented by researcher reflections through post-workshop journaling. The case studies provide contextual understanding of existing practice, while the workshop serves as an applied research tool to consider competency-building strategies and practice risk communication. This chapter proceeds as follows: Sections II and III outline case study selection, gatekeeping limitations, data collection methods (interview and observations), and pilot study findings

(ZU-UK's *Within Touching Distance*). Data for each specific case study follows respectively in Chapters 4 and 5. Section IV of this chapter examines PaR methodology and workshop development, including data collection and analysis techniques. The pilot workshop, presented at the 2nd UTAD Theatre Research Conference, is reviewed, with two subsequent workshops analysed in Chapter 6.

The data collection is best understood in two segments: the case study methods and the Practice-as-Research workshop. While both contributed to addressing the research inquiry, distinguishing their methodological development provides greater clarity for the discussions in this chapter.

I. A Case Study Approach: Exploring Individual Lived Experience Through Interviews, Observations and Questionnaires

This section outlines the three primary data collection methods used in these case studies, which are interviews, observations, and questionnaires. Though questionnaires were initially included in the pilot study, they were later removed to address access challenges with theatre companies. To ensure some representation of audience insight, I pivoted the method of collecting audience feedback, with my own observations as an audience member providing a data point of information on the audience experience. The following subsections discuss the data analysis approach, with a focus on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and conclude with reflections on methodological adjustments informed by the pilot study.

Case studies are a well-established research method for examining complex 'how' and 'why' questions beyond the researcher's control (Yin, 2018, pp. 10-11, 13). By framing individual performances as 'bounded systems' (Merriam, 2009, p. 40), this approach enables an in-depth exploration of risk management in immersive theatre. The use of multiple case studies enhances analytical rigor, allowing for comparative insights across different production contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). Given the varying risks and management structures in immersive productions, I selected two exploratory case studies to investigate these issues.

The number of case studies was determined by both time constraints and accessibility. Yin's (2015) principle of replication design recommends at least two cases for analytical generalisability (p. 242). Yin (2015) uses the term generalisation to mean that findings from each case can be tested against existing theories to examine their explanatory power. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) further expand on Yin's concept, noting that case studies not only provide detailed support for existing theories but also have the potential to generate in-depth insights for emerging theoretical frameworks (p. 29). In my study, the selected theatre companies were assessed against occupational health and safety frameworks and care ethics to evaluate how successfully they implemented audience care practices. The definition of 'successful outcomes' was developed in collaboration with theatre companies during interviews.

However, securing cooperation from theatre companies proved to be a considerable challenge. Many outreach attempts were met with silence, and when responses were received, theatre companies typically agreed to research involving interviews with production staff. Yet, when audience engagement was introduced, interest diminished, and access was ultimately denied.

This gatekeeping issue, explored further in the next section, necessitated adjustments to the project design, particularly the removal of audience questionnaires from the case studies after the pilot study. In response to this unforeseen limitation, the study adapted its methodology to ensure that at least one audience perspective, mine, was incorporated through observations.

i. Case Studies: Sampling Selection and Key Challenges

The case studies analysed in this thesis are ROLL THE BONES' *Dead Letter No. 9* (2023–2024) and Coney's *1884* (2024). These were identified through purposeful sampling, a sampling technique in which participants are deliberately chosen because they meet criteria directly related to the research question (Seale, 2018, p. 104), with priority given to performances that presented significant psychological and social risks. To be eligible for inclusion, productions were required to meet two selection criteria: first, that they were immersive in form, and second, that they involved ergodic physical, psychological, and/or social risks.

In practice, the application of these criteria was shaped by a number of limitations, including the financial feasibility of attending performances, the geographic availability of suitable productions, and the timeframe of the research. Immersive theatre offerings tend to fluctuate, and during the period of fieldwork my access was largely confined to productions within commuting distance of London or, during term breaks, the New York City area. Nevertheless, between 2022 and 2024 I observed forty-three immersive productions across the United Kingdom and the United States. From this pool, case studies were selected on the basis of their alignment with the typology of risks for immersive audiences outlined in Chapter 2. Once a performance was

identified as a ‘fertile example of the theme under study’ (Sousa, 2014, p. 214), the relevant theatre company was approached and invited to participate in the research.

A key limitation during the case study selection was the ubiquitous gatekeeping of audiences by theatre companies. While gatekeeping is a well-documented barrier in qualitative research, its impact remains difficult to explore. Many companies declined participation, citing concerns about ‘bothering’ their audiences, echoing Williams’ (2020) findings that gatekeepers often prevent participants from making informed decisions about involvement. Moreover, investigating risk in immersive theatre requires acknowledging its existence, an implicit liability some companies were unwilling to confront. This reluctance reflects broader industry sensitivities, despite some outspoken advocates for external risk audits in immersive performances (Nelson, 2018).

Compounding these challenges was my positionality as a practitioner-researcher. While I expected my stage management background to facilitate access, my researcher identity repositioned me more strongly as an outsider, mirroring Corrine Tayce Sullivan’s (2019) experience with insider research. Interestingly, while artistic management remained resistant, production staff, particularly stage managers, became key allies, recognising the research’s practical value. Those directly involved in audience handling were receptive to research that could refine their practices, while decision-makers, removed from the day-to-day realities of immersive productions, were more hesitant and difficult to persuade regarding the potential value of the research. As a result, case study selection was constrained to companies willing to engage,

ultimately shaping the research design by centring those who were already deeply invested in care and audience risk management. The next section details the data collection methods used within these case studies.

ii. Case Studies: Interviews

Data collection methods aimed to capture direct feedback from production staff, performance makers, and audiences. Initial options included questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. While questionnaires could reach a broad sample and are discussed in more depth to reach audiences in Section I.iii, for production staff and performance makers, they lacked the depth and adaptability needed for this complex subject (Seale, 2018, p. 221). The need for nuanced responses and clarifications led to prioritising more interactive methods.

Interviews and focus groups both allow for in-depth exploration (Seale, 2018; Krueger & Casey, 2009). However, focus groups were rejected due to concerns about open discussion. Group settings might have shifted the focus to general trends rather than production-specific details. Additionally, bringing together performance makers and production staff raised concerns about power dynamics, potentially inhibiting candid feedback (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). While focus group research did eventually help inform some of the structure of the Practice-as-Research workshop discussed in Section II, interviews became the logical starting point, providing space for individual perspectives (Seale, 2018, p. 220).

Of the three primary styles, structured, unstructured, and semi-structured, semi-structured interviews offered the best balance between providing a framework for the process that still

allowed for flexibility based on participant responses. Structured interviews risked constraining discussions, while unstructured ones might drift from core themes. As this research sought to focus on how the production staff make sense of managing risks and providing care for audiences, my research method needed to reflect this personalised focus. This was further nuanced by the desire to understand how performance makers make sense of this same phenomena before looking closer at how they make sense of it together and the impact that has on the audiences. I also wanted to find a research method that aligned well with doing early stage, exploratory research on a subject. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis provided a compelling framework to explore as it attempts ‘to come as close as possible to an individual’s experience’ (Seale, 2018, p. 512), though there is general consensus among qualitative researchers that it is impossible to capture the reality of another person’s experience perfectly.

Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers and Michael Larkin (2022), in *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, stress that the interview questions should remain open and be ‘exploratory rather than explanatory’ (p. 41). Their interview design also closely followed Kvale’s (1996) seven-stage framework: thematising, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying, and reporting (p. 88), with a more specific emphasis on what should guide each of those steps. The central theme explored how production staff contribute to safer immersive audience experiences, with subtopics covering risk, care, ethics, and practical tools.

Participants were selected from case study productions based on specific criteria: immersive format, participatory elements, and willingness to engage. Interviews were conducted in person

or virtually, depending on availability, and recorded with participant consent (see Appendix J for university ethics forms, including consent form template).

Transcripts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), detailed in Section I.ii.2. To enhance validity, respondent validation was employed: industry reports summarising findings were shared with participants, inviting feedback to ensure accurate representation before finalising results (Silverman, 2022, p. 437).

1. Interview Schedule Design: Balancing Artistic Vision with Safety Protocols

The design process for the interview schedules involved distilling the research's broader themes into targeted questions, resulting in two distinct schedules: one for production staff (Appendix G) and another for performance makers (Appendix H). Building on Porter and Alcorn (2020), who underscored the significance of identifying a production's *why* as the focus for developing stage management theory, these dual interview schedules reflect the study's primary focus on *how* production staff experience and navigate audience risk and risk management, while performance makers provide contextual insights into the *why* frameworks influencing production staff practices.

The production staff interviews examined professional practices, principles guiding audience risk management, and the ethical considerations involved. Questions explored participants' professional backgrounds, training, scope of duty, and perceptions of risk and care. In contrast, the performance maker interviews investigated the creative processes that production staff must manage, emphasising the intersection of artistic direction and audience management.

To establish expertise and experience, interviewees were first asked about their years of experience. While time does not guarantee expertise, it can indicate accumulated experience. This approach draws on research by Karl Ericsson, Ralf Krampe, and Clemens Tesch-Römer (1993) and later insights by Brian Butterworth (2018), emphasising practice, zeal, and dedication over the simplified 10,000-hour rule (which states that expertise is developed over 10,000 hours of practice). Additional questions about immersive and participatory work helped assess interviewees' experience levels more accurately.

Production staff were asked to define their roles, given the potential ambiguity of titles in theatre contexts. Clarifying role scope ensured participants' duties included audience management. Interviewees also identified key skills for their roles, contributing to the study's objective of outlining essential skills for immersive theatre production. Performance makers were asked to classify their work's immersive style. Initially, the question used academic terms like 'instruction-based' and 'exploratory,' but these terms proved confusing in an industry context. The question was revised to describe immersive performance styles more colloquially, resulting in clearer, more practical responses. Subsequent questions explored performance makers' creative processes and audience integration strategies, as well as investigated how these artists perceived production staff, emphasising the importance of clearly communicating artistic intentions and audience management strategies.

Artistry and aesthetics were explored in production staff interviews to determine whether participants considered their work artistic. The debate surrounding stage management's artistic

nature (Smalley, 2024) made this inquiry particularly relevant, especially regarding how aesthetics and trusting their artistic abilities might influence some risk management decisions made by production staff. Training and communication were assessed to identify potential benefits of performance or directing experience for production staff. Given immersive theatre's demands for real-time decision-making, shared training backgrounds may facilitate communication between production and creative teams.

The study also delved into ethics and risk management, prompting participants to articulate their ethical obligations toward performers, staff, and audiences. Drawing on Tronto's (2015) and Thompson's (2023) work on care ethics discussed in the literature review, the questions investigated how ethical frameworks might correlate with effective risk mitigation strategies.

Performance makers reflected on audience responses, discussing their strategies for assessing reactions and defining performance success. They also detailed methods for orienting audiences, referencing Gareth White's (2013) concept of establishing a 'horizon of expectation' (p. 58) to ensure clarity for participants. These responses were then analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is described in detail in section I.v of this chapter. The findings from these interviews contribute to a broader understanding of immersive theatre's complex interplay between artistic expectations, safety, risk management and audience experience.

2. Case Studies: Limitations of Interview Design

Interviews yielded rich qualitative data, but several limitations must be noted. One key concern in interview-based research is the potential loss of contextual and non-verbal cues in virtual settings. This is particularly relevant, as all but one interview was conducted online to accommodate participants' schedules. Seale (2018) cautions that virtual interviews may lack the immediacy and depth of in-person interactions (p. 230). Although distractions outside the camera's view and reduced visibility of body language posed challenges, advancements in connectivity and increased familiarity with virtual platforms, particularly in the post-pandemic world, mitigated many of these issues. Moreover, the flexibility offered by virtual interviews was essential for engaging production staff and performance makers, whose demanding schedules often took them far from the research base.

Time constraints also presented challenges. Most interviews were scheduled for 30 to 60 minutes, and while interviewees were generally generous with their time, it was not always possible to cover the full interview schedule. In some cases, this limitation was mitigated when participants' responses naturally addressed later questions. Additionally, the semi-structured format allowed for deviations that, while sometimes limiting coverage of the intended questions, also yielded unanticipated yet valuable insights.

Another limitation concerns the representativeness of the sample. Because this research prioritised lived experience and the phenomena under investigation over demographic representation, the findings are not broadly generalisable. This is a recognised limitation of phenomenological research (Seale, 2018, p. 572; Sousa, 2014, p. 214). Furthermore, interview subjects were selected by theatre companies as individuals most likely to provide relevant

insights. This reliance on organisational gatekeepers introduces the possibility that some suitable interviewees were overlooked.

The interviews provided valuable insights from two key stakeholder groups: production staff and performance makers. However, the significant time commitment required for these interviews necessitated a different approach to capture audience perspectives. To address this, an audience questionnaire was developed to complement the interview data by gathering a broader range of responses. The next section discusses the development of this questionnaire, including its structure, key areas of inquiry, challenges to deployment and role within the overall research design.

iii. Case Studies: Questionnaires

A short, anonymous questionnaire was designed to explore audience perceptions of risk and care during performance. This method aimed to supplement the interviews by providing an additional perspective and capturing immediate post-performance reflections without disrupting the immersive experience. The questionnaire sought to balance the subjective, individualised responses characteristic of immersive theatre with an effort to identify broader emergent themes. Given the highly personal nature of audience reception in immersive performance, generalising findings is inherently difficult. Therefore, the questionnaire was structured to offer both concise individual insights for this exploratory stage of research and potential indicators for future study.

To minimise response burden (Yan et al., 2020) and encourage participation, the questionnaire was distributed digitally via Microsoft Forms. Audience members could access it through a QR code or link provided after the performance, with distribution methods agreed upon in advance with each theatre company. These invitations were designed to align with the aesthetic integrity of the production. For example, *Dead Letter No. 9* planned to integrate the survey invitation into its period-style programme.

The questionnaire combined closed and open-ended questions to ensure clarity while allowing participants to elaborate on their responses (Dykema et al., 2020). While self-administered surveys have limitations related to memory recall and response accuracy, they provide a practical means of capturing audience attitudes with the anonymity necessary for candid feedback (Robson, 2002, p. 233). The next section examines the questionnaire's content design and the challenges encountered during its implementation.

1. Case Studies: Questionnaire Design

The audience questionnaire was designed to gather insights into participants' perceptions of risk and care in immersive performances. It included a mix of open-ended, multiple-choice, and scaled-response questions to balance structured data collection with opportunities for audience reflection.

The initial open-ended questions asked participants to describe their experience and interpret the performance's meaning. The first provided a broad, descriptive response, while the second helped assess whether audiences grasped the thematic and conceptual elements of the work.

To contextualise responses, Question 4 used a numeric scale (1 = most introverted, 10 = most extroverted) to position participants on the introversion-extroversion spectrum. Since immersive theatre often encourages extroverted actions, this question helped nuance analyses of risk, safety, and care. Questions 5–7 assessed perceptions of care, while Questions 8–10 examined perceptions of safety. Both sets used rating scales and open-ended prompts to identify elements that contributed to feelings of care, neglect, security, or vulnerability.

The content drew from the typology of audience risk in immersive theatre and themes from care ethics and care aesthetics (see Chapter 2). The design for these questions drew on the psychometric paradigm, which quantifies subjective perceptions of risk. In their discussion of cultural theory of risk perceptions and the psychometric paradigm, Claire Marris, Ian H. Langford, and Timothy O’Riordan (1998) describe it as a structured method for assessing qualitative risk characteristics, such as dread or controllability (which were discussed in detail in the literature review). However, Jana Uher (2021) cautions that psychometric models *organise* data rather than measure psychological constructs directly. Accordingly, the questionnaire used rating scales to identify patterns in perceptions of care and safety, while open-ended prompts contextualised these responses. This approach addressed psychometrics’ tendency to oversimplify complex influences, ensuring audience experiences were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively within the immersive theatre context.

Despite its potential, the questionnaire was abandoned after the pilot study due to theatre companies’ resistance to providing audience access. Although ROLL THE BONES initially agreed to integrate it into future performances, their run ended unexpectedly due to venue problems (as discussed in Chapter 4). Subsequent companies declined access, necessitating alternative methods for gathering audience feedback.

2. Case Studies: Limitations of Questionnaires and Adjusting the Project Design

The primary limitation of the questionnaire was its low response rate, which never exceeded 10% during the pilot study. While less than ideal, this limitation highlighted challenges in gathering audience feedback for immersive theatre, and anonymity prevented insights into non-participation. However, each completed questionnaire still provided valuable data within the phenomenological framework.

Audience recall accuracy was another concern. As Matthew Reason (2010) observed, reflecting on an experience can alter how it is remembered. His use of a jam-ranking study illustrated how asking participants to justify preferences shifted their responses to more easily articulated choices. A similar effect likely influenced audience questionnaire responses, as vocabulary and writing skills constrained the depth of qualitative feedback.

As mentioned above in Section II.a, gatekeeper resistance to audience access also posed a significant obstacle. Theatre companies often viewed audience research as extraneous or even threatening. Despite the questionnaire's failure, this process clarified a viable path to understanding audience experiences: my own. As an audience member, my firsthand impressions provided immediate, contextually rich data aligned with the study's phenomenological framework. The next section explores the development and implementation of this observational approach.

iv. Case Studies: Observations

I used observations as a complementary data collection method to enhance my understanding of audience risks in immersive theatre. While interviews served as the primary means of assessing risk management practices, my observations provided essential contextual insights into how productions operated in practice (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022, p. 68). Additionally, this approach was influenced by Ciesielska, Boström, and Öhlander's (2018) argument that observation is both a fundamental part of everyday social interaction and a critical research tool. They emphasise its role in exploratory studies, helping researchers identify nuances and refine their methods. In this study, my observations not only allowed me to verify that each performance met the criteria to be included as a case study, but they also provided validation for the statements made in interviews by offering firsthand confirmation of risk management and audience care practices in action. Additionally, by experiencing the performance through an embodied, reflexive perspective as a participant, I gained deeper insights into what it is like to be an audience member at these shows, further enriching my understanding of the interplay between risk, safety, and immersion.

I prioritised performances with heightened ergodic risks (see p. 23 above) to facilitate clearer discussions with stakeholders about safety and production responsibilities. When audience questionnaires proved ineffective due to access restrictions, the notes I had taken on my own audience experiences, from ticket purchase through post-performance outreach, became valuable phenomenological data.

For each case study, I attended a recent immersive performance once, acknowledging the limitations of single-visit observations (further discussed in Section III.c.2). Given that immersive performances vary based on audience composition and choices, I followed Ciesielska et al.'s (2018) guidance to maintain a focused approach. I experienced each performance as a typical first-time attendee while also intentionally noting embedded risks and my own embodied responses.

These observations provided a critical foundation for identifying potential audience risks and enriched the case study interviews by enabling more detailed discussions with production staff about their work.

1. Case Studies: Observation Design

The observational approach combined elements of full and partial participation (Ciesielska et al., 2018). As a fully participating audience member, I experienced each performance firsthand, observing how production staff managed audience members, including myself. This included orientation processes, general care provisions, and responses to potentially confused or distressed participants. Simultaneously, as a partially participating observer, I was not embedded within the production team but had sufficient knowledge of their roles and functions to make informed observations.

To ensure that each production met the criteria for a case study, a primary goal of the observation was to assess psychological and social risks and confirm the presence of production staff, given

that some smaller immersive works operate without them. Observational data was recorded during breaks, intermissions, and immediately after performances. Initial notes captured orientation techniques, encountered risks, risk management strategies, and any aftercare elements. These notes were expanded into detailed, free-written recollections later that evening or the following morning, incorporating emotional and embodied responses alongside critical reflections on the experience.

My observation method synthesises and extends the approaches of Gilbert Ryle (1971), Clifford Geertz (1973), and Deirdre Heddon, Helen Iball, and Rachel Zerihan (2012), integrating thick description with Spectator-Participation-as-Research (SPaR) to develop a nuanced, embodied approach to immersive theatre analysis. By bringing these methodologies together, my approach uniquely considers both the cultural frameworks that shape audience behaviour and the lived, affective experience of risk within immersive performances.

This process aligns with Ryle's (1971) concept of 'thick description,' later expanded by Geertz (1973) in anthropology. Thick description moves beyond surface-level observation to interpret behaviours within their broader cultural context. For example, while a 'thin' description might note a boy rapidly contracting his eyelid, a 'thick' description distinguishes between an involuntary twitch and a deliberate wink that conveys an inside joke. In immersive theatre, this method allows for a deeper analysis of audience interactions, not just recording what happens, but understanding how and why behaviours emerge within the aesthetic and social framework of the performance.

At the same time, my approach incorporates the principles of SPaR, developed by Heddon, Iball, and Zerihan (2012), which treats audience participation as an experiential form of reception, akin to practice in Practice-as-Research (discussed further in Section II of this chapter). SPaR uses thick description to connect an observer's actions and decisions to the cultural structures of a performance while emphasising the spectator's embodied response. In this research, I applied SPaR principles by examining how my perception of risk shaped my decisions as an audience member and identifying specific affects that arose either in the moment or upon later reflection. By synthesising thick description with SPaR, my approach provides both an external analytical framework and an internal, experiential perspective on risk in immersive theatre. This integration makes my observation method uniquely suited to capturing the interplay between structured production choices and unpredictable audience experiences.

2. Case Studies: Limitations of Observations

Observational methods rely heavily on my skill as an observer to accurately record and interpret data. A cautionary example can be found in Coney's *1884*, the case study presented in Chapter 4, where a social science researcher earnestly collects participant data but ultimately misrepresents their experiences, despite quoting them verbatim. A goal of this research was to avoid such misrepresentation.

Several limitations affected this study. Financial and time constraints restricted the number of visits to each production. All case study productions had limited runs due to unforeseen circumstances. *Dead Letter No. 9* closed permanently after the venue floor collapsed following the first observation. *1884*, initially planning a longer tour, ended early when the company lost

Arts Council funding⁴. The ephemeral nature of immersive theatre makes repeated observations difficult, which may explain why most scholarship focuses on long-running companies like Punchdrunk and Secret Cinema.

Logistical challenges varied across case studies. Some productions, such as the pilot study and *1884*, were fully observable. Others, like *Dead Letter No. 9*, featured branching narratives, making it impossible to witness the entire production in one performance. Additionally, both *1884* and *Dead Letter No. 9* relied heavily on inter-audience interactions, causing significant performance variations due to changing audience composition. This underscores the production staff's crucial role, as they observe every performance.

Thick description, as defined by Geertz (1973), involves interpreting behaviours within their context, which introduces subjectivity. The researcher's background and biases inevitably shape these interpretations. An *epoché* statement (see Section IV.i) helped identify and mitigate these biases, though complete removal is impossible. Recognising this subjectivity aligns with the study's focus on risk perception and care, both inherently subjective concepts.

Generalising from these observations is limited by the specific settings of each performance. However, the goal was not to establish universal truths but to explore risk management methods in immersive theatre. Triangulating observations with interviews and audience questionnaires enhanced the case study's validity and contextual depth.

⁴ Though it is worth noting that *1884* has since been picked up by Koro Productions and a Fall 2025/Winter 2026 tour is in pre-production at the time of this thesis submission.

v. Case Studies: Document Analysis

A final element of the case study research that contributed to my findings was the use of document analysis. Researchers Englander and Morley (2021) emphasise that in phenomenological research, ‘the data collection design should fit the phenomenon instead of the phenomenon being forced to fit the design’ (p. 30). As a goal of this research was to better understand management of audience risks, the document analysis here aligns with the audience experience of the phenomena. Audiences begin to understand and develop trust in a company through the available communication before they even enter the performance. They may also signpost elements of care the company has considered before, during or after the performance. The documents analysed reflected this reality. Additionally, in their discussion of document analysis, Creswell and Poth (2017) highlight that documents often provide rich sources of information that can aid in verifying data obtained through other methods. In this research, document analysis helped verify elements of risk management and care that were later discussed in the interviews or observed during the performances.

1. Case Studies: Documents Analysed

In deciding which documents to use, I applied Flick’s (2018) four factors for selecting documents. I looked for authenticity, which I determined by using sources received directly from the theatre company, the venue the production was occurring in and the ticketing websites. I considered credibility, that these documents appeared free from errors. I was also able to reference back to them during later interviews, which also helped confirm both their credibility and authenticity as interviewees confirmed the information contained within and my understanding of it seemed accurate. I considered the representativeness, specifically looking for the typical documents in the performing arts that contain this information: company websites, ticketing websites, venue websites and playbills. I also considered that sometimes the creative nature of the arts means that this information might be conveyed in unexpected ways; therefore, I discussed whether or not I had over overlooked any pertinent documents during later

interviews. Flick's final step is to make sure the documents convey adequate meaning, and, regarding pre-arrival information, all of these documents were rich with content to consider, or sometimes, an interesting lack of content.

Document analysis actually began with the search for potential case studies via advertisements for performances. Along with searching for performances via word of mouth, I followed postings on the Facebook group Everything Immersive, read performance information on the website No Proscenium and was on the Voidspace mailing list. From these initial encounters, I would either click through or Google the show or theatre company to try to learn more. For the two case studies here, I found Dead Letter No. 9 through a No Proscenium posting and 1884 through a Voidspace email.

In both cases, I then looked up the company websites to see what information was included about their shows and to find a way to purchase a ticket. My analysis also included information provided during the ticket purchasing process, as well as emails received related to the performance from that point on. Additionally, Coney's 1884 emails included a comprehensive audience guide PDF and an invitation to an extensively designed website directly related to the performance, both of which I reviewed in depth after the performance.

2. Case Studies: Documents Analysis Limitations

Document analysis is not without limitations. In this research, it is important to acknowledge that document analysis alone was unlikely to uncover a full understanding of the phenomena of audience risk management in immersive theatre, though it did provide valuable additional insights into the audience experience. Additionally, the documents analysed were only those publicly available to an audience member. There was, likely, additional documentation on the performance maker and production staff side of the performance, that impacts the audience experience, that I did not have access to. Additionally,

while documents may appear objective, it is still possible for them to have hidden biases within (Morgan, 2022).

vi. Case Study Data Analysis Method

1. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

This study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine how production staff and performance makers perceive, manage, and experience risk in immersive theatre. IPA is concerned with exploring how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, while also recognising that this understanding is mediated through the researcher's interpretation, a process described as a double hermeneutic (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2022). In this thesis, analysis extends beyond the idiographic level of individual accounts, examining experiences vertically (within each production) and horizontally (across roles and case studies) to identify both specific and shared patterns. While phenomenological research does not seek statistical generalisability, idiographic studies can nevertheless contribute to broader insights. Heffron and Gil-Rodrigues (2011) argue that such work produces transferable findings, which aligns with Smith et al.'s (2022) notion of 'theoretical generalisability,' where meaning emerges as readers interpret the findings through their own professional and experiential knowledge, engaging in a form of triple hermeneutic interpretation.

Data analysis began with reviewing the transcripts. For my first case study, I transcribed the audio recordings myself, which was a useful, though time consuming, way to reflect on the interview content. For the second case study, I learnt that the tool I was using, Microsoft Teams, had a transcription option after my second interview. I used it for the subsequent interviews, so I only had to make minor corrections to the initial transcript to generate an accurate record of the interviews. While I have included pauses, repetitions and filler words in the transcripts in the

Appendices, unless those moments were central to the discussion of the topic, the non-verbal utterances and filler words are omitted from the case studies (Chapter 4 and 5) and discussion chapter (Chapter 7) in this thesis.

I then read through the transcripts and annotated them by hand, looking for anything that looked interesting through exploratory noting, which is very similar to free textual analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022, p. 79). This stage focused on what the interview subject said ‘at face value’ (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022, p. 83), but also paid special attention to linguistic choices, emotional wording, and conceptual commenting that is also grounded in my understanding of the topic at this stage. At the next pass, I constructed emergent themes, which are statements that directly reflected the experiential statements from the transcript (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022, pp. 86-90). These are concise statements from the more expansive noting that occurred in the previous stage. To help manage these, I created a spreadsheet of each annotation from the previous stage, which made it easier to begin to group these statements into connected sections. The final stage was to name the emergent themes and organise them in a table (see Appendix Q). This system was then applied to all six individual transcripts.

To ensure interpretative depth and reduce over-familiarity, transcripts were revisited after deliberate breaks of at least one week. This iterative cycle of transcription, annotation, theme generation, and thematic organisation ensured rigour while allowing space for unexpected insights to emerge.

2. Thematic Analysis

To analyse the interviews when they deviated from strict phenomenological discourse, an same overarching thematic analysis in a similar style to IPA was applicable but better suited for the

varied data set. This also made it more appropriate to apply to the workshop discussions. This aligned well with a report of a case study of mental health of General Practitioners in the UK, where a reflective thematic analysis was used to discover the sources of stress across while IPA was used in tandem on select interviews in the data set to further nuance the findings. Spiers and Riley (2018), the researchers on the GP mental health project highlighted this analytical pluralism as a way to acknowledge the “multidimensional understanding of the varied elements at play” (p. 278). Statements about tools and their limitations and benefits naturally came together in ways that were not necessarily interpreted at the depth required for phenomenological understanding while uncovering themes and merely required slightly less in-depth translations as such statements did not necessarily indicate or reveal deeper truths. In this regard, the compilation of tools was more a curated collection of tools identified across the six interviewees, nuanced through discussions in the workshop, to consider identified strengths and weaknesses by those who had used or experienced the use of them. This same style of reflective thematic analysis was applied to the document analysis.

vii. Case Studies: Pilot Study

A pilot study is a valuable methodological tool in qualitative research, allowing researchers to test and refine their approach before embarking on the main study. Ismail, Kinchin, and Edwards (2018) describe a pilot study as a small-scale project undertaken in advance of the full research, while Malmqvist et al. (2019) emphasise its role in evaluating research tools, improving data collection processes, and enhancing the trustworthiness of findings. Pilot studies can also provide the researcher with greater confidence in their methods and a deeper understanding of their

positionality, particularly when working as an ‘insider’ within a cultural context (Ismail et al., 2018, p. 15).

In this project, a pilot study was conducted using ZU-UK’s *Within Touching Distance* (2022–present) in order to test the questionnaires, interview schedule and refine the overall case study approach prior to the analyses presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The pilot enabled assessment of the effectiveness of interview and questionnaire methods, response rates, and logistical challenges in collecting perspectives from both audiences and production staff. The findings highlighted a low response rate from audiences to the questionnaires, while still demonstrating the value of individual responses in line with the phenomenological orientation of the research. The interviews also revealed areas where questions in the interview schedule required clearer phrasing. By identifying these issues early, the pilot study ensured that the subsequent case studies were approached with stronger, more reliable methods and clearer expectations about the strengths and limitations of each data collection tool.

ZU-UK, led by Persis Jádé Maravala and Jorge Lopes Ramos, creates live events focused on audience engagement (Ramos, 2015, p. 2; Lopes Ramos et al., 2020). *Within Touching Distance* is a binaural VR experience that guides individual audience members through a bedtime routine from childhood to old age (ZU-UK, n.d.).

The pilot aimed to test the clarity of the questionnaire questions and assessed the feasibility of the survey delivery method. Instead of traditional email or in-person administration, audience members received business cards with a QR code and website link to access the survey. This

method's effectiveness was measured by the response rate and participant understanding of the instructions.

Out of 72 business cards distributed, seven responses were received, yielding a 9.72% response rate. While insufficient for statistical generalisation, the responses provided valuable qualitative insights. Previous immersive audience studies, such as Astrid Breel's (2015), have demonstrated the utility of exploratory research even with low response rates. Given this study's phenomenological foundation, individual responses offered meaningful thematic insights into perceptions of risk and care in immersive performance.

Survey respondents described the experience as 'emotional,' 'confronting,' 'disturbing,' and 'intense,' aligning with the production staff's intended themes of relationships and mortality. Only three participants explicitly identified risks, highlighting the need for a 'No Risks' option in the questionnaire to clarify non-responses. Risk types varied among the three respondents, covering social, physical, and psychological risks. However, all respondents reported feeling safe and cared for, suggesting that while the performance engaged with challenging themes, its design effectively supported audience well-being.

The interview with the production staff, a house manager who also performed some stage management duties, successfully validated the interview schedule. Key themes such as risk, care, and audience management skills were discussed in depth. The process also allowed the researcher to refine interview techniques, revealing the unexpectedly high cognitive and emotional demands of conducting in-depth qualitative interviews.

A planned interview with the performance maker was not completed before the first case study due to communication errors. This resulted in procedural improvements, ensuring clearer communication with theatre companies to verify appropriate points of contact and permissions for interviews. However, after the first case study commenced, the performance maker re-engaged, allowing me to practice Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) before applying it to subsequent case studies. Additionally, this delayed interview confirmed that a question on audience interaction types was overly complex and required revision, leading to a clearer phrasing in the final study.

Key insights and improvements for future case studies from the pilot study included:

- **Enhancing Survey Clarity and Response Rates:** The use of business cards with QR codes yielded a 9.72% response rate, indicating the method's potential but also highlighting the need for improvements. Survey instructions were clarified and a 'No Risks' option to distinguish between overlooked and intentionally omitted responses improved the reliability of audience feedback. As the questionnaire was removed from the final case studies, there was no chance to test this method further, though more extensive research into audience feedback techniques holds the potential to be a rich area of future inquiry, discussed more in Chapter 8.
- **Refining Interview Techniques:** The pilot study revealed the cognitive and emotional demands of conducting in-depth qualitative interviews. Adjustments to the interview schedule and increased practice with Interpretative

Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) resulted in better outcomes for subsequent case studies.

- **Clarifying Communication Protocols:** A missed interview with the performance maker underscored the importance of streamlined communication with theatre companies. Future case studies will implement more structured protocols for verifying interview contacts and scheduling, reducing the risk of similar oversights.
- **Adjusting Question Complexity:** The delayed interview with the performance maker revealed that certain questions regarding audience interaction types were too complex. Revisions to these questions created a more accessible and comprehensible language.

Overall, the pilot study refined the case study methodology by testing data collection strategies, revealing necessary adjustments to survey clarity, response solicitation methods, and interview procedures. These refinements informed the structure and execution of the case studies in Chapters 4 and 5, ensuring more effective research into audience handling and care ethics in immersive theatre.

II. Practice-as-Research (PaR) Workshops: Revealing Tacit Knowledge Through Collective Dynamics

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, a Practice-as-Research (PaR) workshop was developed to explore how individual roles operate and interact in real time, providing a complementary perspective to the insights gained from the case studies. Practice-as-Research

(PaR) is an intersection of artistic practice and academic scholarship, allowing practitioners to critically investigate areas of their practice while contributing to theoretical discourse. In our article on producing a PaR symposium, Carlos Eduardo Pires and I highlight that a fundamental strength of PaR lies in its commitment to methodological innovation (Bondar & Pires, 2024). It challenges existing paradigms and integrates creative approaches to expand academic inquiry. This emphasis on innovation is particularly relevant to this study's focus on production staff, where examining audience handling and risk management required methods that extend beyond traditional models.

Robin Nelson (2022) highlights the value of Practice-as-Research (PaR) in making tacit knowledge explicit (p. 44), which is particularly relevant when examining risk perception, an often implicit and subjective experience, and its conceptualisation within performance contexts. These workshops engaged both production staff and performance makers, the practitioners responsible for creating and managing risk in immersive performances, acknowledging that their lived experiences offer essential insights into risk management practices. Incorporating both groups ensured a broader range of perspectives and addressed the limitations of homogeneity observed in initial interviews.

The practice element of this research is rooted in my professional experience as a stage manager, particularly in the facilitation of dialogue during the workshops, the observation of both verbal and tacit communication, and the structured management of discussions to ensure focus on key concepts and activities. Smalley (2024) describes stage management as fundamentally concerned with communication design, a perspective that aligns with this study's focus on improving risk communication in immersive performances. The role I undertook in these workshops closely

mirrored stage management practices in rehearsals and production meetings, requiring active engagement in structuring communication, maintaining focus on key objectives, and prompting reflective discussions to clarify emerging ideas. Additionally, my role involved observing participants' interactions and considering their contributions in the iterative design process, particularly in shaping the 'cult-building' activities and identifying key themes and tools for discussion.

As a qualitative research method, this PaR workshop contributes to the multi-methods approach by aligning with case study methodology and phenomenological inquiry, as it focuses on the lived experiences of key stakeholders. R. Lyle Skains (2018) notes PaR thrives in theoretical, conceptual, dialectical, and contextual domains. This research situates itself as *conceptual* PaR, ideal for research that asks, 'What if?' For example, what if risk management were approached differently? This framing is crucial for understanding how immersive theatre practitioners might rethink audience care strategies.

William W. Lewis and Niki Tulk (2019) emphasise the iterative, perspectival, participatory, and provisional nature of PaR, particularly its 'practice-research-practice (praxis) feedback loop' (p. 3). This iterative process ensures that practice evolves in response to participant input and theoretical considerations, strengthening its role as both a research tool and a training mechanism. Phenomenology's emphasis on lived experience finds direct application in PaR, where knowledge is not only generated but also transmitted through embodied cognition.

Embodied cognition serves as a crucial epistemological foundation for PaR, challenging Cartesian dualisms by asserting that knowledge emerges through lived, corporeal experiences. Lakoff and Johnson's (1999, 2002) conceptual metaphor theory affirms that perception is fundamentally embodied, reinforcing the necessity for methodologies that prioritise sensory and experiential engagement. While this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, the value of experiential engagement was a recurrent theme in the workshop feedback from participants. This argument aligns with Robin Nelson's (2006) distinction between 'know-how' and 'know-that,' where knowledge is not only articulated through theoretical discourse but also enacted through embodied practice. Performative acts within PaR generate knowledge both for those engaged in their execution and for participants who experience them, whether live or recorded.

Despite the epistemological robustness of PaR, critiques persist regarding its ability to meet conventional academic standards of rigour. As stated earlier in this chapter related to the case study methods, traditional empirical paradigms, which prioritise quantifiable and supposedly objective data, often resist the inclusion of embodied methodologies. However, PaR challenges the premise of neutrality in research, positioning the researcher's lived experience as an integral component of inquiry. Robin Nelson (2022) argues that the actual primary challenge of PaR is effectively communicating its knowledge outcomes within academic discourse, an issue compounded by disciplinary variations in defining research rigour. Thus, articulating and validating embodied knowledge must occur within the methodological frameworks underpinning each PaR investigation.

Given the limited likelihood of production staff engaging directly with a doctoral thesis, it was essential to develop alternative dissemination methods to ensure practical industry impact. The creation of a workshop aligned with the nature of practice among production staff, where ‘know-how’ and ‘know-that’ intersect.

Workshops and one-off training sessions emerged as promising avenues, being widely recognised as effective means of skill enhancement within the profession. While specific data on house managers’ engagement with workshops is limited, David J. McGraw’s 2023 biennial survey of international stage managers offers relevant insights. Out of 1,979 respondents, 1,508 reported attending workshops or training sessions on job-specific topics (McGraw, 2024, p. 14). This suggests a strong willingness among stage managers to engage in this form of knowledge exchange, reinforcing its potential as an effective method for disseminating research findings.

Workshops also foster a participatory dynamic in which facilitators and attendees co-create knowledge, highlighting the relational aspects of embodied inquiry and immersive theatre. Consequently, this PaR project centres on a workshop as a key methodological tool addressing the third research question: **What tools can impact competency among production staff regarding audience care and risk management?**

Fortuitously, the workshop discussions also provided additional insights that informed the case study findings related to the remaining research questions, specifically regarding how audience care is currently considered in immersive theatre by the theatre companies creating it and how

the application of care ethics might influence audience risk management to achieve more successful outcomes.

It is somewhat unconventional to write about a Practice-as-Research project rather than presenting the practice itself. However, for the purposes of this thesis, relying on a set number of voluntary participants at a fixed date and time would have posed a significant risk. Moreover, presenting the findings from the case studies alongside the practice was essential, as the two methods were developed in tandem and mutually informed one another, thereby clarifying the research outcomes.

i. Immersive Safety Cult(ure): Cult Building as a Metaphor

As established in the introduction, the shifting demographics of immersive theatre audiences, from niche, cult-like followers to a broader, less experienced public, necessitate new tools and strategies for audience handling. *Build Your Own Cult: An Immersive Theatre Audience Handling Workshop* was developed in response to these challenges, using hands-on activities to explore how production staff and performance maker decisions shape safety and care for audiences, and how these practices are enacted in real time. By foregrounding both individual and collective approaches, the workshop offered a practical site to examine the interplay between safety culture, artistic risk-taking, and audience experience.

A key challenge was devising a prompt to engage both experienced practitioners and newcomers in creating a short immersive performance within the workshop's limited timeframe. The breakthrough came from a source text describing heightened risks in immersive performances: a review by Maddie Haynes (2021) of Harold and Arthur's *The Pact*:

They hand us each a business card with the words *The Pact* on it, along with the number I'd texted. Then they stand and each raise their right hand, on the wrists of which I see a black tattoo of an eye. They speak in unison: 'Praise be to Hoo.' The following morning, I get another text from Harold and Arthur. They remind me to reach out to them if I ever need help 'realising myself', and tell me 'She will watch over you always' ('She' presumably being their all-seeing owl god, Hoo.) (para. 16-19).

This fictional owl-based religion, paired with the workshop's focus on risk management, crystallised the thematic potential of building a cult as a guiding structure. Cult-building became a productive metaphor for immersive theatre audience handling, offering a framework to examine the dynamics of positive risk-taking and care. Theatre history is deeply entwined with cultic rituals, originating in the worship of Dionysus in ancient Greek drama. The cult-like devotion of early immersive theatre audiences, frequently noted in reviews (see Quinn, 2024; Nelson, 2021; Bishop, 2017), also suggested a natural conceptual link.

The metaphor of cult-building aligns with safety culture through the word's etymology. The Oxford English Dictionary (2025) defines *cult* as 'a collective obsession with or intense admiration for a particular person, thing, or idea,' conceptually linking it to safety *culture*, a risk management term emphasising shared values that prioritise safety within organisations. Historically, culture derives from meanings related to 'worship' and 'reverential homage' (Oxford University Press, 2024), as well as 'refinement of mind, taste, and manners' (Oxford University Press, 2024). This dual meaning aids in underscoring the workshop's goal of fostering a supportive environment for audiences while preserving immersive art's provocative nature.

As cult researchers Rousselet et al. (2017) describe, ‘Cults can be seen as an organised group or a solitary person whose purpose is to dominate cult members by using psychological manipulation.’ The workshop repurposed this concept, heightening risk elements in a controlled environment to assess audience handling. This approach reflected concerns raised by participants in Ontroerend Goed’s *Internal*, where audience members reported feelings of deception and manipulation. While the goal of this research is to foster more care-full immersive works, using the cult theme prompted participants to confront risk, enabling deeper reflection on safety and care.

Recognising that cults can be a sensitive topic, precautions were taken to mitigate distress. While data on global cult involvement is limited, Singer (2003) estimated that 0.1–1.3% of Americans have participated in a cult. Though the likelihood was low, content warnings were included in advertisements and participant materials, clarifying the metaphorical, lighthearted approach. At the workshop’s start, attendees were reminded of this and given the option to leave. Participants uncomfortable with the cult theme could reinterpret the activity as a club initiation, supported by feedback from early PhD sharing parties. Including both cult and club examples ensured broader accessibility.

ii. Practice-as-Research: Workshop Design

Initially conceived as a static research output, the workshop evolved into an iterative, process-driven component of the research, using PaR methodology and focus group methods to explore diverse perspectives on risk and audience care. A year into my research, I presented the initial activity at a PhD sharing party at the University of Greenwich, an informal,

interdisciplinary discussion platform. This diversity mirrored the shifting demographics of immersive theatre audiences as the form gained mainstream popularity (Gardner, 2018).

A notable discussion emerged when a performance maker participant, intrigued by the immersive performance review I shared, highlighted her appreciation for the use of post-show text messages from performers to audience members (Haynes, 2021). This sparked a debate with other participants unsettled by the uncertainty of when the interaction would end, underscoring the subjective nature of risk perception and the ethical tensions between creative expression and informed consent.

Recognising the value of these insights, I integrated the workshop as a dynamic research methodology rather than a static outcome, aligning with Robin Nelson's (2022) concept of 'attending differently' (p. 37) by challenging my assumptions about risk. The workshop incorporated informal focus group methods like debriefings and artifact collection, with participants completing during- and post-workshop questionnaires to track shifts in perspective and refine the structure for greater industry impact.

Collaboration, a fundamental component of the production staff and performance maker relationship, was central to the workshop's cult-building activity. It was structured in two phases to examine how artistic intentions, risk management, and audience handling intersect. In the first phase, participants, acting as performance makers, developed a fictional cult with a purpose, principles, and initiation ceremony. Risk considerations were omitted to encourage uninhibited creativity. In the second phase, participants assumed production staff roles, collaboratively

assessing and mitigating the risks identified in their ceremonies. This process illustrated the transition from unstructured creativity to structured responsibility, mirroring immersive production practices.

To fit the workshop's timeframe, the primary activity focused solely on initiation design. A revised version was tested at a subsequent PhD sharing party with another interdisciplinary cohort. After introductory discussions on participants' backgrounds and immersive theatre familiarity, we again reviewed *The Pact* (Haynes, 2021), identifying physical, psychological, and social risks to prepare participants for the activity.

The Pact was a performance created by Harold and Arthur (performers Jonathan Curd and Kiran Tanna) and performed at Edinburgh Fringe in 2017. Maddie Haynes (2021), author of the review, encountered the performers flyering. They handed her one and told her to text the number on the back if she was interested in an immersive horror experience. Haynes sent a text and was instructed to meet them at a nearby bar. Haynes brings along a friend and the two women proceed to have an unusual evening of very direct questions from Harold and Arthur, chats about souls, ghosts and owl gods, encounter a drunk woman who may or may not be part of the performance, and play a truth game where the men discuss how they would kill someone if they had to. During the evening, the men buy Haynes and her friend several rounds of drinks as they move to multiple bars. The night concludes with an invitation from Harold and Arthur to join their cult and the ladies are given a business card with a phone number on it and sent on their way. Haynes continues to receive text messages from the performers for several days after.

Facilitating the discussion revealed challenges in maintaining focus; outlandish ideas sometimes overshadowed meaningful insights. One participant questioned, ‘Why would I want to do this?’ highlighting a gap in the activity’s framing. The lack of perceived benefit to offset risk, echoing the psychometric paradigm, led me to introduce an additional task in the next iteration: participants named their cult and framed their initiation as a recruitment tool, adding a persuasive element that helped balance risk with engagement.

Peer feedback suggested reframing the activity as a club initiation to enhance inclusivity and providing sample initiations beforehand for clarity. Before the pilot workshop, I introduced two examples: The Cult of the Holy Paperclip, emphasising physical and psychological risks, and The Club of Deep Connection (both examples available in Appendix K), focusing on psychological and social risks.

The workshop also incorporated a risk perception quiz based on Ropeik’s (2011) model, assessing participants’ tendencies toward Individualist-Communitarian and Hierarchist-Egalitarian paradigms. This encouraged reflection on how personal risk profiles influence immersive theatre decisions. Ropeik’s quiz was selected because it was a clear and easily accessible tool for participants across a broad array of professional and risk management experience.

Key objectives included:

- **Understanding Existing Tools for Risk Management and Care:** Discussing their complexities and challenges within immersive contexts.

- **Building Audience Care Strategies:** Developing practical approaches to balance immersive engagement with ethical responsibility.
- **Identifying Diverse Risk Factors:** Examining physical, psychological, and social risks to expand participants' risk vocabulary and situate their own experience of risk.

Each workshop iteration deepened engagement with these objectives, integrating participant feedback to refine immersive theatre risk management practices. A full breakdown of the workshop running order is available in Appendix I.

iii. Practice-as-Research: Data Collection

The workshop analysis employed a multi-method approach, integrating surveys, artifact collection, observations, and reflective practice. This approach synthesises Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), focus group methodology, and reflective inquiry to examine how participants engaged with risk management tools in immersive theatre. By combining these methods, this study aided in understanding participant experiences and providing an opportunity to practice risk communication while also addressing the methodological challenges of data collection in facilitated settings.

1. Practice-as-Research: Surveys and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

To assess participant engagement and learning, I incorporated both real-time Mentimeter surveys and a post-workshop Microsoft Form into the workshop. Mentimeter, an interactive digital tool, gathered baseline knowledge on immersive theatre and risk management while also identifying participant backgrounds in creating, managing, or attending immersive theatre. Mentimeter offers several strengths as a research and teaching tool (Vallely & Gibson, 2018). Its anonymity encourages honest, confident participation, particularly from participants reluctant to speak in large groups. It is user-friendly and provides real-time feedback, which can spark valuable discussion, aiding both learning and professional development.

However, Vallely and Gibson (2018) have also noted there are limitations. Participation requires WiFi-connected devices, which was less of an issue in the already online context of the workshop, and response rates can vary, often falling short of full class engagement. They also found that because students cannot edit responses once submitted, some became frustrated, but as responses were discussed in real time during the workshop, this did not seem to be the case for any participants and it was not mentioned as an issue in the post-workshop survey.

The post-workshop survey was designed to reconcile the highly individual nature of the workshop reception with a very initial search for shared patterns. Rather than aiming for sweeping generalisations, it captured concise personal accounts while signalling lines of enquiry for future study. Open questions provided space for elaboration (Dykema et al., 2020). Although self-administered surveys risk recall bias and imprecision, their anonymity made them a pragmatic way to elicit candid participant reflections (Robson, 2002, p. 233).

Although questionnaires were ultimately dropped during the live case study, as discussed in Section I.iii of this chapter, piloting them proved invaluable when designing the post-workshop feedback survey. This survey explored perceived physical, psychological and social risks in immersive theatre; participants' definitions of informed consent which included clarity, practical visions of audience care, confidence in care tools and training needs, and detailed evaluations of the workshop's usefulness, shortcomings and areas for enhancement. Together, these foci allow the survey both to gauge workshop effectiveness and to chart priorities for future practice and research.

While IPA is traditionally applied to interview data, Smith et al. (2022) highlight its applicability in analysing written responses, including open-ended survey questions. In this study, IPA was used to examine participants' written reflections, in the rare cases they were extensive, identifying recurring themes regarding concerns, gaps in understanding, and potential areas for further inquiry.

2. Practice-as-Research: Artifact Collection

In addition to surveys, artifact collection served as a secondary data source. Participants documented their creative decision-making processes using a modified version of the initiation template introduced in the workshop (see Appendix K). This tool enabled participants to record their construction of fictional 'cults and clubs,' creating a tangible record of their engagement with the workshop material. Artifact collection provided further insights into participant interpretations of risk management tools, complementing both observational and survey data.

3. Practice-as-Research: Observations and Reflective Practice

Observations during the workshops mirrored the approach used in the case study research (see Section I.iv). While recording the sessions was considered, ethical and practical concerns arose regarding participant openness when discussing sensitive topics related to risk management and care (or lack thereof). To mitigate this, I took observational notes on key moments, with an emphasis on anonymity and ethical considerations in data reporting.

Balancing facilitation with note-taking presented challenges, resulting in limited direct quotations from participants. To compensate for this limitation, I conducted reflective writing sessions after each workshop to document key insights, aligning with the reflective practice framework discussed below. However, this remains a methodological constraint. In future iterations, employing a co-facilitator, as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2009) in focus group research, would enhance data collection by allowing for a more comprehensive record of participant contributions.

Another consideration for future research is recording the workshops, though this raises questions about potential impacts on participant disclosure and group dynamics. Notably, the open-discussion format in the first and second workshops fostered strong peer engagement, which may have been altered by the presence of a recording device.

A key component of this research is the integration of critical reflective practice alongside the collection of phenomenological data. Following Gray (1996, p. 8), this study positions the researcher as a reflective practitioner within a collaborative research framework, recognising the interdependent relationship between participant engagement and knowledge production.

Reflective practice is employed in two interconnected ways:

- **First-tier reflection:** Analysing participant observations, field notes, artifact collections, and survey data. This tier ensures that participant perspectives are critically engaged with rather than merely recorded.
- **Second-tier reflection:** Re-evaluating relevant literature and integrating emerging insights from case studies. This cyclical approach allows for iterative refinement of the research process, informing subsequent workshops or the synthesis of findings.

Finlay (2008, p. 5) identifies reflection, critical thinking, and self-awareness as the core competencies underpinning reflective practice. In this study, reflection serves as a bridge between IPA analysis and creative research, supporting the translation of theoretical insights into practical applications. Robin Nelson (2022, p. 84) emphasises that reflection within practice ‘brings out the research dimensions of the project,’ a principle that underpins my reflective process following each cycle of workshop engagement.

By synthesising survey responses, artifact analysis, observational methods, and reflective practice, this study contributes a unique methodological approach to understanding risk management in immersive theatre. These methods, while distinct, are interconnected in their

ability to illuminate both participant experiences and broader theoretical implications. The next section will now examine these methods in the context of a workshop pilot study, evaluating their effectiveness in practice.

4. Practice-as-Research: Limitations

Following the pilot study discussed in the next section, future iterations of the workshop transition to an online format to help better diversify the participant makeup. The transition to an online format via Microsoft Teams introduced both advantages and challenges. One major concern was Zoom fatigue, which was mitigated by encouraging participants to turn off their cameras during more lecture-based segments of the workshop. However, this also meant there was little way to ensure engagement, as some participants may have been multitasking.

Breakout rooms posed another challenge. In in-person settings, facilitators can observe groups from a distance without disrupting their workflow. Online, popping into breakout rooms felt more intrusive, so the decision was made to allow groups to work independently, with the option to call for assistance via chat. This approach worked well, as the groups produced thoughtful and well-structured cult concepts, demonstrating deep engagement with the material.

Despite efforts to address accessibility, some technical barriers emerged. The use of QR codes in the presentation proved problematic, as participants accessing the workshop on mobile devices struggled to scan them. Additionally, the final slide lacked direct links to further resources and upcoming workshops. This oversight led to an important revision: a new accessibility page was

added to the project website, consolidating all resources, instructions, and a video tutorial on using Mentimeter, a tool utilised during the session.

On a positive note, the chat function proved valuable, particularly for quieter participants who may have been hesitant to speak aloud. This facilitated richer discussions and allowed more perspectives to be included in real time.

iv. Practice-as-Research: Workshop Pilot

The pilot workshop, conducted at the 2nd UTAD Theatre Research Conference in Istanbul on September 6, 2024, served as an initial test of the methodologies proposed in this PaR thesis. Its primary function was to trial workshop strategies, assess feasibility in a new cultural and academic setting, and refine the approach before full implementation in later workshops (see Chapter 6). This iteration functioned as a sense check within the industry, allowing participants to engage with the concepts of immersive theatre risk management and audience handling.

Though an international workshop with a wide variety of cultures present, the workshop was attended exclusively by Turkish performance students and academics, with no representation from theatre management, technical production, or immersive theatre professionals. This absence created an imbalance in perspectives, as discussions were dominated by performer-centric concerns rather than a holistic examination of risk from all stakeholders involved in immersive theatre. Recognising this limitation, future iterations expanded participant recruitment to include

production staff to ensure a comprehensive understanding of risk management in immersive environments.

The session was conducted in English, necessitating real-time translation by volunteer student interpreters. This significantly impacted the workshop's structure, as linguistic mediation prolonged activities and simplified complex discussions, particularly around risk management and audience aftercare. The necessity of defining immersive theatre from the outset further delayed engagement with the workshop's core themes. Participants' interpretations of immersive theatre reflected surface-level familiarity, associating it with spontaneity, abstraction, and participatory art rather than the structural and relational dynamics central to immersive performance.

Despite these challenges, the workshop's main activity, developing the orientation for a fictional cult, was implemented with adaptations. However, due to time constraints and translation demands, discussions on aftercare and the post-workshop survey were omitted. The exercise also illuminated a crucial insight: extreme risks (e.g., 'driving a car with a bomb in it') were paradoxically easier to risk-assess than moderate risks, as binary, high-stakes scenarios present clearer boundaries of consent. This observation informed future refinements in workshop structure, emphasising nuanced risk assessment.

The workshop exposed significant cultural and political sensitivities surrounding immersive theatre in Turkey. Several participants expressed strong concerns regarding its feasibility and safety, citing its reliance on secrecy, surprise, and negotiated boundaries as contentious in a

Turkish context. Informed consent discussions were particularly animated, with some participants perceiving immersive theatre as potentially ‘lawless’ and at risk of legal repercussions. This cultural perspective underscores the necessity for contextual flexibility when discussing risk in immersive theatre, reinforcing the need to situate the practice within local legal, ethical, and social frameworks.

Translation complexities further influenced workshop outcomes. While interpretation facilitated content comprehension, it inevitably condensed intricate discussions. Risk management and audience aftercare, key themes of the workshop, suffered from this oversimplification. These findings highlight the importance of hosting workshops in cultural contexts where immersive theatre is already an established practice, ensuring that participants possess foundational knowledge that allows for deeper engagement with risk-related discussions.

Key insights and improvements for future workshops from the pilot study included:

- **Expanding Participant Demographics:** The absence of theatre management and technical production professionals limited the workshop’s effectiveness. Future iterations ensured a more balanced participant pool by recruiting production staff through organisations such as the Association of British Theatre Technicians, Stage Management Association and Production Managers’ Forum, broadening the discussion to encompass all stakeholders in risk management.
- **Contextual Adaptability:** The reception of immersive theatre is not universal. The workshop’s challenges demonstrated that cultural, legal, and political factors significantly shape how immersive theatre is perceived and practiced. It was

evident that future iterations of the workshop, at the present exploratory stage of research, should focus on British and American cultural contexts, as these are both familiar cultural contexts for the researcher.

- **Addressing Audience Care Misconceptions:** Participants frequently conflated ‘audience care’ with marketing strategies aimed at attracting audiences, rather than post-experience well-being. Future iterations placed greater focus on distinguishing between audience engagement strategies, risk assessment techniques and ethical responsibilities of care.
- **Managing Translation Barriers:** The unforeseen reliance on student translators resulted in conceptual dilution and prolonged activities. Future workshops prioritised participant groups proficient in English to mitigate linguistic barriers and facilitate richer discussions.

The pilot workshop underscored the necessity for refining participant selection, adapting content to cultural contexts, and addressing translation challenges to enhance workshop efficacy. While its limitations informed strategic improvements, the workshop successfully tested key methodological elements, reinforcing the thesis’s central argument on the necessity for audience handling frameworks in immersive theatre risk management. The insights gained directly inform the workshops presented in Chapter 6, ensuring they are better equipped to engage with diverse stakeholders and effectively examine risk and care in immersive performance contexts.

III. Case Studies and Practice-as-Research Workshops: Synthesising Data

Both the case studies and Practice-as-Research workshops employed complementary data collection methods, allowing for a synthesis of findings across individual and collective perspectives. See the chart below for a description of the order the research occurred in.

Research Design Flow Chart

Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Preliminary Research	Academic Research	General Literature Review Viewing of Performances



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Data Collection 1 – Case Study Pilot Study	Collection and Analysis of Data	Phenomenological Methods Interviews Questionnaires
Reflection	Academic Research	General Literature Review



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Workshop Development	Practice-as-Research	Practice-as-Research Techniques



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Data Collection 2 – Case Study #1: <i>Dead Letter No.</i> 9	Collection and Analysis of Data	Interviews Observations (SPaR) Document Analysis
Reflection	Academic Research	ADD Care Ethics Literature Review Viewing of Performances



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Data Collection 3 – Pilot Study: Performance Maker Interview	Collection and Analysis of Data	Phenomenological Methods Interviews Questionnaires
Reflection Adaptations to Performance Maker Interview Schedule	Academic Research	Interview Schedule Interview Methodology Literature Viewing of Performances



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Data Collection 4 – Case Study #2 - 1884	Collection and Analysis of Data	Interviews Observations (SPaR) Document Analysis

Workshop #1 – Pilot Study	Practice-as-Research	Practice-as-Research Techniques



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Reflection	Academic Research	Practice-as-Research Techniques Risk Management and Communication Literature



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Workshop #2	Practice-as-Research	Practice-as-Research Techniques



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Reflection	Academic Research	Practice-as-Research Techniques Risk Communication Literature Review



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Workshop #3	Practice-as-Research	Practice-as-Research Techniques



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Reflection	Academic Research	Practice-as-Research Techniques Risk Communication and Languages Literature



Research Stage	Type of Research	Methods Used
Findings	Academic Research	Writeup of Case Studies, Findings, Discussion
Participant Checking	Validation	Shared Findings with Case Study Interviewees to Help Confirm Accuracy

Figure 3 - Research Design Flow Chart

Interview transcripts from the case studies and survey responses from the workshops were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, alongside thick description and reflective observations of both the performances and workshop interactions. While some approaches proved more effective for particular research questions, data from the alternative method often illuminated additional dimensions of the phenomena. For example, interview responses provided rich insights into how audience care is currently conceptualised within immersive theatre, whereas workshop activities revealed the practical and ethical complexities of providing care in real time, such as attempting to manage hypothetical cult participants. Similarly, care ethics emerged implicitly in interviews, with participants discussing the guiding

philosophies of their companies, while workshop observations highlighted the challenges of embedding ethical practices from the outset versus retroactively.

The alignment of data collection and analysis methods across the two approaches, both rooted in IPA and observation, enabled their integration in the discussion chapter. By combining insights from individual interviews with observations of stakeholder interactions, it was possible to construct an overarching thematic analysis that synthesises the micro-level experiences of practitioners with the collective dynamics revealed in the workshops. This synthesis provides a more robust and nuanced understanding of audience care and risk management, offering findings relevant to both academic inquiry and industry practice. The last section of this chapter will now address ethical considerations for the workshop, which are two-fold: primarily, ensuring care for the case study and workshop participants, and secondarily, acknowledging the inevitable influence of my own positionality as the primary researcher through an *epoché* statement.

IV. Ethical Considerations

As this research engages with sensitive topics related to risk, safety, and care within immersive theatre, it was essential to critically consider the ethical implications of the study. Ethical considerations were integral to the research design, ensuring that all participants, whether interviewees, audience members completing questionnaires, or workshop attendees, were protected from potential psychological distress and harm. This section outlines the ethical safeguards put in place throughout the study, emphasising participant well-being, data security, and researcher reflexivity.

Audience questionnaires were fully anonymised and administered via Microsoft Forms with no identifiable data attached. To facilitate withdrawal, participants created a five-word phrase at the end of the survey, which could be used to request removal of their data before 1 October 2024.

No participants exercised this right. Because online questionnaires prevented real-time assessment of participant distress, the landing page included a participant information sheet detailing the study's aims, withdrawal procedures, and contact information for three different mental health services. A full copy of this information sheet is provided in Appendix J.

Participants were given full autonomy to skip any survey questions they found distressing, and responses were saved only upon submission. All data was securely stored in a password-protected OneDrive folder on the University of Greenwich server. Additionally, ethical precautions were taken regarding the potential discovery of active safety concerns. If a participant flagged an ongoing risk in a production, the research protocol required informing the production team while maintaining participant anonymity. In the unlikely case of a severe safety violation, a report would have been submitted to the appropriate authority via the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reporting system. No such incidents were reported.

Similar precautions were applied to interviews. Participants received an information sheet (Appendix J) outlining the research aims, mental health support resources, and withdrawal procedures. While interviews allowed for greater responsiveness to participant distress, psychological trauma is not always immediately apparent. To address this, mental health service reminders were provided before and after each interview.

One key ethical limitation was the impossibility of complete anonymity for interviewees. Since case studies were tied to specific productions, readers familiar with the performances could

potentially deduce the identities of involved personnel. Therefore, confidentiality could not be guaranteed. This limitation was clearly communicated to participants during the consent process.

The workshop component of the research introduced similar ethical concerns, particularly regarding participant distress. However, as the workshop involved collaborative risk creation rather than personal reflections on past experiences, the likelihood of distress was deemed minimal. Participants were reminded at the outset that they could take a break or step away at any time.

The ethical protocols for this research were reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) at the University of Greenwich. Following submission in October 2022, approval for questionnaires and interviews was granted in November 2022. A subsequent addendum for the workshop was submitted in January 2024 and approved in March 2024.

i. Research Ethics: Epoché Statement

Clive Seale (2018) asserts that phenomenological research benefits from an *epoché* statement, which acknowledges that researchers are never neutral agents in the investigative process (p. 519). The term *epoché* is derived from the Greek ‘suspension of judgment’ (Oxford English Dictionary) and serves as a tool for reflexivity. Rather than striving for unattainable objectivity, indeed, this study embraces the inherent subjectivity of phenomenological inquiry (Morley, 2010, p. 224).

My positionality as a researcher is shaped by my identity as a highly educated, white, working-class-raised, American, heterosexual, disabled female. While certain aspects of my identity grant privilege, others such as my gender and disability status situate me within marginalised experiences. My personal risk tolerance, which is a high tolerance for risk-taking,

likely influenced by the security afforded by my privileged positions, has shaped my engagement with risk perception research.

My professional background as a stage manager, production manager, theatre technician, and house staff informed my understanding of immersive theatre structures and risk management. This familiarity allowed me to engage with practitioners from an insider perspective but also presented potential biases. Having encountered challenging working conditions in some immersive theatre settings, I acknowledge the possibility of a negative bias toward performance makers and a positive bias toward production staff. Throughout this study, I have made a conscious effort to mitigate these influences, though I encourage readers to critically consider how my experiences may shape my interpretations.

Additionally, I approach this research as what Kelly Jordan (2019) describes as an ‘expert participant-spectator’ (p. 192). With over a decade and a half of experience attending and working in immersive theatre, I inevitably bring an understanding of the art form’s conventions that differs from that of a novice audience member. While I remained mindful of these differences during observation and analysis, I acknowledge that I can no longer experience immersive performances as an uninitiated spectator.

Philosophers such as Husserl and Amedeo Giorgi emphasise *epoché* as a means of increasing transparency in phenomenological research (Zahavi, 2019, pp. 260–261). By explicitly articulating my positionality and potential biases, I hope to foster a reflexive research approach that allows readers to critically consider these influences, and their own, when engaging with the study’s findings.

IV. Towards a Care Ethics Approach to Audience Handling

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach underpinning this research, detailing how a phenomenological framework, grounded in hermeneutics and idiography, guides the exploration of risk perception in immersive theatre. By adopting a multi-method inductive approach and employing case studies and a PaR workshop, this research seeks to capture the nuanced ways in which production staff contribute to audience safety. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected to analyse the subjective experiences of production staff and performance makers, augmented by thematic analysis when appropriate, and integrated with findings from Practice-as-Research workshops to test audience handling strategies. Ethical considerations and pilot studies further ensured a robust and reflexive research process.

Through this methodology, the study aims to answer how production staff can contribute to establishing safer immersive spaces, refining this inquiry through subquestions on current risk mitigation practices, the role of care ethics, and tools for improving competency in audience management. These insights will be explored through case studies, beginning with *Dead Letter No. 9* by ROLL THE BONES. The next chapter will examine how care, though not explicitly identified as such, was an embedded philosophy in the production from the outset, demonstrating how emotional intelligence, active listening, and community-building shaped their approach to risk management, offering a strong model for integrating audience care into immersive theatre practice.

Chapter 4 - Case Study #1: ROLL THE BONES' *Dead Letter No. 9*

This chapter presents data drawn from my observations and interviews with performance maker Taylor Myers and production staff member Ellery Brown. *Dead Letter No. 9* was staged in Brooklyn, New York, by the theatre company ROLL THE BONES during the 2023–2024 season. Founded in 2012, ROLL THE BONES describes its immersive theatre practice in terms such as ‘conversation as social medicine,’ ‘tangible in-person interaction,’ ‘combating loneliness,’ and ‘a nightlife revolution’ (ROLL THE BONES, n.d.). To situate the production within existing frameworks, I draw on Brigante and Elger’s (2020) model for classifying immersive experiences, which emphasises the importance of identifying team size and production resources in order to manage audience expectations. According to their classification, *Dead Letter No. 9* falls into the category of *Independent*: it involved a project team of between 11 and 49 paid or stipend staff, contractors, freelancers, artists, or collaborators; it maintained creative independence by not being produced on behalf of a corporation or third party (though ROLL THE BONES has undertaken corporate commissions on other occasions); and it was not funded by corporate sponsorship or supported by a professional company (Brigante & Elger, 2020, p. 94). This classification helps to contextualise the company and its available resources, while the interviews with Myers and Brown, together with my performance observations, provide insights that speak directly to the central research question: *how can production staff contribute to establishing safer spaces for immersive audiences?*

Earlier chapters laid the foundation for this investigation. Chapter 1 identified a critical gap in immersive theatre research. While much has been written about audience experience and artistic innovation, little attention has been paid to how production staff manage the ethical and practical

challenges of audience safety and care. Chapter 2 established a conceptual framework by exploring the limits of conventional risk management strategies and introducing care ethics as a complimentary lens to manage those limitations better, one that prioritises relational responsibility, attentiveness, and contextual decision-making.

Chapter 3 then explained the rationale for using case studies as a core methodological approach. Case studies allow for close, situated examination of how principles of risk and care are enacted in practice, capturing the often-tacit knowledge of practitioners. Through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and participant observations, this case study bridges theory and lived experience, offering a grounded perspective on the ethical work of immersive performance-making.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the two interviewees. To aid in understanding the themes raised in the interviews, the interviewee introduction is then followed by an overview of the show drawn from my observations and a brief discussion of the physical, psychological, and social risks encountered during the performance. I then examine how ROLL THE BONES consider audience care at present, according to Myers and Brown. Both quickly make it clear that care begins among company members before extending to the audience. While ROLL THE BONES does not explicitly identify with care ethics, their practices, such as extended time, active listening, and embracing the imperfect nature of care, resonate strongly with the core principles of care ethics described by Tronto and Hamington in Chapter 2. The section exploring how care ethics principles appear within the company concludes with a conversation referencing the strong communication practices within ROLL THE BONES.

Through Myers's and Brown's comments, I will then explore the role of mutual trust among one another and their audiences and how that influences outcomes for the audience experience.

Before moving on to consider the tools for audience care described during the interview, this section will consider the often- invisible role of production staff, exemplified through both the aesthetic design of immersive theatre and the nature of production staff labour, and conclude with the sustainability challenges this invisibility creates.

The chapter begins to wrap up in Section IV with a reflection on tools identified by Myers and Brown to support audience care: playtesting, content warnings, orientations, in-performance care, post-show feedback, and aftercare. These findings are then discussed in Chapter 7, alongside those from the second case study, *1884* (Chapter 5), and the workshop (Chapter 6).

I. The Interview Participants⁵

Speaking with performance makers helps identify what Porter and Alcorn (2020) call the production's 'why', the creative frameworks and conceptual goals that define the boundaries within which production staff operate. The interview with the stage manager reveals the 'how', individualised practices, methods, and techniques, providing insight into how audience handling decisions are made and enacted (p. 9). Together with my firsthand observations as an audience member, these interviews offer a fuller picture of *ROLL THE BONES*' approach to care.

⁵ The transcripts for each interview in the case studies are included as individual appendices for reference. In the transcript, the interviews are recorded verbatim with verbal elements such as repetitions, partially said words, and filler words (such as um, uh, like, you know, etc.) included. In these chapters, repetitions and filler words have been removed for clarity when they do not impact the meaning of the quote.

i. Primary Risk Creator: Taylor Myers, Director and Artistic Director (Performance Maker)

In January 2024, I conducted an online interview with Taylor Myers, director of *Dead Letter No. 9* and Artistic Director of ROLL THE BONES. As the performance maker, Myers was key to establishing the production ontology, the creative world in which production staff operated. An American actor, director, and producer, Myers began creating immersive work in 2012. His early career included roles in *Sleep No More* (Punchdrunk) and *Then She Fell* (Third Rail Projects), later producing immersive events of varying scales. These experiences informed his directorial approach, shaping both the aesthetic and relational frameworks that influenced audience care practices.

ii. Primary Risk Manager: Ellery Brown, Stage Manager (Production Staff)

I also interviewed Ellery Brown, the stage manager for *Dead Letter No. 9*, via an online meeting. Brown's role was pivotal. With no house staff or ushers, they were primarily responsible for managing audience interactions within the creative parameters set by Myers. Their decisions directly impacted audience care, safety, and experience.

Brown joined the production several weeks into rehearsals as a replacement and took on the role of Production Stage Manager. While credited as 'stage manager,' Brown described the position as hybrid in nature: 'You end up wearing a lot of hats' (Appendix B, ln. 40–41). With over eleven years of stage management experience, six of which focused on immersive performance, and an interdisciplinary academic background shaped through a self-designed program at McGill

University, Brown brought adaptability, strategic thinking, and an understanding of how to harmonise diverse artistic disciplines. As they explained:

‘I’ve always been like, give me backstage. Get me to this hybrid nexus of all the information passing through, and we have to make the art form, all the disciplines, harmonise. That’s the best’ (Appendix B, ln. 722–728).

While hesitant to label stage management an ‘art,’ Brown favours the term ‘craftsmanship’ (Appendix B, ln. 152), underscoring the delicate balance of artistic and administrative precision that defines effective audience care in immersive theatre.

1. A Brief Note on UK vs. US Stage Management

Before examining Brown’s contributions, it is important to clarify key differences between stage management in the United Kingdom and the United States, as *Dead Letter No. 9* was an American production. While the roles of the performance maker and house management are similar in both contexts, stage management structures differ.

In the UK, a Company Stage Manager (CSM) oversees logistics and personnel, a Deputy Stage Manager (DSM) prepares the prompt book and calls the show, and Assistant Stage Managers (ASMs) support backstage tasks (Palmer, 2000; Dean, 2002). Artistic maintenance typically remains with directors or associates, not stage managers (Maccoy, 2004).

In the U.S., stage managers also retain artistic oversight after opening night. As Stern and O’Grady (2016) explain, they not only manage technical operations but ensure artistic integrity once the director departs (pp. 199–203). U.S. productions often feature a Production Stage Manager (PSM) overseeing stage managers and ASMs, mirrored in Brown’s role on *Dead Letter No. 9*.

II. The Performance: *Dead Letter No. 9*

ROLL THE BONES prioritises authentic relationships in its immersive work, often requiring conversational input from audiences. *Dead Letter No. 9* exemplifies this ethos. Described as a modern conversation parlour, the production depends on audience participation and draws inspiration from 18th- and 19th-century receiving parlours and intellectual salons, spaces for dialogue and exchange.

Its ergodic structure, which demanded active audience engagement, placed *Dead Letter No. 9* at Level 3 (‘interaction required’) on Brigante and Elger’s (2020) participatory scale, aligning closely with this study’s focus on audience care practices in highly participatory settings.

i. Observations and Document Analysis: *Dead Letter No. 9*

1. Document Analysis

My research for this case study began with document analysis. Prior to and following my attendance at *Dead Letter No. 9*, I reviewed materials connected to the theatre company and the

production, including the ticket confirmation email and the production's website. These materials were examined for two primary functions: first, to gather descriptive information about the show that would help me understand the performance in advance as an audience member, and second, to identify any explicit framing of potential risks or actions of care communicated to audiences before attending. Documents reviewed after the performance also allowed for consideration of any elements of aftercare offered by the company.

The ticket confirmation email was the first substantive point of contact with the show's tone and themes. Vague in design, it promised an evening of 'cocktails, conversation, and connection.' These words suggested an interaction-driven performance, possibly demanding. As an introvert, that immediately raised my guard. While such performances can offer rich emotional experiences, they also carry social and psychological risk. The tagline 'Find Yourself' hinted that self-disclosure might play a central role.

The inclusion of cocktails raised further concerns. Alcohol can lower social inhibitions and encourage bonding, but also trigger unpredictable behaviour, a common concern in immersive performance contexts (Edmonson, 2018, p. 102–140; Appendix B, ln. 428–435). The title, *Dead Letter No. 9*, was striking, potentially invoking grief. I usually avoid grief-themed work, especially near the anniversary of my mother's death. Still, no content warnings were offered in pre-show materials.

Exploring the website provided more clarity. The homepage featured vague but enthusiastic reviews. The Menu button, which was easily overlooked, contained essential show details. I learned it was a 90-minute, free-roaming immersive event structured around conversations between audience members and performers, with some dialogue occurring between audience

members themselves. The FAQ confirmed participation would be expected, signalling a significant level of social risk. The Team section emphasized a commitment to tangible, human connection over digital spectacle, a relational framework suggesting promising ground for exploring the company's care practices.

2. Observations

I attended *Dead Letter No. 9* once before it closed unexpectedly in January 2024 due to building maintenance. Though the venue reopened in October 2024, the show has not resumed. My primary goal in attending was to assess whether the risks present in the production justified its selection as a case study. The visit also helped contextualize and enrich insights drawn from interviews with production staff, allowing me to witness firsthand some of the choices made around risk and care.

Upon arrival, I was warmly greeted by the stage manager, whose initial out-of-world orientation provided clear instructions: coat check, bar, and a relaxed wait until the show began. I classify this as an out-of-world orientation because it occurred outside the performance environment of the show, in a neutral space, where the person providing the orientation was not in-character as anyone other than themselves. The atmosphere was friendly and calm, and I saw others receive a similar welcome. Just before the top of the hour, we were called to gather near a black curtain, the threshold into the performance.

Behind the curtain was a cluttered office set: cardboard skylines, dim lighting, and stacked boxes. A performer greeted us, presenting a menu of drinks: Memory, Myth, and Hope. Each selection paired with a cocktail (or mocktail) and a folded note we were instructed not to open. We were also handed stopwatches.

During this in-world orientation, we were invited to type a statement into a computer, reminded to treat performers with respect, and told we could freely explore three themed rooms until our stopwatch signalled the end. These instructions established clear boundaries and participant autonomy.

Audience members began submitting prompts. I wrote something about hope being hard but love making it bearable. The anonymity provided psychological safety, though I was unsure how these contributions would be used. We were told to finish our drinks before entering, as no beverages were allowed inside the performance space. While a practical alcohol management step, this led most people to quickly down their drinks. I found myself doing the same, first with my pre-show cocktail, then with prosecco, minutes later. This felt even more questionable when it became evident there was a small bar within the performance space where more drinks could be purchased.

I was the first through the curtain beyond orientation. After briefly hesitating at the hallway's end, the group dispersed. I entered a room resembling a campground caravan. It was crowded, but I found a seat near the door and listened to a conversation about orcas, tree sentience, and octopi. Two women were highly engaged, but I didn't find the conversation compelling. The performance space was divided into three rooms, so I continued exploring.

At the far end of the hallway, I discovered a room styled as a treehouse, with a performer perched atop a bunk bed. I slid onto a bench as the group discussed their pets and the grief that follows their loss, comparing it to the grief of losing a human loved one. I stayed in this room for a long time and contributed to the conversation with my own thoughts about our family dog.

I left the room with another audience member, which made exiting feel easier. Walking back down the hallway, I entered the third space, a room styled like a back porch, complete with running water sounds that masked the hallway entirely.

As I entered, the group was discussing zombie apocalypse survival. An older woman teased the group for their pessimism and claimed millennials had a bunker obsession. When I pointed out that bunkers existed in her youth too, atomic shelters, she relented. The performer offered me her chair and sat on the floor, assuring me she didn't mind, though I felt slightly guilty.

In each room, performers remained grounded and responsive, gently drawing people into conversation and backing off when someone showed discomfort. I saw one performer subtly redirect a dominating audience member. The balance between intimacy and safety was carefully maintained. Participation was encouraged but never forced.

When my stopwatch buzzed, I returned to the bar. Some other audience members lingered, still holding their unopened notes. For me, the production demonstrated a thoughtful layering of social, psychological, and physical boundaries, each contributing to how I felt handled as an audience member during this performance.

ii. Identifying Risk Factors

One major goal of the observations was to confirm that this production contained a useful level of risk for discussion in this research, ideally with heightened social and psychological risks.

Below is a brief overview of the risks I encountered during the production.

1. Physical Risks

Like many immersive performances, *Dead Letter No. 9* presented physical risks linked to audience mobility and set design: staircases, confined spaces, dim lighting, and optional climbing.

Both the treehouse and caravan rooms included steps. The treehouse was well-lit and easily navigable; the caravan required an unstable step-up that felt precarious. Additionally, the adjacent ‘woods’ area had lower lighting, which increased tripping risks.

The caravan’s confined dimensions and open-movement model created congestion, especially since a performer sat inside, drawing people closer. While the free-flow design reduced persistent crowding, initial navigation was challenging. Such physical constraints can also trigger psychological stress, especially in individuals prone to claustrophobia or agoraphobia, highlighting the overlap between physical, psychological and social risks.

The bunk bed in the treehouse posed further physical concerns. One audience member climbed onto it alongside the performer. Though the performer’s position could offer informal support, ascending and descending inherently carried risk.

Serving alcohol added another layer of concern. While extreme intoxication is visible, mild impairment can still increase the danger in environments involving stairs, climbing, and close quarters.

2. Psychological Risks

Psychological risks centred on emotional distress, stress, and possible regret. I experienced stress when trying to leave a conversational space mid-show. Active participation collided with cultural norms around politeness, making me reluctant to walk away as others were speaking. As Heddon, Iball, and Zerihan (2012) note, internal introjects can pressure audience members to stay in conversations they'd rather exit. I struggled with this throughout the performance.

Stress was heightened in densely populated rooms like the caravan, where movement was highly visible, and discreet exits were difficult. Guilt emerged as a related emotional risk.

The performance structure allowed any topic to surface, increasing the potential for emotional triggers. My own interaction involved a triggering of grief, which, while emotionally taxing, fostered group solidarity and a cathartic release. However, in a less receptive room, this could have backfired. The show also carried the risk of regretful disclosure. With so much focus on personal storytelling in the moment, participants could later wish they'd shared less.

3. Social Risks

Social risks were closely tied to psychological ones, especially those involving vulnerability and public exposure. Key social risks involved potential embarrassment or alienation, both within the performance (with fellow audience members and performers) and in pre-existing social relationships (e.g., friends attending together). The spontaneous nature of conversation left little time for reflection, increasing the risk of saying something awkward or too revealing.

While performer-audience dynamics were semi-structured, peer-to-peer interactions were less mediated. As Melissa Herburg (2023) notes, inter-audience exchanges carry heightened risk in participatory theatre because they lack the frameworks that typically guide performer interactions. This gap increases the likelihood of miscommunication or boundary breaches.

Thus, *Dead Letter No. 9* posed twofold social risks: immediate (in the performance) and residual (within relationships outside the event). With these examples in view, we now turn to how ROLL THE BONES currently approaches audience care, beginning with an examination of how care is practiced among company members, anchored in trust.

III. Embracing the Collective and Imperfect Nature of Care: Applied Care Ethics

Principles in Practice at ROLL THE BONES

This section examines responses from Myers and Brown related to how audience care is presently considered at ROLL THE BONES. It quickly became clear that, for this company, care begins with one another before expanding to encompass the audience. Many existing concepts discussed in relation to care ethics (specifically time, active listening and an imperfect, but reflective and continuously improving process) were prominent within this theatre company. Thus, while neither Myers or Brown specifically use the phrase ‘care ethics’ at any point, a clear focus on care does permeate the company work. Much of this care is also grounded in trust, for one another and, with some consideration of boundaries, for their audiences. For the production staff, this trust helps empower them to make the decisions necessary to care for the audience, but also sometimes results in the actual labour of the production staff occurring outside the view of the rest of the company. This invisibility of labour can result in misunderstandings about how

risk and care are managed and the scope of the work necessary to do so. Fortunately, ROLL THE BONES also has exemplary communication, with a heightened emphasis on the value of communication and clear lines of communication across all roles in the company. This appears to aid the production staff in their delivery of care and negative risk mitigation.

i. ‘You would never be allowed to do this as a psychological experiment’: Building Ethical Foundations at ROLL THE BONES

One clear indication of the trust-based culture at ROLL THE BONES is Taylor Myers’ leadership approach, which favours autonomy over micromanagement. He remarks, ‘I’m a little bit of a consequentialist. I don’t really care how you do it as long as the way they feel is the same’ (Appendix A, ln. 251–253). This signals that Myers places trust in the judgment and instincts of his team, foregrounding outcomes rooted in audience care rather than rigid procedural enforcement. This model of practice allows space for responsiveness and emotional intelligence, qualities vital in immersive settings where audience reactions can be highly individual and unpredictable.

Trust also underpins Myers’ broader ethical reflections. In an extended anecdote, he discusses the ethical risks of immersive theatre in comparison to psychological experimentation:

I have an uncle who’s a corporate psychiatrist and has designed experiments, of many kinds, for decades, and we have a lot of interesting conversations about this... and I made a joke one time... we were talking about a particular situation that I had performed, in a show that I did not direct or produce or create, and he was like, ‘Wow, that’s crazy. You

would never be allowed to do this as a psychological experiment though. The DSM 5 is full of rules, ethical rules, that would make this completely impossible.’ And the joke, the half joke that I made in response to him, was, ‘Yes, but the difference with an experiment is that either they volunteer or you pay them to gather information from their brain. Whereas in theater they pay you to give them a theatrical experience’ (Appendix A, ln. 415-429).

This self-reflective commentary, though delivered in a humorous tone, acknowledges an awareness of the psychological intimacy that immersive theatre can generate and the risk that intimacy poses when there are no formal ethical guidelines in place.

Myers outlines an ethic of shared responsibility among all participants in the performance, stating, ‘I believe in personal responsibility as audience members to behave like a conscionable human being’ (Appendix A, ln. 493–494). While this may seem optimistic given the variability of audience behaviour, it underscores the reciprocal nature of trust in the ROLL THE BONES model. Audiences are not passive recipients of care. They are participants in a social contract of mutual respect. As Myers affirms, ‘if you cannot treat other people with respect, then find somewhere else to be’ (Appendix A, ln. 496–496), reinforcing that care is extended not just to audience members but also to performers and staff through enforceable boundaries.

This ethic is embedded in what Myers refers to as ‘the collective moral of the experience’ (Appendix A, ln. 477–478). Ethical standards are not static rules imposed from the top down but are collaboratively built across the company, from performers to stage management to the

audience. Acknowledging the unpredictability of immersive settings, Myers describes his team's approach to challenges as an opportunity for collective learning: 'Some of it can only reveal itself as you're doing it with audience members... What are we going to do about this?' (Appendix A, ln. 525–529).

This philosophy invites honesty and transparency about failure, supporting a culture where staff trust they can reflect, improve, and continue to care for their audiences more effectively. Trust, in this context, is not merely a risk management strategy; it is the precondition for a responsive and adaptive ethics of care.

Trust also plays a key role in establishing behavioural norms within the immersive environment. Myers explained:

'The performer has some more authority and some more guidance and does a lot more of like driving the direction of the conversation. They're also the person who's in the room for six and a half hours. And so is kind of setting the tone and is setting a standard of behavior for what occurs in that space. And they're really leading by example in that way' (Appendix A, ln. 110-116).

This trust-based leadership models care rather than mandates it, making performers and staff active agents in co-creating a psychologically safe environment. Modelling behaviour also reflects a reliance on the idea that ethical behaviour is most effective when learned through relational cues rather than imposed constraints.

The company's trust in its performers is especially crucial when navigating moments of audience discomfort. Myers describes his team as 'incredibly skilled performers. And energetic manipulators, space holders' (Appendix A, ln. 459–460). He expressed confidence that these performers can recognize shifts in consent or emotional safety and act accordingly, without the need for prescriptive scripts. In doing so, he entrusts them not just with theatrical delivery but with ethical care responsibilities.

When asked about the role of ethics, or what Taylor Myers' called 'the collective moral of the experience' (Appendix A, ln. 477-478), in their work, stage manager Ellery Brown immediately began to talk about a hierarchy of ethics, 'it starts with the producers. Because if that is not there, you're not gonna be able to reach it' (Appendix B, ln. 376-377). Brown recounts, with some evident frustration, times, on past projects other than *Dead Letter No. 9*, where they would report issues or ask for help and get ignored. Working with those companies taught Brown 'the onus really needs to be on the producers, for that as a place to start and then have it aligned all the way down' (Appendix B, ln. 387-389).

Brown correlated a lot of elements of ethical performance to establishing a clear *why*.

I think if you're delving into a topic that can potentially deeply affect or hurt somebody, just being like, why? Why are we doing this? Do we have bigger goals of community conversation? Is this tied into activism? Are we creating a new space for people? Are we opening people up to new ideas? (Appendix B, ln. 492-497)

They immediately follow their questions of *why* into a pivot to *how*, with ‘how do we support that’ (Appendix B, ln. 497). Their need to frame their *how* work through the performance maker’s *why* highlights the importance of communication between the production staff and performance makers.

Brown further articulates how this culture of trust influenced their own practices. They reflect on the evolving care expectations in immersive performance, especially the shifting role of stage management in audience-facing interactions. Brown poses the question ‘to what degree does just being in the room with audience mean you are now the point person for their care to different degrees?’ (Appendix B, ln. 875–877), indicating a growing recognition of redistributed care roles in immersive theatre. They acknowledge the challenges this move into being an audience care point person caused, coming from traditional stage management training, noting the need to ‘just put annoyance aside’ (Appendix B, ln. 281) and maintain a ‘charity of spirit’ (Appendix B, ln. 271) toward unpredictable audience behaviour. At *ROLL THE BONES*, this charity stems from an internalized ethic of care, not external enforcement.

Brown explicitly links this caring disposition to trust in the production ethos. Recounting how bar staff were integrated into the show’s culture, they note:

‘Angel... was running the bar and he was just, as like the heart of that space, I think really plugged into, again, the idea of care. There [were] a lot of discussions about

language and workshopping... which I thought was interesting... they had that happening to some degree over there in this cohesive world' (Appendix B, ln. 417–422).

This consistency of care across roles reflects the strength of the company's ethical alignment, an alignment made possible by trust in all staff to embody and extend these values. Here, trust is not a passive allowance but an active condition that enables mutual responsiveness, echoing what Hartley (2013) identifies as the role of being 'seen' as a foundation for ethical relations.

Brown also shares how they applied trust in practice, particularly regarding the use of stopwatches for audiences to self-manage room timing. 'I trust you, give it 10 more minutes' (Appendix B, ln. 770-771), a simple but powerful phrase indicating that procedural rigidity gave way to human responsiveness when needed.

Such gestures are only possible in an environment where staff are empowered to make judgment calls, knowing their choices will be supported by leadership. That trust, while useful for providing in-performance care, Brown notes, still includes a healthy dose of pre-planning and risk mitigation: 'They need to be at a bare minimum physically safe and then you work up from there' (Appendix B, ln. 356–357), emphasizing that trust does not mean risk is ignored. It means care is an ongoing, active negotiation, a layer upon a foundation of risk management. As immersive theatre continues to push the boundaries of engagement, this negotiation of safety, comfort, and agency will likely hinge on a deepening of this mutual trust, not only within the company but also with the audience.

Finally, Brown reflects on how the company's culture impacted their own sense of care as a production team member, 'Being like, we're all contributing, we're all giving, let's do this. And also being like, "hey, how are you?" Making sure people are like, like the light check-ins with each other, the care. It was very humanizing' (Appendix B, ln. 473–476).

ii. 'Percolating': The Tempo of Care at ROLL THE BONES

At *Dead Letter No. 9*, this ethos of care was observable from the moment of arrival. Upon entering the space, I was greeted by a production staff member in a manner that was calm and unrushed. The spatial design of the waiting area appeared deliberately structured to avoid crowding, a gesture that diffused the urgency typically associated with venue entry. While I was not given excessive time, indeed, not even long enough to finish a drink, the psychological effect was noticeable. This experience aligns with Machon's (2013) insight that immersive performance often treats time as 'an organic and important experiential element' (p. 96), but when filtered through care ethics, this artistic manipulation of duration becomes more than an aesthetic. It becomes a matter of relational ethics.

This care for temporal pacing is not incidental but is cultivated throughout the creative process. Myers noted that the production developed through iterative stages, beginning with *Galleria Esperienza* in 2019, where a single, short-lived conversation with a bartender became the seed for *Dead Letter No. 9*. Developing this concept required what Myers called 'a lot of talking about talking' (Appendix A, ln. 108–110), a phrase that underlines the slowness embedded in ROLL THE BONES' devising process.

Even after the show opened, Myers resisted the notion of a fixed product, observing that ‘even the first couple of weeks of shows are as much rehearsal as they are performance’ (Appendix A, ln. 79–80). This approach to the performance positions adequate time not just as preparatory, but as generative, allowing care to evolve dynamically in relation to audience feedback and performer responsiveness.

Myers also offered a philosophy of temporal and energetic self-regulation for performers, describing how care could be enacted by resisting the pressure to mirror the frantic energy of distressed audience members:

A lesson that we, you know, have returned to is like slowing down. Breathing. And remembering all of the other things that are in place, and remembering like not to get your energy hijacked by someone else’s. Not to allow them to like, knock you off your balance just because they’re totally off balance. Like you can engage with someone and maintain your pace and your stability and your authority and your grace, even if they are zany, zany, zany fucked up in a million ways. When I was in acting school it, we spoke about spheres, energetic spheres. And pace and like how quickly or slowly, what tempo your personal motor runs. And it’s so easy and natural for like whoever’s fastest and most hectic to set the tone. But you don’t have to let somebody’s sphere take you out of your own or change your tempo or knock you off your balance. You can continue to maintain yours and witness theirs and bring them a little bit more along with you instead of getting dragged along with them (Appendix A, ln. 587-603).

Through metaphors of ‘personal energy spheres’ and ‘tempo,’ he encouraged performers to maintain their own pacing. In this way, time is not simply an abstract measure; it becomes a tool for emotional regulation and care. In moments of heightened emotion or confusion, slowness is framed as self-care that then allows for better audience care: ‘Slowing down. Breathing’ (Appendix A, ln. 588). Such gestures, when practiced, also have potential to help production staff intervening into highly emotional situations.

Brown similarly emphasised the temporal ethics of care in relation to emergency preparedness. Reflecting on previous, less robust rehearsal environments, they remarked on the anxiety caused when training or communication protocols were rushed:

Rushing training or communication around emergency protocol can be scary. It can be quite scary actually. And leaving folks unprepared and just treating emergency protocol like on-the-job learning, like, oh, you'll know how we deal with an electrical fire the first time we get an electrical fire and you're here, is like that... I don't love that' (Appendix B, ln. 773–779).

To counter this rush, Brown often develops extensive documentation, even when there was no formal time allocated for such conversations. ‘So I feel like I have generated like an almost probably annoying amount of paperwork about how to deal with this type of stuff just to be able to share that information with other technicians even if we don't have explicit time or are encouraged to communicate about that’ (Appendix B, ln. 779-783). This demonstrates a

compensatory act of care, where time sacrificed personally acts as risk mitigation for others. This highlights again the concerns around production staff sustainability when appropriate care measures, including adequate time, are not provided.

The dangers of compressed rehearsal or performance schedules are not merely operational, they're ethical. Without adequate time to plan, communicate, and debrief, immersive practitioners risk violating the very principles that underpin care ethics: attentiveness, responsiveness, and responsibility. When time is treated as expendable, the quality of care, and by extension, risk management, is compromised.

Yet *Dead Letter No. 9* seems to resist this tendency. Through iterative devising, test audiences, and what Brown called 'percolating' (Appendix B, ln. 60) ideas, the piece was allowed to evolve at a human pace. This concept of percolation, suggestive of slow brewing, saturation, and depth, mirrors Tronto's (2015) later addition to her initial framework of care ethics: *caring with*, which implies collective responsibility and sustainable forms of commitment.

In sum, the presence of time across *Dead Letter No. 9* operates on at least three interrelated levels:

1. **Preparatory Time:** used to rehearse, run previews, and train staff.
2. **Responsive Time:** enabled performers to recalibrate in the moment without being 'hijacked' by audience distress.
3. **Aesthetic Time:** framed audience experience through tempo, flow, and atmosphere; embedded care into interactions, making the ephemeral feel intentional and held.

To care well in immersive theatre, time must be a visible, protected, and purposefully deployed resource. Not only does this allow for safer and more attuned experiences, but it also affirms time itself as a medium through which care is communicated and risk responsibly managed.

iii. ‘Really listening to where people were’: Developing Active Listening for Care

Active listening also emerged as a cornerstone of both relational success and risk management. Myers defined a potential failure in the piece not as a logistical misstep or a technical error, but as a moment when an audience member might be left feeling ‘unattended’ (Appendix A, ln. 308). He offered an example:

If another audience member juttred in with a different conversation or just broke a fragile moment, and a performer was unable to or chose not to repair that fragile moment with the audience member who could really use it. And that audience member who could really use it was left feeling unattended in a way that felt particularly caring and magical. I think that would constitute maybe a missed opportunity or a failure’ (Appendix A, ln. 303–310)

This framing of failure is not rooted in risk as hazard, but in the erosion of relational care. What is lost is a moment of being *seen* or *heard*, of being held in another’s attention. This aligns deeply with Joan Tronto’s (1993, 2015) care ethics model, in which attentiveness and responsiveness are early and vital stages of any caring act. For Myers, the ethical imperative of

the production was not simply to entertain or safely guide, but to *attend*, to foster ‘magical’ (Appendix A, ln. 308) interpersonal moments through sustained, granular attention.

To achieve this attentiveness, performers and production staff relied on an ethic of listening that was both verbal and non-verbal. Brown emphasized repeatedly the need for ‘hearing people’ (Appendix B, ln. 288, ln. 317, ln. 743), not merely in a performative or transactional sense, but in a way that trusted and validated what the audience shared, even when unspoken.

Crucially, this routine of attentiveness also reflects Hamington’s (2024) suggestion that good care relies on *humble inquiry*, a style of engagement that ensures openness to the wide spectrum of potential responses from those providing feedback (p. 33). The performers and production team approached each audience member not as a fixed type or predictable participant, but as a person whose needs, boundaries, and emotional states might emerge fluidly. Humble inquiry in this context underpinned the responsiveness of the production staff, allowing them to ask, observe, and adapt without imposing predefined narratives of participation, utilising the trust bestowed upon them by Myers to make appropriate judgment calls that uphold the aesthetic of the performance while still providing adequate care. This was essential in reducing harm and increasing the likelihood of meaningful connection.

A unique element of active listening in immersive theatre is its expansion beyond dialogue into continuous audience observation. The production team must interpret body language, silence, hesitation, or enthusiasm as forms of communication. Brown captures this responsibility well:

If we're trying to elicit this genuine feeling of, you're discovering something inside yourself, or you're lightly surprised by something, sometimes that works better. You don't want to signpost everything leading up to it. But if that's what you're doing, you need to be so aware of it and to be prepared to catch them, and also be prepared to off ramp at any point (Appendix B, ln. 210–216).

Here, the metaphor of 'catching' a participant suggests emotional management and competent response. This vigilance is not about controlling or predicting audience response, but about being tuned in enough to offer a timely exit, shift, or gesture of support, what might be considered a responsive act of care. Such care also requires recognising when a participant may need intervention versus when they simply need continued observation. 'If I saw someone upset, I would touch base with them and connect with them and see if like, 'can we get you some water or do you want like a quieter space? You just want your space?' Like do you, you know? But that was very rare that that was that intense and it tended to be like internal. A very internal to the person experience that wasn't negative, it was just big' (Appendix B, ln. 589-594). According to Brown, the structure of *Dead Letter No. 9* supported this variety of response more easily than some other productions. 'The format of the show lent itself well to someone then being approached by a staff member' (Appendix B, ln. 599–601).

Because staff were embedded within the performance environment, functioning alongside or near audiences, there was a fluidity that allowed care-based interventions to emerge without rupturing the performance. Active listening and observation were thus embedded in the design of audience handling. Indeed, the piece's orientation process exemplified this ethic of

listening-as-care. Brown noted that working on *Dead Letter No. 9* meant ‘really listening to where people were entering it. Which is not, I feel, like traditional stage management - you’re not doing that with individual audience members that hard’ (Appendix B, ln. 111–114).

This bespoke attention to individual audience members adds a significant task to the immersive stage manager, to being more of an attuned caregiver, someone responsible not just for timing and safety, but for relational attunement. While a common task for all stage managers among the performers, this shift highlights a change in the stage manager as an immersive production staff role. Within a care ethics framework, this level of attention and flexibility speaks to the moral labour involved in creating conditions for agency, safety, and emotional depth.

In sum, active listening within *Dead Letter No. 9* functioned as both an artistic tool and an ethical stance. It aligned with Tronto’s (1993) care phases by supporting attentiveness, responsiveness, and responsibility through personalised, real-time engagement. When paired with Hamington’s (2024) concept of *humble inquiry*, it becomes clear that the ROLL THE BONES team was not simply managing risk but engaging in an open-ended practice of care-infused risk management that relied on trust and flexibility.

iv. ‘Seen but not noticed’: Production Staff Invisibility and Audience Care at *ROLL THE BONES*

In the context of this research, sustainability refers not only to the physical and logistical viability of a production, but also to the emotional and professional sustainability of those who contribute to its ongoing operation. For production staff, sustainability entails the ability to continue working under conditions that are safe, equitable, and ethically sound, while also being

creatively and interpersonally fulfilling. This includes being recognised for their labor, particularly when that labour is invisible to other members of the company, and being included in a culture of mutual care within the company.

When asked about the role of production staff, Myers immediately highlighted the practical responsibilities of stage management and front of house in terms of audience safety and emergency handling:

Obviously stage management and front of house plays a role in audience safety and handling any sort of like emergencies that arise, which fortunately have been very, very, very, very few. But that's, you know, that's part of their responsibility, right? Additionally, they are the first people that audience members interact with and so it is very much a part of their job to provide people information. It's a couple different kinds of information. One is practical information. You're here for the experience. This is your time. Here's how much time you have. That's where the coach check is. That's where the bathrooms are. Here's where you should wait, right? All the practical, logistical stuff that people need in order to feel comfortable in a space, so they're not just like floating aimlessly, no idea where they are and where to go (Appendix A, ln. 184–197).

This pragmatic framing not only underlines the staff's essential presence but also reveals a systemic trust in their competence and discretion. Myers continued, 'That's one branch of information. Another piece of information is to convey to them a sense of peace and curiosity and understanding and tranquillity and care, which communicates to audience members that they

are in good hands’ (Appendix A, ln. 199 – 202). However, exactly how this is done by production staff remains largely invisible, a condition that is both structurally embedded and stylistically reinforced in immersive performance contexts.

This invisibility is not incidental, it is a defining feature of production staff. House management staff and ushers may be more accustomed to this dual visibility, trained to surface discreetly when needed and disappear when not. For stage managers, however, this expectation can demand new skill sets that challenge traditional training. Brown described this as having to constantly navigate the question: ‘How do I exist in this world?’ (Appendix B, ln. 148). The ability to be ‘seen but not noticed’ (Appendix B, ln. 160) is not merely logistical, it becomes a stylistic position that balances audience immersion with readiness to intervene. Brown even likened this flexibility to a kind of choreography, ‘someone who can really melt into a wall or direct flow... being able to be seen but not noticed’ (Appendix B, ln. 156–160). Despite earlier resistance to being labelled an artist, Brown’s description affirms the artistry embedded in this type of invisible labor.

Preparation for audience engagement is another cornerstone of sustainable production practice, occurring long before the audience arrives. As Brown framed the unique role of the audience in immersive theatre: ‘The audience is the other character... we can be prepared’ (Appendix B, ln. 886–892). This proactive readiness, achieved through test audiences, training, and detailed planning, supports both the psychological safety of the audience and the emotional bandwidth of the production team. This preplanning labour was also echoed by Brown in Section I.ii, when discussing the importance of having enough time. Some of that labour goes unnoticed when the

extensive preplanning helps avoid an emergency. Other labour is more visible. For example, in a prior production Brown stage managed with another company dealing with the topic of abortion, they noted that preplanning included content warnings, lobby signage, and onsite counsellors, all strategies designed to anticipate audience needs while managing the emotional labour placed on production staff.

This commitment to care is equally present in *Dead Letter No. 9*, though adapted to the unique demands of the production. Brown emphasised that their focus was on ensuring ‘the people that are coming in [are] having the intended experience’ (Appendix B, ln. 101–103). Here, the role of production shifts from backstage coordination to active audience stewardship. In immersive formats, where the audience becomes an element of the performance, the production staff must not only facilitate the show but mediate and monitor the psychological climate of the space throughout the experience, another task that when done well, has the potential to become invisible.

Yet sustainability for production staff also relies on how cared-for the caregivers feel. As mentioned above in discussion of the overall ethics of the company, Brown noted that ROLL THE BONES fostered a unique internal culture. ‘We’re all contributing, we’re all giving... and also being like, “hey, how are you?”’ (Appendix B, ln. 473–476). These moments of interpersonal check-in and shared humanity disrupt the often-isolating conditions of backstage labor. This helped demonstrate a heightened visibility of the production staff within the company. For Brown, this inclusion felt ‘very humanising’ (Appendix B, ln. 476), demonstrating that

audience care and staff care are interconnected practices, but this humanising touch is not always guaranteed.

In sum, audience care in ROLL THE BONES' immersive productions is fundamentally shaped by the invisible but vital work of the production staff. From their strategic absence during performance to their deep presence in planning, these practitioners ensure not only the aesthetic continuity of the world but also the ethical and emotional safety of all who enter it. Recognising and supporting the sustainability of their labour is critical, not only for the longevity of immersive theatre as a form, but for the wellbeing of those who make it possible.

v. 'How can I check in at multiple stages with the audience member and pivot away from going deeper if that's not what's wanted?': Communicating Risk Without Breaking Immersion

In the context of *Dead Letter No. 9*, audience care is interwoven with the communication practices embedded in the ethos of ROLL THE BONES. These practices are not limited to performance cues but extend into realms of affective labour, emotional regulation, and consent management. Across interviews with both Myers and Brown, communication repeatedly emerges not just as a functional necessity but as a deliberate tool of care, risk mediation, and audience orientation.

For Myers, the role of production staff is fundamentally communicative. He articulated earlier their dual responsibility, conveying 'practical information' such as directions to cloakrooms or the location of toilets, and 'emotional information' that helps set the atmospheric tone of the

performance (Appendix A, ln. 203). This multi-channel communication creates a soft landing for audience members, facilitating a smooth transition from the outside world into the immersive environment. Myers underscores that these early moments should foster ‘a sense of peace and curiosity and understanding and tranquillity and care’ (Appendix A, ln. 200–201). This framing recognises production staff not simply as logistical facilitators, but as artistic communicators who actively shape the emotional contours of the audience's experience.

Brown builds on this by expanding the framework to include non-verbal modes of communication. In immersive performance, the ability to ‘check in’ involves attuned attention to both verbal and embodied cues. Brown stresses that care-based communication must remain flexible, responsive rather than prescriptive: ‘how can I check in at multiple stages with the audience member and pivot away from going deeper if that’s not what’s wanted? And that doesn’t have to be something that’s verbalised explicitly, that can look like many different things, including verbal’ (Appendix B, ln. 220-226). This responsiveness is vital in navigating immersive theatre’s fluid boundaries between actor and audience, and between narrative and reality.

Brown also identifies a critical need for clear intra-company communication, especially when scenes risk provoking strong emotional responses. ‘Any moment that starts to play with those elements,’ Brown notes, ‘I think it’s really important to have monitored in some way. And for stage management and the company to have a really clear idea of what are the intended outcomes’ (Appendix B, ln. 234–240). This precision in communication allows production staff to interpret audience reactions in context. Without clarity on the artistic intentions, the *why* of the

production, the staff cannot begin to gauge whether a reaction signifies distress, catharsis, or misunderstanding. A transparent communicative framework becomes essential not only for care but also for responsive and ethical decision-making.

Furthermore, Brown emphasises that communication underpins effective risk management. Their detailed planning begins with candid conversations about ‘the worst-case scenario,’ identifying what supports are in place, ‘how it’s going to be handled? Who the support people are? Who do I need to call? How do we want to record it?’ (Appendix B, ln. 360–464). This type of communication practice, uncomfortable, detailed, and deliberately proactive, is foundational to sustainable care practices. It equips production staff with the confidence and clarity needed to respond in real time to emerging situations.

Taken together, these practices illustrate how communication functions not only as a practical tool but also as a central mode of care within immersive theatre. At ROLL THE BONES, a culture of deliberate, multi-layered communication underpins both routine operations and the handling of rare or unexpected events, reinforcing a commitment to audience wellbeing. This communicative ethos also foregrounds the often-overlooked labour of production staff, whose skills in navigating complex interpersonal and logistical dynamics are essential to the company’s success and warrant meaningful recognition. Furthermore, this section has shown how the aesthetic of invisibility, being seen but not noticed, extends beyond performance into the backstage labour network, contributing to an occasionally fraught dynamic between visibility and value. However, such tensions can be mitigated through transparent dialogue and mutual trust, the latter forming a foundational element of the company’s working culture.

vi. ‘What are we going to do about this?’: Embracing the Messy Nature of Care

A final, but important, recurring theme across the testimonies gathered in this case study was the necessity for adaptability, a quality that, while always valuable among production staff, becomes critical in immersive performance contexts. This need to continually adjust and respond is not merely a technical or logistical concern but aligns with what Hamington (2024) frames as the ‘process morality’ of care: a form of ethics that is lived, evolving, and embedded in relationships. Immersive theatre work, then, becomes not about executing a fixed set of rules, but about developing a toolbox of competencies and the expertise to utilise the tools appropriately in constantly evolving contexts.

Brown's reflections underscore this dynamic. Although many responsibilities in *Dead Letter No. 9* paralleled those in traditional stage management, such as supporting performers and setting the emotional tone, they noted how the role also demanded stepping beyond clearly defined boundaries. Stage management became what Brown playfully called ‘the flubber position, where you kind of stretch and fill whatever needs to be kind of taken care of that you, that is, within that is, reasonably related to stage management’ (Appendix B, ln. 44–47). From resetting props mid-show to stepping into costumed roles and responding to unexpected audience needs, the job required not only flexibility but a willingness to accept that the script for care is always being rewritten in real time.

This acceptance of uncertainty reflects the heart of care ethics in action. Brown described moments where audience members did not behave as anticipated, challenging ingrained professional habits that might otherwise interpret such deviations as disruptions. Instead, staff

were encouraged to respond with a ‘charity of spirit’ (Appendix B, ln. 271), resisting judgment and embracing the audience as active, unpredictable participants in the performance.

A strong influence on this openness to unpredictability was the company-wide ethic of trust, woven throughout interviews and rehearsal processes. As Myers noted, ‘some of it can only reveal itself as you’re doing it with audience members... What are we going to do about this?’ (Appendix A, ln. 525–529). In this sense, care-focused action is not just reactive but comes into existence through practice, vulnerability, and reflection.

This resonates with Hamington’s (2024) emphasis on ‘humble inquiry’ as a foundation of care: a stance of openness that welcomes diverse, unexpected responses and prioritises ongoing learning (p. 33). Production staff are not merely implementing ethical guidelines but co-creating them through an unfolding process. They are engaged in an experiential and iterative morality, one that values lived complexity over fixed procedures. Yet this is not to undermine the value of fixed procedures in providing a framework to base these care-based augmentations on. Much as Brown noted their advance preparation of ‘Ellery’s nightlife recommendations’ (Appendix B, ln. 515-516) to address the unique concerns for *Dead Letter No. 9* related to content, the performance site, local regulations, and emergency responses, the development of such structures helps train production staff in basic competencies and provides them with emotional support, encouraging a more sustainable approach to the job, rather than requiring full improvisation and rebuilding basic risk management approaches every time.

While their approach, ‘Ellery’s nightlife recommendations,’ aligns with traditional risk management, this openness to uncertainty directly contrasts with traditional models of risk management, which often aim to produce the illusion of certitude (Mythen, 2004). By contrast, care ethics reframes safety and responsibility as emergent properties of relational practice. This distinction is particularly significant in immersive theatre, where risks, physical, psychological, and social, are not entirely predictable, and where care must be enacted with sensitivity to moment-by-moment shifts in audience response. Rather than smoothing out the unpredictability of performance, care ethics invites practitioners to meet it head-on, with protocol available, but a willingness to contextually adapt via a grounded, collaborative presence. The following section explores how these principles are operationalized through specific tools and strategies used by ROLL THE BONES, as revealed in interviews and observed practices.

IV. Carefulness in Action: Tools for Competent Immersive Audience Handling

As the focus pivots from why care to how to care, the conversation included how ROLL THE BONES utilises several care tools. Aligning with the available literature discussed in Chapter 2, Myers and Brown both focused heavily on what consent looks like in immersive performances and the existing challenges, as well as the importance of orientations to prepare and care for audiences. Brown discussed what active listening looks like in action when providing audience care during the performance. Both Myers and Brown were also expansive on the role of aftercare and obtaining feedback from their audiences after the performances.

i. ‘Here’s how you gracefully, acrobatically maneuver resistant, sceptical, aggressive audience members into a place of receptivity’: Playtesting

Competency around audience care and risk management in immersive theatre begins well before the first ticket is scanned or the first line is spoken. Interviewees emphasized that the audience is not a passive group to be controlled but an active force to be anticipated. As Brown explained, ‘The audience is the other character that is there. That we are acting with... we don’t have to be surprised by who that character is. We can be prepared... through test audiences, through training and preparedness’ (Appendix B, ln. 886–892). For Brown, playtesting, in the form of rehearsals involving unpredictable audience proxies, emerges as a foundational strategy for building that preparedness.

The rehearsal process is not only about refining artistic beats but also about trialing the interactional texture of the work under uncertain or even adversarial conditions. Myers offered a vivid example of this when recalling a rehearsal for a separate piece in a friend’s backyard. A group of sceptical neighbours looked over the fence, were invited in, and became, in his words, ‘the most heinous audience members ever’ (Appendix A, ln. 545–546). Rather than treating their scepticism as a disruption, the team welcomed it as an opportunity. ‘It could not have been better for our cast to be like, and here’s how you gracefully, acrobatically maneuver resistant, skeptical, aggressive audience members into a place of receptivity’ (Appendix A, ln. 546–550). His reflection underscores the pedagogical function of playtesting: it allows production teams to build practical, embodied strategies for care, especially when confronted with real-time resistance, confusion, or discomfort.

Myers was also realistic about the challenges of securing truly diverse test audiences, particularly those who are not already familiar with immersive work or personally connected to the creative

team. Nevertheless, this kind of testing was described as invaluable. Without rehearsing the rough edges of human unpredictability, staff might find themselves unprepared when actual performances invite in participants who are sceptical, confused, or even confrontational. Myers was clear: ‘If all you do is practice with the easy ones... you look like an ass in performance... instead of in rehearsal when you can, like, stop or pause or... talk about the thing and learn’ (Appendix A, ln. 552–555).

This approach to playtesting reframes mistakes not as failures but as learning opportunities that directly enhance both safety and the audience’s emotional journey. Testing under difficult conditions builds not only the team’s ability to adapt but also their confidence in creating a welcoming environment, one that meets Myers’s insistence on accommodating the ‘entire spectrum of skepticism and expectation’ (Appendix A, ln. 324–326). Playtesting, then, becomes a crucial competency tool for the entire company, bridging artistic intent with ethical responsibility.

ii. ‘Is it even possible to consent to something when you don’t know what you’re consenting to? I don’t know the answer’: Content Warnings

As established in the literature review, content warnings have emerged as a key, yet contested, tool for signalling care and ethical responsibility in immersive theatre (George & Hovey, 2020; Elger & Brigante, 2022). Their intended function, to help audiences make informed decisions and prepare for potentially distressing material, has positioned them at the intersection of artistic risk management and audience care. Yet, as immersive industry experts including Nelson (2018)

and Saville (2019) argue, inconsistency in their delivery dilutes their effectiveness. *Dead Letter No. 9* exemplifies these tensions.

My experience as an audience-researcher attending the performance reveals how content warnings, or their absence, mediate perceptions of risk and institutional care. In the lead-up to the event, formal communication channels (ticket confirmation, event reminder emails) provided no explicit advisements. Only by navigating to the production company's website did I find minimal context, framed in vague, aestheticized terms such as 'an evening of cocktails, conversation and connection,' 'find yourself,' and 'take the stage.' While skilled audiences might decode the cues of a Punchdrunk-adjacent experience (given the creative team's affiliations), others may struggle to anticipate the emotional or thematic contours of the event. This lack of accessible and transparent pre-show information challenges the premise of informed consent, a foundational element of ethical engagement.

This supports Jones et al.'s (2023) findings that insufficient or poorly contextualised content warnings can increase, not mitigate, audience anxiety. Moreover, as LaFrance (2013) asserts, generic or withheld labelling may fail to equip audiences for emotionally complex work. In *Dead Letter No. 9*, this gap was partially mitigated by strong on-site orientation practices, yet the missed opportunity to scaffold care earlier in the audience's engagement journey, suggests a weakness in pre-emptive risk management.

Taylor Myers' reflections in our interview underscore a complex but essential insight: while audience perception begins long before a ticket is purchased, production teams increasingly gain

influence over that experience as the encounter becomes imminent. ‘It starts the moment that thing enters your realm of consciousness,’ he notes, ‘but... you can’t control all of that reliably’ (Appendix A, ln. 630–636). His acknowledgment that the funnel of information narrows toward the venue, however, places a greater ethical burden on production staff, likely the first people the audience encounter upon arrival to the performance, to provide clear, proactive information that balances artistic surprise with psychological safety.

Interestingly, Myers expresses ambivalence about the applicability of formal content warnings for this particular production: ‘Is it even possible to consent to something when you don’t know what you’re consenting to? I don’t know the answer to that question’ (Appendix A, ln. 438–440). While *Dead Letter No. 9* avoids overtly triggering content such as violence, sexual trauma, or sudden sensory effects, its improvisational discussion format invites the possibility of emotionally charged or divisive topics. In Myers’ words: ‘You might talk about literally anything... and be confronted with opposing viewpoints... You know, life, I guess’ (Appendix A, ln. 677–687). This admission gestures toward the unpredictability of the narrative while also underscoring a missed opportunity to experiment with flexible or conditional content advisements, tools that could signal care without overprescribing the experience.

The show’s website does address this, albeit obliquely, by framing the performance as a ‘Modern Conversation Parlor’ that ‘relies entirely on your participation.’ While this description proved accurate in hindsight, its rhetorical style is unlikely to meet the expectations of more cautious audience members. From a risk management perspective, this ambiguity may not constitute

negligence, but it arguably reflects a limited understanding of how layered content warnings can function as tools of both competency and care.

Brown's comparison to *Dry Lands*, another work they stage managed, is instructive here. That production incorporated content warnings into both its marketing and in-venue signage due to a known potential for emotional distress (Appendix B, ln. 198). Such choices not only mitigate negative risk outcomes but also signal a culture of trust and transparency, qualities increasingly associated with ethical and professionalised immersive practice. This aligns with guidance from the UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which identifies lack of information and support as a major contributor to stress (HSE, 2024), which in turn connects back to Slovic (2010) and Ripley's (2009) work which highlights how fear and the unknown trigger higher perceptions of risk in activities. In this context, content warnings become more than disclaimers, they are infrastructures of care that scaffold competency among production staff by making invisible labour visible and audience welfare central. They also aid in reducing the audience's perception of *negative* risk.

While the production succeeded in crafting a thoughtful and psychologically safe environment in situ, its omission of accessible and clear content advisements in the lead-up represents a missed opportunity to extend that care across the full arc of the audience journey. In immersive performance, risk management begins long before the lights dim, and content warnings function as an early signal of a company focused on care.

ii. ‘It really is meeting people where they’re at to try and support them into the space’:

Orientations

The dual use of *out-of-world* and *in-world* orientation at *Dead Letter No. 9* functions as a pivotal mechanism for delivering audience care and advancing production staff competency in risk management. These orientations do more than merely transmit logistical information; they form part of what Richard Schechner (1985) might identify as a *pre-performance ritual*, helping to bridge the otherwise stark entry gap between audience arrival and immersion into performance. From the moment a knowledgeable, calm, and unhurried staff member greets attendees at the door, care is made perceptible, not only through tone and body language, but also through the affective environment crafted around waiting. In this sense, orientation becomes a *soft infrastructure* of care: an embodied practice that reduces stress by pre-empting disorientation and enabling emotional regulation.

This aligns with White’s (2013) reframing of Jauss’s *horizon of expectations* into a *horizon of participation*, where audience members’ prior experiences, anxieties, and sociocultural contexts affect how they engage with a piece. Brown’s attentiveness to this horizon is evident in their out-of-world orientation approach, which deliberately avoids heavy scripting. ‘People come in with different preconceptions and anxieties and I’m not trying to heavily shape that experience... It really is meeting people where they’re at to try and support them into the space, that was the biggest part of show run’ (Appendix B, ln. 104-106; 108-110). Such improvisational responsiveness models a form of situational awareness crucial for safe audience integration, especially within immersive formats where the boundaries between performer and participant are

fluid. This responsiveness can be understood as a risk mitigation practice, albeit one rooted more in emotional attunement than in protocol.

Crucially, orientation here does not only function for the audience, it also functions as a site of competency development for the production staff themselves. In choosing to abandon a static script, Myers and Brown made an intentional shift toward cultivating adaptive expertise. Brown explained, ‘I had an entry script at one point to help facilitate the moment and then that got cut’ (Appendix B, ln. 107-108). Since *Dead Letter No. 9* was a piece focused on improvised conversations and attempts to genuinely connect with one another, the focus of orientation became ‘really listening to where people were entering it. Which is not, I feel, like traditional stage management, you’re not doing that with individual audience members that hard’ (Appendix B, ln. 111-114).

This suggests that while the framework of the script was a useful starting point, it evolved into a maturing competency in balancing narrative delivery with audience psychological safety. This reflexive process, where orientation was retooled after a soft launch, demonstrates how competency is co-constructed through practice.

Furthermore, the decision to hand off the audience from Brown’s out-of-world introduction to an in-character performer reflects an embedded dramaturgy of participation (Ramos & Maravala, 2017; Ramos, 2015). This transition formalises a shift in audience responsibility, explaining the mechanics of interaction and providing consent pathways, such as how to exit the experience, while reinforcing the immersive aesthetic of the show. In this sense, orientation functions on

multiple registers: psychological (reducing ambiguity), administrative (explaining logistics), and aesthetic (immersing audiences in narrative world-building). Each of these aspects directly supports safer and more ethical audience engagement.

Finally, orientation moments such as identifying staff by uniform (standard black clothing) also contribute to audience care by clearly signalling access to support. These visual cues become risk mitigation tools in themselves, enhancing audience autonomy in navigating the space while reinforcing production staff presence. Notably, the affective texture of orientation, unrushed, non-intrusive, and responsive, frames the entire production as one where care is not an add-on but a foundational ethic. Brown's approach exemplifies this: 'meeting people where they're at to try and support them into the space' (Appendix B, ln. 108–110) is not just a performance strategy. It's a competency grounded in emotional labour and situational intelligence.

In sum, orientations at *Dead Letter No. 9* act as *both* structured and emergent tools for managing risk and audience wellbeing. They cultivate competency among production staff by requiring attunement and flexibility, skills that are foundational to immersive theatre's promise of co-created experience. When done well, orientation is not simply a preamble but an integral part of care-filled audience handling.

iii. 'I think it was not unusual for... there's going to be somebody crying at some point during the night. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. That's them having a reaction to the piece': Responding with Emotional Intelligence

In-performance care at *Dead Letter No. 9* was not only present, but integral to how the production team and performers engaged with audience members. Unlike the more visible orientation phases, this stage relied on tools that were internalized, emotional intelligence, active observation, and improvisational responsiveness, demonstrating how in-the-moment competency shapes both audience experience and risk mitigation.

Throughout the performance, care was enacted subtly through what can be termed *embodied attentiveness*: production staff and performers alike remained attuned to emotional shifts and physical cues, applying active listening and observational skills to assess whether any audience member appeared distressed or withdrawn. These assessments, although not always overtly acted upon, created a framework of responsive care. Rather than relying on rigid protocols, competency here was grounded in a fluid, situational awareness, an interpersonal skillset built more through experience than formal training.

Importantly, in-performance care was not just about intervention but about discernment. Brown described how initial test audiences often responded emotionally, sometimes with tears, not out of distress, but as a natural reaction to the emotional depth of the experience.

Some of the first test audiences we had, just invited guests, people [were] making it through the other side and like having some tears. I think it was not unusual for... there's going to be somebody crying at some point during the night. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. That's them having a reaction to the piece' (Appendix B, ln. 553-558).

This led to reflections on the kind of response planning that would be appropriate. Unlike Brown's earlier work on *Dry Land*, which necessitated a comprehensive audience response technique, *Dead Letter No. 9* called for a lighter, more intuitive touch. As Brown observed, emotional reactions in this production were 'a very internal to the person experience that wasn't negative, it was just big' (Appendix B, ln. 592-594) and typically not requiring formal intervention plans.

Rather than suppressing emotional responses, the production staff's response was gently affirming. Brown often opted for a check-in approach: a simple inquiry as to whether the participant needed anything, followed by respectful space if none was required. This minimal-intervention approach is itself a skilled form of care, requiring confidence, calm, and a high level of emotional intelligence.

Despite these effective practices, Brown pointed out that training in this area remains limited. When asked what form of education could most support immersive production staff, Brown replied without hesitation, 'audience handling is the one that is coming to mind right away' (Appendix B, ln. 867). While the current model of learning-by-doing, developing competency through direct experience, is valuable, it leaves a significant gap. Brown's suggestion that de-escalation training, such as that provided to nightclub security personnel, could be repurposed for immersive theatre underlines the necessity for formalising this kind of knowledge transfer. In this light, in-performance care emerges not just as a practice of empathy but as a strategic skillset requiring more training than is currently available. Emotional intelligence, real-time adaptability, and space-holding capabilities are vital tools for managing audience care and

mitigating risk. They also highlight how production staff, often invisibly, sustain the integrity of immersive performance environments in ways that are both emotionally grounded and operationally prepared.

iv. ‘Antenna up’: Post-Performance Feedback and Care

Post-performance care was an essential aspect of *Dead Letter No. 9*, demonstrated through the attentive presence of the production staff and the director, particularly in the bar area where audience members exited the performance space. This space was patrolled by staff, utilizing high emotional intelligence to gauge whether an audience member required support or simply needed time alone to process the emotions raised by the performance. As Brown described, this task involved keeping their ‘antenna up’ for any audience members who exhibited strong emotional responses (Appendix B, ln. 579). Care ethics emphasizes the importance of responsiveness to feedback from those being cared for (Noddings, 2003; Tronto, 2015; Hamington, 2024), which directly connects to the post-performance care observed in *Dead Letter No. 9*. Noddings (2003) advocates for ‘listening to believe’ (p. 21), which aligns with the staff’s approach of attentively engaging with audience members rather than challenging or debating their responses. This is further exemplified by Hamington’s (2024) concept of ‘humble inquiry,’ which stresses the importance of recognizing the limits of one’s knowledge and seeking to understand others with empathy and self-awareness. In the context of immersive theatre, such practices highlight the dynamic and relational nature of care, where feedback serves as a critical tool in refining audience care and managing emotional responses.

Brown's description of the post-performance care environment emphasized the role of the bar space as a 'decompression space' where audience members could process any intense emotions triggered by the performance (Appendix B, ln. 575-576). The bar area became a site where staff were tasked with actively monitoring for signs that an audience member might need support. As Brown pointed out, staff were managing multiple responsibilities during this time, but providing care remained a priority. Once an individual who might require care was identified, the bar manager or Brown could check in on them, or the director, who was always present, would step in. This collaborative approach ensured that care was comprehensive, even when staff were stretched thin.

The director's role in this aftercare process was particularly notable. Taylor Myers attended all performances, spending time in the bar space immediately following each show to engage with the audience. Myers' presence was invaluable, offering a personal point of contact for anyone who wished to express their thoughts or feelings about the performance. Reflecting on this, Myers stated he had done, 'about a million [check-ins], maybe not a million, but well over one hundred for this show alone' (Appendix A, ln. 383-384), emphasizing his deep commitment to connecting with audience members post-performance. Myers saw these interactions as vital for gathering nuanced feedback, which he preferred over surveys. He explained, 'In person communication is the highest form of communication and the farther away from that we go, you get into lower forms of communication' (Appendix A, ln. 397-399), further underscoring his belief in the value of direct conversation for obtaining meaningful feedback.

The significance of in-person communication was highlighted further in Myers' reflections on the use of surveys. While he acknowledged that surveys had been useful in past productions to gather feedback on specific elements like the experience, website, and marketing materials, he also recognized the limitations of such tools. Myers noted that surveys often produced quick, shallow responses: 'Sometimes people just kind of like blah, blah, blah information and then like send and then it's like, alright, you gave your first impression anonymous response. What's gonna be fastest and easiest to type?' (Appendix A, ln. 391-396). In contrast, Myers preferred direct conversations, which allowed him to delve deeper into the audience's experience and better understand their emotional responses. As he explained, 'sometimes in conversation, obviously you can get a little more information' (Appendix A, ln. 396), reinforcing his belief that verbal communication offered a richer understanding of audience reactions.

Brown also validated Myers' claims of post-performance follow-ups and conversations. They explained responses to feedback were not only 'gentle' and 'well thought out,' but also followed by invitations to continue the conversation (Appendix B, ln. 304-310). This level of attention to individual audience members helped to foster a sense of community, where people felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and returning for future performances. As Brown recalled, even those who did not have ideal experiences during the show were interested in returning, with some expressing a desire to try again despite feeling unsettled by certain aspects of the performance (Appendix B, ln. 242-247).

Brown attributed this to the care and attention given to audience members both during and after the performance, explaining, 'To me that was a sign that we had created a space where people

felt like they could take risks and be caught' (Appendix B, ln. 248-250). The aftercare practices and the personalized feedback loop between production staff, director and the audience not only contributed to immediate emotional support but also helped build an enduring connection that encouraged audiences to return, confident in the knowledge that their emotional experiences were respected and valued.

As Machon (2013) suggests, immersive performances have a 'life beyond' (p. 97) the event, and the lasting impact of this experience is shaped by how the production team engages with audiences in the aftermath. Alongside these in-person exchanges, ROLL THE BONES maintained a mailing list that served not only to inform audiences about future performances but also as a platform for continued conversation. Emails often included provocations, inviting recipients to reflect and respond. This ongoing dialogue was a deliberate attempt to cultivate community and extend the conversation beyond the performance itself, echoing Myers' commitment to building lasting connections with the audience.

V. Dead Letter No. 9: Care and Connection As Guiding Factors

In examining *Dead Letter No. 9*, it became evident that the concept of care was a guiding factor from the outset of the development of this immersive experience. From the pre-arrival communications that set clear expectations to the thoughtful interactions during the performance and the intentional follow-up post-show, the production exemplified a commitment to audience well-being. This approach not only helped mitigate potential psychological and social risks associated with immersive theatre but also fostered a supportive environment where participants

could engage deeply with the content and each other. The emphasis on adequate time, active listening, active observation and community-building reflected a broader ethos that prioritised the audience's experience, demonstrating that care in immersive theatre extends beyond mere compliance with safety protocols.

In the next chapter, the case study of Coney's *1884* will further illuminate how care ethics concepts in action impact audience handling. By exploring the unique strategies employed in *1884*, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of these elements' role in shaping immersive theatre experiences and their lasting impact on how production staff can improve the audience experience.

Chapter 5 - Case Study #2: Coney's *1884*

This chapter continues my investigation into how production staff contribute to establishing safer spaces in immersive theatre by turning to a second case study, *1884* by Coney. Similar to ROLL THE BONES, the scale of *1884* is also Independent, with a team of between 11 and 49 paid or stipend employees; the work is not for hire for corporations and the work was paid for by the company and grants from the UK Arts Council (Brigante & Elger, 2020, p. 94). The thesis as a whole explores how immersive performance complicates traditional notions of risk and responsibility, requiring production teams to engage with ethical care practices that extend beyond procedural safety. Earlier chapters established the need for this inquiry, introducing care ethics as a framework to augment standard occupational risk management practices. Care ethics emphasises relational attentiveness, context-sensitive judgment, and responsibility towards others.

To explore how these ideas operate in practice, the research uses a qualitative, multi-methods approach. The focus of this chapter is on the second case study, which allows for close engagement with the lived experiences of performance makers and production staff. The previous chapter, focusing on ROLL THE BONES' *Dead Letter No. 9*, revealed an embedded ethos of care in both the design and delivery of the performance and the company itself. Through thoughtful orientations, strong visual cues, and open communication, the company created an environment in which audiences felt welcomed, supported, and empowered. Emotional intelligence and adaptability emerged as essential tools for staff, enabling stage manager Ellery Brown to respond in real time to audience needs.

The present case study examines how Coney, with its distinctive collaborative ethos, prepares and supports its team to manage care and risk during performances of *1884*. Using the same methodological framework for the case study of interviews, document analysis and participant observation, *1884* offers a complementary perspective on how care is enacted behind the scenes in immersive work.

The creative vision for *1884*, developed by performance maker Rhianna Ilube, was central to Coney's emphasis on participant engagement, with particular attention to how risks were managed within the performance's exploration of complex themes.

Since *1884* had a larger team than *Dead Letter No. 9*, the production staff section below is more expansive, including interviews with both the stage manager, Brent Tan, and the Shoreditch Town Hall venue duty manager, Jenni Sinclair, leader of the house management team. The unique company structures at Coney also resulted in all three of these interviewees mentioning that the producer also played a large role in risk and care management, making it evident it was necessary to speak with Coney producer Marie Klimis, who turned out to be the primary risk manager, as part of the production staff section too. Their insights provide an important perspective on how immersive theatre production staff consider audience safety, speaking directly to the primary research question of this thesis: *how can production staff contribute to establishing safer spaces for immersive audiences?*

This chapter will analyse the data gathered to explore how *1884*'s production team structured audience care, examining how current practices address safety and risk mitigation, particularly through the lens of Coney's unique organizational culture. By investigating how production staff

consider and measure the effectiveness of these strategies, this chapter will lay groundwork for discussing potential tools and competencies that may strengthen production staff's capacity to support audience care and manage risk in immersive environments. These insights will also set the stage for a more in-depth exploration of how care ethics could enhance audience risk management in immersive theatre, which will be addressed in the subsequent discussion chapter.

I. The Interview Participants

The following section introduces each of the interview participants from *Coney's 1884*. Together with my own observations as an audience member, these perspectives help construct a more complete understanding of the production's approach to care and risk.

i. Primary Risk Creator: Rhianna Ilube, Writer and Project Director (Performance Maker)

In May 2024, this interview with performance maker Rhianna Ilube, writer and project director of *1884* and Coney staff member, was conducted online. This interview focused on the development process for *1884*, the role of the audience in the performance, the roles of the production staff, and the ethical practices instilled in the performance from conception through the run of the show. These responses help frame the performance and the performance environment for later discussion of the production staff's experience with managing audiences during it.

Rhianna Ilube arrived at theatre through a diverse work background including work as a film programmer and an activist youth facilitator (Coney, n.d.). Additionally, Ilube's background in

event production extended into partnerships with bars to produce nightlife events, which, as discussed in more detail below, significantly informed her insights into audience handling in high-risk scenarios. Another key influence on her personal views of risk was her earlier work with youth activists, which also necessitated significant safeguarding training (Appendix C, ln. 1035-1037). Since 2019, Ilube has focused on writing scripts (Appendix C, ln. 15-16), with most of her interactive work happening in collaboration with Coney (Appendix C, ln. 20-21). Her work often focuses on themes of activism, identity and history (Coney, n.d.).

ii. Primary Risk Manager: Marie Klimis, Producer (Production Staff)

Interviewed in September 2024, producer Marie Klimis emerged as a central figure in the making of *1884*, repeatedly referenced by other team members as the primary conduit for communication and decision-making. With approximately five years of experience producing theatre (Appendix D, ln. 19-20), specifically in non-traditional spaces, Klimis brings over fifteen years of expertise in broader event programming and management (Appendix D, ln. 14-17). Her approach to producing immersive work is also informed by her own background as an immersive theatre maker.

Klimis described the inherently fluid nature of immersive theatre roles, noting that ‘traditional theatre roles are really blurred’ (Appendix D, ln. 137-138) and that each project’s unique format and setting require adaptive strategies. Her stories of past projects, ranging from installing fifty pianos across London to coordinating schoolchildren singing in Epping Forest, reflect the creative unpredictability she embraces in her work (Appendix D, ln. 196-200).

She emphasized that people skills, adaptability, and communication are key to successful production: ‘being [a] nice person, being open-minded and being creative’ (Appendix D, ln. 223-225) were as crucial as logistical planning. For *1884*, her role extended well beyond conventional producing, encompassing aspects of both creative development and production management. She recalled being introduced on the first rehearsal day with the phrase, ‘Anything else? Ask Marie’ (Appendix D, ln. 52-52), which she found both humorous and fitting.

Significantly, Klimis also took on aspects of audience and performer care due to the production’s unique structure. While stage managers are typically expected to oversee performer and audience well-being during shows, this proved impossible in *1884*, as the sole stage manager spent much of act one in a separate room. There, they were creatively engaged in constructing a ‘museum’ for act two, sorting audience-contributed items, drafting captions, coordinating with other museum-focused staff, and overseeing the printing and display setup. As Klimis explained, ‘Stage manager is... care for the company, and that cannot be done if you are making the museum in another room’ (Appendix D, ln. 450-452). In response to this gap, she stepped in to help support both performers and audience members during the live action, ensuring a consistent presence in the performance space. This redistribution of responsibilities, though informal, became essential to maintaining the safety and smooth flow of the production. Klimis noted that for future iterations or touring versions, a dedicated assistant stage manager would likely be necessary, one focused on building the museum, and another remaining in the room to uphold the crucial role of care.

iii. Supporting Risk Manager: Brent Tan, Stage Manager (Production Staff)

Brent Tan began his stage management career in Singapore before relocating to the UK to study production management. By the time of our September 2024 interview, he had worked on twelve to fifteen productions with immersive or interactive elements (Appendix F, ln. 11–52). In *1884*, Tan took on a hybrid role that diverged from conventional stage management. During rehearsals, he handled standard tasks such as scheduling, logistics, and prop sourcing (Appendix F, ln. 163–165). However, during performances, his primary responsibility became the creation of the ‘museum’ for act two, curating and captioning audience-donated items in a display reflecting the fictional world of Wilhelm Street (Appendix F, ln. 158).

This shift meant that the traditional caregiving responsibilities of a stage manager, being present with the cast and monitoring the audience in the room, were taken up by another Coney staff member, for this run usually Klimis or Ilube, a compromise shaped by financial limitations (Appendix C, ln. 405–412). Still, Tan expressed a strong sense of care still permeated his museum duties, explaining his effort to personalize captions by reflecting shared audience moments, so ‘it also feels personal’ (Appendix F, ln. 189–196).

iv. Supporting Risk Manager: Jenni Sinclair, Venue Duty Manager (Production Staff)

Jenni Sinclair, interviewed online in June 2024, brought a rich and varied background in the arts to her current work in house management. With a BA in performance and visual arts, her early experiences included creating and managing installation-based shows that were immersive by

nature, ‘bringing audiences into spaces with installations happening in them’ (Appendix E, ln. 44–46). Her path into full-time house management and operations began in 2017, following ad hoc theatre work, including roles in immersive performances as both a ‘performative usher’ and a horror experience performer (Appendix E, ln. 10–14). Her formal employment in immersive theatre began with Punchdrunk’s *The Burnt City*, a major production that ran from 2022–2023, and which other interviewees, like Rhianna Ilube, cited as a marker of Sinclair’s credibility in the field (Appendix C, ln. 414–417).

Sinclair’s approach to audience care is shaped by this mix of performative and operational experience. Describing her work on *1884*, she said her role was ‘more about supporting the artistic vision of the company’ (Appendix E, ln. 180–182), particularly through ‘judgement calls [about] when to step in’ (Appendix E, ln. 187). This was crucial in a show designed to provoke ‘a certain level of disobedience,’ where knowing ‘when it is appropriate to cross the line’ helped avoid disrupting audience experience unnecessarily (Appendix E, ln. 187–194).

She also emphasized the importance of traditional safety expectations within her role: ‘ushers are there for safety reasons to help with if there was a fire evacuation. And any other instances to step in’ (Appendix E, ln. 326–330). Ultimately, she believes, ‘you have an obligation to keep people safe inside a space and [that] includes sort of feeling safe’ (Appendix E, ln. 330–333).

II. The Performance: *1884*

Founded in 2006, Coney was a UK-based company known for creating immersive experiences grounded in curiosity, reciprocity, adventure, and loveliness. However, due to being transitioned out of Arts Council England's National Portfolio, they informed all members of their mailing list of their closure in April 2025 (T. Stevens, personal communication, 30 April 2025). As CEO Tassos Stevens explained in an interview with Josephine Machon (2013), Coney's work invited varying levels of engagement and aimed to offer experiences that were 'surprising and delightful' (p. 199). These values underpinned their performance, *1884*, validated by theatre critic Lyn Gardner (2024) as theatre that rewrites the rules 'with care, invention, playfulness, and often a lot of joy' (para. 2). Fortunately, *1884* has been rehomed with production company Koro, who will fund a national tour for the performance in autumn 2025.

1884 is an immersive game-theatre piece set in a fictional neighbourhood called Wilhelm Street, inspired by the historical 1884 Berlin Conference (Coney, 2024, p. 3). The show confronts themes such as colonialism, displacement, protest, and memorialization. Coney offered audiences a *Playing Audience's Guide* via their website and pre-performance emails, preparing them for a participatory experience that could be approached at different levels of intensity.

Act one invites audiences to collaborate in small groups to build homes on Wilhelm Street, navigating government restrictions and deciding whether to comply or resist. These choices subtly impact the evolving narrative. Participation is flexible, echoing Coney's principle of reciprocity, though audiences who embrace deeper involvement encounter a more layered experience.

After a reset, act two transforms the space into a museum filled with objects and misremembered histories derived from act one. A lecture delivered by a fictional academic humorously misinterprets their ancestor's interviews during the group's earlier creations, highlighting themes of erasure and historical distortion.

Performance maker Rhianna Ilube described *1884* as 'quite interactive' (Appendix C, ln. 74), though she noted a shift between acts: the first being more participatory and audience-led, and the second more immersive and observational. Inspired by the Berlin Conference, the computer game *The Sims*, TV show *Black Mirror*, and a structural pivot seen in *We Should All Be Dreaming* by Sonya Lindfors and Maryan Abdulkarim, Ilube pitched the project to Coney knowing interactivity would be central.

i. Observations and Document Analysis: *1884*

1. Document Analysis

My research for this case study also began with document analysis. Prior to and following my attendance at *1884*, I reviewed materials connected to the production, the theatre company, and the venue. These included the voidspace dispatches listing where I first encountered the performance, the Coney website, ticketing communications from Shoreditch Town Hall, the *1884 Playing* audience guide, content warning materials, and the digital companion shared after the performance. These documents were reviewed for two primary functions: first, to gather descriptive information about the show that would help me understand the performance in advance as an audience member, and second, to identify any explicit framing of risk or actions of

care communicated by the company before attending. Materials received after the performance also allowed for consideration of potential aftercare elements.

I discovered the show through *voidspace dispatches*, a monthly listing of immersive and participatory performances. Having encountered Coney in my literature review, I recognized the company's reputation and reached out through their website. My inquiry was forwarded to the *1884* producer, who agreed to participate in this case study.

The *voidspace* listing described *1884* as an anti-colonial, game-theatre experience inspired by the Berlin Conference, an event I was unfamiliar with at the time. A link to an interview with Artistic Director Tasso Stevens was provided, but I initially avoided it to prevent spoilers. The Coney website repeated the phrase 'anti-colonial game-theatre show' and featured an image of Africa. I assumed it would involve themes of slavery and British colonial legacy. A trailer video depicted a party-like atmosphere, with people dancing and gathered around game boards, which contrasted sharply with the heavy themes implied.

An option to play the '188.4 FM Experience' was available, but I skipped this as well. The website also offered detailed biographies of cast and creative team members. I wondered whether most audience members would have engaged this deeply before booking.

From there, I was redirected to Shoreditch Town Hall to purchase tickets. A standard confirmation email followed, including directions and accessibility policies but no information about the show's content. The day before the performance, I received a more informative email detailing the runtime, re-entry permissions, and content advisories, including 'audience interaction, loud music, microphone amplified speeches and light changes.'

Importantly, the email included two hyperlinks: one to a 9-page *1884 Playing* audience's guide and another to content warnings. The latter was bolded, while the guide link was not, an easily overlooked detail. I skipped both at first to avoid spoilers but later reviewed them in full.

The audience guide outlined the historical context of the Berlin Conference and explained that audience members would be divided into small groups, with interaction largely occurring between audience members and occasional moments with performers. The guide emphasized non-contact participation and encouraged opting out when needed. It also included a reminder to 'treat each other with respect and kindness' (Coney, 2024, p. 5), acknowledging differing reactions based on lived experience.

The access section elaborated on sensory elements, noise, light, relaxed performances, and captioning, and offered reassurance that stepping out at any time was acceptable: 'Do whatever helps you' (Coney, 2024, p. 8).

The link to content warnings redirected to the venue website, offering a general statement on the value of content notices and an email for requesting further information. The venue also stated a designated quiet space would be available during the show, which led me to anticipate a potentially intense experience.

The following day, I received a post-show email from Shoreditch Town Hall with a link to a feedback survey. The questions were mostly about the venue, with only one section assessing the performance itself across statements like 'I enjoyed it,' 'It introduced me to new ideas,' and 'I could relate to aspects of it.'

Below the survey was a link to the 188.4 FM digital companion. This led to a detailed website with options to submit to the 1884 Memorial, read articles, listen to podcasts, and explore interactive ‘games’ themed around the Berlin Conference.

While the website was extensive, it felt overwhelming and slow to navigate. Entering the memorial required agreeing to six pages of legal terms, including notice that submissions might be used for research. This gave me pause, but I accepted in order to view the website.

Some resources, particularly articles and podcasts, offered useful context for the show’s historical themes, though they required significant time and effort. The ‘games’ included quizzes and word searches but felt more educational than playful, lacking engagement. I soon exited the site.

No further follow-up came from Shoreditch Town Hall or Coney.

2. Observations

I observed *1884* once during its short run at Shoreditch Town Hall in April 2024, aiming to identify moments of risk and care for later discussion with the performance maker and production team.

On arrival, I was sent to the bar and was told twice, once by the usher and once by the bartender, that drinks were not allowed inside the experience. While this limited alcohol intake during the show, it prompted me to quickly drink a whisky and Coke.

We were soon asked to gather in the hallway for an out-of-world orientation led by two facilitators, with ushers nearby. The tone was serious. We were reminded of the potentially

distressing themes, encouraged to take care of ourselves, and told we could leave and return at any time. The quiet area was pointed out, and staff were identified as available for assistance. The gravity of the delivery made me feel apprehensive but prepared.

Inside the performance room, I joined a table with six participants, all white, ranging from mid-twenties to mid-fifties, including immersive makers, scholars, and critics. The group was sociable and cooperative. We submitted two personal items (I offered a flower hairpin) and began gameplay by naming our house using word tiles. We chose ‘Hope House.’

The game fostered casual bonding. We drew our pets on tiles, created ‘house knocks,’ and exchanged drawn ‘gifts’ with other tables. An upbeat DJ played music and read out community news, while a performer playing a local politician and another acting as a postwoman (‘Postie’) moved among the audience. Tensions escalated when we were told to rename our house to conform with new guidelines. Despite my resistance, my group voted to accept the rename to ‘Sycamore House.’ They reasoned that it was a minor change and that the consequences of resistance were unknown. I felt that the best time to fight tyranny was while it was small, but I was overruled. Every group complied, so we still did not know what might have happened had we refused. The next restriction came in an envelope addressed to our new house name. We were only allowed a certain number of rooms. We rejected this reorganization, and a performer entered, removed all our decorative tokens, and forcibly rearranged our house.

Later, we were invited to a community meeting to discuss these new impositions. However, the politician dominated the discussion and dismissed dissenting voices. Protest notices began appearing on the community board, and a woman from the audience went house to house urging residents to drown out the politician at the next meeting using house knocks. We agreed to join

in. Our house posted a protest message on the board, though I grew uneasy about leaving signed messages after our punishment.

A woman identifying herself as a researcher joined our table. She asked about local customs, prompting us to invent an extravagant ‘uber-holiday month’ with a different holiday celebrated each day. She listened attentively and took detailed notes. When she left, the politician returned to the stage. As agreed, the entire room performed house knocks to drown her out until intermission was called. One of the men in my group discreetly pocketed both pet tiles to protect them while we were out of the room, a clever precaution we all supported.

During the intermission, we were ushered into the bar area. The shift was striking; the immersive social cohesion dissolved quickly. I found myself scrolling my phone, and others reverted to small, familiar groups.

When we re-entered, the space had been transformed. Rows of chairs were arranged lecture-style, and museum-style display cases lined the room. As we explored them, we found everyday items, including my flower hairpin, displayed as artifacts with humorous and absurd placards. Mine was labeled ‘ceremonial wedding hairpin from a local tribe.’ Another person’s handkerchief, which no one from my ‘house’ had ever seen, was described as ‘likely used during uber-holiday month.’

We were then seated for a lecture by the supposed author of a forthcoming book based on her great-grandmother’s research on the people of Wilhelm Street. The content reframed all of our protest actions as celebrations or harmless games, normalized the restrictions we had resisted, and trivialized our invented cultural traditions. The lecture was delivered satirically, but it was

unsettling. The absurd misrepresentation of our experience served as a powerful commentary on academic and historical distortion.

We returned to our house groups for a final reflection, where we were invited to think about how the past was recorded and misrepresented. Together, we closed with one last round of house knocks. In the weeks that followed, I often returned to reflect on the figure of the well-meaning academic whose notes were distorted over time, raising powerful questions for me about responsibility and authorship.

ii. Identifying Risk Factors

A key objective of the observations and document analysis was to establish that Coney's *1884* presented a meaningful degree of risk appropriate for analysis within this research, particularly in terms of social and psychological dimensions. The following summary outlines the notable risks identified during the production, helping to contextualise the subsequent interview discussions and highlight the often-unusual, yet still recognisable, forms of risk that emerge in immersive theatre settings.

1. Physical

1884 had minimal physical risks compared to many other immersive performances. The first act focused largely on sitting at a table and completing tasks together that were largely based on communication with some small elements of arts and crafts such as drawing on tiles or creating paper gifts. Leaving the table occurred at our own speed and in a non-rushed manner to do things like pin a notice on a large cork community board at the front of the room, speak with another house table or drop off a paper gift with another table.

During this act, the highest potential for a physical risk was likely found in the house knocks. Each house created their own unique knock that was a combination of clapping, slapping the table and stomping. Over-exuberance while knocking could potentially cause some physical harm to hands or feet, but this was highly unlikely.

In act two, the audiences freely roamed a museum setup at a leisurely pace before taking seats for a brief lecture. Act three concluded with the audience regrouping into their act one house groups and doing their house knock for the last time. The latter half of the show had a similar, very low, likelihood of physical injury as the first half.

2. Psychological

Compared to the low physical risks in *1884*, the show was rife with psychological risks. The imagery of Africa on the show logo and repeated content warnings about colonialism across the website and booking emails provided a heightened sense of psychological risk to me, a white audience member, from before the start of the show.

The show began with a low level of stress relating to selecting which ‘house’ table to join. I also felt a fair amount of guilt as we did our introductions and I realised we were all highly educated, white people with invested interest in immersive theatre either as scholars, practitioners or theatre critics. I felt like our table encapsulated the lack of diversity in much immersive theatre criticised in writings like *The post-immersive manifesto* (Lopes Ramos et al., 2020) that makes claims like ‘real community is made with bodies in proximity, different, divergent and

heterogeneous; anything else is a whitewash' (p. 10). However, looking around the entire room revealed a far more diverse collection of audience members than many other immersive performances I had attended in the past.

I also felt a fair amount of stress to contribute to the game. Speaking up in a public setting has always provoked some anxiety and with each new task we had to do, I felt a fair amount of trepidation to provide my input to our 'house.'

The heightened psychological risks also resulted in us stealing the tiles with our pets on them at intermission. We thought we were protecting them but as the second act pivots into a new direction, we did not return to our homes. We accidentally stole the tiles, and to my regret, vandalism and theft were specifically named by the producer, Marie Klimis, in her interview below as the primary actions from the audience that upset her.

3. Social

The social risks in *1884* were fairly continuous as the entire first act relied on inter-audience interactions to develop. To express an idea that was not in line with the other members of the house was to risk both embarrassment and rejection in this house of strangers. While everyone was largely kind, there was still some friction whenever there was dissent and two of the gentlemen who arrived together took the lead in our house as the primary decision makers.

In most cases, we all agreed, but in the few where we did not, their large personalities and argumentative nature assured that their decision was the one we would go with as a ‘house’. When the first restrictions were issued to our home as part of the game, I felt very strongly that we should not capitulate and, as illustrated in the vignette at the beginning of this thesis, my argument was not well received.

As the performance maker, Rhianna Ilube, illustrates in her interview below, the social risks were a primary concern to her as well, since she realised that the biggest influence on the success of the show was the audience make-up of each table.

Having considered the physical, psychological and social risks of *1884*, the next section will shift the focus to the interviews with the performance maker, producer and production staff. The interview with Rhianna Ilube will help determine the framework that the production staff worked within to safeguard the audience. Once that framework is established through the performance maker interview, this chapter will move on to consider the interviews from the producer and production staff to determine how audience care was considered in *1884* and what tools they use to help impact competency in the production staff for this production.

III. Audience Care in Coney’s *1884*

This section introduces the interview data from Coney’s *1884* to examine how principles aligned with care ethics, such as attentiveness, time, listening, and embracing imperfection, are embedded in the company’s immersive theatre practice. Though not always explicitly named as

care ethics, these values inform both internal culture and practical systems for anticipating and managing audience risk. Coney's approach positions care as a functional aesthetic that strengthens preparedness and responsiveness throughout the production process. The following discussion highlights how pre-planning and collaborative communication play a key role in audience care, helping to surface and share the often-invisible labour of risk management across the entire team.

i. 'What do you need to do your best work?': Comprehensive Care Communication as Company Philosophy

The production of *1884* was grounded in a deliberate ethical framework that shaped not only how the work was made but also how audiences were cared for. Some aspects stemmed from Coney's established practices, like their philosophical goal of building performances that let people 'play well' (Appendix D, ln. 272), but these frameworks are not static. Each project adapts them through collaboration with those involved, making ethics an ongoing, participatory process.

One key element of this is the development of a project-specific manifesto. As Marie Klimis explains:

We write a manifesto where everyone who's in the project agrees together - what are the goals of the project? What do we want to achieve? What may be the challenges? How do we deal with disagreements? So we have a common vision, and it's a living document, so it can be adapted (Appendix D, ln. 324–332).

This living manifesto supports a shared ethical direction while remaining flexible to meet emerging needs. Accompanying the manifesto is an access rider, a tool that, while inclusive of disability accommodations, extends far beyond:

It's about what do you need to do your best work? For some people, it's about 'I need breaks. I need to snack.' Personally, I have children. I need to leave at 5:30 tops and I don't want to have a conversation about this. I just need to go (Appendix D, ln. 335–339).

Creating a space where individual needs are acknowledged before rehearsals begin, and checking in regularly throughout, fosters a workplace where emotional and physical safety are prioritised. The emphasis is on communication, flexibility, and ongoing reflection, ensuring each person is in a position to succeed. As Klimis notes, the environment must support the company employees to be 'in a good place, in a safe place' (Appendix D, ln. 268–269).

This foundation of care within the company naturally extends to audience relationships. For Klimis, the marker of an ethical performance is simple: 'They're having a good time' (Appendix D, ln. 784). But this 'good time' is not about entertainment alone, it's about consent, clarity, and respect. Klimis elaborates:

It's more like they've been taken care of. Their consent has been respected. They don't feel like they embarked on a journey they never [would have] signed up for if they knew what it was (Appendix D, ln. 788–793).

This clarity of intention is a core principle that distinguishes ethical immersive theatre from exploitative forms. Klimis is critical of practices that use surprise or discomfort as a creative crutch. 'I think there is a lot of bad practice in immersive theatre... sometimes it was like, ohhh, we want to shock' (Appendix D, ln. 282–284).

To counter this, she begins each pre-show briefing with reassurance:

I always start my pre-show briefing by saying it's an immersive show but do not worry, which does make people laugh. But it's true. People are nervous about immersive theatre, and for very good reasons... that it doesn't take good care (Appendix D, ln. 726–734).

Audience care at Coney is also shaped through concrete practices like playtesting, orientation, and post-show discussion spaces (discussed in more detail in Section 5). These mechanisms allow creators to assess and adapt audience experiences in real time, ensuring they feel guided, not ambushed. As Klimis puts it, it's about 'a duty of care towards the work... and also it's better care for the audience' (Appendix D, ln. 277–281).

At every level, care begins with open dialogue, both internally, among collaborators, and externally, with audiences. Whether it's writing a manifesto, filling out an access rider, or crafting a thoughtful audience briefing, these formal and informal structures uphold Coney's commitment to ethical, consent-based engagement. In doing so, the company ensures that immersive work is not only creatively ambitious, but safe, inclusive, and sustaining for all involved.

Turning to how care ethics principles are reflected in company structures, Coney emphasizes the importance of adequate time for relationships and responsibilities to unfold. This is evident in the extended development process of *1884*, which was initiated by Coney with an R&D phase in January 2023. Originally planned for five days, this phase extended into two weeks and functioned like a ‘lecture series,’ featuring input from historians, game designers, and artists working with archives. As Rhianna Ilube described, ‘Sometimes someone would come in who was a historian and give us a talk... Tassos from Coney did a workshop on game design. So it was almost like a lecture series’ (Appendix C, ln. 120–131). Rather than rushing, Coney’s timeline allowed for skill-building and collaboration.

The development spanned 18 months, incorporating three separate R&D phases, spaced out with time for reflection. As Ilube explained, ‘We did another R&D and playtest six months later and then... another R&D process four months later’ (Appendix C, ln. 149–153). These intervals allowed for both intensive work and pause, encouraging care for both the people and the piece. The production also involved numerous consultants, including somatic artists who advised on the final act. The attention to detail and time devoted to consultation aligns with care ethics’ emphasis on thoughtful, attentive preparation.

ii. ‘How do you play well?’: Understanding audience types and setting appropriate boundaries

Ilube emphasized that all Coney productions aim to answer the question ‘how do you play well?’ (Appendix C, ln. 287-288). A crucial element of audience experience is ‘giv[ing] them enough information’ (Appendix C, ln. 286) and ‘trust in the audience’ (Appendix C, ln. 285-286). However, striking the right balance between clarity and maintaining mystery is challenging, as audience members need guidance without losing the spontaneity that makes immersive theatre unique. Nonetheless, in this Coney also leans into trusting their audiences when they supply comprehensive audience playing guides pre-performance that outline significant themes, content warnings and the ‘format, interaction and playing audience experience’ (Coney, 2024, p. 2) information.

Ilube discussed different audience types, inspired by a workshop led by Coney co-founder Tassos Stevens. These included: socialisers (those who want to socialize), griefers (those who seek to disrupt the game), explorers (those testing the limits of the game without harming it), and achievers (those focused on winning). Discussing the griefers, Ilube noted ‘these are the people to watch out for’ (Appendix C, ln. 1119).

Ilube then noted the potential for a fifth type of player, ‘totally uninterested or hating the game’ (Appendix C, ln. 1137). She found it helpful to identify these types early on, especially when playtesting. ‘I remember an actor finding this vaguely interesting in the abstract and then finding it really useful as soon as we started playtesting because immediately you can kind of spot that person has potential to be a griever’ (Appendix C, ln. 1140-1148). Griever audience members can increase the risks to the other audience members, particularly when the performance relies on inter-audience interactions.

Drawing from her outside experience working with the Good Night Out campaign, which aimed to improve safety in nightclubs, Ilube noted that immersive environments carry high risks.

‘We’ve created this immersive environment where high risk is high risk, like with nightclubs’ (Appendix C, ln. 929-931). Like in nightclubs, where small boundary-pushing actions are often tested before escalating, staff must be trained to address issues before they spiral. ‘I don’t think any show should just let audiences do anything. Like I think there has to be some doubt, some boundaries, and a plan of action for if boundaries are crossed’ (Appendix C, ln. 911-915).

Ilube also noted that some audience members test boundaries by looking to staff to gauge acceptable behaviour. ‘I would see people look because they’re testing out can I do this? And most of the time it’s totally fine, but you know, sometimes they have been vandalising the set’ (Appendix C, ln. 1019-1022). She emphasized the importance of addressing small issues early to prevent escalation, ‘partiers, especially harassers, will often try out smaller level actions. You don’t necessarily go in and do the worst thing. You do smaller things. And did you get away with it? Yes. Ok. I’m doing it more and more’ (Appendix C, ln. 999-1004). Identifying the griefers, and noticing small infractions can help protect both the audiences and the cast.

Brent Tan, initially focused on the importance of protecting the cast from some audience members, noted, ‘safeguarding the cast members’ was crucial (Appendix F, ln. 142). However, as he continued to discuss care, Tan adopted a more balanced view that included the audience as well. Care for performers involved psychological support during emotional scenes. ‘Let’s say, we are rehearsing a very emotional scene, then it’s also a duty of care for my cast member to check in with them and make sure they are alright’ (Appendix F, ln. 232-236). For the audience, care

meant providing a flexible, safe environment that encouraged exploration. ‘Making sure that their experience feels safe. That they have the flexibility [to] feel like they can share what they want to share’ (Appendix F, ln. 246-250). Between Ilube and Tan, these perspectives indicate an interesting balance between trust and distrust of the audience, highlighting that vigilance on the part of those in the space providing care can help protect both cast and other audience members from ‘griefers’ to help create that safe environment for the others.

iii. ‘You’re on top of things, you know what’s happening’: Invisible Care Through Behind-the-Scenes Pre-Planning

One of the defining characteristics of Coney’s approach to audience care is extensive pre-planning, a process which not only underpins safety but also raises questions about how care becomes invisible when nothing goes wrong. Marie Klimis reflected, ‘we didn’t have any major issues during the run’ (Appendix D, ln. 449–450), a statement that may appear simple but points to the success, and paradox, of an ethical framework designed to prevent harm before it occurs. When preparation is so effective that issues are avoided entirely, the labour behind that smoothness often goes unacknowledged.

Pre-emptive organisation is not just for audiences; it also supports the staff. Klimis noted that this level of preparation ensures performers and crew know what to do should a difficult situation arise. It provides psychological safety and clarity of purpose, which is itself a form of care. Jenni Sinclair echoed this ethos of readiness, describing how crucial it is to be ‘really organised in terms of prep so that by the time you’ve got to the event happening, you’re on top of things, you

know what's happening' (Appendix E, ln. 110–115). That clarity enables flexibility. The ability to 'improvise when needed' (Appendix E, ln. 104–105) was emphasized across all interviewees in both case studies, pointing to the importance of having structure not as a constraint, but as a platform for responsive, adaptive care.

Communication is central to this care. Sinclair described the event briefs Shoreditch Town Hall creates for every performance. 'We write event briefs for every single performance that comes in' (Appendix E, ln. 623–624). These documents typically circulate between venue and production staff, but for *1884*, she made a point of sending briefing notes directly to stewards, so 'they know what they were getting into' (Appendix E, ln. 627–630). In addition, the pre-show email for *1884*, 'compiled with the company' (Appendix E, ln. 550–551), provided clear communication with the audience about expectations before they even arrived.

These forms of pre-planning, event briefs, pre-show emails, collaborative documentation, are not neutral tools. They are part of a deliberate practice of ethical care, one that supports staff, performers, and audiences alike. But because they are often invisible when successful, they risk being undervalued or overlooked. As this case shows, when nothing goes wrong, it's not due to luck. It's likely influenced by deep, thoughtful, and invisible labour.

iv. 'It's always about the communication part': Communication Practices Grounded in Care in Coney's *1884*

Communication played a central role in Coney's care and risk management strategies, particularly in immersive productions like *1884*. As discussed in the previous section, the company's approach to audience care begins long before the performance itself, through detailed planning and open communication aimed at managing potential risks. These communication practices are deeply informed by the ethical principles of humble inquiry (Hamington, 2024) and active listening, which underpin not just the logistics of care, but the ethos of how care is delivered.

The team anticipated potential disruptions, including moments when audience members might become aggressive or triggered. In preparation, staff engaged in open conversations and scenario planning, not to exert control but to collaboratively decide on thoughtful and proportionate responses. As producer Marie Klimis explained, 'it's really just to talk to [the audience] and just inviting them to leave the room. Have a conversation to see if it's helpful... it's difficult to predict' (Appendix D, ln. 907–912). This strategy exemplifies humble inquiry, as it privileges relational dialogue over authority, and seeks to resolve situations through empathy and mutual respect.

Klimis was candid about the limits of formal documentation in risk planning. 'My experience of risk assessments, to be fully transparent, is I write them... one person reads them, and usually nobody cares about them' (Appendix D, ln. 474–478). For her, risk management is not just bureaucratic form-filling but an ongoing process of listening and dialoguing with performers, staff, and venue partners: 'It's making sure that things are safe, whether you have a paper that

proves it or not' (Appendix D, ln. 484–490). This reflects an embedded ethic of care as communication, responsive, evolving and co-produced.

Team meetings were used to collectively develop plans for difficult scenarios. Klimis emphasized that these discussions ensured staff comfort and readiness. 'We had good communication with them, so we didn't have any issue, but if there were, I think we were pretty well prepared' (Appendix D, ln. 513–517). This preparatory dialogue fostered internal trust among the company and venue, as well as a shared sense of responsibility.

Similarly, stage manager Brent Tan underscored the value of preparing for the unpredictable through open rehearsal discussions. 'We love to do this thing... where we will think of the worst thing that could happen and plan for that and rehearse that' (Appendix F, ln. 643–646). Even so, he acknowledged the inevitable uncertainty of live performance. 'It's very different when you're interacting with an audience member and you can't really predict how they'll respond' (Appendix F, ln. 671–674). Here, active listening becomes essential, not just in interpersonal exchanges, but as a mindset guiding adaptive, moment-to-moment care.

Communication also functioned as a vehicle for shared authorship and boundary-setting. Tan noted that decisions about how to respond to audience behaviour were discussed collectively, allowing the team to create a 'safe space' that wasn't bound by rigid rules but allowed the production staff the necessary flexibility to respond to individuals based on their needs. Tan emphasized, 'It's always about the communication part' (Appendix F, ln. 719–720). Subtle, nonverbal cues and gentle boundary-setting were employed to signal expectations, 'It's really

checking in with [the cast] as a team to see how we want to hold the space, and I think everything is a collaborative effort. It wasn't one person making a call on something, but we would discuss the audience interactions and discuss how we want to approach it and what ways we want to approach certain things' (Appendix F, ln. 266–273).

This ethic of subtle, responsive care was maintained through daily team check-ins. Tan described conversations where the team would ask questions like: 'How do you feel about that? Like, yesterday you said that one of the audience members took something and ran away with it... how do you want to proceed?' (Appendix F, ln. 344–349). These exchanges were not just procedural but deeply relational, modelling an attuned care through empathetic questioning and responsive adaptation.

Leadership presence also played a critical role in reinforcing a caring infrastructure. Tan observed, '[The producer and director] would firstly be present. They will be around' (Appendix F, ln. 320–322), describing how leadership made themselves visible and available during rehearsals and performances. This availability created a sense of safety and support that enabled quick, informal resolution of issues. 'If people sound them off, which we did, all these things [were] looked at immediately' (Appendix F, ln. 304–310). Presence here operates not just as surveillance or supervision, but as an embodied form of care.

Venue manager Jenni Sinclair affirmed the value of Coney's communication practices from the perspective of the host site. She described receiving advance documents from the company outlining traffic flow and usher positioning, which enabled smooth coordination between Coney

and the Shoreditch Town Hall team. Coney ‘sent documents to me a couple days before the show and they had a plan for where they wanted the ushers to stand and where they anticipated people to get their tickets scanned’ (Appendix E, ln. 375–379). This proactive planning stood in contrast to companies who simply ‘transpose’ (Appendix E, ln. 519) a production onto a venue without engagement with the venue staff. Sinclair also emphasized how being introduced to the performers and staff beforehand fostered confidence and clarity. ‘Knowing what everybody looked like is really important’ (Appendix E, ln. 612–623). This relational groundwork again reflects care through communication, sustained by human connection rather than top-down directives.

The company’s co-created production manifesto, referred to as a set of ‘guiding lights’ (Appendix C, ln. 345), also exemplifies humble inquiry at the foundational level. These shared values informed every aspect of the production, from safety protocols to audience engagement strategies. The creative team, including Klimis and Tan, regularly asked one another, ‘If this happens, what do we do?’ (Appendix C, ln. 1052–1055), modelling a reflexive and non-hierarchical approach to care.

Performance maker Rhianna Ilube’s expressed nervousness, ‘I’m constantly really nervous about what [the audience] are going to do’ (Appendix C, ln. 267–269), was met not with rigid control mechanisms but alleviated through open discussion and rehearsal scenarios. This again reflects the project’s investment in listening to uncertainty and embracing care as a dialogic process. Even playtesting practices were shaped by these values. Klimis acknowledged that while current diversity in test audiences relied heavily on personal networks, the team recognized this

limitation and hoped to improve, ‘This is something we want to do and haven’t done enough... primarily because of time’ (Appendix D, ln. 620–623). This transparency and self-reflection illustrate the company’s capacity for growth rather than defensiveness.

During performances, a Coney team member acted as an in-room facilitator. In one instance, an audience member asked, ‘Can we protest?’ to which Ilube, present as Coney staff, responded, ‘That’s not an out-of-world question. You guys figure it out...’ (Appendix C, ln. 518–525). This subtle but crucial moment of responsive listening recognised the artistic frame of the event and handed the chance to engage with *positive* risk-taking back to the audience. It highlighted boundaries set and discussed by staff earlier in the process of what constitutes in-world and out-of-world questions, allowing for competent responses, and required production staff to listen deeply and make swift decisions that maintained both the performance aesthetic and psychological safety.

Active listening also took place during feedback cycles. Playtesting was a core methodology in the development of *1884*, and Klimis stressed the importance of listening across a diversity of test audiences. ‘You’re talking about colonialism. You’re talking about race. And those topics are not the same for everyone,’ she explained (Appendix D, ln. 287–290). Feedback wasn’t always easy: ‘Some people said the repression is not hard enough and the consequences are not enforced enough’ (Appendix D, ln. 295–296), prompting ‘a lot of conversations’ (Appendix D, ln. 297) among the creative team. The project’s ability to adapt to critique, even when uncomfortable, was a direct result of listening that was not just passive but deeply engaged. ‘It’s just making sure

that you hear audience feedback and diverse audiences, not just the people who know the show’ (Appendix D, ln. 372–375).

This attentiveness also shaped how audience orientation was managed in performance. Before *1884* opened, Sinclair was sent a copy of the pre-show speech to familiarise herself with its contents (Appendix E, ln. 553–555). But during the orientation, while another staff member delivered the speech, she observed the audience listening to it instead:

It was hard for people to hear sometimes. It was also, audience members don’t always love to listen to sort of introductory speeches. They’re trying to get a drink from the bar at the last minute or they’re trying to go to the toilet. So they had a printed version of that information as well, which I did sneak to people who I saw were like, ‘you didn’t listen to that introduction, so I’m just going to give you this piece of paper so that you’ve got an idea of what’s going on as well’ (Appendix E, ln. 351-361).

Here, active listening wasn’t just verbal. It partnered with active observation and adaptability to ensure no one entered the experience without understanding the show’s rules and risks.

Additionally, sometimes listening was not about direct interactions but rather an attentiveness to the ambient inter-audience conversations. In an early playtest, Ilube overheard an audience member at a table ask, ‘Shall we throw fruit?’ (Appendix C, ln. 1210–1211). The comment surprised her and stuck with her. While it may have been a joke, it surfaced a potential risk: physical action directed toward performers. This moment of overheard speech became a touchstone for her in discussions about limits, risk, and how audience actions should be handled.

The fact that it stayed with Ilube underscores how active listening functions as an early-warning system, not only for care but for safety. Taken together, these moments show how active listening at Coney operates on multiple levels: as humble inquiry in creative collaboration, as active listening during audience feedback, and as observational acuity in live performance.

Communication at Coney is not just a practical mechanism but a care practice, strongly connected to care ethics. Through humble inquiry, active listening, and the continual building of mutual trust, Coney fosters a production culture that prepares for the unknown without pretending to control it. In doing so, it models how immersive theatre can hold space for both imaginative play and genuine care.

v. ‘A willingness to plan and keep learning throughout’: The Processual Nature of Care and Acceptance of Imperfection

Care is rarely perfect; it is iterative and adaptive. Responsibility for setting the boundaries of audience behaviour lies with the creators: ‘It’s never the audience’s fault, really... because it’s us, as how we set up the rules of the space’ (Appendix C, ln. 272–274). This attitude reflects a non-punitive, responsive ethic of care, where mistakes are viewed as feedback rather than failure.

Tan echoed this acceptance of uncertainty, describing how care involves planning, presence, and the resilience to adapt in real time. ‘We can prepare ourselves as much as we can... but ultimately it’s very different when you’re interacting with an audience member and you can’t really predict how they’ll respond’ (Appendix F, ln. 668–674). Fortunately, some of this

uncertainty can be managed with existing tools that the interviewees identified during their interviews.

IV. Pre-Performance, In-Performance and Post-Performance Tools for Managing the Audience

In Coney's immersive theatre production *1884*, pre-performance tools play a critical role in equipping production staff to manage audience care and risk. Tools such as playtesting, content guides, and orientation protocols, not only help the team anticipate a range of audience behaviours but also shape how risk is understood and mitigated before a performance begins. From there, the focus pivots to have care occurred during performance. Interestingly, this is where the tools become a little more vague and understudied. At Coney, it is clear that much of in-performance care is based on advanced planning which includes clear escalation plans, and appropriate staff numbers who are comfortable doing what is asked of them. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a note about the post-performance care at *1884*, which was centred around comprehensive feedback opportunities and an unrushed exit plan for the audiences that allowed them the opportunity to chat with staff, if they felt they needed to.

i. 'In watching it over and over again, you learn all the ways that audiences might play':

Playtesting as Preparatory Practice

Uncertainty regarding audience behaviour is a constant in immersive theatre, and *1884* responded to this through structured playtesting. As Ilube observes, 'In watching it over and over again, you learn all the ways that audiences might play' (Appendix C, ln. 259-261). While it is impossible to predict every audience response, particularly unexpected behaviours that may raise

concerns, regular playtesting allows makers to discern patterns in audience engagement and anticipate common deviations. Ilube elaborates:

Planning, planning, planning. But that can come through playtesting, playtesting, playtesting. That's what I mean with the playtest... I now have ten more shows of data of how audiences can play... I wouldn't say [there is] like perfect ethics from the get go, but it's planning, but like a willingness to plan and keep learning throughout. And knowing there will be mistakes, but like how do we deal with them (Appendix C, ln. 943-957).

These insights are vital in defining the boundaries of the performance. Playtesting evolved in scope throughout *1884*'s development. Initial sessions involved three Coney employees, followed by seven teenagers, and eventually groups of twenty and thirty-five participants. This allowed actors to encounter a range of play styles, reinforcing insights previously discussed in this chapter in relation to audience typologies such as socialisers, griefers, explorers, achievers, and the uninterested (Appendix C, ln. 1106-1137).

Care was also expressed through the attentiveness to feedback. Klimis stated, 'it's just making sure that you hear audience feedback and diverse audiences, not just the people who know the show' (Appendix D, ln. 372-375), particularly given that *1884* addresses sensitive themes such as colonialism and race (Appendix D, ln. 287-290).

Yet recruiting diverse playtest audiences remained difficult. While some participants were sourced via partners or access advisors, even established organisations like Coney faced time

constraints that hindered fuller representation. Klimis was transparent about this limitation: ‘this is something we want to do and haven’t done enough, to be fully transparent. Primarily because of time’ (Appendix D, ln. 620-623).

From the venue’s perspective, Sinclair noted the benefit of Coney conducting both R&D and playtesting in situ at Shoreditch Town Hall. This fostered a collaborative understanding of the production’s needs. Notably, house staff were included in playtests. Sinclair attended one herself and reflected that without it, she would have struggled to explain *1884*: ‘trying to explain *1884* in words is quite hard... seeing it done was really, really helpful’ (Appendix E, ln. 91-95).

ii. ‘What’s gonna happen? What are the themes?’: Advance Information and Content Warnings

Klimis stressed the importance of audience care from the outset: ‘making sure that we take care of the audience from before even this day they book the tickets to the moment they leave’ (Appendix D, ln. 306-310). This was achieved through tools such as the project website and a collaboratively written playing audience guide. These included access information and thematic and structural information. Klimis described the playing guide as, ‘generally it’s about being very clear about what the interactive experience is. What’s gonna happen? What are the themes?’ (Appendix D, ln 392-397).

This material was developed by Klimis, Ilube, the venue, an access advisor, and the marketing team (Appendix D, ln. 947). Access advisors were particularly instrumental in developing

content warnings, with Klimis clarifying their function: '[content warnings are] like, what does this show cover. You're responsible for deciding what is a trigger for you' (Appendix D, ln. 924-926). This model balances disclosure with autonomy, inviting potential attendees to engage in a pre-show dialogue if needed (Appendix D, ln. 959-962).

Informing the audience about their role within the experience is also a tool of care. Klimis explained, 'We realised that one of the main reasons that prevent people from joining interactive experiences, [is] the feeling of being judged. Fear of... being put on the spot. Doing something they're not comfortable with' (Appendix D, ln. 400-406). As such, clear and early communication helps mitigate this anxiety and supports the notion of informed consent. The ultimate aim, Klimis asserts, is that 'people understand the type of interactive work it is and they can make an informed decision' (Appendix D, ln. 418-420).

iii. 'Shall we throw fruit?': Setting Boundaries Through Orientation

The in-venue orientation is another key mechanism of care. Delivered by a Coney staff member who remains present throughout the experience, it is supported by house staff ensuring audience attentiveness. Ilube explained, 'The aim is don't let anyone into that room until they've had the briefing... how do you get out of the game? How do you ask questions if you need to? Where's the quiet room' (Appendix C, ln. 1173-1178). Late arrivals received a latecomers packet and were briefed separately.

Ilube also recalled a playtest moment where an audience member suggested, ‘shall we throw fruit’ (Appendix C, ln. 1210-1211)? This comment highlighted the need for setting explicit behavioural boundaries. Immersive formats, especially when successful, can blur the lines between play and reality, potentially prompting inappropriate actions.

Ilube mentioned the struggle of balancing all the information she wanted to pack into the orientation with the average audience member’s attention span, highlighting that there is an art to a good orientation speech. ‘Because I’m so nervous, I think my orientation was even like double the length, and you could talk to [producer] Marie about how we landed on the length we had and how much to tell and how much to let audiences play and also how much to say so that you don’t bore the audience so much they don’t hear the most important stuff’ (Appendix C, ln. 1160-1167).

This return, again, to the importance of time is noteworthy. Klimis also mentioned the importance of ‘time to digest’ (Appendix D, ln. 720-72) as a motivation for their decision to set their pre-show orientations out of the performance world. Klimis summed up the content of all of Coney’s pre-show orientations as ‘whatever makes you feel comfortable is OK’ (Appendix D, ln. 724). The briefing emphasised the opportunity to leave the performance space if they want to. Klimis discussed some of the challenges with leaving any performance.

Nobody wants to leave a show in the middle, especially if it’s quite an intimate audience. So some people feel forced to stay in something they didn’t agree with. So I think it’s just getting people prepared and giving them, at any time, an opportunity to step out. An

opportunity to leave, an opportunity to stop without feeling judged. So that they know how to do it. And they know that nobody's gonna do anything to them, say anything to them if they don't like it. They want to leave forever or just come back later. It's fine. So I think it's about making it OK for people that any kind of participation is good (Appendix D, ln. 677-695).

These orientations are done before every show, with an emphasis that every person who enters the playing space must be briefed. They also cover key concerns about audience behaviour during the orientation. These concerns included vandalising the set (Appendix D, ln. 1041-1054), breaking or stealing props (Appendix D, ln 1061), verbal abuse (Appendix D, ln. 1062-1068) and touching the performers (Appendix D, ln. 1084-1085).

In Jenni Sinclair's experience, the role of house management during orientations is to act as a guide, a role that is amplified by immersive theatre:

I always feel like when people are going to the theatre, there is a preconceived notion of what they're expecting to find once they get there. And so often it doesn't resemble that, and they can find that surprising and can find it difficult to navigate so you're sort of there to help navigate an experience that they're not expecting, or they just don't know how to engage with, by answering questions, being on hand, and so preparing them for the experience (Appendix E, ln. 335-344).

Though sometimes met with laughter, these warnings are essential reminders that immersive performances often have different boundaries than what many audience members might expect

from a theatrical experience and clearly setting those boundaries helps ensure safety and care for all involved.

iv. ‘Prepared to deal with situations’: In-Performance Escalation Plans

In 1884, audience care during performance was structured through a clear division of responsibilities between the immersive theatre company, Coney, and the venue, Shoreditch Town Hall. Coney staff were responsible for in-world management, while out-of-world management was handled by the venue’s house management team. This separation was intentional, allowing both teams to focus on specific forms of care. As Klimis noted, ‘the Coney person is in the room and whose main role is to deal with any emotion of any kind that may be felt’ (Appendix D, ln. 886–890). This framing positioned the Coney staff member as a production caregiver responsible for real-time emotional and psychological support.

Planning for care began well before the audience arrived. The team prepared for scenarios involving disruptive or distressed audience members, including the possibility of an audience member ‘abusing the cast member or... feeling really upset, really triggered, really angry’ (Appendix D, ln. 452–455). A key tool in managing such incidents was an escalation plan: the Coney staff member would first approach the individual, aiming to ‘talk to them and just invite them to leave the room. Have a conversation to see if it’s helpful’ (Appendix D, ln. 907–910), offering ‘any kind of support we can’ (Appendix D, ln. 930). If de-escalation failed, the situation would be passed to the venue’s duty manager, whose role was ultimately ‘to just get that person out’ (Appendix D, ln. 898–900).

Klimis acknowledged that no plan can account for every potential issue in immersive settings but stressed the importance of preparation: ‘It’s getting the right level of staffing and people feel prepared to deal with situations like that’ (Appendix D, ln. 1007–1009). Her emphasis on preparation aligns with Mary LaFrance’s (2013) legal analysis, which includes ‘trained personnel to supervise the spectators’ (p. 580) as a key suggested regulation measure for immersive theatre. Audience care during the performance also involved creating environments for recovery. Sinclair, part of the venue’s front-of-house team, outlined a thorough system for responding to distressed audience members. ‘If somebody looked like they needed an interventional approach or somebody asked to be removed from this space... we would have brought them out [to] the quiet space, and they would have been joined by me or another member of front of house to... see what they needed’ (Appendix E, ln. 294–305). This system went beyond just extraction; the goal was to help the individual feel well enough to rejoin the performance (Appendix E, ln. 295–306). Such a circular care model contrasts with more traditional audience removal approaches, which often end once a patron is removed from the space.

Training emerged as a vital tool for equipping staff with the skills to implement this care model. Sinclair identified several qualifications, first aid, crowd management, and a door supervisor qualification, that enabled her to manage risk more effectively. She explained that the door supervisor training included conflict prevention and customer service, ‘looking after audiences... making sure that there isn’t going to be a problem because everybody is feeling safe and comfortable and happy’ (Appendix E, ln. 145–148). While none of these certifications are specific to immersive theatre, Sinclair emphasized their adaptability: ‘You can take those skills and put them on a much smaller scale... anticipating audience movements or trigger points’

(Appendix E, ln. 166–169). This reiterates the importance of flexibility and transferable skills in immersive production care work.

House management planning was also informed by formal risk assessments. As Sinclair noted, these documents always included a plan for ‘potential unruly behaviour’ (Appendix E, ln. 429), particularly for immersive or interactive events where boundaries are more fluid and traditional audience etiquette is less predictable. Sinclair continued, ‘Those kinds of things are always on every risk assessment, all performances, but would have special attention paid to them for something that was immersive or interactive because those kind of incidents are more likely to occur’ (Appendix E, ln. 434–438).

v. ‘When did you play in a way that surprised you?’: Post-Performance Feedback and Aftercare in 1884

Ilube described a robust culture of feedback at Coney, stating, ‘I think we do a lot at Coney of asking people, when did you play in a way that surprised you’ (Appendix C, ln. 736–738). This kind of question not only invites creative self-reflection but positions the audience as active participants whose subjective responses are valued. This approach was further reinforced by Coney’s collaboration with academic researcher Dr. Astrid Breel, whose role focused on ‘improving audience evaluation and how do you actually get a sense of what audiences have gone through’ (Appendix C, ln. 719–721). This partnership highlights an ongoing investment in evolving feedback strategies grounded in care and responsiveness.

Breel's feedback tools included unconventional questions such as 'how would you describe your experience as a metaphor' (Appendix C, ln. 732–733), which Ilube found 'quite cool' (Appendix C, ln. 729). These questions seek to capture emotional and symbolic dimensions of audience experience, a glimpse into the positive risks, beyond standard quantitative metrics. For Ilube, such feedback was crucial to understanding 'what the piece is doing that's getting people to step slightly outside of their comfort zone, hopefully in a good way' (Appendix C, ln. 749–751). Coney's partnership with Breel extended into a small impact study during the April 2024 run, incorporating interviews and feedback forms (Appendix D, ln. 535–537). This suggests an ongoing effort to build longitudinal understandings of audience engagement and value.

However, the collection of feedback was not without its challenges. Ilube typically prefers gathering feedback in person after the performance, often by informally lingering in the post-show space. Yet, the late start and long runtime of *1884* limited these opportunities. Instead, Coney turned to digital options, including a dedicated website, *188.4 FM*, which featured 'an online memorial where people could leave their reflections' (Appendix D, ln. 557–558). One such tool was the option for audiences to leave voice notes. Ilube appreciated the intimacy of these responses, saying 'the voice notes are really beautiful, but there's not as many as I would have liked, because I think it's quite a high ask if you've seen something to go home and then voice note to the ether your feelings on it' (Appendix C, ln. 772–776).

Written surveys were also used during the development stages, as Ilube noted, 'we've done serious questionnaires at our playtest. Every single playtest we did like a short survey' (Appendix C, ln. 759–761). Despite their utility, Ilube expressed a preference for voice-based feedback: 'if I had my dream way, I would almost create a voice note hangout space after the show and be like please go and voice note the experience because, for me, that's how I get an

actual sense versus just reading surveys’ (Appendix C, ln. 779–783). Her emphasis on vocal, spontaneous forms of feedback underscores an ethos of care that prioritises authentic expression and emotional resonance.

Post-show care extended beyond feedback collection. On the house management side, Coney’s strategy involved creating decompression spaces for the audience. These included a quiet room and continued access to the performance space itself, where Sinclair explained, ‘the performance space itself had no official clearance deadline. Audience members were able to stay inside that space for as long as they needed’ (Appendix E, ln. 564–567). Although drinks were not served post-show, the bar remained open as a social space, enabling audience members to process the experience communally or in conversation with performers.

Despite these provisions, both Ilube and Klimis recognised the limitations of post-show engagement, particularly the diminished willingness of audiences to provide reflective input after an intensive experience. Klimis noted, ‘I don’t think as many people did it as we hoped. I think when people have done a two and half hour live experience, they don’t necessarily want to go online. They just want to go home’ (Appendix D, ln. 562–567). This observation reflects an understanding of audience fatigue and acknowledges the care labour embedded in the act of feedback itself.

In summary, the pre-performance tools used in *1884* demonstrate how immersive theatre makers at Coney strategically employ planning, testing, and transparent communication to anticipate and mitigate risk. Playtesting serves not only as a rehearsal for the creative team but also as a way to forecast and better understand audience dynamics, while advance materials like content guides and orientations establish clear boundaries and empower attendees with informed consent. These

measures foreground a care-first ethos, laying a foundation that supports in-performance responsiveness and post-performance reflection.

V. *1884*: Mapping Care Frameworks through Coney Practices

Coney's immersive production *1884* exemplifies how care ethics can be intentionally woven into the fabric of immersive performance. Through pre-show preparation, informed consent processes, and thoughtful orientation strategies, the company fosters an environment where audience wellbeing is prioritized alongside narrative engagement. This approach reflects an ethic of care rooted not in rigid control, but in responsiveness, relationality, and trust-building between makers and participants.

At the heart of this care infrastructure are the production staff, often less visible but deeply essential. They are the primary caregivers of the immersive audiences, tasked with anticipating risk, managing unpredictability, and ensuring psychological and physical safety. Much of this work, writing safety protocols, rehearsing contingency plans, responding to emotional or behavioural cues in real-time, goes unrecognized, particularly when it is successful, absorbed into the background of the performance. As such, care and safety planning in immersive theatre frequently become forms of invisible labour: critical, emotionally demanding, and under-acknowledged.

Coney also provides several useful insights into tools for a toolkit for immersive theatre audiences grounded in care ethics, which would include practical tools such as collaborative orientation strategies, layered consent mechanisms, advance information via audience playing guides, appropriate staffing numbers for care, and comprehensive feedback opportunities. These

tools function not only to safeguard audiences but to support staff wellbeing and communication throughout the production lifecycle.

The following chapter explores a workshop developed as part of this research to facilitate open communication around risk and care in immersive performances. The workshop functions as a training tool, offering immersive production staff and performance makers a structured, reflective space to co-create safer, more caring working and performance environments.

Chapter 6 - Build Your Own Cult: A Practice-as-Research Approach to Studying Immersive Audience Risk and Care

Up to this point, the thesis has established a focused investigation into how production staff contribute to creating safer, more ethical spaces for audiences in immersive theatre. Immersive performance challenges traditional audience roles by inviting active participation, which introduces complex physical, social, and psychological risks. Despite the growing popularity of immersive theatre, there has been limited research into how those behind the scenes, particularly production teams, manage these risks and care responsibilities.

Chapter 5 revealed significant descriptions of what a care ethic driven company ethos looks like in *1884*, adding additional details to those established in the *Dead Letter No. 9* case study in Chapter 4. Again, comprehensive communication practices grounded in functional frameworks like their access manifesto, easy access for both formal and informal communication to key decision makers, and a willingness to adapt existing frameworks as needed throughout the process to help everyone ‘do their best work’ (Appendix D, ln. 335-336) were notable ways Coney created an ethic of care that permeates their company from start to finish. Furthermore, Chapters 4 and 5 highlighted the extensive pre-planning as one example of the invisible labour done by the production staff to manage risks and provide care for immersive audiences, before closing with discussion of the tools employed by both companies to care for their audiences: playtesting, advance information and content warnings, orientation, in-performance escalation plans, and post-performance feedback and aftercare.

This chapter presents a detailed account of the two Practice-as-Research workshops which, much like stage management, had both administrative and artistic elements. To study the phenomena of risk management for immersive audiences, my workshop triangulated the three key stakeholder experiences: production staff (managing), performance makers (creating) and audiences (experiencing) through various activities in the workshop of developing a ‘cult initiation’ in small groups, discussion of what it might be like to experience the initiation as audiences and what would make them willing to do so, and managing audiences risks through risk assessing the cult initiations and considering how care might function within the activities. This chapter is structured as follows:

1. **Iterative Design Approach:** This section discusses the iterative design used in this Practice-as-Research workshop, connecting it to Nelson’s (2022) PaR model. I will then discuss the aims of the workshop, what worked and what did not, and specific design changes made between each iteration. Notably, it was through reflection on the iterative design approach that a significant finding of miscommunication in the language of risk between different stakeholders became evident.
2. **Defining Care Ethics in Immersive Performance:** This section looks at how the participant data developed through thematic analysis of an in-session Mentimeter survey and post-workshop survey, as well as my reflections came together highlighting how care ethics in immersive performance is evolving into a structured, shared practice focused on anticipatory care, adaptive responsiveness, and institutional accountability. Rather than

seeing care as separate from artistic intent, participants recognized it as essential to creating meaningful, transformative experiences.

3. **Consent as a Key Element of the Language of Risk in Immersive Theatre:** Using the same data collection methods and thematic analysis again, these workshops highlight a shift in immersive theatre from viewing consent as a static agreement to embracing it as an ongoing, ethically grounded process. They advocate for a shared, care-based language of risk, one that prioritizes informed participation, audience autonomy, and mutual responsibility without compromising artistic freedom.
4. **Redesigning a Toolkit for Immersive Theatre Audiences Built on Care Ethics:** The workshops revealed a growing commitment to embedding *care ethics* in immersive theatre through a flexible, co-created toolkit focused on audience safety, informed consent, and staff well-being. Participants emphasized that tools must go beyond one-off measures to become part of a sustained cultural and operational shift, supported by training and company-wide buy-in. A key finding is that care tools are not static checklists but adaptable practices requiring collaboration, emotional intelligence, and systemic support.

Turning now, the next section explores the changes made to the workshop between each iteration based on participant feedback and reflection.

I. Revealing a Risk Language through PaR Insights: Iterative Design and the Need for Translational Communication in Immersive Performance

This section outlines the iterative design process underpinning the Practice-as-Research (PaR) workshops, aligning it with Robin Nelson's (2022) model and reflecting on key design adaptations, successes, and limitations across iterations. The workshops aimed to deepen understanding of risk perception and management within immersive theatre, engaging both production staff and performance makers whose embodied expertise is often underrepresented in scholarly discourse.

While Chapter 3.II outlines the methodological and conceptual foundations of this study in detail, it is helpful to briefly revisit key elements here to contextualise the workshop design. Nelson (2022) argues that Practice-as-Research (PaR) enables researchers to surface forms of tacit knowledge that are embedded in doing, rather than easily verbalised. This is especially relevant to the topic of risk in immersive theatre, where the experience and communication of risk often emerge through embodied interaction and cannot be fully captured through interviews alone. Early stages of this research, particularly the case study phase, revealed that participants' reflections were, reasonably, rooted in their specific occupational roles, either as performance makers or as production staff, limiting opportunities for cross-disciplinary insight. The workshop method was, therefore, developed to create a collaborative space in which those distinct perspectives could come into dialogue through shared activity and structured reflection.

Importantly, the decision to use workshops was driven by a recognition that no existing resource or rehearsal space currently allows immersive-theatre production staff to practise risk communication in real-time, low-pressure settings. Risk procedures are typically developed

administratively through pre-planning or reactively in the moment of need, rather than through practice. As such, there was a clear methodological gap that the workshops aimed to address. Participant feedback reinforced this rationale, with many indicating that what they needed most to improve risk management was not more policy or theoretical guidance, but the opportunity to actively practise navigating risk with others. The workshops embraced this request to fulfil this need, providing a rare chance for practitioners to test language, framing, and care strategies in context.

This move from abstract theorisation to applied experimentation is where the theoretical model of recontextualisation, introduced in Chapter 2 via the work of David Guile (2019), becomes especially relevant. Guile emphasises that knowledge does not travel unchanged from theory to practice; instead, it is reshaped through the goals, values, and interpretive processes of those applying it. First, practitioners engage with theory in light of their understanding of the problem they are trying to solve, in this case, how to manage audience risk and care in immersive environments. Production staff and performance makers approach this problem differently, informed by their training, responsibilities, and priorities. Second, the act of applying knowledge is always value-laden: decisions about what counts as appropriate, ethical, or effective are filtered through professional norms and creative aims. Finally, Guile stresses the importance of inference, how people interpret the actions, assumptions, and intentions of others, and adjust their own thinking accordingly. These dynamics were particularly visible in the workshops, where participants not only tested care-based strategies but also responded to each other's decisions, often reassessing their own positions in the process.

By designing the workshops to foreground this kind of real-time, negotiated learning, the project created a space in which care ethics could move beyond abstract ideals and become a usable

framework for practice. Each iteration of the workshop built on the last, allowing both the structure and content to evolve in response to participant engagement. My facilitation drew directly on my background in stage management, what Smalley (2024) describes as a discipline rooted in communication design, allowing me to shape discussion, maintain focus on key themes, and guide reflection as the workshops unfolded. In this way, the workshops operated not only as a method for gathering data but also as a space of applied recontextualisation: where concepts developed from the case studies could be tested, refined, and transformed through collective, embodied engagement.

i. Adaptations to Workshop Design in Response to the Pilot Study

Following the pilot study, significant adaptations were made to the workshop design to address both logistical and conceptual challenges. One of the foremost issues encountered during the pilot phase was difficulty recruiting participants for in-person workshops (see Chapter 3.II.iv). In response, the format for Workshop One was transitioned to Microsoft Teams. This shift was driven by accessibility concerns and the aim of fostering broader participation across geographic and professional boundaries. By removing barriers related to travel and scheduling, the online delivery enabled greater inclusion of professionals working across diverse sectors of the theatre industry.

A notable limitation of the pilot was the absence of participants from theatre management and technical production roles, which narrowed the scope of discussion on risk in immersive theatre. To rectify this, the recruitment strategy for Workshop One was expanded. Efforts to reach underrepresented professional groups included targeted outreach through industry bodies such as the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT) and the Production Managers' Forum

(PMF). These changes yielded a more balanced representation across artistic, managerial, and technical domains, allowing for a fuller exploration of how risk is conceptualized and operationalized in immersive contexts.

Another insight from the pilot concerned participant knowledge levels. In Turkey, where the pilot was delivered as part of an international theatre conference, the lack of familiarity with immersive theatre among some attendees hindered the depth of discussion. While I initially suspected this might be due to regional differences in immersive theatre exposure (see Chapter 3.II.iv), the online format of Workshop One also drew an international cohort, primarily from Great Britain, the United States, Canada, and Hong Kong, all of whom reported prior familiarity with the field. When asked to self-assess their knowledge, participants responded: 6 – Yes, 2 – Maybe, 0 – No (Appendix L). These responses were corroborated by open-ended definitions of immersive theatre that emphasized key characteristics such as sensory engagement, audience interaction, unpredictability, and world-building (Appendix L). This shared knowledge base allowed the workshop to bypass introductory explanations and move directly into more nuanced conversations about risk.

Language barriers in the pilot also had a considerable impact on the workshop's structure. The need for translation extended the duration of activities and led to the omission of some key discussion components. Workshop One addressed this issue by engaging only English-speaking participants, thereby eliminating the logistical challenges of translation and ensuring that all planned exercises could be delivered within the allotted timeframe.

Finally, the pilot revealed a critical conceptual misunderstanding: several participants interpreted 'audience care' as a form of strategic marketing rather than as practices related to risk

management and post-experience well-being. This was evidenced during a discussion of the Shifter Cult, where when I asked how we might care for cult initiates who were willing to join during a particularly perilous initiation that involved ‘driving a car that a bomb has put in, which would explode if the car goes down 60/km per hour for an hour’ (Appendix K), the two women who created the cult continually tried to convince me and the other participants that the risk was worth it because they cult members can manipulate time. I reiterated that the people we’re trying to protect already agree it’s worth it and are there, ready to get in the car, so how do we care for them? And I was told the risks really aren’t so big for the reward, so we should all be willing to get in the car. I explained that a potential risk is the bomb detonating, so if we assume we cannot remove the bomb, because it is crucial to the experience, what might we do? Have medical care nearby? Make sure the other initiates are kept at a safe distance until their turn in case a different initiate fails. I was again told that it’s probably unlikely the bomb will detonate, and if the initiate succeeds, they get to manipulate time, so they should still give it a go.

I perceived this as underscoring the need for a clearer framework for risk assessment in subsequent workshops and allocated time to review it before getting into the cult building. However, Workshop One’s participants demonstrated baseline familiarity with risk management concepts, rendering an introductory overview unnecessary. As a result, the session could focus on the specificities of risk in immersive theatre, fostering deeper engagement with complex themes such as emotional safety, boundary negotiation, and infrastructural limitations.

ii. Adaptations to Workshop Design in Response to Workshop One

Feedback from Workshop One provided valuable direction for refining the next iteration. One participant, who disclosed a history involving a friend affected by cult dynamics, shared during the group discussions that they felt reassured by the advance information outlining the session's themes. This affirmed the importance of clear pre-workshop communication, especially when content may intersect with sensitive or potentially triggering personal experiences.

Overall, participant responses highlighted the strengths of the workshop's structure. Case studies, breakout room discussions, and the creative task of designing a fictional cult to examine risk implications were particularly well-received: 'I liked the case studies used and the breakout rooms. The creative element of making your own cult then discussing risk implications was great to know how your own work can be viewed by others' (Appendix L), 'I very much enjoyed making my cult, particularly because we could make it with complete regard for care and then work out ways to build it in later – highlighting how hard that is to do!' (Appendix L). Participants noted 'the breakdown of risk into different categories^[1] not normally part of a standard risk assessment was extremely useful' (Appendix L).

Nonetheless, several areas for improvement emerged. Some participants requested clearer instructions for the cult-building exercise, particularly at its outset, to reduce ambiguity. Additionally, one participant found navigating between different platforms and screens (such as switching between Microsoft Teams and Mentimeter) disorienting, suggesting that a more streamlined format could enhance the user experience.

Any lingering concerns about possible engagement and delivery issues when pivoting to an online format were quelled during Workshop One. Digital delivery facilitated broad participation without detracting from engagement or discussion quality. This underscored the value of continuing to offer remote access in future iterations, especially as a means of improving reach, flexibility, and inclusivity.

Conceptually, one key area for growth involved recalibrating the balance between risk-taking and risk mitigation. Discussions in Workshop One often defaulted to identifying and eliminating hazards, with less attention paid to how performance environments can sustain artistic intensity while still ensuring participant safety. I recognized that if future cohorts lacked a critical mass of performance makers, who often advocated for the positive value of risk during the workshops, I would need to more actively foreground the importance of risk as an aesthetic and experiential feature, not just a liability to be controlled.

In response to feedback around accessibility, I introduced a dedicated webpage ahead of Workshop Two. This resource consolidated all key documents, provided links to readings, and included a tutorial video on using Mentimeter, ensuring that participants, especially those unfamiliar with digital tools, could arrive well-prepared and confident in navigating the workshop's interactive components.

Workshop Two took place online on 25 November 2024 via Microsoft Teams. The format and core structure remained consistent with Workshop One (see Appendix I for running order).

Despite 12 participants registering, only three attended. While the turnout was unexpectedly low, the session still yielded meaningful engagement and opportunities for refinement.

The Mentimeter poll at the beginning of the session indicated a mix of backgrounds: one performer and two academics (Appendix N). Concerned that this might suggest limited production or design experience, I followed up verbally to clarify participants' professional contexts. In fact, the group included one designer with a casual interest in immersive theatre and two performance makers, one of whom regularly engaged with risk management in a non-theatrical professional setting. This reassured me that the cohort retained relevant experience to support in-depth discussion.

The smaller group allowed for an intimate and focused workshop. As all participants were familiar with immersive theatre, the session could bypass foundational risk assessment content developed in response to the confusion in the Pilot Study and devote more time to developing and analyzing the fictional cults. One notable challenge was a participant who faced ongoing audio issues and relied on the chat function throughout the session. To maintain group cohesion and support their engagement, I joined this participant for the breakout activity. Together, we co-created a fictional cult, which unexpectedly provided additional insights into workshop dynamics.

Initially, I was concerned that my participation in the cult-building process might influence the discussion or bias outcomes. However, the experience demonstrated that my facilitation role was not significantly altered by joining the exercise. Much as in Workshop One, my role remained

centred on guiding risk assessment and drawing out key themes from the group's creative work. If anything, the experience served as an informal test of the workshop's adaptability and confirmed the robustness of its structure across varying participant configurations.

iii. Adaptations for Future Workshops

Reflections from Workshop Two surfaced several considerations for refining future iterations of the workshop. One immediate challenge was the unexpectedly small participant group, which required me to take an active role in the cult-building exercise. While this shift in facilitation expanded my mental workload and slightly blurred the boundary between observer and participant, it also proved instructive. Participating directly allowed me to explore risk management discourse from within the creative process, a dynamic that aligns with Practice-as-Research principles and mirrors how production staff often engage during rehearsal and performance contexts. Nonetheless, a larger participant pool in future workshops would ideally allow for a more traditional facilitation model, reducing the possibility of unintentional bias introduced through my involvement in core activities.

Additional practical enhancements were recommended to improve the onboarding experience and establish a more welcoming tone. Suggestions included adding background music, a visible countdown timer, and introductory landing text as participants enter the digital space. These small but meaningful changes could ease early-session uncertainty and support a smoother transition into the workshop's interactive components.

Feedback about the technological setup revealed differing participant preferences. While some participants from Workshop One found the use of multiple platforms disjointed, participants in Workshop Two appreciated tools like Mentimeter for enhancing engagement. This divergence highlights the subjective nature of experience and serves as a reminder to approach feedback with nuance. Rather than pursuing a single ‘ideal’ setup, future workshops should prioritize clarity in tech instructions and remain flexible enough to accommodate a range of user preferences and technological literacies; this echoes some of the considerations around tools discussed later in this chapter (section 3.iii) for immersive audiences.

Ultimately, these reflections affirm the value of adaptability in workshop facilitation. Although a consistent structure is important for maintaining research integrity and comparability across sessions, immersive and participatory formats benefit from fluid, responsive design. By remaining attentive to participants’ evolving needs and experiences, the workshop can continue to balance methodological rigor with care, creativity, and inclusivity.

iv. Reflection: Revealing the Two Languages of Risk Through Workshop Iterations

Although much of the direct work on the language of risk during the workshop focused on how to clearly communicate consent, the most telling aspect of the language of risk became evident as I reflected on some of the development issues with communicating risk management frameworks across the pilot study and both workshops when I tried to encourage participants to risk assess

their cults. This resulted in a key finding. The identification of two distinct but often overlapping *languages of risk* within immersive theatre practice. These languages, risk as a selling point and risk as an operational concern, reflect different conceptual framings that influence both the production and reception of immersive experiences.

The first language, *risk as a selling point*, positions danger, uncertainty, and boundary-pushing as central to the marketing and artistic ethos of immersive performance. Here, risk is framed *positively*. It is thrilling, unpredictable, and tied to emotional and psychological intensity. This framing is evident in how immersive theatre is often promoted, emphasizing elements such as physical proximity, personal challenge, and psychological immersion. These features are not merely tolerated; they are *desired* and even integral to the artistic vision. This was first evidenced in the pilot study with the students who continually focused on how to convince others to join their cult rather than applying an occupational risk assessment. I had to redirect my workshop participants' language from trying to convince others why the cult would be fun to join and what prospective members might gain by joining it, to focus on the potential negative side effects from engaging with their initiation ceremony.

In contrast, the second language, *risk as an operational concern*, operates within the domains of health and safety, accessibility, and safeguarding. It requires a risk assessment framework rooted in identifying and mitigating *negative* risks. This language utilises risk mitigation frameworks to manage, communicate, and reduce potential harms, not just for audiences but also for performers and production staff.

Interestingly, in Workshop One, which was entirely production staff, the same issues that arose in the pilot never occurred. I did not have to utilise my new plan to expand on how basic risk assessment functions. There was absolutely no conflation with marketing language. However, in Workshop Two, which was a mix of performance makers, who happened to also all have additional risk management training, at times I did gently remind the focus was not on marketing the cult during one of the cult orientation risk mitigation discussions, assured them we were focused on the potential cult members already at the orientation, and the participants immediately pivoted their focus to an occupational health and safety response. This may have been helped along by the fact that all participants in Workshop Two had some level of formal health and safety training in their backgrounds, even if they were primarily performance makers.

Importantly, these findings are tied back to both the pilot study and Section I of this chapter, where my early observations flagged inconsistent or unclear delivery methods as a challenge in facilitating conversations around how to manage some of the risk. Initially framed as an issue of inadequate preparation, these moments, upon further reflection, revealed deeper insights into the coexistence of competing priorities and a miscommunication that was occurring. What seemed to be unclear communication was, in many cases, a manifestation of the tension between the *artistic* desire to preserve the *positive aspects* of risk and the *operational* imperative to mitigate the *negative* ones.

This recognition suggests that rather than viewing the two languages of risk as oppositional, a **translational approach**, one that makes space for both meanings, can help foster more

sustainable and ethically grounded immersive practices. While this is a very early-stage finding, it is one of the most interesting, as highlighting the difference between *positive* and *negative* risks for production staff can help improve a long-standing resistance in the language of risk communication among theatre professionals.

II. Towards Defining Care Ethics in Immersive Performance

This section analyses data collected from two Practice-as-Research workshops to explore how care ethics are understood, articulated, and operationalised within immersive performance contexts. Drawing from Joan Tronto's (1993) initial framework of care, which identifies four interrelated phases (see Chapter 2.IX): caring about, caring for, caregiving, and care-receiving, this chapter examines how workshop participants conceptualised and enacted care across different stages of immersive theatre production and facilitation.

Tronto's framework is particularly useful in immersive performance, where audience interaction and co-presence blur traditional boundaries. 'Caring about' requires attentiveness to the potential emotional, physical, and psychological risks for audiences; 'caring for' entails accepting responsibility to mitigate these; 'caregiving' involves implementing safe, supportive practices; and 'care-receiving' refers to recognising and responding to audience feedback, both immediate and post-performance. In this section, workshop participants shared several times what care looks like at different stages, which provides suggestions for what a care ethic of immersive theatre might look like.

Care in immersive performance is relational and processual, unfolding across design, rehearsal, facilitation, and post-show reflection. For production staff, this ethical labour is intersectional: balancing risk, creative expression, inclusivity, and occupational safety. The workshops presented a rich landscape of implicit practices and explicit ethical framings that inform how care operates within the industry.

i. Workshop One Data

The first workshop involved participants with strong backgrounds in production and occupational health and safety. Early discussions revealed a notable divergence in how ‘care’ was interpreted. Some participants understood it in literal, procedural terms (e.g., content warnings, first aid), while others approached it as a broader, more abstract value embedded in the creative process. These latter views are the focus of this section, while a closer look at tools highlighted during the workshop will be discussed in Section 3.3.

When prompted via Menti with the question, ‘What might the moments right after your initiation ritual look like for your initiates?’ participants’ responses offered varied but insightful glimpses into how aftercare was imagined:

- ‘Don’t chuck them out straight away – allow for a gentle return to normality’ (Appendix L)
- ‘I like the idea of a ritualised end to the experience and yes, bars post show are good compression outlets’ (Appendix L)

- ‘Support for them returning to their normality, mental health support and check ins’
(Appendix L)
- ‘Not being rushed out of a space – given time and open discussion with staff/others’
(Appendix L)
- ‘In addition to directly post... I think there should be post event check in, to share response after it’s well internalized/processed perhaps in survey’ (Appendix L)

These responses explicitly reflect Tronto’s ‘care-receiving’ phase, emphasising the importance of allowing audiences to process and articulate their experience after the event. The insistence on decompression time, mental health support, and structured post-event communication all reflect a sustained duration of post-performance care. It is notable how often the role of time, specifically slow time, recurred.

Post-workshop survey data further elucidated how participants imagined audience care:

- ‘Put their experience before your artistic ideals’ (Appendix M)
- ‘Post show care = debrief session, care package’ (Appendix M)
- ‘Providing content warning and expectations on the website, prior to purchasing a ticket, in the foyer before the event, in an announcement before the event, in all marketing materials. As well as having an aftercare plan, including spaces both quiet and social, leaflets for support systems and a way they can contact the company.’ (Appendix M)
- ‘Providing aftercare, providing information ahead of the event, good management and training of staff, appropriate staff numbers and alternative spaces’ (Appendix M)

- ‘Clear information about the extent of participation, content warnings, orientation before entering, management during performance, ritualised closings, decompression spaces, aftercare’ (Appendix M)
- ‘Relationship building, clear and empathetic information, guided post-event follow-up’ (Appendix M)
- ‘Ensuring that all were safe, able to participate equally, that they suffered no harm and were not exposed to risk. That they are decompressed and supported. That they know what sort of thing they will be 'exposed to' and that they give consent. They can leave and can be supported if affected. After care is important’ (Appendix M)

The responses in Appendix M reveal that an ethic of care in immersive theatre is not reducible to a fixed set of tools or protocols, but rather emerges as a philosophical orientation, one grounded in relationality, transparency, and consent. Care, then, is not simply about mitigating harm post-performance. It is embedded across the entire arc of the experience, from initial contact to aftercare.

A key ethical principle evident in the data is prioritizing the audience's well-being over artistic ego, captured succinctly in the call to ‘put their experience before your artistic ideals.’ This is certainly a charged statement, but it can highlight the perception that care as a practice involves humility and responsiveness, where creators centre the needs and capacities of participants, not just their own creative vision.

This ethos is evident in how multiple respondents describe pre-performance care as foundational for the audience to determine their own needs. Care begins well before audience members enter the space. As one participant noted, this involves ‘providing content warning and expectations on the website, prior to purchasing a ticket... in all marketing materials’ (Appendix M), ensuring that consent is informed and ongoing. This repeated emphasis on clear, accessible, and empathetic communication suggests that care is inseparable from transparency, an ethic that honors audience autonomy.

Further, care is framed as structural and systemic, not simply affective. It involves institutional planning, such as ‘good management and training of staff’ (Appendix M) and ‘appropriate staff numbers’ (Appendix M). These insights highlight a model of care that is embedded into the production architecture, not merely an afterthought.

Several participants offer that a core element of care is ‘aftercare’, but what does that really mean? While tools such as ‘care packages’ (Appendix M), ‘decompression spaces’ (Appendix M) and ‘ritualised closings’ (Appendix M) are named, they point to broader frameworks of containment and reintegration, a commitment to ensuring participants are not only prepared for what they may encounter, but also supported as they process and exit. These structures respond to what one participant described as the need to ensure audiences ‘suffer no harm and were not exposed to risk... [and are] decompressed and supported’ (Appendix M). Additionally, the

importance of post-performance feedback is crucial to confirming that the aftercare is appropriate.

Perhaps most significantly, this ethic of care is framed as relational, centred on ‘relationship building’ (Appendix M). One element of that relationship building highlighted in the responses was ‘guided post-event follow-up’ (Appendix M), again referencing the role of duration in immersive theatre, extending it now to encompass what care looks like as well. This underlines that care in immersive theatre should be reciprocal and ongoing. It requires creators to remain attuned to how experiences land, linger, and evolve in the lives of participants. What emerges from these responses is not only a checklist, but a malleable framework that embed care into the infrastructure of the audience risk management tools.

My journal reflections from Workshop One focused on the operational and artistic tensions within immersive theatre. There is a hint of this mindset in the survey response, ‘put their experience before your artistic ideals’ (Appendix M), a response that seems less likely to come from a performance maker; however, this cohort was all production staff. Participants, particularly those trained in occupational health and safety, generally defaulted to risk elimination, a logical response in traditional work contexts and aligned with much of the training that is common to occupational health and safety. However, complete risk elimination was acknowledged to be incompatible with immersive theatre’s reliance on *positive* artistic risks such as unpredictability and emotional engagement, indicating a need to lean into developing safe systems of work.

ii. Workshop Two Data

Workshop Two involved a smaller, more interdisciplinary group comprising both performers and designers. This shift in participant demographics contributed to a more expansive and nuanced engagement with the ethics of care.

In response to the same Menti question about post-initiation rituals, participants in Workshop Two gave answers that extended the emotional and psychological scope of aftercare:

- ‘Check-ins regularly. Exit points discrete and obvious. Activities that help to engender a sense of psychological safety – reassurance, recognition, positive affirmations, choices offered’ (Appendix N)
- ‘Support area with tools for processing/rejoining – music, gentle environment, meditation space. Closing session activities. Follow up text/email active offer. Let them back in [the] room without us.’ (Appendix N)
- ‘Check-in, make sure people can regulate after intense physical activity, check for any sensory issues/overwhelm’ (Appendix N)

These responses acknowledge the ongoing state of care in immersive performance with the repeated mention of ‘check-in’ (Appendix N). These check-ins also rely heavily on active observation from the production staff. One participant also highlighted what psychological safety might look like: ‘reassurance, recognition, positive affirmations, choices offered’ (Appendix N).

This shift is further supported by post-workshop survey responses:

- ‘Offering additional supports, after care, dedicated staff and resources for risk management and engagement.’ (Appendix O)
- ‘Accessible and inclusive intentions backed up by thoughtful and deliberate actions to ensure all, and particularly those who may be disadvantaged, feel able to engage and participate fully and without fear or long term harm or judgement.’ (Appendix O)
- ‘Practically working to create a safe experience alongside crafting the artistic product, building options for informed consent and support into the show based on a detailed understanding of the various risks of the specific experience and good facilitation practice more broadly.’ (Appendix O)

Here, we see explicit ethical frameworks being articulated in terms such as: ‘informed consent’ (Appendix O), ‘dedicated resources’ (Appendix O) and ‘detailed understanding’ (Appendix O) of risks. These concepts also signal an intentional move to embed care into the infrastructure of performance-making rather than treat it as post-hoc mitigation.

Workshop Two discussions also engaged with concrete ethical dilemmas, such as managing surprise or secrecy without violating informed consent, accommodating neurodivergent or disabled audience members, and defining staff responsibilities during moments of audience distress. These moments reveal a collective grappling with ethical design in immersive performance, a field that inherently courts risk and emotional intensity.

iii. Reflection: A Call for Explicit Ethical Frameworks and Deliberate Strategies

Across both workshops, care ethics was increasingly framed through explicit, deliberate strategies. Participants articulated care not merely as a philosophical concept but as an actionable responsibility. Tools identified to action care included pre-show content warnings, transparent communication, post-show decompression spaces, and clear staff roles.

What emerged was not a shared vocabulary in terms of language, but a convergence in ethical commitments. Despite varied terminology, participants across both workshops valued anticipatory care (content warnings, orientation), adaptive responsiveness (check-ins, exit points), and institutional accountability (staffing, resources, follow-up protocols). This marks a step toward formalising care ethics not only as operational good practice but as a conceptual pillar within immersive performance methodologies.

III. Nuancing Immersive Theatre's Languages of Risk: Communicating Consent

i. Workshop One

In Workshop One, data derived from live Menti responses and a post-workshop survey illuminate how participants conceptualize consent and risk, offering insights into both their internalized expectations. During the live Menti session, participants rejected the notion that the mere act of purchasing a ticket could constitute informed consent to engage with immersive performance risks. Specifically, when asked whether buying a ticket is enough to secure consent, responses unanimously indicated 'No' (Appendix L). This unequivocal response signals an

awareness among participants that consent must be actively and explicitly granted rather than assumed through transaction.

Further probing into the elements that participants deem necessary for informed consent elicited several direct responses regarding the pre-show information they require. Participants were asked, ‘What do you want from shows before consenting to them?’ and their answers pointed to a desire for detailed disclosures about the nature and requirements of participation. Direct quotes from the session include broad responses such as ‘The extent of participation’ (Appendix L) and more nuanced descriptions of what that might look like, such as ‘Whether I will be singled out or asked to do things in front of others. The length of the show’ (Appendix L). Additional responses, ‘How much participation will be required’ (Appendix L) and ‘Content information/warnings. Audience expectations eg physical participation... Location, running time, are seats available’ (Appendix L), further underscore a demand for clarity about both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of participation. One participant also highlighted wanting to know what risks they would be undertaking, stating ‘Physical and psychological effects/risks involved’ (Appendix L), which points to an underlying anxiety about the tangible risks posed by immersive experiences, heightened because they are unknown (Slovic & Peters, 2006).

The post-workshop survey extended these insights by asking participants to define what constitutes informed consent. The array of responses suggests that participants hold a multifaceted view of consent that goes beyond a single moment of agreement. Some responses include ‘clear, fully explained, able to opt out or active opting in’ (Appendix M) and ‘Direct

questions that can be answered with yes and no' (Appendix M). Others emphasized participant agency and the importance of flexibility, noting 'Being able to volunteer your consent and remove it when needed.' (Appendix M) and 'Clear information on what one expects from the audience' (Appendix M). Further responses articulated a comprehensive understanding of consent, with participants describing it as 'consent that is voluntary and informed - all risks etc explained in advance of experience' (Appendix M), and asserting that it should involve 'Providing all available information regarding the risks; opt-in; easy to withdraw; voluntary and informed' (Appendix M). There was also a recognition of the need to account for diverse audience backgrounds, as indicated by 'The necessary information to make decision in consideration of lowest common denominator patron' (Appendix M), and a focus on transparency: 'Knowing what you are signing up for, what you may be exposed to/what may be required of you and what the risks may be' (Appendix M).

Collectively, these responses indicate that while marketing discourses in immersive theatre may privilege the appeal of risk as an artistic tool, participants still demand detailed, honest, and dynamic communication regarding the practical implications of such risk. This insistence on detailed consent information highlights an area of tension that will be further interrogated in the subsequent data analysis.

ii. Workshop Two

Workshop Two demonstrated a more developed and reflective engagement with the tension between aesthetic risk and care, particularly in relation to informed consent and audience agency. While some of the themes echoed those from Workshop One, participants in this session articulated a deeper concern for how to balance the emotional and immersive power of performance with the ethical obligations of audience safeguarding.

Once again, during the live Menti session, participants unanimously agreed that the act of purchasing a ticket is not sufficient to constitute informed consent (0 – Yes, 3 – No) (Appendix N). This reiterates a shared understanding that consent cannot be passively assumed through commercial interaction but must instead be actively and deliberately negotiated.

When asked what they wanted to know before consenting to participate in a performance, responses revealed a desire for specific, actionable, and context-sensitive information. Participants highlighted a need for ‘themes and trigger warnings’ (Appendix N) and detailed information about physical interactions: ‘Whether I will be physically touched, how. What level of engagement is required and how to opt out. Financial costs. Heightened risks before ‘reasonable’ (Appendix N). Another participant emphasized the importance of exit strategies and role clarity: ‘How to leave at any point in the experience, ways to either engage or stay away from performers that they will be able to understand & respect within the world of the piece’ (Appendix N). This response is particularly illustrative of the workshop’s broader focus on

ensuring that care is integrated into the *design* of the aesthetic experience itself, not merely attached to it as a procedural afterthought.

Post-workshop survey data reflected a similarly thoughtful approach. One participant wrote that informed consent requires ‘knowing the risks and having [the] option to withdraw at any point’ (Appendix O), while another emphasized cognitive clarity and autonomy: ‘To have [the] ability to understand, retain and communicate a decision having been provided with all relevant information to do so’ (Appendix O). A third participant described informed consent as involving ‘voluntarily opting into the experience with an understanding of what is involved and particularly what their options are to exercise agency and change their choices at any point (e.g. leave the experience, communicate a boundary etc.)’ (Appendix O).

Notably, the data from Workshop Two demonstrates a more sophisticated engagement with the ethical tension between aesthetic risk and care. Participants not only identified the practical mechanisms through which risk might be communicated and mitigated but also emphasised how these must be embedded within the dramaturgy and world-building of the performance itself. This perspective challenges models of after-the-fact risk management and instead proposes an ethics of care that is coextensive with the creative process.

iii. Reflection: Carefully Speaking the Language of Risk Through Examination of Consent Practices

These two workshops collectively nuance and advance the development of a language of risk in immersive theatre by foregrounding the ethical imperatives of care and informed consent as central, rather than peripheral, to artistic practice. What emerges from this section is a discernible shift away from consent as a static, transactional event, implied through ticket purchase or pre-show agreement, toward an understanding of consent as dynamic, contextually responsive, and ethically grounded.

Participants across both workshops articulated a clear demand for multi-dimensional, accessible, and timely information about the nature of participation, potential risks, and avenues for withdrawal. The recurring emphasis on audience autonomy, clarity of expectations, and communication of risk, ranging from the physical to the psychological, signals a critical awareness of the need to decouple immersive theatre's aesthetic allure from the often-unspoken risks it may entail.

Taken together, the workshops reveal a growing appetite among practitioners and audiences alike for a risk discourse that does not oppose artistic freedom but instead enhances it through a framework of mutual respect and informed participation. This section therefore argues for a language of risk that is not only legible to both artists and audiences but also grounded in care ethics, an approach that repositions risk as a shared, negotiated responsibility rather than a

one-sided provocation. This foundation will inform the subsequent analysis of how such language might be practically embedded within immersive theatre's operational and aesthetic structures.

IV. Reimagining a Toolkit: Designing Immersive Theatre with Care Ethics at the Core

While the previous responses explored what the participants want to know to consent adequately, this section examines the actual tools identified for production staff use in gaining that consent and caring for the audience before, during and after performance. This section proposes how care ethics can be operationalized through a practical, co-created toolkit. Informed by real-time Mentimeter data gathered during the workshop, post-workshop surveys, and my reflections as facilitator, this section demonstrates how immersive production teams might imagine, adopt, and adapt care-driven tools. Importantly, it also explores the barriers and knowledge gaps that must be acknowledged in this process.

Care ethics, as proposed by theorists such as Tronto (1993; 2015) and Maurice Hamington (2024), emphasizes attentiveness, humble inquiries, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. Applying this to immersive theatre invites production teams to think not only about safety in physical terms, but also emotional, psychological, and social well-being, before, during, and after a performance.

The challenge lies in operationalizing these values within the often-fractured and resource-constrained realities of live production. What emerged clearly across both workshops is that tools, whether checklists, rituals, frameworks, or training, must not be static. They must be flexible, transparent, and audience-centred, with room for production teams to adapt based on scale, context, and available support. Despite the need to be open to adaptation, these tools still provide a valuable starting point for production staff to gain competence in care for their audiences in immersive performances.

i. Workshop 1: Where Did Participants See the Need for Tools?

Participants voiced a strong consensus that clear and consistent communication about risk is central to audience care. When asked how information about risky elements of a show could be shared, responses included: ‘Via website, ticket/booking pages, dedicated social media posts, display signs at the entrance’ (Appendix L) and ‘Consent forms (if they want to participate, despite knowing the risky elements, they are partially responsible for wanting to participate)’ (Appendix L). These insights support the case for a multi-platform communication strategy that makes critical information accessible and affirmatively visible at multiple audience touchpoints: from pre-purchase to the foyer, and through in-person front-of-house (FoH) interactions.

Participants’ suggestions pointed to a toolkit that could include templated risk language for websites, digital brochures with embedded warnings, signage guides, and consent documentation

designed to prompt informed decision-making rather than absolve producers of responsibility. This desire among the workshop participants to make sure audiences' understand what they are consenting to may help shift the performance into this stage of mutual responsibility for safety in immersive productions.

The post-workshop survey responses added further granularity to this vision. One respondent wrote, 'communication, back up during the event, breakout spaces, surveys' (Appendix M), underscoring the importance of care continuing into the post-performance environment. Others noted tools such as 'ritualised closings, resource sharing for continued engagement/care afterwards, trained staff' (Appendix M) and 'exit strategies and trigger warnings. Support before, during and after. Consent forms. Debriefing sessions' (Appendix M). This presents a layered understanding of care: pre-performance, in-performance, and post-performance phases, each requiring its own tools for support.

ii. Evidence of Gaps: Responsibility, Feasibility, and Training

However, the workshop data also surfaced significant concerns and knowledge gaps that must inform the toolkit's development. When asked about concerns with the use of care tools, several participants expressed frustrations about their use, 'audiences don't read pre show comms! Group dynamics and alcohol hampers consent' (Appendix M) and 'my biggest issue with any immersive experience is the problem of common sense' (Appendix M). This highlights the issue

faced by production teams. Even the most thoughtfully designed protocols risk failure in implementation due to audience behaviour or contextual unpredictability.

Returning to possible issues, the importance of a care driven company ethos appears, when one participant highlighted a major roadblock to caring for the audiences as ‘trying to get producers to buy in!’ (Appendix M). One particularly striking theme was that care often seems to be lacking for the production staff, which in turn may hinder their ability to care for the audiences. As one participant noted, ‘People are always unpredictable and there must be ways for staff to also report discomfort and get assistance’ (Appendix M). Another shared that their main concern was ‘risk to staff’ (Appendix M). The inclusion of staff-facing care tools, such as staff debriefs, internal reporting channels, and mental health first aid training, emerges as an ethical imperative.

Participants also voiced a need for competency-building training. When asked if they needed training to use these tools effectively, responses included ‘mental health first aid’ (Appendix M), ‘post show care in particular’ (Appendix M) and ‘training on effective discomfort care’ (Appendix M). These answers suggest that even experienced production staff feel under-prepared to manage the complexities of immersive care. Importantly, a participant reflected, ‘I think I probably need to do some immersive events to gain experience on how best to use those tools (so that it isn’t a blunt instrument)’ (Appendix M), reminding us that the value of care tools is not simply in their presence, but in the emotionally intelligent deployment of them.

iii. Workshop 2: Deepening the Design Through Introduction of Ethics

In Workshop 2, participants engaged more directly with the idea of care tools, often developing frameworks organically through collective reflection. While their responses echoed many themes from Workshop 1, participants demonstrated an increasingly nuanced and systemic understanding of care, particularly its embeddedness in the culture of theatre-making.

When asked through Mentimeter how information about risky elements of a performance might best be shared, participants identified multiple modalities and stages for communication: ‘Tickets info, entrance signs, text message notifications with details & consent, host/guide, warning labels’ (Appendix N). Others stressed the importance of layering formats and delivery modes: ‘At point of purchase. On entrance to event. Online. At beginning of performance. In written, audio and visual formats’ (Appendix N). One response emphasized the value of ‘a live induction process before the experience begins’ (Appendix N), creating a connection between the existing tool of orientation and the importance of using it to obtain consent from audiences.

Post-workshop survey responses offered concrete tools with specific aims, such as aftercare, information delivery, and co-created boundary-setting. These included: ‘Follow-up contacts, resources, and information about risks’ (Appendix O) and ‘survey, peer support, information sheets, check-in’ (Appendix O). A particularly rich response outlined an integrated, care-led design philosophy:

Clear information and consistent communication about risk, content, types of activities etc. in a range of formats delivered with the same attention as the material itself (i.e. not as an add-on or in a way that encourages disengagement), possibly a basic code for the experience (e.g. ways to engage or stay away from performers that performers/staff will be able to understand and respect within the world of the piece), ways to enable the containment of what might be an intense experience within that theatrical space, adequate resources and staff training to ensure smooth running as much as possible. (Appendix O)

This vision explicitly rejects care as a secondary concern and argues instead for its full integration into both the narrative architecture and production logistics of immersive work. The suggestion of ‘a basic code for the experience’ (Appendix O) is particularly notable, as it implies an internal logic or shared language within the world of the piece, an embedded ethics understood by both staff and audiences that operates within the immersive environment. Setting this code together with the audience would allow for the operation of these rules tacitly within the performance environment, providing care while minimising potential aesthetic disruptions to the performance.

At the same time, Workshop 2 surfaced important concerns and limitations around care tool implementation. Asked about potential problems with using these tools, one participant responded: ‘Meaningful consent - making sure people are informed adequately and multiple channels/formats where necessary’ (Appendix O). Others expressed scepticism about reach and effectiveness: ‘May not reach someone who needs it or be insufficient in scope and intention’

(Appendix O). One participant highlighted a deeper, systemic problem, circling back to the importance of the company culture:

I think the biggest issue is the culture change needed to see this implemented fully with the attention and care it requires. In my experience the world of theatre often feels like it is at odds with concerns around safety, boundaries and care, and at the moment performers might also be seen as expendable/replaceable so their experiences at work might not be a concern for production or management (similar for students/volunteers/collaborators in an informal arrangement). This should be an approach adopted by everyone on the creative team/production side for it to work.

(Appendix O)

This response marks a critical shift in the data from tool design toward institutional critique and highlights again a struggling language of risk that exists in immersive theatre at present. It reflects an understanding that the success of any care-driven toolkit is not merely technical or instructional but cultural. The participant directly connects the precarious labour conditions of immersive artists with systemic barriers to embedding care, pointing to the disposability of performers and production staff as a structural impediment to ethical practice.

The post-survey also captured ongoing professional development needs. When asked whether they required further training to effectively use care tools in future work, two participants answered 'Maybe' and one answered 'Yes' (Appendix O). When asked what specific areas of

training they felt they needed, responses reflect the high-stakes balancing act that care in immersive theatre entails:

- ‘Managing trade-offs of risk and theatre experience; considerations for production (legal, financial, serious physical harms, insurance) vs artistic experience’ (Appendix O)
- ‘Level of appropriate risk to tools and warnings. A graded scale’ (Appendix O)
- ‘While I have had experience with most of these aspects, I feel I would benefit from further practical training and opportunities to practice... It would help me feel more confident and secure in my understanding of the issues involved and in my abilities to navigate these, particularly as an artist with a portfolio career who is not solely focused on immersive work but might be called to be part of an experience (that might also be experimental and daring artistically) at short notice and with minimal training’ (Appendix O)

These responses underscore the importance of iterative, experiential training; however, they also acknowledge the deficiency of these opportunities to practice these skills. Participants increasingly moved from discussing tools as isolated interventions to seeing them as scaffolding for broader reach of care with minimal disruption to the artistic performance.

iv. Reflection: Toward a Care-Centred Toolkit

Based on the workshops, a care-centred toolkit would ideally be modular, scalable, and flexible, tailored to the specificities of the show, the audience, and the team. It might include:

- **Pre-show Communication Templates:** Sample risk language, platform-specific comms (e.g., Instagram vs. email), and FAQs addressing audience anxieties.
- **Consent and Orientation Tools:** Opt-in scripts, guided entry rituals, ‘choose-your-level’ interactions.
- **In-Performance Supports:** Clear identification of staff (e.g., using lanyards), signage for decompression rooms, Front of House scripts for sensitive disclosures.
- **Post-Performance Protocols:** Sample debrief structures, digital follow-ups, curated support resources.
- **Training Modules:** Guidance on implementing the above, especially for freelance or under-resourced teams.

Crucially, these tools must be ethically grounded but operationally feasible. One post-workshop suggestion proposed ‘an online resource - maybe even an interactive R[isk] A[ssessment] template for use?’ (Appendix M), which could become a digital manifestation of the toolkit, accessible and adaptable by producers across the sector.

The workshops reinforced that care tools are not a single action but a multi-part toolkit. Making the toolkit operational demands continual reflection, experimentation, and adaptation.

Participants not only named what tools were missing but offered visions of how immersive care might be structured, rehearsed, and embedded. They also reminded us that ethical frameworks must be made actionable through appropriate training and collaboration.

In future iterations of this workshop, co-design with mental health specialists or therapists may be vital. Such interdisciplinary collaboration could address the knowledge gaps and emotional labour identified by participants. Ultimately, the data suggests that immersive theatre production staff are ready and willing to imagine new paradigms of audience safety, but they need infrastructural support to do so. A care-centred toolkit, developed through collaborative design and anchored in care ethics, offers not only a set of practical instruments but a cultural shift in how we understand the responsibilities of making immersive work.

V. Toward Safer Unsafe Spaces: From PaR Discoveries to Reimagining An Augmented Care Ethics Approach to Reconstitute Risk Management for Audience Handling in Immersive Theatre

This chapter has demonstrated the value of iterative Practice-as-Research (PaR) in both refining the workshop design and generating conceptual insights into how risk and care are communicated and understood in immersive theatre. Through a cycle of planning, facilitation, and reflection, the workshop evolved in response to participant engagement, enabling adjustments in structure, framing language, and accessibility. These iterative refinements did not merely improve delivery but revealed deeper divergences in the values and assumptions held by different stakeholders, particularly between performance makers and production staff.

A central insight to emerge was the unexpected emphasis many participants placed on promoting the appeal of their fictional cults rather than assessing potential risks. Initially interpreted as a design flaw, this response ultimately illuminated two coexisting but often unspoken languages of risk in immersive theatre. The first, which frames risk as a positive attribute, views intensity, danger, and unpredictability as desirable aesthetic and marketing features. The second conceptualises risk in operational terms, focusing on safety, accessibility, and ethical responsibility. These contrasting framings were especially evident across different workshop contexts: performance-makers leaned towards artistic risk, while production staff naturally prioritised mitigation strategies and ethical safeguards.

Rather than being signs of miscommunication or confusion, these participant responses pointed to cultural and disciplinary divergences in how risk is conceptualised and enacted. As such, the iterative PaR process became not just a development tool, but a methodological lens through which to surface these unspoken differences. In doing so, it aligned with Nelson's (2022) argument that PaR allows for implicit knowledge to become visible through embodied engagement. Iteration, in this context, supported not only practical development but also epistemological inquiry, highlighting the need for a translational framework that can bridge these divergent perspectives. Such a framework would support more communicative, inclusive, and care-oriented production practices.

Alongside the iterative workshop methodology, thematic analysis of PaR data played a crucial role in drawing out individual and collective meanings made by participants around key concepts

such as risk and consent. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the analysis unfolded in three stages: initial reflection, theme identification, and deeper interpretative engagement.

The workshop findings also contribute to the broader development of a care ethics framework for immersive theatre. Drawing on Joan Tronto's (2015) phases of care, participants articulated care not just as a procedural concern, but as a deeply relational and philosophical stance. This included emphasising mutuality, empathy, and accountability at every phase, from design through delivery to aftercare. Rather than merely a fixed checklist, care ethics stressed an adaptable, value-driven orientation embedded in transparency, ethical facilitation, and audience relationships. Workshop responses highlighted the importance of inclusive practices, decompression strategies, and consent protocols that are not simply performative but substantively embedded in production design and team culture.

This commitment to care must be systemic, rather than ad hoc, and should inform all aspects of the immersive experience. However, the findings also revealed key barriers to this implementation: lack of training, absence of institutional buy-in, and broader cultural issues within theatre-making. These challenges suggest that a sustainable ethics of care in immersive theatre cannot be achieved through individual initiatives alone but must be underpinned by structural and cultural transformation.

While this study has illuminated key tensions between artistic ambition and ethical responsibility, it also opens several fruitful directions for future research. One area concerns how audiences, practitioners, and production staff variously perceive and navigate risk. While this thesis surfaced some of these divergences qualitatively, further work, potentially applying statistical approaches such as the psychometric paradigm, could systematically map risk attitudes across different groups. This might include variables such as age, cultural background, disability, or previous immersive experience, offering a more granular understanding of how appetite for and tolerance of risk are distributed. In turn, such data could inform more inclusive consent processes and targeted communication strategies. Another critical area is the challenge of ensuring continuous consent during performance. Although widely supported in principle by workshop participants, practical mechanisms for maintaining and checking consent in real time remain underdeveloped. Future research could explore creative and technological solutions, such as embedded verbal or non-verbal check-ins, wearable indicators, or adaptive scenic design choices that facilitate opt-in and opt-out pathways, evaluating their impact on both safety and immersion. Together, these lines of inquiry could contribute to a more evidence-based, ethically responsive approach to immersive theatre-making that honours both artistic freedom and audience care.

Looking forward, the next chapter will integrate these findings with those from the two case study chapters to assess how immersive theatre can develop a more robust, care-centred approach to risk management. Specifically, the discussion will explore how production teams might reimagine traditional safety protocols as part of a holistic toolkit shaped by care ethics. This toolkit would aim not only to protect but to empower audiences and staff across all phases

of performance: before, during, and after. Drawing from the workshops, this augmented approach includes practical tools such as consent-based design practices, audience decompression strategies, and embedded aftercare, while also addressing the systemic issues that impede their adoption.

Additionally, the next chapter will further develop the notion of ‘translational approaches’ to risk, frameworks that can bridge the aesthetic and operational languages identified through this research. By recognising the artistic value of risk alongside its ethical implications, this approach seeks to support safer ‘unsafe’ spaces, immersive environments that are emotionally intense and experientially rich, yet underpinned by care-focused planning and transparent communication.

Finally, the discussion will return to the core aim of this thesis: to develop a care ethics-based method for understanding and managing audience risk in immersive theatre. By bringing together data from the workshops and case studies, the concluding chapter will present a set of proposed principles and tools that can help immersive theatre practitioners navigate the complex ethical terrain of audience handling. These findings aim to support not only immediate improvements in safety and inclusion but also a longer-term shift towards more relational and reflective forms of immersive practice.

In summary, this chapter has shown how iterative Practice-as-Research, supported by thematically rich analysis, can uncover hidden dynamics within creative processes and

production cultures. It has identified the tensions between artistic and operational framings of risk, highlighted the importance of ongoing consent, and suggested useful tools to achieve that consent, as well as ways forward for embedding these insights into practical, systemic change. The next chapter will continue this trajectory, moving from analysis to synthesis to define care ethics in immersive theatre, establish the production staff as caregivers in immersive performance, and outline their often-invisible labour. It will conclude with a look at a reimagined toolkit for immersive theatre built on care ethics.

Chapter 7 – Recontextualising Risk and Care Ethics in Immersive Theatre

This discussion chapter builds on the empirical material and theoretical groundwork laid out in earlier chapters to reflect on how immersive theatre makers and production staff manage risk and care for their audiences. The thesis aimed to investigate how production staff can play a central role in creating safer and more ethical immersive experiences for immersive audiences.

Immersive theatre's interactivity and unpredictability make it an exciting but complex terrain in which to consider audience safety. While this genre has garnered attention for its creative risk-taking, there has been limited research into how the everyday labour of production staff contributes to managing physical, psychological, and social risks. This research addresses that gap.

The central research question asks: *How can production staff contribute to establishing safer spaces for immersive audiences?* To explore this, three supporting inquiries guided the research design: (1) How is audience care presently considered in immersive theatre by the companies creating it? (2) What can care ethics contribute as a useful framework for audience risk management? and (3) What tools can improve competency among production staff in relation to audience care and risk? In approaching these questions, I argue that effective audience management in immersive theatre requires an integration of relational care, ethical sensitivity, and practical competence, qualities often embodied in the work of production staff but rarely foregrounded in academic or professional discourse.

This discussion is structured into four sections. First, a synthesis of the key findings from the two case studies and the Practice-as-Research (PaR) workshop summarises how audience care was

conceptualised and enacted across different contexts. Drawing on thinkers such as Joan Tronto, Maurice Hamington, and James Thompson, it reframes audience care as a dynamic, relational, and ongoing practice that is ethical as well as aesthetic. This synthesis also highlights two key contributions of the study: the emergence of a care ethic of immersive theatre, and the heightened importance of communication within that framework.

Section two positions production staff as primary caregivers within immersive work, focusing on how their contributions are essential yet often rendered invisible. Section three introduces the concept of two languages of risk, the differing ways performance makers and production staff conceptualise and communicate risk, and examines how these might be bridged to enable more cohesive care practices.

Section four proposes a redesigned safeguarding toolkit grounded in care ethics and informed by the PaR workshop. Finally, the chapter concludes with reflections on methodology, limitations, and implications for future practice and research.

Throughout this chapter, David Guile's (2019) concept of *recontextualisation* underpins the analytical approach. As discussed in Chapter 2, recontextualisation refers to the dynamic process of translating theory into practice in ways that are shaped by purpose, context, and inference. This concept guides the discussion as it moves between theoretical ideas, empirical observations, and practical recommendations, drawing on the different responses from participants regarding how to do things in the 'problem space' (Guile, 2019, p. 6) of immersive theatre, aligned to the reasons they provide, to support the continuous negotiation between care and artistic risk.

I. Defining Care Ethics in Immersive Theatre

This section will establish a care ethics of immersive theatre as a philosophical framework that centres relationality, responsiveness, and shared responsibility. Drawing on the foundational work of Joan Tronto (1993; 2015) and Maurice Hamington (2024), care ethics in this context is theorised not as a checklist of safety protocols but as an evolving moral orientation that shapes organisational choices and provides the necessary support for production staff to be able to care effectively for audiences. It foregrounds care as both a creative ethos and ethical imperative, highlighting a necessary culture for theatre companies and production structures that wish to create careful art.

i. Care as a Philosophical Foundation: From Rigid Procedural Regulation to Adaptable Guiding Principles

Immersive theatre's porous boundaries call for a relational, contextually grounded philosophy. This research proposes a care ethic that begins not with audiences, but with the production teams themselves. Without care for the caregivers, providing audience wellbeing is unsustainable. Therefore, though this research intended to align largely with what the production staff can do to improve audience experience, and this **is** focused in *attentiveness*, *responsibility*, *competence* and *responsiveness* (Tronto, 1993), in reality, it is necessary to briefly acknowledge Tronto's (2015) addition of *caring with*, which emphasizes that care is collective and influenced by democratic systems, not merely an individual and private action, to share how both workshop participants and case study interviewees highlighted broader systemic issues that, at times, impact their ability to give adequate care.

1. *Caring With:* How Care Can Function for Production Staff at an Institutional Level

One workshop participant remarked that the major barrier to implementing care was ‘trying to get producers to buy in!’ (Appendix M), indicating that though production staff may be willing and capable of providing this care, without a broader systemic buy-in this is unlikely to be enough to make a significant change. Brent Tan noted that there is a hierarchy of communication at *1884* ‘just sort of like the telephone’ (Appendix F, ln. 424) that travels from the producer down. Support from the director or the producer to back up his decisions or concerns raised during the production was crucial and mentioned repeatedly in his interview (Appendix F, lns. 226-273; 417-424; 445-447). This was echoed by Rhianna Ilube, the performance maker for *1884*, who echoed that the producer was a constant, welcome presence throughout the development and performances (Appendix C, lns. 470-475).

Though most workshop data focused on the development and discussion of tools for care, the importance of institutional support was raised repeatedly. Another workshop participant highlighted that care was often absent for production staff themselves. This omission has critical implications. From the workshops a participant observed, the theatre industry often feels ‘at odds with concerns around safety, boundaries and care,’ and employees are frequently treated as expendable (Appendix O). Fortunately, at *1884* there is evidence, triangulated across the performance maker, stage manager, producer and duty venue manager interviews, that boundaries and care are often discussed and maintained. At Coney, a key practice to help

mitigate these boundary and care transgressions is the creation of a collaborative, project-specific manifesto. Klimis explains: ‘We write a manifesto where everyone who’s in the project agrees together - what are the goals of the project? What do we want to achieve? What may be the challenges? How do we deal with disagreements?’ (Appendix D, ln. 324–332). This living document becomes an evolving ethical compass.

The manifesto is then also supported by tools like an access rider; however, the Coney version goes beyond disability accommodations. It asks: ‘What do you need to do your best work?’ (Appendix D, lns. 335–339), creating a framework for both personal boundaries and institutional support. For example, Klimis shared that, as a mother, an access elements she requires is ‘I need to leave at 5:30 tops and I don’t want to have a conversation about this. I just need to go’ (Appendix D, lns. 342-344).

Jenni Sinclair, duty venue manager for *1884*, mirrored this emphasis on full team communication by describing event briefs that are shared with both Coney employees and venue front-of-house staff, ensuring everyone knows ‘what they were getting into’ (Appendix E, ln. 627–630). Both of these documents, the manifesto and the event briefs, provide those involved with information, which can function as a broader form of institutional care. However, there is a difference. Event briefs share a prescribed set of information and expectations. The manifesto, in particular, with its emphasis on collaborative dialogue and development from all stakeholders, is a useful takeaway of the research with the potential to aid companies who are interested in improving how they *care with* their production staff and other employees.

Interestingly, rather than sharing examples of *good* care both Myers and Brown focused on stories of poor systemic care they experienced or witnessed earlier in their careers that they both aim to avoid replicating. Taylor Myers, the performance maker, is also the artistic director. This means that Myers plays a significant, if not the most significant, role in developing the company ethos. Myers shared this story:

I have an uncle who's a corporate psychiatrist and has designed experiments, of many kinds, for decades, and we have a lot of interesting conversations about this and, you know, not even about this particular show, about immersive work in general ... we were talking about a particular situation I had performed, in a show I did not direct or produce or create, and he was like, wow, that's crazy. You would never be allowed to do this as a psychological experiment though. The DSM 5 is full of rules, ethical rules, that would make this completely impossible. The half joke I made in response to him was, yes, but the difference is with an experiment is they either volunteer or you pay them to gather information from their brain. Whereas in theatre they pay you to give them a theatrical experience (Appendix A, Ins. 415-429).

It was notable that, in sharing the story, Myers immediately recused himself ethically by noting that he played no part in the artistic development of this performance, while he expressed some concerned amusement that because audiences' pay to be there instead of being paid to be there, the act of buying the ticket seems to broaden the ethical base of what is acceptable to do for some creators. Myers suggests that *ROLL THE BONES* relies on the concept that performers will 'behave in a moral way and then morality, of course, is subjective, so, in the way you have

developed the shows' morals to be. The collective moral of the experience' (Appendix A, lns. 474-478).

Ellery Brown, the *Dead Letter No. 9* production staff, recalling a time care went unmet at a previous place of employment, also signposted that *caring with* 'needs to start with the producers. Because if that is not there, you're not gonna be able to reach it... I think the onus really needs to be on the producers as like a place to start and then have it be aligned all the way down. And that really depends on the company. But I feel like ROLL THE BONES was great, I really enjoyed working with them' (Appendix B, ln. 376-391). This helps highlight how it is, at times, easier to describe moments when care is missing rather than what it looks like in action. What Brown does expressly share regarding what makes a workplace feel ethical to them at the systemic level includes 'appropriately compensating people, supporting people in having a work life balance' (Appendix B, ln. 461-462). Brown adds that the ability to call in sick and still feel like you have job security is also an important element for production staff to feel sufficiently cared for (Appendix B, ln. 463-466)

Similar to *1884*, at *Dead Letter No. 9*, there were also comments of strong communication practices among the team. While Myers indicated in his interview that he had put ample effort into thinking about the ethics and morality of the works his company makes, ROLL THE BONES does not have the same concrete practices that Coney had to disperse this information across the company and provide a time for feedback from everyone. Despite formal systems of care, in Chapter 4, Ellery Brown spoke to how this functions informally, as they described the

care practices among co-workers at ROLL THE BONES: ‘Making sure people are like, like the light check-ins with each other, the care. It was very humanizing’ (Appendix B, ln. 473–476).

At ROLL THE BONES, there was also a strong emphasis on the role of trust as part of the company ethos. Brown shared how they applied trust in practice, particularly regarding the use of stopwatches for audiences to self-manage room timing with ‘I trust you, give it 10 more minutes’ (Appendix B, ln. 770-771), a simple but powerful phrase indicating that procedural rigidity gave way to human responsiveness when needed. More broadly, Myers’ indicated how he trusts his team when he shared, ‘I’m a little bit of a consequentialist. I don’t really care how you do it as long as the way they feel is the same’ (Appendix A, ln. 251–253). The company resisted micromanagement, instead fostering collaborative independence within clearly defined ethical goals.

From these comments, it is evident that for theatre companies to *care with* their production staff, they can focus on providing adequate compensation, sufficient work-life balance and adequate coverage for sick days. They can set aside time in their processes to gather the full company and create a manifesto to guide the process, covering elements like communication practices, dispute management, and the individual needs of the team to ‘do [their] best work’ (Appendix D, ln. 338–339). Both case studies and workshop participants note that buy in around these elements of care needs to begin at the top down, and Coney practices highlight how an active presence during rehearsals and performances from the producers and upper management that provides easy access for communication, both on formal and informal levels, can benefit the whole team. Outside of formal structures, ROLL THE BONES interviewees highlight the power of regular

check-ins with one another to make sure everyone is doing ok and handing the stress of the project adequately and the importance of trusting your employees. Theatre companies and venues can then turn to the same themes discussed below of *attentiveness*, *responsibility*, *competence* and *responsiveness* to develop and fine tune how they care with their staff, ensuring that not only performers and creative teams receive adequate care but those functioning as caregivers during the process, the productions staff and their crews, are also considered.

2. *Attentiveness: Recognising the Needs of the Audience through Active Observation*

Tronto's first phase, *attentiveness*, requires recognising the needs of others, and oneself. Ilube speaks to how attentiveness functions in the audience experience as she shares the importance of repeatedly observing the audience, ‘in watching [the performance] over and over again you learn all the ways that audiences might play’ (Appendix C, lns. 259-261). Jenni Sinclair, the 1884 duty manager, pointed out that attentiveness is an important element of orientation for them. They watch each one to make sure audience members are clearly paying attention to the important details to prepare them for the experience and if they don’t seem to be, Sinclair approaches them individually and walks through the orientation again with them before they go (Appendix E, lns. 351-363). Sinclair recognises that the audience will need that information and flags moments where their lack of attentiveness may negatively impact their experience.

At *Dead Letter No. 9*, Brown mentioned that despite their focus being largely on the performers, the audience were ‘something I’m always ambiently aware of’ (Appendix B, lns. 573) and that

they ‘supported audience members as like a release valve’ (Appendix B, ln. 572). Brown did this through keeping an ‘antenna up’ (Appendix B, ln. 579) which aligns with the concept of active observation, also mentioned by Brent Tan who commented on how noticing ‘a difference response is happening from everyone else who is engaged’ (Appendix F, lns. 749-751) is a key moment that grabs his attention during performance. He further nuanced this by discussing how that can manifest differently in different audiences as he shared the example of working on a children’s show where the most concerning response to him there was if a child suddenly got really quiet or still. Among adults, this might not be a response that would pique Tan’s attention but in a group of a children, a still and quiet child is often a different response to the show than those around them. Interestingly, Tan also notes that this attentiveness can be trained in situ. He commented that theoretical discussions or plans sketched out on paper were never the same as actually dealing with the audience and also require constant recontextualization from one audience to the next (Appendix F, lns. 699-728).

Despite Tan highlighting that oftentimes the advanced paperwork planning was not as effective as active observation for *noticing* potential audience issues, he was not alone in developing this paperwork. Brown also noted creating ‘an almost probably annoying amount of paperwork’ (Appendix B, ln. 780) to help organised audience-management protocols, but focused a lot of their musings around a series of ‘why’ questions: ‘Why are we making this piece? What community conversation are we hoping to spark’ (Appendix B, lns. 494-496)? These findings corroborate the central claim of Porter and Alcorn’s *Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice* (2020) that a production’s multiple ‘whys’ function as clarifying parameters: far from stifling creativity, they establish the ethical and aesthetic frame within which all subsequent

decisions are taken (Porter & Alcorn, 2020, p. 9). Understanding the why helps production staff like Brown determine through observation if a response seems ‘different’ enough to warrant a response. In their assessment of an outlier responses in *Dead Letter No. 9*, Brown would keep an eye out for anyone looking upset and highlighted that a lot of these big moments for this show seemed to be fairly internal (Appendix B, ln. 582-594). Therefore, while they kept their ‘antenna up’ for people actively crying or angry, more internalised responses often manifested in a similar quiet or dissociative manner to what Tan mentioned experiencing in children’s performances. This highlights again that trying to plan ahead for exact reactions to observe is not as effect as identifying the audience members who are responding differently and checking in on them.

Brown also briefly highlights that there is an aesthetic to attentiveness for production staff. While observing the audience, production staff need to be both visible enough to be available to respond in case a need for help arises but also invisible enough to not impact the performance. Brown notes that this can include specific costuming requirements (Appendix B, ln. 137) and even, in some cases, a specific artistry or skill set to how production staff should exist within the space. Brown references their time working a Punchdrunk to exemplify a time when they were instructed specifically on how to stand, speak and interact with audiences, but overall encompasses this with ‘how do you step in as a technician... and not pop the bubble of energy that the performers are creating because you are literally in the same room’ (Appendix B, ln. 149-151)?

Here, it becomes evident that paperwork created by the production staff can help highlight areas where attentiveness may need to be more pronounced, as well as indicating some standard

expected responses. However, for production staff, the strength of the attentiveness lies in active observation, which then flags moments when attentiveness needs to move into action.

Futhermore, the way this attentiveness is handled has an aesthetic element as the production staff balance being visible enough without impacting the overall production.

3. *Responsibility: Comparing Formal and Informal Responsibility Structures*

Responsibility, ‘the recognition one can act to address these unmet needs’ (Tronto, 1993, p. 106), in immersive theatre must also be reconceptualised as diffuse and collective. This definition shifts responsibility away from fixed duties and towards a situational and relational responsiveness. Tronto (1993) illustrates this by referring to those in Europe during World War II who recognised, simply because they were human, that they had a responsibility to help rescue Jewish people and others from the Nazis (p. 132). While the circumstances of immersive theatre are far less extreme, the principle is relevant: responsibility emerges where needs might otherwise go unmet. As Brown observed, ‘to what degree does just being in the room with [the] audience mean you are now the point person for their care?’ (Appendix B, ln. 875–877).

In *Dead Letter No. 9*, Brown described their role as a ‘flubber position’ (Appendix B, ln. 44). This term highlights the fluidity and unpredictability of production roles in immersive theatre, where staff must often stretch beyond conventional job descriptions to meet emergent needs. This role fluidity complicates traditional models of competence, which assume stable

responsibilities and clear boundaries. In immersive contexts, such assumptions can falter. Through the case studies, two different views of taking responsibility are illustrated.

At *Dead Letter No. 9*, Myers locating responsibility in his discussion of performer presence:

‘They’re setting a standard of behavior... really leading by example’ (Appendix A, ln. 110–116).

The recognition that responsibility is embedded across roles suggests a more adaptive and resilient care structure. During my observations of *Dead Letter No. 9*, I observed no specific house management team, as Ellery Brown seemed to be covering that role, along with stage managing. Interestingly, as seen above, Brown questioned whether they were responsible for audience care despite being the stage manager because they just happened to be present in the space and centering their understanding of their job around caring for the audience. If this is the case, who was actually caring for the audience at these performances? Brown discussed how care seemed significantly more focused on the performers than the audience at their level. They noted there was Custodian character who would roam during the show but their main function was to protect the actors, provide them with a backup performer if the discussions in a room were particularly heated or provide performers with a break after ‘a really big whatever’ (Appendix B, ln. 568). Brown indicated there was a second floor manager working with them during the performance, sharing ‘I feel like the bar space did give a decompression area for people coming through having big responses, that was either me, or there would always be another floor manager, it was another member of production in that area to just keep antenna up. And they’re taking care of 1,000,001 things, but one of the things on their radar would be that’ (Appendix B, lns. 574-580). This may indicate that decentralizing these responsibilities can create gaps where

care gets overlooked, particularly when the number of staff results in each employee trying to track an immense number of things at once.

Alternative to ROLL THE BONES approach, Coney have extensive conversations with their teams about who is responsible for what related to the audience during the performance. In her discussion of the importance of clearly delineating responsibilities, Klimis says ‘it’s an immersive show, you can’t look everywhere at the same time’ (Appendix D, lns. 870-871). Rather than assuming it’s possible to track 1,000,001, this delineation of responsibility helps everyone to pass on any active observations of moments that might require a response to the correct group. The company began by noting there are two different types of questions: hospitality/venue related questions, which can best be answered by the ushers, and performance related questions, which Coney preferred to be directed to their representative in the performance (Appendix D, ln. 852-862). During the run at Shoreditch Town Hall, this role was fulfilled by Klimis and Ilube, though both noted that it would traditionally be done by a stage manager. However, during the process of creating the show, they realised it was a two stage manager production, with one helping backstage (what Brent Tan wound up doing) and someone providing any necessary care for both the performers and audience in the performance space.

In addition to that dividing of duties, the Coney group also had a clear plan in place for any necessary escalations, should an audience member become disruptive to the performance (Appendix E, ln. 280-306). Jenni Sinclair, the venue duty manager, shared an important part of preparing for the correct people to accept responsibility in immersive productions, and that was to make sure if you have ushers assigned to potentially high conflict areas, they are aware of that and feel comfortable and capable to step in and do what needs to be done should a situation arise.

Sinclair noted that sometimes ushers or venue workers may be unfamiliar with the unique demand of immersive performances.

These findings also indicate a resituating of audience responsibility. While there is always an imperative for audiences to behave like ethical agents, what that looks like in immersive theatre can often be quite heightened. This is crucial to the ethic of immersive theatre, because audience members may be unaware of this new responsibility they accept when attending a performance. Myers stated, ‘I believe in personal responsibility [of] audience members to behave like a conscionable human being’ (Appendix A, ln. 493–494). Yet, the responsibility to structure the space ethically lies with creators. As Rhianna Ilube of Coney put it in Chapter 5, ‘It’s never the audience’s fault... because it’s us, as how we set up the rules of the space’ (Appendix C, ln. 272–274). However, Coney does also emphasise the importance of behaving like a responsible ethical agent to the audiences during their orientations. I observed several warnings to be sure to treat the performers like human beings during the orientation for *1884*. Because of this restructuring of responsibility, communication design, already crucial to theatrical performances, becomes even more fundamental.

Briefly returning to the aesthetics of responsiveness in immersive theatre, Jenni Sinclair introduces the *knowing* as a way to encompass how they encourage their ushers to think about identifying the correct moment to step in and respond. Referring to *1884* ‘it was a show that the whole point was to generate conflict and encourage a certain level of disobedience. So having front of house staff knowing when, where the line is and when it is appropriate to cross the line because the last thing you want to do is interrupt somebody’s experience inappropriately’ (Appendix E, ln. 190-194). Sinclair also discussed their experience in a different immersive

show where, as an usher, they were costumed and instructed on how to direct people as though they were a riot policeman ‘you were allowed to shout and point and threaten them’ (Appendix E, lns. 208-209).

Though both *1884* and *Dead Letter No. 9* reported no negative audience reactions during their runs, there does seem to be an impact to the weight of responsibility placed on the production staff when responsibility is diffused and unclear versus when it is clearly conceptualized and assigned. While immersive theatre may result in everyone involved taking on a larger share of responsibility to cover any gaps in care, knowing who to delegate different responsibilities to and planning for the need to provide the care, does seem to result in less overwhelmed production staff. Additionally, the resituating of more responsibility onto the audience is a place where immersive theatre also deviates from more traditional, mainstream theatre and is an important place to consider tools for communicating this new responsibility to the audience, like orientations (discussed in further detail at the end of this chapter).

4. *Competence: Planning for the How of Responding to the Audience*

Competence, as Tronto’s (2015) third phase, involves more than knowing what to do, it entails knowing *why*, *how*, and *when*, for both audience members and members of the theatre company. *Why* not only aids production staff in knowing what to pay attention to, Brown emphasised the importance of clarity for action. ‘Why are we doing this? Do we have bigger goals of community conversation?... How do we support that?’ (Appendix B, ln. 492–497). Similarly, when scenes involved potential distress, Brown expanded on this to encompass a need for company-wide

clarity, ‘Stage management and the company [must] have a really clear idea of what are the intended outcomes’ (Appendix B, ln. 234–240). Without this shared understanding, an understanding of how and when to react falters. Competence here begins with a philosophical and artistic understanding of the performance before pivoting to focus on a more procedural *how* to respond and *when*.

Discussions of competency also appeared in both case studies and among the workshop participants to reflect appropriate preparatory paperwork to help determine the *hows* of response. Workshop participants highlighted that current training on how to provide care, particularly care for those having a negative experience or big reaction, is particularly lacking (see Appendix M and O). According to Brown, preparation can help reduce the ‘surprise’ responses of the audience (Appendix B, lns. 889-892). Klimis also commented on the importance of brainstorming and creating action plans for potential negative responses from audience members, citing the *1884* team considered ‘an audience member abusing the cast’ (Appendix D, ln. 452-453) or ‘feeling really upset, being really triggered, really angry’ (Appendix D, ln. 454-455). However, Klimis nuanced her discussion of this planning to highlight that while she creates plenty of written documents for these plans, and they have value for her as she brainstorms potential issues, ‘usually nobody cares about them. They [are] long. They [are] painful for performers. Even if I send them to them, they [aren’t] going to read them’ (Appendix D, ln. 477-481). To adequately create plans for her team, she again highlights the necessity of talking with them: ‘It’s talking to your performers. It’s talking to your team. It’s talking to the venue. It’s making sure things are safe, whether you have a paper that proves it or not’ (Appendix D, ln. 486-490). Tan validated Klimis’ emphasis on communication, claiming that when working with

her on *1884*, check-ins and co-developing plans with the team were the norm, asking questions like ‘How do you want to do it?’ (Appendix F, ln. 349) allowed the teams to collaborate well.

Competency should also be considered from the audience point of view. Consider how to ensure that the audience has an appropriate amount of information to perform their role within the performance competently. In the workshops, a core element of care that was raised repeatedly was that that ‘good’ care looks like setting expectations and providing information about the performance in advance (see Appendix M and O). Tools for developing these competencies for the audience are discussed in Section V of this chapter. Importantly, much of developing these competencies comes down to having adequate time.

a. Temporal Ethics: Time as an Aesthetic, Preparatory and Responsive Dimension of a Competency and Care in Immersive Theatre

A critical insight from this research is the heightened role of time in immersive theatre, not merely as a logistical concern, but as an aesthetic and ethical component of care. Time becomes the medium through which care is enacted, experienced, and felt.

At *Dead Letter No. 9*, care was expressed through calm and unrushed greetings, an intentional spatial layout to reduce crowding, and a pacing that allowed audiences to transition into the space without pressure. This aligns with Machon’s (2013) claim that immersive theatre treats time as ‘an organic and important experiential element’ (p. 96), but through a care ethics lens, this temporal design also becomes relationally ethical. This research identifies aesthetic time as

the tempo, flow, and atmosphere used to embed care into interactions, making the ephemeral feel intentional and held.

Equally important is preparatory time. This concept of time also plays a significant role in developing competency. Recalling other work experiences prior to working with ROLL THE BONES, Brown shared the anxiety of poorly planned rehearsals: ‘Treating emergency protocol like on-the-job learning... I don’t love that’ (Appendix B, ln. 773–779). Competence thus requires adequate rehearsal time, shared vocabulary, and transparent goals, allowing for what Brown called ‘talking about talking’ (Appendix A, ln. 108–110). This aligns communication design again as a core facet of developing competency within this care ethic of immersive theatre. Both *Dead Letter No. 9* and *1884* exemplified this in their extended development phases. In *1884*, Coney’s creative timeline stretched across 18 months, allowing for reflection, multiple R&D phases, and sustained collaborative learning. Rather than rushing toward completion, this use of time reflected a care-driven commitment to mutual understanding, skill-building, and audience sensitivity. Sinclair highlighted that unique element to working with Coney was that they included time in their process for the house management team to see the show or attend a playtest, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how the show functioned so they could better answer audience questions. Sinclair said that this is often an overlooked opportunity by theatre companies, but an incredibly valuable tool for the house management team (Appendix E, ln. 71-88).

Myers also explained the value of responsive time, the capacity to harness time to recalibrate emotional and energetic rhythms in real-time by focusing on personal spheres of energy. Myers

taught performers to resist being hijacked by audience distress, encouraging self-regulation through breath and pace. This energetic autonomy became a tool of self-care. ‘You can engage with someone and maintain your pace and your stability and your authority and your grace, even if they are zany, zany, zany fucked up in a million ways’ (Appendix A, ln. 590–593).

Finally, care ethics embraces the imperfections of timing. As Tan noted, ‘We can prepare ourselves as much as we can... but ultimately it’s very different when you’re interacting with an audience member and you can’t really predict how they’ll respond’ (Appendix F, ln. 668–674). Unpredictability is unavoidable, and preparation must co-exist with flexibility. This demands time not only to rehearse but to adapt in performance, to remain present, relational, and open. Together, these temporal modes, Aesthetic, Preparatory, and Responsive, frame time as an essential facet of care ethics in immersive theatre. They demonstrate how timing decisions carry emotional and ethical weight, shaping not just what audiences experience, but how they are cared for.

5. *Responsiveness: Determining the Success (or Lack Thereof) of Care*

Responsiveness, Tronto’s (2015) final phase, closes the loop of care by assessing whether needs have been met and adapting accordingly. Hamington’s (2024) concept of ‘humble inquiry’ offers a valuable perspective. Humble inquiry requires emotional intelligence, active listening, and a willingness to be changed by what one hears. In the workshops, the importance of responsiveness was highlighted as we discussed how our socioculturally influenced experiences position us to consider some things more risky and other things less risky. Though gender is the most often recorded area what one gender may overlook actions the other finds risky, this was

also replicated in the workshops where men often overlooked the concerns women had when the risks in *The Two-Metre Rule* were discussed (see Appendix L and N). Interestingly, as we discussed the responses, it became clear that female-identifying participants at the workshop unanimously voiced concerns about showing up to a random address to ‘attend’ a show and men buying them alcohol, while not a single male identified these concerns. Through even briefly discussing these differences, the male participants were able to learn a little more about potential risks to the flag in their own risk assessments of immersive performances in the future.

At *Dead Letter No. 9*, Brown recounts a story of engaging with an audience member who did not respond well to the show with, ‘not blaming the patron for messing up, but actually hearing them and being like, let’s try to evolve together’ (Appendix B, ln. 287-289). Brown noted that this was an unusual response and had previously worked in places where if an audience member responded negatively, they would just be given assume they’d lost a customer or, at best, be given a free drink ticket (Appendix B, ln. 289-291). These two responses highlight two different extremes of responsiveness. On one end, the audience member is listened to with an intent to understand, on the other, their negative opinions are disregarded and the audience member is ignored or attempts to placate them rather than to actually engage with them. At *ROLL THE BONES*, both Brown and Myers evidenced valuing responsiveness through their thoughtful post-performance feedback systems where the performance maker would wander through the bar after the show and chat with anyone who had chosen to remain. Ilube also shared that her preferred way to obtain feedback is via informal post-show chats with the audience, but the extended running time of *1884* complicated that opportunity (Appendix C, ln. 817-839). Interestingly, while performance makers for both case studies emphasised the value of speaking

directly to the audience, and preferred it to any other kind of feedback, this does result in feedback that is more difficult to share with the full team. If shared at all, it is filtered through the interpretation of the performance maker and potentially focused on what they consider valuable in the production, which may not be the same sort of feedback the production staff need to adequately provide care to audiences. This indicates that there may be space to reconsider how feedback is collected and shared in theatre companies to improve how care is facilitated. Specific techniques for feedback that surfaced in the interviews and during the workshop are discussed in Section V of this chapter.

ii. Toward a Care Ethics Philosophy of Immersive Theatre

A care ethics of immersive theatre reframes care as a systemic, relational, and co-creative process. It prioritises the wellbeing of the company members, including the production staff, as the foundation for audience care. It redistributes responsibility across roles and stages of performance. It understands competence as something cultivated through time, clarity, and trust. And it centres responsiveness as an ongoing ethical commitment, not just to audiences, but to fellow collaborators.

This philosophical framework resists the idea that care is simply about protecting from harm. Instead, it proposes that care is part of the art itself, an aesthetic, a methodology, and an ethic. The practical tools explored in later sections of this chapter emerge from this foundation. Without it, those tools risk becoming hollow or misapplied. Care, then, is not ancillary to immersive performance. It is central to its ethical and artistic integrity.

Where my data extends the literature is in demonstrating that the *why*-driven framing functions not only as a managerial tool but also as a care-ethical practice. In line with Tronto's (2015) notion of *attentiveness* and James Thompson's (2023) idea of a *careful art*, Brown's practice treats audiences first as co-participants whose emotional and social trajectories must be understood, and only secondarily as potential risks. This subtly reorients Porter and Alcorn's (2020) operational concept towards an explicitly relational one: the *why* becomes a lens for discerning what kinds of vulnerability the work intentionally invites and, therefore, what support structures are ethically required. In doing so, the finding challenges residual compliance-centric models which, as noted in Chapter 1, tend to equate risk management with hazard elimination alone; instead it confirms that a values-led articulation of purpose can help mediate between creators' appetite for positive risk and production staff's desire to mitigate negative risk outcomes.

In summary, the study affirms Porter and Alcorn's (2020) emphasis on goal clarity, but extends their framework by evidencing how a care-centred articulation of purpose can transform risk discourse from a language of constraint into one of relational responsibility, thereby advancing both stage management theory and debates on audience care in immersive performance.

Importantly, however, the application of Tronto's concepts does not occur uniformly. A care ethic of immersive theatre is recontextualised each time through the perspectives of the production staff charged with managing risk and care. Attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness will be enacted differently depending on the lived experience, risk tolerance, and priorities of those individuals. As discussed in Chapter 2, audiences also perceive risk in varied ways, which means that risk managers may overlook vulnerabilities that lie outside their own frames of reference. The Practice-as-Research workshop sought to address this by

concluding with David Ropeik's (2011) *What Kind of Risk Taker Are You?* quiz. By situating themselves as high, low, or moderate risk-takers, participants were able to reflect on how their own dispositions shaped the risks they noticed, or failed to notice, in the development of their cults. The subsequent discussion, which surfaced a wide spectrum of concerns at different levels of severity, underscored how easy it is to miss risks common to groups outside one's lived experience.

This suggests an additional phase in developing a care ethic of immersive theatre: those responsible for risk and care must actively reflect on their own positionalities and consult with colleagues whose risk profiles and social positions differ from their own. Doing so not only broadens the range of risks identified, especially psychological and social risks, but also ensures that risk management does not become siloed within the perspective of a single individual. Here Tronto's (2015) fifth phase of care, 'caring with,' is particularly salient, reminding us that care extends beyond individuals to communities and institutions. Building cohorts representative of the audiences a production seeks to reach can strengthen both the ethical and practical dimensions of its care.

Seen in this light, immersive theatre demonstrates what Guile (2019) terms recontextualisation: the process of taking a theoretical framework, in this case, care ethics, and reworking it within a new 'problem space.' Recontextualising care ethics through the risks and responsibilities of immersive theatre practice produces not only fresh applications of theory but also new insights into the social norms of performance and novel approaches to audience handling.

II. Positioning Production Staff as Caregivers in Immersive Theatre: Care Ethics and Invisible Labour

While often perceived as peripheral or invisible, the labour of production staff is essential in maintaining audience safety, regulating affective atmospheres, and enabling responsive artistic conditions. Drawing on the care ethic of immersive theater developed in the previous section, this section explores the changes evidenced through the case studies and workshop regarding how production staff reflect and embody ethical care in practice. It also analyses the structural invisibility of this labour and the epistemic and institutional barriers that contribute to its marginalisation.

Immersive theatre creates porous, unpredictable environments that require performers and staff to anticipate risk, respond to distress, and sustain safe and meaningful audience experiences. Production staff, in particular, are tasked with sustaining the conditions under which immersive work can occur. Their work frequently requires balancing logistical oversight with emotional attentiveness, preparedness with improvisation, and safety with artistic fluidity.

Joan Tronto's (2015) care ethics framework, caring about, caring for, caregiving, and care-receiving, maps closely onto the work of production teams. Each phase is underpinned by an ethical trait: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. These are mirrored in Lawrence Stern and Alice O'Grady's (2016) definition of good stage management: responsibility, attention, preparation, and foresight. Even if less explicitly articulated in other production roles, such as house management, these competencies remain central. Thus,

production staff may be understood not merely as logistical operators, but as primary caregivers within immersive theatre structures.

i. The Invisibility of Care: Labour That Disappears

Despite their critical function, production staff often remain invisible within theatrical hierarchies. This invisibility stems in part from the practical structure of their work, a significant preparatory portion of which occurs outside of rehearsal or public view, but, in immersive theatre, it also becomes an aesthetic strategy, as mentioned above regarding the aesthetic of attentiveness. Brown articulated this as a constant negotiation of presence: ‘How do I exist in this world?’ (Appendix B, ln. 148). In immersive settings, staff must simultaneously be attentive and unobtrusive, ‘seen but not noticed’ (Appendix B, ln. 160), performing a choreographed balance between vigilance and retreat. This skill, what Brown described as the ability ‘to melt into a wall or direct flow’ (Appendix B, lns. 156–160), demands more than logistical efficiency. During the performance I attended, Brown was only visible briefly, in the brief out-of-world orientation before I entered the performance space. I did not notice them again, or any other production staff, until I was leaving the venue entirely. It involves an embodied and responsive interaction with audience movement, timing, and atmosphere. This is also reiterated by Jenni Sinclair and their discussion of ‘knowing’ (Appendix E, lns. 185–194). Knowing as a concept is a skillset that indicates good judgment of what moments require visibility, or ‘cross[ing] the line’ (Appendix E, ln. 192), and impacting an audience member’s experience through a production staff interaction. Sinclair’s emphasis on this care needed for these moments places production staff as aiming for a default space of invisibility, with carefully considered actions when visibility becomes required. Similar to my experience at *Dead Letter No. 9*, I found that the production staff were only visible

upon arrival to direct me to the bar to wait and then as they helped manage the out-of-world orientation before the show. Their presence during *1884* was relegated to sitting in a chair in the corner of the performance space, indicating that the usher for the evening managed to strike that balance of visible invisibility. I knew where to find them, but quickly forgot they were there. My findings reinforce Michael Smalley's (2024) proposition that stage management is not only administrative or managerial but artistic, especially when communication design actively shapes the relational dynamics of the audience to the performance space. In this sense, production labour is not ancillary to the artistic event, but co-constitutive of its aesthetic delivery.

This observation of how production staff think about existing in the performance space deepens Thompson's (2023) theory of *care aesthetics*, discussed in Chapter 2, which posits that care is not simply something that enables art, but is 'part and parcel of the art experience itself' (p. 77). The invisibility of production care practices provides caring support to the audiences. Though I stopped thinking about where the *1884* ushers were, I had marked their quiet presence, much like a child on a playground who knows where their guardian is sitting. Besides providing care through presence, production staff also manage generally 'unseen' elements. In the workshops, a key discussion around each cult orientation activity in the full group was to ask those who did not build the cult what elements of care would make them willing to do the initiation rituals. For one group's initiation activity, which involved being out in the wilderness, even a simple suggestion to ensure there was adequate water and shade shifted some participants into a willingness to engage with the ritual. Similarly, in performance spaces, consideration of elements such as temperature regulation, environmental control, spatial flow, echo Thompson's examples from healthcare, where the quality of linens or softness of lighting becomes sensorial evidence of

care. In immersive theatre, these same details are curated by house and stage management teams, demonstrating that the aesthetics of care is co-authored through logistical and emotional labour. The absence of audience disruption, as noted in both case studies, may therefore indicate not a lack of risk, but the successful orchestration of an underlying care infrastructure, one that remains unnoticed precisely because it is effective. At *Dead Letter No. 9*, I observed that the flow from entering the space through orientation reflected this relaxed feeling in most moments. Notably, this meant that the few times I did feel rushed (finishing my first drink at the bar and the second drink in the orientation space) stood out to me due to the contrast. This aligns with Thompson's (2023) identification of 'tempo,' 'pressure,' and 'relaxation' (p. 135) as felt markers of good care, and suggests that production staff are already shaping affective atmospheres through precisely these means.

However, the invisibility of this work also raises ethical concerns. As my findings suggest, production labour can disappear not just from audience awareness, but from institutional recognition. Brown shared an example of expansive risk management planning from a different production she worked on with another company, 'I feel like I have generated an almost annoying amount of paperwork about how to deal with this type of stuff just to be able to share that information with other technicians even if we don't have explicit time or are encouraged to communicate about that' (Appendix B, ln. 779-783). This mirrors Thompson's (2023) warning that 'many forms of good and bad care are hard to perceive from within certain contexts' (p. 2), particularly when immersive theatre lacks structured feedback mechanisms, with findings that reach the production staff. Without the audience's own articulation of their experience, companies may assume that an absence of complaint equals success. Yet care, as argued by Noddings (2003) and Hamington (2024), must be defined by the recipient, not assumed by the

caregiver. Brown's attentiveness to intentionality, why a piece is being made, what kind of audience experience is desired, reflects the kind of humble inquiry that Hamington identifies as central to ethical care practice (2024, p. 33). It also parallels Smalley's (2024) assertion that communication design contributes not only to logistical flow, but to what the audience notices, feels, and takes away from the event. However, none of the feedback opportunities I received as an audience member at *1884* or *Dead Letter No. 9* included any questions that might help production staff determine the success of their work beyond a very generic question asking if I enjoyed the show. For *1884*, I received an email from the venue asking more marketing based questions: how did I hear about the event, had I been to the venue before this visit, how often I go to the theatre. There was only one question related to the actual performance asking me to rank between strongly agree and strongly disagree five elements; however, these still seemed written with the intention of the venue trying to decide whether or not to book more performances like *1884*: I enjoyed it, it was good value for money, I would like to see more performances like this one, I was introduced to new ideas, I could relate to aspects of it. Nothing on the *1884* Shoreditch Town Hall Survey translates into useful information regarding care for the audiences for production staff. Feedback for *Dead Letter No. 9* did not include any formal requests for information after the performance; instead, an email arrives every two to three weeks with an update of their current events and, sometimes, a thoughtful prompt to encourage reflection alongside an invitation to reach out to the team and share their thoughts. These are more philosophical prompts about the state of the world than a clear connection back to the performance.

Taken together, these findings support an expanded model of care, but highlight that the invisibility of labour done well may complicate the industry understanding of the role of the

production staff, one in which they choreograph both the care environment and the affective tone of the performance. This model contrasts with more dominant framings of immersive theatre that rely on provocation and destabilisation as a proxy for engagement, what Thompson critiques as the ‘aesthetics of scare’ (2023, p. 100). Gareth White’s (2023) suggestion that destabilisation is a necessary ingredient for care, ‘to take care of people we need to provoke and destabilise them’ (p. 133), is directly challenged here. My findings, in agreement with Thompson, demonstrate that disruption is not the only, nor necessarily the most ethical, route to meaning-making. Instead, this research affirms that care can be expressed through presence, anticipation, and responsive action: a ‘careful art’ that quietly shapes the immersive event without dominating it.

In this light, the dual invisibility of production staff becomes not just a paradox, but a powerful dramaturgical device, one that blends attentiveness, discretion, and care into the very fabric of the performance. It is through this lens that production labour must be recognised not only as operationally essential, but as artistically and ethically generative.

ii. Preparatory Care and the Emotional Load of Readiness

Production care begins long before the audience arrives and often extends long after they leave. Sinclair spoke of the importance of being ‘really organised in terms of prep so that by the time you’ve got to the event happening, you’re on top of things’ (Appendix E, ln. 110–115). Such preparation enables not only operational clarity but also emotional flexibility, what Sinclair called the capacity to ‘improvise when needed’ (Appendix E, ln. 104–105). Brown described one element of their own approach to developing competency as involving the creation of ‘an almost probably annoying amount of paperwork’ designed to disseminate knowledge among

technicians, even when no formal time had been allocated for this (Appendix B, ln. 779–783). This ‘paperwork’ acts as a method of care: a mode of pre-emptive knowledge-sharing that mitigates future harm, even as it often goes unacknowledged by others. In this context, documentation becomes not only a technical tool but a visible archive of invisible labour. Unfortunately, as Klimis confirmed in her discussion earlier, paperwork is often ignored by other people in the company, ‘they [aren’t] gonna read them’ (Appendix D, ln. 480–481). This same concern was reflected in the workshop participants related to the audience, noting ‘audiences don’t read preshow comms’ (Appendix M).

However, preparation is a form of care not only for audiences but for staff themselves. By embedding protocols, establishing contingencies, and rehearsing scenarios, production teams build a framework that can flex when unpredictability arises. This echoes Tronto’s (1993, 2015) notion of competence: the ability to provide good care by knowing not just what to do, but how and when to act. It also speaks to a better understanding of who is responsible when action is required. As noted earlier in the chapter, the work distribution was clearer for the Coney employees and more reasonably balanced due to this advanced planning. The *ROLL THE BONES* production staff were attempting to cover a very large range of responsibilities at the same time.

Brown recalled working on a different production addressing abortion, where content warnings, signage, and onsite counselling were integrated into the front-of-house design (Appendix B, lns. 190–206). These interventions demonstrate how production care can be proactively embedded

into audience infrastructure. This labour is emotionally taxing, as it requires holding space for difficult material while maintaining operational calm.

iii. Structural Conditions and the Causes of Invisibility

Then why does this labour remain undervalued? Part of the answer lies in disciplinary silos and institutional hierarchies. As discussed in Chapter 2, performance makers may prioritise risk as generative or aesthetic, while production teams are tasked with mitigating harm. These differing epistemologies, positive artistic risk versus harm prevention, can generate misalignment unless explicitly translated.

Brown's example in the previous section identified the challenge of trying to communicate with producers who don't buy in at a different stage in their career (Appendix B, ln. 779-783). When production staff make recommendations that are just ignored, this clearly illustrates an issue with institutional hierarchies and the necessity of *caring with*. Fortunately, Coney and ROLL THE BONES, though they may vary in their formal and informal structures of care, evidenced a strong company-wide commitment to the concept. Interestingly, when the company does commit to this level of care, they help reduce the invisibility of their production staff when they welcome their feedback into the development processes. Brent Tan and Jenni Sinclair both reported early and consistent communication during all phases of developing 1884. Sinclair pointed out that while many companies do not really consider the house management experience for the audience and just 'transpose it on top' (Appendix E, ln. 519), Coney 'were aware of how the audiences were likely to enter the building and what the rooms look like' (Appendix E, ln. 521-523) and built their experience with this information in mind. When care preparation functions seamlessly, the work can disappear. This invisibility is not accidental. It is structurally reproduced through

lack of formal trainings, funding, scheduling, and language use that does not always translate well between performance makers and production staff.

Compounding this is the fact that production knowledge often circulates informally. Brown's extensive documentation was developed not because it was institutionally required, but because they felt it was ethically necessary. The absence of structured time or recognition for such labour creates unsustainable workloads, which were discussed in more detail in Section I.4.a of this chapter. Without adequate time, care measures become precarious, upheld by the goodwill of individuals rather than supported systemically.

iv. Toward a Shared Ethics: Bridging Artistic and Production Cultures

This section has argued that production staff in immersive theatre function as key caregivers who sustain audience safety, shape affective atmospheres, and maintain the conditions that allow immersive work to occur. Drawing on the care ethic of immersive theatre framework discussed in Section I, the findings show that core production competencies, attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness, align closely with models of ethical care, positioning production labour as central to the audience experience.

At the same time, the case studies and workshops have highlighted the structural invisibility of this work. Aesthetically, production staff often operate through a deliberate balance of presence and unobtrusiveness, enabling immersive dramaturgy while remaining largely unseen. Much of their care labour, such as preparation, risk planning, and environmental management, occurs outside public view and receives limited institutional recognition.

The findings also identify a lack of meaningful feedback mechanisms that would allow production teams to evaluate their care practices, aligned with care ethic driven expectations of *responsiveness*. Audience responses are typically gathered for marketing or artistic evaluation rather than audience care, leaving production staff without clear measures of whether their interventions successfully supported audiences.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that production staff already enact sophisticated forms of care, yet their labour remains marginalised within existing structures. A sustainable ethics of care in immersive theatre must bridge the gap between artistic and production cultures. This requires shared vocabularies and mutual recognition of expertise

IV. Introducing the Two Languages of Risk

This section explores how communication serves as a foundation for ethical care in immersive theatre and introduces two distinct but often overlapping ‘languages of risk,’ one rooted in artistic exploration and another in health and safety protocols. These divergent understandings create tensions that affect collaboration, planning, and care delivery.

i. Communication as a Form of Care

Effective audience care in immersive performance hinges on communication. Myers describes production staff as conduits of both ‘practical information’ and ‘emotional information’ (Appendix A, ln. 203), shaping how audiences transition into the immersive world. Early

moments of contact are designed to foster ‘peace and curiosity and understanding and tranquillity and care’ (Appendix A, ln. 200–201), situating production staff as artistic communicators rather than mere logistical facilitators.

This communicative role extends into production structures. At Coney, a key practice is the creation of a collaborative, project-specific manifesto. Klimis explains: ‘We write a manifesto where everyone who’s in the project agrees together - what are the goals of the project? What do we want to achieve? What may be the challenges? How do we deal with disagreements?’ (Appendix D, ln. 324–332). This living document becomes an evolving ethical compass. The manifesto is supported by tools like the access rider, which goes beyond disability accommodations. It asks: ‘What do you need to do your best work?’ (Appendix D, ln. 335–339), creating a framework for both personal boundaries and institutional support. Sinclair mirrored this emphasis on communication by describing event briefs that are shared with both production and front-of-house staff, ensuring everyone knows ‘what they were getting into’ (Appendix E, ln. 627–630).

Risk management, too, becomes dialogic rather than document-driven. Klimis admitted that risk assessments often go unread, but insisted, ‘It’s making sure that things are safe, whether you have a paper that proves it or not’ (Appendix D, ln. 484–490). Care emerges from listening and responding, not just formal procedures.

Tan described collective discussions about audience interactions: ‘It wasn’t one person making a call on something... we would discuss how we want to approach certain things’ (Appendix F, ln.

266–273). In this way, communication took on a group dynamic, addressing some of the issues that can arise when risk and care decisions are made by a single person, from a single perspective. This cooperative decision-making also gives all of the people deploying the plans a stake in the outcome. However, although communication was evident in the case studies as central to care, it was curious that discussions of tensions and misunderstandings were common reasons given by workshop participants for signing up.

ii. Dissonant Languages of Risk

This dissonance first appeared as a structural misunderstanding in the development of the workshops. During the pilot workshop, when attempting to get the participants to risk assess their cult orientations, the participants kept returning to explain why an audience member would want to join the cult, focusing on themes such as the benefits of being a cult member or the fun they will have at the initiation. Though I kept trying to get them to focus on how a traditional risk assessment would work (identify a hazard and put safeguards in place to manage the risk to an appropriate level, see Chapter 1.VII), and provided them examples I had identified myself in their cult initiation activity, the workshop participants would again explain why their potential cult members would benefit from their idea. By the end of the pilot workshop, I only had half of the class successfully risk assessing their cult orientations, and the other half was still doing a strong mix of selling me their cult, along with limited risk management.

While reviewing my reflections post-workshop, I felt I must not have made sure everyone understood risk assessing well enough and integrated an additional pocket of time to teach more about basic risk assessment into my workshop.

In Workshop One, all participants had some element of production staff background, and this issue did not surface. As everyone there had mentioned having completed some occupational health and safety training in the past, I decided at the last minute not add a more in-depth risk assessment review to the workshop. All participants focused on identifying hazards and developing potential safeguards to care for their cult initiates, as I had thought the activity would go.

In Workshop Two, I had a mix of performance makers and production staff backgrounds and saw that the urge to sell their cult briefly resurfaced. When I reminded them that the cult initiates are already there, doing the thing, and now they just need to be cared for, they then dropped their attempts to market and immediately began focusing on actual hazards and techniques to manage them and care for their audiences. Reflecting on this after the workshop, I was again surprised that when attempting to do risk assessments for cult initiates already at the orientation activity, the workshop participants were still trying to sell their cult. From my own experienced production staff mindset, marketing, getting audiences to attend, is one of the few responsibilities that is not generally mentioned in any house or stage management training. There is understood to be no responsibility for this task. However, this is clearly a high priority for performance makers. It left me wondering if this is the primary risk they see in creating performance and if that needs to be acknowledged in some way.

This research suggests two predominant ‘languages of risk’ in immersive theatre. The first, more common among performance makers, frames risk as a creative asset. Here, risk is seen as part of the artistic value of the work, encompassing secrecy, challenge, and the thrill of boundary-pushing. This was evident in the pilot workshop, where students designed fictional

cults. Their focus rested not on risk assessment, but on persuasion strategies, how to convince others to join. Risk was treated as a point of attraction, not a hazard.

The second language, more prevalent among production staff, interprets risk through a framework of harm prevention. Grounded in occupational health and safety principles, this discourse emphasises preparedness, mitigation, and procedural clarity. In Workshop One, composed entirely of production professionals, participants moved fluently through safety planning without needing to be redirected. There was no conflation between marketing rhetoric and operational considerations; risk was understood as a concrete set of responsibilities.

After the initial resituating discussed above, Workshop Two participants, performance makers with some health and safety training, navigated between both discourses. At times, conversation drifted toward the more promotional framing of risk, yet participants quickly adjusted when prompted to focus on real-time audience safety. This underscores how, even among trained practitioners, the framing of risk can shift subtly depending on context, intent, and role.

These observations echo earlier data from Chapter 6.I.i. What initially appeared as poor communication or inadequate preparation often revealed itself as a deeper tension between fundamentally incompatible discourses: one seeing risk as artistic necessity, the other as potential hazard. These divergent perspectives are not simply semantic, but epistemological, shaped by contrasting expectations of performance and responsibility.

The psychometric paradigm provides a useful explanatory framework for understanding these differences. Rooted in research on subjective risk perception, it holds that individuals assess risk based not only on facts but also on affective, cultural, and social cues (Slovic, 2010).

Performance makers, driven by artistic goals and audience engagement, often exhibit an

optimism bias, placing emphasis on the creative benefits of risk while underestimating its potential harms. This framing can be reinforced by institutional pressures: producers may prioritise audience attendance and creative impact over care considerations, making risk appear essential rather than optional.

Production staff, by contrast, are often guided by a dread response. Their roles demand sustained attentiveness to what might go wrong, leading them to approach risk as a problem to be systematically addressed. Brown's account captures this orientation clearly: 'How it's going to be handled? Who the support people are? Who do I need to call? How do we want to record it?' (Appendix B, ln. 360–464). Here, planning is not abstract, it is logistical, responsive, and grounded in emotional and physical safety.

Workshop One journal reflections further highlight this stance. One participant noted: 'Put their experience before your artistic ideals' (Appendix M). This reveals a protective reflex, one shaped by health and safety training, that prioritises audience care above creative expression. However, immersive theatre's unpredictability and emotional intensity mean that total risk elimination is not only impossible, it would likely negatively impact one of the desired aesthetics of risk-taking that is part of the art form. The task for production teams becomes not removing risk entirely, but building adaptive systems that allow for safe improvisation.

The psychometric paradigm thus helps explain why these two groups perceive and prioritise risk differently. Performance makers and production staff are shaped by distinct emotional heuristics, institutional incentives, and cultural norms. Additionally, each person within these groups is further complicated by their individual perceptions. These differences often manifest in practice as miscommunication or friction, but they are in fact reflections of deeper interpretive

frameworks, highlighting the need for dialogic risk communication approaches that reconcile artistic aims with caregiving responsibilities.

iii. Bridging the Gap: Toward Translational Practice

The divide between these two risk languages is not merely semantic, it reflects different values, training, and operational assumptions. However, the case of *1884* demonstrates that this gap can be bridged. Ilube, who works in both theatre and nightclub safety, carried her health and safety training into the rehearsal room. Her perspective echoed occupational health and safety principles: ‘There has to be some doubt, some boundaries, and a plan of action for if boundaries are crossed’ (Appendix C, ln. 911–915).

Her dual experience highlights that the languages of risk are not inherently oppositional. Rather, they require translation. By acknowledging the artistic value of positive risk while implementing robust harm mitigation systems, immersive teams can develop more sustainable and ethical working practices.

This translational practice, where risk is held as both creative potential and safety concern, requires deliberate communication, shared vocabulary, and institutional support. It moves care out of the realm of individual intuition and into structured, co-created frameworks.

Recognising and naming these two languages of risk is a critical step. By articulating the disconnect, immersive practitioners can move toward more integrated approaches to risk and care, allowing for immersive theatre that is both thrilling and responsibly held.

V. A Redesigned Toolkit for Immersive Theatre Audience Handling Built on Care Ethics

This section proposes a practical, ethics-driven safeguarding toolkit for immersive performance. Drawing on empirical research and workshop insights, the toolkit is structured around three caregiving phases: pre-performance, in-performance, and post-performance. While these stages provide a foundational structure, it is crucial to acknowledge that the demands of individual performances may necessitate adaptations, some steps may need to be reordered, reiterated, or extended based on situational needs. The central goal is not to impose a rigid framework, but to offer a flexible, care-based infrastructure that performance makers can adapt contextually. The decision to split audience handling tools into three areas came from discussions in the workshops. Specifically, several participants called out the lack of tools to use in-performance as what they identified as a main weakness in audience handling. This gap echoed through the existing literature, which had focused heavily on how to orient audiences for their role in the performance (Ramos & Maravala, 2017; Ramos, 2015; White, 2013), with little attention paid to techniques for managing them in-performance and how to provide any care post-performance.

i. Pre-Performance Tools

The pre-performance phase focuses on embedding care into preparatory work, audience communication, and logistical design. It includes methods for rehearsing unpredictability, guiding audience expectations, and establishing informed consent. The tools outlined below prioritise relational care, transparency, and readiness.

1. Playtesting: Rehearsing Uncertainty

As Brown asserted, ‘The audience is the other character that is there. That we are acting with... we don’t have to be surprised by who that character is. We can be prepared... through test audiences, through training and preparedness’ (Appendix B, ln. 886–892). Playtesting with unfamiliar and resistant participants allows teams to anticipate and rehearse diverse audience behaviours.

Myers echoed this benefit, ‘It could not have been better for our cast to be like, and here’s how you gracefully, acrobatically maneuver resistant, skeptical, aggressive audience members into a place of receptivity’ (Appendix A, ln. 546–550). Such rehearsals build embodied strategies for de-escalation and care, offering a pedagogical model for navigating discomfort and misunderstanding.

Ilube captured the same balance required, ‘Planning, planning, planning. But that can come through playtesting, playtesting, playtesting... but like a willingness to plan and keep learning throughout. And knowing there will be mistakes, but like how do we deal with them’ (Appendix C, ln. 943–957).

Dead Letter No. 9 illustrated the value of recruiting audience proxies outside personal networks to challenge assumptions. Echoing the value of this, Coney also recognised the limits of current recruitment strategies, ‘sometimes it’s just through word of mouth, sometimes it’s through partners. If we wanted to have, say, 50% global majority, we target them for things. [Or] playtesting with disabled people... it’s often through partners or through access advisors. This is

something we want to do and haven't done enough, to be fully transparent. Primarily because of time' (Appendix D, lns. 608-623). Klimis' self-reflection signalled ethical responsiveness and openness to improvement, and, importantly, indicated that partner organisations can be a powerful tool for diversifying your playtesting audiences.

From a venue perspective, Sinclair noted the importance of playtesting in situ. Coney's early engagement with Shoreditch Town Hall allowed house staff to observe the work firsthand: 'Trying to explain *1884* in words is quite hard... seeing it done was really, really helpful' (Appendix E, ln. 91–95). This ensured shared understanding between production and venue staff, highlighting that playtesting not only allows for observations of audience reactions to plan for how to handle them in performance, but also can allow production staff on the house management team an opportunity to engage with the performance as an audience member, providing a more robust understanding of the work. This is particularly valuable in immersive theatre where the ability to describe the mechanics and themes of the performance can become rather complicated.

2. Content Warnings: Tools of Trust and Transparency

This research confirms that content warnings function less as legal hedges and more as infrastructures of care. They articulate the 'limiting parameters' of a production (Porter & Alcorn, 2020) in a way that lets audiences decide how, and whether, to engage. Brown's decision to embed advisory language for *Dry Lands*, another performance they worked on with particularly heightened psychological risks, across marketing copy and venue signage (Appendix B, ln 198) echoes the Health and Safety Executive's emphasis on information

transparency as a primary hedge against fear-induced stress (Health and Safety Executive, 2024).

Yet the literature review shows that the efficacy of content warnings is contested. As discussed in Chapter 2, Jones et al. (2023) report that generic warnings can amplify anticipatory anxiety, while Halberstam (2017) brands them ‘paternalistic normativity.’ My findings address both critiques by demonstrating how tiered and collaboratively authored advisories mitigate these shortcomings. Coney’s pre-show emails for *1884* linked to a *Playing Audience’s Guide*. Crucially, the guide not only named potential triggers but supplied coping mechanisms, opt-out routes, historical context, and explicit conduct reminders, such as ‘treat each other with respect and kindness’ (Coney, 2024, p. 5), and invited anyone with concerns to reach out in advance to discuss them. Developed jointly by the access advisor, venue staff and marketers (Appendix D, ln. 947), this layered approach moves beyond LaFrance’s (2013) call for a voluntary rating system by integrating what Bellet et al. (2018) identify as missing: concrete guidance for processing difficult material. It also answers Halberstam’s concern by placing choice with the spectator, advice is available, but only if sought.

Workshop data further extend current theory. Participants asked not for blanket cautions but for actionable, multi-channel information, ‘themes and triggers,’ ‘how to leave,’ ‘how to opt out’ (Appendix N). Their preference for web, social and onsite signage validates Saville’s (2019) recommendation that companies invite audiences to ‘self-calibrate,’ thereby reducing blanket anxiety while preserving agency. Moreover, Myers’s worry that consent cannot be fully secured in improvisational formats (Appendix A, ln 438-440) underscores the need for adaptive advisories that can flex in real time, a nuance absent from existing rating-system proposals (Nelson, 2018; Elger & Brigante, 2022). Thus my findings extend the scholarship by positioning

content warnings not as static disclaimers but as including actionable tips for consenting that evolve with performance conditions.

Finally, the collaborative authorship of advisories illustrates what Bruce and Roberts (2020) call the ‘value signal’ of care aesthetics. Audiences can read transparent risk communication as evidence of an ethical culture. In practice, the Coney model shows that well-designed advisories can support positive risk by building trust and thereby widening the range of experiences audiences are willing to embrace. The data from this research affirms the literature’s call for transparency but refine it by demonstrating how layered, choice-based content warnings reconcile psychological research on anticipatory anxiety with care-ethical imperatives for autonomy and respect.

3. *Orientation: Pre-Performance as Ritual and Relationship*

The orientation period, whether out-of-world or in-world, plays a critical role in establishing the aesthetic, logistical, and ethical ground for immersive engagement. In *Dead Letter No. 9*, this began with a calm, knowledgeable greeter who shaped the emotional tone. Brown described this as ‘meeting people where they’re at to try and support them into the space’ (Appendix B, ln. 104–110).

The transition from out-of-world orientation (by production staff) to in-character facilitation (by performers) formalised consent pathways while sustaining narrative immersion. This dramaturgical bridge helped demystify expectations, offered practical information on exits and boundaries, and contributed to audience emotional regulation. Brown also identified a useful

tool. They were initially supplied with an ‘entry script’ (Appendix B, ln. 107) to help them facilitate that moment. However, once they were comfortable with the content and understood the goals, the script was cut and Brown was allowed to mimic the internal aesthetic of the performance, ‘it really is sort of meeting people where they’re at to try and support them into the space’ (Appendix B, ln. 108-109). In my observation of their orientation, this still included key information, such as how to find necessary spaces (e.g., the toilet) and how to leave the performance, if desired. It also included how long the performance would be, but other than that it was just a calm check-in with everyone that helped establish the unrushed tempo of the performance.

Klimis and Ilube emphasised the need to tailor orientation scripts to attention spans, striking a balance between completeness and clarity (Appendix C, ln. 1160–1167; Appendix D, ln. 720–724). Printed materials were made available to those who missed spoken instructions (Appendix E, ln. 351–361). Ilube insisted on briefing every audience member before entry, offering ‘latecomers packets’ for those arriving late (Appendix C, ln. 1173–1178).

Audience support was not limited to speech. Staff were positioned nearby, quiet areas were signposted, and participants were told they could exit and return freely. Sinclair noted that in immersive contexts, orientation is essential because audiences often ‘don’t know how to engage’ (Appendix E, ln. 335–344).

4. *Consent: Beyond the Ticket Purchase*

Across both workshops, participants unanimously agreed that buying a ticket is not sufficient to constitute informed consent (Appendix N). They emphasised the importance of detailed

disclosures, autonomy, and opt-out mechanisms. Descriptions of ideal consent included phrases such as: ‘clear, fully explained, able to opt out or active opting in’ (Appendix M) and ‘voluntarily opting into the experience with an understanding of what is involved’ (Appendix O). Notably, responses highlighted that consent must account for differences, not all audience members come with the same knowledge, capacity, or expectations. One respondent called for ‘consideration of [the] lowest common denominator patron’ (Appendix M), though a vague phrase, it reinforces the need for inclusive communication design.

Workshop suggestions for toolkit components included: templated language for websites, signage guides, audience briefing templates, and opt-in documentation. Some stressed the importance of multiple modalities, written, verbal, visual, at various points: purchase, entrance, and pre-show (Appendix N).

However, concerns were also raised: ‘audiences don't read pre show comms! Group dynamics and alcohol hampers consent’ (Appendix M). As one participant mentioned their concern was information ‘may not reach someone who needs it or be insufficient in scope and intention’ (Appendix O). These concerns signal that consent systems must be ongoing and, when warranted, repetitive, and definitely not assumed. Interestingly, while initial consent does begin at the top of the performance, it is important to highlight how it must continue to be ongoing throughout the performance. In the next section, in-performance tools help production staff monitor for potential changes in this consent-structure.

In sum, the pre-performance phase of the toolkit centres care as preparation. It uses playtesting to rehearse unpredictability, content warnings to reduce perceived risk, orientations to establish ritual and rapport, and consent practices that are affirmative and transparent. These tools do not merely manage liability, they create the conditions for ethical participation, safer audience engagement, and establish the boundaries of the performance for all involved.

ii. In-Performance Tools

Once a performance is in motion, care shifts from preparation to presence. Audience experience becomes dynamic and unpredictable, requiring real-time attentiveness, adaptability, and ethical responsiveness. In-performance care is not a matter of scripted response but of relational acuity, reading the room, listening actively, and responding with competence and compassion.

1. Active Listening

Myers framed performance failure not as technical error but as relational breakdown, moments when an audience member might feel ‘unattended’ (Appendix A, ln. 308). He described failure as ‘a missed opportunity’ to repair a fragile moment or make someone feel seen (Appendix A, ln. 303–310). Brown echoed this ethic, emphasising the importance of ‘hearing people’, not just their words, but their unspoken cues (Appendix B, ln. 288). Care here manifests again as humble inquiry, a readiness to check in and pivot (Hamington, 2024, p. 33 and see above, Section II.i). This is where training production staff in how to identify ongoing consent in a similar manner to how performers are taught can be a valuable additional safeguard for the audience. Techniques like Maravala’s (n.d.) (discussed in Chapter 2.X.iii), designed to help performers identify the ‘stages’ of their performance and moments to check in for consent, can be useful to convey to the production staff as key pressure points for the audience.

2. Embodied Attentiveness, Emotional Intelligence and Active Observation

Throughout *Dead Letter No. 9*, staff deployed both verbal and non-verbal methods to assess and respond to audience needs. This embodied attentiveness required flexibility and intuition. Brown described situations where emotional responses were intense but internal, calling for soft touch rather than scripted intervention (Appendix B, ln. 589–594). Audience care involved subtle gestures: a quiet offer of water, space to breathe, or simply presence. These responses drew on emotional intelligence and relational discernment, skills often learned through experience, not formal training. Brown noted, ‘audience handling is the one [skill] that is coming to mind right away’ (Appendix B, ln. 867).

Performers and staff alike practiced active observation, attuning to emotional shifts and behavioural cues. This responsiveness extended to unexpected moments. Ilube recalled overhearing an audience member say, ‘Shall we throw fruit?’, a comment that revealed potential physical risk (Appendix C, ln. 1210–1211).

Rather than reacting punitively, staff treated such moments as data, building a deeper understanding of audience play styles (Appendix C, ln. 259–261). Myers similarly advocated for energetic self-regulation, cautioning against performers getting swept into chaotic energy (Appendix A, ln. 587–603). Instead, he encouraged performers to maintain their pace and stability as a grounding force.

3. Audience Typologies

Ilube drew on Coney's audience typology, Socialisers, Explorers, Achievers, Grieferers, and the Disinterested, as a practical framework to support care and risk management strategies (Appendix C, ln. 1119–1148). While typologies must be used with care to avoid stereotyping or misjudging intentions, they offered a shared language through which the production team could discuss audience behaviour and prepare for potential disruptions. In particular, recognising the presence of *Grieferers*, who actively seek to undermine or destabilise others' experiences, enabled staff to plan appropriate interventions in advance.

This aligns with Kelly Jordan's (2019) identification of 'dis-spectators,' audience members who intentionally disrupt performance experiences, and her articulation of a four-stage process: testing, playing, disruption, and sabotage. While Jordan's framework is rooted in critical theory and performance studies, Coney's typology provides a more operational tool that can be directly applied in practice. The overlap between Coney's Griefer and Jordan's dis-spectator highlights the relevance of this typology as a preventative tool for immersive environments where inter-audience interactions carry risk.

Pre-performance meetings incorporated scenario planning for disruptions, including those caused by aggressive or triggered participants. Staff were trained to identify and address early signs of boundary-testing behaviour (Appendix C, ln. 911–1004), a strategy which echoes Jordan's emphasis on the early 'testing' phase as a key moment for intervention. Visible leadership, including the presence of directors and producers within the space, helped create a supportive infrastructure for managing these risks (Appendix F, ln. 304–322).

While typologies can support clearer communication and preparedness among production teams, their use must remain flexible and non-prescriptive. Audience members are not static types, and misinterpretation or misclassification could itself introduce harm. However, when used reflexively, these tools may help to identify patterns of behaviour, especially those that risk impacting others' experience, and allow staff to take pre-emptive, proportionate steps to protect both audiences and performers.

4. Clear Escalation Plans and Role Separation

Coney's model divided emotional care and security responsibilities. In-world facilitators, Coney staff, managed emotional disruptions, while out-of-world venue production staff addressed safety concerns (Appendix D, ln. 886–900). This allowed each role to act swiftly and appropriately. Escalation plans focused on conversation and voluntary exit, privileging relational over authoritarian approaches (Appendix D, ln. 907–912). House managers were prepared to intervene if necessary, as included in formal risk assessments (Appendix E, ln. 429–438). Importantly, communication played a large role here as well, not only in ensuring that all members of the team felt confident and aware of what was expected of them and who to go to for assistance during an incident, but an effort was also made to confirm with the production staff what they felt their own boundaries around such incidents were and to place properly trained and willing production staff in the positions more likely to have to deal with potential de-escalation scenarios (Appendix D, ln. 1008-1009).

5. Environmental Supports: Quiet Spaces and Decompression Spaces

Audience wellbeing also relied on quiet spaces, clearly identified staff, and appropriate staffing levels. Sinclair described a care loop in which distressed audience members were not only removed, but supported and re-integrated if possible (Appendix E, ln. 294–305). Coney highlighted an often-overlooked element of revoking consent: the goal of reintegrating willing audience members back into the performance after care had been provided. In many performance spaces, when there is a mechanism to revoke consent, the mechanism is to leave the performance for good. Knowing that there is an opportunity to leave and return may encourage audience members to step out when necessary in a more timely manner, rather than weighing their decisions against missing the entire show.

Workshops reinforced these needs, calling for ‘reassurance, recognition, positive affirmations, choices offered’ (Appendix M) and ‘good management and training of staff’ (Appendix N). Visible identifiers such as lanyards helped audience members know who to approach. Mental health first aid training, including the ALGEE model, was suggested as a helpful tool (Appendix M). The MHFA Action Plan, known by the acronym ALGEE, outlines five flexible steps to guide mental health first aid responses. These are: *Approach*, assess for risk of suicide or harm; *Listen* nonjudgmentally; *Give* reassurance and information; *Encourage* appropriate professional help; and *Encourage* self-help and other support strategies. Designed to be used in any order depending on the situation, the framework supports sensitive, empathetic engagement with individuals in distress, while also promoting timely access to professional and community-based resources (MHFA England, 2023). This indicates it may be valuable training to invest in for the production staff of any theatre company planning to lean into content that may be troubling for their audiences.

iii. Post-Performance Tools

The final stage of care addresses how the production supports audience members after the performance concludes. Post-performance tools emphasize emotional processing, feedback, reintegration, and ongoing dialogue. These practices centre audience wellbeing and extend the ethics of care beyond the formal end of the show.

1. Revisiting Environmental Supports: Quiet Spaces and Decompression Spaces

Audience care does not end when the performance does. Many workshop participants described the importance of ‘aftercare,’ rituals and environments that allow for emotional regulation. Suggestions included decompression spaces, support areas with gentle lighting or music, and rituals that help ground or reorient participants (Appendix N). *1884* provides an example of a grounding ritual. During the performance, each ‘house’ group created a house knock, a stylised rap on the table or clap, that was done repeatedly throughout Act I. Act II saw the houses dispersed as the room transformed into a museum exhibit and lecture, but the final moment of the performance encouraged us to find our house members from Act I and close out the show with a final house knock.

As Sinclair noted, the performance space itself remained open post-show for those needing time to process (Appendix E, ln. 564–567), with quiet rooms and front-of-house staff available to assist (Appendix E, ln. 294–305). At both *Dead Letter No. 9* and *1884*, a key decompression space was a bar. Though only *1884* had a reserved quiet space, both had a bar attached that

functioned as a space where audience members could gather and chat about their experience with others who had just done the same thing. Production staff continued to monitor these spaces for anyone who might need additional care. Brown described staying attuned to emotional shifts even after the show ended, noting they kept their ‘antenna up’ (Appendix B, ln. 579). Myers emphasized informal post-show conversations as vital for gathering deeper emotional insight and offering personal care (Appendix A, ln. 383–399). For him, these post-performance face-to-face conversations were more meaningful than surveys, which he felt often yielded surface-level responses.

2. Post-Show Check-Ins, Audience Feedback and Observation

At Coney, feedback gathering was treated as part of the caring practice. Staff solicited audience responses through a range of tools: informal chats, surveys, emails, and digital reflections. Coney encouraged reflective voice notes via the 188.4 FM website and hosted an online memorial (Appendix C, ln. 772–783; Appendix D, ln. 557–558). While some tools were underutilized due to time constraints and audience fatigue (Appendix D, ln. 562–567), they nonetheless represent efforts to extend care and collect insights.

Coney staff also incorporated reflective questions like, ‘When did you play in a way that surprised you?’ (Appendix C, ln. 736–738). This language invited creative introspection, indicating that there is value to audience feedback beyond mere marketing. Feedback was not only gathered but engaged with, which echoed Hamington’s (2024) concept of humble inquiry and Noddings’ (2003) model of ‘listening to believe’ shaped the team’s open approach. Staff

responded gently to criticism, often inviting deeper conversation (Appendix B, ln. 304–310). Brown, Myers, and Klimis all described post-show engagement as ongoing relationship-building, not just data collection. Despite this, my observations of the efficacy of the post-show feedback vary. I found *ROLL THE BONES* ongoing invitations to respond to various prompts potentially more effective at continuing engagement than most feedback surveys. The *1884* feedback surveys seemed more focused on marketing information than providing useful, critical feedback of the experience. Notably, the 188.4 FM website and the ability to leave a voice recording there were potentially the most ideal opportunities for the theatre company to receive a reflection on the experience, but the extremely detailed disclaimer about all of the responses on the website being part of an unclear research project left me reluctant to respond. This highlights that improving audience feedback, and including areas asking about care and risk management, is still an area that could see improvement in immersive theatre. However, the current focus on receptive feedback does begin to the philosophical principle of responsiveness, with informal chats, surveys, emails and digital reflections the tools of care utilised in this stage.

iv. Limitations of Care

Despite extensive efforts, the team acknowledged the limitations of post-show care. Some feedback tools required too much effort, such as websites with dense legal disclaimers or complex navigation (Appendix D). Yet even this reveals a care ethic, a desire to honour audience reflections with robust, multifaceted systems.

Care extended beyond the night of performance. Some teams, like in *Dead Letter No. 9*, sent follow-up emails or offered continued dialogue, recognizing the emotional weight that

immersive work can carry. This long-view approach to care underscores a model built not on momentary exchange, but on sustained attentiveness.

In sum, post-performance tools expand care temporally, emotionally, and relationally. They honour the depth of immersive engagement by providing space for reflection, decompression, and expression. Together with pre- and in-performance strategies, they offer the start of a toolbox for audience handling in immersive theatre built upon a care ethic of immersive theatre.

VI. Methodological Reflections and Researcher Insights

This study advanced on two interconnected fronts, two in-depth case studies of immersive-theatre companies and a practice-as-research (PaR) workshop, whose reciprocal influence became increasingly apparent as the project unfolded. Either strand, pursued in isolation, could have answered the core research questions; yet once data collection began, their insights intertwined so tightly that separating them would have stripped the analysis of essential connective tissue. The case studies traced how care-centred values already inflected company philosophies and everyday practices, thereby anchoring my definition of a care ethic for immersive performance. The PaR workshop, by contrast, revealed a persistent gap in the language used to talk about risk. Production staff voiced highly technical, compliance-oriented concerns, while creative colleagues framed risk in marketing terms. The safeguarding toolkit introduced in Chapter 6 therefore draws jointly on case-study observations and workshop reflections, illustrating how the dual design, though demanding, generated a richer, mutually informing evidence base than either method could have provided alone. The experience also

underscored a practical lesson for me. Scope must be contained early, not merely to manage workload but to safeguard my own well-being as a researcher.

Importantly, the two strands did not merely run in parallel; they worked together to enable recontextualization, the process by which abstract concepts are adapted for use in concrete practice. As discussed in Chapter 2, David Guile (2019) defines recontextualisation as an iterative transformation of theoretical knowledge so that it becomes meaningful within a specific vocational setting. In immersive performance, where audience experience is subjective and often emotionally charged, care ethics augments rule-based risk management by pointing towards a more expansive sense of responsibility for the whole body, encompassing psychological and social well-being as well as physical safeguarding. Applying that ethical frame to the practical realities of pre-performance content warnings, orientations, consent mechanics, in-performance care and aftercare required continual movement between the abstract and the concrete, exactly the movement Guile describes.

The empirical reach of the project was nonetheless constrained by access and gatekeeping. Several companies declined to participate once they grasped the depth of risk-related questioning involved; in effect, organisations already invested in audience-care debates were over-represented, while voices sceptical of such inquiry may have remained silent. Gatekeeping also limited opportunities for direct audience contact. The only audience perspective in both case studies is my own. While the resulting phenomenological approach aligns with the project's intention to privilege lived experience, it does restrict generalisability. The findings should therefore be read as context-specific rather than sector-wide. They map how risk and care are perceived and practised within particular immersive environments, offering signposts for further study rather than universal prescriptions.

The limited range of tools explored illustrates this point. Techniques such as active observation surfaced in workshop discussions but were not interrogated systematically across broad styles of immersive work. Each tool identified is arguably deserving of its own focused study to establish where it operates most effectively, where it falters and why, and how practitioners might build competency. Equally, the research did not engage in quantitative or psychometric measurement of risk perception, relying instead on interviews, observation and reflective exercises. This choice resonates with Jana Uher's (2021) argument that psychometrics sprang from qualitative roots, yet it also means that no statistical claims can be advanced regarding incidence or severity of perceived risk. Nor is the study longitudinal; it traces a snapshot of two productions and one workshop rather than charting evolving company cultures over time. Additional dimensions, financial exposure, alcohol consumption, or extended rehearsal processes, though mentioned by interviewees as important factors, remain outside the present scope.

Personal challenges emerged alongside these structural limitations. The PaR workshop, while the most rewarding phase of the project, created an unexpected cognitive burden: juggling facilitation, logistics and real-time reflection reduced the attentional space needed to stay fully present in moments of dialogue. This mirrors industry realities in which stage managers and producers routinely operate at the limits of their bandwidth. Mary LaFrance's (2013) contention that care-centred labour demands adequate staffing became palpable. I learned, in an embodied way, why overstretched practitioners, academic or professional, struggle to enact the attentiveness that care ethics require.

A deeper tension surfaced in my instinctive response to risk during the workshop. Participants were tasked with devising fictional 'cults', a deliberately provocative frame intended to surface risk-laden scenarios. My initial reflex was to eliminate hazards rather than explore their aesthetic

or affective potential. Only in reviewing the data did I recognise how occupational health and safety training can narrow one's imaginative palette, sidelining the creative value of positive risk. This tendency echoes the broader friction between production staff, who are professionally obliged to anticipate harm, and performance makers, for whom controlled danger can heighten immersion. Reconciling these positions is as much an epistemological as a practical task: it requires acknowledging that 'safe enough' is a difficult line to navigate, and that carefully calibrated uncertainty may itself be a condition of meaningful experience.

The workshop artefacts, surveys, prop 'relics', and structured exercises, proved crucial in capturing these complexities once the ephemeral event had passed. Robin Nelson (2022) observes that PaR writing functions as a complementary rather than exhaustive account (p. 103); indeed, without the physical traces generated during the sessions, rendering the workshop legible in Chapter 6 would have been near impossible. Future iterations would benefit from audio or video documentation, yet the absence of recording likely enabled participants to speak candidly about their own experiences. Balancing documentation with psychological safety remains an ethical consideration for ongoing research.

Taken together, these reflections confirm the exploratory character of the thesis. It begins to disentangle, though does not fully resolve, the ethical and procedural knot of audience risk in immersive theatre. The convergent insights of case studies and PaR illuminate how production staff currently perceive and manage physical, psychological and social hazards, and how a care ethic might be articulated across disciplinary lines. At the same time, access constraints, phenomenological focus and the lack of longitudinal breadth caution against over-extension of

the findings. They represent a starting point, a provisional map of practices, tensions and possibilities, rather than a definitive model. Further research might test individual tools across diverse immersive forms, probe the institutional reasons behind gatekeeping, and devise training that helps staff embrace positive risk without compromising duty of care. Such work would build on the foundations laid here, refining both the methodological instruments and the ethical sensibilities required for truly attentive audience practice.

VII. Recontextualising Audience Risk Management through a Care Ethics of Immersive Theatre: How Production Staff Can Contribute to Establishing Safer Spaces for Immersive Audiences

This thesis set out to ask how production staff can help create safer spaces for immersive audiences without diluting the form's distinctive, risk-infused vitality. Across two case studies and a practice-as-research workshop, the research has shown that production teams are far more than logistical back-up; they are co-authors of the audience experience and pivotal agents of ethical practice. By recontextualising care ethics alongside conventional risk management, the study advances a model of immersive theatre that is both safer and more inclusive, yet remains artistically dynamic.

Findings first revealed the power of trickle-down care. When companies treat care as a core organisational value, production staff are empowered to embed it in rehearsal protocols, orientation structures and escalation procedures. Where such a culture is absent, safety work becomes invisible and challenging, with 'risk' meaning starkly different things to creative artists and technical managers. Clarifying that negative risks must be mitigated while positive risks deserve support enables production staff to become managers of meaningful, ethical experiences.

Care ethics offers the conceptual scaffolding for this shift. By foregrounding adequate time, attentive listening and iterative reflection, it reframes safety as a relational practice rather than a purely regulatory obligation. Many participating companies already enact elements of this ethic intuitively, through phased briefings, feedback loops and carefully rehearsed contingency plans, yet the study demonstrates how a more explicit, care-informed vocabulary can deepen those practices. Crucially, care ethics insists on closing the loop with audiences themselves, making their emotional and psychological responses a formal part of post-show review.

The research also articulates a tripartite account of care, pre-performance, in-performance and post-performance, that brings new attention to the middle phase, a period often neglected in both scholarship and practice. Tools such as orientations, playtesting, rehearsed escalation routes and emotional-intelligence training were shown to give production staff the agility to respond to emergent needs without stifling spontaneity. Examining the positionality of risk assessors sharpened awareness of how sociocultural identities shape perceptions of safety and danger, highlighting the importance of reflexive practice for genuinely inclusive work.

Recontextualising risk management through care ethics positions production staff as stewards of ‘safe enough.’ As immersive theatre scales up and attracts ever more diverse publics, the tacit know-how of niche circles will no longer suffice. A care-led vocabulary, embedded in professional training and organisational policy, becomes essential to sustaining the form’s transformative promise. The next and final chapter revisits the contributions this research makes to risk management, care ethics and communication design, and outlines new avenues for inquiry that have emerged from the study’s limitations and discoveries.

Chapter 8 - Creating Safer ‘Unsafe’ Spaces: Reflections on this Research and What Comes

Next

This concluding chapter brings together the key insights of the thesis, which set out to explore how immersive theatre can support safer ‘unsafe’ spaces without compromising the artistic provocation within the performances. The research focused on how production staff perceive and manage audience risk and how these practices might be enhanced through a care ethics framework. In response to the lack of structured guidance or scholarly focus on non-physical risks, particularly psychological and social harms, this study aimed to develop practical tools and a grounded philosophy of care for immersive theatre. The central research questions were: *How do production staff understand and manage risk in immersive contexts? How can care ethics be applied to support and strengthen those practices? And what competencies or training structures are needed to embed care more systematically into production processes?*

This thesis addressed a significant gap in existing literature, by noting how the latter tends to privilege creators’ perspectives and focuses narrowly on physical risk, often neglecting the relational and affective complexities of audience participation. Drawing on Slovic’s (1987; 2010) psychometric model of risk perception, Tronto (1993; 2015) and Hamington’s (2024) care ethics, Guile’s (2019) concept of recontextualisation, and occupational health and safety literature (HSE, 2024, 2023a, 2023b; Möller et al., 2018; Silvers & O’Toole, 2020), the research contributes a more holistic understanding of risk in immersive performance. The study combined two qualitative case studies, using semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations, analysed through thematic analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

(IPA) with an iterative design Practice-as-Research workshop series. This interpretative, constructivist approach allowed for rich, contextualised insight into how production staff and performance makers differently frame and navigate risk in practice.

The findings of this research make several original contributions. First, I developed a working typology of audience risk in immersive theatre that expands beyond physical hazards to include psychological and social dimensions, offering a more comprehensive framework for assessing audience vulnerability. Second, the research informed the development of a care ethic of immersive theatre, a foundational philosophy for theatre-making that centres not only audience care but also care for and among production teams. Third, it deepens the discussion of communication design in risk management, identifying two distinct ‘languages’ of risk: one oriented toward *positive* risk as artistic and affective intensity, often used by performance makers; and one focused on mitigation and prevention of *negative* risks, grounded in health and safety discourse and typically voiced by production staff. I argue that effective audience care requires translation across these discourses and recognition of both forms of risk.

Fourth, the research highlights how the labour of production staff often becomes invisible, particularly in relation to pre-emptive planning and safety design. This invisibility masks their contribution to creating safer experiences. These contributions, though difficult to quantify, particularly as entertainment industry-specific metrics are not available, are, however, supported by broader workplace safety data such as the 79% drop in work-related deaths following the UK's 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act (Employer News, 2024). Finally, through the iterative

development of a training workshop, this project contributes to the foundations of a care-based toolkit that enables immersive practitioners to practise and refine communication strategies around risk. The workshop not only functioned as a research method but also as a prototype for future training initiatives aimed at embedding care ethics more deeply into immersive theatre practice.

The first case study in Chapter 4 revealed that audience care and risk management in *ROLL THE BONES' Dead Letter No. 9* are underpinned by a nuanced, relational approach grounded in emotional intelligence, situational awareness, and responsive communication. Production staff demonstrated a multi-phase care model: using pre-performance orientations to establish trust and emotional preparedness; employing in-performance attentiveness to monitor and adapt to audience responses; and extending care through post-performance aftercare practices that foster ongoing dialogue and community. These efforts reflect a commitment to care as a fluid, embodied practice rather than just a checklist-driven protocol. The case also highlights gaps in formal training, with production staff and performers relying heavily on experiential learning, playtesting, and intuition to manage unpredictable dynamics, prompting a call for structured professional development in areas such as de-escalation and emotional support. Notably, the study surfaced the importance of post-show feedback loops in sustaining care and challenged assumptions that emotional intensity (e.g., tears) signals harm, instead framing such responses as part of meaningful engagement. Overall, this case contributes a detailed framework of care-based competencies, emphasizing adaptability, communication, and the need to professionalise support roles within immersive theatre.

Based on the investigation of Coney's *1884* in Chapter 5, the second case study highlights how audience care and risk management are enacted through a carefully integrated ethic of communication, collaboration, and adaptability. Key findings include the central role of comprehensive pre-planning and transparent communication, such as detailed event briefs and pre-show messaging, which align teams and create preparedness for potential disruptions. Collaborative risk management practices, such as open dialogue and scenario planning, enabled shared authorship of safety protocols, reflecting care ethics principles like mutual respect and active listening. A major theme across the study was the invisible labour underpinning successful outcomes: the often-overlooked backstage work of preparation and care that allows performances to run smoothly without visible incident. The company also demonstrated a nuanced trust in audience autonomy, balancing mystery with appropriate boundaries, thereby supporting agency while maintaining safety. Notably, production staff Marie Klimis raised concerns about the limitations of formal risk assessments, critiquing them as often disconnected from lived, on-the-ground practice. The case underscores how immersive theatre requires a dynamic interplay between structured planning, open communication and real-time responsiveness, and contributes practical insight into how care is operationalised as both a philosophy and a day-to-day practice.

In Chapter 6, the Practice-as-Research workshops revealed that embedding care ethics into immersive theatre requires a relational approach to audience risk management that spans the full arc of the performance experience. Care emerged as an ongoing process, not a fixed act,

encompassing transparency, active and continuous consent, and post-show aftercare practices such as decompression and ritual closure, resonating with Tronto's (1993) phases of care. Participants voiced a strong need for specific, actionable, and context-sensitive information to make informed decisions about participation, rejecting the notion that ticket purchase alone constitutes adequate consent. The study also showed that practical care tools, like checklists or communication protocols, must remain flexible and responsive to different production contexts, rather than operating as rigid templates. Importantly, care must be structurally embedded through staffing, training, and institutional support, rather than treated as an afterthought. A key insight was the tension between upholding artistic freedom and ensuring safety, which participants addressed by calling for translational approaches that recognise both the creative and ethical dimensions of risk. Identification and discussion of the tools mentioned during the workshop helped develop the toolkit. Importantly, the workshops highlighted a gap in knowledge around in-performance tools, which informed another reading of the case studies to specifically identify how those production staff spoke of tools for providing care during the performances. The workshops also surfaced challenges, such as the difficulty of recalibrating attitudes towards risk. Overall, the findings extend existing literature by demonstrating that care ethics can be both a guiding philosophy and a practical framework for immersive theatre, offering concrete yet adaptable pathways for ethical audience engagement. The findings of these three chapters were then discussed in detail in Chapter 7 to support the overall contributions of this research. How those findings map to the field of immersive theatre, risk management, care ethics, and communication design are now discussed below.

I. Contributions to the Field of Immersive Theatre: The Aesthetic Practice of Care

The catalyst for this research emerged during my experiences stage-managing large-scale immersive productions. I observed how some audience members, disoriented by the performance environment, missed the intended artistic impact and, in some cases, experienced genuine harm, both physical and psychological (see vignettes on p. 15). Despite the increasing popularity and complexity of immersive theatre, existing scholarship has largely overlooked the perspectives of production staff, the stage managers and house managers, trained in occupational health and safety, who are uniquely positioned to observe how different audiences respond over time. This research addresses that critical gap by foregrounding their expertise and repositioning risk assessment as a dynamic, care-informed practice within immersive performance.

This thesis demonstrates that production staff are pivotal in establishing safer, ethically attuned immersive theatre environments by embodying a care ethics framework tailored to the unique challenges of immersive performance. Through dual case studies and Practice-as-Research (PaR) workshops, the research reveals how production staff manage not only physical safety but also cultivate affective atmospheres that holistically shape audience experience. This integrative role, situated at the nexus of logistical oversight and emotional attunement, enables safer, more meaningful audience engagement. It positions care as both an ethical commitment and an aesthetic practice central to immersive theatre.

By mapping current audience care practices and risk management strategies across companies, the research identifies a significant gap in scholarship, which often marginalises production labour in discussions of immersive theatre, particularly in relation to audience handling. The study fulfilled its aims by first surveying care practices across leading immersive companies, exposing both strengths and critical gaps, especially the invisibility and undervaluation of production labour in care delivery. It then critically assessed existing risk management methods, incorporating feedback from workshop participants, and highlighting additional tools particularly relevant to in-performance care.

By introducing care ethics as a philosophically rich and practical framework, the thesis repositions care from peripheral to central in immersive practice, proposing it as an aesthetic and ethical principle foundational to the form's integrity. It engages with and extends critical frameworks, notably challenging White's (2023) claim that destabilisation is necessary for audience engagement. In alignment with Thompson's (2023) alternative to this 'aesthetic of scare,' the thesis supports his call for an 'aesthetic of care,' further enriched by Hamington's (2024) concept of care as an affective, anticipatory, and responsive art form embedded in production work. Through the integration of Tronto's (1993; 2015) care ethics phases into immersive contexts, the study advances theoretical understanding while contributing a practical safeguarding toolkit and training workshop, resources previously underdeveloped in both scholarly and professional discourse.

This research contributes to a paradigm shift in immersive theatre: from viewing care as merely protective or logistical, to recognising it as artistic labour, and accepting that production staff are part of the artistic caregiving team. It challenges and reframes dominant theatrical hierarchies that have historically relegated production staff to invisible logistical roles, instead recognising them as central caregivers whose labour shapes not only safety but also the ethical and emotional resonance of immersive experience. The findings support scholars such as Smalley (2024) and Sammarco (2025) on the importance of communication design among production staff, while also pushing boundaries around the ethics of audience engagement, particularly in response to White's (2023) assumptions about necessary provocation.

Finally, the flexible safeguarding toolkit and training workshop developed through this research offer a practical infrastructure for integrating care into production workflows. These tools promote ethical consistency without compromising creative fluidity. Their implications extend across rehearsal structures, training priorities, and collaborative planning processes, advocating for institutional recognition and resourcing of care work as fundamental to immersive theatre. The recognition of a 'careful art' directly challenges dominant 'aesthetics of scare' paradigms, promoting audience engagement through presence and responsiveness rather than provocation alone.

II. Contributions to the Field of Risk Management

This thesis clarifies the complex and often conflicting languages of risk within immersive theatre, namely, the artistic framing of risk as creative potential versus the production-centred framing focused on harm mitigation and compliance. This study demonstrates how risk

management in immersive theatre cannot rely solely on conventional occupational health and safety protocols but must incorporate translational practices connecting diverse stakeholders. While still embracing traditional risk management protocols, this research calls for augmenting them with care to address the gaps related to psychological and social risks unique to immersive audiences. This directly addresses how risk is conceptualised and managed on the ground, emphasizing the necessity for shared vocabularies and interdisciplinary communication to bridge divides.

i. A Dual Language of Risk

Discussions with workshop participants revealed a persistent discursive divide: performance makers often describe risk as an aesthetic catalyst, while production staff refer to it through the lens of health and safety compliance. By mapping these differing framings onto Slovic's psychometric paradigm (2010), the thesis demonstrates that 'risk' is socially constructed within professional cultures. This explains why creative and logistical teams frequently talk past one another. The identification of this dual vocabulary not only clarifies a key source of miscommunication but also offers a conceptual bridge that enables translation between artistic and safety discourses.

ii. A Typology of Audience Risk in Immersive Theatre

Chapter 2 introduced a typology that treats physical, psychological, and social harms as interlocking layers of audience vulnerability. Subsequent testing of this typology across case

studies and PaR workshops (Chapter 7, Section IV) affirmed its practical utility. Participants used it to surface nuanced forms of risk, from reputational damage to post-show shame, that conventional venue assessments often overlook. In doing so, this typology widens the scope of audience care research beyond simple hazard avoidance. It also extends Guile's (2019) recontextualisation framework by demonstrating how theoretical models can be operationalised within the site-specific and relational conditions of immersive practice.

iii. Making Invisible Labour Visible

Field observations underscored how incident-free immersive performances depend on extensive pre-planning, including risk assessments, emergency drills, and extended time for communication and safety protocol practice. Considered alongside accident reduction data from the UK's 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act (Employer News, 2024) from Chapter 1, the thesis argues that preventative labour in immersive contexts is similarly consequential, but far less visible or institutionally recognised. By drawing attention to this often-overlooked labour, the research supports a reallocation of credit, budget, and rehearsal time, reinforcing broader calls for valuing care work as a form of creative labour within immersive production.

iv. A Practice-as-Research Workshop Model

To address the lack of formal training highlighted in both case studies, Chapter 6 presents the *Build Your Own Cult* workshop, a replicable professional development module designed to allow

production teams to rehearse risk communication strategies in low-stakes conditions. Developed through two iterations and shaped by participant feedback (Appendix N), the workshop model proved effective in bridging the dual vocabularies of risk while reinforcing Tronto's (1993) phases of care in real time. It positions dialogic rehearsal for production staff as central to developing competency in immersive risk management.

v. A Reimagined Care-Centred Toolkit for Audience Management

Insights from the workshops coalesced into a flexible toolkit for managing audience care across the arc of performance. This includes pre-show playtesting, orientation scripts, and co-authored content warnings; in-show escalation plans, communication cues, and trained 'floaters' to monitor affective atmospheres; and post-show decompression rituals and follow-up messaging. Chapter 7, Section V details its development, and the complete version is provided in Appendix P for future adaptation. By demonstrating how collaboratively authored warnings can empower rather than patronise audiences, the toolkit offers a practical counterpoint to critiques by Halberstam (2017) and Jones et al. (2023). In doing so, it operationalises care ethics without compromising immersive theatre's capacity for artistic risk.

Together, these contributions reposition risk management in immersive performance as a care-centred, interdisciplinary practice. The research highlights how production staff navigate tensions between creative intent and audience safety, providing tools, language, and training models that can support more ethically and emotionally responsive immersive work.

III. Contributions to Care Ethics

This thesis reframes care ethics from an abstract moral philosophy into a practical, aesthetic, and organisational principle for immersive theatre. Care is treated here as relational, adaptive, and practice-based: it requires attentiveness, responsive action, and continuous ethical engagement. By positioning production staff as central caregivers rather than peripheral logisticians, the research reconceptualises care as co-creative work embedded in every phase of performance. Building on Tronto's (1993; 2015) four phases of care, this study integrates care ethics with communication design and practical care tools, demonstrating that care is simultaneously methodology and aesthetic within immersive theatre.

i. Communication as the Foundation of Ethical Action

Across both case studies, effective audience support hinged on what Hamington (2024) terms humble inquiry, attentive listening and open-ended questioning. Chapter 6's PaR workshops made this visible: participants designed high-risk participatory activities, then negotiated how to manage those risks while caring for participants. Communication thus emerges not as a supplementary soft skill but as the medium through which care ethics is enacted, lending weight to relational theories that privilege dialogue over directive control.

ii. Embedding Care in Theatre Design

The thesis shows that ethical attentiveness can be built not only into dramaturgy, but also production planning. Collaborative planning documents (Chapter 5; Chapter 6), risk planning co-authored by performance makers and production staff (Chapter 4; Chapter 5), redistribute responsibility from individuals to collective frameworks. This institutional turn echoes feminist critiques that call for structural recognition of care labour, pushing care-ethics scholarship to address how policies and artefacts, not only people, can care. It also speaks to the critiques raised in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 about the challenges of attempting to care for audiences as production staff when support from above, such as producers or the theatre company, is missing.

Chapter 5 complicates Gareth White's (2023) claim that audiences need to be disrupted: interview data revealed greater engagement when risk was tempered by clear boundaries and informed autonomy through the use of pre-performance audience playing guides and clear orientation information. The thesis therefore suggests there are subsets of immersive theatre, one of which is a *careful art*, one that privileges presence, anticipation, and responsiveness over provocation, and extends Thompson's (2020) proposition that care aesthetics have an impact on the style of production by influencing the 'shape and feel of the relationships' (p. 439).

iii. Revisiting Invisible Labour

Both case studies reveal production staff as dramaturgical caretakers: monitoring emotional climate, safeguarding performers and audiences, and de-escalating conflict. Although vital, this

labour remains largely unseen by audiences and under-acknowledged in scholarship. By foregrounding these tasks, the thesis supports critical theorists who call for valuing marginalised care work and demonstrates that safety is not mere compliance but an ongoing creative act woven into the fabric of performance.

IV. Contributions to Communication Design: Translating Risk and Care Communication

In immersive theatre, safety, consent, and emotional resonance are choreographed with the same intentionality as space, light, and narrative, and their manner of delivery is often nuanced through communication design. Two core questions guided the inquiry: *How do production staff create safer immersive environments* and *how is risk managed in these contexts?* The answer lies in careful communication: production teams script pre-show briefings, improvise real-time responses to audience needs, coordinate cross-departmental cues, and shape the affective climate of each performance.

Building on Smalley's (2024) proposition that stage management is a form of communication-led scenography, this study shows that communication is not auxiliary but a key medium through which immersive meaning is generated. Because the audience is both observer and participant, communicative acts that can be verbal, gestural, and procedural, guide consent, sustain safety, and frame interpretation while also producing an affective outcome. This affective influence functions as a tacit shaping of mood, trust, and atmosphere. Production staff's ongoing dialogue thus forms an invisible communication layer that regulates the relational dynamics of the event.

Through case studies and practice-as-research workshops, the research exposed two divergent ‘languages of risk’: one technical and compliance-oriented, focused on mitigating *negative* risks, the other bound to artistic aspiration, focused on *positive* risks. While this is still a significant area for further research, it demonstrates that translation itself is a valuable intervention. The safeguarding toolkit developed here, structured around pre-, in-, and post-performance stages, makes communication a practical instrument for caring for immersive audiences.

By foregrounding production labour as continuous, choreographed dialogue, the thesis expands the scope of communication design beyond its traditional administrative-based focus. It proposes a pedagogical and operational model in which communication strategy is integral to both artistic integrity and audience wellbeing, providing a roadmap for training teams in collaborative, care-centred risk management.

V. Limitations of the Research

As with any exploratory, qualitative study, this research is shaped by its methodological choices, practical constraints, and the specific contexts in which it was conducted (Seale, 2018; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022). While this thesis makes contributions to the fields of risk management, care ethics, and communication design, these contributions should be understood within the boundaries of the study’s design. This section outlines the key limitations that have influenced the scope, depth, and generalisability of the research.

The dual-method design, case studies coupled with practice-as-research (PaR) workshops, generated rich, complementary data but introduced considerable complexity. Managing two intertwined strands demanded stringent scope containment to safeguard workload and researcher wellbeing. As a result, the discrete influence of each method is sometimes difficult to isolate, and broader generalisability is necessarily limited. Additionally, while the case studies were indeed deeply phenomenological in nature, speaking directly to the performance makers and production staff, as well as drawing from my own observations of the show, the workshops, at times, deviated from this conceptual framework, particularly in compiling and discussion of the tools for use in the toolkit.

Fieldwork centred on English-speaking companies in the UK (Coney) and the United States (ROLL THE BONES), reflecting my own practice across these two global contexts. As such, this thesis focuses on immersive theatre practice within the cultural, regulatory, and institutional frameworks of the UK and US. While the findings may hold relevance for international contexts, further research is needed to explore how risk perception and care practices are shaped by different cultural, linguistic, and legal environments. These factors may mediate audience engagement in ways this study does not capture. Consequently, the care-ethics framework and safeguarding toolkit developed here may require adaptation before application elsewhere.

Gatekeeper-mediated access, discussed in Chapter 3.I.i, shaped the participant pool and restricted direct engagement with audiences. Planned questionnaires were abandoned after the pilot phase due to company resistance, curbing a broader triangulation of audience perspectives outside my

own. Financial and time limitations further reduced opportunities for repeated observations, especially when productions closed early (venue collapse at ROLL THE BONES, loss of funding at Coney, both described in Chapter 3.I.iv.2). In shows with branching narratives and variable audience composition, no single visit could capture the full performance arc.

My insider/outsider status (see Chapter 3.I.i), simultaneously a stage-management practitioner and researcher, facilitated entry but also risked influencing interactions and interpretations.

Observational methods and interview data depend on subjective judgement (Seale, 2018). While reflexive strategies (see Chapter 3.IV.i) sought to manage bias, complete neutrality is neither claimed nor attainable.

The three-pronged typology of risk developed in Chapter 2.V, derived from existing literature and field testing, is conditional. Other immersive settings may reveal additional categories, especially as immersive theatre continues to develop and expand. Similarly, the emergent care-ethics toolkit in Chapter 7.V is intentionally adaptable; its utility lies in prompting context-specific reflection rather than prescribing universal solutions. As industry practices evolve, both framework and toolkit will require ongoing refinement.

These limitations do not undermine the central argument of the thesis; rather, they highlight the conditions under which its insights were produced. Recognising methodological complexity, cultural specificity, access constraints, interpretive subjectivity, and the provisional nature of its models underscores the need for continued, context-sensitive research, work that can build on these findings while extending them to new audiences, geographies, and performance formats.

VI. Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis was conceived as an exploratory study, designed to investigate how care ethics and risk management might intersect within the complex and often under-acknowledged labour of immersive theatre production. Rather than seeking definitive or generalisable conclusions, the research aimed to surface emerging patterns, test conceptual frameworks, and develop tools for future use. As such, one of its most significant contributions is the identification of several critical areas that warrant deeper investigation. These areas span methodological, pedagogical, and institutional dimensions and collectively offer a roadmap for advancing ethically responsive, care-driven immersive practice.

Audience-centred research remains one of the most pressing areas for future inquiry. Despite its centrality to care ethics, audience response was difficult to access in this project due to institutional gatekeeping. As a result, future work must directly engage audiences to evaluate how they interpret and respond to risk communication, care interventions, and participatory design elements. This could include mixed-methods research on how different formats, such as pre-show emails, venue signage, verbal framing, or digital prompts, influence understanding, consent, and post-performance processing, as well as more expansive studies to determine more effective ways of gathering post-performance feedback. Gathering such data would not only complete the care feedback loop but also inform more inclusive communication strategies. Extending the psychometric and linguistic frameworks introduced in this thesis, further research might explore how audiences and practitioners from different demographic and cultural

backgrounds perceive risk. Quantitative studies could examine how factors like age, neurodivergence, disability, and immersive experience shape attitudes toward risk and safety. A complementary discourse analysis of the language of risk, particularly the tensions between artistic risk as thrill and operational risk as hazard, could reveal how miscommunication arises in creative teams and how it might be mitigated through shared vocabularies or interdisciplinary training.

There is also considerable opportunity to develop and refine the safeguarding tools and workshop frameworks piloted in this thesis. Future research might pursue action research models in partnership with immersive theatre companies, using iterative testing, reflection, and co-design to strengthen and contextualise these resources. The workshop could be expanded to integrate training in relational communication, accessibility, and trauma-informed practice, which are currently outside the scope of this research. Empirical assessment of such interventions, tracking outcomes like improved staff preparedness, reduced audience harm, or clearer team communication would help substantiate the value of communication design as a contributing practice in immersive theatre.

Finally, this thesis has highlighted the importance of institutional structures in either supporting or constraining care-based work. As immersive theatre continues to evolve amid sectoral instability and changing funding priorities, longitudinal studies could investigate how companies embed care ethics over time, or fail to. The recent closure of Coney, one of the sector's most ethically engaged companies, due to Arts Council defunding, underscores the urgency of this work. Future studies might examine the structural supports needed to sustain care-informed

practice, from policy-level changes in arts funding to the formal recognition of production labour as creative and ethical work. Documenting and archiving the methodologies of such companies is also crucial, as much of their innovation risks being lost without active preservation.

Taken together, these areas for future research point not only to the richness of the field but to its ethical stakes. Immersive theatre continues to push the boundaries of form and audience experience; future scholarship must continue to ask how those boundaries are shaped, protected, and cared for.

VII. How can production staff contribute to establishing safer spaces for immersive audiences while still supporting artistic boundary-pushing?

My thesis demonstrates that immersive theatre can remain artistically daring while safeguarding audience wellbeing when production staff act as ethical co-authors of the experience. Drawing on two detailed case studies and a purpose-built practice-as-research workshop, the study reframes risk through care ethics to develop a care ethic of immersive theatre developed from Joan Tronto's (1993; 2015) phases of care and expands safety considerations beyond regulatory compliance to include relational, psychological, and social dimensions. It proposes an interconnected three-phase system of audience care, pre-, in-, and post-performance, and equips production teams with practical tools such as play-testing, orientations, rehearsed escalation protocols, and emotional-intelligence training. Together, these interventions show how production staff can balance desired artistic boundary-pushing with duty of care.

While its exploratory scope and phenomenological focus limit generalisability, my research nonetheless offers a scalable framework for future refinement and study. Ultimately, it embeds a care-driven communication design and philosophy within immersive practice, improving the visibility of production staff as stewards of ‘safe-enough’ spaces that sustain the form’s transformative potential for increasingly diverse audiences.

Reference List

- Akbar, A. (2024, February 22). We go to the theatre to feel something – and people do. Trigger warnings don't stop that. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/feb/22/theatre-trigger-warnings-culture-wars>
- Alston, A. (2012). Damocles and the plucked: Audience participation and risk in *Half Cut*. *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22(3), 344-354.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2012.690742>
- Alston, A. (2013a). Audience participation and neoliberal value: Risk, agency and responsibility in immersive theatre. *Performance Research*, 18(2), 128-138.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2013.807177>
- Alston, A. (2013b). Politics in the dark: Risk perception, affect and emotion in Lundahl and Seidl's *Rotating in a Room of Images*. In N. Shaughnessy (Ed.), *Affective performance and cognitive science body, brain and being*. (pp. 217-228). Bloomsbury.
- Alston, A. (2013c). *Productive participants: Aesthetics and politics in immersive theatre* (Doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London). Royal Holloway Research Portal.
https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/files/18064917/Productive_Participants_final_draft.pdf
- Alston, A. (2016a). *Beyond immersive theatre: Aesthetics, politics and production participation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Alston, A. (2019). Immersive theatre in austerity Britain: Les Enfants Terribles' riot in the Saatchi Gallery and the liquidation of differenceEngine. *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 29(3), 199-217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2019.1615904>
- Andrews, A.J.G. (2022). *Know your place: An investigation of site-specific performances as an exchange of hospitality between artist and audience*. (Doctoral thesis, University of Leeds). White Rose eTheses.
https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/32896/1/Andrews_AJG_PerformanceandCulturalIndustries_PhD_2022.pdf
- Aristotle. (2000). The poetics (I. Bywater, Trans.). In D. Gerould (Ed.), *Theatre theory theatre* (pp. 43-67). Applause theatre & cinema books. (Original work published ca. 4 B.C.E.)
- Aviles-Rodriguez, G., Cole, P., Harmon, R., & Mee, E. B. (2019). Ethics and site-based theatre: A curated discussion. *Theatre History Studies*, 38(1), 166-195.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/ths.2019.0010>
- Balme, C. B. (2008). *The Cambridge introduction to theatre studies*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511817021>

- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1573>
- Beck, U. (1999). *World risk society*. Polity.
- Bellet, B. W., Jones, P. J., & McNally, R. J. (2018). Trigger warning: Empirical evidence ahead. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 61, 134-141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbtep.2018.07.002>
- Belloli, G. (2018). *The construction of skill in contemporary experimental theatre* (Doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge). Apollo. <https://api.repository.cam.ac.uk/server/api/core/bitstreams/910c50cf-11d0-43f9-b1b7-7abf40ca17ea/content>
- Belo, M., & Gustavo, N. (2024). Managing motivations and satisfaction in dark immersive theatre experiences. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 37, 3709-3727. <https://doi.org/10.54055/ejtr.v37i.3417>
- Beres, M. A., & MacDonald, J. E. C. (2015). Talking about sexual consent. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30(86), 418-432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2016.1158692>
- Bessette, E. (2020). *Thinking through fear in films and haunts* (Doctoral thesis, University of California). University of California. https://escholarship.org/content/qt9mz4c2sz/qt9mz4c2sz_noSplash_649c0f13799bc956570ee9fcdc0cee9e.pdf
- Biggin, R. (2017). *Immersive theatre and audience experience: Space, game and story in the work of Punchdrunk*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bisaha, D. (2019). 'I want you to feel uncomfortable': Adapting participation in a 24-decade history of popular music at San Francisco's Curran Theatre. *Theatre History Studies*, 38(1), 133-148). <https://doi.org/10.1353/ths.2019.0008>
- Bishop, G. (2017, September 11). In defence of immersive theatre. *If Theatre Be the Food of Love, Play On...* <https://gailebishop.wordpress.com/2017/09/11/in-defence-of-immersive-theatre/>
- Bondar, M. (2025). Micro-events: A potential tool for navigating consent and accessibility in immersive theatre. *The Journal of Consent-Based Performance*, 3(2). <https://journals.calstate.edu/jcbp/article/view/4096/3945>
- Bondar, M., & Pires, C. E. (2024). A phenomenology of misfits: A case study of practice-as-research in higher education symposia. *PARTake: The Journal of Performance as Research*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.33011/partake.v6i1.2217>

- Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational aesthetics*. Les presses du reel.
- Breel, A. (2015). Audience agency in participatory performance: a methodology for examining aesthetic experience. *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 12 (1), 368-387. <https://www.participations.org/12-01-23-breel.pdf>
- Brigante, R., & Elger, S. (2020). *New adventures: The strength of immersive entertainment. 2020 immersive entertainment industry annual report*. Pseudonym Productions. <https://everythingimmersive.com/storage/website-files/documents/2020%20Immersive%20Entertainment%20Industry%20Annual%20Report.pdf>
- Briscoe, R. (2022, Jan 7). Risk in theatre: self-discovery, not a form to fill in when people go up ladders. *Fast Familiar*. <https://workroom.fastfamiliar.com/risk-in-theatre/>
- Bruce, M., & Roberts, D. (2020). Trigger warnings for abuse impact reading comprehension in students with histories of abuse. *College Student Journal*, 54(2), 157–168. https://www.paytonjjones.com/publication/tw_reading_comprehension/tw_reading_comprehension.pdf
- Bucknall, J. (2016a). Liminoid invitations and liminoid acts: The role of ludic strategies and tropes in immersive and micro-performance dramaturgies. *Performance Research*, 21(4), 53-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2016.1192868>
- Bucknall, J. (Host). (2016b, June 1). TAIT Episode 2 (No. 2) [Audio podcast]. *Talking about immersive theatre (TAIT)*. <https://soundcloud.com/dr-joanna-bucknall/tait-episode-2>
- Bucknall, J. (Host). (2016c, Nov 1). TAIT Episode 7 (No. 7) [Audio podcast]. *Talking about immersive theatre (TAIT)*. <https://soundcloud.com/dr-joanna-bucknall/tait-episode-7>
- Bucknall, J. (Host). (2018, Feb 7). TAIT Episode 21: Zack Polanski [Audio podcast]. *Talking about immersive theatre (TAIT)*. <https://soundcloud.com/dr-joanna-bucknall/episode-21-zack-polanski>
- Bucknall, J. (Host). (2020, Sep 13). Episode 25: Buckbeak Games [Audio podcast]. *Talking about immersive theatre (TAIT)*. <https://soundcloud.com/dr-joanna-bucknall/episode-25-buckbeak-games>
- Bucknall, J. (Host). (2021, Nov 9). TAIT Episode 26: Nick A. Olivero – Mr. Topsy’s Down the Hatch! [Audio podcast]. *Talking about immersive theatre (TAIT)*. <https://soundcloud.com/dr-joanna-bucknall/tait-episode-26-nick-oliver-mr-tipsys-down-the-hatch>
- Bucknall, J. (2022). *Talking about immersive theatre: Conversations on immersions and interactivities in performance*. Methuen Drama. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350269361>

- Butterworth, B. (2018). Mathematical expertise. In K. A. Ericsson, R. R. Hoffman, A. Kozbelt, & A. M. Williams (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of expertise and expert performance* (pp. 616–633). Cambridge University Press.
- Callaway, M. (2021). *The house manager's diary: A guide to customer service for regional and community theaters*. Outskirts Press.
- Carter, A. M. (2015). Teaching with trauma: Trigger warnings, feminism, and disability pedagogy. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 35(2). <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/4652/3935>
- Chen, L. (2022). 'Curtains, music and stages' in Zoom theatre: framing devices in Coney's Telephone. *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 19(1), 27–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14794713.2022.2162273>
- Ciesielska, M., Boström, K. W., & Öhlander, M. (2018). Observation methods. In M. Ciesielska & D. Jemielniak (Eds.). *Qualitative methodologies in organization studies* (pp. 33-52). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_2
- Collins-Hughes, L. (2015, April 29) Review: 'Ziegfeld's Midnight Frolic' explores the murky death of the actress Olive Thomas. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/30/theater/review-ziegfelds-midnight-frolic-explores-the-murky-death-of-the-actress-olive-thomas.html>
- Coney. (n.d.). 1884. *Coney*. Retrieved August 21, 2025 from <https://coneyhq.org/project/1884/>.
- Coney. (2024). *1884 Playing audience's guide*. Coney. <https://shoreditchtownhall.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/1884-playing-audiences-guide-updated.pdf>
- Costa, M. (2011, Nov 7). Ontroerend Goed: Are you sitting uncomfortably? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/nov/07/ontroerend-goed-theatre-audience>
- Creswell, J.W., & Poth, C.N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (4th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Crois, E. (2020). Responsible combodifying: The intelligence of discomfort in guiding interactive performance. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Research*, 25(3), 405-421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2020.1779583>
- Cult, (n.). (2025). In *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1200859423>
- Culture, (n., Sense II.4). (2025). In *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5224374065>
- Culture, (n., Sense III.6). (2025). In *OED Online*. Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9603274986>

- Dake, K., & Wildavsky, A. (1991). Individual differences in risk perception and risk-taking preferences. In Garrick, B.J., Gekler, W.C. (Eds.), *The analysis, communication, and perception of risk*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2370-7_2
- Dean, P. (2002). *Production Management: Making Shows Happen, A Practical Guide*. The Crowood Press.
- Dickson, T. (2025, July 21). Immersive theatre guidance. *Stage Management Association*. <https://www.stagemanagementassociation.co.uk/sites/default/files/2025-07/Immersive%20Th%20draft%203.2%20%20TLD.pdf>
- Dinesh, N. (2018). *Immersive theatre and activism: Scripts and strategies for directors and playwrights*. McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers.
- Douglas, M., & Wildavsky, A. (1982). *Risk and culture: An essay on the selection of technical and environmental dangers*. University of California Press.
- Dunkley, C. R., & Brotto, L. A. (2019). The role of consent in the context of BDSM. *Sexual Abuse*, 32(6), 657–678. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063219842847>
- Dykema, J., Schaeffer, N.C., Garbarski, D., & Hout, M. (2020). The role of question characteristics in designing and evaluating survey questions. In P. Beatty, D. Collins, L. Kaye, J.L. Padilla, G. Willis & A. Wilmot (Eds.), *Advances in questionnaire design, development, evaluation and testing* (pp. 117-152). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119263685.ch6>
- Earle T.C. (2010). Trust in risk management: a model-based review of empirical research. *Risk Analysis*, 30(4), 541-74. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6924.2010.01398.x>
- Edmonson, C. (2018). *Under the influence: Drinking and immersion in New York City theatre and popular entertainment, 1850 to present* (Doctoral thesis, City University of New York). CUNY Academic Works. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/2616
- Eisenhardt, K. & Graebner, M. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25-31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20159839>
- Elger, S. & Brigante, R. (2022). *Proposal audience advisory system*. Pseudonym Productions.
- Employer News. (2024, Oct 29). The Impact of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974: 50 Years of Progress. *Employer News*. <https://employernews.co.uk/health-safety/accidents-at-work-down-the-impact-of-the-health-and-safety-at-work-act-1974/>.

- Englander, M. & Morely, J. (2021). Phenomenological psychology and qualitative research. *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, 22(2023), 25-53.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-021-09781-8>
- Epoché, (n., Sense a.). (2025). In *OED Online*. Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5881689698>
- Ericsson, K., Krampe, R., & Tesch-Roemer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. *Psychological Review*, 100, 363-406.
<https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-295X.100.3.363>
- Feldman, A. (2024, June 11). New York's iconic Sleep No More will now close in September. *TimeOut*.
<https://www.timeout.com/newyork/news/new-yorks-iconic-sleep-no-more-will-close-in-april-032024>
- Finlay, L. (2008). Reflecting on 'Reflective practice'. *The Open University*.
<https://oro.open.ac.uk/68945/1/Finlay-%282008%29-Reflecting-on-reflective-practice-PBPL-paper-52.pdf>
- Finucane, M., Slovic, P., Mertz, C.K., Flynn, J., & Satterfield, T.A. (2010). Gender, race, and perceived risk: The 'white male' effect. In P. Slovic (Ed.), *The Feeling of Risk: New Perspectives on Risk Perception* (pp. 125-139). Earthscan.
- Fischer-Lichte, E. (2008). *The transformative power of performance*. Routledge.
- Fischhoff, B., Slovic, P., & Lichtenstein, S. (1978). How safe is safe enough? A psychometric study of attitudes towards technological risks and benefits. *Policy Sciences*, 9(2), 127-152. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4531720>
- Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research*. Sage.
- Freshwater, H. (2009). *theatre & audience*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gardner, L. (2018, April 11). Is immersive theatre growing up or growing too big, too quickly? *The Stage*.
<https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/is-immersive-theatre-growing-up-or-growing-too-big-too-quickly>
- Gardner, L. (2024, April 9). Lyn Gardner catches up with Rhianna Ilube ahead of 1884 coming to Shoreditch Town Hall next week. *Stagedoor*.
<https://stagedoor.com/theatre-guide/lyn-gardner/lyn-gardner-catches-up-with-rhianna-ilube-ahead-of-1884-coming-to-shoreditch-town-hall-next-week?ia=1662>
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. Basic Books.

- George, E., & Hovey, A. (2020). Deciphering the trigger warning debate: A qualitative analysis of online comments. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 25(7), 825–841. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2019.1603142>
- Gillett, C., & Sheehan, J. (2023). *The production manager's toolkit*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367808174>
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice*. Harvard University Press.
- Gomme, R. (2015). Not-so-close encounters: Searching for intimacy in one-to-one performance. *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 12(1), 281–300. <https://www.participations.org/12-01-18-gomme.pdf>
- Grand View Research. (2025). *Immersive entertainment market size, share & trends analysis report by technology type (virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality), by application (gaming, live events), by region, and segment forecasts, 2025 – 2030*. Grand View Research. <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/immersive-entertainment-market-report>
- Gray, C. (1996). Inquiry through practice: Developing appropriate research strategies. In P. Strandman (Ed.), *No guru, no method?* (pp. 1–28). University of Art and Design.
- Gruber, A. (2022). Affirmative consent. In E. Hoven & T. Weigend (Eds.), *Consent and Sexual Offenses 57* (pp. 57–82). Nomos. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748930242>
- Guile, D. (2019). The concept of “recontextualization”: implications for professional, vocational and workplace learning. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.100343>.
- Halberstam, J. (2017). Trigger happy: From content warning to censorship. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 42(2), 535–542. <https://doi.org/10.1086/688189>
- Hamington, M. (2010). The will to care: Performance, expectation, and imagination. *Hypatia*, 25(3), 675–695. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40928645>
- Hamington, M. (2017). Empathy and care ethics. In H. Maibom (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of philosophy of empathy*. Routledge.
- Hamington, M. (2024). *Revolutionary care: Commitment and ethos*. Routledge.
- Hartley, J.R. (2013). *Guided practices in facing danger: Experiences of teaching risk* (Doctoral thesis, Central School of Speech & Drama, University of London). Royal Central School of Speech & Drama. https://crco.cssd.ac.uk/id/eprint/457/1/Guided_Practices_in_Facing_Danger_Experiences_of_Teaching_Risk.pdf

- Haynes, M. (2021, February 23). The two-metre rule. *Total Theatre*.
<http://totaltheatre.org.uk/the-two-metre-rule/>
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE). (2023a). *Managing risks and risk assessment at work*. GOV.UK. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm>
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE). (2023b). *Risk management: Expert guidance - ALARP at a glance*. GOV.UK. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/enforce/expert/alarpglance.htm>
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE). (2024). *Work-related stress and how to manage it*. GOV.UK. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/causes.htm>
- Heddon, D., Iball, H., & Zerihan, R. (2012). Come closer: Confessions of intimate spectators in one to one performance. *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22(1), 120–133.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2011.645233>
- Hefferon, K., & Gil-Rodriguez, E. (2011). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. *The Psychologist*, 24(10), 756–759. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2011-23560-004>
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Blackwell. (Original work published in 1927)
- Herburg, M. (2023). *Inter-audience interaction in immersive theatre* (Doctoral thesis, Queensland University of Technology). QUT ePrints.
<https://eprints.qut.edu.au/240347/1/Melissa%2BHerburg%2BThesis%282%29.pdf>
- Hockham, D. (2022). *What are the implications for HEI pedagogy and learning when production and technical theatre practices are re-orientated as practices of scenography? Investigating technical theatre training, in higher education institutions (HEI) levels 4-6 within the United Kingdom* (Doctoral thesis, University College London). UCL Discovery. <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10152859>
- Howells, A. (2012). Foot washing for the sole. *Performance Research*, (17)2, 128–131.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2012.671082>
- Husserl, E. (1983). *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and a phenomenological philosophy* (F. Kersten, Trans.). Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. (Original work published 1913)
- Iball, H. (2012). Towards an ethics of intimate audience. *Performing Ethos: International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance*, 3(1), 41–57.
https://doi.org/10.1386/peet.3.1.41_1
- Innes, C., & Shevtsova, M. (2013). *The Cambridge introduction to theatre directing*. Cambridge University Press.

- Innovate UK, UK Research and Innovation, James, M., & Skidmore, C. (2019, January 10). *UK takes centre stage in immersive entertainment revolution*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-takes-centre-stage-in-immersive-entertainment-revolution>
- iosh & RB Health & Safety Solutions. (2018). *Managing safely for theatre and production*. Version 5.0 [Workbook].
- Ismail, N., Kinchin, G., & Edwards, J. (2018). Pilot study, does it really matter? Learning lessons from conducting a pilot study for a qualitative PhD thesis. *International Journal of Social Science Research*, 6(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijssr.v6i1.11720>
- Jacobson, K. (2023) *Real-ish: audiences, feeling, and the production of realness in contemporary performance*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Jamieson, A. (2018, Feb 6). Performers and staffers at “Sleep No More” say audience members have sexually assaulted them. *Buzzfeed*. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/amberjamieson/sleep-no-more>
- Jävelä, S. (2019). How real is larp? In J. Koljonen, J. Stenros, A.S. Grove, A.D. Skjønfsjell & E. Nilsen (Eds.) *Larp design. Creating role-playing experiences* (pp. 22-24). Landsforeningen Bifrost.
- Jones, P. J., Bridgland, V. M. E., & Bellet, B. W. (2023). Content warnings reduce aesthetic appreciation of visual art. *Psychology of aesthetics, creativity, and the arts*, advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/aca0000586>
- Jordan, K. (2019). The ethics of participation and participation gone wrong. *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 7(2), 187-209. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jcde-2019-0021>
- Kitwood, T. (1990). Psychotherapy, postmodernism, and morality. *Journal of Moral Education*, 19(1), 3–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305724900190101>
- Klaver, K., & Baart, A. (2011). Attentiveness in care: towards a theoretical framework. *Nursing ethics*, 18(5), 686–693. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969733011408052>
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. SAGE Publications, Ltd.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews*. Sage Publications.
- LaFrance, M. (2013). Disappearing fourth wall: Law, ethics, and experiential theatre. *Scholarly Works*, Paper 772. <http://scholars/law/unlv/edu/facpub/772>
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and*

its challenge to Western thought. Basic Books.

- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2002). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
- Larkin, M. & Griffiths, D. (2004). Dangerous sports and recreational drug-use: Rationalizing and contextualizing risk. *Journal of Community & Applied Psychology*, 14(4), 215-232. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.770>
- Lewis, W.W., & Tulk, N. (2019). Editorial: Why performance as research? *PARtake: The Journal of Performance as Research*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.33011/partake.v1i1.325>.
- Lopes Ramos, J., Dunne-Howrie, J., Maravala, P. J., & Simon, B. (2020). The post-immersive manifesto. *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 16(2), 196–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14794713.2020.1766282>
- Lugones, M.C. (1978). *Morality and personal relationships*. (Doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin).
- Lukianoff, G., & Haidt, J. (2015, September). The coddling of the American mind. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356>
- Lyng, S. (2005). *Edgework: The sociology of risk-taking*. Routledge.
- Maccoby, P. (2004). *The Essentials of Stage Management*. A & C Black Publishers Ltd.
- Machon, J. (2009). *(syn)aesthetics: Redefining visceral performance*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Machon, J. (2013). *Immersive theatres: Intimacy and immediacy in contemporary performances*. Palgrave Macmillan Hampshire.
- Machon, J. (2016). Watching, attending, sense-making: Spectatorship in immersive theatres. *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 4(1), 34-48. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jcde-2016-0004>
- Malmqvist, J., Hellberg, K., Möllås, G., Rose, R., & Shevlin, M. (2019). Conducting the pilot study: A neglected part of the research process? Methodological findings supporting the importance of piloting in qualitative research studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919878341>
- Manne, K. (2015, September 19). Why I use trigger warnings. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/20/opinion/sunday/why-i-use-trigger-warnings.html>
- Manuele, F. (2013). *On the practice of safety* (4th ed.). Wiley.

- Maravala, P.J. (n.d.). *7 stages of one-on-one encounter by PJ Maravala*. [Unpublished handout provided by author]
- Marris, C., Langford, I., & O’Riordan, T. (2006). A quantitative test of the cultural theory of risk perceptions: Comparison with the psychometric paradigm. *Risk Analysis*, 18(5), 635-647. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6924.1998.tb00376.x>
- Marsh, J., & Rosario, F. (2016, June 7). Woman says she got knocked out during “Sleep No More.” *New York Post*. <https://nypost.com/2016/06/07/audience-member-knocked-unconscious-during-sleep-no-more-suit/>
- McGraw, D.J. (2024). *2023 stage manager survey global study*. The Stage Manager Survey. https://www.stagemanagersurvey.com/uploads/6/4/6/6/6466686/2023survey_english.pdf
- McIntosh, S. (2024, October 29). Balancing the books and wellbeing: Why mental health must be central to workplace reform. *MHFA Portal*. <https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/ceo-blog/why-mental-health-must-be-central-to-workplace-reform/>
- McKinney, J., & Butterworth, P. (2009). *The Cambridge introduction to scenography*. Cambridge University Press.
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Metz, T. (2013). The Western ethic of care or an Afro-communitarian ethic? Specifying the right relational morality. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 9(1), 77-92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2012.756421>
- MHFA England. (2023). *Mental health first aid: Your workbook* (2nd ed.). MHFA England.
- Michael Sarafolean v. Accomplice New York. 904 N.Y.S.2d 223. (2010). <https://caselaw.findlaw.com/court/ny-supreme-court/1530073.html>
- Möller, N., Hansson, S.O., Holmberg, J., & Rollenhagen, C. (2018). *Handbook of safety principles*. John Wiley and Sons.
- Morgan, H. (2022). Conducting a qualitative document analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(1), 64-77. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044>
- Morley, J. (2010). 'It's always about the epoché.' In T.F. Cloonan (Ed.), *The redirection of psychology: Essays in honor of Amedeo Giorgi* (pp. 223-232). University of Quebec Press.

- Murray, C. (2024, May 3). Man Or bear? Many women say they'd rather be stuck in the woods with a bear in latest viral TikTok debate. *Forbes*.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/conormurray/2024/05/03/man-or-bear-many-women-say-theyd-rather-be-stuck-in-the-woods-with-a-bear-in-latest-viral-tiktok-debate/>
- Murray, S., & Keefe J. (2016). *Physical theatres: A critical introduction*. Routledge.
- Mythen, G. (2004). *Ulrich Beck: A critical introduction to the risk society*. Pluto Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs3c4>
- Nelson, N. (2018, March 26). Audience safety & our editorial policy. *No Proscenium*.
<https://noproscenium.com/audience-safety-our-editorial-policy-4ee61ec7cb60>
- Nelson, N. (2021, July 31). The players guide to immersive theatre. *No Proscenium*.
<https://noproscenium.com/the-players-guide-to-immersive-theatre-4f94b5cc39f3>
- Nelson, R. (2006). *Practice as research in the arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nelson, R. (2022). *Practice as research in the arts (and beyond) principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ngoc Ho, D. (2019). *Precious resource: An analysis on the workload of stage managers*. (Master's dissertation, Columbia University). Columbia Academic Commons.
<https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-24p6-w088>
- Nicholson, I. (2011). "Torture at Yale": Experimental subjects, laboratory torment and the "rehabilitation" of Milgram's "Obedience to Authority." *Theory & Psychology*, 21(6), 737-761. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354311420199>
- Noddings, N. (2003). *Caring*. University of California Press.
- Nolan, D. (2013). Deconstructing the duty of care. *Law Quarterly Review*, 129, 559-588. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3093657>
- Núñez, N. (2019). High risk theatre. In N. Núñez (Ed.), *Anthropocosmic theatre: Theatre, ritual, consciousness* (pp. 257 – 288). University of Huddersfield Press.
<https://doi.org/10.5920/anthropocosmic.fulltext>
- Oddey, A. (1994). *Devising theatre: A practical and theoretical handbook*. Routledge.
- O'Grady, A. (2017). *Risk, participation and performance practice: Critical vulnerabilities in a precarious world*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Osman, A. & Lew, C. (2021). Developing a framework of institutional risk culture for strategic

- decision-making. *Journal of Risk Research*, 24(9), 1072-1085.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2020.1801806>
- Palakshappa, N., & Gordon, M.E. (2006). Using a multi-method qualitative approach to examine collaborative relationships. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 9(4), 389-403. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750610689104>
- Palmer, S. (2000). *Essential guide to stage management, lighting & sound*. Hodder Education.
- Parra Jounou, I.P., & Tronto, J.C. (2024). Care ethics in theory and practice: Joan C. Tronto in conversation with Iris Parra Jounou. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 23, 269-283.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-024-00680-6>
- Platt, J. (1992). “Case study” in American methodological thought. *Current Sociology*, 40(1), 17-48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001139292040001004>
- Porter, L & Alcorn, N. (2020). *Stage management theory as a guide to practice: Cultivating a creative approach*. Routledge.
- Quinn, M. (2024, July 6). The evolution of immersive theater: Past, present, and future. *Medium*.
<https://monicapquinn.medium.com/the-evolution-of-immersive-theater-past-present-and-future-4ab556747056>
- Raghuram, P. (2016). Locating care ethics beyond the global north. *ACME: An international journal for critical geographies*, 15(3), 511–533.
<https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v15i3.1353>
- Raghuram, P. (2021). Caring for the manifesto – steps towards making it an achievable dream. *Social politics: International studies in gender, state and society*, 28(4), 865-873.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxab038>
- Ramos, J. (2015). *(Re-)constructing the actor-audience relationship in immersive theatre practice* (Doctoral thesis, University of East London Arts and Digital Industries). University of East London. <https://doi.org/10.15123/PUB.4987>
- Ramos, J., & Maravala, P.J. (2017). A dramaturgy of participation: participatory rituals, immersive environments, and interactive gameplay in *Hotel Medea*. In J. Frieze (Ed.), *Reframing immersive theatre: The politics and pragmatics of participatory performance* (pp. 151-169). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-36604-7_12
- Reason, M. (2008). ‘Did you watch the man or did you watch the goose?’ Children’s responses to puppets in live theatre. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 24(4), 337–354.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0266464x08000481>
- Reason, M. (2010). Asking the audience: Audience research and the experience of theatre. *About*

- Performance*, 10, 15–34.
<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.767306737561035>
- Ridout, N. (2012). Mis-spectatorship, or, 'redistributing the sensible.' In G. Giannachi, N. Kaye & M. Shanks (Eds.), *Archaeologies of presence: Art, performance and the persistence of being* (pp. 172-182). Routledge.
- Rikard, L., & Villarreal, A. (2023). Focus on impact, not intention: Moving from 'safe' spaces to spaces of acceptable risk. *Journal of Consent-Based Performance*, 2, 1-16.
<https://doi.org/10.46787/jcbp.v2i1.3646>
- Ripley, A. (2009). *The unthinkable: Who survives when disaster strikes - and why*. Three Rivers Press.
- Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research* (2nd ed.). Blackwell Publishing.
- ROLL THE BONES. (n.d.). Dead Letter No. 9 | Roll The Bones. *ROLL THE BONES*. Retrieved August 20, 2025 from <https://www.rollthebonestheatre.com/copy-of-actually-macau-1>
- Ropeik, D. (2011, March 9). Take the cultural cognition quiz. *Psychology Today*.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/how-risky-is-it-really/201103/take-the-cultural-cognition-quiz>
- Ropeik, D. (2012). The perception gap: Recognizing and managing the risks that arise when we get risk wrong. *Food and chemical toxicology: an international journal published for the British Industrial Biological Research Association*, 50(5), 1222–1225.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fct.2012.02.015>
- Rousseau, D., Sitkin, S.B., Burt R.S., & Camerer, C. (1998). Not so different after all: A cross-discipline view of trust. *The Academy of Management Review*, 23(3), 393-404.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/259285>
- Rousselet, M., Duretete, O., Hardouin, J.B., & Grall-Bronnec, M. (2017). Cult membership: What factors contribute to joining or leaving? *Psychiatry Research*, 257, 27-33.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2017.07.018>
- Rukhadze and others v Recovery Partners GP Ltd and another. (2023) EWCA Civ 305, (2025) UKSC 10. <https://supremecourt.uk/cases/judgments/uksc-2023-0062>
- Ryle, G. (1971). The thinking of thoughts: What is "Le Penseur" doing? In G. Ryle (Ed.), *Collected papers: Vol 2. Collected essays 1929-1968* (pp. 481-496). Hutchinson.
- Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E. (2004). *Rules of play: Game design fundamentals*. The MIT Press.
- Sammarco, C. (2025). *Communication for effective stage management*. Routledge.

- Sauter, W. (2000). *The theatrical event*. University of Iowa Press.
- Saville, A. (2019, May 19). Immersive theatre, and the consenting audience. *Exeunt Magazine*.
<http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/immersive-theatre-consent-audience-barzakh/>
- Schechner, R. (1985). *Between theatre and anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Schechner, R. (2000). *Mainstream theatre and performance studies*. *TDR*, 44(2), 4-6.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1146844>
- Schechner, R. (2003). *Performance theory*. Routledge.
- Scheier, J.L.S. (2021) *The quest for professionalization: A twentieth century cautionary tale for United States stage managers* (Doctoral thesis, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign). IDEALS. <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/113030>
- Scott, H. (2024, March 25). AL7 - Care & cruelty: When immersive theatre goes too far. *ALTERNATIVE ARTS*.
<https://alternativearts.substack.com/p/al7-care-and-cruelty-when-immersive>
- Seale, C. (2018). *Researching society and culture*. Sage.
- Shank, T. (2014). Experimental theatre: Beyond illusion. In J. Richards & H. Nathans (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of American drama* (pp. 356-374). Oxford Academic.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199731497.013.029>
- Silverman, D. (2022). *Doing qualitative research*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Silvers, J. R., & O'Toole, W. (2020). *Risk management for events*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Sim, J., & Waterfield, J. (2019). Focus group methodology: some ethical challenges. *Qual Quant*, 53, 3003–3022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-019-00914-5>
- Singer, M. (2003). *Cults in our midst: The continuing fight against their hidden menace*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Sjöberg, L. (2003). Risk perception is not what it seems: The psychometric paradigm revisited. In K. Andersson (Ed.), *VALDOR Conference 2003* (pp. 14-29). Stockholm: VALDOR. <https://www.academia.edu/download/89800587/valdor3.pdf>
- Sjöberg, L. (2006, May). *Myths of the psychometric paradigm and how they can misinform risk communication*. SSE/EFI Working Paper Series in Business Administration. Stockholm School of Economics. https://swoba.hhs.se/hastba/papers/hastba2006_010.pdf
- Sjöberg, L. (2007). Emotions and risk perception. *Risk Management*, 9(4), 223-237.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4500403>

- Skains, R.L. (2018). Creative practice as research: Discourse on methodology, media, practice and education. *Media Practice and Education*, 19(1), 82-97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682753.2017.1362175>
- Slovic, P. (1987). Perception of risk. *Science*, 236, 280-285. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.3563507>
- Slovic, P. (2010). *The feeling of risk: New perspectives on risk perception*. Earthscan.
- Slovic, P. (2020). Risk perception and risk analysis in a hyperpartisan and virtuously violent world. *Risk Analysis*, 40(S1), 2231-2239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/risa.13606>
- Slovic, P., & Peters, E. (2006). Risk perception and affect. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15(6), 322–325. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00461.x>
- Smalley, M. (2024). *Stage management: Communication design as scenography*. Methuen Drama.
- Smith, H., & Dean, R. (2009). *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Smith, J., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Sage Publishing.
- Soboslay, Z. (2019). *Hope in uncertainty: Ethical (and other) encounters in participatory theatre* (Doctoral thesis, Monash University) Monash University. https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/thesis/Hope_in_uncertainty_ethical_and_other_encounters_in_participatory_arts_Applying_an_Ethics_and_Aesthetics_of_Care_perspective_to_diverse_and_difficult_community_theatre_practices_in_Australia_and_the_UK_/12986135?file=24742310
- Soloski, A. (2018, Feb 12). The problem with immersive theatre: Why actors need extra protections from sexual assault. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/feb/12/immersive-theatre-punchdrunk-sleep-no-more>
- Sousa, D. (2014). Validation in qualitative research: General aspects and specificities of the descriptive phenomenological method. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(2), 211–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.853855>
- Spence, C. (2021). Scent in the context of live performance. *i-Perception*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2041669520985537>
- Spiers, J. & Riley, R. (2018). Analysing one dataset with two qualitative methods: the distress of

- general practitioners, a thematic and interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 16(2), 276-290.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1543099>
- Stern, L., & O'Grady, A. (2016). *Stage management*. (10th ed.). Routledge.
- Stryker, K., Queen, C., & Penny, L. (2017). *Ask: Building consent culture*. Thorntree Press.
- Sullivan, C.T. (2020). Who holds the key? Negotiating gatekeepers, community politics, and the “right” to research in Indigenous spaces. *Geographical Research*, 58(4), 344-354.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12415>
- Talbot, R. (2017). She wants you to kiss her: negotiating risk in the immersive theatre contract. In J. Frieze (Ed.), *Reframing immersive theatre: The politics and pragmatics of participatory performance* (pp. 171-191). Palgrave Macmillan.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-36604-7_13
- Tangney, J.P. (1999). The self-conscious emotions: Shame, guilt, embarrassment and pride. In T. Dalgleish & M.J. Power (Eds.), *Handbook of cognition and emotion* (pp. 541-568). John Wiley & Sons Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/0470013494.ch26>
- Tansey, J., & O'riordan, T. (1999). Cultural theory and risk: A review. *Health, Risk & Society*, 1(1), 71–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698579908407008>
- Thompson, J. (2023). *Care aesthetics: For artful care and careful art*. Routledge.
- Tronto, J. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. Routledge.
- Tronto, J. (2015). *Who cares? How to reshape democratic politics*. Cornell University Press.
- Turner, R., & Kasperczyk, H. (2022). Space for the unexpected: Serendipity in immersive theatre. In W. Ross & S. Copeland (Eds.), *The art of serendipity* (pp. 101–125). Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84478-3_5
- Uher, J. (2021). Psychometrics is not measurement: Unraveling a fundamental misconception in quantitative psychology and the complex network of its underlying fallacies. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 41(1), 58–84.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/teo0000176>
- Vallely, K., & Gibson, P. (2018). Engaging students on their devices with Mentimeter. *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.21100/compass.v11i2.843>
- Verlander, F. (2023). On scent in theatre audience research: Sensory mining and olfactory archives. *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 33(3), 218-239.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2023.2200176>

- Warren, A. (2022). Governing care. *Performance Research*, 27(6-7), 191-201.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2022.2198325>
- Warren, J. (2017). *Creating worlds: How to make immersive theatre*. Nick Hern Books, Limited.
- Watson, D., & Clark, L.A. (1998) *Measurement and mismeasurements of mood: Recurrent and emergent issues*. Routledge.
- Wagh, R. (2015, Sep 14). The stick house. *Exeunt Magazine*.
<https://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/the-stick-house/>
- White, G. (2013). *Audience participation in theatre: Aesthetics of the invitation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- White, G. (2015). *Applied theatre: Aesthetics*. Bloomsbury.
- White, G. (2023). *Meaning in the midst of performance: Contradictions of participation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429030819>
- Williams, P. (2020). ‘It all sounds very interesting, but we’re just too busy!’: exploring why ‘gatekeepers’ decline access to potential research participants with learning disabilities. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 35(1), 1-14.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2019.1687563>
- Wiseman, S., van der Linden, J., Spiers, A., & Oshodi, M. (2017). Control and being controlled: Exploring the use of technology in an immersive theatre performance. *Proceedings of the 2017 Conference on Designing Interactive Systems (DIS '17)*. Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3064663.3064694>
- WolfBrown. (2011, October 17). *Getting in on the act*. The James Irvine Foundation.
<https://www.irvine.org/insights/getting-in-on-the-act/>
- Yan, T., Fricker, S., & Tsai, S. (2020). Response burden: What is it and what predicts it? In P. Beatty, D. Collins, L. Kaye, J.L. Padilla, G. Willis & A. Wilmot (Eds.), *Advances in questionnaire design, development, evaluation and testing* (pp. 193-212).
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119263685.ch8>
- Yin, R. K. (2015). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford Publications.
- Yin, R.K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage.
- You Me Bum Bum Train. (n.d.). *What is You Me Bum Bum Train?* Retrieved March 20, 2025 from <https://www.bumbumtrain.com/>

Zahavi, D. (2021). Applied phenomenology: why it is safe to ignore the epoché. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 54, 259-273. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-019-09463-y>

ZU-UK. (n.d.). *Within Touching Distance*. Retrieved March 27, 2025 from <https://zu-uk.com/project/within-touching-distance/>

Appendix A - Dead Letter No. 9 Performance Maker Transcript, Taylor Myers

T: Got it.

M: Alrighty.

T: You're have a nice video recording of me eating some lunch.

M: Absolutely. OK. Let's just begin with a little bit of background. How long have you been doing this?

T: What's this?

M: This, I suppose, is directing and any participation elements of performance, I guess, in immersive theatre.

T: Since 2013.

M: And in what capacity?

T: As a director of shows that have a pretty wide variance of audience interactivity and immersion.

M: And what got you?

T: As a director and producer really.

M: OK, And what got you interested in that?

T: I was a cast member at Sleep No More. And I had never seen or been in any immersive work previous to that. And it really blew my mind and excited me about all kinds of theatrical possibility that I had never imagined or considered. And um, and I fell in love with it and then had an idea for a show and was encouraged by friends to turn it into reality and so I did.

M: So what was your background before Sleep No More? Do you have any official training? Do you –

T: Yeah, yeah, I was an actor. I mean, I was an actor there too, but I was... Grew up outside Chicago. Did some theater in high school. Moved to New York to study acting at NYU. Which I did for two years before running out of cash and then at the end of that summer joined Sleep No More.

M: OK. Great. On a scale from immersive to participatory, if we consider participatory a synonym, sort of for instruction based, an immersive, a more free form, sort of open-ended exploratory experience, like where would you sort of place this work? This work being Dead Letter No. 9.

T: I don't know if I have seen anything that is more participatory. I would put it at the far end of the participatory spectrum.

M: OK

T: 10 out of 10.

M: Excellent. I love quantifiable things. Thank you. And how did you develop this work?

T: Well. We had a, an earlier iteration of a similar project called Galleria Esperienza, which is a show that we put up on the Lower East Side in 2019 that had a number of different participatory audience experiences kind of one-on-one scenes, each of which could be done kind of independently from any of the other ones and altogether, kind of collectively made-up the quote-unquote show or experience. One of them was, one of them was a tiny little four seat bar that we created and that experience was entirely about conversation and having something to drink and just digging into interesting conversations with strangers and it was very popular and that was kind of the seed for this project. In terms of how we developed this one we had a multi month workshop series that we did with the original cast members, and then we had some auditions to bring on some additional cast members and then we had a series of rehearsals. And then, you know so much of this work as interactive and participatory. It relies so much on audience members being there that like test audiences and previews and even the first couple of weeks of shows really are like as much rehearsal as they are performance.

M: And when you build something like this, how do you think of the audience? Like what is the audience to you when you consider your performances?

T: It's an interesting question. It's kind of two questions really. So this show, as you know, show is a term used very loosely. Has is, is essentially non narrative, essentially non narrative. And um, relies entirely on improvised conversation with audience members. And so the audience is the experience. They are the - Ohh Boy do I say this? Here is a bit of the thought chain that I think is highly relevant to the work that we're doing. Let me see if I can remember it appropriately. It's gonna be- Well, it's translated anyway, but it's gonna be paraphrased. Umm Dang. You know when you can't get the first line, then the rest of it doesn't fall into place? I'll find it. I'll send it to you at another time. I would say that the audience is the necessary material through which the performers alchemize traditional human experience into something more compassionate.

M: That's a nice. Nice sound bite right there. OK. So can I ask then, while you're building this, which as you've already stated is difficult without the audience there yet, how, how does the role of the audience fit into the process, like when, when they're not there yet?

T: So the workshop series especially we did a lot of like talking about talking and like audience is really no different than performer in our experience. I mean the performer has some more

authority and some more guidance and does a lot more of like driving the direction of the conversation. They're also the, the person who's in the room for 6 1/2 hours and so like is kind of like setting the tone and is setting a standard of behavior for what occurs in that space. They're like really leading by example in that way, whereas audience members like everyone is welcome. Full stop. Everyone has an equal voice and which is an amazing, you know, tenet of democracy, but also means that like even the people who are going to like, you know, take the conversation somewhere that is not super helpful or whatever, like they they do have to have a, they have a voice, too. Everyone. Everyone. So for the workshops and for the rehearsals, it was like, and actually it's fun, you know, we play, you know, we play some games which are basically like dissociation games, which is like somebody will ask a question and your job is to like either answer or not answer that question doesn't really matter, but to continue to wind the conversation into further tangents of interest so that the conversation, any conversation, reveals itself in every conversation. And the job is really to just like find the points of connective tissue between everything and everything else, which is kind of what's happening like on the wall behind me, which like all of these, you know, connectors from all these different ideas.



The, the notion really is that like it's all one conversation. It's all one long and winding dialogue about, you know, what it is to be a person and everyone's different perspectives on all sorts of different things. So like, you can rehearse that with a group of eight performers in the same way that you would rehearse it with a group of 1 performer and seven audience members. It's easier. It's like, it's kind of too easy with a group of eight performers because they're like professionals and they're purposefully trying to do this together. It's like really collaborative as opposed to one person who knows what's happening and the other seven, who are just kind of like following until they get it, but, but they get it. Eventually

M: OK. That's interesting. I was thinking that as you described, that your performers did that incredibly artfully, actually. The idea that it's all connected and it can just keep moving and it doesn't need an answer, so.

T: Yeah, we're not here to answer these questions. We're here to ask them.

M: Alright. Um, I'm trying to think of how to reword my next question because your show is a little unusual, but I guess back to more –

T: A little?

M: I mean, in the grand scheme of immersive and participation, yeah, just a little, I guess, But it is very unique there.

T: No, I think you're right. I don't think it's that crazy.

M: Umm, when you were developing it, was the idea in like the artful side of dead letters on the postal place, or was it in the, the idea of interaction with the audience? Like what was the cat - Where did the initial catalyst come?

T: Definitely conversation among audience members. The Dead Letter of it came only as a result of the, to borrow Punch Drunk phrase site sympathy of the building itself.

M: OK. OK, now moving to the idea of the production staff, what is the function of the production staff? For you.

T: Are you talking about performers or non-performers or everyone?

M: You stage managers, your house managers, anyone who's not a performer but who is audience-facing.

T: I mean it's, it's, it's a couple of things. Obviously stage management and front of house plays a role in audience safety and handling any sort of like emergencies that arise, which fortunately have been very, very, very, very few. But that's, you know, that's part of their responsibility, right? Additionally, they are the first people that audience members interact with, and so it is very much a part of their job to provide people information. It's a couple different kinds of information. One is practical information. You're here for the experience. This is your time. Here's how much time you have. That's where the code check is. That's where the bathrooms are. Here's where you should wait, right? All the practical, logistical stuff that people need in order to feel comfortable in a space. So they're not just like, floating aimlessly. No idea where they are and where to go. That's one branch of information. Another piece of information is to convey to them a sense of peace and curiosity and understanding and tranquility and care, which communicates to audience members that they are in good hands. So it's like one is emotional information and one is practical information. I'm sure there is a whole another

branch too that I'm completely forgetting right now, but. Yeah, their jobs are to like, take care of people in the first moments and make them feel, to, to bring them to their first stage of transition from modern day New York City, you're on the sidewalk in your regular life, to the, you know, complete transition into the space of you're somewhere, someone, someone who is doing something that you wouldn't normally do in your normal life.

M: So do you feel that there's artistic influence in their roles?

T: I don't see how there couldn't be. Artistic influence. What is artistic influence?

M: In some ways I suppose it's however you want to interpret it,

T: I suppose it is.

M: But to me immediately when you start talking about the emotional roles, I did think that it was already there, just I was wondering if you, you did. The way that they are the ones helping guide a transition from one space to another in an intentional way that you seem to want it done.

T: Yeah, totally. Yeah, totally. And like, some of that is about, like, communication with them, about exactly where to have people stand, exactly what order to greet them with, what kind of information. Like, that's all, you know, collaboration for sure. And, like, honestly, for an audience member, I personally believe that every piece of information is kind of equal and the storytelling is just the order that you put them in. And so like it's not like they come in and they're like, ohh this is a the house manager. Like I'm not really in world right now. I'm just like, they don't, it doesn't fuck, it's just a person talking to me. And so they are greeted in that way and it has to be aligned with what's going to happen next and next and next and next. It is the first step in a very purposeful journey. So yeah, it is 100% a part of that journey.

M: And you talk with your stage management, ushers, house managers about how you want things artistically applied for the audience.

T: Yeah, for sure.

M: Do you rehearse part of it?

T: I mean it's like it also depends on the personality of that that individual like some folks are very natural in their, I guess, bedside manner as it would, as it were, and others like, you know, need a little bit. But everybody's got their own personality and kind of, I'm a little bit, I'm a little bit of a consequentialist. I'm like, I don't really care how you do it as long as the way that they feel is the same. You know?

M: Yeah. That's fine. That's all a great answer. Um, what would be your hypothetical example of a perfect audience response to your show?

T: Kubrick has this great quote about the difference between good movies and great movies. He says something along the lines of, In a good movie, you're totally present for every moment of the storytelling. You're with it, you understand it in every way. You get every scene and you leave the movie feeling satisfied. That's a good movie. A great movie, you're with it for a lot of it, but maybe you don't grasp all of it immediately, and you're left with a sense of dissatisfaction at the end of the movie that continues to echo and reverberate in your mind, in your psyche, for days, weeks. Afterwards. It doesn't leave you. Um. We've definitely set out to make a piece of art that reminds people that a genuine and meaningful connection to a stranger is only a choice. It's a choice away. And it starts with care and curiosity. And so I guess an ideal audience reaction is to go through this space to be, you know, awestruck by the transportation. To be shaken up a little bit by the conversation, and to leave feeling better connected to humanity at large.

M: OK. And then reverse what would constitute a failure to you for an audience member?

T: A failure? A failure. A failure.

M: I'm sorry

T: That's OK. A failure like we failed this audience member, or like this audience member just was hell bent on not getting it?

M: Um, no. I think for you as the artistic director of it, like what, what, what would feel like a failure to you if you heard back from an audience member if you found that was their experience?

T: I don't think there's any particular, like audience member says X, which to me constitutes a failure, but I do think that there are particular moments that would constitute a failure. For instance, let's say an audience member, let's say an audience member on their way in, objectively, was a possibility. It was possible for them to have a meaningful experience here. Not a guarantee, but a possibility. But they're also tenuous and they have high boundaries or are very skeptical or had a hard day or whatever, right? It's a little tougher for them. And let's say that person ended up in a conversation that was a little bit challenging for them. And the performer was just starting to dig into that in a way with them into some of that meaty material that like gave rise to a, a real reaction for this audience member. And as they were starting to do so, another audience member juttred in with a different conversation or just like broke a fragile moment and a performer was unable to or chose not to repair that fragile moment with the audience member who could really use it and that audience member who could really use it was left feeling, you know, unattended in a way that felt very, you know, particularly caring and magical. That, I think, would constitute maybe a missed opportunity or a failure.

M: When you start developing this and you're considering the audience, do you create the experience to sort of the idea of one ideal participant as you build it or across a spectrum of participants?

T: Got to be a spectrum. There's no, there is no ideal participant there. Like there are people who come in, well, OK, maybe there, there are, there are. There is no *one* ideal participant. There are a bunch of different kinds of ideal participants. But also like that is a, in my opinion, that is a very, very, very fast way to make a very fragile artistic experience that is just going to get shattered the second you have somebody who is like a tougher audience member. We must build robust experiences that expect and welcome people from the entire spectrum of skepticism and expectation, because that's who you're going to get. You're going to get people who are like, 'Oh my God, I'm in love with this, and I haven't even set foot.' And you're going to get people who are like, 'fuck this and fuck you' all the way through and you're gonna get people who are like, 'I don't know why or what I'm doing here.' And you have to be able to, like you are, you're going to get everybody, so you have to be able to work with everybody.

M: Do you find that your voice right now is resonant of the immersive community as a whole, or do you think you are more of an outlier in these thoughts?

T: I have no idea.

M: OK, that's fine.

T: What do you think?

M: I have some opinions, but I wondered what you thought.

T: What are your opinions?

M: I'll mention them at the end maybe to not color the rest of our initial interview? If that's –

T: Fair enough, that's OK.

M: Have you ever been able to get an audience assessment that felt accurate to you about the experience that you cultivated for the audience?

T: An audience assessment, you mean an interview or a data set of audience opinions or a single audience member who has given us an assessment?

M: I mean, a single audience member is a data point, right? So sort of any feedback in any form.

T: That has been an accurate representation of the experience?

M: Yeah, that felt to you like the way that I have obtained this information feels good. I think what they're telling me is accurate. This is a useful way to obtain this information from these, these audience members.

T: Yeah, yeah, totally. Do you find that it's more done in direct speaking to an audience member in, in private surveys where they don't have to talk to you directly and can speak freely without being concerned about who they're talking to?

T: I don't know. That's a good question. I mean, we've done a number of different kind of like ways Like obviously I'm here all the time, so like and I end up in conversation with audience members both as 'hello, I'm the creator director of this and we know each other' or 'hello, I'm the creator of director of this and we've never met before' or 'hi, I'm a stranger' or 'I'm another audience member', whatever, right? Like the whole, all of the different kind of like ways of like, you don't know who you're talking to or you do, like about a million of those. Maybe not a million, but well over 100. For this show alone. And we've also done some like surveys about specific things, whether it's about the experience itself or whether it's about the website or whether it's about the marketing materials like we've, we've done a number of those. I don't know, like on the one hand they are filling in a survey. People are just like blah, blah, blah information which can be helpful. It means that they're not like being nice about it but it also, I think it's got a little sloppy sometimes. People just kind of like blah, blah, blah information and then like send, and then it's like alright that you know you gave, you gave your first, first impression anonymous response. What's gonna be fastest and easiest to type. Whereas like sometimes in conversation, obviously you can get a little bit more information. I'm a firm believer that in person, communication is the highest form of communication and the farther away from that we go, you get into lower forms of communication. That convey ,by what I mean by that, by lower forms of communication is that they convey less information.

M: OK. Do you feel that you get a a fair amount of feedback regarding your performance? It does sound like you do just one.

T: I believe so.

M: Can I ask you what makes a performance ethical to you?

T: The hard hitting questions, Melissa.

M:They're the interesting ones.

T: I couldn't agree more. So I have an uncle who's a corporate psychiatrist and has designed experiments of many kinds for decades. And we have a lot of interesting conversations about this and he, you know, not even just about this particular show but about immersive work in general. And I made a joke with him one time, he was like, when we were talking about a particular situation that I had performed in a show that I did not direct or produce or create. And he was like, wow, that's crazy. You would, you would never like, that you would never be allowed to do this as a as a psychological experiment the, the DSM 5 is full of rules, ethical rules that would make this completely impossible. And the joke, the half joke that I made in response to him was yes, but the difference with an experiment is that either they volunteer or you pay them to gather information from their brain, whereas in theater they pay you to give them a

theatrical experience and I think that actually like that is a half joke, but it's also real. I mean, people have, have offered their resources in exchange for an experience. It is something that they are, you know, voting with their dollar saying I want this, I paid you for this experience. I made time to come do it. I put it on my calendar. I got my ass there. I literally transported my physical being to your venue to have something happen to me like. That's a hell of a lot of concern. And that said, you know, like the conversation we were having here in person, it's really hard to, is it even possible to consent to something when you don't know what you're consenting to? I don't know the answer to that question.

M: Ohh, I just lost your audio Taylor. I think you might say -

T: Just-

M: Oh, there you are for a second I lost your audio. Now -

T: I got you back. Can you hear me?

M: Yep. Good.

T: In the larger question of, of like immersive work and hell, even like art at large, like consent and surprise do not seem to work very well together. You can't consent to something if you don't know what it is, and you can't surprise someone with something they already know is happening or like, you know, there's gray area in both of those things, obviously. But like if we're gonna say that, we'll say that and that is, I don't know, it's a tricky little conundrum. You and I spoke a little bit also about like soft consent, which is I think a thing that we, like, I really believe that the performers in this show are incredibly skilled performers and energetic manipulators, space holders, but the thing is morality and no immersive show or pretty much no immersive show can be surveilled in its entirety for every performance. In the same way that like on a stage, the stage manager in the booth sees 100% of that performance every show. Every show they see the whole stage. In immersive shows there are one on ones. There are private scenes. There are scenes that take place where, like in a room where there isn't a director or a stage manager there. It is like so ingrained in the in the nature of the beast. And that means that the, that you are trusting your performers to behave in the ways that you have directed and asked them to, and that when they are especially in a piece of art like this, which is so improvised and interactive and full of surprises that audience members themselves bring into the space all the time, you are entrusting your audience, your performers, with the care of your audience. And you really have to believe that they are going to behave in a moral way and, and then morality is of course subjective so you're like in the way that you have developed the shows morals to be. The, the collective moral of the experience. That shit ain't easy.

M: No, the entire thing you've just described is not easy. I think that's why not too many people research it. I think they just kind of give up and go what can we write about this?

T: Oh man, yeah,

M: Who is concern do you think it is to maintain an ethical performance?

T: Everyone's. I believe everyone shares responsibility for the ethics of their daily lives and that is like to put on the performance. It's the directors, it's the stage management team, it's the performers, it's everybody who lays a hand on it and I believe in personal responsibility as audience members to behave like a conscionable human being. Full stop. And if you don't then, pardon my French, get the fuck out. If you, if you cannot treat other people with respect, then find somewhere else to be.

M: Fair enough.

T: Do better. It's not hard. Like. Yeah.

M: There's a theater director who I study a lot of their work, whose phrases don't be a dick. That's just his. That's my - that's everything I do, towards everything I expect from others.

T: Not that hard. Really not that hard. Yeah.

M: So thinking of the toolbox that I'm hopeful to, to create to help train folks better while it's impossible to anticipate everything, have you ever had anything go wrong that you thought, ohh, we could have prepared for that?

T: Yeah, totally. A lot of the stuff that comes to mind first is, uh, like, logistical stuff. You know. Umm. Like, ohh, man what a, what a, what a silly idea to put that power outlet there. Like we have to go back there all the time. Ohh man, we could have prepared better for this. But so much of immersive work reveals itself as the, you know, show reveals itself. So like, what? It's always gonna happen. It's always gonna happen. In terms of audience members? I think that we really have kind of been developing our own, I'm not saying like, it's a brand new never before been done conversation facilitation technique, but I do think we have something particular that is ours. And that, you know, has a developmental process. And so similar to that, like some of it only reveals itself like as you're doing with audience members. It's like one hand you can witness an experience and be like ohh, we could have prepared for that better and then but, but the other, or, and other perspective of it is like, whoa, interesting lesson, what are we going to do about this, you know?

M: Well, yeah, I think part of the goal is to collect other people's interesting lessons.

T: Yeah

M: That's usually one of the best ways to train.

T: Yeah, totally, totally. I will reiterate. Wait, here's a here's a , a story, a very brief story about a different project that is not this project at all. But that one of my cast members here, Stephanie,

was, was, you know, in charge of we took a, we took a piece of interactive performance art to Burning Man and built this structure that the performance took place inside of and as a rehearsal, I was performance directing for it. And as a rehearsal, we built it in a backyard in New Jersey and had everybody there kind of practicing the thing. And we had some of the neighbors who were like looking over the fence, like, 'what the fuck is this?' You know, like whatever. And they and we're like, 'come, come, come'. And they weren't the most heinous audience members ever. They were terrible. And it could not have been better. It could not have been better for our cast to be like and here's how you try to gracefully, acrobatically maneuver resistant, skeptical aggressive audience members into a place of receptivity for the piece. It's like, if all you do is practice with the easy ones, then by the time you get into performance and a medium hard one comes in, then you look like an ass in performance, in front of everybody, instead of in rehearsal when you can like stop or pause or, like, you know, talk about the thing and learn.

M: Yeah, absolutely. I love to hear that you did that because increasingly I'm finding in my research they're trying to just get a diverse group in through your previous, through your early rehearsals is apparently very difficult and it makes a big difference.

T: Sorry your, your audio cut out again, you said increasingly you're finding what –

M: I'm finding that getting a diverse group in, sort of a group of not expert audience participants, is just such a massive difference for previews and rehearsals, because it seems like, you know, everyone goes to their friends, that's who you build your preview group out of,

T: and they're not. But it's perfect. And you're like, it isn't. I know it is, yeah.

M: That's amazing. I'm glad they're from New Jersey. That's the big. I'm also from New Jersey-

T: Yes.

M: Have you, this might sort of, if, if you just answered it, that's fine, but have you instituted or experienced any kind of rehearsal or skill practice that was really beneficial to you or your performers when dealing with unexpected situations?

T: Yeah, I mean, for me also, it's like so much of the work that we do at this show is about being about engaging with challenges gracefully. And I mean a lesson that we, you know, have returned to is like slowing down. Breathing. And remembering all of the other things that are in place, and remembering like not to get your energy hijacked by someone else's, not to allow them to like knock you off your balance just because they're totally off balance. Like you can engage with someone and maintain your pace and your stability and your authority and your grace, even if they are zany, zany, zany fucked up in a million ways. I was in acting school we spoke about spheres, energetic spheres. And pace and like how quickly or slowly, what, what tempo your personal motor runs. And it's so easy and natural for like, whoever's fastest and most hectic to set the tone. But you don't have to let somebody's fear take you out of your own, or change your tempo, or knock you off your balance. You can continue to maintain yours and

witness theirs and bring them a little bit more along with you instead of getting dragged along with them.

M: OK. Umm. Do you have any risk management training in your background?

T: Um. I have not gone through any, any accredited risk management training courses.

M: That's ok.

T: I have managed a hell of a lot of risks.

M: OK. Both of those answers are fine if you just help situate your answers just a tiny bit for me. Does your work include? Well, your work clearly does include sort of orienting at the beginning. Where do you think orienting begins for your production?

T: I have a feeling you have a definition of orienting.

M: Orienting is how you bring an audience member into the space and how you get them to understand like the horizon of expectations in front of them.

T: Hmm. And the question is when does that begin?

M: Yeah, to you, when do you think that that begins?

T: You know, I think they're, you know, they're all, all these different productions and projects that love to think about how it starts as soon as you buy a ticket or even before and it does. It does. It starts the moment that you, it starts the moment that a thing enters your realm of consciousness. The first time you hear about anything, whether you read it in an article or a review, or a friend told you about it, or you saw an ad, or you stumbled on the Instagram page or whatever, right? And from that moment on, your impression of the thing exists. And has a shape. I don't think you can, actually, exert control over all of that reliably, every time, in every way, with everyone. Because like somebody sees a show and then they say something, they describe it to a friend of theirs. You have no idea what they're gonna say. All you can do is make the art that you make and then like, as people start to, like you can, you know, design your web page and your ticket buying experience and the receipt, you know, text and any information that goes to them by text message or e-mail or WhatsApp or physical mail, whatever it is, right? Like any outreach that you have from that moment, I'm like, yeah, you, you have increasing levels of control until they get here and then you have even more control. But. You know, I think it's important to pay attention to all of the, all the steps that you can pay attention to.

M: Great. OK, I only have about three more questions left. Case you're

T: Cool. I've got 10, 10 minutes.

M: Great. Do you use any type of content warning vocabulary when you're in your pre booking on your website or anywhere?

T: Umm. I don't believe the word warning shows up anywhere on our web page.

M: I believe you're right. I just wanted to make sure I didn't overlook it when I tried to go through everything. OK

T: It's funny, I was talking to a, I was talking to an Icelandic friend of mine. I was there doing a project with her and we were walking around and she was cracking up. She was like, in America everything's an emergency. Every street sign that you see is like, so aggressive. It's like danger warning. You're going to die, like she's like, all the street signs in other countries are just like heads up, the left turn or whatever it is, right. Um, I don't know why this came to mind when you said content warning. I think you know, obviously advisements are totally legit and, and have their place. Um, but no, I don't think the word warning shows up on our, our website. Iso like the conversations are completely improvised and they are entirely a result of the prompts that we have, but also like all kinds of shit that people bring in. So it's like, I think the, the only, like, legitimate advisement that we could give is like you're gonna be in an improvised discussion with strangers and you might talk about literally anything. You might talk about literally anything. There's no like violence or sexual acts or aggressive lighting or sound cues like the environment is pretty darn chill.

M: Hmm.

T: But you might end up in a conversation about literally anything. And you will, you know, potentially be confronted with opposing viewpoints that oppose your own. You know, life, I guess.

M: Fair enough. I think your frequently asked questions actually does cover phrase almost exactly like that.

T: And so does, so does the, you know, the welcome speech. And it's like that, you know, trying to give people legitimate information about what's happening here, yeah.

M: OK, just a tiny bit of pivot, but I'm also curious about how does accessibility factor into your production planning?

T: Um, we were fortunate in that we ended up with a space entirely on one level. Which means that concerns of elevators didn't really factor into it because it's all on one level. That said, the rest of the building is all ADA one of our advisors, collaborators is in wheelchair. We've frequently you know spoke with him about what, not just like, I mean ADA compliance is published. It's very easy to just follow the rules for that. But in terms of like, actual comfort and how does this land for you and how does this play for you? Like those are other conversations that we kind of had on an ongoing basis with him. And frankly we're very lucky to be able to

have somebody on our team that we could just like speak very openly about, like, what about if we did this or how does this go? We're like, so you were on the show again, like you know, how was getting around? We changed one of the thresholds between the hallway and this room. Like did you notice a difference? Was it hard or was it easier? Did you care, you know? So yeah, you know, it's, it's, we definitely needed to make sure that each of the rooms was accessible to folks who have mobility issues. Maybe like the entirety of the room isn't, but a significant enough percentage where their experience is, you know, totally comparable to somebody who can go up two steps into the trailer. It's like, you can't, but you can sit right next to it in a ring of other chairs that are all, like, all part of the same experience, same conversation. Same thing with the treehouse. Like, you can't go up two steps onto the bunks maybe, but more than 50% of the room is not on any sort of a grade or, or you know a level other than floor level, so all part of the same experience.

M: Do you have accessibility considerations beyond mobility?

T: Um, so. What we, one of the things that we were really excited to do that unfortunately haven't gotten the chance to do yet, and not sure if we will in this building, is, uh, nights that are for different modes of communication, whether that's in other languages. We're really excited to do a Korean night, a Japanese night, you know, Greek night, Spanish night, where the performers speak these languages and the entire conversation takes place in these languages. So fun. Additionally, like it could be done in American Sign Language. Haven't gotten there yet.

M: It's OK. I'm just curious. I find accessibility and risk and like risk management are very tied together and I'm always a little curious.

T: Yeah, which ones am I overlooking?

M: Which forms of accessibility? Yeah, I guess autism awareness immediately sort of came to mind because some of your environments, uh, might be fine. Might not. I'd be curious to like sort of have. Some people with different abilities and like autism or maybe blindness or hearing impaired come through as part of like a preview and see what issues they find with it

T: Totally. It's also like, you know, so individual dependent on that one. I'm sure some of the spaces would be fine for some people and less fine for others.

M: Yeah, and there's always like a a reluctance to speak for all disabled people within your, your vein. But also if you are there to sort of test it, keeping an open mind with what you know as well. It's probably going to be more informative than someone who doesn't even have those issues even with.

T: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

M: Anyway, that was my last question so I will, I will stop recording.

Appendix B - Dead Letter No. 9 Production Staff Transcript, Ellery Brown

1 M: Great. So I have a list of about 20 questions. We may not go
2 through all of them, and I will let you know as we progress
3 through. Yeah. So how long, how long have you been doing this
4 stage management work?
5
6 E: I've been stage managing since 2012? 2012. So 11 years.
7
8 M: And how long have you been doing immersive work?
9
10 E: I started with Sleep No More in 2018. Um. Yeah.
11
12 M: OK. And a quick apology if I repeat anything we talked about
13 the other day, I just can't take from that. Umm, what other genres
14 do you work in?
15
16 E: I'm kind of a little bit of everything right now. Let's see, I first,
17 very first started early, early and like I was still in Montreal doing
18 like cabaret burlesque spaces, like very queer spaces, and then,
19 but like, since then, a little bit of everything. Black box. A weird - a
20 lot of opera actually. Like dance. Galas. Events. Gaming. Hybrid
21 virtual events once COVID started. And like anything like, yeah,
22 kind of, kind of a little bit of everything, but I enjoy things that
23 really push like what a performance can be. Which is why like I
24 ended up in immersive spaces. And um. Like format screws in
25 general are my favorite to work on.
26
27 M: OK. And do you have any academic background or any school
28 training in this?
29
30 E: Yeah, so I have, my degree is English drama concentration from
31 McGill. McGill University, but within that I put together
32 independent studies to like kind of, on my own, focus on stage
33 management because I don't have a stage management program.
34 So yeah.
35
36 M: Great. For Dead Letter #9, how do you define your role in the
37 production?
38
39 E: Um, so. On paper, I'm a stage manager. I was, I credited as the
40 PSM. I think immersive work in general is, the stage management
41 roles, kind of, can be very broad. You end up wearing a lot of hats
42 and I think with that production in particular because, um, of
43 when I entered it into the process. It was stage management,
44 comma, what I like to call like the flubber position where you kind

45 of stretch and fill whatever needs to be kind of taken care of that
46 you, that is, within that is, reasonably related to stage
47 management. Does that make sense?

48

49 M: Yeah.

50

51 E: So like more of a broad, very broad lens of stage management.
52 And with that show in particular, because there was a specific,
53 specifically an overlap with audience handling which has come up
54 for me in other immersive spaces, I'd say.

55

56 M: OK. You mentioned when you came into the process, at what
57 point did you come into the process for Dead Letter #9?

58

59 E: Sure. So it had been, my understanding is it had been like
60 percolating inside the creative team since like 2019. The COVID of
61 it all, there were some delays. The core creative team found that
62 location. They scoured a couple of locations, and they really based
63 the work on what could exist in that space. Once they got the
64 space, it was very site specific. Umm. And then they had another
65 PSM associated with the production. And then they had like and
66 then she's, she's great. She initially came in as like an over hire.
67 Helping with installing some things, some admin work, just like
68 trying to like, you know, general support. And then when she
69 stepped away, I was there and like with the SM immersive
70 background. I think her focus was more on, I wanna say she went
71 to grad school and it related to like oral story storytelling
72 traditions, which is really heavily related to the work. But yeah,
73 there was in September, October-ish there was like a two week,
74 they did a soft open. There was like a a two week pause where
75 they came in and like refined some of their concepts and some of
76 like their audience flow stuff, and that's the point where I stepped
77 in as well. If that. So timeline wise, but the show had only been
78 running for a couple weeks and then they took that pause and
79 then I tapped in through January 1st.

80

81 M: OK, great.

82

83 E: Big run on sentence.

84

85 M: No, that's OK. Um. What skills does it take for you to do this
86 job well?

87

88 E: Um. Stage managing in general or immersive stage
89 management specifically? I guess?
90
91 M: Very specifically this shows position.
92
93 E: So like Dead Letter specifically. With that one it was some things
94 that helped were like just being really flexible and like bringing the
95 positive energy. It's like trying to raise that baseline. Umm. And
96 then... Also, just really, because it's such like a personal piece for
97 each audience member. Umm. Really holding that and like keeping
98 that as like the focus of what I'm trying to do here today isn't like, I
99 mean, I'm not trying to lose anybody money. I'm not here to like
100 maximize profits. I'm not here to get as many butts in the door as
101 possible. Both of those things are like part of my job, but I'm really
102 focusing on the people that are coming in having the intended
103 experience. And part of that starts at the door right when they get
104 in and I'm trying to time them with the first performer. People
105 come in with like different preconceptions and anxieties and like,
106 I'm not trying to heavily shaped that experience. There was a
107 point where my, I had like an entry script at one point to help
108 facilitate that moment and then that got cut. But it really is sort of
109 like meeting people where they're at to try and support them into
110 the space, was like, the, I think, the biggest part of show run. That
111 I was doing. It's really listening to where people were entering in
112 it. It was, which is not, I feel like traditional stage management,
113 you're not doing that with individual audience members, that
114 hard. Yeah. That makes sense?
115
116 M: Yeah. Did you write the script or was the script provided for
117 you?
118
119 E: No, that was, that was, that was something Taylor developed
120 and it evolved into like, more like, the entry protocol that like the
121 performer is giving. Um, some of the threads in that and also it
122 was like before the pause, there were just components of that,
123 there were components that were refined. That was something
124 that was refined out. There was a bit more of like an explicit meta
125 narrative happening and it's like we got like that was like kind of
126 let go a bit so we could really center like what is like, what are we
127 actually doing? Like the storytelling is cool and there's nuggets
128 there, like if you want to poke and like find them in the world, but
129 like that's not the focus. And to front load all that narrative
130 information makes it feel like that is the focus. So letting that go.
131

132 M: OK. Do you find that there are artistic elements to the skills
 133 that you employ as an immersive stage manager?
 134

135 E: Um. I think. Yes, what's coming to mind right now is how like in
 136 a traditional show, if I am seen as part of a set change, and like
 137 have to wear a costume for some reason, like I'm running on
 138 setting a prop, running off. That I can be like, hey, I'm doing
 139 something artistic. I'm going to negotiate a higher rate. Like off the
 140 bat like that is like I, I think, uh, a standard that I hold to all other
 141 shows, but that with immersive, it's sort of assumed that you're
 142 bringing that because you're entering like.... And it's interesting
 143 too, coming from Punchdrunk. They have such like a particular
 144 style with it. They have like a very - And I think immersive style
 145 separately and the two of them, you know, blah, blah. Um. Like a
 146 concept of like what that artistry looks like and how that feels.
 147 What was really fun with Dead Letter coming in like at like this
 148 early phase to be like, how do I exist in the world? You know? How
 149 do you? How do you step in as like a technician in some cases and
 150 not like pop the bubble of energy that the performers are creating
 151 when you're all literally in the same room, you know? Um, and
 152 that is. I feel weird applying artistry to that, I think. I think it is like
 153 a stylistic skill set. I think it's like another professional persona you
 154 put on. Maybe. Like people have like their customer service self. I,
 155 you know, you got my corporate self. Um. Immersive stage
 156 management self is someone who can really like, melt into the
 157 wall. Um. Or direct flow depending on what's needed. To be
 158 present or not present. Um. I did one there was an immersive SM
 159 workshop I did a number of years ago. The phrase that came up
 160 was being able to be seen but not noticed. You know, so that if
 161 someone needs you, you are there and they've seen you. They're
 162 aware. Like some part of the brain is aware of you but not noticed.
 163 Not felt in a way that is like impacting the space unless, I don't
 164 know, unless that's relevant to the narrative you're working on.
 165 But yeah.
 166

167 M: Out of curiosity if artistry sort of makes you a little
 168 uncomfortable, would framing it as craftsmanship do the same
 169 thing, or does that feel more accurate?
 170

171 E: I like craftsmanship, yeah. I think so, yeah. Then that makes a
 172 lot of sense.
 173

174 M: OK. Umm. What does duty of care mean to you?
 175

176 E: Um. I. People are trusting us with not just immersive work, but
177 like theater in general. It can be... when you're working on
178 something that has the power to elicit an intense feeling and
179 attends anything. I think it's something to be aware of, and to be
180 done with intention, and to be done for like a purpose, you know,
181 like I'm not like... a haunted house has a purpose and people know
182 what they're getting into. They're like choosing to engage with
183 that and that's like a fun activity and just as like an example of like
184 something that could be like, ohh, scary. But I think with other
185 things it's just so important to let people know if they're... Or if
186 not like, if not like explicitly let them know like 'hey, something
187 might come up in this space' to curate a space where if something
188 does come up, they feel safe and protected and it's still like a
189 positive experience. Umm. I'm thinking right now I did a show in
190 like 2015-ish in Boston called *Drylands* that previous stage
191 managers, I was like multiple tiers of stage managers had had left
192 because it was a pretty... It was a medically accurate piece about
193 abortion and abortion care. And it was just following two
194 teenagers seeking health care in Florida was, like broad strokes,
195 the narrative. Um, and we worked with like nurses and folks to be
196 like, with our practical effects team to be like this is, this is what
197 this sequence is, this is what this looks like and you can have like,
198 you know, it's in the marketing. It's like noted in the marketing.
199 There's signs in the lobby and there was like counselors on site.
200 Um, and we also worked with like a number of different
201 community groups to be like, to engage with people and like to
202 give them the heads up, and then if something happens to be able
203 to care for them right away. And I think of that being like, one of
204 the more extreme examples of that, I think immersive theater. It
205 can be more, it's a lot more nuanced. It's intentionally a lot more
206 nuanced. Umm. I'm rambling a bit, feeling really-

207
208 M: It's OK. It's completely ok.

209
210 E: You know, cause like the... If we're trying to, like, elicit this, like,
211 genuine feeling of, like, you're discovering something inside
212 yourself, or you're lightly surprised by something, sometimes that
213 works better. You don't want to signpost everything leading up to
214 it. But if that's what you're doing, you need to be so aware of it
215 and to be prepared to catch them, and also be prepared to like off
216 ramp at any point. Um, I think. Umm. I'm thinking of framing
217 those moments and then I wasn't, this is not speaking to Dead
218 Letter specifically, but like because a lot of like the more in the
219 intimacy workshops were done prior to me coming there. Thinking

220 of it in terms of like, how can I check in at multiple stages with the
 221 audience member and pivot away from going deeper if that's not
 222 what's wanted?
 223
 224 And that doesn't have to be something that's like verbalized
 225 explicitly, that can be, that can look like many different things,
 226 including verbal. But that's another component of it for me.
 227
 228 M: I ask like thinking of those, like, tacit consent moments that are
 229 usually like embodied like do you think that that's entirely the
 230 performers responsibility to catch. Or do you think a stage
 231 management that's a thing that it's helpful to keep an eye out for
 232 as well?
 233
 234 E: Definitely both. I really think any moment that starts to play
 235 with those elements, I think it's really important to have
 236 monitored in some way. Um, and for stage management and the
 237 company to have a really clear idea of like what is the, what are
 238 the intended outcomes so that if something doesn't work out
 239 well. Um. We have like a really clear picture of like how it didn't
 240 work out or why, um, in like those hopefully rare cases. Umm. I
 241 think. Dead Letter did not have, I think in the time that I was
 242 there, maybe two to three, that I was aware of folks who had like,
 243 not ideal, like, experiences in the show where they that like stuff
 244 came up for them that they either, like, that they didn't love.
 245
 246 And even in those cases there was interest in returning and trying
 247 again. Which was really cool, um, I thought because look, like to
 248 be, to be present for, just to see like... To me that was a sign that
 249 like we had created a space that like people felt like they could
 250 take risks and be caught. Right? It wasn't like, took a risk, didn't
 251 work out. Goodbye forever. We hate what you're trying. Took a
 252 risk. Didn't work out. Here's feedback about what didn't work out.
 253 When can we come back? When can we try again? Because they
 254 saw it working out and wanted access that. Umm. I'm sure there
 255 was other interactions that like I wasn't made aware of or like
 256 people would go home and like not feel strongly enough or
 257 comfortable, for whatever reason, flagging a member of the team.
 258 I'm open to that being a possibility, but like, those having the that
 259 style of feedback was kind of new for me actually. And really a
 260 cool part of this process and then that, yeah.
 261
 262 M: Yeah, I think that's incredibly interesting that people had like a
 263 temporarily negative reaction in there and they're still interested

264 in returning. Do you think that there's anything in particular that
265 between you or, or the performance, the directors or the
266 performance team did that really, specifically aided in catching
267 them and helping encourage like a safe landing and a desire to
268 return?

269
270 E: Um. I think Taylor did a really excellent job responding to folks
271 and, like, there's this, there's this charity of spirit or almost
272 production that I really enjoyed and just like... We talked about it
273 once, early on, there was, it was during a test audience and there
274 was someone, a friend of somebody who nobody really knew, this
275 person, she wasn't having a great time. And she felt like her
276 experience was too short and she was like kind of frustrated by it.
277 And there was other stuff going on with her were like staff was
278 kind of frustrated with her. And it was like, well, we got to the end
279 of the night and what if we just like reopened the space for her.
280 What if we just like, what if instead of being annoyed, what if we
281 put the annoyance aside for a second and just like took what she
282 was saying at face value and like, it's test audiences, we're goofing
283 around. Let's just give her the space again.

284
285 Let's just try again right now. And it was great. She had a great
286 time. She was like really engaged. I think it was just like.... And so, I
287 think that attitude of like, not blaming the patron for messing up,
288 but actually hearing them and being like, let's try to evolve
289 together and like really like this, you know, I feel like other other
290 spaces I've worked at, like it would have been like, yeah, yeah,
291 here's a free drink ticket or like, OK, so we lost a customer, but it's
292 like really, on a granular level, being like, how do we make it work
293 for this one person?

294
295 There was such like an intention of building community in that
296 space that I think, especially in like, that that you really felt from
297 week to week growing with people wanting to come back and just
298 like hang out in the bar or even just like, I'm in the neighborhood, I
299 want to check in and like say hi and like keep going. Like not, not,
300 you know that I'm just like speaking. That. Have that being the
301 focus and like a really core tenant of the company was like
302 something I think really felt all the way through.

303
304 And then on the other hand, the catching component of it. The
305 way, like, Taylor would get this feedback and people would get
306 back like, like full essays from him of like, you know what I mean?
307 Like, like it wasn't like, like really... Gentle, like, well thought out,

308 and then like invitations to keep talking because there was this,
309 like, it also is treating it as like a thing that can grow and continue
310 evolving in order to better serve the goals that we're trying to do.
311 On one hand, I made it kind of hard as a stage manager because
312 it's like, you go and it's like we're open, the show is frozen, and
313 now I replicate it like that wasn't, that's not it. It was so alive in the
314 feel, the things that it wanted to accomplish. And that paired with
315 the openness to keep making it be, like growing it in that
316 direction, and to not be frustrated with guests, yeah. You know,
317 just like hearing people.

318
319 M: That's great.

320
321 E: Yeah, it was really cool. I loved it.

322
323 M: What, if any, ethical obligations do you feel that you have to
324 other performers or staff and the audience?

325
326 E: Hmm. I think this is like, so far I've really been thinking about it
327 from like consent and support from the audience side of things.
328 Really my job as the stage manager is to be there to support the
329 performers first, like that is like, the thing that like I feel, like, is
330 more in the realm of my job description and in immersive theater
331 that's, like, it's bigger, there's blend, there's overlaps, but like at
332 the core of it, like, taking care of the performers is it you know?
333 And. Um. It's a, this was a, you go in there, you run for six hours.
334 You know, it was a very demanding show for these performers.
335 Um. And I think. Taylor did a really good job casting folks who
336 were up to that challenge and also like they did work, like the
337 workshopping they did that I was present for too about how, like,
338 the conversation flow in the spaces. And how they would process
339 the audience members through and just from like the discussion
340 points of view, giving that the same space that I've already
341 described for audience members, is one slice of it. But also really
342 giving performers the permission in that space to be like OK.
343 You've gotten the broad strokes of what, you've gotten, you
344 understand what we're trying to accomplish. And now we trust
345 you to like do that. You know, and like there's, there's notes
346 happening, there's growth and feedback on all these things, but I
347 think like. Um. It was like, I mean it is like a performer driven, it's a
348 performer driven piece in a lot of ways. Umm. When they're being
349 asked to like kind of improv so much content. And so you have to
350 really trust your folks. Yeah. Sorry, what was the original question?
351

352 M: No, it's OK. It's what if any, ethical obligations do you feel you
 353 have to other performers, staff or the audience?
 354

355 E: Ohh, OK, yeah. So I mean. Basic safety is like, people are coming
 356 into a space they need to be at the bare minimum physically safe
 357 and then you work up from there. Um. And so a lot of like another
 358 big part of what I do is the preparedness around that. Umm. I feel
 359 like in, I, I kind of feel like a doomsday bringer cause like I'm
 360 always like, let's talk through the worst case scenario, in like all of
 361 the annoying detail that we don't want to get into, but I need to
 362 know if anything ever comes up ever how it's going to be handled.
 363 Who the support people are? Who do I need to call? How do we
 364 want to record it? Um. And developing all of that ahead of time
 365 before anything happens. I would say like that's not just an
 366 immersive thing, that's like that's a stage manager brain thing, but
 367 in immersive specifically, you know that overlaps like NYC nightlife.
 368 At least for these shows, like evening shows, that are in tangent
 369 with the bar space, you know thinking about safety and support
 370 holistically. Um. Yeah. Yeah. Does that answer the question?
 371

372 M: Yeah, it's a very broad question. Effects are very personal, so
 373 the answer varies between people. Whose concern do you think
 374 maintaining an ethical performance should be?
 375

376 E: Everyone. It needs to start with the producers. Um. Because if
 377 that is not there, you're not gonna be able to reach it. You know
 378 what I mean? It can't be like as a stage manager, you're on the
 379 ground, you're clocking stuff as it comes up, feeding that back up
 380 the chain and being like, hey, we need these support, or this
 381 resources, or this is happening, blah, blah. And if. And but you
 382 need upper management to be in a place where to be like. OK,
 383 great. We'll get you that. Or we can't afford that, but we've
 384 clocked it and here's how we'll address it moving forward, like
 385 whatever it is, I think that needs to be really aligned all the way
 386 up. Umm. And it can't be something that's just starting like on the
 387 showrun crew, performer level, it needs to... Yeah. I think the onus
 388 really needs to be on the producers for, for that as like as like a
 389 place to start and then have it be aligned all the way down. And
 390 that really depends on the company. But I feel like Dead Letter...
 391 Roll the Bones was great, I really enjoy working with them.
 392

393 M: Great. You mentioned talking about ethics a moment ago
 394 about the fact that it like is intertwined here with a bar. Are there

395 ever any issues with the fact that drinking is a kind of a prominent
396 part in show or how is that moderated?
397
398 E: Um, so. Earlier iterations of the piece really did not allow drinks
399 into the main floor space, like into the show space. Like you had
400 your toast and then it wasn't more, hardline, past that. But then
401 like the biggest piece of audience feedback that we were getting
402 was people wanted to have like a beer or something as they were,
403 it's their, it's their night, you know, they want to unwind. Um, so
404 adding a satellite bar to the back that just supported drinks into
405 the show spaces and then also... I don't know, things never got too
406 rowdy in that regard in the show spaces because, I think, if you're
407 coming in for that experience, you're showing up at your ticketed
408 time, you have your toast, which can be non-alcoholic, if you, you
409 know that's offered up top, which one do you want? Um. People
410 don't have as much of an opportunity to get belligerently drunk
411 and then get into the showrooms. And then for folks coming in for
412 just the bar experience, or as you exit and you want to hang out in
413 the bar experience, they were really great. They had a really great
414 team on that side. Like Angel, specifically, was that, he was
415 running the bar and he was just, as like the heart of that space, I
416 think really plugged into, again, the idea of care. He was almost
417 like another character in a lot of ways. And there was like a lot of
418 discussions about like language and workshopping and talking
419 about the show space through the bar staff, which I thought was
420 interesting. Talking about, is there artistry of stage management?
421 They had that happening to some degree over there in this
422 cohesive world, but um, with this model I did not have to deal
423 with that significantly. And then for like the nightlife, dancing, club
424 moments. Um, I would do like the flip at the top of the night and
425 then I'd be like, goodbye. Like I wasn't there at 3:00 AM when
426 things got more exciting. That also wasn't directly impacting the
427 show. So I was like, OK, that's outside my purview. Uh. Yeah, I
428 think, um, outside of this, I think alcohol and immersive
429 experiences is something that has to be really closely examined
430 and like taken very seriously, because if you're already working in
431 a world with like nuanced ideas of consent and like that, like, and
432 especially if your art involves it being tacit or like there being
433 multiple points of like gentle easing in, that's not, like, explicit, not
434 verbalized, I think the role of alcohol has to be really carefully
435 explored. Um. I think Dead Letter, I can think of like maybe one or
436 two occasions where a performer mentioned to me like that
437 person was kind of rowdy, but not enough to kick them from the
438 room ever in regards to that, and I'm not enough to like, it didn't

439 derail the work. You know? And someone could come in rowdy
440 from that, some people come in, people come in with all different
441 energy levels, right? And that's impacting the room in different
442 ways. So that is like one to monitor, but one to particularly
443 monitor because there is a bar attached, is what I would say. Yeah.

444

445 M: Great.

446

447 E: Is that? Yeah.

448

449 M: Umm. I guess one final, one final point on that ethical
450 question. Well,

451

452 E: Yeah,

453

454 M: what would you define as an ethical performance?

455

456 E: What would I define as an ethical performance? I feel like the
457 this the conversation so far has been more about like ethics of
458 audience experience. I think of an ethical performance especially
459 in non-union spaces, umm, and my I'm shifting gears more to like
460 the performer experience or technical worker experience. Um.
461 And an ethical performance is like appropriately compensating
462 people. It is supporting people in having, like, a work life balance.
463 It is a space where people, you know, you can call in and be like,
464 'hi, I'm ill today' and you're not worried about. Not getting booked
465 in the future. Um, there's... an ethical performance has that sort
466 of work/life balance and security. Which in like a freelancing art
467 world, I think can be easy to gloss over or be like you're doing this
468 for the love of the game. And it's like, no, these are people's lives.
469 So that's what is coming up for me first. And I think Dead Letter
470 did a really good job, like across the board paying people, like, as,
471 and like explicitly like being like this is as like as much as we can
472 give you, and, like, and communicating around that and having it
473 be nonhierarchical. Being like we're all contributing, we're all
474 giving, let's do this. And also being like. Hey, how are you? Making
475 sure people are like, like the light checkins with each other, the
476 care. It was very humanizing, so I did really like that but that's like
477 so that's what's coming up for me in terms of like, what is an
478 ethical production. Thinking about then the art that is produced?
479 Um, as like a separate topic? Umm. I think tying into things that
480 you've already mentioned. There's like a Susan Laurie Parks essay
481 where she talks about like why is... before you go and make a play,
482 really interrogate like why does this have to be a play? Um. It's just

483 an artistic medium that can be so personal and can access people
484 in a really unique way, and I think you really need to explore like is
485 this a short film? Is this something, like why? What is in my thing
486 that I'm exploring that needs to like get into people's, drill into
487 people in this unique way. And is that an appropriate medium for
488 what I'm exploring? I think is a good question. I feel like
489 sometimes, you know, I love a spectacle piece. I love for-funsies
490 theater. Um. And I think it's there's so many different reasons to
491 make theater and so many like roles it can have like, in so many
492 different contexts, and I just think that if you're if you're delving
493 into a topic that can potentially deeply affect or hurt somebody,
494 just like being like why? Why are we doing this? Is it, do we have
495 bigger goals of community conversation? Are we like, is this tied
496 into activism? Are we creating a new space for people? Are we like
497 opening people up to new ideas? How do we support that or? You
498 know, like it's just really, really pulling all of that apart as well in
499 like early phases of production. So it's like the two thoughts I have
500 about that.

501
502 M: OK. Thank you.

503
504 E: Yeah.

505
506 M: You're doing great. You're a very eloquent interviewee.

507
508 E: Thank you. I'm like, I'm like, is this just bleh, bleh, bleh?

509
510 M: No, that's perfect. I wanted your thoughts. Thank you. Thank
511 you for sharing them. Um, what types of risk assessment do you
512 do for shows like Dead Letter?

513
514 E: Umm. Uh. I think I have like, I have a document on here. God,
515 what's it actually called? I think it's like Ellery's nightlife
516 recommendations or something like that and it's just like... I was in
517 the point of like, it was more of a place for me to organize my
518 thoughts in relation to this specific show. But going through, sort
519 of, as we, as I flagged earlier, like what are all the worst case
520 scenarios and how do we address them? Anything from like: it's
521 raining and we're New York and this building has a couple of leaks.
522 What's all the ways that I can like triage, like how do we...? Where
523 do we store materials to take care of that? Like how do we reroute
524 show things, like what is the, haven't, going through all that
525 beforehand? Um, and then, this is like just like, the theater in
526 general, not specific to Dead Letter, but like it was something I was

527 thinking about as the SM walking around Dead Letter: evacuation
528 protocol, like dangerous persons protocol. Just stuff that's like
529 recommended by the City of New York for everyone. For
530 performance venues to consider. I think when I was looking into
531 this last, it was like framed as performance spaces and places of
532 worship. And it was like the same category of like, yeah and I
533 think, so taking a look at all that. And then also are you familiar
534 with the NYC nightlife program spelled NIT or night school? Sorry,
535 NYC night school, NIT E school. It's came out during COVID
536 primarily as a response to like the opioid epidemic, but it was just,
537 like, it kind of blossomed beyond that to be like tutorials,
538 resources, workshops about creating safer spaces in New York
539 specifically, like New York Life nightlife spaces specifically. And
540 that's anything from like first aid etcetera to, you got a sound
541 complaint from your neighbor, how do you talk to them about it?
542 We did not get that at Dead Letter, but just being like, if someone
543 comes up and knocks on the door and they're like, this crowd is
544 rowdy for some reason ,being like, how do I address that as a
545 person here? Just like thinking through all the permutations of
546 that, and I think those are, it was just another helpful framing
547 space. Umm. Yeah.

548

549 M: Do any of your risk assessments contain anything about
550 psychological or social risks?

551

552 E: Um. I don't think that was something that was like written down
553 explicitly, but it was like, some of the first test audiences we had,
554 whereas, just invited guests, people making it through the other
555 side and like having like some tears. I think it's not, it was not
556 unusual for someone to, there's going to be like somebody crying
557 at some point during the night. And that's not necessarily a bad
558 thing. That's them having a reaction to the piece. Um. There was
559 an earlier iteration, there was a character who just hung out in
560 that dining room area. And doing a number of like durational
561 content, doing all sorts of things. But I think it was helpful to have
562 there as like an offloading person. That character evolved into
563 someone who would check in on all the rooms and was like
564 roaming. I don't know if you saw the Custodian. You may or may
565 not have it time timeline wise, and it also prevent gave space to
566 be like, this this room feels kind of hot right now, let's get a second
567 facilitator in there. This room has, like this person had just had,
568 like, the performer just had a really big whatever so Custodian is
569 going to go in there and like give them 15 to just go like drink
570 some water and like decompress. So that was a nice built-in

571 system. But I think was there to support the performers. I think
 572 also supported the audience members as like a release valve.
 573 Yeah, I think it's something I'm always ambiently aware of and
 574 having... I feel like the bar restaurant space did give a
 575 decompression area for people coming through having big
 576 responses, that there was either, it was either me, or there would
 577 always be like another floor manager who is either, it was another
 578 member of production in that area to sort of like just keep
 579 antenna up. And they're taking care of 1,000,001 things, but one
 580 of the things on their radar would be that, but like, yeah. Yeah.
 581
 582 It wasn't something I felt like I had to prepare like... People were
 583 not experiencing the show and then going into like an extreme
 584 crisis. So like, that was not something I was necessarily prepared
 585 for, compared to Dry Land, that show I mentioned earlier that I did
 586 in Boston where we had like counselors and psychologists present
 587 in the lobby to catch people who needed whatever they needed.
 588 Um. It's show dependent. But yeah, so, so what I had for this was
 589 like, if I saw someone upset, I would I would touch base with them
 590 and connect with them and see if like, 'can we get you some water
 591 or do you want like a quieter space? You just want your space?'
 592 Like do you, you know? But that was very rare that that was that
 593 intense and it tended to be like internal. A very internal to the
 594 person experience that wasn't negative, it was just big. Yeah.
 595
 596 M: OK. Umm. Do aesthetics or artistic intent apply to how you
 597 develop your risk handling methods?
 598
 599 E: Yes. Um. Yeah. I think, so with the example of Dead Letter the
 600 format of the show lent itself well to someone being then
 601 approached by a staff member. Because you have performers and
 602 like the way we've formatted the conversation, and it was then
 603 not a bother or a surprise for someone to come up to them at the
 604 end and be like 'hello, if for whatever reason that felt
 605 appropriate....' So that was helpful. Um, I think also the lack of like
 606 pomparing to a Punchdrunk or the Sleep No More stuff. Sleep No
 607 More so rests on the anonymity with the masks that, and between
 608 the masks and the no talking, approaching someone as a staff
 609 member being like, 'hi, I see you and I'm going to talk to you' is
 610 really like jarring and can well can elicit a variety of reactions.
 611 Maybe someone is like, 'oh, that's helpful. Thank you.'
 612
 613 But like, you know. With something like Dead Letter, people are
 614 already, the work has already primed them to be OK with me

615 being like, 'hey, do you need anything?' So. Yeah. The two are
616 interrelated in regards to that. Yeah, the to back up to the
617 question was, can you repeat the question again?
618
619 M: Sorry. Does aesthetics or artistic intent apply to how you
620 develop your risk handling methods?
621
622 E: Yeah. Yes. Because that can look like. You know, is can I
623 aesthetically, is there like a sign I can put somewhere in the show
624 to help facilitate something, you know? Um. It's... And then like
625 when you're developing like emergency protocol - A conversation
626 that I had had that like was it was on the To Do List, hadn't
627 happened yet. I'm like, can I trigger an evacuation sequence
628 where we have someone from our team saying in a calm voice
629 like, 'hi, this isn't part of the show, there's the door, we'll catch up
630 in a minute.' Just for whatever reason. That is something that you
631 want to design really with the show in mind. Because it can feel
632 like an evacuation thing, can feel like, is this part of especially
633 immersive thing? Is this part of the show? Do we ignore it? Right?
634 Like is there some sort of game happening but also not wanting to
635 cause fear or panic. And just have like... so that's like an example
636 of something that is hyper tailored to whatever show you're
637 working on. Um. Yeah.
638
639 M: Great.
640
641 E: I'm just gonna grab my charger real quick. Sorry I don't want to.
642 Last time we talked it died in the middle. Sorry.
643
644 M: Do you have a puppy?
645
646 E: Ohh yeah, here we've got. Here, where is she?
647
648 M: Ohh, hello, puppy.
649
650 E: Here she'll hang out with you for a second while. Good, Nina.
651
652 M: No, you like the camera as much as my dog does.
653
654 E: I love that. Alright.
655
656 M: My transcript I'm going to put paused for dog one more. Just
657 put a little, grab the screenshot and put the dog in. OK.
658

659 E: We got a dog, and we got 2 cats roaming around here. I'm
660 surprised they haven't. Um, interrupted things, yeah. OK, there we
661 go. Here's the one cat, but. OK.
662
663 M: Great
664
665 E: Back.
666
667 M: So we are running a little long. Are you OK for like?
668
669 E: I'm good, I'm alright if you're good.
670
671 M: Yeah. No, I'm fine. I just don't want... I want to be considerate
672 of your time.
673
674 E: Yeah, I appreciate that. I'm good.
675
676 M: OK, great. The next question is really similar, and maybe you'll
677 feel you already answered it, if so we'll just move on. But does
678 artistic intent influence the way you do any audience
679 management?
680
681 E: Ohh yeah, yeah, I think we just... It's it, it really it's, it's
682 interwoven pretty heavily. This is what are the people primed for,
683 anticipating what might be needed, and what might be wanted as
684 well. Umm, so so yeah, I feel like, I feel like that has been covered.
685
686 M: Do you ever feel like the artistic intent restricts the way that
687 you can manage them?
688
689 E: Ohh, sure. It's providing the frame that we, that you can then
690 work with in. But that's like, it is like, it's a limiting factor. You
691 know, um. But I don't, I don't. But I think like it's a factor that can
692 work harmoniously. Um, I've, I've been in some spaces where it
693 has... Where like the goal of here's the art we're pushing for, it's
694 going to hurt some people, but most people will get the ideal
695 outcome has been prioritized over: How do we take care of the
696 people who are not having the ideal outcome? Um. And that's not
697 just like an immersive, that's like, I think, something that can
698 always be balanced and explored. And, it's, again, not inherently
699 like a bad thing, like if you're working on an art piece, it's like, you
700 can challenge people. That can be a positive. If everybody's, you
701 make a piece and everybody comes away having like a universally
702 positive opinion, then like I don't know that I'm necessarily

703 interested in working on that piece. You know? Like that's sounds,
704 like what are we, like why are we? Or that's like that's something
705 that like, OK, then how do we like keep pushing it? Like I'm not
706 looking to like, not with the goal intention of upsetting anybody,
707 but like the intention of like potentially challenging folks as long as
708 you're there to then catch them on the other side.

709
710 I think. I feel like I'm repeating myself a lot at this point.

711
712 M: And that's OK. The questions are, I think, designed to really
713 drill down into the same idea to see what

714
715 E: Yeah.

716
717 M: Um, but moving on from them, do you have any training in
718 performance or directing as part of your background.

719
720 E: Yes, yeah, that was in my undergrad. That was part of my
721 program. It was, for me, very much something that I had to do to
722 finish my degree, and I know lots of stage managers who were,
723 like got here via performance didn't work out, but they want to
724 continue to be involved and I have never felt that way myself. I'm
725 not that narrative. I've always been like. Give me backstage, get
726 me to like this hybrid nexus of all the information passing through
727 and we have to like make all the art form, like all the art
728 disciplines, like harmonize, like that sounds, that's the best. So I
729 have, but it's not me.

730
731 M: That's OK. Do you think that the training that you did have to
732 do influences your ability to communicate with your artistic team?

733
734 E: Yes, and that is so important and I think like having that at the,
735 having that opportunity at like an undergrad level, um. And it goes
736 both ways like I think performers should have an opportunity to
737 stage manage at some point, just to like kind of see. But it's also
738 like, I have so much respect for performers, and like that they're
739 able to make themselves vulnerable for other people. And be the
740 product that is being examined, like they themselves. Umm. And
741 that being like.... it's something I have a lot of respect for and a lot
742 of, I feel like it is my duty to like, as a stage manager, to hold space
743 for and really hear folks, when they come to me either with notes
744 or concerns or really anything. To then allow, to set them up for
745 success in sharing that with the audience. It's like a cyclical thing.
746 Um, but yeah. I'd say it was just as important for me to also have

747 like, light designing and scenic experience and like be able to like
 748 tap everything at least once as a stage manager to then be able to
 749 speak all those languages.
 750

751 M: OK. Are you made aware of what type of information the
 752 audience receives before they enter the performance?
 753

754 E: Um, with Dead Letter, yes. Um, yeah. And that's. Yeah, super
 755 helpful. We love it.
 756

757 M: OK. And have you ever seen anything go wrong in an
 758 immersive production, doesn't necessarily have to be Dead Letter,
 759 that could have been prevented in advance?
 760

761 E: Yeah. Yes. My Dead Letter example is going to be like silly stuff
 762 like the timers, the room timers, were constantly giving us trouble
 763 and it was just like... I was like, God, we just need like four
 764 rehearsal hours to sit down with everyone who touches these and
 765 really like, you know, like like, ohh, I can fix this. But you know, so I
 766 think with Dead Letter it would have been like... that is like a, kind
 767 of like, a not silly example, but like a light, a lighter example.
 768

769 That would then prevent the confusion later on. But even when
 770 people's timers went off funny, it was just like, I trust you give it 10
 771 more minutes, whatever. I think outside of Dead Letter I think
 772 feeling like you're being on a time crunch either for like financial
 773 reasons or like as a company or like for any reason. The rushing
 774 training or communication around emergency protocol has been,
 775 like it's, it can be, it can be like scary. It can be quite scary actually.
 776 And leaving folks unprepared and just treating emergency
 777 protocol like on the job learning like, oh, you'll know how we deal
 778 with an electrical fire the first time we get an electrical fire and
 779 you're here, is like that... I don't love that. So I feel like I have
 780 generated like an almost probably annoying amount of paperwork
 781 about how to deal with this type of stuff just to be able to share
 782 that information with other technicians even if we don't have
 783 explicit time or are encouraged to communicate about that. I think
 784 also there can be a lot of pressure on upper management
 785 sometimes to not wanna admit to systemic issues, but then the
 786 issues can't be addressed or fixed when it comes to safety and
 787 preparedness.
 788

789 It's like, ohh, we, this is really hard to address, so we're just kind of
 790 going to ignore it. Um. And that is like, I think probably the most

791 stressful thing that can happen to me is as a stage manager is to
792 be in a position where I'm like, and this is not specific to Dead
793 Letter and this is not like a Dead Letter conversation this point, but
794 to be in a position where it's like, I know something dangerous is
795 going to happen. And I've reported it in all the ways that I can. I've
796 flagged it and discussed it and it has been decided from like a risk
797 management perspective that that is like an OK amount of scary
798 things that can happen. Um. As being like that, being like the
799 hardest part of a job, of like of my work, I think. And to then have
800 to turn around and like, explain that to the people it's directly
801 affecting in show conditions. That it's like ohh, we know XYZ is
802 happening and it's going to keep happening. It's like. It's the worst.
803 It's the worst feeling. And I think has like dictated a lot of projects
804 that I know say no to. That as a younger theater professional, you
805 don't have that luxury. You know. Anyway.

806

807 M: Anyway. Have you seen anything go wrong in a production that
808 now is a regular part of your risk assessing? That before you didn't
809 just consider that as part of the list of things to look for, but now
810 you look for it.

811

812 E: Yeah, absolutely. And for me that's going to be, uh, getting
813 naloxone everywhere, you know? And I think again, like, that's so
814 specific to like living in New York the last however many years and
815 working in nightlife spaces in New York. And working like special
816 events parties. But the city recommends all bar spaces have
817 naloxone behind the bar, right, at this point. So just like being an
818 enforcer of that. And also like continuing to educate and
819 destigmatize around that. I think that's my, that's my big one. But
820 it's not something I thought about in Canada 10 years ago. You
821 know, it just hadn't come up. There wasn't, nobody mentioned
822 that in class and it wasn't, you know what I mean? And now it's
823 just in my kit. So I think that's like that's one that's on my mind a
824 lot lately, I think, but broadly speaking, the short answer is yes,
825 and that is just one example of many things.

826

827 E: Are there any specific types of paperwork or activities that you
828 find really useful for organizing participatory rumors of work? Ohh
829 from like, I mean like I like airtable, you know, is that the?

830

831 M: Yeah.

832

833 E: Um, just because you can attach QR codes to like everything so
834 people can be like at a first aid kit in their dressing room, in any

835 backstage space and be able to quickly log incident/accident
836 reports, requests for first aid and have that be able to go straight
837 to the stage manager but also like all the relevant departments.
838 Also like airtable as like a, you can really customize it to your
839 department, but then bring it all together for your SM report in a
840 nice systems way. I think, it's tricky because I've just been typing
841 up paperwork so much, it's also easy to become over reliant on
842 paperwork. Um, and be like, ohh, we have the answer to that. We
843 wrote it down three years ago. Let me check the Google Drive.
844 And then it's buried and put stuff unfolding in front of you in real
845 time.
846
847 So. I guess that's my one caveat with all the all the paperwork
848 stuff to make sure that it's like, as an SM, you're like also building
849 time into like every week that is either reviewing or updating
850 protocol and not letting it just like grow stale. So yeah.
851
852 M: The final question. So you can do training for things like first
853 aid, mental health, fire, fire. What is it called? Fire Assembly
854
855 E: Fire guard?
856
857 M: Yes
858
859 E: Yeah.
860
861 M: Thinking like along those lines are there any additional
862 trainings you think it would be really useful for an immersive stage
863 manager or house manager to have, even if they don't quite exist
864 yet? Like what would the training be that you think could be really
865 handy?
866
867 E: Audience handling is the one that is coming to mind right away.
868 Um, audience handling, de-escalation in general, like any de-
869 escalation workshop. Yeah, but definitely for immersive,
870 specifically audience handling and that can look like, beyond those
871 specific needs of any show, like really taking a step back and being
872 like, what does it mean that you as a technician are gonna be
873 coming into contact with so many people? What does that contact
874 look like? Is it physical? Is it you're in the room with them and
875 like? To what degree does just being in the room with audience
876 mean you are now the point person for their care to different
877 degrees? Like just really, having a really clear sense of that before
878 stepping into, is like helpful, for folks already working in immersive

879 theater, who might not have done that, or for folks considering
880 working in immersive theater or being like, as you said, like house
881 managers, like FOH, as being something really important.

882
883 And. Yeah. Because it's the, there's a lot of talk about like, in not
884 just immersive theatre, in any show, the what is it, the audience is
885 the is the character you don't get to meet until you open
886 necessarily. Like the audience is the other character that is there.
887 That we are acting with. And just thinking about different.... It's,
888 there's like, I think an immersive theater especially there is like. I
889 don't quite know how to phrase this. We don't have to be
890 surprised by who that character is. We can be prepared. You know,
891 we can just, through test audiences, through training and
892 preparedness, and just thinking about all that. I don't know if that
893 answers the question.

894
895 M: No, that's great. That's great. That's all my questions. I'll stop
896 the recording.
897

Appendix C - 1884 Performance Maker Transcript, Rhianna Ilube

1 M: Great. Then, if you don't mind, I have a list of
2 questions to ask you. So how long have you been
3 doing what you did for 1884?
4

5 R: Um, we started. Uh, we did an R&D workshop of
6 it in January 2023. So since then there's been a
7 whole year and a half process to get it to the stage
8 of professional production in April of this year.
9

10 M: And how long have you been directing? What is
11 like your backup?
12

13 R: So ohh so. This was my first ohh no. OK so I've
14 been working with Coney for, since 2020, since
15 2020. And I've been a playwrights or been writing
16 scripts since 2019. Prior to that I worked in NGO
17 International Development sector. So I kind of had
18 like a career change and moved more into the arts
19 and theater in about like about four or five years
20 ago. But Coney, all my interactive work has mostly
21 fallen under Coney, and I started as like, kind of a
22 freelance maker. So I would be attached to lots of
23 different projects as a maker which and then they
24 kind of started directing some commissions or
25 projects and became associate director of in Coney
26 HQ maybe in like 20 -, 20 -, 2022. So I've kind of
27 been directing projects since 2022 basically, but
28 this is my first kind of public, people can buy
29 tickets, artistic projects that I've directed. Like, ever.
30 And with Coney, that makes sense.
31

32 M: Yeah.
33

34 R: Yeah. Right.
35

36 M: Do you work in any other genres besides
37 immersive and participants?
38

39 R: Yeah, so I, I also write kind of, I don't know what
40 we call it but like straight plays. So and I at the
41 same time as having 1884, I had a play on which
42 was at the Yard Theatre and that was a play of
43 which it was just a normal audience sit there,
44 actors, acts. So it was kind of interesting and I've

45 been basically, I've been working on that play for a
46 few, a good few years too. So almost in parallel, I
47 was doing 1884 and Samuel Takes a Break, which
48 was my play at the same time. And so, and then I
49 also work a bit in film, um, programming films and
50 things. So it's like film, normal theater, and
51 immersive theater, are like my main things.
52 M: Yeah, you're very busy.
53
54 R: That's why I'm tired. Yeah.
55
56 M: So for 1884, there's a lot of different styles of
57 immersive and some are more structured and some
58 are more open. What kind of style do you consider
59 your work?
60
61 R: And by your work, you mean 1884?
62
63 M: Yeah, Yeah. Specifically.
64
65 R: Uh. I I. I. I struggle, I use words almost in an in an
66 attempt to communicate to people what they
67 might expect or like in the marketing attempt. But I
68 don't actually think I have a strong word, words,
69 that could summarize it. Like we use game theater
70 a lot, but I, I don't, I don't actually see it really as a
71 game.
72
73 Look, I would overall, I would say it's quite
74 interactive and I would maybe say participatory all,
75 almost. Especially acts 1 audience-led because I
76 feel actually maybe acts 1 and acts 2 are two
77 different types of show. Act one being like we have
78 a structure but everything is dictated. A lot of what
79 happens, especially there's like 1/2 an hour section
80 in act one of which it's kind of up to the audience
81 how it plays out. Whereas at 2 is pretty much the
82 same every night, except for the detail of the
83 captions is different based on what happened in
84 Acts 1. So it's all. So maybe Act 1 is slightly more
85 participatory, audience-ed, game theater-esque.
86 Whereas act 2 is I would say like immersive. But
87 more slightly more traditional. That's my long
88 answer. Yeah.

89
90 M: No, that's a great answer. Thank you. Yeah. How
91 do you develop your work?
92
93 R: And by work 1884? Sorry?
94
95 M: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Sorry, always 1884.
96
97 R: Uh, so this one, um. It was a, it's an iterative
98 process. We did on R&D and at the start of, a year
99 and a half ago, there was no sense that it would go
100 beyond a week. So I had a initial premise. 1884. I
101 feel like something interactive could come from it. I
102 feel like no one's done anything linking to this
103 specific moment in history.
104
105 I've seen some shows which I think were awesome,
106 and I feel like our inspirations to me. I've seen, I've
107 learned about this history and I think more people
108 should know about it. Um, so I said that all to
109 Coney. They gave 5 days and they said I can bring in
110 different makers that I want to kind of explore this
111 with and at the end we will do a play test with 20
112 friends of Coney and so and, and there's no
113 pressure. If we have nothing to show, we could talk
114 through what we've discussed. Uh. And halfway
115 through on day three, three members of Coney
116 came in and played whatever we did. So we had
117 like a mini play test and then like a final play test.
118
119 And I think what it was such a, that was such an
120 amazing room. Like I'm really proud of that specific
121 R&D. It was spread over 2 weeks and we had like,
122 uh, I have 4 core makers with me, a director, a kind
123 of activist, a game maker, and myself. And then on
124 other days, sometimes someone would come in
125 who was a historian and give us a talk or a
126 researcher gave us a talk and somebody who
127 makes interactive work about archives came in and
128 gave us a talk. So like, we, it was almost like also,
129 and we also, skilled up the artists I brought in. So
130 like Tassos from Coney did a workshop on game
131 design. So it was almost like a lecture series. And
132 then we just like brainstorm loads of ideas and I

133 think no one expected us to do as much as we did,
134 but somehow we kind of created that, we, we
135 created that structure and the play test that we did
136 on that final day is not too dissimilar. It really had
137 everything it has the core bones of what you saw a
138 month a year and a half later, which was building
139 your family in acts one. It getting kind of taken
140 away. DJ. Postie. All of those characters existed and
141 in the act 2 we created the museum DIY.

142
143 And so I think that was when we and the audience
144 reaction was so strong and raw. And I feel like it's
145 never, it's never been so exciting because that was
146 the first time we've seen what happened and they
147 really, people really protested. People really, it felt
148 so exciting in the room. So I think that like gave the
149 impetuous to keep going. And so we did another
150 play test, R&D and play test in six months later and
151 then we did another R&D process four months later
152 and then we had a month, a week of rehearsals in
153 March or April, and then we showed it in April.

154
155 So it's basically been like. Uh. Bringing in lots of
156 different people over a year and a half, but I think
157 me and Marie have been the core from the start to
158 the end. The people who have been in every single
159 situation, like development situation, consistently.
160 And then there's been play tests and bringing in
161 people as and when. And upping the production
162 quality with the set design, um. But I would say like
163 the, without the strong foundations of what we had
164 created in R&D one, everything, like that, that was
165 the trick. And I'm really pleased we got there. I I
166 mean, yeah, yeah. That's it. I think.

167
168 If you have further questions to drag out, let me
169 know on that front.

170
171 M: You mentioned that you were influenced by a
172 couple of shows initially. What were they?

173
174 R: Yes, one was *We Should All Be Dreaming*. It was,
175 it's a, I'm gonna say massive show. It was at Lift
176 Festival and they also tour it around, around

177 Europe, um. And it's by two Finnish makers and the
178 first half it's, it's about kind of, utopian and
179 dystopian dreaming and colonialism and futures
180 thinking and it, basically, the first half is a dinner
181 party, imagining it's New Year's Eve in the future
182 and you constantly get told you're now 50 years in
183 the future and as a New Year's Eve celebration. You
184 know, 100 years in the future, New Year's Eve
185 celebration, and you're given prompt cards to
186 imagine, imagine the world you're living in, in the
187 future, and imagine what you'd be doing and whilst
188 eating and just getting to know people.
189
190 And then you leave and then when you come back,
191 you're three thousand years in the future and
192 you're now an atom. And it kind of becomes like a
193 movement party and you like stop moving around
194 and.
195
196 I think, well, I my, what I always say, say I.
197
198 Maybe the piece, I was so excited to do the piece
199 because I'd heard a lot of hype around it because it
200 was touring around Europe and I was so intrigued
201 and potentially it didn't, actually, the piece itself,
202 the content didn't hit me emotionally as hard as
203 maybe I wanted it to, but the structure I loved. I
204 loved the kind of community gathering of Acts 1. I
205 love leaving the room. And when I came back, it
206 was completely different. I loved that it was a pop-
207 up format that was creating this hype that it was
208 like, ohh, it's in Berlin, and now it's coming here.
209 And I love that there were like moments of like,
210 once again, that audience making the show,
211 especially in Acts 1 and like you can meet real
212 people and like have an amazing kind of
213 community experience.
214
215 So I was just kind of keen to do something, do my
216 own version of that um. And then I think another
217 other reference was like. Weirdly, The Sims, the
218 computer game, was a big reference and like
219 making, making your own homes. And I think I've
220 had the Sims in my head because it's like the 25th

221 anniversary is coming up and I think I was like, I was
222 like, no one's talking about The Sims had this like
223 huge cultural impacts and, yeah, so I just, it was in
224 the room. And then also Black Mirror, the TV show.
225 There's an episode called the Black Museum and
226 it's like the final episode and it's, say, of the whole
227 of the whole program, and it's a Museum of all the
228 things that have happened in different episodes.
229 And it's kind of like, and I, I think, I think in that first
230 week of R&D at some point I was like, let's just
231 make, it's a museu-, like act two's a museum. So it's
232 like almost act one is The Sims and act two is a
233 museum or is the black museum. And once you
234 have that, you have the structure of the show.
235
236 But I'm barely sure without *We Should Be, We*
237 *Should All Be Dreaming* I may not have thought of
238 like, the like, basically what you can do in an
239 interval. It like taught me. Taught me it's OK to
240 make your audience leave for 20 minutes and you
241 are running around redesigning the room
242 completely so when they come back, it's a whole
243 new world. That like, I got that from that show.
244
245 M: Yeah, that's awesome. That was super powerful.
246 It was not at all what I expected when I interacted.
247 It was incredible.
248
249 R: Thank you.
250
251 M: Umm. How do you think about the audience?
252
253 R: Um. Hmm. I so. I think I have like an instinct
254 principle. I'm not hard, I'm not hard line on
255 anything, like I'm open for things to, for me to be
256 challenged. But I think as a maker, I do believe even
257 when it's interactive, ultimately, as like the director
258 of designers or something, we have still a lot of
259 control of what audiences do. And in watching it
260 over and over again you learn all the ways that
261 audiences might play. Um. So. I, I what's the
262 question? How do I think about audiences?
263
264 M: Yeah, I do have follow up questions.

265
 266 R: OK. Yes, I, I think I'll hear those in a second. I
 267 think I'm curious about what audiences do and I'm
 268 nervous. I'm constantly really nervous about what
 269 they're going to do and I'm often pleasantly
 270 surprised by like, when people play very creatively
 271 or find roots around. But I also basically, I do go
 272 with the principle that like, it's never the audience's
 273 fault, really, what they do, because it's us as how,
 274 how we set up the rules of the space, the space of
 275 space.
 276
 277 I think it gets if, if, if the room has gone in such a
 278 way that it's gone terribly, there might be some odd
 279 players who have really met, done something that
 280 we, that is, has gone way too far, but in general,
 281 that probably we've set up the space in a way or
 282 the rules of the space and the way that means that
 283 something like something's gone wrong.
 284
 285 And so I, I, it's like trying having trust in the
 286 audience and like giving them enough to play well
 287 is like, we say in Coney a lot, like, how, how do, how
 288 do you play well? How do, how do we encourage
 289 the audience to play well in this space? But I am
 290 also nervous. I'm super nervous about audience
 291 participation, um. But for, yeah, that was, yeah, you
 292 can see say follow up questions, yeah.
 293
 294 M: How, how did the idea of the audience fit into
 295 your process here? Did you have the idea for like
 296 1884 and then sort of weave the audience in, or
 297 were you interested in how the audience do
 298 something and you sort of weaved the other way?
 299
 300 R: Um, I think because, because I knew after seeing
 301 *We Should All Be Dreaming* and working for Coney
 302 for years, I was like, I knew if I pitched it to Coney
 303 and they, then it's going to be an interactive thing.
 304 Therefore the audience are going to be the key, like
 305 a key part of it. Uh, so I think, the key question that
 306 we had at the beginning was because about the
 307 Berlin Conference, are they inside the conference
 308 or not? Uh, and you're like almost the key question

309 to crack at the beginning is: what role of the
310 audience playing? Like if they're going like and... We
311 just felt, if they're gonna, we cannot have them
312 playing colonizers. And if we're therefore, if we're
313 going to have them playing essentially colonized
314 peoples, of which we are, we cannot have them
315 playing real people. Real, a real historical moment,
316 because it because, and this is what I mean about
317 how much control we still have as makers? We,
318 there was one point where maybe a maker, a
319 suggestion in the room was like a table could be
320 Jamaica and a table could be this and like it would
321 be different countries and, that would, it is giving a
322 chance for an audience member to say explicitly
323 stereotypes about a country or to play as, play as,
324 Jamaican or like do weird, do... and we always knew
325 this piece from the beginning, I had parameters
326 and I knew the piece is going to be something that
327 could be played by anyone who buys ticket. Like it's
328 good so it's gonna be mixed audiences that will be
329 white, black, Asian audience members all playing
330 together of all ages, of all knowledge.
331
332 So. A lot of basically creative decisions from the get
333 go were made from that question of what is their
334 role? And that leads to us coming agreeing it has to
335 be a fictional world. And we can't, we don't want
336 them, we don't wanna see people playing as
337 colonizers. Therefore, we cannot play out or role-
338 play the Berlin Conference inside what the
339 conference happened, which I think a lot of people
340 think is what they're doing when they book a ticket.
341 But there's obviously still complexities with playing
342 color colonized and how to do that safely and how.
343 And we always had a principle, because at Coney
344 we make manifestos at the beginning of our
345 projects, and they're like guiding lights and values.
346 So we've always said we will prioritize at all, all
347 times, we will prioritize the experience of people of
348 color, global majority players and we will imagine
349 worst case scenarios for them sitting around tables
350 in our game.
351

352 Worst case scenarios being, they, somebody is
 353 racist to them or they are deeply triggered by the
 354 experience of replaying this kind of, these kind of
 355 scenarios. And so and this statement has become
 356 and so, so, so yeah, I think we are all constantly
 357 thinking, I'm constantly thinking worst case
 358 scenarios for audiences that I care for and I care for,
 359 I care for all audiences. But we were like, that is
 360 one, that is one key thing and almost, therefore,
 361 making sure white players in that situation don't -
 362 the game forces you to live in a fictional world, so
 363 you are not so, so we are trying to minimize the risk
 364 of people playing, people talking about real places
 365 inside the game. Yeah.
 366
 367 M: Awesome. What do you think is the function of
 368 the production staff to you?
 369
 370 R: Um. Does production staff include the producer
 371 or is the stage manager?
 372
 373 M: Like stage management, house management,
 374 production managers are usually.
 375
 376 R: Yeah. It, this, it was a big. This was an extremely,
 377 this isn't was an extremely complex stage manager
 378 job um and there is an ideal world of this piece
 379 which, and it's all to do with funding, but basically,
 380 there's two, there's 2, with this specific job, there's
 381 we need, I think we need at all times.
 382
 383 Somebody in the room watching the room for any
 384 audience, for any issues. Audience and actor safety.
 385 And you need someone out the room building the
 386 museum. And leading the, setting up the room,
 387 leading the changeover at interval. There's a small
 388 amount of tech like lights, lights and sound, if that
 389 goes wrong, like that very practical thing, and I
 390 think and for this run in April, we ended up having
 391 our stage manager who was, who was in the show
 392 became, was running more that practical side. So
 393 was building the museum, was helping if the Q-Lab
 394 went wrong, fixing it, setting up the space and
 395 closing down the space, and then it was a

396 coloConey staff member each night who was
397 watching the room. And particularly for if any
398 audience had questions or being like, basically,
399 being audience point person or we have like a
400 symbol that we would do for the actors if they
401 needed help, they would do X to us quickly and we
402 would like help. We were on WhatsApp so that
403 actors, especially the DJ, so like we were in chat
404 with him all the time if anything was happening.
405 But. In my, well, in a well resourced version of the
406 show, which, and I think we've now agreed, there
407 will be a stage manager and assistant stage
408 manager and, almost, one is responsible for that
409 care and like looking at the room and making sure,
410 noticing everything is happening, and one is, one is
411 responsible for, uh, for yeah, like just product-, like
412 making sure it all runs.
413 And then in the space that, what I found, I felt quite
414 safe with Shoreditch Town Hall. There was a duty
415 manager, a venue manager, who was outside at all
416 times, and had had experience with Punchdrunk
417 and other immersive shows, so kind of got it. They
418 also played tested it the week before with all her
419 staff and then we had some front of house people,
420 one in, in the room with ,helping once again, just
421 noticing stuff in the room. One outside.
422
423 So that was like, the venue also brought their own
424 people, and it was, but it was important that they
425 like play tested, were excited about the game,
426 understood the complexities of immersive shows.
427 I'm not sure all venues will, but Shoreditch Town
428 Hall had that. But yeah, so that's, that's some
429 aspects of it.
430
431 M: Awesome. Was the stage manager making the
432 captions?
433
434 R: yYah, and like this and but and you should talk,
435 this will be a Marie question, because but in the
436 end, we also hired every night one or two caption
437 writers whose also job was it to write captions.
438

439 Stage manager also wrote captions, but more was
440 also in charge of like printing. Telling them, telling
441 the freelancers, like we need a caption for this. We
442 need a caption for this. But I would say to me,
443 that's not, that's me. That's almost that whole job.
444 That's just like a whole job. Museum builder.

445

446 M: Yeah

447

448 R: It's a, versus stage manager is, and I'm and I'm I
449 am speaking from a limited experience of being of
450 a full production, but stage manager is, or is also,
451 care for the company, and that cannot be done if
452 you are making the museum in another room. So
453 we, that's why we've come, we've realized if it's not
454 that Coney staff member, it is, we need, if it ever
455 tours, we need to stage, like stage manager
456 assistant. One is museum and the other one is kept
457 in the room, yeah.

458

459 M: Awesome, yeah. Do you feel like the production
460 staff have any artistic influence in their roles?

461

462 R: Yeah, because particularly well, because, yeah,
463 stage manager is making the museum. He got very
464 creative and like I think that was like really
465 enjoyable, I think for him. And because, and like a
466 pride almost because every night was slightly
467 different and like you could watch people reading
468 your, reading the captions, or like it just felt like the
469 museum team had their own like creative e.nergy
470 to it. And then Marie, my producer, had, has had an
471 incredible amount of creative input and I think
472 from having just watched the show so many times
473 and receiving feedback and it's like, with
474 immersive, it's like, if we tweak this, it's going to
475 help with this. And I think Marie also did a lot of
476 work with our set designer. So she like, she
477 deserves a lot of creative input. But then kind of
478 the help, is I think, less creative input. They're just
479 there to watch and give the microphone out and
480 help on the night and stuff like that. Yes, yeah.

481

482 M: Do you talk with stage management, the ushers,
483 house management, about how artistic aesthetics
484 should apply to their interactions with the audience
485 before they-?.
486
487 R: Yeah. I think. It's more that in our briefing to
488 audience, we would like we would say if you have
489 out of world questions, come to, you know, come
490 to front of house here, or Coney staff here. So and
491 if you have in-world questions, you can ask the
492 actors, but if the actors noted they can like, kind of
493 point to the front of house. So therefore I don't, I
494 think, not telling, not saying that front of house
495 have to do anything in the world because they've
496 been briefed as like they're out of worlds.
497
498 And I kind of, I got that from another show I went
499 to, *With the Shield and Torch*, which was kind of like
500 an immersive 4 hours in a medieval pub kind of
501 role-playing game. But at the beginning they were
502 like, if you do this, they like showed us different like
503 physical actions that meant that if you then spoke
504 to a staff member, they would know that you're like
505 talking out of world. And, and therefore, can you
506 just interact with me as a normal person? And I
507 think it's like, that's so, that's important for
508 audience members to not feel trapped in this
509 immersive world if they genuinely just need to
510 know where's the toilet or actually I just need a
511 break or like, whatever.
512
513 So I would, so there was no expectation for staff
514 members to interact in a creative way, yeah. Yeah.
515 But there were times, sorry, where, for example,
516 me or like if I'm in Coney, I'm a Coney staff member,
517 and people ask me questions like, can we protest?
518 And I'd be like, I, in that moment, I had made
519 maybe creative calls in the role to be like, that's not
520 an out of world question. Like you guys figure it
521 out. But I wouldn't expect front of house to to
522 know how to respond to those questions with
523 limited briefing. They could just point. That's why I
524 think it's important to have someone who knows
525 the show in that room. As well. Yeah.

526
527 M: Great. Hmm. What would be your hypothetical
528 example of a perfect audience response?
529
530 R: Hmm. Hmm. I'm trying to think. The perfect
531 audience response would be that they umm. They
532 act, they genuinely feel frustrated by restrictions
533 being put on them, and spontaneously... Do you
534 start organizing a protest? And the protesters really
535 creative and beautiful and interesting, but they
536 don't. Um. Whilst at the same time not going too
537 far? I have see-, where they, where they overstep
538 or abuse the boundaries of the actors but not i had
539 some people who were aware still aware i could
540 see it in their minds and how they're they're
541 abused the boundaries of the actors.
542
543 But not, I had some people who were aware, still
544 aware, I could see it in their minds and how they
545 were playing, that they were playing a game. And
546 so they were playing to find out what happened,
547 what would happen, if they do this or what would
548 happen if they do this and that's may be fine, but I
549 prefer if people are kind of acting out of almost
550 instincts and but, basically, there's been some
551 nights where I've seen like, kind of, a really
552 interesting creative protest, whether it's like
553 they've all coordinated house, now they're going to
554 do it at the same time or they've moved their
555 tables together. So now they're all sitting in a long
556 table together and like, it looks quite like they've
557 like, felt like agencies to like move the sets and like,
558 like change stuff or like they're all standing around
559 in a circle and they've all like created these slogans
560 and they're chanting these slogans.
561
562 I think that's, because the point of the game, [oint
563 of the piece is that a lot of rebellions and resistance
564 movements in Africa at the time were not
565 documented or were not, are not like, taken
566 seriously. And so we want to kind of make the
567 metaphor that like in 45 minutes you created this
568 family that didn't even exist before. And now you
569 guys are really protesting and you really feel like

570 affronted and we've done, it's not real. We, it is,
571 but it's not real. This is a fictional scenario. So
572 imagine that this really was your home for
573 hundreds of years and this was real. Of course, of
574 course, there's going to be protests because look
575 how instinctively it's just happened from, in this
576 simulated environment. So it is good, it is a good
577 outcome for me if people do protest in some way
578 whilst keeping safe each other and the actors,
579 yeah.

580

581 M: Great. What would constitute a failure?

582

583 R: I would say a failure as if, a failure is if people
584 were abusive, hurt the actors or each other. That is
585 the breaking of, the breaking of the show. To me, a
586 failure is not if they don't protest, that's fine. Like if
587 it would be a failure, it if every single night, it was
588 just a quiet audience that did nothing and kind of
589 sat there and didn't really feel anything and looked
590 really bored. That would be a failure. But for me, I
591 would be like, OK, we did some, like, we didn't
592 achieve the creative goal of the piece, but for me
593 the true failure is if it feels so out of control. That's
594 it's scary and it's not a good space for the actors to
595 hold. So yeah, I think I'm, I'm thinking for some
596 reason, I'm thinking a lot about the access because
597 of the way the show plays. It's almost like it's
598 audience against actors, audience against the
599 game, and audience are in the right so. The show
600 doesn't really massively encourage people to go
601 against each other. That's so, which is good for me,
602 but, so my theory, my theory is that they get riled
603 up, would get riled up too much that's something
604 really bad would happen.

605

606 Uh, which hasn't happened, but like I've seen
607 glimpses, glimpses of some audience members
608 thinking they, like, for example, one player told me
609 that someone on her table was like, shall we
610 throw? She was getting so riled up or like wanting
611 to protest she was like, shall we throw fruit at the
612 DJ? And on the table they were like, I think that's
613 going too far. Uh, and to me, that is going too far.

614
615 Um, and I. And. We, you know, we say in the
616 briefing like don't cross these lines of the actors,
617 don't touch the actors, don't abuse them or
618 something. And people kind of chuckle because
619 they can't see how they're going to get to that
620 stage. But then an hour later you're suggesting
621 that. And that, to me would be a failure, if that
622 happened, um, so yeah. Things like yeah. Umm.
623
624 M: When you start thinking about the audience,
625 do you sort of have like an ideal audience member
626 in your head that's there or do you think of a broad
627 spectrum of people when you're initially planning?
628
629 R: I think the game needs, only works, if it's like a
630 good mix of people. So it's not like one person is
631 great. It's like we need like almost like a good 10,
632 like a good 10, but I would say like, uh, it's great for
633 1884, if there's like one to three, one to five people
634 in the room who are activist-y and maybe literally
635 like have activist background. I have some people I
636 know who came and played and I watched them
637 play and they're like, it's this like Extinction
638 Rebellion or like some race movements, and like
639 the way they played was really good. Or sometimes
640 you have like older activists, like in their 50s, sixties,
641 70s, who have played, who become leaders in the
642 room and like start going from table to table telling
643 people this is what we should do. What do you
644 think about this? So and like they always have the
645 skills to, uh, to plan for the plan creatively. And
646 they, they, they often, there's often players who
647 maybe don't have that activist energy, but like have
648 that like anger inside of them that when this
649 injustice starts happening, they're like, no, like we
650 don't want to do this. We're gonna. So. I think have,
651 if you have, just an entire room of slightly more
652 passive, nervous players, the room is more
653 subdued, but it just, it often only takes one person
654 who's like, come on, guys, let's do this and let's,
655 like, think collectively and let's. I, I would love, but I
656 would say if we had too many of those players in
657 the room, it would also not work. And it would be

658 to comp-. It might get too intense or it might get
 659 too confusing or. So they're not my ideal player, but
 660 they're my ideal player within a group of 14.
 661
 662 And then another ideal players are, because what
 663 I've also learned is that the game is so, or the
 664 pieces, so hinges, act one hinges on the
 665 camaraderie of the table you're sat at, and so a
 666 good few people per table who are friendly and
 667 who say, what's your name? And are up for it and
 668 warm and open, um, and playful and creative, so
 669 that they bring along quiet and nervous players.
 670 Because if you had a table of all quiet people or a
 671 table of all very loud big personalities, it's also
 672 going to struggle, so it's not about perfect, it's not
 673 perfect audience but it's like perfect mix.
 674
 675 And we talked about this with marketing and I
 676 don't know how well we did. Like the rooms were
 677 good but I really, like I almost want to curate the
 678 rooms, but that's too controlling. You have to let
 679 people come.
 680
 681 It's not great if it's an all white room of people in
 682 their 20s like, which is some audiences, theater
 683 audiences here, like you want a range of ages, a
 684 range of backgrounds and experience relationships
 685 to this topic. Yeah.
 686
 687 M: Yeah, I know when I was there, I was super
 688 impressed by the way the camaraderie just built at
 689 my table. We were so scratch to our house and
 690 whenever anything would happen, we're like, no.
 691 Why are you taking our plants? Yeah, I think in
 692 intermission. One of the guys, we had put pets on
 693 some of the tiles, he put them in his pocket and
 694 was like, we're not gonna let them take them. And I
 695 was like, that's a good idea. And I was like, why am I
 696 so invested in these tiles? But I am. They can't take
 697 their pets.
 698
 699 R: But, I've also talked to people who were on
 700 tables with no camaraderie, and they felt none of
 701 this, and they just sat there miserable. So, I'm not

702 yeah. So I'm like, ah, I think this is my biggest, one
703 of my huge learnings of the lot. I was so proud of
704 the game. And I was like, this Act 1 is so cool, and I
705 think it's cool watching it from the outside. But
706 then when you really watch and you see there's
707 always a table that's just sitting there in silence and
708 I need to think a lot about if we remount, what do
709 we do for those tables? To... Yeah, what do we do
710 for those tables? But yeah.

711

712 M: It's a really interesting thing to think, yeah. Have
713 you ever been able to get an audience assessment
714 or sort of feedback that you felt was accurate about
715 the experience you cultivated for the audience?

716

717 R: Yeah, but I haven't looked at them yet, but we
718 actually had a PhD researcher who's, her focus is
719 on, or postdoc, is focused is on how do ,improving
720 audience evaluation and how do you actually get a
721 sense of what audiences have gone through and
722 she collected about 60 responses over the 10 night
723 run. And it's like a good series, like it's a
724 questionnaire survey.

725

726 And she had one question in it that I was like
727 suspicious of. But skimming through, skimming
728 through the responses, I was like, ohh, this is
729 actually quite cool. It's something like what,
730 obviously, don't actually don't say I was suspicious
731 of it, that was just be like me being what? But it's
732 like, what? How would you describe your
733 experience as a metaphor? And the response has
734 been quite cool there. I, I can't, I can't remember
735 them, but I'm like excited to read through them.
736 And I think we do a lot at Coney of asking people,
737 we asked them like, when did you play in a way
738 that surprised you? And I think I'm quite excited to
739 read those responses because that's almost the
740 instinct stuff, like you go in, you go in thinking.
741 Yeah, I'm like, I'm this kind of person. I'm gonna
742 play and I hate interactive stuff. And then like, ohh,
743 an hour in, you're like. Why am I, I'm standing up
744 with a protest sign in my hand and I've never done

745 that before in my life. How? How has the game got
746 me to this stage?
747
748 And that, so I guess the surprise you question is
749 useful for me because it's telling me what, what the
750 piece is doing that's getting people to step slightly
751 out of their comfort zone, hopefully in a good way,
752 yeah.
753
754 M: So does Coney regularly do like questionnaire
755 feedbacks?
756
757 R: Yeah, but the first time we're doing it with like a
758 researcher who kind of took care of it. But we've
759 always done more questionnaires. We've done
760 serious questionnaires at our play test. Every single
761 play test we did like a short survey. How could you
762 improve it? How would we improve it? What words
763 would you use to describe it to your friends? What
764 was the best thing about it? So like that year and a
765 half, all play testers have given us feedback. For this
766 audience because it's 2 1/2 hours long, maybe even
767 longer, the show ended at 10 something, we didn't
768 force people to stay back and do questionnaires in
769 the same way, but everyone received those, that
770 PhD survey thing. And we also have a digital
771 companion where people could voice note their
772 experiences. And the voice notes are really
773 beautiful, but there's not as many as I would have
774 liked, and I would and because I think it's quite a
775 high ask if you've seen something to go home and
776 then voice note to the ether your feelings on it, but
777 the voice notes that we've received are really great.
778
779 So if I had my dream way, I would almost create like
780 a voice for a voice note hangout space after the
781 show and be like please go and voice note the
782 experience because that's for me how I get an
783 actual sense versus just reading surveys. Yeah, so.
784
785 M: Can I ask who the postdoc researcher is?
786
787 R: Her name is Astrid, Dr. Astrid Breel.
788

789 M: And she thought you were going to say.
790
791 R: Like, you guys maybe should talk if you're doing
792 it, but looking at immersive.
793
794 M: Yeah, yeah, I know them actually. So I might ask
795 them what they're finding out from your
796 questionnaires because I'm really, I'm really
797 interested in audience feedback too. And I found
798 though, that when I've been approaching theater
799 companies and I ask if I can do audience feedback
800 as well, they're, they really don't want me to. I
801 think because I'm so focused on risking care, that's
802 not really what they want me asking, a strange,
803 strange woman they've never met, asking people
804 about. But yeah, yeah.
805
806 R: I think Astrid would be very up for it. So like
807 definitely talking. It's like the more the merrier.
808 Curious like, this information should be, um, look,
809 looked at from different angles, um. So yeah, I
810 don't stop. Though they might be happy to talk.
811 Yeah. Yeah,
812
813 M: I will reach out to them. Great. I noticed there
814 was like a bar as well afterwards. Do you ever go
815 talk with people afterwards in the bar?
816
817 R: Yeah, not not in the, but as a maker, I would
818 always just stand around afterwards, more like in
819 the space. And we had made a conscious decision
820 to let the actual space of the show stay open after
821 the show, people often hung around, came and
822 talked to me a little bit. Tell me how they feel.
823 Exchange e-mail addresses. But in my dream world,
824 I would stay forever and ask everyone what
825 happened? How do you feel about it? But like, is it
826 because it's before you know it, it's 11:00. So in my
827 dream world, the show would be shorter and then
828 there would be more, not shorter, I think it's the
829 length that needs to end, but in my dream world it
830 would end at 9:15 to allow for more actual just
831 hanging out afterwards. Because I feel like it just
832 ends a bit too late, which means that people have

833 to go home even though they've made new
834 friendships or the artists are there and we want to
835 talk to them and find out how it was.

836

837 But. It hurt me. It made me sad to see. Everyone
838 has to run off and I want to, I want to chat, find out
839 what it was. So yeah, the bar, I think, actually
840 wasn't always open after the show. It's mostly open
841 in the interval. But like from a risk thing, we didn't
842 want anyone really drinking too much. So like we
843 also spoke to the venue. So we, no drink, no drinks
844 in, no drinks in for acts one. That was also for the
845 set design, we don't want people to spill it onto the
846 sets, but we were wary that like a drunken player
847 could do could just overstep those lines in act one.
848 But by Act 2, it's like I said, it's more theatre. It's
849 more like a traditional theater. There's less I would
850 say, there's just like slight, there's just less risk of
851 acts two. So we conceded that people can have a
852 drink and bring it into the show. OK. OK.

853

854 M: What makes a performance ethical to you?

855

856 R: That's a huge question. Umm. I, this will be, it's,
857 it's a, it's a big one. So I'm, I'll say some things. But
858 it's the kind of thing you can probably, you're
859 probably right like I could, I could think deeply look
860 for a long time. However, I think. I.

861

862 For me, a huge thing is how easy is it for the
863 audience at any point to say I don't want to be here
864 anymore, for immersive or interactive shows, in
865 particular, and even for any, any show. I just, I
866 really, really think no one, no one should, no one
867 should feel they are stuck and they can't leave,
868 which um. And you like anywhere that's an artistic
869 thing. It's not life or death. Like we should be able
870 to walk out. And there's so many reasons why
871 people can't walk out because of, and it's a lot of,
872 like in a normal, in a normal straight theater show,
873 it would feel like a lots to stand up in the middle of
874 an auditorium and like squeeze yourself out whilst
875 actors performing.

876

877 Um. But I, in, and in immersive shows I've just, I've
 878 been to some shows where the immersion starts
 879 almost immediately and we were given no, there's
 880 been no preamble and there's been no, if at any
 881 point you need to leave or you're uncomfortable
 882 that this is the sign you do, this is how you cut, how
 883 you go. This is and so I, I did one of those kind of
 884 shows and I felt and I think me, I can't, I'm I'm
 885 playing it from a different, from a perspective of a
 886 maker, so I'm a hyper aware of what I would do
 887 differently, but I felt so awful not knowing, even
 888 though the show was fine in the end for me, not
 889 knowing how I could, just knowing that I could say
 890 actually, I don't want to be here anymore, but you
 891 haven't told me how to say that. And so I don't
 892 know how to say it and so.
 893
 894 And, but I think this can be done in many ways. In
 895 1884 it was a relaxed environment. We said at the
 896 beginning. People did kind of come and go. You can
 897 go to toilet at any time. There's a quiet room you
 898 can go to that we point out. But I don't think all
 899 shows, therefore, need to be that level. But just
 900 like, I did another immersive show, I think, I think I
 901 saw in your e-mail that you worked with ZU-UK or
 902 whatever and like it was like a one-on-one and
 903 you're wearing like a virtual reality headset called
 904 *Within Touching Distance*. But they were pretty
 905 good and they were like you have if you want to
 906 come, just like tap the person. To say like, they once
 907 again just like, tell me how to get out. So that's a
 908 huge thing.
 909
 910 What's other limits? I think knowing your, yeah,
 911 knowing your, knowing your limits, I don't think any
 912 show should just let audiences do anything. Like I
 913 think there has to be some doubt, some
 914 boundaries, and a plan of action for if boundaries
 915 are crossed. Here's what we do. And I think this
 916 feeling comes from, so I used to be a trainer for
 917 Good Night Out campaign, which was about like
 918 sexual harassment in helping venue training up
 919 venues, nightclubs and bars and pubs on what to
 920 do about sexual harassment in their venues. Um,

921 and nightclubs are a place where people feel we
922 can do whatever we want. You can get completely
923 drunk and you can meet new people and talk. It's
924 not, it's, but I think through training with them for
925 years I learned, was learned, learned and taught all
926 of the behind the scenes things like bartenders
927 should learn and security guards should learn.

928
929 For we've created this immersive environment
930 where high risk is, high risk, and we almost know,
931 like with nightclubs, sorry, I hope, with nightclubs,
932 we would always say it's a bad sign if no one is
933 reporting things because it means like, because
934 inevitably stuff is happening in your space. So the
935 facts that you can say, no, no one's ever reported
936 anything on our club nights, it doesn't mean that
937 your clubmates are perfectly safe. It means that
938 there are barriers to somebody getting to a
939 bartender or getting to a staff member and saying
940 this person is making me feel uncomfortable.

941
942 So. Yeah, I think just like an ethics and like, yeah,
943 planning, planning, planning. But that can come
944 through play testing, play testing, play testing.
945 That's what I mean with the play test. And even I
946 feel ohh, we did 10 shows in April and me at the
947 start, the team at the start, by the end, I now have
948 10 more shows of data of how audiences can play.
949 The fruit thing, like the person that said that, you
950 know, just or there was a time when I just like
951 watching, just like really noticing what audience
952 members, how where they might go with the show
953 and if this happens, what do we do so? I wouldn't
954 say like perfect ethics from the get go. Buts are
955 planning, but like a willingness to plan and keep
956 learning throughout. And knowing there will be
957 mistakes, but like, how do we deal with them and
958 how do we hold them accounts for and not
959 blaming. Yeah, so. And then you can explore quite
960 intense subjects. I mean, we're exploring like
961 colonialism. Yeah. Those are some things.

962
963 M: Amazing answer.
964

965 R: Night clubs is immersive event I. I just think it's
 966 interesting. Yeah. It's interesting to think of spaces
 967 that are not theater but are immersive. They're
 968 immersive show. They're immersive shows, like
 969 parties and festivals. Nightclubs.
 970
 971 M: Yeah.
 972
 973 R: And then applying principles between those
 974 things because there is places where audience
 975 members feel freer and are doing stuff and are
 976 interacting with each other.
 977
 978 M: Yeah, one of my other case studies mentioned
 979 that they think that for production staff, you really
 980 need a skill set of a therapist and a bouncer and I
 981 was like that's interesting, like, I mean, I don't know
 982 that we can train to be therapists, but how do
 983 bouncers train? And I've been looking into that
 984 more and more too.
 985
 986 R: Yeah. I would look into Good Night Out campaign
 987 then, because we have like we train bouncers,
 988 because bouncers can often be the ones who like
 989 do harmful things like they in, it's like not believing,
 990 not believing people, when they report things or
 991 punish or being really punitive or blaming.
 992
 993 Once again, your venue has created, your venue
 994 and your night has created the circumstances in
 995 which people feel they can do so. They can act in
 996 certain ways. It's not necessarily the fault of, and
 997 sorry I, once again I learned this from Good Night
 998 Out campaign, what they said, what we, they, their
 999 view of parties is, is especially harassers, in spaces
 1000 they will often try out smaller, smaller level actions.
 1001 You don't go, they don't necessarily go in. And do
 1002 the worst thing, worst, you do smaller things. And
 1003 did you get away with it? Yes. OK, I'm doing it more
 1004 and more so a person touching someone slightly, in
 1005 a slightly inappropriately, can we catch that and can
 1006 we train up bouncers and start to catch that so that
 1007 that so that it doesn't escalate? And it's probably
 1008 the same with like immersive shows like, and I'm

1009 not saying that like we did it perfectly, but, and I
1010 would love more time to really think about that,
1011 but like, yeah. What? Even whilst people were
1012 playing, I saw them. I would see people look at me
1013 because it was weird. I would say it's weird that I'm
1014 in, because some people know I'm the maker, but
1015 sometimes I was in the room as the Coney person.
1016 This was resources. I don't think that is necessarily
1017 right. I think in my dream world the maker is not
1018 the Coney staff member. That's a power dynamic.
1019 But I, regardless, I would see people like look.
1020 Because they're testing out can I do this? And most
1021 of the time it's totally fine, but you know,
1022 sometimes they are vandalizing the set. And this is
1023 fine, we have planned for it. But so, if people are
1024 playing, if we haven't intervened, it's fine. But
1025 people are test- It's that kind of if I could do this,
1026 they could do this, they could do this. And I think
1027 people in immersive stuff and maybe trying out
1028 stuff, trying that as to yeah.

1029
1030 M: Umm, do you have any other risk management
1031 training?

1032
1033 R: Risk management training from, from Coney no,
1034 though I think more from my like previous life, like
1035 I've done, say, cause I used to work with like young
1036 activists on training and campaigns, so doing a lot
1037 of safeguarding trainings and things like this. But. I
1038 would say and but I would say I've not had like
1039 formal immersive theater risk training.

1040
1041 M: I don't think it exists.

1042
1043 R: No, you're probably gonna do it if anyone, but I
1044 think in, in uh, I think Coney has existed for 15
1045 years and Tassos has been the one consistent like
1046 he, he's a founder. So in that first week of R&D, we
1047 had a workshop on like interactivity 101, care for
1048 the audience, and then, so like in our different like
1049 R and D's with different things, we always have like
1050 a little session about it and then, um, just like, kind
1051 of talking to Brent, our stage manager, Marie, the
1052 production, of like, if this happens, what do we do?

1053 What's our action? Like kind of as we almost as a,
1054 especially with the new actors who came in, co-
1055 created our plan for like, what's going to be
1056 comfortable for you guys to let us know? What to
1057 do? What's our briefing with the duty managers? I
1058 would say this is more of a Marie, Marie thing, but
1059 it was something that I really cared for, just because
1060 I'm so, as I said from the beginning, I'm nervous.
1061 I'm just, I'm, I come, I come to, I come to interactio,
1062 with, I would say a healthy, if not like maybe an
1063 excessive sense of nerves about audience
1064 participation, but like whilst having done it, whilst
1065 having made the situation of which. Like no one
1066 forced us to make this show. And I think it's really
1067 beautiful because I think audiences. I think at its,
1068 sorry, at it's best, act one allows people to be really
1069 creative.
1070
1071 Like it's weirdly like, I think a creative workshop for
1072 players like they can improvise with each other.
1073 They're doing like acting improv. They're like
1074 drawing, they're like creating scenarios and like
1075 creating like, co-creating a story together of what
1076 their community does. So it's like cool, cool creative
1077 workshop. At its worst, it's like, it could, it I can I
1078 can see a version of this show which would be
1079 unsafe and tip over into like anarchy. In a way that I
1080 wouldn't want, yeah.
1081
1082 M: Hmm. I have three more questions. Is that OK? I
1083 know it's-
1084
1085 R: No worries. Yeah, yeah, yeah.
1086
1087 M: OK. Have you instituted or experienced any kind
1088 of rehearsal styles or skill practice that was really
1089 beneficial to you, your performers, for dealing with
1090 unexpected situations with the audience?
1091
1092 R; Um. In our most recent rehearsals, what was
1093 good, I brought. My skill is not like director of
1094 actors. So I brought in a director, like a performance
1095 director, who I really trusted, Tatenda Shamiso.
1096 Which so that's good. That's good, anyway, that we

1097 have like someone who almost is like they're just
1098 purely for the three actors and like care for them.
1099 And then in our rehearsals, I think we did three
1100 play tests. And then the preview. So because you
1101 can talk about the piece in the abstract actors, but,
1102 and we built it up to the 1st play test. We only had
1103 seven and they were like teenagers. And then we
1104 had a group of 20 and then we had another group
1105 of about 20. And then we had the preview of like
1106 35 people. So building up and that just helps the
1107 actors to see different ways of people being played,
1108 people playing.
1109
1110 And then I did like a session for the actors about
1111 and, this might be useful for you, but so I spoke to
1112 Tassos, uh, and he gave me a framework of like four
1113 types of players of immersive shows. And obviously
1114 this is not science, but this is, it was like kind of
1115 useful. One was socialisers who are there just to
1116 kind of have a good time with their friends and
1117 socialize and they kind of playing and they kind of
1118 chilling and talking or whatever. There's something
1119 like griefers. These are the people to watch out for.
1120 They're gonna like push your games to the limit.
1121 They're gonna try and find out how to break the
1122 game. They might be drunk. They might be. They
1123 might, they are trying to trick the game, for some
1124 reason. I'm gonna get because I think it might be,
1125 so I'm gonna find, I have it on my notes. Grief. OK,
1126 Explorers. Wants to creative. They're creative. So
1127 like explorers will like wants to like, also, like test
1128 the limits of the game. If they do this, what's going
1129 to happen? They might call the secret number, they
1130 might pass notes to each other and they're like fun
1131 play. They're like fun and interesting plays and
1132 they're there to play really, but they're not there to
1133 like ruin the game or like break the game and then
1134 the 4th was achievers who were there to be like
1135 how do I play well, how do I win? How do I. Yeah, I
1136 don't ,achievers and, and then I guess people who
1137 like totally uninterested or like hating the game,
1138 that's like a fifth version.
1139

1140 But yeah, we I think that I remember an actor
1141 finding this vaguely interesting in the abstract and
1142 then finding it really useful as soon as we started
1143 play testing, because immediately you can kind of
1144 spot that person has potential to be a griever, just
1145 the way they're like, the way from the get-go, they
1146 kind of shot like making some noises or like, um,
1147 there's just something we need to watch out and
1148 these people are explorers, that's fun, they're going
1149 to do this.

1150

1151 So it was kind of a useful to give the acts of some
1152 kind of framework and for us as well to read
1153 different audiences playing types. Yeah.

1154

1155 M: Does your work include any sort of orienting at
1156 the beginning for audience participants, which it
1157 does, but how do you decide how you've
1158 approached that?

1159

1160 R: Yeah, and I I think. Because I, because I'm so
1161 nervous, I think my orientation was even like
1162 double the length and you could talk to Marie
1163 about how we eventually landed on the length we
1164 had and how much to tell and how much to let
1165 audiences play and I think, and also how much to
1166 say so that you don't bore the audience so much
1167 that they don't hear the most important stuff - like
1168 what's really important, what's really important
1169 that everyone catches and what's nice to know.

1170

1171 But yeah, we created a briefing at the beginning
1172 and then we also had latecomers pack. We
1173 basically, the aim is don't let anyone into that room
1174 until they've heard, they've had the briefing and I,
1175 and the, I would say some of the most important
1176 things to say. Like I said, how do you get out of the
1177 game? How do you ask questions if you need to?
1178 Where's the quiet room the we I found? From
1179 reading reviews, a lot of people reference that this
1180 is a relaxed performance and I feel like the word
1181 relaxed actually does open something. Like I think I,
1182 be just like, this is a relaxed performance. What
1183 does this mean in principle? You can go, you can

1184 get up at anytime. You can make noise at anytime.
1185 You can go to the bathroom, quiet room, talk to us,
1186 move around the tables. Like, I just feel like, and I
1187 feel like some performances, in not, in straight
1188 theater are relaxed, but if you did all that stuff,
1189 there's still so much social struggle. But I felt really
1190 proud to see people really moving and talking and
1191 talking over the actors and doing all that stuff.
1192
1193 And then maybe what I feel proud of, given that we
1194 said, you know, like, it's a tough one because like I
1195 said in our piece the players are against the actors
1196 by the end of the show. So they are allowed to
1197 protest, they are allowed to shout, and they are
1198 allowed to say get out. Boo. And we, that we picked
1199 actors in auditions, and we worked with actors who
1200 knew and were OK with this. And still it was intense
1201 for them, and still we needed to look after them.
1202 But like I said, saying those few things, here's our
1203 lines do not touch the actors. And then we spent a
1204 lot of time, and I think maybe talked to Marie, who
1205 might have a better memory of being like no verbal
1206 abuse at the actors, at the same time you can shout
1207 at them. And I wanted to be like, no swearing, but
1208 then it becomes too much like no, no, no.
1209
1210 But I think if I take back that like, shall we throw
1211 fruit? At the actor comments, that I found out was
1212 said. My saving grace is that the table regulated
1213 that and it almost got cut them out of the game for
1214 a moment. And they had to make a decision about
1215 whether it's appropriate or not. Given that,
1216 hopefully, the briefing. And yeah, so. Yeah, that's
1217 that's, but I think it's super important, and that's
1218 why I'm shocked when I go to immersive things and
1219 they don't do them. But that's their choice.
1220
1221 M: Do you find that the work has like a transitory
1222 phase back to reality at the end for audience
1223 participants?
1224
1225 R: Yes. So we, we previous versions you would have
1226 seen as an Act 3, which is part of Act 2, which is like
1227 noise, like making, doing your house knocks again,

1228 coming back to your family groups. And doing a
1229 protest, shouting a protest site slogan, and this was
1230 new. No other playtest has had this. So previously
1231 we always end the show at Act 2 at the end of the
1232 museum discussion, and so we created act three in
1233 the latest rehearsals. And then we also have the
1234 little bit where we like also come into like real life,
1235 real life again. And the Coney person gives the final
1236 words, the survey, it talk to us. Here's a digital
1237 companion when you're home. So I think there is
1238 like an easing out of the piece and something
1239 cathartic about coming back to your people. Some
1240 people say it's really nice to come back to their
1241 family groups at the end. Some people say they
1242 wanted to be left on the notes of anger and like,
1243 just left to act 2 and it feels it feels a bit too, OK,
1244 let's all come back together and knock and clap
1245 and, um, therefore, so there's both the, there's
1246 both the kind of helping audiences shake off what
1247 they've just done and an artistic choice that needs
1248 to be made about dramaturgically, about where do
1249 you leave an audience member.
1250
1251 And the call that was made was to do more of the
1252 like, uh, physical stuff. And what was quite
1253 interesting, we got some consultancy for act three
1254 from some musicians and people who have somatic
1255 artists and they were, they were like, we need to
1256 like activate the voice at the end of the piece,
1257 because acts were so silencing and audience
1258 members don't get to talk anymore and like there's
1259 something very physical about like having your like
1260 voice like repressed or something. So like having
1261 ending it with that, that was a choice at the very
1262 end, like just like have them all shout again and like
1263 say a process sign and that kind of like really
1264 actually. So I'm not sure like, this is not my, like,
1265 deep skills that we brought in people. I was like, I
1266 said something like, I think that's probably deeper
1267 philosophy around voice, about movement and like
1268 that we were trying to do an act three to help
1269 ground people after three hours of this show. Yeah.
1270
1271 M: OK. Thank you.

1272

1273 R: Thank you. Uh.

1274

1275 M: Very helpful. Yeah. Thank you so much for

1276 making this. I think it's incredible. I feel like it

1277 should tour every academic institution.

1278

Appendix D - 1884 Production Staff Transcript, Marie Klimis

1 **Melissa Bondar** 0:03

2 Trying.

3 OK, there we go.

4 Great.

5 So I have a few background questions sort of
6 about your experience.

7 1st in general and then I'll ask you a bit more
8 about 1884.

9 So I was wondering how long you've been a
10 producer?

11

12 **Marie Klimis** 0:18

13 Ohh.

14 So I've been working in the arts in various
15 types of project management, programming,
16 producing footballs.

17 But 15 years?

18 Umm.

19 And more specifically, producing theater about
20 five years.

21

22 **Melissa Bondar** 0:39

23 OK.

24 And what sort of genres do you work in?

25 Is it always like Immersive and experimental or?

26

27 **Marie Klimis** 0:45

28 Umm, it's a lots of site specific and immersive
29 and interactive.

30 So yeah, I've done a lot of bringing arts and
31 theater in non-traditional spaces, and that does
32 include a lot of Immersive theatre.

33

34 **Melissa Bondar** 1:04

35 OK.

36 Awesome.

37 Umm, how would you define your role in
38 relation to 1884?

39 What are you responsible for?

40

41 **Marie Klimis** 1:14

42 So it was interesting on the the first day of
43 rehearsals, so we had Rhianna. Tatenda, myself,
44 plus the cast and Tatenda introduced the team
45 as Rihanna.

46 She's the creator of the show.

47 Any questions about life writing dramaturgy
48 content history?

49 That's her.

50 I'm the director, so anything about
51 performance direction, that's me.

52 And that's Marie.

53 Anything else?

54 Ask Marie and I think that's that.

55 Was that made me laugh because it was kind
56 of true and, and no, fun.

57 I think a good definition of what producers do,
58 we do anything else. We the glue, one
59 producer, one said to me.

60 Yeah.

61 As producers, we are the glue and I think it's
62 it's pretty accurate.

63 It's like all role is to make sure that people talk
64 to each other, that problems get solved.

65 That's a producer will do anything that needs
66 doing for the show to happen and everyone to
67 have a good time.

68

69 **Melissa Bondar** 2:17

70 OK.

71 How does your role relate to like risk
72 management for the show?

73

74 **Marie Klimis** 2:23

75 Umm.

76 I mean I.

77 My approach to risk management generally is
78 quite I would say informal, but quite
79 continuous.

80 A lot of people often associate risk
81 management to risk assessments.

82 A which to me is just a small part of it.

83 I think is just from the first time you meet with
84 the creatives from the origination of the idea to
85 having the audience in the room is just making
86 sure that uh yeah, performance are safe.

87 Audiences are safe.

88 Sets is safe and doesn't breakdown on
89 anybody's face.

90 So yeah, it's generally because a lot of the
91 producers role is about dealing with all the
92 practical and human aspects of the production.

93 Yeah.

94 Risk management is everywhere, but I don't
95 think it's a particular time or particular role.

96 It's more like overlooking that aspect
97 throughout the process.

98

99 **Melissa Bondar** 3:28

100 Would you say that your role sort of
101 encapsulates what production management
102 usually does, or do you have a production
103 manager?

104

105 **Marie Klimis** 3:34

106 In.

107 In this production, we didn't. We had
108 discussion about the fact that we probably
109 should have and definitely a lot hours during
110 went to production manager Ohm.

111 So.

112 So yeah, clearly my role on this uh on this
113 production was doing way more things than
114 what you would expect from a just a producer,
115 producer, uh.

116 And that was from more kind of creative
117 aspects of the production to production
118 management.

119

120 **Melissa Bondar** 4:10

121 Your friends?

122 Umm. What skills?

123

124 **Marie Klimis** 4:13

125 But generally -

126 Yeah.

127 Oh, no, sorry.

128

129 **Melissa Bondar** 4:14

130 I don't. No, no.

131 Please continue.

132

133 **Marie Klimis** 4:15

134 No, no.

135 I was just saying that generally I one thing I

136 found was, uh, Immersive projects is the fact

137 that the the traditional theatre roles are really

138 blurred because.

139 And.

140 Because the production is unusual and the

141 format is unusual, so it's sometimes quite, for

142 example, for us it was quite, when we recruited

143 a stage manager it was very, we struggled a bit

144 in the beginning because to define that

145 person's role because it has not really a stage

146 manager role and some people told me what

147 are you looking for?

148 Are you looking for technical stage manager,

149 stage manager?

150 Company stage manager? Was like, well, a bit

151 of all those things.

152 But also we need a writer.

153 That person needs to be a writer because that

154 person was doing the museum captions.

155 You saw the show, right?

156

157 **Melissa Bondar** 5:06

158 Yeah.

159

160 **Marie Klimis** 5:07

161 So, uh yeah.

162 So I find it's the same with my role.

163 It's the same with Rihanna's role, with the
164 director role.

165 It's because of the format of the production is
166 each Immersive project is unique, depends on
167 space, on format, on the audience.

168 Then the rules have to adapt to that, and I
169 think people will thrive in that particular
170 context

171 are people who are happy to have their roles?

172 Not that well defined.

173 They know to have their roles evolving based
174 on the needs of the project, which is definitely
175 my case.

176

177 **Melissa Bondar** 5:40

178 OK, great.

179 Thank you.

180 That's part of what I'm doing
181 the thesis cause I agree that the lines get very
182 blurry, so it's more like what sort of skills do
183 you need than like, what's the title of your job?
184 Speaking of, what sort of skills does it take to
185 do your job well?

186

187 **Marie Klimis** 5:56

188 How?

189 I always feel like.

190 Sometimes it's not to have too much, too

191 many expectations
192 about what your job needs to be.
193 So I think one of my previous jobs I got it
194 from my previous boss who I worked with that
195 person in, for different companies and once
196 she called me because she needed to put 50
197 pianos in the streets of London and another
198 one she called me because she had to get
199 school children to sing in the trees of the
200 Epping forest.
201 And and I've, no I've never worked with three
202 climbing experts before, and and I hadn't put
203 pianos in the street and a lot of people in the
204 city thought I was terrorist because I was taking
205 pictures of bins and lamppost. And I think it's
206 just about being quite, yeah, quite creative.
207 Quite solution focused and but I think the most
208 important skill as a producer is human skill.
209 Really, at the skills, I think it's 99% of what you
210 do is talking to people.
211 Uh, it's talking to creatives, talking to venues,
212 talking to tech people, talking to audiences.
213 Uh, and getting that information to flow in all
214 directions and anytime there are some
215 problems, anytime there are some conflicts to
216 be creative about it, whether it is by finding a
217 practical solution.
218 But most of the solutions are human. Is to get
219 people to agree to find a good compromise
220 between people disagree on something.
221 It's to find a solution
222 people may not have thought about it's.

223 Ohh yeah, so I think it's just yeah thing being
224 nice person, being open minded and being
225 creative.
226 I think the rest, yeah.
227 You learn based on the nature of the job, but it
228 changes all the time and that's what I like
229 about it.
230
231 **Melissa Bondar** 7:52
232 OK.
233 Umm, so I just have a list of questions.
234 That's what I'm looking at every time I'm like.
235
236 **Marie Klimis** 7:57
237 Go for the right.
238 I'm also.
239 I ramble a lot that you meet here, this work,
240 and so you feel free to interrupt me and say
241 you have to pay attention.
242
243 **Melissa Bondar** 8:02
244 No, I love it.
245 Thank you.
246 It's very interesting.
247
248 **Marie Klimis** 8:08
249 Just go back to the list.
250
251 **Melissa Bondar** 8:10
252 No, it's OK.
253 I was wondering what the phrase duty of care
254 means to you as a producer?

255
256 **Marie Klimis** 8:20
257 I don't use the phrase, but I'm thinking about.
258 It's, but I understand it.
259 I think generally it's,
260 as I said before, I think it's Simply put, is
261 making sure that
262 Everyone is having good time and, that's the, it
263 means different things depending on different-
264 I don't like the word stakeholders, but different
265 stakeholders of the projects.
266 It can be that all the creatives feel like taken
267 care of.
268 Emotionally, physically, that they are in a in a
269 good space in a safe place in they are in a, one
270 word, is something we see a lot of at
271 Coney is to be put in a situation where they can
272 do their best work, where we say it: to play well
273 together.
274 So it's what can we do as a company for you to
275 play well for you to do your best work.
276 So I think there is some of that.
277 I think it's duty of care towards the work as well
278 to make sure that people's vision can become
279 the best it can be, but also where, that different
280 people may have different visions, and also it's
281 better care for the audience.
282 I think there is a, a lot of really bad practice in
283 immersive theater, and sometimes it was like
284 ohh we want to shock or we want to put
285 people in that in that situation.
286 And when you go with work like 1884, um, it's

287 challenging because we're talking about
288 colonialism.
289 You're talking about race, and those topics are
290 not the same for everyone.
291 And we, we had some audience members or
292 playtesters who told us.
293 Ohh it's not hardcore enough.
294 It's not we are not repressed enough.
295 The repression is not hard enough and or the
296 consequences are not enforced enough, and I
297 and we have a lot of conversations about it.
298 And the show may still evolve as we develop it,
299 but also it's saying like yes, but most- It's very
300 easy for me, for example to say, yeah, that we
301 should be hard enough in this show.
302 I'm a white privileged person, so colonialism is
303 is an idea for me.
304 It's not personal.
305 I don't feel it in my gut, and so I think it's ohh.
306 It's also making sure that we take care of the
307 audience from before even this day they
308 book the tickets to the moment they leave, that
309 they'll remember the project as something that
310 that it was a good experience and I think yeah,
311 in this sector in particular, in the Immersive
312 sector, is very important and it's not done often
313 enough and well enough my
314 opinion.
315
316 **Melissa Bondar** 11:22
317 For 1884 specifically.
318 How did you help prepare people to play well?

319

320 **Marie Klimis** 11:28

321 Umm, I think we have lots of different things.

322 First of all, we would do it as a team,

323 we always writes a Coney,

324 what we write?

325 A manifesto. Where everyone who's involved in

326 the projects agrees together at what are the

327 goals of the project?

328 What are, what do we want to achieve?

329 What may be the challenges?

330 How do we deal with disagreements?

331 So we have a common vision and it's a living

332 document, so we can, it can be adapted.

333 Uh, I think it's about even, like, rehearsal

334 process.

335 We also always have like an access rider, which

336 is not only about like disability, it's about what

337 do you need to do your best work?

338 For

339 some people, it's about I need breaks.

340 I need to snack.

341 I have, personally I have children.

342 I need to leave at 5:30 tops and I don't want to

343 have a conversation about this.

344 I just need to go.

345 So to make sure that before we are together in

346 the room with people, people have the

347 opportunity to share what works for them.

348 Umm.

349 And then in the room, it's about having regular

350 check in with your team as a whole team,

351 as a smaller team, with individual creatives, if it
352 feels like something hasn't been handled the
353 way we should have, and it's not always easy,
354 especially when things get busy.
355 But it's very important. I am, and then,
356 um, then we play test the work a lot.
357 We play test early and we play test at early
358 stages like I actually the only time I play
359 1884 I was part of an audience of three with
360 five performer which was very exciting.
361 So it was artistic director of Coney, Tassos, our
362 general manager, Keith, and myself.
363 And we were the first very first audience
364 members of 1884, and we had no idea what
365 that would be.
366 Ohm and no, but then moving from there to
367 yeah.
368 Through all rehearsal processes, playtest.
369 Actually, because you can't playtest a show like,
370 you can't rehearse the show like that.
371 You need the audience.
372 Umm, so it's just making sure that you hear
373 audience feedback and diverse audiences, not
374 just the people.
375 who know the show.
376 What it is about, ohm, people from different
377 lived experience, people with different access
378 needs.
379 Uh, so you can integrate that feedback and
380 then, so we did quite a lot of work with several
381 access advisors and we also work with an
382 impact, ohm...

383 I mean, that's forget.
384 What's your job title?
385 Astrid Breel.
386 She's in, I think, impact fellow at the university
387 at Bath, Bath, Bath, Spa University and a lot of
388 her work is about how do you prepare
389 audiences to join an interactive experience.
390 And we we do something that's called playing
391 audience guides.
392 That's includes access elements, but not only
393 and generally it's about.
394 Oh, being very clear about what's the
395 interactive ex perience is what's gonna happen.
396 What are the themes?
397 What?
398 And it can go from things like.
399 This is the kind of things that are going to be
400 covered, but also we realize that one of the
401 main reasons that prevent people from joining
402 interactive experiences, the feel of being
403 judged ohm.
404 Ohh, you'll the fear of being then.
405 Pull the parts being put on the spot.
406 Doing something they're not comfortable with,
407 so this is something we don't do at Coney.
408 We do gentle interactivity.
409 We we never force anyone to do anything.
410 They're not comfortable with and, and we
411 make that very clear before the show that you
412 can interact, you can always step out.
413 These as relaxed performance, you can come in
414 and out as often as you want.

415 If you don't want to do something, don't.
416 Performers may talk to you if you don't want to
417 talk to them,
418 don't a so, that people understand the type of
419 interactive work it is and they can make an
420 informed decision.
421 It's the same about accessibility.
422 It's uh, yes.
423 The size of the table.
424 What do we mean by relaxed performances?
425 Because that can mean many, many things.
426 So I think that's, that's sorry, this is a very long
427 answer to your question.
428 I hope it's OK.

429

430 **Melissa Bondar** 16:08

431 Now it's great.
432 It's fantastic.
433 It's the core of my research.

434

435 **Marie Klimis** 16:11

436 And now and then.
437 So that's before the show and then when the
438 show happened, ohm.
439 So we have umm, we always had one person.
440 That person varies.
441 During 1884, it was the core team member.
442 We realized early on that actually, especially
443 because the show is still fairly new, that we
444 either needed Rhianna, Tatenda, who's director
445 or myself, who is basically a person who's
446 responsible for standing there and making sure

447 that everything is OK.
448 Yeah.
449 And but also I mean we didn't have any major
450 issue during the run, actually you didn't have
451 any issue that we had planned, which is, that
452 can go from an audience member abusing the
453 cast member or an audience member being
454 feeling really upset, really triggered, really
455 angry.
456 We also did that show in a very.
457 And volatile political context, we did the first
458 R&D on 15th of October, so that was seven
459 days after 7th of October.
460 So there are a lot of common threads between
461 1884 and what's happening in Palestine, so.
462 Ohm.
463 So and the show is political.
464 And because it's nonspecific, it could be
465 anything.
466 Umm, so we were.
467 So I think we had a lot of conversations with
468 the team, with the cast and with the team at
469 Shoreditch Town Hall
470 about the type of situations we imagine
471 what would happen and how to handle
472 them and then that's where the risk
473 assessment comes in.
474 But in a way, my experience of risk assessments
475 to be fully transparent is I write them.
476 Somebody reads them, one person reads them,
477 and usually everybody, nobody cares about
478 them.

479 They long. They painful for performers.
480 Even if I send them to them, they don't gonna
481 read them, so I do them because I have to do
482 them and it's a good exercise to think about
483 things.
484 The reality is risk management, to me, is not
485 risk assessment.
486 It's talking to your performers, is talking to your
487 team.
488 It's talking to the venue.
489 It's making sure that things are safe, whether
490 you have a paper that proves it or not.
491 I'll write the paper if I need to.
492 Ohm and also as you can hear my accent.
493 I'm not from the UK.
494 Risk assessment don't exist in our country.
495 We do risk management as well, just we don't
496 have the form.
497
498 **Melissa Bondar** 18:42
499 OK.
500
501 **Marie Klimis** 18:43
502 Ohh but yeah, and then I think it's it's making
503 sure that your team is briefed.
504 It's making sure that your staffing is adequate
505 is making sure that there is somebody if
506 there is a problem.
507 There is somebody who can deal with it,
508 somebody who has time as well.
509 Sometimes you're gonna be short by just
510 having your stage manager and your cast, but

511 those guys are busy doing the show ohm and
512 making sure that people know what to do.
513 Like we did
514 usher briefing every day, we had duty manager,
515 we had good communication with them, so we
516 didn't have any issue, but if they were, I think
517 we were pretty well prepared. And then
518 different shows may require different things
519 like 1884 thing was OK, but in other shows you
520 mean, for example, the security, there is
521 something that feels more serious.
522 So yeah, and and yeah, making sure then that
523 you collect feedback and that you talk to your
524 audience so that you can keep improving
525 things.

526

527 **Melissa Bondar** 19:40

528 How do you collect that feedback?

529

530 **Marie Klimis** 19:43

531 So.

532 Ohm.

533 So as I said, we do feedback during the playtest
534 that we do a lot and then 1884, uh, we did.

535 So we had some feedback forms and Astrid

536 Breel also did some

537 individual interviews and if you want to talk to
538 her by the way, you can just doing.

539 Uh, she's doing research.

540 And.

541 Wasn't enough...

542 Yeah, what's the name of her research.

543 It's gonna come back to me.
544 But anyway, if you want to I I can introduce you
545 if it's helpful to you.
546
547 **Melissa Bondar** 20:21
548 Umm, actually, we presented at a few of the
549 same conferences like I know their name, but
550 yeah, at an introduction would be great.
551
552 **Marie Klimis** 20:28
553 And then.
554 But uh.
555 And then we also had a digital companion to
556 the experience that was giving more contacts
557 about the 1884, but also include an online
558 memorial where people could leave their
559 reflections.
560 I don't.
561 I think it was good piece of work.
562 I don't think as many people did it as we
563 hoped.
564 I think when people have done a 2 1/2 hours
565 live experience, they don't necessarily want to
566 go online.
567 They want to go home.
568
569 **Melissa Bondar** 21:08
570 This.
571
572 **Marie Klimis** 21:11
573 So I think one thing that we did in previous
574 situations, but we couldn't do a shortage

575 because it was too late.
576 But what did work really well is to have a live
577 discussions.
578 And uh cause
579 a lot of people after the show want to talk
580 about the show, whether it is with the artist or
581 with each other.
582 So we did Q&A's and conversations between
583 the audience and I think we'd like to do more
584 of that.
585 But it's the duration of the show makes that
586 makes it that it's actually quite late in the venue
587 needs to close.
588
589 **Melissa Bondar** 21:42
590 I'm going back to what you said earlier about
591 like before the show opens and the play testing
592 and the feedback there, how do you know you
593 have diverse audiences in to playtest?
594 Or how did you put that group together?
595
596 **Marie Klimis** 21:55
597 Umm, I mean, you don't know.
598 Always know.
599
600 **Melissa Bondar** 21:59
601 OK.
602
603 **Marie Klimis** 21:59
604 Uh, you do your.
605 You do your best guess.
606 Sometimes it's just through.

607 Ohh.
608 Uh, sometimes it's just through people, you
609 know, or word of mouth.
610 Sometimes it's through partners.
611 For example, we worked a lot with talent and
612 cast so ohm and the creatives.
613 So for example, if you want to say we wanted
614 to have say 50% global majority wouldn't says
615 Ah, be...
616 We target them for things like.
617 Play testing with disabled people.
618 Again, it's often through partners or through
619 access advisor.
620 People we know this is something we want to
621 do and haven't done enough to be fully
622 transparent.
623 Umm, because primarily because of time.
624 And but yeah, but for example we we had one
625 play test for young people and we went
626 through partners and we ended up having the
627 pretest was for young people age like 16 to 18,
628 and we had some people.
629 They went through partners.
630 Some people were older and it's fine.
631 Umm.
632 So you can't always fully control it, but I think
633 as long as you do enough play tests and you
634 can.
635 Ohh, sometimes also play testing with groups
636 so you know that your group of young people
637 and you know they have the agent that is to
638 expect.

639 Uh, But yeah, it's it's quite informal in the way
640 of controlling.

641

642 **Melissa Bondar** 23:38

643 OK. Umm.

644 What would you define as an ethical
645 performance?

646

647 **Marie Klimis** 23:58

648 In the context of Immersive or not necessarily.

649

650 **Melissa Bondar** 24:01

651 Um.

652 Yeah.

653 In the context of immersive.

654

655 **Marie Klimis** 24:06

656 I think it's.

657 It's uh, performance where everybody was
658 involved.

659 Knows what they're getting into.

660 Ohh.

661 Comfortable.

662 Uh.

663 Willing to participate? Ohm.

664 I from yeah.

665 From the creatives who don't feel like we yeah,
666 we use them in any way or we use their ideas in
667 any way that they're not happy with for
668 audiences as well.

669 I think that's to me the most, I think consent is
670 is the most important part of the you can you

671 can do performances about pretty much any
672 topic including very hard for ones and some
673 people love very dark, very disturbing,
674 immersive theatre.
675 But I think it's OK as long as as long as you
676 know what you're getting into, as long as you
677 know pressure to nobody wants to leave a
678 show in the middle, especially if it's quite an
679 intimate audience.
680 So some people may feel forced to stay in
681 something that they didn't ohm.
682 They didn't agree with and so I think it's just
683 getting people prepared and giving them at
684 any time an opportunity to step out.
685 Uh.
686 An opportunity to leave an opportunity to stop
687 without feeling again, without feeling judged.
688 Uh, so, so that they know how to do it.
689 And they know that nobody's gonna do
690 anything to them.
691 Say anything to them if they don't like it, they
692 want to leave forever, or just come back later.
693 It's it's fine.
694 So I think it's about making it OK for
695 people that any kind of participation is good.
696
697 **Melissa Bondar** 26:03
698 And how do you like, orient your audience to
699 prepare them for that?
700
701 **Marie Klimis** 26:07
702 What do you say?

703

704 **Melissa Bondar** 26:08

705 How do you get the audience prepared for the
706 the performance, specifically the audience?

707

708 **Marie Klimis** 26:15

709 I think it's really about the how you describe
710 your show in advance.

711 First of all, so as I said, we've got the
712 description of the show, we've got the playing
713 audience guide with more info and you're
714 really try to get people to read it.

715 It's not like a disclaimer.

716 That's very long at the bottom of that.

717 It's a document that would really encourage
718 people to read, and then we always do a pre
719 show briefings ohm when everybody's there
720 that's live, that people can have time to, to
721 digest and it's not in worlds.

722 It's done before people enter the room.

723 Ohm to basically if you need to summarize this
724 like whatever makes you feel comfortable is OK
725 so.

726 And I always started my pre show briefing by
727 saying it's an Immersive show, but do not
728 worry, which does make people laugh.

729 But it's true.

730 People are nervous about immersive theater,
731 and for very good reasons, because there is no
732 full lot of bad immersive theatre out there.

733 So and not a silly, bad creatively more like that
734 doesn't take good care.

735 And yeah, with Coney, that's what we do.
736 We like to take care, we want people to do
737 more of it.

738

739 **Melissa Bondar** 27:36

740 I know.
741 I love that about your company.
742 Actually, when I started this, it was kind of
743 because as a stage manager I had been like
744 kind of a part of some really questionable
745 things that were upsetting me.
746 And I found that a lot of companies actually
747 won't talk to me, but the companies that will
748 talk to me for this research are ones who are,
749 like, perfect examples of how to make caring
750 performances.

751

752 **Marie Klimis** 27:57

753 Alright, I think people with immersive theater,
754 almost more treat it like a human
755 experiment.
756 Sometimes, and I find it really upsetting.
757 Like we when we did cast ohm for the
758 performers, one performer we auditioned told
759 us about an experience they had at uni.
760 I can't remember
761 which from my school they went to and where
762 they had like a week long Immersive
763 experience where they were reliving the war in
764 Bosnia.
765 Like and like it was every day, you had to go
766 back to it to like a performed war zone.

767 And that performer was just telling you how
768 you see that was really intense and exciting.
769 It was like, that's awful.
770 That's like, how can you do that to people?
771 This is not exciting.
772 This is awful and I think a lot of creatives like,
773 oh, this is so exciting.
774 We can read people.
775 People can.
776 Can really like have more genuine and strong
777 feelings that are the heart of the experience.
778 Like yes, I know.
779 That's what I love about immersive.
780 You put the audience at the heart of it and you
781 have, as you said, duty of care, I think.
782 But if you put them at the heart of it, you have
783 a duty to make sure that when they come out
784 of it, they're having a good time.
785 That they even if when I said, good time, it
786 doesn't necessarily mean that it's all like fun
787 haha.
788 But it's more like they've been taken care of.
789 They the consent has been respected.
790 They don't feel like they've been they
791 embarked on the journey.
792 They never signed up for if they knew what
793 it was.
794 And so yeah, sorry, rambling again.
795
796 **Melissa Bondar** 29:42
797 It's OK, we agree.
798 It's, but it ohm.

799 I was wondering, like for you, what is the role
800 of stage management in front of house?

801

802 **Marie Klimis** 29:58

803 Ohh, stage management is difficult to say
804 because in immersive shows stage manager
805 can be anything.

806 Uh, like our stage manager in 1884.

807 Who we love, decided should actually be two
808 different roles, but.

809 Uh, in terms of, yeah, the difficulty of duty of
810 care, typically a thing we give Brent, our stage
811 manager.

812 A role that was, uh, because there, we were
813 developing the show when we hired him.

814 And I think the moment we saw what the show
815 was we were like, this is too much.

816 So we ended up just stepping into to help with
817 some aspects.

818 But so yeah, in in the case of 1884, you didn't
819 have any of the classic stage manager roles like
820 there was not much prop changing the
821 performers

822 were taking care of that.

823 There was not so much sound or light
824 operating, it was done by the DJ.

825 So as soon as the show was set up, ohh Brent
826 had very limited stage managing like the classic
827 stage managing duties.

828 But in that particular case, as soon as the show
829 was on, he had one role making the museum.

830 But that's unique to 1884.

831 I don't think other shows make a museum
832 collect objects from performers and write
833 captions.

834

835 **Melissa Bondar** 31:18

836 Yeah.

837

838 **Marie Klimis** 31:24

839 So I think.

840 Every Immersive show I've worked on ohh
841 stage managers, a slightly different role.

842 Uh, I think generally I would say it's.

843 It's almost like doing anything that's not done
844 by a performer, and often performers do stage
845 manager rules too, because they're so visible
846 because there is no backstage, or if there is
847 backstage, it's not as obvious as in the
848 traditional theatre.

849 Uh and the front of house?

850 The thing it's to have people who are.

851 I mean, mind you, some shows they are in
852 world as well, but it's too. It's sort of
853 people who welcome you, welcome you to the
854 space, but also invite you to step out of that
855 space if you need.

856 Somebody who can ask questions,
857 somebody who can accept, assist with
858 accessibility so and it's at the front of house is
859 is for me is additional support.

860 It's onboarding you and making sure that
861 offering you any support you may need that's
862 not related to the show.

863 And working jointly with stage management as
864 well, because in in 1884 stage manage.
865 Sorry, the front across were briefed.
866 You say if you notice anything that's not, uh
867 any like for example, inappropriate behavior
868 from the audience member.
869 You don't need to deal with it.
870 Just come and tell us it's an Immersive show.
871 You can't look everywhere at the same time.

872

873 **Melissa Bondar** 32:53

874 Can you tell me more about what the plan
875 would be for any audience who were having
876 like a negative reaction to the performance?

877

878 **Marie Klimis** 33:00

879 Umm so the main thing.
880 The main thing we said to people is first of all,
881 if they just need a break, they can.
882 They can leave and they can come back and
883 then generally will,
884 it was also just come and talk to one of us,
885 whether it's front of house or the they used to
886 call it the Coney person, the Coney person is in
887 the room
888 and whose main role is to deal with any,
889 then yeah, Uh, any emotion of any kind that
890 maybe felt? I know this audience member
891 wants to talk about it and then you had the
892 extreme behavior, which didn't happen, but
893 may happen at the future.
894 One which is for example, have been

895 aggressive audience member and 1st point of
896 call would have again the Coney person
897 coming and talked to that person.
898 And if that doesn't look like a goal, is just to
899 get that person out.
900 And that was usually the future manager.

901

902 **Melissa Bondar** 34:02

903 What if you had, like, an emotionally distraught
904 audience member?

905

906 **Marie Klimis** 34:06

907 Umm, I think it's really just to talk to them and
908 just invite inviting them to just to leave the
909 room.

910 Have conversation to see if it's helpful ohm and
911 and it's it's very.

912 Ohh and it's difficult to predict when we had
913 our.

914 Access uh.

915 We spoke to access advisor.

916 They don't like the use trigger warning because
917 according to them it like you do not know what
918 considers the trigger.

919 Uh, you do not know.

920 Some people may be triggered by something
921 you have no idea what

922 That that would have been a trigger.

923 So they were more like content warning.

924 It's like, what is this,

925 What does this show cover. You're responsible
926 for deciding what is a trigger for you.

927 If you want to know in advance, just great ohm
928 and.

929 So yeah, I think it's generally.

930 Talking to them and see any kind of support
931 that we can offer.

932

933 **Melissa Bondar** 35:04

934 OK.

935 Just answered that... um, do you?

936 Do you write the copy for like what the content
937 of it is or is that supplied by like Rihanna,
938 who?

939

940 **Marie Klimis** 35:21

941 So it's collaboratively uh to usually with that
942 kind of document, it's either I draft or she
943 drafts and the other one feeds into and we
944 have iterations talking to the venue, talking to
945 marketing,
946 Uh, people talking to access advisor, so that's
947 team effort.

948

949 **Melissa Bondar** 35:43

950 OK.

951 And then if people do have questions, what do
952 they do?

953 Are they directed to Coney, or if they reach
954 out to Shoreditch Town Hall, for instance, are
955 they informed on like, how to talk about the
956 show?

957

958 **Marie Klimis** 35:55

959 Yes, there is a contact details I think.
960 I think generally for any questions about the
961 venue was Shoreditch.
962 Any question about the show was us.
963
964 **Melissa Bondar** 36:04
965 OK.
966 And back to in general, have you ever seen
967 anything go wrong in an immersive
968 performance that has, like, influenced how you
969 handle certain risks now?
970
971 **Marie Klimis** 36:19
972 Umm.
973 Very wrong.
974 I haven't seen, I heard.
975 Ohh but I haven't worked or attendance as an
976 audience member uh in my so I'm also an
977 immersive theatre maker.
978 We've got a theatre company called 27 degrees
979 and you know first show we had.
980 It was a show about women as monsters and
981 uh and we had.
982 Very drug, very rude.
983 Very sexist audience member, and it was a
984 moment where you would invite an audience
985 member to come on stage and we had that
986 very loud, very drunk.
987 horrible audience member.
988 It was difficult because we were an emerging
989 company.
990 That was all brand new show and to be honest,

991 at that time we were like, I don't know what to
 992 do.
 993 I want that person out of the stage, but I don't
 994 know how to do that.
 995 So umm, I mean it eventually.
 996 With support from the cast we got that person
 997 out, but I think it's these definitely informed a
 998 lot of the conversations we had about
 999 ohm.
 1000 A show like this one, it's like, what did you do if
 1001 somebody starts to shout drunk?
 1002 Audience members start to shout racist abuse
 1003 and sure, like 1884, there is not a perfect way
 1004 of dealing with situation.
 1005 Will always be a complicated situation, so I
 1006 think it's just making sure that you have,
 1007 I think it's getting the right level of staffing and
 1008 people feel prepared to deal with situations like
 1009 that.
 1010
 1011 **Melissa Bondar** 38:07
 1012 What do you do to help people feel prepared
 1013 to deal with the situations like that?
 1014
 1015 **Marie Klimis** 38:14
 1016 The thing is most of it, I think are funny is just
 1017 to talk about them.
 1018 UM, it's just try to talk about as many situations
 1019 everything may happen and a lot of it evolved
 1020 as we made the show because the very first
 1021 play test we did another one not with the three
 1022 of us, the one with 20 people, the audience

1023 stood up and chanted and protested at the end
1024 of act one with like placards and and all of us
1025 looked at this as like we do.

1026

1027 **Melissa Bondar** 38:36

1028 OK.

1029

1030 **Marie Klimis** 38:50

1031 I mean, this is a great.

1032 It was amazing and we had that a couple of
1033 shows, but not at Shoreditch, funnily enough.
1034 You know, I don't know why. We have-
1035 Anyway, I could talk about that question for a
1036 long time.

1037 We had a lot of debates about that, but
1038 anyway.

1039 And people tend to get carried away in
1040 immersive performances like for example, what
1041 we had a lot of in 1884 is a lot of
1042 vandalism, which always pissed me off, like
1043 people will just be writing on the wooden
1044 things.

1045

1046 **Melissa Bondar** 39:16

1047 So.

1048

1049 **Marie Klimis** 39:17

1050 And I was like, I know it's part of the show, but
1051 you still need to accept that there are people
1052 like me and our stage manager who every day
1053 will need to remake the wooden plaques.
1054 So just, there's a pencil, please.

1055
1056 **Melissa Bondar** 39:26
1057 Uh.
1058 Yeah.
1059
1060 **Marie Klimis** 39:31
1061 But or breaking things or taking things away.
1062 So, but in other immersive shows, I heard
1063 people speak violent or are abusive towards
1064 performers.
1065 I think we also.
1066 Also, that was part of the pre show is to being
1067 very clear that this is not accepted.
1068 This is not tolerated.
1069 Performers are people.
1070 They're not characters, they are real people
1071 with real feelings.
1072 They are not the MP.
1073 They're performer talk to them like you would
1074 like to talk to you, and if you don't, we'll get
1075 you out.
1076
1077 **Melissa Bondar** 40:01
1078 Mm-hmm.
1079
1080 **Marie Klimis** 40:07
1081 And I think it's being very clear about that as
1082 well about the fact that,
1083 it's a, be respectful towards everybody or just
1084 members and performers be. Do not touch
1085 people.
1086 Uh, as you wouldn't normally in real life.

1087 And so we have a good what was your original
1088 question?

1089 I went on a ramble again, OK, and that's it.

1090

1091 **Melissa Bondar** 40:31

1092 My gosh, what was my original question?

1093 I do feel like you've answered it.

1094

1095 **Marie Klimis** 40:32

1096 What's your question?

1097

1098 **Melissa Bondar** 40:34

1099 I think, it's a nice part about transcripts.

1100 I can go back and ask.

1101 I was asking how do you help people feel

1102 prepared to deal with situations like that, but.

1103

1104 **Marie Klimis** 40:42

1105 Yeah, I think it's it's generally about talking

1106 about the different situations, making sure that

1107 they are comfortable to deal with those

1108 situations and if this is a situation that they're

1109 not finding a person who is.

1110 So typically the one is like aggressive behavior.

1111 Do I feel comfortable?

1112 I'm OK to come and talk to somebody.

1113 I'm not gonna physically restrain them.

1114 I'm gonna call the police.

1115 Because it's not my job to fight with a drunk,

1116 aggressive person who wants to shout racist

1117 abuse.

1118 It's not my job and it shouldn't be any of our

1119 um front of house or creatives job.
1120 So, so yeah, it's making sure that we don't put
1121 usually bad things happen when people are
1122 put on the spot or they just assume what they
1123 think their role is.

1124

1125 **Melissa Bondar** 41:27

1126 Umm.

1127

1128 **Marie Klimis** 41:29

1129 And no.

1130

1131 **Melissa Bondar** 41:35

1132 OK.

1133 Um actually, I think that that is most of the
1134 questions that I had for you on my list.

1135 I guess my last question is I was wondering if it
1136 would be possible to talk with your stage
1137 manager of the production?

1138

1139 **Marie Klimis** 41:53

1140 Of course.

1141 Yeah, I'll, I'll.

1142 I'll put you in touch.

1143

1144 **Melissa Bondar** 41:55

1145 OK.

1146 That was it, really.

1147 Thank you for your time today.

1148

1149 **Marie Klimis** 41:59

1150 I hope, I hope red is not going today, that you
1151 had an awful time.
1152
1153 **Melissa Bondar** 42:00
1154 This was so helpful.
1155
1156 **Marie Klimis** 42:02
1157 There was too much, especially because lousy
1158 producer Marie.
1159
1160 **Melissa Bondar** 42:04
1161 What?
1162 No way you guys have been phenomenal and
1163 helpful and I'm so grateful.
1164
1165 **Marie Klimis** 42:08
1166 T-
1167
1168 **Melissa Bondar** 42:12
1169 Thank you for your time tonight too.
1170
1171 **Marie Klimis** 42:12
1172 Very ohh.
1173 Anytime.
1174 And as I said, sorry for ghosting you for so
1175 long.
1176 No, I'll.
1177 I'll put you in touch with Brent and I'll put you
1178 in touch with Astrid.
1179
1180 **Melissa Bondar** 42:23
1181 Um.

1182
1183 **Marie Klimis** 42:27
1184 Thank you.
1185
1186 **Melissa Bondar** 42:28
1187 Alright.
1188
1189 **Marie Klimis** 42:28
1190 Can take care.
1191 Let me know when it's when it's out.
1192 Uh, delete it.
1193
1194 **Melissa Bondar** 42:32
1195 Ah, absolutely.
1196 What's it when it's out?
1197 I'll let you know too, but I'll also make you like
1198 a tiny little case study that I'll send to you guys
1199 about what I've found about your company.
1200 I'm sure you already know that you're pretty
1201 great and you have fantastic techniques and
1202 everything, but maybe if you're applying for
1203 funding or something you can be like someone
1204 did a case study on us and you should give us
1205 more money for more time for.
1206
1207 **Marie Klimis** 42:51
1208 Hello.
1209 That'd be that'd be brilliant.
1210 Yes, absolutely.
1211
1212 **Melissa Bondar** 42:54
1213 Yeah.

1214
1215 **Marie Klimis** 42:54
1216 Anything will get us funding is something
1217 great.
1218
1219 **Melissa Bondar** 42:56
1220 I know it's.
1221 I'm sort of hopeful it will help all of you a tiny
1222 bit since you've helped me so much, but thank
1223 you.
1224
1225 **Marie Klimis** 43:02
1226 Alright, well have a lovely day,
1227 Melissa.
1228 Yeah.
1229 If you think of any other questions you want to
1230 ask anything I should now be able to reply
1231 quickly to any question and so my crunch
1232 points of last spring is over.
1233
1234 **Melissa Bondar** 43:17
1235 OK, great.
1236 Thanks, Marie.
1237
1238 **Marie Klimis** 43:19
1239 And alright, have a look. Bye.
1240
1241 **Melissa Bondar** 43:20
1242 Have a great day. Bye.
1243

Appendix E - 1884 Production Staff Transcript, Jenni Sinclair

1 M: It is recording. Great. Cool. Then I'm gonna start
2 asking you questions from the interview schedule.
3 So how long have you been working in this kind of
4 capacity, and what was your background that
5 brought you into this world?

6
7 J: Um, interesting question. Cause I've been
8 working in front of house and theater operations
9 since 2017. So however long ago that was, seven
10 years now, but I was doing some ad hoc theater
11 work before that, some of which was immersive
12 work. I was a performative usher on a show, and I
13 was involved in a immersive horror experience as a
14 performer as well before. But my actual formal
15 employment in immersive theatre started on
16 Punchdrunk's *Burnt City* in 2023. Which is how years
17 work, I think, so yeah, and I've been at Shoreditch
18 Town Hall since September 2020, no 2022, and I've
19 been at Shoreditch Town Hall since September
20 2023 and Coney's 1884, I think, is the first truly
21 immersive work that we've done at Shoreditch
22 Town Hall since I started. There was a immersive
23 style jazz oerformance, but it was less, sort of,
24 about performers being or audience being
25 immersed with performers, as they were as
26 audience being immersed in like the world of a jazz
27 pub was more interesting than one than anything
28 else. So yeah.

29
30 1884 was the first like immersive and interactive
31 work at Shoreditch Town Hall. Does that timeline
32 makes sense?

33
34 M: Yeah. Do you have any academic training in
35 house management or did you just start with-?
36

37 J: My BA is in performance and visual arts. I did that
38 in Brighton and it wasn't specifically to do with like
39 front of house or performance operations, it was a
40 performance based course, but we were making
41 our own work so we had to like build it from the
42 ground up, including how the front of house
43 operations worked. But I was mostly looking at
44 installation work at that time. So it was immersive

45 and it was bringing audiences into spaces with
46 installations happening in them, but there wasn't a
47 sort of interactive element at all. And yeah, front of
48 house was kind of something I came to you later.
49
50 M: Cool. How do you define your role in the
51 productions?
52
53 J: And so I think, my sort of front of house
54 management point of view it's anything that is
55 outside of the world of the show, so and, especially
56 in terms of 1884, I was almost like very literally
57 outside the world of the showing that the doors
58 were closed and I couldn't see what was going on
59 in there. So it's more about guiding audiences
60 before entering, a little bit during keeping an eye,
61 making sure that everyone is fine inside and then
62 on their way out, but it's more about coordinating
63 between audiences and performers or performing
64 companies. And sort of how they are expecting the
65 audience to act and react and how audiences
66 actually do act and react in that in those moments.
67
68 M: Did you see the performance before you had to
69 house manage it?
70
71 J: So yes. They did three play tests at the venue and
72 I attended one of the play tests. It was a scaled
73 back version of the show. There was only a few of
74 us in the room, but it was as close to the final
75 performance as they could make it.
76
77 M: Do you think that that had any value for you?
78
79 J: That was really helpful. We had a couple
80 meetings with the company beforehand. We'd like
81 done a meet and greet and I sort of spoken to the
82 stage manager and the creators a little bit. But
83 trying to explain 1884 in words is quite hard, like
84 really hard, to explain what's actually going to
85 happen. And so seeing it happen and being able to
86 like feel the reactions to it that an audience
87 member would have because I knew very little
88 about it before I went into the playtest in terms of

89 the format, I knew what they were trying to
90 achieve and sort of the story of the piece, but not
91 like exactly how it was going to work. The game
92 element was just referred to as the game when we
93 were discussing it beforehand, so I was like, I don't
94 understand how this game works at all. So yeah,
95 seeing it done was really, really helpful. And
96 especially in terms of benefit going on to explain
97 that to front of House staff who didn't get an
98 opportunity to see it before they went into work on
99 it.
100
101 M: Awesome. What skills do you think it takes for
102 you to do your job well?
103
104 J: Interesting question. I think being flexible and a
105 certain level of improvisation and with, uh, front of
106 house, even in sort of non-immersive work and sort
107 of traditional theatre, every show is different, every
108 audience is different and being able to adapt
109 quickly to things, to emerging things happening is
110 really important. Being really organized in terms of
111 prep so that by the time you've got to the event
112 happening, you're on top of things, you know
113 what's happening. Having a good idea, being able
114 to disseminate that information to start working on
115 events is really important. I feel a little bit like I'm
116 having a job interview.
117
118 M: A little bit, sorry. Yeah, solid, solid answer. I
119 guess down the job interview vein, are there like
120 certifications or like really structured trainings
121 you've done that you've brought into the job with
122 you that have been helpful?
123
124 J: Interesting. So I have SIA qualification, which is
125 the door supervisor qualification and I did, my, a
126 previous venue paid for because we had audiences
127 with complex needs and there was a sort of
128 thinking that we might need training on how to
129 deal with audience reactions. I don't actually have
130 the qualification. I can't work as a bouncer. I didn't
131 get the card, but I did the training, it was a four day

132 training session and that's really interesting in
133 terms of sorry –
134
135 (*siren noise*)
136
137 M: It's OK. Is the building on fire?
138
139 J: Somebody else is. Like conflict management. De-
140 escalation. Sort of, I can't think of the word for it,
141 it's kind of the opposite of conflict management,
142 preventing conflict in the 1st place. So the SIA
143 training looks a lot on how to prevent incidents
144 before they even happen in the first place.
145 Customer service, looking after audiences before,
146 making sure that there isn't going to be a problem
147 because everybody is feeling safe and comfortable
148 and happy.
149
150 So I have a first aid qualification, which is not really
151 impacted so much on the world, but is obviously
152 good to have full confidence in the knowledge that
153 you can attend if there was to be an incident and
154 something other. So I did also, I don't know if you
155 heard of Walk with Amal, which was the giant
156 puppet. She walked from Syria to England. She
157 came through Deptford and I worked at the Albany
158 at Deptford at the time and they were in charge of
159 managing that procession through Depotford High
160 Street, which was 4000 people in a quite tight High
161 Street with a giant puppet and a steel band. So in
162 preparation of that for that we did a crowd
163 management training course with a really cool ex-
164 police officer who was talking about avoiding things
165 like crowd crash and panic and that kind of thing,
166 which is sort of on a maxi-scale. You can take those
167 skills and put them on a much smaller scale as well
168 in terms of anticipating audience movements or
169 trigger points, things like that.
170
171 M: Would you say the one you were talking about
172 earlier was de escalation training?
173
174 J: Yes, that was definitely part of it, yeah.
175

176 M: Cool. Um. What? Do you find that there are
177 artistic elements to the way that you manage the
178 audience?
179

180 J: Um. That's a really interesting question. I think, I
181 guess it's more about supporting the artistic vision
182 of the company and usually I feel ,y personal role
183 and quite often the front of House staff are kind of
184 removed from that. So you're kind of outside of the
185 artistic elements, but it's more to do with knowing.
186 We had quite a few conversations before about
187 knowing when to step in and especially because it
188 was a show that was like the whole point was to
189 generate conflict and to encourage a certain level
190 of disobedience. So having a front of house staff
191 know when, where the line is and when it is
192 appropriate to cross the line because the last thing
193 you want to do is interrupt somebody's experience
194 inappropriately so, yeah, taking a step backwards, I
195 think and letting the companies, certainly in 1884
196 because they were very present in the room, letting
197 them lead the sort of artistic vision of the show and
198 just making sure you're there as a space to that. I
199 have, when I'm, when I was performing before I
200 started working in front of house and actually, like
201 being a performative usher is a really interesting
202 arrangement because you've got, pointing them in
203 the right direction and making sure they do what
204 you want, but at the same time trying to maintain a
205 character, even if it was, at the time it was as
206 simple as I was a riot policeman shouting at people.
207 So mainly it was quite helpful in terms of guiding
208 people around space because you were allowed to
209 shout and point and threaten them and having
210 those two sort of, not, they're not in conflict with
211 each other, but like remembering you like both
212 roles is a really interesting challenge. I think the
213 immersive work that involves having no external
214 front of house, so everyone is in the world involved
215 with it is really sort of an interesting challenge.
216

217 M: Yeah. Do you find that there's a craftsmanship
218 to what you do?
219

220 J: Craftsmanship. I've never heard it referred to that
221 way or really thought about it that way before, but I
222 guess it is the kind of thing that can be taught
223 because most operational stuff is similar regardless
224 of the venue. And best way to learn is from people
225 who have done it. So in that, like in the way we
226 somebody trying to build a table, which usually be
227 shown how to build a table by somebody who's
228 built a table before. I think that kind of knowledge
229 dissemination is how you kind of learn how to do
230 things in the industry. Like you very rarely that
231 you're going to get information on how best to run
232 operations from a textbook. It's more from the
233 experience of other people who have done similar
234 things before or have attempted a similar event in
235 the past. I, as I say, didn't have any formal training
236 in front of house operations. I learned mostly from
237 watching, standing behind people who were doing
238 it and going ohh OK, that's how you do it. Like
239 stealing their methods and things.

240

241 M: OK. What does duty of care mean to you?

242

243 J: Um. I think when you are inviting people into a
244 space, you do have a responsibility to look after
245 them and like in terms of physically, like the actual
246 like physical well-being, you don't want people to
247 come into a space that you've invited them into
248 and get hurt and you know, and you don't want
249 them to get hurt mentally, I guess, as well and you
250 have a duty of care over them to make sure that
251 people are leaving, you know, the same as you
252 found them or, hopefully happier, hopefully better,
253 hopefully enriched by the experience that they've
254 had.

255

256 M: How does what you just said sort of situate
257 itself, you were talking about how in 1884 like the
258 goal is to encourage conflict looks like, like stretch?

259

260 J: Yeah. I think that that was a really interesting part
261 of thinking about how audience management and
262 behavior management was going to happen and
263 because they are dealing with something that can

264 be very triggering to some people or uh,
265 unexpectedly triggering as well. I think like the way
266 that the show was intended to make you feel was
267 surprising to me when I did the play test I was like,
268 ohh, I'm like really invested in this in a way I wasn't
269 expecting to be and and I think what was so clever
270 about the way they did the work is that they gave
271 you an outlet for that was like cathartic in a way
272 and in the terms, I think the knocking device, like
273 giving people a method of protest that didn't
274 involve standing up and shouting and having to
275 make yourself very visible was really interesting
276 and, and I hope that people came out of it feeling
277 good about themselves and at the end of it, and
278 even like if they had chosen not to rebel like they
279 felt it was like it enlightening experience. I think the
280 company when, I don't think that by me saying this,
281 were really worried that people might find it too
282 much, people might find it overwhelming. And we
283 had processes in place, if that was to happen, so
284 like an escalation route. We have a room here at
285 Shoreditch Town Hall that we call the quiet space
286 that is open for all performances, no matter the
287 nature of the performance. And it's basically just a
288 room where you can take a moment away. We have
289 water. There's comfortable sofas. Take a sort of
290 breather from the performance. So that was
291 offered to audiences before they went in. So they
292 knew that that existed and that was an option and
293 also there was a sort of process with flagging. So
294 we had members from the company in the space,
295 as well as a front of house member of staff. And if
296 somebody looked like they needed an
297 interventional approach or somebody asked to be
298 removed from this space or like expressed that they
299 were having a bad time and we would have
300 brought them out with a space where they would
301 have been taken to the quiet space and they would
302 have been joined by me or another member of
303 front of House to like talk to them and see what
304 they needed to see if they just need some time or if
305 they need any further assistance and hopefully
306 send them back and show.
307

308 And there was also like a pack of resources similar
309 to what you've attached to your introduction about
310 like where to go for further assistance if they felt
311 they needed that. So there was like a plan put in
312 place for that eventuality, which I don't think ever
313 had to be utilized. I don't, we didn't have any
314 audience, but like, most of the feedback I was
315 getting from audience was that they were really
316 into it, really loving it, completely on board and
317 everyone was having a good time with the show,
318 which was great.

319

320 M: Yeah. Umm. Do you feel that you have any
321 ethical obligations to the other performers and
322 staff or audience when you are house managing?

323

324 J: Ethical obligation, I think just really prioritize
325 safety that's mostly what front of house staff are
326 there for and like obviously there is a level of
327 customer service and greeting welcome stuff there.
328 But at a fundamental level, ushers are there for
329 safety reasons to help with if there was to be a fire
330 evacuation. And any other instance to step in. So I
331 think you have an obligation to keep people safe
332 inside in a space and that includes sort of feeling
333 safe, feeling supported in work that might be more,
334 either challenging for them or presented unusually
335 like there's a... I always feel like when people are
336 going to the theater, there is a preconceived notion
337 of what they're expecting to find once they get
338 there. And so often it that it doesn't resemble that
339 ,and they can find that surprising and can find it
340 difficult to navigate so you're there to sort of help
341 navigate an experience that they are, they're not
342 expecting, or they just don't quite know how to
343 engage with by answering questions, being on
344 hand, and so preparing them for the experience,
345 1884 had a sort of introductory speech before you
346 went in where they lay down exactly what was
347 going to happen and some rules and things to
348 guide the audience. But more so ,like just sort of
349 like, get into the idea of what you're about to
350 experience. And that method was incredibly
351 helpful. And it was maybe delivered a bit like it was

352 hard for people to hear sometimes. It was also
353 audience members don't always love to listen to
354 sort of introductory speeches. They're trying to get
355 a drink from the bar at the last minute or they're
356 trying to go to the toilet. So they had a printed
357 version of that information as well, which we I did
358 sneak to people who I saw were like, "You didn't
359 listen to that introduction, so I'm just going to give
360 you this piece of paper so that you've got an idea of
361 what's going on as well." They had a really good
362 sort of plan for their audience management, I
363 thought. So I feel like I went off topic.

364

365 M: No, it was making me wonder. Do you find that
366 there's any sort of difference with immersive
367 companies coming into you working at the venue
368 as opposed to being a part of the immersive
369 company?

370

371 J: Yes, I think that is really interesting because I feel
372 like if they if they're bringing work in to an existing
373 venue, they have thought about the front of house
374 operations from a much more bare side of it. Like
375 they were very involved in front of house. They
376 sent documents to me a couple days before the
377 show and they had a plan for like where they
378 wanted the ushers to stand and where they
379 anticipated people to get their tickets scanned. And
380 all of that kind of stuff that usually I would be
381 devising for companies in a more sort of traditional
382 setting, They'd already thought about how they
383 wanted all of that to work. And so from like my side
384 of it for this particular show, there wasn't a lot that
385 I had to do. We sort of had the staff that they
386 requested in place and we had their plan for what
387 they're going to do under certain circumstances
388 and then we just sort of rolled with it. A lot of it
389 came from them. Whereas I find in occasionally
390 with more traditional theater, they kind of don't
391 think about the front of house element of it at all
392 much past what time they want audience to go and
393 get their seats essentially or how clearance is going
394 to get given so they trust that everything is gonna
395 happen sort of fairly in the same way it usually

396 does. But they let you do that. Whereas, we also
397 had and a piece of work downstairs in the last
398 couple weeks that was a promenade show through
399 our basement space. And again they'd come with a
400 front of House plan where they had pre imagined
401 how they thought audience were going to enter
402 and where they would get their tickets scanned and
403 how they were going to grab a drink before going
404 into this sort of quite complex route around a show
405 that it was being taken around. So I feel like
406 companies coming in to a venue that are used to
407 making immersive work tend to have already
408 thought about that kind of thing.

409
410 M: Awesome. Thank you. What type of risk
411 assessments do you do for these shows?

412
413 J: And so we have a risk assessment template that
414 we fill out for every single performance. We ask
415 companies to write their own risk assessments.
416 And then our Operations Manager also writes a fire
417 evac plan and sort of an enhanced risk assessment
418 if they're doing anything that we deem to be
419 unusually hazardous. And so things that are like
420 mentioned on those risk assessments would be if
421 audiences are moving around, like routes that
422 they're moving. If there's hazards, trip potential trip
423 hazards, if they've got to go in and out or up and
424 down stairs a lot or any sort of movement that
425 would be additional to just going into the
426 auditorium and taking a seat kind of thing if that's
427 gonna produce a hazard. And then they would also
428 have a section on the risk assessment for like
429 potential unruly behavior. So like what we would do
430 to minimize the risk if somebody came in
431 intoxicated or if somebody came in and we thought
432 they were behaving inappropriately towards staff
433 or to company or to fellow audience members. So
434 those kind of things are always on every risk
435 assessment, all performances, but would have
436 special attention paid to them for something that
437 was immersive or interactive because those kind of
438 incidents are more likely to occur, but would be
439 mitigated in the same way with front of house staff

440 intervention and like potential removal from the
441 venue depending on a sliding scale of assessment
442 of their behavior.

443

444 M: Do you find that the risk assessments are all
445 largely focused on physical risks?

446

447 J: Yes, I would say almost exclusively. I don't have
448 ever seen a risk assessment that is mentioned
449 content. We do publish content warnings for our
450 performances. So that is a question that gets asked
451 to companies, but I don't think they appear on the
452 risk assessments themselves. Just yeah, really
453 interesting.

454

455 M: That's the core of the thesis. Thank you for the
456 answer I was kind of hoping to hear, I mean not,
457 but yes.

458

459 J: Yeah, that's, that's a really good point. Yeah.

460

461 M: Do aesthetics or artistic intent apply to how you
462 develop your risk handling methods?

463

464 J: Um. I think short answer is no. Particularly in like
465 a fixed venue like this, like we have certain
466 processes that are kind of immutable depending on
467 the work we have. We do occasion like adapt fire
468 escape routes and things like that if we are building
469 sets and want to cover various different doors and
470 so we might adapt that kind of thing, but I think. At
471 a fundamental level, sort of, if the work, if the
472 design works of the show is sort of fundamental to
473 the show, it's getting designed around the existing
474 safety features and procedures. That makes sense?

475

476 M: Yeah. To be fair, a lot of the interviews involve
477 uh, front of house that are like integrated in the
478 company, which I think likely to apply there, but I
479 was curious.

480

481 J: Yeah.

482

483 M: Yeah, umm. Do you think that the training you
484 mentioned in performance and ther artistic
485 elements, do you think that that has influenced
486 your ability to communicate with artistic teams?
487

488 J: I think so, yeah. I think there is sort of a level of
489 understanding on both, sort of both elements
490 there, like having made my work in the past and
491 being a performer in the past that I yeah, sort of, I
492 can get where they're coming from. Yeah. That and
493 I think more, more than that something is that I've
494 got quite a lot of work experience with working
495 with very, very new companies, very inexperienced
496 companies, student work, that kind of thing and
497 they are not always on top of the lingo, like
498 buzzwords, kind of thing that gets sort of banded
499 around, so like, explaining from like very first
500 principles is something I'm quite used to. So
501 stripping back the sort of traditional understanding
502 of how things work, is, has sort of been part of my
503 work process in the past, so and I think exclusively
504 worked in spaces that are very adaptable. So the
505 seatings aren't isn't fixed and the stage isn't fixed
506 and front of house operations can look really
507 different for show to show and I think in terms of
508 communicating to performers, it tends to come
509 from a collaborative thing.
510

511 A lot of the work I've done in performance have
512 been in the space, including Coney who were in the
513 building for quite a long time before they mounted
514 the performance, they did an R&D here last year
515 and so like having them be familiar with how
516 operations run before they start considering the
517 work is important as well because they it sort of
518 can come up together, so rather than sort of just
519 transposing it on top, it's a joint effort.
520

521 Yeah, they were aware of like, how audiences were
522 likely to enter the building and what the rooms look
523 like and their doors and things that were available
524 before they designed the actual work itself.
525

526 M: Do you find that there's often an understanding
 527 on the artistic side of what your job function does?
 528

529 J: Yes, Coney especially. Yeah, they're very on top of
 530 it. They knew exactly what we would need from
 531 them in terms of information and they had that
 532 ready to go before I asked for it. So yeah, I think it
 533 depends on the company. And as I say, some
 534 companies that I've worked with in the past, I'm
 535 not going to name any names, just seem to think
 536 that audience members appear in front of them
 537 and then disappear once they finished performing
 538 at them and don't really consider how that process
 539 works at all. But on the whole, generally yes I
 540 would say.
 541

542 M: Great. Um, are you aware of what type of
 543 information the audience received before they
 544 enter the performance?
 545

546 J: Yes, so we have, pre-show emails that go out to
 547 any audience attending any performance and I
 548 always get sent those pre-show emails for
 549 proofreading before they get sent to anyone in
 550 those emails are always sort of compiled with the
 551 company, so they also get to see those before they
 552 get out or decide what they want to put in them
 553 and Marie gave me the pre-show speech sheet, so I
 554 had the speech that they were going to say before
 555 we opened as well. As I say, they're pretty thorough
 556 front of house documents, so. Yeah.
 557

558 M: Umm. Did this show have like an intentional
 559 decompression space for after the performance?
 560

561 J: So we had the quiet space available if we needed
 562 it, but we also kept the bar space open even
 563 though the drinks weren't being sold post show
 564 and the performance space itself had no sort of
 565 official clearance deadline. Audience members
 566 were able to stay inside that space for as long as
 567 they needed. We weren't going to sort of hurry
 568 anybody out of that space. Yes. And it was, yeah. It
 569 was highlighted before we opened that we were

570 not going to immediately throw people out of that
571 space. At the end of the performance they would
572 have a chance to continue to look around the
573 museum space, to speak to the performers, to sort
574 of take their time in terms of decompressing back
575 into the real world.
576
577 M: Have you seen anything go wrong in an
578 immersive production that could have been
579 prevented in advance?
580
581 J: Interesting, Interesting question. I think on 1884
582 there we didn't have any incidents at all. Everything
583 I think when generally as they had predicted it
584 would. No, I probably do have examples from other
585 work but I they might be NDA-ed so I can't talk
586 about it.
587
588 M: Have you seen anything go wrong in the
589 production that's now a regular part of your risk
590 assessing?
591
592 J: I don't think so. No. I can't think things.
593
594 M: And are there any types of paperwork or
595 activities that you find really useful for organizing
596 your paperwork for this type of performance?
597
598 J: Sorry, in terms of like...
599
600 M: Are there any specific types of paperwork or
601 activities that you find useful for organizing
602 immersive work? Sorry.
603
604 J: This feels really self-evident, but it's actually quite
605 rare in the sort of other work we do, having an
606 opportunity to meet with the full company - Did I
607 disappear?
608
609 M: Yeah, you did. But that's OK, I can still hear –
610
611 J: It was quite a long time. With that and like
612 actually getting an opportunity to meet and speak
613 with the company and the performers beforehand.

614 They're, in more traditional theatre work, there is
615 some occasions where I haven't seen the
616 performers before they are on stage. So I don't
617 know who they are before they are performing
618 because of the way that their operations have
619 worked. And so being able to meet them, have an
620 opportunity to talk to them knowing what
621 everybody looked like is really important, so that
622 you know who to talk to for the various different
623 things. Yeah, I also, so we write event briefs for
624 every single performance that comes in. I don't
625 usually send them to front of house staff. Usually
626 those are reserved for duty managers and
627 production teams if they need them, but for 1884 I
628 sent the briefing notes to the stewards that were
629 working on it so that they knew what they were
630 getting into. And it was mentioned when the shifts
631 were published that it would be an immersive
632 show, but I just wanted to give them a heads up of
633 what kind of thing that they were gonna expect.
634 And just so that they were not surprised by walking
635 into that environment because it, the work we do
636 here is really different. Shows are really different.
637 But that was a sort of more intense front of house
638 role from an usherin point of view and usually the
639 main job is making sure people aren't filming or
640 talking or know where the toilets are wherever and
641 actually being sort of having that level of awareness
642 of there is a potential here that you might have to
643 look out for the audience behaviour in terms of
644 interactions with performers is not something they
645 used to doing like flags that beforehand with them,
646 but, that is that was the kind of thing you were
647 asking?

648
649 M: Nut yeah, that's great. I mean there is currently
650 like no handbook on how would you the house
651 manager immersive.

652
653 J: Yeah, I think it was interesting as well with the
654 front of house staff at Shoreditch Town Hall aren't
655 expecting it to be immersive work. They were hired
656 as ushers or bartenders or box office and
657 employees. And they are aware that the kind of

658 work we do is very varied, but they have not
659 necessarily applied to work on an immersive or
660 interactive show. I. The pest control team are in the
661 room, is that OK? This would be helpful.
662
663 M: Yeah, it's fine. That's actually the last question
664 too.
665
666 J: It's fine. There might be some banging around,
667 but it should be quick.
668
669 M: OK. Well, that's actually the last question. So I
670 will stop the recording.

1884 Production Staff Transcript, Brent Tan

1 **Melissa Bondar** 0:09

2 OK.

3 Great. So do you mind?

4 I'm gonna ask you a few questions sort of

5 about your background and situate it, and then

6 a few more specific questions about 1884.

7 So how long have you been working in

8 theater?

9

10 **Brent Tan** 0:21

11 I think I've been working in theater for about 8

12 years now.

13 I started off as a stage manager back in

14 Singapore and then I came up here in the UK

15 for the past three years studying in production

16 management. So I graduated last year and I've

17 been working in UK ever since.

18 So yeah, about five years in Singapore and then

19 three to four years now in the UK.

20

21 **Melissa Bondar** 0:48

22 And how did you end up working on 1884?

23

24 **Brent Tan** 0:52

25 How do I end up?

26

27 **Melissa Bondar** 0:53

28 Wind up working on 1884.

29

30 **Brent Tan** 0:56

31 I think it was quite interesting cause Marie was

32 looking for someone and she posted

33 a call out on Facebook and I just happened to
34 see it and I'm very interested in immersive
35 theatre. So which is why that piqued my
36 interest and I was available during the time
37 period that she was looking for.
38 So I just reached out and I asked her.
39 And did an interview. And then yeah, she was
40 happy for me to come on board.
41 So that's how, it's part of it.

42

43 **Melissa Bondar** 1:29

44 So how many shows have you worked on
45 specifically that were immersive or
46 participatory?

47

48 **Brent Tan** 1:36

49 I think out of let's say like 20 shows, I think I've
50 worked on at least like 12 to 15 shows that are
51 immersive in certain aspects, like some of it
52 could be interactive as well. A lot of them are
53 still exploring the space between interactive
54 and immersive, but we are always open to that
55 conversation to see where it goes.
56 But a lot of them fall under that category.

57

58 **Melissa Bondar** 2:04

59 Great. What do you think
60 it takes to do your job well?

61

62 **Brent Tan** 2:12

63 That's interesting. I think it's being...
64 I would say there are a few factors to it. I think

65 having certain skill sets that are very essential
66 to -

67

68 **Melissa Bondar** 2:33

69 Brett, can you hear me?

70 I think I lost you.

71 Brent is your Internet connection OK?

72

73 **Brent Tan** 6:19

74 Hello.

75 Yeah, I think so.

76

77 **Melissa Bondar** 6:45

78 I think we were.

79 You were telling me what skill sets make a
80 good stage manager.

81

82 **Brent Tan** 6:48

83 Right.

84 Yeah, yeah. I think there are a couple of skill
85 sets that are essential to stage management
86 and production management.

87 I think one of them would be like logistical
88 planning. I think having an overview of what is
89 needed for the production, whether it be like
90 set, and how things are being run. If it's in
91 stage management, we do a lot of propping.
92 So then propping can be to a lot of different
93 materials to make the show come together
94 from the design, so it's sort of like being a
95 having a skill to translate designs into the
96 practicalities of theater.

97 So how do we bring it all into fruition in a
98 physical sense from an idea?
99 So that's one thing that's good.
100 Time management.
101 Equally as important, because sometimes we
102 are not given enough time.
103 So with a lot of people working on the same
104 project, how can we then work together to sort
105 of like, make sure that everything runs
106 smoothly and sort of like being able to manage
107 the operation of it? So having a good sense of
108 time is equally as important.
109 I think the last one would be sort of like budget
110 management as well, like having a good sense
111 of what you can and cannot do. It sort of sets
112 your premise of what, how much the idea can
113 achieve.
114 And where it can go with it and how much we
115 can work out in terms of the ideas.

116

117 **Melissa Bondar** 8:33

118 And do you think immersive or participatory
119 productions require any additional skills or any
120 different skills?

121

122 **Brent Tan** 8:40

123 I think more so with immersive shows,
124 a lot of health and safety from the production
125 management standpoint when it comes to
126 audience interactions, because with every
127 show, it being immersive means that we're
128 interacting with every audience and to sort of

129 have the overview to make sure that there is
130 support set in place for everything, for
131 every different types of audience experience, so
132 really working that out of like
133 if that's, if there is an in person interaction,
134 then how can we safeguard the audience and
135 the cast who are gonna interact with each
136 other?
137 Because every day is gonna be with different
138 people, so they may respond to the same set of
139 things differently.
140 So sort of like coming up with protocols,
141 coming up with procedures of ways to
142 safeguard the cast members.
143 Or like to give them a specific like script
144 in hand, if they respond differently, or if they
145 respond within a certain premise, we can do
146 action one. If they respond in this way, we can
147 respond action two.
148 So sort of like having a good rehearse
149 procedure such that everyone can feel safe
150 doing the work.

151

152 **Melissa Bondar** 10:06

153 Great. Thanks.

154 For 1884, how do you define your role on that
155 production?

156

157 **Brent Tan** 10:14

158 I would say I was given the museum section, so
159 it's particularly in the second-half of the show. I
160 was more heavily involved in that.

161 In the rehearsal process, I was very much doing
162 a lot of stage management stuff, so like getting
163 the props, getting all the logistics done,
164 helping them purchase all the props and
165 setting it in place, managing the schedules, and
166 then once we head into the show, my purpose
167 was different from what I was doing.
168 So in the show period, I was very much
169 involved in making the museum, which is to
170 help them in the immersive interactions of like
171 what they offered in the show.
172 To then create a museum caption so that once
173 we orientate, shift the space around, into a
174 museum, then how the audience will be able
175 to?
176 Be immersed in in that so it's very specific to
177 the experience on that day was what I was
178 doing.
179 Sure.

180

181 **Melissa Bondar** 11:26

182 I love the captions in the museum.
183 When I saw it, I could not get over how good
184 they were.

185

186 **Brent Tan** 11:28

187 Yeah, yeah, yeah.
188 And because like every day is so different, so
189 we wanna try to make it as personal as we can.
190 So if let's say like within the show, if they come
191 up within a specific like idea because it's sort of
192 like community bonding, isn't it?

193 So if the house creates something that is so
194 unique, we want to capture that and have that
195 in the museum so that like, you know, you can
196 have a laugh about it, but it also feels personal.
197 Like, oh, yeah, this happened today.
198 But it won't happen the next day here and all
199 that. So yeah.

200

201 **Melissa Bondar** 12:04

202 Yeah. So do you find for stage managing 1884
203 there are artistic elements to your job there?

204

205 **Brent Tan** 12:10

206 Yes, definitely because it requires a creative
207 input on it, and I think that's the difference
208 between an immersive production and
209 a normal West End stage management because
210 you're more heavily involved in the production
211 when it's immersive and you're having to put in
212 a more creative input, which then allows you to
213 explore different options and work out
214 different prospects when working with
215 audience.

216

217 **Melissa Bondar** 12:47

218 What does duty of care mean to you?

219

220 **Brent Tan** 12:51

221 Duty of care, I think.

222 Duty of care means sort of the care of the
223 audience members, the cast, the creative team
224 and also to myself.

225 I think it's also sort of like upholding the
226 responsibility of making sure that everyone is
227 safe in the production. It can be either safe
228 space.
229 Physical space.
230 Feeling safe physically, feeling safe emotionally.
231 And then all this comes into factors where like
232 if, let's say, we are rehearsing a very emotional
233 scene, then it's also a duty of care for my cast
234 members to check in with them to make sure
235 that they are all right or if they are happy to
236 carry on.
237 Or before we even start, they're going to hold
238 the space so they feel safe to share and explore
239 the scenes that we're going to go through,
240 which can be heavy for some of them.
241 So it's also exploring the contents because a lot
242 of it if, it is very historical and has deep
243 emotional roots to some of the members then
244 we want to make sure that like it's done safe as
245 well, and then duty of care to the audience
246 members is also to make sure that their
247 experience feels safe, that they can have the
248 flexibility of feel like they can share what they
249 want to share, that they can sort of like, explore
250 certain things that they want to try.
251 Wanna give them the permission as well to do
252 so if they want to.
253 So sort of like all those factors, but it's what I'll
254 consider the duty of part of the care, yeah.
255
256 **Melissa Bondar** 14:54

257 Talking about that duty of care to the audience,
258 how involved do you feel like you were in that
259 for the show?

260

261 **Brent Tan** 15:02

262 I think I wasn't involved in it directly.

263 It was definitely a with the team. So basically
264 with Marie, with Rihanna and Tatenda.

265 Tatenda was the director for the cast.

266 It's really checking in with them as a team to
267 see how we want to hold the space and I think
268 everything is a very collaborative effort.

269 It wasn't one person making a call on
270 something, but we would discuss
271 audience interactions and discuss how we want
272 to approach it and what the ways we wanna
273 approach it in certain things.

274 So for us, we were saying that like, oh, we
275 wouldn't want the audience to be to touch the
276 cast, so we wanted to create that safe space
277 and how do we establish that?

278 How do we communicate that to the audience
279 without telling them?

280 So we've come up with multiple ways where we
281 either put it in an announcement. So you had
282 your pre show announcement before everyone
283 came into the space so they know what to
284 expect, so we sort of like set the expectation,
285 making sure that everyone safeguarding the
286 experience.

287 So but all these are things that we will discuss
288 beforehand and we go through every single

289 one just to make sure that we cover all the
290 grounds of, yeah, audience interaction.

291

292 **Melissa Bondar** 16:37

293 It seems like communication was very, very
294 strong in the creation of 1884.

295

296 **Brent Tan** 16:41

297 Yes, yes. And I think it's also equally as
298 important in every aspects of the production,
299 because I think if there are any areas that
300 become like under communicated, then all
301 these will start to fall short and then you'll be
302 you'll start to see the cracks along the way.
303 And like as a whole production, you'll be like,
304 oh, your face, we're looking, facing some
305 friction in certain areas and like, if we actually
306 address them early on or like if people sound
307 them off, which we did, all these things was
308 looked at immediately.
309 Yeah, which then made it pretty good for us as
310 we carried on the show, yeah.

311

312 **Melissa Bondar** 17:24

313 Was there anything like unique or specific
314 about the way Coney and 1884 communicate
315 that, like made it so good?

316

317 **Brent Tan** 17:33

318 I think it's, for me, what was different is how.
319 Marie and Rihanna, did their check-ins.
320 I think they've set in place a model that works

321 for the whole team where they would firstly be
322 present, like they will be around.
323 There are a couple of other productions that
324 I've been on where your producer or your
325 director is not around, so you're left on your
326 own to sort of like hold the space, but having
327 them around, just their presence was enough
328 to sort of, like, know what the culture is, what
329 how we gonna run.
330 Yeah, so creating a spirit of that, of work, is
331 great, important. And I would say different.
332 And it was effective for this because we needed
333 a lot of check-ins and the cast needed a lot of
334 care in terms of before, how the show runs and
335 like prepared themselves to go into an
336 audience that's totally new.
337 And yeah, having that was really nice and I
338 think how they handle like communicating as
339 well, I think they always check-in and ask.
340 So I think it's the questions that they ask as
341 well to the cast members to like and they're
342 quite specific with what they are asked like
343 certain scenes is like, oh, a distortion.
344 How do you feel about that? Like.
345 Yesterday you said that like one of the
346 audience members took something and ran
347 away with it.
348 So how do we like?
349 How do you want to proceed? Like do you
350 want to set something in place and then let the
351 cast decide? How do you want to do it?
352 So it's sort of like that collaboration as well

353 where we are a team and that is, I would say
354 they managed to communicate that really well.

355

356 **Melissa Bondar** 19:38

357 Awesome.

358 What, if any, ethical obligations do you feel you
359 have to other performers and staff and the
360 audience?

361

362 **Brent Tan** 19:50

363 Ethical obligations. Would you mind explaining
364 that?

365

366 **Melissa Bondar** 19:57

367 I mean, it's very it's very open-ended because
368 I'm sort of exploring how people think about
369 ethics when they are creating things like this.

370

371 **Brent Tan** 20:01

372 Mhmm.

373

374 **Melissa Bondar** 20:05

375 So when you think about like what is ethical
376 stage management of an immersive
377 performance, like what does that mean to you
378 in relation to your performers and the
379 audience?

380

381 **Brent Tan** 20:16

382 Alright, I guess like I can only share for myself
383 when it comes to ethical standpoint so.

384 But basically it's also.

385 I try to be.
386 I try not to have an opinion when coming into
387 a show that involves the cast and the creative
388 team, purely because as stage management we
389 wouldn't want to then stir direction that we will
390 later on have to take the responsibilities of
391 those actions for.
392 So I would tend to.
393 My standpoint is to share and listen to where
394 we want to sort of like proceed with the things
395 that they want, in the journeys that they want.
396 And then I will support those decisions that are
397 being made by the cast and the creative team.
398 So I'll try my best to always guide them to
399 share with them and support them, but I'll
400 never tell them what they should or should not
401 be doing and the creative aspects. I think when
402 it comes to the technicalities of things, then I'll
403 be able to give my like \$0.02 worth of
404 suggestions, but when it comes to the creative
405 process my standpoint will be to trust in the
406 process of that they will be able to take care of
407 themselves in the decisions that they will make
408 for certain choices of the show.
409 Yeah.

410

411 **Melissa Bondar** 22:00

412 Whose concern do you think maintaining an
413 ethical performance should be?

414

415 **Brent Tan** 22:05

416 I think there might be a heir-.

417 I feel like there will be a hierarchal line of
418 communication.
419 I would say I think for the cast it will go to the
420 director. The director will take care of that and
421 then after the director, it'll go up to the
422 producer. But usually when the stage manager
423 comes into play with this is that we are merely
424 just the sort of like the telephone. If the cast
425 feels safe enough to tell us, then I will redirect
426 it to the director. I wouldn't say that stage
427 management, we will take the appropriate call
428 to make a decision if something was raised, I
429 think we would direct it to the necessary line
430 that is most specific to whatever issues are
431 things that they want to share.

432

433 **Melissa Bondar** 23:01

434 If you were in, say, an immersive production,
435 not 1884, and you felt that they were sort of
436 crossing the line ethically on some of their
437 choices, would you feel safe speaking up about
438 that?

439

440 **Brent Tan** 23:10

441 Yeah.

442 Yeah, I think I will, but I wouldn't bring it up
443 with the cast members, but I would first, share
444 it with the creative team.

445 So I think I'll go up to, I'll go to the producer or
446 the director if it's depending on which points
447 that we wanna talk about, but and then have
448 the discussion with them as a team first as to

449 do we wanna do something about it. Do we
450 just want to acknowledge that this has
451 happened?
452 Or do we want to create an action plan?
453 Because I feel like ultimately we want to be
454 accountable to each other as well.
455 So in that process, it's also to make sure that
456 like for me, as stage management, we don't
457 make the decisions on our own.
458 We are always sort of like getting approval,
459 getting the support that we need from the
460 production team or whoever who is basically
461 employing me to fulfill that duty. So I would
462 make sure to check in with them as well before
463 approaching, yeah, the situation.

464

465 **Melissa Bondar** 24:27

466 OK.

467 What type of risk assessments do you do for
468 these sorts of shows, for immersive shows?

469

470 **Brent Tan** 24:38

471 What type of?

472

473 **Melissa Bondar** 24:40

474 Risk assessments.

475

476 **Brent Tan** 24:42

477 So for risk assessments, I usually follow a
478 template.

479 And that template has, I think for immersive
480 shows, it has a basic, like a baseline that covers

481 fire, exits, evacuation points and all that.
482 And then the specific ones that relates to the
483 show will probably be the materials that we're
484 gonna use for the set.
485 How safe would they be?
486 How accessible the points are?
487 The other things that assess are like if there's
488 any lighting strokes or anything that might
489 cause an effects.
490 Any loud noises? Content warnings.
491 We'll make sure all of this is in.
492 And then for the cast as well, if they're gonna
493 do any dangerous things if let's say they have
494 weapons or if they are gonna play with fire,
495 then all these would be assessed.
496 And added in.
497 So I have templates for each like category.
498 So if let's say like fire is going to be involved, I
499 have a risk assessment for fire to just edit in in
500 the whole template.
501 If there is a working on heights risk assessment
502 then I'll put that template in.
503 So I've created for myself, I think over the past
504 few years and sort of like getting guidance as
505 well from like ABTT or like mentors who have
506 been in the industry as well, they would know
507 what to assess, what to look out for.
508 When assessing risk for certain specific things,
509 and I think for risk assessment as well as to be
510 as specific as we can to the show.
511 Because I realized that some risk assessments
512 tend to be quite general, where they cover an

513 overlying basis, but yet again when something
514 happens and then become liable to something,
515 they will start to look into the specific things.
516 And if you don't have those specific things
517 written down for the show, then that's where it
518 becomes a gray area where an investigation
519 has to happen to sort of like find out where.
520 Yeah. Who's liable for what?
521 So I always find that in risk assessments when,
522 when especially in immersive show if it can be
523 as specific as we can, means that we cover as
524 much ground of like if let's say an injury
525 happens because they were working on height
526 we already knew because in the rehearsal
527 process we will have done a movement call. We
528 will have rehearsed this and make sure that
529 they were safe and like if anything happens or
530 if they were to have a fall where it's their
531 nearest like first aid or like, who did they reach
532 out to, to be attended to so.
533 All these procedures to be put in place.
534 I would say in the rehearsal period when things
535 are being built, you want to get as much
536 information as you can and be as specific for a
537 good assessment.

538

539 **Melissa Bondar** 27:54

540 Have you ever done a risk assessment for
541 psychological risks for your audience?

542

543 **Brent Tan** 27:59

544 For as in the content that they will receive.

545

546 **Melissa Bondar** 28:04

547 Yes, or if they have an adverse psychological
548 reaction?

549

550 **Brent Tan** 28:10

551 I don't think I have, because the only things
552 that we have in place are sort of like places that
553 they can call or check in with after, but not so
554 much during the process.

555 So I think in the past few shows that we've
556 worked on, we have like a mental first aider in
557 place and their contact number for only after
558 the show, but not during.

559 So if they need a safe space, they'll be one that
560 they can exit to anytime in the show and that
561 has been shared, but not so much of if
562 something were to happen in the show, then
563 it's been set in place usually.

564 Where I am from a production management
565 standpoint is that it will be passed on to the
566 venue to take over with the FOH team, who are
567 more equipped or certified in certain areas
568 where we'll pass it over to them.

569 So they will share in that liability of taking care
570 of the audience because they are the paying
571 audience entering the building.

572 So then in terms of like co-sharing the
573 responsibility that then falls on FOH take care
574 of them if they have a breakdown or if they
575 encounter any, yeah, episodes.

576

577 **Melissa Bondar** 29:38

578 OK.

579 Are you made aware of the type of information
580 that the audience received before they enter
581 the performance?

582

583 **Brent Tan** 29:56

584 Yes, I think. Or especially in 1884, I was part of
585 the process as creating the write-up for what
586 we were gonna share with the audience. So
587 being part of that means that, like, we would all
588 be clear on what we're gonna share and how
589 the audience are gonna interpret coming in to
590 the show and knowing what expectations that
591 they might have coming in. So yeah.

592

593 **Melissa Bondar** 30:26

594 Have you ever seen anything go wrong in an
595 immersive production that probably could have
596 been prevented in advance?

597

598 **Brent Tan** 30:34

599 I think there are a few, but yet again I think.
600 It's so, so interesting because the actors,
601 sometimes it comes down to the actors to,
602 sort of like hold a space where they become
603 responsible for guiding the audience members
604 back to safety in that sense.
605 So I was part of this puppetry show where it
606 was horror and then, so it was a walk through
607 and then there was one person who was

608 terrified. And then she started screaming and
609 running backwards, away from the group.
610 So usually we will have like crew set up at like
611 different places.
612 So that we can get them back or like if they
613 need any help to get out, we can help assist.
614 But when she ran away from the other
615 direction, there was a cast member who were
616 there to sort of like work out and keep the
617 story going being in the space, but also
618 guiding them back to where they are because
619 everyone who is sort of like the tour guide.

620

621 **Melissa Bondar** 31:54

622 OK.

623

624 **Brent Tan** 31:55.

625 The tour guide is in charge of bringing them all
626 around and all this, so we have two tour
627 guides, so we placed one at the front and one
628 at the back. So the one at the back was there to
629 like sort of like pick her up and guide her back.
630 So it could have been, it could have escalated
631 into a show stop situation because if she then
632 disappears in the space we'll have to, like find
633 her and like, then it will not be safe to carry on.
634 But because they were there and they were
635 able to manage the audience as well, because it
636 was a small group of eight, so manage one of
637 them and then bring them back into the space,
638 we were able to carry on the show so.
639 It's, I would say it's really different for every

640 show, the things to look out for
641 and what procedures were put in place?
642 But I think as far as that like in the rehearsal
643 period is we love to do this thing called, and
644 this was done in 1884 as well, where we will
645 think of the worst thing that could happen and
646 plan for that and rehearse that and that like, if
647 it happens, then this is what we're all gonna do.

648

649 **Melissa Bondar** 33:12

650 Yeah.

651

652 **Brent Tan** 33:17

653 So sort of like, yeah, having those scenarios in
654 mind helps to create in us the awareness of
655 what to look out for and to find out and to
656 observe audience as well and like,
657 sort of like their behavior. And like, if they feel
658 like they're gonna do something, that's OK
659 then that's what prepare for.

660

661 **Melissa Bondar** 33:41

662 Do you feel like there was plenty of time for
663 those, like back up plan rehearsals?

664

665 **Brent Tan** 33:42

666 Yeah.

667 Yes, I think so.

668 But it's always the element of uncertainty when
669 it comes to the actual show, like we can
670 prepare ourselves as much as we can, have
671 everything written down, but ultimately it's very

672 different when you're interacting with an
673 audience member and you can't really predict
674 how they'll respond, but we can always guide
675 them in the sort of like the space that we
676 create.
677 So it's sort of like making sure that like all of
678 them are equipped to know what that space is
679 and how to guide them and if anything goes
680 beyond that threshold, then it's to pass it over
681 to stage management where we can then come
682 in, so a lot of we have like a lot of safety calls of
683 like if I signal something that means I need you
684 to come in to intervene. Then yes.
685 We will come in to take over, yeah.

686

687 **Melissa Bondar** 34:45

688 That's great.
689 Is there anything that you wish you knew
690 about, like working in immersive theater as a
691 stage manager before you did your first show?

692

693 **Brent Tan** 34:56

694 Oh.
695 Not really, because I always feel like it's sort of
696 like an adventure as well, and that's the fun
697 part of it is where you get thrown into the deep
698 end cuz one thing I realized as well in my, when
699 I first started off in immersive and just figuring
700 out like how it works?
701 Was that all the all the procedures I had
702 were basically like useless.
703 In my very first sort of like, yeah, being thrown

704 into the deep end and like I realized that
705 whatever that I was preparing for just didn't
706 matter like I forgot about all of them once you
707 were with different audience and then I think,
708 slowly bit by bit I started to build that sort of
709 like the experience or knowing how to apply
710 those procedures into real life, I think that is
711 also an interesting thing that I realized along
712 the way is that like I when I first started, I didn't
713 know how to translate the things that we
714 discuss or the things that we put on paper into
715 actions when dealing with audience, but now
716 after trying out certain things and like, OK, this
717 works, this doesn't work, I become more aware
718 of how I can interact with audience, yeah.
719 Or like the words to say, sometimes it's always
720 about the communication part of it, like.
721 Some sentences can just bring you to what the
722 root cause of what they're experiencing is like,
723 rather than ask, you're like, oh, how are you
724 feeling?
725 And all that, like having something specific to
726 ask might help them to share with you how
727 what they're going through with their
728 experience.

729

730 **Melissa Bondar** 36:54

731 Do you have an example of that?

732

733 **Brent Tan** 36:58

734 So.

735

736 **Melissa Bondar** 37:02

737 I put you on the spot.

738

739 **Brent Tan** 37:03

740 Yeah, yeah. But I was just trying to remember

741 specifically, because there were a couple as

742 well.

743 This this was with children, so children is very

744 different from adults as well because they

745 respond really differently, but one of them, in a

746 sort of like a sensorial show, started to just

747 convert, really quiet and like detach from the

748 whole show. So, so, so understanding that like,

749 oh, actually like that is different, like a different

750 response is happening from everyone else who

751 is engaged.

752 Like usually if some of them are distracted of

753 other things, you can tell because they're still

754 engaged, like in their eyes. So, but knowing

755 that like this, I think around 8 year old child was

756 he like disassociated.

757 I went up to check and to find out what was

758 happening and basically like the kid was

759 sharing that like he was having some family

760 thing and yeah, and, so the response that I

761 have that I had for him was, does he want to...

762 Wasn't, I can't remember if his parents was

763 there, but I think I asked, is there someone that

764 you can go to?

765 And I think it was his parents, but those weren't

766 his parents.

767 But I didn't find out.
768 I just basically gave him over to an audience, to
769 an adult that he knew, and that person was
770 looking after him. So to his caretaker basically.
771
772 **Melissa Bondar** 39:04
773 OK.
774
775 **Brent Tan** 39:05
776 To sort of like follow up and all that. But I
777 realized that like usually if you ask them how
778 they're feeling, which I try it with other people,
779 the response will either be what they're actually
780 feeling, but not knowing what they need at
781 that time.
782 So actually asking them what they need is
783 more essential so that you can, you're able to
784 help them, sort of like provide for them what
785 they need in that space to feel safe, yeah.
786
787 **Melissa Bondar** 39:40
788 That's great. Thanks.
789 That is actually my whole list of questions.
790
791 **Brent Tan** 39:47
792 Nothing.
793
794 **Melissa Bondar** 39:48
795 Yeah. So thank you very much for chatting with
796 me.
797 It was very helpful.

Appendix G - Production Staff Interview Question Schedule

Interview Questions for Production Staff

Please note these are intended to be semi-structured interviews, so not all of these questions may be used, follow up and clarification questions may be asked, and if the interview subject opens an unexpected theme within this topic for discussion, it will be explored.

With that in mind, the risks outlined in my UREC application remain the same and will be engaged with and mitigated in the same manner reported therein.

- How long have you been doing this?
- How many shows have you worked on specifically in an immersive/participatory context?
- What other genres do you work in?
- How do you define your role in the production?
- What skills does it take for you to do this job well?
- Do you find there are artistic elements to it?
- What does duty of care mean to you?
- What/if any ethical obligations do you feel you have to the other performers/staff and audience?
- Whose concern do you think maintaining an ethical performance should be?
- What would you define as an ethical performance?
- What types of risk assessment do you do for this/these shows?
- Do aesthetics or artistic intent apply to how you develop your risk handling methods?
- Does artistic intent influence the way you do audience management?
- Do you have any training in performance or directing?
- If so, do you think it influences your ability to communicate with the artistic team?
- Are you made aware of what type of information the audience receive before they enter the performance?
- Have you seen anything go wrong in an immersive production that could've been prevented in advance?
- Have you seen anything go wrong in a production that is now a regular part of your risk assessing?
- Are there any specific types of paperwork or activities that you find really useful for organizing participatory or immersive work?

If you're comfortable with sharing a copy as a template, I'd like to create a public repository of these documents for other production staff (with credit to you regarding any templates you've made).

Appendix H - Performance Maker Interview Question Schedule

Questions for Practitioners/Devisers/Directors

Please note these are intended to be semi-structured interviews, so not all of these questions may be used, follow up and clarification questions may be asked, and if the interview subject opens an unexpected theme within this topic for discussion, it will be explored.

With that in mind, the risks outlined in my UREC application remain the same and will be engaged with and mitigated in the same manner reported therein.

- How long have you been doing this?
- How many shows have you worked on specifically in an immersive/participatory context?
- What other genres do you work in?
- On a scale from immersive to participatory, if we consider participatory a synonym for instruction based and immersive a more free-form open ended exploratory experience, where would you place this work?
- How do you develop your work? And in that sense, where do your ideas begin and where do they go from there? Do you have any set methods or do they change with each project? Essentially, do you have a process?
- What are the audience to you?
 - How does the role of the audience fit into your process?
 - At what point in your idea development does the audience begin to factor in?
 - *If asking questions about a specific production*, when did the audience begin to factor in during the process for *Show X*?
- What is the function of the production staff to you?
 - Do you feel they have any artistic influence in their roles?
 - Do you talk with stage management/ushers/house managers about how your artistic aesthetics should apply to their interactions with the audience?
- What would be your hypothetical example of a perfect audience response?
- What would constitute a failure? Functionally or artistically? Do you have any examples of times this has happened?
- When considering the audience, do you create the experience to the idea of “one” ideal participant or a spectrum of participants?
- Have you ever been able to get an audience assessment that felt accurate to you about the experience you cultivated for the audience?
- If so, how did you receive this assessment?
- Do you feel you have any ethical obligations to the staff and audience?
- What makes a performance ethical?
- Whose concern do you think maintaining an ethical performance should be?
- How do you train your actors to engage with the audience?
- How do you rehearse audience interactions before opening night?
- While it’s impossible to anticipate everything, have you ever had anything go wrong that you thought “we could’ve prepared for that”?

- Have you instituted or experienced any kind of rehearsal or skill practice that was really beneficial to you or your performers for dealing with unexpected situations?
- Have you done any risk management training?
- Does your work include any sort of orienting at the beginning for audience participants?
- Does your work include a transitory phase back to “reality” at the end for audience participants?
- Do you have artistic considerations for how the advertisements for your productions convey initial information to prospective audiences?
- Do you use any types of trigger warning vocabulary pre-booking or pre-event?
- How does accessibility factor into your production planning?
- Has your company ever done anything you’re particularly proud of in regards to accessibility?

Appendix I – Workshop Activities Running Order

In this workshop, participants are introduced to the idea that participatory and immersive theatre productions often include elements that invoke potential psychological and social risks. While these performances also have a unique array of physical risks, traditional risk assessments often cover these. However, the psychological and social risks often aren't considered in the same methodical fashion.

A. Welcome and Group Introductions (00:00 – 00:15)

During this time, the participants will be welcomed. In an effort to model some of the techniques commonly suggested for setting a clear 'horizon of participation' (White, 2013, p. 55), the schedule for the day will be outlined. Participants will be reminded that if any topics are upsetting to them, they are always free to step away or request that we stop. They will all be reminded of the content warning, that this workshop uses the phrase 'cults' flippantly and in a performative manner, so if any participants are among the very small number of people in the population with an unfortunate encounter with a cult, this may not be the workshop for them.

B. Defining Terms: Immersive and Participatory Theatre, Risk Assessment, Typology of Risk (00:15-00:25)

This time is set aside to make sure all participants understand core definitions such as immersive and participatory theatre. Additionally, this section will touch on risk assessments, what they are, how they are usually done, and how they often aren't considered for psychological and social risks in participatory performances. This section will finish out with a look at the typology of risk in immersive performance to help participants better understand the different risks that audience members engage with during these performance.

C. Individual Activity: Reading *The Two-Metre Rule* (00:25-00:35)

Everyone will individually read the Two-Metre Rule, a review of *The Pact*, an immersive and participatory performance from Edinburgh Fringe in 2017:

<http://totaltheatre.org.uk/the-two-metre-rule/>

D. Small Group Activity: Identifying and Discussing Risks in *The Two Metre Rule* (00:35-00:50)

In small groups of 4-5, participants will discuss what risks they have identified in the review and how they could be mitigated. They will also be asked to discuss what aesthetic impact, if any, would mitigating these risks in the ways they propose have?

E. Full Group Activity: Group Reflection on Activity (00:50-01:05)

Following the small group discussions, the group comes together to share what their group identified as risks and possible steps for mitigating them. During this time, there is potential for reflection on how the psychometric paradigm (Slovic, 2010) can affect people's perceptions of risk.

F. Activity Overview: Build Your Own Cult (01:05-01:10)

In small groups, participants will build their own cults and develop an initiation ceremony. Cults were specifically chosen as a subject matter to increase the element of risk and also because of their performative nature. These are the instructions for the activity:

- ◇ Get into groups of 4-5
- ◇ You have 30 minutes to build your cult/club and develop an initiation ceremony for your new followers.
 - ◇ What is the name of your cult/club?
 - ◇ What does your organization believe?
 - ◇ What is the initiation ceremony for new cult members?
- ◇ You are not limited to the resources in this room.
- ◇ Please be prepared to share this information when we reconvene.

G. Small Group Activity: Build Your Own Cult (01:10-01:40)

In small groups, participants will then build their own cults/clubs, decide on the core beliefs of their cult and prepare their initiation ceremony for sharing with the group. *Please note that we will not be doing any initiation ceremonies, we will only be discussing them.*

H. BREAK (01:40-01:55)

Coffee and Tea

I. Full Group Activity: Share Your Cult and Group Discussion (01:55-02:55)

During this time, each group will present information about their 'cult' and their initiation ceremony. As a group, we will discuss what hesitations we might have in engaging in the initiation ceremony and what risk mitigations might make us willing to participate in the initiation. We will identify where the different risks fall on the typology of risk in immersive theatre, as well as how severe they seem. We will also discuss how cultural factors could influence different perceptions of what is 'safe' and what's not.

J. Relevance of Informed Consent & Introjects (02:55-03:05)

This time is set aside to discuss the role of informed consent in audience management and any potential barriers. How can productions balance the need for informed consent when so many productions exist in a 'space of uncertainty' (Stenros et. al, 2021, p. 2)? And despite a

desire for the freedom that comes with embracing that uncertainty, there is agreement that participants often act badly when they are unaware of the 'horizon of participation' (White, 2013, p. 55). Additionally, to what extent do audience members suffer from strong introjects that result in them trying to be good audience members even when they don't really want to participate in the activity (Heddon et al., 2012)? What, if anything, can we do to dissuade this?

K. Relevance of Cool-Downs and Aftercare (03:05-03:20)

Much has been said about the importance of orienting in immersive and participatory performance (Sedgman, 2022; Brigante and Elger, 2020; Talbot, 2016; Ramos, 2015; Machon, 2013; White, 2013), but little is discussed regarding what happens after the performance. Richard Schechner (1985) identified seven phases of performance for actors. In participatory theatre, the audience are asked to become part of the performance but often only engage in one of those seven stages 'the performance itself' (Schechner, 1985, p. 19). The cool-down immediately after performance, and the aftermath, a period of time after the performance in which it still carries influence, are minimally considered. However, for immersive and participatory performances, consideration of cool-down and aftermath can provide a beneficial space for processing for the audience. This brief period of discussion will revolve around potential ideas for what a cool-down could look like to the participants.

L. What Type of Risk Taker Are You? (03:20-03:30)

This activity uses a simple quiz in the style of the one created by David Ropeik (2011), professor of risk perception, communication and management at Harvard. It uses the cultural theory of risk to determine the risk style of the quiz taker. The questions indicate if the quiz taker is more Individualist or Communitarian and more Hierarchist or Egalitarian. The function of the quiz is to identify these traits and consider how they may indicate a high comfort with risk or a lower one and how that knowledge can influence performance makers and production staff moving forward as they evaluate risks for their audience.

M. Final Group Discussion & Survey (03:30-03:45)

The session closes with our own version of aftercare; this final discussion provides time for participants to share any outstanding concerns and also to discuss how they might be able to apply what they have learned in the workshop in their future productions. A brief post-workshop survey to gauge the efficacy of the workshop will also be done during this time.

REFERENCES

Brigante, R., & Elger, S. (2020, May). *New adventures: The strength of immersive entertainment. 2020 immersive entertainment industry annual report*. Pseudonym Productions. <https://everythingimmersive.com/storage/website->

<files/documents/2020%20Immersive%20Entertainment%20Industry%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

Heddon, D, Iball, H & Zerihan, R. (2012). Come closer: Confessions of intimate spectators in one to one performance. *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22(1), 120-133.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2011.645233>

Machon, J. (2013). *Immersive theatres: Intimacy and immediacy in contemporary performances*. Palgrave Macmillan Hampshire.

Ramos, J. (2015). *(Re-) Constructing the actor-audience relationship in immersive theatre practice*. PhD Thesis University of East London Arts and Digital Industries
<https://doi.org/10.15123/PUB.4987>

Ropeik, D. (2011, March 9). *Take the Cultural Cognition Quiz*. Psychology Today; Sussex Publishers, LLC. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/how-risky-is-it-really/201103/take-the-cultural-cognition-quiz>

Schechner, R. (1985). *Between Theater and Anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhjzs>

Sedgman, K. (2017). Audience experience in an anti-expert age: A survey of theatre audience research. *Theatre Research International*, 42(3), 307-322.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307883317000608>

Stenros, J.S., Bart Hughes, L., Zisels Lopes Machado Ramos, J., and Maravala P.J. (2021, October 30.) *Understanding liveness in immersive theatre, LARP and games*. [Conference presentation]. DiGRA 2020. Online.
http://gala.gre.ac.uk/id/eprint/36606/3/36606_RAMOS_Understanding_Liveness%20.pdf

Talbot, R. (2016). She wants you to kiss her : negotiating risk in the immersive theatre contract. In J. Frieze (Ed.), *Reframing immersive theatre: The politics and pragmatics of participatory performance*. Palgrave Macmillan. http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-36604-7_13

White, G. (2013). *Audience participation in theatre aesthetics of the invitation*. Palgrave Macmillan.

University Research Ethics Committee Application Form

APPLICATION REFERENCE:

for office use only

Checklist

Name of applicant: Melissa Bondar	
Faculty/Directorate: Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences	
Title of research: CREATING SAFER “UNSAFE” SPACES: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RISK, AUDIENCE-PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN IMMERSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES	
These papers must be included as appendices to this application form (please tick):	
• Participant information sheet	X
• Participant consent form	X
These papers may be required (tick if included):	
• Letters (to participants, parents/guardians, participating institutions etc)	
• Questionnaire(s) or indicative questions for interviews	X
• Advertisement /flyer/copy of message inviting participation	
• Annex I - Drugs and medical devices	
• Annex II - Research involving the storage of human tissue	
• Annex III - Ionising radiation	
Where possible, please include appendices in the same document as your application form.	

Has the form been signed? YES / NO

Have any annexes been signed where necessary? YES / NO

SECTION 1: APPLICANT DETAILS

1.1 Surname	Forename	Title
Bondar	Melissa	Ms
Faculty/Directorate		
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences		
University address, including Faculty Department		
University of Greenwich		
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science		
Old Royal Naval College		
Park Row		
London SE10 9LS		
University telephone		E-mail
07903416680		mb1578o@gre.ac.uk
1.2 Are you:		
A student? YES		
A member of staff?		
A member of staff applying as a student?		
Other (please specify)?		
Programme of study (if applicable to this application). NB that student applications should be reviewed by the relevant Faculty Research Ethics Committee and do not normally require approval by UREC: see the Guidance on the Ethical Approval for Research for further details. MPhil / PhD / EdD / Masters by Research / other (please specify)		
If you are a postgraduate research degree student, has your research project been approved by your Faculty Research Degrees Committee? Indicate YES or NO.		
If YES, when?	What is the FRDC reference number?	
This shows as approved by Head of School on 23 Jun 22, and approved by RETI on 11 Aug 22, but there were many delays due to a changing Head of School and PULSE technical issues. At this time we are not sure how to access the FRDC number.		
If NO, why not?		
1.3 What is the primary purpose of the research? (Please indicate YES or NO)		
- Educational qualification YES - Internally funded research		

- Externally funded research (please provide details of funding) - Other (please specify).....
1.4 Project supervision (students only) – give the name of the research supervisor(s) and their contact information Dr. Jorge Lopes Ramos j.ramos@greenwich.ac.uk Dr. Natasha Oxley n.oxley@greenwich.ac.uk Dr. Andrew Knight-Hill a.hill@greenwich.ac.uk
1.5 Details of any co-researchers within the university N/A
1.6 Details of any co-researchers external to the university N/A
1.7 Membership of professional bodies - are you or any co-researcher(s) a member of any professional, or other, bodies which set (i.e. require compliance with) ethical standards of behaviour or practice such as the British Psychological Society, Nursing and Midwifery Council, medical Royal Colleges etc.? If so, please specify. N/A

SECTION 2: PROJECT DETAILS

2.1 What are the principal research questions in this research? Describe briefly, in lay terms, the proposed research project including step by step methodology, and its potential outcomes and benefits (no more than 250 words). This study will interrogate the connections between risk (both physical and psychological), ethics, and duty of care in relation to the audience within immersive, participatory practices. - How do performance makers view their ethical responsibility to safety in relation to the role of the audience-participant when considering their artistic plans for a performance? - How does production management engage with concepts of aesthetic and notions of care while functionally mediating safety factors during the practical application of participation management and risk assessment? - How do notions of care, safety and responsibility impact the audience-participant's experience during and after immersive and participatory practices? Step 1: Pilot the interview questions with volunteer participants who have been performance makers and production staff on any immersive, participatory performances in the past. Step 2: Determine 3-5 appropriate case study companies and get permission from them to collaborate.

Step 3: Interview the Performance Maker(s) Step 4: Interview the Production Staff Step 5: Analyse the interviews for existing issues, best practices and recurrent themes. Step 6: Distribute post show audience questionnaires to determine if the existing system for the case study company is working based on their feedback related to risk, safety, and duty of care. Step 7: Analyse the questionnaires for existing issues, best practices and recurrent themes. In addition to developing a critical framework, the research aims to provide a functional guide/workshop that outlines best working practices for participation management and risk assessment in participatory performance. It has become evident that the workshop has the potential to function as Practice as Research, thus this amendment to the application adds a Step 8: Present the workshop sharing best practices in participation management and risk assessment in participatory performance to LVL 4-7 drama students and industry professionals. Step 9: Collect information from participant responses during workshop via discussions and a brief pre and post-workshop survey to assess the knowledge they entered with and if the workshop has changed their perceptions of risk in participatory theatre. Step 10: Use participant feedback to continue to refine the content of the workshop for the next presentation of the workshop.
2.2 Are any of the following involved? (Please indicate YES or NO) • Intrusive procedure e.g. questionnaire, interview, focus group, diary, video or voice recording (attach a copy of your questionnaire or indicative questions) YES • Invasive procedure e.g. venepuncture, tissue sampling NO • Physical contact NO • Covert observation or covert filming / recording (video or voice) NO • Children / young people (under 18) – please include age of participants NO • Vulnerable people (elderly, physically or mentally ill, people with learning difficulties, in care, bereaved, prisoners, other) NO • Research involving animals (refer to 1.2.2 of the University of Greenwich Research Ethics Policy for more information) NO • Research involving harmful or criminal, or sensitive or extremist subject matters or research protocols (refer to 1.2.3 of the University of Greenwich Research Ethics Policy for more information) NO • Any research proposal where the University's Ethical Research Collaboration Policy indicates that the proposal should be referred for ethical review because it may conflict with the University's values (see 1.2.4 of the University of Greenwich Research Ethics Policy). NO

• Drugs, medicinal products or medical devices (if YES, complete Annex I) NO • Storing human tissue (if YES, complete Annex II) NO • Working with sources of ionising radiation (if YES, complete Annex III) NO
2.3 Has there been a pilot study (refer to 2.2 of the University of Greenwich Research Ethics Policy for a definition) for this research? (If YES, please give details) NO
2.4 What is the proposed start date (i) of the project and (ii) of the fieldwork (if different)? December 1, 2022 What is the proposed end date (i) of the project and (ii) of the fieldwork (if different)? February 1, 2025
2.5 Please describe any contractual arrangements (other than agreements with research funders) which will be required by this project. E.g. where a data sharing agreement will be in place or where a third party will be contracted to carry out aspects of the project. Any agreements should be submitted to GRE for approval (agreements@gre.ac.uk). N/A

SECTION 3: PARTICIPATION AND CONSENT

3.1 What are the selection criteria for the proposed participants in the study? For the pilot study, any performance maker or production staff with immersive, participatory experience who is willing to volunteer their time to be interviewed will be selected. For the case studies, I am looking for productions that are large enough to have a defined performance maker(s) and a defined production staff (some production companies are so small these roles aren't clearly delineated), and willing to participate. Audience-participants for the questionnaire will self-select to take the questionnaire, if they so choose, after attending one of the case study productions. Workshop participants will be comprised of Level 4-7 drama students who consent to participate in the workshop and industry professionals who consent to participate in the workshop.
3.2 How many participants are to take part? Pilot: 5-10 Interviews of Performance Makers 5-10 Interviews of Production Staff Case Studies: 3-5 Interviews of Performance Makers on each production (dependent on size of production team) Interviews of Production Staff on each production (dependent on size of production team)

Audience-participants – questionnaire will be offered to all who attend the performances. Audience-participants participation in questionnaire is voluntary.

My goal is to complete the workshop at least twice during the course of this research but ideally 3-4 times. This will depend on the number of academic institutions and industry connections that are willing to partner with me. I plan to approach the University of Greenwich, the UK and US Stage Management Associations, and the Association of British Theatre Technicians, as well as any additional institutions that fit the selection criteria for the proposed participants in the study.

3.3 How will prospective participants be recruited / contacted and informed about their role in the project? (give details and attach your participant information sheet, advertisement, email etc.)

The pilot interviews will be recruited via outreach via phone and email to select theatre companies creating immersive work that fits the criteria of the research, social media and professional groups like the Stage Managers Association. Upon expressing interest, they will be emailed the participant information sheet and consent sheet to review before scheduling an interview time.

Audience-participants will receive an advertisement as they exit the performance (or if the performance has a bar/post performance space, advertisements will be available there too) directing them to a website for the questionnaire. The landing page will have the participant information sheet and consent form.

For the workshops, I will ask partner institutions to advertise for participants and they will be provided with my participation information sheet.

3.4 Where will the interaction with participants take place? E.g. online, classroom, public facility, laboratory, office, home etc. If interaction will take place online (e.g. by a survey or interviews), please describe the software that will be used¹.

Interviews will happen in person or via Microsoft Teams, depending on location and preference of the interviewee.

Questionnaire will be created using Microsoft Forms.

The workshops will likely be done in classrooms, though some groups like the Association of British Theatre technicians do have an annual conference that hosts seminars and workshops and it may be possible that they allow me to run a session at an event like that. However all workshops would occur in a classroom-like setting. Bathway Theatre at the University of Greenwich is a likely setting for many of the workshops.

3.5 Are any external bodies' premises or resources to be used? Please indicate YES or NO and give details of permission sought.

YES – when partnering with theatre companies, the invitations to the questionnaires will be given out on their premises, after their performances. These are TBD. For workshops, it will depend on the partnering body, if they wish to host the workshop on their premises and have an acceptable space (a classroom style room), it is possible to do the workshop there. These are TBD.

¹ Microsoft Teams and Skype are approved for online interviews/focus groups; Qualtrics, JISC Online Surveys, Mentimeter and Microsoft Forms are approved for online surveys. Other packages may require approval by ILS.

3.6 What is the expected total duration of participation in the study for each participant? E.g. 20 minutes to complete a questionnaire, an hour for an interview, etc. 5-10 minutes to complete a questionnaire 30 minutes for an interview The workshop is estimated to run 2-3 hours.
3.7 Is consent to be obtained using the UREC consent template? (Please indicate YES or NO and attach your consent form). If NO please indicate how consent is to be obtained, and attach a copy of your consent questions. YES
3.8 If children or young people (under 18) are involved, please say how consent will be sought, from both the children / young people and their parents or guardians. Children/young people will not be involved.
3.9 Will any payment, incentive or reimbursement of expenses be made? (Please indicate YES or NO and give details, including amount) NO, unless responses from audience-participants questionnaire are very low, then I will add being entered into a monthly drawing for a £5 coffee card/Tesco/etc. as a draw for doing the survey.

SECTION 4: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 What do you consider are the main ethical issues and risks that may arise in this research? (refer to the Guidance on Ethical Approval for Research). What steps will be taken to address each issue? This project uses human participants to delve into sensitive topics regarding whether or not they felt safe (physically and psychologically) in immersive theatrical experiences after the performance. Many immersive productions delve into personal, emotional details and themes (for example, some performance can trigger grief-related reactions, anxiety) with audience-participants, so in the event a theatre company does not do a sufficient job within their duty of care, being asked to recount the experience could be embarrassing, or even traumatic, for a participant. Therefore, the main risk is provoking an emotional and/or mental distress response in the audience-participants. To address this issue, the survey will include information on resources for mental health hotlines and responders on the information page and a reminder that the participants are free to skip any question in the survey that they do not feel comfortable answering. If participants provide information that indicates there are safety concerns about the production, the production staff will be notified that safety issues have been flagged for their production. The details will be provided in a way that identifies the safety risk while maintaining the anonymity of the participant who reported the issue. In the unlikely case that an extreme safety risk is disclosed, along with reporting the incident to the production, a report will be made to Health and Safety

Executive (HSE) or the appropriate indicated authority from the HSE reporting website: https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/authority.htm. Please note that the ethical considerations for the proposed workshop are the same as the previously existing considerations.
4.2 Please explain whether / how participants will be able to withdraw from the project, the deadline for withdrawal and how participants will be informed of their right to withdraw. Audience-participants will not be able to withdraw from the project after they submit the survey. This will be stated on the information sheet. They can stop the survey at any time without submitting and their response will not be recorded. Participant Information Sheets will be handed to the interviewees as soon as they sit down. Review of the Participant Information Sheet will be the first thing addressed. If being interviewed digitally, the interviewee will receive a copy of the Participant Information Sheet in advance with the invitation to the interview. The Participant Information Sheet will appear on the landing page of the survey for those completing the survey. When I considered a mechanism for withdrawal from the anonymous audience surveys, using the tools available from the school, I could ask them for contact information and create a code system, removing their identifying features from the main dataset. To do this, I still have to ask them for an email address or some identifying feature in the survey. I have concerns this will reduce the participants' confidence that their survey is truly anonymous. I do plan to have an additional note before the participant hits submit on the final question noting that this is their last chance to exit the survey and withdraw consent. If this reasoning is not acceptable, I can code the responses, but I do have concerns that any moves to minimize full anonymity in this survey could result in the participants sharing less. Interviewees can withdraw from the project until October 1, 2024 and this will be included on their information sheet and reiterated at the time of interview. They need to contact me and declare their intent to withdraw. My contact information will also be on the information sheet. Workshop participants can choose to leave at any point during the workshop. They can also request that any information gathered from them during the workshop be withdrawn from the project until October 1, 2024. This will be included on their information sheet and reiterated during the workshop. They need to contact me with their intent to withdraw. My contact information is also on the information sheet.
4.3 Please describe any health and safety risk assessments which will be carried out in relation to the project (see the University's guidance on health and safety risk assessments). NB that approval of risk assessments should be sought from your Faculty rather than UREC (see the Code of Practice on Risk Assessments).

SECTION 5: DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Will personal data, as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, be collected during the research (refer to the Guidance on Ethical Approval for Research)? Indicate YES or NO. YES
5.2 If the answer to 5.1 is YES, please describe what steps you will take to ensure compliance with data protection legislation (refer to the Guidance on Ethical Approval for Research). E.g. describe how personal will be stored securely and how long personal data will be retained. Questionnaire responses will be stored in a password protected Excel sheet in a password protected OneDrive folder. Interview recordings will be stored in a password protected OneDrive folder. Digital copies of consent forms will be stored in a password protected OneDrive file. Physical copies of consent forms (if needed) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet drawer.
5.3 If personal data will be anonymised, please describe how that will be done. Audience-participant surveys will be anonymized upon receipt.
5.4 If your project involves transferring or sharing personal data outside the European Economic Area, please provide further details here including what safeguards will be put in place to ensure compliance with data protection legislation. N/A

SECTION 6: FINANCIAL AND OTHER INTERESTS

6.1 Indicate by "YES" or by ticking one of the statements below: - I declare there is no financial or other direct interest to me or my Faculty or Directorate arising from this study. YES - I declare there is a financial or other direct interest to me or my Faculty or Directorate arising from this study (supply details)

Signatures

I undertake to carry out research in accordance with the University's Research Ethics Policy and subject to any conditions imposed by UREC. I will not commence my project until approval by UREC is confirmed in writing. I acknowledge that I am responsible for ensuring that any necessary risk assessments are put in place and approved by my Faculty. In the case of a postgraduate research degree, I confirm that approval has been given by the Faculty Research Degrees Committee.	
Signature of applicant Melissa Bondar Print name Melissa Bondar	Date September 26, 2022
I have discussed the project with the applicant, I confirm that all participants are suitably qualified to undertake this research and I approve it.	

Signature of supervisor (<u>to be signed if applicant is a student</u>) Date 26 SEP 2022 Print name JORGE LOPES RAMOS	
I have reviewed the project with the applicant, or applicant's supervisor, and I confirm that all participants are suitably qualified to undertake this research and I approve it.	
Signature of UREC representative Print name	Date
PLEASE INSERT ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES OR SCAN THE FINAL SIGNED FORM. SIGNED FORMS AND APPENDICES SHOULD BE SENT BY EMAIL TO RESEARCHETHICS@GRE.AC.UK BEFORE THE UREC APPLICATION DEADLINE. YOU DO NOT NEED TO SUBMIT THE FORM IN HARD COPY.	



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

CREATING SAFER “UNSAFE” SPACES: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RISK, AUDIENCE-PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN IMMERSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES

I am a PhD researcher at the University of Greenwich where I am studying risk and safety in immersive and participatory theatre.

This workshop involves discussing risk in participatory performance, as well as creating a small piece of participatory work and risk assessing it during the workshop. During this workshop, we will discuss the various physical, psychological and social risks that can occur in participatory performances, how to identify them, and how to mitigate them using traditional risk assessment guidelines augmented by care. There will also be a brief questionnaire at the beginning and end of the workshop. You can skip any questions you don't want to answer.

This workshop should run between three and four hours.

Please note that your contributions to the workshop may be recorded. You can decide to leave at any time.

You will also be asked to create a random sentence of five or more words at the end of your questionnaire. You can withdraw your consent to be included in this research until January 1, 2025 by emailing m.l.bondar@greenwich.ac.uk and sharing that random sentence. Your questionnaires will then be removed from the responses, and I will not use any information you provided during the workshops.

Your responses will be used to help judge the functionality of the existing risk and safety procedures of the theatre company and determine how they might be improved.

It is not uncommon for some immersive and participatory theatre performances to delve into sensitive topic areas. If you find that today's performance caused you any emotional distress or recounting those moments causes emotional distress, please find someone to talk with. At the bottom of this information sheet are several mental health resources and hotlines you can use.

For further information, problems, or complaints, the principal researcher, Melissa Bondar, can be reached via these contact details:
m.l.bondar@greenwich.ac.uk

If you would be more comfortable speaking to someone else, you may contact her Supervisor, Dr. Jorge Lopes Ramos at j.ramos@greenwich.ac.uk.

Available Mental Health Services:

Call 116 123 to talk to Samaritans, or email jo@samaritans.org

Text SHOUT to 85258 to contact the Shout Crisis Text Line

[Mind](#) is also a registered charity with advice if you feel you need mental health help now.



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

CREATING SAFER “UNSAFE” SPACES: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RISK, AUDIENCE-PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN IMMERSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES

I am a PhD researcher at the University of Greenwich where I am studying risk and safety in immersive and participatory theatre.

This interview will ask you several questions related to that topic of risk and safety in immersive theatre.

In person interviews will be recorded using an audio recording device and I will also take written notes. Any interviews conducted digitally will be recorded using MS Teams and I will also take written notes. Audio and video recordings will be stored in a password protected OneDrive folder.

It should take approximately 30 minutes to complete, though most answers are open-ended and you are welcome to answer in as much or as little detail as you'd like.

You can also skip any questions you don't want to answer.

You can decide to stop answering the questions at any time. If you wish to withdraw any or all of your interview responses from this project, you can either notify me during the interview or any time after the interview until **October 1, 2024**. You can email me at the address below to do so.

Your responses will be used to help determine the current thinking patterns and existing practices around risk in immersive performance. Please note that you are agreeing to be identified in this research by participating in these interviews, though if you reveal any information you do not wish for me to use, during the interview or after, until October 1, 2024, you can contact me via the email below to withdraw partial or full consent to be included in this research project.

It is not uncommon for topics related to risk and safety to delve into sensitive topic areas. If you find that today's interview caused you any emotional distress or recounting those moments at a later date causes emotional distress, please find someone to talk with. At the bottom of this information sheet are several mental health resources and hotlines you can use.

For further information, problems, or complaints, the principal researcher, Melissa Bondar, can be reached via these contact details:
m.l.bondar@greenwich.ac.uk

If you would be more comfortable speaking to someone else, you may contact her Supervisor, Dr. Jorge Lopes Ramos at j.ramos@greenwich.ac.uk.

Available Mental Health Services:

Call 116 123 to talk to Samaritans, or email jo@samaritans.org

Text SHOUT to 85258 to contact the Shout Crisis Text Line

[Mind](#) is also a registered charity with advice if you feel you need mental health help now.

September 2022



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

CREATING SAFER “UNSAFE” SPACES: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RISK, AUDIENCE-PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN IMMERSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES

I am a PhD researcher at the University of Greenwich where I am studying risk and safety in immersive and participatory theatre.

This questionnaire will ask you several questions related to that topic about the performance you just saw.

It should take 5-10 minutes to complete, though a few answers are open-ended and you are welcome to answer in as much or as little detail as you'd like.

You can also skip any questions you don't want to answer.

You can decide to stop answering the questions at any time, and as long as you have not hit the final submit button, your data will not be recorded. Once you do hit the final submit button, your submitted information will be recorded anonymously and stored in a password protected file. You will be asked to create a random sentence of five or more words at the end of your survey. You can withdraw your consent for your survey to be included in this research until October 1, 2024 by emailing m.l.bondar@greenwich.ac.uk and sharing that random sentence. Your survey will then be removed from the responses.

Your responses will be used to help judge the functionality of the existing risk and safety procedures of the theatre company.

Select portions of the questionnaire may also be shared with the theatre company in an attempt to help them improve their risk and safety practices (or commend them on a job well done). No identifiable information will be shared with partners.

It is not uncommon for some immersive and participatory theatre performances to delve into sensitive topic areas. If you find that today's performance caused you any emotional distress or recounting those moments causes emotional distress, please find someone to talk with. At the bottom of this information sheet are several mental health resources and hotlines you can use.

For further information, problems, or complaints, the principal researcher, Melissa Bondar, can be reached via these contact details:
m.l.bondar@greenwich.ac.uk

If you would be more comfortable speaking to someone else, you may contact her Supervisor, Dr. Jorge Lopes Ramos at j.ramos@greenwich.ac.uk.

Available Mental Health Services:

Call 116 123 to talk to Samaritans, or email jo@samaritans.org

Text SHOUT to 85258 to contact the Shout Crisis Text Line

[Mind](#) is also a registered charity with advice if you feel you need mental health help now.

Appendix K – Workshop Cult Example Sheets

Pilot Study – The Tattoo Club **588**
Pilot Study – Shifter Cult **589**
Workshop #1 – Wolf Cult **590**
Workshop #1 – Balloon Cult **591**
Workshop #2 – Oh Zebra Freckles **592**
Workshop #2 – The Fun Cult **596**

Pilot Study

(Cult Name)

The Tattoo Club

- What does your organization believe?

Every human need to get a tattoo that represents an important event or object from their lives. So that it stays w/ them forever and their connection always stays away their bodies.

- What is the initiation ceremony for new members?

To enter the cult each member must get a new tattoo from the previous participant. With each member the rank of the tattoo artist rises to seniority. The leader must have the biggest tattoos.

Pilot Study

Logo

Shifter Cult



(Full Name)

- What does your organization believe?
We all believe the ability that time can be manipulated
- What is the initiation ceremony for new members?
Driving a car that a bomb had put in, which would explode if the speed goes down 60/km per hour - for an hour in Istanbul

Workshop #1 - Wolf Cult

3:00 PM

Pack of Lone Wolves is a dogmatic group of co-dependent independents. Their motto is that "You can only be in true connection with you know your self." They believe in self resilience, individualistic and Alpha-energy.

3:11 PM Edited

Initiation

1. Asked by a member if you're a leader or a follower: answer depends on being invited to the ceremony
2. Your quest starts on the next full moon where you are blindfolded and dropped in the wilderness with no resources
3. On this journey you cannot ask for help from anyone or else you are not Alpha
4. They are told they will be monitored by other Lone Wolves the whole time
5. Must get back to the cult centre for the next full moon
6. You must state you are the Alpha to the cult and have brought your "prey/fave meal" which you will eat the prime cuts before offering to the rest of the cult
7. Howl at the rest of the group and moon alone

2:54 PM

Workshop 1 - Balloon Cult

Balloons capture air and therefore the innate energy of people; meaning they can represent you as an individual on a plane you can't even imagine - "Find your true colour".

image



Stage 1: Choose colour, uniform of that colour/referred to as that colour

Stage 2: Try create static with it and last 15s, if successful, get to join as full of energy. Successful, colour matches you, if unsuccessful choose another colour and retry

Stage 3: Keep-up the balloon game for 30s if unsuccessful 2nd time. If you manage to succeed, congratulations it's the right colour for you. If unsuccessful...

Stage 4: This means you're an energy remover, rather than bringer – you still join the chosen colour group as a useful balancing perspective to the group

Workshop 2 - Oh Zebra Freckles

Oh Zebra Freckles.

Belief is meaningless.
Time and space are social constructs.
Social constructs are beliefs.

I

Outline for a Cult of the Absurd: The Chronovores

This outline draws upon the concepts of absurdity and social constructs found in the sources, as well as the ideas from our conversation about absurd Mad Libs and the initiation ceremony.

Name: The Chronovores

This name plays on the belief that time is a social construct and therefore can be consumed or manipulated. The name evokes a sense of power and defiance against the constraints of linear time.

Core Beliefs:

- **Belief is Meaningless [provided by the user]:** All beliefs are arbitrary and ultimately hold no inherent value. This aligns with the existentialist idea of the "absurd" — the inherent meaninglessness of the universe. The cult rejects any form of dogma or absolute truth.

- **Time and Space are Social Constructs [provided by the user]:** The cult views time and space as fabrications of human perception, not objective realities. This belief is supported by the idea from the sources that "absurdity" often arises from the juxtaposition of the human tendency to seek meaning and the inability to find it. Since meaning is a human construct, the systems we use to perceive the world, like time and space, could also be subjective.

- **Social Constructs are Beliefs [provided by the user]:** The cult recognises that all social structures, hierarchies, and norms are built upon shared beliefs. Therefore, they are also meaningless and subject to manipulation. This could be connected to the source¹ mentioning common knowledge. While this source discusses how common knowledge can be established, it also highlights how our understanding of the world can be shaped by shared beliefs, even if those beliefs are arbitrary.

Initiation Ceremony: The Devouring of Time:

Stage 1: The Unmooring:

- Location: A location that disrupts conventional perceptions of time and space. Examples:

- A completely dark room with distorted audio cues.
- A mirrored maze with shifting pathways.
- A natural environment known for its temporal anomalies (e.g., a place where compasses malfunction).

Objective: To disorient the initiates and challenge their preconceived notions of time and space.

Stage 2: The Confrontation of Meaninglessness:

Objective: To disorient the initiates and challenge their preconceived notions of time and space.

● **Stage 2: The Confrontation of Meaninglessness:**

Activity: The initiates are presented with a series of scenarios that demonstrate the absurdity and meaninglessness of everyday life. These scenarios could draw inspiration from:

- The cyclical plots and routines found in the Theatre of the Absurd (e.g., repeatedly performing mundane tasks with no apparent purpose, as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*).²³

- Nonsensical dialogue and clichés that highlight the breakdown of communication. (e.g., conversations filled with empty platitudes and non-sequiturs, inspired by Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*).⁴⁵

- Objective: To force the initiates to confront the "absurd" and question their own search for meaning.

● **Stage 3: The Deconstruction of Self:**

Activity: The initiates are guided through exercises that challenge their sense of identity and break down social constructs. This could involve:

- Role-playing exercises where initiates embody absurd characters or situations.
- Debates that deconstruct commonly held beliefs and social norms.

- Activities that force the initiates to confront their own biases and assumptions, aligning with the concept of "bad faith" in existentialist philosophy.⁶

- Objective: To liberate the initiates from the constraints of socially constructed identities and beliefs.

● **Stage 4: The Consumption of Time:**

Activity: The initiates participate in a symbolic ritual that represents the "devouring" of time. This could take many forms, but should emphasize the rejection of linear time. Examples:

- A ritualistic destruction of clocks or calendars.
- A choreographed performance that visually represents the distortion or manipulation of time, similar to the "Theatre of Cruelty," which aimed to break free from traditional theatrical conventions.⁷
-

- A guided meditation that leads the initiates to experience a state of timelessness.
 - Objective: To symbolically break free from the constraints of time and embrace the eternal present.
 - **Stage 5: Rebirth into Absurdity:**
 - Activity: The initiates emerge from the ceremony transformed, having embraced the meaningless nature of existence and the fluidity of time and space. They are given new, nonsensical names and welcomed into the community of the Chronovores. Their new identity within the group could be considered a form of shared belief or "common knowledge" that binds them together, as discussed in source¹.
 - Objective: To mark the completion of the initiation process and the initiates' transformation into "Chronovores." Continued Engagement:
 - The Chronovores engage in activities that continuously challenge social constructs and embrace the absurd.
 - They might infiltrate various social institutions and disrupt them with nonsensical actions or language.
 - They could stage public performances that parody or subvert conventional norms and beliefs.
- By embracing the meaningless nature of existence and the fluidity of time and space, The Chronovores seek to live authentically in a world devoid of inherent meaning, mirroring the concepts of freedom and authenticity within existentialist thought.⁸⁹
- Note:** This outline provides a framework, and the specific details of the cult's beliefs, initiation, and activities can be further developed and adapted to create a truly immersive and unforgettable experience.

THE FUN CULT

- What does your organization believe? Maturity is a disconnection from true humanity. As such, all grown up behaviours are evil.
- What is the initiation ceremony for your new cult members?

Take all your suits/ties/office attire to the office and burn them.

Play Duck, Duck, Goose in a goose costume with other recruits in the city centre. Red clown noses must also be worn at all times. These can be purchased from the cult.

What is your background?

Appendix L - Workshop 1 Mentimeter Responses

Director
2

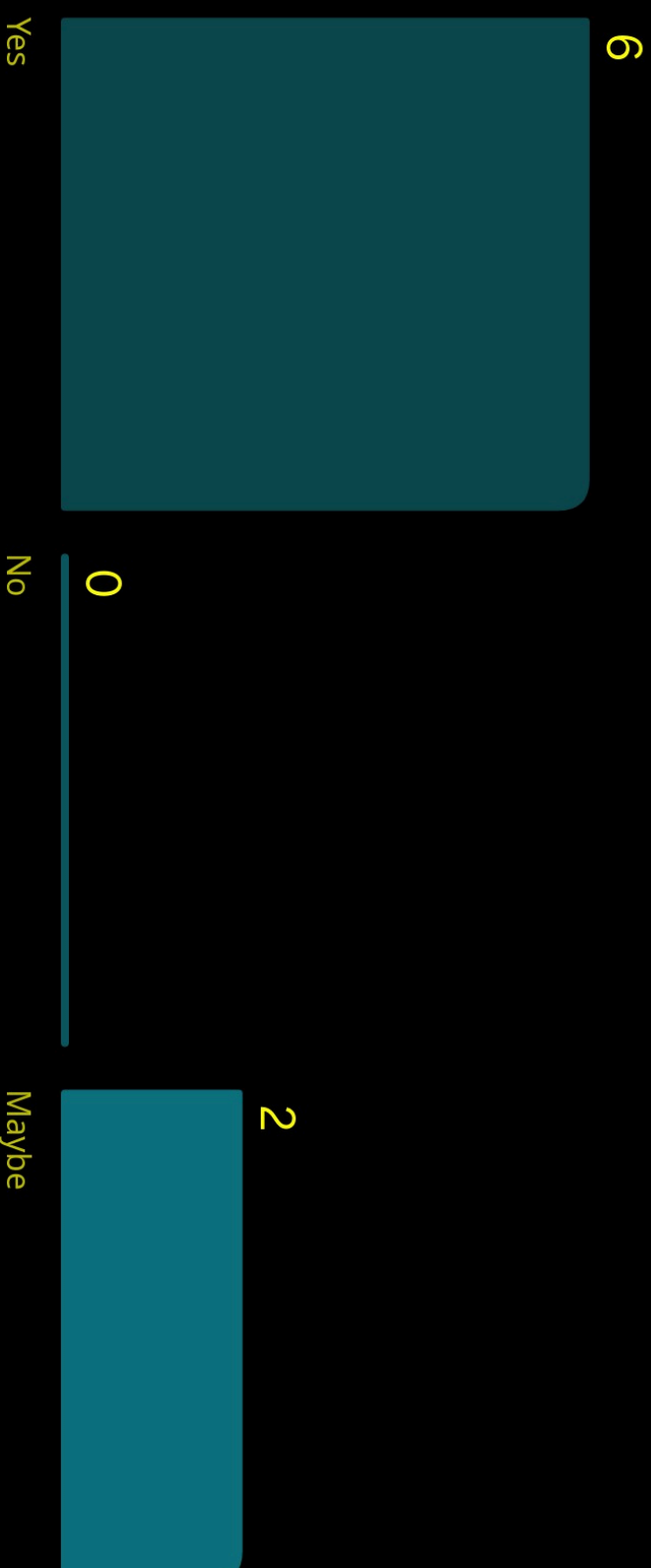
Performer
3

Designer
1

Production Staff (SM/FoH/TD/PM)
9

Academic/Student
3

Do you know what immersive theatre is?



What is immersive theatre?

23 responses

sensory
involvement
experience
permeating
surrounding
engaging
encompassing
engagement
participatory
involved
multi-sensory
participation
world-building
audience involvement
multit-sensory
unpredictable
interactive
experiential
risky

What is risky about immersive theatre?

Audiences don't have a script:

The audience

Th unknown reactions or participation that may be received

audience reaction - unknown element to plan for

How the audience will behave, including how they move through the space, and how they will be affected by it.

Audience engagement can be risky. Location risks.

They often involve moving or interacting with a space and those inhabiting it, which may lead to unexpected responses that weren't predicted

lacking communication of the boundaries

What risk were you most concerned about in The Two-Metre Rule?

The lack of boundaries

The alcohol, and all its associated risks, physical, psychological and social!

The influence of alcohol and the role/non-role of the mystery woman.

Bought alcohol without asking

Lack of informed consent

The physical and psychological risks involved

The Bar locations and the alcohol

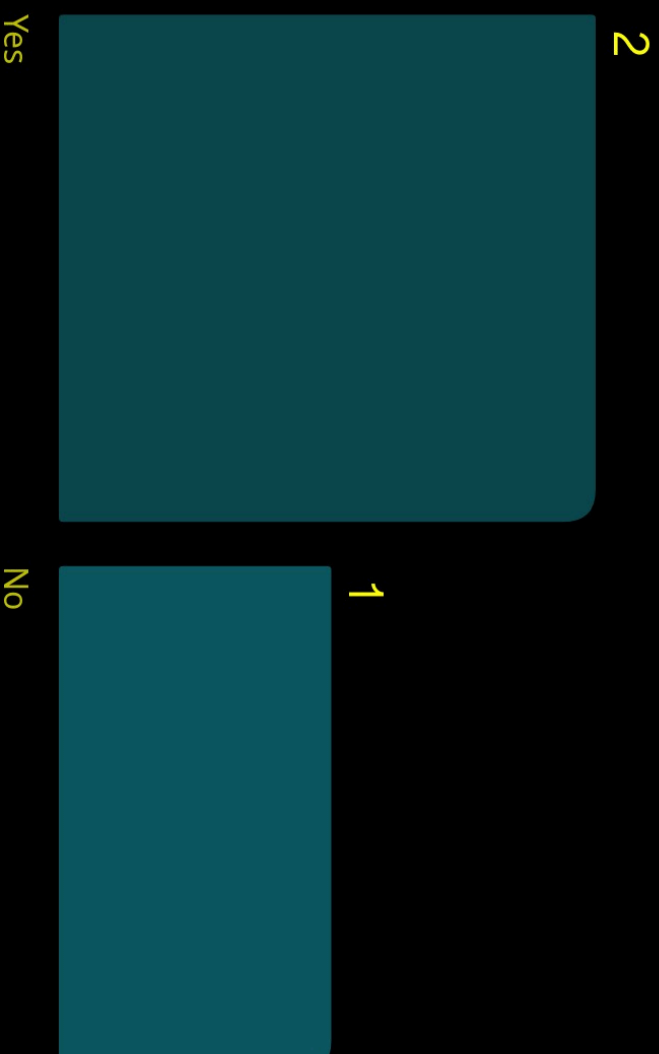
recording of conversation whilst drunk and asking intimate questions

What risk were you most concerned about in The Two-Metre Rule?

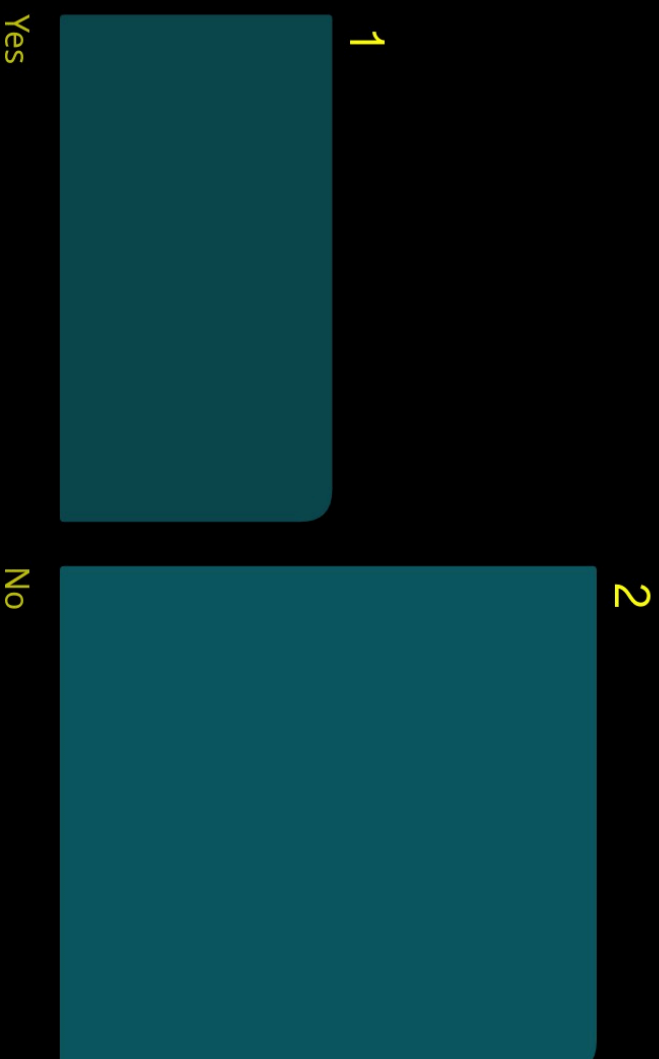
No actual venue

GROUP 1

Would you join this cult?



Would you join this cult?



What information do you want from shows before consenting to them?

The extent of participation

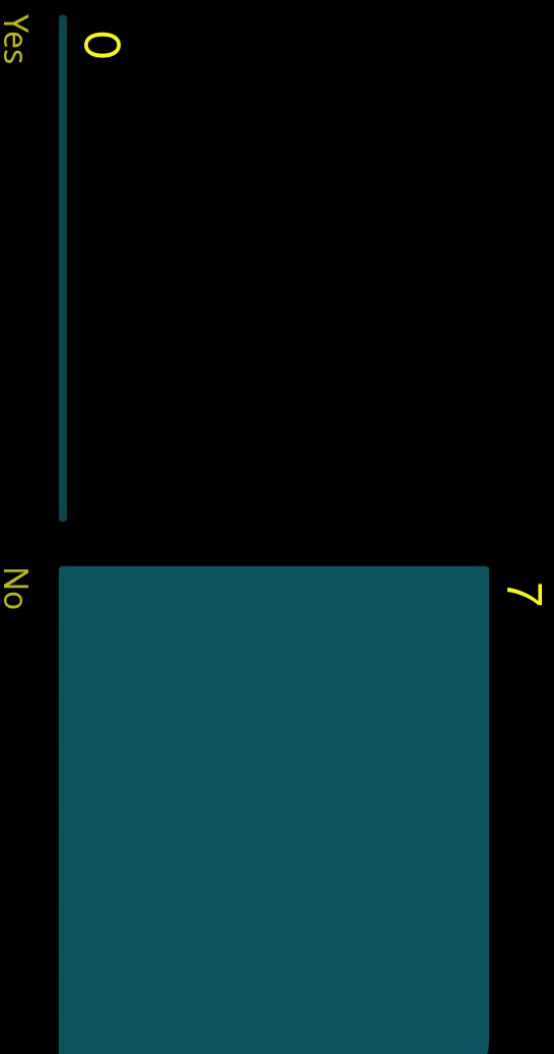
Whether I will be singled out or asked to do things in front of others The length of the show

How much participation will be required

Content information/warnings. Audience expectation eg physical participation or speculation. Location, running time, are seats available

Physical and psychological effects/risks involved.Out process

Is the act of purchasing a ticket enough consent?



How can information about risky elements of the show be shared?

Via website, ticket/booking pages, dedicated social media posts, display signs at the entrance

advisory at point of booking/Pre-show email

On website, prior to purchasing a ticket, in the foyer before the event, in an announcement before the event, in all marketing materials

consent forms (If they want to participate, despite knowing the risky elements, they are partially responsible for wanting to participate)

Brochure/Website at POS/Pre-show communication/Media release / reviews

Information links in show descriptions and web pages

Information on flyers/websites before purchasing tickets. Then after purchase emails, notices in the venue and FoH people informing audience members

What might the moments after your initiation ritual look like for the initiates?

Don't chuck them out
straight away - allow for a
gentle return to normality

I like the idea of a ritualised
end to the experience And
yes bars post show are
good decompression
outlets

Support for them returning
to their normality, mental
health support and check
ins

Not being rushed out of a
space - given time and
open discussion with
staff/others

In addition to directly post... I
think there should be post
event check in, to share
response after its well
internalized/processed
perhaps in survey

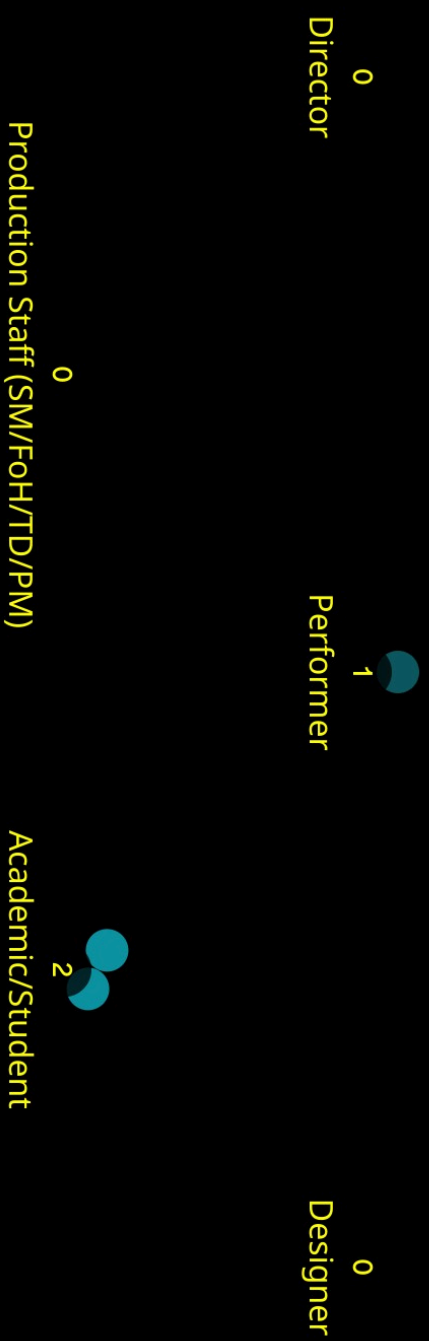
Appendix M - Workshop 1 Survey Responses

Id		Start time	Completion time	Email	Name	What kind of risks do you think are involved in immersive theatre?	What are psychological risks in immersive theatre?	What are social risks in immersive theatre?
1		9/30/2024 16:30	9/30/2024 16:35	anonymous		physical, psychological, social	fear, guilt, concern, emotion, stress	belonging or not belonging, feeling embarrassment, post event regret
2		9/30/2024 16:32	9/30/2024 16:35	anonymous		Physical, psychological	Personal safety, health (intake of food and drinks, such as allergies, lack of information)	Faint boundary of how immersive and intimate the experience can be.
3		9/30/2024 16:30	9/30/2024 16:36	anonymous		Physical, psychological and social	• Imprinting (boundaries aren't clear and audience get overly close, they are not aware of the space; they must know they're entering a fictional world) • Emotional (Guilt, fear stress, grief) – ensure things are consented, horror experiences can tell you something about to happen and you'll still be scared. • • Regretful actions (sharing private info, engaging unwanted actions)	• Embarrassment, • • Rejection
4		9/30/2024 16:30	9/30/2024 16:37	anonymous		Physical, psychological and social risks	Emotional eg guilt, fear, stress, grief, regret	Embarrassment, rejection
5		9/30/2024 16:30	9/30/2024 16:38	anonymous		Physical, psychological and social	emotional, imprinting, actions	embarrassment
6		9/30/2024 16:30	9/30/2024 16:38	anonymous		Physical, Psychological and Social	Imprinting, Emotional, Regretful Actions	Embarrassment and rejection
7		9/30/2024 16:31	9/30/2024 16:41	anonymous		All of them, for everyone. Physical, emotional, relational, transactional. Which is part of what makes it fun and important to do.	possible damage to performer and patron. Bring up old wounds	embarrassment, poor relationship outcomes
8		9/30/2024 16:33	9/30/2024 16:44	anonymous		Physical, social, cultural, emotional, psychological, legal	Causing stress, anxiety, trauma, triggering, damaging mental health,	audience discomfort, isolation, peer pressure, uneven participation

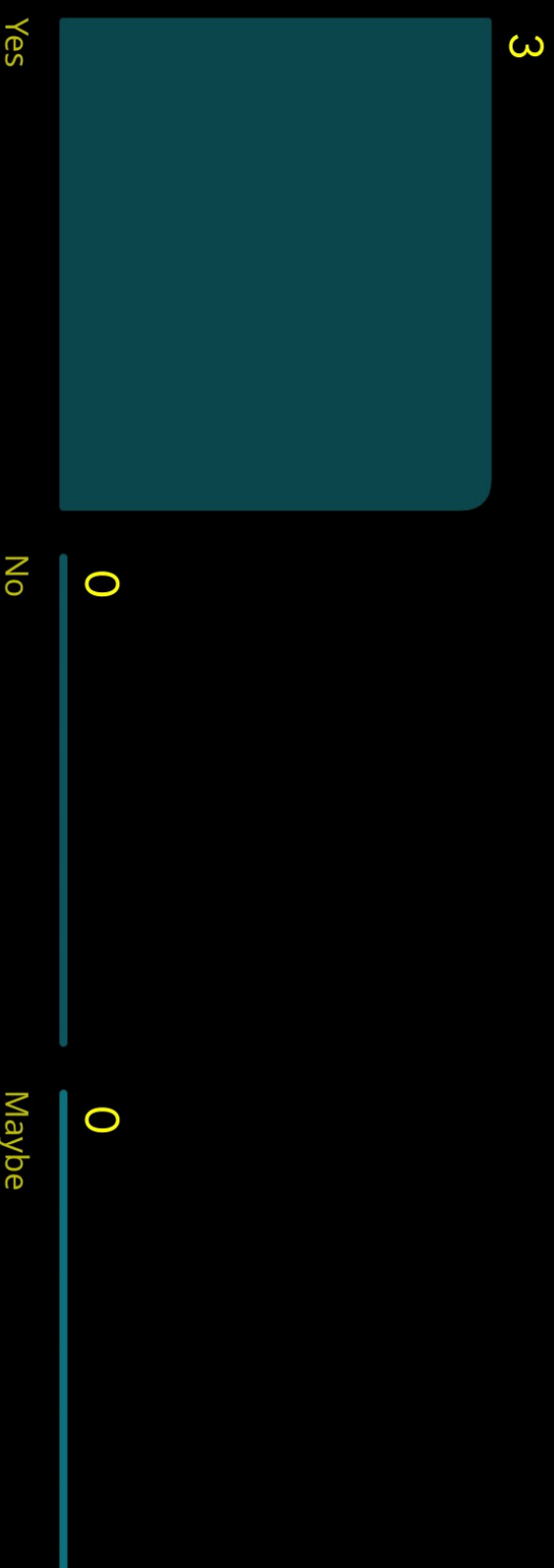
Id	What do you think constitutes informed consent?	What could caring for the audience look like?	What tools can we use to provide care for audiences?	What concerns do you have about using these tools?	Do you feel you need further training in any of these concepts to utilize these tools in the future?
1	clear, fully explained, able to opt out or active opting in	put their experience before your artistic ideals	communication, back up during the event, breakout spaces, surveys	audiences don't read pre show commit! Group dynamics and alcohol hampers consent	Maybe
2	Direct questions that can be answered with yes and no.	Post show care- debrief session, care package	Group discussion, 1-1 discussions, privacy/ (rooms for participants)	How people would react (especially post show care, how intimate after the show can you truly be).	Yes
3	Being able to volunteer your consent and remove it when needed.	Providing content warning and expectations on the show, providing a location to leave the show before the event, in all marketing materials. As well as having an aftercare plan, including spaces both quiet and social, leaflets for support systems and a way they can contact the company.	Sharing information and making it accessible pointing to support spaces, making it easy to leave the show before the event, and during the show. Having trained staff available to guide and reach out if someone is distressed.	People are always unpredictable and there must be ways for staff to also report discomfort and get assistance	No
4	Clear information on what one expects from the audience	Space/time after the show to decompress, making it easy to leave the show before the event, setting clear boundaries, reducing and considering risks as much as possible	Ritualised closings, resource sharing for continued engagement/care afterwards, trained staff	Risk to stiff, outsourcing care means you don't necessarily witness it happening	Maybe
5	consent that is voluntary and informed - all risks etc explained in advance of experience	Providing aftercare, providing information ahead of the event, good management and training of staff, appropriate staff numbers and alternative spaces	trained staff, links to resources for further info, space	Not always practicable (cost, space etc)	Yes
6	Providing all available information regarding the risks: opt-in, easy to withdraw, voluntary and informed	Clear information about the situation about the extent of participation, content warnings, performance, ritualised closings, decompression spaces, aftercare	Good communication, considering the journey from the audience perspective, managing risks to them, aftercare and support	Trying to get producers to buy in!!	Maybe
7	The necessary information to make decision in consideration of lowest common denominator patron.	relationship building, clear and empathetic information, guided post event followup	Direct communication, social media, follow up response, possible performance	My biggest issue with any immersive experience is the problem of common sense, it's a myth. There may have been a time when it existed, but that is long in past, remembered in stories, written and oral tradition	Maybe
8	Knowing what you are signing up for, what you may be exposed to what may be required of you and what the risks may be.	Ensuring that all were safe, able to participate equally, that they said no harm and were not exposed to anything that they were not supported. That they know what sort of thing they will be exposed to, and that they give consent. They can leave and can be supported if affected. After care is important.	Providing safe spaces and decompression. Exit strategies and trigger warnings. Support before, during and after. Consent forms. Debriefing sessions.	Lack of experience with some of them.	Yes

Id	What do you feel you need further training on to utilise these tools in the future?	Is there any feedback you'd like to share on the quality of the workshop? What was most useful to you? What was least useful?	To withdraw your consent for this survey to be used in this research, please enter a random sentence (a full sentence of at least five words) and make note of it. You can reach out via email to ml.bo...
1	mental health first aid	I felt slightly thrown in the deep end when it came to creating the cult - I could have used a bit more guidance	The dog doesn't come upstairs
2	Post show care in particular, how can you care and assist a show when necessary.	It was really informative, I liked the case studies used and the break out rooms. The creative element of making your own cult ten discussing risk implications was great to know how your own work can be viewed by others.	
3			
4	How to appropriately train staff for aftercare	All useful	
5	Training on effective discomfort care	Very helpful - lots of talking points. The breakdown of risk into different categories not normal part of a standard risk assessment was extremely useful. Would be helpful as an online resource - maybe even an interactive RA template for use?	Balloons can still be fun
6	I think I probably need to do some immersive events to gain experience on how best to use those tools (so that it isn't a blunt instrument)	It was really useful, and good fun! I very much enjoyed making my cult, particularly because we could make it with complete disregard for care and then work out ways to build it in later - highlighting how hard that is to do!	
7		It would be great to stick with single format, I felt like I was jumping around screens/systems too much	
8	I think there are more tools available that would be good to discuss.	I loved it! It was so thought provoking and helpful to support safe practices in immersive theatre. Thank you so much.	

What is your background?



Do you know what immersive theatre is?



Immersive Theatre

What is immersive theatre?

8 responses

co-created experience
not seated in one spot

actively experience
embodied art participatory
in real time

moving through a space
participatory performance

What is risky about immersive theatre?

Exposure to external factors that could be benefit or harm to the experience for anyone involved - physical, social, emotional, environmental.

The freedom and choice, (illusory or not) Audience responses can create unknown and therefore unplanned for scenarios which may have inherent danger and risk to all participants

newer form, norms not as clear. crafting a powerful experience without doing harm. exploring in an experiential, engaging(?) way while audience agency & throughout

What risk were you most concerned about in The Two-Metre Rule?

Physical safety initially,
then psychological
safety

Lack of boundaries for
beginning and end of
performance - during the first
encounter the audience was
already engaged & no clear
end. Susceptible to
psychological harms.

it feels like there should be
a clearer process of
informed consent to
suspend disbelief & opt
into these experiences

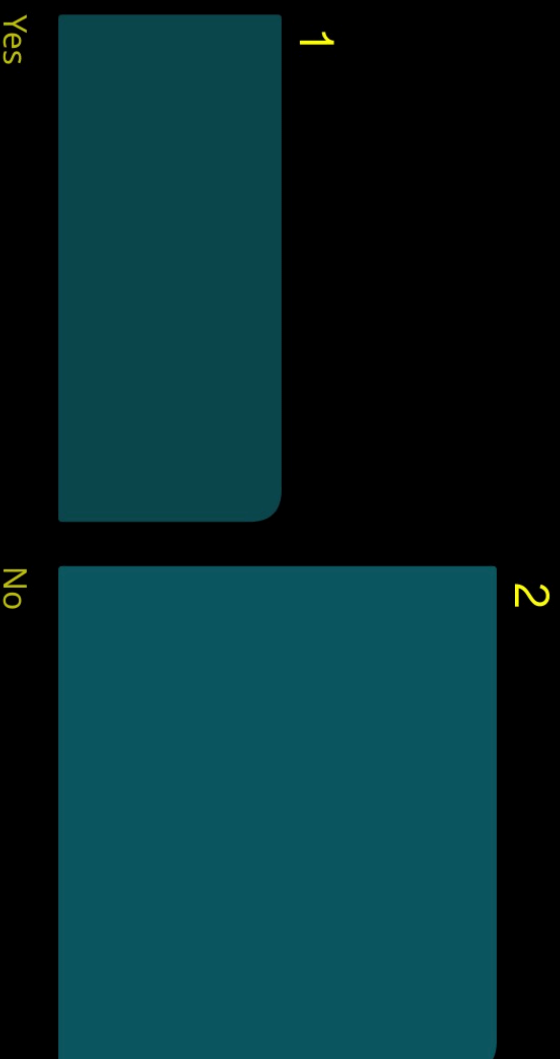
Group 1

Would you join this cult?



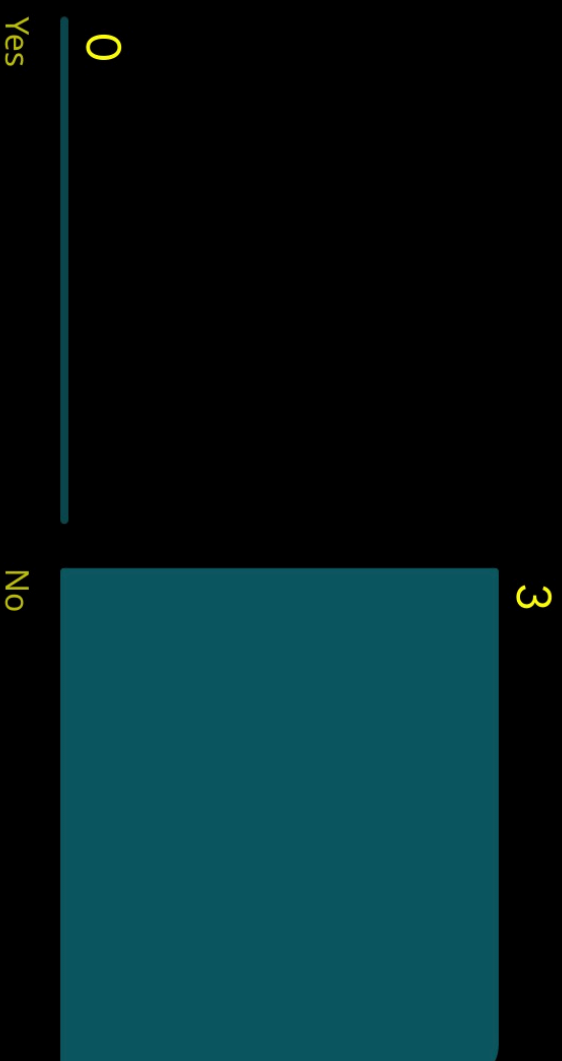
Group 2

Would you join this cult?



Consent

Is the act of purchasing a ticket enough consent?



What information do you want from shows before consenting to them?

Themes and Trigger warnings

Whether I will be physically touched, how. What level of engagement is required and how to opt out. Financial costs. Heightened risks beyond "reasonable".

how to leave at any point in the experience, ways to either engage or stay away from performers that they will be able to understand & respect within the world of the piece

Consent

How can information about risky elements of the show be shared?

Tickets info, entrance signs, text message notifications with details & consent, host/guide, warning labels.

At point of purchase. On entrance to event. Online. At beginning of performance. In written, audio and visual formats.

in writing in advance, a live induction process before the experience begins

Aftercare

What might the moments after your initiation ritual look like for the initiates?

Check ins regularly. Exit points discrete and obvious. Activities that help to engender a sense of psychological safety - reassurance, recognition, positive affirmations, choices offered

Support area with tools for processing / rejoining - music, gentle environment, meditation space. Closing session activities. Follow up test/email active offer. Let them back in room without us.

check-in, make sure people can regulate after intense physical activity, check for any sensory issues / overwhelm.

Appendix O - Workshop 2 Survey Responses

Id		Start time	Completion time	Email	Name	What kind of risks do you think are involved in Immersive theatre?	What are psychological risks in Immersive theatre?	What are social risks in Immersive theatre?
9		11/25/2024 16:02	11/25/2024 16:08	anonymous		Physical, social, emotional, financial. Can be harmful to participants and audience as well as bystanders and staff.	Distress, trauma, sad ??	Guilt, embarrassments , regret
10		11/25/2024 16:02	11/25/2024 16:10	anonymous		Physical, psychological, emotional, social,	Distress, self blame, grief, anxiety, panic, regret	Shame, stigma,
11		11/25/2024 20:25	11/25/2024 21:36	anonymous		A range of physical, psychological and social risks as a newer form where the norms of how audiences should behave and their ideas of what they should expect are less clear, while elements of surprise and suspense are emphasized both within and around such performances.	audience members conflating the world of the show with real life, including developing parasocial relationships with performers, feeling distraught etc.	the experience might give rise to more antisocial/ unusual behavior than other theater/spaces, with negative consequences for participants who might be acting out of character within an unusual situation where boundaries might feel blurred.

Id	What do you think constitutes informed consent?	What could caring for the audience look like?	What tools can we use to provide care for audiences?	What concerns do you have about using these tools?
9	Knowing the risks and having option to withdraw at any point	Offering additional supports, after care, dedicated staff and resources for risk management and engagement.	Follow-up contacts, resources, and information about risks.	Meaningful consent - making sure people are informed adequately/ and multiple channels / formats where necessary.
10	To have ability to understand, retain and communicate a decision having been provided with all relevant information to do so.	Accessible and inclusive intentions backed up by thoughtful and deliberate actions to ensure all, and particularly those who may be disadvantaged, feel able to engage and participate fully and without fear or long term harm or judgement	Survey, peer support, information sheets, check in	May not reach someone who needs it or be insufficient in scope and intention
11	participants voluntarily opting into the experience with an understanding of what is involved and particularly what their options are to exercise agency and change their choices at any point (e.g. leave the experience, communicate a a boundary etc.)	practically working to create a safe experience alongside crafting the artistic product, building options for informed consent and support into the show based on a detailed understanding of the various risks of the specific experience and good facilitation practice more broadly	clear information and consistent communication about risk, content, types of activities etc. in a range of formats delivered with the same attention as the material itself (i.e. not as an add-on or in a way that encourages disengagement), possibly a basic code for the experience (e.g. ways to engage or stay away from performers that performers/staff will be able to understand and respect within the world of the piece), ways to enable the containment of what might be an intense experience within that theatrical space, adequate resources and staff training to ensure smooth running as much as possible.	I think the biggest issue is the culture change needed to see this implemented fully with the attention and care it requires. In my experience the world of theater often feels like it is at odds with concerns around safety, boundaries and care, and at the moment performers might also be seen as expendable/replaceable so their experiences at work might not be a concern for production or management (similar for students/ volunteers/collaborators in an informal arrangement). This should be an approach adopted by everyone on the creative team / production side for it to work.

Id	Do you feel you need further training in any of these concepts to utilize these tools in the future?	What do you feel you need further training on to utilise these tools in the future?
9	Maybe	Managing trade-offs of risk and theatre experience ; considerations for production (legal, financial, serious physical harms, insurance) vs artistic experience.
10	Maybe	Level of appropriate risk to tools and warnings. A graded scale
11	Yes	While I have had experience with most of these aspects, I feel I would benefit from further practical training and opportunities to practice, in the same way it is currently possible to access training in creating accessible spaces or facilitating a group safely, for example. It would help me feel more confident and secure in my understanding of the issues involved and in my abilities to navigate these, particularly as an artist with a portfolio career who is not solely focused on immersive work but might be called to be part of an experience (that might be also experimental and daring artistically) at short notice and with minimal training.

Id	Is there any feedback you'd like to share on the quality of the workshop? What was most useful to you? What was least useful?		To withdraw your consent for this survey to be used in this research, please enter a random sentence (a full sentence of at least five words) and make note of it. You can reach out via email to m.lbo...
9	I am an expert facilitator, you did a great job. Sometimes blurred your role as lead vs participant, can influence the workshop experience depending on goals of the engagement. If it is facilitation, great but for research might be too much. Generally well organized and timed. This should be adapted for community groups and corporate change management and team building. Important transferable conversations. I liked the mintimeet.		
10	1 suggestion! On entry, have background music playing with on screen countdown and the landing text. Allows people to see sound is working and generates some anticipation for th start.		The absurd cult has been disbanded.
11			

Appendix P - A Redesigned Toolkit for Immersive Theatre Audience Handling Built on Care Ethics

This toolkit offers a flexible, ethics-driven framework to embed care practices into immersive theatre audience handling at every stage – before, during, and after a performance.

Rooted in care ethics principles such as responsiveness, relationality, transparency, and ongoing dialogue, the toolkit aims to foster safer, more inclusive, and ethically engaged audience experiences. While this is not an exhaustive list of tools, and you may not need to use every tool on the list, it does function as a starting point to begin a dialogue and plan of care for and with your audiences.

I. Pre-Performance Tools: Embedding Care Through Preparation and Communication

a. Playtesting: Rehearsing Uncertainty and Unpredictability

- *Purpose:* Test the performance with diverse audiences, including resistant or sceptical participants, to establish possible emotional or behavioural reactions.
- *Applying Care Ethics:* Reflects responsiveness and relational care by fostering preparedness rather than surprise, allowing staff to develop empathetic, de-escalation strategies and improve inclusivity.
- *Implementation:* Iterative playtesting in performance space to build embodied skills for managing discomfort without undermining agency.

b. Content Warnings: Layered, Transparent, and Actionable Information

- *Purpose:* Provide clear, comprehensive advisories beyond static disclaimers, including practical tips to aid audiences' informed consent and psychological readiness.
- *Applying Care Ethics:* Affirms autonomy, respect and trust-building by openly communicating risk and framing warnings as part of the caring relationship with audiences.
- *Implementation:* Use multi-modal, layered communication as different points (e.g.: point of sale, pre-show comms, signage upon arrival, verbal at arrival) allowing audiences to opt-in actively, with flexibility to adapt to evolving performance conditions.

c. Audience Orientation: Ritual and Relationship Building

- *Purpose:* Engage audiences with clear, accessible information about expectations, exists, boundaries, and performance logistics before immersion.
- *Applying Care Ethics:* Emphasises transparency, ethical clarity, and emotional regulation; helps audiences feel supported and included rather than confused or anxious.
- *Implementation:* Use calm, knowledgeable greeters; bespoke scripts tailored for attention span; printed materials for latecomers; and demonstration of care through available staff and quiet spaces.

d. Consent Practices: Ongoing, Affirmative, and Transparent

- *Purpose:* Go beyond ticket purchase as consent; embed detailed disclosure and opt-out mechanisms while recognising differences in audience capacity and expectations.
- *Applying Care Ethics:* Champions autonomy and respect by ensuring consent is informed, continual, and adaptable to diverse needs.
- *Implementation:* Provide clear, fully explained options for participation before and during the show; affirm the right to exit and (if applicable) return freely.

II. In-Performance Tools: Attentive Care in the Moment

a. Active Listening: Relational Awareness and Dynamic Responsiveness

- *Purpose:* Equip production staff to attentively ‘hear’ not only audience words but also unspoken emotional cues and behavioural shifts. Recognise moments of relational breakdown or fragility as opportunities to repair, affirm, and re-engage participants.
- *Applying Care Ethics:* Centres on humility, humble inquiry, and a readiness to adapt care responsively rather than rely on inflexible interventions, fostering an atmosphere of mutual presence and respect.
- *Implementation:* Train staff in emotional intelligence and embodied attentiveness, encouraging observation of verbal and non-verbal signals. Maintain physical proximity to audience members to offer subtle, compassionate interventions if needed, such as quiet offers of water or assistance to decompression spaces. Exercise gentle, adaptive responses tailored to the intensity and type of emotional response rather than formulaic scripts.

b. Ethical Boundary Setting

- *Purpose:* Sustain clear, compassionate boundaries that protect the liminal nature of immersive spaces, balancing participant autonomy with collective wellbeing. Establish and maintain expectations for behaviour that enable creative play while safeguarding everyone’s safety and comfort.
- *Applying Care Ethics:* Support psychological safety through transparent and respectful communication of limits. Honors mutual respect by allowing participants freedom within an agreed ethical framework.
- *Implementation:* Utilise dramaturgical bridges (such as orientations) to delineate expectations. Deploy clear signage and orientation scripts to reinforce boundaries without disrupting the audience experience. Encourage staff to model and uphold these boundaries consistently and compassionately throughout the performance.

c. Emotional Regulation of Production Staff

- *Purpose:* Facilitates a supportive environment that helps maintain fair and calm interactions with audience members during the performance, minimising harm and distress to both parties. Prevents staff burnout, overwhelm, or reactive behaviour that can negatively impact audience care and group dynamics.
- *Applying Care Ethics:* Reflects the importance of self-care as a prerequisite to ethical care for others. Enables staff to provide steady,

grounded, and impartial support, sustaining relational equity with audiences.

- *Implementation:* Provide training on energetic self-regulation techniques, helping staff maintain steady pacing and presence even amidst chaotic or emotionally charged moments. Encourage awareness of personal limits and emotional boundaries, including strategies for self-calming and de-escalation. Facilitate regular communication within the team so staff can offload, seek peer support, and access breaks when needed.

III. Post-Performance Tools: Sustained Care and Relationship Building

a. Decompression and Emotional Processing Spaces

- *Purpose:* Create physical and ritualistic environments for audiences to regulate emotions, reflect, and ground themselves after intense experiences.
- *Applying Care Ethics:* Demonstrates circular, continuous care ensuring participants are not abruptly ‘released’ but gently re-integrated into everyday life.
- *Implementation:* Offer quiet rooms with gentle lighting or music; provide staff to assist emotional processing and answer questions. Provide an unrushed space to process the show, potentially with other audience members.

b. Post-Show Check-Ins and Reflective Feedback

- *Purpose:* Engage audiences in informal conversations, surveys, and/or digital reflections to gather insights and foster ongoing dialogue. Recognise post-show interaction as a process of relationship-building, not just data collection or evaluation.
- *Applying Care Ethics:* Embodies ‘listening to believe’ by valuing feedback not merely as data but as part of a caring relationship that informs continual improvement.
- *Implementation:* Use face-to-face chats, voice notes, art installations and/or responsive staff interactions to invite creative introspection and gentle responses to criticism.

The toolkit reframes safeguarding and audience support as relational and ethical acts rather than only procedural checklists. Across all phases, care ethics prioritizes responsiveness, respectful autonomy, transparency, and continuous dialogue. Tools like playtesting are not merely technical rehearsals but embodied rehearsals in empathy and ethical agility. Content warnings move beyond warnings to active trust signals. Orientation and consent practices are understood as relational contracts fostering safety, inclusion, and emotional preparedness. Finally, post-performance care completes a circle of ethical attention that honors audience experiences holistically.

This care-based infrastructure is designed to adapt flexibly to diverse performances and audience needs, prioritizing human connection and ethical respect.

Appendix Q - IPA Analysis Spreadsheets from Interview Data

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: *Dead Letter No. 9* Performance Maker, Taylor Myers

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet - <i>Dead Letter No. 9</i> Performance Maker, Taylor Myers						
Line	Transcript	Initial Noting	Focus	Reflection	Emergent Themes	
235	"I has to be aligned with what's going to happen next"	Production Staff are part of the audience journey	Descriptive Content	Perceptions of the audience.	Artistry	Audience
116-117	Whereas like audience members everyone is welcome. Full stop.	Indicates an awareness of wide varied personality types.	Conceptual	This is both a description of the audience and his concept of how he thinks of the audience. Indicates an awareness of the wide variety of audience personalities in attendance.	Audience	Audience
117-121	"Everyone has an equal voice... everyone, everyone"	Repeated	Linguistic		Audience	Audience
307-308	"I feel feeling you know, unintended"	Failure is an audience member feeling unintended	Descriptive		Audience	Audience
	"We must build robust experiences that expect and welcome people from the entire spectrum of skepticism and expectation because that's who you're going to get... able to work with everybody."		Conceptual	Audience diversity		Audience
324-332		Awareness of diverse audience make-ups	Conceptual			
376-378	"I'm here all the time... with audience members"	Large time commitment. Possible for shows with longer runs?	Descriptive			Audience Feedback
378-380	"Hello, I'm the creator... we've never met before"	Does Taylor's role as a director encourage frank conversation about the experience or are people more likely to not share negative feedback?	Conceptual			Audience Feedback
385-391	"we've also done some surveys about specific things... being nice about it"	Pro Survey: Honesty, Con Survey: less thoughtful responses	Descriptive			Audience Feedback
395-401	"Whereas like sometimes in conversation, obviously you can get... survey less information"	Audience feedback is a regular element of this production	Descriptive	Do productions with high care concerns have robust feedback practices?		Audience Feedback
385	"like slowing down, breathing"	Time as a tool. Breathing techniques.	Descriptive	Skills for handling difficult audience interactions		Audience Handling
597-603	"And it's so easy and natural... along with them."	A possible de-escalation techniques?	Descriptive			Background
26	"As a director and producer"	A lot of additional performance related skill's overlap.	Descriptive			Background
40-42	"I was an actor... I grew up outside Chicago... Moved to New York to study acting at NYU"	Background	Descriptive			Background
473-478	"entrusting your audience, your performers... the collective moral of the experience"	Trust and Care	Linguistic			Care
114-116	"Setting the tone and is setting a standard of behavior for what occurs in the space. And they're like really leading by example in that way."	How do you train to set the standard of behavior?	Conceptual	Is it just performers setting this standard?		Communication, Ethics, Orientation
		Does this indicate a worldview in which human interaction lacks compassion? An awareness of the lack of compassion? Are performers more compassionate? Acting is more compassionate?	Conceptual	What does this idea of compassion mean?		Compassion
98-100	"I would say that the audience is the necessary material... more compassionate"	Consent	Conceptual	Is the fact that Taylor has thought so deeply on this subject a good sign about the care that does into the consent in this production?		Consent
438-439	"Is it even possible to consent to something when you don't know what you're consenting to?"	Consent & Surprise	Conceptual	Speaks to Macion, who also mentions this dilemma. And White		Consent, Ethics
450-454	"consent and surprise do not seem... what is happening"	Soft consent and ethics/morality	Conceptual			
457-460	"soft consent... the thing is morally"	Despite there being no advisements for this production - because sometimes an advisement is not possible or appears in a less standardized way.	Content			Content Warnings
673-674	"Advisements are totally legit and have their place"	Under the FAO the first question addresses this, so while not a standardized content warning, and you have to look for it, if an audience member wants to know more about the performance, it would tell them this.				
680	"We might talk about literally anything... the welcome speech"	Recounts story of theatre vs. psychological experiments	Descriptive	Thoughtful response to why there is no content warning.		Content Warnings
415	"So I have an uncle... a theatrical experience"	A commerce based ethics? Does this connect to the idea that buying a ticket is consent?	Descriptive			Ethics
433	"I paid you for this experience."	Re: who is responsible for the show's ethics?	Conceptual			Ethics
489	"Everyone"	Acceptance of imperfect results but continually striving to do better.	Descriptive			Ethics
524-526	"And so similar to that... with audience members"	Repeated several times	Descriptive	Is it ethical because of the desire and effort to improve?		Ethics
100	Compassionate	Approx. 10 years experience at this point.	Linguistic	Is this a core concept in Myers' ethics?		Ethics
17	"I like some folks are very natural in their, I guess, bedside manner... feel is the same."	Descriptive	Descriptive	I wonder if care comes with experience?		Experience
248-253		Informing but doesn't micromanage	Descriptive			Managing Style

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet - *Dead Letter* No. 9 Performance Maker, Taylor Myers

Line	Transcript	Initial Noting	Focus	Reflection	Emergent Themes
628-629	"I starts as soon as you buy a ticket or even before"	Impressions of the project are not fully controllable	Descriptive		Orienting
631-633	"The first time you hear... and has a shape."	Uncontrollability of audience perceptions	Descriptive		Orienting
641-649	"All you can do is... you can pay attention to."	Increasing levels of control as people approach the performance.	Descriptive		Orienting
185-186	"audience safety and handling of like emergencies that arise?"	This was the first view that of PS mentioned.	Descriptive		Production Staff
188-197	"they are the first people that audience members... where to go?"	Practical info: safety and hospitality	Descriptive		Production Staff
196	"comfortable"	Interest in making sure people are comfortable.	Conceptual	The themes raised in these conversations aren't necessarily concerned with comfort, so there is a co-existing comfort/discomfort tension that the production staff and performers seem to balance.	Production Staff
199-202	"that's one branch of information... they are in good hands."	Emotional info: Is this is tone? How do production staff convey these things?	Descriptive		Production Staff
203	"emotional information" "practice information"	How do these roles get balanced?	Conceptual		Production Staff
208	"Complete transition"	Production staff as guides/enablers of liminal spaces	Descriptive		Production Staff
215	"I don't see how there couldn't be"	Immediate recognition of artistic influence in production staff roles.	Conceptual	Production Staff as Artists	Production Staff
226	"communication"	Aware of importance of communication	Conceptual	Communication Design as SM Scenography	Production Staff
608-610	"I have not gone through any accredited risk management... a lot of risks."	Acknowledgement of need to manage risks but lack of training	Descriptive	Level of risk management training.	Risk Management
186-187	"which fortunately have been very, very, very, very few"	Are the safety incidents few because of the advance work done to prevent them?	Conceptual	Potentially speaks to the invisibility of labour.	Safety
32-53	"I would put it at the far end of the participatory spectrum"	Describing DL/N9	Descriptive		Show Description
68-72	"One of them was a tiny little four seat... the seed for this kind of project"	Describing development process. Grew out of an earlier project.	Descriptive	A very long process. Does this extended conception period allow for increased care?	Show Description
76-80	"series of rehearsals... being there like a test audience and reviews... Performance"	Comprehensive development. Clear multi-step process	Descriptive		Show Description
108-110	"We did a lot of like talking... in our experience"	Process	Descriptive		Show Description
128	"tangents of interest"	Show description	Descriptive		Show Description
130-131	"find the points of connective tissues between everything and everything else"	Strong focus on connection as a guiding theme of the work	Descriptive		Show Description
134-137	"It's all one long and winding dialogue about you know, what it is to be a person... all sorts of different things."	Core concept of the show.	Descriptive		Show Description
171	"Definitely conversation among audience members"	Conversation the primary goal of the show	Descriptive		Show Description
173	"Site sympathy of the building itself"	Setting more functional	Descriptive		Show Description
236-237	"It is the first step in a very purposeful journey. So yeah, it is 100% a part of that journey."	Production Staff greeting/orienting as part of the performance	Descriptive		Show Description
269-270	"make a piece of art that reminds people that a genuine and meaningful connection to a stranger is only a choice away."	Descriptive of Show	Descriptive		Show Description
543-550	"Had what the fuck is this? you know... a place of receptivity for the piece."	Process. Find difficult test audiences.	Descriptive	Audience handling practice	Show Description
468	"Trusting"	Mention of trust	Linguistic	Relating to performers. Your audience. Though also when stage manager isn't there. Is there some innate belief in the ethical/morals of stage managers?	Trust

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: *Dead Letter No. 9* Production Staff, Ellery Brown

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet - <i>Dead Letter No. 9</i> Production Staff, Ellery Brown				
Line	Transcript	Initial Noting	Focus	Reflection
281-282	"I just like the way that she was aware of face value"	Does this not immerse?	Descriptive	
31-32	"I put together independent studies to like kind of, on my own, focus on stage management"	early evidence of adaptability and independent problem solving	Descriptive	
3-9	"So on paper, I'm a stage manager"	"on paper" indicates a wider different <i>(I)</i> source of responsibilities	Descriptive	
4-1	"I'm like very proud"	rough sketch broad filter	Insulative	emphasis on the skills of adaptability necessary for immersive production staff
4-5	"Sketch and all whatever needs to be kind of taken care of"	Does this indicate that despite abstraction about the individualized experiences of immersive, they are largely, in fact not?	Conceptual	
5-1	"Very broad lens of stage management"	Does this indicate that despite abstraction about the individualized experiences of immersive, they are largely, in fact not?	Insulative	
391-292	"It's like really, on a granular level being like, how do we make it work for this one person?"	Visual aesthetics	Descriptive	but the individuality of the experience often a draw for audiences?
622-624	"Can I aesthetically, is there like a sign I can put somewhere in the show to help facilitate something?"	Aesthetics of emergency announcements	Descriptive	
627-631	"The situation sequences... that is something that you want to design with the show in mind."	Aesthetics of emergency announcements	Descriptive	
636-637	"That is hyper informed to whatever show you're working on"	audience impact how safety announcements are made	Descriptive	
693-696	"Where like the goal of these the art we're making for... who are not having the ideal outcome?"	Aesthetics of scene?	Personal Reflexivity	if you push with a goal of making sure of those who don't want the experience, does it move from a scene aesthetic to a care aesthetic?
304	"The earliest component of it"	Receptive to feedback mode. Someone listening and acknowledging?	Descriptive	In this company, the director remained with the show and was there to chat with people at the end. Does this need to be a role in community building aftercare?
305-306	"I guess I would get this feedback and people would get back like full essays from him of like, you know what I mean?"	Receptive to feedback mode. Someone listening and acknowledging?	Descriptive	Ways of doing aftercare
561-562	"I feel like I think it was helpful to have there as like an offloading person."	Tools for end of show.	Content	Should aftercare come via performers in a continued role or staff? Does that matter?
564	"The Canadian"	A character that checks on all the rooms.	Descriptive	
574-579	"I feel like the bar restaurant space did give a decompression area for people coming through having big responses... to sort of like just keep them up."	A responsibility for care.	Content	Decompression Space. Knowing to keep them up?
246-260	"And even in these cases... really a cool part of the process"	Illustrates the power of receptive feedback.	Descriptive	Descriptive regarding successful outcomes
428-438	"I think alcohol and immersive experiences... had to be really carefully explored"	alcohol use requires careful consideration because how it affects the ability to consent	Content	
579-580	"And they're taking care of 1,000,000 things but one of the things on their radar would be that"	At what point is so much asked of production staff that individualized responses become impossible? Even if the staff say they are doing it, can they possibly be?	Personal Reflexivity	Where might have suggested a reasonable number. LaFrance mentions 'appropriate staffing numbers' - this is really the crux of the thesis - how do we develop care-all audience handling skills?
53-54	"Specifically in an overlap with audience handling which as come up for me in other immersive spaces"	is audience handling an expected SM skill in immersive?	Content	
875-877	"I've don't have to be surprised by who that character is. We can be prepared. You know, we can just through test different degrees"		Descriptive	
889-892	"We don't have to be surprised by who that character is. We can be prepared. You know, we can just through test different degrees"	How to prepare to handle the audience as a dinner	Descriptive	
182	"Scholarship to engage"	Indicates the audience have a choice in what they are doing.	Conceptual	
112-114	"It was, which is not I feel like traditional stage management, you're not doing that with the individual audience members, that kind."	Habitualized knowledge deviation from traditional SM	Content	
30	"evidence"	university trained but developed their own program	Content	
64-65	"Then they had another PSA associated with the production... came in as like an overlay."	based on replacement for first PSA	Content	
722-723	"I know lots of stage managers who were, like, get here via performance didn't work out"	Awareness of a common history of SMs	Content	Is there a different level of passion or interest from an SM who is doing it specifically because they want to, not because their primary goal didn't happen?
23-24	"Which is why I like ended up in immersive spaces"	Indicates a connection between diverse background and interest in immersive.	Content	
40	"PSA"	Canadian trained	Descriptive	Reminiscent of JALT, notion of makers who approach from diverse backgrounds.
40	"PSA"	Canadian trained	Descriptive	
461-462	"And an ethical performance... a work life balance."	How does this speak to turnout concern?	Personal Reflexivity	
779-782	"So I feel like I have retained... when it comes to safety and preparedness"		Personal Reflexivity	How much safety preparation is done in personal time of the clock?
317	"I just like hearing people"	How does hearing people... and I'd repeated mention of it, connect to care?	Conceptual	
705-706	"I like the fun and looking to like not with the goal intention of upsetting anybody... catch them on the other side."	Word choice: catch them	Insulative	
224-225	"And that doesn't have to be something that's withheld capability"	Word choice: catch them	Descriptive	Is there SM training on their consent?
236-238	"The stage management and the company to have a really clear idea... if something doesn't work out"	value of clear communication of concerns to SMs	Content	
735-737	"and it goes both ways. I think performers should have an opportunity to stage manage at some point, just to kind of see"	Personal Reflexivity	Personal Reflexivity	This seems to be lacking in performers functioning as production staff interviewed who seem not to understand a lot of elements that if identified as basic stage management skills.
				Communication

633

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet - *Drad Letter No. 9* Production Staff, Ellyery Brown

Line	Transcript	Initial Noting	Focus	Reflection	Emergent Themes
215-216	"be prepared to catch them and also be prepared to off-put at any point."				Emotional intelligence, Empathy, Empowering
327	"coherent and support from the audience side of things?"	This is the ethical obligation of stage managers. What happens when the audience also perform? When the production staff does not come from an SM background?	Content	Content confirming, supporting	Empowering, Empathy, Ethics
328	"support the performers first"		Descriptive		ethics
354-357	"Basic safety is like, people are coming into a space they need to be in the bare minimum physically safe and then they work up from there. What? We do I need to call? How do we want to record it? Oh, and developing all of that 36-36, ahead of time before anything happens."	Ethical Obligations: Physical safety	Content	Physically safe	ethics
376	"everyone. It needed to start with the people in the early phases of production."	How to talk through emergency plans	Descriptive	This indicates a real lack of support for these roles.	ethics
407-409	"It's just really making all of that input as well in the early phases of production."	Whose job is it to maintain an ethical performance?	Content		ethics
51-52-53	"There's a really good recommendation that you have to be in relation to the specific show."	Advanced preparation	Descriptive		ethics
414-420	"The show, specifically, was that it was running the bar... which I thought was interesting"	Ethical context of company ethos. Does one that permeates the whole company ultimately trickle down to the audience?	Descriptive		ethics
474-476	"Making sure people are like... the same"	Does this indicate that it's all sometimes dehumanizing?	Personal Reflexivity		ethics
470	"It was very humanizing"	Are perceptions stage managers more like to work for dangerous companies?	Personal Reflexivity		ethics
803-805	"And I think that has identified a lot of projects that I say no to. This as a younger theatre professional, you don't have because it's such a personal piece for each audience member... keeping that as the focus of what I'm trying to do for each."	Does one that permeates the whole company ultimately trickle down to the audience?	Descriptive		Ethics
906-908		emphasises an audience experience	Descriptive		Ethics
101-110	"I'm really becoming as the people that are coming in here today having the intended experience?"	emphasis on audience experience	Descriptive	Also repetitive about use of word 'Focus' and how the focus pivots to the audience	Focus on Audience
509-601	"The format of the show [on itself well to someone being then approach by a staff member]"		Content	Still: How to approach audiences with aesthetic consideration.	Interacting with Audience
148-151	"how do I exist... when you're all literally in the same room"	This idea of how your presence changes in immersive (feel very similar to any sort of acting movement)	Conceptual		Interacting with Audience, Immediacy
352-359	"Now having the room for pressing up, but eventually hearing them and being like, let's try to evolve together?"	to make it work for one person, you have to listen to one person	Content		Listening
317	"from the hearing people"	Hearing & Listening	Literature		Listening
104-110	"People come in with the different perceptions... the biggest part of the show was..."	Orienting... initially shared their act	Content		Orienting
104-110	"People come in with the different perceptions... the biggest part of the show was..."	Meriting people where they are at	Content		Orienting
111-112	"I'm really listening to where people were entering it."	Listening... extends to the audience	Descriptive	How to orient	Orienting
123, 128	"Everything is cool... that's not the focus"	Scripts more important for structured performances?	Descriptive	Aesthetics of performances reflected in existing technologies	Orienting
754-755	"Super helpful. We love it."	Does it if the production staff know what the audience receives in advance of the performance.	Content		Orienting
601	"Yes, that the script was, that was something [to] be developed and it evolved into like, more like, the entry point to what we did that that narrative information makes it feel like that is the focus. So letting that go."	Initial orientation script developed by director	Content		Orienting
129-130	"And to front that all that narrative information makes it feel like that is the focus. So letting that go."	Initial scripted framework	Descriptive		Orienting
609-609	"I'm providing the frame that we, that you can sit within."	Impact of artistic intent	Content		Restrictions
791-803	"Successful thing that can happen as much as a stage manager is to be in a position... It's the worst feeling"	Lack of safety planning and support feels like the worst thing that can happen to E.	Descriptive		Safety, Care
601	"Presenting most the audience from since 2012"	Time as a strong resource for SMs	Conceptual	how does time function within sure theatre?	Time
754-755	"It's like... the way that we do it down with everyone who comes to these and really like, you know I can fix this."	Time as a strong resource for SMs	Descriptive		Time
773-779	"The making training or communication around emergency protocol... I don't love that"	Does this indicate that it's common for emergency protocol practice to get bypassed at E's previous companies?	Descriptive		Time
10	"Stage No. Nine in 2018"	6 years ago (time of director's), more than half their career that has been in	Content	NTC Chase company - entry had strong SM connections. What is the influence of	Time, Background
74	"last actor"	well seen and then back into rehearsal. SM often vs. previous	Descriptive	Methods for forming audience handling.	Time, Practising
176-177	"People are reading us now with just immersive work but like theatre in general"	awareness of a contract of trust with audience	Descriptive		Trust
700-711	"I must you to give it 10 more minutes, achieve"		Descriptive		Trust

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Performance Maker, Rhianna Ilube

Line	Transcript	Initial Noting	Focus	Reflection	Emergent Themes
1226-1229	"Act 3, which is part of Act 2... doing a protest."	House knocks to transition.	Descriptive		Aftercare
1235-1247	"And the Coney person... what they've just done."	Current closing strategy. Can't please everyone.	Descriptive		Aftercare
1248-1249	"About where do you leave an audience member?"	Important choice.	Descriptive	Aftercare can begin in the closing moments of the performance experience.	Aftercare
841-842	"From a risk thing... drinking too much."	Aware of alcohol concerns.	Descriptive		Alcohol
846-847	"We were wary that like a drunken player... in act one."	Removed risk of alcohol	Descriptive		Alcohol
259-261	"And in watching it over... audience might play."	Can you learn all? But you can learn a useful amount by repeat viewings of the audience.	Conceptual		Audience
272-283	"It's never the audiences fault... somethings gone wrong."	Failure of audiences is almost always failure of the production.	Conceptual		Audience
285-286	"Having trust in the audience... play well"	Trust and inform. Enough to play well.	Conceptual		Audience
288-289	"How do... well in this space?"	Requires defining 'play well'	Descriptive		Audience
290	"Nervous. I'm super nervous"	Repetition of nervous	Linguistic		Audience
325-330	"I had parameters and I knew the piece is going to be something that could be played... of all knowledge."	Clear view of desired audience.	Descriptive		Audience
337-340	"Therefore, we cannot play out... when they book a ticket"	Aware people have misconceptions when booking.	Content	Audience don't always understand what they are signing up to do. It's easy to misunderstand even with clear signposting.	Audience
489-492	"Out of world... ask the actors."	Indicates audience can understand in-world vs. out-of-world moments.	Content		Audience
532-535	"They genuinely feel frustrated... beautiful and interesting."	Ideal audience is genuine and creative.	Descriptive		Audience
536-538	"Whilst at the same time not going too... of the actors."	Not going too far. Interesting. That's first.	Descriptive		Audience
548-553	"I prefer if... all coordinated house."	Ideal response is to act out of instinct.	Descriptive		Audience
576-578	"So it is good... keeping safe each other and the actors."	There is a lot of concern for actor and inter-audience safety.	Descriptive		Audience
583-586	"A failure is if people were abusive... the breaking of the show."	Repetition	Linguistic		Audience
629-630	"I think the game needs... a good mix of people."	Unique to this show there are several ideal audience members at each table.	Descriptive		Audience
664-66	"So hinges, act one hinges on the camaraderie... who are friendly."	Ideal table make-up	Descriptive		Audience
701	"They just sat there miserable."	Table makeup can also lead the show to fail.	Descriptive		Audience

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Performance Maker, Rihanna Ilube					
254-256	"I'm not hard. I'm not hard line... challenged"	Flexibility	Descriptive		Audience
267-268	"I'm nervous."	Repetition of nervous	Linguistic		Audience
718-720	"PhD research... audience evaluation."	Feedback via partnership.	Descriptive	Willingness to partner with a research indicated an interest in feedback.	Audience Feedback
732-733	"How would you describe your experience as a metaphor?"	Unique questions lead to unique feedback.	Descriptive		Audience Feedback
736-738	"And I think we do a lot of Coney... that surprised you?"	Coney also does feedback.	Descriptive		Audience Feedback
749-751	"What the piece is doing... hopefully in a good way."	R is curious about feedback regarding this area.	Descriptive		Audience Feedback
759-761	"We've done serious questionnaires... like a short survey."	Playtest questionnaires.	Descriptive		Audience Feedback
768-772	"Do questionnaires in the same way... note their experiences."	I also received this but had trouble understanding how the video feedback worked.	Descriptive		Audience Feedback
774-776	"I think it's quite... you feelings on it."	Feedback can be a 'high ask' of audiences.	Conceptual		Audience Feedback
781-783	"Be like please go and voice note... reading surveys."	Preference for voice note.	Descriptive		Audience Feedback
817-819	"I would always just stand around afterwards, more like in the space."	Seems fairly standard primary way of obtaining feedback from audiences.	Descriptive	Creeper Feedback	Audience Feedback
820-822	"Let the actual space of the show... tell me how they feel."	Performance space as part of decompression.	Descriptive	What is the potential emotional weight of this for the maker?	Audience Feedback
911-915	"I don't think any show... boundaries are crossed."	A plan of action.	Descriptive		Audience Handling
917-919	"Good Night Out... training up venues"	R has a background in clubs and bars	Descriptive	Connects audience handling to managing crowds in high risk venues like bars and clubs.	Audience Handling
932-940	"It's a bad sign if no one... making me feel uncomfortable."	In high risk spaces, things are happening. If no one is reporting it is a culture problem.	Descriptive	What kind of culture have we build in immersive theatre?	Audience Handling
955-960	"A willingness to plan and keep learning... intense subjects."	Creating safe reporting spaces allows for more risk taking.	Descriptive		Audience Handling
973-975	"Then applying principles... audience members feel free."	Boundaries allow freedom.	Conceptual		Audience Handling
988-991	"Bouncers can often be the ones... punitive or blaming"	Need to believe people when they report bad behaviour.	Descriptive		Audience Handling
1000-1007	"They will often try out smaller... so that it doesn't escalate."	Small misbehaviours lead to big ones.	Descriptive		Audience Handling
1019-1023	"But I, regardless... we have planned for it."	Like children.	Descriptive		Audience Handling
1106-1108	"So building up and that just helps the actors... people playing."	Going from smaller to bigger. Scale.	Descriptive	Helps everyone see the types of audiences they may have in.	Audience Handling

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Performance Maker, Rhianna Ilube				
1112-113	"He gave me a framework of like four types of players of immersive shows."	Helped identify possible problem audience.	Descriptive	Audience Handling
347-350	"We will prioritize the experience of people of color... in our game"	Identified those with the most potential to have a negative experience with the production and planned with them in mind.	Descriptive	Audience, Care
352	"Worst case scenario being"	Identify worst case scenario at a full team level	Descriptive	Audience, Care
357-359	"I'm constantly thinking worst case scenarios for audiences that I care for... all audiences"	One way to care for audiences	Descriptive	Audience, Care
15-16	"been writing scripts since 2019"	non-performance background. Working in theatre for 5 years.	Descriptive	Background
20-21	"all of my interactive work has mostly fallen under Coney"	R is firmly embedded in a Coney ethos for interactive work	Descriptive	Background
1036-1037	"So doing a lot of safeguarding trainings... things like this."	Some risk management training.	Descriptive	Background
405	"In a well resourced version"	Acknowledges budget realities.	Conceptual	Care
606-610	"Like I've seen glimpses... shall we throw?"	Concern begins with small actions - similar to plot of the show.	Conceptual	Care
5-7	"an R&D workshop of it in January 2023. So since then there's been a whole year and a half process to get it to this stage"	Process longer than most traditional theatre timeframes	Descriptive	Development Process
98-100	"We did an R&D and at the start of.. beyond a week"	Had one week to indicate potential for development	Descriptive	Development Process
121-123	"we had like, I have 4 core makers with me... and myself"	Large creative team - does this effect their strong communication skills	Descriptive	Development Process
128-131	"So like, we, it was almost like also, and we also, skilled up the artists... so it was almost like a lecture series"	In some ways, a very resourced production	Descriptive	Development Process
149-153	"and so we did another play test... and we showed it in April"	What does downtime between these moments do for space to process?	Conceptual	Development Process
155-156	"Bringing in lots of different people over a year and a half"	Lots of consultants	Descriptive	Development Process
155-156	"Bringing in lots of different people over a year and a half"	Broad consultants and audiences	Conceptual	Development Process
301-305	"Working for Coney for years... a key part of it"	1st interest in 1884, then pitching it to Coney determined it would be immersive	Descriptive	Development Process
311-312	"We cannot have them play colonizers."	Addressed loaded questions directly. Thought through worst outcomes.	Descriptive	Development Process
1049-1052	"Different things... what do we do?"	Everyone knows the plan.	Descriptive	Development Process

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Performance Maker, Rhianna Ilube					
1054-1057	"Co-created our plan for like... what to do?"	Power of going through 'what-if' and creating plans.	Descriptive		Development Process
1071-1080	"I think a creative workshop... wouldn't want, yeah."	Can see spectrum of outcomes, including negative outcomes.	Descriptive		Development Process
1093	"I brought, my skill is not like a director... trusted, Tatenda Shamiso."	Knowing the limits of your skills.	Descriptive		Development Process
1253-1255	"We got some consultancy for act three... somatic artists."	Spoke with experts.	Descriptive		Development Process
343-345	"At Coney... light and values."	Company/project ethics. A highlighted space to emphasize them.	Conceptual	What is it to make a <i>manifesto</i> ?	Ethics
862-864	"How easy is it for the audience at any point... anymore."	Ethics requires choice remains.	Descriptive		Ethics
866-870	"No one... able to walk out."	Good ethics make making a choice easier.	Conceptual		Ethics
877-883	"I've been to some shows... how you go."	Learning from attending shows she didn't like.	Descriptive		Ethics
942-944	"I think just like an ethics... play testing."	Ethics require planning.	Descriptive		Ethics
498-499	"I got that from another show... and <i>Torch</i> ."	Influenced by a good preshow orientation they experienced."	Descriptive		Orientation
615-621	"We say in the briefing like... suggesting that."	Importance of repeating the obvious	Descriptive		Orientation
894-898	"In 1884... that we point out."	Highlights ways out in preshow speech.	Descriptive		Orientation
906	"Just like tap the person."	Knowledge of alternative ways from other shows to exit the experience.	Descriptive		Orientation
1161-1163	"I think my orientation was even like double the length... on the length"	Skill to develop orientation speech.	Descriptive		Orientation
1165-1167	"Also how much to say so that you don't bore the audience... the most important stuff."	Key element of good orientation.	Descriptive		Orientation
1171-1176	"But yeah, we created a briefing.. the most important things to say"	You <i>must</i> be briefed to enter.	Descriptive		Orientation
1203-1208	"And then we spent... no, no, no."	Have to not stamp out all agency.	Descriptive	Balance in orientation speeches.	Orientation
1210-1211	"Shall we throw fruit?"	People lose themselves in good immersive theatre.	Descriptive	Sometimes you still need very basic reminders.	Orientation
507-511	"That's important for audience members... I just need a break."	A way to care for audiences.	Descriptive		Orientation, Care
945-948	"I feel we did 10 shows in April... how audiences can play."	Phenomenology of participatory performance.	Conceptual		Phenomenology
383-386	"Somebody in the room... building the museum"	Unique stage management role.	Descriptive	Stage management is a very trusted role.	Production Staff
390-395	"We ended up having... closing down the space."	Very technical SM	Descriptive		Production Staff
407-409	"There will be a stage manager... for that care."	Care so necessary it is someone's full time function.	Conceptual	Interesting the role of the caregiver was immediately assigned to the stage management team.	Production Staff

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Performance Maker, Rhianna Ilube

414-421	"There was a duty manager... One outside."	FOH experienced. Familiarized with show.	Descriptive		Production Staff
424-426	"It was important... of immersive shows."	Adequately staffed.	Descriptive		Production Staff
444	"That's just like a whole job. Museum builder."	Importance of skilled staff. Time to playtest.	Descriptive		Production Staff
450-452	"Stage manager is... in another room."	Unique role for this SM position.	Descriptive		Production Staff
463-465	"Stage manager is making... enjoyable."	Care requires presence.	Conceptual	Focused on focus.	Production Staff
472-475	"From having just watch the show so many times... help with this."	Obvious creative impacts in 1884.	Descriptive		Production Staff
478-480	"The help, is I think, less creative input... stuff like that."	Marie provided some administrative input.	Descriptive		Production Staff
494-496	"Front of house... out of worlds."	Value in watching so many shows.	Descriptive		Production Staff
		Are FOH the help? Technicians?	Descriptive		Production Staff
		FOH as out-of-worlds	Descriptive		Production Staff
518-525	"I had made... the show in that room."	It's a creative call how to answer some of these questions that are intended to be the future SM role.	Descriptive		Production Staff
396-397	"Coney staff members... watching the room."	Coney staff in safeguarding position.	Descriptive	Safeguarding from a company level.	Safeguarding
401-402	"Needed help... We were on Whatsapp."	Communication plans for help during the show.	Descriptive		Safeguarding
65	"I struggle"	Show description is difficult to classify	Descriptive	For performers.	Show Description
68-71	"I don't actually think I have a strong word... as a game"	Game theatre is a phrase from Coney	Descriptive		Show Description
	"I don't actually think I have a strong word... as a game"			I wonder if it's good to struggle to classify your work from a H&S standpoint. To see it with 'eyes' not full of expectations for how to manage/prepare for a certain style.	Show Description
68-71	"quite interactive and I would say participatory almost... show"	Describing levels of participation	Conceptual	Scales of participation can change even within the performance.	Show Description
74-77	"everything is dictated"	Instruction-based	Descriptive		Show Description
78		Built out of 1884 as a topic	Descriptive		Show Description
100		Structural influence pulled from other shows	Descriptive		Show Description
203-206	"The structure I loved... was completely different"		Descriptive		Show Description
217-218	"The Sims, the computer game... you own homes"	Structural influence.	Descriptive		Show Description
224-228	"Black Mirror, the TV show... in different episodes"	Thematic influence	Descriptive		Show Description
	"so maybe act I is slightly more participatory, audience-ed, game theatre-esque. Whereas act II is I would say more immersive"	Highlights difference between immersive and participatory	Conceptual		Show Description

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Production Staff, Marie Klimis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Production Staff, Marie Klimis (Producer)						
Line	Transcript	Initial Noting	Focus	Reflection	Emergent Themes	
576-581	"But what did work really well is to have live discussions.. or with each other."	Live feedback commin in other works.	Descriptive	Decompression space? Community building? Connections?	Aftercare	
1082-1044	"Vandalism, which always pisses me off.. the wooden things."	Limits to agency.	Descriptive	Description of bad audiences.	Audiences	
1051-1053	"You still need to accept there are people... remake the wooden plaques."	Things that cause people real work outside the planned work of the show.	Descriptive	Description of bad audiences.	Audiences	
1061	"Breaking things or taking things away."	People steal bits of the show.	Descriptive	Description of bad audiences.	Audiences	
1062-1068	"I heard people speak violent... this is not tolerated."	Verbal abuse is not tolerated - mentioned in pre-show speech.	Descriptive	Description of bad audiences.	Audiences	
1081-1085	"And I think it's being very clear about that as well... do not touch people."	Clear instructions.	Descriptive	Orienting	Audiences	
14-15	"Various types of project management"	diverse background of experience	Descriptive		Background	
17	"15 years"	work including projects outside the theatre	Descriptive		Background	
19-20	"more specifically, producing the theatre about five years"	theatre work	Descriptive		Background	
28-29	"It's a lot of site specific and immersive and interactive"	Broad experiential experience	Descriptive		Background	
31-32	"non-traditional spaces and that does include a lot of experimental theatre"	Broad experiential experience	Descriptive		Background	
976-977	"It's also an immersive theatre maker."	Background	Descriptive		Background	
165-175	"It's because of the format of the production is each immersive project is unique... which is definitely my case."	Opinion on who thrives in immersive environments	Content		Background	
257	Re: duty of care "I don't use the phrase, I'm thinking about."		Content	Might be interesting to double check KOLN because I think it's the same. Interesting there are legal ramifications and meanings that don't seem to be present.	Care	
260-262	"Simply put, it's making sure that everyone is having good time."	Primary definition of duty of care for M.	Conceptual		Care	
264-265	"different stakeholders of the project"	good time is subjective to the stakeholder.	Conceptual		Care	
266-269	"It can be that all the creatives feel... in a good space, in a safe space."	Does care for the audience have to start at the creative/performer level?	Conceptual		Care	
271-273	"Put in a situation where they can do their best work, where we say it to play well together."	Duty of care as environment - to build that space	Conceptual		Care	
277-281	"It's duty of care towards the work as well to make sure that, um, people's vision can become the best it can be... it's better care for the audience."	Who are people - audiences? Creatives? Is duty of care balancing these needs?	Conceptual		Care	
287-297	"We're talking about colonialism. You're talking about race, and those topics are not the same for everyone... we have a lot of conversations about it."	Listening to feedback from test audiences on hard topics.	Descriptive		Care	
306-310	"We take care of the audience from before even this day... it was a good experience."	Care should be comprehensive - beginning at the ticket purchase.	Descriptive		Care	
323-332	"We always writes a Coney... It's a living document."	Coney manifesto as a care and communication tool for the creatives, staff and cast.	Descriptive		Care	
335-337	"We also always have like an access rider, which is not only about like disability, it's about what do you need to do your best work?"	Access rider as care	Descriptive		Care	
349-350	"And then in the room, it's about having regular check in with your team as a whole."	Communication as the highest priority in care	Conceptual		Care	
392-400	"That's includes access elements... this is the kind of things that are going to be covered"	Playing audience guides	Descriptive		Care	
401-414	"Main reasons that prevent people from joining interactive experience, the feel of being judged... and out as often as you want."	Highlights how interaction works in their shows.	Descriptive	Communicates clearly to the audience what to expect regarding interaction.	Care	
418-420	"Don't a so that people understand the type of interactive work it is and they can make an informed decision."	Concerned with what makes an informed decision.	Conceptual		Care	
439-441	"So we have ummm, we always had one person. That person varies. During 1884, it was the core team member."	Active observation	Descriptive		Care	
461-465	"Any issue that we had planned... already triggered, already angry."	Planned for the worst case scenarios	Descriptive	Preparation	Care	
736-737	"We like to take care, we want people to do more of it."	Care is encouraging.	Descriptive		Care	
780-793	"You put the audience at the heart of it... they never signed up for it if they knew what it was."	Duty of care is consent.	Descriptive		Care	
907-909	"I think it's really just to talk... just to leave the rooms."	Invite is interesting terminology.	Linguistic		Care	
930-931	"Talking to them and see any kind of support that we can offer."	Communication - talking as care. They tell what support they need.	Descriptive	They say what they need helps avoid a paternalistic style of caregiving.	Care	
959-962	"Yes, there is contact details I think... any question about the show was us."	Both groups available through contacts.	Descriptive	Re: website, audience playing guides, etc.	Care	

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Production Staff, Marie Klimis (Producer)

997-1000	"I think these definitely informed a lot of the conversations we had about... what did you do?"	There is value in experience.	Descriptive		Care
1005-1009	"We always be a complicated situation... with situations like that."	Dealing with bad audience is reliant on the right level of staffing.	Content	Adequate staffing - LaFrance	Care
1016-1019	"The things is most of 'em I think are funny... everything may happen."	Time to talk about difficult audiences.	Conceptual	Time as an important concept.	Care
616-623	"We target them for things like... because of time."	Time as a restricting measure for care.	Conceptual		Care
1121-1123	"Usually bad things happen when people are put on the spot... their role is."	Make sure scope of roles is clear in advance for dealing with bad situations.	Descriptive		Care, FOH
380-382	"We did quite a lot of work with several access advisors and then we also worked with an impact"	Bring in outside experts.	Descriptive		Care, Playests
386-391	"She's in, I think, impact fellow at the university... playing audience guides."	Expert advice.	Descriptive		Care, Playests
632-633	"I think as long as you do enough playests."	What is enough playests?	Conceptual		Care, Playests
915-926	"We spoke to access advisor. They don't like the use of trigger warnings because according to them... deciding what is a trigger for you."	Rather than trigger warnings, consider content warnings.	Descriptive	Moves responsibility towards audience.	Content Warnings
667-669	"It's a performance where everybody was involved knowing that they're getting into."	Definition of ethics	Descriptive		
661	"Comfortable."	Comfort as ethics?	Conceptual	What does comfort mean in this context?	Ethics
663-668	"Willing to participate... for audience as well."	Ethics is knowing what you are getting into.	Descriptive		Ethics
669-679	"I think consent is the most important part... if it's quite an intimate audience."	Ethics is knowing what you are getting into.	Descriptive		Ethics
686-690	"An opportunity to leave an opportunity to stop... gonna do anything to them."	Ethics is people know they can leave and how to do so.	Descriptive		Ethics
694-695	"So I think it's about making it OK for people that any kind of participation is good."	Does this relate to the Convey idea that every performance is a gift?	Conceptual		Ethics
784	"A good time."		Conceptual	Good time live philosophical good? Artistic - good life?	Ethics
682-684	"I think it's just getting people prepared... to step out."	Opportunity to withdraw consent.	Conceptual	Polematic ambiguous word. Good.	Ethics, Care
557-567	"Include an online memorial where people could leave their reflections... they want to go home."	Alternative feedback.	Descriptive	Also highlights an issue with obtaining feedback - length of show, time of evening.	Feedback
522-525	"Making sure then that you collect feedback and that you talk to your audience so that you can keep improving things."	Emphasis on needing feedback to improve.	Conceptual	Iterative nature of careful performance.	Feedback, Care
533-537	"We do feedback during playest that we do a lot and the 1884, um we did, we had some feedback forms and Astrid also did some individual interviews."	Various styles of feedback.	Descriptive		Feedback, Care
853-862	"People who met we come you... not related to the show."	FOH Description	Descriptive		FOH
866-871	"You say if you notice anything that's not... you can't look everywhere at the same time."	Supportive of FOH. Ready to help. Acknowledge limitations of active observation.	Descriptive		FOH
884-890	"It was also just come and talk to one of us... that maybe not?"	Remove responsibility from venue staff for audiences during performance. Convey staff as primary responder.	Content		FOH
895-900	"First point of call would have again the Convey... usually the duty manager."	Escalation plan: FOH users to Convey to duty manager.	Descriptive		FOH
282-285	"I think there is a lot... people in that in that situation."	Equates shock to bad practice.	Descriptive		Immersive
730-734	"People are nervous about immersive theatre... doesn't take good care."	Bad immersive doesn't take good care.	Descriptive		Immersive
753-756	"Alright, I think people with immersive theatre... sometimes and I find it really upsetting."	Immersive as human experiments.	Descriptive		Immersive
762-764	"They had a week long immersive experience where they were reliving the war in Bosnia."	Ethics of performing a war zone?	Descriptive	What sort of future makers does activities like this in educational settings encourage?	Immersive
	"And that's Marie. Anything else? Ask Marie and I think that's, that was, that made me laugh because it was kind of true and, and no, I think a good definition of what producer is do, we do anything else, we the glue, one producer, one producer said to me, Yeah, As producers, we are the glue and I think it's pretty accurate."	Job description similar to how Ed describes SM in DLN9.	Descriptive		Job Description
63-64	"It's like our role is to make sure that people talk to each other, that problems get solved."	Communication as paramount	Descriptive		Job Description
90-95	"So yeah, it's generally because a lot of the producers role... I don't think it's a particular time or a particular role."	Description of Role	Descriptive		Job Description
112-118	"Clearly my role on this production was doing way more things than what you would expect from just a producer... to production management."	Job description.	Descriptive		Job Description
136-138	"Immersive projects is the fact that traditional theatre roles are really blurred."	Iterating the unclear nature of job descriptions and expectations in immersive as a norm.	Conceptual		Job Description

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Production Staff, Marie Klimis (Producer)

140-141	"Because the production is unusual and the format is unusual."	Why the roles are difficult to define	Descriptive		Job Description
190-191	"Sometimes it's not to have too much, too many expectations."	Highlighting flexibility	Descriptive		Job Description
196-200	"Once she called me because she needed to put... children to sleep in the trees of Epping"	Prior experience with flexible jobs	Descriptive		Job Description
206-210	"Quite creative. Quite solution focused... is talking to people."	Skills: talking/communication	Content		Job Description
218-221	"But most of the solutions are human is to get people to agree to find a good compromise... it's to find a solution."	Job Description	Descriptive	Communication	Job Description
223-225	"Being nice person, being open minded and being creative."	Description of producer skills	Descriptive		Job Description
709-715	"I think it's really about how you describe your show in advance... it's not like a disclaimer."	Advance prep.	Descriptive		Orientation
718-721	"Then we always do a pre-show briefings when everybody's there... and it's not in words."	Intentionally out of world briefings.	Descriptive		Orientation
723-724	"If you need to summarise this like whatever makes you feel comfortable is OK."	Audience prep.	Conceptual		Orientation
727-728	"It's an immersive show but do not worry."	Power of humour to diffuse tension.	Descriptive		Orientation
946-947	"That's a team effort."	To write the pre-show packs.	Descriptive		Orientation
356-357	"We play test the work a lot. We playtest early and we playtest at early stages."	To play well, test it.	Descriptive	Playtest as soon as possible in rehearsals.	Playtests
372-378	"So it's just making sure that you hear audience feedback... with different access needs."	Value of diverse playtest groups.	Descriptive		Playtests
607-610	"Sometimes it's just through people, you know, or word of mouth. Sometimes it's through partners."	Diverse playtesting is often achieved through partners.	Descriptive		Playtests
1022-1025	"The audience stood up and chanted... as like what we do."	Playtests can reveal unexpected reactions from audiences in lower stakes ways.	Descriptive		Playtests
399-403	"This is the kind of things that are going to be covered... the feel of being judged."		Personal Reflexivity	Jade mentioned something like this about the difference between Brazilian and UK audiences.	Risk
77-79	"My approach to risk management generally is quite... I would say, informal, but quite continuous."	What makes risk assessment formal?	Conceptual		Risk
80-89	"A lot of people often association risk management to risk assessments... on anybody's face."	Safety Culture	Conceptual		Risk
302-305	"I'm a white privileged person... I don't feel it in my gut."	Acknowledged limitation on her own perception of risk	Content		Risk
467-473	"I think we had a lot of conversations with the team... where the risk assessment comes in."	Conversations as superior to paperwork.	Descriptive		Risk
474-478	"But in a way, my experience of risk assessments... nobody cares about them."	Issue with risk assessments.	Conceptual		Risk
479-483	"They long. They painful for performers... to think about things."	Issue with risk assessments.	Conceptual	They are a useful theoretical process but lacking in ability to encourage a safety culture?	Risk
484-488	"The reality's risk management to me, is not risk assessment. It's talking to the venue."	Risk management is about verbal communication.	Conceptual		Risk
514-515	"Isher briefing every day we had duty manager, we had good communication with them."	Good communication with venue. Every day.	Descriptive		Risk
322	"Would do it as a team"	No single person makes calls about risk and care	Conceptual		Risk, Care
502-506	"It's making sure your team is briefed... There is a problem."	Highlights adequate staffing.	Descriptive		Risk, Care
1105-1117	"Yeah, I think it's generally talking about... who wants to shout racist abuse."	How to deal with difficult audiences.	Descriptive	Preplanning. Communicate to all stakeholders.	Risk, Care
146-154	"Some people told me what are you looking for? Are you looking for technical stage manager... that person was doing the mission captions."	Description on an unusual ask for a fairly standard role.	Descriptive		Stage Management
803-805	"Stage management is difficult... can be anything."	Even person hiring struggles to define SM role.	Descriptive		Stage Management
809-815	"Uh in terms... this is too much."	SMs usually tasked with care. An expected duty.	Descriptive		Stage Management
818-824	"You didn't have any of the classic stage manager roles... it was done by the DJ."	SM job tasks.	Descriptive		Stage Management
843-848	"It's almost like doing anything that's not done... it's not as obvious in the traditional theatre."	The previous line of responsibility can cross into actors too.	Descriptive		Stage Management

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Production Staff, Jenni Sinclair

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Production Staff, Jenni Sinclair (Duty Venue Manager)					
Line	Transcript	Initial Noting	Focus	Reflection	Emergent Themes
464	"I think the short answer is no."	Interesting because earlier responses (in 53-66) indicated yes.	Descriptive		Aesthetics
561-566	"Some had the quiet space available I've needed it... official clearance deadline."	Aftercare spaces	Descriptive	Questioned if aesthetics influence how something is done.	Aftercare
64-66	"And sort of how they are expecting the audience to act... in those moments."	Is there a discrepancy sometimes?	Conceptual		Audience
314-317	"Most of the feedback was getting was really... having a good time with the show."	Really positive audience response	Descriptive	Informal feedback	Audience Response
7-12	"I've been working in front of house and theatre operations since 2017... some of which was immersive work."	Seven years experience in FOH and theatre ops.	Descriptive		Background
12-14	"I was a per for mative usher on a show... as well before."	Some performance background - does that help?	Conceptual		Background
14-16	"Formal employment in immersive theatre... in 2023"	2 Years immersive	Descriptive		Background
37	"My BA is in performance and visual arts"	Background in performing arts.	Descriptive		Background
40-43	"We were making ground up... operators worked."	Initial experiences in FOH.	Descriptive		Background
243-249	"I think when you are inviting people into a space... you don't want them to get hurt mentally."	Focus on physical and mental risks	Descriptive		Care
250-254	"Make sure that people are leaving... by the experience that they've had."	Definition of duty of care	Descriptive		Care
279-284	"I think the company... so like an escalation route."	Systems of care management supplied by theatre company	Descriptive		Care
305-306	"Hopefully send them back into the show"	Ability to re-enter the performance	Descriptive		Care
308	"Pack of resources"	Acts of care	Descriptive		Care
311-313	"So there was a plan put in place for that eventually... had to be utilised."	Extreme pre-planning may have been effective.	Conceptual	Visibility of labour	Care
45-47	"And it was bringing audiences into spaces... elements at all."	Highlights differences between immersive and interactive	Descriptive		Defining Immersive
324-325	"I think just really prioritise safety."	Ethics = safety	Descriptive		Ethics
331-332	"You have an obligation to keep people safe inside in a space."	This is the core tenant of ethics for FOH per Jenni. What is safe?	Conceptual		Ethics
104-105	"I think being flexible and a certain level of improvisation"	Focus on flexibility, adaptability	Descriptive		House Management
113-115	"Being able to disseminate that information... is really important."	Communication as a skill	Conceptual		House Management
127-129	"A sort of thinking that we... with audience reactions."	Door Supervisor Qualification	Descriptive		House Management
139-140	"Like conflict management. De-escalation."	Useful skills	Descriptive	Training	House Management
142-144	"So the SA training looks a lot on how to prevent... first place"	Prevention vs. reaction	Descriptive	Training	House Management
152-153	"Good to have full confidence in the knowledge... if there was to be an incident."	Why skills matter.	Descriptive		House Management
162-163	"Crowd management training course"	Skills	Descriptive	Training	House Management
166-169	"You can take those skills and put them... or trigger points."	You can adapt other knowledge, adjust to the necessary scale.	Descriptive	Training	House Management
224-225	"And best way to learn is from people who have done it."	Ways of learning	Descriptive	Training	House Management
228-235	"I think that kind of knowledge... have attempted a similar event in the past."	How to learn FOH	Descriptive	Training	House Management
293	"Sort of a process of flagging"	Plan for people who need an intervention.	Descriptive		House Management
335-338	"I always feel like when people are going to theatre... and so often it doesn't resemble that."	FOH as guides between expectation and reality.	Descriptive		House Management
340-344	"You're there to sort of help navigate... preparing them for the experience."	Guides/navigators	Uniquistic	Word choice	House Management
488-492	"I think so, yeah. I think there is sort of a level... can get where they're coming from."	Translation Communication skills.	Descriptive		House Management
507-509	"I think in terms of communicating to performers... from a collaborative thing"	FOH as collaborator/s for performance	Descriptive		House Management
53-59	"My sort of front of house management... I couldn't see what was going on there."	Division of worlds 1884 more traditional in that sense?	Conceptual		Job Duties
58-59	"I couldn't see what was going on in there."	Clear division of labour.	Descriptive		Job Duties
59-66	"Guiding audiences before entering... in that in those moments."	This is a change from traditional house management.	Descriptive		Job Duties
145-150	"Customer service... first aid qualification."	Job Description	Descriptive		Job Duties
180-182	"I think... supporting the artistic vision of the company."	Care as a preventative action. Skills. These actions provide support.	Descriptive		Job Duties
184-194	"So you're kind of outside of the artistic elements... somebody's experience appropriately."	It seems there is a sort of artistry in this skill of knowing.	Conceptual		Job Duties
326-330	"Obviously there is a level of customer service... any other instance to step in."	FOH tasks. Job description.	Descriptive		Job Duties
195-197	"In 1884 because they were very present in the rooms, letting them lead the sort of artistic vision of the show."	There was an artistic choice maker in the space for performance.	Descriptive		Job Duties
345-351	"1884 had a sort of introductory speech... incredibly helpful."	Orientation	Descriptive		Orientation
352-356	"Hard for people to hear... trying to go to the toilet."	Issues w/ orientation speeches	Descriptive		Orientation

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Production Staff, Jenni Sinclair (Duty Venue Manager)

356-362	"So they had a printed version... for their audience management."	Printed orientation too for those not really paying attention.	Descriptive	Backup plans, acknowledgement of limitation that often occurs with orientation.	Orientation
553-555	"Marie gave me the pre-show speech sheet... before we opened as well."	Descriptive			
428-433	"Have a section on the risk assessment... or to fellow audience members."	Plans for unity audience standard at venue	Descriptive	Risk assessments	Risk assessments
436-439	"Special attention paid to them... same way with front of house staff."	But reviewed for immersive performance	Descriptive	Risk assessments	Risk assessments
447-449	"I would say almost exclusively... mentioned content."	Primary focus on physical hazards.	Descriptive	Possibly confusion with content warnings vs risk assessment.	Risk assessments
332-334	"Feeling sort of safe... feeling supported in what that might... presented unusually."	Safety start just physical	Descriptive		Safety
414-419	"We ask companies to write their own risk assessments... we deem to be unusually hazardous."	First level risk assessment from company, then reviewed by venue Ops Manager	Descriptive	Risk assessments	Safety
83	"Trying to explain 1884 in words is quite hard, like really hard"	Difficulty describing style of performance	Conceptual	What does it say for the audience experience if the industry professionals don't know how to describe the show?	Show Description
89-94	"I knew what they were trying to achieve... how this game works at all."	It's possible to understand the mechanics without understanding the mechanics of the performance, which won't help the audience understand the mechanics	Conceptual		Show Description
71-72	"They did three plays at the venue and I attended one of the plays."	Preparation for FOH	Descriptive		Show Prep
79-82	"We had a couple meeting with the company beforehand... a little bit."	A lot of prep - possibly because rehearsals were in the same space.	Descriptive		Show Prep
85-88	"And so seeing it happen... before I went into the play itself."	Prep for FOH	Descriptive		Show Prep
96-99	"In terms of benefit... they went into work on it."	Value in at least one member of the team seeing it in advance.	Content		Show Prep
107-113	"Every show is different... you know what's happening."	Pre-planning	Descriptive		Show Prep
372-374	"They're bringing work into an existing... a much more bare side of it."	Difference between home venue and touring	Descriptive	Pre-planning from company	Show Prep
386-388	"We had their plan for what they're going... we just sort of rolled with it."	Coney provided a lot of the FOH plan	Descriptive	Pre-planning from company	Show Prep
517-519	"The sort of can come up together, so rather than just sort of... it's a joint effort."	A preferred way of developing FOH plans.	Descriptive	Pre-planning from company	Show Prep
529-532	"Yes, Coney especially... I asked for it."	Very positive views on Coney's understanding of FOH.	Descriptive		Show Prep
535-539	"Just seem to think that the audience members... how that process works at all."	Not all companies have this sort of understanding of FOH	Descriptive		Show Prep
546-551	"Pre-show emails that go out to any audience... are always compiled with the company."	Comprehensive pre-show email development done with company	Descriptive		Show Prep
605-606	"Having an opportunity to meet with the full company."	Helpful to FOH	Descriptive	Things companies can do to make things easier for FOH	Show Prep
623-630	"Some write event briefs for every single... what they were getting into."	Useful tools for FOH	Descriptive		Show Prep
30-31	"1884 was the first like immersive... at Shorelitch Town Hall."	Not a venue specific to immersive shows.	Descriptive		Venue
284-289	"At Shorelitch Town Hall... there's comfortable sofas."	Venue is always prepared that people might need to step away	Descriptive	Care during and after.	Venue

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Production Staff, Brent Tan

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Spreadsheet: 1884 Production Staff, Brent Tan (Stage Manager)				
Line	Transcript	Initial Noting	Focus	Reflection
140-142	"coming up with protocols... safeguard the cast members."	Still thinks first of guarding cast from the audience	Conceptual	Emergent Themes
245-250	"Then duty of care to the audience members is also to make sure that their experience feels safe, that they can... Certain things they want to try."	Duty of care to audience	Descriptive	Audiences
11-19	"Working in theatre for about 8 years now... About five years in Singapore"	Establishment of expertise	Descriptive	Background
49-54	Out of her's say the 20 shows, I think I've worked on at least like 12 to 15 shows that... interactive and immersive"	Notes space between immersive and interactive	Conceptual	Background
225-230	"Upholding the responsibility of making sure that everyone is safe in the production... feeling safe physically, 'feeling safe emotionally'"	Defining duty of care	Descriptive	Care
680-685	"Then it's to pass it over to stage management where we can come... we will come in to take over."	How does this mesh with the co-sharing responsibility mentioned in 572-575	Descriptive	Care
266-273	"It's really checking in with them as a team... It in certain things."	Worked as a team to determine how to approach audience interactions	Descriptive	Communication
304-308	"We're looking, facing some... All these things was looked at 'timed at eye'"	Awareness of importance of good communication	Descriptive	Communication
340-351	"I think it's the questions that they ask as well to the cast members... how do you want to do it?"	Specificity in check-ins	Descriptive	Communication
417-424	"I feel like there will be a hierarchical line of communication... just the sort of like the telephone."	Hierarchy of ethics... from the producer down	Conceptual	Communication
445-447	"So I think I'll go up to, I'll go to the producer or the director... that we wanna talk about"	Connects to others mention of top down ethics. This is a very specific style of communication.	Descriptive	Communication
584-591	"It was part of the process as creating the write-up for what... that they might have coming in."	Positive about being included in the pre-show write-up process.	Content	Communication
719-720	"It's always about the communication part of it."	Skill: communication	Descriptive	Communication
776-785	"But I realized that like usually if you ask them... in that space to feel safe, yeah."	How do you feel vs. what do you need?	Conceptual	Communication
276-279	"We wanted to create a safe space and how do we establish that?"	Concerned with communication	Content	Communication
190-192	"If they come up within a specific idea because it's sort of like the community bonding"	emphasis on community building even at prop level	Conceptual	Community
321-329	"I feel like be present, they they will be around... what how we gonna run."	Presence helps guide the culture.	Descriptive	Ethics
572-575	"So then in terms of co-sharing the responsibility... if they encounter any episodes..."	Doesn't match what Marie said	Descriptive	Front of House
134-138	"Then how can we safeguard the audience and the cast who are gonna interact with each other... things differently"	Challenges to immersive	Descriptive	Immersive stage management
87-91	"Yes, definitely because it requires a creative input... a more creative input"	Consider immersive stage management more creative	Content	Immersive stage management
100-102	"I think one of them would be like logistical planning... we do a lot of dropping"	Skills	Descriptive	Job Description
109-111	"Time management. Equally as important, because sometimes we are not given enough time"	Skills	Descriptive	Job Description
124-126	"I think the last one would be sort of like... you can and cannot do."	Skills	Descriptive	Job Description
158	"A lot of health and safety from the production management standpoint when it comes to audience interaction"	Skills particular to immersive	Descriptive	Job Description
161-171	"I was given the museum section"	Assigned to this task?	Descriptive	Job Description
280-286	"In the rehearsal process... what they offered in the show"	Mix of traditional and non-traditional duties	Descriptive	Job Description
497-500	"So we've come up with multiple ways where we either... that everyone safeguarding the experience?"	Orientation	Descriptive	Orientation
513-520	"So I have templates for each like category. So if let's say like fire... the whole template"	Demonstrates broad knowledge of many traditionally risk-assessed elements.	Descriptive	Risk Assessments
544	"Buyer tag in when something... who's liable for what?"	Awareness of liability for accidents and importance of paperwork at this stage.	Conceptual	Risk Assessments
551-554	"Is in the content that they will receive"	Frisk makes a connection between psychological risk assessment and content warnings	Conceptual	Risk Assessments
643-647	"I don't think I have because the only things that we have in place are sort of like... much during the process"	Adverse reactions are focused on dealing with post-show	Descriptive	Risk Assessments
667	"We love to do this thing called... this is what we're all gonna do."	There was a lot of planning for the worst with the full team.	Descriptive	Risk Management
668-676	"Yes I think so"	Indicated there was enough time for practicing worst-case scenarios	Descriptive	Risk Management
123-130	"But it's always the element of uncertainty... sort of like the space we create."	Acknowledges responsibility, but you can't plan for everything	Descriptive	Risk Management
715-718	"The overview to make sure that there is support set in place for everything"	General Approach	Descriptive	Skills
148-150	"But now after trying out certain things and like OK, this works... how I can interact with audience."	Trial & error despite preplanning. A necessary reflexive flexibility	Descriptive	Skills
	"So sort of like having a good rehearsal procedure such that everyone can feel safe doing the work."	You need time to rehearse these procedures	Conceptual	Time